

# **Introduction to Latin American Cinema**

## **Sample Syllabus**

### **Course description**

How have Latin Americans represented themselves on the big screen? In this course we will explore this question through close readings of representative films from each of the following major periods: silent cinema (1890s-1930s), studio cinema (1930s-1950s), Neorealism/Art Cinema (1950s), the New Latin American Cinema (1960s-1980s), and contemporary cinema (1990s to today). Throughout the course we will examine evolving representations of modernity and pay special attention to how these representations are linked to different constructions of gender, race, sexuality, and nationality.

### **Learning objectives**

By the end of the course you will be able to describe, analyze, and evaluate the intersection between form and content in a select number of important Latin American films, and to situate them in contexts that are simultaneously national, regional, and global. Class-specific objectives are listed in the calendar below.

**Note to teachers:** This course can be taught without having to include a unifying theoretical concept. However, I have found that by incorporating the theoretical framework of multiple modernities, classroom discussions on such topics as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nationalism, populism, and historiography can be more productively framed from a distinctively Latin American perspective.

**Required text:**

Paul A. Schroeder Rodríguez. *Latin American Cinema: A Comparative History*.

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016.

**Calendar overview:**

1. Introduction (week 1)
2. Silent cinema (weeks 2 and 3)
3. Studio cinema (weeks 4-8)
4. Neorealism and Auteur cinema (week 9)
5. New Latin American Cinema (weeks 10-13)
6. Contemporary cinema (weeks 14-15)

**Note to teachers:** In the weekly calendar below, each class has at least two learning objectives. Generally speaking, the first learning objective has to do with modes of production and representation, and the second objective with the representation of modernity. For example, Week 5 (Studio Cinema II: Growth of an Industry) has as its first objective defining Hollywood's international style, and as its second objective discussing how *Allá en el Rancho Grande* and/or *Puerta cerrada* adapt this style to represent the nation as an organic body politic, without yet representing the State through a specific character (this is a later development). The class could therefore begin with Bordwell's summary of the stylistic and narrative elements that make up Hollywood's international style, proceed with a lecture on Latin American corporatism in the 1930s, and then proceed to a discussion of one or both films. Finally, in order to widen the

corpus of films, I have found it productive to include two films each week: a required one that everyone watches and discusses in class, and a second one that a student or group of students present on, and possibly use in their final research paper.

### Weekly calendar:

| Week                                                                                                                                                                                              | Learning objectives                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
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| <b>Week 1</b><br><br>Introduction to the course, learning objectives, and assignments.<br><br>Reading assignment: Introduction to <i>Latin American Cinema: A Comparative History</i> , pp. 1-14. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the major geo-cultural regions in Latin America (Mesoamerica, the Caribbean, the Southern Cone, the Andes, Amazonia), and its nations (the big three, mid-size countries, and small countries).</li> <li>• Define modernity broadly, and Latin America's experience of modernity specifically.</li> <li>• Discuss how cinema can simultaneously document and represent modernity.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Week 2</b><br><br>Conventional Silent Cinema (1890s-1920s)<br><br>Reading assignment: Chapter 1 of <i>Latin American Cinema</i> , pp. 17-44.                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the salient features of popular entertainment films of the silent period.</li> <li>• Discuss how <i>El último malón</i> (Alcides Greco, Argentina, 1916) and/or <i>El automóvil gris</i> (Enrique Rosas, Joaquín Coss and Juan Canals de Homes, Mexico, 1919) employ these features to represent a liberal project of modernity.</li> </ul>                                                  |
| <b>Week 3</b>                                                                                                                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define avant-garde cinema.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

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| <p>Avant-Garde Silent Cinema (late 1920s - early 1930s)</p> <p>Reading assignment: Chapter 2 of <i>Latin American Cinema</i>, pp. 45-67.</p>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss how <i>¡Que viva Mexico!</i> (Sergei Eisenstein, Mexico, 1932) and/or <i>Limite</i> (Mario Peixoto, Brazil, 1929) use avant-garde modes of representation to narrate a version of Mexican history that culminates in a socialist modernity (in Eisenstein's case) or to critique patriarchal values associated with liberal modernity (in Peixoto's case.)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                           |
| <p><b>Week 4</b></p> <p>Studio Cinema I:</p> <p>Transition to Sound (1930-1935)</p> <p>Reading assignment: Chapter 3 of <i>Latin American Cinema</i>, pp. 71-87.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe how the arrival of synchronous sound changed the dynamics of film production in Latin America.</li> <li>• Discuss how <i>El día que me quieras</i> (John Reinhardt, U.S.A., 1935) and/or <i>¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!</i> (Fernando de Fuentes, Mexico, 1935) take advantage of the arrival of synchronous sound, and how they suggest the need for a corporatist State that can combat the excesses of capitalism (in <i>El día que me quieras</i>) or <i>caudillismo</i> (in <i>¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!</i>).</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Week 5</b></p> <p>Studio Cinema II:</p> <p>Growth of an Industry (1936-1940)</p>                                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define Hollywood's international style.</li> <li>• Discuss how <i>Allá en el Rancho Grande</i> (Fernando de Fuentes, Mexico, 1936) and/or <i>Puerta cerrada</i> (Luis Saslavsky, Argentina, 1938) adapt this style</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

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| <p>Reading assignment: from Chapter 4 of <i>Latin American Cinema</i>, the sections on ‘The Musical Birth of an Industry’, ‘Argentinean Cinema’s ‘Golden Age’’, and ‘Social Comedies’, pp. 88-100.</p>                                                                                            | <p>to local tastes by mixing it with elements of local popular culture, and how they use the resulting vernacular of Hollywood's international style to represent the nation as an organic body politic.</p>                                                                                                                                                     |
| <p><b>Week 6</b></p> <p>Studio Cinema III:</p> <p>Height of an Industry (1940s)</p> <p>Reading assignment: from Chapter 4 of <i>Latin American Cinema</i>, the sections on ‘The Impact of the Good Neighbor Policy on Latin American Cinema’ and ‘The Mexican School of Cinema’, pp. 100-110.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the salient formal features of the Mexican School of Cinema.</li> <li>• Discuss how <i>María Candelaria</i> (Emilio 'El Indio' Fernández, Mexico, 1943) and/or <i>Río Escondido</i> (Emilio 'El Indio' Fernández, Mexico, 1947) use this style to allegorize the nation as an organic body politic.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Week 7</b></p> <p>Studio Cinema IV:</p> <p>Peronist Cinema (1946 - 1955)</p> <p>Reading assignment: from Chapter 4 of <i>Latin American Cinema</i>, the sections on ‘Studio</p>                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the main elements of the Peronist discourse in the 1940s and 1950s.</li> <li>• Discuss how and to what degree <i>Dios se lo pague</i> (Luis Amadori, Argentina, 1948) and/or <i>Las aguas bajan turbias</i> (Hugo del Carril, Argentina, 1952) represent the corporatist discourse of the first</li> </ul>     |

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| Cinema and Peronism’ and ‘The Corporatism of Latin American Studio Cinema’, pp. 110-115.                                                        | Peronist government.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Week 8</b><br>Studio Cinema V:<br>Crisis and Decline (1950s)<br>Reading assignment: Chapter 5 of <i>Latin American Cinema</i> , pp. 116-126. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the main causes of the double crisis of studio cinema and state corporatism after World War II.</li> <li>• Discuss how <i>Aventurera</i> (Alberto Gout, Mexico, 1950) and/or <i>Nem Sansao Nem Dalila</i> (<i>Ni Sansón ni Dalila</i>, Carlos Manga, 1954) use parody to represent this double crisis.</li> </ul>                                                                                              |
| <b>Week 9</b><br>Neorealism and auteur cinema (1950s)<br>Reading assignment: Chapter 6 of <i>Latin American Cinema</i> , pp. 129-163.           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the main formal elements and recurring themes in Neorealism and in auteur cinema.</li> <li>• Discuss how <i>Los olvidados</i> (Luis Buñuel, Mexico, 1950) and/or <i>La mano en la trampa</i> (Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, Argentina, 1961) combine modes of production associated with Neorealism and auteur cinema in order to critique the social and aesthetic values associated with studio cinema.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Week 10</b><br>New Latin American Cinema:<br>Militant Phase I (early 1960s)<br>Reading assignment: from Chapter 7 of <i>Latin American</i>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the main formal elements and thematic concerns of the militant phase of the New Latin American Cinema (NLAC).</li> <li>• Discuss how <i>Araya</i> (Margot Benacerraf, Venezuela, 1959) and/or <i>Deus e o Diabo na Terra</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                        |

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| <p><i>Cinema</i>, the sections on ‘Documentary Foundations’ and under ‘Epic Projections’, the discussion of <i>Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol</i>, pp. 167-178.</p>                                                                                                                                     | <p><i>do Sol</i> (Glauber Rocha, Brazil, 1963) represent rupture as the inaugurating trope of a new modernity as yet to be defined.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <p><b>Week 11</b></p> <p>New Latin American Cinema: Militant Phase II (late 1960s to early 1970s)</p> <p>Reading assignment: from Chapter 7 of <i>Latin American Cinema</i>, under ‘Epic projections’, the discussions on <i>La hora de los hornos</i> and <i>La batalla de Chile</i>, pp. 178-190.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss how <i>La hora de los hornos</i> (Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, Argentina, 1968) and/or <i>La batalla de Chile</i> (Patricio Guzmán, Chile, 1975-79) represent a project of socialist modernity that is based on a Marxist understanding of their respective national histories.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Week 12</b></p> <p>New Latin American Cinema: Militant Phase III (late 1960s to early 1970s)</p> <p>Reading assignment: from Chapter 7 of <i>Latin American Cinema</i>, the section on ‘Transition to a Neobaroque</p>                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss how <i>Lucía</i> (Humberto Solás, Cuba, 1968) and/or <i>Memorias del subdesarrollo</i> (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Cuba, 1968) represent and simultaneously critique the Cuban Revolution's project of socialist modernity.</li> </ul>                                                                  |

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| Praxis', pp. 190-209.                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Week 13</b><br><br>New Latin American Cinema:<br><br>Neobaroque Phase (1970s - 1980s)<br><br>Reading assignment: Chapter 8 of <i>Latin American Cinema</i> , pp. 210-242. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the main formal elements and thematic concerns of the Latin American neobaroque.</li> <li>• Explain why the content and aesthetics of the New Latin American Cinema shifted radically after the authoritarian turn of the 1970s.</li> <li>• Discuss how <i>Frida, naturaleza viva</i> (Paul Leduc, Mexico, 1983) and/or <i>La nación clandestina</i> (Jorge Sanjinés, Bolivia, 1983) use neobaroque aesthetics to represent an alternative project of modernity based on horizontal social relations and cultural pluralism.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Week 14</b><br><br>Collapse and Rebirth (1990s)<br><br>Reading assignment: Chapter 9 of <i>Latin American Cinema</i> , pp. 245-260.                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the main causes of the collapse in Latin American film production in the early 1990s.</li> <li>• Discuss how and why Latin American cinema in the 1990s uses nostalgia to revisit the projects of liberal modernity (<i>Como agua para chocolate</i>, Alfonso Arau, Mexico, 1992), socialist modernity (<i>Fresa and chocolate</i>, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío, Cuba, 1993) and/or corporatist modernity (<i>Central do Brasil</i>, Walter Salles, Brazil, 1998).</li> </ul>                                            |
| <b>Week 15</b>                                                                                                                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the main factors that have contributed to</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

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| <p>Contemporary Cinema (2000s - present)</p> <p>Reading assignment: Chapter 10 of <i>Latin American Cinema</i>, pp. 261-291.</p> | <p>the unprecedented rise in production of Latin American narrative films in the first decades of the twenty-first century.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss how <i>La mujer sin cabeza</i> (Lucrecia Martel, Argentina, 2008) and/or <i>La teta asustada</i> (Claudia Llosa, Perú, 2010) use suspense to explore traumatic memories that the forced implementation of different projects of modernity throughout the twentieth century have left in their wake.</li> </ul> |
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