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Sensationalism, Cinema and the Popular Press  
in Mexico and Brazil, 1905-1930

By

Rielle Edmonds Navitski

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Film and Media

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Kristen Whissel (chair)

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Professor Mary Ann Doane

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Sensationalism, Cinema and the Popular Press in Mexico and Brazil, 1905-1930

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## Abstract

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Rielle Edmonds Navitski

Doctor of Philosophy in Film and Media

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Kristen Whissel, Chair

This dissertation examines the role of new visual reproduction technologies in forging public cultures of sensationalized violence in two rapidly modernizing nations on the periphery of industrial capitalism. I trace parallel developments in the production and reception of silent crime and adventure film in Brazil's First Republic and in revolutionary and post-revolutionary Mexico, at a moment when industrialization and urbanization were reshaping daily experience without eliminating profound social inequalities. Re-evaluating critical frameworks premised on cinema's relationship to the experience of modernity in the industrialized U.S. and Western Europe, I argue that these early twentieth-century cultures of popular sensationalism signal the degree to which public life in Mexico and Brazil has been conditioned by violence and social exclusion linked to legacies of neo-colonial power.

In the first half of the dissertation, I examine cinematic re-enactments of real-life crimes filmed in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Mexico City between 1908 and 1919. Combining an emphasis on location shooting with melodramatic tropes inherited from popular literature and theater, these true-crime films grapple with representational problems at the heart of the cinematic medium: its potential for both documentation and dramatization and its indeterminate relationship to topical events. Incorporating analysis of locally produced crime serials, I focus on the dynamics of unequal cultural exchange between Mexico and Brazil and industrialized nations, particularly France and the United States, which acted as exporters of cultural products. Addressing the economic polarization of metropolitan centers and rural areas, the latter half of the dissertation analyzes fiction features produced outside the two countries' principal cities in the 1920s, where economic development lagged behind that of urban centers. These productions drew on the conventions of imported serial films and westerns (particularly location shooting and dynamic action sequences) to display local landscapes even as they asserted mastery over cinematic technology's viscerally thrilling effects. In constructing violence and risk as markers of local modernity, early Mexican and Brazilian crime and adventure films rendered spectacularly visible the social tensions of national modernization projects.

For my family

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## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation, “Sensationalism, Cinema and the Popular Press in Mexico and Brazil, 1905-1930,” focuses on two intertwined cultural forms—the expanding sphere of illustrated journalism and the then-novel medium of film—, exploring how they rendered spectacularly visible the social tensions of modernization in the two nations during the tumultuous decades of the early twentieth century. I address a period beginning with the completion of urban reforms in Rio de Janeiro in 1905 and ending with the rise of Getúlio Vargas’s populist regime in 1930, encompassing the height of the revolutionary conflict in Mexico (1910-1920). Aiming to account for parallel developments in film production and consumption in two Latin American countries with divergent political trajectories, I argue that early crime and adventure films and their print intertexts (police reportage, serial literature, and illustrated magazines), gave expression to distinct but comparable experiences of industrialization and urbanization. In Mexico and Brazil, these processes unfolded in a manner that was at once accelerated and delayed in relation to nations on the forefront of the Second Industrial Revolution.

Catalyzed and contested by the political, social, and spatial reforms proposed by Brazil’s Republican governments and Mexico’s revolutionary factions, the expansion of industrial capitalism reshaped daily life without eliminating profound inequalities between classes, races, and regions. In this context, media spectacles of real-life crime crystallized anxieties about immigration and internal migration, control of public space, and new modes of public self-presentation and visual surveillance. In this context, locally produced representations of violence, risk, and danger in print and on film framed modernity as a thrilling spectacle by drawing on the conventions of serial literature, theater, and imported cinema. Popular sensationalism forged a repertoire of cultural tropes addressing the dark underside of ambitions for national progress, whose legacy continues to inform present-day public discourse in the two nations. From the early twentieth century to the present, local cultures of popular sensationalism have signaled the degree to which public life in Mexico and Brazil rests on foundations of violence and social exclusion linked to legacies of neo-colonial power.

In the first half of the dissertation, I examine cinematic re-enactments of real-life crimes filmed in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Mexico City, from the 1908 *Os estranguladores* (*The Stranglers*, Antônio Leal, Brazil) to the 1919 *El automóvil gris* (*The Grey Automobile*, Enrique Rosas, Mexico), which constituted some of the greatest box office successes of the two nations’ early cinema. Combining a (heavily publicized) impulse to film in the “scene of the crime” with melodramatic codes inherited from popular literature and theater, these true-crime films grapple with representational problems at the heart of the cinematic medium: its potential for both documentation and dramatization and its indeterminate relationship to topical events. Incorporating analysis of locally produced crime serials, I focus on the dynamics of (unequal) cultural exchange between Mexico and Brazil and industrialized nations, particularly France and the United States. Such exchanges were exemplified by the circulation of literary and cinematic crime narratives, whose appeal to audiences was grounded both in their serial structure and their evocation of an ambivalent imaginary of cosmopolitan, thrillingly modern criminality.

Addressing the economic polarization of metropolitan centers and rural areas, the latter half of the dissertation focuses on film production outside the two countries’ principal cities in the 1920s, where economic development lagged behind that of urban centers. Groups of semi-amateur filmmakers drew on the tropes of the imported serial film and the western in fiction features like *El tren fantasma* (*The Ghost Train*, Gabriel García Moreno, Mexico, 1927) and

*Tesouro perdido* (*Lost Treasure*, Humberto Mauro, Brazil, 1927), which incorporated on-location shooting and thrilling stunt sequences. Asserting local technological modernity by staging dynamic action sequences in landscapes recognizable to a local audience, regional productions reactivated the tension between scenic views and suspenseful narrative manifest in the early true-crime films.

Both groups of films under study juxtapose narrative codes adapted from imported cinema with documents of local spaces and social practices. They thus inscribe, at the level of their textual strategies, the selective appropriation of cinematic codes developed elsewhere to address experiences of modernization on the periphery of industrial capitalism. The juxtaposition of fictional and non-fictional content in Mexican and Brazilian silent cinema after 1907, when relatively firm boundaries between these modes were established in the United States and Europe,<sup>1</sup> registers the hybrid characteristics of a Latin American modernity that is, in many respects, yet to be achieved. Furthermore, silent crime and adventure films' fascination with documents and representations of singular bodily events and states—violence, death, physical risk—invite an interrogation of the ontological status of moving images, their relationship to history and to lived time. Drawing on the work of film theorists from André Bazin to Mary Ann Doane,<sup>2</sup> I pose the political and theoretical problem of representing violence in historically and geographically specific terms. Through its comparative approach and attention to theoretical concerns, my dissertation addresses a gap in scholarly monographs on Latin American cinema, which, with the exception of works on the New Latin American cinema of the 1960s,<sup>3</sup> has overwhelmingly taken the individual nation as its unit of analysis, overlooking parallel trajectories of development in the region and cultural circulation within its boundaries.<sup>4</sup> Focusing on the uniquely international moment of early film history,<sup>5</sup> I engage in ongoing debates on the viability of the concept of “national cinema” in an increasingly globalized media landscape.

Focusing on close analysis of surviving films and reconstruction of lost films' reception from their traces in the popular press, I incorporate archival materials such as scripts, correspondence from filmmakers and spectators, and publicity photographs, as well as analyses of relevant journalistic, literary, and theatrical texts. Examining the intermedial exchanges between cinema, journalism, and popular amusements, my project both draws on and complicates Benedict Anderson's influential argument that the mass circulation newspaper created a collective experience of temporal simultaneity that was pivotal in inaugurating the “imagined community” of the nation.<sup>6</sup> This dynamic takes on a distinct inflection in the Latin American case; by 1900, major Mexican and Brazilian cities boasted modern-format illustrated newspapers, but the countries also had strikingly low literacy rates (35 percent in Brazil, 20 in Mexico),<sup>7</sup> giving print journalism an intimate relationship with oral and visual culture, including the cinema. Topical, true-life subjects, depicted using cinematic codes consolidated by foreign cinema, forged a “vernacular modernism,” in Miriam Hansen's term, that addressed local spectators by sensuously engaging with the conflicts of local modernization processes.<sup>8</sup> However, Hansen's assertion that cinema spectatorship carried with it the potential to function as an “alternative public sphere,”<sup>9</sup> is a dynamic that would be complicated in the case of Mexico and Brazil by early elite embrace of the cinema and its close links to discourses of national progress, even when these took the paradoxical form of hailing criminal violence as an ambivalent symptom of local modernity.

In early twentieth-century Mexico and Brazil, narratives of crime and violence signaled the contradictions of national modernization processes conceived to benefit members of the oligarchy rather than broader sectors of the population, who were increasingly subject to

wholesale criminalization along class lines in growing metropolises like Rio de Janeiro and Mexico City.<sup>10</sup> Writing in the context of Argentina, Josefina Ludmer has influentially discussed crime as “one of the tools most commonly used to define and found a culture,” constituting “a cultural frontier” which “serves to trace limits, differentiate, and exclude.”<sup>11</sup> Ludmer argues for the discursive power of crime as legal category and narrative trope, suggesting its pivotal role in the constitution of the public sphere in Latin America. Formulations such as Ludmer’s nuance scholarly generalizations about the relationship between violence and the social in modernity, such as Mark Seltzer’s concept of a “pathological public sphere,” in which “the spectacle of violent crime provides a point of attraction and identification, an intense individualization of... social conditions, albeit a socialization via the media spectacle of wounding and victimization.”<sup>12</sup> While I investigate the pivotal role of spectacularized crime in defining public life in Mexico and Brazil, I position my argument against Seltzer’s all-encompassing definition of “the [modern] experience of relation—sexual or collective—as mass-mediation and of mass-mediation as violation and wounding.”<sup>13</sup> Drawing on the notion of “reflexive modernity” advanced by thinkers such as Anthony Giddens, Seltzer understands contemporary life as a system of convergences and equivalences between the individual and the mass, and between bodies and (media) technologies. This project investigates some of the questions investigated by Seltzer: “reenactment [as] a necessary component in the recursive and reflexive structure of modern crime” and the “ceaseless migrations across the fact/fiction divide” manifest in the true-crime genre.<sup>14</sup> Yet in defining modernity as characterized by self-reflexive discourse, Seltzer assumes, that just as there is no “outside” to the “prison house of language,”<sup>15</sup> there is also no “outside” to modernity. His mode of argument deliberately effaces the manner in which narratives of real-life crime are conditioned by racial and sexual difference, and discounts the uneven penetration of modern communication and transportation technologies across geographic space, which is a central concern of this study.

In attending both to the local production and the reception of crime and adventure films, taking into consideration their positioning in broader visual and entertainment cultures, I seek to bring new critical perspectives to bear on empirically-oriented scholarship on early Latin American cinema, reconsidering its relationship to American and European cultural products. Furthermore, I re-evaluate existing critical frameworks whose understanding of cinema’s relationship to modernity is premised on the experience of the Second Industrial Revolution in the United States and Western Europe. Drawing on scholarship that explores the imbrication of early cinema and sensationalism, most notably Ben Singer’s *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema in its Contexts*, this dissertation revises the so-called “modernity thesis” developed in the scholarship emerging from Film Studies’ “historical turn,” beginning in the late 1970s. Experiences of modernization in Mexico and Brazil demand a re-evaluation of key components of the “modernity thesis,” such as the notion of “cinema as a *consequence* of modernity” and the “key formal and spectatorial resemblances between cinema [...] and the nature of metropolitan experience.”<sup>16</sup> In the contexts I examine here, moving images could not be unproblematically experienced as the “fullest expression and combination of modernity’s attributes,”<sup>17</sup> since, in contrast with the United States and France, cinema manifested itself not as continuous with a collective experience defined by wholesale capitalist industrialization, but rather as a technology imported to nations that were struggling to modernize.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, in Mexico and Brazil’s capitals, the explosion of consumer culture and transportation technologies in urban space would not fully manifest itself until the early 1930s.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Mexican and Brazilian cities were reshaped

by urban reforms modeled on the Hausmannization of Paris were first beginning to eliminate configurations of urban space dating from the colonial period and earlier, as well as “disorderly” working-class uses of the city.<sup>19</sup> Race, class, and crime were intimately bound up with this restructuring of urban space, as historians Pablo Piccato and Marcos Luiz Bretas have persuasively argued. Both suggest that elite-driven urban reforms in Mexico and Brazil’s capitals gave rise to a struggle for control over public space, signaled by the criminalization of working-class practices (such as vagabondage, public drunkenness, and even appearing in public in indigenous dress or without shoes or a hat).<sup>20</sup> Spectacles of violence and risk, mediated through new technologies of visual reproduction, were constructed as thrilling signs of local modernity and gave expression to new forms of social exclusion and belonging. As Robert M. Buffington has signaled in his perceptive study of the racial taxonomies developed by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Mexican criminology, discourses of crime and violence were central to positivist projects for national progress, and were extensively mobilized to police the racial and class boundaries of national citizenship.<sup>21</sup> Even as sensationalistic narratives of violence highlighted the specific tensions of rapid urban modernization, informed by positivist principles of order and progress that perpetuated and heightened inequality, they also worked to constitute a mass culture that capitalized on the violence of these social tensions.

These reconsiderations of cinema’s relationship to modernity in Mexico and Brazil seek to expand on Latin American cultural criticism that explores the apparent paradox of “an exuberant modernism with a deficient modernization,” in Néstor García Canclini’s phrase. García Canclini discusses the dynamics of culture in Latin America in terms of a failure to develop “economic development capable of sustaining efforts at experimental renewal and cultural democratization,” and a corresponding lack of “autonomous markets for each cultural field.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Julio Ramos has analyzed the problem of literature’s aesthetic autonomy, a key concern of modernist movements, in the context of “dependent and uneven modernization” in Latin America.<sup>23</sup> These evaluations of the horizon of cultural production in Latin America emphasize lack or deficiency, bearing a clear debt to dependency theory and its revision in Immanuel Wallerstein’s world systems theory. Yet beginning in the mid-1980s, cultural critics have begun to re-evaluate the politics of mass culture in Latin America, highlighting the productivity (and unpredictability) of cultural mixture, even within relations of structural economic dependence. In an influential account of Latin America’s “hybrid cultures,” García Canclini emphasizes the hybridity and “multitemporal heterogeneity”<sup>24</sup> of the region, in which globalized cultural commodities collide in unpredictable ways with state constructions of folk tradition. In a similar vein, Jesús Martín Barbero has analyzed the “new combinations and syntheses” that give expression to the “the interweaving of modernity and the residues of various cultural periods, the mixture of social structures and sentiments” that constitute complex “mediations” of cultural hegemonies in the region.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Beatriz Sarlo has characterized urban Buenos Aires in the 1920s and 1930s as a “peripheral modernity,” defined by “a culture of mixture” that juxtaposed “European modernity and *rioplatense* difference, acceleration and anxiety, traditionalism and a spirit of renewal, *criollismo* and the avant-garde.”<sup>26</sup>

This dissertation draws on these theoretical frameworks to examine the processes of cultural mixture that were pivotal in constituting new public spheres in early twentieth-century Latin America. Yet my argument also signals some of the limits of evaluations of modernity and mass culture in early twentieth-century Latin America that take high-cultural modernist movements as their primary focus.<sup>27</sup> Existing scholarship that compares Mexican and Brazilian cultural production in this period relies heavily on concepts borrowed from the avant-gardes

themselves. These include Oswald de Andrade's notion of cultural cannibalism advanced in the 1928 "Manifesto antropófago" ("Anthropophagist Manifesto"), the structuring metaphor of Robert A. Gordon's *Cannibalizing the Colony: Cinematic Adaptations of Colonial Literature in Mexico and Brazil*.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in *Errant Modernism: The Ethos of Photography in Mexico and Brazil*, Esther Gabara takes the shared interest of Brazilian modernists and Mexican *estridentistas* (stridentists), in photography, "both as a means to represent modern life as well as a rich mine of words and concepts,"<sup>29</sup> as the key point of intersection between cultural production in the two nations. Yet her study pays relatively little attention to popular production without clear links to modernist movements. My research extends such inquiries beyond scholarship on, or substantially informed by, the canonical literary avant-gardes, attending more closely to the ephemeral products of emerging mass media. I understand the sensational as a lens through which to view the intersection between the visual reproduction technologies that signaled, represented, and negotiated industrial modernity, and the emergence of mass culture in the context of elite projects of national modernization that perpetuated structural relations of social exclusion.

In defining the sensational as a mode of cultural production, I draw on Singer's influential account of sensationalism in American cinema and stage melodrama in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Describing these genres as characterized by "an emphasis on action, violence, thrills, awesome sights, and spectacles of physical peril," Singer interprets them as attempts to capitalize on the "sensory intensity of modernity" and the new dangers posed by urban life.<sup>30</sup> Yet in the context under study, the popular appeal of sensational cinema and journalism was not limited to its evocation of violence and risk; it was also grounded in claims of topicality and authenticity. This characteristic approximates it to what Vanessa Schwartz has described as "the visuality of modern boulevard culture [in turn-of-the-century Paris] and its connection to the way the mass press used sensationalism to frame and re-present the everyday as spectacle."<sup>31</sup> Schwartz highlights the historically contingent constructions of reality effects as a function of expanding commercial entertainment. Like Singer, she views sensationalism as a function of the market, arguing that "sensationalizing and literally spectacularizing became the means through which reality was commodified."<sup>32</sup> It must be emphasized that Singer and Schwartz sketch sensationalism's place in capitalist mass culture in the United States and France, two nations whose economic development placed them at the forefront of industrial modernity. Their formulations thus should not be uncritically transposed to the Latin American context, where early twentieth-century urban experience rarely approached the "sensory intensity" of New York or Paris, and where robust cultural markets were slow to develop. Ana M. López argues that in Latin American nations, "cinema fed the national confidence that its own modernity was 'in progress' by enabling viewers to share and participate in the experience of modernity as developed elsewhere," while threatening to relegate local viewers to "the position of [...] voyeurs, rather than participants in, modernity."<sup>33</sup> In this dissertation, I analyze sensationalistic visual culture as a site of cultural mixture, arguing that Mexican and Brazilian appropriation of the sensational tropes of imported print media and cinema must be understood as a means of articulating desires for, and anxieties regarding, modernization, rather than a direct expression of a thrilling and overwhelming local modernity.

Cinema's relation to the contradictions and conflicts of modernization in Mexico and Brazil complicates Singer and Schwartz's largely apolitical accounts of sensationalism. The popular cultures of shocks and thrills they discuss emerged in more politically stable nations—in fact, Schwartz associates *fin-de-siècle* mass culture with a historical shift of the Parisian masses



from a political actor to consumer market—yet they largely neglect sensationalism’s imbrication with public discourse and state ideology. A more helpful model for considering these questions is Shelley Streeby’s work on the relationship of popular sensationalism to American imperialism—and resistance to it—in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Streeby suggests that “[t]he pejorative meanings of the word *sensational*...partly respond to fears that modern media and the shift to the visual might incite mass rebellion or even revolution,” even as she highlights the ways in which sensationalistic texts have been complicit with the United States’ imperial projects.<sup>34</sup> Taking into account the relative fragility of the Mexican and Brazilian governments in the same period, this dissertation addresses the political volatility (as well as the elite recuperations) of sensationalistic visual culture in a period marked by pervasive labor unrest, a series of urban uprisings in Rio de Janeiro beginning at the turn of the century, as well as military revolts in 1922 and 1924, culminating with Getúlio Vargas’s 1930 coup, and by the outbreak of the Revolution in Mexico and the later Cristeros War fought (1926-1929), a popular counter-revolution that responded violently to the state’s anti-clerical reforms.

Like Singer, Streeby develops her account of sensational representations through reference to melodrama, which both scholars understand as a mode with close affinities to sensationalism. While Singer argues that melodrama should be viewed as a “cluster concept,” a mode defined by qualities of sensation and sentiment that are not always found in a single text,<sup>35</sup> Streeby argues that “the sensational and sentimental [...] exist on a continuum.” She maintains that both “work by provoking affect and emotional responses in readers and by foregrounding endangered, suffering, and dead bodies [...], often in order to make political arguments about races, classes, nations, and international relations.”<sup>36</sup> While I follow Singer in emphasizing sensationalism’s relationship to urban danger, I also take up the political ambivalence of both sensationalism and melodrama, a pivotal aspect of Mexican and Brazilian cinema’s negotiation with local modernity through the end of the silent period. Carlos Fuentes has affirmed that melodrama is the “central fact of private life in Latin America” and the sole context in which “Latin Americans recognize each other ecumenically.”<sup>37</sup> This dissertation explores melodrama’s productivity as a mode that mediates public discourse and individual experience, exploring how the social uses of melodrama are conditioned by local and national, as well as region-wide, experiences of uneven development.

Throughout the project, I focus on the role of the serialized novel (*folletín* in Spanish, *folhetim* in Portuguese), as both precursor to the cinema’s mass appeal and a key discursive context of film production and reception in the two nations. Associated with the explosion of print media and literacy, especially in France and Britain, in Mexico and Brazil the serial novel remained closely associated with oral and visual culture. Relating the serial novel to the radio soap operas that attained massive popularity in the 1930s, and of the *telenovelas* broadcast globally as well as nationally, Martín Barbero writes, “the newspaper serial brought the melodrama from the theater to the press. There, it expanded the reading public and inaugurated a new relationship between popular readers and writing [...] The ‘open structure’ of a tale written day-by-day, carried out according to plan, but open to the influence of its readers’ reactions, propitiated the (con)fusion of fiction and life.”<sup>38</sup> The *folletín/folhetim* mingled the melodramatic with the topical as it constituted an early formation of mass culture in the region; its interarticulation of the sensational and the sentimental is one of the particularities of the Latin American mode of melodrama.

As a form initially adapted from the English serial novel and, more directly, from the French *feuilleton*, whose texts were published extensively in translation in both countries’

nascent newspapers,<sup>39</sup> Mexican and Brazilian serial literature became a key forum for the publication of popular nineteenth-century novels that functioned as, in Doris Sommer's term, "foundational fictions." These sentimental narratives allegorize processes of national unification through heterosexual romance.<sup>40</sup> As a site for the paradoxically intertwined processes of cultural appropriation and literary nation-building, serial novels incorporated an alternation between lyrical, naturalistic description and vertiginous narrative action that prefigures the strategies of the early films I discuss in the dissertation. Literary critic Flora Süssekind suggests that the figure of the narrator in Brazilian literature of the nineteenth century emerges at the intersection between the genres of the *folhetim* and travel literature, modeled on European accounts, that worked to produce scientific knowledge about national landscapes and territories.<sup>41</sup> She notes in early novels an alternation between the rapid-fire plot twists characteristic of serial literature and minute descriptions of the topography, flora, and fauna. This strategy prefigures the twin impulses towards documentation and dramatization evident both in early true-crime films and later regional productions in both countries. Early crime and adventure films show an oscillation between imported narrative models and documents of the local, often registered by marked shift in codes of cinematic representation (panoramic shots of picturesque views versus continuity editing, or pauses in the narrative to industrial or agricultural production). These texts' mixed representational strategies promised marketability for local productions, in that they displayed mastery of international cinematic conventions, as well as attention to the topical and the locally specific.

Furthermore, the serial novel became a frequent point of reference in the emerging practice of film criticism in Latin America, functioning as a marker of cinema's cultural status and playing a key role in early attempts to define its specificity and its relationship to other media. In 1915, two Mexican writers, Alfonso Reyes and Martín Luis Guzmán, writing under the joint pseudonym *Fósforo* ("Match") in Spain, evoked film's effects on the public by drawing parallels to the serial novel. In a column devoted in part to the 1914 Thanhouser serial *The Million Dollar Mystery*, they write, "If we want to find something whose function approaches to some extent that of the cinema [...] we must search for it in the literary field and its most humble regions: we find it in the *folletín*." *Fósforo* notes that the serial novel and the film share "the element on which all works of art that imitate human life rest: the aesthetic inherent to action."<sup>42</sup> Cinema was held to exemplify and extend this aesthetic of action, understood both as vertiginous plot twists and sudden, shocking bodily events: "in the *folletín*, the action is accompanied by bad literature; while in the cinema, with the disappearance of the word, one gains distance from the problem of style and only the action remains."<sup>43</sup> At the end of the silent era, the *folletín* remained a key point of reference in the reception and criticism of Hollywood melodrama. In 1931, Chilean literary critic Raúl Silva Castro described Chaplin's sentimental *City Lights* as "nothing more than a *folletín*, and if it were translated into words, a novel, that could perfectly well take its place beside the fantastic narrations of [Émile] Richebourg, [Paul] Féval and Ponson du Terrail."<sup>44</sup> Despite an apparent distaste for "a special and characteristic vulgarity, that which we call *folletín*-esque," Silva Castro notes that the literary works "which seem to accommodate themselves best to the particular demands of the cinema, are those in which the dimension of the *folletín* is greatest."<sup>45</sup> Silva Castro suggests the cinema's capacity to "cleanse the most truculent subjects of their *folletín*-esque content."<sup>46</sup> His rhetoric echoes *Fósforo*'s reflections regarding cinema's capacity to exemplify action by eliminating language, viewing cinema both as the culmination and the transcendence of melodramatic literature. In early twentieth-century Mexico and Brazil, the *folletín/folhetim* constituted a key

“trop[e] of film reception,” in Yuri Tsivian’s phrase.<sup>47</sup>

The “permeability to contemporary life” that Martín Barbero identifies in the *folletín/folhetim*, a characteristic shared by the other cultural forms he mentions (journalism and popular theater) is given a unique valence by novel technologies of visual reproduction, which held out the promise of scientific objectivity that could be harnessed to projects of national progress, including policing.<sup>48</sup> In cinema and illustrated journalism, pretensions to visual authenticity were frequently used to shock and titillate, while the melodramatic moral polarities evoked in the context of the criminal worked contain the potentially disruptive social effects of spectacularizing crime. With its oscillation between the melodramatic and the topical and its simultaneously cosmopolitan and national pedigree, the *folletín/folhetim* provides a productive optic for examining two overlapping phenomena: the sensationalization of everyday life through excessive and theatrical tropes that were shared by novels, popular theater, and journalism; and the dynamics of cultural circulation between Mexico and Brazil and industrialized nations, exemplified by the import and production of serial novels and literary and cinematic crime narratives.

The first three chapters of the dissertation address two categories of films—re-enactments of real-life cases and locally produced serial films—which intersect in the case of *El automóvil gris* (*The Grey Automobile*), discussed in Chapter 3. In Chapter 1, entitled “Cinema, Criminality, and Popular Sensationalism in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, 1906-1913,” I examine the importance of topical narratives of real-life crimes to early attempts at film production in Brazil’s fastest-growing cities. I chart the production of early true-crime films in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, from the massive box-office success of the 1908 *Os estranguladores* (*The Stranglers*), considered Brazil’s first fiction feature, to a proliferation of film adaptations of the so-called “Crime of the Trunk,” (involving a victim who was dismembered and stuffed in a steamer trunk), to later, more sophisticated reconstructions of real-life cases such as the 1912 *O caso dos caixotes* (*The Case of the Strongboxes*) and the 1913 *Um crime sensacional* (*A Sensational Crime*). I link the spectacular cross-class appeal of narratives of crime and violence to the tensions of urban reform and elite-driven modernization. These processes physically reshaped Brazil’s capital at the turn of the twentieth century, instituting often violent mechanisms of arbitrary policing and geographic exclusion that increasingly pushed poor and working-class citizens out of the city center. My analysis draws on social histories of criminality and policing, as well as police reportage, advertisements for popular amusements, and literary texts of the period, ranging from the *crônicas* (urban chronicles) of João do Rio to the pessimistic novels of Lima Barreto. I argue that true-crime films built on the tendency of print media and popular amusements to dramatize current events, promising a proliferation of “authentic” details even as they contained the socially disruptive potential of violent narratives within a framework of moral polarities recognizable from literary and theatrical melodrama.

Chapter 2, entitled “Imported Serials, Paraliterary Appropriations, and the Production of Crime Films in Rio de Janeiro, 1917-1924,” examines the intersection between a local tradition of serial literature and a craze for imported serial films, in many cases exhibited with tie-in novelizations published in local newspapers. I emphasize the productivity of filmic and literary intertextuality for new forays into local film production, and the role of cosmopolitan narratives of criminality in attempts to envision Rio as modern metropolis. Analyzing the reception of French and American serials such as Louis Feuillade’s *Les vampires* and the Pathé New York film *Os mistérios de Nova York* (*The Mysteries of New York*, based on three serials starring American actress Pearl White), and their links to imaginative paraliterary texts that appeared in

local film magazines, I argue that the popularity of serial films and fictional tie-ins allowed local writers and producers to imagine inserting their own narratives within a mode of imported serial culture, itself characterized by the constant recycling of iconographies and narrative tropes. Local productions like *Os mistérios do Rio de Janeiro/The Mysteries of Rio de Janeiro* (1917) and *A quadrilha do esqueleto/The Skeleton Gang* (1917) made use of key elements of imported serials' sensational appeal (insidious criminal organizations, international intrigue, new technologies used for nefarious ends) staging their plots against the backdrop of well-known local sites. In so doing, these films constructed Rio de Janeiro's as stage for a distinctly modern brand of criminality, staking the city's claim to the status of a producer of sensational cinematic entertainment, a project extended by a series of adventure films produced by director Luiz de Barros in the early twenties, *A jóia maldita/The Accursed Gem* (1920), *O cavaleiro negro/The Black Rider* (1922) and *Hei de vencer (I Must Triumph)*, (1924).

Turning my focus towards Mexico, in Chapter 3, "Spectacles of Violence and Politics: True-Crime Film in Post-Revolutionary Mexico City, 1919-1926," I examine the case of *El automóvil gris* (*The Grey Automobile*, dir. Enrique Rosas), a 1919 film based on a notorious string of robberies apparently committed with the complicity of military officials. Even as the film drew on the codes of the French and American crime films popular with local audiences, it also addressed the crisis of the state's monopoly on violence occasioned by the Revolution. *El automóvil gris*'s suspenseful narrative, highly reminiscent of foreign serials, is interrupted by non-fictional images of an execution, which seem to constitute an "authentic" demonstration of state power over life and death. *El automóvil gris* combines fictional sequences that refute rumors of officials' involvement in the crimes, to a scene of supposedly unstaged death that spectacularly demonstrates the authorities' use of lethal force. The film thus throws into relief the political uses of the indeterminate truth-value of the cinematic image. I situate *El automóvil gris* in the context a contemporary culture of public spectacles of violence and politics, articulated in mass events such as rallies and parades, theatrical productions, journalism, news photography, and cinema, examining the interplay in Revolutionary visual culture between an "appetite for the realist effect"<sup>49</sup> and the open theatricalization of political life (exemplified, and satirized, by revue productions such as *En el país de la metralla* (*The Land of the Machine Gun*, José F. Elizondo, 1912). *El automóvil gris*, and films such as *La banda del automóvil* (*The Automobile Gang*, dir. Ernesto Vollrath, 1919), based on the same events, constructed Mexico City as the backdrop for a uniquely modern and cosmopolitan brand of criminal activity. Furthermore, *La banda del automóvil*, along with the adventure film *Fanny o el robo de los veinte millones* (*Fanny or the Theft of the Twenty Millions*, 1922), and a number of true-crime films featuring women accused of murder, presented titillating images of female criminality that negotiated between the images of foreign serial stars and changing definitions of Mexican womanhood.

In Chapter 4, "Nationalist Iconographies, Cosmopolitan Images of Crime: Regional Production and Adventure Narratives in Mexico, 1923-1927," I analyze how Mexican adventure films of the 1920s, produced in picturesque locations both by Mexico City filmmakers and semi-amateur enthusiasts, negotiated the country's recent revolutionary past. Local film critics like Carlos Noriega Hope constructed the production of adventure films as a sign of local progress, suggesting the role of locally produced cinema in simulating and thus mediating violence in the immediate post-Revolutionary period. In this chapter, I first examine a series of lost films made by self-styled film director and actor Miguel Contreras Torres, which drew explicitly on the conventions of American westerns even as they worked to code particular regional iconographies

(namely that of the *charro* (cowboy) associated with the states of Jalisco and Michoacán) as distinctly Mexican. I then turn to two 1927 films made by Gabriel García Moreno in the city of Orizaba, located near the port of Veracruz. These productions were publicized and received on a primarily local level and were thus, I suggest, more able to openly sensationalize ambivalent signs of local modernity: an expanding railway network controlled by bandits in *El tren fantasma* (*The Ghost Train*), and the spread of drug abuse in *El puño de hierro* (*The Iron Fist*) at the hands of a trafficker disguised as a social reformer. *El tren fantasma*'s stunt sequences featuring dynamic traveling shots simultaneously showcase the fast-moving train and the film camera, a conjunction of technologies that both documents and dynamizes the local landscape, rendering it marketable both locally and in Mexico City. By contrast, *El puño de hierro*'s flirtation with the narrative incoherence and fluid identities characteristic of imported serials led to its rejection as morally problematic.

Chapter 5, "Serials, Westerns and Cine-Romances: Adventure Melodrama in Regional Films and Cinema Magazines in 1920s Brazil," analyzes the production of sensational and sentimental melodramas by groups of semi-amateur film enthusiasts working on Brazil's economic and geographic margins. I draw on contemporary reviews and stills from lost films in order to examine the inter-articulation of dynamic action sequences with local scenery in surviving films such as *Tesouro perdido* (*Lost Treasure*, dir. Humberto Mauro, 1927), made in the small city of Cataguases in Minas Gerais and *Retribuição* (*Retribution*, dir. Gentil Roiz, 1925), filmed in the economically stagnant northeastern capital Recife. I read regional production in the light of the distribution patterns of imported westerns and serials, arguing that regional productions transformed an index of rural "backwardness" – the exhibition of film genres considered obsolete in major metropolises – was transformed into a sign of local cinematic modernity. Film journalists in southeastern Brazil's cosmopolitan cities, who promoted Brazilian cinema in the pages of illustrated magazines, disseminating its products in the form of stills and melodramatically worded plot summaries (*cine-romances*), condemned regional productions as hopelessly outdated. The incorporation of the tropes of the serial and western offered both technical and symbolic advantages; daring stunt sequences involving transportation technologies showcased the development of local infrastructure, while outdoor location shooting both reduced the need for studios and artificial lighting and allowed for the display of local landscapes. Staging thrilling action sequences in recognizable local spaces, regional productions reactivated the tension between scenic views and depictions of violence and danger that were manifest in the early true-crime films.

The sensationalization of everyday life in early twentieth-century Mexico and Brazil, exemplified by silent crime and adventure films, marked a collective negotiation with the social tensions occasioned by both elite-driven and Revolutionary projects of national modernization. The manner in which they registered, capitalized on, and attempted to ideologically contain the often violent and exclusionary terms of public life has continued to shape media culture in the two nations. In Mexico, the genealogy of the graphically illustrated police blotter can be traced from Porfirian and Revolutionary-era newspapers and illustrated magazines to the lurid pulp magazines popular from the 1930s through the 1950s, to the infamous publication *¡Alarma!* founded in 1963, to one of Mexico City's top-selling newspapers, *Metro*,<sup>50</sup> which features graphic covers showing victims of murders and accidents. Fernando Fabio Sánchez has argued that "the act of assassination and murder, both in artistic representation and historical fact," has come to constitute "one of the foundational elements of th[e] narrative construct known as modern Mexico," which, before its gradual erosion in the second half of the twentieth century,

rested upon “a stable and homogenized portrayal of the violent revolutionary past.”<sup>51</sup> In the Brazilian case, the perniciousness of urban exclusion and economic polarization between urban and rural areas have remained pivotal in iconographies of national culture, giving rise to two of Brazilian cinema’s most lasting topoi: the *favela* (slum) and the *sertão* (backlands).<sup>52</sup> By examining parallel trajectories in Mexican and Brazilian cinema in the silent era, before the consolidation of hegemonic national iconographies under the populist regime of Vargas or in post-Revolutionary Mexico, I seek to illuminate the role of visually mediated violence in the experience of modernization and the construction of the public sphere at the intersection of mass culture and national politics.

### Notes to Introduction

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 155.

<sup>2</sup> André Bazin, “Death Every Afternoon,” trans. Mark A. Cohen in *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*, ed. Ivone Margulies (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 27-31; Doane, “Dead Time, or the Concept of the Event” in *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 140-171.

<sup>3</sup> See especially Zuzana M. Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Ana M. López, “Early Cinema and Modernity in Latin America.” *Cinema Journal* 40, no. 1 (2000): 48-78.

<sup>5</sup> See *Early Cinema and the National*, ed. Richard Abel, Giorgio Bertellini and Rob King. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO, “The Making of Literate Societies” in *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* (UNESCO, 2006), 192.

<sup>8</sup> Miriam Hansen, “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism.” *Modernism/Modernity* 6:2 (1999), 59-77.

<sup>9</sup> Miriam Hansen, “Early Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?,” *New German Critique* 29 (1983), 147-184.

<sup>10</sup> See Teresa A. Meade, *Civilizing’ Rio: Reform and Resistance in a Brazilian City, 1889-1930*. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900-1931* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Marcos Luiz Bretas, *Ordem na cidade: O exercício cotidiano da autoridade policial no Rio de Janeiro: 1907 – 1930* (São Paulo: Rocco, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Josefina Ludmer, *El cuerpo del delito: un manual*, quoted and translated in Joanna Page, *Crisis and Capitalism in Contemporary Argentine Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 81.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Seltzer, *True Crime: Observations on Violence and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 10.

<sup>13</sup> Seltzer, *True Crime*, 47.

<sup>14</sup> Seltzer, *True Crime*, 73, 59.

<sup>15</sup> See Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972).

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- <sup>16</sup> Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema in its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 102-103.
- <sup>17</sup> Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds. *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 1.
- <sup>18</sup> Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, *Cinema na América Latina: Longe de Deus e perto de Hollywood* (Porto Alegre: L&PM Editores, 1985), 9.
- <sup>19</sup> See Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900-1931* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) Marcos Luiz Bretas, *Ordem na cidade: O exercício cotidiano da autoridade policial no Rio de Janeiro: 1907 – 1930* (São Paulo: Rocco, 1997).
- <sup>20</sup> Piccato, *City of Suspects*; Bretas, *Ordem na cidade*.
- <sup>21</sup> Robert M. Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen in Modern Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).
- <sup>22</sup> Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*, 41.
- <sup>23</sup> Julio Ramos, *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), xl.
- <sup>24</sup> García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*, 3.
- <sup>25</sup> Jesús Martín Barbero, *Communication, Culture, Hegemony: from the Media to Mediations* (London: SAGE Publications, 1987).
- <sup>26</sup> “Rioplatense” refers to the region surrounding the mouth of the Río de la Plata, including Buenos Aires and Montevideo in Uruguay. *Criollismo*, stemming from a term used to refer to people of Spanish ancestry born in the New World, refers to cultural forms and characteristics naturalized as local or national. “cultura de mezcla:” “modernidad europea y diferencia rioplatense, aceleración y angustia, tradicionalismo y espíritu renovador, criollismo y vanguardia.” Beatriz Sarlo, *Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires 1920 y 1930* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión, 1988), 15.
- <sup>27</sup> See Flora Süssekind’s *Cinematograph of Words: Literature, Technique, and Modernization in Brazil* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997) Rubén Gallo’s *Mexican Modernity: The Avant-Garde and the Technological Revolution* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005) and Esther Gabara’s *Errant Modernism: The Ethos of Photography in Mexico and Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).
- <sup>28</sup> Robert A. Gordon, *Cannibalizing the Colony: Cinematic Adaptations of Colonial Literature in Mexico and Brazil* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2009)
- <sup>29</sup> Gabara, *Errant Modernism*, 4
- <sup>30</sup> Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 48, 66.
- <sup>31</sup> Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 11.
- <sup>32</sup> Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*, 11.
- <sup>33</sup> Ana M. López, “Early Cinema and Modernity in Latin America,” *Cinema Journal* 40:1 (2000), 53.
- <sup>34</sup> Shelley Streeby, *Radical Sensations: World Movements, Violence, and Visual Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 18.
- <sup>35</sup> Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 44.
- <sup>36</sup> Streeby, *Radical Sensations*, 15.

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<sup>37</sup> Carlos Fuentes, quoted and translated in Laura Podalsky, “Disjointed Frames: Melodrama, Nationalism, and Representation in 1940s Mexico,” *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 12 (1993), 57.

<sup>38</sup> Jesús Martín Barbero, “Memory and Form in the Latin American Soap Opera,” in *To Be Continued: Soap Operas Around the World*, ed. Robert C. Allen, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 277.

<sup>39</sup> Marlyse Meyer, *Folhetim: uma história* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, Álvaro Barros Lêmez, *Vidas de papel: el folletín en el siglo XIX* (Montevideo: Monte Sexto, 1992)

<sup>40</sup> Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>41</sup> Flora Süssekind, *O Brasil não é longe daqui: O narrador, a viagem* (São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 1990).

<sup>42</sup> “Si queremos hallar algo cuya función se acerque en parte a la del cine [...] hemos de buscarlo en el campo literario y hacia las regionaes más humildes: lo encontramos en el folletín [...] ese element en que descansa toda obra de arte que remeda el vivir humano: la estética inherente a la acción.” “El cine y el folletín,” *Frente a la pantalla*, November 25, 1915, reprinted in *El cine que vio Fósforo*, ed. Manuel González Casanova (México D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003), 136.

<sup>43</sup> “En el folletín, la acción va acompañada de la mala literature; en tanto que en el cine, al desaparecer el verbo, se aleja el problema del estilo y queda sola la acción.” Guzmán and Reyes, “El cine y el folletín,” 136.

<sup>44</sup> “*Luces de la ciudad* es nada más que un folletín, y si le tradujera en palabras, en una novela, podría perfectamente ocupar un sitio junto a las fantásticas narraciones de Richebourg, Féval y Ponson du Terrail.” Raúl Silva Castro, “Entre el cine y el folletín,” *Atenea*, August 1931, reprinted in Jason Borge, ed., *Avances de Hollywood: Crítica cinematográfica en América Latina, 1915-1945* (Buenos Aires: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 2005), 92.

<sup>45</sup> “parecen acomodarse mejor a las exigencias propias del cine, son aquellas en las cuales la dimensión de folletín es más grande.” Silva Castro, “Entre el cine y el folletín,” 93.

<sup>46</sup> “lavar de su contenido folletinesco a los asuntos más truculentos.” Silva Castro, “Entre el cine y el folletín,” 93.

<sup>47</sup> Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 3-4.

<sup>48</sup> Alberto del Castillo Troncoso, “El surgimiento del reportaje policiaco en México: Los inicios de un nuevo lenguaje gráfico (1888-1910).” *Cuicuilco* 5:13 (May – August 1998), 167-171.

<sup>49</sup> John Mraz, *Photographing the Mexican Revolution: Commitments, Testimonies, Icons* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 12.

<sup>50</sup> <http://debatemx.wordpress.com/2012/03/17/dominio-de-la-prensa-roja-y-cifras-alegres-en-los-diarios-mas-vendidos/>, March 17, 2012. Accessed March 22, 2013.

<sup>51</sup> Fernando Fabio Sánchez, *Artful Assassins: Murder as Modern Art in Mexico* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>52</sup> Ivana Bentes, “The *Sertão* and the *Favela* in Contemporary Brazilian Film” in Lúcia Nagib, ed., *New Brazilian Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 121-138.



# CHAPTER 1

## Cinema, Criminality and Popular Sensationalism in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, 1906-1913

**A quadrilha da Morte**  
**NAS DOBRAS DO MYSTERIO**  
**DENTRO DA NOITE**  
**ASSALTO A UMA JOALHERIA**

A escolha dos brilhantes — Dois irmãos — Paulino é morto — Estrangulado — Onde está Carluccio? Também assassinado? Quarenta contos de joias — Na rua da Carioca — A casa Jacob Fucco & C.

Pensava os amigos que não havia mais nada de novo...  
 O crime de Paulino é o primeiro de uma série de crimes...  
 A escolha dos brilhantes...  
 Dois irmãos...  
 Paulino é morto...  
 Estrangulado...  
 Onde está Carluccio?...  
 Também assassinado?...  
 Quarenta contos de joias...  
 Na rua da Carioca...  
 A casa Jacob Fucco & C.



A vítima no seu quarto de morte como foi encontrada



Paulino Fucco — No Necrotério



CARLOS FUCCO



A joalheria de rua da Carioca — Local do crime

**OS ESTRANGULADORES**  
 A quadrilha da morte...  
 O crime de Paulino...  
 A escolha dos brilhantes...  
 Dois irmãos...  
 Paulino é morto...  
 Estrangulado...  
 Onde está Carluccio?...  
 Também assassinado?...  
 Quarenta contos de joias...  
 Na rua da Carioca...  
 A casa Jacob Fucco & C.

Fig. 1.1: Sensationalistic press coverage of the case on which Brazil's first fiction feature, *Os estranguladores* (*The Stranglers*) was based. *Gazeta de Notícias*, October 16, 1906. Acervo Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil.

On the morning of October 16, 1906, sensational reports appeared in Rio de Janeiro newspapers of a shocking case of robbery and murder, quickly dubbed “the Crime of Carioca Street” after the downtown thoroughfare where it occurred. For several days, the front pages were dominated by articles relating to the case, accompanied by reproductions of autopsy and crime scene photographs and detailed engravings of the locations where the events unfolded. First, the body of nineteen-year old Paulino Fuoco, who had been strangled, was discovered in a ransacked jewelry store belonging to his uncle; his brother Carluccio had gone missing. After Carluccio’s corpse was found floating in Guanabara Bay, an abandoned boat led the authorities to a group of thieves, who eventually confessed to luring the victim onto a boat and taking the keys to the jeweler’s before strangling him and disposing of the body.

In addition to becoming the subject of graphically illustrated police reportage that unfolded over several weeks, the “Crime of Carioca Street” was quickly adapted to the stage in the form of melodramas and topical musical revues, manifesting with striking rapidity Rio de Janeiro theatrical culture’s persistent interest in topical events and subjects.<sup>1</sup> Two years later, it would become the basis for what is considered the first fiction feature produced in Brazil, the 700-meter<sup>2</sup> *Os estranguladores* (*The Stranglers*), filmed by camera operator and cinema owner Antônio Leal and reportedly exhibited a staggering 830 times during its three-month run in the capital.<sup>3</sup> The varied print, onstage, and onscreen iterations of the real-life events of the “Crime of Carioca Street” suggest the extensive scope of a turn-of-the-century culture of popular sensationalism in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Staging spectacles of violence that addressed new forms of urban experience, cinema, journalism and theater situated violent events within discourses of progress and urban reform, constructing criminality as a sign and symptom of modernizing processes.

In the following, I link the striking cross-class appeal of these subjects for local audiences to the profound social conflicts of the elite projects that physically reshaped Brazil’s capital during the period, which were characterized by violent dynamics of social exclusion that expelled poor and working-class citizens from the city center. Furthermore, I examine how these cinematic re-enactments of real-life cases exploited cinema’s simultaneous potential for documentation and dramatization, and its privileged, if ambiguous, relationship to the categories of the topical and the event. Depictions of violence were associated with a public hunger for visual and verbal detail, even as they signaled the limits of representation itself. As unpredictable, contingent, and transgressive events, criminal acts are difficult to capture through mechanical reproduction technologies, while depictions of death, according to Mary Ann Doane, “mark the insistence and intractability of the real in representation.”<sup>4</sup> Moving images built on the tendency of print media and popular amusements to spectacularize current events, offering a proliferation of “authentic” detail, even as they situated this information within a framework of moral polarities drawn from the repertoire of literary and theatrical melodrama.

The initial report on the “Crime of Carioca Street” published in the *Gazeta de Notícias* is particularly suggestive in this regard (Fig. 1.1). Illustrated with several engravings showing graphic images of the victim’s corpse, in addition to the jewelry shop surrounded by curious onlookers, the article narrates the crime in a highly imaginative style:

The last stragglers emerging from the houses of diversion on the nearby square were passing by. In the new street lamps, the yellowed light of the Auer bulbs softly lit the street [...]

It was a horrifying crime at the classic hour of horrifying crimes, accentuated by the audacious circumstance of having taken place in the heart of the city [...] The flash of diamonds in a *vitrine*, the profusion of jewels lined up on the shelves, with fat figures attesting to their value, from that brilliant, illuminated rectangle arose a hallucinatory fascination that tempted a group of bandits, whose number is not yet known, to crime.<sup>5</sup>

The *Gazeta de Notícias*'s account is framed by references to novel practices of urban diversion and consumption (popular amusements and the shop window), which are in turn associated with new technologies of light (the illumination of the centrally located street, the glow of the jeweler's *vitrine*). This description links the display of commodities and the increasing circulation of city residents in spaces of commercialized leisure to the growing incidence of criminal violence, suggesting that unexpected dangers accompanied emerging forms of urban mobility and visibility. The article in the *Gazeta* was published almost a year before permanent cinemas began to open in Rio de Janeiro; nevertheless, it prefigures the close relationship between sensational journalism and the "hallucinatory fascination" exerted on local audiences by the "brilliant, illuminated rectangle" of the cinema screen.<sup>6</sup>

When the *Gazeta de Notícias* described the "Crime of Carioca Street" as a "horrifying crime at the classic hour of horrifying crimes," it referenced a broader imaginary of criminality, situating a real-life event within a horizon of expectations shaped by popular narratives that blended fact, speculation, and outright fiction. The vogue for true-crime films in turn-of-the-century Brazilian cities was in some senses a logical extension of the dramatization of topical events in popular journalism; Jean-Claude Bernadet suggests that "by making fiction in the actual locations of the crime, the film[s] develop[ed] a double desire" for document and fiction "already manifest in the newspaper."<sup>7</sup> Police reportage offered a proliferation of visual documents and verbal truths, even as it made imaginative use of drawn images and novelistic diction, dramatizing the facts that were known and inventing those that were not. In Rio de Janeiro's best-selling newspapers *Jornal do Brasil*, the *Gazeta de Notícias* and the *Correio da Manhã*, exemplars of modern-style illustrated journalism, transcriptions of autopsy and police reports, ostensibly verbatim interrogations, and reporters' conversations with witnesses were reproduced along with suspicions, speculation, and rhetorical strategies belonging to a literary register.<sup>8</sup> As befitting a journalistic tradition developed by men trained in the *belles lettres*,<sup>9</sup> police reportage was replete with detailed descriptions of settings and persons, vivid adjectives and superlatives, and evocations of moral extremes.

Given the affinities between true-crime films and police reportage, it is fitting that the productions discussed in this chapter, none of which is currently extant, be reconstructed from their traces in the mass press. Beyond the intertextual exchanges between cinema and police reportage, illustrated journalism served as a training ground for early filmmakers: both Antônio Leal and rival camera operator Alberto Botelho began their careers as photographers for popular newspapers and illustrated magazines.<sup>10</sup> Leal explicitly linked his film productions to his journalistic activities, commenting, "Perhaps because I worked for a time with the press, I developed a taste for opportunities; I was attracted by filmed reportage, the animated documentation of interesting things."<sup>11</sup> In 1916, Leal maintained that

The best stimulants to spectators' abundant attendance at the cinema are films of their own social life, live reportage [...] We have already verified this here: films

produced in 1908 and 1909 about more or less interesting occurrences, some of them taking advantage of the popular emotions left in the wake of great crimes, achieved in Rio and the states a success never equaled by great works of art, made with expense and care, executed in the great European studios.<sup>12</sup>

In a growing city on the periphery of industrial capitalism, where “cinema appeared as yet another foreign import,”<sup>13</sup> local productions could not hope to match the budgets and technical sophistication of imported film. Yet they could incorporate topical events and concerns, taking advantage of the “popular emotions” capitalized on by press coverage and popular theater.

Seeking to replicate the spectacular success of *Os estranguladores*, Leal produced two additional filmed re-enactments of sensational cases: *A mala sinistra* (*The Sinister Trunk*) in September 1908 and *Noivado de sangue* (*Bloody Honeymoon*) in February 1909, as well as a fictional film that focused on another subject dear to the *fait divers* - an amorously motivated suicide - entitled *Um drama na Tijuca* (*A Drama in Tijuca*, which at the time was a wealthy outlying neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro). These productions were part of a broader production and exhibition strategy emphasizing “national films,” an attraction that distinguished Leal’s Cinema Palace among local entertainment venues.<sup>14</sup> While they were unable to match his comparatively steady production of actualities, comedies, and dramas, Leal’s commercial rivals quickly imitated the success of *Os estranguladores*. The September 1908 “Crime of the Trunk,” (so called because the victim, Syrian businessman Elias Farhat, was strangled and stuffed into a steamer trunk by his employee Miguel Traad) was also adapted to the screen by camera operator Júlio Ferrez of the Cinema Pathé and by impresario Francisco Serrador in São Paulo. This intense but short-lived vogue for true-crime productions had peaked by late 1908; by 1912, a near-monopoly over local distribution and exhibition was consolidated by Serrador’s Companhia Cinematográfica Brasileira, superseding the primitive vertical integration of the producer/exhibitors, edging locally made films out of the market, and arguably bringing an end to a “*belle époque* of Brazilian cinema.”<sup>15</sup>

However, local film producers who remained active through the early teens continued to capitalize on the audience appeal of cinematic reconstructions of widely publicized real-life cases. In 1912 and 1913, camera operator Alberto Botelho produced two true-crime films in collaboration with his brother Paulino. The first, *O caso dos caixotes* (*The Case of the Strongboxes*), depicted an audacious payroll robbery, while the second, *Um crime sensacional* (*A Sensational Crime*), reconstructed the murder of businessman Adolfo Freire by his gardener. Significantly, these were the only Brazilian-made fiction films to be exhibited in São Paulo during these two years.<sup>16</sup> *O caso dos caixotes* integrated the newspaper publicity surrounding the heist into its narrative structure, directly citing articles in its intertitles and incorporating views of the locations where the crime unfolded.<sup>17</sup> In an inverse development, a still from *A Sensational Crime* depicting the moment of the murder was reproduced on the front page of the *Gazeta de Notícias*, enhanced with a pool of vibrant red blood.<sup>18</sup> The Botelho brothers’ cinematic reconstruction of a contingent event impossible to capture on camera was used to impart gruesome visual appeal to the ongoing newspaper coverage.



Fig. 1.2: An image from *Um crime sensacional*, enhanced with color and reproduced on the front page. *Gazeta de Notícias*, July 26, 1913. Acervo Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil.

This local imaginary of sensational crime in some ways recalls the “spectacular realities” of Parisian fin-de-siècle mass culture as discussed by Vanessa Schwartz, who analyzes the construction of a cultural “repertoire in which people were accustomed to a mediatized and spectacularized version of reality.”<sup>19</sup> This affinity is hardly coincidental; Paris was a key point of reference for local elites at a moment described by Jeffrey Needell as a “tropical Belle Époque.”<sup>20</sup> The expanding local press adopted the gruesome representations of violence characteristic of French sensational journalism, as a privileged sign of local modernity. Yet in Brazil’s expanding cities, the overwhelming, enervating, and downright dangerous quality of modern life in highly industrialized metropolis was as much an object of longing as it was a part of daily experience. Ben Singer has argued that American sensational journalism capitalized on a sense of “chance, peril, and shocking impressions” symptomatic of the nervous and perceptual “overload” experienced by individuals in the modern city.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, in early twentieth-century Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, the greatest threats to an individual’s health and safety were often posed by the failure to modernize, rather than to the perceptually overwhelming hazards of daily life in industrialized cities. Although Rio almost doubled in size between 1890 and 1906, growing from 500,000 to 800,000 residents during this period,<sup>22</sup> and São Paulo’s population exploded from only 35,000 in 1880 to 600,000 in 1924,<sup>23</sup> both cities possessed only rudimentary systems of public services like transportation, lighting, sanitation, and policing.

In this context, the consumption of real-life cases as popular spectacles was considered a means of approximating local urban experience to daily life in metropolises like London, New York, and especially Paris. The French expression “grand crimes” was frequently used in the popular press to draw a distinction between the types of violence associated with the working classes—bar fights, disputes over questions of honor, and “crimes of passion”—and the intriguingly mysterious, gruesome, or perverse acts of violence committed in European and U.S. cities, which received international publicity.<sup>24</sup> The irony inherent in constructing “grand crimes” as a signal of local progress suggests the social costs of national modernization projects

imposed from above, which did little to address the lack of economic opportunity that arguably fueled criminal behavior.<sup>25</sup>

The occurrence—and perhaps more importantly, the news coverage—of sensational cases was persistently linked by local journalists to ambitions for national progress measured against European and American models. After the commission of the “Crime of the Trunk,” the *Correio Paulistano* noted ironically, “There are those who affirm that grand crimes are indices marking the degree of civilization of the milieu where these refinements of cruelty occur with frequency. If this phrase we have recalled is not a paradox, it can be said without exaggeration that S[ão] Paulo, day by day, is becoming civilized, competing with the great centers.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, in the context of the “Crime of Carioca Street,” a writer for the *Gazeta de Notícias* declared: “One of the characteristics of the greatest and most refined civilizations are [sic] grand crimes. In this respect, and under this aspect, we have the right to consider ourselves among the most advanced of civilized peoples. We are not lacking in what journalistic technology calls sensational crimes.”<sup>27</sup> The reference to “journalistic technology” suggests a self-conscious adoption of investigative reporting techniques modeled on the mass press of Europe and the United States. Although the *Gazeta de Notícias* stated, “the progress of crime is cause for alarm,” the newspaper was quick to admit that it also “enriches our articles.”<sup>28</sup> The rise of the illustrated press provisionally expanded the reach of journalistic texts beyond the sphere of the lettered elites; its focus on graphic images of victims and perpetrators suggests the degree to which the massification of public culture in the period was premised on violence.

This paradox was perhaps formulated most suggestively by João do Rio (a pseudonym of the writer Paulo Barreto, celebrated for his literary articles on quotidian experience in Rio de Janeiro). In a 1909 text on child murderers, he writes, “Given the current level of civilization, a civilization that carries with it the seeds of every kind of decadence, crime tends to increase, as the budgets of great powers increase, and with an ever greater percentage of impunity.”<sup>29</sup> In terms reminiscent of the critique of modernity and rationalization developed in Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, João do Rio suggests that the “progress” constituted by industrialized nations’ capitalist expansion is in fact an implacable evolution towards barbarism. While statements intimately linking sensationalized violence with civilization might be dismissed as merely ironic, I argue that they exemplify the contradictions of elite visions of progress in early twentieth-century Brazil.

In the euphoric, but politically unstable, decades following the 1889 declaration of the Republic, modernization projects modeled on the capitals of industrialized nations (and often bankrolled by substantial external loans from these same countries, especially Great Britain) failed to efface the economic and social legacy of a slave economy that had promoted the development of a powerful rural oligarchy. The federal capital, Rio de Janeiro, was to be reconstructed as a visible affirmation of Brazil’s increasing integration into the global economy, both as a major producer of agricultural products (especially coffee) and an importer of mass-produced commodities and cultural goods. The nation’s increasing “civilization” was made visible both to the inhabitants of its political and economic center, and to observers abroad, through a reconstruction of the central Rio on the model of Haussmann’s reforms in Paris, initiated in 1903 by city prefect Fernando Pereira Passos.<sup>30</sup> Densely clustered buildings from the colonial era that had been transformed into tenements were demolished to make way for broad thoroughfares such as the emblematic Avenida Central. Urban reforms displaced the informally employed and the working classes, including large numbers of immigrants and emancipated former slaves, to the city’s northern margins. Infrastructural improvements, such as the

expansion of trolley lines and installation of electric illumination, were concentrated in Rio's center and the wealthy neighborhoods that were being constructed in the city's southern zone.

These acts of demolition and expulsion were justified by local elites for both hygienic concerns—high population density and unsanitary living conditions exacerbated frequent outbreaks of yellow fever and other infectious diseases—and for cosmetic reasons. Local journalists formed a “League Against Ugliness” [*Liga contra o Feio*],” launching newspaper campaigns against “unattractive” aspects of the urban landscape such as narrow streets, poor sanitation, and the presence of beggars in the city center.<sup>31</sup> Such efforts were reinforced by the arbitrary exercise of police authority on the city's poor inhabitants, who were subject to arrest for crimes such as vagrancy and public drunkenness.<sup>32</sup> In her analysis of urban reform and social dissent in Republican Rio, Teresa A. Meade suggests that elites were more troubled by the visibility of crime and prostitution, especially in central areas that might be frequented by foreigners, than by its actual existence. She writes, “the city's elite, then as now, was less concerned with an increase in vice so long as it remained contained to the poorer neighborhoods. The real problem in Rio was that the city had grown so rapidly and haphazardly that congested areas brought the diverse social classes and races into close proximity.”<sup>33</sup> A key element of the disturbing appeal the “Crime of Carioca Street” held for local residents was the fact that it occurred on an important central street.

Even as elites and police forces strove to suppress visible signs of vice, emerging forms of popular sensationalism actively worked to link criminality to the modernity promised by urban reform and demographic shifts. The newspaper *Jornal do Brasil* situated the perpetrators of the “Crime of Carioca Street” among a group of suspicious figures circulating on the capital's newly inaugurated avenues, aligning the physical transformations of city space and the emergence of new leisure cultures with the threat of violent crime:

With the alteration of the habits of our tranquil and utterly bourgeois city, due to its radical transformation, with the new arteries that already lend it the aspect of a European city, day by day, European immigration grows, and as is natural, on par with the arrival of new elements good for our prosperity, it brings some bad ones as well.

New types make their appearance daily, giving preference to places of amusement [*casas de espectáculos*], confectioneries and fashionable cafés, in order to promenade on the avenues in automobiles and luxurious carriages, without anyone knowing their provenance or how they maintain the lifestyle of wealthy persons.<sup>34</sup>

In this article, a congruence is established between the physiognomy of public spaces and those that populate them; the newly Europeanized appearance of the city is directly associated with the arrival of European immigrants. Liberal elites influenced by various brands of scientific racism had encouraged the arrival of these newcomers as a means of effacing the economic and demographic legacy of slavery in Brazil. The goal was to “whiten” the population and simultaneously foster the productive work habits stereotypically associated with Europeans.<sup>35</sup> Yet with the article's suggestion that criminals are present amongst the influx of otherwise desirable white immigrants, the public display of wealth fostered by new practices of circulation and diversion is implied to be a potentially dangerous deception. The demographic shifts of the

rapidly growing city fostered anxieties about the legibility of bodies in urban space, an anxiety closely articulated with the emergence of new visual technologies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>36</sup> Not coincidentally, most of the victims and perpetrators of the “grand crimes” adapted to the screen were recent immigrants (Italians in the “Crime of Carioca Street,” Syrians in the “Crime of the Trunk”).

The latent threat posed by criminals of foreign origin was linked to anxieties regarding the presence of anarcho-syndicalists among their ranks, which magnified elite fears about the very real prospect of popular uprisings,<sup>37</sup> exemplified by the November 1904 riot in protest of compulsory universal smallpox vaccination, part of the broader public hygiene movement. Meade finds special significance in the fact that rioters targeted the most visible elements of urban reform, rather than the institutions directly responsible for the vaccination program: they “overturned and set ablaze streetcars, brok[e] gas and electric streetlights, erected barricades to cut off access to the main arteries in the vital business districts [...] invaded construction sites [...] and vandalized train stations.”<sup>38</sup> The eruption of collective violence directed against urban suggests a public consciousness that state-driven modernization processes was intended to benefit local elites to the exclusion of broad sectors of the population.

Although these gatherings lacked the nascent political consciousness of the riots, huge crowds flocked to the physical locations associated with “grand crimes,” as well as to the films based on them. Masses of curious onlookers would crowd crime scenes, the morgue, and the House of Detention; at times they even threatened to lynch accused criminals arriving in police custody, necessitating the intervention of the authorities. Cinema-going crowds were comparatively peaceful, although their sheer numbers occasionally obstructed traffic on main thoroughfares, again resulting in police intervention. Schwartz has linked the emergence of mass entertainments to the pacification of the Parisian masses;<sup>39</sup> by contrast, in turn-of-the-century Rio de Janeiro, elite hegemony was precarious, and the threat of mass mobilization a very real one. As a compensatory measure, police reportage and the films that drew on it evoked moral extremes sketched in melodramatic terms, emphasizing individual guilt over difficult economic conditions or the shortcomings of local police.<sup>40</sup> Theatrical spectacles and true-crime films strategically distanced violent events from their real-life referents by changing characters’ names (and in some cases altering the narratives to dramatize events further), defusing the broader implications of the individual acts of violence and de-emphasizing issues such as police reform and the difficult situation of the urban poor.

As I have suggested above, rising rates of homicide and robbery in the growing cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo were viewed with striking ambivalence, functioning both as welcome confirmations and disturbing indices of local modernity. Criminal acts were roundly condemned in highly moralistic terms, yet criminal narratives were a key means of expanding the readership of local papers and audiences for locally produced films. True-crime films and their journalistic and theatrical counterpoints rendered everyday life in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo a thrilling spectacle; yet they also indirectly dramatized the social conflicts of rapid modernization, which was, by design, distributed unevenly across urban space. The marginalization of a large proportion of the population coexisted with the modest expansion of literacy (which rose to thirty-five percent by 1900)<sup>41</sup> and the development of a commercialized mass press with the technical capacity for vastly increased circulation, permitting the working classes and an emerging petty bourgeoisie to participate in a mass print culture with strong links to the emergent medium of cinema. By reading the history of film production in Rio and São Paulo in the first two decades of the twentieth century through the lens of popular



sensationalism, I seek to illuminate the ways that spectacles of violence were imbricated with novel modes of urban experience and new forms of social exclusion and belonging. I first turn to print culture, exploring the literary roots of police reportage and the effects of the visual technologies of photography and cinema on journalistic genres at the turn of the century.

### Sensationalizing the everyday: Police reportage, the *folhetim*, and the *crônica*

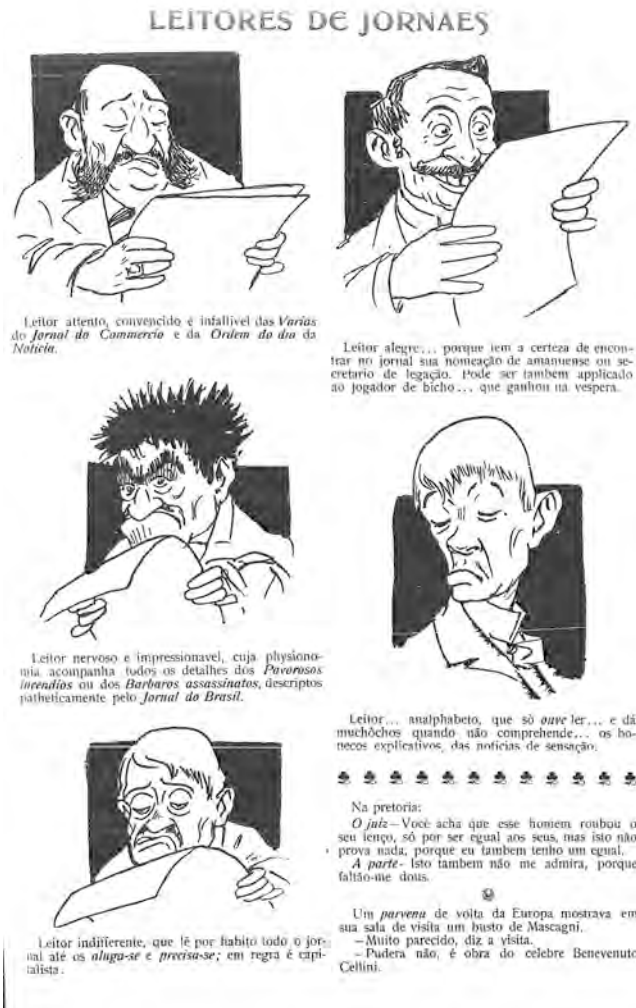


Fig. 1.3: A gallery of types of “newspaper readers,” including the “nervous, impressionable reader whose facial expressions accompany all the details of ‘Frightful Fires’ or ‘Barbarous Murders’, described in pathetic terms in the *Jornal do Brasil*” (center left) and “the illiterate reader” who relies on “the explanatory figures of sensational news” (center right). *Fon-Fon*, June 8, 1907. Acervo Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil.

Sensational journalism operates at the intersection of the melodramatic and the topical; it invests quotidian experience with shocking, thrilling, and disturbing characteristics through rhetorical excesses and moral polarities. According to literary historian Brito Broca, the emergence of the sensationalistic police blotter in Brazilian mass-circulation newspapers can be traced to the melodramatic tropes of serialized novels, which had appeared in their pages beginning in the mid-nineteenth century:

The *romance-folhetim* was perhaps the first element of sensationalism to be introduced into the press. It preceded police reportage, offering readers a dish identical to the one that it would later provide them. So much so, that when the newspaper took on a new profile, approaching the modern model, the attraction of novels [printed] at the foot of the page began to decline. Today, the reader no longer seeks the continuation of a novel, but rather follows the police blotter, curious to know how the investigation is proceeding, if the criminal has been caught.<sup>42</sup>

This dynamic of substitution is dramatized in the satirical newsroom novel *Recordações do escritor Isaías Caminha* (*Recollections of the Writer Isaías Caminha*) by Lima Barreto, a mulatto author who penned biting critiques of early twentieth-century Brazil's drive towards "progress."<sup>43</sup> The titular writer and narrator of the novel describes the manner in which news of a (fictional) "grand crime" – the discovery of an apparently wealthy couple's decapitated bodies in an isolated suburb – demanded the re-arrangement of the entire front page of the newspaper (a thinly disguised version of the recently founded *Correio da Manhã*):

On the day of the crime...the editor-in-chief did not spare his vastly amusing *folhetim*. He ordered that it not be published, as he wanted a page and a half about the crime; let it be invented, the most minor details given, the wildest conjectures [...] Whatever it took, he wanted a page-and-a-half and twenty-five thousand copies for single-issue sales.<sup>44</sup>

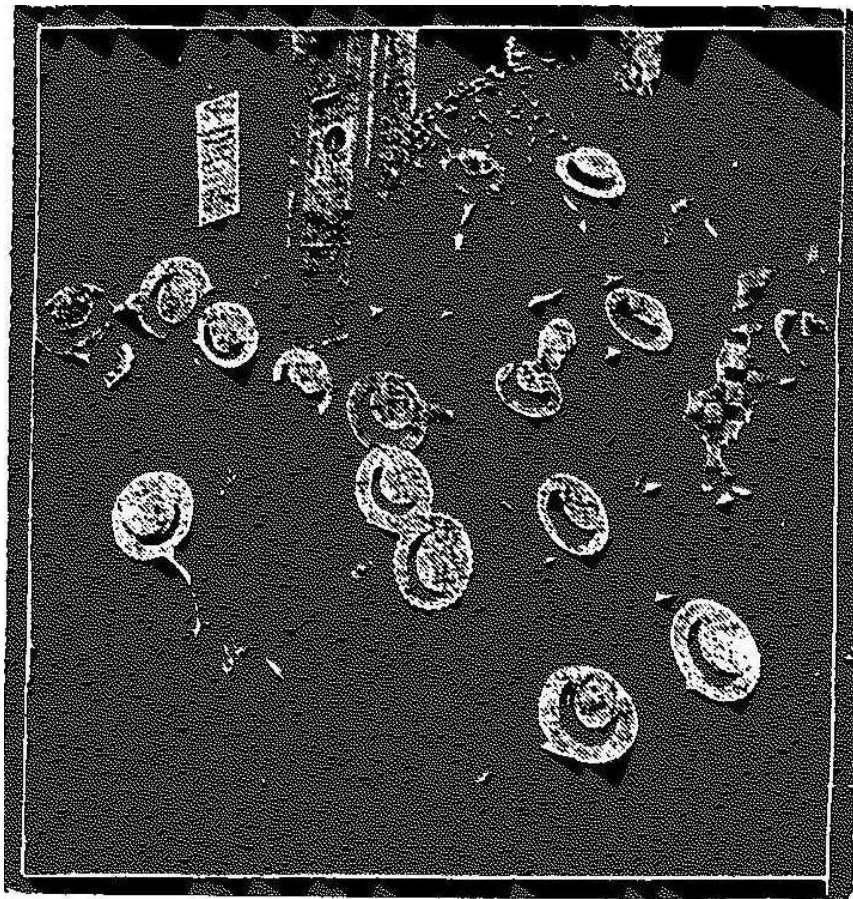
In Barreto's fictional description, the sensational news item includes many elements directly cannibalized from the literary *folhetim*: one journalist finally settles on "a Rocambole-esque title of a popular novel" as the headline, and another, charged with the duty of writing the lead-in paragraph, takes advantage of his "reading of *folhetins policiais*" (serial novels with criminal themes).<sup>45</sup>

This transplantation of literary tropes, associated not only with the *romance-folhetim* but also with the short, topical form of the *crônica* that sometimes occupied the same space at the foot of the page, creates an ambiguity about the truth-value of the information by mixing journalistic and literary genres. In an essay on the place of novelistic strategies in sensational reportage, Valéria Guimarães notes that the "confusion between the employment of a rhetoric committed to information and a literary tone, long used in the *crônica*" creates a situation of ethical ambiguity: "[o]n the one hand, the commitment to the 'truth' of the facts, on the other a dialogue with fiction that slips into pure invention, compromising the truth."<sup>46</sup> Although the fictionalization of topical events certainly had limits – Guimarães recounts the resignation of one reporter who was tricked into giving false news – sensational reportage purveyed a heightened, dramatized "truth" that owed much to popular literature.

Several aspects of the process of producing sensational news, as described in Barreto's novel, recall the work of the serial novelist: a division of literary labor; production under intense time pressure and with deliberate space-wasting techniques; and the importance of imaginative invention in the absence of further facts to report. Barreto significantly describes this labor as a "task of developing, explaining, reconstructing the scene to the public taste."<sup>47</sup> According to Isaías, this public taste is ephemeral, fickle, and ultimately unfathomable. He states, "Due to this

strange, mysterious faculty of the masses, this case, banal a month earlier or later, on that day took on the proportions of an event, an uncommon happening.”<sup>48</sup>

Although questions of class (as in Barreto’s fictional crime), race, and immigrant identity were decisive in which cases were considered worthy of mass attention the role of the multitudes is suggested as pivotal in the staging of media spectacles of sensational crime. The mass described by Lima Barreto is a heterogeneous one, composed of “all sorts of people: old, young, bourgeois, workers, ladies—people of all ages and conditions,”<sup>49</sup> suggesting the cross-class appeal of the quotidian melodramas of sensational crime narrated by the mass-circulation dailies, which functioned as a provisional extension of the “republic of letters” to a broader segment of the local population. In contrast to the drive towards spatial exclusion of the working classes that characterized turn-of-the-century urban reforms, the voyeuristic participation in spectacles of sensational violence seems to have – at least in Barreto’s literary imagination – temporarily dissolved class boundaries in the figure of a mass bodily moved by curiosity and horror.



**POPULARES, EM FRENTE AO “CORREIO DA MANHÃ”.  
LENDO UM BOLETIM**

Fig. 1.4 “Common folk in front of the *Correio da Manhã*, reading a bulletin”: a crowd gathers seeking updates on the murder that inspired the film *Um crime sensacional*. *Correio da Manhã*, July 10, 1913. Acervo Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil.

The category of the sensational, frequently characterized as appealing to the “lowest common denominator,” in fact suggests a negotiation between elite and mass, oral and literate culture. Valéria Guimarães emphasizes the presence of the cliché and other forms deriving from oral culture both in the serialized novel and police reportage, suggesting that “when the editor or *cronista* takes up the traditional narrative formula, he opens a channel of dialogue with the reader, even if this reader is little acquainted with the realm of writing...the *faits divers* and other sensationalist formulas reveal the duality of the operation of cultural exchange between producer and receiver.”<sup>50</sup> If, as Lima Barreto’s Isaiás suggests, the collective will of the masses transforms a violent happening into a media spectacle, popular language also left its mark on the journalistic texts that disseminated such events.

Although an examination of crime reportage from the period does suggest the transfer of elements from lurid serial novels to sensational police reportage, it is important to note in that in Barreto’s novel, the *folhetim* so brusquely displaced by news of the sensational crime does not closely resemble the melodramatic tales on the model of (or translated directly from) the French *roman-feuilleton*. Described as stickily sentimental but with “pretensions to elegance, lightness and ease, without ceasing to be intellectual,”<sup>51</sup> this particular *folhetim* seems closer to the topical, ephemeral tone of the *crônica* more than the blood-and-thunder plots of a typical serialized novel. Insisting on the polyvalent nature of the space of the *folhetim*, which was not limited to the publication of fiction, Marlyse Meyer traces a more complex web of relationships between the serialized novel, police reportage, and the short, anecdotal form of the *crônica*. Meyer notes their common point of origin in the *variedades* or “varieties” that began to appear in Brazilian newspapers in the first decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>52</sup> The characteristics of the *variedades* – brevity, topicality, and ability to draw the reader’s attention – would continue to unite the *faits divers*, the *crônica* and the *folhetim* in its many incarnations; for example, at the turn of the century the *Gazeta de Notícias* published a daily section entitled “*Pequena crônica da cidade*” (“Little chronicle of the city”) which resembled the *faits divers* in its enumeration of unconnected (and usually minor) accidents and crimes. Literary *crônicas* were frequently published in the section below-the-fold section of the front page, suggesting the *folhetim*’s similar embrace of diverse genres and forms, in turn-of-the-century Brazilian newspapers.

A 1907 article in the *Gazeta de Notícias* entitled “O Folhetim” registers the mutability of the form and its both complementary and competitive relationships with other sections of the newspaper. The article’s author, identified only as Zig-Zag, begins by recalling the heyday of the *crônica*, a genre developed by literary giants such as Machado de Assis in the 1850s, and published in the *folhetim* section. This space came to be occupied by the *romance-folhetim*, “those homeopathic doses of strong sensations and dramatic sallies” that became essential to the newspaper’s hold on its public.<sup>53</sup> Zig-Zag writes, “A newspaper can lack a telegraphic service, it can be weak in its information, it can lack grammar [...] but take away its *folhetim* and you will see if this is not the same as taking away its life.”<sup>54</sup> Just as the *crônica* had been displaced by the popular serialized novel, in turn, the literary story published vertically in the seventh column was edged out by the police reportage that often occupied the right-most columns of the front page. Zig-Zag refers to this form as the *calunga*, using the contemporary term for a caricature or schematic drawing, and declares that the public’s overwhelming present preference is for:

...the synthesis of the *calunga* which informs and updates [readers] on events with the speed and penetration of a lightning bolt. One does not need time to read the *calunga*. It is enough to see it, enough to glance at it and make out, on the

page blackened by the traces of the artist's pencil, a face, a prone body, with a name and some suggestive headlines underneath, for the reader to come to know of the latest crime committed against a man, and, also, ordinarily, against the art of drawing and engraving on cheap paper.<sup>55</sup>

Although “the masses are omnipotent and if they love and adore the *calunga*, what is not only practical for them, but also humane, is to give them their fill of it,” Zig-Zag announces that the newspaper will revive the tradition of the *folhetim*, publishing articles by prominent contributors below the fold on the front page.<sup>56</sup>

In his description, Zig-Zag emphasizes that the vertical section devoted to police reportage is *seen*, instantaneously apprehended, rather than read. His description of what would have attracted the reader's attention—the crudely rendered image of the face and body, the name, and the string of “suggestive headlines”—suggest that this arrangement was a graphic message at least partially legible even to the large number of *cariocas* who were illiterate. The tendency of journalism towards the image, both in its inclusion of engravings and photographs and its framing as a striking graphic object that could be apprehended instantaneously, would continue to manifest itself in the *crônica*. In *Cinematograph of Words*, Flora Süssekind has discussed the (somewhat later) development of a curt, telegraphic style “suggestive of a snapshot” in the genre, linking this tendency to writers' experiences with the new technologies like the cinema, the gramophone, and the typewriter.<sup>57</sup>

However, Süssekind suggests that in the first decade of the twentieth century, modernist writing strategies that attempted to transpose the effects of photography or cinema to the medium of writing had not yet been seriously undertaken; writers had only just begun to contemplate the *crônica*'s affinity to cinematic and photographic representation. This affinity is the subject of an oft-cited passage by João do Rio:

The *crônica* evolved towards the cinema [...] It passed through drawing and caricature. Lately it has been photography, retouched but lifeless. With the delirious haste of us all, it has now become cinema – a cinematograph of words, the story [*romance* – literally, novel] of the [camera] operator in the labyrinth of events, of others' lives, and of fantasy, but a story in which the operator is a secondary character dragged along in the rush of events.<sup>58</sup>

Confounding observer and observed, the cinema both documented and enacted the rapid sensory impressions of a shifting urban landscape. Maite Conde suggests in an analysis of film and the *crônica* in turn-of-the-century Rio that, “the cinema's superficiality and its absence of memory are seen by João do Rio as ideally suited to the new urban environment, with its rapid transformation and destruction of the past.”<sup>59</sup>

Rather than experience these developments with sense of a loss, João do Rio implies that the pleasures of both cinema and journalism are rooted precisely in their ephemerality: “A film, another, yet another... we don't like the first? On to the second. The second's no good? Onwards then!”<sup>60</sup> Discounting cinema's possibilities as a means of storing and preserving time, he concludes his comparison of film and the *crônica* by noting, “It follows that, just as the film is not re-viewed, the page resembling life is not re-read. It displeases, or it enchants. There was no time to re-read it and note its defects – precisely because there is no time for anything.”<sup>61</sup> Like the graphic police reportage that is not read but is visually understood in an instant, the

*crônica* resembles film in the manner in which it precludes reflection, exemplifying the rapidly accelerating pace of daily life.



Fig. 1.5: The 1909 edition of João do Rio's *Cinematógrafo*.  
Doe Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Comparing cinema and the *crônica* as forms that offer fleeting impressions that rush by at the vertiginous speed of modern life, João do Rio additionally makes reference to a unique element of film viewing in the Rio de Janeiro at the turn of the century. He writes, “Perhaps you will see people you know, who do not speak to you, which is a blessing. Perhaps you will see strangers who do not speak to you but laugh, just as the apparatus captured them, perpetuating this symptom of happiness.”<sup>62</sup> He at once sardonically comments on the constant interaction demanded by public life, in which one might be hailed in the street by numerous bothersome acquaintances, and alludes to the experience of seeing familiar faces on the cinema screen, which would have been a relatively frequent occurrence for affluent sectors of the Rio de Janeiro audience between 1908 and 1910.

During this period, actuality films taken by Antônio Leal of the Cinema Palace and Júlio Ferrez of the Cinema Pathé captured the leisure activities of the *carioca* elite – carriage rides, a confetti-throwing “battle” during Carnival, football games – as well as more solemn events such as state funerals. The filming, and in some cases the exhibition, of these actualities were discussed with interest in Figueiredo Pimentel’s *Binóculo* (“Opera Glass”) column in the *Gazeta de Notícias*. Pimentel styled himself the promoter of social practices such as the five o’clock tea and the “fashionable” times to attend film screenings (referred to as *sessões da moda*), which helped establish cinemas as a point of rendezvous for the well-off.<sup>63</sup> In the column, he promoted Júlio Ferrez’s filming of elite families who participated in a weekly carriage promenade, specifying the hour at which the carriages should appear (and the reduced velocity at which they should move) in order to appear in the film.<sup>64</sup>



*Aspecto do "Corso", às quartas-feiras em Botafogo.*



*Figueiredo Pimentel, o inventor do smartismo carioca, Mr. e Mme. Raul Toché.*

Figs. 1.6 and 1.7: Two examples of "Rio in Flagrante": Wednesday carriage rides in Botafogo (*Fon-Fon*, December 7, 1907) and a candid portrait of Figueiredo Pimentel, inventor of "smartismo" in Rio (*Fon-Fon*, January 18, 1908).  
Acervo da Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil.

The filming of such actualities was in some ways an extension of the visibility of local elites that Pimentel had promoted and pioneered in his column. Each day, *Binóculo* featured a section entitled “Vimos ontem” (“Yesterday we saw”), which included a list of the society gentlemen and ladies who passed in front of the newsroom of the *Gazeta de Notícias*, accompanied by a description of their lavish formal attire (famously impractical for such a warm climate). These lists were the verbal counterpart of a growing practice of public photography, usually of elite subjects, which was published in illustrated magazines. Interestingly, these snapshots were referred to as *flagrantes*; *Fon-Fon* magazine, founded in 1907, published photographs with the caption “O Rio em flagrante: os nossos instantâneos” (Fig. 1.7) This description emphasizes the camera’s power to capture events *in media res* by producing an image (almost) instantaneously. However, *em flagrante* literally refers, as it does in English, to the idea of being caught red-handed.<sup>65</sup>

Photography was an expanding aspect of policing methods in Rio de Janeiro at this time; the universalization and standardization of crime scene photography seems to have been adopted concurrently with the 1907 reform of the police forces in the city. During 1907, the first year for which information is available in the official *Boletim de Policia*, the photographic department photographed 3,141 suspects.<sup>66</sup> As Allan Sekula has suggested, the camera lens has been attributed with the power to figuratively and literally arrest human subjects, organizing them in an implicit hierarchy that extended from the “bourgeois portrait” to the criminal mugshot.<sup>67</sup> In a 1907 *crônica*, João do Rio suggests that this continuum can be literally observed in the pages of the illustrated press, where the current “generation makes, on its own initiative, its anthropometric identification for the future.”<sup>68</sup> He writes, “The interesting thing is to observe the desire for one’s portrait in the papers, from the dark promenades of the garden of crime to charity *garden-parties* [in English in original], from criminals to angelic souls who only think of the good. Appear! Appear!”<sup>69</sup> Significantly, these two diametrically opposed groups were attributed with similar literary tastes. João do Rio notes criminals’ fondness for violent, melodramatic narratives in several of his *crônicas*, while the magazine *Fon-Fon* observed that the majority of adult women “only read the sections of mundanities, *Binóculo*, and all of them, without exception, simply die for the *folhetins*. The more violent and full of tragic peripeties the *folhetim* is, the more it absorbs them.”<sup>70</sup> João do Rio’s *crônicas* exemplified a print culture that addressed, and was consumed by, a cross-class readership belonging to these diametrically opposed social spheres.

As his interest in the “gardens of crime” that coexist with an elite world of charity garden parties suggests, João do Rio’s *crônicas* did not focus exclusively on the modernized façades of Rio’s new thoroughfares and public monuments, but also explored the darker side of urban life, through which he moved in a manner he explicitly compared to the behavior of a *flâneur*.<sup>71</sup> His 1908 collection of *crônicas*, *A alma encantadora das ruas* (*The Enchanting Soul of the Streets*), included a section entitled “Where the Street Sometimes Ends” – namely, the House of Detention.<sup>72</sup> João do Rio often positioned himself or one of his acquaintances as a guide through the urban underworld, a convention that he explicitly links to French sensational journalism and theater. In a *crônica* describing the abysmal conditions in cut-rate lodging houses, ironically titled “Sono calmo” (“Peaceful Slumber”), João do Rio refers to his role as urban guide as part of a venerable tradition. He writes, “In French plays of ten years ago, there already appeared the journalist who brings fashionable people to macabre places; in Paris the reporters of the *Journal* move about accompanied by an authentic *apache*. I merely repeated a gesture that is almost a



law. I accepted.”<sup>73</sup> A piece that might be construed as a critique of the social order is situated in the context of an imported journalistic and theatrical culture that sensationalizes urban life, blunting its potential political impact.

João do Rio’s role as intrepid investigative reporter is reprised in his volume of crônicas *Cinematógrafo* (*Cinematograph*) in “As crianças que matam,” (“Children Who Kill”). The *crônica* provides an opportunity to explore the “crimson neighborhood,” a zone plagued by rampant violence.<sup>74</sup> He writes:

this whole part of the city, one of the oldest, still full of colonial memories, has at every step the traces of a lugubrious history. Gamboa Street is dark, dusty, with a cemetery in between the houses; Harmonia Street was called Cemetery Street, because of the existence of a necropolis for slaves brought from the coast of Africa...Prainha Street, even opened up [by recent port reforms], with new buildings, at night creates a frightening impression.<sup>75</sup>

Crime is at once a vestige of the old Rio of the colonial period and the slave trade, and inherent to the new Rio of reforms and construction and newspapers that openly sensationalize violence. In this *crônica*, João do Rio notes the “seeds of decadence” latent in the “civilizing” process; as I show, the true-crime films of the first two decades of the twentieth century would capitalize on the ambivalence of this vision of criminality *as* modernization.

Having sketched some elements of the complex relationship between the cinema and the popular press in creating new and often sensational forms of public visibility in turn-of-the-century Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, I now turn to the primary focus of this chapter: the intertextual network of spectacles based on a number of “grand crimes” that were publicized in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo between 1908 and 1913.

### **From Front Page to Stage to Screen: *Os Estranguladores* and the Emergence of the True-Crime Genre**

The true-crime films produced in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in the first two decades of the twentieth century extended a self-proclaimed aim of sensational crime reporting: to verbally and visually reconstruct violent events that were by their very nature unpredictable and resistant to narration.<sup>76</sup> Unable to represent the crime itself using the modes of visual representation that connoted maximum verisimilitude—photographic reproductions—dailies like the *Gazeta de Notícias* and the *Correio da Manhã* presented a parade of images of sites and persons linked to the violent events: scenes of the crime, the homes of the victims, images of their corpses, and portraits of suspects and authorities. These images were supplemented by drawings of imaginatively reconstructed events that could not be photographed, such as the moment of the commission of the “Crime of the Crystal Arcade.”<sup>77</sup>

A VINGANÇA DA PROFESSORA



Fig. 1.8: “The Teacher’s Vengeance” in the “Crime of the Crystal Arcade.”  
*Gazeta de Notícias*, March 7, 1909. Acervo da Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil.

Photographic reproductions and engravings with an indexical link to the sites and persons involved in the crime coexisted with imaginative renderings of moments impossible to capture; similarly, in police reportage medical and juridical discourses were juxtaposed with novelistic descriptions and exaggerated moral pronouncements of suspects’ innocence or guilt. Furthermore, both cinematic and journalistic representations of criminality in the period were permeated with the terminology of the stage. Both theatrical spectacles and true-crime films strategically distanced violent events from their real-life referents (often through slight changes to characters’ names or events), and by including apotheosis scenes (static tableaux illustrating allegorical concepts, a convention of local musical revues and dramas). Like announcements of theatrical productions, advertisements for true-crime films included lists of the tableaux or single-shot scenes (*quadros*) of which they were composed. These filmed scenes likely resembled theater in their spatial organization and flat, frontal orientation towards the camera.

In newspaper reports, the site of violent events was often referred to as the *cenário do crime* (setting or backdrop of the crime) or as the *teatro do crime* (theater of the crime).<sup>78</sup> One columnist in the *Jornal do Brasil* implicitly linked the theatrical rhetoric of crime reportage with the mounting of actual theatrical productions. Referring to the insertion of scenes representing key moments of the case into a pre-existing musical revue, the journalist writes, “The artists of the Palace Theatre had their own idea about the horrifying case of Carioca Street. If from the true theater of events things passed into the theater of exploitation and the ridiculous, they too resolved to take advantage of the situation, reproducing several scenes of the crime.”<sup>79</sup>

As this commentary suggests, the “Crime of Carioca Street” was heavily exploited on local stages almost from the very first reports well into the following year. It even became the subject of a peculiar form of printed theater: prominent playwright Artur Azevedo comically portrayed the collective obsession with the case in short vignettes, part of a long-running series of topical dialogues published in the newspaper *O Século*. These playlets sketch out the means by which the mass press and popular theatrical spectacles developed a cross-class appeal,

prefiguring the cinema's role in a sensationalistic public culture. In the first of the sketches related to the "Crime of Carioca Street," "Um desesperado" ("A Desperate Man"), Dr. Chiquinho, a genteel male caller pays a visit to a well-off lady and her four daughters. Upon entering, he complains:

At home, over lunch, in the office, in court, on the Rua do Ouvidor, on the Avenida [Central], at my tailor's, at my barber's [...] everywhere, in short, no one speaks of anything but the crime of Carioca Street! [...] And then I remembered your ladyships. There, I said to myself, I will certainly hear nothing of [accused criminals] Carletto and Rocca...these ladies only enjoy talking of fashion, balls, the theater, excursions, etc. There I will be free of this cursed subject!<sup>80</sup>

Humorously oblivious to their guest's frustration, the young ladies in fact do nothing but discuss graphic details of the sensational case until their visitor is once again driven out into the street. One of them even sends a passing boy to see if a second edition has been printed with new information about the case.

In a second dialogue between two working-class men in a humble restaurant, entitled "Depois do espetáculo" ("After the Theater"), Azevedo mocks a less-than-faithful adaptation of the events by a local theatrical company. Returning from a performance, one of the men complains about alterations to events and character names: "They changed everything...and it ended up a mess not even the devil could understand!"<sup>81</sup> The disgruntled spectator ultimately concludes that the changes are due to the producers' unwillingness to "stir up the people."<sup>82</sup> Azevedo's dialogue hints at the danger of stoking a fervor for justice among the popular classes, suggesting the volatility of a collective viewing experience meant to provoke strong sensations in relation to current events. At the same time, the humor of the two scenes is rooted in a striking class reversal: proper young ladies thirst for gruesome details, while a working-class man attends and critiques a theatrical performance, albeit one catering to popular tastes. This reversal suggests both a transformation of elite spheres, with women enjoying increased participation in public life and increased ability to circulate through urban space, and the expansion of theatrical culture to the working classes.

Azevedo's dialogue referred to an actual theatrical performance staged in the Teatro Lucinda by the Dias Braga Company, whose advertisements described it as a spectacle of both "sensation" and of "actuality," since it boasted "new and appropriate scenery, props and furniture."<sup>83</sup> Schwartz has observed that the category of actuality is grounded in topicality rather than factual authenticity, a position supported by the language of the advertisement, which prioritizes novel scenery over a truthful rendering of events.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, real events were openly adapted to conform to melodramatic moral polarities; a reviewer for the *Jornal do Brasil* noted both the production's opportunism and the sensational elements of its plot. He observes that while the play's appeal was enhanced by the influence of the lingering "impression of the horrendous crime," it was a "merely industrial play, made for box-office and not for pleasure. Go see it because its shocking tableaux produce strong emotions, of revolt and then relief when we see virtue rewarded and infamy punished."<sup>85</sup> Melodrama and topicality are linked in their overt solicitation of a mass audience. Suggesting a wholesale capitalization on the case, two other theatrical adaptations of the "Crime of Carioca Street" were announced in November 1906,<sup>86</sup> and another production based on the case was presented at the Theatro São José in January 1907.<sup>87</sup> Advertisements for this latter play similarly touted the "[n]ew sets...with the

scenes of the jeweler's shop and on the high seas a faithful copy of the scenes of the crime [teatros do crime].”<sup>88</sup>

Concurrently with these theatrical productions, a local theater exhibited an actuality film showing three suspects in the “Crime of Carioca Street,” *Rocca – Carletto – Pigato na Casa da Detenção* (*Rocca, Carletto, Pigato in the House of Detention*), filmed by a camera operator employed by theatrical impresario Paschoal Segreto in November 1906.<sup>89</sup> A report in the *Gazeta de Notícias* evokes journalists' frenzy to capture verbal and visual detail during a public statement given by one of the accused criminals:

It is not difficult to imagine the great anticipation that was brewing yesterday, with the news that Rocca would delay until today his announcement, promising to make important declarations and clear up obscure and mysterious points of this tenebrous crime, promising, in an ambiguous phrase, that his declarations would bring new names to light.

This was the sensational news, promised and awaited, with the possibility of a dash of scandal [...] Thus from early in the morning, all who managed to gain entry into the house of Detention were there. Journalists, the authorities, photographers, even a cameraman [*cinografista*] with his apparatus, there they were, thrilling with the same curiosity, the same eager expectation.<sup>90</sup>

In the scene vividly painted by the report, the cameraman takes a position among the other purveyors of visual and verbal information jockeying for access to Rocca's declarations. The description suggests that in this exceptional case, the cinematic actuality functioned in a manner similar to news photography and written reportage. The week-long exhibition of the film in the Teatro Maison Moderne (permanent venues specifically devoted to film exhibitions would not appear for another year) suggests its sensational appeal for audiences at a moment when individual films were shown for very brief intervals, in some cases a single day, and were rarely advertised by title.<sup>91</sup>

Unlike the actuality film of the suspects in the “Crime of Carioca Street,” Antônio Leal's reconstitution *Os estranguladores* was not directly topical in nature. Yet it was among the most ambitious aspects of a combined production/exhibition strategy that aimed to entice audiences to Leal's Cinema-Palace with the prospect of locally produced films. Made more than two years after the original events of the case, *Os estranguladores* was advertised as “a magnificent reconstitution of the exciting drama for which Rio de Janeiro served as theater.”<sup>92</sup> Fittingly, a theatrical work is believed to be the most immediate source of Leal's film: a play penned by local writers Figueiredo Pimentel of the *Binóculo* column and Rafael Pinheiro. The play's title, *A quadrilha da morte* (“The Deathly Gang”), is identical to the headline consistently used to refer to the case in the *Gazeta de Notícias*.<sup>93</sup> In addition to this creative contribution to *Os estranguladores*, Pimentel publicized the film in his column, describing it as “a film that will attract the attention of all the people [*todo o povo*] of the Capital...It is nothing more and nothing less than the reproduction of the exciting tragedy of the Deathly Gang. All the peripeties of the horrible crime of Rocca, Carletto & Co. are there reproduced.”<sup>94</sup> This description casts *Os estranguladores* as a popular spectacle whose parameters had been defined by sensational police reportage. The film's potential audience is understood to encompass the entire population of the capital (although it is implied to be the working classes [*povo*]); its drawing power is grounded

both in moral outrage and morbid attraction (implied by the term “exciting tragedy”); and it worked to reconstruct and represent contingent acts of violence that did not lend themselves to being captured by a moving picture camera.

The available information on the film’s cost, profits, and exhibition suggest a relatively modest investment that reaped immense monetary and popular success. The Photocinematografia Brasileira worked on the film for a full month, spending slightly under 4 *contos* on the production.<sup>95</sup> On July 6, 1908, the first advertisements for the film were published; however, four days later the suspension of the exhibition by the police “until further notice” was announced, suggesting fears that the film was potentially socially disruptive.<sup>96</sup> Despite the delay imposed by threatened censorship, advertisements register the film’s exhibition from August 3 to 16 (the film was then “temporarily withdrawn for the improvement of various tableaux”), from September 3 to 16, and from November 16 to 18 of 1908.<sup>97</sup> According to an estimate given by Leal in 1915, in his cinema alone, the film raked in 57 *contos*, attracting 20,000 spectators in the first month.<sup>98</sup> Leal reported that three copies were also rented out to exhibitors in other states, who gave him a 50 percent share of the profits.<sup>99</sup> On September 12, an advertisement described *Os estranguladores* as “the film that has achieved the greatest success both in Rio and in [our] States;”<sup>100</sup> in Fortaleza, the capital of the state of Ceará in northeastern Brazil, it was still being shown in 1910.<sup>101</sup>

The widespread popularity of *Os estranguladores* is attributable in large part to its depiction of the space of the capital as ambivalent emblem of a national modernity. The list of tableaux published in advertisements for *Os estranguladores* promises re-enactments of violent happenings – as titles such as “the first strangling” and “arrest of the second criminal” indicate – even as it highlights the precise locations where the events of the case unfolded, as reported by local newspapers. The sites mentioned by name include the emblematic Avenida Central, where one of the victims, Carluccio, had arranged a rendezvous with the robbers; the Prainha pier, where he embarked on the fatal voyage with the robbers; and the suburb of Jacarepaguá to the west of the city, where Carletto, the last of the suspects to be captured, was ultimately detained by police.<sup>102</sup> Like the trajectories of the criminals, the film would have linked sites in the heart of the capital’s commercial districts (where the importation and consumption of goods was concentrated) with its margins: isolated islands and remote suburbs connected to the city center by suburban train lines. The film’s final tableau, entitled “In prison,” constructs the criminals’ punishment as the agent of narrative closure. Leal’s later film *A mala sinistra* would evoke an even stronger moral meaning with its conclusion: an allegorical apotheosis scene entitled “Virtue crushes calumny,” which invites audiences to interpret topical events through polarized moral categories.<sup>103</sup>

The indexical anchoring of the tableaux in the actual sites of the events would have approximated it to the genre of the actuality, topical films that often blurred the boundary between documentation and reenactment.<sup>104</sup> Richard Abel notes that in French film of the same period, “the difference between recording a current public event as it was happening and reconstructing a past (or even present) historical event in a studio” was not as significant as might be expected; rather, the key distinction made by film producers was between “real” and purely imaginary events.<sup>105</sup> This dynamic helps explain the indexical markers of authenticity advertised in a production that was not directly topical, given the gap between its production and the events on which it was based. *Os estranguladores* was an ambitious initial venture into a precarious, marginal, but in this case highly profitable, production and exhibition strategy centering on the presentation of locally produced films, an attraction that distinguished Leal’s

Cinema Palace from other venues.<sup>106</sup> By re-creating the spectacle of murder and practices of policing (and investigative reporting) that promised to map urban space, and by evoking “popular emotions” that had already been stirred by print journalism and theater, *Os estranguladores* worked to constitute an audience for locally produced film, although the production model in which it participated would ultimately be a fleeting one.

### **Reconstituting “The Crime of the Trunk:” Topicality and Competition between Film Producers**

During the wildly successful run of *Os estranguladores*, news of another sensational case, the aforementioned “Crime of the Trunk,” swept São Paulo, where the murder was committed, and Rio de Janeiro, where the criminal Michel Traad was taken for questioning after being apprehended aboard the ocean liner *Cordillière*. Within a week of the first reports of the crime on September 5, the Cinema Palace began to advertise a film version of the events, entitled *A mala sinistra* (*The Sinister Trunk*).<sup>107</sup> This decreasing lag between crime and exhibition approximated the filmed dramatic reconstruction to journalistic reportage; however, this meant that local audiences demanded considerable visual fidelity to the actual locales and figures involved in the case. Antônio Leal’s attempt to film in the actual locations where the crime occurred (according to advertisements for the Photo-cinematografia’s version of *A mala sinistra*) left him vulnerable to competition from other film producers/exhibitors who moved to capitalize on the same sensational events. When Leal’s *A mala sinistra* was first exhibited at the Cinema Palace on October 13, 1908, a rival adaptation shot by Júlio Ferrez had already been shown at the Cinema Pathé owned by Júlio’s family, as well as at the Cinema Rio Branco, between October 2 and 8.<sup>108</sup>

Although Ferrez’s version of *A mala sinistra* may also have involved location shooting—the *Gazeta de Notícias*’s described it as a “curious work that demanded great sacrifice on the part of the company, which had to send camera operators to São Paulo and Santos to photograph all the minutiae of the reconstitution of the nefarious crime”—other evidence suggests it was a far more modest undertaking than the Photo-cinematografia Brasileira’s version.<sup>109</sup> Ferrez’s film was touted as a “grand national creation of 450 meters in length divided in five tableaux: 1<sup>st</sup> – Purchase of the trunk; 2<sup>nd</sup> The crime; 3<sup>rd</sup> On board; 4<sup>th</sup> In the police station; 5<sup>th</sup> Remorse.”<sup>110</sup> However, Inácio de Melo Souza considers the length to be an exaggeration, and suggests that, “the number of tableaux, the fact it was programmed with five other films, and the small number of days of exhibition indicate a modest production with little appeal.”<sup>111</sup>

Yet the Ferrez version of *A mala sinistra* still posed a potential threat to the novelty, and thus the box-office attraction, of the Photo-Cinematografia Brasileira’s version, as suggested by a series of advertisements aggressively touting the superior virtues of the version shot by Leal. An October 11 advertisement reads, “We now call attention to this national work which *challenges* the others on the same subject which have been exhibited in various cinemas, to which we ask you to compare it.”<sup>112</sup> Despite the shorter production time, and thus greater topicality, of the Ferrez version, the Cinema Palace’s appeal to local spectators seems to have been successful. After the day of the film’s premiere, Pimentel’s *Binóculo* column in the *Gazeta de Notícias* noted that “the Rua do Ouvidor was almost impassable yesterday in the area of the Largo de São Francisco. This was because of people who wanted to enter the Cinema Palace. There, for the first time, the film *A mala sinistra* was being exhibited, a surprising film that re-enacts, minute by minute, the celebrated crime.”<sup>113</sup> (Again, Pimentel may have embellished the

enthusiasm with which the film was received, given his close personal and creative ties to Leal). The film was shown for eight days, was briefly replaced in the program after October 20, and exhibited for an additional eight days from October 27 to November 3.

An advertisement for the film provides a sense of a simultaneous appeal to indexical authenticity and to the spectacular (exemplified by the use of color):

Notice: This film has nothing in common with that exhibited in other cinemas. A unique composition of the Photo-cinematografia Brasileira and the Cinema Palace: first exhibition of this grand tragedy of furor and ruthlessness, composed of twenty-some tableaux, some colored and others natural, taken in the city of S. Paulo and Santos, on board [the *Cordillière*], and in Rio. Performed entirely by national artists, whose impeccable work is just and exuberant proof of how much we have advanced in cinematic art.<sup>114</sup>

Leal's 640-meter version also had an additional attraction: as mentioned above, it concluded with "a beautiful apotheosis, also colored: VIRTUE CRUSHES CALUMNY."<sup>115</sup> This may have referred to the eventual vindication of Farhat's wife Carolina, originally accused of having colluded in the murder, or been a more general reference to the triumph of justice over crime. This film is unusual in that it juxtaposes a stylized, allegorical apotheosis with images whose status as a visual document is foregrounded by advertising discourses.

Leal's concern with authenticity is suggested not only in the greater delay in releasing the film compared to the Ferrez version, but also by an anecdote recounted by Paulino Botelho, who boasted that he had managed to photograph the coach and driver that had transported the infamous trunk in a surprise ambush. According to Botelho, Leal made a failed attempt to buy the driver's cooperation, offering him a hundred *mil-réis* to pose (whether for moving images or still photographs is not clear).<sup>116</sup>

The manner in which Leal's production strategies approximated journalistic procedures was echoed by newspaper coverage that emphasized the film's affinities (and its debt) to the popular press. The *Correio da Manhã* commented:

[...] profound excitement still persists in *carioca* and *paulista* minds regarding the sorrowful scene occasioned by the infamous Traad, since it has been reported in detail by all the papers, this crime that captured the attention of the public for a long period due to the circumstances surrounding it. Today, if you would like to see animated [*ao vivo*, literally meaning "live"] everything that happened from the murder to the latest declarations of the notorious bandit, go to the Cinema Palace [...]<sup>117</sup>

According to this description, the cinema is able literally to bring to life the events of the crime, whose stirring effect on residents of the two metropolises is attributed to the effects of journalistic coverage. The *Jornal do Brasil* directly compared the work of the camera operator to that of the journalist, noting that, "in the production of this film, the cinematic press [*imprensa do Cinema*] labored to accomplish the best reconstruction of this tragedy."<sup>118</sup> Similarly, Pimentel emphasizes the role of the press (and his employer, *the Gazeta de Notícias*, in particular) in creating the public furor from which the film derived its appeal:

*A mala sinistra*, the name given by this paper to the crime of Miguel Traad, has caused a stir. Today, the Cinema Palace exhibits a highly interesting film. It is the exact reproduction of the crime. The cameraman Antonio Leal went to Santos and S. Paulo, he was on board, in all the places, in short, where the terrible scenes took place. It could be said that it is a true film, *d'apres-nature*.<sup>119</sup>

This claim to an “exact reproduction” of the events, is complicated by the distinction made in the Cinema Palace’s advertisement between “colored” and “natural” scenes (the latter term was through the 1920s to refer to any non-fiction film). The description suggests the juxtaposition of different modes of cinematic representation in the film. However, as Joshua Yumibe suggests, color can create both “a verisimilar effect and a dazzling, spectacular quality.” He argues that “these two tendencies are not mutually exclusive in the cinema, or more generally in the ‘spectacular realities’ of *fin-de-siècle* representation.”<sup>120</sup>

The anti-realistic convention of the climactic apotheosis might have been familiar to local audiences from the endings of the Pathé *féeries* and Passion plays imported by the Ferrez family, the company’s exclusive agents in Brazil. (The advertisements’ emphasis that it is a *colored* apotheosis also suggests an attempt to capitalize on one of the special attractions for which Pathé films were well known). However, the possible influence of French cinema cannot account for the seemingly incongruous presence of an apotheosis in a dramatic reconstitution of a sensational crime (although scholars have pointed out that filmed Passion plays, like the local true-crime films, are violent spectacles that solicit a sadistic engagement on the part of the spectator).<sup>121</sup> The Photo-cinematografia Brasileira’s unusual use of the apotheosis to dramatize and give a moral interpretation of topical events can be accounted for in part by the local theatrical culture of the period. Revues and magic plays, two theatrical genres that were locally adapted from French models (models which also served as the basis for Méliès’s *féeries*<sup>122</sup>) frequently included apotheoses.

A possible function of this surprising conjunction of actuality and apotheosis is further suggested by an unusual exhibition at the Cinema Palace in March 1908, when the Photo-Cinematografia Brasileira actually added such an ending to an imported non-fiction view of events following the assassination of the King of Portugal and his heir. An advertisement promises images of “the funerals of D. Carlos and D. Luiz in Lisbon - a gorgeous confection of the House of Gaumont [...] ending with a lavish apotheosis by the Photo-Cinematografia Brasileira: THE PORTUGUESE FATHERLAND—THE BRAZILIAN FATHERLAND (emphasis in original).”<sup>123</sup> Noël Burch describes the apotheosis as an “open endin[g]” that exemplifies the lack of a true *dénouement* characteristic of pre-classical film narratives.<sup>124</sup> By contrast, I would like to suggest that in the case of *A mala sinistra*, and perhaps in a number of the other true-crime films, it may have in fact provided a form of ideological closure that mitigated the disruptive effect of the violent true-life events.

While the title of *Os estranguladores*’s final tableau merely makes reference to the criminals “in prison,” the two major theatrical spectacles based on the same events presented in 1906 and 1907 each ended with a scene or apotheosis entitled “Justice,” and the images of the criminals in prison may have explicitly or implicitly carried a similar charge of meaning. As noted above, the final tableau of the Ferrez version of *A mala sinistra* is entitled “remorse,” suggesting a scene imbued with a clear moral meaning, if not necessarily the static, spectacularized allegory offered by an apotheosis. These allegorical scenes would have imposed a legible, abstract order on the flow of current events, encouraging the audience to make sense of



a contingent, violent event by means of melodramatic moral polarities. The addition of the apotheosis, which glorified both “Brazilian fatherland” and the “Portuguese fatherland” also seems to have been a means of creating a greater sense of proximity to the local context.

The inclusion of this sequence suggests the relative sophistication of the Photocinematografia Brasileira’s production strategies in comparison with other film producers working in Brazil at the time. Yet while the most elaborate versions of the “Crime of the Trunk” were produced in Rio de Janeiro, purveyors of popular spectacles in São Paulo also capitalized on the gruesome events that had taken place in their city.<sup>125</sup> Well before any of the reconstitutions of the case were completed, and only five days after the announcement of a judgment in favor of the victim’s wife Carolina Farhat (accused of planning the crime in complicity with Traad, with whom she was suspected of having an affair), the Edison Cinema showed the “actuality film O CRIME DA MALA. Habeus-corporus of the innocent widow, filmed from nature [*tirada do natural*] by the Empresa Cinematográfica Paulista.”<sup>126</sup> While declaring that it recorded topical events in a “natural” fashion, its description of the widow as “innocent” framed these images within a moralistic framework. On its third day of exhibition, the cinema announced, “In light of the great success it has obtained, the sensational film ‘O crime da mala’ will be repeated for the last time[...].”<sup>127</sup> While the actuality’s short run suggests that it was experienced as a fleeting novelty, the magazine *A Ronda* claimed that its appeal to “public curiosity” led the film to “break the record for cinematography in S[ão] Paulo.”<sup>128</sup>

A number of imaginative renderings in various media followed on the exhibition of the actuality film, suggesting an avid public demand for visual and narrative material related to the case. Although *O Estado de São Paulo*, the city’s best-selling newspaper, did not illustrate its crime reports with photographs or engravings at this time, visual material relating to the crime was abundantly offered in illustrated magazines like *A Ronda*, which published several photographs relating to the case its September 18 and 25 issues. On September 24, the *Estado de São Paulo* described a proliferation of literary texts based on the crime:

The publications on the shocking crime of Boa Vista Street [where the murder took place, inside the perpetrator’s residence] grow and multiply [...]. An anonymous prose writer has written the history of the victim and now three more novels are being announced, all concurring in the reconstitution of the horrifying scene of the strangulation and in decorating themselves with the most fantastic settings.<sup>129</sup>

Amongst this growing number of poetic and prose works devoted to the crime, the journalist distinguished a work that was literally sensational, prompting a physical thrill; it recounted the commission of the murder “in such brilliant and striking tints that we came to feel a *frisson* of terror run down the spine.”<sup>130</sup> The events also were the subject of a theatrical adaptation by Gustavo Spadari, which managed to pass censorship in São Paulo only on December 2, suggesting the material was considered potentially disruptive to public order.<sup>131</sup>

As in the case of Spadari’s play, censorship would be a significant obstacle to a locally produced dramatic reconstitution of the case produced by Francisco Serrador, whose negative reception suggests some of the limits of sensationalist content as a draw for film audiences. José Inácio de Melo Souza conjectures that the film, also entitled *O Crime da Mala*, was not prohibited by the police to preserve public order, but rather because of the negative reaction to a private screening for journalists and authorities (its exhibition was never advertised). *O crime da*

*mala* was a first venture into fiction for Serrador, who had previously produced only two actualities, but who had recently established a studio, investing 80 *contos* in its construction.<sup>132</sup> Melo Souza argues, on the basis of a negative review published in the magazine *Cri-Cri*, that the film did not establish a continuity of action adequate to the demands of an audience accustomed to European productions, nor did it effectively simulate the locations and people involved in the crime, and was thus both unsuccessful as fantasy and as document.

The *Cri-Cri* review, mocking in tone, harshly criticized what the journalist judged to be gaps in the narrative. For example, a scene in which Traad stuffs Farhat's corpse into the trunk was immediately followed by an image of him trying to throw the trunk overboard; and similarly, after being overpowered on the boat, Traad was immediately shown at the police station in São Paulo. Furthermore, the review noted the lack of the resemblance between the actors used in the film and their real-life counterparts, who had been abundantly pictured in the illustrated press. The lead detective on the case, the slender and rather dapper João Batista Sousa, was portrayed by an overweight actor, while the heavy, mustachioed scribe Menezes was played by a thin actor with no facial hair.<sup>133</sup> Upon the appearance of the widow in the film, "everyone leapt to their feet but...sat down quickly – Carolina was played by a *cabocla*! [term referring to a person of mixed white and indigenous heritage]."<sup>134</sup> This rendering of a blonde Italian woman who was described as having "a pallid countenance" with a "muted tone of moonless marble" by the *Estado de São Paulo* was seen as a particularly egregious offense.<sup>135</sup> Melo Souza summarizes the net effect of Serrador's production by stating:

The cruel lack of versimilitude of the actors (the police official, the widow, the scribe), which could have passed merely as a (tolerable) sign of an incipient film production, is surpassed by the narrative "holes" and "leaps," whose "filling-in" by the spectators forced them into an exercise of comparison between reality and fiction, with a serious loss on Serrador's part.<sup>136</sup>

In de Melo Souza's view, the Serrador version of *O crime da mala* failed to present itself convincingly as either actuality or as a narrative fiction with appropriate relations of continuity. While unable to aspire to the smooth transitions of imported films that had effectively established self-contained diegeses, reducing the necessity for journalistic or other intertexts to make them comprehensible, it also manifested a lack of fidelity to local topical events in its glaring contrasts with the spectators' visual familiarity with those involved in the sensational events of the crime. Like other true-crime productions, the Serrador version of *O Crime da Mala* mingled fictional and factual registers, but apparently without managing to satisfy audiences with respect to either. The case of the various adaptations of the "Crime of the Trunk" demonstrated some of the potential obstacles facing filmmakers who wished to capitalize on sensationalized real-life events: maintaining novelty in the face of competitors entailed a delicate negotiation between fictional narrative strategies and visual authenticity, as signaled by the diverse strategies adopted in the three reconstitutions. Topical events needed to be convincingly evoked but, as the inclusion of the apotheosis in Leal's film suggests, adequately contained by melodramatic moral frameworks.

**Feminized Crime and Suicide Onscreen:  
*Noivado de Sangue* and *Um Drama na Tijuca*, 1909**

Francisco Serrador's installation of the studio where the ill-fated *O Crime da Mala* was produced was paralleled by the expansion of Leal's Photo-cinematografia Brasileira's into a similar atelier, where the company would experiment with the fictionalization of current events and the production of what seems to be a purely fictional film inspired by the *faits divers*, *Um drama na Tijuca*. Whereas *Os estranguladores* was first exhibited nearly two years after the murders were discovered, *Noivado de sangue* was released in the Cinema Palace only eight days after the crime was first reported on February 24; yet according to Antonio Leal's account, it still involved location shooting in São Paulo.<sup>137</sup>

The "Crime of the Crystal Arcade" had little mystery, which was frequently cited as a primary element of sensational crimes' mass appeal; yet the case more than compensated for this lack in its striking gender reversal of the typical "crime of passion," a type of homicide that, unlike the "grand crime," was condemned by reformers as a troubling incidence of the nation's "retrocession of civilization."<sup>138</sup> It also evoked contemporary debates about the legal status of "seduction," the consensual but legally criminal deflowering of an underage woman.<sup>139</sup> The perpetrator, Albertina Barbosa, openly admitted to having killed her former lover Arthur Malheiros de Oliveira, who had been living as a tenant in the home shared by herself and her mother. An affair between the two produced a child, but de Oliveira refused to marry Albertina and the child was placed in an orphanage. After Albertina's marriage to another teacher, Elizio Bonilha, she confessed her transgressions to him, and they jointly planned to kill de Oliveira. Despite the four years that had passed since the "seduction," Albertina was initially acquitted of the murder in June 1909 on the grounds it constituted a legitimate defense of honor, although she would undergo two more trials before being ultimately declared innocent in April 1910.<sup>140</sup>

Though the legal proceedings around the case dragged on, the Photo-cinematografia Brasileira's adaptation of the film was completed with sufficient speed for the Cinema Palace to advertise its reconstruction as the "recent tragedy of love and blood that unfolded in São Paulo last week."<sup>141</sup> Although it was filmed in "São Paulo backdrops,"<sup>142</sup> unlike the advertisements for *Os Estranguladores* and *A mala sinistra*, which list the specific sites that would have been displayed to viewers in the films, the announcements of *Noivado de Sangue* "dispense with a lengthy description since the subject of this film is too well known to the public."<sup>143</sup> The advertisements emphasize public knowledge of the crime - an indirect reference to its journalistic intertexts - rather than enumerating the sites to be displayed.

This advertising strategy and rapid turnaround time suggest that *Noivado de Sangue* was a less ambitious production overall than the Photo-cinematografia Brasileira's previous true crime films - its extension was advertised as 450 meters with fifteen tableaux (compared to *Os estranguladores*' 700 meters, seventeen tableaux, and *A mala sinistra*'s 640 meters and more than twenty tableaux). Yet despite the film's comparatively modest scope, the public responded favorably to the film, as this notice in the *Gazeta de Notícias* suggests:

A great number of persons yesterday could be noticed yesterday in the Rua do Ouvidor, in their efforts to see the reconstruction of the recent bloody tragedy that took place in São Paulo and now on view at the Cinema Palace in a splendid film...which has nothing to fear from a comparison with that of the best foreign producers. From the first to the last session, the Cinema Palace was full to the

brim, struggling to contain the congress. This is because new national films are now being made with all the trimmings in the new studios of the Cinema Palace.<sup>144</sup>

Similarly, the *Jornal do Brasil* noted that “the sensational film” attracted a “great flow” of spectators to the theater; the following day it stated, “The Cinema Palace fills up hour by hour. A mad prodigality passes through its box office. The money flows and jingles at every step. This is because the cinema constantly updates its programs.”<sup>145</sup> Despite this rapid turnover, *Noivado de sangue* enjoyed a long run in the Cinema Palace, where it was programmed alongside a number of locally produced fiction films from March 4 to March 17, and revived from April 27 to May 1. Perhaps because of the sensitive nature of its content, the film seems to have gotten a much more limited release in São Paulo, where the crime occurred.<sup>146</sup>

I speculate that audiences were drawn to *Noivado de Sangue* not only because the Photo-cinematografia Brasileira was able to capitalize on the sensational events with surprising speed, but also, paradoxically, because the film may have been closer to a fiction than a reconstitution. Both these developments could be attributed to the aforementioned new studios, advertised as being located on the Rua dos Invalidos, n. 39, where new films were reportedly produced weekly.<sup>147</sup> In contrast to previous announcements of Leal’s true-crime films, which did not provide any credits beyond the reference to the Photo-cinematografia Brasileira, advertisements for *Noivado de sangue* noted that the film was “coordinated and rehearsed by the actor Antonio Serra,” additionally noting the participation of several local theatrical actors in the film.<sup>148</sup> Although stage actors likely participated in Leal’s true-crime films beginning with *Os estranguladores*, their contribution had not been previously publicized in the company’s advertisements.

From a reconstitution based on a female “crime of passion,” the Photo-Cinematografia Brasileira seems to have continued its tendency towards fiction with *Um drama na Tijuca*, which narrates one of the amorously female motivated suicides frequently reported on in sensationalistic articles. Maite Conde identifies the film’s source as a 1906 case in which a young student murdered a rival for the affections of an attractive widow, wounding her as well, which gained considerable notoriety in the press.<sup>149</sup> However, the events of the case do not closely correspond to the film as described in a review in the *Jornal do Brasil*. *Um drama da Tijuca* centers on a love triangle, but it ends in a suicide by poisoning rather than a murder. Like *Noivado de sangue*, a more topical investigation of deviant female behavior, the film was advertised as “rehearsed by Antonio Serra,” and several of the same actors were featured.<sup>150</sup> Promotional announcements also include a credit that had not previously appeared in the Photo-cinematografia Brasileira’s advertisements; they cite João Barbosa, one of the actors who appear in the film, as the author of its plot.<sup>151</sup> The reference to Barbosa’s authorship leads me to believe that the film was entirely fictional, though it likely drew on the 1906 case a set of romantic and mysterious associations with the Tijuca neighborhood that were frequently evoked in the popular press.

According to news items from the period, the corpses of suicides and others who died under mysterious circumstances were being found with increasing frequency in Tijuca’s caverns, which provided a convenient hiding place for corpses. In November 1908 the *Jornal do Brasil* reported: “Tijuca, picturesque Tijuca, has been decidedly mysterious. Just a few days ago now, there appeared the corpse, already pecked by vultures, of a man whose identity has not yet been established; before this task was completed by the police working behind the scenes, another one

appeared as laborious as the first, to give our investigators difficulty.”<sup>152</sup> More romantically and less morbidly, Binóculo wrote, “Tijuca... Oh, Tijuca has for us infinite enchantments. We don’t consider it a suburb. It is a country, a veritable Country of Dreams, of Legends, of Loves. Enchanting land, with its forest full of secret corners, where Mystery reigns, where the Secret reigns.”<sup>153</sup> These “enchanting” characteristics may have been felt to raise its cultural level to that of the *film d’art*, a description applied to *Um drama na Tijuca* by contemporary newspapers;<sup>154</sup> French films boasting this classification had been launched three months prior to the release of the film.<sup>155</sup>

In keeping with Tijuca’s image as an elite haunt with picturesque qualities, *Um drama na Tijuca* is described as “real and characteristic scene of the intimate life of Rio’s finest society, with tableaux of astonishing artistic effect, some taken on the natural sites of that fantastic mountain, full of beauty and a witness to innumerable amorous adventures.”<sup>156</sup> The film was to have narrated the ill-fated romance of Dolores (Julieta Pinto) and her (unnamed) lover, who sets off to seek his fortune in the world. In his absence, Dolores betrays her lover with another man; upon his return, the two rivals realize she has compromised herself with each of them, and she then poisons herself.

The apparent tension between visual documentation and narrative in the previous true-crime productions by the Photo-cinematografia Brasileira likely took on a new form with this film, which seems to have continually foregrounded picturesque views. The titles of tableaux are principally lines of dialogue, suggesting the film’s theatrical orientation; however, these narrative elements appear alongside frequent references to the landscape, as in the tableaux which directly precedes the lovers’ parting, entitled “Idyll, My love is great and strong like our blessed nature.” A tableau entitled “Lovers’ walk, how happy they are!” would have included “Views taken in the caverns and other sites in Tijuca.”<sup>157</sup> Even the confrontation between the two rivals for Dolores’ affection is situated in a scenic location: the tableaux description refers to a “View taken on the path to the Cascatinha waterfall.”<sup>158</sup> In a register that was apparently sentimental as well as sensational, *Um drama na Tijuca* undertakes the mapping and display of Rio de Janeiro’s urban space, in this case an affluent and scenic neighborhood. If the productions of the Photo-cinematografia Brasileira gradually moved from a focus on the reconstruction to productions that drew on dramatic techniques (the rehearsal and direction of actors) and may have been wholly fictional (such as *Um drama na Tijuca*), they apparently maintained a focus on the display of local landscapes as the sites of violent acts that approximated the local experience of Brazil’s federal capital to that of “great centers” like Paris, London and New York.

Perhaps because of its lack of an immediate journalistic antecedent, the success of *Um drama na Tijuca* was fairly modest – it was released in the Cinema Palace on April 1, exhibited continuously for a week and reprised it for six days in early May.<sup>159</sup> The film brought the cycle of topical and sensational films produced by the Photo-Cinematografia Brasileira from 1908 to 1909 to a close. A falling-out between co-owners Leal and Giuseppe Labanca led to the dissolution of the production company and with it, the end of one of the most successful examples of the joint production/exhibition model that defined the “Bela Época” of filmmaking in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, in which audiences could experience and participate in urban modernity through sensational, topical narratives projected on local screens.

***O Crime dos caixotes and Um crime sensacional:  
The Botelho Brothers's True-Crime Films after the "Bela Época"***

The craze for true-crime films had waned by early 1909, displaced by a craze for *filmes falados e cantantes*, or "talking and singing films," screen adaptations of opera, operetta, and musical revues, whose projections were accompanied by actors performing life behind the screen. The most popular of these films, a political satire entitled *Paz e amor (Peace and Love)*, was exhibited over nine hundred times in 1910.<sup>160</sup> Despite such successes, the 1911 consolidation of the Companhia Cinematográfica Brasileira greatly reduced opportunities for vertically integrated production and exhibition of feature films. Actualities and newsreels continued to be produced, but longer films were rarely attempted. As noted above, Alberto and Paulino Botelho's *1.400 contos/O caso dos Caixotes* and their "dramatic actuality film" *Um crime sensacional/O crime de Paula Matos* were the only domestic fiction films to be shown in São Paulo in 1912 and 1913.<sup>161</sup> These isolated projects suggest that sensational topical events remained a potentially profitable subject for local filmmakers, even after the decline of the integrated producer/ exhibitor model that had allowed filmmakers immediate access to local audiences.<sup>162</sup> The discourse linking notorious cases to a cosmopolitan imaginary of crime, seems to have been equally persistent. Shortly after the commission of the "Crime of Paula Matos," the magazine *Fon-Fon* declared, in terms strongly reminiscent of crime reportage of the previous decade, "Rio is becoming civilized. From time to time our tranquil provincial souls are overcome by the tragic narrative of a sensational crime of an absolutely European type." The author goes on to ironically define "the determining elements of territorial progress" as "sensational crimes, the Academy of Letters and various Institutes, Historical or no."<sup>163</sup>

The first true-crime film produced by the Botelhos took as its subject a payroll heist that took place in June 1912 and captivated local newspaper readers for its sheer audacity and elaborate mechanics, and, like the reconstitutions of the "Crime of the Trunk," included location shooting in Rio, Santos and São Paulo.<sup>164</sup> In preparation for the daring robbery, the thieves constructed their own strongboxes, substituting these for the coffers of money being transported on the steamboat *Saturno* to the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Mato Grosso. The case was not solved until August of that year, when the robbery turned deadly: one of the thieves, João dos Santos Barata Ribeiro, was seen burying his share of the money, and murdered the witness, prompting a police investigation. The second film re-created the "Crime of Paula Matos," as it was called in the newspaper headlines that publicized the murder of businessman Adolfo Freire by his gardener Secundino Augusto Henriques. While the latter headline, referring to the neighborhood where the crime was committed, was adapted as one of the film's titles, crime reportage did not provide the only orientation for the production. Rather, the Botelho brothers adapted the events to the screen under the instructions of two different directors, with Paulino operating the camera for both films.<sup>165</sup>

Suggesting a persistent interest in sensational cases in the mass press and in popular spectacles, both the "Case of the Strongboxes" and the "Crime of Paula Matos" were adapted into theatrical productions. The first served as the basis for a topical musical revue entitled "1.400 Contos," which lampooned the handling of the case (including apparent police theft of much of the recovered money) and was performed over a hundred times in the Cinema Theatro Rio Branco in late 1912.<sup>166</sup> Reversing the more customary development in which theaters converted themselves to cinemas after a period of mixed exhibition, the Rio Branco was one of a number of *carioca* cinemas that incorporated live performance into its film programs.<sup>167</sup> In

some cases, these theaters came to dedicate themselves entirely to the presentations of plays using a business model explicitly adapted from the cinema: *o teatro por sessões*, or “theater by sessions,” which theaters presented three shows a night, thereby approaching the number of film exhibitions offered nightly, and charged economical prices comparable to those of film programs.<sup>168</sup> If the 1908-1909 true-crime films had drawn on both the topicality and the allegorical strategies of the revue, the popular theatrical form was becoming imbued with a cinematic rhythm; a reviewer commented, “those who write for the theater by sessions must be cinematographic, and this quality is present in ‘1.400,’ which captures a series of hilarities with an exuberant joy which makes the revue victorious.”<sup>169</sup>

Again suggesting cinema and theater’s joint participation in a topical culture of popular sensationalism, “O crime do jardineiro” (“The Gardener’s Crime”), which took its inspiration from the same events as the Botelho brothers’ *Um crime sensacional*, premiered the day after the film’s initial release on August 15, 1913, perhaps in an attempt to capitalize on its publicity after production difficulties delayed its premiere. *A Noite* described the play as a “drama of profound actuality” that was “intense, vibrant and exciting.”<sup>170</sup> The play was shown in one of Rio de Janeiro’s most prestigious theaters (after several venue changes), suggesting that the cross-class appeal of sensational narratives noted with respect to earlier cases persisted into the mid-teens. This decision that seemed incongruous for one critic, who noted that “In the *Lírico*, in spite of ‘O crime do jardineiro’ having been announced at popular prices, and as presented by a popular company, ladies appeared in “*toilette*” and gentlemen in “*smoking*.”<sup>171</sup>

As in the case of the theatrical adaptation of the “Crime of Paula Matos,” the Botelho brothers’ films were shown in prestigious venues, but in relatively brief runs, suggesting a more limited place for locally produced films on topical subjects in the local entertainment markets. Like *A mala sinistra*, *1.400 contos* was produced quite quickly, premiering roughly five weeks after the arrest that cracked open the case, while events were still relatively fresh in audience’s minds. However, in sharp contrast with *Os estranguladores*’ reported forty-five consecutive days of exhibitions, *1.400 contos* was shown in two theaters owned by the Companhia Cinematographica Brasileira trust for only three and five days respectively, before being reprised at two other cinemas later in the month for a total of three additional nights.<sup>172</sup> *Um crime sensacional* seems to have had a somewhat more enthusiastic reception. It was initially shown in the Pavilhão Internacional and the Teatro São Pedro, both owned by impresario Paschoal Segreto, a month and a half after the first reports of the crime on June 30, 1913, lasting four days in the first venue (where it was held over “by request”) and ten in the second.<sup>173</sup> Both productions were shown in São Paulo after their exhibition in Rio, although neither attained more than five total evenings of screenings.<sup>174</sup>

The Botelho brothers’ films, like earlier true-crime productions, strove for topicality with their short production times and mixtures of documentation and reconstitution; yet in contrast to these previous works, *O caso dos caixotes* and *Um crime sensacional* approached the running times of feature-length imported films. Advertisements indicate the length of the former as 1,200 meters and that of the latter as 1,500 meters, and their complexity seems to have increased accordingly. Advertisements for the films specified that *1.400 contos* had 220 tableaux (*quadros*) and *Um crime sensacional* 300; each of these *quadros* was likely equivalent to a shot. Although the Photo-cinematografia Brasileira’s films may not have needed intertitles to be comprehensible to spectators familiar with the events,<sup>175</sup> the two Botelho brothers’ productions definitely included them: a rare production still from *Um crime sensacional* shows Paulino Botelho in the process of filming one of the intertitles.<sup>176</sup>

Significantly, in *1.400 contos*, these intertitles directly inserted the discourse of police reportage into the language of the film, although advertisements also suggested the audience would rely on prior knowledge of the crime. As in the case of *Noivado de sangue*, the crime was described as “recent enough that we think we can dispense with reminding the public of it.”<sup>177</sup> One notice stated, “the portion that unfolds in São Paulo is narrated by bulletins from the newspaper, which the present film illustrates, showing to the public the locations where the events occurred in their everyday existence [*vida normal*].”<sup>178</sup> Although these visual documents would have been marshaled to illustrate the events narrated by the newspaper, the language of advertisements suggests a clear distinction was suggested between re-enactment and location views. According to advertisements, *1.400 contos* would have offered both an “admirable reconstitution of the famous robbery” and “grand and sublime natural landscapes,”<sup>179</sup> including a view of the Santos mountain range shown in “majestic panoramas.”<sup>180</sup>

As Mary Ann Doane has suggested, in the early years of cinema the use of a panning shot often indicated location shooting, signaling a comprehensive view of an actual space.<sup>181</sup> This association would have been attenuated by 1912, when spectators would have been accustomed to a variety of uses of the panning shot in narrative film. However, it still seems significant that the cinematic narration of the crime, lent authenticity by the citations from the newspaper, is juxtaposed with an actuality view that is not anchored in the specific time of an exceptional event, but instead presents everyday existence or literally, “normal life.” The picturesque/quotidian and the sensational/exceptional seem to have constituted two separate categories of attractions for local audiences. The implied split between dramatic re-enactment and actuality view suggests the complexity of the brand of visual truth purveyed by the Botelho Brothers’ films, a tension between narrative and document manifest in the earlier true-crime films.

In another parallel to these previous productions, both *1.400 contos* and *Um crime sensacional* ended with an allegorically titled scene emphasizing the criminal’s punishment and suffering. In the case of *1.400 contos*, this seems to have been a rather complex sequence combining flashback and unpleasant reverie. An advertisement describes the film as “ending with a segment of fantasy in which João Carochó [the fictional version of one of the heist’s organizers, João dos Santos Barata Ribeiro], in prison, recalls the principal moments of his crime and sees, in a cruel dream, the astute Picolo [his accomplice, whose real name was Piccoli Vicenza], enjoying the results of his audacity in the company of beautiful women – TERRIBLE DREAM!! TERRIBLE AWAKENING!!”<sup>182</sup> The descriptions of *Um crime sensacional*’s ending are less detailed, but like *Os estranguladores* and *A mala sinistra* before them, it seems to end with the criminal’s suffering in prison, an image attributed with a clear moral meaning by the film’s description: “In jail; Divine Justice.”<sup>183</sup> This rhetoric of this tableau description closely parallels that of the play *O crime do jardineiro*, whose final scene is entitled “The justice of God.”<sup>184</sup> Both imply the religious overtones of an apotheosis, if not necessarily its formal structure. The cast list for *Um crime sensacional* also refers to the character of “FORTUNE, played by Davina Fraga,” who may have appeared as an allegorical figure.<sup>185</sup>

As in the case of the two *carioca* versions of *A mala sinistra*, advertisements for *Um crime sensacional* made no suggestion that these heightened, moralistic endings were in conflict with their depiction of the “natural settings and the actual locations where police investigations have shed light on the case.”<sup>186</sup> A brief news item in *A Noite* touted *Um crime sensacional*’s “true *clou*: the reconstitution of the crime in the actual location – in the house, on the roof, in the mango tree, in the bedroom, in the bathroom [...] the environment is the same, the situation



identical.”<sup>187</sup> The specificity of the wording echoes the level of minute detail provided in the same newspaper’s coverage, which included an image of the floor plan of the house marked with the exact trajectory of Henriques and his victims, and even an image of a bloody footprint left by Maria Antonia.<sup>188</sup> Using more sensational language, an article recalling the making of the film published in the *Casa do Anuário dos Artistas* in 1949 noted that the police “permitted [...] the Botelho brothers to train their lenses on the natural set: the walls, bedclothes, and floors of the house still stained with the blood of Adolpho Freire [...]”<sup>189</sup>

This strategy of reconstruction was one shared between the mass press and the Botelhos’ film; on the Sunday following the crime, the *Gazeta de Notícias* published an extensive series of drawings suggesting the stages of the struggle between Freire and his killer.<sup>190</sup> As mentioned above, later that month, they published a still from the Botelho Brothers’ film, attributing it to “Brazil-Films,” enhanced with a bright red pool of blood at the feet of the victim. The gruesome appeal of the image through the novel process of two-tone printing, even as it aligned the cinematic reconstruction with the informational discourse of the newspaper.<sup>191</sup> However, the narrative of *Um crime sensacional* seems to have deviated in a number of ways from a straightforward reconstruction of the crime. An unidentified press clipping from the time of the film’s release, states, “the plot [was] modified a bit to make the action more interesting.”<sup>192</sup> This modification may have been in the form of an increased emphasis on “Rosa, the demon woman”, played by actress Judith Saldanha, who also appeared in the theatrical adaptation of the events in a similar role as the gardener’s lover Julia.<sup>193</sup> The newspaper coverage of the events suggested that the culprit’s wife Maria Josepha, who was living in Lisbon for health reasons, had indirectly incited the murder. Struggling to pay her expenses, supposedly including lavish indulgences, Henriques allegedly became obsessed with finding sufficient funds to pay for her return to Rio de Janeiro. In both the film and the play, however, the gardener’s lover is blamed; the scene list included in an advertisement for the film suggests that this female character was at each stage responsible for urging him to commit the crime (for example, a scene entitled “in Rosa’s house” is immediately followed by “the odious pact.”)<sup>194</sup> Other scene titles among the sixty-three listed in an advertisement suggest a general melodramatic and moralistic heightening of events, such as “on the path of crime,” “fidelity betrayed,” and “bloody dawn.”<sup>195</sup>

As an added attraction, the film also included a topical event apparently unrelated to the crime, “the accident on the famous track of the Conde de Frontin,” a scene which a reviewer in the *Correio da Manhã* found especially successful, and which would have added the horrifying spectacle of technology gone awry to that of acts of individual violence.<sup>196</sup> Indeed, the network of railways surrounding Rio was infamous for frequent accidents, and local newspapers frequently lambasted the Count of Frontin’s management. In the three months preceding the release of the Botelho brothers’ *Um crime sensacional*, there were three serious collisions on tracks routed through the Rio’s Central Station; the *Correio da Manhã* bombastically dubbed the system *A Estrada da Morte* (“Rails of Death”) and accused the Count of a morbid desire to see his name in the papers alongside news of a fresh disaster.<sup>197</sup> While it seems plausible that the Botelho Brothers could have shot footage of these disasters to include in their recurring newsreels, the Cine-Jornal Brasil, these compilations seem to have focused on glorifying local progress by focusing on sports, aviation, and prominent visitors to the city.<sup>198</sup> In any case, *Um crime sensacional* certainly drew on a strong association between novel transportation technologies and violent death in the local context.

The scene of the railway accident seems to have been integrated into the plot, perhaps marking the demise of the “demon woman.” A sequence of scene titles in the third and final part

of the film reads: “Waiting for the train,” “The beast [Henriques] becomes agitated;” “The demon who departs;” “the punishment begins!...;” “the accident,” “the hand of God,” “I am avenged.”<sup>199</sup> *Um crime sensacional* may also have featured some “phantom ride” sequences in this part of the film; *A Noite* reported an incident in which the cast and crew of Brazil-Films boarded a train operated by the Central do Brasil railway company in order to “shoot a film of the landscape with the train in motion,” and to record a scene featuring their “artists inside the train car.”<sup>200</sup> However, an employee of the company protested, and was supported in his prohibition by the conductor of the train, a decision roundly condemned by the author of the article on the basis that “shooting films in trains, stations, and the open air is permitted in all countries” and that the decision had deleterious effects on “our civilization.”<sup>201</sup> The Botelhos may have been inspired to include this scene given the admiration produced by a spectacular stunt scene involving transportation technologies in *1.400 contos*, in which the villain Carochão scaled the side of the ocean liner to escape from the police.)<sup>202</sup>



Fig. 1.9: An accident on the “Rails of Death.”  
*Correio da Manhã*, May 29, 1913. Acervo da Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil.

Beyond the inclusion of elements that were apparently extraneous to the real-life narrative of the crime, there is evidence that fictional sets coexisted with the actual scenes of the crime, both interior and exterior. An unidentified review of *Um crime sensacional* comments, “The landscapes are varied and very well chosen. There are two good interiors, quite acceptable. [However, p]ainted cloth never gives a good impression, and Brasil Film [sic] should avoid it. It is so easy to put together folding screens, covered in painted paper. The interiors betray the

precipitousness with the film was made.”<sup>203</sup> This production strategy resulted in uneven effects of verisimilitude, which corresponded to the liberties taken with the actual events of the crime.

If in 1913 audiences still displayed interest in local feature productions with some affinities to the genre of the actuality, these productions could hold only a marginal place in the increasingly centralized exhibition circuits that were consolidated at the beginning of the teens. While the attraction of filmed adaptations of local, topical events could be extremely profitable as part of a vertically integrated production/exhibition model, which had the flexibility to take advantage of spectacular box office successes, such adaptations had relatively little place within the context of a chain of theaters focused on the distribution of foreign films. However, the desire to produce thrilling narratives of adventure and crime with local settings would in fact be stimulated by the American and European serials that quickly gained popularity with *carioca* audiences in the second half of the decade.

In fact, the persistent tension in these films between the categories of the visual document and elements of dramatization (especially the apotheosis included in *A mala sinistra* and other concluding scenes whose titles suggested strong moralistic messages) speaks to the broader contradictions of modernization from above. Even as these films thematized the shocking, gruesome aspects of daily life in turn-of-the-century Rio and São Paulo, focusing on violence attributable in part to unchecked urban growth, exclusionary city planning and lack of economic opportunity, their moralistic conclusions circumscribed the range of meaning that could be attributed to them, emphasizing individual agency over social factors and refusing to interpret crime as a symptom of broader social ills. Instead, violent acts were presented as an ambivalent index of both savagery and civilization, but it was pleurably consumed as spectacle rather than being marshaled to question the contradictions of elites’ modernizing projects they indirectly highlighted.

## CHAPTER 2

### Imported Serials, Paraliterary Appropriations, and the Production of Crime Films in Rio de Janeiro, 1917-1924

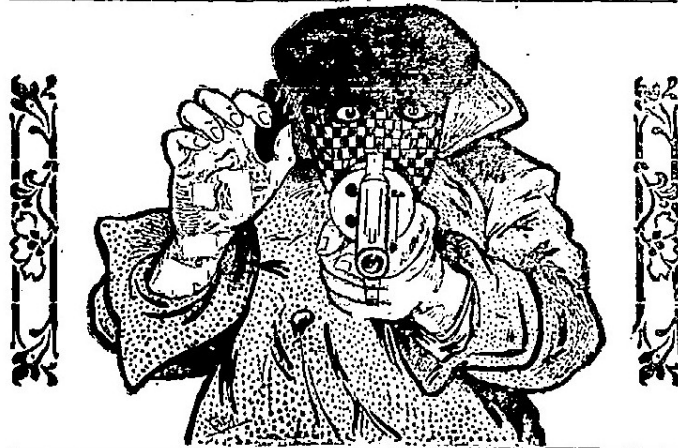
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A MÃO DO DIABO (1º capitulo, em dous actos. SOMNO AMNESICO (2º capitulo, em dous actos

Leiam o folhetim n'A NOITE.

Fig. 2.1: *A Noite*, March 15, 1916. Acervo Fundação Biblioteca Nacional - Brasil

Between January and April of 1920, the Rio de Janeiro entertainment magazine *Palcos e Telas* (*Stages and Screens*), published an installment of an original story entitled “Um caso estranho” (“A Strange Case”) in each of its weekly issues. Described as a “*folhetim cinematográfico*,” or cinematic serial novel, “full of improbabilities, perhaps, but sensationally mysterious,”<sup>1</sup> “Um caso estranho” investigated the murder of an American film distributor living in Rio. The story transposed the conventions of imported serial films and detective stories to Brazil’s federal capital, a strategy especially evident in its first installment, in which a police interrogation reconstructing the victim’s movements serves as a pretext for abundant references to sites linked to the local entertainment world. These included Praça Tiradentes, a square around which several popular theaters and cinemas were clustered, and the Odeon, flagship cinema of the powerful local distribution and exhibition conglomerate Companhia Cinematográfica Brasileira.<sup>2</sup> Such references to actual locations likely added to the thrill for local readers, who could imagine the kind of detective story more frequently set in London or New York unfolding in their midst. Yet it is a fictional location that comes to play a pivotal role in the story: the imaginary Brazilian-Film studio, where the distributor’s murder (by a director in the pay of German spies, as it turns out) was serendipitously captured on film.

“A Strange Case” constructs Rio de Janeiro as the stage for cosmopolitan crime and intrigue linked to international espionage. Such plot elements evoke the recently concluded First World War, also a key point of reference for French and American serials. It seeks to approximate the addictive narrative thrills of the crime films that attained striking local popularity in the mid-teens, explicitly modeling itself on the novelizations of film serial episodes that were published in local newspapers. As Rafael de Luna Freire has noted, in Rio de Janeiro this practice was pioneered by the sensationalistic newspaper *A Noite*, which began to publish *Os Mistérios de Nova York* (*The Mysteries of New York*) in March 1916, in tandem with the exhibition of the Pathé New York serial of the same name compiled from select episodes of *The Exploits of Elaine*, *The Romance of Elaine*, and *The New Exploits of Elaine*.<sup>3</sup> According to Luna Freire, the paper’s founding editor, Irineu Marinho, would later participate to varying degrees in the production of two local crime-themed films, *A quadrilha do esqueleto* (*The Skeleton Gang*) e *Os mistérios do Rio de Janeiro* (whose name clearly evokes the local exhibition title of the wildly popular American serial), in 1917. These efforts were undertaken in collaboration with Antônio Leal, camera operator of several of the true-crime films discussed in Chapter 1.<sup>4</sup>

Indirectly recalling these recent efforts, “A Strange Case” mobilizes fantasies about the possibility of local film production, which been increasingly stifled by the consolidation of exhibition interests aligned with foreign film producers after 1911. A self-sustaining local film industry seemed ever more improbable in the face of the onslaught of American film imports that accompanied World War I. As imports of French, Italian and Danish films plummeted due to the conflict, American producers took advantage of naval blockades to flood international markets with their product. Hollywood studios established their first offices in Rio de Janeiro in the mid-teens: Universal was the first to do so in May 1915, followed by Fox and Paramount in 1916.<sup>5</sup> “A Strange Case”’s narrative of an American film distributor’s murder in a *carioca* film studio might be considered wishful thinking, suggesting a desire to reclaim a market dominated by Hollywood cinema for national productions that had been disappointingly slow to materialize.

Though it is certainly a footnote to the history of film culture in Rio de Janeiro, I have chosen to linger on the publication of this serial story because it crystallizes a set of desires linked to the assertion of local modernity through the exhibition and sporadic production of crime films in the capital during the late teens and early twenties. I argue that the broad

popularity of crime narratives, and their privileged place among rare efforts to produce fiction film in Rio de Janeiro in the period can be attributed to two factors: their association between criminality and modernity, which was extended in the local press; and the paraliterary character of these fictions, which lent them a special degree of cultural productivity. I understand the category of paraliterature in two senses; on one hand, it refers to the formulaic and “sub-literary” nature of crime narratives;<sup>6</sup> on the other, it refers to the “parasitic” interdependence between film serials and their tie-in novelizations, on which they relied in some cases to achieve narrative intelligibility.<sup>7</sup> As these intertwined forms were appropriated in the local context, they spawned *folhetins cinematográficos* without corresponding films, and locally produced crime and adventure films without tie-ins novelizations, both of which capitalized on the local popularity of imported crime fictions.

The dissemination of imported serials and their tie-ins exemplified processes of cultural massification, characterized by intertextual relationships across media that signaled “the increased mobility and circulation of all ‘social things.’”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, in the Brazilian context, it marked the growing domination of American cinema over the local exhibition market. Yet serials’ functioning as “heterogeneous text[s]” characterized by “openness and intertextuality”<sup>9</sup> also meant that they provided multiple entry points for Rio de Janeiro’s spectators and readers, some of whom, unlike the vast majority of serial fans in major film-producing countries, managed to produce paraliterary narratives and serial-influenced films that had a significant, if short-lived, local impact.

In Rio de Janeiro, the publication of tie-ins synchronized precisely to the exhibition of episodes, was relatively short-lived, continuing for approximately two years, from early 1916 to early 1918. However, beginning with its founding in March 1918, *Palcos e Telas* almost invariably published some form of verbal supplement to local serial exhibitions, whether in the form of lengthy summaries or text-heavy advertisements placed by the cinemas. The magazine also featured more imaginative appropriations of the genre codes and stars of Hollywood cinema in original fictional texts. Shortly after its founding, *Palcos e Telas* began to publish installments of a curious story entitled “Film em séries” (“Serial Film”), whose heroine, Ruth, moves through a series of natural spaces, from a cave where she is menaced by wild beasts, to a sort of primordial Eden.<sup>10</sup> Three years later, in March 1921, *Palcos e Telas* published the first installment of “Sidney, the Bandit, a cinematographic novel dedicated to William S. Hart”, which included a cast list dreamed up by the author that paired the characters’ names with those of popular American actors.<sup>11</sup>

A recurring feature of the magazine was a section entitled “Plots in the Genre of ...” (“Argumentos gênero...”); each installment included a short story evoking the types of narratives closely associated with certain Hollywood stars. “Plots in the genre of Pearl White,” for example, involved a wealthy young heiress whose life was in peril. She becomes involved in a car chase whose stakes are abruptly raised by the discovery of a bomb attached to the her car; she deliberately wrecks her vehicle, plunging into the water; then, in a final plot twist, one of her captors tricks the other, then reveals himself to be her fiancé.<sup>12</sup> These re-imaginings of the highly conventionalized tropes of Hollywood narratives suggest the fascination that imported cinema held for local audiences, even as they mark a certain ironic distance from the emerging star and genre systems that inspired these paraliterary texts.

In this chapter, I will examine the cross-medial form of the cinematic serial novel, as a site where a local tradition of popular serialized literature intersected with the exhibition of imported crime and adventure serials, in turn catalyzing the local production of paraliterature and

films. Rudmer Canjels has argued that the distribution of serials became a site at which imported cinema was re-imagined through local cultural forms, often acting as a stimulus to local production.<sup>13</sup> In crime films produced in Rio, key elements of imported serials' sensational appeal – insidious criminal organizations, international intrigue, novel technologies used for nefarious ends – were marshaled alongside these views of well-known local sites. As Jennifer Bean has argued, American serials capitalized heavily on the “affective sensation of realistic thrills [...] grounded in on-location shooting.”<sup>14</sup> Crime-themed fiction films produced in Rio would adopt a similar strategy, showcasing urban landscapes and, in some cases, featuring fantastic stunts, or *trucs* (as they were referred to by local critics) that asserted the spectacular authenticity of the cinematic image, even as they defied verisimilitude. These texts thus asserted Rio de Janeiro's place in a cosmopolitan imaginary of crime, staking its claim to the status of a producer of thrilling cinematic entertainment (though apparently without achieving national diffusion or long-lasting success). It is important to note that the serial craze of the late teens was a fairly localized phenomenon, manifesting itself most prominently in the nation's capital. While serial films and tie-in novelizations were disseminated in other Brazilian cities in the teens and early twenties, as I explain in more detail at the end of the chapter, the ambitions of serial-influenced productions in Rio seem to have been principally local in scope.

This chapter focuses on two serial-influenced crime films, *Os mistérios do Rio de Janeiro* and *A quadrilha do esqueleto*, whose production and reception has been previously researched by Luna Freire. Seeking to situate these films within a broader context of serial and paraliterary culture in early twentieth-century Rio, I begin by discussing the imaginary of crime and technological modernity developed by American and French serials and referenced in local newspapers. As in the previous decade, criminal activity was constructed as a symptom of modernity's ambivalences by the local press; however, the charge of collective anxiety and fascination attached to real-life cases seems to have lessened. Marcos Luiz Bretas suggests that in Rio “in the 1910s [...] there was a change in the type of preoccupation with the maintenance of order, since the flow of immigrants was subsiding and the city was developing better-defined behaviors and routines in the redefined public space.”<sup>15</sup> By 1917, crime was more likely to be discussed in the context of new technologies of communication and transportation that forged international networks, facilitating the circulation of goods and persons but also bringing about a ‘globalization of risk’, in Anthony Giddens' phrase,<sup>16</sup> or accelerating the pace at which catastrophic events unfolded, as Stephen Kern has argued in the case of the outbreak of World War I.<sup>17</sup> Significantly, the plot of *Os mistérios do Rio de Janeiro* pivoted on the German ships stranded in Guanabara Bay due to the Allied blockade, whose presence signaled the global effects of the conflict in Brazil, still neutral at the time of the film's production. By chance, the film premiered, along with *A quadrilha do esqueleto*, the same day that the country announced its entry into the war.<sup>18</sup>

Despite serials' self-conscious capitalization on the “terrors of technology”<sup>19</sup> and their frequent condemnation as a school for criminals, as would be in the case in Mexico, no widespread public outcry against serials was made in Brazil. Their suspenseful, addictive structure was perhaps mitigated somewhat by the particularities of serial exhibition in Rio de Janeiro. Serials were usually shown in two-episode blocks approximating a feature-length program, though not always according to a regular exhibition schedule. I suggest that these exhibition practices may have influenced the mode in which locally produced crime films were ultimately released. When plans to shoot multiple-episode serials proved unfeasible, these projects were exhibited as feature-length films that attained respectable box-office success. This

was, of course, the logical way to recuperate some of the investment made in these films; however, an emphasis on closure rather than cliffhangers in advertisements for serial films also suggests an exhibition environment in which this strategy would be relatively well received.

This particularity of exhibition suggests that the conception of the serial as a “training ground for feature films,<sup>20</sup> or a stepping stone to more complex narratives, does not hold in the context of urban Brazil. Furthermore, it provides additional impetus for rethinking the longstanding association between serial and the industrialization of the creative process, intended to foster the compulsive consumption of literary and cinematic commodities. Susan Hayward has traced this critical position in Marxist criticism from Antonio Gramsci to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno,<sup>21</sup> arguing that, far from being passive dupes of the culture industry, “serial audiences use their texts” in “processes of collaborative interpretation, prediction, metacommentary, and creation.”<sup>22</sup> Serial mystery narratives invite reader engagement through a segmented, long-term mode of dissemination that subjects the writing process to the constraints of the publication format and the whims of the market. Serial novels were often the result of collective, semi-industrialized processes, involving active editing, and in some cases, the work of several writers and feedback from the public, who have the opportunity to comment on and, often, to affect the development of a serial narrative still in progress.<sup>23</sup>

The tendency to understand serial culture as a series of formulaic narratives with homogenizing and culturally deadening effects minimizes the degree to which serial literature and other “formula stories,”<sup>24</sup> such as detective fiction, solicit participatory engagement from audiences. If the *folhetim* seeks to engage the reader directly by means of suspenseful cliffhangers that carry the narrative from one installment to the next, mystery narrative invite readers and viewers to observe, collect clues, and attempt to predict the solution of the mystery. Writing in the context of film serials and tie-ins in the United States, Shelley Stamp notes how promotional materials and contests solicited the readers and viewers of serial texts “to participate in the outcome of the drama, fostering a model of interaction that supported serialized plots by encouraging fans to suspend narrative desire across and between episodes and to become actively involved in unfolding events through posing questions and hypotheses about their outcome.”<sup>25</sup> As a number of scholars have observed, one of the first serials to be screened in Rio de Janeiro, *Lucille Love, Girl of Mystery*, exhibited in July 1915 with the title *A rapariga misteriosa*, was promoted by means of a contest which invited fans to predict the ending of the film, part of a publicity campaign surrounding the public debut of Universal’s recently opened local distribution branch.<sup>26</sup> A very similar contest accompanied the publication of “A Strange Case,” which invited its readers to compete for a golden medallion and the title of “first national detective” by guessing the murderer’s identity.<sup>27</sup> Both contests solicited participatory engagement from local consumers; the second borrowed an imported advertising strategy to promote a locally themed crime narrative.

In the Brazilian context, the broad popularity of serial films and fictional tie-ins allowed local writers and producers to imagine inserting their own narratives within a mode of imported serial culture, which was itself characterized by repetition and the constant recycling of iconographies and narrative tropes. The literary and cinematic appropriations of crime serials in Rio de Janeiro certainly do not approximate the rationalized system of self-sustaining production and cross-medial promotion that in some cases characterized American serials; yet this is precisely why they can offer insights regarding the relationship between cinema and modernity in early twentieth-century Brazil. In turn, examining serial production from the perspective of its



interstices and from the periphery of capitalist industrialization can help nuance its reductive reading as a rationalization (or, in the case of Brazil, a colonization) of culture.

Furthermore, the intimate relationship between the cinema and the *folhetim* in Brazil, was not limited to local films that drew on serial conventions. As I discuss further below, two canonical Brazilian novels published in or associated with the mode were adapted to the screen during the same period. Tracing the connections to national literature and local journalism manifest in the production history of *Os mistérios do Rio* and *A quadrilha do esqueleto*, I also turn my attention to 1917 *Le film du diable* (*The Devil's Film*, released locally with the French title), originally conceived as a World War I-themed serial, as well as to three crime and adventure films produced by *carioca* director Luiz de Barros in the early twenties. The production and reception of these films were conditioned by the locally developed notion of the *truc*, a notion borrowed from the French and understood to encompass displays of physical prowess, cinematic special effects, and thrilling plot developments. The spectacular quality of the *truc*, experienced as literally incredible (in that it defied verisimilitude), might compromise a sense of gritty realism or local authenticity that a film might seek to create. However, it was also praised as a sign of cinematic modernity, whether observed in imported or locally produced films. *Os mistérios do Rio de Janeiro*'s planned production as a serial film suggests ambitions for a self-sustaining production model premised on a local appetite for serial narratives. Writing in the context of Italian serial film production, Monica dall'Asta notes that its "lack of financial organization, standardization and rationalization" precluded "reaching levels of industrial, thus serial, manufacturing."<sup>28</sup> This goal would have been exponentially more difficult for Brazilian film producers of the period to achieve. Yet the fact that it was attempted at all suggests the exhibition of foreign serials in Brazil left a margin for films that constructed Rio de Janeiro as the site of bold crimes and thrilling adventures.

### **Serial Film Exhibition and the *Cine-Folhetim*, 1916-1918**

At the turn of the twentieth century, Brazil's capital nurtured a culture of popular sensationalism that constructed notorious cases as signs of local modernity in print, onstage, and onscreen. Extending this tendency, in the latter half of the teens, local audiences developed a fascination with crime films' exploration of the dark side of modern transportation and communication technologies. As these imported crime series and serials gained broad popularity with local audiences, their possible effects on audiences became a matter for debate. In 1915, an article in the illustrated magazine *Selecta* discussed the ambivalent effects of cinematic crime narratives, noting that, "The cinematograph, with its frequent reproductions of crimes and Rocambolesque enterprises, has been considered by many modern Catos<sup>29</sup> as the most efficient school of crime."<sup>30</sup> Yet in addition to "enriching the repertory of [criminals'] audacities" by providing them with models, it could also be mobilized as a crime-fighting tool.<sup>31</sup> The article goes on to relate the (quite possibly apocryphal) tale of a group of police officers in a small town outside New York who filmed a reconstruction of the crime, screened it in a local theater, and caught the curious robbers as they tried to flee the cinema.

Expanding this reflection on the cinema to the question of criminality more broadly defined, the magazine mused two weeks later, "if civilization has forged new instruments of criminality, such as firearms, the press, photography, dynamite, the wireless telegraph, the automobile, hypnotism, new poisons, microbial infections, etc., in science itself we have found valuable, efficient resources, which are capable, to a greater extent than penal repression, of

attenuating the effects, diminishing the successes, combating the results of contemporary criminality.”<sup>32</sup> This formulation initially constructs modern transportation and communication technologies as “instruments of criminality” rather than signs of progress. Such a stance was implicit in the serial film genre, which consistently “flaunt[ed] catastrophe, disorder and disaster rather than continuity and regulation,” emphasizing the shocking and unexpected impressions that characterized modern life.<sup>33</sup> As Tom Gunning has suggested in his analysis of Griffith’s *The Lonely Villa*, the use of communication technologies as both theme and vehicle of the formal articulation of the narrative can often gesture towards “the darker aspects of [...] instant communication and the annihilation of space and time,” hinting at the possibility of catastrophic reversals: “the smooth functioning of technology glides over the abyss of anxiety at its sudden failure.”<sup>34</sup>



Fig. 2.2: Technology as thrilling threat: the façade of the Cinema Pathé decorated to advertise the “Death Ray” (*Radiações mortais*) episode of *Os mistérios de Nova York* in 1916. Coleção Família Ferrez – Arquivo Nacional

The fascination with the ambivalence of technology, which could be enlisted either to commit or to combat nefarious crimes, and which also played a significant role in the mass violence and destruction of World War I, was a key aspect of *Os mistérios de Nova York*. Locally, the serial’s “absolutely ingenious and unprecedented applications of science”<sup>35</sup> were considered to be a key selling point for the film. While the locally produced true-crime films did not attempt to present anything like the fantastical array of inventions featured in the Pathé

Exchange serial, they do suggest an interest in the destructive effects of modern weaponry and transportation technologies. *Os mistérios do Rio* strongly evoked the First World War in a scene featuring poison gas attacks, while *A quadrilha do esqueleto* featured a gruesome automobile accident that would have evoked the sharp rise of traffic accidents and deaths in Rio de Janeiro in the teens as the number of automobiles soared, a problem exacerbated by the city's topography and poor road conditions.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps most spectacularly, the latter film incorporated a chase sequence and fatal fall from the gondola used to transport sightseers to the top of Sugarloaf Mountain.

By showcasing the gondola as technological achievement in the context of violent crime, *A quadrilha do esqueleto* suggests a desire to sensationalize everyday life in Rio by appropriating the tropes of imported serials. This impulse is also evident in the police blotter of *A Noite*, which frequently referenced characters from crime serials. In November 1915, a released criminal was called a "new Fantômas,"<sup>37</sup> this reference may have been inspired by, or intended to complement, advertisements for Feuillade's film, which was re-exhibited in Rio de Janeiro later the same month. In what may have been an instance of cross-promotion of the film beyond the *cine-folhetim*, July 1916, *A Noite* described the theft of a cigarette case and a pearl necklace as a "case à la 'Devil's Hand,'" which was the local name given to the villain of *The Exploits of Elaine*, the "Clutching Hand."<sup>38</sup> Evoking the moniker of the serial's hero (which corresponded almost exactly to his name in the French release, Justin Clarel), the newspaper described the robbery as "a difficult problem even for the cunning of a Justino Clarel with all his extraordinary coincidences."<sup>39</sup> Even as the article ironizes the serial's lack of verisimilitude, it also suggests that the real-life crime partakes of the thrilling intrigue offered by the film. This confusion between life and cinema could even manifest itself literally: in 1918, *A Noite* published an article entitled "Like in *Os mistérios de Nova York*" referring to a group of students that heard strange noises from the building next door and called the police, supposedly thinking that it might be the criminal gang from the film.<sup>40</sup>

The police blotter cultivated a sense that the uniquely modern thrills and anxieties associated with crime serials were part of quotidian experience in Rio de Janeiro, an attitude that seems to have inspired the production of films that capitalized on serial conventions. The manner in which serial films were locally exhibited made the genre seem comparatively more attainable for local producers: serials were often shown in blocks of two episodes of two parts each, approximating them to the feature programs that had recently become the dominant local exhibition format.<sup>41</sup> As Canjels has observed in the case with European exhibitions of American serials, which did not conform to the pattern used in their country of origin, the practice of releasing one serial episode per week was quite rare in Brazil.<sup>42</sup> In addition, before the carefully synchronized publication and exhibition of *Os mistérios de Nova York*, many French series films, and even serials such as Feuillade's *Les Vampires*, had been shown with markedly irregular release schedules. While neither of the two projected serial films made in Rio in 1917, *Le film du diable* and *Os mistérios do Rio*, ever attained a second episode, the pattern of irregularly recurring feature-length exhibitions would have promised more flexibility for producers than the prevailing American model of serial film exhibition.

When Universal exhibited a string of serials on the heels of *Lucille Love, Girl of Mystery* in July 1915, they were always screened in pairs. The novelty of exhibition in episodes quickly caught the public's attention, and was soon creatively adapted as a marketing technique. French series films that had been shown years earlier were retrospectively linked to the new vogue for serials. For example, *Zigomar* was advertised as "the first crime film [*film policial*] exhibited in

distinct chapters.”<sup>43</sup> Upon the release of a new Zigomar film in September 1916, the three previous episodes were re-exhibited as a supplement to the Cinema Odeon’s programming, beginning with the first, erroneously described as having been exhibited “seven years ago” (an impossibility, given that the film was made in 1911).<sup>44</sup> Other series and serial films such as Feuillade’s *Fantômas*, whose first installment had already been shown in Rio in 1913,<sup>45</sup> were re-exhibited beginning in late 1915.

In addition to the re-exhibitions of series films repackaged as serials, mystery narratives that had been designed to be shown on a more rigid timetable were shown rather haphazardly. For example, Feuillade’s *Les vampires (Os vampiros)* was announced first in January, then in February 1916, but not actually shown until March, when it was exhibited concurrently with *Os mistérios de Nova York*. After a series of irregularly spaced screenings, the film finally concluded in January 1917.<sup>46</sup> The intermittent practice of showing two episodes of a serial at a time may have mitigated the unpleasant experience of a cliffhanger without a timetable for resolution.

When the publication of “Os Mistérios de Nova York” began in *A Noite* on March 9, 1916, an explanatory preface emphasized that each episode was an autonomous unit, perhaps seeking to reassure audiences they would not be subjected to perpetually unresolved cliffhangers. Similarly, an advertisement in the entertainment section stated that, “each episode, which can be read separately, constitutes a film, to be exhibited in the Cinema-Pathé.”<sup>47</sup> As in France, installments of the story were published daily in the *folhetim* format familiar to local readers, occupying the bottom quarter of the page, rather than an entire sheet as in the case of the tie-ins published on a weekly basis in American newspapers. However, by contrast with the French novelization, from which Brazilian tie-in was apparently translated, the story does not seem to have been modified to include the types of local references so prominently featured in “A Strange Case.” As Canjels has pointed out, Pierre Decourcelle’s French-language novelization *Les mystères de New-York* draws on Arthur B. Reeve’s original fictional texts and preserves the American setting, even as it includes references to France (including a flashback conversation between Justin Clarel and celebrated French criminologist Alphonse Bertillon) and incorporates subtly expressed anti-German sentiments.<sup>48</sup> By contrast, an initial comparison between the Brazilian and the Mexican versions of the tie-ins reveals texts that are almost identical beyond the languages of their publication, with similar word choice throughout.<sup>49</sup>



Fig. 2.3: The first installment of *Os mistérios de Nova York*. *A Noite*, March 9, 1916. Acervo da Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil.

The episodes of *Os mistérios de Nova York* were shown between March 16 to August 22, always in pairs, and always at two-week intervals. An advertisement for the film emphasized that, “Accompanying *without a single interruption* the publication of *A Noite*, the Cinema Pathé presents on fixed dates the famous romance chronicling the exploits of the Devil’s Hand [*Mão do Diabo*], a new, enigmatic, attractive, plot” (emphasis added).<sup>50</sup> In this case, regular exhibition and thus consistent audience expectations were maintained.

Although it may not have always depended on the cliffhangers that seduced American audiences, serial fever swiftly struck Rio de Janeiro. While Pathé New York films were extensively promoted in the tie-in novelizations published by *A Noite*, Universal serials retained great popularity with local audiences, and the informal rivalry between the two gives an indication of the sweeping popularity of the genre in Rio in the late teens. According to Pedro Lima, the Rua da Carioca was flooded with cinemagoers on Mondays, the days that new episodes of serials were first shown, due to the exhibition of Universal and Pathé New York programs in two rival cinemas: “The audience of the Iris mixed with that of the Ideal, since they were almost directly in front of each other. The showings began at 1 pm and interrupted the traffic, no one could get by,” until a bell rang announcing the beginning of the screening and the crowd rushed inside.<sup>51</sup>

Given that the audience draw of the suspenseful cliffhanger was somewhat mitigated by local exhibition strategies, it seems likely that much of the fanaticism inspired by American serials can be attributed to its dynamic female heroines. “Serial queens” enjoyed great popularity with audiences and were evoked by contemporary writers as the quintessential figures of the modern age. After the conclusion of *Os mistérios de Nova York*, the Cinema Pathé exhibited the *Aventuras de Elaine* [*The Perils of Pauline*] in November 1916; its advertisements emphasize the reappearance of the serial’s the popular heroine.<sup>52</sup> The Cinema Ideal responded by showing another episodic narrative featuring a dynamic female protagonist, exhibiting fifteen installments extracted from the series *The Hazards of Helen* under the title *A mulher audaciosa* (“The Audacious Woman”).<sup>53</sup> Even after the serial craze passed, Pearl White continued to captivate the imagination of the group of São Paulo-based modernist writers who would found the celebrated avant-garde magazine *Klaxon*. In the manifesto that opens the first issue, published in May 1922, the group affirms that “cinematography is the most representative artistic creation of our age,” signalling some of the medium’s most exciting qualities by means of a contrast between the serial queen and an actress held to embody a now-outmoded model of femininity.<sup>54</sup> The manifesto declares, “Pearl White is preferable to Sarah Bernhardt. Sarah is tragedy, sentimental and technical romanticism. Pearl is ratiocination, instruction, sport, rapidity, joy, life. Sarah Bernhardt = nineteenth century. Pearl White = twentieth century.”<sup>55</sup> According to the memoir of local writer Pedro Nava, the attractions of French serials paled beside that of the American films starring Pearl White, who “was the synonym of the happiness, health, sportiveness and courage of the American girl. And what eyes. Not even *Os vampiros* and the French suggestiveness of the clinging suit of old Musidora could prevail against her and against *Os mistérios de Nova York*.”<sup>56</sup> These reflections by Brazilian writers recall contemporaneous reflections on American serials penned by surrealist Philippe Soupault, for whom “Pearl White’s [...] almost ferocious smile announced the upheavals of the new world,” and who pronounced these narratives of “crimes, departures, wonders” as “nothing less than the poetry of our age.”<sup>57</sup>

Capitalizing on the popularity of serials featuring White and other “serial queens,” to promote its paper, *A Noite* again began to print tie-ins in April 1917, continuing the practice through early 1918. These included *O enigma da mascara ou a garra de ferro* (*The Iron Claw* a.k.a *The Laughing Mask*, dir. José Edward, 1916), starring White; *O Estigma ou a Malha Rubra* (*The Red Circle*, dir. Sherwood MacDonald), with Ruth Roland; *Ravengar* (*The Shielding Shadow*, dir. Louis Gasnier, 1916), and *O mysterio da dupla cruz* (*The Mystery of the Double Cross*, dir. William Parke, 1917), featuring Mollie King, as well as of an Italian film in episodes, *O Fiacre n. 13* (*Cab N. 13*, dir. Alberto Capozzi, 1917). Other publications followed the lead of Irineu Marinho’s paper; Luna Freire notes the 1917 serializations of *O telefone da morte* (*The Voice on the Wire*, dir. Stuart Paton, 1917) in the *Correio da Manhã*; and the publication of summaries of *Os Estranguladores de New-York ou o Mistério da Mancha Vermelha* (*The Stranglers of New York*, also known as the *Crimson Stain Mystery*, the original English title) in both the program of the Cinema Pátria, and the newspaper *A Rua*; and the publication of the tie-ins in book form, beginning with *Os mistérios de Nova York*.<sup>58</sup> The peak of serial novelizations’ popularity in 1917 coincided with the high point of crime-film production in Rio, when three serial-influenced films were released.

The vogue for serials in Brazil’s capital began to wane in early 1918, signaled by *A Noite*’s decision to stop publishing tie-in novelizations, just as they were falling out of favor in the United States.<sup>59</sup> In June of that year, a critic in *Palcos e Telas* displayed evident fatigue with the genre, describing *Seven Pearls*, a 1917 Pathé New York serial directed by Louis Gasnier and starring Mollie King, as just another instance of “the eternal and ultra-Rocambolesque adventures of the *cine-folhetim*” which failed to present any exciting novelties for audiences.<sup>60</sup> In the same issue, an Italian serial starring Emilio Ghione was criticized for its “impossible scenes with truly miraculous coincidences, intended to prolong the series with an eye on the biggest profit possible, which for this very reason, no longer move us.”<sup>61</sup> Local critics had begun to draw parallels between the anti-realistic conventions of the serial film, its assembly-line production mode, and its self-consciously addictive (and repetitive) narrative structures. While Rio de Janeiro film producers could hardly aspire to flood the local market with episodes of locally made serial films, their products vied for local success by combining spectacular stunts and narrative *coups de théâtre* with a focus on local scenery and, in two cases, a focus on national literature.

### **The *Cine-folhetim* and Local Film Production**

At the moment that American film distributors were gaining a firm foothold in the Brazilian capital’s exhibition market, Antônio Leal, who had recently returned to Brazil from Europe, proposed a series of strategies to stimulate local film production.<sup>62</sup> In two interviews given in late 1915 and early 1916, he suggested that adaptations of sensational topical events, such as disasters, as well as works of national literature, would most effectively capture the interest of local audiences.<sup>63</sup> If Leal had capitalized handsomely on the first strategy in 1908 and 1909, in 1915 and 1916 he would adopt the latter, adapting Joaquim Manuel de Macedo’s 1844 *A Moreninha* (*The Little Brunette*), originally published in the *folhetim* format, and José de Alencar’s 1862 *Luciôla* to the screen. These films were based on romantic, melodramatic novels imbued with a cultural prestige that contrasts sharply with the “low” genre of the serial. (It is also worth noting that *A moreninha* was one of the first Brazilian novels to focus closely on Rio

de Janeiro; similarly, in contrast with Alencar's well-known indigenist "foundational fictions" such as *Iracema* and *O Guarani*, *Luciôla* is entirely set in the capital.)<sup>64</sup>

However, *Luciôla*, a sentimental tale of a noble prostitute, was advertised in a fashion that directly recalled the film's origins in a serialized novel. While it certainly did not compare in length to the tie-ins novelizations published over several weeks, a summary of *Luciôla* was serialized over three days in *A Noite* in December 1916, suggesting a desire to approximate a well-known work of Brazilian literature to these highly popular "romances cinematográficos." The amount of space allotted to promotion of the film – the summaries occupied a much greater proportion of the page than ordinary advertisements – may also have been a sign of the working relationship between Leal and *A Noite*'s editor-in-chief Irineu Marinho. Luna Freire notes that the two were already business partners before the filming of *A quadrilha do esqueleto* was initiated.<sup>65</sup> Although the degree to which Leal was involved in the production of the latter film is not entirely clear, there is evidence that it was developed and copied in his laboratory, if not shot in his studios as well.<sup>66</sup> To a greater extent than in the case of *Luciôla*, Marinho would take advantage of his position at *A Noite* to promote the film; as Luna Freire notes, the paper provided what amounted to extensive free publicity for *A quadrilha do esqueleto*, publishing an extensive interview with one of the owners of Veritas and short profiles of some of the actors, along with a number of other news items. This interpenetration of journalism and sensational fiction, present in the news items discussed earlier in the chapter, suggests the interpenetration of film production and consumption with the mass press.

Of the three 1917 productions with close affinities to serials, the first to be released was *Le film du diable*, whose French title suggests its curious self-positioning as a local production purporting to take place "in that machine-gun devastated territory that is Belgium."<sup>67</sup> Inspired by the events of World War I, *Le film du diable* was initially conceived of as "the first [part] of a long projected series."<sup>68</sup> However, it was eventually released as a feature in April 1917, and was certainly not a crime or adventure narrative in the usual sense. Yet like *Os mistérios do Rio* and *A quadrilha do esqueleto*, *Le film du diable* seems to have juxtaposed violent sequences with prominent displays of local and regional scenery: a view from an ocean liner entering the port of Santos; the Cubatão mountain range, also located in the state of São Paulo; and Gávea and Tijuca, which at that time were wealthy and picturesque *carioca* suburbs.<sup>69</sup> In one case, this scenery was juxtaposed with a mechanical disaster: "the fall of an automobile, which plunges from the bluffs of Gávea, into a profound grotto" until the "motor explodes there below."<sup>70</sup>

*Le film du diable* featured a number of novel (and rather strange) elements beyond its spectacular car crash. Its intertitles were short verse compositions by author (and advertising copywriter) Manuel Bastos Tigre: "Amongst the spurts of machine-gun fire/From the friendly trench emerges/A soldier who attempts/To save the maiden's life" is an example.<sup>71</sup> A particularly striking attribute of the film was its series of "artistic nudes" rendered by "[M]iss Ray," described as an eighteen-year-old American actress.<sup>72</sup> In a series of (apparently bizarre) allegorical sequences, she represented "the apparition of the 'naked truth' that represents the 'Force of Law,' in contraposition to the 'Devil' who expresses the 'Law of Force.'"<sup>73</sup> In their focus on abstract moral concepts, these scenes could be seen as linked to the apotheoses that ended the true-crime films, but their narrative function remains rather puzzling, especially given the lack of detailed information about the film.

In another parallel to the true-crime films discussed in the previous chapter, *Le film du diable* seems to have manifested a tension between narrative and visual document: the dramatic local scenery is supposed to stand in for a war-torn European country in the narrative, although it

is extratextually identified as a visual document of Rio de Janeiro in advertisements for the film. *Le film du diable*'s suspenseful narrative of violent events is thus in tension with the attraction of the local "prise de vues,"<sup>74</sup> although the scene of the car wreck on the cliffs of Gávea would presumably have harmoniously integrated the two. The film's idiosyncratic odd integration of imported narrative models with visual documents of local scenery seems to have attained respectable, but not sweeping, success with local audiences.<sup>75</sup> One of the film's reviewers noted its "points of interest that characterize good production companies, such as *trucs* [in French in original] of perfect execution, and scenes that excite."<sup>76</sup> This reference to the cinematic 'truc' suggests the significance of physical stunts, visual special effects, and narrative thrills in local film consumption and production. As a category of cinematic attraction, the "truc" apparently encompassed three intertwined dimensions: virtuosic physical stunts (often involving modern transportation technologies such as automobiles, trains and airplanes); the cinematic special effects used to capture or simulate these sequences; and surprising plot elements that stretched verisimilitude.

The category of the 'truc' could either be used to praise displays of physical, technical or narrative virtuosity, as in the review cited above, or to criticize the repetitive nature of devices intended to thrill the story's consumers. Upon its exhibition in April 1916, an episode of Feuillade's *Les Vampires* was described as "The romance of an evildoer, just as he is, without *trucs* or impossible events,"<sup>77</sup> as Luna Freire has pointed out, the Gaumont serial was marketed as comparatively gritty and realistic.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, a text published in *A Noite* advertising *Os mistérios de Nova York* suggested that the novelization had attractions beyond the gimmicks that abound in the genre: "when the 'trucs' and 'ficelles'<sup>79</sup> intended to engage readers' curiosity could no longer offer any new configuration whatsoever, there appeared in the United States a novelty that achieved stupendous success in just a few days," namely, the Pathé Exchange serial.<sup>80</sup> Emphasizing the addictive qualities of its suspenseful narrative, the text advertised *Os mistérios*' "peripetias that are exciting and so well structured, that the reader is forcibly dragged into trying to find out the ending."<sup>81</sup>

While neither was accompanied by a tie-in novelization, both *Os mistérios do Rio* and *A quadrilha do esqueleto* boasted plots characterized by the narrative twists and turns of the *folhetim*, as well as spectacular displays of physical virtuosity and transportation technology and of local scenery. As Luna Freire has noted, the documentation of local spaces in the context of sensationalized violence is an element that the serial-influenced films of the late teens apparently shared with the true-crime reconstitutions made nearly a decade earlier. In the advertisements used to promote both groups of films, he notes an "emphasis on the authenticity of characters, settings and plots, which surely stimulated the interest of the local audience."<sup>82</sup> While he is careful to distinguish between the pre-classical form of the true-crime reconstitutions and the feature-length crime films made in 1917, in all likelihood using the continuity editing conventions consolidated in Hollywood by 1915, Luna Freire speculates that both groups of films were "sustained by sensationalistic cultural matrices, such as the fascination for the monstrous other [...] the murderer who could be among us, hidden in the anonymity of the big city, as well as the emphasis on an excess of sensation, the desire to really *see* or *feel* a reality that is unknown (or undergoing a process of rapid change), transformed into a spectacle."<sup>83</sup> This impulse can be observed in the emphasis on local scenery and topical events in advertisements for the serial-influenced films.

In contrast with Leal's literary adaptations – a commentator in *O Imparcial* blamed the limited success of recent domestic productions on the fact that they were "in their totality, taken



from old novels”<sup>84</sup> –, *Os mistérios do Rio de Janeiro* was based on an original script by a well-respected contemporary author, Coelho Neto, whose participation was emphasized in the film’s publicity. While this gave the film a distinctly up-to-date air, its title refers back to a longer tradition of serial literature, recalling not only the recently exhibited *Os mistérios de Nova York*, but also at least two other *romance-folhetins* with the same title,<sup>85</sup> not to mention the fountainhead of several decades’ worth of enigmatic urban narratives: Eugène Sue’s 1843 *Les mystères de Paris*. While Coelho Neto’s participation in the filming was noted,<sup>86</sup> according to *A Noite*, the camera operator for the six-reel film was Alberto Musso,<sup>87</sup> and it featured actor João Barbosa,<sup>88</sup> who had appeared in *Os estranguladores* and written the story for *Um drama na Tijuca* eight years previously. The film’s lone episode was entitled “The Treasure of the German Ships”; it cast the Axis vessels stranded in Brazilian harbors as a site of international intrigue. The violence of World War I is here linked to a criminal conspiracy; the film’s villain, a false Tunisian prince named Djalmo of Tunis, is described as “an audacious thief, linked to an international gang organized to operate in the great capitals during the war.”<sup>89</sup> Like the journalistic discourses publicizing turn-of-the-century “grand crimes,” this rhetoric situates Rio de Janeiro amongst the world’s urban capitals precisely by evoking criminality.

A summary of the plot of *Os mistérios do Rio de Janeiro* published in the *Correio da Manhã* gives its general outlines, although some of the *folhetin*-esque twists and turns are not clarified. Insinuating himself with local high society, particularly with “a widowed consul” and his daughter Hilda, the Prince learns that a boat under the consul’s guard, called the *Viking*, holds a “million in gold” aboard.<sup>90</sup> A series of love triangles develops: Hilda falls in love with the villain, arousing the jealousy of Djalmo’s Veronese lover Fiammetta; in turn, an accomplice in the robbery, Bracco, “escaped from the prisons of Florence,” falls in love with Fiammetta.<sup>91</sup> During a party at the consul’s house, Djalmo drugs the consul and kidnaps Hilda. Suspicious of his motives, Fiammetta urges the gang of thieves to kill Djalmo (perhaps the situation pictured in the surviving scene from the film, in which a dark-haired woman standing in a tavern surrounded by a group of nefarious-looking men, raises her arms above her head, the gesture mimicked by a number of her compatriots).



Fig. 2.4: Fiammetta makes a pact with bandits reminiscent of Parisian *apaches*.  
 Coleção Jurandyr Noronha – Museu da Imagem e do Som, Rio de Janeiro.

Bracco finds the boxes of stolen gold to be empty, and suspects Fiammetta. (The summary does not make it entirely clear when the theft occurs—the scene of a “struggle in the depths of the ocean” was frequently announced in advertisements for the film and may refer to the aftermath of the robbery onboard the ship). The aforementioned confrontation involving poison gas bombs ensues; Fiammetta faints, Brocca “takes her in his arms, but the Veronese, recovering her senses and recognizing her kidnapper, stabs him in the back, leaving him for dead.”<sup>92</sup> Fiammetta then receives a letter from Djalmo, and becomes convinced that his death was faked by Bracco. Hilda, now back at the consul’s house, goes to pray for the return of the prince (whom she also suspects may not be dead after all) at a statue of Christ in a nearby park. Since she has covered herself with a shawl, she is mistaken for Fiammetta and kidnapped by Bracco and an accomplice, who have sent the letter in order to lay this trap. Fiammetta hears Hilda’s cries for help and finds her shawl; crying in turn for help, she indirectly alerts the consul, who returns home to find his daughter gone; he enters the park “in despair, as if thunderstruck, falling at the feet of the statue of Christ.”<sup>93</sup>

Even without a second episode, *Os mistérios do Rio de Janeiro* apparently featured multiple kidnappings, interlocking love triangles, and betrayals piled on betrayals, recalling the “intensity and polyvalence of the hostility” that Ben Singer has observed in American serials.<sup>94</sup> Rather than drawing directly on these American productions, however, the openly cosmopolitan aspirations of the film seem to have been principally oriented towards Europe. A program of the period describes an erotic scene between Djalmo and Fiammetta: “The two laugh, with her seated on the knees of the prince. He, picking up a glass of champagne, takes a sip and, with a kiss, transfers it to the mouth of his lover, the two of them in this way drinking to fortune!” Transcribing this description, Alex Viary draws the conclusion that “this sophistication indicated that Coelho Neto had truly absorbed the new and daring *mondanisme* [*mundanismo*] of the divas of Italian cinema (Pina Menichelli, Francesca Bertini, and so many others.)”<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, a curious detail from the beginning of the film (as described in the summary) recalls the fifth episode of Feuillade’s *Les vampires*, “The Eyes that Fascinate,” first exhibited in Rio de Janeiro in the Odeon on June 15, 1916.<sup>96</sup> The prince is able to “only with his look, detach a branch of flowers that the maiden [Hilda] had admired from the tree,” explaining this feat by the fact that “he had learned, with the fakirs in India, to dominate nature [...]”<sup>97</sup> Hypnotic powers similar to those attributed to the gaze in Feuillade’s serial are here invested with a physical power and an Orientalist mystique (although this sequence may have also been a drug-induced vision, since a description of the film refers to “poisoned flowers”).<sup>98</sup>

Advertisements for the film suggested that these fantastical details and the film’s exotic cast of Mediterranean characters (from Tunis, Verona, and Florence), were not in conflict with the documentation of local sites and topical events: “The film, with a plot thrilling for the elements of interest and fantasy it combines, shows the subversive work of spies in our country, and especially in Rio de Janeiro, whose most picturesque locations, and most characteristic types and customs are presented, “*d’après nature*,” in the course of the exhibition.”<sup>99</sup> Similarly, a review described *Os mistérios do Rio* as “a romance of adventures [...] of the most convoluted sort, which, because it takes place in well-known locations, will arouse great interest, always maintaining the spectator’s attention, one moment in tragic romantic situations, the next in the splendor of our dwellings which are as lavish and tasteful as the most opulent in Europe, or in the marvelous exuberance of our incomparable landscapes.”<sup>100</sup> The description simultaneously suggests the film’s affinities to the tradition of the *folhetim* and the adventure serial; its promise

of romance, glamour, and affluent settings rivaling European mansions; and its emphasis on local scenery.

The summary of the film's plot in the *Correio da Manhã* refers to Prince Djalmo residing in the neighborhood of Cosme Velho; another article refers to "combat with the police in the Caverns" of Tijuca;<sup>101</sup> and advertisements for the film list a series of other locations depicted: "Tijuca, Pão de Açúcar, Gávea, Furnas, Santa Theresa, Guanabara Bay, Leme, Copacabana, Ipanema, Fluminense Football Club [in the neighborhood of Laranjeiras], Jockey Club" and "the Botequim da Revira," a "SENSATIONAL" attraction, according to the advertisement.<sup>102</sup> The tavern was identified as being located in the working-class neighborhood of Saúde and described as "authentic," implying the sequence set there was shot on location.<sup>103</sup> This setting probably corresponds to the humble barroom visible in the surviving still.

With the exception of the tavern sequence, all of these locations were upper-class neighborhoods, most in the Zona Sul of the city (Leme, Copacabana, and Ipanema), which were rapidly expanding in the first decades of the twentieth century, although some, like Santa Teresa, Cosme Velho, and Laranjeiras, were older neighborhoods filled with lavish mansions. The two athletic venues mentioned were places for the elite to enjoy spectator sports recently adopted on the model of English pastimes; Jeffrey Needell cites the Jockey Club in particular as a key point of rendezvous.<sup>104</sup> Ironically, this focus on elegant neighborhoods and lavish mansions seems to have been in part a reflection of the limited resources available to the production; Coelho Neto's son recalled that "almost all the scenes were shot in public gardens, private mansions," and even the writer's own office.<sup>105</sup>

In April 1917, when *Os mistérios do Rio de Janeiro* had still been conceived of as a multi-episode film, the *Correio da Manhã* described it as "a serial drama [*drama em séries*], but, as each episode is a drama on a different subject of thrilling actuality, the public is now notified that the second episode will reflect the latest sensational events in Brazilian life."<sup>106</sup> When the film was finally released on October 25, 1917, concurrently with *A quadrilha do esqueleto*, its claim to "rigorous actuality" and grounding in the local context seems to have been more tenuous than that of its rival. In the case of *A quadrilha do esqueleto*, audiences were promised "plot, images, types, landscapes, in short, everything genuinely carioca."<sup>107</sup> While the advertisement for *Os mistérios do Rio de Janeiro* implied that the capital would naturally serve as the backdrop for "the latest sensational events in Brazilian life," the reference to the "genuinely carioca" suggests the local, rather than national, focus of the two films.

In an interview in *A Noite*, one of the directors of this new production company described the release as "a crime film, of a kind that pleases everyone, like the police blotter in their newspaper. The company preferred to debut in this way, because we wanted to reproduce onscreen some very characteristic aspects of Rio de Janeiro."<sup>108</sup> The director insisted that fantasy played only a small role in the film, "otherwise, I think we have obeyed the truth." In a phrase that strongly evokes *Fantômas* and *Les vampires*, exhibited in the capital in 1915 and 1916, the director comments, "It would doubtless be easy to make films with terrifying bandits, who commit hold-ups with black sacks over their heads. But that is for other milieus; we wanted to produce excitement only with our types, our habits, our police, our milieu, in short."<sup>109</sup>

This emphasis on local content is further suggested by an advertisement for the film published a few days later listed the professional actors and their roles, concluded with "patrons of the Hunchback's Tavern (authentic), reporters (one authentic), civil guards (authentic)," police, passersby, etc."<sup>110</sup> In an interview given about the film, the director admitted that the barroom where the "authentic" patrons gathered was reconstructed in their studio, but that the

clients were real, and given copious amounts to drink to render the scene more realistic.<sup>111</sup> *A quadrilha da morte* showcased the following locations:

A great part of the Quinta da Boa Vista [a large park in the northern section of the city, originally part of the grounds of the imperial palace], the Misericórdia neighborhood, showing the ruins that exist in front of the Central Market, a beautiful section of the garden in the Plaza of the Republic, the great extension of Conde do Bomfim Street, various sections of Tijuca, Sugarloaf Mountain and its proud Aerial Way, the secular ruins of Brás de Pina, about which there is an interesting controversy and where a lovely garden will be constructed, the House of Detention, with its corridors and cells, innumerable city streets, various private residences, etc., etc.<sup>112</sup>

Although there is some overlap in the sights shown by the two simultaneously released films (Tijuca, Sugarloaf Mountain), *A quadrilha da morte* focuses principally on working-class neighborhoods in the Zona Norte, and interestingly, on a pair of ruins. The rather odd phrase “the secular ruins of Brás de Pina” refers to a series of articles published by *A Noite* that indirectly provided further publicity to the film by debating the provenance of these ruins (which were described by the director of *Veritas* as a Carmelite convent, an assertion debated by a local historian), and calling for their preservation in the face of possible demolition.<sup>113</sup> The use of these ruins was likely an inexpensive way to add atmosphere and a sense of authenticity – a “gang of telegraph wire thieves” had recently been apprehended there, according to *A Noite*.<sup>114</sup> Yet they also inscribe into the film vestiges of the destructive, as well as constructive, processes that transformed Rio de Janeiro in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In contrast to this interest in ruins, *A quadrilha do esqueleto* also showcased the modern transportation technologies that were transforming daily experience. According to Pedro Lima, spectators were particularly impressed with a scene in which an automobile appeared to crush a character’s leg, an effect accomplished with the help of the journalist Inácio de Carvalho, who had suffered an amputation and used a prosthetic leg.<sup>115</sup> More spectacularly, a vertiginous chase sequence ending with a fatal fall was staged on the gondola used to transport sightseers to the top of Sugarloaf Mountain, beginning in 1912. Like the cinema itself, the gondola produced an exciting mobile view by means of a technological apparatus. In 1917, the ride was still being advertised (at “reduced prices”) as a “splendid, enchanting, refreshing excursion” boasting “the most thrilling panorama!”<sup>116</sup> The gondola was thus not only an engineering feat, but also a means of making the local landscape spectacularly, even thrillingly, visible, a project that the serial-influenced local films shared.<sup>117</sup> The high-wire pursuit exemplified the transplantation of the daring stunts of American serials to the local context. The influence of American cinema is also made explicit in advertisements for the film; despite this insistence on the visual documentation of the local “bas fond,” the advertisement specifies that “the procedures used in the direction [“pose,” referring to production of a fiction film referred to as a “pousado”] were largely those of the Fox studio,”<sup>118</sup> a series of productions that had gained a new prominence on the marquee of the Cinema-Pathé.



Fig. 2.5: “A pursuit on Sugarloaf Mountain’s Aerial Way” in *A quadrilha do esqueleto* *A Noite*, October 24, 1917. Acervo da Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil.

Suggesting the complex, highly *folhetim*-esque character of *A quadrilha do esqueleto*’s plot, the summary published in the *Correio da Manhã* opens with the disclaimer that it will not attempt to provide “a complete summary, which would be impossible.”<sup>119</sup> The summary goes on to introduce the principal characters, whose desires and conflicts, as initially established by the summary, closely resemble those of the Pearl White serial *The Iron Claw*, exhibited in Rio with a tie-in between April and August of 1917:<sup>120</sup>

Rodrigo is an unscrupulous type who, feigning friendship for the capitalist Peixoto, had long been obsessed with the idea of stealing his wife and fortune, taking advantage of his intimacy with those of the house to carry out his doubly shameful plan. As an obstacle to this, Rodrigo constantly encountered the resistance of Emilia, a virtuous woman incapable of betrayal.<sup>121</sup>

Frustrated in these attempts and in need of money, Rodrigo plans to murder the capitalist with the help of the eponymous Skeleton Gang at a secret meeting. Rodrigo’s nefarious plans are discovered by the Dwarf, a “deformed being, full of envy and ambition,” who lives in the capitalist’s home as a sort of court jester to his daughter, and who has followed Rodrigo to the location of the secret meeting.<sup>122</sup> However, instead of trying to foil the plot, the Dwarf “preferred to accompany the entire crime, enjoying the vengeance it represented for him.”<sup>123</sup> The capitalist is murdered by the gang’s leader, Skeleton, and just as the “most interesting part of the film” (according to the reviewer) begins, the summary becomes rather vague: “A struggle, a

real duel between the police and the bandits is established, ending after a series of peripeties [...] with the arrest of the gang.”<sup>124</sup>

*A quadrilha da morte* was shown simultaneously in two of the most elegant cinemas in Rio, the Avenida and the Ideal, while *Os mistérios* was exhibited in the slightly less prestigious Cine Palais. Despite the divergent address of the two films – Coelho Neto’s production seems to have been intended to capitalize on the imported cachet of the serial genre, appealing to the elite with its overt cosmopolitanism and images of wealthy neighborhoods, while *A quadrilha da morte*’s focus was the local and popular – they both attained considerable success. On October 28, the final day of the exhibition of *Os mistérios do Rio de Janeiro*, an advertisement for the film boasted that “defying the inclement weather, [the film] has attracted to the Cine Palais 13,964 persons, anxious to acclaim the ingenious creation of the prince of Brazilian novelists.”<sup>125</sup>

Reports and publicity for *A quadrilha do esqueleto* did not cite exact audience numbers, but verbally and visually attested to massive crowds. Ticket sales were temporarily suspended in both the cinemas exhibiting the film, and in “the Ideal, the attendance was so great, that the public had to wait in the street, blocking traffic, and making necessary the police’s intervention to regulate the circulation.”<sup>126</sup> The pressure of the crowd was even reported to have broken a mirror in the Ideal’s waiting room.<sup>127</sup> The film’s final day in these two theaters, like that of *Os mistérios do Rio de Janeiro*, was October 28, consistent with the usual amount of time films were kept in these cinemas’ program, three to four days. *A quadrilha do esqueleto* was exhibited in a series of neighborhood cities and the nearby city of Petrópolis through November 4.<sup>128</sup> Over the course of January and February, it was shown at ten cinemas in São Paulo and one in the neighboring port of Santos.<sup>129</sup> *Os mistérios do Rio de Janeiro* received a more modest exhibition in São Paulo, appearing in two cinemas over four days in April.<sup>130</sup>

These two Brazilian films won a place alongside the customary foreign offerings of these cinemas, likely thanks in part to the intervention of *A Noite* editor Irineu Marinho. Yet their relatively brief run, especially compared to the 830 exhibitions of *Os estranguladores* in 1908, suggests the sweeping transformation of the infrastructure of distribution and exhibition since 1911. Despite publicity surrounding the creation of a national cinema, local productions were still marginal in local markets, even if they were greeted with intense (but fleeting) popular excitement. Like the regional productions discussed in Chapter 5, they were the product of semi-amateur initiatives that had difficulty achieving self-sustaining production. The momentum behind *Os mistérios do Rio* had been exhausted long before the release of the film, and while Veritas went on to make two additional productions, a comedy and a drama (like *Os mistérios do Rio*, written by a well-known local author),<sup>131</sup> in the end neither film was able to capitalize on the audience excitement catalyzed by serial narratives, itself short-lived.

### **The After-life of the Serial Craze: The Films of Luiz de Barros and the Regional Exhibition of Serials**

I would like to close this chapter with an examination of three little-documented films directed by Luiz de Barros, who would go on to enjoy a lengthy career in Brazilian cinema. Their production in the early twenties suggests the continued appeal of crime serial conventions in tentative local efforts at film production. I end with a brief discussion of the exhibition of imported serials and the publication of tie-in novelizations in cities outside Rio de Janeiro, often months or years after exhibitions in the capital. In the 1920s, the conventions of serials and other adventure melodramas, most notably the western, would be appropriated in regional film

productions that strove to assert technological modernity in economically peripheral regions of Brazil.



Fig. 2.6: Image from *A jóia maldita* (*The Accursed Gem*). *Selecta*, January 31, 1925  
Acervo da Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil.

In 1920, Luiz de Barros was approached by Antonio Tibiriça, who would produce a number of sensationalistic features in the 1920s,<sup>132</sup> with the project that became the adventure film *A jóia maldita* (*The Accursed Gem*). Filmed in the port city of Santos in 1920 by Paulino Botelho, the film depicted the exploits of “[a] jewel thief, who reaches the extreme of robbing his own wife and becomes a fugitive.<sup>133</sup> “A series of incidents and peripeties that motivate the display of landscapes of São Paulo, Alto de Santana and Rio de Janeiro”, as well as images shot from on board the steamship *Uberaba*, follow.<sup>134</sup> This inter-articulation of action sequences and display of local landscapes is a characteristic shared by the earlier true-crime films as well as the serial-influenced films discussed in Chapter 5. A surviving photograph from the film suggests it was quite close to the action-driven conventions of the serial, with its often exoticized iconographies: an actor in old-age make-up holding a dagger is shown entering a room through the window, while a second actor holds him at bay with a vaguely Oriental-looking urn from which steam is pouring.<sup>135</sup>

The following year, Barros directed *O cavaleiro negro* (*The Black Rider*) which, despite the masculine pronoun used in the title, featured a female heroine, played by local actress Antonia Denegri. The hero of the film spots the titular rider, originally assuming that the mysterious figure is a man; he discovers the rider’s gender when he comes upon her unconscious after a fall. This emphasis on disguise and on the heroine’s physical dynamism immediately recalls American serials. A letter from a reader published in *Para Todos* provides a hint as to its plot, referring to openly fantastical elements. Praising the work of the main actor, the letter-writer continues, “I only lament the subject chosen by the [production] company. Mysteries, witches, goblins, souls from the underworld – how terrifying! – only good for frightening children. It was not worthwhile to film such a mediocre plot [when] we have no lack of good writers.”<sup>136</sup>

While such explicitly supernatural elements were not customary in serial films, they may have provided a pretext for the use of special effects and displays of physical virtuosity. An article in *Selecta* published a number of years later relates a humorous anecdote about the film's production, suggesting that Luiz de Barros "wanted to make [a film] where he could apply some cinematic 'trucs.' He wanted to show that not only the Americans, but he, too, could make use of all these effects."<sup>137</sup> Providing considerable detail about the staging of a scene where the hero and heroine gallop through a torrential rainstorm, complete with lightning and tree-shaking winds, the anonymous author humorously notes a detail that spoiled the illusion: a dust trail visible in the wake of the galloping horse. Although here the term "truc" apparently refers to the special effects used to create the false rainstorm, it is closely linked to a physical exploit – the "vertiginous gallop" on horseback.

Similarly, in an interview with the suggestive title "Antonio Denegri admires the cinema, because it has an infinity of sensations," the actress recounts how one of her stunts went dreadfully awry. During a staged tumble off her horse, she overshot the spot that had been prepared in advance to break her fall, suffering serious injuries.<sup>138</sup> These narratives linked the performance of the almost unknown Denegri to press coverage of American "serial queens," which focused heavily on the physical perils they faced during filming. Jennifer Bean has argued that these discourses inaugurated a model of stardom grounded in a "semiotics of catastrophe," which advanced the realistic imperative of the cinematic medium by displacing spectatorial attention from the mechanical and economic machinery of filmmaking (itself subject to spectacular breakdown) onto the physical peril endured by the "extraordinary body" of the film star.<sup>139</sup> The notion of the 'truc' implied a more self-conscious relationship between the physical virtuosity of actors and cinematic special effects, arising from the difficulty of duplicating them locally.

Luiz de Barros' boldest foray into adventure melodramas came in 1924 with *Hei de vencer* (*I Will Triumph*). The film's hero Alberto, a would-be journalist, must unravel the mystery of a woman's murder when the police suspect his friend. Alberto begins to investigate the victim's husband, triggering a series of sensational chase sequences. The aspiring reporter follows the husband by jumping onto the moving car in which he is traveling, later leaping from the roof onto an overpass near the train station. Alberto later tracks the husband to an airfield from which he plans to escape, resulting in an airborne pursuit in which the villain is accidentally killed.<sup>140</sup> *Selecta* described *Hei de vencer* as "a film of sensational adventures, such as an actor's passage from one airplane to another at a height of 800 meters, and the 'barrel roll of death,' filmed inside the vehicle itself, which serves to prove that among us, as well, there is no lack of courage and perseverance to obtain what is desired."<sup>141</sup> Daring stunt sequences skillfully captured on film were held to be a point of local pride by reviewers as well; one commented, "The scenes with the airplanes are one of the best parts of the film, we never imagined this could be done here!"<sup>142</sup> Thrilling aviation sequences would also play a role in another film produced in São Paulo in the twenties, *Quando elas querem* (*When Women Love*, 1925).<sup>143</sup> Strikingly, the airplane's operator is a young woman, although the last-minute rescue involves sentimental and economic peril, rather than a sensationalized bodily threat.<sup>144</sup>

Despite the lingering interest in spectacular stunts and in the conventions of imported crime and adventure films manifested in local film production through the early twenties, by mid-1918 these genres were shunned by local critics and by the exhibitors who ran Rio's most centrally located cinemas. Banished to second-run neighborhood cinemas and isolated areas of the country, imported crime and adventure serials went on to attain significant popularity outside



the rapidly industrializing cities of Brazil's southeast. Serials and adventure melodramas were shown in large population centers linked to the country's principal transportation networks shortly after consolidating their popularity in the capital in 1916, slowly making their way around the country's far North, South, and interior. For example, *Os vampiros* was shown in Porto Alegre in the far southern state of Rio Grande do Sul in 1916, followed by *Os mistérios de Nova York* in 1917. The exhibition of serials in the city was frequently accompanied by the publication of tie-in novelizations.<sup>145</sup> Following on the exhibition in Recife of *Os mistérios de New-York*, in the final months of 1916, apparently without a newspaper tie-in, the serials *O Enigma da Máscara* (*The Iron Claw*) and *A malha rubra* (*The Red Circle*) were shown in weekly sessions of two episodes each, concurrently with the daily publication of their novelizations, respectively in the newspapers *A Provincia* and *A Ordem*.<sup>146</sup> *The Hazards of Helen*, which as in Rio was exhibited with the title *A Mulher audaciosa* (*The Audacious Woman*), was exhibited beginning in May 1918, accompanied by summaries printed in a pamphlet distributed free at the Teatro Moderno.<sup>147</sup> As Jota Soares, who would become an important figure in regional production in the city in the twenties, recalled, serial films often were accompanied by synchronized sound effects that increased the audience's enjoyment.<sup>148</sup>

Recife also produced a number of cinema-influenced literary and paraliterary texts; for example, in 1926 a young writer self-published "VIOLETA, a sentimental story in cinematic intertitles."<sup>149</sup> Later that same year, the magazine *A Pihéria* published a story entitled "*A estrela morta*" (*The Dead Star*) that directly thematized American adventure melodramas and their consignment to second-run cinemas. The story narrates the love affair between two film actors, Dick, "the fearless *cow-boy*, who rode wild broncos, lassoed trains, drove off his enemies with blows, and made dreamy young ladies sigh," and Alice "who worked in the 'dangerous' genre, as the principal figure of serial films, those that feature disasters and assaults at every turn."<sup>150</sup> After Alice is killed in a horseback riding accident during filming, Dick wanders from town to town attempting to catch an exhibition of her now-outdated films. He eventually happens upon an exhibition in the unnamed location where the story is set, but to his horror, the film featuring his beloved catches fire before his very eyes, an extreme example of the physical abuse to which film prints were subjected as they circulated through regions distant from the cities of the industrialized Southeast, on an exhibition circuit which followed the railways and was known as the *linha* or line.<sup>151</sup>

This fictional reflection on the impermanence not only of the film material itself, but also of the shifting fortunes of stars and genres, functions on a meta-commentary on film exhibition in Brazil's smaller cities, which continued to show imported serials long after they were considered outmoded in the capital. In January 1922, the very first issue of the weekly Campinas publication *Cine-Jornal* published a *cine-folhetim* of Pathé's production of the *Three Musketeers*, although its synchronization with the screening of episodes of the serial seems not to have lasted.<sup>152</sup> As late as 1928, Paul Leni's comedic horror film *The Cat and the Canary* would be advertised as "sensational novel of love, adventures and mysteries," with a tie-in published in installments in the *Diário de Notícias* in Porto Alegre.<sup>153</sup> In Chapter 5, I explore the cultural afterlife of the "outmoded" genres of the serial and the western in regions outside Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, cities constructed as the privileged locations of Brazilian modernity, exploring how the spectacles of violence and technology associated with these genres were appropriated and juxtaposed with documentation of local landscapes in productions that asserted local technological modernity.

## CHAPTER 3

### Spectacles of Violence and Politics: True-Crime Film in Post-Revolutionary Mexico City, 1919-1926



Fig. 3.1: Advertisement for *La banda del automóvil* (*The Automobile Gang*)  
*Don Quijote*, September 10, 1919, n/p. Biblioteca Lerdo de Tejada.

If the true-crime films produced in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in the first two decades of the twentieth century spoke to the tensions of Republican modernization projects premised on social exclusion, analogous productions filmed in Mexico City in the late teens and early twenties addressed the open conflicts unleashed by the Revolution's violent demand for a national modernization that would benefit broader sectors of society, especially rural and indigenous populations. During the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1884-1911), the urban elite had reaped the principal benefits of a drive towards industrialization fueled by foreign capital and oriented by positivist principles. Following the military overthrow of Díaz by troops backing Francisco I. Madero, and Madero's subsequent assassination in 1913 during the *Decena trágica* that engulfed the nation's capital in conflict, the Revolution would devolve into a series of bitter struggles among military factions.

Broadly speaking, these factions can be divided into two categories: those led by reformist figures such as Venustiano Carranza, who assumed the Presidency in 1917, and Álvaro Obregón, who took power in 1921, and those aligned with more radical proposals for land reform and social inclusion, most notably Francisco Villa and Emiliano Zapata. Yet this schematic opposition fails to capture the complexity of a conflict marked by a succession of political declarations levied against the leaders in power and temporary agreements between charismatic military leaders (*caudillos*) who frequently assassinated or betrayed their supposed allies. These phenomena worked to comprehensively militarize politics and de-stabilize the always-precarious nation-state and its monopoly on legitimate violence.<sup>1</sup> Anthony Giddens has characterized the state's "monopoly control of the means of violence" as a key feature of modernity; the Mexican Revolution at once held out the promise of a more equitable modernization, and constituted an obstacle to modernity understood as "order."<sup>2</sup>

The pervasive threat of violent death and the comprehensive undermining of political authority attendant on the Revolution was a key factor in both the production history and the representational strategies of one of the most commercially successful works of Mexican silent cinema: Enrique Rosas' 1919 *El automóvil gris*, which mimicked the episodic structure of French and American crime serials.<sup>3</sup> The film, which originally consisted of twelve episodes, survives only in a shortened version with a soundtrack added, the product of editing for re-release in 1933 and 1937. *El automóvil gris*'s serial structure has not been preserved, and it has been reduced to 111 minutes from an estimated running time of three to four hours.<sup>4</sup> Delving into a notorious string of robberies with murky links to corrupt military personnel, the film framed a local urban experience of personal insecurity and political uncertainty, using narrative structures and visual strategies appropriated from imported cinema. These assaults were committed by a group of criminals dubbed "The Grey Automobile Gang" (after the color of their getaway vehicle), beginning in 1915 when Mexico was under Zapatista control, and continuing through the occupation by Carranza's forces. During the latter period, the bandits entered the homes of affluent Mexico City residents dressed in the Carrancista uniform, and aided by military search warrants.

The production of *El automóvil gris* was conceived to mend the reputation of Pablo González, a Carrancista general and presidential hopeful who was suspected of complicity in the gang's activities, and had swiftly ordered the executions of several of its members in December 1915 (to cover up his role in the crimes, it was rumored).<sup>5</sup> Speculations regarding the military's involvement in the thefts, and a series of scandals surrounding the fates of the surviving criminals – one was murdered in prison, while two successfully escaped, triggering nationwide manhunts – had maintained the case in the public eye throughout 1919. González's presidential

ambitions demanded that a more flattering version of events be presented to, and partially invented for, the public. González's alleged lover, the variety actress Mimí Derba, was Rosas' partner in his production company Azteca Films and the star of four of the five features released by the studio in 1917.<sup>6</sup> She was also accused of complicity in the robberies, and was reportedly spotted wearing jewelry stolen from the Grey Automobile Gang's victims.<sup>7</sup>

While the personal relationship between González and director Enrique Rosas gave the *El automóvil gris* a unique proximity to topical events, it was only one of several films that sought to capitalize on the scandalous, widely publicized case of the Grey Automobile Gang. Shortly after Rosas announced his intentions to produce a cinematic adaptation, local distributor Ausencio Martínez exhibited the Vitagraph serial *The Scarlet Runner* under the title *El automóvil gris*.<sup>8</sup> This marketing strategy sparked legal action by Rosas, who had copyrighted the title, accompanied by a publicity campaign asserting the "thrilling actuality" of his locally produced version.<sup>9</sup> The same year, film distributor Germán Camus produced *La banda del automóvil* (*The Automobile Gang*, dir. Ernesto Vollrath), a serial film with a more tenuous relationship to real-life events.<sup>10</sup> Camus released his version (which is no longer extant) in September 1919, again amid complaints by Rosas, who in this case failed to prevail against his rival.<sup>11</sup> Camus was thus able to claim the distinction of having produced the "first Mexican serial film [*película en episodios*],"<sup>12</sup> suggesting a desire to duplicate the commercial success enjoyed by the French, American and Italian serials so popular with Mexico City audiences of the period.



Fig. 3.2: Advertisement for *The Scarlet Runner* with the misleading title *El automóvil rojo*. *El Universal*, February 16, 1919. Biblioteca Lerdo de Tejada.

In the early twenties, a number of other films would also adopt sensational news, reconstructing a series of "crimes of passion" and the activities of criminal gangs, usually with limited commercial impact. The most successful among these was the 1922 film entitled *Fanny o el robo de los veinte millones* (*Fanny or the Theft of Twenty Millions*, dir. Eduardo Urriola), which refashioned a recent case of espionage and government misappropriation<sup>13</sup> into an adventure tale strongly reminiscent of the Hollywood serial. Featuring aviation stunts and high-wire escapes, the film's eponymous American villainess also functioned as a parody and critique of American "serial queens" such as Pearl White. As I argue below, *Fanny* and Camus's *La banda del automóvil* simultaneously reveled in and critiqued shifting models of Mexican womanhood by linking femininity and crime.

Like the later producers of *Fanny*, Rosas, Camus, and Martínez sought to profitably position their products within the circulation of narratives and iconographies of modern criminality between Mexico, France, and the United States. *El automóvil gris* appropriates imported cinematic styles and fictional tropes in the service of eminently national concerns, suggesting a simultaneous impulse to document and to impose narrative order on the violence of

the Mexican Revolution, apparently opposing tendencies that were both harnessed to the project of legitimating a precarious state. The result is textual incoherence: the majority of the film conforms to the cinematic codes of narrative fiction, elaborating a convenient political fiction that obscured evidence of the corruption on the part of military officers. Yet it concludes with a deeply unsettling type of punitive ending – in its current form,<sup>14</sup> the film ends with a depiction of the real-life criminals' execution, a display of state authority given the force of the real through the use of actuality codes. Rosas had filmed the sequence with the permission of González and previously included it in the 1916 compilation film *Documentación nacional histórica* (*National Historic Documentation*).<sup>15</sup>



Fig. 3.3: Video still, *El automóvil gris*.

As the strategic re-use of a sequence previously included in a documentary suggests, *El automóvil gris*'s juxtaposition of representational registers marks a shift in modes of cinematic production into its textual structure. The film fuses elements of the dominant Mexican genre between 1910 and 1916 – actualities and complication documentaries relating to the Revolution – with fictional codes of foreign provenance. *El automóvil gris* thus exemplifies the manner in which imported narratives of criminality were used to mediate modernization processes accompanied by spectacularized violence: the mass-mediated bloodshed of the Revolution, ostensibly in the name of a more equitable form of national development, and the accelerated growth of Mexico City and its accompanying social ills, including a sharp increase in crime. Local crime-themed films tempered the socially disruptive potential of their topical subjects by evoking the implicitly cosmopolitan thrills of the crime serial; their local reception and their publicity campaigns hailed both their topical appeal and their mastery of suspenseful narrative structure and high-quality cinematography associated with foreign productions.

Although fiction film had almost entirely displaced documentary by the time of its release, due to politically motivated film censorship, growing public sentiment against the prolonged and bloody hostilities, and increasing commercial ambitions for the national

industry,<sup>16</sup> the immense popularity of *El automóvil gris* suggests a continued demand for narratives that dealt with topical local events and promised (but did not necessarily comply with) a journalistic standard of truth. In addition to the actuality sequence of the execution, the film incorporates supplementary markers of authenticity, such as the performance of lead detective Juan Manuel Cabrera, who plays himself in the film,<sup>17</sup> and the ostensible filming in the actual scenes of the crime,<sup>18</sup> that can be identified as such only from advertisements and other extratextual accounts. This combination of fictional and factual strategies suggests a seemingly paradoxical investment in authenticating and dramatizing real-life events.

In literalizing the potential slippage between cinematic narrative and visual document, *El automóvil gris*'s structure recalls the representational indeterminacy of the actuality genre, which thrived in American and European cinema before its abrupt disappearance around 1907.<sup>19</sup> Miriam Hansen links this indeterminacy to a sadistic mode of audience engagement, observing that "the sensationalist appeal of [actualities and historical re-enactments thematizing violent death] cuts across documentary and fictional modes of representation and overtly caters to sadistic impulses; later films could do this only in the guise of narrative motivation and moral truth."<sup>20</sup> Hansen suggests that this open sadism was soon contained narratively by the development of comparatively more complex plot structures. Yet while *El automóvil gris* certainly solicits a sadistic mode of spectatorship, it resists categorization in the actuality mode. The hybrid representational strategies of *El automóvil gris* are not sufficiently explained by considering it a "primitive" holdover attributable to Mexican cinema's delayed development. Beyond the film's participation in the sensationalistic visual culture of the Revolution, which I explore below, it actively plays on the ontological paradoxes of cinema itself.

Complicating accounts of the cinematic re-enactment as "a kind of transitional object between the actuality and the narrative film," Mary Ann Doane argues that it raises "unanswerable questions about the ontology of the [cinematic] image," which simultaneously holds out the promise of documenting and preserving lived time, and the possibility of fiction.<sup>21</sup> She writes, "The reenactment exploited the temporal specificity of the image, its ability to [...] be "timely," or topical [...]. On the other hand, the very acceptability of the reconstruction of an event constituted an acknowledgment of the atemporality of the image, the fact that it did not speak its own relationship to time," a precondition for the construction of fictional narrative time.<sup>22</sup> Whether the execution sequence in *El automóvil gris* constitutes the recording of non-fictional or faked deaths cannot be made legible in the image itself. Whether or not one accepts these images as an authentic representation of physical death, its visual codes (rapid pans, shifts in focus in the course of a take, human figures who pass directly in front of the camera) contrast sharply with the continuity editing codes used in the rest of the film, suggesting a contingent moment captured on the fly.

For Doane, the representation of death, exemplar of a singular, contingent moment, has a privileged place in cinema's vexed relationship to the category of the event.<sup>23</sup> The concluding scene of *El automóvil gris* constitutes what André Bazin has referred to as "ontological obscenity," in that it allows for a mechanical repetition of absolutely singular moment of death.<sup>24</sup> Doane suggests that this very particular type of obscenity gave rise to "social and legal bans on the direct, non-fictional filming of death."<sup>25</sup> Yet it is the film's oscillation between "fictional" and "factual" representations of violence and death that is potentially most unsettling for the contemporary viewer. In welding a convenient political fiction exonerating the authorities of complicity in the crimes to a spectacular scene of "real" death, the film tempers the pleasures of a suspenseful crime narrative, which at several points encourages psychological identification

with the bandits, with an “authentic” demonstration of the state’s punitive power. In local newspapers, the case of the “Grey Automobile” became a pretext for critiquing the militarization of Mexican politics and the arbitrary application of lethal force, while *El automóvil gris* was seemingly intended to allay suspicions of such abuses. Catering to the curiosity and the tastes of the local public with a narrative fiction, the film abruptly shifts from crime fiction to violent fact, producing disquieting effects in the contemporary spectator.

The disturbing qualities of this final sequence must be understood in the context of a contemporary culture of public spectacles of violence and politics articulated in mass events such as rallies and parades, theatrical productions, journalism, news photography, and cinema. These media worked to document, dramatize and sensationalize everyday life at a moment of great political and economic upheaval. *El automóvil gris*’s incorporation of real-life elements also echoed the police practice of staging and photographing reconstructions of violent events. The images produced by these reconstructions were frequently published in newspapers and illustrated magazines, providing visual drama to police reportage by presenting contingent moments that could not have been captured on camera, even as they promised access to the “truth” of events attained through forensic procedures.<sup>26</sup>

In the visual culture of Revolutionary-era Mexico, the ambiguous truth-value of photographic and cinematic representations of violent acts was compounded by the difficulty of distinguishing criminal acts from “legitimate” political violence. In the struggle for a more democratic and inclusive mode of national development, the very notion of private property had been called into question, and the unpredictable exercise of violence threatened Mexico with social disintegration. Locally produced crime films thematized these military abuses; but rather than being solely perceived as documents of the conflict’s extreme violence, these productions also functioned as signs of Mexico City’s urban and technological modernity. *El automóvil gris*, *La banda del automóvil*, and *Fanny* constructed Mexico City as the backdrop for a uniquely modern brand of criminal activity, linked tangentially to a national crisis in politics.

The imaginary of cosmopolitan crime evoked in these films was characterized by an exchange of narrative tropes and rhetorics between police reportage and crime films in a rapidly modernizing Mexico City.<sup>27</sup> As historian Pablo Piccato observes, the real-life Grey Automobile Gang “was surrounded by an aura of technical prowess that resembled images imported in the form of movies and literature from Europe and the United States.”<sup>28</sup> Postulating further links between the exploits of the “Grey Automobile Gang” and foreign crime films, de los Reyes speculates that the gang’s epithet was influenced by the public’s memory of *L’auto gris*, a film depicting the exploits of a Parisian gang of automobile bandits that was exhibited in Mexico City in 1912.<sup>29</sup>

Citing both lawbreakers and authorities, press reports attributed the spread of “advanced” criminal techniques to films like the Nick Carter series produced by the French studio Éclair and the Pathé New York serial *The Exploits of Elaine*, released in modified form in Mexico as *Los misterios de Nueva York*.<sup>30</sup> Claims that the viewing of serials was directly linked to an increase in crime is likely more revealing of the anxieties generated by the still-novel medium of cinema, than of the actual causes of criminal activity in the period. However, the two-way traffic between criminal acts and criminal fictions suggests the extent to which contemporary urban experience in Mexico City was understood through the lens of imported visions of criminality. Examining the little-researched local reception of foreign serial films can shed further light on the dynamics of adaptation and appropriation manifest in *La banda del automóvil* and *El automóvil gris* and discussed in their local reception.

Beyond concerns about the deleterious social effects of crime films, critics often made harsh judgments about local films that appropriated their conventions, noting and criticizing the juxtaposition of local settings with the narrative tropes and iconographies of imported cinema, as was the case in reviews of *El automóvil gris*. The two competing adaptations of the Grey Automobile Gang case established divergent relationships to local content and imported cinematic codes. Where *El automóvil gris* shows a Mexico City visibly ravaged by conflict, surviving stills and contemporary reviews of *La banda del automóvil* suggest that it spectacularized the local urban landscape, emphasizing its newly broadened avenues illuminated by electric lighting.<sup>31</sup> Evoking a cosmopolitan imaginary of crime and addressing the real-life case only indirectly, *La banda del automóvil* apparently sidestepped the politically charged issues of military impunity and the physical damage inflicted on the capital by the conflict.

As these comments on post-Revolutionary crime films' political content and representational strategies suggest, they must be carefully contextualized within the regimes of sensationalized truth surrounding representations of crime and violence in early twentieth-century Mexico. In the following, I position these productions within a broader culture of popular amusements, sensational journalism, and political spectacle. After briefly analyzing the diverse visual representations of Revolutionary violence in photography and cinema, I return to the late years of the Porfiriato, tracing the roots of sensational crime journalism before turning my attention to the exhibition and reception of foreign serials and the local production of serial-influenced films.

### **Spectacles of Violence and Politics in Late Porfirian and Revolutionary Visual Culture**

Beyond its staggering human costs and long-lasting political legacy, the Revolution radically reshaped the iconography of Mexican nationhood, even as newly popular forms of mass-mediated images played a key role in the unfolding of historical events and the social meanings ascribed to them.<sup>32</sup> Beyond its comprehensive refashioning of icons of national culture, the Revolution was crucial for the expansion of topical journalism and cinema. Despite the challenges faced by Mexican journalism during the revolutionary years, leading many Porfirian-era publications to disappear around 1914, a new wave of mass-circulation publications that took the American press as their models quickly emerged.<sup>33</sup> This shift did not immediately lead to more progressive editorial stances: illustrated magazines represented revolutionary violence in a manner consistent with their bourgeois audience. For example, as Marion Gautreau has pointed out, when images of soldiers' corpses were published, they were almost invariably identified as those of the Zapatista forces, rather than the Federal troops.<sup>34</sup> By contrast, mass-circulation newspapers, which were priced more cheaply and enjoyed a broader readership, tended to be less restrained: photographs depicting the corpses of affluent victims of both criminal acts and politically motivated killings frequently appeared on the front page. Furthermore, there was a great demand across all social sectors for picture postcards showing the conflict's leaders, its pivotal moments, and the realities of mass mobilization in the period, as well as for moving images depicting topical events. These images show a great diversity, a function of the range of available photographic equipment and the coexistence of pictorialist conventions inherited from painting and *costumbrista*<sup>35</sup> photography with "modern culture's appetite for the realist effect" that "resulted in codes of realism that varied greatly."<sup>36</sup>

The role played by visual reproduction technologies in capturing and narratively organizing violent topical events is allegorized in Fernando Elizondo's 1913 play *El país de la*



*metralla* (*The Land of the Machine-Gun*). *El país de la metralla* inaugurated the genre of the satirical musical revue, which exemplified the political valence of popular amusements during the Revolution.<sup>37</sup> Opening with a musical sequence performed by a chorus of picture-postcard sellers hawking images of Revolutionary generals, the play's brief, unconnected tableaux are framed throughout by a series of dialogues between the anthropomorphized characters of *La Cámara* (The Camera) and *El Lente* (The Lens).<sup>38</sup> Elizondo's metatheatrical device provides a suggestive metaphor for the visual culture of the Mexican Revolution, during which ritualized public events such as speeches, inaugurations, or funerals, and even violent, apparently contingent happenings such as battles or executions – were staged not only for the masses, but also for photographic and cinematic cameras.

In one of the most extreme manifestations of this practice, Pancho Villa reportedly signed a contract with Mutual cameramen that stipulated that battles and executions must take place during the day so as to allow for clearer images. While a recent examination of the agreement shows no evidence of these provisions, they were widely reported in both the Mexican and the American press, constituting a powerful myth of the Revolution's visual mediation.<sup>39</sup> Beyond the possibility that these violent, contingent events were to some degree staged for the camera, images of the Revolution clearly inscribe the staging of rituals of power on the level of image content. Extant photographs and actualities from the Revolutionary period show the elaborate accoutrements of public events, depicting leaders positioned under arches, on daises, on the balconies overlooking public squares and on the rear platforms of trains, which were invariably draped with bunting, garlands, and banners.<sup>40</sup>

There is also evidence that the “revolutionary documentaries,” as they are referred to by Mexican scholars,<sup>41</sup> spectacularized topical happenings, utilizing climactic narrative structures and culminating apotheosis sequences that glorified the Revolution's leaders.<sup>42</sup> The compilation documentary had taken on increasing complexity as the genre developed from the four-part 1911 film *Insurrección de México* (*Insurrection in Mexico*), which edited together several sets of actuality views shot by Salvador, Guillermo and Eduardo Alva, to films such as the Alva Brothers' *Revolución orozquista* (*Orozco's Revolution*, 1912), which adopted strategies associated with narrative film, such as parallel editing juxtaposing the two sides of the conflict, to dramatize current events.<sup>43</sup> (Unfortunately, it is impossible to speak definitively about the formal strategies of these films, since none has survived in its original form). Although its provenance is uncertain, an allegorical image found in the collection of pioneering filmmaker Salvador Toscano (showing Mexico incarnated as a white-clad woman and two soldiers shaking hands in front of a bust of Madero), suggests that stylized tableaux with clear allegorical meanings were also featured in these films.<sup>44</sup> I postulate that, as in the case of early Brazilian cinema, the use of the apotheosis signals a desire to impose narrative order and moral meaning on violent and chaotic events. Attending to the use of suspenseful narrative structures and allegorical apotheoses in revolutionary documentaries helps contextualize *El automóvil gris*'s hybrid representational strategies within a contemporary panorama of images of spectacularized violence.

Police photography and images of the Revolution followed distinct, but converging trajectories. Both are inextricable from the massification of the press and the adoption of new image reproduction technologies in the final decade of the nineteenth century. As it became technically feasible and affordable to publish reproductions of engravings, lithographs, and ultimately photographs, images of criminals and victims proliferated in newspapers and magazines. Public demand for these images signals great contemporary interest in criminality's

causes (explored extensively by positivist criminology, a discourse that was key in defining the racial and class parameters of Mexican citizenship<sup>45</sup>) as well as the appeal of its gruesome effects, rendered in self-consciously sensationalistic representations. The conjunction of scientific, progress-oriented discourses with gruesome images and morbid details of criminal cases reached its apogee in the official publication *Gaceta de Policía*, which published articles on forensic procedure alongside graphically illustrated accounts of murders and gruesome accidents. In its inaugural October 1905 issue, the magazine's editors declared, "in addition to its obvious utility, we can assure you that our publication will also be of thrilling interest, given that, to the extent possible without compromising our service, one will be able to read in our newspaper the story of each crime that makes Mexican society tremble."<sup>46</sup> Material relating to the scientific detection and prevention of crime was published alongside texts that reveled in their ability to viscerally thrill the public.

A similar phenomenon can be noted in *El Universal*, Mexico City's first modern-format newspaper. As historian Alberto del Castillo Troncoso observes, the publication not only emphasized topical and factual information over the political journalism that had dominated previous dailies; it was also the first to extensively incorporate images into its layout, beginning in May 1892.<sup>47</sup> The following month, the newspaper's first example of illustrated police reportage combined lithograph portraits of two criminals with minute descriptions of their clothing, bearing and behavior. This combination of visual and verbal content signals a positivistic desire for exhaustively detailed empirical observations, which could be used to reinforce preconceived hierarchies of morality elaborated along class and racial lines.<sup>48</sup> This taxonomic impulse was also manifest in the phenomena of *El Universal's* *Galería de Rateros* (*Thieves' Gallery*) or the *Gaceta de Policía's* *Página Negra* (*Black Page*). These regularly appearing publicized the faces of "known criminals" for preventive purposes, presenting them in a grid layout that recalled the groups of illustrative photographs that appeared in criminological works.<sup>49</sup>



Fig. 3.4: *Gaceta de Policía*, January 21, 1906. Hemeroteca Digital Nacional de México.

Beyond its diffusion of individual portraits for repressive purposes, police reportage strove to verbally and visually reconstruct violent events. Castillo Troncoso notes the emergence in 1903 of "graphic reportage with a certain independence from the text, which presented complete stories with narrative unity expressed in different blocks or vignettes."<sup>50</sup> These

imaginative journalistic reconstructions had close affinities (and sometimes even overlapped with) the images produced by official police re-enactments of crimes, which Jesse Lerner characterizes as “hyperbolic and even theatrical,” although the neutral expressions of the participants sometimes betrayed their status as forensic documents.<sup>51</sup> While Lerner here refers to reconstructions dating from the 1920s, the practice was in use as early as January 1919, when a photograph from the murder of one of the members of the Grey Automobile Gang, Francisco Oviedo, in prison was published in *El Pueblo*.<sup>52</sup> Transcending its function as a tool of detection and social control, the publication of images from police reconstructions worked “to cultivate and benefit from the public interest in crime and punishment,” fostering the production of images that were intended to “excite and impact” rather than to “categorize, study and measure.”<sup>53</sup>

Verbal discourses on criminality showed parallel developments in the period; crime ceased to be discussed as a sign of national backwardness and became an ambivalent symptom of local modernization. In 1893, *El Universal* had declared that “in Mexico, criminality has not advanced sufficiently to penetrate into certain superior classes: crime has all the brutal simplicity of a group of humans in the first stages of civilization.”<sup>54</sup> This positivistic association between criminality and social and racial “degeneracy” would shift dramatically as processes of urbanization and modernization accelerated. According to Jesse Lerner, following the Revolution, “crime acquired a new signification – no longer as a symptom of the inferiority and backwardness of the population as a whole, but on the contrary, as proof of a new emergent modernity.”<sup>55</sup> However, given the myriad problems facing Mexican society in the teens and early twenties, criminal activity was less openly touted as a badge of modernity than in the Brazilian case. Instead, robbery and murder in Mexico City would be constructed as both an urban malady and a national problem, compounded by the blurring of the distinction between military and criminal violence. An October 1919 editorial in *El Universal* declared:

For nine years, on this soil we have fought for all the ideals of free and civilized nations; blood has amply reddened the earth; but, sad to say, the greater part of those who have lost their lives, did not fall in combat; they fell in an immense series of murders that have unfolded like a great chain. [...]  
Enough! we say. Save something that is above the Revolution; save the Fatherland, which is drowning in a sea of blood. It is necessary, because, looking from above, as far as the eye can see, in long stretches, one can distinguish only victims and executioners, murderers and murdered.<sup>56</sup>

In the opinion of the editorialist, the conflict had devolved into a bloodbath in which political violence could not be easily extinguished from criminal violence. *El Universal* conjures an image of a nation whose basic social relation was one of murderous violence, even as it emphasizes the need to “save the Fatherland” through the re-instatement of a vanished distinction between military and criminal aggression.

In a series of articles in a similar tone, published throughout the late teens and early twenties, *El Universal* protested the outbreaks of violence accompanying elections and waged campaigns against thieves (*rateros*),<sup>57</sup> continually drawing attention to criminal activity as a marker of social disintegration, personal insecurity, and the unregulated use of violence. By 1925, when the intensity of the social upheaval of the Revolution had diminished, *El Universal* commented: “in the same ways in which Mexico City is no longer a provincial city, pleasant and welcoming, and has become a cosmopolitan center, criminality, which used to wear diapers, has

grown and matured.”<sup>58</sup> Journalists frequently made ironic allusions to the progressive “refinement” of crime, framed in terms both of growing efficiency and a certain aesthetic perfection (as suggested by recurring references to Thomas de Quincey’s essay “On Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts”).<sup>59</sup> In their coverage of audacious criminal acts, Mexico City newspapers of the teens and early twenties frequently employed the vocabulary of sensationalized serial literature and film. Comparisons were often made between ingenious thieves and Rocambole, protagonist of the famous series of novels by Ponson du Terrail and of several Pathé film adaptations, which were released in Mexico City beginning in July 1914.<sup>60</sup> In 1916, a failed swindle at a bank, carried out by a woman in mourning dress (a key trope of *La banda del automóvil*, as I explore further below), prompted the newspaper *El Pueblo* to comment, “there is no doubt that refined criminal education, of a distinctly European stamp, which has been imported in recent years by means of the cinema, increases each day.”<sup>61</sup> By suggesting that the abundant disguises and ingenious criminal schemes portrayed in French and Italian crime serials had influenced local practices, such comments constructed crime as an ambivalent marker of “civilization” and cosmopolitanism.



Fig. 3.5: Criminality and/as Progress: “The Modernization of Our Thieves; Just Like the Advances of Science, it has had its Predecessors and Its Martyrs, Among them the Members of the Grey Automobile Gang.” *Excelsior*, October 26, 1919. Biblioteca Lerdo de Tejada.

In 1920, references to foreign crime serials played an important role in local debates regarding film censorship (catalyzed in part, Aurelio de los Reyes speculates, by the legally problematic exhibition of *El automóvil gris*).<sup>62</sup> Speaking out in support of government oversight in the name of public security, government official Aguirre Berlanga evoked the audacious techniques of kidnapping and robbery depicted in such films:

Everyone will recall that in the past our thieves did not sedate their victims, nor were there masked robbers, nor did theft occur on a grand scale. For this to occur, it was necessary that models come from abroad. In this fashion, stemming from the exhibition of “The Mysteries of New York” with copious attendance by thieves, they modernized their strategies and were more easily able to elude the police.<sup>63</sup>

While these speculative connections between the exhibition of crime film and an increase in crime are impossible to confirm, the serial certainly attained exceptional popularity with audiences. One critic in the entertainment magazine *Don Quijote* noted that “when *Los misterios de Nueva York* was launched into circulation, it was to attain success that I very much doubt the production company will manage to equal.”<sup>64</sup> *Los misterios de Nueva York* had the unique distinction of being one of the only imported serial films shown locally with a tie-in novelization; after the exhibition of the Pearl White serial, a Spanish translation of the tie-in was printed in the French-language newspaper *Le Courrier du México et de l’Europe*.<sup>65</sup> After the box-office triumph of *Los misterios* “serial films [*películas en episodios*] began to rain down;” a critic notes that “currently, there are announcements that are sufficient, by themselves, to fill a cinema: those of serial films.”<sup>66</sup>

Serials also occupied a place of honor in the pioneering section of film criticism published in *El Universal*, “Por la pantalla” (“Onscreen”), inaugurated in March 1917. In the inaugural column of the section, critic Rafael Pérez Taylor, writing under the pseudonym Hipólito Seijas discusses *The Daughter of the Circus* [likely *The Adventures of Peg O’ the Ring*, dir. Francis Ford, 1916]. He frames his discussion of the film with the preliminary reflection that “The American film is a synonym of a vulgar movie in which railroads, cowboys, assaults, beasts, struggles, leaps and crudely painted eyebrows are the indispensable corollaries of every plot.”<sup>67</sup> Similarly, another critic noted that these episodic productions constituted “the American’s greatest success,” singling out Antonio Moreno, Pearl White’s co-star in *The House of Hate*, as the most popular serial actor, showcased in these “circus films that allow us to admire, in a new form, the agility, force and vigor of the muscles of an actor who, on the strength of this alone, has achieved a position that gives him the right to claim the name of king of cinema.”<sup>68</sup> Despite the reviewer’s dismissive attitude towards the “vulgarity” of Hollywood cinema, the local production of films that sought to appropriate imported serials’ physical dynamism suggests that the genre played a key role in the articulation of Mexican cinema’s “vernacular modernism.”

French crime serials also enjoyed considerable local popularity, and were more to Pérez Taylor’s liking. In March 1917, he suggested that Feuillade’s *Les vampires* had lived up to its enthusiastic billing. Signaling the irregularities of local exhibitions of series and serial films, which might not be shown at regular intervals or even in the same cinema, Seijas pronounced the episodes of *Les Vampires* “so interesting that the audience who sees the first, will have to undertake continuous trips to all the cinemas where they are unfolding.”<sup>69</sup> The villainess of *La banda del automóvil*, the “woman in mourning,” who appears clad in black with pistol in hand in surviving publicity photographs, seems to have clear affinities to the character of Irma Vep in Feuillade’s film, who appears throughout in a form-fitting black bodysuit which conceals her face. Yet if Irma Vep exemplified a “fluid sign of criminality” in her rejection of “Third Republic morality” and assertion of “a level of independence and sexual freedom,”<sup>70</sup> the figure

of the “woman in mourning,” linked to an iconography of feminine suffering, was considerably more circumscribed.

As the example of the female villain of *La banda del automóvil* suggests, the popularity of imported serials was viewed as an opportunity for local film production. Serial-influenced productions simultaneously sought to incorporate the suspenseful narrative structures and kineticism of imported serial films, and to appeal to local audiences by extending police reportage’s tendency to sensationalize topical local events. In some cases, journalists dramatized these happenings by framing them in explicitly cinematic terms. In January 1919, the magazine *El Universal Ilustrado* directly compared the Grey Automobile Gang case to a suspenseful film that unfolded over a series of distinct “episodes,” in turn linking it to a culture of popular sensationalism with an international scope:

The scandalous matter of the “Grey Automobile” has been the subject of all the murmurings heard over the past week.

The expectations of the public, now very difficult to disturb, given the sensationalism to which it has become accustomed, given the rapid succession of surprising spectacles the world over, has followed with renewed avidity the most minor episodes of this tragic film in which those involved lose their lives in circumstances that are unclear to the authorities and the threads of the plot slip from one’s hands, and the physiognomies of the true criminals are hidden behind a veil of mystery.<sup>71</sup>

In a similar vein, the escape of Francisco Oviedo, one of the principal members of the Grey Automobile Gang, was described by *El Universal* as having been achieved “with an audacity only imaginable in films;” after Oviedo was re-captured and murdered by a fellow prisoner, the same newspaper stated, “It is indispensable that a film be released. Inevitably, we all must remember, as a comparison, the exciting and at times unbelievable episodes of *The House of Hate*, still fresh in the mind.”<sup>72</sup>

Capitalizing on this logic, *El automóvil gris* was doubtless the most successful instance of local film production that adapted events from the police blotter. However, the production history of an ill-fated film made in the mid-twenties, *Los compañeros del silencio* (*The Companions of Silence*),<sup>73</sup> perhaps best exemplifies the exchanges between serial literature, police reportage, and crime and adventure film, that constituted cultures of popular sensationalism in early twentieth-century Mexico. Ostensibly based on the real-life kidnapping of a millionaire (in turn “doubtless copied from the cinema,”)<sup>74</sup> the film takes its title from a name attached to a number of criminal groups that operated in Mexico City in the period. References to “los Compañeros del Silencio” in the police blotter ranged from an article speculating that a gang of Cuban thieves were responsible for a robbery in a local department store,<sup>75</sup> to a report on a group of extortionists who faked the kidnappings of wealthy women’s husbands in order to collect ransom money and signed their threatening letters with a name “taken from a novel,”<sup>76</sup> (that is, the *roman-feuilleton* by Paul Féval entitled *Les compagnons du silence* and published in Mexico in Spanish translation in early 1860).<sup>77</sup> A film adaptation of Féval’s work produced by Pathé, entitled *Les habits noirs* (*The Black Hoods*) was also shown several times in Mexico City during the teens with the title *Los compañeros del silencio*.<sup>78</sup>

The cosmopolitan imaginary of crime exemplified by the iterations of *Los compañeros del silencio* in police reportage, serial literature, and cinema provided a pretext for thrilling stunt

sequences that showcased both transportation and cinematic technologies. Adela Sequeyro, who would become a well-known actress during the sound film era, starred in *Los compañeros del silencio* as the victim of “a group of evildoers in hoods [who] carried out a series of criminal conspiracies, including snatching me away from the bosom of my family.”<sup>79</sup> Sequeyro describes the extreme precariousness of the filming and the considerable danger it involved:

the masked men put me inside a beat-up little airplane, on top of five cushions so my body would be sufficiently visible in the image, and those daring actors got into the vehicle, holding on only to the slats connecting the wings, without anything protecting them and without being able to see, since the wind had shifted their masks and the eyeholes were up around their ears.<sup>80</sup>

After the failed attempt to capture this sequence (the group was ejected from the aviation field and the cameraman realized he had allowed the crank to drop from his hand during filming), the actors consoled themselves in the following manner: “We went to the Paseo de la Reforma” - the most emblematic of Mexico City’s broad boulevards - “got into two cars and shot some spine-tingling scenes: I managed to wriggle from the arms of the masked men holding me down and jumped to the other car, which had come up alongside that of the outlaws at full speed, some fifty kilometers per hour.”<sup>81</sup> Sequeyro’s reminiscences emphasize the precarious, improvised quality of the production, which did not preclude attempts to capitalize on the dynamism of modern transportation technologies. Perhaps exacerbated by the difficulty of adequately capturing these stunts, the poor quality of the film’s cinematography apparently precluded its public exhibition.<sup>82</sup>

Produced the year following the ill-fated filming of *Los compañeros del silencio*, *La banda de los cinco de oros* (*The Band of the Five of Pentacles*) was based on a real-life case. An unidentified corpse was discovered on Avenida Chapultepec in the newly developed wealthy western zone of the city, with a note announcing that the dead man had been a member of the “Sociedad de la Banda del Cinco de Oros” (“Society of the Five of Pentacles”). After further investigation, it was discovered that the victim had been poisoned in an establishment known as the Moulin Rouge, a “neighborhood cabaret” populated with clients “who wore the typical clothing imitating the Parisian *apache*.”<sup>83</sup> The press’s evocation of this distinctly French iconography of crime coexisted with an interpretation of the case as yet another manifestation of a pervasive criminality that had Mexico City residents “fed up with so much scandal, so much crime, and such a lack of security and assurances.”<sup>84</sup> Perhaps because it highlighted these social problems, *La banda de los cinco de oros* seems never to have been exhibited in Mexico. Reportedly, it was shown in the United States “horribly cut and reduced to the dimensions of a newsreel;” which prompts the question whether the film was presented abroad as fiction or faithful reconstruction of the real events on which it was based.<sup>85</sup> While its exhibition seems to have been limited, the film’s production constituted another instance of sensationalized journalistic truths translated into a fictional cinematic spectacle of violent events.

Three films intended to capitalize on the public furor surrounding female perpetrators of “crimes of passion,” whose production history has been traced by Aurelio de los Reyes, conclude the inventory of local true-crime films. These include the actuality film *El proceso de Magdalena Jurado* (*The Trial of Magdalena Jurado*); the filmed reconstruction *Redención* (*Redemption*, 1924), based on the life and trial of Luz González and starring the accused as herself; and the planned *El drama de Alicia Olivera*, which seems never to have been

produced.<sup>86</sup> These cases, in which women were accused of complicity in the murders of their husbands or lovers, were explicitly understood within the melodramatic, sensationalized imaginary of serial literature; Magdalena Jurado's trial was described as "a living *folletín*, forged of blood and tears."<sup>87</sup> Similarly, the sudden notoriety of Alicia Olvera was described in terms of sensational literature: one writer declared that "[t]he blood that poured from the hole made in the conjugal skull, was sufficient for Alicia to be endowed with a disproportional fame, which made the soul of every reader of truculent novels in this city moan with desire."<sup>88</sup> The *folletín* with causing, as well as publicizing, Olvera's crime: speculating on the potential danger posed by this feminized appetite for sensational narratives, the journalist continues: "Now, husbands whose wives frequent the cinematograph and read *folletín*-esque literature, tremble! Alicia was like your wives [...] She had a secret longing for adventures [...] Alicia Olvera felt herself to be, at one moment, in the middle of a novel, and killed, to give a tinge of red to the grey opacity of her bourgeois existence."<sup>89</sup> The suggestion that gruesome serial literature could prompt women into murder constructs sensation-seeking behavior as a gendered peril.

None of the films depicting women accused of crime of fashion achieved the box-office success of *El automóvil gris* or *La banda del automóvil*; in fact, like *Los compañeros del silencio* and *La banda de los cinco deoros*, their impact seems to have been minimal. Yet the journalistic (and cinematic) interest in the figure of the female criminal suggests the conflictual re-negotiation of gender roles stemming from women's participation in the armed conflict. Scandals involving female criminals suggest the extent to which (bourgeois) women had ceased to inhabit separate spheres and had come to participate, on both private and political levels, in highly publicized instances of violent criminality that were felt to epitomize modern life. Yet significantly, the accused women strategically mobilized gendered iconographies in order to recuperate their acts within traditional models of womanhood.

Prominent lawyer Querido Moheno, who defended each of the three women, advised his clients to stage spectacles of womanly virtue and suffering in front of the riotous popular juries that had recently replaced military tribunals, and which themselves functioned as popular spectacles (in some cases they were even held inside cinemas).<sup>90</sup> Moreno suggested several strategies that allowed these women to lessen the sense of gender transgression produced by their alleged acts, successfully garnering the sympathy of the jury. The mourning dress worn by all of the female defendants was a key element, suggesting their condition as bereft wives rather than cold-blooded killers. Alicia Olvera's constant tears and Luz González's fainting fits were read as signs of female "delicacy," while Moreno's frequent references to Olvera's young son capitalized on the mother-child bond to plead for the jury's leniency.

While they were effective with juries, these self-consciously feminine theatrics did not conquer all local commentators. Local writer Cube Bonifant reviewed the cinematic reconstruction of Luz González's life and multiple trials with scathing irony.<sup>91</sup> Admiring the "reconstruction of the [c]rime," Bonifant notes the film's overall lack of verisimilitude, judging that "[t]he plot, in spite of supposedly being a copy of something real, is quite ludicrous."<sup>92</sup> *Redención* even included an openly fantastical moment in which the victim "rises up from the tomb to give thanks to justice."<sup>93</sup> This juxtaposition of reconstruction and fantasy was paralleled by the simultaneous falseness and sincerity of Luz González herself; Bonifant observes, "we already knew she was no measly theater actress. Luz González is truly sincere in her fakery."<sup>94</sup> Questions of justice and truth thus highlighted the theatrical aspects of the performance of femininity—"womanliness as a masquerade"<sup>95</sup>—, even as they suggested the persistence of ongoing interchanges between crime journalism and cinema which were so pivotal in the



production of the two 1919 serials. *La banda del automóvil* capitalized on the titillating potential of female criminality dressed in the accoutrements of traditional femininity, prefiguring the procession of “women in mourning” that paraded before the public eye in the early twenties. As these true-crime films suggest, criminality as mediated through cinema was a key site at which potentially destabilizing forces of social change were mediated and contained. In the following section, I explore this dynamic in the context of the female criminals prominently featured in *La banda del automóvil*.

### **Technological Modernity and Female Criminality: *La banda del automóvil***

Unlike *El automóvil gris*, which for many years was the only work of Mexican silent cinema available for viewing, and has enjoyed a place of honor in national film histories as well as in the accounts of English-language scholars, *La banda del automóvil* has received very little attention, in part because of a prevailing attitude that it was a hastily produced imitation of Rosas’ film that lacked the latter’s ambitions to address a scandal of national import, in part because of a dearth of information about its content. While *La banda del automóvil*’s extensive publicity campaign has left abundant traces in the illustrated press, indications as to its plot, structure, and visual strategies are scant. However, an analysis of surviving publicity stills, reviews, and promotional discourse sheds light on how the film constructed itself as a thrillingly modern product—the narrative and technical equal of foreign cinema—both by means of its high-quality cinematography and optical effects (aspects abundantly praised by reviewers) and its plot elements evoking imported serials.

*La banda del automóvil* rendered female criminality a thrilling spectacle, drawing both on the tropes of foreign serials such as Feuillade’s *Les vampires* and the distinctly local figure of the “woman in mourning,” whose performance of feminine suffering had the potential to redeem criminal acts. In contrast to *El automóvil gris*, in which the criminals’ lovers (the sole female characters) are portrayed as innocent victims of kidnapping and seduction, in *La banda del automóvil*, the criminal mastermind is a bereaved mother, and a female criminal plays a key role in the events, in a clear divergence from the real-life case of the Grey Automobile Gang.

The advertising campaign for the film played on its tangential, but profitable, association with the real-life bandits. For example, an article published in *Excelsior* with the title “The success of the Automobile Gang is assured,” quickly adds the clarification that “we are not making any sort of allusion to the evildoers, organized into a gang, who offer us the opportunity to write shocking articles about robberies, hold-ups and murders. We refer to the success which will surely be achieved by the national film entitled *La banda del automóvil*, produced at high cost by Germán Camus and Company.”<sup>96</sup> The newspaper plays ironically on the (profitable) confusion between the real-life case and Camus’ film, even as it makes self-conscious reference to its own role in sensationalizing current events.<sup>97</sup>

Press coverage of the film suggests that its key distinction from the real events was the gender (and gendered motivation) of the criminal protagonists. A reviewer for *Don Quijote* magazine noted that *La banda del automóvil* was “not at all related with the series of robberies and crimes committed by evildoers who seeded panic amongst neighbors in the ‘City of Palaces.’” In fact, “it is not gold that impels the outlaws to commit kidnappings and other crimes, but rather the love of an anguished mother who watches over her son at a distance, that motivates the principal events [...]”<sup>98</sup> Maternal love, rather than greed, is constructed as the driving force of narrative events. In addition to this figure of the “anguished mother,” a “lady in

mourning,” played by Matilde Cires Sánchez, is shown in action in many of the surviving images. The figure also provides the title to the film’s first episodes, “La dama enlutada.” While de los Reyes notes a suspicious parallel with one of *El automóvil gris*’s installments,<sup>99</sup> the episode title also evokes the film adaptation of an Emile Richebourg novel of the same name, exhibited several times in Mexico City in the teens.<sup>100</sup>

While the grieving mother and the “lady in mourning” are cited in press accounts as the film’s two most important figures, the details of *La banda del automóvil*’s plot are far from clear in contemporary reviews. Most note the film’s intricately woven intrigues, illogical coincidences, and abundant disguises, staples of serial films and popular literature. The target of the bandits’ robbery attempts seems to have been an elderly banker (Antonio Galé), portrayed as a semi-invalid in a number of the images used to publicize the film.<sup>101</sup> A young woman, played by Dora Vila, is also presented as the victim of a nocturnal assault; one publicity image shows her sleeping,<sup>102</sup> and another, likely drawn from the sequence, depicts her sprawled unconscious on the floor while a masked man peers at her with the aid of a lantern beam.<sup>103</sup> On the side of law and order is Detective Maclovio (Roberto Soto), a portly comic actor who seems to have been featured in several humorous scenes; a surviving image shows him paying court to Dora Vila’s character in an exaggerated fashion, posing next to an automobile given a prominent place in the frame.<sup>104</sup>

Presenting the film’s heroes in various states of vulnerability, surviving images from *La banda del automóvil* show the “lady in mourning” in a number of dynamic and threatening poses. In one image published in the newspaper *Excélsior*, the mysterious woman stands silhouetted on a wrought-iron balcony, pointing a pistol towards the interior of the room (Fig. 3.6). In another publicity still from the same article, veiled and dressed entirely in black, she lies in wait with a male accomplice for their victim to emerge from around a corner, again pointing the pistol while her companion prepares to deal the victim a blow to the head (Fig. 3.7).<sup>105</sup> While the mourning veil itself and the voluminous skirts function as markers of femininity, the all-black garb of the “lady in mourning” evokes Feuillade’s Irma Vep as rendered by Musidora. Vicki Callahan has read Musidora’s sleek black bodysuit as radically “inscribing indeterminacy” regarding identity and vision into the cinematic text;<sup>106</sup> somewhat more pessimistically, Mary Ann Doane argues that in close-ups of the woman “the veil functions to visualize, and (hence stabilize) the instability, the precariousness of sexuality,” even as it functions as “the mark of that precariousness.”<sup>107</sup> If the use of the mourning veil would later help recuperate the figures of accused female criminals such as Luz González, in *La banda del automóvil* it simultaneously figures and subverts traditional models of Mexican femininity. In the case of *Fanny o el robo de los veinte millones*, discussed in further detail below, the physically dynamic female criminal is entirely split from conventional Mexican womanhood (she is in fact marked as American), finding a counterpoint in the figure of the hero’s virtuous, long-suffering wife. Yet extratextual knowledge that the film’s two principal actresses were in fact sisters, and both of Mexican origin, complicates the opposition established by insistent parallel editing called for in the surviving script.

It should be noted that the figure of the “lady in mourning” in *La banda del automóvil* seems not to have attained the seductive menace of Irma Vep, much less the virtuosic athleticism of American serial queens. A reviewer in *Cine Mundial* judged Cires Sánchez to be “a lady in mourning who weighs a few more kilos than she ought and delays too long when acting or fleeing.”<sup>108</sup> Beyond this apparently matronly figure ill-suited to the rapid attacks and daring escapes characteristic of film serials, Cires Sánchez’s character drew on an iconography of

femininity distinct from that popularized by foreign serial actresses. *La banda del automóvil*'s emphasis on mourning dress and the veil, used as both a sign of feminine suffering and a means



Figs. 3.6 and 3.7: Images of the “lady in mourning.” *Excelsior*, September 7, 1919. Biblioteca Lerdo de Tejada.

of concealing identity and deflecting suspicion, extends the film’s subversion of feminine virtue implicit in its linkage of maternal devotion with criminal acts. By placing an “anguished mother” at the center of the criminal plot and making the “lady in mourning” an active agent of criminal acts, the film juxtaposed criminality with virtuous suffering, suggesting a contemporary concern with the articulation of femininity and violence that constitutes the specificity of local true-crime film.

If the figure of “the lady in mourning” evoked the topical issue of female criminality, it also distanced the film from the real-life exploits of the “Grey Automobile Gang.” Yet rather surprisingly, the films’ reviewers continually cited the relative realism of the film as a means of distinguishing it from the excesses of imported serials. One emphasized *La banda del automóvil*’s verisimilitude in comparison with most representatives of the serial genre. He writes, “[N]othing about this episodic adventure film defies common sense or verisimilitude. It is a *folletín*-esque subject skillfully developed in cinema; but despite being *folletín*-esque, despite its aspects of the detective genre, despite belonging to this episodic genre, it is sensible, reasonable, sane and sober.”<sup>109</sup> In distinguishing *La banda del automóvil* from imported serials, especially American ones, the reviewer implicitly claims a higher cultural level for the national production, evoking many of the criticisms leveled at foreign crime films:

Of course this film caused no great sensation, due to its sobriety, because the majority of the spectators of this type of episodic film, instead of the sensible and the believable, enjoy the conventional, the distorted, the fantastic, the truculent and even the absurd, in order to experience those favorable violent emotions, those brusque shocks that this “reasonable” film does not evoke.<sup>110</sup>

However, not all contemporary reviewers drew a distinction between the strategies of *La banda del automóvil* and the sensationalistic excesses of imported crime serials. A notice published in

*El Heraldo de México*, whose tone suggests it was in fact paid promotional material, described it as “rich in fantasy” and “abundant in excitement and sensationalism.”<sup>111</sup>

Suggesting the sensuous engagement invited by the thrilling film, journalist Carlos Noriega Hope suggested that it “carries out propaganda in favor of death, illogical coincidences, and the five senses, with the exception of common sense.”<sup>112</sup> However, he also notes, “there is nothing more disdained than logic and common sense, since even the police, when writing a citation, appeal only to the logic of events and the least common of senses.”<sup>113</sup> Noriega Hope’s ironic reference to irregularities among the police, recalling the broader problem of the arbitrary use of repressive state powers, is in keeping with the irreverent tone of the review as a whole. Its entire opening paragraph is dedicated to the need to actively cultivate in Mexico “the healthy propaganda in favor of death advanced by serial films,” an ironic commentary on their apparent celebration of physical dynamism and vitality by means of exaggerated depictions of peril.<sup>114</sup> The bloody cost of the Revolution and the alarming frequency of armed assaults and murders in the metropolis suggest a strong note of black humor in Noriega Hope’s affirmation that Vollrath’s film “will begin to awaken among us greater support for death.”<sup>115</sup> However, the manner in which the reviewer traces this fascination with mortality to a foreign source—the fantastical perils and overtly illogical plot devices of American serials—suggests that imported serials functioned as models for the local production of cinematic spectacles of violence that could be pleurably consumed by local audiences, even in the face of concerns regarding a local culture of pervasive violence.

Constructed as thrilling entertainment with no direct connection to true-life events, the advertising campaign for *La banda del automóvil* did not claim that its sequences had been filmed in actual crime scenes. Yet if *El automóvil gris* ostensibly documented the upper-class homes where the Grey Automobile Gang’s robberies had taken place, *La banda del automóvil* also reportedly “took advantage of the authentic interiors of lavish residences, discarding the sets that substituted such interiors in a rudimentary and imperfect way.”<sup>116</sup> A surviving still of a ballroom scene, showing a large hall decorated with ornate columns, may depict a scene filmed in one of these private homes.<sup>117</sup>

In order to faithfully capture such spaces, artificial lights and reflectors were used, a novel practice for local productions.<sup>118</sup> This technique was celebrated as a marker of technological advancement and, somewhat paradoxically, of representational authenticity. One article emphasized that *La banda del automóvil*’s “settings turn out beautifully because of the system of artificial light, since they conserve their true character, creating the impression of real rooms, as in fact they are.”<sup>119</sup> This use of artificial illumination and reflectors was also attributed with making possible “a play of light which we frequently encounter in European and North American films, and which it was believed impossible to attain in Mexican productions.”<sup>120</sup> In addition, reviews highlighted the use of optical effects like irises and dissolves, “which constitute the appeal of Italian, French and North American films,” as well as the “perfect execution of the development, tinting and toning of the prints.”<sup>121</sup> On the grounds of this technical virtuosity, *La banda del automóvil* was held to be “a film that rivals foreign ones, and surpasses all made up to this point in Mexico.”<sup>122</sup>

The sophisticated photographic techniques used in the production *La banda del automóvil* were perhaps most spectacularly displayed in an image of the Avenida Cinco de Mayo by night that opened the film. According to one reviewer, this sequence caused a sensation among the spectators present at a private press screening. The reviewer writes, “When the room had been completely filled by an extremely select audience, the exhibition of “La Banda del

Automóvil” began. An admiring exclamation escaped the spectators when there appeared on the screen the surprising effect of the Avenida del 5 de Mayo at midnight.”<sup>123</sup> The sequence showcased an important thoroughfare in the city’s center, constructed in the late 1890s to link the Plaza de la Constitución (the city’s central square, better known as the Zócalo) with the Palacio de Bellas Artes. Illuminated by electric lighting, itself a luminous sign of local modernity, the sequence would also have demonstrated the cinematographer’s capacity to capture a clear image under low-light conditions. Writing in the context of still photography in a slightly earlier period, John Mraz writes, “Photographing the luminous city must have offered a double certification of the up-to-date: the images not only testified to Mexico’s electrical capacity, but also demonstrated the technological capabilities of the photographers.”<sup>124</sup> The nighttime view of the Avenida showcased a modernity signaled both by sophisticated cinematic techniques and by electrification, imbricating these technologies in a spectacle that was at once local and cosmopolitan.

Apparently referring to the same opening scene, another reviewer stated, “One must begin by praising the perspective in black which announces and symbolizes the topic that will be developed in the film.”<sup>125</sup> The references to the limited lighting and to the display of a “perspective” suggest that the film opened with a deep-focus nocturnal shot of the avenue, showing its vanishing point. This visual motif was prominent in one of the most frequently reproduced publicity images for *La banda del automóvil*, which shows an automobile in the foreground, the beams of its headlights cutting across the image, with a line of lamps marking the vanishing point of the broad avenue (Fig. 3.1). This image of a broad avenue, product of recent urban reforms, illuminated with and the headlights of automobiles, constructs Mexico City as a distinctly modern stage for thrilling criminal acts.

This advertising image, however, included no landmarks that would signal its setting as Mexico City; the imaginary of motorized crime it evokes is explicitly cosmopolitan, rather than local. If some reviewers drew a clear distinction between the sobriety and believability of *La banda del automóvil* and the illogical plots of imported serials, others found the film uncomfortably close to imported cinematic models. A reviewer in *Cine Mundial* criticized *La banda del automóvil*’s director, Ernesto Vollrath, for his adoption of a markedly foreign style, linking these traits to apparent export ambitions for the film:

to the excessive exoticism of the plot, he adds his own and makes a picture completely in the French style, which is Mexican only in name....It is a film that could be exhibited abroad without diminishing us; but also without giving an idea of us, because, as I have said, it is completely exotic. It seems that an American business is in negotiations with the producers...<sup>126</sup>

The films made by Vollrath in subsequent years were often subject to similar criticisms: one reviewer referred to his “desire to make his films aristocratic. He includes no Mexican touches. He is too fond of putting into his films characters of a refined cosmopolitan education, to whom nationality is irrelevant.”<sup>127</sup> Another noted that he was “plagued by a mania for Europeanizing our customs.”<sup>128</sup> A promotional description of *La banda del automóvil* characterizes it as an accomplishment that “will be translated into prestige and renown for our country, by equaling the most perfect films of Europe and North America.”<sup>129</sup> Indeed, Camus cherished ambitions to export his films, concretized in a trip to the United States in 1922, during which he managed to sell the later productions *Alas abiertas* (*With Wings Outspread*) and *En la hacienda* (*In the*

*Hacienda*).<sup>130</sup> According to Laura Serna, Camus also sold the two productions to Félix Padilla, an itinerant film exhibitor working in the Mexico-U.S. border regions.<sup>131</sup>

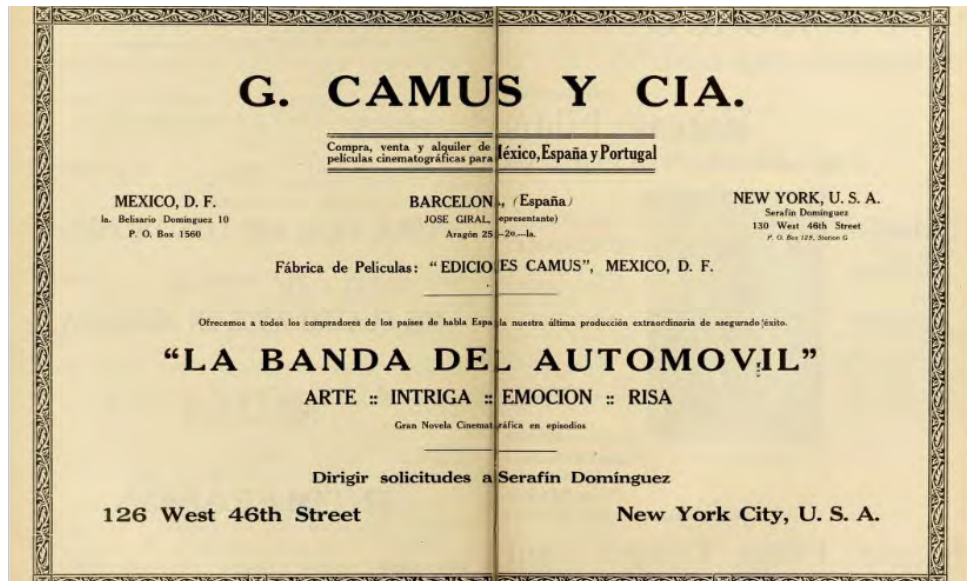


Fig. 3.8: An advertisement placed in the New York-based publication *Cine Mundial*. January – December 1920. Media History Digital Library.

Oriented more towards international cinema than national concerns, the formal accomplishments of *La banda del automóvil* were asserted as proof of the advancement of local film production. The cosmopolitan orientation of this crime narrative apparently allowed it to function in this capacity, in contrast to the local reactions against American productions featuring villainous Mexican characters, often bandits or “bad men,” as “films denigrating to Mexico.”<sup>132</sup> *La banda del automóvil*’s metropolitan setting and its cosmopolitan representational strategies distanced it from the images of social bandits or armed agrarian movements, which were limiting its prospects for attracting foreign investment and rendering it vulnerable to intervention by the United States. *La banda del automóvil* was able to attract local audiences and could additionally be hailed as a sign of process for national film production, because it apparently balanced the characteristics of imported fiction film (clear, adequately lit photography, optical effects, narrative tropes that recall imported serials) with local content (its passing allusion to the case of the “Grey Automobile,” its display of lavish metropolitan residences and broad central avenues, and its evocation of feminine criminality tempered by abnegation and suffering). *La banda del automóvil* suggests the varying degree to which local crime films engaged with the uniquely modern and specifically national problem experience of pervasive violence.

### ***El automóvil gris*: Local Authenticity, Imported Crime Film, Political Fictions**

If *La banda del automóvil* capitalized only in the most tangential fashion on the cinematic qualities of the events of the Grey Automobile Gang case observed by the mass press, *El automóvil gris* more directly translated the stuff of public scandal onto celluloid, provoking controversy in its own right. Copyright disputes, the threat of censorship by local authorities, and libel suits lodged by the alleged criminals contributed to a swirl of newspaper publicity that likely supplemented the film’s box office receipts. As film critic Carlos Noriega Hope ironically

commented, “The red flags of scandal gave [the film] luster and splendor and all of the questions of judicial boards and watermarked paper served to stimulate the curiosity of our public each day.”<sup>133</sup> This threat of censorship, according to Noriega Hope, heightened the sense of suspense built into serial exhibitions. He describes spectators gathered into

processions in the neighborhoods and caravans in central streets that directed themselves, anxiously, to view the bloody ‘Automobile’; at the entrances of the cinemas lines formed awaiting the opening, since many well-informed people (might they be, by some chance, publicity agents?) spread the rumor that the energetic hand of the police would impose an interminable parenthesis in the middle of the exhibition.<sup>134</sup>

Lampooning the public furor cultivated by Rosas around the film’s opening, with the conscious or unconscious complicity of the police, Noriega Hope also alludes to the proverbial question mark which announced to film serial spectators that they would have to wait another week for the enigma presented onscreen to be unraveled.

Suggesting dynamic connections to sensational literature and journalism, the production of *El automóvil gris* was apparently prompted by the publication of investigative reports about the case, which held a prominent place in three of the capital’s most important newspapers for several months during early 1919.<sup>135</sup> This attempt to capitalize on a case that had become newly topical, thanks to articles that delved into past miscarriages of justice was only one of multiple links between the film and the mass press of the period. In addition to his collaboration with the police detective who appears in the film, Rosas consulted with journalist Miguel Necochea, and then “subjected [the facts] to a literary treatment close to a *folletín*.”<sup>136</sup> The few surviving original intertitles maintain this melodramatic literary tone, reinforcing the film’s tendency to cast topical events in sensational and moralistic terms reminiscent of serial literature, even as they promised journalistic authenticity.

Supplementing the legitimacy lent to the screen adaptation by Necochea’s participation, advertisements for the film emphasized the use of the actual crime scenes as shooting locations. In sequences showing the robberies, establishing long shots are carefully framed to include the precise house numbers. Like photographic police reconstructions, *El automóvil gris* claimed to approach an evidentiary truth through re-enacting and visually registering contingent violent events. An advertisement for the film suggests its participation in a public media culture that persistently linked the topical with the sensational:

This film is not a fiction. A copy of the real events, it is an exact transcription of the truth, selected from the incongruent details of a mystery. Plotted around the crimes of the Grey Automobile Gang, it has exciting and dramatic details, terrible scenes and poetic renderings which are pious rays, lightning bolts of virtue that from time to time break the shadow of the fearful den where evil and crime seek refuge.<sup>137</sup>

The trope of light penetrating darkness constitutes what Shelley Streeby, writing in the context of Mexican sensational journalism, has called a “rhetoric of exposure, of bringing hidden horrors into the light of day,” a trope with clear links to sensational literature.<sup>138</sup> Recurring frequently in crime reportage of the period, it also exemplifies the journalistic genre’s drive to investigate and

verify real events. The reproduction, transcription, and selection of reality are presented as unproblematically compatible with promises of sensational melodrama. The advertisement's rhetoric betrays no sense of tension between the creative falsification of a re-enactment and the investment in indexical realism suggested by the choice to film at the literal scene of the crime.

*El automóvil gris*'s most striking manifestation of this mixture of ontological registers comes in its portrayal of the criminals. For most of the film's running time, actors play the roles of the bandits; in the execution sequence, they are abruptly replaced with the historical bandits. With the exception of the execution sequence, *El automóvil gris* consistently uses techniques associated with narrative fiction film. Cross-cutting is frequent; a particularly masterful example appears in the film's first sequence, in which a flashback of a robbery is intercut with the aftermath of the kidnapping of the virtuous Ernestina (Dora Vila), on orders of her suitor Oviedo (Ángel Esquivel), who unbeknownst to her is one of the bandits. Overall, the film uses analytical editing procedures, punctuating the long shots that make up most of its running time with occasional close-ups emphasizing a facial expression or significant object. The film also makes use of visual effects such as irises and lap dissolves, which had strong associations with imported cinema, as critical responses to *La banda del automóvil* attest.

*El automóvil gris*'s dynamic fight sequences, daring stunts involving dizzying vertical movements (including a leap from a high wall in a spectacular prison break scene), deep-focus compositions and use of location shooting, have all prompted comparisons with Louis Feuillade's crime serials for the Gaumont studio. Similarly, its virtuosic tracking shots, with the most spectacular following the getaway car through the streets of the city after the third robbery, are reminiscent of Italian film epics of the period.<sup>139</sup> These shots articulated the camera's vision with the automobile's speed, foregrounding their joint role in traversing and mapping urban space.

Beyond these cinematic devices associated with foreign serials, *El automóvil gris* draws on cosmopolitan images of crime in the off-duty costumes of its villains, who when not dressed in their military disguises wear caps, ascots, and sharply creased suits that recall the clothing of French *apache* bandits. Some contemporary spectators found these iconographies to be uncomfortably incongruous. Carlos Noriega Hope complained that the figure of Granda in Rosas' film possessed "distinction, elegance, gallantry and good manners which I fear do not conform closely to the historical truth." Evoking the criminological discourse that equated certain physical characteristics with an innate propensity towards violence, Noriega Hope pictures the "real" Granda as a hirsute, menacing bandit, primitive in appearance and manners:

I always thought that the fearful gang's leader was sturdy in appearance; I imagined that this offspring of evil would be a blood-soaked bandit, whose pupils would flash while his thick, hairy eyebrows underlined all of the horror of his look...[But] in the film the leader of the Grey Automobile Gang shocks us with his broad gestures that have the air of the boulevard, with his graceful component of *sportman* [sic] dressed, for dilettantism, as a Parisian *apache*.<sup>140</sup>

This figure may well have been part of the theatrical repertoire of the actor who played Granda, Juan Canal de Holms; according to the script of the 1920 film *La bastarda*, conceived by the opera singer María Cantoni, who played the starring role in it, he was to accompany Cantoni as an unscrupulous thief in a "Grand Guignol tableaux" that was inserted into the storyline.<sup>141</sup> As a Spanish immigrant, the historical Higinio Granda was himself an international figure;



photographs also suggest he was slim and had delicate features, in contrast to Noriega Hope's imaginings, though he did not closely resemble Canal de Holms.<sup>142</sup> Noriega Hope objects to the application of an implicitly French imaginary of crime to a case of national import, suggesting the film's precarious balance between national content and cosmopolitan imagery and narrative structures.

Yet *El automóvil gris*'s use of location shooting and staging in depth (accentuated by frequent framings on the diagonal, as Charles Ramírez Berg notes),<sup>143</sup> which frequently prompt comparisons to Feuillade's serials, also work to document the half-ruined urban spaces of Mexico City after the occupation of the capital. These sharp deep-focus shots capture the background and the figures of passersby, even as they display a mastery of cinematic technique. The film's documentation of an urban landscape devastated by the recent conflict is especially notable in a climactic confrontation between the police and fleeing bandits in the latter half of the film, set amongst the rubble of half-destroyed structures. A reviewer in *Cine Mundial* commented:

Strangely, the streets have not been scoured [for locations] to make Mexico City seem prodigiously beautiful, a mania of producers around here; almost everything was filmed in ugly, deserted passageways, which give realism to the chases in other incredible locations, and the formidable combats, proper to the anarchic age in which they took place.<sup>144</sup>

A fascination with the local urban landscape is also manifested in the inclusion of large-scale maps of the city in two scenes in which the criminals plot their future robberies.<sup>145</sup> In the very first sequence of the surviving film, the robbers swear allegiance to each other on top of a map of Mexico City; in a close-up shot, Granda indicates to his conspirators the route they plan to take in the automobile in order to reach their target. The flashback to the robbery itself, shown following the scene of Ernestina's kidnapping, functions as a sequential presentation of the locations: the automobile pauses to pick up the individual robbers, now dressed in military uniforms, on various street corners. Emphasizing physical and mechanical dynamism – the robbers leap onto the automobile in motion – this scene also highlights the bandits' mastery of urban space, indicated by their translation of the route indicated on the map into coordinated action in several physical locations. In a later sequence, Granda discusses a new heist with an accomplice at his desk in the police station, using a wall-mounted map to explain the plan of attack. This map clearly shows the city's borders and its broad, modern avenues, indicating the capacity for illicit traffic along these thoroughfares, as well as within the very police operation intended to repress their criminal activities.<sup>146</sup>

Highlighting the sense of geographical verisimilitude reinforced by the presence of the maps, the opening intertitle of *El automóvil gris*, added in 1931, but revealing of the manner in which the film was framed in terms of sensational truth in 1919, proposes a similarly rigorous fidelity to the original locations in which the crimes occurred:

The story here presented unfolds in the same sites that served as theater for the exploits that make up its plot. The scenes of the robberies, the houses in which the members of the ill-fated Grey Automobile Gang lived, and the places in which they were apprehended or expiated their crimes are rigorously authentic. The action takes place in the year 1915.<sup>147</sup>

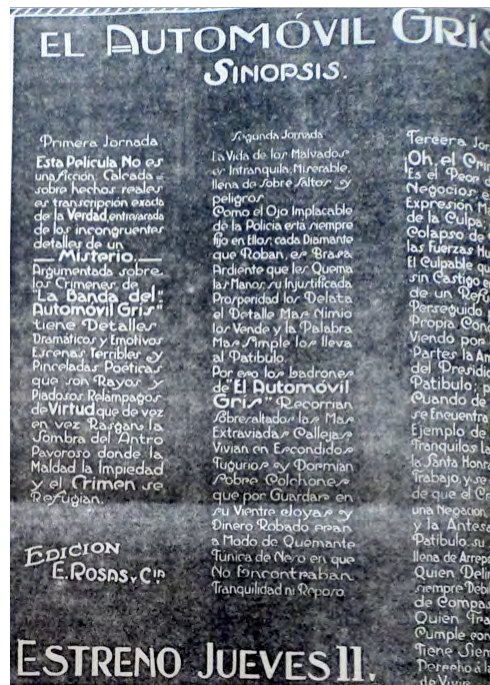


Fig. 3.9: Advertisement, *Excelsior*, December 11, 1919.

This initial statement touts the use of real locations as a source of surplus verisimilitude that augments the narrative thrills of the film’s sensational plot. Its rhetoric betrays no sense of tension between the creative falsification of a re-enactment and the investment in indexical realism suggested by the choice to film at the scene of the crime. The locations themselves are attributed with the characteristics of a theater, and the historical events accorded the status of exploits [*hazañas*]. Here, public spectacles of crime and violence are implicitly understood as inherently narrativized and fictionalized. As in the case of the Brazilian true-crime films, strategies of re-enactment could be marshaled to commodify and domesticate the violence of the real, refashioning public insecurity into mass entertainment and limiting the range of political interpretations that could be applied to violent events.

While the political situation had stabilized to some degree in 1917, with the adoption of a new constitution and Venustiano Carranza’s ascension to the presidency, at the time of *El automóvil gris*’s production, the need to fortify the legitimacy of the military and police was still keenly felt by those whose reputations had been tarnished by the disorder of the military occupations. In the anarchic atmosphere of occupied Mexico City, with its attendant violence, food shortages, and proliferation of counterfeit currency, the looting practiced by police or military did not differ recognizably from that practiced by bandits with no political affiliation. Historically, civil authority was comprehensively undermined by the presence of the military in Mexico City—as Pablo Piccato notes, “when rebel armies occupied the city, gendarmes were often no more than witnesses or victims of the disorders created by troops”<sup>148</sup>—but in *El automóvil gris* the police work efficiently and effectively to capture the gang.

The plot of *El automóvil gris* emphasizes the slippage between criminal, police, and military activity manifest in the period: for example, the historical Granda worked as a Zapatista captain concurrently with his criminal activities and as a court clerk after his imprisonment.<sup>149</sup> His fictional avatar in *El automóvil gris* infiltrates the ranks of both the police (to steal the search warrants used in the robberies) and the military (to escape prison through conscription into the

army). In a parallel development, Don Vicente González (Joaquín Coss), an elderly victim of one of the robberies who is mercilessly tortured by the bandits (they suspend him by his thumbs and even simulate his execution by firing squad in order to extract from him the location of his safe), asks police permission to dispense vigilante justice throughout the film. The police themselves adopt disguises in the film, dressing as electricians in order to gain entry to a rooming house where Chao (Manuel de los Ríos) and his lover Carmen (María Mercedes Ferriz) are in hiding. Rosas' original script even includes a scene, not present in the current version of the film, in which the police end up fighting with their own agents in disguise, mistaking them for the bandits.<sup>150</sup> Despite these allusions to the difficulty of drawing a distinction between the official and unofficial exercise of violence, *El automóvil gris*'s narrative is excessively generous to the Carrancista authorities who controlled Mexico during the apprehension of the bandits.

The film's narrative is excessively generous to González and to figures of state power in general (González himself appears twice in the existing version of *El automóvil gris*, examining an article about the gang's activities in a newspaper, and urging the police to redouble their efforts to capture the criminals, and during the execution sequence). While the search warrants used in the historical robberies bore the authentic signatures of military officers, in contrast to those used in similar crimes,<sup>151</sup> in the film they are depicted as having been stolen by Granda with the complicity of a low-ranking colleague on the police force. Official involvement in the robberies is further disavowed by means of a curious narrative device. Roughly mid-way through the film, Granda pretends to respond to the summons of a higher-up in a private room for the benefit of an accomplice; during a police raid later in the film, the supposed crime boss is revealed to be a mannequin dressed in a Carrancista uniform. De los Reyes has noted that this strange scene deviates both from plausible historical fact and from the pre-existing legends about the band, playing on and then refuting popular suspicion about military complicity in the crimes.<sup>152</sup>

The coexistence of these strategic fictionalizations with the documentary execution sequence demonstrates that the determination of truths about guilt, innocence, and authority were not matters of indifference during the Revolutionary period. Rather, they are shown to have literally life-and-death stakes. While the authorities' investigation produces a highly suspect truth, the demonstration of their repressive power is constructed as authentic and thus irrefutable. The break in ontological registers between the fictionalized narrative and the documentary sequences makes this contradiction evident, even as it moves to suppress the spectator's potentially subversive identification with the criminal with a non-fictional display of the state's lethal authority.

Because of its marked play with such identifications, *El automóvil gris* can hardly be reduced to a mere apology for Carrancista abuses or a glorification of state authority. A number of critics have noted that the film encourages empathy with the bandits as a consequence of their greater psychological complexity (in comparison with the police detectives), involvement in romantic subplots, and their somber pre-execution meal, complete with an eleventh-hour jailhouse wedding.<sup>153</sup> These potential affective responses are unsettled by the film's final documentary sequence, which Paul Schroeder Rodríguez reads as an attempt to quell Europe-oriented, bourgeois Mexicans' anxieties about shifting class and race hierarchies in the wake of the Revolution. He emphasizes the film's incoherent portrayal of the Grey Automobile Gang's members, noting that the "real-life bandits do not look anything like the ones played by actors. Rather, they look like indigenous-mestizo Zapatistas with their wide-brim hats and their tight

pants.”<sup>154</sup> He also notes the powerful effects of the sequence’s wide framing, suggesting the criminals are

...dehumanized by the way the event is shot and edited to show only the moment of death from a full-shot perspective. What we see are not individuals, but a faceless, indistinct pattern of falling bodies. The effect of this closing montage is that the viewer’s previous identification with the bandits is severed, criollo fears of losing their privileges and properties are effectively allayed, and revolutionary activity is equated with banditry.<sup>155</sup>

While Schroeder-Rodríguez helpfully evokes the close imbrication of formal and political strategies at play in the film, I would like to complicate his reading on several points. In a recently restored version of the film, it is evident that the criminals wear shapeless coats and nondescript fedoras that look distinctly urban, rather than resembling the iconic image of the rural Zapatista. As noted above, the Grey Automobile Gang did have ties to Zapata’s forces; however, Pablo Piccato has suggested that the public associated them not with the revolutionary leader’s calls for the violent re-distribution of wealth in rural areas, but rather with a cynical and unscrupulous urban criminality.<sup>156</sup> In addition, Schroeder Rodríguez fails to consider the visible distinction between the narrative and newsreel conventions that are juxtaposed in the film. What he interprets as a strategic dehumanization of the bandits could be better explained by the shift from fictional codes that at times work to convey a sense of psychological interiority and suspense to newsreel codes used in the scenes that emphasize the fortuitous capture of the chaotic and the contingent, as David Levy emphasizes in his discussion of actualities and re-enactments.<sup>157</sup> The sequence opens with a quick pan left and then right to show the soldiers assigned to the firing squad; the criminals awaiting execution are displayed by means of a slower pan along an exterior wall, which is framed to recede on the diagonal. Intercut are frontal shots of officers milling about as they prepare for the execution and another discontinuous pan along the wall. An iris out on a shot of an expectant crowd is followed by a very brief image of the puffs of gunsmoke and falling bodies; soldiers then approach the prone bodies to give each the *coup de grace*, passing close to the camera. Aside from the iris and the nominal point of view shot from the perspective of the crowd, no codes associated with narrative cinema are used here. The panning motions and wide shot scale, which avoid a focus on individual criminals, suggest a desire to capture the totality of a public spectacle which is alien to the goals of the fictional narrative, but very much consistent with surviving actuality images of the period.<sup>158</sup>

Most significantly, Schroeder Rodríguez does not consider that rapid shifts in identification are a characteristic feature of crime genres. It is a truism that the censorship codes demanding the punishment of evildoers as a deterrent to the audience, such as those adopted in Mexico under the regime of Victoriano Huerta in 1913,<sup>159</sup> produce their own narrative pleasures. Long before the execution sequence, the film’s focus has shifted from the criminals’ virtuosic stunts and nefarious deeds to the authorities’ investigation and the arrests of the bandits, who have scattered across the nearby countryside (which provides the opportunity for a few picturesque pans of provincial landscapes and a display of rural customs such as cockfighting). The film’s force comes from the fact that the state’s power is ultimately exercised not on the fictional bodies shown throughout, but rather on real ones. *El automóvil gris*’s questionable politics are thus linked less to its disruption of the spectator’s identification with the criminals than to its incoherent portrayal of two models of state authority: an efficient, benevolent police

force working to restore order, and a violent repressive power. In revolutionary Mexico, as in the film itself, the first was a fiction, and the second an insistent reality. Rosas' film does not, as Schroeder-Rodríguez suggests, propose a conservative equation of revolution with banditry; rather, it makes a reactionary attempt to re-impose the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence and appropriations of private property that had all but disappeared during the occupation of Mexico City. *El automóvil gris* registers its political contradictions in its mixture of documentary and fictional registers; examining this representational incoherence makes it a powerful example of the political uses of verisimilitude, and an extension of spectacles of violence that sensationalized the everyday.

The historical events of the Mexican Revolution instituted a singular mode of producing and consuming visual truths that was at once distinct from, and intertwined with, an international repertoire of representations of criminality and violence. The fragility of the state seems to have limited the possibilities for pleasurable play with the boundaries of fictional and factual depictions of violence, instituting a pressing social need for the ontological verification of documentary images. The contradictory and seductive strategies of *El automóvil gris* crystallize the vexed politics of image-making in early twentieth-century Mexico.

### The serial queen appropriated and critiqued: *Fanny o el robo de los veinte millones*



Fig. 3.10: An advertisement for *Fanny* emphasizes a thrilling aviation scene. *El Universal*, October 13, 1922

*Fanny*, like *El automóvil gris*, was based on rumors of criminal misconduct by military officials that provided a pretext for the chase scenes and daring stunts prominent in foreign, and especially American, serial films. The film's surviving script consistently links the figure of Fanny with the presence of the automobile, and would have capitalized on the fascination with aviation manifest in illustrated magazines of the period (the protagonist Arturo works at a military airfield, and the film culminates in an airborne chase after Fanny and her accomplice Rufiar). Like the black-clad protagonists of *La banda del automóvil*, the eponymous villainess invites a reflection on female criminality as a manifestation of the social upheaval of the Revolution, in addition to the presence of cultural products imported from the United States that posited increasingly active, kinetic, and sexualized models of femininity.<sup>160</sup> The juxtaposition of conventional iconographies of female suffering and virtue with dynamic, aggressive, and even

murderous behavior by women in these true-crime films suggests a renegotiation of gendered behavior as a consequence both of national political processes and the large-scale importation of Hollywood films.

*Fanny* was interpreted by period reviewers as a direct response to the Americanization of film exhibition in Mexico, and the threat of Americanization of production, issues that crystallized around the figure of the serial queen. In 1919, several journalists criticized the casting of an American actress, Hilda North, as the heroine of a serial based on the exploits of the real-life bandit Chuchito el Roto (the film was never produced). The participation of North, who had supposedly appeared in films with Mary Pickford, was presented as a coup for local film production; a notice declared, "Mexico will be the first place in Latin America where a film will be shot with an actress of the American silent art."<sup>161</sup> However, not all local critics greeted this news with enthusiasm; one commented, "it occurs to us to ask why one would import from Yankeeland [*Yanquilandia*], for an exorbitant salary, a 'miss' who will not fit as well in the role of this national film, as a number of Mexican cinematic artists would," emphasizing that "it will not be much of a stimulus [to national production] to bring here a blond 'miss' for a role more suited to a lovely *criolla*."<sup>162</sup> The reconfiguration of a national legend into an American-style serial complete with a Hollywood performer threatened to Americanize nascent Mexican film production from within.

*Fanny* reverses these terms, employing a Mexican actress in a dynamic female role, and using the titular character to critique the Americanized femininity promulgated by Hollywood films. Although its structure was not episodic, *Fanny*'s plot can be compared to those of many serials in that it pivots on the struggle for possession of a significant item—dubbed "the weenie" by actress Pearl White, as Ben Singer has observed.<sup>163</sup> Combining two separate scandals—the theft of sensitive military maps, and Carranza's alleged theft of funds from the national treasury during his escape from Mexico City—the film is constructed around the quest for one half of a map indicating the location of the titular twenty millions. In a flashback, the spectator is informed that the map was stolen by *Fanny*'s lover Roberto Rufiar and Ruíz Velasco (Néstor Vargas), who turns against his accomplice and hides the treasure. In a struggle that nearly kills both, the map is torn in two and the half found on Ruíz Velasco's corpse is given to the military authorities. In collusion with Rufiar, *Fanny* resolves to obtain the missing half of the map through any means necessary. De los Reyes has criticized *Fanny*'s "obvious intention of distorting the events it was based on"<sup>164</sup> and evoking a "Mexican reality of violence presented in the manner of North American serials."<sup>165</sup> By contrast, I argue that *Fanny* both appropriates and critiques the serial queen in a simultaneous bid for both popular appeal and a rebuttal to Hollywood cinema.

As in the case of *El automóvil gris*, *Fanny* was filmed with the patronage of a high-ranking military official, General Cal y Mayor, who apparently supported the production, independently undertaken by Ángel Álvarez, with the aim of repairing the reputations damaged in the scandal of the stolen plans. (The Secretary of War later funded another film, *Cuando la patria lo manda* or *When the Fatherland Calls*, based on the same events.) The military loaned some of his troops to figure as extras in the final scene, and the general also had significant financial and logistical involvement in the film, providing abundant funds to the struggling production and using his personal influence and connections to the nation's president, General Álvaro Obregón, to secure desirable exhibition venues and dates, according to an account by one of the film's actors, Ángel E. Álvarez.<sup>166</sup> Upon the film's release, again according to Álvarez, Cal y Mayor rigidly controlled the box-office profits of the film.<sup>167</sup> After *Fanny*'s premiere

(which seems to have been something of a disappointment, since the film was released in multiple cinemas but exhibited for a relatively short period of time),<sup>168</sup> the general insisted that the film had not covered its costs, and kept it in his possession, without the filmmakers receiving any of the profits.<sup>169</sup> De los Reyes suggests that the film was pulled from exhibition in Mexico City by a newly established municipal censorship authority.<sup>170</sup> As in the case of *El automóvil gris*, with *Fanny* profitability, scandal and censorship were closely linked.

*Fanny*'s focus on the devious plottings of a foreign seductress imbues it with a striking, but ultimately ambivalent, nationalist orientation. The implication that *Fanny* is American invites us to read the character as a negative mirror image of American serial queens like Pearl White (especially beloved by local audiences for her role alongside Antonio Moreno in *House of Hate*), Ruth Roland, and Kathlyn Williams. An advertisement for the film emphasizes that the female protagonist "carries out daring exploits, which make her the equal of the most famous stars of adventure films."<sup>171</sup> In the film's shooting script, *Fanny* is presented as possessing a dynamic and active, but also morally corrupt, femininity. She skillfully operates both an automobile and an airplane, but gains control over the map by means of seduction rather than through her physical prowess, cunning, or daring. Throughout the film, *Fanny*'s behavior is contrasted with that of Captain Aguirre's submissive wife Alma, who, according to the script, was frequently shown waiting for her husband while he gradually succumbs to *Fanny*'s charms. Significantly, the two women are played by sisters María (whose name is appears in advertisements as Mary) and Anita Cozzi. The persistent cross-cutting between Arturo's illicit encounters with *Fanny* and scenes featuring Alma and their children, indicated in the shooting script, at once underlines moral polarities tied to patriotic values, and sets up a certain equivalency between the two women.

Even as the film melodramatically opposed villainous American femininity to the abnegation and virtue of the Mexican mother, its script suggests a persistent fascination with the physical virtuosity of the serial queen and the glamorous iconography of Hollywood's dramatic actresses, as suggested by the frequent references to *Fanny*'s elaborate attire and immaculate appearance in the script. Although advertising images show María Cozzi in elegant dresses, other surviving publicity stills show her in rather masculine clothing, such a button-down shirt, jacket, jodhpurs, and boots, topped off with a cap, ready to perform athletic feats. Attributing the figure of *Fanny* with a wide range of aspects of modern femininity, from masculinized physical virtuosity to seductive glamour, *Fanny o el robo de los veinte millones* suggests a desire for a local production that could attract audiences by showcasing different models of Hollywood femininity, embodied in a Mexican actress. This strategy constitutes a "vernacular modernism" inflected by Mexico's deep ambivalence regarding cultural and economic influence by the United States.<sup>172</sup>

The eponymous American villainess of *Fanny* was perceived as a potentially problematic intervention in the protests against Hollywood films considered "derogatory to Mexico" for their portrayals of bandits and "bad men," a phenomenon discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.<sup>173</sup> In the Spanish-language film magazine *Cine Mundial*, published in New York, critic Epifanio Soto Jr. noted that many Mexican films could be considered "as derogatory as the Yankee [productions]" in their depictions of adultery, violence, and military abuses (in the case of *Fanny*). The critic also suggested that Mexican filmmaker's impulse to "revenge" themselves on Hollywood by producing negative depictions of America and Americans, an impulse embodied by *Fanny* as well as by Miguel Contreras Torres' border-crossing narrative *El hombre sin patria* (*The Man Without a Country*), was potentially counterproductive. While he highlights the

ironies involved in Mexican cinema's attempts to respond to and compete with Hollywood, Soto attempted to smooth over the conflict by evoking a key aspect of *Fanny*'s appeal: "Doesn't it seem preferable to you that we forget that Fanny, of the 'Theft of the Twenty Millions,' is an American, in order to remember that her interpreter, Mary Cozzi, is a limber and agreeable girl, with as much capacity to make a thrilling serial as any American 'miss'?"<sup>174</sup> Downplaying the critique of American cultural influence implicit in the film, Soto emphasizes the actress's physical virtuosity as an asset to Mexican cinema.

Providing evidence of the talent of a homegrown actress, *Fanny o el robo de los veinte millones* seems to have included several daring stunt sequences. According to the script, several dynamic scenes were to be included: the initial struggle between Rufiar and Ruíz Velasco; a chase scene between two airplanes; and a scene depicting Fanny and Rufiar escaping from their hotel room by means of a wire stretched tight between the fifth floor of the building and the structure facing it directly across the street, which according to anecdotes about the production nearly had fatal results for two of the film's actors. In addition to the thrills provided by these sequences, the figure of Fanny is continually brought into relation with modern transportation technologies and emerging public spaces. Her characterization likely permitted the audience to simultaneously entertain and criticize a fantasy of modern, Americanized, womanhood, although this model of femininity is condemned throughout by the conservative moralistic discourse of the film, and ultimately punished with capture and imprisonment.

The automobile and urban public spaces are initially associated with the family's engagement in leisure time activities, harmoniously integrated with Captain Aguirre's employment as a military officer. He is first shown in a scene in which he brings his wife and two young children to the Aviation school in a hired car in order to show them the machinery; he then brings them to promenade on the Alameda, a public park in the city's center that functioned as a key location for leisure and elegant display. Edited in parallel with these sequences, the film would have shown Fanny hiring a car and demonstrating obvious mastery over the machine; in a sequence intended to be humorous, she manages to open a car door where the bellboy has failed. After Fanny's encounter with Aguirre in the Secretary of War, where she has come to make discreet inquiries about the location of the map, Fanny is shown to effectively manage both modern transportation technologies ranging from an automobile to a plane, and public spaces. After giving Aguirre her card and "a handshake with an amorous squeeze,"<sup>175</sup> they meet again in an "unexpected encounter" in the Bosques de Chapultepec (a large park modeled on the Bois de Boulogne in Paris) where she is riding in an "elegant carriage" while he is on horseback.

After a kiss shared in the park, Arturo calls Fanny's hotel to arrange an encounter. As Alma is shown sadly clearing the plates for a family dinner at which Arturo fails to appear, he and Fanny drink a toast in an expensive restaurant. With this stimulant, Arturo soon begins to relate the sequence of events following the theft of the twenty millions, to be pictured onscreen in a flashback. The first truly dynamic stunts of the film would have appeared in this sequence: Rufiar's accomplice Ruíz Velasco hurling himself from a train to escape with the treasure (which he buries, hastily scrawling a map to be able to recall its location); and the fight between the two. According to the script, this struggle is witnessed by a young worker who reports it to nearby authorities, who then recover the corpse and the half of the map. After hearing this, Fanny accepts an invitation to visit the airfield the following day, extracting a promise from Arturo to show her the map at their next rendezvous.

The following illicit encounter between Arturo and Fanny would have exemplified the film's morally loaded parallel editing patterns, which establish clear contrasts between the two



women. Alma “waits for Arturo, looking at the time with impatience. She gives up hope, goes to the window; opening it a ray of moonlight illuminates her brow, showing its paleness, as two tears stream down.”<sup>176</sup> Meanwhile, in her hotel room Fanny plies Arturo with champagne. Once Arturo has fallen asleep from overindulgence, Fanny and Rufiar lock him in one of the suite’s rooms, but he awakens before they can carry out their objective of copying the map. Discovered, Fanny and Rufiar are forced to make a daring escape by crossing the street several stories up along an electric wire, a stunt that ostensibly garnered the film significant publicity even as it nearly cost the lives of the three principal actors. In an interview given in the 1950s, film’s director and star, Eduardo Urriola, recalls that his co-star Ángel Álvarez initially refused to carry out the stunt:

As it had been announced in the press that the sequence would be shot with total realism (seeking publicity), starting in the early morning hours a multitude of curious onlookers had gathered, and not wanting to look ridiculous in front of them, seeing that Alvarez resisted, to encourage him, I tried to show him it was easy, and putting my money where my mouth was, I leapt off the balcony and threw myself into the void, confident of myself.<sup>177</sup>

Urriola’s boldness was nearly fatal; the wire from which he was suspended immediately snapped, and he would have fallen if he had not become tangled in the electrical, telephone and telegraph cables that ran alongside the highwire. After he was rescued by firefighters, a second crossing was attempted, again presenting considerable danger to the actors. According to Urriola; María Cozzi tired and had to be sustained by Ángel Álvarez’s superior strength. While perhaps apocryphal, such anecdotes recapitulate the discourses of “real” physical danger that were persistently mobilized around foreign serial stars in the American press (and reprinted in Mexican newspapers and magazines); the promise of “total realism” was “the lure of [a] referentiality” premised on “catastrophe, disorder, and disaster” that was pivotal in serial stardom.<sup>178</sup> Urriola’s account suggests that the filming of virtuosic stunts during the production of *Fanny* constituted a sensational public event mediated by the press. Beyond the (apparently limited) commercial impact of the finished film, passersby were interpellated as spectators as local actors embodied a physical virtuosity linked to serial actors. Film production was itself constructed as an urban spectacle, a thrilling sign of local participation in the cinema’s technological modernity.



Fig. 3.11: María Cozzi and Ángel Álvarez dangle from vertiginous heights as onlookers watch from a balcony. *Cinema Repórter*, August 18, 1954. Filmoteca de la UNAM

The chase scene that was to have concluded *Fanny* would have displayed both the physical capacities of the actors and the technological resources available to the local production with its spectacular displays of transportation technology, including an encounter between an airplane and a moving train. This chase sequence, beginning with Fanny and Rufiar in a stolen Ford and Arturo in a police vehicle, becomes even more spectacular as the schemers trick Arturo's colleague Luis into preparing the plane for a pleasure flight. After Luis and Arturo launch a second airplane in pursuit, firing upon the first craft, yet a third type of vehicle quickly comes into play as Rufiar leads Fanny to jump from the plane onto a passing train. However, Arturo's plane soon overtakes the train. He boards, locates the criminals, and struggles with Rufiar atop the vehicle. The two villains escape, only to come to the edge of a steep canyon in their flight. The two throw a cord across the void, but Rufiar falls to his death (according to the script, this is depicted in a suspense-creating series of close-ups on the fraying rope) and Fanny is forced to surrender to the authorities. The film ends with parallel sequences of Fanny recalling the genesis and execution of the robbery from prison, while Arturo receives a decoration for his efforts (after being scolded for having put classified information at risk) and a warm welcome from his family.

According to the script, during the chase sequence the action was to have consistently cut away to Alma, who had fallen asleep while waiting for her husband, and later, sensing the danger, was shown praying in front of an icon. This strategy would have both augmented suspense, and emphasized how far Arturo has strayed from the idealized family home. At the same time, it extends a contrast between the two female figures that might also be understood as a comparison. While Fanny's punishment by imprisonment and the closing shot of Arturo being welcomed back into the family fold unambiguously condemn Fanny's seductive and physically

virtuosic qualities alike, implicitly condemning the pernicious influence of American cinema on feminine virtue and the stability of the Mexican family, even as it invites audiences to take pleasure in these very characteristics. *Fanny* stages thrilling spectacles of speed, transportation technology, and feminine criminality, simultaneously critiquing and capitalizing on the conventions of Hollywood cinema, even as it addresses in fictional form the national problem of military misconduct.

In conclusion, the production of crime films based on real-life cases in Mexico City of the late teens and early twenties articulated ambivalent visions of national modernity. The progressive “refinement” of criminal behavior in tandem with the exhibition of crime films and the expansion of the sensationalist press converged rhetorically with the excesses and abuses of the Revolutionary conflict, whose project for a more inclusive and democratic mode of national modernization was accompanied by the comprehensive destabilization of state authority and the militarization of everyday life. Even as true-crime films asserted local modernity, through their attempt to establish self-sustaining film production and to showcasing their mastery of photographic technique and fictional cinematic narrative codes, they hearkened back, in differing degrees, to the dominant mode of film production in Mexico before 1916—the revolutionary documentary—and the broader spectacularization of politics enacted by cinema, photography, and popular theater. Crime-themed films produced in Mexico City in the period engaged with the conflicts of national modernization, from the comprehensive undermining of the state’s monopoly on legitimate violence (inscribed in *El automóvil gris*’s juxtaposition of fictional and actuality codes), or with the renegotiation of gendered imaginaries of violence evoked by *La banda del automóvil*. As these productions addressed national concerns mediated by cosmopolitan iconographies of modern criminality, they capitalized on an expanding culture of mass sensationalism that transformed crime, politics, and their intersection into the stuff of popular entertainment. Analyzing the popular local genre of true-crime film in the context of a broader panorama of visual culture and popular amusements allows us to trace its participation in a spectacularization of everyday life that packaged the violent conflicts of national modernization for popular consumption.

## CHAPTER 4

### Nationalist Iconographies, Cosmopolitan Images of Crime: Regional Production of Adventure Films in Mexico, 1920-1927



Fig. 4.1: Video still from *El tren fantasma*.

In a 1920 article entitled “The Hero of the Film” (*El héroe de la película*), pioneering film journalist Carlos Noriega Hope spins a playful fiction around a false piece of news that had appeared in local papers: the death of a local actor during the filming of a railway accident.<sup>1</sup> Requesting tolerance from his readers for an “intrusion of literature on cinema,” Noriega Hope occupies his weekly film column with a story, whose protagonist Rodríguez is a newspaperman. Scolded by his boss for having lost two important scoops the previous day—“the murder on the Calzada de Tlalpan<sup>2</sup> and the worker’s strike in Tizapán”—Rodríguez receives a report that an army official had been crushed by a passing trolley. Hurrying to the site of the accident, Rodríguez finds a group of armed men on horseback in intense combat; initially “thinking [it was] a new Revolution,” he “greedily imagined [an article] above the fold, seven columns, with a red headline,” before realizing the battle is in fact a simulation staged for film cameras. When he speaks to the director, Rodríguez finds out that the actor survived the accident (a collision between his horse and a train, following his character’s kidnapping of the heroine), which thus merits only “an insignificant notice in the police blotter.” Given this disappointment, the reporter decides to falsely report the actor’s death; significantly, he dramatizes it with the true detail that the victim was an actor killed during filming; he becomes not a military, but rather a cinematic, “hero.”<sup>3</sup>

If Noriega Hope’s short story implies that the ideal subject for sensationalistic journalism in the early twenties was a fresh outbreak of revolutionary conflict (with criminal violence and labor strikes serving as acceptable substitutes), it simultaneously evokes the role of locally produced cinema in simulating and thus mediating that violence. “The Hero of the Film” constructs film production as an activity that is in itself newsworthy, especially when linked to displays of physical virtuosity and the perils of modern transportation technologies. The article prefigures a proliferation of journalistic anecdotes about local film production in the early twenties, in which cinematic violence was consistently confused with “real” (and sometimes, revolutionary) violence. This journalistic rhetoric that dramatized the mechanics of film production itself as a thrilling spectacle of progress, even as it linked cinematic violence with the nation’s recent past.

The metatextual joke of Noriega Hope’s “The Hero of the Film” links cinematic simulation to journalistic distortion; ironically, it also invokes Noriega Hope’s authority as both commentator on and participant in local film production. He was able to give the lie to (and subsequently invent a fiction about) the published “news of a cinematic catastrophe” because he, “fortunately, was present at said ‘catastrophe.’”<sup>4</sup> The journalist was personally acquainted with the majority of Mexico City film enthusiasts, whose production practices he observed and recounted in his weekly cinema column (at times he even participated, as when he choreographed a fight scene in the film *El Zarco*).<sup>5</sup> In 1921, Noriega Hope would direct his own comic adventure film, *La gran noticia* (*The Big News*), in the small town of Chapala outside Guadalajara. Premised on the close relationship between cinema enthusiasts and a growing group of local film critics, “The Hero of the Film” also signals local productions’ close but complex relationship to the Revolution and the strong currents of cultural nationalism that arose in its wake. Emphasizing feats of horsemanship, hand-to-hand combat, and the thrilling velocity of the train and plane (which were, respectively, the primary vehicle of revolutionary mobilization and a key object of the Federal army’s technological ambitions), Mexican cinema of the twenties resembled images of the Revolution without, with rare exceptions, directly invoking it.<sup>6</sup>

Working to code particular regional iconographies as distinctly Mexican, especially that of the *charro* (cowboy) associated with the states of Jalisco and Michoacán, adventure melodramas of the early twenties negotiated the often contradictory impulses of the period following the most active military phase of the Revolutionary conflict. On one hand, the production of adventure films signaled a desire to establish a profitable local film industry based on clearly legible icons of national culture. On the other, the critical reception of these films often triggered debates about the need to rehabilitate Mexico's international image after a decade of conflict. Crime and adventure films were perceived as more authentically "national" than sentimental, European-influenced melodramas like the 1917 *La luz* (*The Light*). Yet they had the drawback of steering perilously close to the iconographies of Hollywood films prominently featuring Mexican bandits and "bad men." Locally decried as "denigrating to Mexico,"<sup>7</sup> these productions provoked a presidential ban on the imports of a number of Hollywood studios in 1922, leading to negotiations with Mexican authorities (not always in particularly good faith).<sup>8</sup>

While Hollywood depictions of Mexico often betrayed great ignorance regarding the country's climate, geography, and customs, this representational double-bind was also embedded in the iconography of post-Revolutionary Mexico itself. Significantly, the *charro*, characterized by an elaborately embroidered costume, originated in the figure of the nineteenth-century bandit, or *plateado*, decked out in precious metals seized from victims, although this genealogy is largely effaced in nationalist iconography. As Paul Vanderwood has argued in his study of bandits and *rurales* (police) in Mexico, "brigands and lawmen" have frequently switched roles, functioning "as double agents of order and disorder."<sup>9</sup> This reversibility of lawbreakers and authorities that was prominent in discourses surrounding the "Grey Automobile Gang," signals the complexities of establishing a state monopoly on violence in a nation that has struggled to establish and maintain its sovereignty.

In this chapter, I analyze the ways in which Mexican adventure films of the 1920s, produced in scenic rural locations by filmmakers based in Mexico City, and made across the country by isolated groups of enthusiasts, negotiated the country's recent revolutionary past and its renewed program of modernization. I focus on two groups of films – a series of lost productions by Miguel Contreras Torres, a self-styled director and star who would remain active into the sound era, which drew explicitly on the conventions of American westerns and were much debated in the Mexico City press; and two 1927 films made by Gabriel García Moreno in the city of Orizaba in the eastern port state of Veracruz, which are the only two surviving Mexican fiction features of the twenties. These productions were publicized and received on a primarily local level and were thus, I suggest, more able to openly sensationalize ambivalent signs of local modernity: an expanding railway network in *El tren fantasma* (*The Ghost Train*); and the spread and attempted control of drug abuse in *El puño de hierro* (*The Iron Fist*).

Unlike Contreras Torres' films, whose direction and photography were frequently criticized by contemporary reviewers, García Moreno's films repurpose the codes of Hollywood westerns and serials with impressive technical fluidity, even as they draw heavily on techniques associated with early cinema (extreme long shots, "phantom ride" sequences) in their display of the mountainous local scenery and subtropical vegetation. Conversely, many of the shots in *El tren fantasma* emphasize the vanishing point of train tracks and telegraph wires, constructing local space as both rationalized "second nature" and picturesque scene. The film's positive reception both in Veracruz, the state of its production, and in Mexico City, suggests its success in displaying two intertwined technologies – the train and the cinema – that had altered the perceptual experience of an unevenly developed landscape.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, the serial-influenced

*El puño de hierro*, and Contreras Torres' rurally themed films drawing on the codes of the American western, could not pleasurably display physical virtuosity and technical mastery to the same degree.

Through careful attention to these productions and their appropriations of imported genres, I aim to nuance existing histories of Mexican cinema that emphasize its national specificity (as represented by, for example, the uniqueness of the "Revolutionary documentary") and its role in forging nationalist iconographies, especially during the "Golden Age" of national production spanning the late 1930s to the late 1950s. I also aim to complement scholarship on the period that limits its discussion of Mexican modernity to the trajectories of local modernist movements, such as the competing literary groups dubbed the *estridentistas* ("stridentists") and *contemporáneos* ("contemporaries"). Mexican film production of the 1920s has tended to fall outside the scope of both scholarly narratives, perhaps because film production was (surprisingly) marginal both to the creative production of the avant-gardes and the period's dominant trend towards cultural nationalism (exemplified by the ideology of *mestizaje* (racial/cultural mixture) popularized by José Vasconcelos, Mexico's first Secretary of Education, and the work of muralists like Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros.<sup>11</sup> While film production did not play a central role in elite or popular culture in the period, I contend that its engagement with imported cinema and national history sheds new light on post-Revolutionary cultural tensions.

The nationalistic series of adventure films produced by Miguel Contreras Torres constituted an unofficial response to "films denigrating to Mexico," even as it implicitly accepted the terms on which Hollywood productions constructed a non-specific, and usually unflattering, version of "Mexican-ness." Contreras Torres's films were frequently discussed as a sort of cinematic "revenge" on the United States, which is most evident in the border-crossing narrative of *El hombre sin patria* (*The Man Without a Country*), which recounts the tale of a dissipated young man who immigrates to the United States only to face racism and ridicule.<sup>12</sup> Despite this anti-American gesture, Contreras Torres' films appropriated the conventions of the American western to forge iconic cinematic depictions of the *charro*, as signaled by the frequent comparisons made between him and the stars of American westerns, especially William S. Hart, in journalistic accounts.

Contreras Torres' first production, *El Zarco*, was an adaptation of a well-known novel by Ignacio Altamirano, originally published in serial form in 1869. *El Zarco* is a tale of banditry and overzealous paramilitary repression that would have evoked the contemporary political climate, although it was set during the War of the Reform (1858-1861) that brought Benito Juárez, Mexico's first president of indigenous descent, to power. Contreras Torres played the hero to the titular villain, leader of a dangerous band of *plateados*. His version was only loosely inspired by the novel, and apparently used its plot as a pretext for fight scenes and displays of horsemanship. It thus articulated references to national culture and politics with the dynamic physical choreography of Hollywood westerns, which were frequently referenced in press discourses around the director and star. His follow-up film, *El caporal* (*The Foreman*, 1921) was an adventure melodrama that pitted the hero against a band of cattle thieves. In 1922, he filmed *De raza azteca* (*Of the Aztec Race*) in collaboration with Guillermo Calles, a Mexican actor who had worked with William Duncan in Hollywood. The film recounted the friendship between Contreras Torres' (light-skinned) character and an indigenous man from Xochimilco, who battle bandits in Mexico City and represent "The Charro and the Indian, who are the synthesis of the national soul."<sup>13</sup>

By contrast, García Moreno's *El tren fantasma* and *El puño de hierro* did not extensively draw on the iconographies of national customs to assert a local cinematic modernity. Rather, they self-consciously drew on the conventions of imported serials, capitalizing on Orizaba's long-standing importance in Mexican transportation networks. The state of Veracruz had served as a point of entry to the country since the colonial period; Orizaba fell along the nation's first railroad route, constructed through the region in the 1840s.<sup>14</sup> Produced with the aid of the *Ferrocarril Mexicano* (Mexican Railway Company), *El tren fantasma*'s display of modern transportation technologies and its alternation between stunt sequence and landscape can be attributed with rendering it marketable, both locally and in Mexico City. By contrast, *El puño de hierro*, which graphically addresses the local problem of drug trafficking and addiction, proved more problematic. The film's negative reception and geographically limited circulation (it seems not to have been shown outside the state of Veracruz) can in part be attributed to its dialogue with the conventions of foreign crime narratives. The film's episodic and often confusing narrative structure and its frequent play with disguise recall the films of Louis Feuillade. In the film's most provocative plot point, the virtuous Dr. Ortiz, who campaigns against drug abuse, is ultimately revealed to be the film's villain "The Iron Fist," in an implicit critique of positivist models of social hygiene.

As the status of *El tren fantasma* and *El puño de hierro* as lone exemplars of Mexican fiction features of the twenties indicates, Mexican cinema of the period has a survival rate of only five percent, and is even more sparsely documented than its Brazilian counterpart. Few specialized film magazines were published in Mexico City during the decade, although the practice of film criticism was expanding in newspapers like *Excelsior* and *El Universal* and illustrated magazines like *El Universal Ilustrado* and *Revista de Revistas*.<sup>15</sup> This latter publication included a supplement, the *Magazine Fílmico*, which was first published in 1926.<sup>16</sup> Unlike their counterparts in Rio de Janeiro in the same period, film journalists in Mexico City had little knowledge of the activities of filmmakers outside the capital, and the products of these endeavors have left relatively few traces. Drawing on available press accounts, I situate the divergent cases of productions helmed by Miguel Contreras Torres and Gabriel García Moreno, within a broader panorama of filmmaking and cinema journalism, highlighting the role of these two interconnected cultural forms in re-negotiating notions of national modernity after the active phase of the Revolution had concluded.

This dynamic is evident in a *crónica* by Cube Bonifant, who was a columnist for *El Universal Ilustrado*, a film critic in her own right, and an unwilling collaborator in the production of Noriega Hope's *La gran noticia*. Bonifant describes her journey to the town of Chapala as a dull excursion devoid of the sensational emotions that would have accompanied it just a few years before:

Unfortunately, today the [rail] routes lack the appeal of danger. When there were rebels who assaulted the trains, one traveled with eyes full of disquiet and an almost tremulous excitement.

Someone would say, "Look, we're coming to a dangerous place" and [everyone's] looks were of curiosity and fear...Now, traveling is irritating, above all when one is with people who take life too seriously.<sup>17</sup>





Fig. 4.2: A *crónica* by Bonifant entitled “As the Film Runs.” *El Universal Ilustrado*, April 28, 1921. Hemeroteca Nacional – Mexico.

Bonifant’s self-consciously blasé tone ironically presents the anarchic conflict of the Revolution, with its wholesale disruption of transportation networks and threat to human life, as a pleasurable source of sensational excitement. While the writer proclaims herself even further annoyed by the companions “all around me who do nothing but talk of cinema,” her narrative suggests that film production itself was conceived of as a thrilling undertaking that offered its own sensational emotions. *La gran noticia*’s subtly self-reflexive narrative pitted the protagonist, a vacationing reporter, against a mysterious bandit clad in a red *sarape* (an indigenous garment resembling a poncho or cape). Film historian Aurelio de los Reyes notes the unflattering associations between the villain and the legacy of the Revolution, quoting from a passage in the film’s script that describes him as an “ex-military colonel, *cacique*<sup>18</sup> of the village, and deep down, a man of the noose and knife who had made famous his *nom de guerre*: ‘El Pintado.’”<sup>19</sup> While attempting to unmask the villain with the hope that his capture will provide a sensational news item, the reporter falls in love, and the “big news” of the title turns out to be the announcement of his wedding.<sup>20</sup>

The production of *La gran noticia* in Chapala—a small lakeside town whose backwardness and inconveniences were emphasized in the chronicles of the film’s production published in *El Universal Ilustrado*<sup>21</sup>—places it in the company of other itinerant film productions frequently reported on by the illustrated press. In the case of *El Zarco*, director José Ramos led his actors on a “cinematic odyssey” to Xochimancas in the state of Morelos, setting of Altamirano’s novel,<sup>22</sup> before the group of filmmakers moved on to “invade” the state of Michoacán.<sup>23</sup> The film was described as being “composed almost exclusively of exteriors, [which meant that the cinematographer] Lamadrid did not have to ‘force’ his lens, which accounts for the absolute clarity and perfect relieve of the figures.”<sup>24</sup> Contreras Torres’ *El caporal* was shot in the same state and displayed its well-known lakes. In her review of the film, Cube Bonifant in fact found the scenery to be the film’s sole point of (tenuous) superiority over imported cinema; she notes a viewing companion’s observation that “those backdrops could never have be obtained in the United States.”<sup>25</sup> Other productions whose location shooting was prominently advertised included three films directed by Ernesto Vollrath (who had helmed *La*

*banda del automóvil*); *En la hacienda* (*At the Hacienda*, 1922) and *La parcela* (*The Parcel* [of Land], 1923), and *Alas abiertas* (*With Wings Outspread*, 1922), described as “a film of exteriors, shot in various parts of the Republic and showing sad and bloody episodes of our Revolution,”<sup>26</sup> adapted from a recent novel that capitalized on the contemporary interest in aviation also explored in *Fanny*.

De los Reyes links the production of what he calls “open air” films to a growing interest in elements that “made singular the landscape” of Mexico—“popular types and customs, archeological sites, colonial buildings”—and to the expansion of the illustrated press through the importation of rotogravure presses that allowed the reproduction of abundant photographs in large print runs.<sup>27</sup> He notes that landscape photography depicting far-flung locations and disseminated in illustrated magazines and newspapers served as “complement to intrepid trips in automobiles” and “the increasingly daring aerial ‘raids’ over ever-greater distances” undertaken by Mexican aviators.<sup>28</sup> Esther Gabara argues that “Mexican writers and photographers were fascinated with the idea of being tourists in their own land,” emphasizing that the journalistic and photographic discourses of travel must be analyzed as adjacent to, but distinct from, official cultural nationalism.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, she notes the privileged place of female “tourist-protagonists”—of whom Bonifant would be an example—and their travel narratives in the simultaneously modernist and popular genre of the photo-essay that dominated illustrated magazines.<sup>30</sup>

As Bonifant’s short narrative of the railway journey suggests, on-location shooting was understood within the context of an adventurous breed of tourism reliant on modern transportation technologies. These “open-air” films extend a nationalistic interest in visualizing Mexico’s varied landscapes, even as they constitute a more complex negotiation with the conventions of imported cinema. (This conjunction is exemplified by a bit of trivia: Contreras Torres frequently advertised his use of Emiliano Zapata’s horse in his early films, while dubbing the animal’s replacement “Pinto, in honor of the master;” that is, William Hart.<sup>31</sup>) The physically dynamic adventure narratives reminiscent of American cinema both asserted local cinematic modernity and indirectly grappled with recent (and ongoing) collective experiences of violence.

Mexican adventure films of the twenties tended to be caught in a representational double-bind; the American genre conventions that constituted an inevitable point of reference for film enthusiasts in Mexico were inseparable from racist imagery that, in turn, drew on often biased international press coverage of the Revolution. In order to assert themselves as authentically Mexican and sufficiently modern (that is, topical), adventure films could scarcely avoid referring to the recent conflict altogether. Yet any depictions of violence risked perpetuating associations of the national character with savagery and backwardness. Before a hegemonic iconography of the Mexican Revolution as heroic struggle had fully developed,<sup>32</sup> crime and adventure films “found a way to restage the shock of war”<sup>33</sup> without directly referring to it, displacing the conflict onto popular imported film genres.

A number of anecdotes exemplify this representational balancing act. Like the journalistic embellishments parodied by Noriega Hope, many were likely apocryphal or exaggerated, intended to stimulate the reader’s interest. For example, during the shooting of *El Zarco*, journalists invited to observe the proceedings were surprised by an unannounced burst of “shots, hoofbeats and imprecations.”<sup>34</sup> One of the actresses “took refuge in her rooms, suspecting some Zapatista attack,” before learning that the disruption was merely meant to create the proper atmosphere for a wild pursuit of the villain by the hero, played by Contreras Torres.



Fig. 4.3: Shooting a scene from *El Zarco*.  
*El Universal*, August 30, 1920. Biblioteca Lerdo de Tejada.

Similar anecdotes circulated in newspapers regarding the filming of a combat scene in *Alas abiertas* on the outskirts of Mexico City. One journalist reported:

It was a combat between revolutionaries and federal troops and, in effect, [the filmmakers] obtained from the chief of the battalion a sufficient number to achieve a good cinematic fight. The curious thing was that, a half an hour after the simulation [*simulacro*] began, the soldiers attacked each other with real rage, with a truly bellicose ardor, saying things not fit to be transcribed. Perhaps this is due to the fiery spirit that, fortunately, we Mexicans possess. With this, absolute reality for the scene was achieved, although the services of the Red Cross had to be solicited to tend to five or six wounded [...]<sup>35</sup>

This anecdote dramatized the act of filming violence by suggesting the ease with which it spilled over into “real” physical conflict, thanks to the “fiery” national temperament.

One of the film’s actors, José Gómez, narrated the story to Noriega Hope in very similar terms. He suggests that the injuries are due to the fact that “some of the boys must have put metal bullets instead of wooden ones in their rifles. What can you do! It’s our blood that makes us do these things.”<sup>36</sup> Gómez further observes that the film’s director and cinematographer “must have been delighted, because reality came and entered through their [very] eyes.”<sup>37</sup> The slippage between simulated and “real” violence, enacted by substitution of prop bullets for real ones, is emphasized by the aggressive physicality of vision implied in Gómez’s phrasing. It is implied that merely observing and filming a scene of “real” violence has the potential to materially impact the viewer’s body. The anecdote attests to two interlinked forms of authenticity: it attests both to the “realness” of the physical aggression depicted in the film (which had the unanticipated effect of actual physical injury to the participants), and to an essentialized national temperament characterized by a tendency towards spontaneous conflict.

Such discourses reified Mexican-ness as violence, ironically aligning national productions with the Hollywood “films denigrating to Mexico.”

While a distinctly national problematic seems to be at work in these anecdotes in which simulated violence materialized as actual bodily threat, they were of course familiar from Hollywood discourses on western and serial stars. Jennifer Bean has argued that in emergent Hollywood star discourses, a focus on the dangers faced by the star’s “extraordinary body” displaces the problem of cinematic realism and the threat of technological breakdown so closely linked with film’s ontological claims in the pre-classical era.<sup>38</sup> These discourses were evident in discussions of actors like Fernando Elizondo, a former employee of the National Mexican Railway in the United States,<sup>39</sup> whose daring stunts attracted considerable attention among Mexico City film critics. (Local journalists generally showed particular interest in actors who had worked in Hollywood, even in a modest capacity.) In a column discussing Elizondo’s ability to perform stunts such as “leaping from one [train] car to another as they meet each other rapidly on parallel tracks,” Noriega Hope situates these spectacular feats in the context of American journalism’s sensationalistic strategies. He admits to recurring to the “polychromatic columns of Yankee [newspaper] supplements to [...] find each day a thrilling event to exploit in our papers;” on this particular day, however, Elizondo arrived in his office, serendipitously providing him with material for that day’s article.<sup>40</sup> Noriega Hope thus suggests how cinema played a privileged role in a transnational print culture that emphasized the thrilling qualities of violence and catastrophe, even as he implicitly claimed Elizondo’s feats of physical virtuosity as a point of national pride. He quotes Elizondo’s claim that “I learned all these things in Mexico and there’s nothing to it; many of our unschooled brakemen do them impeccably every day.” Since such dangerous maneuvers were rarely seen in the United States, Elizondo was coincidentally offered a job, a happening so improbable that it inspires Noriega Hope to “hallucinate” that the headline “Strange Story of a Mexican Railway Man who Became a Film Star” has inserted itself into the copy of the *New York World* he was reading when Elizondo entered.<sup>41</sup> Elizondo’s exploits win him a (fantasized) place in an international discourse of sensationalistic news.

Similar discourses of cinematic violence and authenticity were frequently invoked in the context of Mexico’s nascent “stars”; for example, one journalist described Contreras Torres as “a young ‘sportman’ [sic] who will carry out feats in the style of Bill Hart, formidable horseman, ‘desesperado’ in all sorts of sensational acts, [and] willing to risk his skin.”<sup>42</sup> In his comparison of Contreras Torres to Hart, the reviewer (mis)uses an English term evoking skilled athleticism. At the same time, he re-appropriates a Spanish word (*desesperado*, which roughly translates to “desperate man”), which had entered English with the incorrect spelling of “desperado” and crops up frequently in narratives of the American West. This two-way linguistic exchange suggests the hybridity of Contreras Torres’ *charro* persona.

Emphasizing the physical virtuosity that was central to this cinematic comparison, Contreras bombastically declared during the filming of *El Zarco*, “I’m willing to be killed. I want this fight to be real and effective, for blood to flow and injuries to swell up...No tricks or superimpositions. Clean blows!”<sup>43</sup> As in the United States, the promise of “authentic” violence seems to have been a significant factor in adventure melodramas’ popular appeal. Yet in the Mexican context, such productions did not reflect a full-blown industrial modernity. Rather, they were understood to evoke recent national history, whose violence was inevitably invoked, it seems, by cinematic spectacles of violence. In part because of this perceived linkage to the revolution, adventure melodramas were cast as a popular and profitable subject for local filmmaking.



Fig. 4.4: “The end of the fight.” Publicity still for *El Zarco*.  
*El Universal Ilustrado*, September 9, 1920. Hemeroteca Nacional – Mexico.

Articles, interviews and reviews with an openly promotional tone consistently framed locally produced adventure films, and Contreras Torres’ work in particular, as superior local substitutes for American westerns. Following the premiere of *El Zarco*, one reviewer wrote, “From now on, we will have no interest in the dramas of the ‘Far West’ [in English in original], in which William Hart and William Farnum, those two cowboy artists who awaken with their skill and energy such sympathy and admiration in the affable audiences of North America, who see in them a superior incarnation of their ethnic qualities: action, force, daring.”<sup>44</sup> If westerns affirmed American audiences’ sense of their own national vitality, Mexican adventure films could provide offer similar validation to local spectators.

Another reviewer predicted success for Contreras Torres in gendered terms, suggesting that the “fervent female admirers of [Antonio] Moreno, Hart, Polo and Mix – the devotees of [physical] force – will think that we, without being masters of cinematography, possess *men* who are ignorant of the existence of rice powder...” (emphasis in original).<sup>45</sup> If Mexican productions could not boast the technical fluidity of American adventure films, they could nevertheless showcase a national masculinity that was defined precisely in opposition to an effeminate concern with appearance and artifice. The reference to rice powder evokes the figure of the *fifi*, or modern dandy, whose dedication to appearance was read as a sign of overinvestment in a consumption-driven, implicitly Americanized mode of masculinity, popularized locally by Hollywood films.<sup>46</sup> Contreras Torres’ films are implied to be promising representations of dynamic Mexican masculinity that rivaled American adventure film.

Not surprisingly, Contreras Torres himself presented his films as nationalistic attempts to consolidate film production in Mexico and enable its circulation abroad:

Our films, in order to be Mexican, in order to have a market all over the world, must speak to us of our land. I only make things of the people, without showing

‘fox-trots’ or grand aristocratic ballrooms. For me, a scene in the country – in our country – is worth more than any city scene, with the stupidly European or Yankee life we lead here [in Mexico City]. Don’t you think that the salvation of cinema in Mexico is precisely...Mexico? This is my belief – I who would give my life for a national film.<sup>47</sup>

Contreras Torres attempts to clearly distinguish his productions from the “Europeanized” productions that had preceded it, characterizing urban life as excessively cosmopolitan and rural space as the source of the “authentically” Mexican.

However, his films’ emphasis on violence and physical struggle was seen as potentially exacerbating the damage to Mexico’s image wrought by Hollywood films. Epifanio Soto, a critic for the New York-based publication *Cine Mundial*, reviewed Contreras Torres’ *De raza azteca* harshly for its use of conventions that evoked the American serial and western:

Miguel Contreras Torres has just premiered ‘De raza azteca,’ his third production, which he assures [us] is of nationalist tendencies, although we find these only in the protagonist’s cowboy [*charro*] hat. Because the spectator stumbles on a gang of bandits, in the clothing of Texan cowboys, which operates in the vicinity of Chapultepec; witnesses kidnappings and crimes in the most central avenues of the city and has the general impression that, in all the places the plot takes him to, there are no decent people other than the hero and his sidekick.

And this leads him to be ignorant of the reality of this poor country that seeks to defend itself, confirming, rather than destroying, the ideas planted by some Yankee film people, [who are either] ignorant or malicious.

Beyond this defect, the plot is truly absurd, in the vein of the series of films [starring] William Duncan.<sup>48</sup>

Beyond his objection to the mixed iconographies of the film, which populated well-known Mexico City sites with bandits dressed in costumes of a recognizably American stamp, Soto complains that Contreras Torres fails to manifest “a single feat of horsemanship or athleticism worthy of being photographed.” In his opinion, the film perpetuated negative representations of Mexicans and the lack of verisimilitude that characterized Hollywood adventure melodramas, without managing to duplicate their pleasurable kineticism. Attempting to incorporate American adventure melodramas into “nationalist” narratives could lead to juxtapositions that defied verisimilitude, even as they threatened to promulgate the very Hollywood influences they ostensibly combated.

Regionally produced films made in the twenties that drew on the thrilling and mysterious narrative tropes of the serial film would have similarly ambivalent effects. Gabriel García Moreno’s *El tren fantasma* and *El puño de hierro* simultaneously showcased cinematic and transportation technologies, but they also evoked the dark underside of modernization in a potentially problematic fashion. Having traced the uneasy negotiation between nationalist iconographies, revolutionary history and Hollywood adventure film in Mexico City-based “open air” productions, I turn to the ambivalent assertion of regional modernity in the films of Gabriel García Moreno.

## “Cine en provincia”: The Adventure Films of Gabriel García Moreno

As in the case of Brazil, discussed in the following chapter, as well as other Latin American nations like Colombia and Venezuela, a considerable percentage of the country's film production during the silent era was comprised of regional productions. Many of these efforts were initiated by local film enthusiasts, as in the Brazilian case. However, the two best-known examples of this phenomenon, *El tren fantasma* and *El puño de hierro*, were not completely homegrown. Reversing the dominant migratory trend of the period, in which increasing numbers of rural residents moved to the capital,<sup>49</sup> Gabriel García Moreno, a lifelong resident of greater Mexico City, moved to the city of Orizaba in the state of Veracruz with the express purpose of establishing a film studio. García Moreno had previously experimented with feature filmmaking, shooting the adventure film *El buitro* (*The Vulture*) in Mexico City in 1926.<sup>50</sup> The film is now lost, but a number of sequences depicting the misdeeds of masked bandits were incorporated in *El puño de hierro*. García Moreno employed Mexico City actors (including Manuel de los Ríos, who had played one of the bandits in Enrique Rosas' *El automóvil gris*), in addition to local talent such as Lupe Bonilla, winner of a contest sponsored by a newspaper in the city of Veracruz to elect the “Estrella Veracruzana” (“Starlet of Veracruz”).<sup>51</sup> This initiative was apparently modeled on contests organized by Mexico City newspapers in the early twenties.<sup>52</sup> García Moreno's financing came principally from “representatives of the local bourgeoisie – businessmen, lawyers, bankers, high-ranking employees of the Moctezuma Beer Factory or of oil companies,”<sup>53</sup> and perhaps from the general public as well, who were offered the opportunity to purchase shares in the production.<sup>54</sup>

As the only Mexican fiction features from the 1920s to survive to the present day (they were conserved by one of García Moreno's business partners), the recently restored *El tren fantasma* and *El puño de hierro* hold a privileged place in contemporary discussions of Mexican silent film. However, as David M. J. Wood has pointed out, this preservation itself has complicated the contemporary scholar's relationship to the filmic texts. Wood suggests that Esperanza Vázquez's restorations, especially of *El tren fantasma*, whose footage was preserved entirely out of order, may unwittingly emphasize the film's affinities to North American cinema by incorporating suspenseful parallel editing and other “classical” strategies.<sup>55</sup> In addition, some of the original intertitles in *El puño de hierro*, and all of those in *El tren fantasma*, have been lost and were replaced with text drawn from the shooting scripts. This choice greatly facilitates narrative clarity, but obscures possible alterations to the narrative made later in the production process.

Despite these ambiguities regarding the two films' style and structure, their narratives and iconographies show a clear dialogue with imported crime and adventure films, considered outdated by Mexico City critics by the time of the film's production. As early as 1921, Marco Aurelio Galindo, a columnist for *El Universal Ilustrado*, noted in the public “a decidedly bad impression of detective plots, despite the fact that these are the [genre] most filled with cinematic visuality;” he suggests that the uniquely photogenic quality of action sequences led to over-exploitation of the genre, resulting in repetitive narratives.<sup>56</sup> A Mexican journalist writing in *Cine Mundial* in 1928 mocked the two genres successively, suggesting that both were attributable to American cinema's formulaic, profit-oriented mode of production:

Who enjoys the truculence of the uncultured, savage West? Let's get rid of serials featuring massive hats, huge pistols, spurs and chaps, [with characters]

who shoot left and right, ride wild broncos, carry damsels on their backs like someone holding a sack of potatoes and after punching out the villain, inevitably marry the girl.

And does anyone get pleasure out of those interminable sequences whose continuation next week is greeted with a disconsolate “Ah!” from the little ones! Enough of those episodes in which the protagonists always end up on the verge of death or in such a precarious situation that no one knows how they’ll get out of the predicament until a *mysterious character* appears to resolve the conflict through any means necessary, and let’s move forward.<sup>57</sup>

García Moreno’s films showcase these genre conventions, which had been judged repetitive and predictable, if uniquely cinematic, in their emphasis on physical dynamism. In *El puño de hierro*, the dialogue with imported crime genre conventions takes on a self-reflexive dimension; the film features a character named Juanito, a young boy addicted to Nick Carter stories who “thinks himself a real detective,” according to an intertitle. *El tren fantasma*, whose action turns on a romantic rivalry between the bandit Paco Mendoza and Adolfo, a city boy dispatched to Orizaba to investigate illicit activities on the railroad, plays the visual codes of the genre for thrills rather than comedy. The two characters compete for the affections of Elena, daughter of the local stationmaster, who is presented not as a traditional provincial maiden, but rather as a *chica moderna* / modern girl or “*pelona*” / flapper, and sporting the closely cropped hair and streamlined clothing.<sup>58</sup> The romantic rivalry between Paco and Adolfo neatly dovetails with their position on opposing sides of the law. In the film’s second sequence Paco, alias “The Ruby”, commits robberies dressed in a black leather mask and bodysuit that recalls the masked villains of serials like *Fantômas* and *Les vampires*, among many others; he then rappels down the side of the factory to escape, a stunt emphasizing the verticality so often capitalized on in serial films. Just seconds later, one of his accomplices, dressed in a wide-brimmed sombrero with a pointed peak, lassoes a factory guard as he fires at the escaping robbers, inserting iconically local attire into an action sequence which drew on the serial and the Western.



Fig. 4.5: A dance competition mixes rustic and urban iconographies. Video still from *El tren fantasma*.



Beyond the role of local costumes, in *El tren fantasma*, as in *El automóvil gris*, “characteristic” customs make a brief appearance. In the sequence in which the spectator is introduced to the bandits (who, apart from the sharply dressed Paco, primarily wear rustic clothing), an impromptu dance competition breaks out. One dances a sensual rumba, while another demonstrates fast-paced *jarabe* steps, associated respectively with Cuba and the state of Veracruz; the rivalry ends in bullets and blows. A bullfight plays a more substantial role in the plot: when Paco Mendoza received an invitation to take the place of a professional matador, he seizes it in order to impress the heroine Elena.

Beyond this combination of *costumbrista* touches with serial and western iconographies, the manner in which these genres articulate local landscapes with narrative action prove to be productive models for García Moreno’s films. Bandits lurk in ruined buildings and caves that exploit verticality; robbers and their pursuers scale walls and plunge enemies into by means of a hidden trapdoor; chase sequences on foot and on horseback, filmed in extreme long shot, emphasize the undeveloped expanses of countryside around Orizaba, while the varied “phantom ride” sequences of *El tren fantasma* simultaneously showcase the fast-moving train and the film camera, a conjunction of technologies that both documents and dynamizes the local landscape. His actors performed their own stunts - such as Carlos Villatoro’s leap to a moving train from horseback in *El tren fantasma*<sup>59</sup> - enacting the discourse of physical authenticity associated with both imported and domestically produced adventure film.

Previous scholarship on *El puño de hierro* and *El tren fantasma*, which is scant, has focused on the ideological meanings attached to this display of modern transportation technology. The railroad played a pivotal yet highly ambivalent role in Mexico’s modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The construction of rail lines with foreign capital exemplified the economic policies of Porfirio Díaz’s regime; as Lynne Kirby writes, “The development of a railroad system in Mexico between 1876 and 1910 was utterly dependent on foreign investment, primarily American, and oriented the national economy toward export production and the international economy dominated by Western nations (many lines ran into Mexico directly from the United States via railway concessions).”<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the economic integration of agricultural hinterlands made possible by the railroad facilitated the private purchase of communal land, one of the main factors that fueled poverty and social unrest among rural populations, and thus a catalyst for the Revolution. The railroad, and its sabotage, would in turn become a pivotal aspect of military strategy during the conflict. While Díaz’s influential finance minister José Limantour initiated the nationalization of the railroads in 1907, the process unfolded at a glacial pace, and negotiations between the post-Revolutionary governments of Álvaro Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles with foreign powers in 1923 and 1924 assured the eventual re-privatization of the transportation network.<sup>61</sup> The discourse of modernity surrounding the railroad was itself a conflictual one, an ambivalence that is echoed in the frequent use of the transportation network for nefarious purposes in the film.

William Drew and Esperanza Vázquez Bernal argue that *El tren fantasma*’s “images of the modern wonder of electric railways” – constructed only five years before – “unmistakably suggested the triumph of 20<sup>th</sup> century progress in an emerging Mexico.”<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, evoking the recent pacification of the country, “the state-owned railroad in the film triumphs over the lawless bandits attempting to thwart its spread into the countryside.”<sup>63</sup> While the film certainly has a triumphalist tone (as Drew and Vázquez Bernal point out, its final image is of a fluttering Mexican flag), I argue that rather than establishing an opposition between technological modernity and banditry, *El tren fantasma* in fact explores “the ways in which interconnecting

lines of high-tech modern traffic might be exploited to nefarious and tragic ends.”<sup>64</sup> While the dynamic images of the steam-powered and electric locomotives in *El tren fantasma* constitute concrete evidence of Orizaba’s integration into expanding national transportation networks, the bandits’ appropriate transportation technology for their own purposes also function as an ambivalent sign of cinematic modernity.

At no point in *El tren fantasma* do the bandits demonstrably impede the spread of the railway; rather, their various misdeeds, registered by the company authorities as the series of “irregularities” that the hero Adolfo is dispatched from the city to investigate, are articulated with its very workings. On one hand, criminal activities indirectly hamper the efficiency of the train’s operation; for example, early in the film, one of the bandits arrives late to his job as a railway operator after participating in a robbery of the Moctezuma beer factory, itself a reference to local industry. On the other hand, and perhaps more troublingly, the bandits consistently appropriate the train in order to carry out their illegal activities, most strikingly in the two kidnappings of the heroine Elena. Only at the end of the film do the bandits recur to direct sabotage, attempting to blow up a passenger train to revenge themselves on their estranged leader Paco (it is not entirely clear why the train is targeted, perhaps in order to murder Elena, who is en route to her honeymoon with Adolfo).

The integration of criminal activities and rail traffic in *El tren fantasma* complicates the opposition that Drew and Vázquez Bernal’s draw between the two films. They write, “Whereas *El tren fantasma* dramatized the triumph of modern progress and civilization, *El puño de hierro* showed [...] the dark underside of Mexican society in which urbanization spread the noxious stimulants of vice, and vice itself often wore a mask of respectability.”<sup>65</sup> *El puño de hierro* certainly contains much more graphic and potentially disturbing imagery than *El tren fantasma*; it includes frequent close-ups of drug injections and imagery evoking bestiality (in an early scene, the young drug addict Carlos caresses a donkey, mistaking it for his girlfriend Laura) and other “deviant” sexual practices (in a scene set in the drug den, a group of young men caresses a mature man dressed only in a diaper). Furthermore, the film more directly subverts nationalistic discourses of progress through the double life of anti-drug campaigner Dr. Ortiz, who is secretly El Tieso, the owner of the drug den.

The film’s ambivalent positioning in relation to scientific discourses of national progress is exemplified by the inclusion of graphic documentary images in a medico-scientific register, which had been filmed by García Moreno in Mexico City.<sup>66</sup> Emphasizing the ambivalent nature of narcotics as both modern malady and advanced medical tool, a sequence demonstrates their use in surgical procedures, including a close-up of a scalpel making an incision in a patient’s abdomen.<sup>67</sup> Evoking a key concern of positivist criminology<sup>68</sup> – the effects of drugs and alcohol as an agent of degeneration both in the individual and in future generations, a sequence of images of physically deformed children, identified in an intertitle as the offspring of addicts, are subsequently shown. Beyond soliciting empathy or disgust from the spectator, the documentary images’ integration into the narrative register a profound ambivalence regarding the authoritative scientific discourse in whose service they are mobilized. Narcotics are first presented aligned with teleological notions of progress, enabled by medical treatment and improved mechanisms of social control. Yet at the same time, the sequence suggests the impossibility of untangling the risks and benefits of modernized medical treatment. Compounding the irony, at the end of the film Ortiz/El Tieso is revealed to suffer from a physical deformity himself: one of his hands is shown as paralyzed in a rigid posture, a feature reminiscent of that suffered by the “Clutching Hand,” villain of *The Exploits of Elaine*. This revelation at once explains his nickname (“The

Rigid One”) and sheds light on the film’s title, itself reminiscent of the 1916 Pathé serial *The Iron Claw*. Physical and moral deformity are shown as manifest in the very authority charged with eliminating them.

While *El tren fantasma* does not link scientific authority and criminality so closely, its plot also turns on disguise and deception, most strikingly in a simulated rescue scene in which Paco Mendoza, having ordered Elena’s kidnapping, pretends to free her from the group of bandits who are in fact his accomplices. I argue that both *El tren fantasma* and *El puño de hierro* explore the negative potential of accelerated circulation in modernity, and that their divergent reception and distribution histories can be attributed to the specific ways in which they appropriated the conventions of imported adventure melodrama. The narrative organization of *El tren fantasma* more closely resembles the structure of the romantic melodrama, whose dominance was uncontested by the time of the film’s production in 1927, while *El puño de hierro* shows more affinities to the absurdities and logical inconsistencies associated with (outdated) serial narrative.

In *El tren fantasma*, the titular vehicle is consistently linked with the making and unmaking of the romantic dyad, a dynamic has been described by Lynne Kirby as “coupling.” Linking technological (and narrative) machinery with heterosexual desire, Kirby writes, “The train is a social force that puts bodies in relation to each other by chance and joins them together, even if by accident. The train, as such, offers itself as a social ground of integration, a mobile support of attraction, an intermediary term in the engendering and channeling of desire.”<sup>69</sup> The relatively closed world of Orizaba allows for few chance encounters: the three members of the love triangle meet for the first time when Adolfo disembarks in the first sequence of the film. The railroad’s relationship to regional progress is also evoked in a scene in which Elena rebuffs Adolfo following Paco’s injury during a bullfight, played against the backdrop of a stone monument to the completion of the railway in 1923. Yet the train literally becomes the vehicle of multiple kidnappings and rescues. While raising the specter of technology’s potential to serve nefarious ends, the bandits’ activities allow the performance of physical virtuosity heroism (whether feigned, as in Paco’s rescue of Elena after a kidnapping he has himself orchestrated, or true, in the case of Paco’s decision to save the train from sabotage by his own former partners in crime).



Fig. 4.6: Paco and Elena converse near a monument to the electric railway’s completion; Veracruz’s mountains serve as backdrop. Video still, *El tren fantasma*.

In contrast to the relatively conventional narrative trajectory of *El tren fantasma*, the characters and narrative action of *El puño de hierro* are much closer to the complex and often incoherent plots of the episodic serial, involving intersecting plotlines, surprising revelations, and unexpected acts of violence. Early in the film, the hero and heroine (the drug addict Carlos and his concerned girlfriend Laura) cross paths with the majority of the film's other characters at a public anti-drug address given by Dr. Ortiz. The contingent encounters and physical contact attendant on the assembly of a crowd in public space are exemplified by the meeting of, and romantic liaison between, Antonio, who is secretly the bandit *El Murciélago* ("The Bat") and Esther, employee of El Tieso (and, it is implied, a prostitute), neither of whom is aware of the other's occupation before they cross paths in the drug den.



Figs. 4.7 and 4.8: Manuel de los Ríos as Dr. Ortiz, publicly showing an example of "degeneration" in his public anti-drug discourse, and as El Tieso in the drug den. Video stills, *El puño de hierro*.

The potential challenges that such plot structures posed for comprehension of the film are signaled by the critical reaction to the film in the port of Veracruz, where it premiered. After giving mixed praise to the film's cinematography and actors, a reviewer in the newspaper *El Dictámen* judged its plot to be:

Completely deficient. Lacking unity and connection, of very slow and confusing development, at times difficult to understand [...] It does not offer thesis nor action, and limits itself to the presentation of scenes, some very fine, which do not build to a final moral or a defined and solid objective. It is the weakness and total lack of interest of the plot that compromises the success of this production, which boasts quite accomplished artists, beautiful scenes, very intense sequences and an ensemble that is truly heartening for the national [cinematic] art, all of which loses its luster due to the lack of action, dynamism and pleasing unity in the overall work.<sup>70</sup>

While the tediousness of the film's development, in this reviewer's opinion, certainly sets it apart from serial films that trade on fast-and-furious thrills, the ostensible lack of narrative unity and clarity and the episodic structure recall the critical excoriations to which the serial was frequently subjected. Significantly, the reviewer links the lack of coherent narrative effect to the absence of an effective moral, a failure to recuperate the film's shocking scenes of violence, sexual desire

and drug abuse into a clear lesson, that is itself cast as a hindrance to ambitions for “national” film production.

If in *El puño de hierro*, chance encounters and secret identities triumph over linear causality, matters are complicated further by the fact that in the film’s final sequences, nearly the entire narrative is revealed to have been a drug-induced hallucination suffered by Carlos the very first time he indulges in narcotics, shown in the film’s first scene. (By contrast, in *El tren fantasma*, the one concrete threat to the integrity of the rail network – the explosive planted by Paco Mendoza’s disgruntled accomplices – both morally salvages, and physically eliminates, Mendoza, restoring “order” to the world of the film far more definitively.) According to a surviving synopsis of the film, Carlos “encounters all the characters that took part in his dream safe and sound,” including Esther and Antonio, who are portrayed frolicking on a local beach. While this sequence partially recuperates the disturbing effects of the previous sequences, it also implicitly superimposes the film’s nightmare vision onto an idealized public space.

Despite the film’s divergences in terms of plot structure, they manifest a strikingly similar treatment of local spaces and landscapes. While research suggests that García Moreno possessed an unusual amount of technical knowledge,<sup>71</sup> his two features in Orizaba conformed to the dominant tendency of regional production in both Mexico and Brazil in that they contain very few interior scenes. These are invariably spaces defined by criminal behavior and entrapment. In *El tren fantasma*, the only indoor sequences unfold in a shack where Elena and later Adolfo are imprisoned by the bandits; similarly, most of *El puño de hierro*’s interior scenes take place in the drug den, although there is also a brief sequence in Dr. Ortiz’s home, where Laura goes to ask for help in combating Carlos’s drug addiction. Instead, the majority of both films’ dialogue scenes unfold in public spaces that function as points of encounter. The locations chosen—train stations, gardens, and public plazas (a prominent feature of pre-modern urban planning in Spanish America)<sup>72</sup>—often allow the camera to capture the movement of pedestrians and crowds. Scenes that take place at the train station and during the bullfight (which incorporates actuality images of local matador Juan Silveti) extensively incorporate passersby.<sup>73</sup> While the principal characters in both the films are light-skinned with European features, in keeping with the “creole” racial ideal of the period,<sup>74</sup> unpaid extras with visible indigenous heritage and rustic clothing who often glance sideways into the camera are frequently captured in the frame, highlighting the demographic fiction that constructs the ideal Mexican actor as light-skinned and dark-haired.

At the same time, the films’ emphasis on public places as spaces of transit whose “reality” exceeds the (racial) fiction of their narratives, is tempered by the careful incorporation of visual elements in a picturesque register. The actors are often framed against faintly visible ridgelines, a subtle reminder of Veracruz’s mountainous terrain. Likewise, local vegetation is frequently used as a compositional element; in *El tren fantasma* in a scene in which the engine runs out of control, spiky maguey plants, which would be used to such great effect in Eisenstein’s unfinished *Que Viva México!*, seem to race past the camera, reminding the spectator of the specificity of the location even at a moment of considerable suspense.

While the train accomplishes a fluid integration of action and space in *El tren fantasma*, in *El puño de hierro*, an incongruous logic permeates the editing and the spatial relationships it establishes. For example, the drug den, initially shown only from the inside, seems to belong unambiguously to the urban *bas fonds*. Only late in the film, through a series of point-of-view shots from the perspective of the young amateur detective Juanito and his adult sidekick Perico, does the spectator learn that the drug den is actually situated in a cave, isolated in a large tract of

open field. When the two spaces are belatedly put in relation with each other, the conventional logic of the point-of-view shot threatens to break down in the face of a cinematic iconography visibly “out of place”<sup>75</sup> in Orizaba’s undeveloped landscape. While the eclectically decorated drug den seems to declare itself the stuff of cinematic fancy, the surprising way it is located in diegetic space speaks to the unexpected profile of modernization on the periphery (not only drug dens without slums, but filmmaking without urban infrastructure).

By contrast, in *El tren fantasma* modernity is displayed by means of a smoother integration of the cinematic gaze and the landscape, perhaps another factor that led to a more positive reception by the public. One notice published in Mexico City (where the film premiered simultaneously in ten cinemas)<sup>76</sup> observes that “*El tren fantasma* has a sensational plot, and one can see in all of its scenes the tropical setting, which take advantage of the beautiful landscapes that surround the cheerful Pluviosilla [a nickname for Orizaba] inspiration of writers and now filmmakers [...]”<sup>77</sup> While the notice’s tone seems suspiciously promotional, suggesting it was written by someone involved in the film’s production, it indicates that the joint appeal of thrilling events and local landscapes was considered a powerful selling point. Offering both local and Mexico City audiences images of a landscape exemplifying national notions of the picturesque, *El tren fantasma* rendered visible the local negotiation of modern technology, converting modernization into spectacular entertainment.

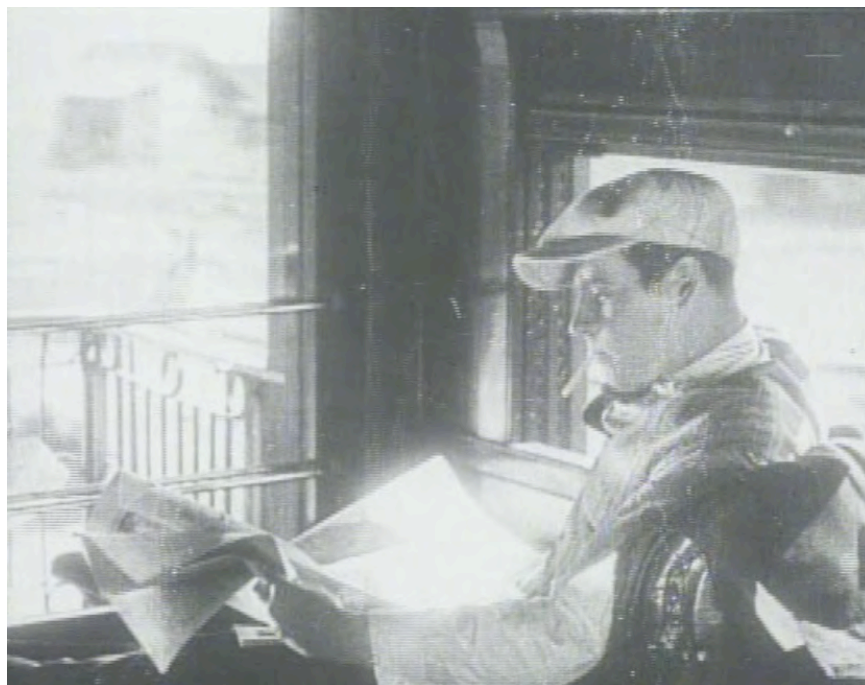


Fig.4.9: The newspaper and the train, icons of modernity in transit. Video still, *El tren fantasma*.

The train serves as visual organizing device for the landscape from the film’s very first sequences; the opening shots of the film frame Adolfo, en route to Orizaba to shed light on the activities of the bandits led by Paco Mendoza, in medium close-up against a blurred view of the passing landscape. Clad in a jaunty cap, Adolfo reads the Veracruz newspaper *El Dictámen* and lights a cigarette, proceeding out to the observation deck at the rear of the train. His profile frames the blurred view, integrating the “phantom ride” with the close-up and prefiguring the film’s integration of suspenseful narrative with the thrills of technology. This sequence

exemplifies the “panoramic perception” elaborated by Wolfgang Schivelbusch in the context of railway travel, a viewing experience defined by speed and by a consciousness of technological mediation, signaled by the presence of objects such as telegraph poles and wires, and here recorded by the cinematic apparatus.<sup>78</sup> Adolfo acts as a surrogate for the spectator, and through this identificatory device, local and regional audiences were encouraged to turn a touristic gaze on a familiar landscape, a discursive strategy that would be used to market the film in Mexico City.

The following scene shows the arrival of the locomotive in the town, presented in a diagonal framing that almost exactly duplicates the Lumière brothers’ “Arrival of a Train at Ciotat,” although the screen direction is reversed.<sup>79</sup> The shot captures a number of passengers disembarking and milling on the platforms, before a cut to a medium shot in which Adolfo is greeted by the stationmaster and Elena. The visual logic of the actuality and the narrative are thus maintained curiously separate, suggesting an impulse to document the local. Paulo Carneiro da Cunha Filho has commented in the context of silent cinema in Recife, Brazil, that “on the periphery of capitalism, cinema took almost thirty years to learn to film a train arriving at a station.”<sup>80</sup> Cunha’s comment suggests the way in which regional productions inscribed temporal delay and backwardness, even as they showcased the modernity of local transportation infrastructure.

The extended use of “phantom ride” sequences in the film, which are partially but not seamlessly integrated into the narrative, exemplifies this dynamic. After the scene following Adolfo’s arrival, which shows the aforementioned robbery of the Moctezuma factory, the action doubles back to the railway yard where Paco Mendoza’s accomplice Bocachula has arrived late for work. Adolfo appears flirting with Elena at the rear of the train, which is shown in long shot lurching into motion. After Adolfo discusses his mission with the stationmaster, the action moves to a number of narratively unmotivated “phantom ride” shots taken from a moving locomotive. The first shot, filmed at a spot several cars back from the locomotive, captures the length of the train as it goes around a curve, at once accommodating itself to the topography and slicing through it.<sup>81</sup> In the next shot, a fixed camera captures the oncoming train, and in the following, another traveling shot taken from the train itself, the vehicle is shown plunging into a tunnel.

Images that more strongly evoke the visual conventions of American adventure melodrama appear later in the film, by which time the train has become a key agent of the narrative conflict. After the bullfight scene, Adolfo is bidding Elena and her father goodbye in the railyard when bandits spring out of the train, which dominates the frame while the struggle is shown in extreme long shot. Adolfo manages to jump on board the moving locomotive, where he fights with one of Paco Mendoza’s accomplices while clinging to a railing at the front of the train, in a number of long shots apparently filmed from another moving vehicle, and a few seconds later, at a reverse angle, shot from onboard the train itself. Far from displaying dramatic scenery, a number of slightly blurred landscape shots show a number of humble shacks in cultivated fields. Adolfo’s adversary eventually manages to push him to the ground; proceeding back to the railyard, he manages to save Elena’s father, who has collapsed on the tracks, from an oncoming engine in the nick of time (Fig. 4.1).

The film’s evocation of transportation technology’s destructive potential intensifies after the false rescue of Elena, suggesting ever-increasing stakes regarding the possibility for catastrophe. After Adolfo falls into the clutches of the bandits, Paco coerces Elena into running away with him and then loses control of the train (this is signaled by a shot in which quick

camera movements loosely follow the line of the tracks, embodying a point of view that has literally run off the rails). Paco jumps from the rear and tries to convince Elena to follow, but she balks. Meanwhile, Adolfo escapes with the help of Paco's jealous girlfriend Carmela and pursues the train on horseback, managing to jump aboard and save Elena before a catastrophic explosion, shot using a miniature. A lengthy sequence of the film is missing at this juncture, making relations of causality difficult to follow. According to intertitles drawn from the script, Paco thinks Elena is dead, falls into a depression and quarrels with his accomplices, who plot the aforementioned sabotage of the train on which Adolfo and Elena are riding. Paco Mendoza struggles with one of the saboteurs, saving the train but losing his life in the process.

*El tren fantasma* enjoyed an enthusiastic reception when it was shown at the Teatro Variedades in Veracruz; a reviewer reported that, despite an early arrival at the theater, his "efforts to enter easily were frustrated by the quantity of people who invaded the lobby door." Amid the complaints and excited chatter of the crowd, the reviewer managed to find a seat and waited along with the rest of the spectators while "they showed an art film, which everyone watched with little interest, wanting above all to see *El tren fantasma*. Intermission comes. Finally the lights go down again and EL TREN FANTASMA appears. Applause and exclamations break out on the spot." Entirely omitting the experience of viewing the film itself, the reviewer rushes to assure the reader that "everyone left satisfied, having appreciated the film; we sincerely declare that it is a good production, where the efforts of a group of Orizaba business have been made manifest [...] we do not doubt that in short time, [the Centro Cultural Cinematográfica] will present us with films worthy of being shown all over the world." The journalist added, "the whole state of Veracruz should see [*El tren fantasma*], as should every good Mexican who can appreciate [a good] effort."<sup>82</sup> This omission of any discussion of the film itself, while frustrating to the historian, perhaps signals that by presenting *El tren fantasma* as a worthy effort, the journalist was attempting to elide its shortcomings as a cultural product. Yet the emphasis on the anticipation, irritation, applause, and (ostensible) satisfaction of audiences anxious to view a film produced in a nearby city suggests that this mode of consumption was itself a powerful means of experiencing a developing local modernity.

Regional production and the practice of location shooting in Mexico in the 1920s configured the "adventure" of filmmaking in a period of economic reconstruction and the consolidation of discourses of national identity in a variety of ways. In the case of the films of Miguel Contreras Torres and other "open air" productions like *Alas abiertas* and *En la hacienda*, national legends, rural landscapes, and "authentic" customs were imagined through the dynamic choreography and star personae capitalized on by American westerns to mutually reinforce film production and national identity. Not bound by the same market pressures or journalistic scrutiny, *El tren fantasma* and *El puño de hierro* drew more heavily on the serial genres, crafting speculative fables of local modernization that registered its geographic and social particularities and insisted on modernity's complicity with violence, disaster, and social dissolution. Taking divergent approaches to post-Revolutionary uncertainties, these regional productions of the 1920s forged viscerally thrilling, if suggestively incomplete, visions of local modernities.



## CHAPTER 5

### Serials, Westerns and Cine-Romances: Adventure Melodrama in Regional Films and Cinema Magazines in 1920s Brazil



Fig. 5.1: A publicity still from *Entre as montanhas de Minas* (*Between the Mountains of Minas*, 1928).  
Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro.

Throughout the 1920s, in cities and towns across Brazil, from Porto Alegre in the far south, to Recife in the northeast, in Campinas near São Paulo and in several cities and towns in the neighboring state of Minas Gerais, groups of semi-amateur filmmakers undertook a utopian task. They sought active participation in the technological modernity of the cinema by producing and exhibiting feature-length films. In some cases, they reaped significant profits locally before obstacles to national distribution and other difficulties bankrupted their production companies. Walter Benjamin famously declared in 1936 that “Any man today can lay claim to being filmed;”<sup>1</sup> the efforts of regional filmmakers in Brazil staked this claim to produce and appear in mechanically reproduced images, in spite of their location in a nation where full-fledged industrial modernity was a cherished but still elusive ambition, and furthermore, outside the country’s most rapidly growing urban centers. As Paulo Carneiro da Cunha Filho has argued in the case of film production in Recife, the regional filmmakers struggled to become “subject[s] of the gaze on the periphery of capitalism.”<sup>2</sup>

The film enthusiasts who struggled to assume this subjecthood of the cinematic gaze were for the most part small-time entrepreneurs, engineers, inventors, and other members of the petit bourgeois, who forged alliances with local elites and capitalists in order to finance and film their projects. Operating under extreme economic and technical limitations, these film enthusiasts managed to acquire camera equipment (often dating from the previous decade or intended for home use) and to overcome logistical obstacles from the scarcity of virgin negative to the difficulty of lighting sets and developing and printing film. The regional film producers collectively outstripped the output of producers in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, but their business model proved highly precarious. As one production company in a particular location went bankrupt, another would often emerge, purchasing equipment accumulated in the failed endeavor and capitalizing on the modest stardom of local actors who had appeared in previous films. Yet in most cities and towns, film production ceased altogether within a few years. The discontinuous character of this filmmaking activity is implicit in the term used to describe it in Brazilian film scholarship – “ciclos regionais” or “regional cycles,” which evokes the “boom and bust” cycles of export commodity production in Brazil.<sup>3</sup>

The primary engine of economic growth in the period—coffee production—fostered growing disparities between rural and urban spaces, as well as between geographic regions. Processes of industrialization and urbanization, hailed as forces for national progress, had also led to an increasing polarization between the wealthy south and the impoverished north whose commodities—rubber in the Amazon, sugar in the coastal northeast—were not subject to the protectionist measures accorded to the coffee plantations of the southeast. As Marly Rodrigues observes, “the expansion of capitalism in Brazil...the construction of railroads, the opening of new areas of coffee cultivation, concentration of labor power, the growth of electrical potential, of the industrial sector and of cities, sealed the distinction between the south and the other regions of the country.”<sup>4</sup> While the size and prosperity of the cities and towns where regional films were produced varied greatly, in many cases the technological modernity epitomized by film production was mobilized against a sense of economic and social decadence. The sense of malaise provoked by a countryside in premature decline, where growth had stagnated before modernization could definitively arrive, is explored in writer Monteiro Lobato’s 1921 story collection *Cidades mortas* (*Dead Towns*), which compares the historical decadence of the Northeast to the decreasing productivity of coffee plantations in the state of São Paulo due to the depletion of the soil. “Progress in Brazil,” he writes, “is nomadic and subject to sudden attacks of paralysis.”<sup>5</sup> Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes evokes a similar dynamic in his discussion of the

films of Humberto Mauro, produced in a region of Minas Gerais that had seen a sharp decline in its prosperity as its soil was progressively exhausted by coffee cultivation.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Carneiro da Cunha Filho has argued that films produced in Recife manifest a profound “melancholia” associated with the failure of the once-wealthy capital to effectively modernize.<sup>7</sup>

Responding to this sense of delayed and interrupted modernity, regional filmmakers refashioned an index of local “backwardness” - a temporal lag in film distribution - into a visible sign of local “progress”: thrilling films that showcased technological virtuosity on the level of plot and cinematic technique. Regional films show a persistent fascination with imported serials and westerns, genres that were increasingly confined to second-run neighborhood theaters and far-flung cities and towns that might receive films several months, or even years, after they were exhibited in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Regional filmmakers deliberately played on this lag between Brazil’s central and peripheral areas in their appropriations of imported cinema. In the regional productions, “outdated” cinematic codes nevertheless signified modernity by evoking a thrilling kineticism, associated with virtuosic human bodies, modern transportation technologies, and the spectacle of cinematic special effects. At the same time, these genres’ emphasis on location shooting allowed for the display of local landscapes. This dynamic of appropriation and documentation constitutes the specificity of visions of cinematic modernity conceived from the geographic and economic margins of Brazil.

The visual contrasts of regional productions – urban and picturesque sequences minimally integrated with the narrative action, “Americanized” chase and fight scenes unfolding in recognizable local spaces – parallel oppositions between technical modernity and rural life that are clearly evoked in the plots of the regional films. Schematic poles of good and evil that characterize the melodramatic mode are mapped onto oppositions between urban and rural characteristics, and by extension, modern and conservative values, though not in a uniform fashion. Villains tend to embody either rural authoritarianism or cosmopolitan criminality; physical violence, arguably the principal attraction of imported westerns and serial films, is either used to critique of the persistence of a semi-feudal agrarian economy in rural areas, characterized as an archaic and authoritarian mode of production and social organization, or to condemn the corrosive moral effects of modern values on youth, especially young men.

In many cases rural life is presented as a corrective to the corrupting effects of modern life, playing a key role a sentimental reconciliation between city and country in the course of the formation of a heterosexual couple. Female virtue, frequently threatened in melodrama, is menaced by sexual aggression by villains of three types: motorized bandits and rugged outlaws (appropriated from imported films without substantial modifications), abusive representatives of the traditional land-owning class, and dissipated upper-class youths. Despite the passive portrayal of female characters, consistent with the general conservatism of the regional productions, there are isolated examples of heroines who take on more dynamic roles in these dramas of physical violence, often by taking the wheel of an automobile, and whose performances in some cases recalled those of American “serial queens.” While melodrama dominated fiction film production in Brazil in the twenties, regional crime and adventure melodramas most provocatively manifest a negotiation with a technological modernity variously inflected as local, national and cosmopolitan, and articulated at the intersection of technology, sensation and sentiment.

The relatively modest production values of imported crime and adventure melodramas would have seemed more accessible models for regional filmmakers working within extreme technical limitations. By following these genres’ tendency towards outdoor shooting, film

enthusiasts could circumvent the problems posed by sets and artificial lighting. Furthermore, this strategy also allowed for the display of scenery familiar to local audiences, taking advantage of Brazil's "natural beauty," often discussed as an untapped resource that could foster domestic film production. Gesturing towards this understanding of place as potentially exportable raw material, rather than as a set of clear iconographic signifiers of the region or nation, regional productions rarely featured well-known sites strongly associated with regional characteristics. Instead, these films (and the promotional discourses surrounding them) offered audiences picturesque views that were non-specific in nature, such as mountain ranges and coffee cultivation (São Paulo and Minas Gerais), sugar plantations (Pernambuco) and wide plains (Rio Grande do Sul). This tendency is symptomatic both of these films' mixed geographic affiliation—they usually circulated within the state or region of their production, but their producers often cherished ambitions for national distribution—and of specifically Brazilian traditions of imagining national space. Flora Süssekind has discussed how the emergence of Brazilian literature shows the traces of a discourse of scientific exploration and categorization first registered in travel narratives by foreigners; drawing on such texts, she argues, Brazilian writers came to imagine the nation as a territory defined by an overwhelming natural world that demanded classification.<sup>8</sup> This understanding of landscape as intimately bound up with the idea of the nation itself helps explain the construction of the picturesque scene as a key element of regional productions' local and national appeal.

As in the case of the true-crime films discussed in Chapter 1, the regional films' picturesque images of scenic landscapes constituted semi-autonomous attractions that were articulated with violent action sequences. Yuri Tsivian has noted the interest shown by pre-1924 Soviet cinema and film criticism in American serial films characterized by "the prevalence of outdoor locations, event-filled narratives and physical stunts (*tryuk*)."<sup>9</sup> Early Russian film critics' concept of the *tryuk*, defined by Tsivian as "trick, stunt, or acrobatic feat," resembles the Brazilian use of the term *truc* to refer to interarticulated feats of physical virtuosity and special effects, discussed in Chapter 2.<sup>10</sup> Texts promoting regional films called attention to these displays of cinematic technique, understood to encompass both the actors' bravery and skill and the cinematographer's ability to capture (or fake) dangerous action sequences. They thus emphasized a brand of technical mastery that was more accessible to local producers than the high production values of big-budget Hollywood films.

Arguing for the status of Hollywood cinema as "the first global vernacular," Miriam Hansen writes, "If this vernacular had a transnational and translatable resonance it was because it played a key role in mediating competing cultural discourses on modernity and modernization, because it articulated, multiplied, and globalized a particular historical experience."<sup>11</sup> Hansen's formulation sheds light on the regional films' appropriations of imported adventure serials and westerns in order to construct schematic oppositions of urban and rural, modern and conservative. Carneiro da Cunha Filho suggests that in film production in the northeastern state of Pernambuco, "the model of the western and the melodrama take on a unique dimension – not that of a pure copy, but rather a reinvention: the fight scenes, kidnappings and confrontations are always between a baroque, abandoned world, and a desired modern world."<sup>12</sup> Beyond the narrative utility of the codes of "low" cinematic genres in negotiating the specific conflicts of local modernization processes, Hansen emphasizes the sensuous engagement solicited by genres like "adventure serials [which] succeeded because they conveyed a new immediacy, energy and sexual economy," thus bridging a misleading divide in cultural criticism between high modernism and twentieth-century popular culture by tracing the ways in which both "engaged

the contradictions of modernity at the level of the senses.”<sup>13</sup> The importance of shocks and thrills to the regional films’ assertion of a mastery of cinematic technique suggests an impulse to address these contradictions on a visceral, sensuous level, a strategy borne out by the contemporary reception of the films.

As Luciana Corrêa de Araújo writes in the context of *A filha do advogado* (*The Lawyer’s Daughter*, dir. Jota Soares) produced in Recife in 1926, regional films responded to a pressing question posed by the accelerating urbanization of Brazil: “How to reconcile the transformations of modernity with the persistence of tradition? The answer was close at hand, in the American films exhibited in all the cinemas, in novels and popular plays, in short, in the dominant fictional imaginary of the period: melodrama.”<sup>14</sup> The moral extremes of melodrama are clearly operative in many of the regional films, whose titles evoke tropes of justice, revenge, and punishment, as in the case of *Retribuição* (*Retribution*, Recife, 1923-5); *Jurando vingar* (*Swearing Revenge*, Recife, 1925), *Pecado da vaidade* (*The Sin of Vanity*, Porto Alegre, 1931), *Castigo do orgulho* (*The Punishment for Pride*, Porto Alegre, 1927). Others evoke virtuous suffering and redemption: *O vale dos martírios* (*Valley of Martyrdom*, Ouro Fino, Minas Gerais, 1926), *Corações em suplício* (*Tortured Hearts*, Guaranésia, Minas Gerais, 1925), *Amor que redime* (*Redeeming Love*, Porto Alegre, 1928) and perhaps the quintessential melodramatic title, *Sofrer para gozar* (*Suffer to Enjoy*, Campinas, 1923).

A contemporary review of the film *Alma gentil* (*Kind Soul*), produced in Campinas in 1923, suggests that audiences of the period perceived the social function of melodramatic narratives in terms similar to those articulated by Corrêa Araújo. The reviewer suggests that the film, which recounted the love affair between a shepherd who rescues an heiress and her uncle from drowning and later follows her into the city to continue the courtship, constitutes “an easy narrative [*novela*], within the reach of any public[’s comprehension], and very much of the moment in this time of transition through which we are passing, from village life to the accelerated existence that progress imposes on great centers.”<sup>15</sup> The sentimental reconciliation between city and country staged in the plot of this (lost) film was perceived by the reviewer as a pedagogical tool that would help viewers of varying sophistication negotiate the experience of an emerging local modernity.



Fig. 5.2: A daring rescue in the melodrama *Alma gentil* (1925). *Selecta*, March 7, 1925. Acervo da Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil.

The sentimental and sensational melodramas produced by regional filmmakers reconfigured Hollywood models in their assertions of local modernity and regional specificity. Anco Márcio Tenório Vieira has suggested the implicitly nationalist orientation of regional filmmakers' efforts "to prove that we Brazilians, with all our human and technical deficiencies, could produce *folhentim*-esque narratives as 'good' and 'stimulating' as those produced by the American culture industry at the time."<sup>16</sup> Yet I would argue that in this period, the notion of Brazilian national cinema primarily existed in the pages of a handful of illustrated film magazines published in Rio de Janeiro. Publications like *Selecta*, *Para Todos* and *Cinearte* worked to disseminate news of films in progress and stand-ins for the finished products, in the form of publicity stills and detailed plot summaries. Between 1924 and 1930, the journalists (and avid film fans) Ademar Gonzaga and Pedro Lima waged a campaign promoting national film production, whose slogan was "Every Brazilian film should be seen," founding *Cinearte* in 1926 to further this goal. The illustrated magazine simultaneously encouraged domestic film production and persistently sought to change its course, guiding it towards fiction films modeled on the American super-production, with its high-quality cinematography, lavish costumes and elaborate sets.

Despite their proximity to the themes of thrillingly dynamic genres overwhelmingly coded as American, many of the regional productions were clearly oriented towards the glorification of the states in which they were produced. This promotional stance was likely intended to foster government involvement in film production and facilitate the firm establishment of local film production, which was hailed as a profitable industry and a sign of local progress. Government officials took an interest in the regional films, most notably governors Sérgio Loreto in Pernambuco and Antônio Carlos in Minas Gerais.<sup>17</sup> Beyond this association of cinema with the modernization of the city or state, the lure of technological modernity extended to the individual participant and spectator. Contemporary and retrospective accounts alike emphasize local actors' excitement at performing in front of the camera lens (and in attending local premieres of the films, which often generated great public enthusiasm, if not always substantial profits). In 1964, Jota Soares, a key participant in film production in Recife, wrote of the first fiction feature made in the city, the 1925 *Retribuição* (*Retribution*): "[it] had everything: trains, boats, chase scenes, torture and love too. The public thrilled [*vibrou*] and began to believe in [c]inema in Pernambuco. And how the courageous bandits of the film walked proudly through the streets of Recife! They wore their caps and everything, just as they acted on the screen."<sup>18</sup> Enacting the conventions of imported crime dramas in the streets and more importantly, on the screens, of Recife, the once-wealthy capital of an impoverished region, reads as a utopian act.

Soares' description suggests that the longing for cinema stardom manifested itself in a particular potent fashion outside Brazil's largest cities. A 1924 editorial in *Selecta* ironically commented on a deluge of letters sent to the magazine by would-be stars, observing that such missives "come to us principally from the interior of the States. It seems that films, there in the hinterlands, addle the heads of lots of people, much more than in Rio."<sup>19</sup> While this statement may be attributable to the urban author's assumption of rural naiveté, it raises the possibility that readers in economically marginal areas of the country felt a particularly strong drive to participate in the industrial modernity represented by the cinema. The precarious production values of the regional films and their exhibition on a local level seem to have made the distance between spectator and screen appear tantalizingly small. In the absence of industrial

consolidation and the professionalization it entailed, the national cinema could be made anywhere and by almost anyone.

If regional film producers implicitly contested the cultural centrality of Rio de Janeiro with their efforts to transform each of their cities and towns into “Hollywood in Miniature” or the “Los Angeles of Brazil” the illustrated magazines tried to harness these ambitions for the consolidation of a national film industry.<sup>20</sup> Given obstacles to the nation-wide distribution and exhibition of domestic productions, in most cases the regionally produced films were in fact most widely disseminated in the pages of these magazines. Depending on their personal relationships with film journalists in Rio and their geographic proximity to the capital, the regional filmmakers had varying degrees of opportunity to see their productions covered in the pages of the illustrated magazines, and screened in the prestigious and profitable Rio and São Paulo markets. Brazilian films that attained public exhibition in Rio were accorded the same treatment given to imported films: the publication of lengthy plot summaries that used excessively sentimental or suspenseful language and were abundantly illustrated with stills, which could be considered the inheritors of the *cine-folhetim* of the teens.<sup>21</sup>

Like the historical readers of *Selecta*, *Para Todos* and *Cinearte*, the contemporary researcher lacks the opportunity to see the vast majority of the regionally produced films. Although a number of these productions survive in whole or part, notably works filmed in Recife, in Campinas, and in the small city of Cataguases in the state of Minas Gerais, the majority can be analyzed only through their traces in the popular press. As they survive in the historical record, the regional films are heavily mediated by the conception of national cinema promulgated in cinema magazines, which both encouraged and censured those involved in film production in moralistic terms, often blaming artistic or economic failures on the “undesirable elements” present in many regional production companies. These publications reserved special disapproval for filmmakers involved in non-fiction productions, which they dismissed as *filmes de cavação* (literally translating to “digging,” *cavação* is roughly equivalent to “hustling”). These included touristic and propaganda films exalting local sights or the accomplishments of politicians or businessmen. The fact that Rio’s film journalists deliberately discouraged and openly disparaged non-fiction films may help account for the inclusion of semi-propagandistic images of local scenery and economic activities (especially agriculture) in fictional productions. The legacy of the illustrated magazines’ campaign against the non-fiction film, or *filme natural*, and in favor of the fiction feature or *filme pousado*, has persisted in scholarship on Brazilian silent cinema, which overwhelmingly focuses on fictional productions.<sup>22</sup>

While the production of non-fiction films was often an important source of financing for fiction features, remedying the historical inattention to these works is beyond the scope of this present chapter. However, this analysis does depart from previous works on regional production in Brazil in its comparative analysis of their narrative tropes and iconographies. I divide the films into two main categories: rural melodramas influenced by the western, which showcased local customs and landscapes even as they appropriated aspects of a genre understood to be quintessentially American; and films whose display of violence is often linked to modern transportation technologies, suggesting the influence of crime serials. Before beginning to discuss the films themselves in depth, I turn first to the manner in which regional productions have been framed as signs of national progress or backwardness, both by the illustrated magazines of the period and by later critical historiography on Brazilian cinema.

## Historical and Scholarly Reception of the Regional Productions

Renewed interest in popular Latin American cinema stems in part from a re-evaluation of the melodramatic mode in both Anglo-American and Latin American scholarship over the past three decades, a current of inquiry that can be traced to Peter Brooks's influential 1976 work *The Melodramatic Imagination*.<sup>23</sup> In the past, Brazilian scholars have often expressed a certain disappointment with the regional films' appropriations of narrative tropes considered plebeian (in their associations with mass rather than elite culture), retrograde (with more affinities to the nineteenth century than the twentieth), and conservative (given melodramatic narratives' tendency to restore the idealized social equilibrium presented at their beginnings). Referring to the use of similar narrative tropes in films made across Brazil in the period of 1925-1926, Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes characterizes the "melodramatic extremes" that appear in these works as "the expression of a backwards local culture, owing nothing in this aspect to foreign films."<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, critics have frequently pondered why the regional productions have so few links with the vibrant modernist movements that were reshaping Brazilian literature, painting, music, and architecture in the same period (and occasionally even in the same locations).<sup>25</sup> The regionally produced films manifest few of the modernist strategies utilized by isolated works of Brazilian silent cinema, such as Mário Peixoto's 1931 *Limite* (*Limit*) or Adalberto Kemeny and Rodolfo Lustig's 1929 *São Paulo, Symphonia da Metrópole* (which, as its title indicates, clearly took inspiration from Walter Ruttmann's 1925 *Berlin, Symphony of a Big City*). Nor can the regional films be neatly aligned with the roughly contemporaneous regionalist literary movement in Brazil, which took a realist and critical perspective on life outside the nation's urban centers.<sup>26</sup>

Grappling with this disconnect, scholarly works on the regional productions have positioned these films relative to aesthetic modernism and a critical tradition of Brazilian cinema in a variety of ways. Humberto Mauro, a director from Cataguases in Minas Gerais, was the first of the regional filmmakers to be recuperated for national film history. In his 1964 book *Critical Revision of Brazilian Cinema*, Glauber Rocha hailed Mauro as a key precursor of Cinema Novo, despite the relatively conservative tone of his silent melodramas. According to Rocha, Mauro's attention to local social realities renders him the first representative of a Brazilian cinema that seeks to establish "a continuous dialogue with reality, a dialectical relationship that leads to transformative critique and praxis."<sup>27</sup> In Rocha's opinion, Cinema Novo should trace its genealogy from Mauro rather than from Mário Peixoto, whose much-celebrated (and at the time, little-seen) film *Limite* represents a decidedly cosmopolitan film modernism. While Rocha acknowledges Peixoto's talent, he views his work to be an imitation of the French avant-garde, and thus aligns it with a dynamic of cultural colonization.<sup>28</sup> In his typically bombastic tone, Rocha declares, "[f]orgetting Humberto Mauro today – in fact, not returning constantly to his work as a unique and powerful expression of Cinema Novo in Brazil – is a suicidal attempt to start from zero, moving towards a future of sterile experiences disconnected from the living source of our people, sad and starving in an exuberant landscape."<sup>29</sup>

Participating in a contemporaneous movement to preserve and recuperate Brazilian film history, initial studies of the regional productions focused on uncovering factual information regarding their production and exhibition. At the same time, these writings tend to read the trajectories of the "regional cycles," with their initial euphoria and ultimate inability to sustain production, as symptomatic of Brazil's peripheral position in global cultural economies and its vulnerability to "colonization" by imported cultural forms. For example, Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes' exhaustive study *Humberto Mauro, Cataguases, Cinearte*, laments the progressive



influence in Mauro's films of his friendship with Adhemar Gonzaga, who urged the director to incorporate more "modern" elements. In Salles Gomes' view, what Mauro had expressed of the "genuinely Brazilian" in his films was gradually sacrificed in favor of urban, cosmopolitan cinematic standards on an implicitly American model.<sup>30</sup> In *Cinema in Campinas*, Carlos Roberto Souza refers to the regional cycles as a "typical phenomenon of underdeveloped film production,"<sup>31</sup> while Maria Rita Galvão discusses the discontinuous and mutually disconnected character of regional filmmaking as an ultimately sterile expression of the structural disadvantages faced by Brazilian cinema. She writes,

Perhaps better than any other, the phenomenon of the regional cycles typifies a situation of underdevelopment in film production. This production does not present itself as a straight line; it does not effectively constitute a movement. Outside of Rio and São Paulo [...] Brazilian silent cinema is made up of experiences that exhausted themselves, isolated from each other and in most cases mutually ignorant of each other.<sup>32</sup>

I would argue that the communication between semi-amateur filmmakers across Brazil, mediated by the circulation of illustrated magazines and by personal correspondence with Pedro Lima and Ademar Gonzaga, seems to be greater than Galvão's account suggests.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, Galvão's statements exemplify a critical trap observed by Ana M. López in the context of Latin American silent film: "because of temporal ambiguity and asynchronicity, teleological narratives of evolution become mired in dead ends and failed efforts and do not do justice to the circuitous routes of Latin American modernity."<sup>34</sup> López's implicit call for an alternative methodology of cultural analysis is informed by a critical shift initiated in the 1990s by scholars such as Néstor García Canclini and Jesús Martín Barbero. These scholars sought to nuance the dominant scholarly discourses of underdevelopment and cultural colonization developed by Marxist critics, formulating more nuanced accounts of the processes of cultural hybridization that have shaped social experience in Latin American nations, as well as the multi-layered temporalities that define daily life in nations whose modernization processes can be viewed as still incomplete.<sup>35</sup>

Reflecting this critical turn, more recent discussions of regionally produced Brazilian films read them not as unambiguous signs of national "progress" nor as symptoms of Brazil's cinematic underdevelopment, but rather as more complex negotiations with imported technologies and cultural forms that took place on a local scale. This current study of the regional cycles extends the line of research undertaken by Sheila Schvarzman's examination of Humberto Mauro as a filmmaker who was "able to dominate modern technique and to view this same modernity from its margins, that is, the border between city and country,"<sup>36</sup> and Carneiro da Cunha Filho's exploration of film productions in Recife as instances in which "a peripheral society gave itself over to the staging, not of itself, or of how it was, but of the cosmopolitan utopia it nourished at that time."<sup>37</sup>

These specifically local notions of modernity borne out in film production often diverged sharply from the notion of national cinema that was fostered and consolidated in the pages of *Selecta*, *Para Todos* and *Cinearte*, which shaped the development of the regional films and their later critical reception. The illustrated film magazines did not transparently disseminate and uncritically promote domestic cinema; a number of scholarly works have analyzed the degree to which the campaigns in *Selecta*, *Para Todos* and *Cinearte* worked to encourage, but also to

police, censure and influence film producers.<sup>38</sup> This is most evident in Lima and Gonzaga's relentless condemnation of the production of non-fiction films.<sup>39</sup>

The two journalists insisted that propagandistic features and newsreels would create negative associations with Brazilian cinema in the minds of audiences, in part because of the low production values they associated with these films. Their active hostility towards non-fiction film can be linked to a racist desire to control tightly (and thereby effectively whitewash) the cinematic image of Brazil, since in most regions of the country, filming in any public place would capture a large number of citizens with visible African ancestry.<sup>40</sup> Only the production of fiction films, according to Gonzaga and Lima, could aid in the consolidation of cinema in Brazil, by treating the cinema as an art on the level of the American super-production. Where producers of propagandistic films were portrayed as unscrupulous and motivated only by profit, producers of fiction films were described using the rhetoric of pioneering heroism and sacrifice, as Regina Maria Rodrigues Behar has observed in the case of film production in Recife.<sup>41</sup>

Working imaginatively with the publicity photographs and information provided to them by film producers and actors, Lima and Gonzaga's columns manufactured an image of robust film production across Brazil and a stable of bankable film stars, journalistic practices that seem to have incorporated both wishful thinking and willful distortion. Yet despite the financial and technical improbability of Lima and Gonzaga's ambitions to foster Brazilian films and stars on a Hollywood model, their vision was highly influential. Articles and reviews in local and national newspapers widely adopted the language used in the "campaign" initiated by *Para Todos*, *Selecta* and *Cinearte*; they condemned non-fiction films, lamented film producers' lack of attention to publicity, and associated film production with national or local progress. Correspondence from regional filmmakers published in the magazines and held in Pedro Lima's personal archives indicates that some of those involved in film production adopted the values of the journalists' campaign,<sup>42</sup> while consistently failing to live up to their expectations.

Reading against the grain of the of the illustrated film magazines' dominant discourses on "modern" cinematography, I will focus on a previously unexplored aspect of their coverage: the traces they preserve of the exhibition and reception of imported adventure melodramas outside Rio and São Paulo. Previous studies of Brazilian silent cinema often mention individual filmmakers' admiration for western and serial stars – the fondness of Jota Soares, an important member of the filmmaking movement in Recife, for Universal serials, or Humberto Mauro's affection for Eddie Polo, whose serials were shown in Cataguases in 1919, for example.<sup>43</sup> Yet they fail to reflect on the specifics of these genres' circulation or the broader cultural meanings assigned to them.

The magazine *Para Todos* boasted a number of active sections devoted to letters from readers all over Brazil, which provide scattered information regarding patterns of film exhibition across the country.<sup>44</sup> To give a sense of the extension of the readership – as well as the popularity of American westerns across the country – in October 1919, less than a year after *Para Todos* was founded, the magazine reported on Tom Mix's marital status "in response to hundreds of questions we have received from the capital and twenty Brazilian states, including faraway Acre [a state located on the border with Bolivia and Peru]."<sup>45</sup> Despite many of its readers' apparent enthusiasm for American adventure melodramas, by late 1920, *Para Todos* had made clear its editors' distaste for serials, declaring "We know nothing about serial films. We never watch this genre, which decidedly does not seduce us."<sup>46</sup> In the Brazilian context, the physical dynamism, illogical plots, and American origin of serial films led them to be conflated in some cases with the western; in 1924, *Para Todos* characterized serials [*films de séries*] as

“films with cowboys, shootouts and chase scenes.”<sup>47</sup> The magazine *Selecta* also suggested a close link between the serial film and the series western, suggesting that the “decadence of the [serial] genre” - that is “adventures that left one’s mind in suspense at the end of each episode, stimulating spectators’ interest” - had given rise to the western.<sup>48</sup> The journalist declares, “this vulgar phase of cinema which still persists, for the consolation of a naïve public, improved its deplorable proportions somewhat, since it has reduced itself to its current length, which alone is a great victory, and has come to be shown in cinemas of abysmal category, always latecomers when it comes in accepting innovations.”<sup>49</sup> By the early twenties, most Hollywood westerns were produced exclusively for second-run cinema audiences in the U.S. and for spectators overseas; they had a long cultural afterlife in Brazil, where silent westerns were shown in the interior as late as 1941.<sup>50</sup>

In June 1923, an editorial in *Para Todos* discussed the near-absence of French cinema from the local exhibition market, declaring “the perfectly imbecilic Gaumont serials have deserted the Avenida [Rio Branco] in search of obscure neighborhoods and backwards towns.”<sup>51</sup> A year and a half later, one of *Para Todos*’ loyal correspondents in the northeastern city of Recife, who used the pseudonym of “Cyclone Smith” (the hero of a serial starring Eddie Polo), made two observations about local film offerings: the exhibition of Hollywood super-productions at a lag of two years behind Rio, and the presentation of “several Gaumont serials” by the same unsatisfactory local distributor.<sup>52</sup> (There were exceptions, of course; a theater in the city of Salvador in the state of Bahia publicized a supposedly direct agreement with Fox and Paramount, which specified that “the films come directly here without passing through other states.”)<sup>53</sup> Similarly, *Pearl of the Army*, exhibited in Brazil with the title *O Correio de Washington*, was shown in Rio de Janeiro beginning in March 1918;<sup>54</sup> almost exactly three years later, *Para Todos* published a sonnet in praise of Pearl White by a reader in Belém, located near the mouth of the Amazon river in northern Brazil, which had been composed “on the occasion of the exhibition in this capital of the serial film *O Correio de Washington*.”<sup>55</sup> This notice suggests both the degree to which exhibition in remote cities lagged behind that of southern capitals, due to their circulation on the “line,” and the degree of fanatical devotion to the star that persisted among fans.<sup>56</sup>

Overwhelmingly classified as marginal products even in their countries of origin, in many cases serial films dominated peripheral exhibition markets where access to expensive imported productions was limited by logistical and financial obstacles. While many of the magazines’ readers wrote enthusiastic inquiries about these “outdated” adventure films, others expressed dissatisfaction, holding up the exhibition of serials as a sign of their exhibition markets’ backwardness. For example, a reader in Maceió, capital of the northeastern state of Alagoas, complained “We have to put up with the pathetic whacks taken by Universal, the incorrigible mania of old Carl Laemmle for blows, bullets and horseback rides. Serials, struggles, punches and the eternal final kiss!”<sup>57</sup> Similarly, a reader in the town of Gravatá, located in the neighboring state of Pernambuco, expressed frustration with the local exhibition of serials even as he praised the locally made film *Jurando vingar* (*Swearing Revenge*):

We have only one cinema here, quite average, by the way. So we put up with the most irritating kind of filler. This cinema has a mania for serials, and what serials!...real stinkers [*borracheiras*]. If it had a competitor, perhaps they would show good films, but it doesn’t... We have to bear with patience what it shows us.

After all, we thank God, because it's the only amusement we have here on Sundays.<sup>58</sup>

In the eyes of readers who shared *Para Todos*'s negative opinion of the genre, its conventions were felt to be repetitive, cliché, and outdated, and furthermore, closely linked with second-run theaters and the working-class spectators that frequented them. A female reader in the capital of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, complained bitterly that a local exhibitor had resolved to show Paramount and First National super-productions exclusively in a new cinema located in a distinctly unfashionable area. As a consequence, "the best families of Belo Horizonte society are forced to attend the new cinema, sitting in the same rows as the riff-raff [...], people without composure who only understand the ridiculous chase scenes of Tom Mix and similar!"<sup>59</sup> While the publication of this letter sparked a series of indignant rebuttals, it is suggestive of serials and westerns' image as a spatially and artistically marginal genre.

Paradoxically, the working-class, "backwards," and geographically marginal connotations of the serial and the western were transformed into signs of local modernity, imbuing regional films with signs of physical and technical virtuosity. A 1920 review of the film *Coração de Gaúcho* (*Heart of a Gaucho*) is instructive on this point. The author describes the film as

vividly impregnated with the character of the region where it takes place, the pampas of Rio Grande do Sul. Not only were the natural backdrops splendidly chosen, the interiors are proper and the work of the artists relatively good. The film only displeases us when it presents violent scenes that seem to us slow and inexpressive, accustomed as we are to the audacities and brutalities of the North American production.<sup>60</sup>

This brief commentary evokes two recurring concerns of regional filmmakers throughout the 1920s: an interest in including "authentic" local customs and picturesque natural scenery,<sup>61</sup> and the obstacles to filming adequately lit interiors. Most significantly, the review suggests a desire to appropriate the physical dynamism of imported adventure melodramas; without the rapid action and fluid choreography explicitly associated with American cinema, violent sequences were not felt to be viscerally exciting. Even after adventure melodramas lost their association with "ultramodern" cinematography and came to be considered outdated, their ability to showcase "regional character" and "natural backdrops," even as they incorporated a kineticism associated with Hollywood adventure melodrama, rendered them a formula ripe for appropriation.

In the next section, I turn to a series of films that resembled *Coração de gaúcho*, inasmuch as they appropriated conventions of American western to enliven depictions of rural customs and local landscapes with dynamic action sequences. In some cases, these conventions were mobilized to criticize the vestiges of an authoritarian social order and of an archaic mode of agricultural production in rural areas. In others, they seem to have adopted American adventure melodrama conventions wholesale, making few concessions to local specificity. This latter strategy was alternately critiqued by reviewers and praised as an effective path for producing marketable cinema. I address these productions in chronological order, discussing two films made in Campinas in 1923, *João da Mata* (*John of the Bush*) and *Sofrer para gosar* (*Suffer to Enjoy*), turning to *Jurando vingar*

(*Swearing Revenge*), produced in Recife in 1925, and concluding with a brief analysis of two gaúcho-themed films made in Rio Grande do Sul at the end of the 1920s.

### **The Rural Melodrama: Between Genre Appropriation and Local Critique**

One of the first successes of regional production in Brazil, *João da Mata* was produced in 1923 in the city of Campinas, located a hundred kilometers outside São Paulo. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Campinas's growth kept pace with the coffee boom that transformed São Paulo the richest state in Brazil. The town expanded into a sizeable city in the early twentieth century as it increasingly incorporated small-scale manufacturing into its economy. In the 1920s, film production became one of these industrial activities, as local film enthusiasts founded a series of short-lived companies. The first of these, Phenix Film, came into being on the initiative of writer Amílcar Alves, whose play *João da Mata* had won a contest sponsored by the Academia Brasileira de Letras in 1921. According to the contest's judges, the play presented "an impressive piece of the true Brazil, with its good native people who are overrun and despoiled at every turn by the brutality of the intruders who come from the city to dispossess the legitimate landowners of the hinterland."<sup>62</sup> While the play explicitly opposed wealthy city-dwellers to poor farmers, the film addressed an internal dynamic specific to rural communities: the persistence of *coronelismo* (the tendency of local landowning elites to exercise undue political and economic influence, often embodied by the charismatic local leader, or *coronel*).

*João da Mata* drew upon the conventions of the western to address this social conflict, concretized in a land dispute between the eponymous young farmer and a local landowner, Viga, which plays out through a number of violent physical confrontations. Lacking a deed to the house where he and his mother live, João becomes a victim of the false testimonies provided by witnesses bribed by the *coronel*. After the trial, the two men become involved in a physical confrontation; in another miscarriage of justice, Viga then falsely accuses João of robbery. The young man flees to the state of Bahia in order to avoid imprisonment; there he fortuitously finds evidence that Viga is guilty of robbery and murder, which gives him the opportunity to challenge the *coronel's* corrupt misuse of the rule of law. Returning to Campinas, João confronts Viga with his discovery, leading to a final struggle. This sequence, one of a few surviving fragments of the film, is consistent with the visual language of the other regional productions. Presented primarily in long shot showing the two men grappling with each other in standing and prone positions, the scene is punctuated with a few medium shots and one close-up of João. At its conclusion, the police burst in to find João collapsed on top of Viga's corpse; the young farmer has beaten him to death without realizing it. In an intertitle, an official comments to João's mother, "Your son killed an extremely dangerous thief; he'll be acquitted," suggesting a tentative optimism regarding the farmer's challenge to a corrupt justice system.

As a supplement to this melodramatic plot in which humble apparently prevail over the powerful (though no comprehensive critique of rural authoritarianism is offered), *João da Mata* depicts characteristic aspects of local agriculture, most notably the coffee harvest. The *Para Todos* summary cited above advertises *João da Mata's* display of "the... natural beauty that should characterize our films so that they have the double effect of [audience] appeal and propaganda."<sup>63</sup> This promotional text is careful to assert the film's authenticity and mark its distance from the American genre of the western, even as it emphasizes elements that were key

to imported adventure melodramas' appeal. Among the chief attractions cited are "the plantation houses and their well-observed interiors, the coffee groves and their details, the characters' costumes which do not plagiarize that of the American cowboy, the automobile accident and the real fight scenes, impeccably photographed."<sup>64</sup>

Such sensations scenes are discussed at once as a source of thrills and a demonstration of the mastery of cinematic technique; in some cases, they seem to have little connection to the plot.<sup>65</sup> For example, the automobile accident, in which a car collides with a boy at the edge of the road, was advertised as a semi-independent attraction. This sequence, which survives, builds suspense in a rudimentary fashion, intercutting a wide shot of the boy walking along a curve in the road with a medium long shot that shows him bending down to tie his shoe, followed by a cut back to wide shot showing a rather unconvincing collision between the car and the boy (the automobile obviously stops short of the actor). In spite of the apparently gratuitous nature of this scene, the promotional notice suggests that *João da Mata* offers the dynamic appeal of American adventure genres without their narrative excesses: "Upon viewing *João da Mata*, one accompanies with enormous attention the development of the entire story, which is simple, well told, without elements that stretch credulity," in contrast with imported serials that were frequently criticized for their lack of verisimilitude. By contrast, *João da Mata* was ostensibly characterized by "intense sentiment and natural emotions, a story in the same genre at times so brutally exploited by the Americans."<sup>66</sup> Another review of the film similarly affirmed both the influence of Hollywood conventions and the superiority of the local film; the author comments, "The two fight scenes are impeccable, better than those presented by the Americans, who are unquestionably experts in this particularity."<sup>67</sup>

The film's combination of thrills and action sequences with local concerns seems to have appealed to audiences in the region. Carlos Roberto de Souza has traced the comparatively extensive exhibition circuit of *João da Mata*, which circulated along railroad lines (the producers offered stationmasters a commission to distribute the film).<sup>68</sup> However, de Souza notes that only a little over a tenth of the capital invested in the film was ever returned to the producers, and Phenix-Film was thus liquidated without the possibility of making a second film.<sup>69</sup> The mantle of film production in Campinas would be passed to a unique figure in Brazilian silent cinema: "E.C. Kerrigan," a consummate con man who passed himself off as an Italian count and an employee of Paramount, and established cinema schools where he charged students to "film" their screen tests without ever loading negative into the camera.<sup>70</sup> However, Kerrigan was also apparently a skilled director who participated in filmmaking in the city of São Paulo, in Guarnésia in Minas Gerais, and in Porto Alegre in Rio Grande do Sul.<sup>71</sup> Upon founding the Escola Cinematográfica Campineira, Kerrigan recruited the crew of the defunct Phenix Film to film a fiction feature, *Sofrer para Gosar*, beginning in late 1923.<sup>72</sup>

A program leaflet for the film, which is itself lost, sketches its plot in language replete with melodramatic extremes:

Edith Barros, a rare example of virtue and abnegation, lives in constant martyrdom at the hands of her husband Tim, a rough man and habitual drunk. With the resignation of a saint, she bears all of her husband's brutality, without paying heed to Jacques Fernandes, an evil and unscrupulous man, who courts her constantly, suggesting she leave her unworthy husband, promising her a position commensurate with her value in his place of business, and offering her all the services of a supposed friend.<sup>73</sup>

When these inducements fail, Jacques arranges to have a group of men ambush and kill Tim; seeing no other option, Edith accepts his offer of employment, only to find that she will be forced to work in at a bar “where dancers, landowners, peons and adventurers, intoxicate themselves in disgusting promiscuity, stupefied by the flash of roulette chips, glasses of stimulants and the beauty of women.”<sup>74</sup> As if this description did not sufficiently evoke the disreputable cantinas of the Hollywood western, the program description further specifies that in the saloon, “life hangs by a thread and the only guarantee is to be found in the possession of a set of revolvers and a good dose of courage.”<sup>75</sup> Another summary of the film, published in both *Selecta* and *Para Todos*, specifies that it is “a bar on the American system, with women, alcohol and gambling.”<sup>76</sup>

With the introduction of the hero, cattle rancher Jayme Lourenço, into this unsavory atmosphere, where he meets and falls in love with the Edith, the program summary ends, inviting the reader to go to the cinema in order to “follow point by point all the peripeties of the film, extremely felicitous scenes of natural landscapes and the most exciting touches, which will capture the complete attention of the public.”<sup>77</sup> Other summaries, however, fill in details of the film’s ending: police agents arrive to investigate the death of Edith’s husband; realizing suspicion has fallen on him, Jacques shoots one of them but is ultimately overpowered by Jayme. According to the program, this “tremendous struggle between two men for the conquest of the beloved woman” is characterized by “a perfect labor of technique and by an excitement so intense that the spectator will feel a ‘frison’ [sic] of enthusiasm and indescribable anxiety run up his spine.”<sup>78</sup> Drawing on interviews with participants in the filming, Carlos Roberto de Souza describes the choreography and special effects that went into the sequence:

A violent blow from the hero was to have made the villain break the railing and fall on his back onto a table full of bottles, which, in turn, would shatter as well. The hero jumps from the upper level and the fight ends on the ground floor. The action was carefully prepared: the railing and the table were previously sawed down so that, at the right moment, they would break without difficulty and the villain’s fall was decomposed by the camera, first falling from the upper floor, caught by a thick tarp below, and then shattering the table, rolling from a small platform constructed especially for the take.<sup>79</sup>

As the openly promotional language of the program leaflet suggests, this sequence was to have offered two simultaneous and intertwined thrills to the audience: the excitement generated by the violent physical combat, and the spectacle of the cinematic technique that maximized its visceral impact. While in American productions such effects were intended to be visually seamless, the program for *Sofrer para Gosar* primes spectators to note and appreciate the “perfect labor of technique” necessary to produce the scene, marvelling at the cinematic achievements of the local filmmakers. The use of the *truc*, a term that simultaneously implied a physically dynamic stunt and a special effect, was repeatedly emphasized by promotional discourses that linked locally produced films with American adventure melodramas.

By contrast with *João da Mata*, *Sofrer para Gosar* was received as a melodrama in a distinctly American mold. One reviewer wrote, “In the characterization of the types onscreen, artistically done, we note only a preoccupation with Americanizing everything, from the costumes to the gestures, and from the gestures to the action; this, however, will never be a grave

defect, since we know that ‘household gods work no miracles.’”<sup>80</sup> Not all spectators were so tolerant, however – one responded to the film by ridiculing

Characters with names like Edith, Tim, Jack, Bill and others with revolvers in a holster fallen almost to the knee, blows, fights, the manner of throwing a drink in the face of an insolent joker, pulling a revolver and...hands up, half a dozen shots and the escape on horseback...it could be that this pleases the public in general, but those who are familiar with the great difference between our customs and those of the people of the north, merely think it a great absurdity.<sup>81</sup>

In this reviewer’s opinion, the “public in general” is implied to have little concern with local specificity; to appeal to more discerning viewers as well, greater fidelity to the setting was required.

As local productions grew more technically ambitious under the leadership of Kerrigan, the perceived proximity to American cinema seems to have proportionally increased, and attention to local concerns diminished. Though Kerrigan eventually departed to make films in Porto Alegre, this trend would continue. The final fiction film produced in Campinas during the period, *Mocidade louca* (*Mad Youth*, 1927), discussed later in this chapter, drew extensively on the codes of American film in both its stunt sequences (one involving an automobile, a mad bull, and a train) and in the costumes of its distinctly modern heroine, thematizing local industry and seemingly avoiding the depiction of rural life.

From Campinas in Brazil’s southeast, I shift focus to the city of Recife in the northeastern state of Pernambuco to examine the 1925 film *Jurando vingar* (*Swearing Revenge*). Among the “regional cycles,” film production in Recife was the most prolific in numerical terms: thirteen fiction films and as many non-fiction productions were made in the city between 1922 and 1931.<sup>82</sup> According to Carneiro da Cunha Filho, film production signaled a strong local desire to modernize in the face of the city’s reduced importance to the national economy. One of the earliest sites of European colonization, Recife became a center of sugar production, as well as the only port authorized to serve the region during the colonial period.<sup>83</sup> With the decline of sugar production and the increasing economic importance of coffee throughout the nineteenth century, slave labor migrated southwards, and northeastern Brazil slipped into a depression. A series of devastating droughts in the region, beginning in the late nineteenth century, forged an image of the Northeast as a region characterized by poverty, scarcity and suffering.<sup>84</sup> Concurrently, Recife’s significance as a port was increasingly eclipsed by the rise of steam-powered ocean vessels, since its harbor was too shallow to accommodate them. Seeking renewed economic relevance and insertion in the global economy, local officials initiated a series of reforms, modernizing the port’s facilities and constructing broad avenues in the downtown districts in the second decade of the twentieth century. Carneiro da Cunha Filho has suggested that the activities of filmmakers in Recife were part of a modernizing euphoria marshaled against the melancholia of economic decadence and delayed modernity. Significantly, filmmaking was spearheaded by petit bourgeois rather than by elites, who sought to maintain their historical privilege by clinging to traditional cultural forms.<sup>85</sup>

The difficulties of asserting technological modernity on the periphery of capitalism are borne out by the rather tumultuous history of film production in Recife. Aurora-Film, the most prolific production company to operate in Recife during the period, went bankrupt twice in the period between its founding in 1923 and its dissolution in 1926. Frequent disputes among the



key players – the camera operator Edson Chagas, and Gentil Roiz, Ary Severo, and Jota Soares, each of whom acted, wrote and directed films in Recife – led to the founding of a number of rival studios, as well as quite a bit of gossip in the columns of *Para Todos* and *Selecta*.

*Jurando vingar* was filmed following on the drawn-out production of the serial-influenced adventure film *Retribuição* (*Retribution*), discussed in the following section. Gentil Roiz, director of *Retribuição* and author of the script for *Jurando vingar*, drew a strong distinction between the two productions. He characterized the former as “a story that resulted from the assimilation of American films;” by contrast, *Jurando vingar* was “an attempt to register the Northeast, its cane fields,” thus highlighting the local economy’s most important product.<sup>86</sup> Writing in 1963, Jota Soares suggests that the film “possessed a versatile plot” that allowed the film to display “lovely landscapes of the rich Northeast” at some moments, and at others to “descend into the depths of crime, livening up the sequences, especially those which obliged the spectator to concentrate his entire attention on the film.”<sup>87</sup> Only eighteen minutes of *Jurando vingar* have survived, but extant sequences include wide shots of landscapes and visual tropes associated with American adventure melodramas.

*Jurando vingar* appropriates the codes of the western—showdowns in saloons, bitter vendettas and swiftly galloping horses—to dramatize local conflicts, additionally incorporating conventions of the serial. The catalyst for the narrative of *Jurando vingar* is an argument that takes place in a local bar, a key trope of the American western: Júlio (Gentil Roiz), the owner of a sugar plantation, defends the honor of his beloved, Berta, who works as a waitress in the establishment, against the unwanted attentions of the bandit Zé Morais. Beaten by Júlio, Zé swears revenge, which he initiates as soon as Júlio travels to a refinery to sell the product of the year’s harvest. Upon his return, Júlio learns that Zé has murdered his sister Maria; kneeling by her grave, Júlio in turn swears revenge.

After Zé Morais learns that Berta plans to marry Júlio, he arranges to have her abducted on her way home from the cantina. Although the villains in the film wear the same shirtsleeves and rustic broad-brim hats sported by the other male characters, at this point in the film they behave very much like motorized bandits. In an extreme long shot, two bandits descend from an automobile; one begins to garrote her with a piece of rope, dragging her into the car. Seeing this, Berta’s mother implores the Virgin Mary to send help, which providentially arrives in the form of Júlio. He races to the rescue on horseback, identifying the house where Berta is imprisoned by means of tire tracks left in the mud. In the following sequence, the hyperbolic gestures of Rilda Fernandes, shown in profile behind a bolted door, and the struggle that leads to her rescue strongly evoke serial conventions. Bursting through the door, Júlio is ambushed by Zé, who is brandishing a knife. In keeping with the tendency towards tableau-style framing throughout the film, the fight is depicted entirely in long shot, with the exception of a two medium close-ups showing their struggle over the weapon. Images of the struggle are intercut with medium long shots of the anguished Berta pushing fruitlessly at the locked door, and later in the sequence, medium close-ups in which she wrings her hands dramatically and runs her fingers nervously through her hair.

*Jurando vingar*’s hybridization of imported film codes and local landscapes seems to have led to a fairly positive reception. The film was judged to be “three times better than [the preceding production] *Retribuição*” by a reader in *Para Todos*.<sup>88</sup> However, despite the film’s ostensible emphasis on local content, the reader explicitly notes the “Americanized” fight sequences.<sup>89</sup> While the reader acknowledges that *Jurando vingar*’s production values cannot compare to those of imported films, he notes that the “audience received the film with a loud

round of applause. I thought it fitting and grew enthusiastic, since I have always dreamed of Brazilian cinema. It is a pity not to be part of it.”<sup>90</sup> His comment suggests the degree to which local film production solicited participatory fantasies and ambitions for national cinematic progress.

I would like to conclude this section with a brief examination of two films produced in the state of Rio Grande do Sul in the south of Brazil. This region had been settled primarily by European immigrants devoted to agriculture and cattle ranching, whose topography and local customs are similar to that of the Argentine pampas; the local iconography of the *gaúcho* made the American western a logical point of reference. Rio Grande do Sul was the site of a number of filmmaking ventures in the early teens,<sup>91</sup> and in the latter half of the twenties, groups of film enthusiasts again attempted to render cinema a viable undertaking in the state. In the capital of the state, Porto Alegre, a young automobile salesman named Eduardo Abelim with a much-commented-upon resemblance to Eddie Polo directed the film *Em Defesa da Irmã* (*In a Sister's Defense*, 1926), which seems to have reduced the drama of offended female virtue and male villainy to its barest elements.<sup>92</sup> A brother and sister living alone in a rural cottage agree to host a stranger in their house; when the brother leaves to work in the fields and the sister goes to gather flowers to place on their mother's tomb, the stranger attempts to rape her.<sup>93</sup> Learning this, her brother hunts down the stranger with the help of a group of local men, “some dressed perfectly in the *gaúcho* mode, others in a mixture of *guasca*<sup>94</sup> and ‘cow boy’ (a figure of great influence at the time, which was the age of Tom Mix, Eddie Polo, Buck Jones, and others), with checkered shirts, and instead of bombachas,<sup>95</sup> they wore culottes, or even gaiters of the kind used at this time by the Army.”<sup>96</sup> This mixture of clothing styles suggests both the improvised nature of the filming, and the desire to appropriate the American iconographies of the western while also incorporating the traditional image of the local *gaúchos*.

Drawing on a similar set of themes, the following year, Walter Medeiros, son of a local landowner, undertook the filming of *Um Drama nos Pampas* (*A Drama in the Pampas*), described as a “super-production of regional customs.”<sup>97</sup> Surviving photos show groups of men on horseback in rustic costumes interacting with elegantly dressed characters, including the heroine.<sup>98</sup> Recalling the land disputes and sexual threats of *João da Mata*, *Um Drama nos Pampas* recounted the tribulations of a widow and her beautiful daughter Célia. Their farm is mortgaged to an unscrupulous local landowner, Guerra, who asks for the girl's hand in marriage as payment for the debt. Celia, however, is in love with her cousin Mário; when her brother tries to defend her against the landowner's proposition, Guerra has him killed and flees the area, pursued by Mário and a group of men from the farm. Unsurprisingly, “[a]fter a thousand peripeties, love and justice triumph.”<sup>99</sup>

While relatively little is known about these films produced in Porto Alegre, the few traces that remain of their content suggest an investment in the tropes of the western – rustic clothing, chases on horseback, and polarized conceptions of good and evil - comparable to that of other regional productions. The mobilization of genre conventions of the American western in films produced across Brazil in the 1920s suggests their flexibility in both incorporating geographically specific content and approximating regional cinema to the physical dynamism and technical mastery associated with American adventure melodramas. Whether the regional films were praised as effectively tempering these codes and adapting them to local concerns, as in the case of *João da Mata*, or considered imitations of Hollywood adventure films, as in the case of *Sofrer para Gosar*, they suggest a creative re-purposing of imported film tropes that also constituted an assertion of technological modernity.

### **Errant Youths, Active Heroines and Melodramas of Modernization: Serial Tropes and Spectacles of Technology in Regional Films**

In this section, I turn to the regional films that most closely approximated the strategies of American serials, featuring abundant fight scenes, chase sequences and races to the rescue involving horses, trains, motorcycles and cars. The automobile, especially, was mobilized as a potent symbol of local modernity, at times to a degree reviewers found unrealistic.<sup>100</sup> For example, one reviewer criticized scenes in Humberto Mauro's *Braza Dormida* in which the hero, a disinherited youth from a wealthy family working as a factory manager, drives an automobile, arguing that "no one could say that in Brazil, unlike in the United States, where automobiles line up in front of factories, that a simple employee could exhibit himself behind the wheel of a Chrysler of his own," suggesting that the film "shows off a standard of living which we, unfortunately, do not have."<sup>101</sup> The film *O Castigo do orgulho (Pride's Punishment)*, produced by Eduardo Abelim in Porto Alegre, also showed a fascination with the automobile that local commentators found exaggerated, reading it as an imitation of American adventure melodramas.<sup>102</sup> Observing publicity photographs for the film posted around the city, a journalist for local film magazine *A Tela* noted "the abuse of the automobile. Is it necessary [...] that such a vehicle figure in all films?" The writer judges the prevalence of automobiles to be a sign that local filmmakers were "obsessed by Americanism."<sup>103</sup> Another article in the same publication observes, "If the title which the film is to receive were not [already] printed there, I would be capable of baptizing it 'Automobile Madness' or 'The Mysterious Automobile', or 'Automotive Racetrack' or, perhaps, 'Anything for an Automobile,' in short, a quantity of automotive titles."<sup>104</sup> Evoking clichés of the adventure melodrama – and the serial more specifically, in the case of "The Mysterious Automobile" – the promotional discourses surrounding the film (over)emphasized the dynamism of transportation technologies associated with American lifestyles and Hollywood cinema.



Fig. 5.3: A publicity still for *Mocidade louca* emphasizes the presence of the automobile. Coleção Pedro Lima - Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro.

Two tropes relating to the vehicle seem to have been considered especially thrilling (and threatening) for regional filmmakers: the motorized bandit and the modern girl behind the wheel. This is perhaps most striking in the film *Amor que redime, Redeeming Love*, E.C. Kerrigan, Porto Alegre, 1929), a Dickensian tale of an innocent young woman, Nora, victimized by her lover Nurmis, leader of a gang of robbers.<sup>105</sup> The film's opening, which survives in a synopsis published in the film magazine *A Tela*, capitalized on the iconographies of motorized crime and the thrilling verticality common in the serial film.<sup>106</sup> Nurmis is shown keeping watch on the changing of the guard of two neighborhood patrolmen; while their attention is diverted, he makes a signal to Nora, who makes an agile leap from the high wall of a nearby mansion. The two then make their getaway in an automobile. Several other regional films evoked a cosmopolitan imaginary of urban criminality, often juxtaposed somewhat incongruously with local landscapes, as in the case of *Retribuição (Retribution)*, Gentil Roiz, Recife, 1923-5) and *Tesouro perdido (Lost Treasure)*, Humberto Mauro, Cataguases, 1927), two tales of buried treasure made two years and several thousand kilometers apart. These simple adventure plots functioned as pretexts for fight scenes and chase sequences, evoking a legendary past without delving deeply into local concerns.

By contrast, films such as *Entre as montanhas de Minas (Between the Mountains of Minas)*, Manoel Talon, Belo Horizonte, 1928) and *Mocidade louca (Mad Youth)*, Felipe Ricci, Campinas, 1927), integrated stunt sequences into romantic melodramas of local modernization that play out between city and countryside. Their plots focused on errant youths reformed by the love of *melindrosas* (a figure roughly equivalent to the American flapper). These young women, whose modernity is indicated by their sleek dresses, fashionable hats and (comparatively) active roles in the narrative, usually appear as the daughters of capitalists, who provide the aristocratic heroes with an opportunity to marry into a new regime of industrial productivity.

If the films discussed in the previous section appropriated conventions of the American western to address the social conflicts of rural Brazil, they were fairly conservative regarding gender roles. The heroines of the films discussed in this section are hardly a match for American serial queens in terms of their physical exploits; however, they show more active characteristics than do the innocent rural heroines that abound in the western-influenced films. In *O vale dos martírios (Valley of Martyrdom)*, made in a small town in the state of Minas Gerais, the heroine drives to her lover's rescue; while in *Mocidade louca*, the female protagonist gets into a scrape while out for a spin alone; in the opening minutes of *Sangue mineiro (Blood of Minas Gerais)*, she insists on taking the wheel on a pleasure drive with her suitor. In the film *Senhorita agora mesmo (Miss Right Now)*, the heroine, an orphan who runs her late father's rural estate, single-handedly pursues a gang of bandits. However, like the hapless Pauline in *The Perils of Pauline*, she eventually needs rescuing herself. A similar protagonist would be featured in *Sofrer para Gosar's* director E.C. Kerrigan's film *Revelação (Revelation)*, made in Porto Alegre in 1929, whose premise also recalls serial conventions in its focus on a wealthy, independent young woman who lacks a father figure. The heroine is a recent orphan who has inherited a cloth factory and an agricultural estate;<sup>107</sup> she becomes entangled in a love triangle between the hero, a worker accused of her father's murder who bears a mysterious tattoo, and the villain, identified as "an international vagabond, the bandit Sanchez [...] feared for his exploits and history of a novel-esque [*romanesca*] existence stained with blood".<sup>108</sup>

Surprisingly, it is not these fatherless heroines, nor the ultramodern figure of the *melindrosa* (the local equivalent of the flapper) who is presented as the greatest threat to the

social order in the regional films. Rather, it is the male *estróina*, a term that can be translated as “libertine” or “ne’er do well.” In several of the regional films, young men from wealthy urban families who lead dissipated lives, drinking excessively and squandering their inheritance, are either punished or, more frequently, reformed in the course of the narrative, with their desire for the heroine acting as a catalyst.

*A filha do advogado* (*The Lawyer’s Daughter*), directed by Jota Soares in Recife in 1926, is perhaps the most extreme example of this narrative paradigm. The anti-hero, Helvécio, played by Soares himself, is the pampered son of the eponymous lawyer; he is described in an intertitle as a “libertine and ne’er-do-well, victim of the madness of the world.” Helvécio develops a powerful sexual attraction to the heroine Heloísa, who has recently arrived in Recife. In true *folhetim*-esque fashion, unbeknownst to him, she is his sister, an illegitimate daughter of the lawyer raised in secret in the countryside and recently sent to the city at her father’s request.<sup>109</sup> The climax of the melodramatic narrative comes when Helvécio bribes a servant (one of a number of racist depictions of African-descended villains in films produced in Recife) to lock him in a room with Heloísa. Heloísa shoots her half-brother to protect her honor and is tried for murder; Helvécio’s fiancée, a law student depicted as a caricatured feminist, leads the prosecution. Heloísa’s father, however, arrives in disguise to defend her. While the degenerate figure of the *estróina* is eliminated in the narrative, Heloísa is progressively integrated into an urban, modern social order, a process that culminates in the lawyer’s acknowledgment of his paternity.

This narrative progression inverts the trope developed in a number of regional films – *Braza dormida*, *Entre as montanhas de Minas*, and *Mocidade louca* – in which upper-class youths from the city are expelled from the family fold, migrating to rural areas or small cities where they find love and happiness by assimilating the bourgeois values of hard work. This trajectory reverses the dominant migratory trend of the period, which increasingly concentrated Brazil’s population in urban centers, although seventy percent of Brazilians still lived in the countryside.<sup>110</sup> The melodramatic reconciliations of the regional films propose a path towards a modernization that would mitigate the uneven processes of development that increasingly polarized urban and rural space. To elucidate this dynamic, I initially turn to Recife to discuss the importance of serial tropes to the first fiction film produced in the city, *Retribuição*, and to later works by smaller production companies in the city. I then discuss the filming of melodramas, both sensational and sentimental, in the state of Minas Gerais between 1926 and 1930. In conclusion, I address the final silent fiction film made in Campinas, *Mocidade louca*.

### *Re-imagining Serials in Recife, 1923-1926*

In 1963, Jota Soares published a series of nostalgic articles recalling the early days of film production in Pernambuco. In one of these brief chronicles, Soares makes a surprising comment regarding American cinema in the years immediately following World War I, the moment at which Hollywood consolidated the global market dominance judged so disastrous for film production in other nations. Evoking his and his peers’ enthusiastic viewings of “the adventures of Grace Cunard, Eddie Polo, Noble Johnson, Pearl White, Ruth Roland, Jack Perrin and other experts in the art of confronting the greatest of perils,”<sup>111</sup> in films like *The Broken Coin*, *The Bronze Bullet*, *The Mystery of the Double Cross*, and *The Tiger’s Trail*,<sup>112</sup> Soares concludes that “the influence of American films on the spirit of the film pioneers of Pernambuco was a powerful element of their impulse to undertake these enterprises.”<sup>113</sup> Soares’s language, especially the reference to an “impulse” to make cinema, suggests that the visceral excitement

solicited by American adventure melodramas catalyzed a desire to occupy the place of the serial stars, and to demonstrate a mastery of cinematic technology through exciting stunt sequences.

As the first fiction film produced in Recife, *Retribuição*'s reliance on the tropes of the serial film is particularly telling. Directed by Gentil Roiz, the film survives today only as fragments totaling thirty minutes in length. *Retribuição* opens with a brief introductory prologue sequence, in which intertitles displaying the names of the participants are followed by medium close-up shots in which they face the camera. Carneiro da Cunha Filho notes that the formal characteristics of silent cinema produced in Recife (centrality, frontality, distancing) are consistent with Noël Burch's notion of a "primitive" mode of representation;<sup>114</sup> indeed, this device seems remarkably archaic if we recall that *Retribuição* was shot between 1923 and 1925, and prologues (whose best-known use comes in the film *Fantômas*) had fallen out of favor by the late teens.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, the sequence diverges from the conventional use of the prologue in one key respect: the first figure to be introduced is neither an actor nor a character, but rather the film's cinematographer. An intertitle reading "Shot by M. Edison Chagas" (suggesting a name inspired by the American inventor) is followed by a medium close shot of the operator dressed in a jacket and bowtie, formal clothing that belies Chagas' real-life poverty.<sup>116</sup> Unlike the principal actors who appear in the following shots, Chagas does not look directly into the camera, manifesting a certain shyness in front of the lens. Yet the prologue foregrounds the role of camera operator; responsible for the mastery of moving-image technology, Chagas is in a sense the true "hero" of the film.

After his appearance onscreen, an intertitle announces the pseudonym Almetry Steves - the actress who plays the film's heroine Edith, who bears the same English-language name as the protagonist of *Sofrer para gozar* - followed by an image of a rose glimpsed through a star-shaped mask. There is a cut to an image of the actress framed by the same mask; she smiles seductively and looks directly into the lens. In addition to cementing the poetic association between the woman and the rose, in a sense, the star-shaped mask literalizes the attempt to create local film stars on a pre-determined Hollywood model, which was manifest not only in the regionally produced films, but in their coverage in the illustrated press.

Following the prologue, a brief high-angle shot establishes the location of the action, panning to the right to display the domes of several baroque churches in Recife. The action begins with an event that, as Ben Singer has noted, is frequently the catalyst for the heroine's adventures in serial films: the death of the father.<sup>117</sup> Just before expiring, Edith's father entrusts her with a map showing the hidden location of "a fortune in gold coins that circulated in Brazil during the Empire."<sup>118</sup> Despite this revelation, the search for the treasure does not begin until a moment identified in an intertitle as "one year later." The catalyst is the appearance of the hero Artur in Edith's garden, where he has wandered after being tricked and badly beaten by the villain of the film, Curisco, who shares a name with a well-known real-life bandit.<sup>119</sup>

After this action is presented in flashback (shown in a single long shot whose distant framing lessens the visual impact of the violence), the focus of the action shifts to Curisco, described in an intertitle as "a highwayman and the leader of a terrible gang."<sup>120</sup> A series of intertitles and close-ups introduce the rest of the gang as they sit playing cards. It is here that the visual codes of French and American serials are most evident: Curisco wears a cap, jacket, and soft bow tie; the outlaws almost universally appear in caps as well, dressed in shirtsleeves and vests; only one of them wears a broader-brimmed hat which gives him the appearance of a cowboy. Curisco is welcomed by the group after a stint in jail, yet, as in *El tren fantasma* (*The Ghost Train*) discussed in Chapter 4, there is discontent within the ranks of outlaws. Curisco

berates one of the gang, Espião (“The Spy”) for not having found a target for the gang’s next assault. Leaving the hideout, “The Spy” predictably ends up at the very bench where Edith and Artur are discussing the treasure.

In the next segment of the film, which contains the most dynamic chases and struggles, Edith and Artur hire a car and set off for the fictional “Ruins of Palmyra,”<sup>121</sup> where the bandits are lying in wait for them. When Edith balks at having to descend a particularly steep slope, the two separate and Artur begins to dig for the treasure, but is soon interrupted by Edith’s cries for help as she is pursued by the bandits. Artur turns, pulls out a pistol, and fires at one of the bandits, who dramatically tumbles down the slope; however, a close-up on the gun (a rare departure from the near-continuous use of long shots and medium shots) as he attempts to fire further shots shows it to be empty or malfunctioning. Artur scrambles up the embankment after the bandits, not realizing that several members of the gang are lying in wait for him. As Edith runs towards the ledge, Artur is shown in long shot fighting off his pursuers with his fists, but Curisco enters the frame to subdue him at gunpoint. “The Spy” catches up with Edith at the edge of the cliff (a subtle low angle shot emphasizes its height) and they briefly struggle.

In the following scene, the captives are transported to the bandits’ hideout, shown to be located on an island. The depiction of the hero and heroine’s imprisonment draws heavily on serial tropes; Edith is shown supporting herself against a locked door, dramatically tossing back her head in desperation. Artur receives more punishing physical abuse; tied up and gagged, he is tortured during a later scene, in which the bandits progressively tighten a knotted rope around his head. The couple is rescued from this predicament by the intervention of “The Spy,” who secretly consults with Edith in her cell (this is indicated by the use of a keyhole-shaped mask, which was considered outdated in Hollywood films by 1925). The heroine sends the repentant bandit to seek help at her home, where her maid shows him a telegram from her brother Roberto, announcing that he is due to arrive from the interior on the next train. “The Spy” hurries to the station to explain her plight.

The simplicity and poverty of this “arrival of a train,” considered by Carneiro da Cunha Filho as a sort of “remake” of Lumière’s 1896 original, as mentioned above, signals the dynamics of technological delay.<sup>122</sup> Although Edith’s home is located as “Recife” by the telegram, shown as an insert, Roberto is the only passenger to disembark at what appears to be an isolated rural station, in sharp contrast with the dynamic urban sequences showcasing trolleys and trains in *A filha do advogado*. After “The Spy” explains the situation, Roberto rushes off to hire a boat to free the captives on the island, fending off the bandits with impressive physical skill (at one point, he throws two of them over his shoulders). Meanwhile, a procession of policemen arrives at the dock; one bandit is fatally shot, the rest apprehended; Curisco “seeing the end of the gang, ends his existence.”<sup>123</sup>

In keeping with the conventions of the American serial, a romantic union between the hero and heroine concludes the film.<sup>124</sup> As Edith walks with Artur by the edge of a lake, she notes her brother’s observations regarding “how wonderful life is outside the city,”<sup>125</sup> where one would presumably be safe from automobile bandits. Hearing this, Artur reflects that he must soon depart, an announcement that prompts a confession of love from Edith. Roberto, surprising the two lovers in the midst of their conversation, notes that he must leave on the next steamship for Rio and hopes to see his sister married before he does. Eliding the wedding sequence, the film moves directly to the newlyweds’ departure in an automobile, heading to an unidentified destination (in keeping with the film’s imprecise evocation of place).



Fig. 5.4: A publicity image showing the ostensibly American-style ending of *Retribuição*: “a declaration of love by the heroine to the hero, followed by a ride in an automobile.” *Para Todos*, May 9, 1925. Cinemateca Brasileira.

While the sense of the local conjured up by the film in its surviving form is quite tenuous, its integration of local sights with the dynamic action sequences associated with imported cinema was praised by contemporary critics; one reviewer noted its “Lovely panoramas, exciting struggles,” judging that “nothing was lacking for a perfect film.”<sup>126</sup> However, not all viewers welcomed this strategy. Writing in the *Diário de Pernambuco*, local intellectual Samuel Campello complimented the film’s clear photography and views of “the Beberibe woods, the Palmyra ruins, in Olinda, Pina beach and Dois Irmãos [a neighborhood of Recife].” However, this praise for the film was preceded by a long tirade on the lamentable state of contemporary cinema, held to be a consequence of “those films, called *policiais* [detective films], with an infinity of series. [There is] nothing more unrealistic, nothing more dangerous to society’s customs, than such adventure films. Who can deny their pernicious influence on weak brains?”<sup>127</sup> In order to support his case, Campello cites several cases of crimes inspired by the cinema in Mexico, New York, and Rio de Janeiro, and complains that serial films have caused him to become completely disillusioned with film attendance.

However, Campello makes an exception for the premiere of *Retribuição*, which he describes as taking place in an overheated cinema packed with eager spectators, and is bitterly disappointed. He writes, “the plot, my God! It has nothing of ours in it; it’s an imitation of American films, the so-called ‘policiais’. Blows, punches, gangs of bandits, impossible sequences, and even a marriage in the American style, with a declaration of love made to the hero by the heroine, immediately followed by an automobile ride.”<sup>128</sup> (Humberto Mauro’s 1928 *Braza dormida* ends in a very similar fashion, with the couple setting off on their honeymoon in an open car). While the film’s heroine, Edith, is a far cry from an American serial queen—as Ribeiro Bernadet points out, both the hero and the heroine are remarkably passive, and Edith’s



brother Roberto is responsible for their rescue<sup>129</sup>—her active role in determining her romantic destiny was interpreted as a threatening sign of Americanization.

Perhaps responding in part to such criticisms, Aurora Film's next production *Jurando vingar* focused more closely on local themes, as discussed above. Yet the iconography and narrative thrills of American adventure films remained a key point of reference among local film producers. Discontented with the leadership of Aurora-Film, Barreto Junior and Tancredo Seabra, who respectively played the hero and the villain of *Retribuição*, left to found their own company, Planeta-Film, in 1925. Their first production, *Filho sem mãe* (*Motherless Child*), juxtaposed the codes of the American western with the figure of the *cangaçeiro* (a term referring to social bandits who had long operated in the Northeast, terrorizing the population but also challenging the authority of the rural oligarchy).<sup>130</sup> Planeta-Film's next project, never completed, was to have been a serial film entitled *Herança Perdida* (*Lost Inheritance*), according to a local reader of *Selecta* who wrote in to complain about the folly of undertaking such a lengthy, ambitious project.<sup>131</sup> Local interest in filming adventure narratives persisted even after Aurora-Film had begun to produce melodramas more rooted in local concerns. Contracted to direct a film in the nearby town of Gôiana in 1926, Jota Soares noted that “the Goianenses wanted a film of the American type called ‘mustang’ [in English in the original],<sup>132</sup> with adventures, fight scenes, shoot-outs with autos, peripeties.” The result was *Sangue de irmão* (*Brother's Blood*), which according to the director's extremely brief description, “was about land disputes and the resulting kidnapping of a nine-year old child. Lots of action.”<sup>133</sup>

If the brutality of rural landowners remained a key concern for locally produced films, *Aitaré da Praia* (*Aitaré of the Beach*), which contrasted the lives of rural fishermen with urban life, and *A filha do advogado* focus on the tension between urban and rural spaces and values. While neither film sought to directly thrill audiences with sensational stunts, they continued to draw on melodramatic oppositions to indirectly address local modernization processes. In the section that follows, I turn to melodramas produced in the state of Minas Gerais in the same period, which shared the sensational sequences and sentimental reconciliations of city and countryside evident in films made in Recife.

### *Sensational and Sentimental Melodrama in Minas Gerais, 1926-1930*

In fiction films produced in Minas Gerais in the latter half of the 1920s, melodramas of both sensation and sentiment sought to assert local modernity and negotiate shifting gender roles. One example is the curious film *O Vale dos Martírios* (*Valley of the Martyrs*), filmed in the small town of Ouro Fino. The film was praised for foregrounding specifically *mineiro* elements; for example, a reviewer for the *Correio da Manhã* commented, “upon seeing the first scenes of the film, we felt great emotion appreciating the beautiful landscapes, the life of the interior, so characteristically ours, which speaks to the Brazilian soul. There is the ox-cart, the hunt, the great wheel of the sugar mill [a key trope in a number of films made in Minas Gerais, as I discuss further below], the peons of the estate, the guitar, inseparable companion of the country dweller.” This serenely bucolic tone, however, was not consistently maintained throughout the film; the reviewer's principal complaint about the film, judged to be “quite good for a work from a little town in the interior, where the lack of technical resources must be enormous,” is that “the final scenes are a bit long and tend toward the serial genre, with forced and almost unbelievable situations.”<sup>134</sup>

“Forced and unbelievable” certainly seems a fair description of many elements of *O Vale dos Martírios*'s narrative, especially in its latter portion, which is replete with false deaths and

bizarre substitutions. The plot of the film pivots on an ill-starred love affair between two youths, Angela and Fernando, who have been raised side by side. Angela's father has arranged another match for her; and the lovers' plans to run away are complicated by an apparent ally, a local doctor who turns out to be the villain of the piece. Promising to arrange their escape, the doctor instead kidnaps Angela, attempting to make her receptive to his advances by falsely informing her father and lover have engaged in a violent confrontation and are both dead.<sup>135</sup> Initiating a series of events strongly reminiscent of "Romeo and Juliet,"<sup>136</sup> the doctor leaves a vial of poison within Angela's reach. However, after she has drunk its contents "a mysterious figure" (whose identity is left unexplained in existing plot summaries) frees her. She races to the rescue of Fernando, who is headed for a showdown with Angela's wealthy suitor, in an automobile, Angela arrives and separates the combatants before collapsing, apparently lifeless. After a shooting, a psychotic break, an inadvertent live burial, and a rescue, the hero and heroine are united and receive her father's blessing.

Despite the conservatism of this ending, typical of melodrama, *O Vale dos martírios*'s heroine embodies a model of modern, active femininity, albeit inconsistently. Publicity photographs of Juracy Sandal show her wearing a short bob, a hairstyle that would have aligned her with the figure of the *melindrosa*.<sup>137</sup> In surviving images from the film, she appears in masculinized clothing, sporting a white shirt, dark jacket, and narrow tie. The "heroine's desperate race in an automobile to save her beloved" similarly marks a departure from the position she occupies at other moments in the film as a vulnerable object of exchange between men.<sup>138</sup>

In addition to this apparent influence of the American models of femininity, Hollywood crime serials were a clear point of reference for *O Vale dos martírios*'s advertising campaign. A promotional circular for the film featured a giant question mark, framing the figure of a man on horseback with a cape drawn up over his face. The image's caption reads, "Heavy black clouds block the brilliance of the stars on a horrific night in whose shadow a mysterious figure will perpetrate a heinous crime! WHO CAN THIS MYSTERIOUS FIGURE BE? SEE *O Vale dos Martírios*" (emphasis in original).<sup>139</sup> The use of a question mark to evoking a sense of mystery and arouse curiosity in the potential spectator was a staple of innumerable publicity campaigns for imported serials, including Gaumont's *Les Vampires*, Pathé New York's *Exploits of Elaine* and *Who Pays?* (dir. Harry Harvey and H.M. Horkheimer, 1915).<sup>140</sup> Aligning the film with a "low" genre of American and French cinema did not prevent its producers from attempting to capitalize on the discourse of national progress associated with film production in illustrated magazines. The promotional leaflet claimed that "the vertiginous action of some of its scenes, the dramatic paroxysms of which it is full, the tenderness of its romantic parts, the unexpected denouement of its sequences, all this makes 'O Vale dos Martírios' the true consecration of the Brazilian film industry and a legitimate source of pride for every Brazilian whose heart thrills [*estremece*] for his fatherland."<sup>141</sup> The sensational thrills offered by the film are constructed as a source of pride for those concerned with the progress of Brazilian cinema. Interestingly, nationalistic sentiments are themselves attributed with a literally sensational character here—*estremecer*, the verb used to express the physical effects of patriotic emotion, literally means to "shudder" or "to shiver." The broad popularity of the serial in peripheral exhibition markets, seems to have allowed the promoters of *O Vale dos Martírios* to claim its codes as a sign of cinematic modernity, although Rio de Janeiro's more cosmopolitan critics had a distinctly different vision of the brand of cinematic modernity that national films should emulate. *Cinearte* lambasted the film for its "ridiculous story," the reviewer continued, "beyond this, its motifs are

anti-cinematic, like the [live] burial of the ingénue,”<sup>142</sup> suggesting that they belonged to a strain of melodrama quite distinct from that of more recent American films.

*O Vale dos martírios*'s *folhetim*-esque qualities had clear local antecedents in a group of films produced in the city of Cataguases in the late twenties by Humberto Mauro, an electrical engineer by training, and photographer Pedro Comello. One of these projects, *Os Tres Irmãos* (*The Three Siblings*), was never completed and survives only as a written booklet whose “verbose, difficult to condense” text recounts the melodramatic adventures of the beleaguered titular siblings.<sup>143</sup> Salles Gomes situates the abortive project within a national culture of melodramatic narratives, suggesting that “[t]he appearance in *O Vale dos Martírios* and *A filha do Advogado* of the most typical ingredients of melodrama contained in *Os Tres Irmãos* – false deaths and substitutions of identity with the use of beards – indicate that these works belonged to the same cultural family,” which he suggests had more affinities to “Italian and French *folhetins*” than imported adventure films.<sup>144</sup>

After the two collaborators parted ways, Mauro would go on to complete *Tesouro perdido*, *Braza dormida*, and *Sangue mineiro*, while Comello would film the three-reel adventure film *Senhorita agora mesmo* (*Miss Right Now*), starring his daughter Eva Nil. Like many American serial heroines, the film's protagonist Lili has lost her father; at the time of the film's action, she is engaged in running his estate with a firm hand. While *Senhorita agora mesmo* has not survived to the present day, a summary published in *Cinearte* gives some clues as to its plot and the characterization of its heroine; it describes her as having “an energetic temperament, always prompt and decisive,” as implied by the film's title.<sup>145</sup> These qualities are an obstacle to her courtship by Mário, the son of a neighboring landowner; as the summary explains, “a girl like her could only return the love of a man of proven courage, whose nature was lively and decisive like hers.”<sup>146</sup> Not surprisingly, the film's plot provides an opportunity for him to prove his masculinity to the heroine, who gets herself into a scrape when she rushes off to confront a group of thieves who have stolen the family jewels.

At one point in the narrative, Lili's expedition seems to be a success: a surviving publicity photo shows the two bandits, dressed in wide-brim hats and with bullets in their belts, with their hands tied to a single rope, almost giving the impression they have been lassoed and hogtied.<sup>147</sup> However, for reasons not explained in the summary, “after various peripeties,”<sup>148</sup> the tables are turned on Lili and she must be rescued from the bandits by Mario, who has been searching fruitlessly for her all night. The hero manages to save her from the outlaws and their romantic union is assured. Although the film's iconography most closely recalls the genre of the western, Lili's fatherlessness, her resistance to romantic relationships, and her impulsive involvement in adventures, requiring her rescue by a male figure, all strongly evoke American serial conventions, a connection contemporary reviews made explicit.<sup>149</sup> Luciana Corrêa de Araújo has speculated that the use of this dynamic iconography of femininity, considered outdated by Brazilian audiences in the late twenties and did not correspond closely to the ingénue roles played by Nil in earlier films, may have been responsible for the film's unenthusiastic reception.<sup>150</sup>



Fig. 5.5: Publicity image, *Senhorita Agora Mesmo*. Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro.

If Pedro Comello's *Senhorita agora mesmo* drew on the tropes of the serial film and the western to showcase his daughter Eva Nil as star, Mauro's *Tesouro perdido* drew on a similar cultural repertoire, but constructed a somewhat more complex relationship between rural spaces and urban modernity. In *Tesouro perdido*, sharply-dressed vacationers and abundant automobiles (loaned by Mauro's business partners)<sup>151</sup> coexist with remnants of lawlessness and scenic sequences that evoke the powerful forces of nature. The intertitle that opens the film identifies its location as "the foot of the majestic Camparaó mountains, in Minas."<sup>152</sup> The scenic images that open the film emphasize the rugged and picturesque setting of this tale of adventure, in which two young brothers, Braúlio and Pedro, search for a buried treasure obsessively sought by their father during his lifetime. Bandits Manoel Faca (played by Mauro himself) and Raul Litz also covet the treasure, menacing the brothers and their adopted sister Suzanna.

Sporting a bushy beard, ragged straw hat, and sloppy garments, Manoel Faca is portrayed as a savage who is at home in the untamed natural landscape, as well as in the disreputable saloon of Chico Barriga, which is filled with rough types knocking back drinks and shooting dice in the tradition of early American westerns. The figure of Litz, on the other hand, is strangely ambivalent. He wears the most stylish, modern dress of the film, and is always depicted in a cap, vest, jacket, and tie, while other male characters appear in shirtsleeves with rustic hats. The spectator is first introduced to Litz behind the wheel of an automobile filled with young women yet when he goes to a secret meeting with Manoel Faca in a cabin in the woods, he is shown on horseback.

While the film's principal villain manifests both archaic and modern qualities, the quest for hidden gold belongs to the mythic time of childhood adventure stories. It is precisely this quality that Salles Gomes criticizes in the device of the buried treasure, which he suggests does not arise organically from the local setting.<sup>153</sup> However, the narrative of the treasure's origin is explicitly rooted in late colonial history; an intertitle states "It was said that [the original owner] had enlisted with the Portuguese forces that rose up against the idea of Independence, in 1822,

and before fleeing to Lisbon buried the fortune, being unable to carry it.”<sup>154</sup> In contrast to Salles Gomes’s reading, Schwarzman has suggested that this allusion functions as “a means of marking a national affiliation, creating an origin, a historical past disrupted by struggles for the constitution of a nation, just as in the western.”<sup>155</sup> While it may evoke imported adventure films, the trope of the buried treasure is mobilized in the construction of a (mythic) national past.

Despite this romanticization of Brazil’s history, *Tesouro perdido*’s tragic ending emphasizes the need to leave this savage, if thrilling, age behind. Having already escalated their misdeeds to the level of murder, the bandits kidnap Suzanna (Lola Lys, a pseudonym of Mauro’s wife Bêbe), promising her safe return in exchange for the remaining half of the map. Pedro rushes off to release her; his struggle with the bandits in a burning cabin is intercut with images of a group led by Braúlio galloping towards the cabin in a “race to the rescue” strongly reminiscent of the films of Griffith, dramatized by intercut close-ups of the horses’ hooves.<sup>156</sup> Yet Braúlio arrives too late to save his brother, who dies in his arms after being seriously wounded by the bandits. This tragic development diverges from the plot of *Tol’able David* (dir. Henry King, 1921), considered to be the model for *Tesouro Perdido*,<sup>157</sup> a coming-of-age tale in which a younger brother proves himself by successfully completing a similar rescue. Pedro achieves a mature, heroic masculinity only by sacrificing his life, and his brother Braúlio must chart a future course.

Offered a reward by the governor for having located Raul Litz, Braúlio renounces the search for the treasure and burns the reassembled halves of the map, then announces the donation of the reward money to found an orphanage. The intervention of the governor and the founding of the orphanage both imply that the installation of a benevolent state authority can replace a quest for individual gain through the acquisition of riches linked to the colonial past. Bringing the conclusion to a sentimental pitch, Braúlio declares “Your love, Suzanna, is my treasure.” *Tesouro Perdido* ends with the triumph of rural simplicity, associated with familial love and loyalty, over the greed associated with the bandits, responsible for Pedro’s death and their father’s ruin. *Tesouro Perdido* shows urban space only briefly, but it pits rural characters (who are shown to be motivated by loyalty and affection) against the greed of bandits associated both with the savagery of the colonial past and with an ultra-modern criminality.

Mauro’s later films *Braza Dormida* and *Sangue Mineiro* would establish more systematic antinomies between city and countryside, associating the former with emotional turmoil and the latter with personal renewal. In the former film, Rio de Janeiro is the site of financial ruin and family discord for the protagonist Luiz (Luis Sorôa), an exemplar of the wealthy *estróina*, whose refusal to work precipitates the melodramatic conflict. In *Sangue mineiro*, Carmen (Carmen Santos) flees a crushing romantic disappointment in Belo Horizonte—she is cast aside by her lover in favor of her sister, whose flirtatious ways are attributed to her education “in the American fashion” in a private school in Rio. Each protagonist finds redemption in the countryside: Luíz’s work in the sugar mill and relationship with the owner’s daughter Anita (Nita Ney) bring him prosperity and eventually romantic happiness; Carmen becomes the object of romantic rivalry between two cousins on a farm significantly called Acaba-Mundo (“World’s End”).

Concurrently with Mauro’s production of *Braza dormida*, another cinematic tale of errant youth reformed by rural life was being filmed four hundred kilometers away in the city of Belo Horizonte, the capital of Minas Gerais. The city was constructed in the late nineteenth century as a means of breaking with the state’s colonial past, and became a locus of literary modernism in the twenties. In late January 1928, the *Diário da Manhã* published a brief notice on a project for

the production of the film that would become *Entre as montanhas de Minas* (*Between the Mountains of Minas Gerais*). The article specified, “This film will be produced exclusively in the Capital and its surroundings, being a production of Adventures and sensations new to our public,” suggesting the conjunction of an impulse to showcase the region’s scenery to local audiences even as it thrilled them with fight scenes, chase sequences, and other staples of American serials and westerns.<sup>158</sup>

As I have suggested was the case with many regional films, “the genre chosen for these first productions was the adventure drama, because it can dispense with the installation of costly studios.”<sup>159</sup> Similarly, another newspaper noted that the filmmakers had intelligently chosen “a subject which can dispense with artificial sets, taking advantage of the panoramic beauty of our fields and our mountain ranges, unequalled in their proud grandiosity.”<sup>160</sup> The codes of the genre also allowed for an apparent alternation between spectacular stunts and sentimental scenes, and between images of Minas Gerais’s relatively new capital and an estate located in the interior, where, as in *Braza dormida*, a “rich, dissipated young man” is reformed through hard work and the love for the owner’s daughter.<sup>161</sup> However, in *Entre as montanhas de Minas* his redemption in the eyes of the heroine’s family is contingent on his attempt to rescue her from the clutches of a dangerous bandit, *Águia Preta* (Black Eagle).

Only a handful of surviving photographs and plot summaries published in local newspapers provide clues regarding the film’s content.<sup>162</sup> A summary published in the newspaper *O Estado de Minas* describes it as opening with “lovely segments of Belo Horizonte which should be excellent propaganda for the beauties of the Capital of Minas;” Mauro’s *Sangue mineiro* began with similarly picturesque images.<sup>163</sup> The value of these scenic images as propaganda, and the enterprise of film production in general, were associated with the modernization of the state and the growth of its young capital. One local newspaper praised the filmmakers’ initiative, declaring, “Any effort dedicated to the progress of Minas, and especially of our Capital, will always encounter the greatest sympathy from us.”<sup>164</sup> In keeping with these patriotic ambitions, the film was exhibited for the state’s governor, Antônio Carlos (who supported Humberto Mauro in the production of *Sangue Mineiro*), and a number of other officials. Reportedly, the governor pronounced it “worthy of being exhibited in any cinema in the Republic’s capital.”<sup>165</sup>

*Entre as montanhas de Minas* begins with the initial encounter between the hero, Hugo (played by Talon himself), and his love interest Geny (Edla Guimarães) in the amusement park of a local Agricultural Exposition, after Hugo has indulged in a “night of adventures and alcoholic libations.”<sup>166</sup> The two wealthy youths are products of the state’s urban and rural economies, respectively: the hero is described as “the son of a rich businessman from the capital of Minas,”<sup>167</sup> while Geny’s father is a “rich landowner from the south of Minas and one of the principal exhibitors” at the agricultural fair.<sup>168</sup> In the few surviving images from the film, Geny is shown with a short bob and with trousers and a loose shirt, tomboyish clothing that is appropriate to the rustic setting and resembles the costumes of other heroines of the regional productions.<sup>169</sup>

The flirtation between Geny and Hugo is “quickly interrupted by a sensational scene:” while they are dining in a restaurant on the fairgrounds, Geny attracts unwanted attention from another young man.<sup>170</sup> A physical fight between Hugo and Geny’s unwelcome suitor ensues; the hero takes out his gun and fires at his adversary, who falls to the ground. This hasty action is directly attributed to the young man’s intoxicated state, a consequence of his “unruly and dissipated existence.”<sup>171</sup> Although the summary does not directly suggest that the urban

environment of Belo Horizonte, which was still a relatively provincial town, is responsible for Hugo's irresponsible conduct, his actions do seem to imply a "modern" loosening of moral values amongst wealthy youth. In the course of the narrative, Hugo will be reformed by honest work on a rural farm.

Believing he has committed murder (falsely, as it turns out), Hugo flees the scene of the shooting, giving rise to a pursuit that was likely one of the film's most striking scenes, and probably the most challenging to shoot. The film's photographer, Rodrigo Octavio Arantes, had to call on two more experienced cameramen working in Belo Horizonte, Ignacio Bionfioli and José Silva, in order to capture the sequence in which Hugo flees in his automobile.<sup>172</sup> Pursued by a policeman on a motorcycle, "after many peripetias,"<sup>173</sup> Hugo makes a definitive escape by jumping onto a passing train.<sup>174</sup> This pursuit, involving multiple vehicles and at least one daring leap, is a local rendition of the sensational thrills offered by imported serials. The image that survives of this chase sequence (which seems to be a production still rather than an image drawn directly from the film), shows the automobile with motorcycle in hot pursuit, traveling along a dusty road against a backdrop of low hills. While this scenery does not exactly embody the picturesque "grandiosity" evoked in newspaper accounts of the film, it serves to articulate local topography with dynamic action.



Fig. 5.6: A publicity still for *Entre as Montanhas de Minas*. Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro.

Hugo's trajectory through rural Minas Gerais is replete with the incredible coincidences that tend to characterize melodrama. Not only does he encounter Geny on the train he has just boarded, he also happens to find work at the estate owned by her father, which is apparently free of the abuses depicted in other regional films. The summary describes it as a "model establishment, where the greatest harmony between employees and overseers reigns."<sup>175</sup> This idyllic picture is complemented by the arrival of Geny, who excuses Hugo's crime as an act of self-defense; encouraged by this, "the young man, impassioned, attempted to conquer the heart of his beloved, completely forgetting the mad life he had led up to that point."<sup>176</sup>

Interrupting the regeneration of the protagonist, a threat to the prosperity of the estate emerges in the form a group of cattle thieves led by the bandit Águia Preta (Ozorio Almeida).

The villain is described in one notice as a “perverse Indian,” an example of the racist coding of villains that manifested itself sporadically throughout Brazilian regional productions of the twenties.<sup>177</sup> While the bulk of the cattle thieves are captured, Águia Preta escapes and kidnaps Geny, carrying her off on horseback “at a furious gallop, across wide fields and the slopes of the mountains”<sup>178</sup> and bringing her to “his lair, which he has established in the ruins of an old mill.”<sup>179</sup> Traces of this now-archaic form of production are associated with the violent abuses of the presumably “degenerate” villain, whose perversity is in this case linked to his indigenous origins.<sup>180</sup>

Hugo rushes off to rescue Geny from the bandit, although the struggle between the hero and villain is only vaguely described in the summaries. One notes that the young man, together with Geny’s father Alberto, “after many peripeties, manage[s] to snatch the girl from the claws of the bandit,”<sup>181</sup> another merely evokes “exciting scenes, ending with the arrest of Águia Preta.”<sup>182</sup> Hand-to-hand combat featured prominently in this segment of the film: a surviving still shows Hugo and Águia Preta tussling on the ground; Águia Preta holds Hugo down, while the latter thrusts his thumb into the corner of his adversary’s mouth. A gun is visible in the bandit’s hand, and both wear holsters at their waists and western-style clothing. Another photograph, reproduced in *Cinearte*, shows Hugo at an even greater disadvantage; completely subdued, the hero has been tied up and suspended upside down from the mill wheel, while Geny, tied to a post, is menaced by Águia Preta.<sup>183</sup> A last-minute rescue by her father might have been necessary to free the young protagonists from such a vulnerable position. While the particulars of the villain’s defeat are unclear, it leads to the obligatory outcome – the union of the couple. The legal obstacle to their marriage conveniently evaporates with the appearance of Hugo’s friend Júlio, who brings him a letter from his father containing the good news that the man he wounded has completely recovered.

Perhaps drawing a contrast with American serials and westerns exhibited locally, a reviewer observed that in *Entre as montanhas de Minas*, “The scenes unfold at the pace necessary for them to be comprehended, without excesses that fatigue one’s attention.”<sup>184</sup> Another noted, “it is a simple romance,” associating its melodramatic narrative with a lack of pretension.<sup>185</sup> Other reviewers observed the modest ambitions of the film’s advertising campaign, which avoided the misleading label of “super-production” frequently applied by regional producers.<sup>186</sup> To my knowledge, *Entre as montanhas de Minas* was never shown in the nation’s capital.<sup>187</sup> The film’s overall impact was likely as modest as the pretensions of its semi-amateur producers. Yet its apparent appropriation of the codes of American westerns and serials (kidnapped maidens, thrilling chase sequences both motorized and on horseback, cattle thieves, hand-to-hand struggles and at least one shoot-out) and its melodramatic reconciliation of city and interior through the union of two privileged youths emblematic of Minas’ past and present, suggest the ongoing negotiation with modernity constituted by film production in the state.

#### Mocidade Louca: *Transportation Technology and Cinematic Technique as Spectacle*

*Mocidade louca*, the final silent production to be made in Campinas, was financed by a group of railroad company employees.<sup>188</sup> The film is now lost, but a summary published in *Cinearte* establishes its affinities to tales of wayward young men such as *Braza dormida*, *Entre as montanhas de Minas* and *A filha do advogado*:

If, instead of having satisfied his spendthrift inclinations, they had tried to divert him from the path of dissipation, putting in his hands an instrument of work,



perhaps the young Newton Rios would not have caused his parents the displeasure of revealing himself to be a ne'er-do-well and an ingrate, to the point of being expelled from the parental home, to confront the world and to learn to live through his own experience.<sup>189</sup>

The prodigal Newton (Antônio Fido) wanders through the interior of São Paulo until a complete lack of money and provisions forces him to head to Campinas and devote himself to gainful employment. Once there, Newton becomes embroiled in a series of adventures that included the following sensational attractions, as listed in a promotional notice for the film:

In *Mocidade Louca* we will see:  
an ascension to and struggle at 60 meters off the ground in the great facilities of the important Portland Brasileira Cement Factory  
a magnificent and extremely risky shot of a wild bull very close to the camera  
an accident in which a train collides with an automobile on a bridge, with the heroine left hanging from it, later falling into the water where she is saved by the hero.<sup>190</sup>

This list of visual attractions minimally integrated with the plot, certainly recalls Ben Singer's characterization of sensational melodrama, in both stage and screen incarnations, as an often disjointed collection of suspenseful situations.<sup>191</sup> However, the film's attraction was not limited to the thrilling – and thrillingly modern – content of these sequences showcasing local industry and transportation infrastructure in the context of heroism and danger. Advertising discourses also emphasized the technological modernity of cinematic special effects used to capture them. In terms reminiscent of those of the program of *Sofrer para Gosar*, released four years earlier, one of the film's reviewers details the optical feats involved in the film:

In *Mocidade louca* the spectator will have opportunity to appreciate the most cunning “trucs”, the most ingenious artifices of cinematography, such as: automobile chases filmed with a telephoto lens – super-vision; marvelous photographic work with miniatures; extremely felicitous shots – a railway disaster, authentic, formidable – struggles at a great height, unique in national films.

In short, these were the details that astonished the film critics of the capital, and “Selecta Film” calls the public's attention to the attentive observation of these shots, which constitute the triumph of “Mocidade Louca”, and the rosy victory of cinema in Campinas.<sup>192</sup>

As was the case with the program of *Sofrer para Gosar*, the audience is invited to carefully observe the labor of cinematic technique involved in producing spectacular and thrilling sequences. Significantly, the skill required to produce such sequences is described as having gained the admiration of film critics in Rio, although the reviews published in the capital that I have consulted do not distinguish these characteristics.

The conjunction of two of these sensational attractions—the wild bull and the train accident—marks the meeting between the hero and the heroine, Yvone. In publicity

photographs, Yvone appears as a thoroughly modern girl with bobbed hair, sporting a cloche hat and a calf-length print dress. Her independent ways are apparently responsible for placing her in mortal danger; she is described as having a “weakness for going on rides through the country, driving her jalopy herself, with confidence in her own abilities.”<sup>193</sup> Like the titular heroine of *The Perils of Pauline*, in *Mocidade louca* the heroine’s “imprudence and lack of sense are always the accomplices of life’s greatest adventures.”<sup>194</sup> While crossing the bridge, the motor of the car grinds to a halt; alighting to investigate the problem, she finds herself menaced by the bull. To make matters (implausibly) worse, the heroine hears a train approaching the bridge (the summary explains that it has been dispatched for an emergency track repair). Throwing herself out of the way, she hangs by her hands from the bridge, but reaching the point of exhaustion she falls into the water, where she is rescued by the hero. As in the case of *Fanny o el robo de los veinte millones* in Mexico, the filming of the locomotive crash with the cooperation of the Mogyana Railway Company became a local spectacle, with over two hundred residents gathering to observe the scene.<sup>195</sup>

Newton’s rescue of the heroine gains him a position in her father’s silk factory; this focus on local industry suggests the city’s productivity in the manufacturing sector. The film’s dramatic conflict in fact develops out of a commercial rival’s nefarious plans to commit industrial espionage: two saboteurs kill the factory’s guard and break into the factory, intending to ruin the textiles with a corrosive fluid. In the meantime, Newton, at a company picnic, realizes that he has left the keys to the office in the lock.”<sup>196</sup> Racing back in an automobile, he catches the saboteur in the act and chases him to a nearby cement factory, site of the spectacular fight and deadly fall mentioned in the description above.

In a review of *Mocidade louca* published in the *Gazeta de Campinas*, the sentimental and sensational aspects of the film are discussed side by side. Both are characterized as a source of excitement for audiences, in part because both were constructed as achievements in cinematic technique, whether in terms of polished acting or accomplished camerawork. The reviewer writes, “Especially in the scene in the boat, in which she listens to the impassioned declarations of her beloved (Antonio Fido), Isa Lins is truly admirable [...]. Another exciting scene is the train wreck, which due to the perfection with which it was captured, left us breathless for a number of seconds.”<sup>197</sup> The review suggests that the film evokes physical thrills by means of its threatened violence to vehicles and bodies and its impressive combination of choreography and stunt work involved in its filming. At the same time, Lins’ performance evokes sentiment by showcasing acting technique. The review’s author discusses the performances of the film’s hero in similar terms, noting that he “revealed himself as an excellent artist, both in his performance in the love scenes and in the formidable struggle with the well-known boxer Bellini [sic]. The camera operator of Selecta [Film] was quite felicitous in capturing the scene of Bellini’s fall, as well as the chase that follows.”<sup>198</sup> The setting of the cement factory scene, in addition to providing the fight scene with a thrilling verticality, suggests another subtle homage to the local industry.



Fig. 5.7: A publicity image showing the aftermath of the villain's fall in *Mocidade Louca*.  
Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro.

*Mocidade louca* was perhaps the most striking example of a film that re-combined the iconographies of imported cinema, including daring stunt sequences and fashionably modern models of femininity, to stage the reconciliation of a specifically Brazilian polarization between urban centers and small cities. Integrating sensational and sentimental melodrama, the film suggested an alternative to the temptations of urban modernity in the industriousness of the smaller community of Campinas, mediated through the romance and redemption of the hero.

While Mauro's *Sangue mineiro* would still have a modest run on Brazilian screens in early 1930, the moment at which the production of silent fiction features could allow film enthusiasts outside Rio and São Paulo to participate in the cinema's technological modernity was reaching its end by the end of the twenties. The arrival of sound film, introduced in Brazil in 1929, created a demand for productions that entailed complex equipment and large capital investments. Regional filmmakers' ad-hoc technical solutions and financing strategies, always precarious, would become definitively unsustainable. The populist government of Getúlio Vargas, which came to power in the Revolution of 1930, initiated efforts to consolidate nationalistic cultural forms, conceived in an explicitly propagandistic fashion. In the following decade, Brazilian cinema produced in the capital would capitalize on sound cinema's new capacity to reproduce popular music (especially samba, which was increasingly constructed as a national musical genre) in a series of musicals that featured the stars consecrated by the growing popularity of radio and the public spectacle of Carnaval. Yet the combination of a locally defined "melodramatic imagination" with iconographies appropriated from imported cinema would never again be mobilized in a comparable fashion. In post-Republican Brazil, the regional films' articulation of local modernities in a semi-amateur mode of film production operating outside a consolidated culture industry was a project that could no longer be sustained.

## CONCLUSION

Almost exactly twenty years after the release of the original *O crime da mala* in Rio de Janeiro cinemas, a second “Crime of the Trunk was committed, again involving the immigrant community. The *Correio Paulistano* reported in October 1928: “an Italian recently arrived in São Paulo repeats, along general lines, the sensational crime of Miguel Traad.”<sup>1</sup> A young woman, Maria Fêa Pistone, was murdered by her husband José Pistone, who placed her body in a trunk and had the trunk brought aboard the *Massilia*, headed to Bordeaux. “[P]roject[ing] intense light in the night of mystery,” the police managed to catch Pistone, who confessed to the murder.<sup>2</sup> As in the case of the original “Crime of the Trunk,” competing film adaptations sought to exploit the violent events, with both taking the title *O crime da mala*. A rather impassioned critical opinion about one version, expressed in a fan letter to the magazine *Cinearte*, suggests that the regime of sensational reality exploited by Brazilian true-crime films of the early twentieth century persisted through the end of the 1920s. Like the majority of its antecedents, this film was “ready in the blink of an eye,” according to the letter writer; like them, it yielded a theatre “packed with spectators.”<sup>3</sup>

The letter, signed by a “Nick Carter” who was likely male and identifies his place of residence as Campinas, expresses a certain confusion about the genre of *O crime da mala*, revealed in the opposition he draws between the value of fiction and non-fiction film. He writes, “I thought I’d be seeing a good film. Not the tragedy in all its details. Instead, a non-fiction film [*film natural*]. I wanted to see the famous bandit up close. So I ended up seeing the bad example of those individuals, who instead of making a narrative film [*filme de enredo*] make this.”<sup>4</sup> While criticizing the production company’s failure to make a well-executed, purely narrative feature, “Nick Carter” simultaneously expresses a desire for a visual document of the actual criminal. Furthermore, he makes a somewhat contradictory objection to the portrayal of “the crime in all its details.” While “Nick Carter” seems to be referring to the re-enactment of the murder—he notes a “*clos-up* [sic] of the criminal hand with the murdering knife in his fist”—he also cites many markers of visual authenticity linked to journalistic accounts: “Details of Santos captured on the site of the tragedy [...] The fatal trunk. The carriage [that transported the trunk] framed so that it can be seen it was really this one. 716 [the license number]. Ha!”<sup>5</sup> Like the *carioca* adaptations of the “Crime of the Trunk” from two decades earlier, this version of *O crime da mala* seems to have mixed elements of a dramatic re-enactment with objects and locations with a real or simulated indexical link to the crime portrayed.

The film even seems to have had a jailhouse apotheosis of a sort, which “Nick Carter” describes thusly: “The Prison. This wasn’t published in the papers. It’s an invention of [Dardis] Neto [the director] or of Pistone in prison. Fêa’s ghost appears. It’s ridiculous! She accuses him of stealing her life and that of the creature about to come into the world. Ridiculous.”<sup>6</sup> Where turn-of-the-century true-crime films and newspaper reports had not hesitated to portray the subjective states of the criminals and victims in a novelistic fashion, this sequence suggests the adoption of a more “objective” journalistic style, as well as a clearer distinction between fictional and non-fictional genres in the minds of film spectators. Yet the conflicting expectations of “Nick Carter,” who wanted to see both “a good (that is, narrative) film” and the face of the actual bandit, and the structure of the film itself as he describes it, suggest that document and dramatization could not be so easily disentangled, even two decades after the production of the first local true-crime films. The fan’s description suggests that the sensational mixture of re-enactment and actuality, of narrative and view, that was present to differing degrees in both the

true-crime films of the turn of the century and the local produced “serials” of the teens, persisted as a uniquely national mode of portraying sensational local realities through the end of the silent period.

The mixed representational registers of the 1928 *O crime da mala*, manifest two decades after the abrupt disappearance of the actuality genre in American and European cinema, signals the ambiguities attendant on an absence of industrial consolidation of film production, which persisted in Mexico until the late 1930s, and arguably, was only achieved in Brazil in 1969 with the founding of Embrafilme, a state film agency that regularized production and distribution in the country. Whether capitalizing on sensational current events or asserting regional modernity in nations in which no city could truly lay claim to the status of a center of film production, silent cinema in Mexico and Brazil maintained an openness to the local and topical that would have been unthinkable in fully capitalized, export-oriented industries like Hollywood. As in the case of their literary antecedents, true-crime and adventure films mingled the documentary impulse with the Manichean morality and openly theatrical effects of popular literature and stage melodrama. It was this conjunction of representational registers that made it possible to mediate legal authority and popular sentiment, local politics and cosmopolitan imaginaries of crime, elite-driven modernization and emerging mass culture. It is these encounters of opposites, yoked to projects for local, regional, and national progress and marketed for popular consumption, that trace the contours of Mexico and Brazil’s “peripheral” modernities.

In this project, cinema and the popular press have appeared as modes of recording, disseminating, and managing topical events, as well as documenting and traversing space. As Esther Gabara has signaled, mechanical visual reproduction technologies in Latin America “bore both the promise of modernity as technological advancement and the stain of nineteenth- and early-twentieth century projects of imperial expansion.”<sup>7</sup> These technologies’ status as products of industrialized nations that acted as neo-colonial powers, in addition to their role in producing, mapping, and mastering space and disciplining the emergent modern subject, is clear in the visual and print culture discussed in this project. Yet the early twentieth-century cultures of popular sensationalism in Mexico and Brazil also foreground the points of rupture in narratives of cultural colonization and projects of conservative modernization, even as they signal the inherent violence of the social order in nations afflicted by persistent economic and racial inequality.

These dynamics have taken on novel and often divergent forms throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, through Mexico’s “party dictatorship” of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, returned to power in the latest presidential elections, and Brazil’s populist governments under Getúlio Vargas, who governed as dictator between 1930 and 1945 and as a democratically elected president from 1951 to 1954. In Mexico, representations of violence gained monumental and ideologically stabilizing representation in the muralist movement, the “novel of the Revolution,” and Mexican cinema of the Golden Age.<sup>8</sup> In Brazil, popular culture – the export-ready trinity of soccer, samba, and Carnival (the latter two enshrined in part by the growth of radio under Vargas’ first regime<sup>9</sup>), has been characterized by an “imperative towards happiness” which discourages collective confrontation with past wrongs, including those inflicted by the last military dictatorship (1964-1985).<sup>10</sup> At the same time, exclusionary models of urban planning and management—exemplified by the recent “pacification” and demolition of *favelas* in preparation for the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games—, combined with a culture of surveillance and paranoia, signal the persistent production of social marginality and “criminalized” spaces in Brazil.<sup>11</sup> The urgency of these

questions has been signaled by a proliferation of films and television shows about the *favela*, including the internationally successful *City of God* (*Cidade de Deus*, Fernando Mereilles and Kátia Lund, 2002). Such productions have been accused of glamorizing poverty and violence, but have also intersected with community initiatives seeking to offer youth alternatives to drug trafficking.

In Mexico, the electoral defeat of the PRI brought the PAN (Partido de Acción Nacional), to power, and with it, an initiative to destroy the drug cartels in attempt to consolidate political legitimacy. The result has been a seven-year conflict that has cost more than 60,000 lives as of this writing, accompanied by high-profile displays of violence such as assassinations of public officials and public displays of large numbers of victims' corpses with "narco-banners," carrying messages the cartels wish to make public. The government and the state-controlled press have censored these messages, as well as the *narcocorridos*, a modern form of the traditional ballads narrating the exploits of bandits and Revolutionary heroes, which, like Brazilian *cordel* literature, constitute an eminently popular form of narrating and consuming topical events. However, alternative media, including websites like *El blog del narco*, act as repositories of images produced by citizen journalists and by the traffickers themselves, including videos of arrests, confrontations, interrogations, and even executions.<sup>12</sup> Like the "revolutionary documentaries," these websites collect images of mass violence, which has proliferated far beyond the "legitimate" monopoly by the state, and present them to public view. The graphic, shocking nature of these documents, which often defy "social and legal bans against the direct, nonfictional filming of death,"<sup>13</sup> gestures towards the rupture of the social contract that characterizes contemporary experience in Mexico.

The representations of criminality, death, and physical risk discussed in this dissertation allow us to trace the roots of contemporary articulations of violence, media, and space in Mexico and Brazil, shedding new light on the ambivalent relationships between elite-driven modernization and persistent inequality in Latin America. My focus on crime and adventure narratives, often considered the definitive genres of rationalized urban modernity, has permitted me to trace a key point of exchange and appropriation between industrialized countries and unevenly modernizing nations with strong parallels to the contemporary moment. Early Mexican and Brazilian cinema's fascination with depictions of singular bodily events and physical virtuosity demands a reconsideration of cinema's ontology as understood in the period of early cinema, as well as the geographic specificity of fiction and non-fictional genres, modes which are themselves mobilized to ideological ends. In analyzing the role of new technologies of visual reproduction in early processes of cultural massification, I argue for their pivotal significance in reconfigurations of the public sphere in these two nations in the early decades of the twentieth century.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the relationship of revue theater to historical events and the reshaping of urban space in Rio de Janeiro in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Flora Süssekind, *As revistas do ano e a invenção do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Fronteira, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> This figure is based on period advertisements for the film; it should be noted that film lengths were frequently exaggerated during the period.

<sup>3</sup> *Correio da Manhã*, November 12, 1908, 5. The film was first exhibited on August 3, 1908. *Gazeta de Notícias*, August 3, 1908, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 144.

<sup>5</sup> “Passavam os últimos retardatários que vinham das casas de diversão do largo próximo. Dos novos combustores a luz amarelada dos bicos Auer suavemente aclarava a rua [...] Era o crime horripilante á hora clássica dos crimes horripilantes, acentuado pela circunstância audaciosa de se dar no coração da cidade [...] O fulgor de diamantes numa *vitrine*, a profusão das jóias alinhadas na prateleiras, com cifras gordas atestando o seu valor, daquele retângulo iluminado e brilhante partiu uma fascinação alucinante que tentou ao crime um grupo de bandidos, cujo numero não é ainda conhecido.” *Gazeta de Notícias*, October 15, 1906, 1. All translations from the Portuguese are mine. Citations in the original have been altered to conform with contemporary spelling.

<sup>6</sup> José Inácio de Melo Souza cites the opening of the Chic on August 1, 1907; the Parisiense on August 10; the Pathé on September 18; the Paraíso do Rio on September 28; and the Pavilhão Internacional on October 17. *Imagens do passado: São Paulo e Rio de Janeiro nos primórdios do cinema* (São Paulo: Editora Senac, 2003), 119.

<sup>7</sup> “ao ficcionar nos próprios locais do crime, o filme desenvolve um duplo desejo já manifesto no jornal [...]” Jean-Claude Bernadet, *Historiografia clássica do cinema brasileiro: metodologia e pedagogia* (São Paulo, Editora Annablume, 1995), 85-86.

<sup>8</sup> The *Gazeta de Notícias*, founded in 1875, was one of the few newspapers established during the imperial period to thrive in Brazil’s new Republic; the *Jornal do Brasil* was founded in 1891, distinguishing itself amongst the *carioca* press for its clear business plan; and the *Correio da Manhã*, founded in 1901, quickly became popular for its polemical political stances.

<sup>9</sup> The importance of the expanding mass press in the professionalization of writers is noted in Flora Süssekind, *Cinematograph of Words: Literature, Technique and Modernization in Brazil*, trans. Paulo Henriques Britto (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995). This point is also emphasized by Nelson Werneck Sodré in his classic *História da imprensa no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1966).

<sup>10</sup> de Melo Souza, *Imagens do passado*, 212.

<sup>11</sup> “Talvez por haver em tempo trabalhado na imprensa, fiquei com o gosto pelas oportunidades; atraia-me a reportagem filmada, a documentação animada das coisas interessantes.” Antônio Leal, manuscript document. Cinemateca Brasileira, Arquivo Pedro Lima, AP/PT 1.

<sup>12</sup> “Os melhores estimulantes de uma farta concorrência de espectadores ao cinema são os “films” da sua própria vida social, a reportagem viva, são as lendas indígenas, a sua história, os contos populares, as novelas dos seus escritores prediletos [...] Já o verificamos aqui: fitas

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organizadas em 1908 e 1909 sobre ocorrências mais ou menos interessantes e algumas explorando a emoção popular deixada como rastro de grandes crimes, produziram no Rio e nos Estados sucesso jamais alcançado por verdadeiras obras de arte, de despesa e de arrojo, executadas nos grandes “ateliers” europeus. “O Rio vai ter uma fabrica de ‘fitas’ cinematográficas.” *A Noite*, January 29, 1916, 1.

<sup>13</sup> “O cinema aparece na América Latina como mais uma importação estrangeira.” Paulo Antonio Paranaguá, *Cinema na América Latina: Longe de Deus e perto de Hollywood* (Porto Alegre: LP&M Editores, 1984), 9.

<sup>14</sup> de Melo Souza, *Imagens do passado*, 236.

<sup>15</sup> For commentary on the so-called “Bela Época” of Brazilian cinema, see Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes, “Cinema: A Trajectory in Underdevelopment” in Michael T. Martin, ed., *New Latin American Cinema*, vol. 2 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 263-271; Randal Johnson, *The Film Industry in Brazil: Culture and the State* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987), 19-40; Bernadet, *Historiografia clássica do cinema brasileiro* (São Paulo: Annablume Editora, 1995), 34-48; de Melo Souza, *Imagens do passado*, 87-104.

<sup>16</sup> Jean-Claude Bernadet, *Filmografia do cinema brasileiro, 1900-1935: Jornal O Estado de São Paulo* (São Paulo: Secretaria da Cultura, 1979).

<sup>17</sup> *Correio da Manhã*, September 11, 1912, 14.

<sup>18</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, July 26, 1913, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 190.

<sup>20</sup> See Jeffrey D. Needell, *A Tropical Belle Époque: Elite Culture and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>21</sup> Singer attributes the qualitative difference between modern city life and urban experience in other periods to rapid population growth, an unprecedented rise in commercial activity, and the introduction of transportation technologies such as the trolley and automobile. Ben Singer, “Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism.” *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 79.

<sup>22</sup> Christine Ritui, “João do Rio: ombre et lumière du Rio de Janeiro de la Belle Époque.” *Littérature et modernisation au Brésil*, ed. Jacqueline Penon and José Antonio Pasta Jr. (Paris: Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2004), 32.

<sup>23</sup> Boris Fausto, *Crime e cotidiano: a criminalidade em São Paulo, 1880-1924* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1984), 10-11.

<sup>24</sup> For comments on elite attitudes towards crime among the working classes, see Sidney Chaloub, *Trabalho, lar e botequim: o cotidiano dos trabalhadores no Rio de Janeiro da belle époque* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1986), 19-21.

<sup>25</sup> Teresa A. Meade, *‘Civilizing’ Rio: Reform and Resistance in a Brazilian City, 1889-1930* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> “Há quem afirme que os grandes crimes são expoentes marcando o grau da civilização do meio onde esses requintes de crueldade ocorrem com freqüência. Si não é um paradoxo, a afirmação que lembramos, pode-se dizer, sem exagero, que S. Paulo dia a dia se civiliza, competindo com os grandes centros.” *Correio Paulistano*, September 5, 1908, 1.

<sup>27</sup> “Um dos característicos das maiores e das mais requintadas civilizações são os grandes crimes. A esse respeito e sob esse aspecto nós temos o direito de nos considerar entre os primeiros povos



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civilizados. Não nos faltam o que a tecnologia jornalística chama crimes sensacionais.”

“Civilização e policia,” *Gazeta de Notícias*, October 17 1906, 1.

<sup>28</sup> “[É] motivo por sobressaltos o progresso do crime, que nos enriquece as crônicas [...] “O ano policial,” *Gazeta de Notícias*, January 2, 1907, 3.

<sup>29</sup> “Dado o grau de civilização atual, civilização que tem em germen todas as decadências, o crime tende a aumentar, como aumentam os orçamentos das grandes potencias, como uma porcentagem cada vez maior de impunidade.” João do Rio, “As crianças que matam.” *Cinematógrafo* (Porto: Livraria Chardron, 1909), 32.

<sup>30</sup> See Needell, *A Tropical Belle Époque* and Jorge E. Hardoy, “Theory and Practice of Urban Planning in Europe, 1850-1930: Its Transfer to Latin America” in *Rethinking the Latin American City*, ed. Richard E. Morse and Jorge E. Hardoy (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 20-49.

<sup>31</sup> de Melo Souza, *Imagens do passado*, 116

<sup>32</sup> Marcos Luiz Bretas, *A guerra das ruas: povo e policia na cidade do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, 1997).

<sup>33</sup> Meade, ‘Civilizing’ *Rio*, 36.

<sup>34</sup> “Com a modificação dos nossos hábitos de cidade pacata e sumamente burguesa, devido a sua transformação radical, com as novas artérias, que já lhe emprestam o aspecto de cidade européia, dia a dia, cresce a imigração estrangeira, que como é natural, a par de novos elementos bons para a nossa prosperidade, traz-no-al uns maus também. Diariamente vemos novos tipos aparecerem de preferência nas casas de espetáculos, nas confeitarias e cafés da moda a passearam pelas avenidas, em automóveis e carruagens de luxo, sem que ninguém lhes conheça a precedência ou de onde auferem recursos para manterem a situação de pessoas ricas.” *Jornal do Brasil*, October 16, 1906, 3.

<sup>35</sup> See Sales Augusto dos Santos, “Historical Roots of the ‘Whitening’ of Brasil,” *Latin American Perspectives* 29:1 (January 2002), 61-82.

<sup>36</sup> See Tom Gunning, “Embarrassing Evidence: The Detective Camera and the Documentary Impulse” in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, ed. Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 46-64 and Allan J. Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (Winter 1986), 3-64.

<sup>37</sup> Francisco Foot Hardman, *Nem patria, nem patrão!: vida operária e cultura anarquista no Brasil* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1983).

<sup>38</sup> Meade, ‘Civilizing’ *Rio*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*, 5.

<sup>40</sup> However, Sidney Chaloub observes that one campaign against police brutality launched by the *Correio da Manhã* in 1905; Chaloub, *Trabalho, lar e botequim*, 91-92. The need for the professionalization of the police was intermittently noted by journalists; the police force underwent one of several reforms in 1907. See Bretas, *A guerra das ruas*.

<sup>41</sup> UNESCO, “The Making of Literate Societies” in *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* (UNESCO, 2006), 192.

<sup>42</sup> “O romance-folhetim foi, talvez, o primeiro elemento de sensacionalismo introduzido na imprensa. Precedeu ele à reportagem policial, oferecendo aos leitores um prato idêntico ao que esta viria proporcionar-lhe, mais tarde. Tanto assim que, quando o jornal passou a ganhar novo feitio, aproximando-se aos padrões modernos, a atração das novelas, em rodapé, começou a decair. Hoje, não é mais a continuação de um romance que o leitor procura, mas o seguimento

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de uma reportagem policial, curioso de saber em que pé estão as diligências, se já foi encontrado o criminoso.” Brito Broca, *Românticos, pre-românticos, ultraromânticos* (São Paulo: Polis, 1979), 174-175.

<sup>43</sup> See Nicolau Sevckenko, *Literatura Como Missão: Tensões sociais e criação cultural na Primeira República*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (São Paulo: Editora Schwarz, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> No dia do crime [...] o diretor não poupou o seu folhetim engraçadíssimo. Ordenou que não saísse, pois queria página e meia sobre o crime; que se inventasse, que se dessem os menores pormenores, as suspeitas mais desarrazoadas [...] Fosse como fosse, ele queria página e meia e vinte e cinco mil exemplares para a venda avulsa.” Lima Barreto, *Recordações do escrivão Isaías Caminha* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Mérito, 1949), 206.

<sup>45</sup> “um título rocambolesco de romance popular,” “leitura de folhetins policiais.” Barreto, *Recordações* 198, 196.

<sup>46</sup> “A confusão entre o emprego de uma linguagem comprometida com a informação e o tom literário, de largo uso na crônica, faz emergir uma questão ética. De um lado o compromisso com a ‘verdade’ dos fatos. De outro, o diálogo com a ficção que resvala na pura invenção, comprometendo a informação.” Valéria Guimarães, “Tensões e Ambigüidades na Crônica Sensacionalista: O Jornalismo no Rio de Janeiro e São Paulo no Início do Século XX” in *Nas tramas da ficção: História, Literatura e Leitura*, ed. Clóvis Gruner and Cláudio DeNipoti (Cotia, Brazil: Editora Atliê, 2009), 231.

<sup>47</sup> “o encargo de desenvolvê-lo, de explicá-lo, de reconstruir a cena para o gosto público.” Barreto, *Recordações*, 200.

<sup>48</sup> “Por essa estranha e misteriosa faculdade das multidões, aquele caso, vulgar um mês antes ou depois, naquele dia tomou a proporção de um acontecimento, de um fato pouco comum.” Barreto, *Recordações*, 199.

<sup>49</sup> “Havia gente de toda a sorte; velhos, moços, burgueses, operários, senhoras – gente de todas as idades e condições.” Barreto, *Recordações*, 201.

<sup>50</sup> “Quando o editor ou cronista remoa a fórmula narrativa tradicional, abre um canal de diálogo com seu leitor, ainda que este seja um leitor de pouca intimidade com o mundo da escrita [...] o *faits divers* e as demais fórmulas sensacionalistas revelam a mão dupla da operação de trocas culturais entre produtor e receptor.” Guimarães, “Tensões e Ambigüidades,” 237.

<sup>51</sup> “pretensão a graça, a coisa ligeira e leve, sem deixar de ser intellectual,” Barreto, *Recordações*, 204.

<sup>52</sup> Marlyse Meyer, “Voláteis e versáteis. De variedades e folhetins se fez a crônica” in *A Crônica: o gênero, sua fixação e suas transformações no Brasil*, ed. Antônio Candido (Campinas: Editora da Unicamp, 1992), 93-134.

<sup>53</sup> “essas doses homeopáticas de sensações fortes e de lances dramáticos,” “O Folhetim,” *Gazeta de Notícias*, April 1, 1907, 1.

<sup>54</sup> “Um jornal pode não ter serviço telegráfico, pode ser manco nas suas informações, pode não ter gramática [...] Tirem-lhe, porém, o folhetim-romance e verão se não é o mesmo que lhe tirar a vida.” “O Folhetim,” *Gazeta de Notícias*, April 1, 1907, 1.

<sup>55</sup> “a síntese do calunga que o informa e o põe ao facto dos acontecimentos com a presteza e a penetração do raio. O calunga não precisa tempo para o ler. Basta vel-o, basta olhar para ele e distinguir entre a pasta ennegrecida pelas sobras do lápis do artista uma cara, um corpo estendido, com um nome por baixo e alguns títulos sugestivos, para o leitor ficar conhecendo a

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vítima do último assassinato cometido contra um homem, e também de ordinário contra a arte do desenho e da gravura em papel barato.” “O Folhetim,” *Gazeta de Notícias*, April 1, 1907, 1.

<sup>56</sup> “As massas são onipotentes e se elas amam e adoram o calunga, o que os é pratico e, além de práctico, humano, é dar-lhes calunga a faltar,” “O Folhetim,” *Gazeta de Notícias*, April 1, 1907, 1.

<sup>57</sup> Flora Süssekind, *Cinematograph of Words: Literature, Modernization and Technique in Brazil*, trans. Paulo Henriques Brito. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997.

<sup>58</sup> “A crônica evoluiu para a cinematografia [...] Passou o desenho e a caricatura. Últimamente era fotografia retocada mas sem vida. Com o delírio apressado de todos nós, é agora cinematografia – um cinematógrafo de letras, o romance da vida do operador no labirinto dos fatos, da vida alheia e da fantasia – mas romance em que o operador é personagem secundário arrastado na torrente dos acontecimentos.” João do Rio, *Cinematographo*, x. A translation of the *crônica* is included in Maite Conde, *Consuming Visions: Cinema, Writing, and Modernity in Rio de Janeiro* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 185-187. The translations here are my own.

<sup>59</sup> Maite Conde, “Film and the ‘Crônica’: Documenting New Urban Experiences in Turn-of-the-Century Rio de Janeiro.” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 42:2 (2005), 80.

<sup>60</sup> “Uma fita, outra fita, mais outra..Não nos agrada a primeira? Passemos á segunda. Não nos serve a segunda? Para diante então!” João do Rio, *Cinematógrafo*, v.

<sup>61</sup> “Segue-se d’ai que nem a fita se revê, nem a página parecida com a vida se torna a lêr. Desagradou ou encantou. Não houve tempo de reler para notar defeitos – mesmo porque não há tempo para nada.” João do Rio, *Cinematógrafo*, xi.

<sup>62</sup> “Talvez encontres gente conhecida que não te fala, o que é um bem. Talvez vejas desconhecidos que não te falam mas riem conforme os tomou a machina, perpetuando esse sintoma de alegria.” João do Rio, *Cinematógrafo*, v.

<sup>63</sup> de Melo Souza, *Imagens do passado*, 143-146.

<sup>64</sup> “Binóculo,” *Gazeta de Notícias*, February 15, 1908, 2 and February 17, 1908, 2.

<sup>65</sup> The Photo-cinematografia Brasileira also produced a film entitled “O flagrante pelo cinema,” or “Caught Red-Handed by the Cinema,” which was shown in May 1909. I speculate that this may have been a film along the lines of “The Story the Biograph Told.”

<sup>66</sup> I have found only fragmentary information regarding the adoption of photographic identification by the authorities in Rio de Janeiro. “Relatório de policia,” *Boletim de policia*, July 1908 (ano II, n. 3), 138.

<sup>67</sup> Allan J. Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” 3. See Marcos Luiz Bretas, *A guerra das ruas: povo e policia na cidade do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional), 91-115, for a discussion of the manner in which police visually classified individuals at the time of the First Republic.

<sup>68</sup> “geração faz por contra própria a sua identificação antropométrica para o futuro.” João do Rio [Paulo Barreto], “Tabuletas,” *A alma encantadora das ruas* (Sao Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1997), 97.

<sup>69</sup> “O interessante é observar como se almeja um retrato nas folhas, desde as escuras alamedas do jardim do crime até as *garden-parties* de caridade, desde os criminosos às almas angélicas que só pensam no bem. Aparecer! Aparecer!” João do Rio [Paulo Barreto], “Tabuletas,” 98.

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<sup>70</sup> “as senhoras, nas sua maioria, só leem as secções mundanas, o Binóculo, e todas, todas sem excepção, morrem de amores pelos folhetins./E quanto mais violento, mais cheios [sic] de trágicas peripécias, mais o folhetim as absorve.” *Fon-Fon*, January 4, 1908, n/p.

<sup>71</sup> João do Rio [Paulo Barreto], “A Rua” in *A alma encantadora das ruas* (Rio de Janeiro: Organização Simões, 1952), 8.

<sup>72</sup> do Rio (Paulo Barreto), “A Rua,” 13.

<sup>73</sup> “Quer vir comigo visitar esses círculos infernais? [...] Nas peças francesas há dez anos já aparece o jornalista que conduz gente chique aos lugares macabros; em Paris os réporteres do “Journal” andam acompanhado por um autêntico *apache*. Eu repetia apenas um gesto que era quase uma lei. Aceitei.” João do Rio, “Sono calmo” in *A alma encantadora das ruas*, 158.

<sup>74</sup> “bairro rubro,” João do Rio, “As crianças que matam,” *Cinematógrafo*, 33.

<sup>75</sup> “Toda essa parte da cidade, uma das mais antigas, ainda cheia de recordações coloniais, tem, a cada passo, um traço de história lugubre. A rua da Gamboa é escura, cheia de pó, com um cemitério entre a casaria; a da Harmonia já se chamou de Cemiterio, por ter aí existido a necrópole dos escravos vindos da costa da África [...] a da Prainha, mesmo hoje aberta, com prédios novos, causa, á noite, uma impressão de susto.” João do Rio, “As crianças que matam” in *Cinematógrafo*, 34-35.

<sup>76</sup> In a European context, Uri Eisenzweig argues that in the context of the twentieth century’s mass violence, both detective fiction and narratives of duels indicate the resistance of sporadic, individualized violence to narration, the shadow of “a violence that is inherently untellable and that, as such, cannot but exit the scene of history and enter into that of fiction.” Uri Eisenzweig, “Violence Untold: the Birth of a Modern Fascination,” *Yale French Studies* 108 (2005), 35.

<sup>77</sup> See the front page of *Gazeta de Notícias*, March 7, 1909.

<sup>78</sup> *Jornal do Brasil*, October 16, 1906, 1; *Estado de São Paulo*, February 26, 1909, 3.

<sup>79</sup> “Os artistas do Palace-Theatre também tiveram a sua idéia, a propósito do caso horroroso da rua da Carioca. Se do teatro verdadeiro dos fatos a cousa passou para o teatro da exploração e do ridículo, também eles resolveram aproveitar-se da situação, reproduzindo várias cenas do crime.” *Jornal do Brasil*, November 4, 1906, 10, 13.

<sup>80</sup> “Em casa, no almoço, no consultório, no juízo, na rua do Ouvidor, na avenida, no meu alfaiate, no meu barbeiro [...] no bonde, ao jantar, em toda a parte, enfim, não ouço falar senão do crime da rua da Carioca! [...] Lembrei-me então de vossas excelências...Ali, disse eu aos meus botões, com certeza não ouvirei falar de Carletto e Rocca...Aquelas senhoras só gostam de conversar sobre modas, bailes, teatros, passeios, etc. Lá estarei livre desse maldito assunto [...] Artur Azevedo, *Teatro a Vapor*, ed. Gerald Moser (São Paulo: Editora Cultrix, 1977), 46.

<sup>81</sup> “Mudaram tudo [...] Mudaram pra francês e ficou uma embrulhada que nem o diabo entende!” “um Quetano Junior lá de Paris.” Azevedo, *Teatro a Vapor*, 50.

<sup>82</sup> This play, entitled “Ladrões do mar” (“Smugglers,”) was to have featured the criminal Pegato and was indeed advertised after the closing of “Os Estranguladores.” “Mas há de ver que trocam tudo outra vez, Nam, que eles nem querem assanhar o povo.” Azevedo, *Teatro a Vapor*, 51.

<sup>83</sup> “Cenário, adereços e mobiliário novos e apropriados, atualidade. *Gazeta de Notícias*, November 3, 1906, 12.

<sup>84</sup> Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*, 192.

<sup>85</sup> “Do enredo emocionante, tanto mais quanto estamos sob a impressão do recente crime horrendo, *Os Estranguladores* são [sic] uma peça meramente industrial, feita para a *bilheteria* e não para deleite. Vai-se vel-a porque, provocam emoções fortes os seus quadros de espanto, que

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revoltam e que desoprimem, finalmente, ao ser premiada a virtude e castigada a infâmia.” *Jornal do Brasil*, November 5, 1906, 4.

<sup>86</sup> The first seems never to have been performed; a play on the subject by José de Castro was advertised to take place in the Teatro S. José but then postponed. The second was much more limited in scope and humorous in tone: a one-act comedy “Um crime na Rua da Carioca” that was performed in the Teatro Lucinda on November 25 as a supplement to another play. *Gazeta de Notícias*, November 11, 1906, 14 and November 25 1906, 12.

<sup>87</sup> “Companhia de opereta, mágica e revista do ex-theatro Carlos Gomes” *Gazeta de Notícias*, January 11, 1907, 6.

<sup>88</sup> “cenários novos [...] as cenas **da ouvriuesaria e do alto mar** são uma copia fiel dos teatros do crime.” *Gazeta de Notícias*, January 11, 1907, 6.

<sup>89</sup> The operator may have been Paschoal Segreto’s brother Affonso; there is also a possibility it may have been Leal.

<sup>90</sup> “Não é difícil imaginar a grande ansiedade que fervilhou ontem, a notícia de que Rocca emprazara para esse dia a noticia, prometendo fazer declarações importantes e esclarecer pontos obscuros e misteriosos do tenebroso crime, adiantando mais, numa frase ambígua, que as suas declarações trariam a lume nomes novos./Era a nota sensacional esperada e prometida, com a possibilidade de uma gota de escândalo. [...] Desde cedo, portanto, todos quantos puderem conseguir entrada na Detenção, lá estavam./Jornalistas, autoridades, fotógrafos, até mesmo um cinegrafista, com o seu aparelho, lá estavam vibrantes da mesma curiosidade, de mesma expectativa sôfrega.” *Gazeta de Notícias*, November 1, 1908, 1.

<sup>91</sup> The film was shown between November 12 and 19. *Gazeta de Notícias*, November 9, 1906, 6 and *Gazeta de Notícias*, November 19, 1906, 6.

<sup>92</sup> “Magnífica reconstituição de emocionante drama de que foi teatro o Rio de Janeiro,” *Gazeta de Notícias*, August 4, 1908, 6.

<sup>93</sup> de Melo Souza, *Imagens do passado*, 155. I have thus far been unable to uncover any references to its production in the Rio de Janeiro press.

<sup>94</sup> “uma fita que vai atrair a atenção de todo o povo desta Capital. É, nada mais, nada menos, que a reprodução da emocionante tragédia da Quadrilha da Morte. Todas as peripécias do horrível crime de Rocca, Carletto & Cia. acham-se ali reproduzidas.” *Gazeta de Notícias*, July 9, 1908, 6.

<sup>95</sup> A *conto* was a unit of currency measurement corresponding to one million *mil-réis*. A cinema admission cost about one thousand *mil-réis* during the period. Antônio Leal, “As grandes industrias - ‘Films.’” *Gazeta de Notícias*, December 19, 1915, 2.

<sup>96</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, July 6, 1908, 6. *Gazeta de Notícias*, July 10, 1908, 6.

<sup>97</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, August 17, 1908.

<sup>98</sup> Leal, “As grandes industrias,” 2; de Melo Souza, *Imagens do passado*, 247.

<sup>99</sup> Leal, “As grandes industrias,” 2.

<sup>100</sup> “A fita que maior sucesso tem conseguido tanto no Rio como nos Estados.” *Gazeta de Notícias*, September 12, 1908, p. 6.

<sup>101</sup> Ary Bezerra Leite, *Fortaleza e a era do cinema* (Fortaleza: Secretaria de Cultura e Desporto do Ceará, 1995), 451.

<sup>102</sup> The tableaux list of the film is as follows: “1. The drama of the crime. 2. On the Avenida Central. 2. Embarking at Prainha. 4. Blacksmith’s Isle. 5. The first strangling. 6. Searching for the stone [used to weight down Carluccio’s body.] 7. Landing at São Cristóvão. 8. The

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robbery. 9. Second strangling. 10. Division of the jewels. 11. The capture. 12. The informant. 13. Arrest of the first bandit. 14. On the border of Jacarepaguá. 14. Arrest of the second [bandit]. 15. Two years later. 17. In prison.” *Gazeta de Notícias*, August 4, 1908, 6.

<sup>103</sup> *Jornal do Brasil*, October 11, 1908, 14.

<sup>104</sup> Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*, 190-193; David Levy, “Reconstituted Newsreels, Re-enactments and the American Narrative Film.” *Cinema 1900/1906: An Analytical Study by the International Film Archive (London) and the International Federation of Film Archives* (Brussels: 1982), 243-260.

<sup>105</sup> Richard Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema 1896-1914* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 92.

<sup>106</sup> de Melo Souza, *Imagens do passado*, 236.

<sup>107</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, September 12, 1908, 6.

<sup>108</sup> According to advertisements in the *Gazeta de Notícias*, the version of the film made by Júlio Ferrez was shown from October 2 to 5 in the Cinema Pathé, and from October 4 to 8 in the Cinema Rio Branco.

<sup>109</sup> Quoted in Paula de Araújo, *A bela época*, 270.

<sup>110</sup> “Grandiosa criação nacional dividida em 5 quadros. 1º compra da mala; 2º O Crime; 3º A bordo; 4º Na policia; 5º O remorso.” *Gazeta de Notícias*, October 2, 1908, 8.

<sup>111</sup> “O número de quadros, a programação com outras cinco fitas e o pequeno número de dias que ficou em cartaz indicam uma produção modesta e de pouca atração.” “As imperfeições do crime da mala: “cine-gêneros e re-encenações no cinema dos primórdios.” *Revista USP* 45 (March/May 2000), 109. Indeed, the running time of the film seems exaggerated; the Photo-cinematografia Brasileira’s *Noivado de sangue*, exhibited in March 1909, is described as having a comparable length (500 meters), but three times as many tableaux.

<sup>112</sup> Desde já chamamos a atenção para este trabalho nacional que *desafia* aos outros que, sobre o mesmo assumpto têm sido exibidos em diversos cinematographos, com os quais pedimos confrontal-s [sic]. *Jornal do Brasil*, October 11, 1908, 20.

<sup>113</sup> “A rua do Ouvidor, nas proximidades do largo de S. Francisco, esteve ontem quase intransitável. Eram pessoas que queriam entrar no Cinema-Palace. Exibia-se allí, pela primeira vez, A Mala Sinistra, fita cinematográfica supreendente, en que se revive, minuto por minuto, o celebre crime.” “Binóculo,” *Gazeta de Notícias*, October 14, 1908, 3.

<sup>114</sup> “Aviso: Esta fita nada tem de comum com outra que tem sido exibida outros cinematographos. Composição unica da Photo-Cinematografia Brasileira e o Cinema “Palace”; pela primeira vez em exhibição esta grandiosa tragedia de furor e cinismo, composto de vinte e tantos quadros, sendo alguns coloridos e outros naturais, tomados na cidade de S. Paulo e Santos, a bordo e no Rio. Toda interpretada por artistas nacionaes, cujo trabalho impecavel é justo prova exuberante o quanto temos adiantado na arte cinematográfica.” *Gazeta de Notícias*, October 13, 1908, 6.

<sup>115</sup> “uma bela apoteose igualmente colorida: A VIRTUDE ESMAGA A CALUNIA. *Jornal do Brasil*, October 11, 1908, 14.

<sup>116</sup> *Careta*, September 19, 1908, n/p.

<sup>117</sup> “Ainda perdura profunda emoção no espirito carioca e paulista a dolorosa cena praticada pelo já celebre Trad [sic], pois fôra noticiado circunstanciadamente por todos os jornais, crime que prendeu por largo espaço de tempo a atenção do publico, pelas circunstâncias de que se revestiu./Hoje, se quizerdes ver ao vivo tudo o que se passou desde o assassinato até ás ultimas

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explicações prestadas á justiça pelo famigerado bandido, ide ao Cinema Palace [...]” *Correio da Manhã*, October 15, 1908, 2.

<sup>118</sup> “Na organização dessa fita trabalhou a imprensa do Cinema com a preocupação de realizar a melhor reconstrução da tragédia.” *Jornal do Brasil*, October 13, 1908, 11.

<sup>119</sup> “A Mala Sinistra, denominação dada por esta folha ao crime de Miguel Traad, tem causado ruído. Hoje o Cinema-Palace exhibe uma fita interessantíssima. É a reprodução exata do crime. O operador A. Leal foi a Santos e a S. Paulo, esteve a bordo, em todos os lugares, em suma, onde se desenrolaram as terríveis cenas. Pode dizer-se que é uma fita verdadeira, d’apres-nature.” “Binóculo,” *Gazeta de Notícias*, October 13, 1908, 3.

<sup>120</sup> Joshua Yumibe, *Moving Color: Early Film, Mass Culture, Modernism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 7.

<sup>121</sup> Jean-Claude Bernadet notes and reiterates Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes’ insistence on this point. *Historiografia clássica*, 81.

<sup>122</sup> Richard Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema 1896-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 70.

<sup>123</sup> “Os funerais de D. Carlos e D. Luiz em Lisboa – Belíssima confecção da Casa Gaumont de Paris [...] finalizando por uma riquíssima apoteose da **Photo cinematografia brasileira**./A PÁTRIA PORTUGUESA/A PÁTRIA BRASILEIRA.” *Gazeta de Notícias*, March 10, 1908, 6.

<sup>124</sup> Noël Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, translated and edited by Ben Brewster (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 193.

<sup>125</sup> Jean-Claude Bernadet suggests that the Ferrez version of *A mala sinistra* was shown in Paschoal Segreto’s Theatro Sant’Anna as part of the “Cinema da Exposição” (“Cinema of the [National] Exposition,” which was ongoing in Brazil’s capital) on October 8 and 9 of 1908, although I have not found any direct references to the film programming at the Exposition including this film. Bernadet, *Filmografia do cinema brasileiro*, n.p. The Iris-Theatre showed *A mala sinistra*, likely the film by Leal, on October 23 and 24. *O Estado de São Paulo*, October 23, 1908, 7; October 24, 1908, 7.

<sup>126</sup> “fita da atualidade/O CRIME DA MALA/Habeus-corporis da inocente viúva, vista tirada do natural pela Empresa Cinematográfica Paulista.” *O Estado de São Paulo*, September 19, 1908, 7.

<sup>127</sup> “Em vista do grande successo obtido, será hoje repetida, pela ultima vez [...]” “Palcos e circos,” *O Estado de São Paulo*, September 21, 1908, 3. The film’s first exhibition was on September 19.

<sup>128</sup> “curiosidade pública,” “venceu o ‘record’ da cinematografia em S. Paulo.” *A Ronda*, September 25, 1908, n/p.

<sup>129</sup> “Sobre o espantoso delicto da rua da Boa Vista, crescem e multiplicam-se as publicações. Já apareceram versos em alexandrinos e em redondilhas, destilando por entre as pálpebras cerrados do poeta, umas lagrimas amaríssimas. Um prosador anônimo fez a história do estrangulado e agora anunciam-se mais 3 romances novos todos concordes em reconstituirem a horrorosa cena do estrangulamento e em decorarem-se com os mais fantásticos cenários.” “Notícias diversas,” *O Estado de São Paulo*, September 24, p. 4.

<sup>130</sup> “numas tintas tão vivas e brilhantes, que chegamos a sentir na espinha um frisson de terror.” “Notícias diversas,” *O Estado de São Paulo*, September 24, 1908, p. 4. In Rio, the crime also seems to have inspired a *romance-folhetim* entitled “O crime da mala preta” (“The Crime of the Black Trunk”), serialized in the *Correio da Manhã* from October 20 to November 28, 1908,

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although its narrative bore little resemblance to the crime itself; and an investigative report by the *Gazeta de Notícias* published over the course of three days. The conclusion of the article's first part read, "As in *folhetins-romances*, we will leave for tomorrow the conclusion of this interesting, true narrative, which depends on the action of the police [...]." *Gazeta de Notícias*, "O Homem da Capa Preta," September 25, 1908, 3. The column reappeared on September 27 and October 2.

<sup>131</sup> "Palcos e circos," *O Estado de São Paulo*, December 2, 1908, 3. The play was presented in the Teatro Colombo in the working-class neighborhood of Brás, where "extremely economical prices" were charged for entrance, on December 3, 5, 6 and 8 (*O Estado de São Paulo*, December 3, 1908, 7). Having yielded "encouraging full houses" in the Colombo, the play was transferred to Paschoal Segreto's Theatro Sant'Anna (the same venue where Ferrez's film was likely shown), where it was performed on December 10 and 13. "enchentes animadoras," "Palcos e circos," *O Estado de São Paulo*, December 8, 1908, 3.

<sup>132</sup> de Melo Souza, "As imperfeições do crime da mala," 110.

<sup>133</sup> "1) Compra da mala 2) Entregue da mala; 3) O estrangulamento; 4) Transporte da mala; 5) A bordo; 6) A prisão; 7) Na policia Central em São Paulo; 8) O interrogatório; 9: A viúva." de Melo Souza, "As imperfeições do crime da mala," 111.

<sup>134</sup> "Todos ficam de pé mas...sentam-se prontamente: - d. Carolina estava representada por uma cabocla!" de Melo Souza, "As imperfeições do crime da mala," 111.

<sup>135</sup> *Estado de São Paulo*, September 7, 1908, p. 3. This lack of resemblance may be explained by the fact that Serrador did not cast a very wide net in terms of casting: the ticket-taker of the Bijou Theatre at the time of the film's production, Júlio Llorente, recalled "the intense involvement of all of Serrador's personnel in the film; the actors were employees of the company." Quoted in Maria Rita Galvão, *Crônica do cinema paulistano* (São Paulo: Ática, 1975), 23.

<sup>136</sup> "Os exemplos cruéis de falta de verossimilhança entre os atores (o delegado, a viúva, o escrivão), que poderiam passar apenas como um signo, porém, tolerável, de uma cinematografia incipiente, são ultrapassados pelos "vazios" e "saltos" narrativos, cujo preenchimento pelos espectadores forçava-os a um exercício de comparação entre realidade e ficção com grave perda por parte de Serrador." de Melo Souza, "As imperfeições do crime da mala," 112.

<sup>137</sup> Document prepared by Antonio Leal at request of journalist Pedro Lima. Cinemateca Brasileira, Arquivo Pedro Lima, APL-PT/1.

<sup>138</sup> Maria Eugenia Celso, quoted in Susan K. Besse, "Crimes of Passion: the Campaign Against Wife-Killing in Brazil, 1910-1940." *Journal of Social History* 22:4 (1989), 653-666.

<sup>139</sup> See Boris Fausto, *Crime e cotidiano*.

<sup>140</sup> Guido Fonseca, *Crimes, criminosos e a criminalidade em São Paulo (1870-1950)* (São Paulo: Editora Resenha Tributária, 1988), 136-137.

<sup>141</sup> "Recente tragédia de amor e sangue desenrolada em S. Paulo na semana passada." *Gazeta de Notícias*, March 3, 1909, 2.

<sup>142</sup> "cenários paulistas." Antônio Lela, manuscript document. Cinemateca Brasileira, Arquivo Pedro Lima, AP-PT/1.

<sup>143</sup> "Dispensemo-nos de uma longa descrição, por ser o assunto desta fita por demais conhecido." *Gazeta de Notícias*, March 5, 1909, 6.

<sup>144</sup> "Grande número de pessoas notava-se ontem na rua do Ouvidor empenhando-se para ver a reconstrução da recente tragédia de sangue desenrolada em S. Paulo e agora em exibição no Cinema-Palace em esplendida fita de 500 metros que não teme o confronto com as dos melhores



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fabricantes estrangeiros. O Cinema-Palace esteve, desde a primeira até a última sessão, cheiíssimo [sic], torpando-se para conter a grande concorrência de espectadores. É que as novas fitas nacionais estão agora sendo feitas a capricho nos novos ateliês de ‘pose’ do Cinema-Palace.” *Gazeta de Notícias*, March 5, 1909, 1.

<sup>145</sup> “sensacional fita” “grande afluência” *Jornal do Brasil*, March 5, 1909, 13. “A sala do Cinema-Palace enchesse de hora em hora. Uma doida prodigalidade vai pelos *guichets*. O dinheiro corre e tilinta a cada passo. É que o Cinema renova constantemente o seu programa.” *Jornal do Brasil*, March 6, 1909, 12.

<sup>146</sup> After the completion of the trial, it was shown at the Iris Theatre for a single day, June 29. Jean-Claude Bernadet, *Filmografia do cinema brasileiro*, n.p.

<sup>147</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, March 5, 1909, 6; *Correio da Manhã*, March 29, 1909, 8.

<sup>148</sup> The advertisement notes the participation of Helena Cavalier, Julieta Serra, Albertina, Antonio Serra, Asdrubal, Mendonça, and Romeu Bastos. *Jornal do Brasil*, March 5, 1909, 6.

<sup>149</sup> Maite Conde, *Consuming Visions*, 153.

<sup>150</sup> “ensaiada por Antonio Serra,” *Jornal do Brasil*, April 2, 1909, 12. Albertina Ramires, Asdrubal Miranda and Mendonça Balsemão all appeared in both films.

<sup>151</sup> “interprete nacional de Sherlock Holmes,” *Jornal do Brasil*, April 2, 1909, 12.

<sup>152</sup> “A Tijuca, a pitoresca Tijuca, anda decididamente misteriosa. Ainda não há muitos dias apareceu ali, já roído pelos urubús, o cadaver de um homen cuja identidade não foi até agora restabelecida e quando ainda não chegou a termo dessa tarefa nos bastidores policiaes, eis que uma outra aparece tão trabalhosa como a primeira, para pôr em dificuldade os nossos investigadores.” *Correio da Manhã*, 13 November 1908, 2.

<sup>153</sup> “A Tijuca...Oh! a Tijuca tem para nós encantos infinitos. Não a consideramos um arrabalde. É um país, um verdadeiro País de Sonhos, de Lendas, de Amores. Terra encantadora, com a sua floresta cheia de recantos secretos, onde reina o Mistério, onde reina o Segredo.” “Binóculo.” *Gazeta de Notícias*, March 23, 1909, 3.

<sup>154</sup> *Correio da Manhã*, April 2, 1909, 1.

<sup>155</sup> de Melo Souza, *Imagens do passado*, 183.

<sup>156</sup> “Cena característica e real da vida íntima da fina sociedade do Rio de Janeiro, composta em muitos quadros de deslumbrante efeito artístico, sendo alguns tomados nos próprios pontos naturais dessa fantástica montanha cheia de beleza e testemunha discreta de inumeras aventuras amorosas!” *Gazeta de Notícias*, March 25, 1909, 6.

<sup>157</sup> “Passeio de noivos, Quanto [são] feliz!... (vistas tomadas nas Furnas e outros pontos da Tijuca);” *Jornal do Brasil*, April 2, 1909, 12.

<sup>158</sup> “7º quadro, Explorações, É minha aman[te?]...veja!! (vista tomada na estrada da Cascatiuha [sic]);” *Jornal do Brasil*, April 2, 1909, 12.

<sup>159</sup> While it was in one case referred to as *Um crime na Tijuca* in the *Gazeta de Notícias*, this seems to have been an error. *Gazeta de Notícias*, April 2, 1909, p. 3.

<sup>160</sup> Vicente Paula de Araújo, *A bela época do cinema brasileiro* (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1976), 347.

<sup>161</sup> “fita dramática da atualidade.” *Gazeta de Notícias*, August 15, 1913, p. 10.

<sup>162</sup> In the same period, but outside of the geographic scope of this chapter, one also finds the example of *O crime dos Banhados*, a reconstruction of the politically motivated murders of a family produced and shown in the city of Pelotas in Rio Grande do Sul in early 1914 by Portuguese immigrant Francisco Santos.

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<sup>163</sup> “O Rio civilisa-se. De vez em quando a nossa socegada alma provinciana, desabala-se diante da narrativa trágica de um crime sensacional absolutamente à européia;” “os elementos mais determinativos do progresso territorial – os crimes sensacionais, a Academia de Letras e várias Institutos Históricos ou não.” João Fabricio, “Assuntos para crônica,” *Fon-Fon*, July 5, 1913, n/p.

<sup>164</sup> *Correio da Manhã*, September 13, 1912, 14.

<sup>165</sup> According to advertisements, Candido Castro provided direction for *1.400 contos* and Luiz Rocha for *Um crime sensacional*. *Correio da Manhã*, September 11, 1912, 14 and “Da platéia,” *A Noite*, August 8, 1913, 4.

<sup>166</sup> The play premiered on September 26, 1912; its 113<sup>th</sup> and last performance occurred on November 3, 1912. *A Noite*, September 27, 1912, 2 and November 2, 1912, 8.

<sup>167</sup> de Melo Souza, *Imagens do passado*, 290.

<sup>168</sup> For a concise description of the genesis and effects of the system of *teatro por sessões*, see Delson Antunes, *Fora do sério: um panorama de teatro de revista no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, FUNARTE, 2004), 38-39.

<sup>169</sup> “quem escreve por sessões tem de ser cinematográfico e essa qualidade tem-n’o a “1.400” que apanha uma série de ridículos com uma exuberância de alegria que tornou a revista vitoriosa.” “Da platéia,” *A Noite*, September 27, 1912, 2.

<sup>170</sup> “um drama de profunda atualidade [...] é intensa, vibrante e empolgante.” “Da platéia,” *A Noite*, August 18, 1913, 4.

<sup>171</sup> “No Lírico, apesar de se anunciar o “Crime do jardineiro”, a preços populares, de se dizer que a companhia era popular, apareceram senhoras de ‘toilette’ e cavalheiros de ‘smoking’!” “Da platéia,” *A Noite*, August 18, 1913, 4. After attaining rather limited success in the Lírico, “O Crime do jardineiro” was later reprised in a theater in the working-class neighborhood of Cascadura. The play had been rehearsed in two other theaters before its presentation in the Lírico.

<sup>172</sup> According to advertisements in the *Correio da Manhã*, September 11- September 25, 1912, *1.400 contos* was first shown on September 11 in the Cinema Odeon and Cinema Ideal. The film was shown at the Parque Fluminense on September 16 and 17, and on the twenty-fifth in the Cinema Edison and the Cinema Lapa.

<sup>173</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, August 15, 1913; *Correio da Manhã*, August 19, 1913, 14; August 22, 1913, 12.

<sup>174</sup> According to Jean-Claude Bernadet, *1.400 contos* was exhibited in three different theaters for a total of five evenings in late September and early October, before being reprised in 1914 and 1918. *Um crime sensacional* had a more limited run: four total nights of exhibition in two theaters. Bernadet, *Filmografia do cinema brasileiro*, n.p.

<sup>175</sup> Ana M. López has commented in the context of the Brazilian true-crime films that “the audience’s familiarity with the crimes enabled filmmakers to tell their ‘stories’ efficiently without intertitles or internal continuity.” “Early Cinema and Modernity in Latin America.” *Cinema Journal* 40:1 (Fall 2000), 60. I have not found evidence that would either confirm or deny the presence of intertitles in the films.

<sup>176</sup> “Na infância do cinema nacional: O CRIME DE PAULA MATOS,” *Anuário da Casa dos Artistas*, 1949, np.

<sup>177</sup> “é bastante recente para que nos julguemos dispensados de o rememorar ao publico.” *Correio da Manhã*, September 11, 1912, 14.

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- <sup>178</sup> “A parte desenrolada em S. Paulo é a narrada pelo noticiário dos jornais, que a presente fita vem ilustrar, mostrando ao publico, em sua vida normal, os locais em que passaram os acontecimentos.” *Correio da Manhã*, September 11, 1912, 14.
- <sup>179</sup> “Reconstituição admirável do celebre roubo – Grandiosas e sublimes paisagens naturais,” *Correio da Manhã*, September 10, 1912, 14.
- <sup>180</sup> “majestosos panoramas,” *Correio da Manhã*, September 1, 1912, 16.
- <sup>181</sup> Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 153.
- <sup>182</sup> “uma parte de fantasia, em que João Carochó, na prisão, recorda os principais momentos do seu crime, e vê, num sonho cruel, o esperto Picolo gozando, na companhia de formosas mulheres, o resultado de sua audacia./SONHO TERRIVEL!/TERRIVEL DESPERTAR!” *Correio da Manhã*, September 11, 1912, 14.
- <sup>183</sup> “no Cárcere – Justiça Divina.” *Gazeta de Notícias*, August 15, 1913, 10.
- <sup>184</sup> “justiça de Deus,” *Gazeta de Notícias*, August 16, 1913, 10.
- <sup>185</sup> “Começa o castigo,” “O dedo de Deus,” *Gazeta de Notícias*, August 15, 1913, 10.
- <sup>186</sup> “cenários naturaes e nos próprios locais onde as investigações policiaes têm trazido luz sobre o caso.” *Correio da manhã*, September 1, 1912, 16.
- <sup>187</sup> “‘Um crime sensacional’ tem um verdadeiro ‘clou’: a reconstituição do crime no próprio local – na casa, no telhado, na mangueira, no quarto, no banheiro [...] o ambiente é o mesmo, a situação idêntica.” “Da platéia,” *A Noite*, August 8, 1913, 4.
- <sup>188</sup> *A Noite*, July 3, 1913, 1, 3.
- <sup>189</sup> “permitiu [...] que os Irmãos Botelho focalizassem no cenário natural – os paredes, roupas de cama e assoalhos da casa ainda tintos do sangue de Adolpho Freire [...],” “Na infância do cinema nacional,” *Anuário: Casas dos Artistas*, 1949, n.p.
- <sup>190</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, July 11, 1913, 1.
- <sup>191</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, July 26, 1913, 1.
- <sup>192</sup> “O enredo um pouco modificado para tornar a ação mais interessante,” Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, Coleção Pedro Lima, C: Cx 15/15.
- <sup>193</sup> *Gazeta de Notícias*, August 16, 1913, 10.
- <sup>194</sup> “Na casa de Rosa,” “O pacto odioso,” *Gazeta de Notícias*, August 15, 1913, 10.
- <sup>195</sup> “A caminho do crime.” “Fidelidade atraçoada,” “A madrugada de sangue,” *Gazeta de Notícias*, August 15, 1913, 10.
- <sup>196</sup> *Correio da Manhã*, August 15, 1913, 4.
- <sup>197</sup> “A ‘ESTRADA DA MORTE.’” *Correio da Manhã*, May 29, 1913, 3. One of the train’s crew was killed in this collison; the other two accidents, without fatalities, were reported on May 10 and July 13. *Correio da Manhã*, May 10, 1913, 3; July 13, 1913, 5.
- <sup>198</sup> This characterization is based on advertisements for the newsreels summarized in Jean-Claude Bernadet, *Filmografia do cinema brasileiro, 1900-1935: Jornal O Estado de São Paulo* (São Paulo: Secretaria da Cultura, 1979).
- <sup>199</sup> “Aguardando a hora do trem; A fera agita-se; O demônio que parte; Começa o castigo!...; O desastre; O dedo de Deus; Estou vingado.” *Gazeta de Notícias*, August 15, 1913, 10.
- <sup>200</sup> “com o comboio em movimento, tomar uma fita da paisagem [...]Ao mesmo tempo, tomaria uma fita com os seus artistas dentro do vagão.” “A Central é inimiga de ‘fitas!’” *A Noite*, July 31, 1913, 2.
- <sup>201</sup> “A Central é inimiga de ‘fitas!’” *A Noite*, July 31, 1913, 2.
- <sup>202</sup> *Correio da Manhã*, September 11, 1912, 14.

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<sup>203</sup> “As paisagens são variadas e muito bem escolhidas. Temos dois bons interiores, são sofredores. Tela pintada nunca dá boa impressão e a *Brasil Film* [sic] deve evital-a. É tão facil montar biombos, forados de papéis pintados. Ressentem-se, os cenários de interiores, da precipitação com que foi organizada a fita.” Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, Coleção Pedro Lima, C: Cx 15/15.

### Notes to Chapter 2

- <sup>1</sup> “um folhetim cinematográfico, cheio talvez de inverosimilhanças, mas sensacionalmente misterioso,” “Sensação e mistério!,” *Palcos e Telas*, December 18, 1919 (II, 91), n/p.
- <sup>2</sup> “Um caso estranho,” *Palcos e Telas*, January 1, 1920 (II, 93), n/p.
- <sup>3</sup> Rafael de Luna Freire, *Carnaval, mistério e gangsters: O filme policial no Brasil (1915-1950)* (Doctoral thesis, Universidade Federal Fluminense, 2011), 146.
- <sup>4</sup> Rafael de Luna Freire, *Carnaval, mistério e gangsters*, 158-160.
- <sup>5</sup> Inácio de Melo Souza, *Imagens do passado: São Paulo e Rio de Janeiro nos primórdios do cinema* (São Paulo: Editora Senac, 2003), 328.
- <sup>6</sup> See Marc Angenot, « Qu’est-ce que la paralittérature? » in *Le roman populaire : Recherches en paralittérature* (Montréal : Les Presses de l’Université de Québec, 1975), 3-14.
- <sup>7</sup> See Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 263-287.
- <sup>8</sup> Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 263.
- <sup>9</sup> Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 111.
- <sup>10</sup> “Film em séries,” *Palcos e Telas*, April 11, 1918, (1,4), n/p.
- <sup>11</sup> “Sidney, o bandido,” *Palcos e Telas*, March 31, 1921 (IV, 157), n/p.
- <sup>12</sup> “ARGUMENTOS (GÊNERO PEARL WHITE)”, *Palcos e Telas*, July 25, 1918, 1, 19, n/p.
- <sup>13</sup> Rudmer Canjels, *Distributing Silent Film Serials: Local Practices, Changing Forms, Cultural Transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2011), xxi.
- <sup>14</sup> Jennifer Bean, “Technologies of Early Stardom and the Extraordinary Body.” *Camera Obscura* 48 (2001), 12.
- <sup>15</sup> Marcos Luiz Bretas, *Ordem na cidade: O exercício cotidiano da autoridade policial no Rio de Janeiro: 1907-1930*, trans. Alberto Lopes (Rio de Janeiro, Editora Rocca, 1997), 64.
- <sup>16</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 125-128.
- <sup>17</sup> Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 258-286.
- <sup>18</sup> *A Noite*, October 25, 1917, 1, 5.
- <sup>19</sup> Tom Gunning, “Heard over the ‘phone: *The Lonely Villa* and the de Lorde tradition of the terrors of technology,” *Screen* 32:2 (Summer 1991).
- <sup>20</sup> Ben Singer argues against this notion, attributed to David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, in *Melodrama and Modernity*, 210.
- <sup>21</sup> Jennifer Hayward, *Consuming Pleasures: Active Audiences and Serial Fictions from Dickens to Soap Opera* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1997), 5-8.
- <sup>22</sup> Hayward, *Consuming Pleasures*, 4.
- <sup>23</sup> See “Dickens’ Pattern of Weekly Serialization,” *ELH* 9:2 (June 1942), 141-156, for general considerations and Juan Ignacio Ferreras, *La novela por entregas 1840-1900: Concentración obrera y economía editorial* (Madrid: Taurus, 1972), for a discussion of the Spanish case.

- <sup>24</sup> See John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).
- <sup>25</sup> Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, 120.
- <sup>26</sup> Alice Gonzaga, *Palácios e poeiras: 100 anos de cinemas no Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro, FUNARTE, 1996); Luna Freire, *Carnaval, mistério e gangsters*, 142-143.
- <sup>27</sup> “Sensação e Mistério!”, *Palcos e Telas*, December 18, 1919, (II, 91), n/p.
- <sup>28</sup> Monica dell’Asta, “Italian Serial Films and ‘International Popular Culture,’” trans. Giorgio Bertellini. *Film History* 12:3 (2000), 304.
- <sup>29</sup> This may refer to either Cato the Elder or Cato the Younger, two Roman statesmen, father and son, who lived in the first century BCE and were famously conservative regarding social mores.
- <sup>30</sup> “O cinematógrafo, com as suas freqüentes reproduções de crimes e empresas rocambolescas, tem sido considerado por muito modernos Catões como a escola mais eficaz do crime”; “Os ladrões no cinema,” *Selecta*, August 25, 1915 (1:13), n/p
- <sup>31</sup> “o repertório das suas astúcias.” *Selecta*, “Os ladrões no cinema.”
- <sup>32</sup> “si a civilização forjou novos instrumentos de criminalidade, como as armas de fogo, a imprensa, a fotografia, a dinamite, o telégrafo sem fio, o automóvel, o aeroplano, o hipnotismo, os venenos novos, a infecção microbiana, etc., na própria ciência encontramos recursos valiosos, eficazes, capazes de, mais que a repressão penal, atenuar os efeitos, diminuir os sucessos, combater os resultados da criminalidade contemporânea.” Elysio de Carvalho, “Os laboratórios do crime”, *Selecta*, September 8, 1915 (1:15), n/p.
- <sup>33</sup> Bean, “Technologies of Early Stardom,” 12-13.
- <sup>34</sup> Gunning, “Heard over the ‘phone,” 188, 195.
- <sup>35</sup> “aplicações absolutamente engenhosas e inéditas da ciência.” Advertisement, *A Noite*, April 11, 1916, 5.
- <sup>36</sup> Beginning to rise in 1909, injuries and deaths in automobile accidents peaked in 1913 at 927 and 65 respectively, falling to some degree in the latter half of the teens. Bretas, *Ordem na cidade*, 72-73.
- <sup>37</sup> “novo ‘Fantomas’”, *A Noite*, November 2, 1915, 2.
- <sup>38</sup> “Era um caso á “mão do diabo,” “EM PLENO MISTÉRIO – Wu-Fang no Rio,” *A Noite*, July 21, 1916, 1.
- <sup>39</sup> [...] um problema difícil mesmo para a argúcia de um Justino Clarel com todas as suas coincidências extraordinárias.” “EM PLENO MISTÉRIO – Wu-Fang no Rio,” *A Noite*, July 21, 1916, 1.
- <sup>40</sup> “Como nos Mistérios de Nova York,” *A Noite*, January 31, 1918, 4.
- <sup>41</sup> See Luna Freire, *Carnaval, mistério e gangsters*, 142-143.
- <sup>42</sup> Canjels, *Distributing Silent Film Serials*, 19-23, 35-36.
- <sup>43</sup> “O primeiro filme policial editada em capítulos destacados,” *A Noite*, September 17, 1916, 5.
- <sup>44</sup> “há sete anos atrás,” *A Noite*, September 17, 1916, 5.
- <sup>45</sup> *Correio da Manhã*, May 30, 1913, 16.
- <sup>46</sup> Advertisements in *A Noite* establish the following exhibition schedule: the second episode appeared on the program on March 28, the third not until April 25, the fourth on May 12, the fifth on June 18, the sixth on July 25, the seventh on September 14, the eighth and ninth on September 21, and the final episode on January 4, 1917.
- <sup>47</sup> “Cada episodio, que pode ser lido destacadamente, constitui um filme, a ser exibido no Cinema-Pathé.” *A Noite*, March 9, 1916, p. 5.

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- <sup>48</sup> Canjels, *Distributing Silent Film Serials*, 41-56.
- <sup>49</sup> For details on the publication of the tie-in in Mexico, see Chapter 3.
- <sup>50</sup> “Acompanhando sem uma única interrupção a publicação da A NOITE o Cinema Pathé apresenta em datas fixas o famoso romance que relata as proezas da quadrilha “Mão do Diabo,” entrecho novo, atraente, enigmático.” Advertisement, *A Noite*, April 11, 1916, 5.
- <sup>51</sup> “juntava o público do Íris com o do Ideal, pois ficava quase defronte do outro. As sessões começavam as 13 horas e interrompiam o trânsito, ninguém passava.” Quoted in Alice Gonzaga, *Palácios e poeiras*, 103.
- <sup>52</sup> Advertisement, *A Noite*, November 6, 1916, 5.
- <sup>53</sup> Advertisement, *A Noite*, November 15, 1916, 5.
- <sup>54</sup> “A cinematografia é a criação artística mais representativa da nossa época.” *Klaxon* 1, (May 1922), 3.
- <sup>55</sup> “Perola White é preferível a Sarah Bernhardt. Sarah é tragédia, romantismo sentimental e técnico. Perola é raciocínio, instrução, esporte, rapidez, alegria, vida. Sarah Bernhardt = século 19. Perola White = século 20.” *Klaxon* 1, (May 1922), 3.
- <sup>56</sup> “era sinônimo da alegria, da saúde, da esportividade e da coragem da moça americana. E que olhos. Contra ela e contra *Os mistérios de Nova York* não prevaleceram *Os vampiros* nem a sugestão francesa do maiô colante da velha Musidora.” Quoted in Inácio de Melo Souza, *Imagens do passado*, 330.
- <sup>57</sup> Phillipe Soupault, “Cinema U.S.A.” (1924), reprinted in Paul Hammond, ed., *The Shadow and its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema* (San Francisco: City Lights), 56.
- <sup>58</sup> Rafael de Luna Freire, *Carnaval, mistério e gangsters*, 148, 170.
- <sup>59</sup> Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 278.
- <sup>60</sup> Review, *Palcos e Telas*, June 13, 1918 (1, 13), n/p.
- <sup>61</sup> “Cenas impossíveis de coincidências verdadeiramente milagrosas, no afã de prolongar as series, visando o maior lucro possível e que, por isso mesmo, deixam de comover.” Review, *Palcos e Telas*, June 13, 1918 (1, 13), n/p.
- <sup>62</sup> Leal notes that he departed for Europe in 1914 and fought briefly in World War I before returning to Brazil; however, he does not provide exact dates. Manuscript document by Antonio Leal. Arquivo Pedro Lima, Cinemateca Brasileira, APL-PT/1.
- <sup>63</sup> Antônio Leal, “As grandes industrias ‘Films’, *Gazeta de Notícias*, December 19, 1915, 2; “O Rio vai ter uma fabrica de ‘fitas’ cinematográficas,” *A Noite*, January 29, 1916, 1.
- <sup>64</sup> The term is from Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: the National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993).
- <sup>65</sup> Luna Freire, *Carnaval, mistério e gangsters*, 159.
- <sup>66</sup> De Luna Freire, *Carnaval, mistério e gangsters*, 159-160.
- <sup>67</sup> Advertisement, “naquele território devastado pela metralha, que é a Bélgica,” *A Noite*, April 13, 1917, 5.
- <sup>68</sup> “Da Platéia - A cinematografia nacional,” *A Noite*, April 1, 1917, 5.
- <sup>69</sup> Advertisement, *A Noite*, April 13, 1917, 5.
- <sup>70</sup> “a queda de um auto, que se precipita das ribanceiras da Gávea em um grotão profundo! [...] até vir explodir o motor cá em baixo.” “‘Le film du diable’ no Odeon,” *A Noite*, April 13, 1917, 5.
- <sup>71</sup> Quoted in Sússekind, *Cinematograph of Words: Literature, Technique and Modernization in Brazil*, translated by Paulo Henriques Britto (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 26.

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<sup>72</sup> *Fon-Fon*, April 14, 1917, n/p.

<sup>73</sup> “A aparição da ‘verdade nua’ que simboliza a “Força do Direito” em contraposição ao “Diabo”, que exprime o “Direito da Força,” *A Noite*, April 13, 1917, 5.

<sup>74</sup> Advertisement, *A Noite*, April 13, 1917, 5.

<sup>75</sup> During April 1917, the film was first shown at a press screening that was also advertised as a benefit for war victims; later in the month, it had a five-day run (slightly longer than the customary three or four days film programs were usually held over for), in the Odeon cinema. *Correio da Manhã*, April 16, 1917, April 21, 1917.

<sup>76</sup> “apresenta outros interesses, que recomendam as boas fábricas, como sejam *trucs* de um acabamento perfeito, e cenas que emocionam...” “‘Le film du Diable’, no Odeon,” *A Noite*, April 13, 1917, 5.

<sup>77</sup> “O romance de um malfeitor, tal qual ele é, sem *trucs* nem impossíveis...”, *A Noite*, April 26, 1916, 5.

<sup>78</sup> Luna Freire, *Carnaval, mistério e gangsters*, 145.

<sup>79</sup> Both words appear in French in the original. Translating literally to ‘string,’ ‘ficelle’ can also refer to a trick or deception.

<sup>80</sup> “quando os ‘trucs’ e as ‘ficelles’ dispostas para entreter a curiosidade dos leitores, já não podiam oferecer disposição alguma nova, eis que aparece nos Estados Unidos uma novidade que em poucos dias conseguiu um sucesso estupendo.” “O ROMANCE-CINEMA – Os mistérios de Nova York,” *A Noite*, March 8, 1916, 1.

<sup>81</sup> “peripécias emocionantes e tão bem conduzidas que o leitor é forçosamente arrastado a procurar conhecer o fim”. “O ROMANCE-CINEMA – Os mistérios de Nova York,” *A Noite*, March 8, 1916, 1.

<sup>82</sup> “a ênfase na autenticidade dos personagens, cenários e tramas, o que certamente estimulava o interesse do publico local.” de Luna Freire, *Carnaval, mistérios e gangsters*, 162.

<sup>83</sup> se sustentavam em elementos de matrizes culturais sensacionalistas como a fascinação pelo outro monstruoso – não mais meramente fantástico ou exótico, mas o assassino que pode estar entre nos, escondido no anonimato da grande cidade –, assim como a ênfase na sensação em excesso, na necessidade de realmente *ver* ou *sentir* uma realidade desconhecida (ou em acelerada mudança) transformada em espetáculo. de Luna Freire, *Carnaval, mistério e gangsters*, 165.

<sup>84</sup> “na sua totalidade, tiradas de romances antigos,” “Os Mistérios do Rio de Janeiro,” *O Imparcial* (Rio de Janeiro), March 4, 1917, 4.

<sup>85</sup> *Os mistérios do Rio de Janeiro, ou os Ladrões de Casaca*, a 1860 novel by Antonio Jeronymo Machado Braga, included the phrase in its title. An 1881 novel with this title by José Leão Rocha is mentioned in Yasmin Nadil Jadaf, *Rodapé das miscelâneas: o folhetim nos Jornais de Mato Grosso, séculos XIX e XX* (Rio de Janeiro: 7 Letras, 2002), 32.

<sup>86</sup> Luna Freire, *Carnaval, mistério e gangsters*, 152.

<sup>87</sup> Drawing on accounts by Adhemar Gonzaga and Pedro Lima, Luna Freire suggests that Guido Panela was in fact effectively the director of the film. Luna Freire, *Carnaval, mistério e gangsters*, 152.

<sup>88</sup> “Cinematografia nacional,” *A Noite*, March 26, 1917, 2.

<sup>89</sup> “um audacioso ladrão, filiado a uma quadrilha internacional, organizada para operar nas grandes capitais, durante a guerra,” “Cinemas - Dois ‘filmes’ nacionaes,” *Correio da Manhã*, October 26, 1917, 5.

<sup>90</sup> “um milhão em ouro,” *Correio da Manhã*, “Cinemas - Dois ‘filmes’ nacionais.”

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- <sup>91</sup> “evadido das prisões da Florença,” *Correio da Manhã*, “Cinemas - Dois ‘films’ nacionaes.”
- <sup>92</sup> “toma-a nos braços, mas a veroneza, voltando a si e reconhecendo o raptor, ferro-o nas costas, deixando-o por morto.” *Correio da Manhã*, “Cinemas - Dois ‘filmes’ nacionais.”
- <sup>93</sup> “em desespero, caindo, como fulminado, aos pés do Cristo.” *Correio da Manhã*, “Cinemas - Dois ‘filmes’ nacionais.”
- <sup>94</sup> Ben Singer, “Serial Melodrama and Narrative *Gesellschaft*,” *Velvet Light Trap* 37 (1996), 70.
- <sup>95</sup> “Riem os dois, sentando-se ela nos joelhos do príncipe. Ele, tomando uma taça de champanha, sorve um gole e, num beijo, passo-o á boca da amante, bebendo assim os dois à fortuna!” Tal sofisticação denuncia que Coelho Neto absorvera bem o novo e atrevido mundanismo das divas do cinema italiano (Pina Menichelli, Francesca Bertini e tantas mais).” Acervo Alex Viany, <http://www.alexviany.com.br>. Accessed November 4, 2010.
- <sup>96</sup> *Correio da Manhã*, June 14, 1916, 4.
- <sup>97</sup> “fazendo, só com o olhar, desprender-se da arvore um ramo de flores, que a donzela elogiara. [...] ‘Que aprendera com os fakires, na India, a dominar a natureza [...]’” *Correio da Manhã*, “Cinemas – Dois ‘Filmes’ Nacionais.”
- <sup>98</sup> “envenamento de flores,” “Os Mistérios do Rio de Janeiro,” *O Imparcial* (Rio de Janeiro), March 4, 1917, 4.
- <sup>99</sup> “O filme, num entrecho empolgante pelos elementos de interesse e fantasia que reúne, mostra o trabalho de sapa da espionagem no nosso país, e particularmente no Rio de Janeiro, cujos logares mais pitorescos, tipos e costumes mais característicos são apresentados, “d’après nature”, no correr da exibição.” *A Noite*, October 24, 1917, 5.
- <sup>100</sup> “O romance de aventuras [...] é dos mais enredados e, por passar-se todo em pontos conhecidos, despertará grande interesse, mantendo sempre presa a atenção do espectador, ora nas situações trágicas amorosas, ora no esplendor das nossas vivendas que as temos de muita riqueza e gosto igual ao das mais opulentas de Europa ou na maravilhosa exuberância das nossas paisagens incomparáveis.” *O Imparcial*, “Os Mistérios do Rio de Janeiro.”
- <sup>101</sup> “combates com a policia, nas Furnas,” *O Imparcial*, “Os Mistérios do Rio de Janeiro.”
- <sup>102</sup> *A Noite*, October 23, 1917, 5.
- <sup>103</sup> *A Noite*, October 24, 1917, 5.
- <sup>104</sup> Needell, *A Tropical Belle Époque, Elite Culture and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 74-77.
- <sup>105</sup> Quoted in de Luna Freire, *Carnaval, mistério e gangsters*, 153.
- <sup>106</sup> “Trata-se de um drama em séries, mas, sendo cada série um drama de assunto distinto e de palpitante atualidade, fica o publico desde já avisado que o segundo episodio, refletirá sempre os últimos sensacionais acontecimentos da vida brasileira.” *Correio da Manhã*, April 23, 1917, 5.
- <sup>107</sup> “Assunto, Fotografias, Tipos, Paisagens, tudo enfim genuinamente carioca! [...],” *A Noite*, October 24, 1917, 5.
- <sup>108</sup> “um “filme” policial, que agrada a toda a gente, como o noticiário de crimes do seu jornal. A minha empresa preferiu estrear desse modo, além do mais, porque queria reproduzir na tela algumas cousas bem características do Rio de Janeiro.” “Cinematografia nacional - O Rio vai ter seu primeiro filme característico.” *A Noite*, October 20, 1917, 1.
- <sup>109</sup> “Sem duvida, não seria difícil fazer “filmes” com pavorosos bandidos, que praticassem assaltos com a cabeça coberta por um saco negro. Mas isso é bem para outros meios; não quisemos produzir emoção senão com os nossos tipos, os nossos hábitos, a nossa policia, o nosso meio, enfim.” “O Rio vai ter seu primeiro filme característico,” 1.



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<sup>110</sup> “freqüentadores do botequim do Corcunda (autênticos), repórteres (um autêntico), guardas civis (autênticos), soldados de policia, transeuntes, etc.” *A Noite*, October 24, 1917, 5.

<sup>111</sup> “O Rio vai ter seu primeiro filme característico,” 1, 1.

<sup>112</sup> “grande parte da Quinta da Boa Vista, o bairro da Misericórdia, vendo-se as ruínas existentes em frente ao Mercado Novo; um belo trecho do jardim da praça da Republica, grande extensão da rua Conde de Bomfim, vários trechos da Tijuca, o Pão de Açúcar e o seu soberbo Caminho-Aéreo, as seculares ruínas de Brás de Pina, sobre as quais há uma interessante controvérsia e onde se vai fazer um lindo jardim; a Casa da Detenção, com os seus corredores e celulas, inúmeras ruas da cidade, varias residências particulares, etc, etc.” Advertisement, *A Noite*, October 24, 1917, 5.

<sup>113</sup> *A Noite*, October 22, 1917, 2; “As ruinas de Braz de Pina – Uma campanha a favor de sua conservação,” *A Noite*, October 23, 1917, 1.

<sup>114</sup> “uma quadrilha de ladrões de fios telegráficos,” *A Noite*, “O Rio vai ter seu primeiro filme característico,” 1.

<sup>115</sup> De Luna Freire, *Carnaval, mistério e gangsters*, 165.

<sup>116</sup> “Esplendido, arrebatador e reconfortante passeio/*Panorama o mais empolgante!*” Advertisement, *Correio da Manhã*, April 12, 1917, 12.

<sup>117</sup> The gondola would be used for another sensational scene in the 1925 film *A Esposa do Solteiro*, in which the hero leaps onto the outside of the moving car from a high pole in order to arrive in time to save his beloved from committing suicide by jumping from the summit. I thank Luciana Corrêa de Araújo for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>118</sup> “Os processos de “pose” foram em grande parte os seguidos pela fabrica FOX,” Advertisement, *A Noite*, October 24, 1917, 5.

<sup>119</sup> “um resumo completo, que seria impossível,” “Dois ‘filmes’ nacionais,” 5.

<sup>120</sup> *A Noite*, April 22, 1917, 2; August 7, 1917, 5.

<sup>121</sup> “Rodrigo é um tipo sem escrúpulos que, fingindo-se muito amigo do capitalista Peixoto, tinha há muito a idéia fixa de roubar-lhe a esposa e a fortuna, aproveitando-se da intimidade que tinha na casa para executar o seu duplo e infame plano. Como obstáculo a isso, Rodrigo encontrava sempre a resistência de Emilia, senhora virtuosa e incapaz de uma traição.” “Dois ‘filmes’ nacionais,” 5.

<sup>122</sup> “ser disforme, cheio de inveja e ambição,” “Dois ‘filmes’ nacionais,” 5.

<sup>123</sup> “preferiu acompanhar todo o crime, gozando a vingança que ele representava para si!...” “Dois ‘filmes’ nacionais,” 5.

<sup>124</sup> Começ [sic]ahi a parte mais interessante do filme. Estabelece-se uma luta, um verdadeiro duelo entre os agentes da policia e os bandidos, que termina, depois de uma serie de peripécias [...] com a prisão da quadrilha. “Dois ‘filmes’ nacionais,” 5.

<sup>125</sup> “zombando das inclemências do tempo, já atraiu ao CINE PALAIS 13,964 pessoas, desejosas de aclamar a engenhosa criação do príncipe dos romancistas brasileiros.” Advertisement, *Correio da Manhã*, October 28, 1917, 12.

<sup>126</sup> “No Ideal, a concorrência foi tal que o publico teve que esperar na rua, interrompendo o trânsito, e tornando necessária a intervenção da policia, para regularizar o movimento.” “Dois ‘filmes’ nacionais,” 5.

<sup>127</sup> *A Noite*, October 26, 1917, 5.

<sup>128</sup> On October 30 and 31, *A quadrilha do esqueleto* was shown in the Mattoso and Haddock Lobo cinemas; on November 1, it was exhibited in the Modelo, and on November 3 and 4, in the

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Cinema Rio Branco in the nearby city of Petrópolis. *A Noite*, October 30, 1917, 2; *A Noite*, November 2, 1917, 2.

<sup>129</sup> Beginning on January 4, the film was shown in São Paulo, exhibited for a single day each in the Central, the Coliseu, the Rio Branco, the Royal, the Brasil, and the São Paulo, only failing to appear on a marquee on the sixth and tenth of the month. It was then shown at the Guarani in Santos on the twelfth, returning to the state's capital to be shown in the América and the Mafalda for a single day at the end of the month, and returning to the Éden and the Mafalda in February. Bernadet, *Filmografia do cinema brasileiro 1900-1935: Jornal O Estado de São Paulo* (São Paulo: Secretaria da Cultura, 1979), n/p.

<sup>130</sup> The film was shown in the São Pedro cinema on April 6 and 7 and the América on the ninth and twelfth of the same month. Bernadet, *Filmografia do cinema brasileiro*, n/p.

<sup>131</sup> A comedy and a drama by Medeiros de Albuquerque, both produced by the production company were exhibited later that year. *A Noite*, December 9, 1917, 5.

<sup>132</sup> Tibiriça was later involved in the filming of one of the 1928 versions of *O Crime da Mala*, as well as the 1926 *Vício e Beleza* (*Vice and Beauty*), a sensationalistic film about drug abuse.

<sup>133</sup> Maria Rita Galvão, *Crônica do cinema paulistano* (São Paulo: Ática, 1975), 304.

<sup>134</sup> Galvão, *Crônica do cinema paulistano*, 304.

<sup>135</sup> *Selecta*, January 31, 1925, n/p.

<sup>136</sup> Letter from "Liz," *Para Todos*, April 21, 1923, n/p. "Só lamento o assunto escolhido pela empresa. Mistérios, bruxas, duendes, almas de outro mundo, que pavor! só para amedrontar crianças. Não valia a pena filmar-se tão medíocre enredo. Não nos faltam bons escritores."

<sup>137</sup> "O Cinema no Brasil – Telo-objectiva," *Selecta*, August 24, 1927, n/p. "quis fazer uma, onde pudesse aplicar alguns 'trucs' cinematográficos./Queria mostrar que, não somente os americanos, mas ele também sabia fazer uso de todos esses efeitos."

<sup>138</sup> "O Cinema no Brasil - ANTONIA DENEGRI ADMIRA O CINEMA, POR QUE ELE TEM UMA INFINIDADE DE SENSACIONES!..." *Selecta*, January 3, 1925, n/p.

<sup>139</sup> Bean, "Technologies of Early Stardom," 18, 32.

<sup>140</sup> The plot details are drawn from "Filmagem Brasileira," *Para Todos*, November 8, 1924, n/p.

<sup>141</sup> "película de aventuras sensacionais, como a passagem do ator de um aeroplano para outro a oitocentos metros de altura, e o "parafuso da morte", tirado de dentro do próprio aparelho, o que serve para provar que também entre nós não faltam perseverança e coragem para seu conseguir o desejado." "O Cinema no Brasil," *Selecta*, April 26, 1924, (X:17), n/p.

<sup>142</sup> "As cenas dos aeroplanos, é das melhores coisas do filme, nunca imaginamos que se fizesse isto aqui!" "O Cinema no Brasil," *Selecta*, November 22, 1924 (47), n/p.

<sup>143</sup> The film was directed by E.C. Kerrigan, a nomadic film director whose career is discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>144</sup> The aviation sequence comes at the end of the film when the heroine Clarinda, having finally resigned herself to entering into a loveless marriage in order to save the business of her adopted father (with whom she is in fact in love), enlists the help of Laura to reach the port of Santos before her betrothed embarks for Europe.

<sup>145</sup> Fábio Augusto Steyer, *Cinema, imprensa e sociedade em Porto Alegre, 1896-1930* (Porto Alegre: Editora da Pontífica Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul, 2001), 86-87.

<sup>146</sup> Details about the publication of these serialized novels are drawn from *A Ordem*, October 26, 1917, 2 and November 30, 1917, 4. *O Enigma da máscara* was advertised (inaccurately) as the

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“first cinematographic novel in the world,” making it unlikely that *Os mistérios de Nova York* was exhibited with a tie-in. *Jornal do Recife*, August 20, 1917, 6.

<sup>147</sup> *Moderno-Jornal*, May 31, 1918, 2.

<sup>148</sup> Luciana Corrêa de Araújo, “Os seriados norte-americanos e o cinema brasileiro dos anos 20.” *Contracampo* 24 (2012), 167.

<sup>149</sup> ‘Gracita,’ “Frivolidades,” *A Pilhéria*, no. 237, April 10, 1926, n/p.

<sup>150</sup> “o **cow-boy** destemido, que montava cavalos indomáveis, caçava trens a laço, dispersava os inimigos a socos e fazia suspirar todas as jovens sonhadoras,” “trabalhava no gênero “perigoso”, como figura principal de **filmes** em serie, desses que há desastres e atentados a cada momento.” José Franco, “A estrela morta,” *A Pilhéria*, no. 256, August 21, 1926, n/p.

<sup>151</sup> One critic complained, “When a film returns from the ‘line’ [linha], having traveled through the interior of the central states, or when it comes from the North or the South [...] its state of decay is well advanced. It is ‘rainy’, that is, scratched all along its length, giving an awful impression in the light portions of the film; pieces are missing, meaning that figures constantly make jumpy shifts in position; this is because of the cuts made, because of damage to the perforations of the film.” *Selecta*, “Cinematográficas,” August 9, 1924, n/p.

<sup>152</sup> In July 1923, the exhibition of a “new chapter” of the film was announced in local cinemas, suggesting that the screening of the film was drawn out and irregular. “Teatros e Salões,” *Gazeta de Campinas*, July 25, 1923, 1.

<sup>153</sup> *Diário de Notícias*, May 6, 1928, 7; May 31, 1928, 11.

### Notes to Chapter 3

<sup>1</sup> This concept is developed in Max Weber’s 1919 lecture “Politics as a Vocation.” *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2004), 32-94.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 58.

<sup>3</sup> Until the restoration of Gabriel García Moreno’s *El tren fantasma* and *El Puño de hierro*, discussed in Chapter 4 of the dissertation, *El automóvil gris* was the only work of Mexican fiction film from the silent period available for viewing by scholars.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Ramírez Berg, “*El automóvil gris* and the Advent of Mexican Classicism.” *Visible Nations: Latin American Film and Video*, ed. Chon Noriega (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> See de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, 237-261 and Ramírez Berg, “*El automóvil gris*.”

<sup>6</sup> Ramírez Berg, “*El automóvil gris*,” 8.

<sup>7</sup> Derba may be a partial model for the character played by Dolores del Río in Emilio Fernández’s 1945 film *Las abandonadas*, a beautiful and kind-hearted prostitute who is unknowingly seduced by the leader of the Grey Automobile Gang.

<sup>8</sup> Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México: Vivir de sueños* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1981), vol. 1, 246.

<sup>9</sup> Advertisement, *El Universal*, January 30, 1919, 7.

<sup>10</sup> However, film historian Aurelio de los Reyes has pointed out that episode titles such as “The Robbery of the Banker’s House” and “A Sensational Escape” alluded to well-publicized facts of the case. De los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. 1, 246.

<sup>11</sup> de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. 1, 246.

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<sup>12</sup> “first Mexican film in episodes,” *Excelsior*, September 2, 1919, 8.

<sup>13</sup> The millions of the title were likely a reference to the quantity stolen by Carranza before his ill-fated flight from the capital in 1920. Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. 2: *Bajo el cielo de México* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1993), 91-92.

<sup>14</sup> The original serial film included a number episodes devoted to events that occurred after the December 1915 execution.

<sup>15</sup> de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. 1, 245.

<sup>16</sup> De los Reyes cites government censorship as the most compelling reason for the documentary cinema’s disappearance. “The Silent Cinema,” *Mexican Cinema*, ed. Paulo Antonio Paranaguá (London: BFI, 1995), 71. By contrast, Ana M. López emphasizes changing audience tastes and attitudes and desires to forge a national fiction cinema in “Early Cinema and Modernity,” *Cinema Journal* 40:1 (2000), 48-78.

<sup>17</sup> Advertisement, *Excelsior*, September 11, 1919, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Advertisement, *Excelsior*, December 11, 1919, 8.

<sup>19</sup> David Levy, “Reconstituted Newsreels, Re-enactments and the American Narrative Film.” *Cinema 1900/1906* (Brussels: International Federation of Film Archives, 1982), 248.

<sup>20</sup> Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 31.

<sup>21</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 258.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-164.

<sup>24</sup> André Bazin, “Death Every Afternoon,” trans. Mark A. Cohen, in Ivone Margulies, ed., *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 31.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>26</sup> Jesse Lerner, *El impacto de la modernidad: Fotografía criminalística en la Ciudad de México* (Mexico, D.F.: Turner/CONACULTA, 2007), 48-51.

<sup>27</sup> Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900-1931* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 175-177.

<sup>28</sup> Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects*, 176.

<sup>29</sup> De los Reyes mentions a Pathé serial, but it seems likely he is referring to the Éclair series *L’auto gris*; *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. 1, 188. According to Richard Abel, the film was based on the exploits of the Bonnot gang, who were captured and executed in Paris in 1912, “The Thrills of *Grand Peur*: Crime Series and Serials in the Belle Epoque,” *Velvet Light Trap* 37 (Spring 1996), 6, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Álvaro Matute, “Salud, familia y moral social (1917-1920).” *Históricas* 31 (1991): 34; Piccato, *City of Suspects*, 176.

<sup>31</sup> For information on urban reforms in Mexico City, see Piccato, *City of Suspects*, 17-33.

<sup>32</sup> See *Mexico: fotografía y revolución* and Chapters 1 and 2 of John Mraz’s *Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009). Film is addressed more specifically in *La luz y la guerra: El cine de la Revolución mexicana*, ed. Fernando Fabio Sánchez and Gerardo García Muñoz (México, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2010), and Zuzana M. Pick, *Constructing the Image of the Mexican Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

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<sup>33</sup> These challenges included economic depression, politically motivated censorship and military retaliation, and a world-wide paper shortage brought about by World War I. See Marion Gautreau, “La Revolución mexicana a los ojos del mundo: Diferentes perspectivas en la prensa ilustrada,” *México: Fotografía y Revolución*, ed. Miguel Ángel Berumen and Claudia Canales (México, D.F.: Fundación Televisa, 2009), 119-128. For a concise history of the illustrated press during the Porfiriato and the Revolution, see Julieta Ortiz Gaitán, *Imágenes del deseo: arte y publicidad en la prensa ilustrada mexicana, 1894-1939* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2003), 40-50.

<sup>34</sup> Gautreau, “La Revolución mexicana a los ojos del mundo,” 121.

<sup>35</sup> This term refers to representations of local customs and “types.”

<sup>36</sup> John Mraz, *Photographing the Mexican Revolution: Commitments, Testimonies, Icons* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 12.

<sup>37</sup> Armando de María y Campos, *El teatro del género chico en la Revolución Mexicana* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1956).

<sup>38</sup> José F. Elizondo and Rafael Gascón, *El país de la metralla* (México, D.F.: A. Wagner and Levien, 1913).

<sup>39</sup> See Aurelio de los Reyes, *Con Villa en México: Testimonios de los camarógrafos norteamericanos en la Revolución* (México, D.F.: Universidad Autónoma de México, 1995). Zuzana M. Pick contests the existence of this provision in the contract, citing Frederick Katz’s *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), in *Constructing the Image of the Mexican Revolution*, 40.

<sup>40</sup> Claudia Canales, “La densa material de la historia: Notas sobre la fotografía olvidada de la Revolución,” *México: fotografía y revolución*, ed. Miguel Ángel Berumen (México, D.F.: Fundación Televisa, 2009), 60.

<sup>41</sup> According to Bill Nichols, the application of the term for films produced earlier than the 1920s is an anachronism; however, I will preserve it here for the sake of clarity. See “Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde,” *Critical Inquiry* 27:4 (Summer 2001), 580-610.

<sup>42</sup> Ana M. López, “Early Cinema and Modernity,” 67-68.

<sup>43</sup> López, “Early Cinema and Modernity,” 67-68.

<sup>44</sup> Ortiz Monasterio, Pablo, ed. *Fragments: Narración cinematográfica compilada y arreglada by Salvador Toscano, 1900-1930* (México, D.F.: Conaculta, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> See Robert M. Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen in Modern Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

<sup>46</sup> “podemos asegurar que á más de ser de utilidad notoria nuestra publicación, será también de palpitante interés, puesto que, en cuanto sea posible y sin perjudicar el servicio, se leerá en nuestro periódico la historia de cada crimen que haga estremecer á la Sociedad Mexicana.” “Nuestra Periódico – Su Programa,” *Gaceta de Policía*, October 8, 1905, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Alberto del Castillo Troncoso, “El surgimiento del reportaje policiaco en México: Los inicios de un nuevo lenguaje gráfico (1888-1910).” *Cuicuilco* 5:13 (May – August 1998), 167..

<sup>48</sup> Alberto del Castillo Troncoso, “El surgimiento del reportaje policiaco,” 165-171. See also Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen*, 47-51.

<sup>49</sup> See Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen*, 38-63.

<sup>50</sup> Castillo Troncoso, “El surgimiento del reportaje policiaco,” 177-178.

<sup>51</sup> Lerner, *El impacto de la modernidad*, 50.

<sup>52</sup> *El Pueblo*, January 22, 1919, 6.

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<sup>53</sup> Lerner, *El impacto de la modernidad*, 44.

<sup>54</sup> “En México la criminalidad no ha avanzado hasta penetrar en ciertas capas superiores: el crimen tiene toda la sencillez brutal de un grupo humano en las primeras etapas de la civilización.” Quoted in Castillo Troncoso, “El surgimiento del reportaje policiaco,” 169.

<sup>55</sup> el crimen obtenía una nueva significación, no como síntoma de inferioridad y retraso de la población en su conjunto, sino al contrario, como prueba de una nueva modernidad emergente” Lerner, *El impacto de la modernidad*, 44.

<sup>56</sup> “Nueve años se ha luchado en este suelo por todos los ideales de las naciones libres y civilizadas; la sangre ha enrojecido ampliamente la tierra; pero triste es decirles, la mayor parte de los que han perdido sus vidas, no cayó en hechos de armas; ha caído en la inmensa serie de homicidios que se desarrolla como una larga cadena. [...]

¡Ya basta! decimos. Salvad algo que está por encima de la Revolución: salvad la Patria, que se ahoga en un mar de sangre. Es preciso, porque desde lo alto, en toda la extensión que abarca la mirada, sólo se divisan, a largos trechos, víctimas y verdugos, asesinados y asesinos.” “¡Basta de Crímenes!” *El Universal*, October 29, 1919, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Piccato, *City of Suspects*, 163-188.

<sup>58</sup> *El Universal*, May 9, 1925, quoted in Piccato, *City of Suspects*, 177.

<sup>59</sup> Examples include Carlos Noriega Hope’s text “El asesinato en el cine,” [“Murder in Film”], *El Universal Ilustrado*, March 25, 1920, 6; the crónica “El raterismo considerado como una de las bellas artes,” [“Thieving considered as one of the Fine Arts”] published by Figaro [Porfirio Hernández] in *El Universal*, May 3, 1922, 9; and an anonymous text in the section “Notas del día,” “El suicidio considerado como una de las bellas artes,” [“Suicide Considered as one of the Fine Arts,”] *El Universal Ilustrado*, February 1, 1923, 11.

<sup>60</sup> For example, a 1921 headline promised to describe “the Rocambolesque escape of the Famous and Celebrated Chato Bernabé,” one of the alleged members of the Grey Automobile Gang, *El Universal*, February 5, 1921, 1. I have found a number of other examples in the period under study. Exhibition dates for the Pathé films are drawn from María Luisa Amador and Jorge Ayala Blanco, *Cartelera Cinematográfica 1912-1919* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2009), 33.

<sup>61</sup> “La educación criminal refinada, la de marca netamente europea, la que ha sido importado de unos cuantos años acá, por medio de los cines, no cabe duda que cada día adelanta más.” “Una casa comercial que iba a ser robada,” *El Pueblo*, September 7, 1916, 1.

<sup>62</sup> de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. 1, 256; See also Matute, “Familia, salud y moral social,” 33-34.

<sup>63</sup> “Todos recordarán que antaño nuestros rateros no anestesiaban sus víctimas, ni había encapuchados, ni se robaba a la alta escuela. Fue preciso que del extranjero vinieran los modelos. Y así, a raíz de que se exhibieron ‘Los Misterios de Nueva York,’ con asistencia copiosa de rateros, éstos modernizaron sus procedimientos y pudieron burlar mejor a la policía.” “La censura de las películas no es anticonstitucional,” *El Universal*, January 29, 1920, 11.

<sup>64</sup> “Cuando se lanzó a circulación ‘Los Misterios de Nueva York’, dudo mucho que la casa filmadora llegará a suponerse el tremendo éxito que habría de alcanzar la cinta.”

“Nemo,” “Don Quijote en el Cine – ‘La cinematografía en Estados Unidos,’” *Don Quijote*, May 28, 1919, n/p.

<sup>65</sup> An advertisement published preceding the novel’s publication emphasized its participation in a public media phenomenon: “All who have seen, and those who have not seen, the ‘Mysteries of

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New York” in the cinema, should read the thrilling novel by Pierre Dourcelle to be published in Spanish by *Le Courrier du Mexique*. beginning Monday, July 24.” *Le Courrier du Mexique et de l’Europe*, July 21, 1916, 4. The novelization concluded in October.

<sup>66</sup> “Nemo”, “La cinematografía en Estados Unidos.”

<sup>67</sup> “Hipólito Seijas” (Rafael Pérez Taylor), “Por la pantalla – La hija del circo,” *El Universal*, March 16, 1917, reprinted in Manuel González Casanova, *Por la pantalla*, 167.

<sup>68</sup> “Son películas de circo, para admirar en una forma nueva la agilidad, fuerza y vigor de los músculos de un actor que, solo por ello ha alcanzado el puesto que da derecho a tomar el nombre de rey ....del cine.” “Don Manolito,” “Cines – Arte Americano,” *Arte y sport*, March 27, 1920, 11.

<sup>69</sup> Hipólito Seijas, “Por la pantalla – Los Vampiros,” *El Universal*, May 26, 1917, reprinted in González Casanova, *Por la pantalla*, 232-233.

<sup>70</sup> Kristine J. Butler, “Irma Vep, Vamp in the City: Mapping the Criminal Feminine in Early French Serials” in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, ed. Jennifer Bean and Diane Negra. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 96.

<sup>71</sup> “Ha sido tópico de todas las murmuraciones durante la última semana el asunto escandaloso del ‘Automóvil gris.’/La expectación pública, muy difícil de inquietarse ya después del sensacionalismo a que la tiene acostumbrada la rápida sucesión de espectáculos sorprendentes en el mundo entero, ha seguido con renovada avidez los menores episodios de esta película trágica en la que pierden la vida los complicados en circunstancias que no son claras para la justicia y en la que se escurren de las manos los hilos de la trama y las fisonomías de los verdaderos delincuentes se pierden detrás de un velo misterioso.” “EN TORNO DE UN AUTOMOVIL,” *El Universal Ilustrado*, January 10, 1919, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. 1, 240.

<sup>73</sup> An unrelated film of the same title, produced in the town of Irapauto, is discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Aurelio de los Reyes, *Filmografía del cine mudo vol. III (1924-1930)*, (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2000,) 44.

<sup>75</sup> “¿QUIENES FUERON LOS AUTORES DEL ROBO DE SEDAS? SE HABLA DE LA TENEBROSA BANDA DE “LOS COMPAÑEROS DEL SILENCIO” *El Pueblo*, December 20, 1918, 1.

<sup>76</sup> “Aparece una Banda de Estafadores Llamada ‘Los Compañeros del Silencio’.” *El Universal*, January 4, 1920, 12.

<sup>77</sup> Advertisement, *Diario de Avisos*, April 24, 1860, 4.

<sup>78</sup> Amador and Ayala Blanco, *Cartelera Cinematográfica 1912-1919*, 42. Advertisement, *El Pueblo*, July 6, 1917, 5; Advertisement, *El Pueblo*, September 24, 1917, 5.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in José María Sánchez García, “Comentarios adicionales: lo que dice Adela Sequeyro,” *Cinema Repórter*, December 8, 1954, 34.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in José María Sánchez García, “Comentarios adicionales: lo que dice Adela Sequeyro,” 34.

<sup>81</sup> Sánchez García, “Lo que dice Adela Sequeyro,” 34.

<sup>82</sup> Sánchez García, “Lo que dice Adela Sequeyro,” 34.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. II, p. 75

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. II, p. 75.

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<sup>85</sup> José María García Sánchez, “Tres películas inolvidables,” *Cinema Repórter*, March 1, 1952, 76.

<sup>86</sup> de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. II. Both Jurado and Olivera were accused of either direct or indirect responsibility for the murder of their husbands; Luz González was tried twice for her involvement in a sordid love triangle in which one of her lovers murdered another; condemned to twelve years in the first trial, she was exonerated in the second.

<sup>87</sup> This description refers to the case of Magdalena Jurado, accused of having shot her husband, Carlos Félix Díaz. Quoted in Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. 2, 83.

<sup>88</sup> “La sangre que brotó del agujero hecho en el cráneo conyugal, bastó para que Alicia se tiñera de una fama dislocante, que hizo gemir de deseo el alma sensitiva de cuanto lector de novela truculenta hay en la ciudad.” “Zeta,” “La Figura de la Semana – Alicia Olvera,” *El Universal Ilustrado*, December 30, 1920, 14.

<sup>89</sup> “Ahora, ¡oh maridos de esposas que frecuentan el cinematógrafo y la literatura folletinesca! temblad. Alicia era como vuestras mujeres [...] Tenía un secreto afán de aventuras [...] Alicia Olvera se sintió, durante una hora, en pleno romance, y mató, para dar un color bermejo a la gris opacidad de su existencia burguesa.” “Zeta,” “La Figura de la Semana,” 14.

<sup>90</sup> de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. II.

<sup>91</sup> Cube Bonifant, “Crónicas Cinematográficas – “REDENCION” PELICULA MEXICANA EN SIETE ROLLOS,” *El Demócrata*, July 4, 1924, 3.

<sup>92</sup> “El argumento, a pesar de ser dizque copia de algo real, está muy disparatado.” Bonifant, “Crónicas cinematográficas,” 3.

<sup>93</sup> Bonifant, “Crónicas cinematográficas,” 3.

<sup>94</sup> Bonifant, “Crónicas cinematográficas,” 3.

<sup>95</sup> The phrase is drawn from Joan Riviere, “Womanliness as a masquerade.” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10 (1929), 303-313. See also Mary Ann Doane, “Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator” *Screen* 23:3-4 (1982), 74-88, which discusses the literal veiling and unveiling of the woman, which resonates with the figure of the mourning veil here.

<sup>96</sup> “No hacemos alusión a partida alguna de malhechores que, constituidos en banda, nos ofrezcan la oportunidad de escribir espeluznantes reportajes sobre robos, asaltos y asesinatos. Nos referimos al éxito que de seguro alcanzará la película nacional que se intitula “La Banda del Automóvil” y que, a todo costo, ha editado la Casa “Germán Camus y Compañía [...]” “Está asegurado el éxito de la Banda del Automóvil,” *Excélsior*, September 3, 1919, 8.

<sup>97</sup> In addition to helping construct the media spectacle on which Camus’ film capitalized, journalists fulfilled creative functions in its production. *La banda del automóvil’s* script was penned by Enrique Guardiola Cardellach, a Spanish reporter, and two other representatives of the profession, Manuel Haro and Alberto Michel, appeared as actors in the film. *El Universal*, September 3, 1919, 5.

<sup>98</sup> “La Banda del Automóvil nada se relaciona con la serie de robos y crímenes cometidos por los malhechores que sembraron el pánico entre los vecinos de esta ciudad de palacios...no es el oro que impulsa a los forajidos para cometer raptos, plagios y demás delitos, sino que el amor de una madre angustiada que vela por su hijo a distancia, es lo que motiva los principales sucesos que con tan buen tino son explotadas en la pantalla.” J. L. del C, “EL AÑO CINEMATOGRAFICO – LAS PELICULAS NACIONALES EN 1919,” *Don Quijote*, December 31, 1919, n/p.

<sup>99</sup> de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México: Vivir de sueños*.



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<sup>100</sup> First shown in the Salón Rojo on April 15, 1914, the film was re-exhibited on Sept. 26, 1915 (*El Demócrata*, 8), April 12 and May 26, 1916 (*El Pueblo*, p. 7, 3), and five times in 1917 between February and July (*El Pueblo*). While the re-exhibition of films was standard practice during this period, the number of re-exhibitions suggests that this production was of a particular popularity.

<sup>101</sup> *Don Quijote*, December 31, 1919, n/p; *Excelsior*, Sunday supplement, September 7, 1919, 6.

<sup>102</sup> *Excelsior*, Sunday supplement, September 7, 1919, 6.

<sup>103</sup> *Arte y Sport*, September 11, 1919, n/p.

<sup>104</sup> *Don Quijote*, December 31, 1919, n/p. As several reviewers noted, all of the principal actors in the film were recruited from the local theater, which was a common but not exclusive practice during the period. Producers also sought to make cinematic stars out of complete unknowns, as was the case with schoolgirl Elena Sánchez Valenzuela, star of the 1918 *Santa*.

<sup>105</sup> *Excelsior*, Sunday supplement, September 7, 1919, 6.

<sup>106</sup> Vicki Callahan, "Screening Musidora: Inscribing Indeterminacy in Film History," *Camera Obscura* 16:3 (2001), 58-81.

<sup>107</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 46.

<sup>108</sup> Gabriel Ramírez, *Crónica del cine mudo mexicano*, 116.

<sup>109</sup> "nada de esta película de aventuras y episodios discrepa del sentido común y de la verosimilitud. Es un asunto folletinesco hábilmente desarrollado en el cine; pero siendo folletinesco, siendo de aspecto policial, siendo de ese género de episodios, es sensato, razonable, cuerdo y sobrio." J. L. del C., "EL AÑO CINEMATOGRAFICO", n/p.

<sup>110</sup> Claro es que no causó inmensa sensación esta película, dada su sobriedad, porque la mayoría de los espectadores de ese estilo de películas en episodios, más que de lo sensato, de lo verosímil [sic] como *La Banda del Automóvil*, gusta de lo convencional, de lo deforme, de lo fantástico, de lo truculento y hasta de lo absurdo, con tal de experimentar esas propicias emociones violentas, esos sacudimientos bruscos que no suscita esta "film" razonable. J. L. del C., "EL AÑO CINEMATOGRAFICO", n/p.

<sup>111</sup> "Un Triunfo de la Producción Nacional – LA BANDA DEL AUTOMOVIL," *El Heraldo de México*, September 3, 1919, 8.

<sup>112</sup> "se hace propaganda tanto de la muerte, como de las casualidades ilógicas, y de los cinco sentidos, con excepción del común." Silvestre Bonnard (Carlos Noriega Hope), "Por la pantalla – La banda del automóvil." *El Universal*, September 11, 1919, 7.

<sup>113</sup> Noriega Hope, "La banda del automóvil," 7.

<sup>114</sup> "saludable propaganda que las películas de episodios desarrollan en pro de la muerte." "repetidos alardes de desprecio hacia la vida." Noriega Hope, "La banda del automóvil," 7.

<sup>115</sup> "principiará entre nosotros una mayor adhesión hacia la muerte." Noriega Hope, "La banda del automóvil," 7.

<sup>116</sup> "se han aprovechado los interiores auténticos de residencias fastuosas, desechándose las decoraciones que rudimentaria e imperfectamente sustituían a dichos interiores." *El Heraldo de México*, September 4 1919, 8.

<sup>117</sup> *Excelsior*, Sunday supplement, Sept. 7, 1919, 6.

<sup>118</sup> This was a novel practice for local productions; the most successful locally produced film of the previous year, *Santa*, was filmed entirely with natural light in an improvised space within the

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Olimpia theater. José María Sánchez García, “Tres películas inolvidables,” *Cinema Repórter*, March 15, 1952, 78.

<sup>119</sup> “Los escenarios resultan bellísimos por el sistema de luz artificial, puesto que conservan su carácter real, y nos causan la impresión de habitaciones efectivas, como de hecho lo son.” *El Heraldo de México*, September 4, 1919, 8.

<sup>120</sup> “juegos de luz que frecuentemente encontramos en las películas europeas y norteamericanas, y que se creía imposible de obtener en las cintas mexicanas.” “‘La Banda del Automóvil’ es un Portento de Fotografía,” *El Heraldo de México*, September 4, 1919, 8.

<sup>121</sup> “constituyen el encanto de las cintas italianas, francesas y norteamericanas.” “‘La Banda del Automóvil’ es un Portento de Fotografía,” *El Heraldo de México*, September 4, 1919, 8.

<sup>122</sup> “una película que rivalice con las extranjeras, y que supera todas las que hasta ahora se han hecho en México.” “‘La Banda del Automóvil’ es un Portento de Fotografía,” *El Heraldo de México*, September 4, 1919, 8.

<sup>123</sup> “‘La Banda del Automóvil’ Será Un Suceso,” *El Heraldo de México*, September 10, 1919, 9.

<sup>124</sup> John Mraz, *Photographing the Mexican Revolution*, 35.

<sup>125</sup> J. L. del C., “EL AÑO CINEMATOGRAFICO,” n/p.

<sup>126</sup> Epifanio Soto in *Cine Mundial*, November 1919, quoted in Ramírez, *Crónica del cine mudo mexicano*, 114.

<sup>127</sup> afán de aristocratizar demasiado sus películas. No pone en ellas ningún girón de México. Gusta demasiado de presentar personajes de una refinada educación cosmopolita donde la nacionalidad no significa nada. “Silvestre Bonnard” (Carlos Noriega Hope), “LOS DIRECTORES CINEMATOGRAFICOS MEXICANOS Y SUS OBRAS HASTA EL AÑO DEL CENTENARIO,” *El Universal*, September 11, 1921, section 2, 7.

<sup>128</sup> a quien se achacaba la manía de “europeizar nuestras costumbres” Epifanio Soto Jr. “Crónica de Méjico.” *Cine Mundial*, March 1922, 144.

<sup>129</sup> “‘La Banda del Automóvil,’” *Excélsior*, September 2, 1919, 7.

<sup>130</sup> Epifanio Soto Jr. “Ernesto Vollrath, la Primera Figura del Cine Mejicano.” *Cine Mundial*, October 1922, 542, 568.

<sup>131</sup> Serna, “We’re Going Yankee,” 358.

<sup>132</sup> See Aurelio de los Reyes, “Las películas denigrantes a México” in Ignacio Durán et. al, *México/Estados Unidos: Encuentros y desencuentros en el cine* (México, D.F.: IMCINE, 1996), 23-35, and Isabel Laura Serna, “‘As a Mexican I Feel It’s My Duty: Citizenship, Censorship, and the Campaign Against Derogatory Films in Mexico, 1922-1930.’” *The Americas* 63:2 (2006), 225-244.

<sup>133</sup> “Las rojas oriflamas del escándalo le dieron lustre y esplendor y todas las cuestiones de curia y de papel timbrado sirvieron también para estar pinchando todos los días la curiosidad de nuestro público.” “Silvestre Bonnard” (Carlos Noriega Hope), “Por la pantalla – El automóvil gris,” *El Universal*, December 13, 1919, 5.

<sup>134</sup> “Había romerías en los barrios y caravanas en las calles céntricas que se dirigían, anhelantes, a contemplar el sangriento “Automóvil”; en los pórticos de los salones se hacían cola esperando la apertura, pues que muchos bien informados (¿no serían, acaso, agentes de publicidad?) deslizaron el rumor de que la mano enérgica de la policía habría de poner un interminable paréntesis en plena exhibición...” Noriega Hope, “Por la pantalla – El automóvil gris,” 5.

<sup>135</sup> For a discussion of this press coverage, see de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. 1, 240-243.

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- <sup>136</sup> Federico Serrano and Antonio Noyola, “Nota a *El automóvil gris*” in *El automóvil gris* (Cuadernos de la Cineteca Nacional 10, 1981), 13.
- <sup>137</sup> *Excelsior*, December 11, 1919, 8. This advertisement was also posted in department stores and other retail outlets.
- <sup>138</sup> Shelley Streeby, *Radical Sensations: World Movements, Violence, and Visual Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 132
- <sup>139</sup> Ramirez Berg notes the influence of Italian epics, especially in terms of their extensive camera movement, as well as the emerging formal and narrative norms of American feature films; “*El automóvil gris*,” 4; Aurelio de los Reyes observes affinities to Italian and American melodramas in the subplots involving the female characters Carmen and Ernestina. *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. 1, 254.
- <sup>140</sup> “Silvestre Bonnard” (Carlos Noriega Hope), “Por la pantalla – *El automóvil gris*,” *El Universal*, December 13, 1919, 5.
- <sup>141</sup> Maria Cantoni, script of *La bastarda*, Archivo General de la Nación, Propiedad Artística y Literaria, Caja 335, Expediente 4698, 2-3.
- <sup>142</sup> Granda’s mugshot is reproduced in De los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. 1, 183.
- <sup>143</sup> Ramírez Berg, “*El automóvil gris*,” 20.
- <sup>144</sup> *Cine Mundial*, February 1920, quoted in Gabriel Ramírez, *Crónica del cine mudo mexicano*. México, D.F.: Cineteca Nacional, 1989, 121.
- <sup>145</sup> For reflections on the relationship between cinema and maps, see Tom Conley, *Cartographic Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
- <sup>146</sup> For a discussion of the anxieties surrounding the criminal or illegitimate uses of modern traffic, see Kristen Whissel, *Picturing American Modernity: Traffic, Technology and the Silent Cinema* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008), especially 161-184, 206-214.
- <sup>147</sup> “La historia aquí representada se desarrolla en los mismos sitios que fueron teatro de las hazañas que forman su argumento. Las escenas de los robos, las casas en que vivieron y los sitios en que fueron aprehendidos o expiaron sus crímenes la funesta Banda del Automóvil Gris son rigurosamente auténticos. La acción se desarrolla en el año 1915.”
- <sup>148</sup> Piccato, *City of Suspects*, 185.
- <sup>149</sup> Piccato, *City of Suspects*, 178.
- <sup>150</sup> *El automóvil gris*. Cuadernos de la Cineteca Nacional 10, 1981, 28-29.
- <sup>151</sup> de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. 1, 183.
- <sup>152</sup> de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. 1, 248.
- <sup>153</sup> Paul A. Schroeder Rodríguez, “Latin American Silent Cinema: Triangulation and the Politics of Criollo Aesthetics.” *Latin American Research Review* 43:3 (2008), 33-57; de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. 1, 257.
- <sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.
- <sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.
- <sup>156</sup> Piccato, *City of Suspects*, 188.
- <sup>157</sup> See Levy, “Reconstituted Newsreels.”
- <sup>158</sup> Actuality images from the period are incorporated in *Memorias de un Mexicano* (*Memories of a Mexican*, dir. Carmen Toscano, 1950) and *Epopéyas de la Revolución* (*Epic of the Revolution*, dir. Jesús H. Abitia, 1961), as well as in more recent works such as *La historia en la mirada* (*History in the Gaze*, dir. José Ramón Mikelajáuregui, 2010), and in uncatalogued materials from the collection of Edmundo Gabilondo held by the Filmoteca de la UNAM.

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<sup>159</sup> Aurelio de los Reyes, “The Silent Cinema,” 20. *El automóvil gris* faced censorship not only because of its criminal content, but also because of accusations of libel by surviving members of the Grey Automobile Gang.

<sup>160</sup> See Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining la Chica Moderna: Women, Nation and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>161</sup> “México será la primera parte en la América Latina en la cual grabará una película una estrella del arte mudo americana, de la talla de Hilda North.”

“HILDA NORTH – Estrella cinematográfica americana, grabará una película de Series en México.” *Excelsior*, November 10, 1919, 8.

<sup>162</sup> “se nos ocurre preguntar para qué importar de Yanquilandia, a costo de exorbitantes honorarios, una *miss* que de fijo no encajará tan bien en el papel de esta película nacional, como si lo hiciera alguna de las artistas cinematográficas mexicanas [...] poco estímulo será traer a una rubia *miss* para que represente un personaje más adecuado para la figura y la modalidad de una linda criolla.” “CHUCHO EL ROTO” EN PELICULA, *Don Quijote*, November 19, 1919, n/p.

<sup>163</sup> Ben Singer, Serial Melodrama and Narrative *Gesellschaft*.” *Velvet Light Trap* 37 (1996), 72-80.

<sup>164</sup> Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México: Bajo el cielo de México*, vol. II, 91.

<sup>165</sup> Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México*, vol. II, 95.

<sup>166</sup> This is according to Ángel E. Álvarez, one of the film’s principal actors, in a written testimony published in a series of articles by José María Sánchez García. “Comentarios adicionales: lo que dice Ángel E. Álvarez,” *Cinema Repórter*, October 13, 1954, 30.

<sup>167</sup> Apparently, his officials collected all of the takings after each exhibition of the film, requiring theater owners to retrieve their daily share at his office. José María Sánchez García.

“Comentarios adicionales: lo que dice Ángel E. Álvarez,” *Cinema Repórter*, October 13, 1954, 30.

<sup>168</sup> The film premiered on October 14, 1922 in ten cinemas; its final day of exhibition was October 17, when it was shown in only two cinemas. Advertisements, *El Universal*, October 14, 1922, 6; October 17, 1922, 4.

<sup>169</sup> Quoted in José María Sánchez García, “Comentarios adicionales: lo que dice Eduardo Urriola,” *Cinema Repórter*, October 20, 1954, 29.

<sup>170</sup> Aurelio de Los Reyes, *Bajo el cielo de México (Cine y sociedad en México vol. II)*, 223.

<sup>171</sup> “lleva a cabo atrevidas hazañas, que la igualan con las más famosas estrellas en las películas de aventuras.” Advertisement, *Excelsior*, October 14, 1922, 6.

<sup>172</sup> See Laura Isabel Serna, “*We’re Going Yankee*”: *American Movies, Mexican Nationalism, Transnational Cinema, 1917-1935* (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2006), 5.

<sup>173</sup> See Aurelio de los Reyes, “Las películas denigrantes a México” in Ignacio Durán et. al, *México/Estados Unidos: Encuentros y desencuentros en el cine* (México, D.F.: IMCINE, 1996), 23-35, and Isabel Laura Serna, ““As a Mexican I Feel It’s My Duty: Citizenship, Censorship, and the Campaign Against Derogatory Films in Mexico, 1922-1930.” *The Americas* 63:2 (2006), 225-244; Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 93-94, 170-176.

<sup>174</sup> “¿Y no les parece a ustedes preferible que nos olvidemos de que Fanny, la de “El robo de los veinte millones”, es una americana, para acordarnos de que su intérprete, Mary Cozzi, es una muchacha suelta y simpática, con tantas facultades para hacer una serie espeluznante como

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cualquiera ‘miss’?” Epifanio Soto Jr., “La producción mejicana tan denigrante como la Yanqui,” *Cine Mundial*, December 1922, 668, 688.

<sup>175</sup> Manuel E. Gusmán, script of “Fanny” o “El robo de Veinte Millones,” Archivo General de la Nación, Propiedad Artística y Literaria, Caja 393, Expediente 2077, 3.

<sup>176</sup> Manuel E. Gusmán, script of “Fanny” o “El robo de Veinte Millones,” 9.

<sup>177</sup> Quoted in José María Sánchez García, “Comentarios adicionales: lo que dice Eduardo Urriola.” *Cinema Repórter*, October 20, 1954, 29-30.

<sup>178</sup> Bean, “Stardom and the Extraordinary Body,” 12.

#### Notes to Chapter 4

<sup>1</sup> “Silvestre Bonnard” (Carlos Noriega Hope), “Por la pantalla - El héroe de la película,” *El Universal*, September 12, 1920, 18. Noriega Hope may have been inspired by reports of an accident suffered by actor and filmmaker Fernando Elizondo in August 1920, which he suspected was exaggerated as part of “a novel system of publicity.” Silvestre Bonnard, “Por la pantalla – Fernando Elizondo e Italia Almirante Manzini,” *El Universal*, August 10, 1920, 12.

<sup>2</sup> The Calzada de Tlalpán was an important north-south thoroughfare in Mexico City.

<sup>3</sup> Noriega Hope, “El héroe de la película,” 18.

<sup>4</sup> Noriega Hope, “El héroe da la película,” 18.

<sup>5</sup> Advertisement, *El Universal*, November 6, 1920, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Aurelio de los Reyes has discussed the rhetorical strategies by which Mexican films of the twenties, such as *El caporal* and *En la hacienda*, skirted the issue of the Revolution. *Cine y sociedad en México vol. II: Bajo el cielo de México* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1995) 230-234, to

<sup>7</sup> See Aurelio de los Reyes, “Las películas denigrantes a México” in Ignacio Durán et. al, *México/Estados Unidos: Encuentros y desencuentros en el cine* (México, D.F.: IMCINE, 1996), 23-35, and Isabel Laura Serna, “As a Mexican I Feel It’s My Duty: Citizenship, Censorship, and the Campaign Against Derogatory Films in Mexico, 1922-1930.” *The Americas* 63:2 (2006), 225-244.

<sup>8</sup> See Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939* (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 93-94, 169-176.

<sup>9</sup> Paul J. Vanderwood, *Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police, and Mexican Development* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), xi.

<sup>10</sup> See Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: the Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986)

<sup>11</sup> A number of points of intersection exist, however, such as Noriega Hope’s role in popularizing the work of the *estridentistas* in the magazine he edited, *El Universal Ilustrado*. Elissa Rashkin, *The Stridentist Movement in Mexico: The Avant-Garde and Cultural Change in the 1920s* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 33, 96.

<sup>12</sup> Contreras Torres’ *El hombre sin patria* is presented in this light in many reviews of the period. See Silvestre Bonnard (Carlos Noriega Hope), “Por el teatro del silencio - Las películas mexicanas de acción directa,” *El Universal*, Dec. 10, 1922, sec. 4, 6; *El Universal*, “Por el teatro del silencio - El Nacionalismo Agresivo – Un artículo olvidado de Vanegas Arroyo,” Oct. 15, 1922, sec. 4, 5.

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<sup>13</sup> “El Charro y el Indio, que son la síntesis del alma nacional.” “Una gran película de tendencias nacionalistas,” *El Universal*, February 4, 1922, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Rachel A. Moore, *Forty Miles from the Sea: Xalapa, the Public Sphere, and the Atlantic World in Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011), 97-99.

<sup>15</sup> See Ángel Miquel, *Por las pantallas de la Ciudad de México: periodistas del cine mudo* (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1995) and Manuel González Casanova, *Por la pantalla: Genesis de la crítica cinematográfica en México* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Laura Isabel Serna, *We're Going Yankee: American Movies, Mexican Nationalism, Transnational Cinema, 1917-1935*. Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 436.

<sup>17</sup> Cube Bonifant, “Sólo para Mujeres – ¡Todo esto es música!” *El Universal Ilustrado*, June 30, 1921, 12.

<sup>18</sup> This word refers to local officials who exercised authoritarian power over local communities.

<sup>19</sup> De los Reyes, *Bajo el cielo de México*, 236.

<sup>20</sup> Blas Hernán, “Crónicas de Cine – ‘La Gran Noticia,’” *Revista de Revistas*, January 21, 1923, 45.

<sup>21</sup> Bonifant, “Todo esto es música;” *El Universal Ilustrado*, July 28, 1921, 10; Carlos Noriega Hope, “Viñetas de México,” *El Universal Ilustrado*, September 28, 1922, 26-27.

<sup>22</sup> “ECRAN,” “La última odisea cinematográfica,” *El Universal*, August 8, 1920, 9.

<sup>23</sup> “Michoacán Invadido,” *El Universal*, October 12, 1920, 8.

<sup>24</sup> “se compone casi exclusivamente de exteriores, Lamadrid no tuvo que forzar su lente, y de ahí la limpidez absoluta y el perfecto relieve de las figuras.” “Cómo se hizo una película de charros,” *El Universal*, November 7, 1920, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Cube Bonifant, “Por la hoja de plata – Permitan que les cuente algo,” *El Universal Ilustrado*, July 7, 1921, p. 15, 18.

<sup>26</sup> “una película de exteriores, filmada en diversas partes de la República y que traerá a la pantalla tristes y sangrientos episodios de nuestras revoluciones.” “Puntos de vista – Algo sobre la producción nacional,” *El Universal*, April 17, 1921, n/p.

<sup>27</sup> De los Reyes, *Bajo el cielo de México*, 211, 215-216.

<sup>28</sup> De los Reyes, *Bajo el cielo de México*, 219.

<sup>29</sup> Esther Gabara, *Errant Modernism: the Ethos of Photography in Mexico and Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 146, 168.

<sup>30</sup> Esther Gabara, *Errant Modernism*, 146.

<sup>31</sup> “Roberto El Diablo,” “Crónicas de Cine – La Hermosa Novela ‘El Zarco’, en Película,” *Revista de Revistas*, October 24, 1920, n/p; “Silvestre Bonnard” (Carlos Noriega Hope), “El Teatro del Silencio – En busca de las estrellas,” *El Universal*, February 6, 1921, 20.

<sup>32</sup> See especially Zuzana M. Pick, *Constructing the Image of the Mexican Revolution: Cinema and the Archive* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> Tony Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>34</sup> “El Caballero Mordaz,” “Notas cinematográficas – De cómo ‘El Zarco’ causó alboroto en Tacuba.” *El Universal*, August 27, 1920, 8.

<sup>35</sup> “Se trataba de un combate entre revolucionarios y federales, y, al efecto, se consiguió de la jefatura de la guarnición el número suficiente para lograr una buena lucha cinematográfica. Lo curioso fue que, a la media hora de principiado el simulacro, los soldados se acometieron con

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verdadera saña, con un ardor realmente bélico, diciéndose cosas que no son para ser transcritas. Quizá ello se debió al espíritu inflamable que, dichosamente, poseemos los mexicanos. Con esto se logró que la escena fuese de una realidad absoluta, aunque hubieron de solicitarse los servicios de la Cruz Roja para curar a cinco o seis heridos.” R[afael] Bermudez Z[atarain], “Notas cinematográficas,” *El Universal*, February 6, 1921, 20.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in interview with “Silvestre Bonnard” (Carlos Noriega Hope), “El Teatro del Silencio – Siluetas de Artistas Cinematográficas,” *El Universal*, May 8, 1921, section 4, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Noriega Hope, “Siluetas de Artistas Cinematográficas,” 6.

<sup>38</sup> Jennifer Bean, “Technologies of Stardom and the Extraordinary Body.” *Camera Obscura* 16.3 (2001), 9-57.

<sup>39</sup> Fernando R. Elizondo, “La alegría de filmar: Mi primera carrera en mi carrera,” *El Universal Ilustrado*, July 28, 1921, 19.

<sup>40</sup> “a los policromas columnas de los suplementos yanquis para refrescar nuestras ideas, aguzar la imaginación y hallar cada día un asunto palpitante que explotar desde nuestros periódicos.

“Silvestre Bonnard” (Carlos Noriega Hope), “El teatro del silencio - Estrella de cine, ferrocarrilero y hombre de buena voluntad,” *El Universal*, July 11, 1920, 18.

<sup>41</sup> “Todas esas cosas aprendí en México y no tiene ningún ‘chiste’, pues muchos de nuestros ignorados garroteros las efectúan impecablemente todos los días.” Quoted in Noriega Hope, “Estrella de cine, ferrocarrilero y hombre de Buena voluntad,” 18.

<sup>42</sup> “un joven ‘sportman’ que realizará proezas a los Bill Hart, formidable caballista, ‘desesperado’ en toda clase de actos sensacionales y que está decidido a exponer el pellejo.” “Ecran,” “La última odisea cinematográfica,” *El Universal*, August 8, 1920, 9.

<sup>43</sup> “Estoy dispuesto a que me maten. Yo quiero que esa lucha sea real y efectiva, donde corra la sangre y broten injurias... ¡Nada de trucos ni combinaciones! ¡Trompada limpia! “Cómo se hizo una película de charros,” *El Universal*, November 7, 1920, 22.

<sup>44</sup> De hoy más, ya no nos causarán interés los dramas del “Far West”, en que William Hart y William Farnum, esos dos artistas cow-boys que tantas simpatías y admiración despiertan con su destreza y energía en los bonachones públicos de Norteamérica, que ven en ellos como una superior encarnación de sus cualidades étnicas: la acción, la fuerza, la osadía. “Roberto El Diablo,” “La Hermosa Novela ‘El Zarco’, en Película,” n/p.

<sup>45</sup> “algunas fervientes admiradoras de Moreno, Hart, Polo y Mix, - las devotas de la fuerza – piensen en que nosotros, sin ser maestros en la cinematografía, poseemos **hombres** que desconocen los polvos de arroz...” “El Caballero Mordaz,” “Notas cinematográficas – Un conquistador,” *El Universal*, September 12, 1920, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Serna, *We’re Going Yankee*, 175-180.

<sup>47</sup> “Nuestras películas, para ser mexicanas, para tener mercado en todo el mundo, necesitan hablarnos de la tierra. Yo solo hago cosas del pueblo, sin mostrar “fox-trots” o grandes salas aristocráticas. Para mí una escena en el campo – en nuestros campos – vale más que todas las escenas de la ciudad, con la vida estúpidamente europea o yanqui que vivimos aquí. ¿No crees que la salvación del cine en México es precisamente... México? Yo así lo creo que daré mi vida por una película nacional.” Quoted in “Silvestre Bonnard” (Carlos Noriega Hope), “El Teatro del Silencio – En busca de las estrellas,” *El Universal*, February 6, 1921, 20.

<sup>48</sup> “Miguel Contreras Torres acaba de estrenar “De raza azteca”, su tercera producción, que asegura es de tendencias nacionalistas, aunque nosotros sólo lo encontramos en el sombrero charro del protagonista. Porque el espectador tropieza con una pandilla de bandidos, con

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indumentaria de vaqueros tejanos, que opera en las inmediaciones de Chapultepec; presencia raptos y crímenes en las avenidas más céntricas de la ciudad y tiene la impresión general de que, en todos los lugares a que lo conduce el argumento, no hay más personas decentes que el héroe y su auxiliar./Y todo eso ayuda al que desconoce lo que es en realidad este pobre país al que se pretende defender, a confirmar, en vez de destruir, las ideas sembradas por algunos pelicularos yanquis, ignorantes o venenosos./Además de este defecto, tiene la trama el de ser espantosamente disparatada, a lo serie de William Duncan.” Epifanio Soto Jr., “Crónica de Mejico,” *Cine Mundial*, VII:2 (April 1922), 204.

<sup>49</sup> This trajectory is dramatized in a short story by J. Martínez Velasco published in *El Universal Ilustrado* entitled “A Story from Veracruz – A Vulgar Story,” which recounts the downfall of a middle-class woman from the state who moves to the capital with the hope of being a film star, but ultimately ends up as mistress to a series of powerful men. J. Martínez Velasco, “Un cuento vulgar,” *El Universal Ilustrado*, October 12, 1922, 52-53, 64.

<sup>50</sup> William M. Drew and Esperanza Vázquez Bernal, “*El Puño de Hierro*: A Mexican Silent Film Classic,” *Journal of Film Preservation* 10:66 (2003), 11.

<sup>51</sup> Caption, “Sección de Rotograbado,” *El Dictámen* (Veracruz), May 21, 1927, n/p.

<sup>52</sup> For example, *El Universal Ilustrado*, under the direction of Carlos Noriega Hope, launched a contest to find the “Estrella Mexicana de 1921” (Mexican Star[let] of 1921. Miquel, *Por las pantallas de la Ciudad de México*, 92-94. See also Serna, “We’re Going Yankee,”

<sup>53</sup> Federico Dávalos Orozco and Esperanza Vázquez Bernal, *Carlos Villatoro: pasajes en la vida de un hombre del cine* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1999), 18.

<sup>54</sup> Advertisement, *Alborada*, January 16, 1927, 2.

<sup>55</sup> David M.J. Wood, “Recuperar lo efímero: Restauración del cine mudo en México,” in *El patrimonio de los siglos XX y XXI*, ed. Louise Noelle (México, D.F.: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas-UNAM), 125-157.

<sup>56</sup> “una decidida mala impresión hacia los asuntos policíacos, a pesar de que estos son los más llenos de visualidad cinematográfica.” Marco Aurelio Galindo, “Los estrenos cinematográficos – La mujer y el cadáver,” *El Universal Ilustrado*, September 15, 1921, 1.

<sup>57</sup> “¿Qué gustan las truculencias del Oeste inculto y bravío? Pues a largar series con sombrerozcos, pistolones, espuelas y chaparreras, que disparan a diestra y siniestra, montan indómitos broncos, cargan doncellas a la grupa como quien carga un costal de patatas y después de dar una mano de trompis al villano se casan invariablemente con la niña.

¿Agradan también las secuencias interminables en que con un “¡Ah!” desconsolado de los chicuelos se anuncia la continuación para la próxima semana? Pues vayan episodios emocionantes en los que siempre quedan los protagonistas a orillas del sepulcro o en tan precaria situación que no sabe uno cómo saldrán del apuro, hasta que surge un *carácter misterioso* a resolver de cualquier manera el conflicto, y vamos adelante.” F. Borja, “El Mal del Cine,” *Cine Mundial*, June 1928, 476, 529-531.

<sup>58</sup> See Joann Herschfield, *Imagining la Chica Moderna: Women, Nation and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Serna, “We’re Going Yankee,” 166-175.

<sup>59</sup> Drew and Vázquez Bernal, “*El Puño de Hierro*,” 12.

<sup>60</sup> Kirby, *Parallel Tracks*, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Michael J. Gonzales, *The Mexican Revolution, 1910-1940*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 69, 197, 205.

<sup>62</sup> Drew and Vázquez Bernal, “*El Puño de Hierro*.”



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- <sup>63</sup> Drew and Vázquez Bernal, “*El Puño de Hierro*,” 13.
- <sup>64</sup> Kristen Whissel, *Picturing American Modernity*, 11.
- <sup>65</sup> Drew and Vázquez Bernal, “*El puño de hierro*,” 14.
- <sup>66</sup> Drew and Vázquez Bernal, “*El puño de hierro*,” 18.
- <sup>67</sup> Images of surgical procedures cropped up frequently in fiction films of the period; the first commercially successful Mexican sound film *Santa* (dir. Antonio Moreno) 1931, whose heroine’s illness has been read as an allegory for the corruption of modern Mexico City, contained a lengthy; the melodrama *A filha do advogado* (*The Lawyer’s Daughter*, Brazil, 1926), discussed in Chapter 5, contained a surgery scene in which the anti-hero Helvécio is treated for injuries which turn out to be fatal; the 1928 film *A Morfina* (*Morphine*) also contained a surgery scene.
- <sup>68</sup> See Robert M. Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen in Modern Mexico* (University of Nebraska Press, 2000).
- <sup>69</sup> Kirby, *Parallel Tracks*, 107.
- <sup>70</sup> “ARGUMENTO – Completamente deficiente. Carente de unidad y de [f]iliación, con desarrollo muy cansado y confuso, difícil de comprender en parte. Presente escenas enfadosas e innecesarias, que pudieron suprimirse. No ofrece tesis, ni acción, y se limita a la presentación de cuadros, algunos muy bellos, que no encadenan hacia uan [sic] moraleja final o un objeto definido y sólido. Es el ningún interés y raquitismo del argumento el que compromete el éxito de esta producción, que presenta artistas bastante completos, bellas escenas, cuadros muy intensos y un conjunto verdaderamente alentador para el arte nacional, todo lo cual pierde lucimiento por la falta de trama, de acción, de dinamismo y de unidad bella en el conjunto de la obra. Estamos seguros que en obra de más interés, el director artístico y los estudios de Orizaba podrán presentarnos una película más completa y amena, cuidando la lógica y la acción en sus escenas.” “Espectáculos – *El puño de hierro* y sus intérpretes,” *El Dictámen*, June 6, 1927, 6.
- <sup>71</sup> Drew and Vázquez Bernal, “*El puño de hierro*,” 18.
- <sup>72</sup> Ángel Rama, *The Lettered City*, ed. and trans. John Charles Chastain (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 5.
- <sup>73</sup> Drew and Vázquez Bernal, “*El puño de hierro*,” 13.
- <sup>74</sup> Laura Isabel Serna, “Picturing *la patria*: Ethnography, *costumbrismo* and Mexican Feature Film Production in the 1920s.” Paper presentation at Berkeley Conference on Silent Cinema, February 2011.
- <sup>75</sup> I am using this term in the sense developed by Brazilian critic Roberto Schwarz. See *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture* (New York: Verso, 1992).
- <sup>76</sup> Advertisement, *El Universal*, April 17, 1927, 10.
- <sup>77</sup> “La industria nacional y el cinematógrafo,” *El Universal*, April 13, 1927, 4.
- <sup>78</sup> Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 31.
- <sup>79</sup> Throughout the film, diagonal framing of the train tracks and train station frequently emphasizes the screen’s depth of field.
- <sup>80</sup> Paulo Carneiro da Cunha Filho, *A Utopia provincia: Recife, cinema, melancholia* (Recife, PE: Universidade Federal de Pernambuco), 31.
- <sup>81</sup> For more on this dialectic, see Schivelbush, *The Railway Journey*.
- <sup>82</sup> “Corre una de arte primero, la cual todos miran con poco interés y quieren ver ante todo al Tren Fantasma. El intermedio viene. Por fin se vuelve a quedar a obscuras el salón y aparece: EL TREN FANTASMA. Aplausos y exclamaciones prorrumpan en el acto.”

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“La película ha terminado todos han salido complacidos y la han sabido apreciar, nosotros, sinceramente declaramos que es una buena producción, en donde los esfuerzos de un grupo de hombres de negocios de Orizaba, se ha puesto de manifiesto” “debe verla todo el Estado de Veracruz,” “Revista de espectáculos – Del estreno del Tren Fantasma en Veracruz,” *El Dictámen*, February 15, 1927, 8.

### Notes to Chapter 5

<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>. Accessed January 25, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> “inclusão do sujeito do olhar na periferia do capitalismo.” Paulo Carneiro da Cunha Filho, *A Utopia Provinciana: Recife, Cinema, Melancolia* (Recife: Editora Universitária UFPE, 2010), 218.

<sup>3</sup> Luciana Corrêa de Araújo has critiqued this term, arguing that it reproduces Brazilian film historiography’s traditional focus on Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, as well as perpetuating a neglect of non-fiction production in favor of fiction features. “O cinema em Pernambuco nos anos 1920,” Catalog of the I Jornada Brasileira de Cinema Silencioso, n/p.

<sup>4</sup> “A expansão da capitalismo no Brasil [...] implantação de ferrovias, abertura de novas áreas de cafeicultura, concentração de mão de obra, crescimento da potência elétrica, do setor industrial e das cidades -, havia selado a distinção entre o sul e as demais regiões do país....” – Marly Rodrigues, *O Brasil na década de 1920: os anos que mudaram tudo* (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1997), 22.

<sup>5</sup> José Bento Monteiro Lobato, “Cidades mortas,” *Cidades mortas* (São Paulo: Monteiro Lobato & Cia., 1921), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Salles Gomes, *Humberto Mauro, Cataguases, Cinearte* (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1974), 10-11.

<sup>7</sup> Carneiro da Cunha Filho, *A utopia provinciana*, 39.

<sup>8</sup> Sússekind, *O Brasil não é longe daqui*.

<sup>9</sup> Yuri Tsivian, “Between the Old and the New: Soviet Film Culture in 1918-1924.” *Griffithiana* 55/56 (September 1996), 39.

<sup>10</sup> Tsivian, “Between Old and New,” 43.

<sup>11</sup> Miriam Hansen, “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism.” *Modernism/Modernity* 6(2), 68.

<sup>12</sup> “No contexto pernambucano, o modelo do melodrama e do western vai adquirir uma dimensão própria – não de pura cópia, mas de reinvenção: as lutas, os raptos, as disputas sempre se dão entre o mundo barroco, abandonado, e o mundo moderno, desejado.” Carneiro da Cunha Filho, *A Utopia provinciana*, 100-101.

<sup>13</sup> Hansen, “The Mass Production of the Senses,” 70, 71.

<sup>14</sup> “Como conciliar as mudanças da modernidade com a permanência da tradição? A resposta estava bem ali a mão, nos filmes americanos exibidos em todos os cinemas, nos romances e peças populares, enfim, no imaginário ficcional dominante na cultura de massa da época: melodrama.” Corrêa de Araújo, “Melodrama e vida moderna: o Recife dos anos 20 em *A filha do advogado*.” *Cadernos da pos-graduação da UNICAMP* 3 (2006), 128.

<sup>15</sup> “‘Alma Gentil’ é a representação de uma novela fácil, ao alcance de qualquer público, bem de atualidade nessa momento de transição que atravessamos, da vida aldeã para a vida vertiginosa

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que o progresso impõe aos grandes centros.” “Condor film,” *Diário do Povo*, October 16, 1924, 1.

<sup>16</sup> “Se existia alguma ideologia nacionalista nesse grupo de pioneiros da indústria cultural cinematográfica, no Brasil, era a de poder provar, com todas as deficiências técnicas e humanas, que nós, brasileiros, também podíamos realizar estórias folhetinescas tão “boas” e “estimulantes” como as que eram realizadas pela então indústria cultural americana.” Anco Márcio Tenório Vieira, “Soares e o ciclo do Recife,” in Paulo C. Cunha Filho (ed.), *Relembrando o cinema pernambucano: dos arquivos de Jota Soares* (Recife: Editora Massangana, 2006), 18.

<sup>17</sup> Corrêa de Araújo, “Melodrama e vida moderna,” 121; Salles Gomes, *Humberto Mauro, Cataguases, Cinearte*, 254-255, 385.

<sup>18</sup> “havia de tudo: trens, lanchas, policiais, perseguições, suplícios e também amor. O público vibrou e passou a acreditar no Cinema Pernambucano. E como andavam orgulhosos pelas ruas do Recife os valentes bandidos do filme! Andavam de boné e tudo, tal como atuaram na tela.” Jota Soares, untitled article, reprinted in Paulo C. Cunha (ed.), *Relembrando o Cinema Pernambucano*, 61.

<sup>19</sup> “Cinematográficas,” *Selecta*, October 25, 1924 (43), n/p. “Do interior dos Estados, principalmente, nos chegam elas [letters from would-be film stars]. Parece que o film, aí pelo sertão, vira a cabeça a muita gente, muito mais do que aqui no Rio.”

<sup>20</sup> “Onde será a Los Angeles do Brasil?,” *Selecta*, July 19, 1924, n/p; “Hollywood em miniatura,” *Diário de Notícias* (Porto Alegre) February 19, 1928, 16.

<sup>21</sup> In the case of *Selecta*, these “cine-romances,” as they were also called, appeared alongside serialized Nick Carter stories, sentimental novels and short stories, making their affinities to these forms evident.

<sup>22</sup> This skewed perspective is critiqued by Luciana Corrêa de Araújo in “O cinema em Pernambuco nos anos 20”. *Catalog of the I Jornada Brasileira do Cinema Silencioso* (São Paulo: Cinemateca Brasileira, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Within the vast bibliography on melodrama, this turn can be initially traced to Peter Brooks’ influential *The Melodramatic Imagination* (1976) in English-language scholarship, and the work of Jesús Martín Barbero and Carlos Monsiváis in the Latin American context. Melodrama’s sensational characteristics have been influentially explored in Ben Singer’s *Melodrama and Modernity*.

<sup>24</sup> “eram em seus extremos melodramáticos a expressão de uma cultural local retardada, nada devendo sob esse aspecto aos filmes estrangeiros, mesmo porque os eventuais enterrados vivos ou as barbas da vanguarda francesa e alemã não chegavam até aqui.” Salles Gomes, *Humberto Mauro, Cataguases, Cinearte*, 91-92.

<sup>25</sup> For example, in the city of Cataguases in Minas Gerais, the avant-garde magazine *Verde* was published concurrently with film production in the city. See Anco Márcio Tenório Vieira, “Soares e o ciclo do Recife,” for a more recent example of this critical tendency.

<sup>26</sup> Tracing its inception to sociologist Gilberto Freyre’s 1926 “Regionalist Manifesto of Recife,” the regionalist movement included authors such as Graciliano Ramos and José Lins do Rego.

<sup>27</sup> “contínuo diálogo com a realidade, uma relação dialética que [...] leva à crítica e à prática transformadoras.” Glauber Rocha, “Humberto Mauro e Situação Histórica,” *Revisão Crítica do Cinema Brasileiro* (São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2003), 54.

<sup>28</sup> Glauber Rocha, “O Mito de Limite,” *Revisão Crítica do Cinema Brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1964), 65-67.

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<sup>29</sup> “Esquecer Humberto Mauro hoje – e antes não se voltar constantemente sobre sua obra como única e poderosa expressão do ‘cinema novo’ no Brasil – é tentativa suicida de partir do zero para um futuro de experiências estéreis e desligadas das fontes vivas de nosso povo, triste e faminto, numa paisagem exuberante.” Rocha, “Humberto Mauro,” 31.

<sup>30</sup> Salles Gomes, *Humberto Mauro, Cataguases, Cinearte*, 295-345.

<sup>31</sup> “[f]enômeno típico de uma cinematografia subdesenvolvida.” Carlos Roberto de Souza, *O Cinema em Campinas nos anos 20, ou, uma Hollywood brasileira*. Master’s thesis, Escola de Comunicação e Artes, Universidade de São Paulo, 1979.

<sup>32</sup> Maria Rita Galvão, “Cinema brasileiro: O período silencioso.” *Cinema Brasileira* (Lisboa: Cinemateca Portuguesa, 1987), 33.

<sup>33</sup> For example, a little over a month after *Selecta* published its first column on film production in Brazil, it began to inform its readers about production companies in the state of São Paulo and Minas Gerais, whose existence had come to light thanks to letters from readers.

“Cinematográficas”, *Selecta*, June 7, 1924 (x, 23); “O CINEMA NO BRASIL – MINAS, TAMBEM COOPERA PELA NOSSA HEGEMONIA CINEMATOGRAFICA!”, *Selecta*, June 14, 1924 (x, 24).

<sup>34</sup> Ana M. López, “Early Cinema and Modernity in Latin America.” *Cinema Journal* 40:1 (2000), 49.

<sup>35</sup> Jesús Martín Barbero, *From the Media to Mediations*, trans. Elizabeth Fox and Robert A. White. (London; Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1993); Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. López. (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

<sup>36</sup> “capaz de dominar as técnicas da modernidade e de olhar essa mesma modernidade a partir de suas margens, isto é, na fronteira entre a cidade e o campo.” Edgar Salvadori de Decca, “Apresentação” in Schvarzman, *Humberto Mauro e as imagens do Brasil* (São Paulo: Editora UNESP, 2004), 13.

<sup>37</sup> “sociedade periférica se prestava à encenação, não de si mesma, ou de como ela era então, mas da própria utopia cosmopolita que alimentava então.” Carneiro da Cunha Filho, *A Utopia Provinciana*, 114.

<sup>38</sup> See Salles Gomes, *Humberto Mauro, Cataguases, Cinearte*, 295-366; Artur Autran, “Pedro Lima em *Selecta*,” *Cinemas 7* (1997), 53-65; Luciana Corrêa de Araújo, “O cinema silencioso pernambucano segundo as revistas cariocas,” *Estudos SOCINE de Cinema IV* (São Paulo: Nojesa Edições, 2005), 236-242.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, “Cavações”, *Selecta*, November 14, 1925, 20; “Previndo contra os cavadores,” *Selecta*, January 6, 1926, 16.

<sup>40</sup> For example, a 1929 editorial in *Cinearte* declares that “Making quality films in Brazil must involve purifying our reality, by selecting aspects that deserve to be shown on screen: progress, works of modern engineering, our beautiful white people, our natural wonders. No documentaries, since you cannot totally control what is shown and undesirable elements can infiltrate them[...].” *Cinearte*, December 11, 1929, translated and quoted in Lisa Shaw and Stephanie Dennison, *Brazilian National Cinema* (London/New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>41</sup> Regina Maria Rodrigues Behar, *Caçadores de Imagens: Cinema e Memória em Pernambuco*. Ph.D. thesis, Escola de Comunicações e Artes, Universidade de São Paulo, 2002.

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<sup>42</sup> One group of filmmakers in Campinas even named their production company Selecta Film in honor of the magazine. Letter from Antonio Dardis Neto to Pedro Lima, June 29, 1925. Arquivo Pedro Lima, Cinemateca Brasileira, APL-C/60.

<sup>43</sup> Lucilla Ribeiro Bernadet, *O cinema em Pernambuco 1922 – 1931: primeira abordagem*. Master's thesis, Escola de Comunicação e Artes, Universidade de São Paulo, 1970, 55; Salles Gomes, *Humberto Mauro, Cataguases, Cinearte*, 64.

<sup>44</sup> These viewpoints should be considered a reflection both of the opinions of individual readers and as an expression of the magazine's editorial position; the editors' responses to disgruntled readers in the "Questionário" make it clear that they only published letters expressing positions that conformed to the magazines'.

<sup>45</sup> "Cinemas e Teatros," *Para Todos*, October 25, 1919, n/p.

<sup>46</sup> "Não conhecemos nada de 'films' em série. Nunca vemos esse genero, que decididamente não nos seduz." "Questionário," *Para Todos*, November 13, 1920, n/p.

<sup>47</sup> "film de series são os de cow-boys com tiros e perseguições. *O Conde de Monte Cristo*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Judex* e *Mistérios de New York*, não são 'seriados'...são romances..." *Para Todos*, June 14, 1924, n/p.

<sup>48</sup> "decadência deste gênero" "aventuras que deixavam o ânimo em suspenso no final de cada capítulo, estimulando assim o interesse dos espectadores." J.G., "As Lutas no Cinema – Os Artistas Lutam a Valer." *Selecta*, May 2, 1928 (xiv, 18), n/p.

<sup>49</sup> "Esta fase do cinema grosseiro que ainda persiste para consolação dum público ingênuo, melhorou um pouco as suas deploráveis proporções, pois se reduziu á metragem actual, o que já é uma grande victoria, e passou a ser apresentado em salões de infima cathegoria, sempre retardários em aceitar inovações." J.G., "As Lutas no Cinema."

<sup>50</sup> Smith, *Shooting Cowboys and Indians*, 187-188, 193.

<sup>51</sup> "As séries Gaumont, de uma perfeita imbecilidade, desertaram a Avenida, buscando bairros recônditos, cidades atrazadas." *Para Todos*, June 9, 1923, n/p. The Avenida Central was renamed the Avenida Rio Branco in 1912.

<sup>52</sup> *Para Todos*, "A Página dos nossos Leitores – O Cinema em Recife," December 20, 1924, n/p. Luciana Corrêa de Araújo identifies "Cyclone Smith" as Mário Mendonça, who provided information about the film scene in Recife to *Para Todos* and *Cinearte* for a number of years. "O cinema silencioso pernambucano segundo as revistas cariocas," 236.

<sup>53</sup> "venham directamente para aqui, sem passar por outros estados." *Diário de Notícias* (Salvador), April 10, 1920, quoted in Raimundo Nonato da Silva Fonseca, *'Fazendo fita': cinematógrafos, cotidiano e imaginário em Salvador, 1897-1930* (Salvador: Universidade Federal da Bahia, 2002), 102.

<sup>54</sup> Cinema Pathé ledger, Colecção Família Ferrez, Arquivo Nacional, reference number FF-FMF6.1.0.9.

<sup>55</sup> Ernani Vieira, "Cinematográficas..." *Para Todos*, Mar. 19, 1921, n/p.

<sup>56</sup> White had previously been the subject of another poem by a film fan in Salvador in the northeastern state of Bahia. "Cinematográficas..." *Para Todos*, January 8, 1921, n/p.

<sup>57</sup> Letter from "Gil Berto," dated December 8, 1922. "A Página dos nossos Leitores," *Para Todos*, Jan. 13, 1923, n/p.

<sup>58</sup> "Só temos aqui um cinema, aliás bem regular. Entretanto, agüentamos aqui buchas de causar raiva. Este cinema tem a mania das séries, e que séries!...verdadeiras borracheiras. Se ele tivesse competidor, talvez passasse bons films, mas, não tem...Temos que suportar com

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paciência o que elle nos apresenta. Emfim, damos graças a Deus, pois, é o unico divertimento que temos aqui, aos domingos.” *Para Todos*, November 14, 1925, 7.

<sup>59</sup> “as famílias da melhor sociedade horizontina são obrigadas a freqüentar o novo cinema, sentando-se na mesma fila que a escoria da Floresta e Barro Preto, gente sem compostura, que de cinema só comprehendem as carreiras ridiculas de Tom Mix, e quejandas!” Letter from Nivea Delorme, dated January 14, 1923. “A Pagina dos Nossos Leitores,” *Para Todos*, March 24, 1923, n/p.

<sup>60</sup> “O enredo interessa, é bem urdido, impregna-se vivamente do caráter da região em que transcorre, os pampas no Rio Grande do Sul. Não só os cenários naturais foram esplendidamente escolhidos, os interiores têm propriedade e os trabalhos dos artistas é [sic] relativamente bom. O film só nos desagrada quando reproduz cenas violentas que nos parecem inexpressivas e lentas, acostumados como estamos ás audacias e brutalidades da producção norte-americana.” “Coração de Gaúcho”, *Palcos e Telas*, April 29, 1920 (III, 110), n/p.

<sup>61</sup> Ironically, the producers of *Coração de Gaúcho* were based in Rio rather than Rio Grande do Sul.

<sup>62</sup> quoted in de Souza, *O Cinema em Campinas*, 20-21.

<sup>63</sup> “beleza natural, como mesmo deve caracterisar os nossos films para que eles tenham o duplo efeito de interesse e propaganda.” *Para Todos*, November 17, 1923, p. 43.

<sup>64</sup> *Para Todos*, November 17, 1923, p. 43

<sup>65</sup> The automobile accident discussed below was related to the main narrative only in that it displayed Viga’s disagreeable qualities: arriving on the scene where the boy is being treated, he kicks over a container of medication.

<sup>66</sup> “Ao assistir *João da Mata*, acompanha-se com enorme atenção todo o desenrolar da historia, que é simples, bem contada, sem inverosimilhanças, de intenso sentimento e naturais emoções, história esta no mesmo gênero, ás vezes, tão brutalmente explorada pelos americanos.” *Para Todos*, November 17, 1923, p. 43.

<sup>67</sup> quoted in de Souza, *O Cinema em Campinas*, 53.

<sup>68</sup> In addition to its four or five screenings in Campinas between October 8 and 20, *João da Mata* was shown in Rio in a program with an installment of the American serial *The Mysteries of Paris*; in the city of São Paulo; and in several towns in the interior of the state and one in Minas Gerais. Carlos Roberto de Souza, *O Cinema em Campinas*, 54-60.

<sup>69</sup> Carlos Roberto de Souza, *O Cinema em Campinas*, 60.

<sup>70</sup> De Souza, *O Cinema em Campinas*, 60.

<sup>71</sup> See Helena Stigger, “*Amor que redime*: reconstituição do pioneirismo do cinema gaúcho” in Cristiane Freitas Gutfreind and Carlos Gerbase, eds., *Cinema gaúcho: Diversidades e inovações* (Porto Alegre: Editora Sulina, 2009), 43-45.

<sup>72</sup> De Souza, *O Cinema em Campinas*, 72-73, 88.

<sup>73</sup> “Edith Barros, raro exemplo de virtude e abnegação, vive constantemente martirisada pelo seu marido Tim, homem rude e ébrio habitual. Ela suporta com resignação de santa, todas as brutalidades de seu marido, sem dar ouvidos a Jacques Fernandes, um homem malvado e sem escrúpulos, que a corteja constantemente, insinuando-lhe a abandonar o marido indigno, prometendo-lhe uma colocação compatível com a sua pessoa, em sua casa comercial, e oferecendo-lhe os seus préstimos de pretense amigo.” *Sofrer para Gosar* program, Coleção Pedro Lima, Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro.

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<sup>74</sup> “numa promiscuidade repugante embriagam-se, confundidos com o retinir das fichas de roleta, taças de estimulantes e belezas das mulheres.” *Sofrer para Gosar* program.

<sup>75</sup> “a vida está suspensa por um fio de cabelo e que a única garantia consiste em possuir um belo bar de ‘revolvers’ e de uma boa dose de coragem.” *Sofrer para Gosar* program.

<sup>76</sup> “sistema norte-americano, com mulheres, alcool e jogo.” “Soffer para Gosar,” *Selecta*, April 18, 1925, n/p; *Para Todos*, April 25, 1925, 54; *Selecta*, April 18, 1925, n/p.

<sup>77</sup> “Não queremos tirar ao espectador o imprevisto do romance, dando-lhe ensejo de seguir ponto por ponto, todas as peripécias do film, cenas felicíssimas de paisagens naturais e lances emocionantíssimos que prendem por completo a atenção do publico.” *Sofrer para Gosar* program.

<sup>78</sup> “luta gigantesca entre dois homens, pela conquista da mulher amada,” “um trabalho de técnica perfeita e de uma emoção tão forte que o espectador sentirá correr pela espinha um “frison” de entusiasmo e de ancia indescritível.” *Sofrer para Gosar* program.

<sup>79</sup> “Um soco violento do galã faria o vilão quebrar a balaustrada e cair de costas sobre uma mesa cheia de garrafas que, por sua vez, também se espatifaria. O galã salta do primeiro andar e a briga termina no andar térreo. A movimentação foi hábilmente preparada: balaustrada e mesa foram previamente serradas para que, no momento oportuno, se quebrassem sem dificuldades e a queda do vilão foi descomposta pela câmara, primeiro caindo do andar superior – e sendo amparado embaixo por uma lona grossa – e depois espatifando a mesa – rolando de um pequeno andaime especialmente construído para a tomada....” de Souza, *O Cinema em Campinas*, 90.

<sup>80</sup> De Souza, *O Cinema em Campinas*, 94.

“Na caracterização dos tipos em scena, artisticamente feita, notamos apenas a preocupação que houve de americanizar tudo, desde os trajes até os gestos, e desde os gestos até a ação, isso porém não será nunca um defeito grave, quando sabemos que ‘santo de casa não faz milagres’.” “Teatros e Cinemas,” *Diário do Povo*, Dec. 27, 1923, 2.

<sup>81</sup> “Personagens de nomes como Edith, Tim, Jack, Bill e outros, com revolver na cinta caída até quase ao joelho, socos, luctas, modo de atirar um copo de bebida á cara de um gracejador, engatilhar um revovler e...braços no ar, ½ duzia de tiros e fuga a cavalo...pode ser que agrade ao povo em geral, mas, para quem conhece a enorme diferença dos costumes nossos e do pessoal do norte, acha simplesmente um grande absurdo.” Letter from Diogo de Mariz in Ouro Fino, “A Opinião dos Nossos Leitores,” *Selecta*, March 17, 1926, no. 11, 5.

<sup>82</sup> Carneiro da Cunha Filho, *A Utopia provinciana*, 38.

<sup>83</sup> Carneiro da Cunha Filho, *A Utopia provinciana*, 48.

<sup>84</sup> See Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Jr., *A Invenção do Nordeste e outras artes* (Recife: Editora Massangana, 1999).

<sup>85</sup> Carneiro da Cunha Filho, *A Utopia provinciana*, 26-27.

<sup>86</sup> “uma história que resoltou da assimilação de filmes americanos, *Jurando vingar* foi uma tentativa de registrar o nordeste, os canaviais....” Lucilla Ribeiro Bernadet, interview with Gentil Roiz, quoted in *O Cinema em Pernambuco*, 92.

<sup>87</sup> “possuía um enredo versatile,” “paisagens belíssimas deste Nordeste tão rico e exuberante” “descendendo a ladeira do crime, vitalizando as seqüências, mormente aquelas que obrigavam o espectador a não desviar a mínima parcela de atenção ao filme.” Jota Soares, untitled article reprinted in Paulo C. Cunha Filho (ed.), *Relembrando o Cinema Pernambucano*, 34.

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<sup>88</sup> “alguns defeitos de fotografias, jogos de cena, acanhamento dos artistas e algumas cenas fracas, está três vezes superior á *Retribuição*.” *Para Todos*, November 14, 1925, 7. The letter dates the exhibition in Gravatá to October 8.

<sup>89</sup> “O *cabaret*, infelizmente, estava pau, parecia que os freguezes não tinham gosto de pousarem para a objetiva, pois, estavam paradas. As lutas, americanizadas. Muitas scenas deste drama estão naturais.” *Para Todos*, November 14, 1925, 7.

<sup>90</sup> “A platéia daqui recebeu *Jurando vingar* debaixo de uma forte salva de palmas. Achei justo e entusiasmei-me, pois, sempre sonhei com o cinema brasileiro. É pena não poder fazer parte dele.” Gravatá did have a short-lived production company, Pernambuco-Film, which attempted to produce a fiction film in 1924. *Para Todos*, November 14, 1925, 7.

<sup>91</sup> In the small city of Pelotas, Portuguese immigrant Francisco Santos produced the 1912 film *Os óculos do vovô* (*Grandma’s Eyeglasses*), which apparently resembled George Albert Smith’s 1900 film *Grandma’s Reading Glass* and is thought to be the oldest (partially) surviving fiction film made in Brazil, as well as several newsreels and actuality films, and a true-crime film entitled *O Crime dos Banhados* (1913), which reconstructs the politically motivated murder of a local family, a project comparable to, and contemporaneous with, the Botelho brothers’ contemporaneous *Um crime sensacional* and *O crime dos caixotes*.

<sup>92</sup> Antonio Jesus Pfeil, “Eduardo Abelim: Um primitivo do cinema gaúcho,” *Correio do Povo* (Porto Alegre), March 31, 1974, 22.

<sup>93</sup> Pfeil, “Eduardo Abelim,” 22.

<sup>94</sup> This adjective refers to a person from rural Rio Grande do Sul.

<sup>95</sup> *Bombachas* are wide-legged trousers, a traditional part of *gaúcho* attire.

<sup>96</sup> Letter from Guido Mondin to Antonio Jesus Pfeil, quoted in Pfeil, “Eduardo Abelim,” 22.

<sup>97</sup> *A Tela* (Porto Alegre), September 15, 1927. Clipping, Arquivo Pedro Lima, Cinemateca Brasileira, APL-G32-301.

<sup>98</sup> *A Tela*, September 15, 1927. Clipping, Arquivo Pedro Lima, Cinemateca Brasileira, APL-G32-301.

<sup>99</sup> *Diário de Notícias*, March 4, 1927, quoted in Antonio Jesus Pfeil, “‘Um Drama nos Pampas:’ Cinema Gaúcho em Tempo de ‘Western,’” *Correio do Povo*, April 21, 1974, 25.

<sup>100</sup> J.M.R., *Diário da Noite*, February 13, 1929. Coleção Pedro Lima, Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>101</sup> “J.M.R.,” *Diário da Noite*, February 13, 1929. Press clipping from Coleção Pedro Lima, Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>102</sup> This summary is based on information from an interview between Eduardo Abelim, Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes and Gustavo Dahl in 1973, Cinemateca Brasileira. Reference number 5497.

<sup>103</sup> “o abuso do automovel. Será necessario que em todos os films seja necessario [sic] figurar tal veículo?” “obsecados pelo americanismo.” “A Cinematografia no Rio Grande do Sul.” *A Tela*, October 15, 1927. Unpaginated press clipping from Arquivo Pedro Lima, Cinemateca Brasileira, APL-G31/104.

<sup>104</sup> “Si não estivesse ali escrito o titulo que o film receberá, eu seria capaz de baptisá-lo por ‘Loucuras em automóvel’ ou ‘O automovel misterioso’, ou ‘Pista automobilística’ ou, ainda, ‘Nada por um automóvel’, emfim uma quantidade de títulos automobilísticos.” “Agora é a vez da ‘Gaúcha’... *A Tela*, October 15, 1927. Unpaginated press clipping in Arquivo Pedro Lima, Cinemateca Brasileira, APL-G30/147.



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- <sup>105</sup> Nurmis disguises himself as her crippled adoptive father; the two run an antique shop that serves as a cover for stolen goods.
- <sup>106</sup> *A Tela*, April 30, 1928. Coleção Pedro Lima, Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro.
- <sup>107</sup> Unattributed press clipping, (likely from the *Correio do Povo*), dated February 20, 1929. Arquivo Pedro Lima, Cinemateca Brasileira, APL-G32/280.
- <sup>108</sup> “Um deles, alma errante de vagabundo internacional, o bandoleiro Sanchez, era temido pela façanhas e histórico, de uma existencia romanesca e manchada de sangue...O outro um simples e honesto operário, que a fatalidade obriga a refugiar-se nos matos...Entre os dois homens, transformados em feras trava-se uma luta de morte...” *Diario de Noticias*, April 14, 1929, 10.
- <sup>109</sup> Giving a distinctly Freudian twist to the film’s production, father and daughter were played by a husband and wife employed by a traveling theater company.
- <sup>110</sup> Rodrigues, *O Brasil na década de 1920*, 66.
- <sup>111</sup> “as aventuras de Grace Cunard, de Eddie Polo, de Noble Johnson, Pearle [sic] White, Ruth Roland, Jack Perrin, Louise Lorraine, Joe Bonomo e tantos mestres na arte de enfrentar perigos os mais duros.” Untitled article, Jota Soares in Paulo C. Cunha Filho (ed.), *Relembrando o cinema pernambucano*, 62.
- <sup>112</sup> Jota Soares, “Os Filmes Pernambucanos Também Tinham Seus Beijos,” reprinted in Paulo C. Cunha Filho (ed.), *Relembrando o cinema pernambucano*, 45.
- <sup>113</sup> “A influência produzidas pelos filmes americanos no espírito dos pioneiros do cinema em Pernambuco foi um elemento de grande poder no impulso ao empreendimento dos mesmos.” Jota Soares, untitled article reprinted in Paulo C. Cunha Filho (ed.), *Relembrando o cinema pernambucano*, 61.
- <sup>114</sup> Carneiro da Cunha Filho, *A Utopia Provinciana*, 175.
- <sup>115</sup> See Tom Gunning, “A Tale of Two Prologues: Actors and Roles, Detectives and Disguises in *Fantômas*, Film and Novel.” *Velvet Light Trap* 37 (1996), 30-36.
- <sup>116</sup> Due to inconsistent spelling in the period, the camera operator’s name sometimes appears as “Edison Chagas,” though the spelling “Edson” is more common.
- <sup>117</sup> Ben Singer, “Female Power in the Serial-Queen Melodrama: Etiology of an Anomaly,” *Camera Obscura* 8:1 (1990), 90-129.
- <sup>118</sup> “um tesouro em moedas de ouro que circulavam no tempo em que Brasil era Império.”
- <sup>119</sup> Marcelo Didino, *O Cangaço no Cinema Brasileiro* (São Paulo: Editora Annablume, 2010), 38.
- <sup>120</sup> “Curisco: um salteador de estradas e chefe de um terrível bando.”
- <sup>121</sup> The scenes were shot amongst the steep slopes of a former chalk mine in the neighboring city of Olinda. Ribeiro Bernadet, *O Cinema em Pernambuco*, 87.
- <sup>122</sup> Carneiro da Cunha Filho, *A Utopia Provinciana*, 31.
- <sup>123</sup> “Vendo o fim de sua quadrilha, Curisco acaba com a existência.”
- <sup>124</sup> Shelley Stamp discusses the manner in which marriage, deferred throughout many serials’ installments, provided it with a semblance of narrative closure. “An Awful Struggle Between Love and Ambition: Serial Heroines, Serial Stars and their Female Fans” in *The Silent Cinema Reader*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Peter Krämer (New York: Routledge, 2004), 210-224.
- <sup>125</sup> “como é adorável a vida fora da cidade”
- <sup>126</sup> “belos panoramas, emocionantes lutas, nada faltou para que tivéssemos [...] uma perfecta película.” *Jornal do Comércio*, March 17, 1925, 3.

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<sup>127</sup> “tais películas, chamadas policiais, com uma infinidade de séries./Nada mais inverosímil, e mais perigoso para os costumes sociais, que semelhantes [sic] fitas de aventuras./Quem poderá negar a sua perniciosa influência sobre os cérebros fracos?”

Samuel Campello, “Fitas de Cinema”, *Diário de Pernambuco*, March 22, 1925, 4.

<sup>128</sup> “O entrecho também, meu Deus! Não tem nada nosso, é uma imitação das fitas americanas, chamadas policiais. São os socos, são os murros, são as quadrilhas de bandidos, são as passagens impossíveis, e até um casamento á americana, com declaração de amor feita ao galã pela moça e logo após um passeio de automóvel.” Samuel Campello, “Fitas de Cinema.”

<sup>129</sup> Ribeiro Bernadet, *O cinema em Pernambuco*, 88.

<sup>130</sup> Glauber Rocha’s “Black God, White Devil” is probably the example of this hybridization best-known outside Brazil; it in turn draws on the genre of “filmes de cangaço” popularized in the 1950s.

<sup>131</sup> Letter from Izidoro Junior, Recife, “A Opinião dos Nossos Leitores,” *Selecta*, March 17, 1926, 5.

<sup>132</sup> The name might refer to a brand name associated with the American Film Manufacturing Company. Carl Bennett, “Progressive Silent Film List,” <http://www.silentera.com>. Accessed December 13, 2012.

<sup>133</sup> “questões de terra e conseqüente rapto de uma menina de nove anos de idade. Muita ação.” Jota Soares, “Contribuição do interior do estado,” in Paulo C. Cunha Filho (ed.), *Relembrando o Cinema Pernambucano*, 41.

<sup>134</sup> “NOTÍCIAS DO CINEMA BRASILEIRO – O VALE DOS MARTÍRIOS,” *Correio da Manhã*, February 3, 1927. Coleção Pedro Lima, Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>135</sup> Press sheet, “O Vale dos Martírios,” Coleção Pedro Lima, Cinemateca Brasileira, reference number 549/24.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Paulo Augusto Gomes in Gomes, *Pioneiros do cinema em Minas Gerais*, 82.

<sup>137</sup> *Selecta*, October 13, 1925, 35; March 9, 1927, 23.

<sup>138</sup> “A interessante cena em que um misterioso vulto rapta a heroína da peça,” “A desesperada corrida do automóvel pela heroína para salvar o seu namorado.” Press sheet, “O Vale dos Martírios.”

<sup>139</sup> Press sheet, “O Vale dos Martírios.”

<sup>140</sup> Thanks to Kristen Whissel for drawing the final film in this list to my attention.

<sup>141</sup> “A ação vertiginosa de algumas de suas cenas, os tranzes dramáticos de que está cheia, a ternura de suas partes românticas, o desenlace inesperado de suas passagens, tudo isto faz que “O Vale dos Martírios” seja uma verdadeira consagração para a indústria cinematographica brasileira e um legítimo orgulho para todo o brasileiro que estremece a sua patria.” Press sheet, “O Vale dos Martírios.”

<sup>142</sup> “O melhor filme brasileiro de 1927,” *Cinearte*, April 4, 1928, 4.

<sup>143</sup> Salles Gomes, *Humberto Mauro, Cataguases, Cinearte*, 81.

<sup>144</sup> Salles Gomes, *Humberto Mauro, Cataguases, Cinearte*, 91, 89.

<sup>145</sup> “temperamento energético, sempre pronto e decidido.” “Senhorita Agora Mesmo,” *Cinearte*, September 14, 1927, 6.

<sup>146</sup> “É que uma moça como aquela só poderia corresponder ao amor de um homem de valor reconhecido, cujo natural fosse vivo e decidido como o seu.” “Senhorita Agora Mesmo,” *Cinearte*, September 14, 1927, 6.

<sup>147</sup> “Senhorita Agora Mesmo,” *Cinearte*, September 14, 1927, 6.

- <sup>148</sup> “depois de várias peripécias,” “Senhorita Agora Mesmo,” *Cinearte*, September 14, 1927, 6.
- <sup>149</sup> Luciana Corrêa de Araújo, “Os seriados norte-americanos e o cinema brasileiro dos anos 20,” *Contracampo* 24, 171.
- <sup>150</sup> Corrêa de Araújo, “Os seriados norte-americanos,” 172-173.
- <sup>151</sup> Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes, *Humberto Mauro, Cataguases, Cinearte*, 94.
- <sup>152</sup> “ao pé da majestosa serra do Camparaó, em Minas.”
- <sup>153</sup> Salles Gomes, *Humberto Mauro, Cataguases, Cinearte*, 145.
- <sup>154</sup> “Dizia-se que ele [the original owner] adherira às forças Portuguesas que se revoltaram contra às idéias da Independência, em 1822, e antes da fuga para Lisboa, não podendo carregar, enterrou a fortuna.”
- <sup>155</sup> Sheila Schvarzman, *Humberto Mauro e as imagens do Brasil*, 41.
- <sup>156</sup> In order to capture this shot, Mauro had to improvise a crude version of a telephoto lens. Salles Gomes, *Humberto Mauro, Cataguases, Cinearte*, 139.
- <sup>157</sup> Salles Gomes, *Humberto Mauro, Cataguases, Cinearte*.
- <sup>158</sup> “Esse film será produzido exclusivamente nesta Capital e immediações, sendo uma produção de Aventuras e de sensações novas para o nosso publico.” “Entre as Montanhas de Belo Horizonte,” *Diário da Manhã* (Belo Horizonte), January 25, 1928, 1. Press clipping, Coleção Pedro Lima, Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro.
- <sup>159</sup> “O gênero escolhido para essas primeiras produções foi o drama de aventuras, porque elle prode dispensar a instalação de custosos studios.” “‘Entre as Montanhas de Minas’, será a primeira pellicula da Bello Horizonte Film,” *O Jornal* (Rio de Janeiro), August 10, 1928. Unpaginated press clipping, Coleção Pedro Lima, Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro.
- <sup>160</sup> “um assunto que prescindisse dos cenários meccanicos, aproveitando a beleza panorâmica de nossos campos e de nossas serras inigualáveis no soberbo de sua grandeza.” “Entre as montanhas de Minas” – O primeiro “film” de aventuras executado em Belo Horizonte.” *Correio Mineiro* (Belo Horizonte), August 26, 1928. Unpaginated press clipping, Coleção Pedro Lima, Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro.
- <sup>161</sup> “rapaz rico e estroina,” “Cinematografia mineira – ‘Entre as montanhas de Minas,’” *O Estado de Minas*, August 26, 1928. Unpaginated press clipping, Coleção Pedro Lima, Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro.
- <sup>162</sup> I have encountered two lengthy summaries of the film. The first, taken from the issue of *O Jornal* of August 10, 1928, refers to the protagonist as “Wilson,” suggesting there may have been later alterations to the film, but its details are largely consistent with the second summary, published in *O Estado de Minas* on August 26, 1928, following a press screening of the film on August 24.
- <sup>163</sup> “O princípio do film mostra trechos lindos de Bello Horizonte, o que deve equivaler, pois, a uma excelente propaganda das belezas da Capital de Minas.” *O Estado de Minas*, “Cinematographia mineira.”
- <sup>164</sup> Qualquer tentativa que tenha como finalidade o progresso de Minas, e principalmente de nossa Capital, hade [sic] encontrar sempre de nossa parte a maior simpatia. *Correio Mineiro*, “‘Entre as montanhas de Minas’.
- <sup>165</sup> “digno de ser exibido em qualquer cinema da Capital da República.” *O Estado de Minas*, August 30, 1928.
- <sup>166</sup> “noite de aventuras e libações alcoolicas.” *O Estado de Minas*, “Cinematografia mineira.”

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- <sup>167</sup> “filho de um rico comerciante da capital mineira.” *O Jornal*, “‘Entre as Montanhas de Minas’”.
- <sup>168</sup> “rico fazendeiro do Sul de Minas,” *O Estado de Minas*, “Cinematographia mineira.”
- <sup>169</sup> Pedro Lima, “Cinema Brasileiro,” *Cinearte*, August 15, 1928, 6.
- <sup>170</sup> “idílio” “logo interrompido por uma cena de sensação.” Pedro Lima, “Cinema Brasileiro,” *Cinearte*, August 15, 1928, 6.
- <sup>171</sup> “uma vida desregrada e de dissipação.” *O Jornal*, “‘Entre as Montanhas de Minas’”.
- <sup>172</sup> Gomes, *Pioneiros do cinema em Minas Gerais*, 56, 132.
- <sup>173</sup> “Depois de muitas peripécias,” *O Jornal*, “‘Entre as Montanhas de Minas’”.
- <sup>174</sup> Gomes, *Pioneiros do cinema em Minas Gerais*, 132.
- <sup>175</sup> “estabelecimento modelo, onde reina a maior harmonia entre empregados e patrões,” *O Jornal*, “‘Entre as Montanhas de Minas’”.
- <sup>176</sup> “O rapaz, apaixonando-se, procurava conquistar o coração da sua amada, esquecendo, por completo da vida de loucuras que, até então, levava.” *O Jornal*, “‘Entre as Montanhas de Minas’”.
- <sup>177</sup> “índio perverso.” *Correio Mineiro*, “‘Entre as montanhas de Minas’”.
- <sup>178</sup> através de sua galopada furiosa, pela amplidão dos campos e pelas escarpas das montanhas, até o seu covil.” *Correio Mineiro*, “‘Entre as montanhas de Minas’”.
- <sup>179</sup> “o covil que arranjara nas ruínas de um velho moinho.” *O Estado de Minas*, “Cinematographia mineira.”
- <sup>180</sup> In *Braza dormida*, the villain of the film (Pedro Fantol), who tries to sabotage both the sugar refinery’s operations and the romance between the hero and the heroine after being fired as manager, lives in an obsolete *engenho*, where he administers violent beatings to Luis’s best friend, played by Máximo Serrano.
- <sup>181</sup> “após varias peripécias, conseguem arrebatam a moça das garras do bandido.” *O Jornal*, “‘Entre as Montanhas de Minas’”.
- <sup>182</sup> “cenas emocionantes, que terminam com a prisão de “Águia Preta.” *O Estado de Minas*, “Cinematografia mineira.”
- <sup>183</sup> “Cinema Brasileiro,” *Cinearte*, August 15, 1928, 6.
- <sup>184</sup> “As cenas se desenvolvem dentro do tempo preciso para serem compreendidas, sem demasias que cansam a atenção.” *Correio Mineiro*, “‘Entre as montanhas de Minas’”.
- <sup>185</sup> “um romance simples.” *Correio Mineiro*, “‘Entre as montanhas de Minas’”.
- <sup>186</sup> *O Jornal*, “‘Entre as Montanhas de Minas.’”
- <sup>187</sup> Gomes, *Pioneiros do cinema em Minas Gerais*, 133.
- <sup>188</sup> De Souza, *O Cinema em Campinas*, 294.
- <sup>189</sup> “Mocidade Louca,” *Cinearte*, September 7, 1927, 6.
- <sup>190</sup> Em “Mocidade Louca” veremos:/Uma ascensão e luta a 60 metros do solo nas grandes silas da importante Fábrica de Cimento Portland Brasileira./Um magnífico e arriscadíssimo apanhado de um touro bravo bem próximo do aparelho./Um desastre em que um trem apanha um automóvel sobre uma ponte, estando a heroína pendurada nela, caindo depois á água, sendo salva pelo galã.” Unattributed, undated press clipping from Coleção Pedro Lima, Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro.
- <sup>191</sup> Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 7, 151.
- <sup>192</sup> Em “Mocidade Louca” o espectador terá ensejo de apreciar os mais ardilosos “trucs”, os mais engenhosos artificios da cinematografia, como sejam: corridas de automóveis apanhadas com

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tele-objectiva – super-visão; maravilhosa trabalho de fotografias – visão em miniaturas; apanhados de rara felicidade, - desastre ferroviário, autêntico, formidável – lutas, em grande altura, única em films nacionais./Enfim, foram estes os detalhes que maravilharam os críticos cinematográficos da capital, e a ‘Selecta Film’ chama a atenção do público para observar com atenção estes quadros, que constituem a vitória de “Mocidade Louca”, e a aureolada vitória da arte campineira. “Teatros e Cinemas – Mocidade Louca”, *Diário do Povo*, August 14, 1927, 6.

<sup>193</sup> “tinha o fraco de andar em passeio pelos campos, dirigindo ela mesma a sua baratinha, confiante na propria habilidade.” “Mocidade Louca,” *Cinearte*, September 7, 1927, 6.

<sup>194</sup> “a imprudência, a falta de senso, são sempre os cúmplices das grandes aventuras que se dão na nossa vida.” “Mocidade Louca,” *Cinearte*, September 7, 1927, 6.

<sup>195</sup> De Souza, *O Cinema em Campinas*, 308.

<sup>196</sup> “Mocidade Louca,” *Cinearte*, September 7, 1927, 36.

<sup>197</sup> “Especialmente na cena do barco, quando ouve as juras apaixonadas de seu noivo (Antonio Fido), Isa Linas é verdadeiramente admirável, encantando a assistência com as suas maneiras distintas de artista já victoriosa. Outra scena também empolgante, é o do encontro de trens, que pela perfeição com que foi apanhada, nos deixou com a respiração suspensa por alguns segundos.” A. Till, *Gazeta de Campinas*, July 19, 1927. Unpaginated clipping from Coleção Pedro Lima, Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>198</sup> “Antonio Fido, o galã, revelou-se tambem ótimo artista, que no desempenho de scenas amorosas, quer na formidável luta travada com o conhecido pugilista Belline. O operador do Selecta foi bastante feliz ao apanhar a scena da queda de Bellini, bem assim as de perseguição que vêm a seguir.” A. Till, *A Gazeta de Campinas*.

#### Notes to Conclusion

<sup>1</sup> “Um italiano, recém-chegado a S. Paulo, revive, em suas linhas gerais, o sensacional delito de Miguel Tra[a]d,” *Correio Paulistano*, October 8, 1928, 8.

<sup>2</sup> “a policia projeta intensa luz na noite do mistério” *Correio Paulistano*, October 8, 1928, 8.

<sup>3</sup> “pronto num abrir e fechar de olhos,” “regorgitava público.” Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, Coleção Pedro Lima. C:Cx 15/15.

<sup>4</sup> “Pensei assistir um film bom. Não a tragédia em todos os seus detalhes. Mas um film natural. Queria ver de perto o famigerado bandido. Então vi o mau exemplo desses individuos que em vez de um film de enredo fazem isso.” Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, Coleção Pedro Lima. C:Cx 15/15.

<sup>5</sup> “Detalhes de Santos apanhados no lugar da tragedia [...] Clos-up [sic] da mão criminosa empunhando a navalha assassina. A mala fatal. O caminhão posto a vista para se vêr que era o mesmo isto é. 716. Ha!” Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, Coleção Pedro Lima. C:Cx 15/15.

<sup>6</sup> “A Prisão. E....(Isto não saiu nos jornais. E invenção do Neto ou do Pistone na prisão. E surge o fantasma de Fêa. É coisa ridícula. Ela acusa este de roubar a vida dela com a do ente que estava para vir ao mundo! Ridícula.)” Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, Coleção Pedro Lima. C:Cx 15/15.

<sup>7</sup> Esther Gabara, *Errant Modernism: the Ethos of Photography in Mexico and Brazil*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Among many others, see Fernando Fabio Sánchez, *Artful Assassins*; Julia Tuñón, “Between the Nation and Utopia: The Image of Mexico in the Films of Emilio 'Indio' Fernández,” *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 12 (1993), 159-174.

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<sup>9</sup> Bryan McCann, *Hello, Hello Brazil: Popular Music in the Making of Modern Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004)

<sup>10</sup> Maria Rita Kehl, "O ressentimento no Brasil," unpublished essay, courtesy of the author.

<sup>11</sup> Roberto da Matta, *A casa e a rua: espaço, cidadania, mulher e morte no Brasil* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1985); Andreilino Campos, *Do quilombo à favela : a produção do "espaço criminalizado" no Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Contreras, Sergio Octavio. "La semántica del Blog del narco," *Etcétera*, November 11, 2010. <http://www.etcetera.com.mx/articulo.php?articulo=5612>. Accessed March 20, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 164.

## Filmography

### Brazil

*Retribuição*, dir. Gentil Roiz, 1923/1925  
*Jurando vingar*, dir. Ary Severo, 1925  
*Aitaré da Praia*, dir. Gentil Roiz, 1925/1927  
*A filha do advogado*, dir. Jota Soares, 1926  
*Revezes*, dir. Chagas Ribeiro, 1927  
*João da Mata*, dir. Amilcar Alves, 1923 (fragments preserved in *Um drama caipira dedicado a Caio Scheiby*, dir. Carlos Roberto de Souza, 1973)  
*Tesouro perdido*, dir. Humberto Mauro, 1927  
*Braza dormida*, dir. Humberto Mauro, 1928  
*Sangue mineiro*, dir. Humberto Mauro, 1929  
*São Paulo, sinfonia da metrópole*, dir. Rodolfo Lustig and Adalberto Kemeny, 1929  
*Limite*, dir. Mário Peixoto, 1930

### Mexico

Uncatalogued actualities, Colección Edmundo Gabilondo, Filmoteca de la UNAM  
*El automóvil gris*, dir. Enrique Rosas, 1919  
*El tren fantasma*, dir. Gabriel García Moreno, 1927  
*El puño de hierro*, dir. Gabriel García Moreno, 1927

### Archives

Archivo General de la Nación (Mexico City)  
Arquivo Nacional (Rio de Janeiro)  
Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro  
Biblioteca Lerdo de Tejada  
Biblioteca Nacional (Rio de Janeiro)  
Biblioteca Nacional (Mexico)  
Cinematca Brasileira (São Paulo)  
Cineteca Nacional (Mexico City)  
Fundação Joaquim Nabuco (Recife)  
Filmoteca de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (Mexico City)  
Fundação Nacional das Artes (Rio de Janeiro)  
Hemeroteca Nacional (Mexico City)  
Museu da Imagem e do Som (Rio de Janeiro)

### Periodicals

#### Brazil

*Boletim de Policia* (Rio de Janeiro)  
*Careta* (Rio de Janeiro)  
*A Cena Muda* (Rio de Janeiro)  
*Cinearte* (Rio de Janeiro)  
*Correio da Manhã* (Rio de Janeiro)  
*Correio Paulistano* (São Paulo)  
*Diário de Noticias* (Porto Alegre)  
*Diário de Pernambuco* (Recife)

*Diário do Povo* (Campinas)  
*O Estado de São Paulo Fon-Fon* (Rio de Janeiro)  
*Fon-Fon* (Rio de Janeiro)  
*Gazeta de Notícias* (Rio de Janeiro)  
*Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro)  
*Jornal do Comércio* (Recife)  
*Moderno-Jornal* (Recife)  
*A Noite* (Rio de Janeiro)  
*Palcos e Telas* (Rio de Janeiro)  
*Para Todos* (Rio de Janeiro)  
*A Pilhéria* (Recife)  
*A Ronda* (São Paulo)  
*Selecta* (Rio de Janeiro)

### **Mexico**

*Alborada* (Orizaba, Veracruz)  
*Arte y Sport* (Mexico City)  
*Cine Mundial* (New York)  
*Don Quijote* (Mexico City)  
*Cinema Repórter* (Mexico City)  
*Le Courrier du Mexique et de l'Europe* (Mexico City)  
*El Demócrata* (Mexico City)  
*El Dictámen* (Veracruz, Veracruz)  
*Excélsior* (Mexico City)  
*Gaceta de Policía* (Mexico City)  
*El Heraldo de México* (Mexico City)  
*El Pueblo* (Mexico City)  
*Revista de Revistas* (Mexico City)  
*El Universal* (Mexico City)  
*El Universal Ilustrado* (Mexico City)

### **Online Resources**

Biblioteca Digital das Artes do Espetáculo - Museu Lasar Segall  
<http://www.bjksdigital.museusegall.org.br>

Carl Bennett, Progressive Silent Film List, <http://www.silentera.com/PSFL/>

Filmografia Brasileira (Cinemateca Brasileira)  
<http://www.cinemateca.gov.br/cgi-bin/wxis.exe/iah/?IsisScript=iah/iah.xis&base=FILMOGRAFIA&lang=p>

Hemeroteca Nacional Digital de México (<http://www.hndm.unam.mx>)

Jota Carlos em Revista ([www.jotacarlos.org](http://www.jotacarlos.org))



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