

Mex-ciné: Mexican Filmmaking, Production, and Consumption in the Twenty-first Century. Frederick Luis Aldama. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2013. ISBN: 9780472051939

*Mex-ciné: Mexican Filmmaking, Production, and Consumption in the Twenty-first Century* provides an excellent introduction to the world of film analysis. Through studying recent works in Mexican cinema, Aldama introduces the idea of a film's blueprint, or the plan that integrates all of the film's components into a narrative that shapes how the film is produced and how it is told to its audience. Aldama analyzes hundreds of Twenty-first Century Mexican films, and his eighty-page filmography appendix gives the reader a clear understanding of the diversity in this broad genre. To demonstrate the utility of the concept of the blueprint, Aldama reflects on how filmmakers carefully construct films to present a perceived reality and how they use these portrayals to affect their audience.

In a broad sense, the chapter entitled "The Nuts and Bolts of Mexican Film" is the most useful chapter for a broader audience, as it presents a clear methodology for film analysis. Despite the chapter's title, which suggests that these components are specific only to Mexican film, what the chapter really provides is a succinct and yet thorough discussion of film composition, regardless of the place or time of the film's production. Aldama discusses concepts that belong to the "anatomy" of the film, such as screen direction, frame composition, editing, lighting, and location. Each subsection clearly delineates how the director consciously and carefully chooses each component of film construction in order to guide the viewer's interpretation. Aldama ultimately argues that the better films are those where the director intentionally controls the most components of the blueprint, including the physical elements of planning and production, the cognitive processes that the film triggers, and the viewer responses the film ultimately elicits. Any

student of film will benefit from this section, as it provides useful and practical ways to analyze any type of film.

Similarly, the following chapter, entitled "Hecho a Mano...Hecho por *Homo sapiens*," also will serve a wide audience, as here Aldama discusses cognitive brain functions and their role in filmmaking and consumption. Without becoming incomprehensibly technical, he explores several cognitive functions, such as laughter, anticipation, and morality, providing clear examples from Mexican films to explain how these cognitive functions affect audience perception and interpretation of the film. He argues that Mexican directors are aware of the important roles played by cognition and that they use these elements to construct the film's blueprint and guide the audience's subsequent interpretation of the film.

The book, at this point, transitions to focus more specifically on characteristics and qualities of Twenty-first Century Mexican film. Although this section will more likely be of interest to scholars of Mexican cultural history or Latin American film, its readability and its careful presentation of thoughtful and yet critical film reviews is useful to a wider audience. Aldama first discusses the importance that the Mexican-U.S. border has for Mexican film production, both in terms of film content and in terms of the lived realities for actors, directors, and film production. While several films, such as *El Norte* and *40 días*, focus on the experience of border crossings, Aldama relates these fictional accounts with the real experiences of actors such as Gael García Bernal, and directors such as Alejandro González Iñárritu, who work in both Mexico's and the U.S.'s film industries. Aldama also places the Mexican film industry into the socio-political context of Mexico, explaining how prior to 2000, state control of unions created severe obstacles to the production of any film that was critical of the ruling political party, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*. Similarly, Aldama explains how companies such as

Televisa are able to purchase distribution rights for many Mexican films, and limited options make it difficult for film producers to market and distribute their films widely through alternative channels. While Aldama's critique is convincing and certainly valid, a comparison with another national film industry would have been useful for allowing the reader to conceive of possible alternatives for the Mexican film industry. Similarly, a brief history of Mexican film production would also help a reader unfamiliar with Mexican cultural history to understand how the past has shaped the present reality.

Two chapters explore genres of Twenty-first Century Mexican film. Aldama establishes three categories that he utilizes to analyze why some film blueprints are successful at generating emotive responses from the audience and why some either fail to elicit any type of response or only trigger a short-lived, ineffective reaction. He calls these categories *refrito*, *buena onda*, and bubblegum films. While the attempt at categorization is appreciated, Aldama's failure to clearly define these categories resulted in more confusion than clarity. The film analyses in these sections are excellent, and his criteria for judging why a film's blueprint succeeds or fails becomes increasingly clear; generally, Aldama is concerned with the film's portrayal of reality and the ability of all the various components to, as he states, "cohere" with one another, resulting in a believable and engaging story. However, clearer explanation of his three categories would serve to strengthen and clarify this section.

Similarly, the reader never quite understands what about either Aldama's three categories or his description of film components is unique to Mexican cinema. On the one hand, this makes the book seem applicable to a much broader audience; on the other, one is left pondering what exactly about the book's arguments and methodology is unique to Twenty-first Century Mexican film. The only explanation for this choice is on the final page of the manuscript, where Aldama

simply states that he chose to examine Mexican cinema because he enjoys it. Choosing one's subject based upon one's expertise and satisfaction is certainly sufficient reason, but perhaps a clearer explanation of the relationship of the methodology, the analysis of film composition, and the categorization of films to Mexican cinema would have allowed the audience to better grasp his overall goals with this text. Regardless, the reader will gain an appreciation for both Twenty-first Century Mexican cinema, the process of film production and consumption, and general film analysis after reading *Mex-ciné*.

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