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Libertad Gills  <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6987-6027>
(University of Leeds, United Kingdom)

Por un cine cachinero: Reappropriation as a Survival Strategy in Contemporary Experimental Cinema from Guayaquil

Watch the audiovisual essay here:

<https://youtu.be/7SmI072mz4>

Abstract

The video essay *Por un cine cachinero*, based on the manifesto of the same title published in the book *Guayaquil en ruinas* (“Guayaquil in Ruins,” Guayaquil Analógico, 2023), brings together films made in Guayaquil on analog film or made by reappropriating archives. The aim is to recontextualize these works within the local framework of “cachinería,” the name of popular second-hand markets. What would a film theory inspired by the *cachinería* look like? This video essay considers reappropriation in experimental cinema in Guayaquil as a practice that resignifies international found footage tendencies or fashions as well as local DIY traditions of reemployment and recycling. In a crisis of rising living costs, *cachinería* becomes a survival strategy for experimental filmmakers.

Keywords

found footage, Ecuadorian cinema, experimental film, Latin American cinema, analog filmmaking

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Creator's Statement

Cachinería is a term used in Ecuador to refer to second-hand markets located in popular areas of the city center. They are also known by locals as “el mall del piso” (or “mall on the ground”), in reference to the objects that are displayed at street level. Although the origin of the items sold is often unknown (or even questionable), it remains an attractive alternative to the malls, where products are often imported and much more expensive. More than just a hipster trend, in Guayaquil second-hand reappropriation is a survival strategy for the working class.

The first time I saw Guayaquil's *cachinería* was in the documentary *Descartes* (Fernando Mieles, 2009), about Gustavo Valle, who unexpectedly won several amateur filmmaking contests in the 1980s and then stopped making films when the contests were discontinued. The title *Descartes* — a wordplay relying on Spanish for “discarded” as well as the philosopher's name — comments not only on the fact that Valle's films were badly preserved and partially lost (by the local municipality), but also on how artists are unsupported and eventually “discarded” in Guayaquil society through systems that do not value cultural production or understand the importance of preserving films. Mieles shot Valle in the *cachinería* in order to reflect on how many films have ended up there — as trash. Valle's livelihood depends on the *cachinería* and the buying and reselling of objects, especially photographic cameras and books. On rare occasions, Valle even finds old Super 8, 8mm, and 16mm films and film projectors.¹⁾ But Mieles's reflection also concerns Guayaquil's

1) For more about Valle's analog films from the 1980s and his return to cinema through digital experimental filmmaking see Libertad Gills, “Notes Toward a History of Amateur Filmmaking in Guayaquil,” in *Small Cinemas of the Andes: New Aesthetics, Practices and Platforms*, eds. Diana Coryat, Christian León, and Noah Zweig (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 219–233. For more about Fernando Mieles's filmography see Libertad Gills, “De *Tábara* (2003) a *Persistencia* (2016): El cine sobre arte de Fernando Mieles,” *Fuera de Campo* 1, no. 5 (2017), 20–39.

forgotten, abandoned, and invisibilized film history. He made *Descartes* when he returned to Guayaquil after completing his studies abroad, uneasy about what it means to be an artist from Guayaquil and to continue making films there.

Like Mieles, in 2018 I returned to Guayaquil and experienced a similar desire to understand what it meant to be a filmmaker — as well as a film educator in a public university — in this city. Recognizing that there was already a history of analog filmmaking that I knew little about, I began a research project at the Universidad de las Artes titled “Guayaquil Analógico” dedicated to the study of — and correspondence with — the city’s analog past. Together with filmmaker Martín Baus, we organized our first public events, which were flooded by students and artists from the community. We realized that there were many other people just as interested as we were in this history. Together with students, teachers, and artists, Guayaquil Analógico organically became a film collective: we studied, found, projected, and corresponded with analog films made in Guayaquil, from the *Ruta sin cine* guided walks through the cemetery of closed movie theaters, to found Super 8 film community screenings, to experimental film practices of reappropriation or *cachinería*, and artisanal practices of film processing, the collective proposed ways of thinking through cinema that could constitute a community-centered, practice-based, living research project. This work took place between 2018 and 2022 and was collected and published in a book titled *Guayaquil en ruinas: Cartografía de una ciudad filmica*,²⁾ for which we were awarded the Premio Nacional de Artes Mariano Aguilera.

As we worked, the *cachinería* kept returning, not only as a place (to find abandoned films, projectors, cameras, reels, books about film), but also as a *practice*, and therefore, as a verb, *cachinear*, and as a way of being, as a noun: *cachinero*. Gustavo Valle — the quintessential filmmaker from Guayaquil, experimental, unfunded, yet resourceful, whose films were shot in the city and with nonprofessional actors, often inspired by stories read in the local newspapers — is a *cachinero*. Every morning he rides his bicycle to the *cachinería* and finds objects to resell or to use in his work. But also artists working today in Guayaquil, such as Juanca Vargas, Eduardo Jaime, Fabricio Medina and photographers from the Pinhole Guayaquil collective: they too are *cachineros*, rummaging through the abandoned and discarded in order to find materials to make their art. When the pandemic set in, and we were unable to travel, buy film stock or film books, or get our film processed, Martín started developing film at home using alternative recipes, since the traditional ones included chemicals that were prohibited in Ecuador. Meanwhile, the pandemic was devastating for Guayaquil’s working class. As the government washed its hands of all responsibility, and the morgues were overcrowded, cadavers were left out on the streets, making international headlines the following day. The sense of abandonment and ruin was everywhere. One day, we found dozens of cans of 35mm film on a street corner, which had been thrown out by a film distributor that had been out of business for decades. We took some of these film cans home, as did some of our friends and students. These films became the *materia prima* (raw material) for new film projects. And we, in the process, became *cachineros*.

2) Libertad Gills and Martín Baus, eds., *Guayaquil en ruinas: Cartografía filmica de una ciudad* (Quito: Guayaquil Analógico, 2023).

This is how we started to think of *cine cachinero* as a practice, as an ethos, as an attitude and way of life of working artists and filmmakers in Guayaquil. It encapsulates the experimental film practices of reappropriation and found footage filmmaking in contemporary cinema made in Guayaquil. In a context where fresh film is difficult to find — not to mention process and scan — and where the notion of film as industry excludes more experimental practices of filmmaking, *cine cachinero* encompasses a local DIY way of making films cheaply and independently, with pre-existing materials, and without the need for financial assistance from national film funds (which often comes with long waiting periods and bureaucratic obstacles).

The video essay *Por un cine cachinero*, based on the eponymous manifesto published in the aforementioned book *Guayaquil en ruinas* (Guayaquil in Ruins, 2023),³⁾ brings together *cachinero films*, including films that we found, digitized, intervened on, and made, in order to recontextualize these works within a framework that is local, in both economic and political senses. Our original text “Por un cine cachinero” is written as a manifesto, echoing the language and urgency of revolutionary texts like Julio García Espinosa’s “Por un cine imperfecto” (“For an Imperfect Cinema,” 1969), which challenges the notion of a technically perfect cinema of quality from Hollywood and Europe, embracing instead a low-budget, anti-academic, and revolutionary Latin American cinema.⁴⁾ Our manifesto also directly cites Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade’s “Manifesto Antropófago” (1928),⁵⁾ in which the iconic line “Tupi, or not Tupi: that is the question” creates a mashup of Shakespeare and the Tupi, one of the largest Indigenous groups in Brazil prior to colonization, which, according to European travelers, practiced cannibalism. De Andrade turns the accusation of cannibalism into a metaphor for postcolonial cultural reappropriation, for how artists can eat up dominant cultural references and spit them out in a new form. Similarly, our manifesto posits reappropriation as a form of reverse colonial plunder. And it reimagines the “cachinero,” sometimes also considered a thief who sells stolen goods, as our inspiration.

The video essay considers reappropriation in experimental cinema in Guayaquil as a practice that resignifies international found footage tendencies or fashions and local DIY traditions of reemployment and recycling. In a crisis of rising living costs, *cachinería* additionally becomes a survival strategy for experimental filmmakers too. The video essay begins with images of Valle wandering through the *cachinería* in Fernando Mieles’s *Descartes* and then cuts to images from a film that we found in Valle’s home and digitized. This film, titled *Un muñeco llamado Año Viejo*, is a documentary about the traditional effigies made and burnt at midnight on New Year’s Eve in Ecuador. Originally shot in color and then stored at room temperature in Guayaquil’s swampy climate, the colors have transformed over time into a yellowish-red hue. I likewise wanted to include the images of

- 3) Libertad Gills and Martín Baus, “Por un cine cachinero: Un manifesto,” in *Guayaquil en ruinas: Cartografía filmica de una ciudad*, eds. Libertad Gills and Martín Baus (Quito: Guayaquil Analógico, 2023), 199–201.
- 4) Julio García Espinosa, “Por un cine imperfecto,” *Cine cubano* 66/67, 1969. Translated into English by Julianne Burton for *Jump Cut*, no. 20 (1979), 24–26.
- 5) Oswald de Andrade, “Manifesto Antropófago,” *Revista de Antropofagia*, 1928. Translated into English by V. S. Contren here: Oswald de Andrade, “Anthropophagic Manifest,” *Bunker within Reason*, June 9, 2020, accessed September 30, 2025, <https://huebunkers.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/andrade-anthropophagic-manifesto.pdf>.

the burning effigies in reference to the many fires that have wiped out archives and contributed to Guayaquil's "lost" cultural memory.

The video essay continues with fragments from Oscar Illingworth's *Flores de fuego* (2020), a film made in response to the corpses found on the streets of Guayaquil during the pandemic and in which fire plays an important role. It follows with contributions from photographer and painter Eduardo Jaime, materials from visual artist Juanca Vargas, and two films by Martín Baus — *Al pasar: cartas desde el trópico* (2022) and *Preludio (a la siesta del Fauno y la Bacante)* (2020), the latter made with the 35mm found on the street corner — as well as the documentation of his work titled *Reductos ecuatoriales* (2020), for which he created an apparatus for transforming 35mm into 8mm film using only recycled materials. It also includes camera-less, found footage films manually intervened on by students from the Universidad de las Artes, including *Guía de calentamientos y ejercicios de control para niños* (Mayro Romero, 2021), *Los danzantes* (Génesis Barahona Rodríguez, 2021), and a film also made with the found 35mm film, *Presente* (Melanie Bravo, 2021) — all three films produced in the context of Andrés Dávila's experimental cinema course at the University.⁶⁾ I incorporate fragments from my own work as well: the Super 8 film *cielo abierto / suelo abierto / mar abierto* (co-directed with Baus, 2021), my archival essay film *1922* (2023) about the massacre of striking workers in Guayaquil in 1922,⁷⁾ as well as Super 8 home movies shot in Guayaquil during lockdown and developed by hand.

The video essay includes two salsa songs, which are part of the soundtrack to life in Guayaquil and referenced in different parts of the manifesto. As the manifesto "Por un cine cacinero" was written while listening to these tracks, they also reflect the rhythm (and humor) of the words/texts that appear onscreen. The first is "Arroz con habichuelas" by El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico (2006), a song that celebrates the vibrant culture of salsa music and Puerto Rican heritage. Here the line "Esto no es ensaladita light" ("This is not a light salad," meaning that salsa music is not something light or superficial, but rather rich and substantial like the title's "rice and beans") is reappropriated in the manifesto to say: "This is not found footage," "reappropriation, or remploi." The second song referenced is "Periódico de ayer," a salsa classic by Héctor Lavoe from 1976, in which the line "tu amor es un periódico de ayer" ("your love is yesterday's paper") is transformed into "tu industria es un periódico de ayer" ("your industry is yesterday's paper") in reference to a dying film industry.

6) For a dossier about these works and more produced in the framework of these film courses at the Universidad de las Artes led by professor and filmmaker Andrés Dávila, including articles written by Romero, Barahona Rodríguez, and Bravo about their individual films, see Andrés Dávila, ed., *Autoetnografías: Archivos y apropiaciones / Preliminar Cuadernos de Trabajo 8* (Guayaquil: UA Ediciones, 2021–2022). Bravo's text describes the process of finding the can of film on the street corner, discovering it to be the Italian film *L'ultimo volo all'inferno* (Ignazio Dolce, 1990), and then proceeding to rework a fragment of it manually in order to create a critical tribute to the Indigenous activists murdered by the police in Ecuador in the protests of 2019. This text was republished in our book *Guayaquil en ruinas: Cartografía filmica de una ciudad*. See Melanie Bravo, "Presente," in *Guayaquil en ruinas: Cartografía filmica de una ciudad*, eds. Libertad Gills and Martín Baus (Quito: Guayaquil Analógico, 2023), 219–222.

7) For more about my process making this film while teaching at the Universidad de las Artes, see my co-authored article: Libertad Gills, Andrés Dávila, and Carlos Terán Vargas, "Professor-artist and Professor-researcher: Making the Case for Experimental Filmmaking as Research in the Academic Context of Ecuador's Universidad de las Artes," *Academic Quarter*, no. 27 (2024), 83–95.

In his 2017 essay “The Image Belongs to Those Who Work It: Recycled Cinema in Latin America,” filmmaker and writer Jesse Lerner also discusses De Andrade’s aforementioned manifesto and the cannibal archetype “not just as a paradigm for a critical cinematic practice, but also more broadly as a strategy of decolonization and as a powerful model for Latin American cultural production.”⁸⁾ He goes on to argue that *cine reciclado*, or recycled cinema, is not just “one more strategy” available to the Latin American experimental filmmaker, but rather “an anticolonial gesture of appropriation and resignification, a way of creating an ‘original’ through the reproduction, the illegitimate, the borrowed, and the stolen.”⁹⁾ He then asks, “[H]ow different would a history of found footage filmmaking look if written from a Latin American perspective?”¹⁰⁾

In my research with Guayaquil Analógico, the question arises: What would a film theory inspired by the *cachinería* look like? My search echoes similar contemporary scholarship which seeks to create a “theory from below,”¹¹⁾ where “theory” is understood for its original meaning — as scholar Jiří Anger recalls (channeling an interview with Eugenie Brinkema) — namely, as “a way to see differently.”¹²⁾ In Juanca Vargas’s exhibit “El Amanecer de los cines zombies” (“The Awakening of the Zombie Cinemas”), which I curated in Guayaquil at the Museo Nahim Isaias in 2024 and which was inspired by our manifesto (and, in turn, by Vargas’s work), Vargas proposed to place his reworked art pieces on red blankets on the ground, similar to the ones found in the *cachinería*. Mixed with his creations were objects from the *cachinería* (readymades), and other found objects (including a copy of our book). In preparations for the exhibit, Vargas and I spoke on the phone often, and he told me that he wished to transform the museum into a *cachinería*. As people wandered through the museum space, they looked down instead of looking up at the walls. Vargas proposed a way to see — and to experience the museum space — differently. A film theory of cine cachinero would similarly challenge traditional forms of film scholarship. For this reason, perhaps, the video essay or videographic criticism — as an alternative form of film scholarship that thinks with and through images and sounds instead of “about” them — is a coherent form for this film theory in construction.

The initial aim of this video essay was to group together artists who have not yet been thought of in a collective way. By calling this “cine cachinero,” we propose a local name — a name that comes from inside rather than outside, a name that refers to the practices of economic, material, and aesthetic survival which already take place in Guayaquil, and which offer a colorful and rich context from which to think about local artistic and filmmaking practices. But *in the process, something else also becomes possible* through the video essay, as themes, styles, and attitudes become visible through the coming together of

8) Jesse Lerner, “The Image Belongs to Those Who Work It: Recycled Cinema in Latin America,” in *Ismo, Ismo: Experimental Cinema in Latin America*, eds. Jesse Lerner and Luciano Piazza (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 108–127, 110.

9) *Ibid.*, 120.

10) *Ibid.*, 116.

11) Jiří Anger, *Towards a Film Theory from Below: Archival Film and the Aesthetics of the Crack-Up* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2024).

12) Jiří Anger and Tomáš Jirsa, “We Never Took Deconstruction Seriously Enough (On Affects, Formalism, and Film Theory): An Interview with Eugenie Brinkema,” *Iluminace* 31, no. 1 (2019), 80.

these individual audiovisual works. One question I had while preparing the video essay to be seen by English speakers was how to translate the term “cachinero.” In the end, I decided not to. We have “cannibalized” enough from the English and French languages in our writing on appropriation, found footage, and recycled cinema; it is time for other words to enter the conversation.

Qué viva el cine y el arte cachinero, long live the cine cachinero.

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Filmography

1922 (Libertad Gills, 2023)
Al pasar: cartas desde el trópico (Martín Baus, 2022)
cielo abierto / suelo abierto / mar abierto (Libertad Gills and Martín Baus, 2021)
Descartes (Fernando Mieles, 2009)
Flores de fuego (Oscar Illingworth, 2020)
Guía de calentamientos y ejercicios de control para niños (Mayro Romero, 2021)
Los danzantes (Génesis Barahona Rodríguez, 2021)
Preludio (a la siesta del Fauno y la Bacante) (Martín Baus, 2020)
Presente (Melanie Bravo, 2021)
Reductos ecuatoriales (Martín Baus, 2020)
Un muñeco llamado Año Viejo (Gustavo Valle, 1979)

Biography

Libertad Gills is a filmmaker, writer and researcher. She is Lecturer in Videographic Criticism at the University of Leeds since 2025. Prior to this, she was a Postdoctoral researcher for the Future of Cinema and the Audiovisual Arts at the Università della svizzera italiana-Locarno Film Festival and from 2015 to 2023 she taught film at the Universidad de las Artes in Ecuador, where she co-founded Guayaquil Analógico, a film collective dedicated to the preservation, screening and study of analogue films made in Guayaquil. She has published two books, *Guayaquil en ruinas* (Guayaquil Analógico, 2023) and *La crítica es una escuela* (UA Ediciones, 2022), as well as a chapter on a history of amateur filmmaking in Guayaquil in the volume *Small Cinemas of the Andes: New Aesthetics, Practices and Platforms* (2023).

Email: L.Gills@leeds.ac.uk