

# Intermedial relations in Mexican cinema: musical numbers and theatrical space

## Relaciones intermediales en el cine mexicano: los números musicales y el espacio teatral

### *Relações intermediárias no cinema mexicano: números musicais e espaço teatral*

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**ABSTRACT** | We will study Mexican films clips from its classic period, where intermedial links between cinema and theater spaces take place. We will highlight a blurring of boundaries between theater and cinema in the stages filmed in those movies, considering their narrative-spectacular strategies. We will select singing and/or dancing sequences where those exchanges were notable, in the films *Canto a mi tierra* (México canta, José Bohr, 1938), *Aventurera* (Alberto Gout, 1950) and *Aventura en Río* (Alberto Gout, 1953), distinguishing the specificities of this phenomenon. The objective is to determine the representation modalities adopted in the stages where those shows were displayed. The analysis will be made through a comparative methodology on staging. We will evidence a tendency to parcellation of theater space in the musical numbers. This will guide us to stand out the intermedial links between cinema and theater, alluding to the connection among media, in the context of the emergence of new technologies during the first half of 20th century.

**KEYWORDS:** intermediality; Mexican cinema; musical cinema; cabaret; spaciality.

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**RESUMEN** | Estudiaremos fragmentos de films mexicanos del período clásico, en los que se evidencian nexos intermediales entre el cine y el espacio teatral. Destacaremos una difuminación de límites entre el espacio teatral y el cinematográfico en los escenarios filmados en dichas películas, con base en sus estrategias narrativo-espectaculares. Seleccionaremos secuencias de canto o baile en las que estos intercambios se hicieron patentes, en las películas *Canto a mi tierra* (México canta, José Bohr, 1938), *Aventurera* (Alberto Gout, 1950) y *Aventura en Río* (Alberto Gout, 1953), distinguiendo las especificidades de este fenómeno. El objetivo será determinar las modalidades de representación que se adoptan en los escenarios en los que dichos espectáculos fueron desplegados. Utilizaremos una metodología comparada determinando sus procedimientos por medio del trabajo sobre la puesta en escena. Evidenciaremos una tendencia a la parcelación del espacio teatral manifiesta en los números musicales. Esto nos guiará a destacar los vínculos intermediales entre cine y teatro, aludiendo a la conexión entre medios expresivos, en el contexto de la emergencia de las nuevas tecnologías que aparecieron en la primera mitad del siglo XX.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** intermedialidad; cine mexicano; cine musical; cabaret; espacialidad.

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**RESUMO** | Estudaremos fragmentos de filmes mexicanos do período clássico, nos quais se evidenciam vínculos intermediáticos entre o cinema e o espaço teatral. Destacaremos uma dissipação de limites entre o espaço teatral e cinematográfico nos cenários gravados nesses filmes, com base nas suas estratégias de narrativa e espetáculo. Seleccionaremos sequências de canto e/ou dança em que essas trocas se notabilizem, nos filmes *Canto a mi tierra* (México canta, José Bohr, 1938), *Aventurera* (Alberto Gout, 1950) e *Aventura en Río* (Alberto Gout, 1953), distinguindo as particularidades desse fenômeno. O objetivo será determinar as modalidades de representação que são adotadas nos cenários onde são exibidos ditos espetáculos. Usaremos uma metodologia comparativa determinando seus procedimentos através do trabalho de encenação. Mostraremos uma tendência de parcelamento do espaço teatral manifestada nos números musicais. Isso nos guiará a destacar os vínculos intermediáticos entre o cinema e o teatro, aludindo à conexão entre meios expressivos, no contexto do surgimento das novas tecnologias na primeira metade do século XX.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** intermedialidade; cinema mexicano; cinema musical; cabaré; espacialidade.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper will study fragments of films from the period known as the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, which corresponds to cinematographic classicism, in which intermediate links between cinema and the theatrical space are evident. In view of the generic diversity linked to melodrama and musicals, the study will focus on musical cinema and, to a large extent, on that of rumberas, deployed between the forties and the fifties, specifically in the trajectory of the company Cinematográfica Calderón, from which the works we will study originate.

This production company's musicals are part of a defining corpus because of the support, especially if we consider that Mexico had, according to Castro-Ricalde (2014), an international impact that gave it representativeness in Latin America. The selection of Mexican films corresponds not only to the prevalence of this cinematography in markets, but also to the research framework to which this article contributes<sup>1</sup>. Although what has been studied has the potential to be applied to cinematographies such as Argentina (with its exploitation of tango music) or Brazil (with its *chanchadas*), Mexico's leadership and the scope of the Calderon's musical cinema thanks to its frequent intermediate exchanges merit this selection, as an initial approach, expandable and comparable with these other cinematographies.

Cinematográfica Calderón featured transnational casts, diffusion beyond its own borders, and employed regional musicality, encouraging exchanges in an articulation of expressive means for the reciprocal strengthening of the industries involved. We will stress that in the musicals in which theatrical or nightclub scenarios are represented, there is a blurring of boundaries between the theatrical and cinematographic space, based on the installed narrative-spectacular strategies. To determine them, we will select song or dance sequences in which these exchanges were evident, located in the films *Canto a mi tierra* (Mexico sings, José Bohr, 1938), *Aventurera* (Alberto Gout, 1950), and *Aventura en Río* (Alberto Gout, 1953) to distinguish the specificities of this phenomenon. These sequences are a sample of the ways in which intermediality was presented in Latin American cinemas of the period, manifested in three connection categories: a) the simultaneity of the theatrical stage in contrast with the syntagmatic nature of cinema; b) the displacement of theatrical space by cinematographic space, and c) the links between theatrical and cinematographic spectatorship.

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1. See project details at the end of the article.

Our objective will be to make visible these representation modalities adopted in the scenarios where such shows were performed to establish them as a methodological procedure that contributes to intermedial studies. We will start from the spaces distribution, the types of shots, the angles and camera movements, as well as their interrelation with the acoustic point of view, a vital crossroad to specify the expected conclusions: the planning of products based on strategies linked to the world of show business in its generality. With such purposes, the article will be structured in two parts: the first is a laying down of the notions of intermediality and media convergence, which will offer the conceptual framework for the understanding of spatial planning in musical numbers, along with the referential context of Latin American cinemas regarding these media crossovers. The second will be the categorization of the convergence procedures between both types of spectacular representations through the analysis of the film corpus.

#### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MEDIA CONVERGENCE AND ENTERTAINMENT BROADCASTING**

To highlight the intermediate links between cinema and theater, we will apply a theoretical approach that refers to the connection or convergence between expressive media in the context of the new technologies of the first half of the 20th century. We are referring to intermediality, which offers an understanding of the random relationships between film, theater, and music that exist in these films. Intermediality proposes that no artistic or expressive media is pure or homogeneous (Sánchez Mesa, 2012) and that it is possible to encourage a mutual enrichment based on the contributions that each media offers from its own specificity. This approach makes it possible to study the transformations in the structures of narrative and aesthetic production that these media are forced to undergo in their exchange, as well as the new behaviors of expectation that they give rise to.

If we consider that the partition and boundaries between the arts is a long-standing issue, particularly since the paradigms installed by the industrial revolution, which added the economic-social factor to the aesthetic, it is not strange that cinematography, this art linked to its essence as a technological device, has become a seat of intermediality: an expressive, industrial and artistic instrument that incorporated elements of different arts and media, namely the plastic and design arts, music and narrativity (image, sound and text). Hybrid phenomena occurred in all the arts, whenever there were events that involved the links between media and that, in their broad sense, can be both intramedia and transmedia or constitute transpolations, in the form of adaptations from one

art to another (Rajewsky, 2005). Cinema, from its technological and expressive specificity, contributed its capacity for intermediate connection, allowing, in addition to such transpositions, the combination of two or more arts and media. As Onaindia and Madedo (2013) reaffirm, even in its beginnings the cinematographic phenomenon found in other arts the allies for its development, whether it was the implementation of human and technical resources of the theater, the seriality that inspired serial novels, and the notion of narrativity, as well as the topics adhered to some genres of song such as tango or bolero, linked to the cinematographic melodrama in Latin America.

Although intermediality has a tendency to detach itself from hierarchies, even leading to a redefinition of the media involved (Cubillo Paniagua, 2013) –even more so with the growth of media convergence in the midst of the 21st century–, in the historical period we will address, we will understand the phenomenon from the exploitation of this resource by the cinema for its promotion.

The theatrical stage set in the musical numbers sometimes dissolves in its equivalence with the cinematographic space in its totality, making the former disappear momentarily under the primacy of the shots' fragmentation. This reciprocity, and the permeability of artistic discourses, is the platform for the analysis of the selected sequences. Cinema, music and theatrical scenarios will be put in dialogue, to find their combinations. Although there is a competitiveness that serves as a starting point, we understand that the interconnection of expressive media offered by classical Mexican musical cinema is an act of feedback from these industries, a mutual collaboration for the dissemination of the spectacle. This was made visible in *ranchero* melodramas, a genre exported by musical figures such as Tito Guízar, Jorge Negrete, Pedro Infante, Antonio Aguilar or Miguel Aceves Mejía. However, it found its alternative in cabaret or rumba movies, largely launched by the Calderón family, with a wide diffusion of popular music through song and dance artists, both national (Pedro Vargas, Agustín Lara) and international (Dámaso Pérez Prado, Ninón Sevilla, María Antonieta Pons, Los Ángeles del Infierno).

Including musical figures from Mexico and other latitudes demonstrated an attempt to connect the film, theater and radio industries as a marketing tactic for the region's movie theaters in their period of expansion, which took advantage of the popularity of music as a vehicle for self-dissemination. Radio sets, according to de Souza Ferreira (2003), were since the 30s the main acquisition of households in Brazil, making radio a growing means of mass communication. In Mexico, radio transmissions, with their inauguration in 1921 and their advance in the following decade, also marked a new era, coinciding with the transition to sound

movies. This made it possible to incorporate in movie theaters the figures that delighted radio listeners, being able to see them, and even do it up close, due to the facilities of short shots, absent in theatrical stages. There has been a feedback, as Vargas Arana states when he emphasizes that actors of silent films came to the radio room, as did directors and writers of plots and scripts; those who spoke and sang into the microphone were exposed to the filmic eye, contributed acting and melodic repertoire to cinematographic works” (2022, p. 27). This combination is not strange if we consider the information provided by Vargas Arana himself: that Lupita Tovar, protagonist of the first Mexican film with optical sound (*Santa*, Antonio Moreno, 1931) was consecrated queen of the *Gran Feria del Radio 1931* at the Teatro Nacional, a film that in turn found in the radio its broadcasting space, generating an industrial symbiosis.

The cinema, moving towards industrialization, encouraged the stardom of singers and dancers by incorporating them as actors, especially in its musical display. This was strengthened by a frequent assimilation between artists and characters in the Latin American musical at the beginning of the sound era, which was installed as a procedure for the promotion of artists on the radio and in musical theater. The former found a new exhibition space and the film industry was benefited, giving body to the voices dreamed from the radio sets or to the figures seen from the theatrical stages or the pages of amateur magazines. Cinematography offered an audiovisual technology that enabled new forms of spectacularity, nonexistent in radio (due to the absence of image) or in theaters (due to the distance between stage and seats), causing the attraction of audiences that consumed those products from other media. As Karush points out in the case of Argentina, a mutual affinity soon began to be established between cinema and the music industry:

Radio station owners were frequently involved in film production, popular singers became movie stars, film scripts and tango lyrics were developed in tandem, and [...] the audiences for these entertainment forms overlapped in obvious ways (2013, p. 32).

Another noteworthy case was the intermediate connection in Brazil, with the crossovers between the music industry and carnival films, as well as the chanchada genre, expanded by Cinédia and Atlântida, proposing industrialization and a competitiveness with Hollywood. According to Cesarino Costa, the musical numbers of *chanchadas* “usually interrupt the narrative flow with song-and-dance spectacles that directly reference radio performances and theatrical revues, confirming this films' status as a complex intermedial mixture” (2022, p. 113). They mixed an attractive number of “comedians, heroes, heroines, cantores, cantoras,

and villains” (Vieira, 2018, 373), and emulated the structure and language of Carnival, reflected in such a succession of numbers interspersed with the plots. In Mexico, the “sound film fever” (Dávalos Orozco, 2016, p. 77) began without delay, with coinciding phenomena in the main cinematographies of the region, such as the musicalization of silent films, sound systems (having international repercussions with the inventions of Roberto and Joselito Rodríguez, transcendent in Hollywood), as well as with the aforementioned implosion of musical stars.

These peculiarities led the cinema to become a massive distribution channel for the music and theater industry: once the novelty of sound was introduced, music and its artists found the opportunity to be included in it, and the cinema, in turn, found greater popularity and adherence as a response. As a result, many films were made based on the musicality offered by the artists. Thus, tango operas emerged in Argentina (exploiting the influence of Libertad Lamarque), Spanish operas on the other side of the Atlantic (with the international Imperio Argentina), sambas and carnival marches in Brazil (internationalized by the Portuguese Carmen Miranda) and, in Mexico, ranchera comedies and rumbera films, which brought to the screen the most prized artists of popular music, encouraging transnational bonds.

Therefore, and bearing in mind the attributes of cinema –fragmentation of the montage and the gradualities of image planning–, the musical numbers we will study, set in theatrical or cabaret scenes, show a tendency to parcel or substitute the theatrical space by means of the cinematographic device. For the first case, we have the procedures of this art of moving images that involve the displacement of the camera, its angles and the gradation of the shots; for the second type of interconnection, the possibilities of montage are usually used to perform manipulations, such as chaining between images or duplications in the framing.

The theatrical and cinematographic space have similarities and differences, and this strange characteristic is favorable for their convergence and mutual exploitation. The theatrical space is a meeting place between spectators and artists, a platform where the theatrical event takes place (Cueto Pérez, 2007), which includes the stage –the scenic place where the actors embody their characters– and the spaces occupied by the spectators, knowing that this division can merge when leaving the conventions of traditional theater.

Cinema also has spatial differentiations, but in two temporalities (a present of the spectator who is watching the film and a present of the actors and objects on the screen), which are not simultaneous and do not share a real physical space. On the other hand, as Pérez Bowie (2007) states, the theatrical space, even when

it is made in a naturalistic way, presents a consciousness of construction, due to the coexistence between the space of representation and the dramatic space; the cinematographic image, by an induction effect that semioticians such as Metz (2001) or theorists such as Bazin (2003) had already highlighted, tends to eliminate, at least in classical cinema, this awareness of artifice, although in the construction of the spectacle within the spectacle a possible nuance of this phenomenon will be observed, to a greater or lesser extent. Nevertheless, the two-dimensional nature of the screen will give the cinematic image an ambiguity revealed in its constituent duality, shared perhaps also with painting: that of the surface offering an unequivocal impression of depth (Comolli, 2010).

The frontal, stopped-down camera of early cinematic views could be likened to the visual of a theatrical stage, although it generally presented outdoor sets. As cinema sought to establish itself in narrativity, the cinematic space began to conform to the conventions of theatrical staging, replacing the invisible fourth wall of the theater with the eye of the camera and providing a frontality of the actors, being the camera, from its fixed tripod, comparable to the point of view of a spectator seated in a privileged place in the theatrical hall. Likewise, the French film d'art, to cite one example, shows a trend that would grow with cinema's industrialization: its protagonists were actors with theatrical careers, which gave prestige to the films by attracting audiences who wanted to see their favorite stage stars. Theater and cinema found their first convergence by sharing internationally renowned artists, such as Sarah Bernhardt, who soon joined their ranks due to the high profitability it brought, since it was a popular spectacle with greater audience adherence, and the latter could more easily access a movie ticket than that of a prestigious theater. Thus, these productions brought to the popular culture of cinema "the consecrated forms of art" (Jelicić, 2020, p. 54), animating works of literature and drama.

With George Méliès, cinema exploited its artifice, provided by its nature as an optical apparatus, in the well-known "encounter between two different techniques: that of the photographer and that of the man of theater and illusionist" (Gubern 1992, p. 63). The films, although they lacked the possibility of making the actors' voices heard, offered in compensation cinema's imagistic realism. This was stated in a review in the newspaper *Caras y caretas* in 1913: "... the scales of art must necessarily incline towards the cinematograph, whose realism can never be equaled in any theater, since a painted landscape is never the same as nature itself" (Jelicić 2020, p. 77). In silent Mexico, the animosity that cinema provoked in theater impresarios led to fiery defenses of the new spectacle, such as the one in 1917 by the writer Carlos González Peña:



In many cases, theater is substituted favorably, since it is worthwhile to see great silent artists rather than bad talking comedians; and the contemplation of living scenery or nature reproduced by photography is more pleasing than mediocre decorations painted on paper or rags. Cinema is gaining ground in terms of spectacles; it is also becoming more popular thanks to its cheapness (González Casanova, 2000, p. 56).

Sound, with the technical difficulties it entailed, once again stopped the camera, recalling the sensation of filmed theater, more so when films organized around the structure of the musical parade emerged, limiting the scenes to the duration of the songs, although it would soon find the aesthetic variations that the learning of the new technique finally materialized, making these films something more than a musical illustration.

Starting in the 1930s, the Hollywood musical would seek to receive contributions from the theater, adapting Broadway musical revues to the still subordinate film screen. Latin America would join this trend, with plots based on the repertoires of the musical revue, with its zarzuelas imported from Spain, its tangos and rumbas, and its sainetes<sup>2</sup>, delineating a cinema that would progressively specify itself in order to find its own language. Although over the decades the technique and aesthetic procedures would innovate, the convergence between the cinematographic and the theatrical space, and the correlation between the film and the musical industry would never cease to exist, but rather would increase.

All staging in cinema, as Torras i Segura (2015) points out, implies an organization of the staging based on the construction of frames, types of shots and sets. Musical cinema is a space elaborated “narratively with audiovisual resources to place or frame the musical performance” (p. 160). The song is usually its core, but as the genre matured it began to be functionally integrated into the plot, as we will see in the selected examples.

## **CINEMA, MUSIC AND STAGE: TRENDS IN CLASSIC LATIN AMERICAN MUSICAL CINEMA**

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2. See *Tango!* (Luis José Moglia Barth, 1933), *Ídolos de la radio* (Eduardo Morena, 1934), and *Radio Bar* (Manuel Romero, 1936) in Argentina; *Cielito lindo* (Roberto O’Quigley and Roberto Gavaldón, 1936), *Allá en el rancho grande* (Fernando de Fuentes, 1936), and *Amapola del camino* (Juan Bustillo Oro, 1937), in México; and *Coisas nossas* (Wallace Downey, 1931), *A voz do carnaval* (Adhemar Gonzaga and Humberto Mauro, 1933), and *Alô, alô Brasil* (Wallace Downey, Alberto Ribeiro, and João de Barro, 1935), in Brazil.

The numbers of *Canto a mi tierra (México canta)*, *Aventurera*, and *Aventura en Río* present different perspectives of the intermediate convergence between cinema, music and theater, through the multiplicity of resources offered by the cinematographic discourse. By analyzing some sequences, we will distinguish three modalities of connection. Firstly, we will establish the procedures that the films used to show in succession the simultaneous elements of the theatrical scene; secondly, we will identify the displacement of the theatrical space through audiovisual resources and, finally, we will study the assimilation between the theatrical and cinematographic spectator through the modes of representation of the audience and their view of the stage. We will observe how the cinematographic language sought to absorb the theatrical language in its representation of the stage and we will reflect on the incorporation of the theatrical language into cinema through the explicitness of the spectacle.

### **Simultaneity and continuity**

*Canto a mi tierra (México canta)* exploits the popularity of the tenor of the Americas, Pedro Vargas, a nickname and name that also identifies the character he plays. He is a humble rancher, who sweetens the prairies with his voice, until he is discovered by a musical director who transforms him into a renowned singer in theatrical shows. The film has two sequences in which the intermediate crossover between cinema and theater is presented. One of them, called *Nocturnal*, has the first of the forms of convergence between scenic and cinematographic space, combining the simultaneity of the elements of the theatrical stage with the syntagmatic character of cinema: Pedro Vargas appears in front of a set with palm trees and a background of a full moon, and his figure occupies the center of the frame. This emphasizes the celebrity of both the fictional and the real Vargas, since the latter had already been fully incorporated into Latin American music for more than a decade. An American shot, coupled with the fixed camera, perfectly emulates the live spectacle of the theatrical stage. The convergence with cinematography is established through the intercalation between some close-up shots, where we observe the singer's face with greater clarity. He directs his gaze to the room, specifically to a woman, in whose exchange we see complicity.

Thus an alternation is established between the stage from where he sings and the external space of the audience seated in their seats, shown on a single occasion in a shot/counter-shot that evidences that act of expectation. Vargas is not the only one on stage: musicians and dancers seem to share the same stage. While the latter play their role in the show, Vargas' voice continues to permeate the scene: we deduce that the theatrical spectators are witnessing a simultaneity of action. The cinema, however, due to the syntagmatic nature proclaimed by

Metz (2001), presents a succession of frames, in which the actions of the singer and those of the secondary protagonists of the show alternate.

The theatrical and cinematographic space have different modalities for spectators. If in the theater they can place their gaze according to the interests of their perception (although always guided by some staging procedure that seeks to highlight actors or objects), in the cinema the gaze can be redirected, if desired, by means of the shots' fragmentation and the camera's movements and angles. What in theater is seen at the same moment, through differentiated spaces on the stage, in cinema, on the other hand, is shown one thing at a time: one image replaces the other and the film audience cannot see, in these cases, more than what the camera puts in front of their eyes. There is a succession that, unlike other narrative-figurative arts, implies, following Comolli, an image in plural, in series, "contained, dragged, worked by the succession of all the other images that make up the film" (2010, p. 53), producing the classic impression of reality, but also, according to the author, an "impression of continuity" (2010, p. 55).

### Displacements

In the second musical sequence of *Canto a mi tierra (México canta)*, a landscape of the pyramids is displayed, general shots that do not establish the point of view of the theater spectator; rather, they reveal a fully cinematographic space since they are environmental images and not a theatrical set. Immediately, the singer appears in a medium profile shot, characterized as a tribal chief, as he sings *Cuando México canta*. We assume that the audience is watching him from the distance of their seats, but the possibility of cinematic framing allows us, the delayed viewers, to have a closer view. After this image, a general shot of the ruins of the beginning is inserted again, to then return to the same medium shot of the singer. Here the theatrical representation can be seen in a fully cinematographic way, although it can be linked to the logic of the theatrical spectator, who may be seeing these spaces as scenery. We observe in this case the second modality of convergence, referring to the total displacement of the theatrical space by the cinematographic one.

The medium shot of Vargas as an indigenous leader is replaced, by means of a chained fade-in, with the same image of the singer, but this time dressed as a charro (image 1). The location of the character in a theatrical room is left aside to deploy the more realistic possibilities, in terms of representation, of the cinematographic apparatus. In addition to the medium shot of Vargas, there is a series of short inserted shots of women outdoors, in the same sunny landscape where the singer is, looking at the camera. In the previous number, something similar happens throughout the song, when



**Image 1. Progression of the chain fade on the theatrical stage (Bohr, 1938)**

the face of a woman appears superimposed on the stage, next to the singer, the eventual recipient of the romantic tune, whose emergence is more akin to the optical device capacity of cinema than to the visual possibilities of the theater. In short, the films give cinematographic edges to the theatrical representation, without explaining how the audience in the theater is viewing these images.

On the other hand, the first musical number of *Aventurera*, focused on the display of the dances of the rumbera Ninón Sevilla (Elena) in a cabaret, is based on an orientalist motif. There she is shown transformed from an ingenue to a cabaret performer due to the unfolding of the tragedy, being assigned to an artistic role as a dancer. Until that moment, the space used in the cabaret as a seat for the musical show was reduced to a small stage surrounded by tables and a space for the audience to dance; here, however, it is immediately transformed into a larger stage, no longer identifiable, made up of a scenography with arches, stairs and a tower, through which Elena will move to perform a dance. The camera accompanies the rumbera in her movements, with acrobatic angulations reminiscent of the geometric choreographies that abounded in the American musical of the 1930s with Bubsy Berkeley at the helm (image 2). The shots alternate between aerial views and close-ups, offering a privileged gaze, absent in the nightclub audience. At the end of the number, Elena is applauded, showing the more diminished spatial composition of the cabaret that had previously been unveiled.

A high contrast is thus created between that conventional place, of humbler dimensions, which we see from a general shot while the dancer, with her back to the camera, greets her audience, and the magnificence of the stage where she is, now behind the curtain. The stage, as opposed to the space where the audience is housed, is then transformed by means of the audiovisual resources of the cinematographer.



**Image 2. Amplified scenario (Gout, 1950)**

Cinema enables the extension of spaces through the reconfiguration perpetrated by the fragmentation of shots and montage. In one moment of the film, Elena begins to work in the nightclub, whose stage is previously occupied by the musical group Los Panchos, but which will later increase in size to make room for Elena's act. The limitations of the theatrical stage space find a way out in the cinematographic device, with its close-ups of the camera and the tracking of the movements of the dancers and singers, who move around that amplified space. The show culminates with applause and a curtain closing, revealing a stage of much smaller dimensions, similar to what the previous musical presentation had shown.

The last number includes the most notorious characteristics of the aforementioned intermediality. In the number *Arrímate, cariñito*, Elena initiates a dance in which her figure is multiplied by means of a photographic manipulation (image 3).

In this case, cinema's ability to manipulate the image no longer extends the dimensions of the stage, but causes a distortion of reality, only achievable through the intervention of a technical device, capable of multiplying the image of the dancer on the stage. The cinematographic *mise-en-scène* once again demonstrates its capacity to transport the spectator to its conscious artifice.



**Image 3. Photographic montage in the cabaret (Gout, 1950)**

The third film, *Aventura en Río*, also applies cinema's audiovisual resources in the last of its numbers, using the slow-motion effect and following a dreamlike tone, since it is a dream of the protagonist. In the middle of the dance, again with Ninón Sevilla, there is an instantaneous costume change, a product of the direct cut hidden behind the smoke of the ambience, something that could not be done on the theatrical stage. Similarly, there is a series of zoomed-in close-ups of the figures of three men, with whom the protagonist was involved, and immediately the fading of these figures, thanks to a procedure comparable to the logic of the dream, which shows the woman's point of view. We notice with this second modality of convergence a tendency in musical films to dissolve the theatrical or cabaret scenario through the resources of the technical device that is cinema.

### **The viewer's gaze**

From the credits, *Aventurera* shows this symbiosis between cinema and theatrical space. From there, the film's information is showed, framed in a visual that assimilates the stage lights with a theater curtain, in a preview of the plot. As is usual in rumberas' films, the cabaret stage is introduced in a combination with the plot. Sevilla's character is tricked by a pimp named Lucio, who offers her a job as a secretary for the owner of a cabaret, unaware that she will be introduced to a lowlife, where she will work as a dancer/prostitute. Sitting Elena and Lucio at one of the tables in the nightclub, the singer Ana María González is observed in depth of field singing the soft melody of a bolero.



**Image 4. Shot and counter-shot between audience and stage (Gout, 1950)**

This introduces us to the third modality studied, referring to the links established between the cinematographic and theatrical spectators and their gaze on the stage. In these films, the audience usually appears along with the stage of the cabaret or nightclub, simultaneously exposing the space of the spectacle and the spectatorial space, the place of the performance and that of its recipients; both, as a whole, compose the fictional stage arranged for the cinematic audience. One of the ways in which this is done is by combining short shots of the artist who is the focus of the musical number, along with general shots that contextualize the entire stage and the reaction of the diners. The song itself, whose leitmotif is a farewell, is assimilated to the stage of innocence that Elena is leaving behind. This is implied through an alternation of shots between the couple talking and the singer saying goodbye: there is a frontality of the table where they are seated with the stage where the singer is, which gives rise to the linking of the narrative plot with the lyrics of the song. On that same stage, the figure of Pedro Vargas emerges, inviting with his presence to join the dance floor. On this occasion, the assimilation between the stage and what happens in the filmic plot is achieved through the subjectivization of Elena's gaze: Vargas' show is seen through her clouded eyes as an eventual spectator, through the out-of-focus that denotes the mental affectation generated by the drink provided by her corruptor (image 4).

In the next number, the stage again presents Pedro Vargas, who sings the title song of the film. Here again a counterpart is established between the stage from which the song is sung and an intermediate space between the stage and the audience. It is in the latter place where Elena circulates during the performance, being given the nickname of adventurer, a simile of a prostitute. To this end, shots and counter-shots that confront the singer and Elena are used. An exchange of glances is generated in which Vargas seems to refer to the cabaret performer through the musical discourse in second person, while the camera follows Sevilla, who is alluded to by this glance and by the lyrics of the song.

She is framed by means of close-ups that capture an icon of the woman who has sold her love, as the song recites, a cliché of the prostitute melodrama of which Mexico has been offering its exponents since the 10s<sup>3</sup>. While the cabaret-goers focus on Vargas' presentation, ignoring the assimilation between the artist-singer-dancer triad, the film spectator is nevertheless a privileged witness of this appeal through the resources offered by cinema.

The shot/counter-shot directs the spectator's gaze in terms of the links between characters. According to Comolli (2010), cinema gives us a visual similar to that of the human eye, starting from an assigned place, our position as spectators. In the dynamics of planning, the spectatorial gaze is moved from one place to another, depending on what is to be shown and hidden in the game of framing, imposed to give birth to an interpretation. These shots/counter-shots put the spectator in the place of the witness of the correspondence between the gazes of the characters, but also identified them with some of them, through subjectivation.

On the other hand, in *Aventura en Río* there is a connection with the literary realm since, after its credits, a quotation from the writer Victor Hugo is displayed, which introduces the drama of Alicia, a woman suffering from a transposition of her personality, transforming from a noble lady to the malicious *fichera*<sup>4</sup> Nelly. The samba chords that accompany the narration link it, along with the images of the city of Rio de Janeiro, where the action takes place, with the Brazilian music industry, promoted from the credits with the mention of dances from that country choreographed and performed by Ninón Sevilla.

The first number takes place at the Muñeco cabaret, where Nelly dazzles the diners. She dances on a circular stage to the song *Moreno, moreninho*. The camera follows her movements, with the close-up shots typical of cinema. However, it offers other possibilities to the theatrical spectacle, since it reveals to the cinematographic spectator a parallel dramatic situation, absent to the cabaret visitors: it is Nelly's jealousy of the Muñeco, due to his momentary interest in another *fichera*, whom Nelly executes during an interval of her performance and then returns to the stage. Something similar will happen with the second number, where Nelly is identified

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3. In one of the scenes, and under the melodious music of Los Panchos, the protagonist's situation is also related to what happened on stage: they sing about a tender love story, which will result in the plot of the film in Elena's revenge against the woman who, along with Lucio, prostituted her.

4. A woman that will sit down at your table and have a drink with you. Their drinks cost about twice as much as regular drinks, and they get a *ficha* or ticket for each drink you buy them. At the end of their shift, they turn in their *fichas* and get paid for them (translator's note).



by a family acquaintance, unleashing the discovery of her double personality: the dance will not only aim at making the show explicit but also at developing the internal plot of the film, the parallel story that happens behind the scenes.

In this third convergence modality, not only the singers and dancers who are part of the theatrical show are shown, who in turn are the protagonists of the cinematographic story, but also the musicians and other elements outside the diegesis, such as lights and curtains, are present on the stage. With greater or lesser emphasis, the curtains are arranged in the analyzed films to make a distinction between what happens on the stage of the nightclub or theater, and the development of the plot. In short, theatrical and cinematographic space are combined to reinforce the importance of the spectacle within the spectacle, establishing cinema as a means of disseminating popular culture, on the stage and on the virtual stage of the films.

## CONCLUSIONS

Cinema, theater and the music industry have a long tradition of coexistence, which becomes protagonist in the generic development of classic cinema, and of Mexican cinema specifically. The theater and nightclubs offered the possibility of seeing artists live, while radio brought their voices into homes thanks to the incorporation of this new communication technology. Nevertheless, the cinema, with its multiple shots, made it easier for spectators to get closer to their favorite music and dance stars, provoking a popularity that served as feedback to the industries concerned.

Based on the intermediate loans identified, we highlight a tendency towards this interrelationship motivated by the feedback effect of the record-radio industry and the film industry, especially if we consider that the former was able to benefit from the rights of the songs and that the latter was an important focus of national and foreign commercialization. If radio, nightclubs and theaters were launching platforms for artists, even more so with their appearance in Mexican cinema, an industry that, according to Castro-Ricalde and McKee Irwin (2011), not only imposed itself in the markets, but also deployed a cultural penetration in Latin America. Thus, to cite an example, the success of Pedro Vargas in the microphones of radio stations and stages found its complement in the stages represented on the movie screen, offering greater visibility and personalization for viewers; similarly, the dissemination of films was an incentive to promote the artist's presentations in other expressive media.

We can thus corroborate that the structuring of the various arts in this first half of the 20th century was marked by the changes brought about by the new technologies.

The art of cinema would not be the same after the appearance of radio, whose golden age coincided with the moment when the film industry tried to emulate it by including sound. Radio, on the other hand, would take advantage of the repercussion of the audiovisual spectacle. Cinema, in that combination of disciplines that is part of its essence, became the epicenter of an artistic circuit in which intermediality was resounding.

We have identified three modalities or categories that demonstrate this phenomenon. We start from the theater or cabaret scenario in its representation by the cinema, which exploited its technical resources, either for the extension of the theatrical space, for its fragmentation or even for its momentary suppression, and at the same time to make the audience participate in this representation, as a constituent part of that theatrical space exhibited by the cinema. We can add and conclude that, if there was a first intermediate convergence between both artistic expressions –and perhaps *à raison d'être* of its exploitation during this period– it was the one that took place through the artists shared in the musical cinema, coming from those other arts and media, which converged in the cinema to show off the spectacle within the spectacle.

The analysis particularities allow us to deduce that the intermediate exchanges transcend the incorporation of human resources from music, radio and cinema. It also offers us an overview of the aesthetic complexity involved in the elaboration of cinematographic language, to hybridize it in such symbiosis, allowing us to understand how procedures were assimilated and contrasted in order to exploit, in reciprocity, the specificities of each media. These exchanges produced an alloy of spectacle that blurred the boundaries between the modalities of expression themselves. These films momentarily turned cinema into theater, due to the recurrence of stages in the musical numbers, a prototypical sign of the genre even beyond Latin America. Likewise, they made cinema represent theater as an art that believes itself to be cinema for a few moments, entering it inexplicably, although assuming them naturally, the virtual resources of cinematography. This caused cinema and theater, like so many other means of expression that made their contributions in them, to be fused and transformed into spaces that were as opposed as they were assimilable for the reverie of their audiences.

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