

## Circulation and distribution of ethnographic films in Latin America

### *Circulación y distribución de cine etnográfico en América Latina*

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#### **Abstract**

While visual anthropology, as the roof under which is usually wrapped this films, enjoys good health in the region and new educational and research projects are generated every year, It has not been the same with the diffusion, distribution and exhibition despite the long tradition of documentary film linked to the anthropological view in countries such as Argentina, Colombia and Mexico. In the last decade, in parallel, they have significantly changed the logic of consumption and circulation of films. This scene presents new opportunities. The purpose is twofold, on one side analyzes the importance of building spaces for the formation of audiences such as festivals and exhibitions, starting from the premise that the future of every film depends on how it can reach the people. By the other side seeks to provide material for consultation and guidance for those interested in distributing audiovisual works of ethnographic cutting in Latin America.

#### **Keywords**

Visual anthropology, ethnographic cinema, festivals, distribution, exhibition, Latin America.

#### **Resumen**

El presente trabajo reflexiona sobre los circuitos y espacios de exhibición para el cine etnográfico en América Latina. Si bien la antropología visual, como el techo que suele arropar a este cine, goza de buena salud y cada año se generan nuevos proyectos de formación e investigación en la región, no ha pasado lo mismo con la difusión y exhibición a pesar de la larga tradición de cine documental vinculado a la mirada antropológica en países como Argentina, Colombia y México. En la última década, de manera paralela, han cambiado de forma significativa las lógicas de circulación y consumo de cine. Tal escenario plantea nuevas oportunidades. El objetivo es doble, por una parte busca analizar cuál es la importancia de construir espacios para la formación de públicos como lo son festivales y muestras. Por la otra intenta proporcionar una guía para quienes están interesados en distribuir trabajos audiovisuales de corte etnográfico en América Latina.

#### **Palabras clave**

Antropología visual, cine etnográfico, festivales, distribución, exhibición, América Latina.

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## Introduction

Visual anthropology, today more than ever, is going through an interesting moment in Latin America. Although the academic initiatives are young in relation to those of other latitudes like Europe and they have points of confluence with the different traditions of the discipline, also of innovation and rupture. Diplomas, seminars, colloquiums, laboratories, master's programs and, to a lesser extent, journals<sup>2</sup>, festivals, film clubs and ethnographic films have been opened in the last decades. The topics covered are broad. We are faced with a field of diffuse frontiers in which methods and objects are always on the table, generating possibilities for experimentation and dialogue.

In this context an interesting circuit of collaboration and exchange between researchers, directors and cultural managers (mainly from Chile, Argentina, Peru, Ecuador and Mexico) is emerging. Such a circuit, operates more at an interpersonal level than an institutional one, but allows us to glimpse the formation of networks of work and collaboration between universities and institutes. However, although the Latin American ethnographic cinema has also continued to reinvent itself, mainly outside the academic sphere, the spaces for its diffusion and distribution (relevant because they stimulate not only production but also the formation of audiences) are still very few. Nevertheless, Olatz González-Abrisketa and Aída Vallejo (2014, p. 61) find that spaces for the exhibition of audiovisual works related to visual anthropology are growing (mainly in Europe).

The purpose of this article is to reflect on what is the importance of having a specialized exhibition circuit in our region? How necessary is it and why? Although in the last two decades the film festivals have been consolidated in Latin America, why are spaces for ethnographic cinema still scarce? addressing these questions necessarily implies thinking in detail what we are understanding of ethnographic cinema in a broad sense, who make and see these films, how we interpret today the traditional tensions between academic and film worlds, but also what we conceive how the purpose of these films and the ideal form for their circulation. Likewise, it also seeks to be a reference material for those interested in distributing audiovisual works

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2 One of the most representative is the Chilean Journal of Visual Anthropology: [www.rchav.cl/](http://www.rchav.cl/). Also the magazine-blog E-Imgen edited by the Center of Studies of the Image Sans Soleil (CEISS) and the Area of Visual Anthropology of the University of Buenos Aires (AAV): <http://www.e-imagen.net/and-image/>

of ethnographic nature in Latin America through a general radiography of the places where this cinema has found space in recent years.

### **The beginning of a complicated marriage: photography, cinema and anthropology.**

The discussions about images and their use have found space in diverse disciplines of the social sciences; nevertheless, it is perhaps in the anthropology where they have developed with greater solidity. To a great extent it has to do with the history of the discipline itself as a producer of images and with the weight that the gaze has in its work. From here I will ask two questions: Can we think of ethnography, without the act of looking, without observation? Could we glimpse as raw material of anthropology the word without looking?

It is true that in anthropological work there are several possibilities that are not linked to the act of looking, but without a doubt, gazing occupies a very important place on which to reflect. "It is possible to say that anthropology revolves around the strategies of the gaze and the fact of looking becomes a strategic space. A way of accessing the universe of the other, which at the same time makes possible a place of construction, meaning and meaning" (Mier, 2009).

Virtually since photography and film emerged with the industrial society of the late nineteenth century were used by anthropology, giving rise to new fields of exploration. The images were basically understood as a medium that reaffirmed the veracity of the information collected in the field (Edwards 2011, p.161). It's supposed transparency gave authority to the ethnographic company, which carried out in remote places only had the description and the drawing to account for the studied societies. The first steps came from England, France and the United States.

In the modern way of knowing, Susan Sontag (2007, p. 134) notes, it seems that there must be images for something to become real. However, in this way of looking, reality is mainly appearance. Photography and film are above all ways of looking, not the look itself. Outstanding anthropologists, who do not usually relate to images, such as Franz Boas, integrated photography peripherally to their research. In subsequent decades, not without some mistrust, other key figures such as Malinowski (in the twenties) and later

Levi-Strauss <sup>3</sup>(in the second half of the 1930s) used photography because it allowed them to capture visual aspects relevant to their field notes<sup>4</sup>.

The ethnographic cinema, in which I will focus, is one of the oldest and most recognized views of visual anthropology (Ruby, 2007). The technological revolution had an immediate impact on its development, so it has always worked with technological innovations, building methods of research and representation in the traditional ways of the word. In “The Man and the Camera” Jean Rouch <sup>5</sup>(1995, pp. 103-104) describes how ethnographic cinema advanced rapidly with the development of portable equipment accelerated by war<sup>6</sup>. Thanks to the emergence in the 1920s of 16 mm, visual research could be done in the next decade such as those of Mead and Bateson in Bali.

These first productions were in opposition to the notion of documentary as an art form<sup>7</sup>, they were thought only for the academic work. Documentalists, on the other hand, separated documentary film <sup>8</sup>from the descriptive images of daily life that anthropologists did. For this pair of researchers, Ardévol (2008, pp. 40-41) points out, “(...) it was not only a machine for recording data, but also an instrument that would revolutionize ethnographic practice and theoretical elaboration.” Mead considered it important to think that although anthropology had privileged words, its contact with the production of images added new meanings.

This relationship between images and anthropology was named in the forties by Mead herself as “visual anthropology”. Little by little, it gained a

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3 These images can be consulted at: <http://pueblosoriginarios.com/recursos/colecciones/strauss/brasil>

4 Naranjo (2006, p.18) states that since the end of the 19th century, photography became more relevant in the field work, but it was from Malinowski when it became a method of work used by many anthropologists. “These researchers were more characterized by the use of photography and to include it in their publications than to perform a theoretical work around it.

5 “It was with the intent of satisfying our demands for lightness and solidity as we perfected recorders and portable cameras, originally used by American filmmakers such as Leacock and Frenchmen such as Michel Brault and I” (Rouch 1995, 104). See The Camera That Changed The World <https://vimeo.com/50533709>

6 Brigarde (1995, pp. 32-41) emphasizes that the development of aesthetic capacities decisively influenced the style of ethnographic cinema when it was already established as a genre after the Second World War.

7 In this view subjectivity appears in the foreground, Mead’s proposal, instead, was to place the devices as if it were a “fly on the wall” with the intention of intervening as little as possible.

8 For Grierson, for example, the documentary must be an art form rather than the mechanical record of reality. “Considering documentary film as a mere document ignores the creative formation that is an inevitable element of all documentary films” (Plantinga, 2011).

better position in the face of academic anthropology, turning the image into a possible path within scientific practice (Pink 2006, p.14). By the 1950s, it was already an institutionalized discipline with recognized specialists and critics. The cinema became an educational tool of great utility for many cultural anthropologists of the United States and that was its main purpose and mechanism of diffusion (it remains one of its main windows).

More or less during this period and before it was spoken with a force of reflexivity in anthropology, Jean Rouch (who circulated more in the spaces of the cinema than in the academics) began to film and to explore those ideas. Unlike Mead, he did not seek attachment to reality. For him, the positivist trend of ethnographic cinema had a markedly ethnocentric and colonialist character. The cinema verité proposed the experimentation with the camera implying in the process the characters and placing as axis for the production of knowledge to the reflexivity (Canals, 2011, page 63).

On the other side of the world, American ethnographic film struggled with narrative limitations in trying to portray reality as it is, but found a way with the directors of the *direct cinema* of the mid-sixties. They advocated an aesthetic of authenticity that would avoid the manipulations of the director. These films, designed for the cinematographic circuits, incorporated concepts of character development and subjectivity, rejected by anthropology, but unlike other cinemas, they responded to social issues of which we are aware in a conscious way (Loizos 1997, pp. 81- 85). Already in the eighties, David MacDougall criticized the most radical observational aspects and developed what he called “transcultural cinema”. In it he conceives as a cross of cultural perspectives the encounter between the represented group and the filmmakers. When subjects feel involved, he describes, it is because the film has been structured according to their own interests. MacDougall cinema is mainly exhibited in specialized circuits and in the academic field.

In Latin America, although there is a rich and long tradition in the anthropological gaze through photography and cinema<sup>10</sup>, as Ziri6n (2017),

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9 Leacock (The Children Were Watching, 1961), Pennebaker (Monterrey Pop, 1968), and Frederick Wiseman (Titicut Follies, 1967) tried to minimize the effect of their presence and tried to let events occur as if they were not there. However it was inevitable to control the production of the film.

10 For Ziri6n (2017) this ethnographic view is expressed in Mexico during the twentieth century, from the film record of the *Revolution*, through the filming of Manuel Gamio and Miguel Covarrubias, indigenist propaganda films, the cinema of Nicol6s Echevarr6a, movement of urban documentalists, the work of several groups of indigenous video and other community media.

Zamorano and Andrade (2012, p. 11) point out, the same thing did not happen with visual anthropology as academic discipline; the discussions about images in Latin American anthropology did not develop in a specific field until relatively recently. The theoretical reflection and training in universities and research centers do not exceed two decades. The postgraduate courses are even younger, the one of FLACSO-Ecuador has been around for nine years, the one of the even PUCP less.

Universities' visual anthropology laboratories, for example, would be ideal for encouraging the production, distribution, exhibition and dissemination of ethnographic cinema, although they are usually located outside academic structures and are usually (although not all) turned into places whose main task is the loan of equipment and the register of events. Although some have a life beyond this, in general, their work has little diffusion and does not achieve a circulation outside the own institutions.

Perhaps it is in the collaborative <sup>11</sup>cinema where the greatest contributions of Latin America are to the history of ethnographic cinema. This cinema (in which much of the work of Rouch and MacDougall can be thought) had a great impulse in the anthropology (especially in the one realized in English) with the "crisis of the representation"<sup>12</sup>, in which the ghosts of colonialism origin became visible and began to question the authority of the ethnographer. Although the first projects came from the United States, the USSR, France and Canada<sup>13</sup>; there is a strong tradition in our region that has roots in the militant cinema of the mid-seventies.

One of the most significant examples is the work of Jorge Sanjinés, who developed in the book *Theory and practice of a cinema with the people* (1979) a proposal of participatory cinema. The work of this author, like much of the

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11 A reference to understand the history of participatory projects and their relationship to technological development is the Participatory section of the Moments of Innovation interactive project, from the Open Doc Lab of MIT.

12 "If in a general representation of a culture or a subculture it is possible to find intuitively or with reasonable and objective methods of observation something that people had not noticed or of the importance of which they had not noticed, then I think that visual anthropology will have proved its worth. We should not have so many doubts about the authenticity of the means of representation. What else do we have? I think all anthropologists have is their sensitivity" (Gardner in Ziri6n y Flores, 2009, p. 165).

13 Some of the most representative projects of the beginnings are: In the Land of the Head Hunters (1914) by Edward S. Curtis, Nanook of the North (1922) by Robert Flaherty, Kino Eye (1924) by Dziga Vertov, Cinema-Train of Aleksander Medvedkin (developed in the thirties) and the television series Challenge for Change (1967-1980) of the National Film Board of Canada.

third cinema, was initially projected in popular spaces, such as assemblies or film clubs and later, as his fame and prestige grew; international festivals began to program his films. More immersed in the field that occupies us and with less visibility outside the specialized circuits, the “ethnobiographic” cinema of Jorge Prelorán <sup>14</sup>stands out. Starting from long talks, in a close and committed way, he documented the region, its problems and the way in which people have managed to live in that environment. Prelorán was not at all comfortable with “the label of ethnographic cinema,” so he was not so worried about showing his work in anthropological spaces. Paradoxically, they are the ones who are most interested in his work today.

Thus, throughout the region there are several active projects as the emblematic *Video na Aldeias de Brasil*, Ojo de Agua Communication in Mexico and others, of more recent formation, dedicated to the education and diffusion like Acampa Doc in Panama and the Itinerant Audiovisual Camp in Mexico, among others. In terms of the collaborative aspects (of which there are several modalities, many of which are nowadays enhanced by interactive means), in very general terms, there is a search for more horizontal, rich and dynamic ways of exchanging knowledge and cultural interpretations in the creative processes of a movie<sup>15</sup>. More and more initiatives are being created by the communities themselves.

It does not mean that these projects act on a neutral field and that, the roles and hierarchies present regularly in a film are blurred, but it is proposed not to impose meanings, to build collectivities and to dialogue directly with the involved communities; many times they are designed for local diffusion and their cinematographic nature is not emphasized, but their capacity to influence and reflect on the problems of the communities where it was realized. Some of these works circulate in specialized circuits others are spread by local and/or digital means.

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14 Prelorán said about his work (1987: 114): “My films deal with those who quickly become my friends, and in whose life I enter with many duties and responsibilities. In that sense, the films acquire a nuance of subjectivity given by my vision and particular relationship with those people.”

15 “The observer is finally descending from his ivory tower; his camera, his recorder and his projector are driving him, through a strange road; and for the first time, his work is not being judged by a thesis court but by the very people he went to observe. I am referring to this extraordinary technique of feedback as an audiovisual counterweight. You will not see an ethnologist observing his character as if it were an insect (dominating them), but as if it were a stimulus for mutual understanding. That was the beginning of what some of us call shared anthropology” (Rouch, 1995, pp. 117-118).

The collaborative documentary is a type of audiovisual production that is coherent with the intercultural perspective of contemporary anthropology and with which Antonio Ziri6n (2015, pp. 57-59) describes as an interesting synergy. In the same way, in recent years, there is a marked tendency to include participatory methodologies in anthropological research. Paradoxically, although there is an interesting academic production around the subject in Spanish (with researchers like Adolfo Estalella and Tom6s S6nchez Criado), the author points out, the numerous reflections have remained isolated in Latin America and have been little systematized.

Although ethnographic cinema is more often linked with observational and expository documentary, the variety of proposals is enormous and many of the frontiers we have traditionally known are blurring in hybrids that can approach different forms and genres, making them increasingly difficult to classify, not only of the films, but also, of the spaces where they are shown. We are, therefore, facing a terrain in which there are no formulas or steps to follow.

Next, I will discuss the recent discussions on the definitions of visual anthropology and ethnographic cinema, with the intention of having a broad picture and thinking about how they impact on the circulation of a film and on the creation of professional spaces for exhibition.

### **From anthropology to the audiovisual: tensions between academy and cinema**

The theme of the gaze, says Raymundo Mier (2009), “has been highlighted by philosophical reflection, but in the anthropological field often appears as a tacit facet shifted to the realm of methods.” A strict condition of anthropology is thought implicit. It would give the impression, Mier stresses, that anthropology is indeed fully constituted over the act of looking. It is no coincidence that we speak again and again of observation as one of the fundamental conditions of anthropology. And it is perhaps for this reason that it is difficult for us to characterize the relation between anthropology and images.

The title “visual anthropology” seems then too ambiguous; however, it is under this label that a tradition, method and formal object of study related to the social use of images have been established (Le6n, 2012, p.100) With the passing of the years and the eagerness to characterize in more detail the different relations between images and anthropology, new ways of focusing



the objectives and of naming the meetings have emerged (some under the general umbrella of visual anthropology, others totally separating from it).

Researchers, such as Carlos Flores, do not completely reject the idea of “visual anthropology”, but they emphasize not losing on the radar the importance of sound and propose to speak of “audiovisual anthropology”. There are also those who prefer the label “audiovisual ethnography” to emphasize the weight of ethnographic work. The same line discusses whether it is better to think of “ethnographic cinema” or “anthropological cinema”, they are regularly different in terms of the theoretical load they have, however the fact is that many academics and festivals make no difference any. To name the investigations that reflect on films, similar to the Film Studies, but using anthropological tools, on the other hand, there are those who speak of “Anthropology of the cinema”. A good example is the book: *Cine mexicano antropológico (Mexican anthropological cinema)* by Javier González Rubio and Hugo Lara Chávez.

As for the dialogue between anthropology, art and philosophy <sup>16</sup>is often spoken of “anthropology of the image or the visual.” In these last aspects the production is mainly theoretical. From sociology is the “audiovisual sociology” that includes the analysis and practice of sociological research based on images. Finally, I find a growing theoretical interest from anthropology to the so-called “visual studies” that approach the production of cultural meaning through visibility.

As it is evident, the visual anthropology has not managed to develop a unified definition, its characteristics and objectives are always in debate<sup>17</sup>. Almost two decades ago, Paul Henly (2001) wrote that the impact of images in recent years had not gone unnoticed by academic anthropology, but at the same time, he saw the existence of some insecurity in what is or should be visual anthropology.

In analytical terms we can find two lines of work very present in Latin America. On the one hand is the medial production traditionally covered

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16 See: What is the anthropology of the image? Interview with Hans Belting <https://youtu.be/j8O-90TYBtDw>

17 Ruby (2007) finds three types of visual anthropology. The first focuses on the production of ethnographic films and their educational use. The second, to study the media, usually television and film. And finally, visual anthropology of communication, which is the broader version, encompasses the anthropological study of all visual and graphic forms of culture, as well as the production of visual material with an anthropological intention.

by film and photography as instruments of research and dissemination of ethnographic work and on the other, the study of intercultural communication and criticism of the visual representation of cultures, which inscribes mostly in the fields of analysis and theory.

The most dogmatic consider that for an audiovisual work to be anthropological it must have the same rigor of written research, in addition of course, thematic and methodological affinity with the discipline, a team that integrates at least a professional anthropologist, etc. (these jobs usually have very limited mobility). The most open to the contrary, can come to think of anthropological relevance any production that appeals to the encounter with the “otherness.”

Placed at extreme poles, of course, both points of view, pose many difficulties. Too closed a posture limits the possibilities for dialogue and greatly limits the way we work. A fully open one can be diluted easily and lose course. I find that the negotiation between both and a territory by which one can tread firmly, is to think of visual anthropology as a meeting point between different disciplines in which image and sound enable the researcher more free forms of ethnographic work and channels for reach a wider audience. However, there is a conflict that is still present and difficult to balance, I am referring to the struggle between those who prioritize anthropology as the fundamental value of ethnographic cinema and who subordinate it to cinematographic language (González-Abrisketa and Vallejo, 2014, p. 62).

This conflict, which for discussion can also transpose the tension between production of text and images, is not only conceptual but also practical. On the one hand, there are few filmmakers who participate in the theoretical debates on the subject, on the other, the academic structures of anthropology are usually rigid and rarely see audiovisual production as the main format for presenting an investigation. There are no specialized supports and those of the cinematographic institutions are usually very closed and for anthropologists it is difficult to obtain them. Usually, although we would have to discuss it in greater depth, there are better chances of being raised projects that include people in the work of film and anthropology.

The same thing happens with the exhibition. For example, with specialized events (whose main circuit is in Europe) while the most open and associated with documentary film (such as the Jean Rouch Festival, Astra Film Festival and Festival dei Popoli, etc.) are interested in the cinematographic language and experimental forms, program works by different filmmakers regardless

of their background. The most closed (such as RAI Film Festival, Gottingen Ethnographic Film Festival and NAFA Film Festival, etc.) are concentrated in the academic ethnographic tradition, are not so much concerned with form and have a more rigid selection criteria (Gonzalez-Abrisketa and Vallejo, 2014, p60). Although there are movies that are scheduled in both types of festival, it is not common enough.

Since the production and distribution of the first films “self-described as ethnographic”, there is a discussion about what characterizes this cinema, whether or not an anthropologist needs it and whether the classrooms and academic events are their main channel of diffusion. Beyond looking for definitions to exhaustion, like Ziri6n (2015, p. 52), I consider it more fruitful to ask ourselves in what ways can we say that a film is considered ethnographic? A point in which many approaches usually converge, is to think of it as a field that addresses the representation of cultural diversity<sup>18</sup> encompassing productions in which anthropologists may or may not participate; to tell specific stories, within the frame of reference of those who are been portrayed, to evoke their culture and make it meaningful for an audience that may or may not be specialized (Bishop, 2012, 45).

The anthropological character of a film or a photograph may have more to do with the process of realization, with the encounter between cultures, with the construction of dialogues, that even, with the central theme, the final objectives and the characters (Ziri6n, 2015, p 52). On the other hand, Olatz Gonz1lez-Abrisketa and A6da Vallejo (2014, p. 62) find that for most anthropologists and filmmakers it is irrelevant to distinguish what is or is not ethnographic cinema. In this sense a film can become ethnographic in relation to the route it has (the festival circuit in which it participates and the catalogs in which it is offered, etc.).

The t-shirt of anthropology, we must note, not only worn by the filmmaker, but also the one who sees the film, analyzes it, comments it, the programs it at a festival or inscribes it in a particular discussion frame. However, it is very important to emphasize that not all audiovisual productions that are made from anthropology are cinematic, nor do they try to be, there are also

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18 Elizabeth Edwards (211, pp. 161-171) finds a shift in the way in which anthropology originally used images, in the various criticisms made by the poststructuralists, and in the later reaction -from the so-called visual anthropology- in which the relation of such images to colonialism was discussed, since these, it was argued, helped to build domination over ethnic populations by reinforcing stereotypical categories.

pieces (capsules or reports for example) that are designed for other spaces and have another type of diffusion. In Latin America and generally in the world, the most interesting films for visual anthropology <sup>19</sup>(I am thinking of those that approach cultural diversity, social conflicts, daily life, etc.) are not made by anthropologists or anthropological institutions (of course there are honorable exceptions), but by independent filmmakers (it is enough to review the programming of the last years of the Margaret Mead Film Festival, for example, to get an idea about it) that use ethnographic tools (artists, filmmakers, communicators, etc.) <sup>20</sup>and show their work in different spaces. Talking about ethnographic cinema, however, still makes sense because it allows us to characterize the cinema that deals with cultural diversity with an affinity to anthropology and to discern the use of ethnographic tools in audiovisual production.

The exhibition, whose study is increasing from anthropology (a significant example is the book *Film Festivals and Anthropology* coordinated by Aída Vallejo and Maria Paz Peirano), plays a fundamental role, because to put certain labels to a film, as “ethnographic cinema”, and concentrating on a very specific field can help define the mechanisms of legitimization, dissemination, distribution and finally help you find the audience, but it can also close doors and put straitjackets.

In this regard, Robert Gardner commented:

I would like to think that the future of ethnographic cinema will include the abandonment of this way of referring to any film. Creating an “ethnographic” film category makes it difficult to explore the human condition cinematographically. Using this term benefits only those dogmatists who prefer to ignore the fact that we are all members of the same humanity (Gardener in Ziri6n and Flores, 2009, p. 167)

Although I will not get into the efforts that have been made by researchers like Bill Nichols and Carl Plantinga, to classify the types of documentary that exist; I consider it important to leave clearly on the table that ethnographic cinema is diverse as the issues it addresses. Same thing with formats. If visual anthropology expanded in the middle of the last century the limits of the discipline itself rethinking the position of the other, its presence as

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<sup>19</sup> As a concrete example I think of *Calle L6pez* (2013) by Lisa Tillinger and Gerardo Barroso

<sup>20</sup> See the work of the Mexicans Adriana Trujillo, Emilio T6llez Parra, Tania Ximena and Yolotl Alvarado.

a subject and not only as an object of study opening the way to reflexivity; the 21st century opens possibilities for thinking about the development of a visual anthropology from the new media (Gutiérrez, 2012, pp. 102-105).

For example, under the growth of the Internet and the notion of expanded cinema, crossmedia artifacts, such as interactive documentary<sup>21</sup>, have emerged that extend the classic two-dimensional picture of the screen into narrative and display formats, where the viewer, to some extent becomes co-creator (Yáñez, 2011). These documentaries have a different logic of distribution and dissemination that merits deepening in another work. The truth is that they present new possibilities for the medial practices of anthropology. Not all films will have the same field of action: some will find a greater spectrum in the circuits closest to art, others in academics and anthropological cinema, others in the circuits of documentary, etc. The truth is that a fundamental task, which is often left out (at least by a good number of anthropologists trying to make films), is to work in the exhibition as well as in the investigation and completion of the film.

### **An intermittent circuit: mapping of festivals and shows of ethnographic cinema in Latin America**

Luis Ospina, the Colombian documentary filmmaker, said in an interview I quote from memory, “that one of the functions of a film festival is to make visible the invisible.” With this idea that serves as my starting point, Ospina refers to one of the missions of the festivals is to show the cinema that has few exits, which will not have a run in commercial halls, which does not have a press team and we probably would not find out otherwise. That is, one of its main objectives is to be a bridge between filmmakers and the public.

Although there are festivals of very different types and themes (some competitive with business and industry components, others more focused on the diffusion and formation of audiences, etc.) Olatz González-Abrisketa and Aída Vallejo (2014, p. 67) have classified them in three large groups in relation to their fields of specialization. I will add a fourth: 1) Ethnographic film festivals; 2) Documentary film festivals; 3) Generalist festivals (refers

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21 To go deeper into the expanded documentary you can see the conference *Flows of the visible: the expansion of the documentary* by Josep Ma Català: <https://vimeo.com/33016851>.

to festivals that have different categories, for example, the International Film Festival of Morelia) and 4) Thematic festivals (I refer to those who base their programming on particular topics, e.g. environment or human rights). Such a panorama draws various possibilities for the circulation of a film, but also raises more questions about how to characterize the ethnographic cinema.

The list that accompanies this work only contemplates specialized events in ethnographic cinema (for reasons of space there were no anthropological photography contests, nor related festivals such as those of indigenous cinema and social cinema), although the focus is Latin America, with projects of : Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Ecuador and Mexico; separated on regional maps, it includes festivals from all over the world with the intention of building a global panorama, which can serve as support for those who wish to build a route. As in all mapping it is possible that some initiatives are left out, however, including those that, by reviewing and comparing, the greatest number of specialized sources possible, were the most representative and consolidated in the region. Now, from my perspective, as an anthropologist and director, a route to festivals ideally, even if we think of our film as ethnographic, it must contemplate along the way, to a greater or lesser extent, the four types of festivals. (There are various databases that can be consulted online). Whether it is accepted or not depends on different factors, but to remain only in the field of anthropology would be to diminish the possibility of dialoguing with a wider audience, which is one of the possibilities that we cannot let go of the small thing that is usually the diffusion of anthropological work.

Of the films that sought to capture reality as it is to the new wave of sensory cinema, there is a world of difference, but in general the spaces focused on ethnographic cinema do not have so many variations (although they are clear). They can be broadly divided into two items, which I mentioned earlier, and I will review a little more.

The first are the most open, for example the *thespiello Festival Internacional de Documental Etnográfico de Sobrarbe* (Sobrarbe's Espiello International Festival of Ethnographic Documentary), understands in a broad sense the ethnographic documentary as the documentary productions whose primary intention is to show aspects related to the ways of living and understanding life within a culture. In this range can enter many films that were not necessarily made with anthropological tools.

The second are the most closed, such as the *Society for Visual Anthropology Film & Media Festival* which defines ethnographic film and video in general terms

as works created as a result of ethnographic field work or in which ethnography is used, are informed or illustrated by the principles of anthropological theory or methodologies. In this look there is also an endless number of possibilities, but the emphasis is placed on the use of anthropological methodologies.

It is not always so easy (or so necessary) to decide which side the balance is on. Equally not all those who produce cinema considered ethnographic are interested in exhibiting their films in the anthropological circuit. A significant example is the work done by the Harvard Sensory Ethnography Lab coordinated by Lucien Castaing-Taylor. Although they are well acquainted with the tradition of ethnographic cinema, they are often opt out of it. If we look at the films of *Manakamana* (2013), *Leviathan* (2012) and *Sweetgrass* (2009), we will find more major festivals such as Locarno and CPH: DOX, than ethnographic festivals. If we do not know where they come from (although they are consonant with the mainstream of observational cinema) perhaps we would put them under the umbrella of experimental cinema and yet come from a laboratory of sensorial ethnography.

Some Latin American examples that we can review are the *Tiyarus* (2015) documentaries by Emilio Téllez Parra and *La piedra absente* (2013) by Sandra Rozental and Jesse Lerner. As for the first, the director has no anthropological training and yet we can inscribe the film within the framework of experimental ethnography. Its route has been diverse, includes generalist festivals, others of social court and academic events. The second is directed by an anthropologist and a filmmaker and writer. Its route has been long and diverse, although it could be described as anthropological cinema, we can also put it alone under the umbrella of the documentary cinema. It was premiered in theaters and distributed on digital platforms. I describe this to account for how complicated the classifications can be, but also how diverse the path of a movie is.

Although it is true that digital platforms have changed the rules of the game drastically, it is also true that in the sea of current information we need certain tools to not get lost in the mist. Journals and reviews, specialized catalogs, programming cycles, shows and festivals remain crucial to connect with people. In Latin America, these spaces, paradoxically, tend to emerge in academic institutions such as universities and museums, but there are also important independent initiatives, such as the *Foorumdoc*, *Documentary Film Festival of Belo Horizonte* (which in 2017 turns 20) and *Conference on Visual Anthropology* (2005-2012), organized by the



collective *Ethnoscope*. Although this project is not yet active, I consider it important to include it because other initiatives have been derived from it. The conference consisted of an academic colloquium, a photographic exhibition and a sample of contemporary Mexican documentary that projected the works of a new generation of documentalists <sup>22</sup>that arose in the late nineties and early twentieth century, addressing in an interesting, critical and diverse way what was happening at that moment in the country. Although few of these documentaries had been made from anthropology, the questions and discussions generated around them from our field revealed the multiple possibilities for the realization and investigation of the audiovisual media. Subsequently, in collaboration with the Documentary Film Festival of Mexico City DOCSMX, another retrospective show was the aforementioned Cine entre Culturas, which aimed to review the work of the most outstanding filmmakers and collectives of ethnographic cinema as Jorge Prelorán, Jonh Marshal and Video na Aldeas, Robert Gardner, Ojo de Agua communications, etc. The seminars ended in 2012. The Ethnographic Film Forum, the Academic Colloquium on Audiovisual Anthropology and the Audiovisual Research Encounter and Sampler emerged in Mexico, which is only consolidating.

There are very few festivals and shows consolidated in the region. The vast majority are relatively recent. In total they do not add more than 10. Although new initiatives emerge each year, few reach international visibility. Without a doubt it is not possible to speak of a circuit; I mean a set of festivals, shows, forums that interact with each other and generate exchanges, dialogues and that allow the filmmakers to build a regional broadcasting route. It should be noted that very few ethnographic films have commercial outlets, there are practically no distributors in the region, nor specialized catalogs.

Latour (2008, pp. 53-56) finds that groups cannot exist without an accompaniment of formators, spokespersons (who speak for their existence, invoking rules and precedents) and questioners. Groups are not silent things, but rather the circumstantial product of all the voices that speak about what a group of who corresponds to what. “No matter what example you take,

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22 Some of them are: Everardo González with *La canción del pulque* (2003) and *Los ladrones viejos* (2007), Eugenio Polgovsky with *Trópico de Cáncer* (2004) and *Los Herederos* (2008), Adrián Arce, Antonio Ziri6n y Diego Rivera Kohn with *Voces de la Guerrero* (2004), Natalia Almada with *Al otro lado* (2005) and *El General* (2009), Juan Carlos Rulfo with *Del olvido al no me acuerdo* (1999) and *En el Hoyo* (2006) y Lucía Gajá with *Mi vida adentro* (2007) among others.



everyone needs people to define who they are, what they should be, what they have been.” There is already a community of filmmakers, there is research and academic production about it, but we do not have an institutional framework that provides funding, dissemination, distribution, etc.

This creates a bottleneck, which is not alien to the dissemination of anthropological knowledge. We have independent production, but not the right mechanisms for it to reach people, so the filmmaker must pay special attention to the strategy he uses to distribute his work and the emphasis he wants to put on each type of possible space. The events dedicated to documentary film in the region are in good health, are growing enormously and represent a very important window for filmmakers; however few of them contemplate components of visual anthropology (workshops, samples, forums, etc.). However there are collaborations and are increasing.

For example Transcinema of Peru has projects with the Master in Visual Anthropology of the PUCP; DocsMX (formerly DOCSDF) performed for several years, in collaboration with Etnoscopio A.C., Cinema between Cultures (for now on pause) and Itinerant, every so often include in its programming ethnographic works and related academic events. On the other hand, in the new tendencies of the circuits of the contemporary cinema, in the experimental as in the independent one, the traditional borders are being diluted, important festivals of the region like FIC-Valdivia and FICUNAM have eliminated the division between documentary and fiction of its competitive sections; at this juncture ethnographic cinema from its most experimental slopes has gradually consolidated as a fertile field of realization.

On the other hand, the most solid festivals of ethnographic cinema in the region and with a clearer profile are the Brazilians, the already mentioned Forumdoc.bh (more open and loaded towards the documentary) and the International Ethnographic Film Festival of Recife (a little more charged to anthropology). However, interesting proposals are emerging in the framework of international congresses such as the Ethnographic Film Forum (which is being held in different congresses) and the LASA Film Festival with much more open and risky programming than those usually found in such places, however they still have little public and occupy a marginal position. It is also important to note the emergence of the Ethnographic Film Festival of Ecuador, which recently celebrated its second edition and is working to consolidate.

As we all know this type of spaces are extremely necessary, but generally have little projection and require a lot of effort. The question, however contradictory it may seem, is whether we need to create new festivals or if it is more proactive to make alliances with other (generalists or documentary) that already have more reach and diffusion? Creating samples, academic events and specialized programs.

This short tour tried to bring to the table the importance of generating specialized spaces in the diffusion of ethnographic cinema and, on the other hand, the relevance of this type of films to be sent to non-specialized forums, to broaden their scope and dialogue with a broader audience. Below is a world map and calendar of ethnographic film festivals.

**Figura 1**  
**Festivales de cine etnográfico**



<p><b>Reino Unido</b> RAI International Festival of Ethnographic Film</p> <p><b>Francia</b> Festival International Jean Rouch Etnografilm Festival</p> <p><b>España</b> Espiello, Festival Internacional de Documental Etnográfico de Sobrarbe Muestra de Antropología Visual de Madrid (MAAM) Mostra de Cine Etnográfico Museo do Pobo Galego</p> <p><b>Portugal</b> Mostra de Filme Etnográfico Congresso da Associação Portuguesa de Antropologia CinANTROP Festival Internacional de Cinema Etnográfico e documental de Portugal</p> <p><b>Alemania</b> Göttingen International Ethnographic Film Festival Freiburg Film Forum</p> <p><b>Austria</b> Athnocineca</p>	<p><b>Holanda</b> Beeld voor Beeld</p>  <p><b>Polonia</b> Eyes and Lenses: Ethnographic Film Festival</p> <p><b>Eslovenia</b> Days of Ethnographic Film</p> <p><b>República Checa</b> AntropoFest International Festival of Movies With Antropological Themes</p> <p><b>Croacia</b> ETNOFILM Ethnographic Film Festival International Ethno Film Festival the Hert of Slavonia</p>	<p><b>Finlandia</b> Viscult-Festival of Visual Culture NAFA (Nordic Anthropological Film Association) Film Festival</p> <p><b>Suizia</b> Regard Bleu Festival for ethnographic student film and media</p> <p><b>Bulgaria</b> International Festival of Ethnographic Fil Sofia</p> <p><b>Macedonia</b> Kratovo Ethnographic Film Festival</p> <p><b>Eslovaquia</b> Etnofilm Cadca</p>	<p><b>Italia</b> Festival dei Popoli-Festival Internazionale del Film Documentario Intima Lente Festival of Visual Ethnography SIEFF-Sardinia International Ethnographic Film Festival</p> <p><b>Grecia</b> :thnofest, Athens Ethnographic Film Festival</p> <p><b>Rumania</b> Astra Film Festival Etno Film Zlatna-Festival international de Film Etnografic</p> <p><b>Rusia</b> Russian Anthropological Film Festival Moscow International Visual Anthropology Festival</p> <p><b>Estonia</b> World Film Festival Pa'rnü International Documentary and Anthropology Film Festival</p> <p><b>Serbia</b> International Festival of Ethnological Film</p>
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<p><b>Armenia</b> Apricot Tree International Ethnographic Film Festival</p>	 <p><b>Taiwan</b> Taiwan International Ethnographic Fil Festival</p>
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<p><b>Enero</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Antropofest International Film Festival (Praga, República Checa).*</li> <li>- Ethnographic Film Festival of Montreal (Canadá).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Febrero</b></p>	<p><b>Marzo</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Days of Ethnographic Film (Liubliana, Eslovenia).*</li> <li>- Eyes and Lenses: Ethnographic Film Festival (Varsovia, Polonia).</li> <li>- FIFEQ- International Ethnographic Film Festival of Quebec (Canadá).</li> <li>- World Film Festival (Tartu, Estonia).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Abril</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anthropology Film Festival at UBC (Vancouver, Canadá).</li> <li>- CinANTROP (Lisboa, Portugal).</li> <li>- Espiello, Festival Internacional de Documental Etnográfico de Sobrarbe (Huesca, España).*</li> <li>- ETNOFILM Festival (Rovinj, Croacia).</li> <li>- Etnografilm Festival (París, Francia).</li> <li>- Russian Anthropological Film Festival (Ekaterimburgo, Rusia).</li> <li>- LASA Film Festival (Lima, Perú).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Mayo</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ethnocineca (Viena, Austria).*</li> <li>- Freiburg Film Forum - Ethnology (Alemania).</li> <li>- Göttingen International Ethnographic Film Festival (Alemania).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Junio</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ethno film Festival - The Heart of Slavonia (Djakovo, Croacia).</li> <li>- Mostra de cine etnográfico (Santiago de Compostela, España).</li> <li>- RAI International Festival of Ethnographic Film (Reino Unido).</li> <li>- Congreso de Antropología (Bogotá, Colombia).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Julio</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pa'mu International Documentary and Anthropology Film Festival (Estonia).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Agosto</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NAFA (Nordic Anthropological Film Association) Film Festival (itinerante).</li> <li>- Etno Film Zlatna – Festival International de Film Etnografic (Zlanta, Rumania.)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Septiembre</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SIEFF - Sardinia International Ethnographic Film Festival (Italia).</li> <li>- Viscult - Festival of visual culture. (Joensuu, Finlandia).</li> <li>- Festival de Ojo - Festival de Cine Etnográfico (Quito, Ecuador).</li> </ul>

<p><b>Octubre</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Astra Film Festival (Sibiu, Rumania).</li> <li>- Kratovo Ethnographic Film Festival (Macedonia).</li> <li>- Moscow International Visual Anthropology Festival (Rusia).</li> <li>- Regard Blue (Zurich, Suiza).</li> <li>- Taiwan International Ethnographic Film Festival (Taipei).</li> <li>- Foro Mexicano de Cine Etnográfico (México).</li> <li>- Encuentro Académico de Antropología Audiovisual (México).</li> <li>- Encuentro y Muestrario de Investigaciones Audiovisuales (Michoacán, México).</li> <li>- DocAnt Muestra del Documental Antropológico y Socia (Buenos Aires, Argentina).</li> <li>- Apricot Tree Etnografic Film Festival (Yerevan, Armenia).</li> <li>- 1er Festival Etnografía Audiovisual Interpretativa</li> </ul>	<p><b>Noviembre</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aspekty. Festival of Visual Anthropology (Torun, Polonia).</li> <li>- Ethnofest Athens Ethnographic Film Festival (Grecia).</li> <li>- Etnofilm Cadca (Eslovaquia).</li> <li>- Festival dei Popoli (Firencia, Italia).</li> <li>- Festival do Filme Documentario e Etnográfico (Belo Horizonte, Brasil).</li> <li>- Festival International Jean Rouch (París, Francia).</li> <li>- International Festival of Ethnographic Film (Sofía, Bulgaria).</li> <li>- International Festival of Ethnological Film (Belgrado, Serbia).</li> <li>- Margaret Mead Film and Video Festival (Nueva York, Estados Unidos).</li> <li>- Mostra Internacional do Filme Etnográfico (Rio de Janeiro, Brasil).</li> <li>- SVA Film and Video Festival (Estados Unidos).</li> <li>- Festival do Filme Documentário e Etnográfico de Belo Horizonte</li> </ul>	<p><b>Diciembre</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Beeld voor Beeld (Amsterdam, Holanda).</li> <li>- Intima Lente Festival of Visual Ethnography (Caserta, Italia)</li> </ul>
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## Filmography

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