

The new cinema of spectacle as business strategy. An analysis of consumption trends in theatrical cinema

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Abstract

In Argentina, we have just achieved ten years of the application of a screen quota and continuity media, two policies that regulate film exhibition and which intended to protect national cinema. In this article, we perform an analysis of the evolution of por: the consumption of films in movie theaters, in the light of the new regulation and of a series of changes that took place in the period. This analysis is based on quantitative and qualitative data from different sources, which allow us to delineate a panorama of the patterns of cinema-going. According to the analyzed data, movie theater is being split into two different territories: on the one hand, there are films “to be seen at the cinema”, and on the other hand, there are films “to be seen at home”. Argentinian cinema is mainly falling into the second category, with the exception of a limited set of films. And a special sector of spectators that support Argentinian cinema explicitly. Finally, the box office of the cinemas is sustained principally on the good performance of children movies, sequels, 3D and films with high visual impact.

Key words: Cinema. Spectators. Movie theaters. Digitalization. Consumption.

Introduction

In Argentina, it has been a decade since regulations on film exhibition were implemented (2004-2014). The aim of the screen quota and film attendance minimum was to protect Argentine films, ensuring their theatrical release at local theaters and keeping them in theaters as long as certain requirements were met¹. In keeping with these policies, a certain number of Argentine films are released in theaters each month and if weekly viewership remains at a given level, the theater is required to continue showing the film the following week. With these regulations, INCAA sought to increase the exhibition venues for Argentine films and reduce the prevalence of foreign films showing at commercial venues.

¹ On Jun 28, 2004 Argentina’s national film institute INCAA, Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales, passed Resolution No. 2016. This established a screen quota (as stipulated in Law 17,741) requiring theater owners to release at least one Argentine film per screen each quarter. The film attendance minimum establishes that if a certain theater occupancy rate is reached for an Argentine film at the end of the movie week, the theater must continue showing the film the following week. This measure was revised and modified by Resolution 1582/2006.

Fundamentally, the aim was to place certain limits on the alliances between the Hollywood majors and large multiplexes.

This seems like a good time to evaluate what these policies have achieved and to what extent – if any – they have resonated with spectators. Over the course of the decade, film has undergone myriad changes, including the transition to digital cinematography and digital projection systems at commercial theaters; new strategies for film production, distribution and exhibition; the rise of new spectacle cinema focused on visual enthrallment; a certain lull in the enthusiasm surrounding *nuevo cine argentino*²; the appearance of new generations of directors; the consolidation of Argentina's film industry; a new local star system; and others.

In this article, I propose to explore film reception in Argentina in light of the new film exhibition regulations. My work is based on the analysis of a set of quantitative and qualitative data that allows us to explore new movie consumption trends. First, I use the annual reports and statistics published by Argentina's national film institute, INCAA (Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales), which provides box office information that allows me to characterize moviegoers. Second, I draw on the *Encuesta Nacional de Consumos Culturales y Entorno Digital* (National Survey of Cultural Consumption and the Digital Environment, 2013) conducted by Argentina's Department of Culture to sketch the principal trends in movie consumption habits in Argentina, focusing primarily on social practices. To supplement the quantitative data and incorporate the moviegoers' own perspectives of their practices, I have incorporated a series of qualitative interviews conducted over the past three years with fifty-two urban dwellers ages sixteen to twenty-three from different socioeconomic backgrounds³.

In the first section of this article, I present a brief overview of the changes in-theater cinema has experienced over the past few decades. In the second section, I present a review of the literature on film reception in Argentina, presenting the main hypotheses on changes in spectator habits. Movie consumption trends in theaters are the topic of the third section, where I bring in the quantitative data from the annual reports and my own surveys. In the fourth section, I explore the perspectives of the moviegoers and their motivations, using qualitative interviews that I conducted to contextualize the personal choices of spectators. Finally, in the conclusions I reflect on in-theater cinema and on the need to incorporate the topic of informal film circulation to both research agendas and public policy discussions.

² Closely associated with the Argentine social and economic crisis that erupted at the beginning of the new century, *nuevo cine argentino* [new Argentine film] was the term used to refer to several low-budget films by young directors whose themes included urban violence, the unraveling of social ties, working class characters and exclusion.

³ Interviewees included young people from low-income families, with parents who do unskilled labor, suffer from job insecurity or are unemployed; middle class youth, with parents working in skilled trades; and upper-middle class youth, whose parents were professionals or in some cases, business entrepreneurs.

Film, constantly reinvented

Movie-going is one of the cultural practices that has changed the most in the past decades due to technological innovations and to theater owners' strategies to preserve profit margins in a complex scenario. A brief historic overview will reveal how moviegoer practices have changed: moviegoers returned to theaters after abandoning them for a time, but they incorporated new ways of approaching film texts in the interim. On more than one occasion, movie theaters have seemed in danger of extinction, but they have flexibly adapted to come up with new appealing ways of watching film collectively. These reinventions of the film experience occurred, as we will see, in a close collaboration with Hollywood's major studios.

Movie-going was by and large the only way to see films for most of the twentieth century. Television appeared in the mid-1950s, but it didn't become a place for film until the 1980s, when video technology allowed movies to be watched at home for the first time. Video technology introduced a more radical change, as spectators could choose their movie at a video rental store and then see it at home, individualizing the time and the place for cinema. As cable TV channels and companies began to multiply, households were treated to an impressive selection of movies.

These new forms of accessing film represented competition for movie theaters, which witnessed a drop in audiences towards the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. Many theaters closed and were renovated for other purposes, in what appeared to be the end of the in-theater film experience. However, towards the mid-1990s, international movie theater chains began to open new kinds of theaters in Argentina and worldwide. The multiplex, which housed many small theaters outfitted with new technology at a single location, thus reinvented in-theater cinema through a novel format. These theaters provide a movie watching experience that is safer, more comfortable and more appealing.

The most recent changes in film access can be attributed to the widespread use of computers and the Internet, which facilitate and significantly reduce the cost of copying audiovisual contents and enable digital circulation; this has led to myriad forms of piracy and the informal circulation of films (and other audiovisual contents). Thus, movie consumption has multiplied, becoming an individualized but also a ubiquitous practice. The profits of the film industry, which came out against piracy and promoted a series of measures to fight against it, were jeopardized in the process. At the same time, however, the industry embarked upon its own technological renovations, abandoning film to ultimately produce, distribute and exhibit digital images.

Towards the mid-2000s, after the majors struck an agreement on digital exhibition formats, mass renovations began at movie theaters, which had to "migrate" to digital

projection systems. Movie theaters and producers jointly reintroduced 3-D, using special effects and digital technology to create a spectacle that could only be appreciated in theaters with these ultramodern systems. A novel type of viewing that is available both legally and illegally, streaming⁴, has also transformed movie consumption. As a result of all of these changes, movie-going is no longer the exclusive or even the predominant form of movie consumption.

In order to understand cinema today, then, it is necessary to focus on other types of movie consumption outside theaters, as proposed in certain books that have laid out the current agenda within Film Studies⁵. I concur that it is essential to learn more about movie consumption practices outside of theaters in order to incorporate such practices to studies on both film and cultural consumption.⁶ However, for a series of reasons I believe that film distribution and reception in theaters continue to be important research topics. First, although other myriad forms of watching movies have appeared, these have not replaced movie-going, which has been reinvented as both a ritual and as a recreational activity. Second, theatrical releases serve as the point of entry to the unauthorized circulation of films (though not the only one, as we shall see) since blockbusters are the films that most frequently circulate via bootleg copies or Internet downloads. Another compelling reason for such research is that INCAA policies are currently focused on movies in theaters, since a theatrical release is required in order for directors to receive the filmmaking subsidies the institute provides. Finally, in terms of social relevance, “institutional” film, as Lobato calls it, continues to be a highly profitable industry, creating jobs and attracting millions of spectators across Argentina.

Studies on film audiences in Argentina

Studies on film distribution and reception are especially important today in order to comprehend a highly dynamic context. However, film reception has received little attention in scholarly research in Argentina and it has been quite difficult to access disaggregated data on spectators and their consumption. This has changed in recent years, however, as diverse institutions and research programs have prioritized the study of film reception, making better data available for investigators.

⁴ Streaming is the digital distribution of multimedia through a network of computers connected via Internet. YouTube, for example, is a streaming system. If an event is broadcasted live, the term used to refer to the broadcast is live streaming. Streaming requires a high-speed Internet connection.

⁵ In *Shadow Economies of Cinema* (2012), Ramón Lobato traces the informal circulation of film through piracy, bootleg copies and video, placing these “shadow economies” at the center of Film Studies. In a similar way, the film studies anthology by Iordanova and Cunningham (2012) presents essays and case studies on film and online exhibition.

⁶ In a recent work, I explored movie consumption outside theaters (Moguillansky, 2016).

In academia, Ana Wortman (2008) took a sociological approach to changes in movie consumption practices over the past decades in Argentina, focusing particularly on the middle classes. Wortman notes that film has a historic importance among the Argentine middle classes, but as a result of the neoliberal policies of the 1990s, the country's social demographics were increasingly divided between poor and rich – and ever since, the rich have been the principal moviegoers. As film has gradually veered into the private, intimate sphere of the household, its social meaning has shifted as well. Artemio Abba (2002) approaches film from the perspective of economic and cultural geography to show how movie theaters are highly concentrated in the urban spaces of the upper-middle classes of Buenos Aires. My own work in the sociology of culture and in the political economy of film has yielded insight on the increasing elitism surrounding in-theater movie consumption (MOGUILLANSKY, 2007) and on how the joint strategies of major studios and theater owners have diminished cultural diversity on the big screen (MOGUILLANSKY, 2008, 2011). Emiliano Torterola (2009, 2010) has also explored this issue, noting that although in-theater movie consumption has become more elitist, access to films has also expanded thanks to broadcast networks and cable TV.

The team José Borello leads at the UNGS (Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento) has conducted a movie consumption survey among university studies, revealing correlations between a student's socioeconomic status/family structure (as explicative variables) and his/her consumer tastes and habits (GONZÁLEZ, 2012; QUINTAR Y BORELLO, 2014). Another researcher, Santiago Marino (2014), has analyzed public film policies in relation to distribution, exhibition and consumption, including the Audiovisual Communication Services Act. Theoretically, the Act should increase the amount of Argentine film shown on television, but as Marino shows, non-compliance, ineffective enforcement and trade alliances have all undermined Argentine productions. Finally, some scholars have taken a bold step towards analyzing how film circulates at alternative screening venues. The work by Christian Dodaro, Santiago Marino and María Graciela Rodríguez (2007), for example, explores alternative distribution strategies and informal screening venues for documentary film in Argentina's post-2001 crisis, while De La Puente and Russo (2007) analyzed screening practices in relation to militant cinema.

In this way, different contemporary scholars are drafting a new agenda for Film Studies where film reception and the conditions for film circulation are two critical issues; a third important consideration is film outside theaters, on other types of screens. In this regard, Eduardo Russo (2016) explores the diverse ways in which spectators embody their relationship to films, suggesting that “new spectator configurations” challenge the market order, questioning its rules and multiplying alternatives. In keeping with the idea that today's media landscape is characterized by “four screens” – the big screen, the television screen,

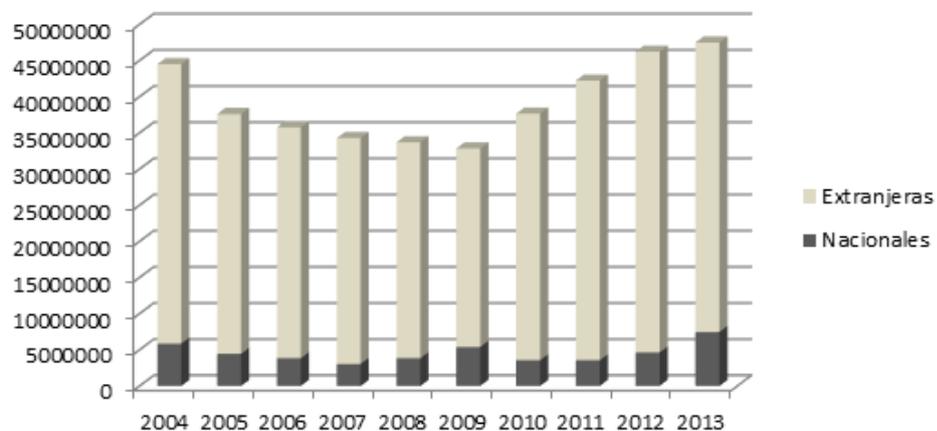
and the computer and cell phone screens (ARTOPOULOS, 2011) – the author suggests that the secret lies not in distinguishing among them but in evaluating the interactions and interplays between them.

In terms of statistics on these phenomena, just a few years ago all data on film consumption was produced by private consultants, primarily marketing firms, and sold at a high cost, which represented an enormous problem for researchers. Since 2009, however, INCAA has been publishing annual reports with detailed information on film production, distribution and exhibition in Argentina. The Sindicato de la Industria Cinematográfica, Animación, Publicidad y Medios Audiovisuales (Union of the Cinematographic Industry, Animation, Advertising and Audiovisual Media, or SICA-APMA) has been releasing its own publications with sector data for many years, and online since 2008. Finally, the Sistema de Información Cultural de la Argentina (Cultural Information System of Argentina, or SInCA) has conducted several national surveys on cultural consumption and its data is widely distributed. The recent availability of information has created a new problem, however, as the data from different sources is prone to discrepancies.

Movie theater spectators

In this section, I will describe the principal trends of in-theater movie consumption using data from the annual reports of the INCAA, the ENCCED 2013 and the periodic SInCA reports. Together, these sources allow me to analyze the choices spectators make in theaters, including what type of theater and movies they prefer.

Chart 1 – Spectators of Argentine vs. Foreign Films (2004-2013)



Source: Adapted from SICA and INCAA data

From a historical perspective, ticket sales are currently low across Argentina, though they have risen slightly in recent years. According to INCAA data (2009), the box office slump continued until 2009 – a year with unusually low movie theater attendance due to swine flu⁷ – but began rising the following year. In 2009, 33,628,162 movie tickets were sold; in 2010, sales rose 15% to 38,648,297. The following year, 2011, brought another 11.5% rise over the previous year’s sales (43,312,416 tickets); in 2012, tickets sales rose an addition 9.8%, reaching 47,312,416 tickets, and in 2013, 48,339,739, a rise over the previous year, albeit just 2.2% (INCAA, 2013). The boom ended in 2014, when ticket sales fell by 6.6% and 45,648,799 tickets were sold (INCAA, 2014).

The return to theaters can be attributed to several factors, including the cost of movie tickets, which remain relatively cheap in comparison to other outings or recreational activities in a context of rising inflation. Another possible explanation is the way Hollywood and multiplexes have reinvented in-theater film as a visual and technological spectacle. In this regard, the majors increasingly concentrate their production efforts on three different but complementary types of films: i) films with a high visual impact; ii) films with prequels and sequels, that is, film series that aim to replicate a successful narrative formula; and iii) films that target children and/or teenage audiences. The first type of film – which involves digitally produced images, special effects and a three-dimensional image to create a “new spectacle cinema” (DARLEY, 2000) – is closely related to the needs of multiplexes, as it yields a film that is clearly easier to appreciate in a modern movie theater than on one’s home screens.

In the case of Argentina, moviegoers increasingly opt for films that provide a momentous visual spectacle. If we observe the lists of the five highest grossing films in Argentina in a five-year period (2009-2013), we see that Hollywood films are vastly predominant, especially children’s films, film series and movies whose primary appeal is visual enthrallment. The following table lists these films, which represent around 30% of movie theater box office grosses in their respective years.

⁷ The swine flu scare occurred during winter break, the high season in theater attendance across Argentina. Distributors opted to postpone the release of the most awaited films due to the abrupt drop in spectators (around 30%). In some cities, movie theaters closed temporarily to avoid contagion.

Table 1 – Top Five Highest Grossing Films in Argentina

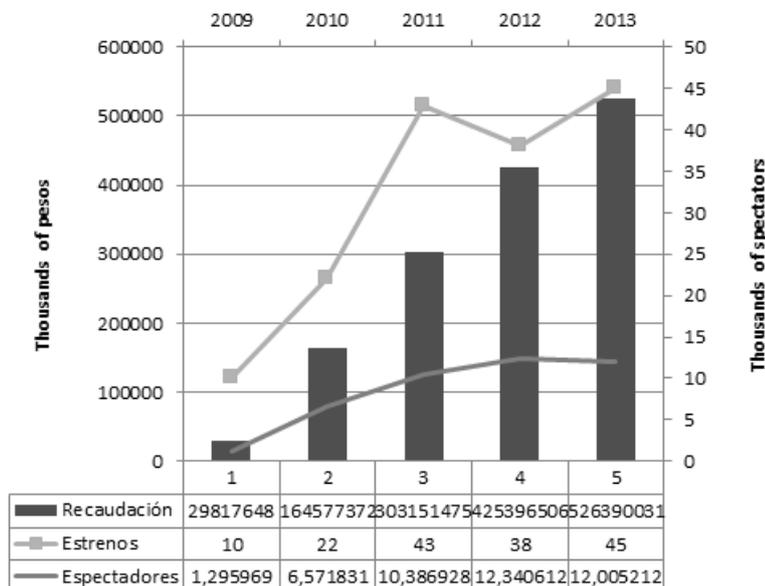
2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
1. <i>El secreto de sus ojos</i> [<i>The Secret in Their Eyes</i>] 2. <i>Ice Age 3</i> 3. <i>Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince</i> 4. <i>Angels and Demons</i> 5. <i>2012</i>	1. <i>Toy Story 3</i> 2. <i>Avatar</i> 3. <i>Shrek Forever After</i> 4. <i>Alice in Wonderland</i> 5. <i>Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (Part 1)</i>	1. <i>Cars 2</i> 2. <i>Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides</i> 3. <i>Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (Part 2)</i> 4. <i>Tangled</i> 5. <i>Rio</i>	1. <i>Ice Age 4</i> 2. <i>Madagascar 3</i> 3. <i>The Avengers</i> 4. <i>The Dark Knight Rises</i> 5. <i>Brave</i>	1. <i>Monsters University</i> 2. <i>Despicable Me 2</i> 3. <i>Fast & Furious 6</i> 4. <i>Metegol</i> [<i>Underdogs</i>] 5. <i>Iron Man 3</i>

Source: Adapted from INCAA annual reports

If we focus on the top grossing movies of each of these five years, the Argentine film *El secreto de sus ojos*, directed by Juan Campanella, is a notable exception from the overall trend. The film, which starred local celebrities Ricardo Darín and Guillermo Francella, won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. The other films are mostly for children, the majority filmed either in 3-D or using digital animation technology, or with special effects that create an impressive visual spectacle, like *Avatar* or *Fast & Furious 6*. Three-dimensional films captured approximately 30% of box office sales in these years and the return of spectators to theaters coincides with the rise in 3-D features.

Three-dimensional movies became popular in 2009 and have been on the rise ever since, as can be seen on Graph No. 2. Between 2009 and 2013, the number of 3-D releases skyrocketed, though it dropped slightly in 2012. Spectators have increasingly opted for 3-D and most importantly, the box office grosses of 3-D films have risen. In the past few years, the vast majority of blockbusters were screened in 3-D. In 2012, fewer spectators opted for 3-D films; this could indicate that the novelty is wearing off.

Graph 2 – Spectators, Releases and Box Office Grosses of 3-D Films in Argentina (2009-2013)



Source: Adapted from INCAA annual reports

Ticket sales in Argentina peak in July and August, the months that coincide with winter break. The vast majority of theaters screen children’s films, which are also predominantly exhibited in 3-D, to attract children and youth off from school.

On the other hand, spectators overwhelmingly choose foreign films, which represent 85% of all tickets sold. The vast majority of these foreign films are made in the USA and almost invariably produced by the majors. Argentine film attracts 15% of spectators on average, with significant fluctuations from year to year; a good year depends on the release of an Argentine “blockbuster.” Although there are no hard and fast rules for success, the Argentine films that tend to attract local audiences star Ricardo Darín, Adrián Suar or Guillermo Francella, the three most renowned actors in the country’s current star system. During the past few years, the Argentine films that surpassed a half million spectators almost inevitably starred one of these three⁸. Yet another factor that affected the success of local films is TV advertising, which is generally reserved for movies produced by one of Argentina’s multimedia conglomerates.

The vast majority of Argentine moviegoers choose modern multiplexes (87.5%) which offer more sophisticated viewing experiences, surround sound, wide screens and

⁸ *El misterio de la felicidad* [The Mystery of Happiness], *Relatos salvajes* [Wild Tales], *Corazón de león* [Lion Heart], *Dos más dos* [2 + 2], *Elefante blanco* [White Elephant], *¡Atraco!* [Hold Up!], *Un cuento chino* [Chinese Take-Out], *Igualita a mí* [Just Like Me], *Carancho* [The Vulture], *El secreto de sus ojos*. The only exceptions were *Metegol*, (an animated film, no on-screen actors) and *Bañeros 4: los rompeolas* [no international title].

comfortable seating. Movie consumption is concentrated in the city of Buenos Aires, Greater Buenos Aires, and the cities of Córdoba and Santa Fe, where 80% of tickets are sold (INCAA, 2013). In spite of the fact that their ticket prices are lower, alternative exhibition venues do not attract as many spectators.

Now, one important trend to consider is that according to the data analyzed, most Argentines do not go to the movies. According to the SInCA survey, 60% of those interviewed do not go to the movies, and 33% said they used to go to the movies but no longer do. Movie-going varies considerably according to social class, cultural capital and the family situation of the subjects, as noted by Borello and Quintar (2014), who found that people with more cultural capital are more likely to go to the movies. In the next section, we will explore movie-going among young people from different socioeconomic backgrounds through qualitative interviews conducted over the past few years.

The social logic behind movie-going

One of the principal reasons that a percentage of the population does not go to the movies is a lack of infrastructure. In many towns across the country – especially those with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants – there are no movie theaters, making it impossible for inhabitants to access this cultural product. Through the circuit of INCAA centers, an attempt has been made to remedy this by opening state-run movie theaters in small towns. However, as can be seen on Figure 1, there are still many locations across the country the circuit has not reached. In addition, the INCAA centers do not represent a true alternative to commercial cinemas since almost all screen exclusively Argentine films in spite of moviegoers' overwhelming preference for Hollywood features. It is interesting to note that some of the INCAA centers have recently allowed more flexible programming and added a few mainstream movies to their listings; this has attracted more audiences not only to these films, but to the Argentine movies showing as well⁹.

According to the interviews I conducted with young people from low-income groups, movie-going is not a common practice. In their case, this is not a question of infrastructure, since I interviewed young people living in urban areas with movie theaters relatively close by. However, it became clear that for these young people, movie-going is not included within their universe of recreational/leisure experiences. Many have never been to a movie theater or seen a film on the big screen, which was the predominant and often only way to view films just a few decades ago.

⁹ I would like to thank Santiago Marino for bringing this data to my attention.

Some of the lower-income youth I interviewed said that they had been to the movies only a few times as kids; movie-going was a rare outing with either family or friends. For these young people, a movie ticket was expensive, though not inaccessible, and going to the movie also meant a trip outside their neighborhood. On the other hand, given that young people access films daily in other ways (mainly on television and bootleg DVDs), they simply don't have any need to go to the movies.

Movie-going is part of the universe of cultural consumption among middle and upper-middle class youth, but is far from a common outing. These young people generally go to the movies two or three times a year to see a movie they are especially interested in or because their family or a group of friends has decided to go. Several of the young people I interviewed noted that they go to the movies less and less, partly because of the ticket cost and other associated costs (transport, food and beverage). However, the top reason for not going to the movies was that they could stay in to watch the films on high quality home entertainment systems while enjoying all the comforts associated with the home.

Thus, movie consumption habits among middle and upper-middle class youth include more frequent movie-going than students from low-income families, who never (or almost never) go to the movies. When young people do go to the movies, they choose multiplexes operated by major chains like Cinemark or Hoyts. In-theater movie consumption is configured as an outing all its own, which includes meeting up with friends or going with a boyfriend/girlfriend, in a sort of ritual that goes beyond the specific movie they are going to see. Yet in general the decision to go to the movies is associated with the type of movie they want to see and young people generally prefer Hollywood films, especially major productions with special effects that are easier to appreciate on the big screen.

When I am going to see a movie with a lot of special effects, a movie that is visually stunning like *Avatar* or *Gravity*, I think you miss out if you watch it at home. I prefer to see movies like these at a nice theater where I know I am



Figure 1 – Distribution of privately owned theaters (white circles) and INCAA venues (dark circles) in Argentina (Source: SINCA)

going to get the most out of it. Sometimes I check to see if the movie's being shown in 3-D. I usually go to the Hoyts theater at the Abasto mall. But for other films that don't have any of that, I'd rather just watch them at home. (Gonzalo, age 25, psychology student)

Other young people interviewed agreed that some films need to be screened in a certain way in order to “get the most” out of their visual effects. Among such films, young people mentioned *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009), *Harry Potter* and *Toy Story* (different films from both series), and *Gravity* (Cuarón, 2012). In all cases, these blockbusters with million-dollar budgets fundamentally engage spectators' fascination with the visual spectacle that is created through digital technology and special effects. In his book *Visual Digital Culture: Surface Play and Spectacle in New Media Genres* (2000), Andre Darley characterized these films as “new spectacle cinema”, where the visual becomes so predominant that the narrative dimension or plot of the film becomes secondary. In this regard, the increasingly hegemonic role of special effects and 3-D in Hollywood films is a strategy aimed at keeping audiences – whose numbers had been dropping – in theaters, making it advantageous to both the majors and to theater owners. The recent surge in the number of 3-D films released and their box office takeaway are indicative of how successful this strategy has been. In the past few years, 3-D films have captured around 25% of movie-goers (with ticket sales rising since 2009) and a good chunk of box office grosses; they are important to theater owners not only because they attract spectators but also because tickets to 3-D showings cost more¹⁰.

In other words, spectators choose to watch less exceptional films – or films with a lower budget for visual effects – at home, either on TV or on the computer. Argentine films are usually included in this lot and their value, according to the young people interviewed, is associated with showing characters and places they can culturally relate to, and plots and stories that are “familiar” to some degree.

In keeping with a broader trend, as we mentioned earlier, young people rarely go to the movies, with a few exceptions. However, it is also true and increasingly more evident that they see plenty of films, though their viewing practices vary along with the places, screens and ways they watch. It is time for Film Studies to give this phenomenon the attention it deserves in order to incorporate unofficial types of film circulation and consumption to the research agenda.

Conclusions

Cinema has been reinvented outside movie theaters as well, entering homes and becoming ubiquitous thanks to the screens on mobile devices. Thus, our times are

¹⁰ In 2013, the five highest grossing films were all screened in 3-D (*Monsters University*, *Despicable Me 2*, *Metegol*, *Fast & Furious 6*, *Iron Man 3*). That year, 3-D films captured 25% of ticket sales but 31% of box office grosses. Moviegoers who choose 3-D films pay on average AR\$44 per ticket; those who opt for foreign films pay over average AR\$35.50 and those who choose Argentine films, AR\$32.50.

characterized by a relatively low level of movie ticket sales and a boost in movie consumption in sites other than theaters. The most recent reinvention of the cinema is linked to the intensification of film as a spectacle, that is, the visual impact and special effects that are best appreciated in the theater, not in the home. This can be seen in the fact that today's blockbusters utilize digital technology, 3-D and special effects, in a phenomenon that has been dubbed "new spectacle cinema" because it appeals to the senses.

In Argentina, policies aimed at protecting Argentine film have not had a clear effect on spectator behavior. A decade after the implementation of these policies, U.S. films are still undisputed in terms of their appeal to spectators and their box office gross. More Argentine films have been released at local theaters but they have not proved successful at attracting more spectators, with the exception of a handful of films starring a few celebrated actors, produced by certain multimedia conglomerates, and advertised on television. The booming success of Hollywood films at commercial theaters can mainly be attributed to 3-D films with high visual impact, film series and children's films. There are virtually no Argentine movies of this kind, which means that the local industry cannot compete in this category.

Outside theaters, the predominant social practice in movie consumption is home viewing on television, cable TV, the DVD player and the computer. The cinematographic experience is being transformed by multiple screens and individual, ubiquitous and fragmentary viewing strategies. Both formal and informal channels are used for this consumption, which represents a challenge for Film Studies to rework both its theories and methodologies. There is a need to shift the focus away from "institutional cinema" and add alternative types of film circulation and viewing to the agenda; far from exceptional, these alternatives have become so common that they are the way most films are seen today. It is thus essential to expand the research agenda to include informal film circulation; film practices and consumption strategies in households; spectator preferences in terms of places and viewing devices; and the association of certain venues with certain types of films.

Finally, it is interesting to note that film support policies that regulate what is shown in theaters do not consider this very relevant aspect of contemporary film consumption. While for years a theatrical release has been considered a "key" that unlocks other exhibition spaces (in a sequence that moves from the theater to video to television), it is now necessary to rethink this approach. Film policies in Argentina – and more broadly, across Latin America – must respond to the new consumption trends, supporting national cinema so that it not only finds its way into theaters but also reaches the diverse screens where spectators now enjoy movies.

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