

---

# Latin American Cinema

Stephen M. Hart  
Reaktion Books, 2015

Reviewed by Isabel Seguí

In Professor Stephen M. Hart's words: "This book seeks to create its own knight's move by providing a new analysis of Latin American film as seen through the looking glass of the major step-changes in film technology." If the challenge of writing a history of Latin American cinema from 1895 to 2014 in less than 200 pages is overwhelming, the defiance of doing it avoiding what the author calls the sociological turn—"namely, tying the meaning of the films too closely to the history of human society"—is enormous.

Instead of contextualizing 120 years of filmmaking (in a very big and very diverse subcontinent) in its historical, political, and societal changes, the author therefore prefers "to contextualize these films within the history of the camera-eye". However, reading in the list of acknowledgements names of filmmakers very much in dialogue with the historical, political, and societal changes of their respective countries such as Beatriz Palacios, Jorge Sanjinés, Julio García Espinosa, Luis Ospina or Fernando Birri, I wonder what these filmmakers would think about this endeavour of an exclusively technological approach to Latin American filmmaking. I also wonder whether something akin to this is even possible to do, taking into account that most Latin American intellectuals, including filmmakers, are as inextricably tied to their societies as their work is.

In this sense, the book struggles to achieve its main goal, especially in the second chapter, which looks at the New Latin American Cinema. In spite of its attempt to frame the analysis within a Deleuzian reading, it is unable to describe comprehensively this cinematic movement avoiding historical and political contextualization. How can one talk about the stunning theoretical developments of the time (*Third Cinema* by Solanas and Getino, *Imperfect Cinema* by García Espinosa, *The Aesthetics of Hunger* by Rocha, or the *Cinema with the People* by Sanjinés) without contextualizing them in a continental (or even tricontinental) decolonial struggle? How can one talk about the Cuban cinema or the influence of Italian neo-realism in Cuba without framing it in the process of the revolution?

Nevertheless, the book contributes some very beautifully executed analyses, which sometimes provide interesting insights about the importance of technological changes. For example, when addressing

---

Mikhail Kalatozov's film, *Soy Cuba* (1964), it shows how the use of Russian film technology (infrared photography, wide-angle convex lens) allowed a linguistic step forward. Moreover, the cameras and crane left in Cuba by the Russian director continued to be used by local filmmakers, providing wider expressive possibilities to them. However, globally, the step-changes in film technology do not seem strong enough, or important enough, to articulate the overarching narrative of the book. The author relies instead on a well-structured succession of analysis of key films. The book, consequently, is able to do its best in the tiny space the author has to tell a coherent story of Latin American Cinema, but does not entirely fulfil its initial expectations.