Inti: Revista de literatura hispánica

Volume 1 | Number 73 Article 32

2011

Óscar González-Barreto and Ernesto Silva-Zolezzi: Voces y Cine en América Latina: El caso de Venezuela. Fondo Editorial Cultura Peruana, Lima, 2011.

Brian Cope

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/inti

Citas recomendadas

Cope, Brian (Primavera-Otono 2011) "Óscar González-Barreto and Ernesto Silva-Zolezzi: Voces y Cine en América Latina: El caso de Venezuela. Fondo Editorial Cultura Peruana, Lima, 2011.," *Inti: Revista de literatura hispánica*: No. 73, Article 32.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/inti/vol1/iss73/32

This Reseña is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Providence. It has been accepted for inclusion in Inti: Revista de literatura hispánica by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Providence. For more information, please contact dps@providence.edu.

Óscar González-Barreto and Ernesto Silva-Zolezzi: *Voces y Cine en América Latina: El Caso de Venezuela. Fondo Editorial Cultura Peruana, Lima, 2011.*

Excavating and making sense of the vast cinematic terrain of Latin American cinema constitutes a monumental task that only those with exceptional wherewithal and knowhow attempt to realize. Autochthonous films that will never be seen outside of their respective cultural milieus come and go very quickly in cities like Lima, Mexico City, Santiago, and Buenos Aires. The commercial market is at best an arbitrary mediator of artistic quality and cultural relevance. Thus for every film like *La Historia Oficial, Fresa y Chocolate*, *Amores Perros*, or *Central Station*—all nominated for the Oscar in the category of Best Foreign Language Film—there are numerous others of enormous cultural relevance and artistic merit that reach only a relatively small national audience. Films like *Machuca*, *B-Happy*, *Matando Cabos*, *La Otra Conquista*, *Polvo Enamorado*, *El Violín*, *El Infierno*, *Nueve Reinas*, and *Tony Manero* come to mind, and how we discover these and other (often obscure) gems of Latin American cinema is usually anything but systematic; for we rely on word of mouth, the Internet, and in many instances, film festivals. Unfortunately these tactics almost always fail when it comes to learning about, or acquiring copies of, films from countries like Uruguay, Perú, and Venezuela. The sad reality is that scholarly work on the national cinemas of most Latin American countries is scant, which makes books like *Voces y Cine en América Latina: El Caso de Venezuela* extremely timely and valuable.

No Venezuelan film has ever been nominated for an Oscar and even the most commercially successful films rarely receive distribution beyond Venezuela. *Secuestro Express* and *Oriana* are perhaps the most notable exceptions. Nonetheless, since 1973 and the advent of the Nuevo Cine Venezolano, Venezuela has produced numerous films of varying technical quality that serve as unique portals into the social geography of Venezuela. Óscar González-Barreto and Ernesto Silva-Zolezzi take us on an intriguing voyage through contemporary Venezuelan cinema by way of a series of interviews with ten contemporary Venezuelan filmmakers. These interviews take on the form of fluid and expansive conversations that gravitate around the directors' formal education in film; their perspective on their own film production; and, finally, their insight onto Venezuelan cinema, Latin American cinema, and cinema in

general. The ten filmmakers interviewed are Alberto Arvelo, Elia Schneider, José Ramón Novoa, Román Chalbaud, Solveig Hoogesteijn, Michael New, Diego Rísquez, Alfredo Anzola, Oscar Lucién, and Fina Torres.

Several common threads weave their way through the series of rigorous and telling interviews contained in the book. One surprising pattern in the interviews is a pervasive skepticism toward the *auteurist* paradigm of cinema and how poorly it has served the Venezuelan film industry. Several of the filmmakers make a point of noting that filmmaking is a collective endeavor requiring a large investment of capital and therefore must not be pursued with the mentality of "art for art's sake." This leads the same filmmakers to note that more of an effort needs to be made to produce films that the public wants to see instead of assuming that Venezuelans can and will modify their aesthetic sensibilities in order to embrace a Venezuelan vanguard cinema. Nevertheless, a pronounced deference to Luis Buñuel and to Italian neo-realist cinema—paragons of the *auteurist* tradition—arises over and over again in the interviews. On the surface this may seem contradictory, but we should remember that Buñuel suffered significant setbacks in his career because of his willfulness to exercise unprecedented artistic control in films like *Los Olvidados* and that, in contrast, Rossellini and De Sica always showed a certain degree of pragmatism in their planning and execution of their works. Remarkable, nonetheless, is Elia Schneider's admittance of self-censorship, which goes well beyond the pragmatism that perhaps nearly every independent filmmaker must exercise, to some degree, in order to obtain commercial success and professional recognition.

Similarly, the difficulty of making films in Venezuela and the necessity to operate within very restrictive cultural and political boundaries in order to survive arise as another common theme. As is the case with many Latin American countries, the Venezuelan government provides financial support to film production; nevertheless, there are few places to go to receive technical training in the various aspects of filmmaking (script writing, sound engineering, lighting, shooting, editing, etc.); and, most demoralizing, Hollywood distributors continue to exercise a hegemonic control over the various viewing venues, a situation with which the Venezuelan government has never ceased to be fully complicit.

Voces y Cine en América Latina: El Caso de Venezuela makes a valuable contribution to the scholarship on Venezuelan cinema in particular, and Latin American cinema in general. Although the presentation of the material is at times unconventional, the erudition of its authors, Óscar González-Barreto and Ernesto Silva-Zolezzi, is unmistakable in the way they handle the dialogues. The unconventionality of the book lies in the fact that the two chapters of introductory remarks develop along a testimonial trajectory with each author taking great care to reveal his subject position and personal motivations for writing the book. González-Barreto writes the first introductory chapter and

discusses his youth spent in Caracas viewing many of the films discussed in the book at special cinemas on the outskirts of the city that he has now come to understand as serving to purposely present little to no competition to the larger commercial cinemas that showed exclusively American movies. Silva-Zolezzi writes the second introductory chapter and reflects on how some of the films under discussion contradict many of the romanticized stories about Venezuela he heard during his youth from returning Peruvian exiles and émigrés to his native Lima, thus leading him to see the period of Venezuelan prosperity that attracted so many from neighboring countries to cities like Caracas and Mérida as one tainted by disadvantage to large and conspicuously anonymous segments of the Venezuelan population. What these two examples show is that the theoretical premise underlying the book is, by design, more intra-historical (*à la* Unamuno) than purely academic (which on some levels it still is) and gravitates around cinema and recent history as a lived experience that is echoed, too, in many of the remarks made by the filmmakers interviewed. In fact, the reflective candor of González-Barreto and Silva-Zolezzi in their introductory remarks brilliantly foregrounds the frank and unaffected tenor of the subsequent series of conversations—not interviews *per se*—with the selected filmmakers.

Researchers and cinema aficionados interested in Venezuelan cinema have encountered, until now, a vacuity of available source materials. V*oces y Cine en América Latina: El Caso de Venezuela* takes a giant leap toward remedying this unfortunate *lacuna*. The book is not, as the authors note in the introduction, a comprehensive study of Venezuelan cinema from its origins to the present. While this is true to the extent that the book only focuses on Venezuelan cinema since the mid-twentieth century, it does, however, provide a nearly comprehensive overview of contemporary Venezuelan cinema, albeit in a non-linear fashion and employing an intra-historical methodology. Accordingly, those who read the book cover to cover will leave with a nuanced and dynamic understanding of Venezuelan cinema. In the end, what the book offers is an intelligent and perceptive introduction to Venezuelan cinema—filtered through the unique and informed perspective of the interviewers and interviewees—that can be useful to both novices and specialists alike. From a practical standpoint, the most useful contribution of the book for the many of those unfamiliar with contemporary Venezuelan cinema will be the detailed filmography that appears at the end, although only some of the films listed there are obtainable by conventional means (Amazon, NetFlix, university libraries, etc.).

What makes *Voces y Cine en América Latina: El Caso de Venezuela* so compelling, is the erudition and critical disposition of its authors. Both are specialists in Latin American cinema, as well as cinephiles and skilled amateur filmmakers. These characteristics make them both at once connoisseurs of the cinematic terrain under examination and perfectly adept at speaking

the language of the filmmakers interviewed. As a result, the conversations between the authors and the filmmakers unfold as discussions wherein both sides, respectfully and unreservedly, trade insights and perspectives on the filmography of the interviewee; on Venezuelan cinema; on the Venezuelan cultural dynamic; on Latin America; and on Latin American cinema. The authors ask sophisticated and discerning questions, and the filmmakers respond in kind with unscripted candor and a generosity of spirit that comes as rather unexpected for a book of this type.

González-Barreto y Silva-Zolezzi make an explicit and impassioned case for studying Venezuelan cinema. *Voces y Cine en América Latina: El Caso de Venezuela* is both an impressive inroads into this endeavor that will hold the attention of specialists in the field of Latin American cinema and an important starting point for anyone wishing to delve deeper into this very rich and yet largely ignored cinematic topography.

Brian Cope