No Concessions: Aesthetics and Politics in the Cinema of Eduardo Quispe Alarcón

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One of the objectives of this book is to explore how neoliberalism, as the core cultural and political regime established in Peru since the early 1990s, has influenced the role played by Peruvian cinema in creating and disseminating national imaginaries and models of citizenship that circulate both locally and globally. Against this backdrop, and in the context of the erosion of the political (Rancière 1999, pp. 95–97) that characterized the turn between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, my purpose here is to critically examine the films and counter-hegemonic practices of production, distribution, and exhibition of Eduardo Quispe Alarcón, a main figure of Peruvian experimental cinema. Placing him within a historical and global tradition of anti-hegemonic artists that has shaped

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his aesthetic, thematic, and anti-industrial choices, I put in dialogue his films, his production, distribution, and exhibition practices, his engagement with the local cinematic milieu, and his ideas about cinema as a political intervention. Consequently, one of the wider questions that I wish to address pertains to the role played by cinema—understanding it as a multifaceted cultural ecosystem composed of the actual media artifact and by the discourses and processes that surround it—in either reproducing or questioning the status quo.

In light of the way that free-market principles have substantially redefined the cultural field in the late capitalist era, film scholars like Kapur and Wagner (2011) and Mazierska and Kristensen (2018) have studied the global filmmaking sector’s embrace of neoliberal ideology and practices, while Sandberg and Rocha (2018) have explored the particularities of the Latin American case. In particular, Sandberg has pointed out how since the early 1990s, privatization shifted a media landscape that until then had operated on regional and national levels and had been at least partially protected by the state, toward one of private entities strongly interested in transnational expansion (Mc Chesney, in Sandberg 2018, p. 6). Both in the commercial and the art film sectors, market driven logics have become the guiding principles of film production, distribution, and exhibition.

Peru’s insertion into the global marketplace since the Fujimori government (1990–2000) resulted in cinema following this same model. The cuts to state funding implemented by the 1994 Cinema Law significantly reduced filmic production, prompting many filmmakers to insert themselves into the network of international film festival financing institutions (Barrow 2018, p. 29; Bedoya 2015, p. 54). Consequently, the technical standards and stylistic and thematic parameters of this global film market were imposed as necessary paths for success, especially for art films (Bedoya 2015, pp. 53, 61). In addition, the expansion of Peruvian consumer culture facilitated the emergence of privately owned and relatively successful commercial film companies with global models of style and genre for production, and standardized industrial systems for distribution and exhibition.

In the face of both this commodification and internationalization, the digital revolution—also a feature of twenty-first-century neoliberalism—caused another sector of Peruvian film to move in the opposite direction, following a global alternative trend. By making it possible for filmmakers to carry out all aspects of production and postproduction independently without the financial support of private companies, state or international
funding agencies, access to new technologies substantially democratized and de-centered Peruvian film production. Lima-based and regional independent commercial, art and experimental films blossomed, changing aesthetic parameters and allowing a diverse range of narrative structures and styles (Bedoya 2015, pp. 50, 73). Technological availability also triggered the growth of alternative circuits of exhibition both in Lima and throughout the country, breaking up—albeit on a limited scale—the monopoly of mainstream multiplex-model movie theaters. All this significant expansion and reconfiguration of the field of Peruvian cinema within the current global historico-political landscape provides the context for my discussion of Eduardo Quispe Alarcón’s work.

Born in Ayacucho in 1980 but living in Lima from a very young age after his parents migrated to the capital, Quispe Alarcón practices what is known as guerrilla cinema; an extremely low-budget, artisanal way of producing, distributing, and exhibiting film that fiercely locates itself outside and against market forces. Quispe Alarcón’s films do not have any financial support from private or state sources, do not regularly compete in film festivals, do not use professional actors, and are not shown in mainstream theaters. Since 2008, he has directed and produced six feature films sequentially named 1 (2008), 2 (2009), 3 (2010), 4 (2011), 5 (2014), and 6 (2016), all centered in exploring the lives of young second-generation Limeños of the early twenty-first century. These films are available online for free, but have also been exhibited in cultural centers, cineclubs and other non-commercial venues.

An organizer of art and experimental film showcases since attending the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes in Lima where he trained as a video artist, Quispe Alarcón has collaborated on many projects—mostly small free film screening showcases—which aim has been to develop an alternative Peruvian film culture in opposition both to the industrial model and to institutional state or public-private sources of film financing and exhibition, such as the yearly funding competitions organized first by CONACINE and then by DAFO, or the Festival de Cine de Lima. His objective has been to expand and update the field of Peruvian cinema by exposing spectators to both classic and current tendencies of international and local experimental films usually ignored by commercial venues and cultural private or state-sponsored institutions. These initiatives have also promoted alternative modes of film production, distribution, and exhibition.
Independent Film: Making it Count

Perhaps Quispe Alarcón’s most significant undertaking as a cultural agent was his role as one of the organizers of the 2009 Primera muestra de cine limeño, which in 2010 became the showcase Un nuevo cine peruano, and later evolved into the first edition of the Festival de Cine Lima Independiente in 2011. This festival contested the state funding competitions’ aesthetic and technical parameters and their “technocratic bureaucratization and homogenization of the creative process” (Radio Lima Gris 2015a) by presenting those Peruvian experimental films which did not adjust to such standards (Quispe Alarcón 2019) and which, therefore, had been rendered invisible. With avant-garde-inspired antagonism, the festival presented its films as enacting the concept of a “new Peruvian cinema” which was innovative, transgressive, marginal, and radically free of all those constraints that usually accompany the economic support of sources other than the artists themselves.

If we understand the field of Peruvian film as “a space of positions and a space of position taking” where “permanent struggle” is a structuring principle (Bourdieu 1993, pp. 30, 34), we might acknowledge that in its constitution, Lima Independiente was taking possession of a specific form of capital—namely, what its organizers considered “authentic” independent filmmaking—that served to validate it as a significant player in the field. In addition to documenting and institutionalizing a distinct corpus of Peruvian cinema far beyond that which is governed by commercial aspirations or ambitions of artistic transnational success, Lima Independiente was the first local festival at the time to position itself in open contrast to the type of national film culture promoted by the Festival de Cine de Lima, Peru’s leading cinematic event. By 2011, this institution had already gathered significant regional and international prestige and had become a powerful local and regional arbiter and shaper of cinematic taste (Barrow 2016, pp. 133–134). Denouncing what it called the Festival de Cine de Lima’s auteurist and high culture principles, as well as its neoliberal public-private model of nation-building through cultural capitalism, Lima Independiente emerged as a dissenting space for developing an alternative Peruvian film culture, a political act aimed at breaking the homogeneity of the field’s status quo. This opening embraced radical artistic innovation and attempted to forge meaningful transnational dialogue with world cinema in quite a different manner from what was seen as the “decadent” internationalist profile of the Festival de
Cine de Lima which, according to Quispe Alarcón (2019), was excessively centered on red carpets, prominent guests and vast press coverage. With a similar spirit to that of Humberto Solás’s Festival de Cine Pobre de Gibara, launched in opposition to Cuba’s main cinematic event (the Festival de Cine de La Habana), Lima Independiente sought to create an alternative circuit for low-budget cinema which rejected the need for expensive equipment and was not afraid of alienating audiences with its experimentation. As such, Lima Independiente might be read, with Rancière (1999), as the disruptive political appearance of that type of “surplus” cinematic production that was being left unaccounted for in the field of Peruvian cinema.

In terms of mapping Quispe Alarcón’s position within this field, we need to consider his manifesto Qué es el cine independiente, published in 2011. In it, he highlighted what he believes are independent film’s fundamental ethical groundings: a practice of art-making that is only “indebted to itself,” that is, to its own desire to communicate and create human contact, and not to the logic of artistic or commercial success (Quispe Alarcón 2012). As he stated in that document:

> Beyond budgets, finances, formats, technology and technical issues, independence is to be autonomous, to make film less dependent on external tastes and demands, whether they are those of the public, of a certain type of festival, of the critics, and especially, to reject any concession to standardized, industrialized language. (Quispe Alarcón 2012)

With his refusal to join the ranks of mainstream global art filmmakers, and his firm reluctance to seek any funding for his films or to actively pursue them being featured in film festivals, Quispe Alarcón has resisted—with a few exceptions—that common practices that, according to Dudley Andrew, have significantly altered the very idea of “independent cinema” by having “independent” directors participate in “a fully global network that makes every film quite ‘dependent’” (2010, p. ix).

As a self-proclaimed “film junkie” (Zunin 2015), Quispe Alarcón’s filmmaking practices are inspired by a wide range of artistic provocateurs from around the globe. Acknowledging his deep “ideological debt” to Jean Luc Godard, José Luis Guerín and Pedro Costa, his work and activism have also been significantly shaped by movements like Dogme 95, independent subgenres like American Mumblecore, and by the radical Latin American cult filmmaking icon Raúl Perrone from
Argentina (Quispe Alarcón 2019). In addition, as I will develop further in the last section of this chapter, his understanding of cinema’s political role and the fusion of art and life that he proposes, echoes the militant ethos of the New Latin American Cinema (NLAC) movement of the 1960s and early 70s. In what follows, I will present how, while inscribing himself within an already established global tradition of artistic experimentation, Quispe Alarcón has creatively appropriated it by presenting a sincere take on his main subject: young second-generation Limeños of the early twenty-first century. Beyond the many influences that can be traced through his films, his main objective has been, first: to give cinematic life to a specific cohort that he believes has been ignored or superficially represented, and second: to provide a cinematic space where these young people might see themselves in the characters, the situations, and the natural, unscripted dialogues. In this sense, his films aim to transcend their dimensions as works of art, and rather wish to create a bond with specific spectators by exploring some aspects of their identities and relationships, and by critically engaging with their immediate socio-historical context. This is the result of an understanding of cinema not only as a means of representation, but as a larger project of political proportions meant to disrupt and enhance what Rancière conceptualized as the governing “regime of the perceptible” (1999, p. 102).

Against Artifice: Austere Production and Placing the Real into the Frame

In tune with Dogme 95’s founding principle of the need to purify filmmaking from the artificiality of technical manipulation and generic and narrative conventions in order to return to the fundamental “honesty” of the raw moving image (Kehr 2004), Quispe Alarcón aims to give back the power of cinematic production to the director as an artist. Consequently, he has rejected all those industrial corporate and marketing resources (high production values, sophisticated postproduction editing, elaborate and rigid scripts, and professional acting) that in his view, transform film into mere spectacle (Zunin 2015). This rejection is a core principle of much low-budget digital film production, a global phenomenon that has flourished in the last few decades thanks to the ever-increasing accessibility of technology. Within experimental filmmaking, low-budget digital film production has not only challenged established cinematic language and to a certain extent weakened the role
of the most invasive capitalist elements of filmmaking; most importantly, it has democratized film production away from the colonizing effects of funding needs and production agents. Sometimes paying the price of low visibility and reduced audiences—something increasingly offset by internet streaming, as in Quispe Alarcón’s case—low-budget production has distanced filmmaking from one of its most persistent curses: its dependency on significant sums of money. Particularly in a country like Peru, where filmmaking used to be the privilege of the urban cosmopolitan elite, low-budget film production—apart from having been key in the development of regional commercial film—has enabled the flourishing of a wide variety of experimental projects by filmmakers from modest backgrounds, limited economic and professional means, and self-taught or alternative film instruction like Quispe Alarcón. In sum, in spite of persistent limitations, the profession of the filmmaker has been substantially democratized in the country.

Quispe Alarcón’s films are exercises of aesthetic and technical austerity (resonant of neorealism) which aim to recover and convey the authenticity of spaces, dialogues, and human interactions. As he himself has remarked, the freedom brought by making film with whatever is at hand has an important effect on the filmmaker’s ability “to understand reality grounded in the perspective of those who live it, rather than from the gaze of the distant artist-observer” (Quispe Alarcón 2019). For example, in all six of his films, the absence of artificial lighting means that sometimes people and objects are hard to distinguish. Occasionally, unedited direct sound—like loud street traffic or the clicking of cups and saucers in a café, as in 1 (2008)—makes the characters’ conversations unintelligible. As a rejection of the intrinsic artificial nature of filmmaking, these formal choices are unavoidably romantic attempts to represent life in its most genuine form. Likewise, the use of one single shot to film the sixty-eight minute long 3 (2010) attempts to install the Deleuzian “time-image” of a city park into the frame, encouraging “a new way of seeing, one that is open to the capturing of mistakes, errors, and randomness of the reality being filmed” (Rombes 2009, p. 40). In sync with the contemplative principle of slow cinema, whose “direct presentations of time” (Deleuze, quoted in De Luca and Barradas Jorge 2016, p. 8) offer the spectator a different temporal relationship to perception, Quispe Alarcón believes that the long take reduces the spectators’ exposure to constant stimuli, becoming “an invitation to think about the image” (2019).
Quispe Alarcón has also been inspired by the so-called “digital socialism” of the American Mumblecore movement of the early 2000s (Naish 2013, pp. 43–47). Mumblecore had naturalism as its fundamental production ethos both in acting and in dialogue, and thus used no scripts or professional actors. Instead, improvisation was encouraged and dialogue was prioritized over plot, actors were willing friends, and locations were regular people’s apartments or non-iconic ordinary urban places. Rejecting “the cult of the director or producer,” Mumblecore incorporated a practice of collective creativity based on the horizontal collaboration of all those involved in making a movie (2013, pp. 43, 57). Following this spirit, the actors and crew of Quispe Alarcón’s films are also friends who have varying levels of professional training and who are not paid for their work. They are all recognized in final credits as part of a creative community: actors are not listed as cast but as filmmakers themselves (realizadores); in 3, for example, the cameraman (Jim Marcelo Santiago) appears as co-director; and in 4 no director is acknowledged (Marcelo Santiago and Quispe Alarcón simply appear as producers). Still, in all six films, this type of collaborative production practice is nonetheless quite grounded on autorial structures of individual style, marking its difference with other forms of Peruvian collective filmmaking.

A Critique of Operating Technologies of Power

Thematically, if Mumblecore focused on a specific generation of Americans—one those in their 20s and 30s at the beginning of the twenty-first century—Quispe Alarcón’s films explore the urban living and affective needs of second-generation Limeños whose origins can be traced to the massive migration of Peruvians to the capital city at different points of the twentieth century. His films’ portrayal of this specific social, cultural, and economic group focuses on how their interpersonal dynamics, psychological states, and romantic relationships, result in a particular way of inhabiting the city. By exploring the development of couples’ relationships under the specific frame of Limeño landscapes, Quispe Alarcón conceives and constructs urban experience as a way of inquiring into these young people’s lives in twenty-first-century neoliberal Peru. As he has stated, “all the suffering experienced in the relationship reflects, to a certain extent, the suffering experienced by the country […] I believe couples mirror cities” (Rojas 2014).

The overarching critique of neoliberal rationality that connects Quispe Alarcón’s cultural agency, his aesthetics and his anti-industrial decisions,
is also key to his thematic choices: his films denounce the effects of traditional capitalist and neoliberal technologies of power on human social behavior, showing how they function through modulating subjectivities “from below” as Gago (2017, p. 2) has argued. For example, several of his characters display the “intrinsic” entrepreneurial spirit of what Cánepa Koch (2013, p. 9), in line with current studies of technologies of citizenship and nation branding, refers to as “participatory subjects” who embody the way that neoliberalism’s performative order has redefined the concept of citizenship. Conceiving themselves as human capital, these Peruvians have internalized a normative force by which they hold themselves responsible for the efficient management of their lives. By representing them in his films, Quispe Alarcón condemns on screen, at the end of 6, the way neoliberal power, “having controlled a territory and its market, aspires to conquer minds, hearts and souls.” A few minutes into 3, for example, we find a young woman impatient with a romantic relationship that she considers a “waste” of her time because it obstructs her professional advancement. As she explains, the money that she could make in the future if she concentrated on her studies rather than on her romantic bond would allow her to “to advance” and so meet her mother’s demand to be the one to move the whole family further up economically. In her view, this potential achievement should not be risked for what she refers to as “a fleeting relationship.” This quantification of affective life, which establishes goals, designs strategies and manages resources following market metrics (Cánepa Koch 2013, p. 9) points to the dehumanizing and isolating effects of these young people’s embrace of the “entrepreneurial epic” (Cánepa Koch and Lossio Chávez 2019, p. 18) and their subsequent inability to give themselves to others without thinking of costs and benefits. In this young woman’s particular case, what her statements reveal is the juxtaposition of two regimes of subjugation: on one side, the Christian logic of debt that results from the sacrifice made by parents for the benefit of their children, and on the other, the traditional capitalist and neoliberal technologies of power which demand the individual’s performance as a fully productive subject. As a further expansion and transformation of capitalist biopolitics, what Han (2017) has conceptualized as “psychopolitics” operates by taking control of the individuals’ psyche, engineering and steering the subject’s wishes and needs from within. As Han has stated, following Deleuze, if the biopolitical regime imposed repressive control over the body, the neoliberal regime, as a step further, is a psychopolitical one that operates
“like a soul” exploiting the individual’s freedom (2017, p. 15, 18). In this context, and via characters like the one presented above, Quispe Alarcón depicts the demand that these enslaved subjects exert on themselves: the mandate for compulsive achievement is here combined with the obligation to respond appropriately to the opportunities given by migrant parents. As a critique of this logic of subjugation, Quispe Alarcón wants to show the truth that he believes lies below these subjects’ performative discourse: loneliness and human disconnection. In his films, many of these young Limeños appear isolated, drifting through an urban space that is filmically constructed as an extension of their own uncertainties, unrest, and emotional wanderings (Bedoya 2015, pp. 193–194). Ideologically, this representation connects with the long tradition of Marxist critique that understands isolation and alienation as the fundamental traits of social life under capitalism. In that vein, fragmentation—both as a fundamental social condition of life under late capitalism, and as the essence of Quispe Alarcón’s own realist aesthetic—is the overarching principle of his work.

**Fragmentation as Structuring Principle**

Thematically, the conversion of contemporary urban fragmentation into a logic for social bonds appears in Quispe Alarcón’s films as a recurrent motif: young couples’ persistent inability to sustain a fluid and continuous romantic relationship. This affective fragility is symbolized in the tension and the discomfort felt at the same time by characters and spectators in response to the erratic, intermittent and inconclusive conversations that compose the “action” of all his films. In the street scenes of *I*, for example, the chosen location (the plaza outside a 1970s Brutalist state building), the position and gestures of unease of the characters’ bodies, the male protagonist’s inability to keep the conversation flowing, and the constantly elusive look of his girlfriend, point out to an impending breakup for which the location’s symbolic power appears as a metaphor: the dehumanizing nature of Brutalism’s urban rationality and its failure to harbor human sociability becomes the spatial manifestation of the couple’s inability to communicate (Fig. 15.1).

In addition, in *2* (2009) we see the male protagonist unsuccessfully trying to establish a steady romantic relationship with a woman who ignores him and expresses her endemic cynicism toward this type of bond. As a result, he is mostly seen aimlessly walking the streets or passively lying in bed. At the aesthetic level, fragmentation is also the guiding structure
Fig. 15.1 Protagonist couple of I (Quispe Alarcón 2008) having an awkward silence during their conversation in front of the Centro Cívico building, in Lima’s downtown

in 2, where social gatherings are filmed from extremely low-angle point of view shots that fragment bodies and objects, and where the narrative flow is repeatedly interrupted by cuts to black screens. Furthermore, in all six films, disaffection both in human relationships and in the individuals’ connection to the city is effectively transmitted through high levels of abstraction resulting from extreme close-ups on objects and body parts.

Fragmentation as a structuring principle also affects the compositional unity of some of the films. The main body of 5 (2014), for example, is framed by a prologue and an epilogue that thematically have no apparent connection with the rest of the film. They appear as leftovers of an earlier recording over which new material has been filmed: blue screens that look like “tracking” jump cuts make up the transitions between the main body of the film and these frames. This technique, nowadays widely used in experimental film, intends to reproduce the feeling of a home video filmed on a previously used cassette tape. By using it, Quispe Alarcón intends to show how chance can spontaneously “edit” a film, creating an unexpected “story” (Rojas 2014). In this sense, fragmentation becomes an alternative way of composing a narrative. This approach culminates in 6, where an even more radical dismissal of compositional unity occurs,
and different filmic languages are combined. 6 is the residue of several failed film projects: they all appear as fragments or ruins of absent movies that never came to be. After an initial shot that apparently has no connection to what follows—a scene where Quispe Alarcón gives instructions to the cameraman—the first thirty-two minutes of the film tell the story of a couple made up of two young women who aspire, but are ultimately unable, to make a film. Then, for the next seventy minutes, 6 becomes a manifesto-type film essay where, in pseudo-documentary style and amidst footage of failed filming and shots of the storyboard, Limeño landscapes, and urban events, Quispe Alarcón tells the frustrating story of how his original idea of a film about the difficulties of making independent cinema in Peru became just that due to the precarity of resources and the never-ending obstacles. When volunteer actors left the project for other commitments or when locations became unavailable, the “plots” and structure of 6 had to be changed repeatedly. In sum, the film’s fragmentation at various levels became not so much the result of an artistic decision, but a reality check of the all-embracing precarity that this type of independent filmmaking in Peru has to face.

**Human Emancipation as the Political Role of Film**

Toward the end of 6, after he and other directors lament the hardships of Peruvian independent filmmaking, Quispe Alarcón poignantly reflects on the isolating effects of sticking to his principles of a “poor” cinema of radical freedom. With stoic frustration, he alludes to the prophetic irony of his initial idea for the film, and states: “And finally, here I am alone […] filming myself.” The scene’s existential solipsism is accentuated by the reverse shot of the tripod-held camera shooting him among the solitude of the room, as if stating that his work has no place in the current field of Peruvian cinema (Fig. 15.2).

Still, in spite of this somber call to consider the limits of the filmmaking model he proposes, 6 is the persistent affirmation of Quispe Alarcón’s unyielding advocacy for the ethical and aesthetic principles that guide his understanding of the role of cinema. Firmly calling for that fusion of art and life that distinguishes him from other Peruvian directors, his antagonistic filmmaking choices express his stance against art conceived either as part of a cultural industry, as a merely contemplative elitist activity, or as a commodity responding to individual interests and benefits. As he mentions halfway through the film:
For me, film is transversal, that is, it encompasses all aspects of our lives. Not only is it our way of making a living, of earning some money, of socially stratifying ourselves, of looking for recognition; it is transversal. That is, every molecule of oxygen in our body relates to film, every way of doing things is cinematic, every viewpoint, every word, every position we take is a form of activism, isn’t it? And it’s a little outrageous that when we talk about cinema in Peru we talk about marketing, advertising campaigns, economic advantage, etc. For me, that is absurd.

The demanding moral position that these words imply brings to mind the ideological foundations of the NLAC movement and its ideals of absolute coherence between art and life. Addressing issues of neocolonialism, poverty and underdevelopment, NLAC filmmakers understood material constraints as a catalyst for artistic experimentation and conceived cinematic praxis as a tool for social and political change (Burucúa and Sitnisky 2018, p. 2). Quispe Alarcón’s convictions echo NLAC’s idealism, its decolonizing “mission,” its desire to transform habits of spectatorship, and its call for politically committed artists and intellectuals. Nevertheless, both his films’ aesthetics and his ideas about cinema’s role are quite distant from this group’s Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy and from its continental collective project of political uprising. From an Anarchist rather than a Marxist perspective, Quispe Alarcón takes from Grupo Liberación’s
“Third Cinema” (1969), Julio García Espinosa’s “Imperfect Cinema” (1969), and Glauber Rocha’s “Aesthetics of Hunger” (1965) their belief in a much needed “decolonization of culture” (Getino and Solanas 1969a, b, p. 37) that liberates the spectator from the banality of commercial cinema and from auteur film’s structures of dependency and elitist limitations. His understanding of liberation, though, is far from the revolutionary radicalism and the ardent belief in the historical protagonism of the “masses” professed by NLAC filmmakers. For example, in contrast to the passionate and direct call to political activism that the highly successful and recently released La revolución y la tierra (2019) makes on Peruvian spectators—in a tone much closer to that of NLAC documentaries—for Quispe Alarcón, cinema’s role is to restore individual autonomy in its most essential sense, freeing individuals from neoliberal mandates through cinematic experiences that break up their passivity as spectators, challenge their imagination, and allow them to critically see themselves on screen. In his view, this process has the potential to re-humanize audiences and trigger a socially and politically engaged citizenship.

Quispe Alarcón’s understanding of the political dimension of cinema echoes Imperfect Cinema’s principle that art should be a radically disinterested activity fully accessible for everyone to produce and to be exposed to (Velleggia 2009, pp. 226–227). Rather than the task of “illuminated artists” or “specialists,” he believes cinema should be an integral part of human beings’ lives, a tool to fight alienation and dehumanization. At the same time, far from the clandestine and radical political instrumentalization of NLAC’s concept and practice of “cine-acto”, but still close to its understanding of cinema as a politically transformative experience, Quispe Alarcón advocates for breaking up the barriers between filmmaker and spectator. However, he believes this should not be achieved by developing a “cinema of the masses”, but by calling on the state’s obligation to facilitate culture as a public service. He demands the state to discard its current operating principle of economic sustainability for matters of cultural promotion, and instead focus on developing art’s potential to strengthen the country’s social fabric (Quispe Alarcón 2019). To put this in practice at the level of film production, Quispe Alarcón believes it is essential to democratize who can become a filmmaker in Peru and how filmmaking is done. He argues for the state’s creation and funding of public and economically accessible film schools that would stand as alternatives to the purely technical and market-oriented private film schools and university communications departments that have flourished mostly
in Lima in the last two decades. With Humanities-focused curricula, these schools would not only allow directors and film scholars from diverse geographical, cultural, and economic backgrounds to develop; they would also promote a different understanding and practice of cinema as an art form inherently linked to exploring the circumstances, the needs, and the problems of Peruvians (Radio Lima Gris 2018). Realizing that this is quite an ambitious goal considering the limited political will of the Peruvian state to support cinema, Quispe Alarcón calls on Peruvians’ resourcefulness by stating that nowadays, anyone with a true passion for cinema and an authentic interest to learn from its history can become a filmmaker without the need for expensive education or equipment. As happened in his case, the vast resources currently available through the internet provide a valuable tool to surpass economic and educational limitations (2019).

At the level of exhibition, if creating national audiences for a cinema of artistic value and social engagement is nowadays quite a challenge in Peru as it is elsewhere, for Quispe Alarcón this can be achieved by transforming the very nature of what is understood as the experience of watching a film. In what appears unusual coming from a self-identified Anarchist, he calls once again on the state to play a stronger role working together with artists to create programs intended to re-humanize and re-politicize Peruvian audiences. In his view, this could be done by significantly expanding and financing community-building film-viewing public screenings and discussions that prioritize direct contact and dialogue between filmmakers and audiences (Radio Lima Gris 2015b). He contends that the type of conversations that naturally develop in these events reinforce what he believes is cinema’s crucial role: to trigger people’s interest in exploring their own subjectivity and that of others, to awaken their political conscience, and to bring people together in a way that encourages a communal sense of belonging (Radio Lima Gris 2018). For Quispe Alarcón, it is not a matter of understanding cinema as an object of cult or erudite value that needs to be paternalistically “decoded” for an uneducated public. It is rather about opening up opportunities for regular people to be exposed to an audiovisual experience that stimulates their aesthetic sensibility, fosters their critical thinking, and connects with them through real-life situations and characters. As an alternative to the neoliberal model of experiencing cinema in isolation as a commodity, Quispe Alarcón believes that these cinematic events are opportunities for
Peruvians to connect, relate, and empathize with each other through discussions about film.

From a critical standpoint, several considerations of Quispe Alarcón’s inspiring ideals and artistic practices need to be taken into account. The first is to acknowledge the significant difficulties of reconciling some of the most radical artistically experimental elements of his aesthetics with his desire to connect with average people in a non-erudite form. While his films do capture and portray real-life circumstances and genuine, non-artificial characters capable of interpellating and affectively connecting with a specifically differentiated local—and potentially international—audience (urban middle-class youth), their abstraction, fragmented composition, elliptical narratives and slow temporal unfolding can be difficult for many to undergo. In this sense, at a practical level, the way his films aesthetically embody his theoretical pronouncements can certainly interfere with his convictions about the need to bridge the gap with his spectator. Inevitably, films like Quispe Alarcón’s are mostly seen by small audiences accustomed to cinematic experimentalism. In this sense, his belief in art or independent film’s potential for social impact cannot avoid what Rancière described as “the aesthetic cut that separates outcomes from intentions” (2009, p. 82).

In addition, history has shown us that much of the fresh radicalism of provocateur artists like those that inspire Quispe Alarcón’s work has faded, having been co-opted by mainstream consumer-oriented filmmaking and even by mainstream media/video platforms. By contrast, until now Quispe Alarcón has remained fervently coherent and committed to his principles of a fiercely autonomous low-budget practice, but for this he has paid a price. As shown in 6, his ability to continue making film is limited and exhausting. Moreover, his refusal to seek state or private funding, to accept the conditions of mainstream venues to screen his films, and to regularly participate in film festivals, has significantly reduced the visibility of his work and his capacity to reach a wider audience. In this respect, he has stated that he is not interested in promoting a successful career, but rather in offering his films as opportunities for artistic, personal, and communal exploration. He believes that, whoever has an authentic desire to explore cinema on these terms can find his films in alternative screening circuits or online (Quispe Alarcón 2019). However, what solitary online viewing does not fully allow is precisely that shared space for human encounter and collective discussion that he himself advocates is essential for advancing a sense of community and
citizenship. Furthermore, any consideration of the political potential of cinema needs to address the limited relevance, particularly of independent or art film, as mediums through which collective imaginaries can be developed. If at certain points in the history of Latin American cinema, film had the ability to consolidate feelings of national kinship through the shared viewing habits of domestic audiences (Poblete 2018, pp. 17–18, 21), it was in fact commercial films “for-the-masses” where this was achieved.

Beyond these considerations, I contend that within the field of Peruvian cinema, Quispe Alarcón’s films and cinematic practices have played a substantial role. Thematically, his highly specific generational portrait, together with his understanding of the everyday as both a critical and aesthetic category (Crary, quoted in De Luca and Barradas Jorge 2016, p. 15) follow the spirit of Rancière’s claim around the issue of aesthetic worthiness, reconfiguring who (and how) is worthy of being shown on-screen (De Luca and Barradas Jorge 2016, p. 14). In sharp contrast to how many Peruvian films of the last two decades have represented young Limeños of migrant origins as emblems of the neoliberal model, Quispe Alarcón’s critical exploration of their sociability, their romantic endeavours, their relationship with the urban fabric, and the societal and familial pressures they face, provides an alternative and complex portrait of this particular cohort.

Finally, it is certainly inspiring to see how Quispe Alarcón’s stance in favor of posing a political and aesthetic challenge to the spectator as a human being and as a citizen remains firm; as well as his commitment to an alternative way of producing, distributing and exhibiting films. By refusing to make concessions to a consumer culture that for him has co-opted much of the world, he continues to insist on the liberating power of cinema as an art form, and as such, demands that it should be a vehicle of inquiry, resistance, and rehumanization. His faith that film, like all art, “when it is free, frees, when it is independent, brings about independence” (Radio Lima Gris 2018) remains untouched. Understanding the camera neither “as a rifle” nor as an “author’s pen,” but rather as a tool toward human emancipation and political engagement, the following words at the end of 6 summarize his position.

Cinema is not made by filmmakers, nor by businesses, nor by advertising agencies, nor by production companies. Cinema is not made with money, but with ideas, with soul. Because it is an art and it needs to be human.
In sum, with respect to the position and role of cinema in society, Quispe Alarcón’s most valuable contribution to a field that is structurally defined—and fractured—by neoliberal commodification, is his attempt to restore cinema as “a specific mode of human being-together” (Rancière 1999, p. 101) which triggers spectators to think critically beyond themselves.

Notes

1. This term was widely used within the New Latin American Cinema (NLAC) movement, particularly to refer to the role of cinema as an aggressive agent of political liberation whose precarious means of operation and perilous attitude—similar to that of the guerrilla soldier—were its tools for attacking the system (Getino and Solanas 1969a, b). Over time, the term has been loosely used to refer to its anti-institutional nature, its precarious means, and its rejection of market forces.

2. For example, he collaborated on several film series at the now defunct Cine Club Cayetano Heredia, and organized the Ciclo Influencias (available for viewing on social media) at the Centro Cultural Olaya. One of his many future projects is a weekly online free program of live interaction with the public, where the discussion of a particular film would serve as the starting point for a wider analysis combining aesthetic, political, economic and socio-cultural issues (Quispe Alarcón 2019).

3. These are the subsequent names of the offices in charge of supporting film and audiovisual projects within Peru’s Ministry of Culture. CONACINE stands for the Consejo Nacional de Cinematografía [National Cinema Council] and DAFO stands for the Dirección del Audiovisual, la Fonografía y los Nuevos Medios [Directorate of Audiovisual, Sound Production, and New Media].

4. This phrase inevitably reveals a desire to establish a link with the Nuevo cine argentino of the late 1990s in terms of the production practices and diverse set of experimental aesthetics of its filmmakers. In my view, though, the wider scope of the innovations and the continental influence of the Argentinian movement is hardly comparable with the Peruvian independent film of the early 2000s.

5. For an in-depth study of this festival’s role in the national, regional and international cinema landscape, see Barrow (2016).

6. Isabel Seguí’s chapter in this volume also refers to the way that other small, local independent film festivals like Lima Independiente have enhanced the Peruvian cinematic field.
7. The guiding principles of Solás’ project are explained on his *Manifiesto del cine pobre*, accessible at [https://www.ecured.cu/Festival_Internacional_de_Cine_Pobre](https://www.ecured.cu/Festival_Internacional_de_Cine_Pobre).

8. Unfortunately, this festival ceased in June 2019.

9. In 2014, 5 was presented at the Transcinema Festival Internacional de Cine, where it won an award, and in 2019, 6 was presented at the Festival Internacional de Cine de Viña del Mar.

10. Following Eco, Tompkins (2013, p. 2) states that in experimental film, innovation and critique occur from within an established tradition.

11. In spite of this, economic factors still have a notable influence on someone’s capacity to make a film, as Quispe Alarcón himself makes explicit in 6.

12. For a thorough discussion of the main characteristics of “slow cinema”, see De Luca and Barradas Jorge (2016).

13. Mumblecore started with Andrew Bujalski’s film *Funny Ha Ha* (2002) and ended around 2010 when the core directors and actors transitioned to more mainstream big budget productions.

14. Among many others, a quite different model of Peruvian collective filmmaking is the work done by the Escuela de Cine Amazónico, discussed by Claudia Arteaga in Chapter 16 of this volume.

15. In addition to Mumblecore, the work of other filmmakers who focus on generational portraits like Godard, Rohmer, and especially Perrone—who portrays the marginal youth of his hometown, Ituzaingó—has deeply inspired Quispe Alarcón’s work.

16. Gago’s concept of “neoliberalism from below” emphasizes how neoliberal rationality “is not purely abstract nor macropolitical, but arises from the encounter with forces at work and is embodied in various ways by the subjectivities and tactics of everyday life, as a variety of ways of doing, being and thinking that organize the social machinery’s calculations and affects” (2017, p. 2). While “neoliberalism from below” is an ample concept encompassing the multiple and heterogeneous ways in which neoliberal rationality is simultaneously enacted, contested and reinterpreted by subjects with different levels of agency in different spheres of their daily lives, the character of Quispe Alarcón’s 3 that I discuss in this section embodies how neoliberal rationality has become deeply rooted in popular subjectivities by conquering the psyche, and in this particular case, by directing affective life.

17. In Peruvian commercial cinema, an emblem of this type of “participatory subject” can be found in the protagonist of the ¡Asu mare! films.

18. As Cánepa Koch and Lossio Chávez (2019, p. 13) have further explained when discussing *Marca Perú* from a Foucauldian perspective, the mandate of this power device calls for Peruvian citizens to “live the brand”.

19. This also happens in 4, although that film has no prologue or epilogue.
20. It is interesting to realize that this precarity is not exclusive to experimental cinema: as Martha Dietrich shows in her chapter in this volume, the same thing occurs in regional commercial filmmaking. A point of contact is then established between substantially different filmmaking practices like Quispe Alarcón’s and Ccorahua and Berrocal’s in terms of the arduous obstacles faced to complete their films.

21. Getino and Solanas defined this concept by which a film projection was transformed into a political act which, in their view, liberated a territory and transformed its people thanks to the participation of “the masses” who, from being simple spectators, became actors by participating in post-screening debates. For more on “cine-acto”, see Getino and Solanas (1969a, b, pp. 55–57).

22. Other Peruvian film projects like Chaski’s Microcines, Docuperú or the previously mentioned Escuela de Cine Amazónico, can be seen as being more directly inspired on this political objective. For example, in contrast to Quispe Alarcón’s strict “no concessions” stance, Microcines has a more flexible approach to making cinema an influential tool for many of the same objectives that he avows. For a thorough analysis of the Microcines project, see McClennen (2011) and Ross (2010).

23. Some of these have already been held by grassroots organizations, academic institutions and even by corporations: examples are the screenings, discussions and workshops led by film critic Mónica Delgado at the former Cineclub de la Universidad Ciencias y Humanidades, or those at Espacio Fundación Telefónica. Most recently, there has been an upsurge of these type of public engagements in online cineclubs, forums and coverage of local festivals as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

24. It should be noted that La revolución y la tierra, a documentary that has gathered unprecedented acclaim and record numbers among Peruvian audiences, with sold-out shows has, to a small extent, made a step in this direction.

25. One of the few instances when this was possible was during the classic Golden Age of Latin American cinema in Mexico, Argentina and Brazil between 1930 and 1950. For more on this, see Poblete (2018).

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