

# *Letras Hispanas*

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**TITLE:** *New Documentaries in Latin America*

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Since the early 1960's, when documentary filmmakers used film as denunciation and protest, Latin American documentary has had a strong tradition and impact. By the end of the century, the restoration of democracy and the reconstruction of the public sphere came to most of the region, and documentary played an important role in these processes, offering alternatives to complicit discourses and inviting a rethinking of questions of the representation of politics and the politics of representation, at the same time as it has placed itself at the center of paradigmatic changes in international documentary. Focusing on the last three decades and seeking to answer the overarching question of what has changed in Latin American documentary, this volume brings together fourteen essays that examine multiple aspects and texts reflective of the turn in Latin American non-fiction film. Editors Navarro and Rodríguez organize the contributions into the collection's three thematic sections in which social, political, economic, cultural, and even technological factors are brought to the consideration of current developments in nonfiction filmmaking.

The first thematic section, "Aesthetics and Politics," brings together six separate essays that treat themes and films from Brazil, Argentina, Cuba, and Chile. Ana López ("A Poetics of the Trace") and Antonio Gómez

("First-Person Documentary and the New Political Subject: Enunciation, Recent History, and the Present in New Argentine Cinema") open the section with a central theme of the volume: the shift toward the personal, local and domestic in Latin American documentary practice. López focuses on issues of emotion, affect, and indeterminacy in Eduardo Coutinho's *Jogo de cena* and Gonzalez-Rubio's *Alamar*. Gómez demonstrates how personal documentaries, like *Los rubios* (Albertina Carri, 2008), have come to be primary in the socially oriented inquiry into Argentina's history.

The influence of Nicolas Guillén Landrián is central to Ruth Goldberg's examination of the authorial expression of two Cuban FAMCA graduates and documentarists, Armando Capó (*Nos quedamos*) and Jorge De León (*El bosque de Sherwood* and *La niña mala*), as they challenge identity assumptions.

"Performance in Brazilian Documentaries" takes performance to mean the acts that connect documentary subjects to the process of filming, as Vinicius Navarro discusses the role of social actors in several recent emblematic Brazilian films (*O fim e o princípio*, *Notícias de uma guerra particular*, *Ônibus 174*, *Edifício Master*).

The last two essays in "Aesthetics and Politics" examine films employing diverse

reflexive strategies characteristic of some current Latin American documentary practice. Cecilia Sayad examines how *Ónibus 174* (José Padilha, 2002) allows for a review, interrogation, and critique of images produced by other media—a televised hijacking—where event reconstruction creates social environment explanations as well as raising questions of mediation.

Analyzing the use of still images in two films, *Chile, Obstinate Memory* (Patricio Guzmán, 1997) and *City of Photographers* (Sebastián Moreno, 2006), José Miguel Palacios shows how the two films connect two previously politically disconnected periods in the public discourses of memory in Chile, dictatorship and post-dictatorship.

Since the 1980's indigenous communities and independent political movements have engaged with audio-visual media to express their concerns and to document their activities and struggles, and these are the foci of the essays that comprise the second of *New Documentaries in Latin America's* sections, "Community and Indigenous Media."

Here, while "Reenact, Reimagine: Performative Indigenous Documentaries of Bolivia and Brazil" gives a good summary of indigenous media, the essay's strength is the discussion of docudramas, reenactments and collective direction as hybrid aesthetic practices employed in order to rectify representations of the past and to promote an understanding of current as well as ongoing concerns. Amalia Córdova offers a detailed account of some of the works by CEFREC-CAIB and Video nas Aldeias.

In her essay, Freya Schiwy returns to the 2006 protests in Oaxaca to look at the participation of independent media collectives. Emphasizing affect, Schiwy describes their optimistic agency as documentarists and participants.

Antonio Traverso and Germán Liñero go further back to examine "Chilean Political Documentary Video of the 1980's." For them, grassroots video documentaries are essential to Chilean film culture's continuous engagement with resistance and memory.

In "Local, National, and Transnational Dialogues," contributors study those contemporary documentaries that capture

the emergences of new identities, the transformation of nation- and urban-scapes, and migration flows. This section of *New Documentaries* concerns itself with the articulation of questions of citizenship and globalization, the transformation of locally inflected media practices into transnational dialogues, the role of nonfiction film in global information exchange, in films where notions of place, space and identity intertwine with questions of mobility and migration.

Michael Chanan looks at the transnational question of traveling filmmakers and image production in "Bolivia in View" in an examination of the representation of Bolivian politics and migrant communities by filmmakers from three different countries: Argentina (*Copacabana* [Martín Rejtman, 2006]), Venezuela (*América tiene alma* [Carlos Azpúrua, 2009]), and Cuba (*Volveré y seré millones* [Jorge Fuentes, 2009]). The films manifest different chronotopes, which, along with other differences, express the coexistence of different temporalities within Latin American cultural susceptibilities and their aesthetic representation.

Susan Lord and Zaira Zarza examine the ways in which three Cuban women filmmakers (Sandra Gómez, Susana Barriga, Heidi Hassan) use the migration process as the starting point for dealing with issues of identity- and place-making, where gendered positionality is key to exploring the city as deterritorialized imaginary and as intimate geography.

Karen Rossi's *Isla chatarra* (2007) captures the various speeds of modernity, development and globalization as well as the social and environmental consequences of automobility in Puerto Rico. Co-editor Juan Carlos Rodríguez's essay explores the convergence of automobile and moving image in this "documentary on wheels."

Debra Castillo provides the last essay for *New Documentaries in Latin America*, and her "Rasquache Mockumentary: Alex Rivera's Why Cybraceros?" gives a different twist to the concepts of traveling and mobility. Castillo examines the ways Rivera, through his spoof, tears down and rebuilds images at the same time as he denounces ethnic-based discrimination as it persists in spite of technology promised remedy for social anxiety.

This is a collection of perceptive and convincing analyses authored by a mix of established scholars and emerging researchers, who highlight the meaning and relevance of recent Latin American documentaries. Rigorous in their contextualization, as they engage with contemporary theory, they examine contrasts and parallels with a tradition begun in other socio-political times.

With *New Documentaries in Latin America*, editors Navarro and Rodríguez offer a useful and informative volume with a three-themed approach to recent nonfiction filmmaking. This is valuable reading for students and teachers of Latin American film and culture, and it provides an important contribution to a field of growing interest within Film Studies, and within Latin American film study in particular.