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# Transnational Cinemas: A Critical Roundtable

**By Austin Fisher and Iain Robert Smith**

In November 2012, the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) approved our proposal to form a new scholarly interest group devoted to “Transnational Cinemas”. One of our primary goals in setting up the group was to address the problem, raised by Mette Hjort in 2009, that “to date the discourse of cinematic transnationalism has been characterized less by competing theories and approaches than by a tendency to use the term ‘transnational’ as a largely self-evident qualifier requiring only minimal conceptual clarification”.<sup>[1]</sup> With the recent proliferation of research being published on the transnational dimensions of cinema, we felt that it was high time for us to come together as scholars to reflect upon what we mean by “transnational cinemas” and to discuss the most productive ways forward for this emerging sub-discipline.

We wanted this to be an inclusive and broad-ranging grouping that could bring together researchers who might otherwise be working primarily within other frameworks such as national cinemas or area studies. Indeed, while we initially secured support from 36 SCMS members to launch, our grouping has subsequently grown to over 380 scholars and it has become clear that our membership approaches the topic of the “transnational” from a dizzying array of methodological perspectives.

Furthermore, while there have been a number of significant publications and conferences devoted to theoretical and historical research on transnational cinemas, we also wanted to use the group to help interrogate the pedagogical implications of this scholarship. There has been a long tradition of teaching classes on “world cinema”, with each session generally focused on individual national cinemas, yet the recent shift towards considerations of the transnational has meant that many scholars are grappling with how best to address this in designing their syllabi and preparing their classes.

Raising these various issues, our group has organised specialist workshops on such topics as “Researching Transnational Cinemas”, “Teaching Transnational Cinemas” and “Transnational Cinemas Studies: Future Directions” and these have helped move forward the scholarly discourse. Nevertheless, while it is evident that the field is growing and developing in significant new ways, we have found that a number of questions repeatedly emerge that would benefit from further clarification and debate.

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For this roundtable, therefore, we approached a number of leading scholars who have published on the topic and invited them to answer five questions that speak to the current discourses on cinematic transnationalism. We hope that this intervention might help us move beyond the theoretical impasse that Hjort identified above, and, ultimately, help produce more rigorous and nuanced scholarship on transnational cinemas, as well as generating a valuable resource for teaching in the field.

## Questions

1. What is your definition of “transnational cinema”?
2. What research methodologies do you find are most useful in interrogating the transnational dimensions of cinema?
3. What implications does the shift from a national to a transnational framework have for your teaching?
4. One of the criticisms of the transnational turn within film scholarship is that it appears to have displaced other (arguably more political) approaches such as postcolonialism. For you, what are the politics underpinning an engagement with the transnational?
5. Is “transnational” the most appropriate term for discussing this topic? What do you think of alternatives such as “transcultural cinema”, “cosmopolitan cinema” or “world cinema”?

## Contributors

[Tim Bergfelder](#)

[Robert Burgoyne](#)

[Elizabeth Ezra](#)

[Rosalind Galt](#)

[Will Higbee](#)

[Andrew Higson](#)

[Lucy Mazdon](#)

[Lúcia Nagib](#)

[Kathleen Newman](#)

[Deborah Shaw](#)

**1. What is your definition of “transnational cinema”?**

I don't think it is productive to conceive of a single definition or a core essence of the term “transnational cinema”. It is more productive to consider it as an umbrella that encompasses a range of historically mutable activities and movements between national cinemas and also between nations. These can, among other things, include economic exchanges, movement of labour, co-production practices, instances of cross-national distribution and reception, cross-national aesthetic influences in terms of imitations, adaptations, and transformations of visual style and narrative (genre); and finally the on-screen representation of actual transnational processes and experiences of migration and exile. I believe the term works best when it has a concrete case study at hand; I also believe it is at its most interesting where it is used to question and if necessary debunk some of the exclusionary narratives and historical practices that underscore the majority of national film histories.

**2. What research methodologies do you find are most useful in interrogating the transnational dimensions of cinema?**

The multiplicity of dimensions of transnational cinema as described under question 1 inevitably necessitates a multiplicity of methodological approaches. If the focus is on the textual qualities of individual films or categories of films (narrative, genre, representation etc.), then textual analysis is likely to be the most sensible way to go ahead. If the emphasis is on industrial, economic, or institutional aspects, then it is important to understand them with the appropriate interpretative tools.

**3. What implications does the shift from a national to a transnational framework have for your teaching?**

Transnational cinema remains difficult to teach for a variety of reasons. For once, there is still a paucity of textbooks and teaching material (including films), compared with the sheer endless resources on national cinemas. This corresponds to the way many University curricula organise their programs around “national” teaching blocks. Teaching transnational cinema also puts higher demands on students because it forces them to negotiate at least two different cultures (if not languages). Constructing courses around themes and genres can be a productive way of avoiding national categorisations, and opens up the possibility for a more comparative approach.

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**4. One of the criticisms of the transnational turn within film scholarship is that it appears to have displaced other (arguably more political) approaches such as postcolonialism. For you, what are the politics underpinning an engagement with the transnational?**

I don't think that the "transnational turn" has necessarily displaced postcolonialism as an approach, nor do I think that the transnational has to be a less political framework. Where the transnational is used to homogenise different practices and experiences into "universal" or "global" patterns, there is indeed the chance that it becomes meaningless and bland. However, at its most politically probing, it can and indeed should be used to interrogate and challenge myths of national exceptionalism, "purity" and "containment", and that seems to me to be an important political task today more than ever. At their best, transnational approaches are anti-essentialist, and champion fluidity between cultures and identities over and above demarcations. I think that concepts of transnational cinema and postcolonial methodology can overlap and sometimes share common ground in their political aims and motivations. But in some instances they may also diverge - after all postcolonialism has historically been a by-product of postcolonial processes of national liberation, reconstruction and (re)legitimation, whereas transnational methodologies often aim to delegitimise the primacy of the nation. I also think postcolonialism as a critical approach can sometimes reach its limits in explaining encounters and experiences where there is no direct link to a colonial past.

**5. Is "transnational" the most appropriate term for discussing this topic? What do you think of alternatives such as "transcultural cinema", "cosmopolitan cinema" or "world cinema"?**

These are all common terms, but I don't think they work as exact synonyms for what the term transnational encompasses. "World Cinema" has frequently been employed (especially as a marketing term in the field of distribution) as basically anything that is not Hollywood (or at least Anglophone), and as such can have rather derogatory or at least homogenising connotations. In its economic sense, "world cinema" is valued more for its exotic otherness, or for its educational potential in understanding foreign cultures, than for its aesthetic merit or entertainment value. "Transcultural Cinema" does not need to be transnational, because different cultures can exist in the same national space, but like the transnational it can be a productive term to interrogate and question boundaries and distinctions between supposedly contained cultures. "Cosmopolitanism", on the other hand, is essentially an idea and an ideal, less a social phenomenon or a specific cultural

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practice, and more an individual attitude and personal outlook. Cosmopolitanism can infuse transnational practices and motivate filmmakers and audiences, but in certain instances it does not. Like nationalism, cosmopolitanism is essentially an ideology and needs to be carefully understood in its historical lineages.

## **Robert Burgoyne**

**Professor of Film Studies, University of St Andrews**

### **1. What is your definition of “transnational cinema”?**

I’ve thought a lot about this question since coming to St Andrews six years ago. When I was first asked this question at my job interview, I did a quick intellectual shuffle and said that I thought it was a term of art – a critical term that was mainly useful for critical theory, rather than for defining or demarcating an existing body of work. Today, I think my answer was better than I knew at the time. In the view of my colleague Dennis Hanlon – who has investigated this question in a focused way – the category of transnational film encompasses more films than it excludes. He argues that film, from its inception, has been transnational in its technological development, in its migrations of talent, in its distribution and marketing, and in the cross fertilisation of concepts of genre, cinematic style, and even subject matter. I am tempted to go even further, and say that “transnational film” might be a tautology, and that the only cinemas that are not transnational are the local, popular cinema forms that are made specifically for an ethnic, national, or regional audience. Essentially, I think it is a matter of critical perspective: we can view a great many films as examples of transnational cinema depending on the angle we take. Maybe we should drop the term “transnational,” and presume that this is the default position of films that are not otherwise defined as specifically national, ethnic, or heritage films.

That said, some types of film travel better than others, and some productions are geared more explicitly to international audiences than others. And as someone who works on Hollywood film, although not exclusively, I am aware that the migration of talent, for example, is pretty much in a single direction, and that the international cultural dominance of US filmmaking is limiting in many, many ways.

Ultimately, I would say that the idea of “transnational film”, while not giving much definitional clarity, has created a critical climate where different cinemas, a “world of cinemas” to use David Martin Jones’ phrase, can be considered in a productive intellectual framework that highlights the lines of connection. The concept is useful for critical practice, as I do believe it changes the way we look at films. I think it

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might best be seen as a term of art, which has produced a very productive scholarly development.

## **2. What research methodologies do you find are most useful in interrogating the transnational dimensions of cinema?**

In my view, it's more a question of critical perspective rather than methodology. But then I've been hesitant to label any critical work I do as a methodology. Methodology is a pretty loose term in our field, and I don't think it means much, although we are required to cite and defend it for the grant proposals we write. From my perspective, the only rigorous methodology I've encountered in Film Studies is narrative analysis. Narratology, I would say, is a genuine methodology, and it is one I have practiced and admire. It gives us concrete categories of narrative structure and discrete methods for asking questions about a text. Narrative analysis has been enhanced and to some extent diminished by the rise of digital approaches in the humanities, as the practice of the methodology requires a great deal of subtlety, which is sometimes lost in contemporary studies. But outside of narrative analysis, which I once considered to be my specialty, there is not much in our field that qualifies, in my view, as a methodology.

That said, our critical perspectives have changed, and this is a salutary development catalysed by the discovery or invention of the concept of the transnational, a term which has a great deal of rhetorical power and changes the way we look at texts.

## **3. What implications does the shift from a national to a transnational framework have for your teaching?**

Teaching is where the rubber meets the road, as they say in the States. If there is a form that we can call transnational – and again, Dennis Hanlon has begun to theorise the forms and conventions of the transnational film – then it should certainly manifest itself in our teaching. If it is a critical perspective rather than a body of films or a style of filmmaking, as I suggest above, then this should also manifest itself in our teaching. In my case, I have been increasingly aware of the need to go outside the Western canon in my teaching, something that the students in my classes have asked for as well. But the cultural tourism that a superficial approach entails is as flawed and limiting as a nation centric approach.

When I taught and wrote on Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*, for example, I had no particular interest in exploring the transnational aspects of this pioneering film; for me, it was a fine and brilliant exploration of the politics of the image, and the ways that the emperor Pu Yi was constructed as an image of god-like authority by the traditional

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Chinese and as an image of abjection and monstrosity by the communist Chinese. I did not attend fully to the remarkable international cast and crew, nor to the occasion of the film's being shot in the Eternal City, the first time a Western film crew was allowed in. Today, this would take central focus, and its ramifications for future film projects would be of great interest. Some of this is covered in the interesting volume edited by Bruce Sklarew on the film.<sup>[2]</sup> I would look at the film differently now, although the psychoanalytic / Marxist reading I gave in an earlier treatment still holds up, I believe.

**4. One of the criticisms of the transnational turn within film scholarship is that it appears to have displaced other (arguably more political) approaches such as postcolonialism. For you, what are the politics underpinning an engagement with the transnational?**

This is a very good question. But I don't feel I have sufficient grounding in the literature to speak with any real insight. I will have to take this question under consideration, and I look forward to reading the other participants' views on this important question.

**5. Is "transnational" the most appropriate term for discussing this topic? What do you think of alternatives such as "transcultural cinema", "cosmopolitan cinema" or "world cinema"?**

This is another interesting question. I think each of these terms can be seen as different lenses with which to view the same object of analysis. In many ways, I prefer "transnational" as the term of art. By preserving the word "national" within itself, the term gains an implicit polemical force. It suggests the tension of working against the old idea of the "national" as the source of cinematic art. "Cosmopolitan", or "world cinema", do not communicate a sense of tensions or even that something has changed. "Transnational" implies a perspective that is in contrast or perhaps opposition to older forms of analysis. I think that's a good thing.

**Elizabeth Ezra**

**Professor of Cinema and Culture, University of Stirling**

**1. What is your definition of "transnational cinema"?**

As Terry Rowden and I have written, "the concept of transnationalism enables us to better understand the changing ways in which the contemporary world is being imagined by an increasing number of filmmakers across genres as a global system rather than as a collection of

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more or less autonomous nations”<sup>131</sup>. Transnational cinema is cinema that acknowledges this global system in one way or another, though this acknowledgment is often expressed through interactions between characters from different countries. Transnational films are often co-productions, but I don’t feel that this is an absolute requirement.

**2. What research methodologies do you find are most useful in interrogating the transnational dimensions of cinema?**

I wouldn’t presume to prescribe a methodology because I know there are many approaches to the study of cinema. I personally favour what media studies people call “textual” analysis (and what everyone else calls “close analysis”), but that is merely a predilection and not a prescription.

**3. What implications does the shift from a national to a transnational framework have for your teaching?**

The shift from a national to a transnational framework has opened up my teaching to a wider range of students. I started out in French cinema, and interest among undergraduates in particular was primarily limited to people studying French, but transnational cinema seems to appeal to a wider cross-section of students.

**4. One of the criticisms of the transnational turn within film scholarship is that it appears to have displaced other (arguably more political) approaches such as postcolonialism. For you, what are the politics underpinning an engagement with the transnational?**

The transnational is actually analogous to the postcolonial: as the postcolonial bears the traces of the colonial, so the transnational bears the traces of the national. In both cases, the past haunts the present. As we become more historically distant from colonial empires, postcolonialism as an explanatory narrative becomes no less valid, but it has to make room for other narratives that can help us understand the history of social inequality on a global scale. The transnational is a step on the road to globalisation, a stage at which national borders are still, at the very least, recognised. Globalisation is presented as the end of this road, expressing as it does the will to erase national borders altogether. Yet, as I argue in my forthcoming book, *The Cinema of Things*, “[t]he term ‘globalization’ expresses the aporia of a constant movement toward an imaginary wholeness and plenitude (a unified ‘globe’), an endless supplementation that strives for wholeness at the same time that it undermines the very possibility of wholeness.” Then again, with the development of space travel and the potential viability of habitable spaces “outside” what is currently the global, I’m guessing that sooner or later

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we will be speaking of transglobalism...

**5. Is “transnational” the most appropriate term for discussing this topic? What do you think of alternatives such as “transcultural cinema”, “cosmopolitan cinema” or “world cinema”?**

“Transcultural cinema” is a potentially useful term for discussing encounters between different cultural groups. It overlaps with the term “transnational cinema”, but it may depict, for example, second- or third-generation immigrants, and it does not place as much emphasis on national identity as on issues associated with acceptance and legitimacy within a culture deemed not to be one’s “own”. I am slightly concerned that the term “cosmopolitan” does not do the kind of work that “transnational” and “transcultural” do, because, to my mind, it has not managed to shake off its associations with the jet-setting elite. “World cinema” is still a potentially useful term if used properly: it is important to include American cinema within this category, but unfortunately, more often than not, the term is used to reinforce the outdated and largely inaccurate dichotomy between “Hollywood” films and “all the rest”. I would also include another term in this lineup, “global cinema”, which I would define as the body of films with a large global circulation (which includes almost all Hollywood blockbusters, but also films from other parts of the world that are aimed at a global audience).

**Rosalind Galt**

**Professor in Film Studies, King’s College London**

**1. What is your definition of “transnational cinema”?**

I tend to retain “transnational” to think of objects of study that, in themselves, move between or among nations. In this regard, the transnational might be a narrower category than “world cinema”, less interested in films that speak to or about their place in the world and more interested in the specific ways in which films recode the world through transits, circuits, and flows. Of course, these transits might speak to funding, modes of production, shooting locations, talent, or to distribution, exhibition, or audiences, or to textuality, themes, and narrative. Since cinema has always been a global phenomenon, it’s easy to see any film or other cinematic object of study as transnational, and I suspect this plasticity is at once the appeal and the difficulty in the term. Nonetheless, there’s a value to bringing these relationships into critical focus, and at its best, transnational cinema studies leverages this focus to make connections among these various levels (institutional, industrial, textual etc.). There’s also something to be said about the “trans” in

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transnational: it's not merely a bridge between more than one traditional national approaches but rather it finds something quite different in that transition. The transnational promises to transform the object of cinema. By shifting our attention to the mode of movement between things, the transnational asks us to look at cinema in terms of processes and transits, rather than objects and states.

## **2. What research methodologies do you find are most useful in interrogating the transnational dimensions of cinema?**

The transnational does often require tracking down particular archives: I've often found myself tracing exhibition histories across different national markets, following a film around the world via film festival screenings and marketing materials, release dates and box office figures, theatre adverts and reviews. In thinking the relationships between cinema and geopolitics, it's always helpful to be able to argue institutionally. More importantly, though, I'm committed to the theoretical implications of the transnational, and so central for me are transnational feminist and queer theories, Marxist, postcolonial and anti-imperialist thought, and critical accounts of globalisation.

## **3. What implications does the shift from a national to a transnational framework have for your teaching?**

My teaching has always been worldly: I tend to teach topic-based and comparative classes in which I encourage students to think issues across a range of national cinemas and cultural contexts. The transnational turn makes it easier to ask structural questions that enable students to make links across what might otherwise have seemed like isolated national examples. In a module on Contemporary European Cinema, for instance, we address issues of migration and Fortress Europe by discussing postcolonial theories, European Union histories, old and new media representations, and co-production mechanisms, as well as using close textual analysis of films made across several countries. Here, the transnational nature of the topic is clear, but we can equally use these methods to place apparently more "national" films in a cross-cultural context.

I've also found it pedagogically incredibly helpful to draw on the transnational nature of the student body to map out what we mean when we think of "world cinema" and what currents and flows might be at stake for audience members differently emplaced in cinema's world. I've used interactive maps to capture what kinds of films students have seen - and what regions' films they have had little access to. Asking students to participate in defining what transnational cinema means to them (and what hierarchies might be at play in these flows) has often opened up

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discussion in productive ways. The transnational supports my pedagogic goals of helping students to critique Eurocentric modes of thought and to decentre dominant maps of the world.

**4. One of the criticisms of the transnational turn within film scholarship is that it appears to have displaced other (arguably more political) approaches such as postcolonialism. For you, what are the politics underpinning an engagement with the transnational?**

I think this is a valid criticism insofar as there certainly are some strands in transnational film scholarship that are precisely not engaged in thinking the postcolonial, the political, or the work of structural critique. The question becomes whether the transnational structurally excludes these questions or whether it rather describes a contiguous or intersecting set of issues. For me, the transnational is always political because it demands that we think about the relationships of cinema and geopolitics through, between, and beyond the state. Categories such as the postcolonial have been critiqued in the humanities more broadly, and it may be that in film studies, the transnational has, along with “world cinema”, become the presiding conceptual rubric for negotiating problems of world systems, cultural representation, and power. That said, my own engagement with the transnational has closely focused on problematics of geopolitical power: for instance, I’ve written about how the cross-cultural transits of the arabesque depend on Orientalist histories of aesthetic encounter between Europe and the Middle East, and how colonialist attitudes toward the primitive suffuse both classical and contemporary film theory. For me, the transnational is useful to the extent that it opens up ways of thinking cinema’s complex location in world systems, and more so, that it enables a political model with multiple centres, attentive to existing hierarchies without reifying core-periphery reading practices.

**5. Is “transnational” the most appropriate term for discussing this topic? What do you think of alternatives such as “transcultural cinema”, “cosmopolitan cinema” or “world cinema”?**

I am probably more affiliated with “world cinema” or the “global” as categories than with the transnational, but it seems to me that we need a complex ecology of concepts with which to think cinema’s transits and localities. In our introduction to *Global Art Cinema*, Karl Schoonover and I argued for the inherent difficulty of choosing among these imperfect terms.<sup>[4]</sup> “Global” sounds too corporate; “world cinema” opens out to all the debates in world literature, not to mention the rather appropriative implication of world music; and “cosmopolitan” similarly evokes the flaws

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of cosmopolitanism as a world-view that has found it hard to escape accusations of privilege. If we accept that no ideal term exists, each of these concepts has its advantages in drawing something particular to the surface about the relationship between cinema and the world.

## **Will Higbee**

### **Professor of Film Studies, University of Exeter**

#### **1. What is your definition of “transnational cinema”?**

To simply label a particular film “transnational” as if it satisfies a list of criteria (such as being classed an international co-production, involving a multi-national cast and crew) or refers to a universal cinematic phenomenon, in my opinion defeats the object of employing this term as a distinctive way of thinking about cinema. I agree with Mette Hjort’s assertion that transnationalism does little to advance our thinking about important issues if it can mean anything and everything that the occasion demands. Rather, I view transnational cinema as an *approach* to studying the global circulation of film as a cultural and industrial art form in terms of production, distribution and exhibition / reception. I also see the term as incorporating films that deal, either in their production or thematically, with notions (or experiences) of migration, exile or diaspora. I think it is still very much a scholarly term. What’s interesting is that when you speak to filmmakers as opposed to academics about “transnational cinema” you’re usually met with a blank expression. In that respect, I think there’s more that we as academics could do to bridge the gap with film practitioners. That’s certainly the aim of the new AHRC-funded research project that I am working on in relation to transnational Moroccan cinemas, where the emphasis is on how thinking in terms of the transnational can open up a better understanding of how the global reach of this “small” national cinema from the Maghreb functions in relation to filmmakers of the Moroccan diaspora, the role of festivals and international co-productions, as well as the place of Moroccan cinema’s local and global audiences in the age of digital disruption.

#### **2. What research methodologies do you find are most useful in interrogating the transnational dimensions of cinema?**

Beyond the work of other film scholars, I personally find the research of sociologists, political philosophers as well as those working in the fields of postcolonial theory and diaspora criticism most useful; though I suspect that says more about my own interests in postcolonial, immigrant and accented cinema than it does about what research methodology might be the most appropriate for thinking about cinema “transnationally”.

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### **3. What implications does the shift from a national to a transnational framework have for your teaching?**

The first thing to say is that the national doesn't simply disappear and we shouldn't forget that in our enthusiasm for the transnational turn. I think that it is just as important to consider the relationship between the national and the transnational (and indeed the regional and the local) when presenting the transnational to our students as an analytical framework or theoretical approach. The key advantage for me is that the transnational opens up this possibility of a perspective that is at once theoretical, historical and industrial as a means of destabilising given ideas of the nation in national cinema. Of course, part of the challenge now is how we approach the term "transnational" in the classroom, as it has moved away from being a new way to consider the global reach of cinema to, arguably, an integrated part of the syllabus for film studies (in the UK at least). I remember when I started teaching a first year undergraduate module on transnational cinema over ten years ago, it seemed like we were offering a new perspective to our students. Now, as it becomes a more established term in film studies, it feels as if we need to do more to justify the continued relevance of the transnational.

### **4. One of the criticisms of the transnational turn within film scholarship is that it appears to have displaced other (arguably more political) approaches such as postcolonialism. For you, what are the politics underpinning an engagement with the transnational?**

The transnational only eschews or elides questions of politics and (imbalances of) power if we let it. I still maintain the same position as the one I took in the piece published a few years ago with Song Hwee Lim.<sup>151</sup> We defined "critical transnationalism" as an approach that doesn't ghettoise transnational filmmaking on the margins of global film industries but is, equally, attentive to questions of postcoloniality, politics and power, scrutinises the tensions and dialogic relationship between national and transnational whilst simultaneously promoting the potential for local, regional and diasporic film cultures to affect, subvert and transform (politically speaking) national and transnational cinemas.

### **5. Is "transnational" the most appropriate term for discussing this topic? What do you think of alternatives such as "transcultural cinema", "cosmopolitan cinema" or "world cinema"?**

I suppose that it's almost an occupational hazard for academics to want to introduce a critical neologism to distinguish their work (!). I do think though that the transnational, for all its potential problems and pitfalls,

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does offer a productive and enduring framework within which to analyse the dynamics of film as a global, industrial art form.

**Andrew Higson**

**Professor of Film and Television, University of York**

**1. What is your definition of “transnational cinema”?**

For me, the term “transnational cinema” is a useful way of describing and highlighting a number of features of both much, if not all, contemporary cinema and various historical cinemas. First, “transnational cinema” can describe the ways in which film production, distribution and exhibition often take place across national boundaries. Secondly, the term can indicate the involvement in film production or distribution of personnel or companies from more than one country, people who are therefore in some ways part of a network of economic migrants. Thirdly, the term can describe the ways in which films often narrate the journeys of characters across national boundaries, where the characters may also be from more than one country, and thereby encounter people from other cultures and nations. Fourthly, it may speak of the ways in which such films will occasionally draw attention to the social and political implications of such journeys and encounters. Fifthly, it can draw attention to the ways in which films draw on cultural traditions, genres and formal conventions associated with different countries. Finally, the term can signify the ways in which audiences in different national contexts engage with and make sense of the films they watch. To focus on the transnational is thus a way of challenging the national bias in much film scholarship, which often assumes that the national is a self-contained entity when the evidence is often to the contrary.

**2. What research methodologies do you find are most useful in interrogating the transnational dimensions of cinema?**

What I’m interested in are the empirical dimensions of transnational activity, so the research methods I favour are empirical. To find out about the transnational dimensions of production and funding, it’s necessary to gather and analyse data about production, and especially co-production; to look at the record of particular production companies and filmmakers; and to identify and follow up the funding sources for such films, both public and private. It is important in this context to access official national and regional databases, consult the trade press and equivalent online sources, interview key agents, and analyse the composition and biographies of production teams, cast and crew. The same sorts of approaches apply for investigating distribution, marketing and theatrical and online exhibition, DVD / Blu-ray availability and television screenings.

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Then there are the questions of policy, at the national and local level, at the regional level (e.g. Scandinavian or Nordic regional policies) and at the supranational level (e.g. EU policies). What incentives do such policies create, for instance, for co-production, and foreign distribution and exhibition? In all these cases, there is also work to be done to determine *why* transnational arrangements have been adopted in any particular instance. Is it about prioritising economic decision-making to exploit specific funding or market opportunities, or about responding to specific creative needs or opportunities? Is it the result of contingent pragmatism and the seizing of opportunities as they present themselves, or the result of careful advance planning and long-term strategy? And so on?

Textual analysis is necessary to provide evidence of transnational dimensions at the level of form, theme and content. To what extent do films draw on a range of culturally specific film traditions? To what extent do they tell stories about transnational movement, migration and interaction? To what extent are characters marked by and engaged in such activity? To what extent do films self-consciously address the implications of transnational activity?

Finally, it is necessary to understand the nature and composition of audiences for particular films and types of film, and the extent to which those audiences exist in a variety of countries and engage with films differently depending on their circumstances. This involves examining box-office data and other quantitative evidence of film-viewing, but also undertaking qualitative research with audiences in different countries and in different socio-economic and cultural situations, through surveys, focus groups, interviews, analysis of online user comments and social media, and so on. It's also important to analyse critical reception across national boundaries.

Most of these approaches can be used for the analysis of both contemporary and historical developments.

### **3. What implications does the shift from a national to a transnational framework have for your teaching?**

First, it is important to focus on transnational activity, to note its existence and importance, and to challenge an exclusively national approach. Secondly, the shift from a national to a transnational framework encourages the development of courses about “national” cinemas that engage with the transnational dimensions of those cinemas. And thirdly, it encourages courses that focus on transnational trends (e.g. Nordic noir) or on trends across a range of world cinemas.

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**4. One of the criticisms of the transnational turn within film scholarship is that it appears to have displaced other (arguably more political) approaches such as postcolonialism. For you, what are the politics underpinning an engagement with the transnational?**

There is surely no necessary reason why attention to transnational developments cannot go hand in hand with postcolonial theories and analysis. One can look at postcolonial problems and strategies just as easily and productively in relation to transnational as to national contexts. If the transnational is defined empirically as I do above, I'm not sure there is a necessary politics underpinning an engagement with the transnational. But I do think it is important to recognise the evidence of transnational developments, relationships and narratives in cinema, both historically and in the present. Inevitably, this challenges those who define the national in terms of purity, exclusivity and self-containedness.

**5. Is “transnational” the most appropriate term for discussing this topic? What do you think of alternatives such as “transcultural cinema”, “cosmopolitan cinema” or “world cinema”?**

I find the term “transnational” very useful for describing cross-border cultural and/or economic activity. It's not an exclusive term, however, and shouldn't be defined too rigorously; nor does it in my opinion need to be heavily theorised. Other terms such as “transcultural”, “intercultural” and “cosmopolitan” also work well, but for me they focus more on the cultural aspects of cinema (form, content, personal biography), and tend to overlook the industrial dimensions of production, distribution and exhibition and the issue of policy; perhaps they also overlook the dimension of reception, the nature and composition of audiences and how they make sense of particular films.

**Lucy Mazdon**

**Professor of Film Studies, University of Southampton**

**1. What is your definition of “transnational cinema”?**

I would argue that transnational cinema cannot be defined in any straightforward way. Indeed on-going debates about the term, not least this collection, are testimony to its complexity. Transnational cinema should not be reduced to international co-productions or an accumulation of national cinemas. Understanding cinema as transnational means being aware of its porosity, its intersections with others (including the national), its indeterminacy and its contingency. Cinema can and should

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be perceived as transnational at the level of production (industry), text, circulation and reception which of course means that all cinema could simply be defined as transnational. Nevertheless I would urge caution as this runs the risk of reducing the term to a self-evident qualifier and emptying it of all critical force. With this in mind it seems to me vital that we retain a critical and discursive engagement with the transnational and its applicability to film research. Perhaps most productive is an understanding of transnational cinema as an approach, a methodology, a way of thinking about cinema rather than simply an object of study.

## **2. What research methodologies do you find are most useful in interrogating the transnational dimensions of cinema?**

A number of methodologies lend themselves well to an interrogation of the transnational dimensions of cinema: textual analysis; industry studies; film historiography. Of particular value I think is a reception studies approach. Analysis of the circulation of film, its consumption and the responses it provokes in audiences are particularly revealing. My own research on remakes and on the UK distribution and reception of French cinema for example revealed the ways in which a film's identity could be altered radically through its journey from one cultural context to another. To some extent British audiences' reception of French film meant an underwriting of the national as a film would be perceived and consumed primarily as "French". Nevertheless, despite this foregrounding of the national, it seems to me that this in fact provides evidence of the transnationalism of film, its indeterminacy. As the film moves from one culture to another so it becomes something different to new audiences. It is unfinished, incomplete, porous, and a focus on transnational reception enables us to reveal and analyse this.

## **3. What implications does the shift from a national to a transnational framework have for your teaching?**

Overall I have found the shift from a national to a transnational framework extremely beneficial from a teaching point of view. My sense is that students are increasingly less interested in focusing on a single national cinema (including Hollywood cinema). They appear to be much more attracted by questions of genre, stars, technologies and so on. All of this can, I believe, be explored and taught much more fruitfully and much more interestingly within a transnational framework. When teaching "national" cinemas (for a number of years I taught a module on 1930s French cinema) I found an engagement with its transnational dimensions and connections extremely productive, provoking a much more thoughtful and sophisticated engagement from the students.

## **4. One of the criticisms of the transnational turn within film**

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**scholarship is that it appears to have displaced other (arguably more political) approaches such as postcolonialism. For you, what are the politics underpinning an engagement with the transnational?**

Rather than sharing anxieties about the transnational turn's displacement of other approaches, I would argue for the vital necessity of an approach to cinema and other cultural forms which questions and problematises nations and nationalism. As we approach the EU referendum in the UK and Donald Trump with his calls for a wall between the US and Mexico makes significant headway in his bid to be the Republican candidate for the US presidency, so an engagement with the transnational, underpinned by an interrogation of the discourse and ideologies of nationalism, seems ever more imperative.

**5. Is "transnational" the most appropriate term for discussing this topic? What do you think of alternatives such as "transcultural cinema", "cosmopolitan cinema" or "world cinema"?**

I do have some slight reservations about the term "transnational". As I have already mentioned, a transnational approach should be much more than an acknowledgement of multiple nations or national signifiers. While it should engage with the national and nationalism, it must go beyond this to examine the contingency of cinema and cinema audiences in all their complexity. In using the term "transnational" we perhaps run the risk of ignoring this and reducing the critical force of this approach. However alternative terms are not without their own limitations so I would tend to favour retention of the transnational with the proviso that the term and the methodology should be always subject to critical engagement and potential rethinking.

**Lúcia Nagib**

**Professor in Film, University of Reading**

**1. What is your definition of "transnational cinema"?**

Theoretically, a "transnational film" should be the one funded by a pool of multinational producers. But this is not exactly what is usually meant by being "transnational". The desire to transcend the nation has evolved in the wake of the defence of hybridity ushered in by structuralist and post-structuralist theory, and very much in tune with cultural studies' championing of minorities of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity. There was also an understanding that the "national" project, in cinema, which was at the core of the Third Cinema movements of the 1960s as a

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reaction to and resistance to global capitalism, had achieved their historical aims and needed to move forward towards closing ranks with movements of resistance across the world.

## **2. What research methodologies do you find are most useful in interrogating the transnational dimensions of cinema?**

Within my polycentric approach to film studies, I tend to organise world cinema according to “creative peaks” and look at them through recurrent tropes. For example, in New Waves and New Cinema movements, one can observe an attempt at engaging physically with the world, as a means to take possession of a land and its culture. For example, I have studied the figure of the runner on foot across a number of inaugural films, such as *The 400 Blows* (François Truffaut, 1959) (in France), *Black God, White Devil* (Glauber Rocha, 1964) (in Brazil), *Atanarjuat, the Fast Runner* (Zacharias Kunuk, 2001) (among the Inuit) and *Yaaba* (Idrissa Ouedraogo, 1989) (in Burkina Faso). Though strongly connected with a region, a nation and a culture, these films connect across borders through the act of physically engaging with their land.

## **3. What implications does the shift from a national to a transnational framework have for your teaching?**

Processes of nation building are historical and become particularly urgent when the nation is under threat. There have been excellent studies of “cinemas of small nations” (Hjort & Petrie’s for example)<sup>[6]</sup> that demonstrate how the borders of a nation become crucial, when the country is, for example, Scotland that has a fraught relationship with the United Kingdom, or Bulgaria or Finland or Taiwan, whose bigger neighbours project a shadow on their claim for a distinctive national identity. To answer your question, the focus on issues of the national or the transnational depends on the subject I am teaching and does not cause any particular “problems”.

## **4. One of the criticisms of the transnational turn within film scholarship is that it appears to have displaced other (arguably more political) approaches such as postcolonialism. For you, what are the politics underpinning an engagement with the transnational?**

I don’t think I have ever resorted to “postcolonial” theory to approach any cinemas, because this necessarily defines the perspective adopted as Eurocentric. Countries, nations and cultures existed before, during and after the European Imperialism, but postcolonial theories tend to erase and forget about what they were before the arrival of the European. At the same time, “transnationalism” is not my religion. If anything, it’s a

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means, not an end. If thinking about the transnational factors that cause a film to be what it is – for example, a Brazilian film needs to have a German actor due to an imposition of the German funders – then it would be silly to disregard these factors in the analysis of this particular film.

**5. Is “transnational” the most appropriate term for discussing this topic? What do you think of alternatives such as “transcultural cinema”, “cosmopolitan cinema” or “world cinema”?**

What is the use of defending one concept to the detriment of another? What determines my methodology is the object under scrutiny. *Germany Year Zero* (Roberto Rossellini, 1948) is a film about Germany, so one needs to know something about this country at that particular time in order to produce a valid analysis. At the same time, *Germany Year Zero* was directed by an Italian who was spearheading a revolutionary cinema movement, called neorealism, that changed the way cinema was made in Europe and in the rest of the world, so here knowing German history alone would not be enough. Many concepts are themselves determined by the perspective of those who invented them. The concept of world cinema, for example, only makes sense in the Anglophone world, where “cinema” means American cinema, and “world cinema” means “the rest of the world”. In France, in Brazil, in Germany and most of the other countries in the world there isn’t world cinema, but simply cinema. As for the cosmopolitan turn, that emerged in cultural studies in the 1990s, I find it an important and helpful branch of theory, as it accounts for the extraordinary urban developments in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that inflected all the artistic outputs coming from these centres.

**Kathleen Newman**

**Associate Professor of Cinema and Spanish, The University of Iowa**

**1. What is your definition of “transnational cinema”? and 5. Is “transnational” the most appropriate term for discussing this topic? What do you think of alternatives such as “transcultural cinema”, “cosmopolitan cinema” or “world cinema”?**

Given that cinema is part of the (complex, dynamic, multidirectional) global circulation of narratives (operating at multiple scales), I think the adjective “transnational”, rather than describing a category of cinema, is most useful for describing our area of theoretical inquiry, that is, transnational film theory. We have seen, over the last quarter century or so, a significant geopolitical decentring of the discipline of Film Studies. Whereas European and US cinemas were considered core and all other

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cinemas were treated as derivative, we can now think of world cinema as the core category, subsuming European and US cinemas, and all cinemas, be they regional or national or defined by another geopolitical scale, as part of world cinema. The general deployment of the term transnational cinema is evidence of this ongoing disciplinary decentring, but I am not sure if it is a sufficiently capacious term to signal all of the current theoretical and analytical stakes. In this same quarter century, the debates of the relation of art and politics have recognised the complexity of the spatial and temporal registers of film narrative and scholars now hold themselves responsible in their analyses for accounting for the ways in which multiple geopolitical scales operate textually. Yet, the question of how film texts serve as evidence of historical transformations and how cinema contributes to social transformation (one and the same thing) is not resolved. The transnational circulation of cinema, because it is always present in the cultural repertoire from which film derives meaning and in which film is meaningful, requires film scholars to examine the geopolitics of all film address.

## **2. What research methodologies do you find are most useful in interrogating the transnational dimensions of cinema?**

Formalism - as old-fashioned as possible - mixed with as complete attention as humanly possible to the trajectories of (a) the ongoing interdisciplinary debates between the humanities and social sciences on the relation between nature of print and audiovisual representation and the multiple determinants of social transformation and structuration and (b) the current work on screen cultures and new media.

## **3. What implications does the shift from a national to a transnational framework have for your teaching?**

My research and teaching concerns Latin American cinema and so my classes often address how Latin American filmmakers have dealt with questions of authoritarianism and social inequality in their many forms. There is a very clear distinction between the assumptions of Latin American filmmakers during the short twentieth century (mid-1910s to the early 1990s) regarding uneven power relations, how they are instantiated and how they can be changed, and current Latin American filmmakers, particularly the producers and directors of the various “new cinemas” that emerged in the 1990s (a post-authoritarian period for some Latin American nations). The politics of these new cinemas, in opposition to previous generations, can be seen at the level of story in the characters’ shared distrust of collective undertakings and a much-needed sharp eye for deception and self-deception. The geopolitical imaginary of most of these films is global in reach even when the focus is local (and at times seemingly non-political), and the filmmakers, like most of their

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audience, seem highly aware of the positive and negative implications of the mobility of people and messages in our times.

**4. One of the criticisms of the transnational turn within film scholarship is that it appears to have displaced other (arguably more political) approaches such as postcolonialism. For you, what are the politics underpinning an engagement with the transnational?**

A transnational perspective obliges one to take a stance on the nature of capitalism and various social and political-economic relations assigned within the category called globalisation, which leads, in turn, to the ongoing theorisation of the relation of art and society. Transnational studies and postcolonial studies within the discipline of Film Studies share many of the same, longstanding - very political - concerns: what can the study of cinema tell us about how to make the world a better place?

**Deborah Shaw**

**Reader in Film, University of Portsmouth**

**1. What is your definition of “transnational cinema”?**

The first stage in any young field of study is definitional and there have been scholars who have attempted to nail down the “what is transnational cinema?” question.<sup>[7]</sup> A number of us have argued that the application of the term was too loose and that we needed to specify which aspects of cinema we were referring to. In a chapter on the subject, I outlined a series of 15 inter-connecting and overlapping categories which would allow us to clarify our focus.<sup>[8]</sup> These included: transnational modes of production, distribution and exhibition; transnational modes of narration; exilic and diasporic filmmaking; transnational influences; transnational critical approaches; transnational viewing practices; transregional / transcommunity films; transnational stars; transnational directors; transnational collaborative networks. These can be tinkered with, added to, adapted or disagreed with, but the point is that there is no single definition for transnational cinema. This does not mean that the transnational does not provide a useful theoretical framework for film studies, rather that we need to know what we are talking about for it to have meaningful application. I would argue that following the early definitional stages, we can now focus on applications, effects and functions.

**2. What research methodologies do you find are most useful in interrogating the transnational dimensions of cinema?**

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I would argue that we have to approach this from the bottom up; that is to say, the answer to this depends on the focus of the study. Following on from my response to the previous question, I would argue against a single methodology applicable to all studies. A quick scan through a selection of the most recent articles accepted for publication in the journal *Transnational Cinemas* (7:1, 2016) is a good example of the focus on applications, effects and functions of transnational cinema, and reveals the diverse methodologies and theoretical approaches employed.

In order to “compare a large number of films and identify broad trends and categories” Huw Jones analyses quantitative data from public databases for his article “The Cultural and Economic Implications of UK / European Co-production”. These include two databases, the BFI database of films produced in the UK (2003-2013) and the European Audiovisual Observatory’s LUMIERE. In addition he “uses the BFI’s ‘Cultural Test’ for film to quantify how much European creative input goes into UK/European co-productions”<sup>[9]</sup>. Anna Cooper’s article “Colonizing Europe: Widescreen Aesthetics in the 1950s American Travel Film” takes a more theoretical approach and “uses textual methodologies adapted from postcolonial studies to explore the colonialist aesthetics of mid-century American cinema”<sup>[10]</sup>. Arezou Zalipour turns to Hamid Naficy’s concept of “accented cinema”<sup>[11]</sup> for her study of “Interstitial and Collective Filmmaking in New Zealand: The Case of Asian New Zealand Film”<sup>[12]</sup>. I could go on but word space and respect for readers prevents me. The point is, I hope, clear: the focus of the study and the knowledge base of the researcher will determine the methodology and theoretical framework. Each is valid and each sheds new light on a different aspect of the transnational in film, whether that be historical research, an approach that relies on data collection or interviews, or readings that engage with some of the key theoretical interventions in the field.

### **3. What implications does the shift from a national to a transnational framework have for your teaching?**

The shift to a transnational framework has greatly impacted film studies as a discipline. A recent SCMS (Society for Cinema and Media Studies) study, “The State of the Field of Film and Media Studies”, demonstrated that there are 179 departments / programs that teach modules on “global or transnational cinema and/or television”<sup>[13]</sup>. This study was limited to the US and there are similar courses in most institutions that teach film studies. I have written more about a shared and personal experience of teaching a course “World and Transnational Cinemas” in a chapter co-authored with Ruth Doughty for an edited book, *Teaching Transnational Cinema: Politics and Pedagogy*.<sup>[14]</sup>

In addition, a transnational framework will be applied to other courses

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without the “T” word in their title. As a recent scan of the SCMS panels sponsored by the “Transnational Cinemas” Scholarly Interest Group run by Austin Fisher and Iain Smith reveals, transnational frameworks are now applied to scholarship in many areas. These include: early cinema, star studies, remakes / adaptations, feminist film theory, fan studies, exploitation cinema, genre studies, experimental film, the growing area of video essays, sound studies, readings of race, regional / national studies, the business / economics of film, and audience studies, among others. A transnational approach is thus informing film studies beyond the obvious courses dedicated to the subject.

**4. One of the criticisms of the transnational turn within film scholarship is that it appears to have displaced other (arguably more political) approaches such as postcolonialism. For you, what are the politics underpinning an engagement with the transnational?**

The transnational is as political as we make it, and the transnational is an intrinsic part of postcolonialism; it does not present an oppositional approach or displace it. By way of illustration, the editors of *Transnational Cinemas* (Armida de la Garza, Ruth Doughty and I) have recently accepted a proposal for a special issue of the journal co-edited by Sandra Ponzanesi and Verena Berger: “Postcolonial Cinemas in Europe: Migration, Identity and Spatiality in Film Genres” (forthcoming 2017). To reference the journal again, in their article for the inaugural issue Will Higbee and Song Wee Lim put paid to the criticism that transnationalism may be less concerned with politics or less interested in postcolonial power relations. In it they call for a critical transnationalism that will explore relations of “postcoloniality, politics and power” that are at the root of the cross-border activities and transactions that make up transnational cinema in all its manifestations.<sup>[15]</sup>

**5. Is “transnational” the most appropriate term for discussing this topic? What do you think of alternatives such as “transcultural cinema”, “cosmopolitan cinema” or “world cinema”?**

There is not a competition as to which is the best term - they co-exist, and have different meanings according to the contexts in which they are used. The key point is that we should use terminology carefully and define our terms of reference critically. We should ensure that we show an awareness of the definitional work that has taken place in film studies and other disciplines, rather than using terms lazily as catch-alls.

**Notes on Contributors**

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Austin Fisher is Senior Lecturer in Film and Television Studies at Bournemouth University. He is author of *Radical Frontiers in the Spaghetti Western* (IB Tauris, 2011), editor of *Spaghetti Westerns at the Crossroads* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016) and co-editor of Bloomsbury's *Global Exploitation Cinemas* book series. He is also co-chair of the SCMS 'Transnational Cinemas' Scholarly Interest Group, and serves on the Editorial Boards of the *[in]Transition* and *Transnational Cinemas* journals.

Iain Robert Smith is Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at the University of Roehampton, London. He is author of *The Hollywood Meme: Transnational Adaptations in World Cinema* (EUP, 2016) and co-editor of the collections *Transnational Film Remakes* (with Con Verevis, EUP, 2017) and *Media Across Borders* (with Andrea Esser and Miguel A. Bernal Merino, Routledge, 2016). He is co-chair of the SCMS Transnational Cinemas Scholarly Interest Group and co-investigator on the AHRC-funded research network *Media Across Borders*.

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## Notes

[1] Mette Hjort, "On the Plurality of Cinematic Transnationalism", in *World Cinema, Transnational Perspectives*, edited by Nataša Durovicová and Kathleen Newman (London: Routledge/American Film Institute Reader, 2010), 12-13.

[2] Bruce H. Sklarew, Bonnie S. Kaufman, Ellen Handler Spitz and Diane Borden (eds), *Bertolucci's The Last Emperor: Multiple Takes* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998).

[3] Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden, "General Introduction: What is Transnational Cinema?," in *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader*, eds Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden (London: Routledge, 2006), 1.

[4] Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, "Introduction: The Impurity of Art Cinema," in *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, eds Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[5] Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim, "Concepts of Transnational Cinema: Towards a Critical Transnationalism in Film Studies," *Transnational Cinemas* 1:1 (2010).

[6] Mette Hjort and Duncan Petrie (eds), *The Cinema of Small Nations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

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[7] See Ezra and Rowden, *Transnational Cinema*; Hjort, "On the Plurality of Cinematic Transnationalism"; Higbee and Lim, "Concepts of Transnational Cinema"; Chris Berry, "What is Transnational Cinema? Thinking from the Chinese Situation," *Transnational Cinemas* 1:2 (2010).

[8] Deborah Shaw, "Deconstructing and Reconstructing 'Transnational Cinema'," in *Contemporary Hispanic Cinema: Interrogating the Transnational in Spanish and Latin American Film*, ed. Stephanie Dennison (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2013).

[9] Huw D. Jones, "The Cultural and Economic Implications of UK / European Co-production," *Transnational Cinemas* 7:1 (2016).

[10] Anna Cooper, "Colonizing Europe: Widescreen Aesthetics in the 1950s American Travel Film," *Transnational Cinemas*, 7:1 (2016).

[11] Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[12] Arezou Zalipour, "Interstitial and Collective Filmmaking in New Zealand: The Case of Asian New Zealand Film," *Transnational Cinemas*, 7:1 (2016).

[13] Aviva Dove-Viebahn, "The State of Film and Media Studies," accessed March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016, [http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.cmstudies.org/resource/resmgr/SCMS\\_StateoftheField2015.pdf](http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.cmstudies.org/resource/resmgr/SCMS_StateoftheField2015.pdf).

[14] Deborah Shaw and Ruth Doughty, "Teaching the 'World' through Film," in *Teaching Transnational Cinema: Politics and Pedagogy*, eds Katarzyna Marciniak and Bruce Bennett (London: Routledge / AFI Film Readers, 2016).

[15] Higbee and Lim, "Concepts of Transnational Cinema," 18.

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