

Saludos Amigos and The Three Caballeros: *The Representation of Latin America in Disney's "Good Neighbor" Films*

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This essay examines representations of Latin America and situational Latin American identities in the feature-length Disney films *Saludos Amigos* (1942) and *The Three Caballeros* (1945). These films have come to be known as "Good Neighbor" films because, in contrast to earlier Disney animations that focused on children's stories and family entertainment, they were produced with a clear political and public relations mandate: to foster goodwill between U.S. and Latin American audiences. In a notable scene from the 16mm documentary short *South of the Border with Disney*, cartoonist Norm Ferguson is shown in Santiago, furiously sketching page after page of Pluto drawings to give away to a seemingly endless line of Chilean children. The footage, shot by Walt himself in 1942, represents a concise visual summary of the underlying set of relationships between the Disney Studio and its Latin American subjects. While the artist provides cartoon images from a widely recognized compendium of characters, the filmmaker captures new, "authentic" images of inhabitants of an exotic locale. These are in turn framed for consumption, and repackaged as a Hollywood product for U.S. consumers as well as those same exotic Others that the films putatively seek to represent.

From a structural point of view, the films are divided into discrete segments, which in *Saludos Amigos* are linked by the travel footage of Disney and his entourage, or "El grupo." In *The Three Caballeros*, the narrative is more organically connected by the travels of Disney's cartoon surrogate, Donald Duck, and his avian friends. In both, we can identify several central strategies

that allow the narrative to contain the largely unfamiliar and potentially threatening degree of difference that the Latin American world signified to U.S. audiences. First, the “Good Neighbor” films are intertextual: that is, they rely on the audience’s familiarity with a variety of external sources. The literary term “intertextuality” was introduced by Julia Kristeva, who describes two axes for each cultural text: a horizontal axis that connects the author and reader, and a vertical axis, which locates the text in an infinite dialogue with other texts.¹ Robert Stam, referring to the intertextuality of cinematic texts remarks that it is “as if both filmmaker and spectator were members of a vast audio-visual library.”² Both films contain references to a diversity of texts and genres from this “library,” calling on the spectator’s previously garnered knowledge of film genres and characters. *Saludos Amigos* provides, for example, a satirical wink at then-popular film travelogues, and also presents itself as a quasi-ethnographic documentary, in the style of Robert Flaherty, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack, to bolster its claim to realism. Both films also draw on Disney’s collection of widely recognized characters as well as the Disney brand itself. The spectator’s previously-established expectations of Disney animation endow these films with an aura of legitimacy and perceived quality to which no other filmmaker of the time could lay claim.

In addition, and in an effort to both personalize the films (making them appear to come directly from Walt Disney’s authorial hand) and to depersonalize them (ultimately reflecting the Disney model of keeping the actual artists anonymous), *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros* exhibit a surprisingly high degree of reflexivity, underscoring their own means of production, and intentionally uncovering the nature of cartoon illusion itself. Reflexivity blurs the divisions along the vertical axis of a text, and make visible what by generic custom had largely been invisible: the presence of the author in the text itself. Self-reflexivity in animation was certainly not new to audiences in the 1940s. References to the “real” cartoonist and/or the cartoon genre itself can be found from the early days of animation. Characters from Max Fleishman’s 1930s “Out of the Inkwell” series and Otto Mesmer’s “Krazy Kat” often interacted with the animated “cartoonist.” Similarly, in Tex Avery’s cartoons, spectators are occasionally addressed directly, and asides are often spoken specifically to the complicit spectator, without the knowledge of the other characters.

Early Disney cartoons were also sometimes self-reflexive, including interventions by the animator’s voice or hand in cartoon shorts. But the technique of self-reflexivity was first introduced in an animated feature in 1941 with Disney’s *The Reluctant Dragon*. Contrary to the traditional and unstated “rules” of animated film, *The Reluctant Dragon* is deliberately and self-consciously reflexive. It begins by depicting in live-action the animator, Robert Benchley. Benchley, who, in the scripted process of searching for Walt Disney himself to pitch his cartoon idea, learns about the workings of animation and the

process of converting written narrative into cartoons. The film then launches into the actual cartoon featuring the dragon. Perhaps what is most remarkable about the inclusion of the cartoonist in *The Reluctant Dragon* is that the film's production coincides with the animator's strike that was taking place at the Disney studios. The strike was principally about dissatisfaction over unpaid work, overtime and job security, but another very central issue for the strikers was the lack of attribution and credit for individual artists. All work produced at the Disney studios was signed by only one creator, and that was Walt Disney, in the unmistakable signature that has become the international logo of the company.

And while *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros* were commissioned, in part, to dispel negative stereotyping of Latin Americans in Hollywood cinema, close analysis reveals that the films actually promote other, no less inaccurate stereotypes, and, in particular, underscore the longstanding unequal relationship between the U.S. and Latin America. They continue to depict the flow of cultural texts from north to south as natural and unequivocal. Furthermore, *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros* code the nations and people of Latin America as exotic, idealized and sexualized. This last category, especially, has been the focus of numerous commentators and critics. Film and cultural critics José Piedra, Jean Franco and Julianne Burton have, from different perspectives, all analyzed the many segmented sequences of *The Three Caballeros* as the staging ground for a gendered narrative of U.S. masculine-identified hegemony vis à vis a highly feminized representation of Latin America. Piedra focuses on the sexualization of Latin America as an extension of U.S. financial interests in the region, the real motor behind this libidinal economy:

Ultimately the U.S., self-styled as a good neighbor, stands as an incestuous *padre de familias* who, while ostensibly teaching his Pan-American children to forge their own nations, libidinally encourages their dependency. The system even teaches us Latin Americans how to become the "child brides" of the United States. Thus we Latins in and around the U.S. backyard become not only the poor live-in neighbor but the tantalizing girl-next-door—not to mention the fruit-next-door—so dear to the United Fruit Company's heart.³

Burton, on the other hand, likens Disney animation to an unmediated reality beyond objective experience that "can also be the site of unbridled expressions of the individual and collective unconscious ... cartoons in this sense can be understood as a kind of dreamer's dreaming, the unconscious of the unconscious."⁴

In their landmark 1971 study *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart pointed out that Disney represents another kind of dream, more a reflection of the way Disney products work to construct meanings, and ultimately reproduce, in the words of Henry A. Giroux, "ideologically loaded fantasies."⁵ According to

Dorfman and Mattelart, this invitation to fantasize about the Other represents a grave threat to the cultural autonomy of Latin American nations. The threat is not so much that Disney products embody the “American way of life” as the “American Dream of Life”:

It is the manner in which the U.S. dreams and redeems itself, and then imposes that dream upon others for its own salvation, which poses the danger for the dependent countries. It forces us Latin Americans to see ourselves *as they see us*.⁶

While Dorfman and Mattelart's analysis is primarily focused on the Donald Duck comic strip, and their interpretation of Donald may seem limited today, the point of their latter statement is central to understanding the “Good Neighbor” films. Even at their most authentic, the films offer up an externally-constructed, highly condensed and almost parodical representation of Latin American national identities *for* Latin American audiences. Both films situate Latin Americans as exotic Others in contrast to a normative (U.S.) hegemonic culture, which is always eager to incorporate them—literally, through the figures that are “animated,” literally brought to life through the magic of animation, and figuratively, through the many ways that they are framed as “real” by the film narrative.

The question of realism in Disney cartoons has always been a complicated one, since from the moment the studio embarked on the production of its first animated feature, *Snow White*, the Disney studio strove to produce cartoons that rival live action footage in their ability to depict realistic characters and backgrounds, all while maintaining the “magic” of animation. The emphasis on producing animation that closely approximated the look and movement of live humans and animals came to be known in the Disney context as “the illusion of life.” It is described in detail in both a 1981 book and “Wonderful World of Disney” television special.⁷ In the 1940s, cartoons were generally flat and characters lacked personality and depth. Disney's aim was to create an animated scene that presented an almost photographic fidelity to “real” life and therefore could “forge that emotional bond with the audience—an animated universe he called ‘the plausible impossible’ that stretched natural laws without actually breaking them.”⁸ To achieve this aim, Disney artists studied photographs, live models and live action film to accurately reproduce the look of landscapes and backgrounds and especially the seamless, natural way that bodies (human and animal) moved. The studio had already been making use of the Disney-developed technology of the multi-plane camera, which created the illusion of depth by layering animation cels⁹ one over another and photographing them from above. The desire to animate as realistically as possible even led to the use of the “rotoscope,” a device that allows live action footage to be traced and used for animation drawings.

Disney's “illusion of life” animation as a form of cinema art has been widely commented and frequently criticized. In the opinion of film theorist

Sigfried Kracauer, animation is a form of cinema that does not depend on a photographic reproduction of the real; i.e., nothing in the cartoon exists in real life, except in the very literal sense that the camera photographically records a collection of drawings. Thus, animators do not actually reproduce life or reality and therefore do not make use of what Kracauer terms the cinema's "inherent affinities." Kracauer continues:

Unlike photographs or live action, animation is called upon to picture what is not real—that which never happens. (...) Walt Disney's increasing attempts to express fantasy in realistic terms are aesthetically questionable precisely because they comply with the cinematic approach. There is a growing tendency toward camera-reality in his later full length films. Peopled with the counterparts of real landscapes and real human beings, they are not so much "drawings brought to life" as life reproduced in drawings.¹⁰

In Kracauer's view, animation is an inherently fantastic form of cinema and therefore Disney's attempt to depict cinematic realism, either by the "illusion of life" techniques or by creating hybrid forms, such as those featured in the "Good Neighbor" films, was necessarily a poor format to exploit the aesthetic qualities of the medium. And while Kracauer's estimation of Disney's "realism" is wholly negative, his description of the realism that characterizes these films is quite accurate. Disney's intent was indeed to "reproduce life in drawings" as well as in live-action and hybrid forms.

But the assumption that this reflects a deliberate aesthetic decision with regard to the "Good Neighbor" Disney films is questionable. The live action footage, by virtue of its photographic realism clearly endowed the films with an aura of authenticity. But the inclusion of live action footage was, in the end, a financial decision. The highly realistic animation such as that featured in the early, "illusion of life" films—*Snow White*, *Pinocchio*, *Fantasia*, *Dumbo* and *Bambi*—was extremely labor-intensive and very expensive. It required thousands of individual cels to be hand drawn and inked. In contrast, live action sequences shot on location allowed the films to be extended significantly in length without the additional cost of animation or filming on a studio set. Thus, the preference for hybrid forms and the use of live-action footage in *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros* point to a central priority of the Disney Studios at the time: keeping production costs low while maintaining quality and assuring a profit. The studio had been experiencing continued financial troubles due in part to Walt's mismanagement, and in part to the high cost of producing its recent cartoon features, which left the Disney with a deficit of more than a half of a million dollars in 1942.¹¹ In addition, as mentioned above, in 1941 the Disney studio was in the throes of a bitter strike led by the animators union. The company was facing, for the first time since its establishment in 1923, the prospect of pay cuts and layoffs. Disgruntled animators picketed the studio daily and refused to work, creating an even more dire finan-

cial outlook for Disney. In short, the company was in need of a way to continue making films quickly and with a reduced labor pool. The combination of live action and animation was one response to this problem. Another was to rely on external funding to cover the production costs. The U.S. government's "Good Neighbor" policy was just the thing to afford Disney the opportunity to turn a profit with little capital investment.

Although the "Good Neighbor Policy" dates back to the presidency of Herbert Hoover, it was President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1933, who, determined to improve relations with the nations of Central and South America, adopted the "Good Neighbor" as the official U.S. foreign policy vis-à-vis Latin America. Its stated mission was to emphasize cooperation and trade rather than military force to maintain stability in the hemisphere. In his inaugural address on March 4, 1933, Roosevelt stated: "In the field of world policy I would dedicate this nation to the policy of the good neighbor—the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others." Roosevelt's Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, participated in the Montevideo Conference of December 1933, where he backed a declaration favored by most nations of the Western Hemisphere: "No state has the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of another." In December Roosevelt stated, "The definite policy of the United States from now on is one opposed to armed intervention."¹² Obviously, this emphasis on good neighborliness versus interventionism is open to question, given the continued U.S. military operations in Latin America. But the policy did address a number of economic issues that had been troublesome for U.S.-Latin American relations. Hull's policies of low tariffs improved the economies of the Latin American countries that had been hurt by the protectionist Hawley-Smoot Tariff of 1930, especially in Cuba, where low prices on sugar had previously made it difficult to sell to the United States.

Near the end of the 1930s, the U.S. government encountered reason to fear that the Nazi communications machine was making inroads in Latin America. Already disconcerting was the fact that in the early 1940s German interests held ownership or majority control over the telephone systems in Argentina, Ecuador, Uruguay, Paraguay, southern Chile and Mexico.¹³ Anatole Litvak's 1939 anti-Nazi film *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* had been banned in eighteen Latin American countries. In 1940, most Latin American governments also banned Charles Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, understood universally as an exhortation to oppose Hitler's tyranny, and many were allowing Nazi propaganda films (such as the fictional film described in Argentine writer Manuel Puig's novel *The Kiss of the Spider Woman*) to be shown freely in commercial cinemas. To counter that troubling trend, President Roosevelt in 1940 named Nelson Rockefeller, who had extensive experience in Latin America because of the many business holdings he possessed there, to head the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. One of Rockefeller's first actions

was to create a Motion Picture Division that would concentrate its efforts on seeing that Hollywood films, which had presented almost exclusively negative stereotypical images of Latin Americans, would now present positive ones. The goal of the Motion Picture Division would be to present assumedly more authentic images of Latin America and Latin Americans. To head this division, Rockefeller chose John Hay Whitney, a vice-president of the Museum of Modern Art, a financial backer of many films, and, like Walt Disney himself, an enthusiastic polo player.

The Coordinator's office sent various Hollywood celebrities to visit Latin American countries to take advantage of their celebrity and charisma to win over this public. Hollywood producers were even asked to include Latin American themes in their movies to attract Spanish-speaking viewers and to bolster good will between the continents. Twentieth Century-Fox released a string of films highlighting Latin American topics, including *Down Argentine Way* (1940), *That Night in Rio* and *Weekend in Havana* (both 1941). Following Fox's success, other studios followed suit. Latin music soared in popularity, and U.S. audiences across the nation became familiar with entertainers like Xavier Cugat and Desi Arnaz. Nonetheless, it was clear that the strategy of advancing the "Good Neighbor" policy by including Latin American themes in Hollywood films was, by any measure, a dismal failure. Instead of promoting a sense of pride and good will in Latin American audiences, the inaccurate and stereotypical images enraged them. J.B. Kaufman, one of Disney's official historians, commented on Universal Pictures' *Argentine Nights*: "When the film was shown in Buenos Aires, with its wildly inaccurate portrayal of Argentina and its jumble of Spanish dialects, audiences were so infuriated that riot police were called to quell the disturbance, and the feature was pulled after two days."¹⁴

In an effort to stave off this kind of blatant and insensitive inaccuracies, the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs agreed to finance not only the Disney Studio's "Good Neighbor" film production itself, but also travel for Disney and a group of 15 artists through Latin America to research, draw and generally familiarize themselves with the cultures and the geography of the continent. Disney artists, musicians and other employees received instruction in the history, customs, music, art and literature of the various regions as though they were completing a research seminar on the topic. Perhaps most important, the Office arranged visits with Latin American comics, artists and musicians. J.B. Kaufman, one of the Walt Disney Family Foundation's official historians, commented glowingly on Disney's efforts at depicting an authentic Latin American reality:

Walt was already on the right track with in-depth research on individual countries. (....) Let other Hollywood studios commit their careless cultural mistakes: the Disney studio would consistently strike a responsive chord with Latin American audiences by picturing their cultures in authentic detail.¹⁵

Did Disney in fact, provide a more authentic representation by providing attention to detail, or manage to avoid committing “careless cultural mistakes” as Kaufman asserts the other studios did? In response, I note that that the representations of the diverse Other in the Disney animations are far from careless, and do not project the non-intentionality of the term “mistake.” The Latin Americans in the “Good Neighbor” films are without exception depicted as happy, friendly and frequently child-like. Disney’s gaze at the indigenous Other is clearly an idealized and exoticizing one, which aims less to provide a faithful representation of an historical reality than to make it attractive and as such to render it less threatening: that which is diverse becomes positive. And the inclusion of diverse elements in the films are highly selective: some indigenous elements are presented (such as the Andean populations around Lake Titicaca in *Saludos Amigos*) and others elided (such as any intimation of African heritage in any of the Brazilian segments). With the sole exception of the documentary scenes in *Saludos Amigos*, which offer a picture-postcard representation of “modern” cities such as Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires, neither history, nor political or social reality infects the idealized and exoticized universe of Disney’s Latin America. As Jean Franco notes: “This was a Latin America that people could live with....”¹⁶

This idealized celebration of the idealized Other, and its positioning in a timeless, faceless, classless context, however, is in fact simply the other face of its polar opposite: ethnocentrism. Débora Krischke Leitão’s remarks regarding Brazilian exoticism in French fashion are applicable here:

Ranging from suspicion to hostility, [ethnocentrism] rejects all cultural forms that are different from one’s own. In this regard, ethnocentrism and exoticism are drawn closer together. Even if different in content—one valuing, the other repelling—both attitudes are less a statement about the *other* than about one-self.¹⁷

Ethnocentrism can be described as the understanding of one’s own culture as hegemonic, the dominant standard against which, from the perspective of the creator/viewer, all others are measured. Consumption of the exotic is not only the process of consuming products from *elsewhere*; it is also a process of differentiating between *us* and *them*.

And indeed the opening shot of *Saludos Amigos* could not be more direct in its positioning of Latin America as Other in relation to the dominant position of Disney—the enunciative “I” in the “Saludos” of the title. The opening screen is dominated by a written message, superimposed on an outline map of Latin America, and signed by Walt himself: “With sincere appreciation for the courtesy and cooperation shown us by the artists, musicians, and our many friends in Latin America.” An animated airplane flies over the map, standing in stark contrast to the subsequent live-action scene of a gleaming silver Pam Am airplane that Walt and his artists are boarding (a scene that, in keeping

with the simulacrum that characterized many subsequent Disney products, was actually shot in the parking lot of the Disney Studio in Burbank). The animated airplane flies over the map, showing all of Latin America as a colorful region of tidy cities, quaint villages, mountains and rivers, all fitting nicely into a camera frame. When the plane arrives at Lake Titicaca, the format suddenly switches to live-action. Like the popular Fox Movietone newsreels and travelogues, the subsequent scenes are accompanied by an authoritative male voice-over. This is the intertextual cue for the viewer to switch into the documentary mode: the live action sequences resemble nothing so much as Disney's 1950s nature documentaries such as *The Living Desert* and *The Vanishing Prairie*, which feature footage of real animals and flora. In addition, by showing the animators who are the same creative force behind the film we are watching, the film reflects back on itself, and invites the audience to observe the creative presence behind the animation they are watching.

While this self-reflexive technique is often employed as a distancing technique by modernist authors and filmmakers to "elicit an active thinking spectator rather than a passive consumer,"¹⁸ the effect here is rather the opposite. By couching the exotic Other in a generic format that is familiar for audiences, and exposing the American artists as the "authors" of the segment, the diverse elements are contained in the narrative and rendered less threatening.

To complement the neutralization of the exotic difference of the Other, the U.S. "visitor" not only encounters, but also appropriates the exotic cultural artifacts. The first Latin American people we see in the film are the Bolivian inhabitants of the *altiplano* assembled for market day. A Bolivian woman, dressed in a traditional colorful *pollera* and an undersized bowler hat, carries a large bowl on her head and a baby, wrapped in a long shawl, on her back. The live action is magically and self-reflexively transformed into a pastel drawing, showing the freckled hand of the artist filling in the color of the now mimetically-rendered woman. As strains of an Andean flute are introduced in the soundtrack and the image returns to a live action frame, the voice-over remarks: "Their music is strange and exotic." This statement summarizes the representation of the Latin American Other throughout the film, which is appropriated by Disney's various surrogates, and adjusted to suit the perceptions of the hegemonic "us" of the narration. The point is unambiguously exemplified in the following scene, in which Donald Duck permits us to see "The land of the Incas through the eyes of a celebrated North American tourist." (Contemporary viewers will recognize the depictions of the Andean landscape, the llamas, and even the people from 2000s Disney feature *The Emperor's New Groove*.) Wearing an explorer's helmet in the style of H.M. Stanley, Donald, golf clubs in tow, engages in a series of visual gags on the shores of Lake Titicaca. Donald produces a still camera and begins photographing examples of "local color," injecting yet another moment of reflexivity, and pointing again to the unseen presence of both the filmmakers and the animators introduced

at the beginning of the film. In one of many moments of cultural appropriation, Donald exchanges the young “Incan” boy’s wool cap, poncho and *flauta* for his own helmet and camera. “The visitor is never satisfied until he tries on the native costume,” quips the voice-over. Donald initially plays the “strange exotic music” of the *altiplano*, but then switches to a jazzy tune that sounds unmistakably like a lively Hollywood sound track. This small example again illustrates the dynamic underlying the “Good Neighbor” films: The image of the exotic Other (the boy) is captured by a familiar character (Donald’s camera), rendered unthreatening through cultural appropriation (Donald’s Americanization of the strange, exotic music) and then repackaged for international consumption as a Hollywood product by a studio that represents the best of American capitalism (the feature itself).

There are numerous additional examples of this pattern of intertextuality, reflexivity and cultural appropriation in the remainder of the film, but suffice it here to point out a most compelling one: the Argentine segment, and especially the representation of Goofy as gaucho. The segment begins with live action “postcard” shots of Buenos Aires, but quickly moves to the “lush, wind-swept plains of the Pampas.” This is followed by a segment introducing Argentine artist, F. Molina Campos, best known for his folkloric paintings of gauchos. Disney’s pre-production collaboration with Campos was supposed to assure an authentic representation of the gaucho. But, in the end, the camera only briefly focuses on Campos’ paintings during a visit to his studio. In contrast, it is the Disney animator who is shown sketching the dancing gauchos. John Rose, Disney’s liaison to the Office of the Coordinator for Inter-American Affairs, in a private memo to the New York office remarked: “The frank truth of the matter is that we don’t *need* the guy at all- and that blunt fact applies to all the other South American talent we had lined up.”¹⁹

The next segment, again underscoring the *us/them* structure of the film, “compares the life of the Argentine gaucho to that of our own cowboy.” Goofy begins the segment as a stereotypical cowboy figure in Texas, flies over the map of Latin America to the Pampas, and, like Donald in the previous segment, dons a traditional gaucho costume. Again, what follows is a series of visual gags punctuated by descriptions of gaucho dances. In the end, Goofy flies safely back to “his prairie homeland” and the “natural” order of things is restored. Again, the exotic Other is neutralized through its elision with a familiar intertextual figure. The self-reflexive format emphasizes the fact that the normative position of the film is “us,” and not “them.” The last segment of *Saludos Amigos* points forward toward *The Three Caballeros*, with the introduction of both the figure of the seductive (and anonymous) Latin Beauty, and Donald’s second caballero, the Brazilian parrot Zé Carioca.

The Three Caballeros begins with Donald Duck tearing open a series of wrapped boxes. Donald (Disney’s best-known character after Mickey Mouse), like Goofy in *Saludos Amigos* appeals to the audience’s intertextual familiarity,

providing an unequivocally U.S. perspective from which to venture into the unknown. The boxes are labeled in Spanish: "Best wishes to Donald Duck on his birthday, Friday the 13th, from his friends in Latin America." Self-reflexivity makes its first appearance here, as the first box contains a movie projector, a screen and a film reel. As he subsequently screens these films, Donald repositions himself: no longer just a cartoon subject but a spectator; focusing his "all-American" gaze at a collection of tropical cartoon birds, followed by the unlikely stories of a penguin who loves warm weather and a young gaucho's flying donkey.

At this point, the film-inside-a-film concludes and Donald opens the next gift. This time, the intertextual "container" is a large encyclopedia-like book entitled *Brazil*, out of which, when opened, pop a collection of Brazilian sequences. The most significant of these, from the point of view of diversity in Disney, is the scene that features the first "Latin Baby," of the film: a live-action Aurora Miranda, singing "Os quindins de Yayá." This is the first instance in this film of a hybrid format, and the first one in Disney since the 1923 production of a very primitive *Alice in Wonderland* featuring a superimposed live action Alice. Miranda appears over a cartoon background of the quaint colonial streets of Bahia. Again, we encounter the key strategy of intertextuality: with her exaggerated headdress and long, flowing skirt, it would be nearly impossible for audiences not to associate Aurora with Carmen, her more famous sister. Carmen Miranda had already become an iconic signifier, both for her flamboyant, tropical style and her positioning as the "Brazilian Bombshell" in many Hollywood films. Myra Mendible demonstrated how Miranda's body came to serve as a "synecdoche for Latin America." Identified as she eventually became with the Chiquita Banana trademark, Miranda ultimately functioned "as an ethnic commodity—and unwitting marketing rep for U.S. corporate exploitation of Latin American labor and natural resources."²⁰ The fact that Aurora Miranda is portrayed as a Bahian sweets-seller only underscores her insertion in the economy of sexual and material consumption that underlies the representations in *The Three Caballeros*. The commodification of the Latina body is paralleled in an unequivocal manner here with Miranda's depiction as purveyor of authentic Brazilian "goods" (especially the sexually suggestive "cookies") and her positioning as the object of both the Anglo (Donald's) and the Brazilian (Zé's) eroticizing gaze. The fact that she is dancing in the scene gives added weight to the stereotype of the hypersexual Latina, given that even this simple act is "loaded with gendered, racialized baggage."²¹

It is in this scene, accordingly, that Donald reveals himself for the first time as a *rara avis*: "a wolf in Duck's clothing." He lusts after women to the point of having to be restrained by his parrot friend, who exclaims: "Donald, you are a wolf! Take it easy!" This characterization is affirmed in a subsequent scene, as well as in the text that appears in one of the first posters advertising the film. Located in a cartoon balloon above Donald's sombrero'd head it says

Imagine me and all my pals singing, dancing, romancing in the same scenes, with real, live, three-dimensional (and what dimensions!) luscious latin beauties like Aurora Miranda, Dora Luz, Carmen Molina! We're twice as torrid as a hot foot on the equator—and even more fun! Just change the name girls, from Donald Duck to Donald El Wolf, sí, sí, and wooooooooo-woooooo!"

With the depiction of Donald exhibiting this traditional (Latin-associated) macho behavior, another stereotype is reinforced; this time in the all-American character, who, recalling his role as tourist at Lake Titicaca in *Saludos Amigos*, now engages in a frenzy of real and symbolic cross-dressing, code-switching and "slumming with the natives."

Out of the next gift box, the largest of all, emerges Panchito, a Mexican cock dressed as a traditional *charro*. He is easily identified as the gun-toting, pistol-shooting *bandito*—another negative Latin stereotype familiar to Hollywood audiences. He yells loudly, dances, sings and leads the trio in panting over the silhouette of a shapely woman. The three take off on a magic flying serape to tour Mexico. After a series of cultural sidetrips that feature Mexican customs and folklore, they end up flying over the beach in Veracruz—again, this scene was actually simulated in the Burbank studio parking lot.²² In this scene the telescope that Donald looks through self-reflexively becomes the subjective circular iris of the camera's "eye." The all-female sunbathers wave at the visitors, but then scatter and run, as Donald tries in various ways to catch them, even playing an improvised game of blind-man's bluff (called, significantly, in Spanish, "the blind hen"). In the end, the women escape, leaving Donald, still blindfolded, kissing an imagined woman, but actually in the arms of Zé Carioca. "No, Donald, don't do that!" exclaims the parrot. While transgendered characters, gender ambiguity and hints of homoeroticism occur throughout the film (*Piedra*), like the threatening degree of difference represented in the native Others, this is quickly neutralized as the trio continues on its serape ride. As if to compensate for this lapse in normative heterosexuality, the remainder of the film features Donald rapturously entranced by a number of Mexican women, and variously framed by flowers, animated lips, disembodied legs, stars, sombreros and an army of phallic cacti. These in turn transform into a series of miniature Donalds. The reference here to sexual reproduction could not be more unambiguous. Even the original meaning of the term "animation" becomes relevant here, as the cartoon quite literally becomes a life-giving agent of creation. And not surprisingly, the creative mechanism here is purely a masculine undertaking—the phallic cacti beget the baby ducks. The female component is relegated to the background, or played out mimetically by the male birds. *The Three Caballeros* concludes with a frenzied bullfight scene, in which Donald plays the bull, and an orgasmic fireworks finale, in which all restraint is abandoned and the three cartoon birds sing, dance, and morph from one figure into another. The concluding scenes show the three "amigos" with Donald in the middle, synecdochically channel-

ing his apparent ultimate contrition for his bawdy behavior, again, through costume: he wears the serape over his head like a Madonna, and looks angelically heavenwards, while his sailor's cap floats gently above his head in the guise of a halo. But the final ending, over which the words "The End" appear, is a cataclysmic explosion. In the end, neither the framing of the camera nor the sturdy boxes can contain the difference that Latin America, with its irrepressible birds, maps, colorful dancers and especially Latin women represents.

Saludos Amigos and *The Three Caballeros* both signal a turning point in the history of Disney's cinema. They mark the beginning of the Disney foray into the documentary mode that characterized much of its later production, especially in the educational animated and live-action shorts that rounded out Walt's commitment to the "Good Neighbor" program. They introduced the highly stereotypical representations of Latin America and Latin Americans that remained stubbornly consistent throughout subsequent productions, including the colorful, exotic Latins that appear in the feature-length 1988 film *Oliver and Company*, the 1990 animated film and television show *Duck Tales*, the 2000 release *The Emperor's New Groove* and even the cartoon map of Latin America that makes a brief appearance in the 2009 feature *Up*. These early films also set the stage for the introduction of a longstanding Disney animation staple: the offensive and condescending treatment of the exotic and diverse Other that can be observed in the subsequent representations of African Americans in *Song of the South* and other ethnic characters in later films. As Jean Franco points out, the Disney cartoon "vies with the real and forecasts the power of the simulacrum that today draws millions of Latin Americans to Disneyland and Disneyworld."²³ Among those many consumers, viewers and visitors, there are many who either learned to see their Latin neighbors, or indeed to see *themselves*, through Disney's "Good Neighbor" treatment of difference.

Notes

1. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Leon S. Roudiez, ed. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 66.
2. Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature from Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Goddard*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 21.
3. José Piedra, "The Three Caballeros": Pato Donald's Gender Ducking. *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* no. 39 (June 1994) 23, 112.
4. Julianne Burton, "Don (Juanito) Duck and the Imperial-Patriarchal Unconscious: Disney Studios, the Good Neighbor Policy, and the Packaging of Latin America" in: *Nationalisms & Sexualities*, Andrew Parker ... [et al.], eds. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 31.
5. Henry A. Giroux, "Are Disney Movies Good for Your Kids?" in *Kinder Culture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood*. Steinberg, Shirley and Joe L. Kincheloe, eds. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 57.
6. Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart. *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*. David Kunzle, ed. (New York: International General, 1991), 95. Emphasis mine.
7. Ollie Johnston, Frank Thomas. *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation*. (New York: Disney Editions, 1981).

8. Neal Gabler. *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*. (New York: Knopf, 2006), 173.
9. A "cel" in animation, short for "celluloid" is a transparent sheet on which objects are drawn or painted. See Tim Dirk's FilmSite: <http://www.filmsite.org/animatedfilms.html>.
10. Siegfried Kracauer. *Theory of Film*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), 89–90.
11. Gaizka S. de Usabel. *The High Noon of American Films in Latin America*. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982), 164.
12. Fredrick B. Pike. *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy: Sixty Years of Generally Gentle Chaos*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).
13. Rodolfo Vidal González. *La actividad propagandística de Walt Disney durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial*. (Salamanca: Publicaciones Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 2006) 114.
14. J.B. Kaufman. *South of the Border with Disney: Walt Disney and the Good Neighbor Program, 1941–1948*. (New York: Disney Editions, 2009), 19.
15. *Ibid.*, 24.
16. Jean Franco. *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), 26.
17. Débora Krischke Leitão. "We, the Others: Construction of the Exotic and Consumption of Brazilian Fashion in France" *Horizontes Antropológicos*, Vol.4 no. se Porto Alegre, 2008, 7.
18. Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature from Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Goddard* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 16.
19. Kaufman, *South of the Border with Disney*, 73.
20. Myra Mendible, ed. *From Bananas to Buttocks: The Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 10, 12.
21. *Ibid.*, 20.
22. Kaufman, *South of the Border with Disney*, 221.
23. Franco, *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City*, 28.

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