

Introduction

The Modern Foundations of Brazilian Cinema

In 1909, Brazilian writer João do Rio documented his impressions of a medium that was still new to his country—film. The apparatus, he declared, “is extremely modern and up to date. This is its principal characteristic.” The author added that the medium “is of a new age. The outcome of modern scientific development, it is extra modern.”¹ João do Rio was not the only commentator in Brazil to stress film’s modernity. Immediately after the first screening in Rio de Janeiro in 1896, journalists began to emphasize the cinema’s modern status. One writer for the *Jornal do Brasil*, for instance, commented on the movies’ “roots in modern progress,” and another for *A Notícia* asserted the technology as proof of the “enormous modern progress that has taken place during the last few years.”² Domestic exhibitors echoed these descriptions, promoting and celebrating the cinematograph as “the most marvelous of all modern inventions.”³

These reports appear to support “the premise that the cinema was the fullest expression and combination of modernity’s attributes” in Brazil, with the medium participating in what film scholars Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz have called “the invention of modern life.”⁴ Yet film’s relationship to modernity in Brazil, as in Spanish America, was far from straightforward or symbiotic. Rather than emerging from and developing in synchronicity with the scientific and technological inventions and revolutions that produced modernity in Europe and the United States, the cinema appeared fully formed on Latin American soil as a foreign import, on board the same ships that brought other manufactured goods from abroad into the country. Consequently, as Ana M. López writes, “In reference to Latin America, it is difficult to speak of cinema and modernity as points of reflection and convergence, as is the presumption in U.S. and European early cinema

scholarship. Rather, the development of cinema in the region was not directly linked to the wide scale transformations of the daily experience resulting from industrialization, rationality, and the technological changes of modern life." López states that these transformations were not taking place in early twentieth-century Latin America, where modernity was "still a fantasy and a profound desire."⁵

While it was not the expression of socioeconomic transformations, modernity, I argue, was more than a mere fantasy or desire in turn-of-the-century Brazil. It was, to use Néstor García Canclini's word, a project.⁶ This project constituted part of what Angel Rama has called the "second birth of modern Latin America," a continent-wide recolonizing process that involved purging the country of its colonial past and updating its identity, bringing it in line with European civilization.⁷ In Brazil this civilizing project was foundational to the politics of the First Republic (1889–1930), which initiated what Jeffrey Needell refers to as "a new era" in the country's history.⁸ In 1888 slavery was abolished in Brazil, followed a year later by the ousting of the imperial Portuguese family and the declaration of the Republic. Once in power, the Republican government set out to reinvent the country's identity: the marginal status of Portugal's former colony was to be a thing of the past, and, incorporating European liberal discourses that promoted universal values of civilization and progress, Brazil's social and political elite turned their backs on the country's rural, slaveholding past to rewrite Brazil's identity as a modern nation-state, a nation of order and progress, equal to any other in the Western world.

The configuration of Brazil's new identity cannot be separated from broader changes taking place internationally, wrought by the dramatic expansion of capitalism. By the start of the twentieth century, the economies of European countries and North America was stepping up a gear. Seeking out new markets for their surplus goods, they turned to peripheral nations, like Brazil, which increased their exchange of raw materials for manufactured goods. This economic integration into the global market was accompanied by ideological configurations in which universal discourses of civilization and progress sold a narrative of global citizenship. The Republican elite identified with this narrative and sought to project themselves and the Brazilian nation into the modern world at large.

Brazil's new identity was thus influenced by international changes, as the elites embarked on a civilizing mission to remap the colonial contours of the country by adopting foreign models. In this context the social and political upper classes became receptive to a belief in progress, as it sought to extirpate barbaric elements of the past, which included social life and culture associated with the remnants and memories of slavery. This new attitude was manifested in state policies and ideas. It was also expressed in early twentieth-century urban reforms and immigration policy that aimed at recruiting Europeans, particularly North Europeans, to carry out agricultural labor and to work in new industries. At the level of ideas, European positivism with its emphasis on science and authoritarian social

engineering provided a rationale for progress without popular participation or change in the country's traditional sociopolitical structure. This exclusion of the popular was central to transformations in the country's key cities. At the start of the 1900s, the topography of Rio, São Paulo, Recife, and other urban centers was dramatically altered. With inspiration taken from Paris, colonial buildings were razed and replaced with grandiose beaux arts structures, streets were widened, and parks were constructed, all of which provided Brazilian cities with a new, modern identity that reflected the French capital. These urban changes went hand in hand with the removal of the cities' poorer inhabitants—former slaves and working migrants and immigrants—whose popular cultural practices were also outlawed. Music, dances, and rituals like *capoeira*, *candomblé*, and *umbanda*, with their roots in slaves' African past, were viewed as an attack on progress and were consequently banned and their practitioners imprisoned.⁹ Brazil's new identity thus articulated the elite's view that modernization, as a project from above, would forge the country's new era, and their progressive reforms consequently upheld structural relations of marginality and exclusion, as well as traditional hierarchies.

This history encapsulates what Needell illustrates as the contradictions of the elite-led project of modernization during Brazil's First Republic. While the elite was fully receptive to foreign ideas of progress, "imposing them with a steady desire," traditional social relations inherited from the colony and empire prevailed, and there was no attempt to institute a democratic, inclusive mode of national development.¹⁰ Indeed, the new regime continued to favor a land-owning oligarchy at the expense of an emergent industrializing middle class. This process entailed abandoning the path of independent economic development and accepting neocolonialism, whereby Brazil embraced economic liberalism and exchanged its primary goods for imported manufactured items.

This paradox, the intersection of old structures with progressive beliefs, encapsulates what Roberto Schwarz has theorized as Brazilian modernity's out-of-placed-ness, in which foreign ideals and symbolic representations are adopted in a country whose material base does not correspond to them.¹¹ The classic example Schwarz provides is the nineteenth-century elite's endorsement of European liberal ideologies, even though the Brazilian economy and society were based on the incompatible practice of slavery. This radical disjunction and dissonance between Brazil's socioeconomic reality and its forms of ideological sustenance reveals how foreign philosophies were adopted without any modification of the social order. In this context, modern ideologemes of development were not lived as expressions of the country's material reality but ornamentally and spectacularly.

Brazil's imported or out-of-place modernity thus did not substitute for tradition and traditional identity as in Marx's "All that is solid melts into air." Instead, it evidenced contradictions, or what Canclini emphasizes as a hybridity, a multitemporal heterogeneity, in which modern beliefs coexisted with older configurations

and structures.¹² What Canclini stresses in Latin America's hybrid modernity, more than the superficial transplantation of ideological beliefs that did not fit with social reality, is the re-elaboration and reorganization of external models, as local and global combinations express the combining of the modern with residues from the past, a mixture of social structures and sentiments that constitutes what Jesús Martín Barbero analyzes as complex mediations.¹³ These complex mediations were evinced in Brazil's First Republic as the traditional social and political elite embraced impulses from abroad in its particular project to invent a modern Brazil.

The cinema was intimately linked to and developed from the hybrid configurations of this particular embrace. The first screening of what was initially called the *omniograph* took place in 1896, only seven years after the start of the First Republic, and the new medium was soon implicated in the period's foreign-inflected modernizing drive. For Brito Broca, the years of the First Republic were characterized by what he calls a *mundanismo*, a worldliness, in which the social and political elite were attuned to and attracted by everything foreign. In this context the upper classes enthusiastically accepted everything from abroad, foods, clothes, and of course ideologies.¹⁴ They also embraced the imported technology of the moving pictures.

The foreign cinematic apparatus soon became part of the elite's worldly utopianism, which producers and entrepreneurs spectacularly relayed to viewers. As testimonies of the initial reception of the new medium reveal, the very presence of the technological media seemed to feed a national self-confidence that modernity was in progress. Imported sights of foreign civilized cities and peoples reinforced this sentiment, allowing Brazilian spectators to envisage themselves as part of the wider modern world. The production of domestic films buttressed this new visual imaginary. Early movies made in Brazil replicated the relationship between cinema and modernity in Europe and the United States, while at the same time creating spectacles of local modern attractions. One of the first films to be screened in Brazil was August and Louis Lumière's *L'arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat* (1895). The impact of this early actuality gave rise to Brazilian versions, *Chegada de um trem em Cadouços* (1894) by Aurélio da Paz and *Chegada de um trem em Petrópolis* (1897) by Vittorio di Maio, both of which documented the country's developing railroad as an adequate equivalent of the modern sight screened in the French original. Such local "copies" became common, with a number of filmmakers in Brazil producing counterparts of foreign *vues*. French actualities like *Un boulevard*, which displayed fashionable Parisians promenading, for instance, inspired movies such as *Avenida Central da capital federal* (Avenida Central in the federal capital; n.dir., 1906) and *O corso de Botafogo* (Promenade in Botafogo; n.dir., 1909), which showed civilized Cariocans strolling along Rio's elegant avenues. Seeking out local sights that resonated with foreign vistas, early producers in Brazil adopted international film language to recast the former colony's image as a modern nation, similar to any other in the Western world. It was not just filmmakers that copied foreign vistas. Specta-

tors too emulated the modern visions, refashioning their own local identities to fit in with models from abroad.

From the very start, therefore, film in Brazil spectacularly articulated and projected the desires underlining the Republic's modernizing mission. Inaugurating new techniques for seeing the nation, the cinema helped to make people see and believe in its new, civilized contours. It is this projection that this book charts, looking at how cinema was implicated in the progressive foundations of Brazil's First Republic and its particular invention of modern life. In doing so I show that although film formed a crucible for ideas, techniques, and representations present in other places, its reception and development were intimately entwined with the Republic's national discourse of modernity and its elite-led process of modernization.

ELITE PROJECTIONS OF BRAZIL'S NATIONAL IMAGINARY

Filmmakers in Brazil immediately adopted the imported cinematic medium to screen the country as a modern nation. The very apparatus of film, as well as filmic codes, genres, and cultures consolidated abroad, thus forged what Miriam Hansen calls a "vernacular modernism" by addressing local needs and impulses—historical, social, and political.¹⁵ Movies and their reception and consumption articulated and mediated the desires and experiences of the changes impelled by the Republic's upper class as it sought to update the country's identity.

Brazilian cinema's ties to an elite-led project of modernity complicated the potential of its manifestations of vernacular modernism to function as what Hansen terms "an alternative public sphere," even as it embraced worldliness.¹⁶ Foregrounding the privileged relationship of working people—including migrants and immigrants—to the moving pictures, Hansen and others have elaborated on film's ability to furnish an intersubjective context in which marginalized inhabitants could recognize fragments of their own experience. In Brazil, this ability was contained and constrained by the medium's close links to the country's upper classes. In fact, in Brazil, unlike Europe and the United States, early productions included few so-called factory gate films, in which workers were filmed as they departed from their factory or workplace, in a bid to attract them to shows in order to see themselves on screen.¹⁷ While new industries were featured in Brazilian movies like *A uzina Estrellina* (The Estrellina factory; n. dir., 1930), these tended to abstract workers' bodies from the scenes depicted, with the chief focus being on the factories' modern technologies.¹⁸ If laborers did appear, it was to express and convey the modern workplace's discipline and order. Early cinematic images thus carefully screened Brazil to emphasize the country's civilized modernity.

Indeed, if early accounts of cinema's reception in Brazil stressed its modernity, they also foregrounded the medium's relationship to the country's upper classes.

On June 17, 1898, for instance, a writer for the *Jornal do Brasil* listed viewers present at a screening held at the Super Lumière Cinema in Rio the night before, highlighting “the president of the Republic, Prudente de Moraes, and his family; naval minister Almirante Alves Barbosa; minister of the Supreme Federal Court Dr. André Cavalcanti; Baron Pereira Franco; Attorney General Dr. João Pedro M. Correia de Melo; Captain Marques da Rocha; Colonel Carlos Soares, police commander; General Luís Mendes de Moraes; Military Chief Dr. Capistrano do Amaral; secretaries of the Ministry of the Interior Irineu Machado and Érico Coelho e Valadares; Major Zoroastro, head of the fire brigade; and many judges, doctors, lawyers, and notable businessmen.”¹⁹ Similarly on February 3, 1903, the *Gazeta de Notícias* referred to the presence of “deputies, senators, and businessmen in suits” at a film show that week.²⁰

Such reports provide a glimpse into the constitution of early audiences in Brazil, foregrounding the elite’s immediate embrace of the medium. This embrace shaped the content of early movies made in the country. In his overview of Brazil’s silent cinema, Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes identifies a key theme of the country’s actualities that he refers to as “the ritual of power.”²¹ The ritual of power, he states, crystallized around the documentation of notable individuals from Brazilian society, including the country’s presidents. “From the first civil president to the last military president of the First Republic (1889–1930), Brazilian cinema has not excluded a single leader: Prudente de Moraes, Rodrigues Alves, Campos Salles, Afonso Pena, Nilo Peçanha, Hermes da Fonseca were all filmed governing, visiting regions, receiving dignitaries, inaugurating events, and, eventually, being buried.”²² The subjects of these actualities extended to official events such as military parades, visits of foreign dignitaries, and the inauguration of national monuments. Films like *Inauguração da estátua do Doutor João Mendes* (Inauguration of the statue of Dr. João Mendes; dir. Antonio Campos, 1913), *Viagem presidencial a Campos* (Presidential visit to Campos; n. dir., 1916), and *A posse do novo governo do estado* (Inauguration of the new municipal government; dir. Gilberto Rossi, 1920) fostered identification with Brazil’s official politics and politicians, eliciting what Jens Andermann calls “statist ways of seeing.”²³

Exploring cinema’s role in disseminating these ways of seeing, this book examines how spectatorship was aligned with existing power structures and how the appeal of early films was that of seeing not ordinary citizens but socially and politically prominent ones—metaphorical stand-ins for the nation. Yet, as I show, the cinema-nation symbiosis was not restricted to these more overtly political films. It was also present in what Gomes calls early actualities’ “splendid cradle,” which refers to the celebration of Brazil’s natural wonders.²⁴ Filmmakers immediately contributed to this celebration. In 1898, Afonso Segreto filmed Rio’s Guanabara Bay from the ship *Brésil* on a return journey from Europe, and José Roberto Cunha de Salles also captured Rio’s seascape that same year. Rio’s natural wonders, like Sugarloaf Mountain, Corcovado, and the forest of Tijuca, became a popular subject for

early actualities. Other films recorded natural sites beyond the then capital, such as Icarai, Paquetá, and Petrópolis, displaying their waterfalls and landscapes. Late feature films, like *Visita ao Brasil* (Voyage to Brazil; n. dir, 1907), *Nos sertões do Brasil* (In the Brazilian backlands; n. dir, 1927), *O Brasil pitoresco* (Picturesque Brazil; dir. Cornélio Pires, 1925), *O Brasil desconhecido* (Unknown Brazil; dir. Paulino Botelho, 1926), *O Brasil maravilhoso* (Marvelous Brazil; dir. Alfredo dos Anjos, 1928), and *O Brasil grandioso* (Magnificent Brazil; dir. Alberto Botelho, 1923), documented the Paulo Afonso and the Amazon regions. For Gomes, this focus on the country's tropical exuberance was "part of a collective psychological mechanism that compensated for Brazil's underdevelopment."²⁵ Here, as Jean-Claude Bernardet points out, nature functioned as a response to industrialization, which was not fully in place.²⁶ The fetishistic gaze at grand natural landscapes, untouched by industry, thus made up for the country's lack of modernity. Yet it also revealed Brazil's potential for future progress by showing untapped virgin territories rich in natural or raw promise. Indeed, cinematographers often recorded the cultivation, harvest, preparation, and shipment of natural products like coffee or wood, with cameras charting every step of the development of nature into international commodity. *Brota do café* (Coffee harvest; n. dir., 1925), *Fazenda Santa Catarina* (Santa Catarina Farm; n. dir, 1927), and *A uzina Estrellina* (The Estrellina factory; n. dir., 1930) all charted the process of transforming primary materials into products for export.

Such documentaries proudly registered the country's participation in the world as a producer of raw materials. This participation was evident in the cinematic recordings of Brazil's International Exposition in 1922, which displayed the country's modern image to the international community. As Eduardo Morettin has shown, the exposition incorporated screenings of Brazilian films within its various expositions, with the state purposely commissioning a number of movies for the international occasion.²⁷ Visual records of manufacturing and industry, as well as scientific and technological developments, symbolically produced and reproduced a progressive Brazil and placed it in the interconnected space of the International Exposition. Cinema's inclusion in the exposition shows that while films were linked to the politics of the Republic, they were not nationally self-enclosed; they were mediated by another's valuation.

This mediated gaze was seen as fostering a national pride. Commentators often praised the medium's modern sights as means of instilling patriotism and claimed that cinematic visions of the country's progress would be of great service to the nation. Newspaper commentators also stressed the medium's ability to forge a sense of belonging. In a 1928 review of *Voyage to Brazil*, a writer for the *Estado de São Paulo* stated, "All Brazilians are obliged to know their nation! Brazil is one of the largest countries in the world, yet it is unfamiliar to many inhabitants."²⁸ Such reviews point to the pedagogical role and importance of these films, which would teach spectators about Brazil and inculcate a national culture. Cinematic spectatorship was tantamount

to a visual pedagogy and could help to forge what Benedict Anderson has famously called the imagined community of the nation.²⁹

For Anderson, the development of print culture created a shared experience and commonality, a horizontal comradeship that helped consolidate the imaginary contours of the nation and create modern subjects and citizens. Following Anderson's argument, Doris Sommer emphasizes the importance of writing in forging Latin American national identity.³⁰ She focuses specifically on nineteenth-century novels, or romances, many of which appeared as newspaper *folhetins* before being novelized. Written shortly after independence, these foundational fictions helped legitimize new nations and also construct them. Nineteenth-century Latin American literature thus had the capacity to intervene in national history and to create it. The region's writers fulfilled the paradigms of what Angel Rama terms the lettered city, wielding the power of written discourse to help form Latin American societies. In doing so, Sommer notes, they carried out an important pedagogical function: "Novels could teach people about their history, about their barely formulated customs."³¹ Constituting forms of civic education, the romances symbolically inculcated readers into the space of the nation.

Literature's role in forging the foundations of the Brazilian nation was taken over and superseded by the mass media, not least given the high rates of illiteracy in the country.³² If literature had previously designated the place where a national imaginary was articulated, by the start of the Republic it had become clear that the modern and imported medium of film could occupy an increasingly important place in the redefinition of Brazilian society as part of a wider modern landscape. Far from fostering a collective or horizontal consciousness, however, films tethered spectators to the hegemonic and hierarchical visions of the elite. These early films overlapped with the desires of the modernizing few and aimed to inscribe spectators into their official projections, reconciling their progressive spectacles with the traditional bases upon which their hegemony depended. This reconciliation did not hinge solely on the libidinal and erotic dimensions that Sommer notes were crucial to novelistic foundational fictions.³³ In the positivist spirit of the Republic, the rhetoric of love was matched and even overtaken by a rhetoric of science and technology. Stories of star-crossed lovers were no longer the dominant ground for constituting political and patriotic passion. With their masterful ability to rationally order the old world, scientific and technological infrastructures laid the foundations for Brazil's new modernizing period and became key protagonists in its cinematic productions. Indeed, even sentimental melodramas that involved conjugal tales, like Humberto Mauro's *Tesouro perdido* (Lost treasure, 1927), delighted in presenting technical advances, with stunt sequences involving new modes of transportation. As a product of "modern scientific developments," to cite João do Rio, the cinema seemed perfectly suited not just to registering but also to forging the new era. It is in this recognition of the cinema's productive force that I delineate what I call foundational films, films that

conceived of a national cinema and of the nation itself. If Sommer has shown us that the national, configured through its narration, cannot be taken as a fixed entity and always comes into being as a system of cultural signification, I demonstrate how by the turn of the century cinema articulated new foundations for composing Brazil by projecting its image as modern. As this book charts film's implantation and development in Brazil, then, it pays close attention to how the country's foundational films became involved in establishing the progressive contours of the Brazilian nation.

BRAZILIAN CINEMA'S ALTERNATIVE MODERNITIES

The symbiotic relationship between cinema and the elite does not mean that film and filmmaking practices were completely and unproblematically complicit with hegemonic visions of modernity. This book shows that as the medium developed commercially, many filmmakers in Brazil sought out alternative spectators in cinematic forms and stories that often countered the progressive ideology of the Republic. In spite of its out-of-placedness, the Republican project of modernity did provoke dislocations in Brazil, including changes in race and gender relations, with the emergence of new social groups and the liberation of women from the traditional enclave of the home. At a more popular level, these transformations included new cultural manifestations of mass-produced and mass-mediated products and a variety of everyday discourses that both articulated and responded to the elite project—newspapers, magazines, fashion, advertisements, all of which changed the fabric of everyday life, promoting new forms of experience, interaction, and public life. The cinema was not closed off from these everyday articulations of modernity. Indeed, I show how filmmakers and exhibitors, seeking to profit from the development of the medium as a mass product, catered to women, migrants, and immigrants in narratives that recognized their particular experiences of modern life. Here films intersected, dialogued with, and borrowed from other cultural forms and practices—vaudeville theater, crime stories, magazines, shopping, maps, and press reports—producing an “impure cinema,” to use André Bazin's term, which did not dovetail with official modernity.³⁴ These movies provided alternative visions of the Republic's project, allowing spectators to mediate their own passage into modernity from their everyday cultural landscape.

This centrifugal pull away from centripetal narratives was evident in popular movies made at the start of the Republic; it was also manifested in late 1920s avant-garde cinematic texts, both written and visual. These cinematic experimentations articulated what Esther Gabara calls a “critical nationalism,” which questioned the dominant ideology of progress and development.³⁵ This critical nationalism was central to writers belonging to the avant-garde movement, *modernismo*, who adopted the language of the moving pictures in their revolt against the progressive version of the elite-led modernization and its adoption of foreign models. So, as

this book maps the official foundations of cinema and modernity in Brazil's Republic, it also charts ambivalences within and contestations to its hegemonic lexicon, in both vernacular and avant-garde manifestations.

In its combined explorations of both popular everyday and artistic articulations of the cinematic, the book departs from dominant examinations of cultural modernity in Brazil, which have been largely limited to debates that took place exclusively among intellectuals and within artistic institutions. Scholarly discussions of cultural modernity in Brazil have focused almost entirely on *modernismo*, whose iconoclasm has been theorized as a break with past cultural forms, evidenced most notably in its 1922 Week of Modern Art.³⁶ This book seeks to challenge the limited range of this conventional focus by exploring how film manifested the politics of modernity more broadly throughout Brazilian society and culture. I place *modernismo*'s challenge to the official rhetoric of progress in dialogue with and as part of vernacular articulations of the Republic's progressive project evidenced in cinematic production. In doing so I seek to relocate the very notion of an aesthetic of modernity, as one that pertains not solely to artistic institutions but also to everyday culture. As I show, the cinema, as a product and symbol of Republican modernity, did more than represent and embody official development; it also exemplified the restructuring of everyday society, which started to visualize the possibility and promise of what Dilip Gaonkar calls "alternative modernities".³⁷

Like Canclini and Schwarz, Gaonkar and other scholars have worked to dislodge the genealogy of modernity by delineating developments beyond the Euro-American world, which vary according to their social and geopolitical locations but are nevertheless configured along the axis of global capitalism and postcoloniality.³⁸ In addition to opening "the modern" up to the wider world, such scholarship has foregrounded how the adversary culture associated with high modernism was articulated in different cultural practices around the world, from artistic experimentations to vernacular forms. In Brazil too, high and popular cultural practices registered, responded to, and reflected upon the process of change under way in the country. In doing so they often questioned the Republic's project and revealed other narratives of modernity. These alternative modernities remind us that the spectacular mediations of foreign ideologies in Brazil did not cohere into a homogeneous totality but revealed different domestic configurations, confounding, in the process, any simple bifurcation of the local and the global. Brazil's early cinematic landscape demonstrated this varied articulation of modernity as it displayed sights that reflected alternative experiences and interpretations of hegemonic visions of progress.

"EARLY CINEMA" IN BRAZIL

In its historiographic focus on the implementation and development of cinema in Brazil, this book draws on and intersects with recent Euro-American scholarship

on the symbiotic relationship between film and modernity, which has been central to what is now referred to as the field of early cinema. This field of study has revised the traditional bias toward narrative economy and the tendency to mark the initial years of cinema as primitive. More than a period term, *early cinema* functions as a critical category, one that has been accorded more significance and attention ever since the 1978 annual conference of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) held in Brighton in 1978. It refers primarily to films and also media intertexts, industry and market, between 1895 and 1917, after which classical narrative cinema and the industrial mode came to be received and perceived as the dominant mode of filmmaking. In early cinema studies, then, 1917 is seen as marking a definitive break from previous distinctive aesthetic forms, which were predicated not on storytelling but on “presenting and representing the world and lived experience.”³⁹ As Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra note, however, this period marker and its uncritical adoption can “limit rather than expand new film historical discourse,” and they caution against the universal adoption of early cinema’s historical demarcation. Indeed, for these scholars, the paucity of documents from the silent period “must obviate attempts to specify the date and time of an allegedly wholesale shift to a systematic application of classically defined formal means.” They argue that “the absence of textual evidence demands that we remain agnostic about the efficacy of rigidified period breaks.”⁴⁰

This particular study of the development of film in Brazil troubles the period break between early cinema and cinematic classicism, questioning its historical (and universal) demarcation to reveal an alternative history of early cinema. It does so by taking seriously Alison Butler’s caveat that revisionist historiographies must engage in a “politics of location.” As she puts it, “History takes *place*.”⁴¹ In the Brazilian context, though the first film was allegedly made in 1898, attempts at forging a Brazilian film industry took place only in the 1930s. The time lag between early European and American cinema and early Brazilian cinema certainly speaks to the underdevelopment of Brazilian modernity, specifically with regard to belated technological transfer and implementation. The enjoyment of cinema, however, soon became an integral part of the everyday landscape of Republican Brazil, especially in major cities, as films presented and projected the nation’s modern image. Brazil’s civilized makeover was thus a key cinematic attraction and point of identification throughout the years of the Republic. Indeed, even narrative films made in the 1920s were careful to showcase the modern images of their stars or to include scenes and techniques (chases with rapid pans and tracking shots) that emphasized the modern technology of filmmaking itself. The broader film culture of stardom, fanzines, and discourses also stressed the medium’s modernity.

This book, therefore, explores early cinema in Brazil not as a rigidly defined aesthetic or cinematic period but as a force integral to the invention of modernity. As Charney and Schwartz have shown us, film’s connection to modernity was also

key to its development in the United States and Europe. This study thus expands the horizon of cinematic modernity, revealing the vibrancy of early cinema's international lexicon. Indeed, while early cinema studies have included rigorous inquiry into the relations between film and the broader culture of modernity, this inquiry has largely focused on European and American experiences, with few scholars examining how cinema was part of the invention of modernity beyond the United States and Europe. In its focus on Brazil, this study endeavors to address this absence. In doing so it seeks to question the bedrock assumption of early cinema studies: that the emergence of film should be examined in relation to industrialization. Situating Brazil's early film and film culture within the span from the arrival of cinema in the country to the end of the First Republic in 1930, I provide a different genealogy for the emergence and development of the cinema, one that examines how its development was governed not by industrial changes but by a political project. By looking at how film interacted in specific ways with the local exigencies of Brazil's history and politics, the book illuminates an alternative history of the relationship between cinema and modernity, exploring its foundations in a different national and cultural site.

In its focus on the early years of film in Brazil, this examination joins a new wave of scholarship that is emerging from Latin America. Key here is the work of a research group that beginning in 2002 has met monthly at the Cinemateca Brasileira in São Paulo to view and discuss Brazilian films from the institute's rich archives, focusing particularly on the country's silent movies. Led by film scholar Carlos Roberto de Souza, their gatherings have generated a new interest in and knowledge of Brazil's silent cinematic productions, which have given rise to developments like the annual *Jornada Brasileira de Cinema Silencioso* (held at the Cinemateca), seminars and conferences, and courses dealing with the earlier history of cinema in Brazil. These new undertakings have in turn produced a number of publications that examine the development of cinematic production in Brazil from varied perspectives. Notable studies include José Inácio de Melo Souza's exploration of early film in Rio and São Paulo, Eduardo Morettin's work on early actualities, and the group's own edited collection *Viagem ao cinema silencioso do Brasil*.⁴²

These Brazilian studies form part of a new trend of attending to earlier years of cinema in Latin America more generally. In the last few years, conferences such as the Congreso de la Asociación Argentina sobre Estudios de Cinema y Audiovisual, the Coloquio Interdisciplinario de Estudios de Cine y Audiovisual Latinoamericano in Montevideo, and the Encuentro Internacional de Investigación sobre Cine Chileno y Latinoamericano have increasingly featured panels dealing with Latin America's earlier film history, something that is the sole focus of the Coloquio Internacional de Cine Mudo en Iberoamérica, held annually in Mexico City. This increased critical attention has led to the publication of *Vivomatografía*, the first journal dedicated exclusively to silent film in Latin America.

These new scholarly endeavors are making small steps to fill in what López refers to as the virtual absence of scholarly work on silent cinema in Latin America. As López notes, the early years of film in Latin America are the least discussed in the country's media history.⁴³ In Brazil, this cinematic period has largely been overshadowed by later cinematic events, its significance, in particular, eclipsed by the emergence of the avant-garde film movement of the 1950s and '60s, *Cinema Novo*. Study of the period has additionally been made difficult by the lack of textual material available—most of the films produced then have disappeared, victims of the ravages of time and fires and the official neglect of preservation. Examinations of these years of cinema have therefore been limited to a small number of extant movies or have focused on unearthing overlooked archival information in order to piece together a more comprehensive prehistory for the advent of national film production in the 1950s, something I elaborate on in chapter 1 of this book. In fact, until the emergence of the recent studies noted above, most of the work dealing with the earlier history of film in Brazil was part of and integrated into broader historical accounts of the country's cinematic production, with subsequent scholarly concerns often informing the viewpoint and method of analysis. Recent work in Brazil by Morettin and others has thus sought to correct these tendencies. This book contributes to that endeavor by examining the implantation and development of film in Brazil before 1930. While other recent studies of early Brazilian film have zoomed in on particular geographical areas or genres, my study zooms out to track film's relationship to a broader topos, locating film's initial years in Brazil within the context of its arrival and elaboration, that is, within the transformative period of the First Republic. In doing so it looks specifically at how the medium's development was caught up in dominant sociopolitical discourses, debates, and concerns that aimed to transform the country into a modern nation. In this era and its discussions, I argue, the foundations of a Brazilian cinema are to be located.

The historical narrative of the book starts with the arrival of the cinema in Rio de Janeiro during the late nineteenth century and explores how its development in the city was closely tied to a makeover of what was then Brazil's capital city, which intended to transform it into a tropical version of Paris. Progressing through chapters that analyze ethnographic films made in the Amazon in the 1910s, part of a wider campaign to map and to civilize Brazil's hinterlands and its indigenous peoples, and the impact of Hollywood on Brazilian film and film culture in the 1920s, the study ends in the late 1920s with the production of experimental films by iconoclastic filmmakers who were attuned to and strongly influenced by European avant-garde movements. Their translation of international experiments with film form into a Brazilian setting illuminates the key aspect of the cinema's invention of modernity in Brazil: from the start it was a global, intertextual experience, addressing models from abroad according to local codes of reception. Key here was the negotiation of cinema's modernity with traditional structures and privileges,

especially with regard to questions of race, gender, and class. This process of translation, hybridization, and reconfiguration of foreign (and not just American) as well as indigenous discourses on modernity lies at the heart of *Foundational Films* and its examination of early Brazilian cinema and cinematic practices and cultures. Cumulatively, the book draws on archival work and close reading to chart distinct ways in which the cinema created new imaginaries, cinematic and national, for Brazil and Brazilians and to explore the tensions that often arose from this. One theme of the book is to take seriously the context of reception, notably looking at intellectual and journalistic discussions regarding film and stressing how the extratextual and paratextual illuminate ways in which cinema produced and negotiated the invention of modernity in Brazil. This approach supports Andrew Higson's recommendation that the parameters of national cinema should be drawn at the site of reception as well as production.⁴⁴ Taking up his call for a more expansive definition of national cinema, this book focuses on production and also exhibition practices and fan culture.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book thus examines the historically specific culture of early cinema in Brazil as it intersected with and at times diverged from the social and political context of the modernizing First Republic and its engagement with the world at large. Aiming to illuminate some key aspects of the links between film and Republican modernity, the book, in a cinematographic manner, produces long takes and close-ups on four key topoi in the cinematic landscape of Brazil's Republic. In Part I, "Locating the Belle Epoque of Brazilian Cinema," I examine and revise an era of film production and reception, roughly the years 1906–12, prior to Hollywood's arrival in Brazil and dominance of the domestic market. Brazilian film critics and historiographers have theorized these years as a golden age of Brazilian cinema, a brief period when domestic production was unhampered by what Ana López has called the pressure to face up to Hollywood.⁴⁵ In chapter 1 I examine the utopian dimensions of these theoretical approaches and elaborate a topoanalytical approach to the belle époque's cinematic history, drawing on and contributing to discussions concerning the homologous relationship between early cinema and urban space. Chapter 2 maps out how the introduction and development of film were part of a project of urban transformation that took place in the country's then capital, Rio de Janeiro, at the start of the twentieth century, and aimed to transform the city into a modern global capital modeled on Haussmann's Paris. Analyzing early actuality films and patterns of spectatorship, the chapter examines how the foreign medium's arrival was inscribed and implicated in the city's transformation, helping to chart and project an ideal modern image. In chapter 3, I unearth different aspects of cinema's links to Rio's re-formation. Looking at how films and film

culture keyed into popular cultural forms, I outline ways in which some early movies problematized the contours of the new city in cinematic narratives that countered Rio's official map of modernity. Together, the three chapters in this opening part of the book thus chart a new cultural and geographical topography of the early development of the cinema and its intimate relations with Rio, one that, given the absence of extant texts, I trace through intercultural, intertextual, and intermedial connections, looking at films' connections with vaudeville theater, political-satirical magazines, maps, music, carnival, and the illustrated press.

Part II, "Hollywood Revisions," focuses on the consolidation of North American cinema in Brazil, exploring ways in which magazines aided its hegemonic presence in the country. Key here was Brazil's first magazine dedicated exclusively to film, *Cinearte*, which proudly declared itself the natural intermediary between Brazilian spectators and Hollywood producers. At the same time, however, the publication was fiercely patriotic, ardently defending and promoting national film production. In chapter 4, I examine ways in which *Cinearte* disseminated American films and fan culture, which addressed Brazilian audiences, largely conceived of as female, as part of a modern audience of consumers. The magazine's writers became important interlocutors between the US film industry and the domestic consumer, at once providing instruction in the practices of fandom and offering a connection to Hollywood from a Brazilian perspective. I show how *Cinearte*'s writers mobilized female desires through fandom and channeled them to promote domestic movies, as part of a project to forge a national cinema. At the same time the writers downplayed modern depictions of sex roles, especially of women, in order to cater to traditional patriarchal structures still present in Brazil. In chapter 5, I show how this modulation of modernity fed its way into Humberto Mauro's 1927 film *Tesouro perdido* (Lost treasure), an adaptation of Henry King's 1921 movie *Tol'able David*. My close analysis illuminates differences between the Brazilian film and its North American model, especially in terms of race, which, I argue, reveal an allegiance to Brazilian society's patriarchal contours.

The close bonds between cinema and the positivist discourse of order and progress are explicitly brought to light in Part III, "The Rondon Commission: Producing New Visions of the Amazon," which examines the visual archive of what was known as the Rondon Commission. Beginning in 1907, the military officer Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon was charged with a massive undertaking: the building of telegraph lines connecting the Amazon region and its indigenous peoples with coastal cities. This task of stringing the nation together by telegraph was aimed at forging a unified community of "Brazilians" in the new Republic. Photography and film were part of this political endeavor, for visual technology was used to consolidate and expand the state's order and progress in the tropical backlands. In chapter 6 I examine the Rondon Commission's visual archive, looking at how film and photography together articulated and responded to the Republic's

“techno-politics,” defined by Timothy Mitchell as an operation of political rule via the technological workings of infrastructures.⁴⁶ While noting how photography and film were part of the same techno-material as the telegraph, in chapter 7 I go on to explore how the commission, and in particular its filmmaker Luiz Thomaz Reis, exploited the specific lexicon of film, its moving images, in particular ways, in its endeavor to chart unknown lands and peoples. In doing so I foreground how film’s distinctive syntax reveals what Todd Diacon calls the discursive fragility of the commission and its campaign to consolidate a national territory.⁴⁷

Part IV of the book, “Modernism and the Movies,” delves into the discursive fragilities in the Republic’s progressive narrative by examining avant-garde adoptions of the medium. Key here are new debates regarding film language that developed in postwar France, which rethought the nature and function of the movies away from Hollywood’s dominant narrative model and began to seriously consider its formal systems. In this part of the book I look at how these discussions played a decisive role in reconfiguring the medium and its use in Brazil and laid foundations for avant-garde experimentations with film. Chapter 8 explores how, influenced by foreign discussions regarding film form, avant-garde writers belonging to the Brazilian modernist movement deployed cinematic techniques, like montage and simultaneism, in their literary works. This cinematic deployment, I argue, became part of the movement’s critical nationalism, which saw *modernista* writers question the hegemonic narrative of modernity imported from Europe to produce what Fernando Rosenberg calls a new geopolitics.⁴⁸ This departure from the progressive model of modernity is explored in chapter 9, which analyzes the “cine-poetry” of Mário Peixoto’s experimental film *Limite* (1930). In its filmic lyricism, *Limite*, I argue, rejects and refuses the projection of a national modernity and instead registers an ontological and epistemological crisis in Brazil’s ideology of modernity. If Peixoto’s film articulated a refusal of the dominant narrative of progress, I show how this was not universal to the experimental films made in Brazil during this period. Key here is the city-symphony film *São Paulo, A sinfonia da metrópole*, discussed in chapter 10. Made in 1929 by Hungarian immigrants Adalberto Kemeny and Rodolfo Lustig, the São Paulo film draws self-consciously on international avant-garde “city symphony” films like Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand’s *Manhattan* (1921), Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), and Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Der Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927), which focus on the power and excitement of cities. In examining the Brazilian film’s engagement with and adoption of the experimental genre, I show how it provides a triumphalist image of São Paulo as a progressive industrial center in a project that ultimately coheres with official discourses of modernity, rather than critiquing them.

Together the four parts of the book illuminate some spaces in which the cinema was introduced and developed in Brazil, looking at how film was bound up with discourses and debates on the Republic’s project of modernity and how it sought

to articulate its own definitions of the country's modernity. This is by no means a complete map of early Brazilian cinema, and the book does not provide an exhaustive panorama of the country's filmmaking and film culture before the 1930s. Rather, it focuses on some of the roots of cinema's inception and growth in Brazil. Exploring what João do Rio in 1909 referred to as film's embodiment of the modern age, I reveal how the medium was framed by and contributed to the formation of new national and nationalistic concerns. It is in the intersection of the cinema and the national politics of modernity that I explore early cinema in Brazil. Let us now begin this cinematic cartography of Brazil's foundational films.