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# Transnational Networks of Avant-Garde Film in the Interwar Period

## 1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is twofold: to map the circulation of avant-garde films in Europe and the Americas, and to develop a theoretical framework to understand this phenomenon. The film that we focus on as a case study was produced in a specific context, and it occupies a special position in cinema history: *Un chien andalou* (FR 1929, Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí). While the film itself is a complex work of art, it is usually understood as the most typical example of surrealist cinema in general. Moreover, the film is routinely studied as a standout example of avant-garde cinema, as it was produced in the second half of the 1920s, during the heyday of the first wave of avant-garde cinema. It has often been labelled as avant-garde for distribution and exhibition purposes during (and after) its premiere, and it spread through specific infrastructural networks of circulation.<sup>1</sup> Through an exploration and examination of the film's transnational circulation, we argue that its meaning and its discursive value do not lie in an immanent aesthetic quality; instead, these aspects are constructed in and through practices of circulation, such as processes of cultural transfer, and through networks whose nodes and edges are traceable in its circulation patterns. To make sense of various aspects of these practices and processes, we will introduce a number of theoretical concepts to our discussion.

## 2 Transnational Circulation: Terms and Theories

“Circulation” is a curious and complicated term.<sup>2</sup> At its etymological root, it points to the circle, the perfect geometrical form that closes unresistingly unto itself. It

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1 See, for example, self-proclaimed introductory works to the field such as Sitney (1987); Albera (2004); and Turvey (2011).

2 See Hagener, Opitz, and Tellmann (2020).

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implies a complete and perfect movement of matter without any friction, loss or addition. In its common usage, the energy necessary for setting up a circulatory system and keeping it in motion is often ignored, as it is implied that the change of physical position within the system is a quasi-magical operation. First used in medicine to describe the blood circuit, it was adapted by political economy (most famously by Karl Marx) to refer to the value-generating processes of modern capitalism. As useful as the term has proven in this context, we want to unpack assumptions, highlight ambiguities, and complicate ways of thinking about the cultural objects in motion hidden within the concept of circulation. We will focus on two aspects in particular.

First, we will highlight the infrastructure necessary for circulation, because movement never happens without facilitation or far-reaching pre-conditions. Energy always has a source and a particular vector of impact. In the case of *Un chien andalou*, many factors contribute to the operation of transnational circulation: embassies and mail service, friendships and institutional arrangements, magazines and telegraph services, leaflets and transoceanic commercial steamboats. While we cannot fully outline every potentially relevant aspect in detail, we will turn our attention to the (infra)structures that often support and enable circulation. Zooming in on infrastructures is also a way to highlight labour that normally remains invisible, as Susan Leigh Star (1999) has pointed out. This shift of focus allows one to see aspects that may have gone unnoticed before, such as the contributions of women, as we will later see in our case study. Leigh Star has argued that when we forget the “invisible” work of cleaners, secretaries, caretakers, or parents, it means that we are operating with a model that lacks certain essential aspects: “leaving out what are locally perceived as ‘nonpeople’ can mean a nonworking system” (Leigh Star 1999, 386).

Secondly, we are interested in the work of interpretation and adaptation on a semantic level, which shapes and adapts an object for different contexts. Again, Susan Leigh Star’s work is productive here, because her concept of a “boundary object” (Leigh Star, Griesemer 1989; Leigh Star 2010) helps us to understand cooperation without consensus and the connections between very different systemic units. For Leigh Star, an object is something people act *towards* and *with*, and the object’s materiality depends on actions, not on its “thing”-ness. The term boundary “is used to mean a shared space,” so “these common objects form boundaries between groups through flexibility and shared structure” (2010, 603). As in the Leigh Star’s example with a car, films can function as boundary objects as they move through different contexts and are approached, employed and understood in various ways. Understanding films as boundary objects is a way to open up the idea of a film’s meaning and aesthetic value as tied not only to its “thing”-ness or to itself, but also to the networks – including the actors – through which it

circulates, including the network of actors who perform in it. Here, it is worth highlighting the inherent infrastructural flexibility of film, whose meaning can be more vague or specific depending on the needs of each network – for instance, a film can be tailored to a local use, or it can maintain its “vague identity as a common object” (605) when there is no consensus among groups. In this respect, we will also employ Michel Espagne’s theory of cultural transfer (2013), which describes the resemantisation process any cultural object undergoes when it circulates. The effect of circulation can be witnessed in the way specific entities (e.g., cultural objects like films) are approached, used, and understood in distinct contexts. Depending on the frame or network the boundary object comes from or arrives at, conditioned by its circulatory pattern, its meaning/s will be modified, expanded, or negated. The environment an object finds itself in not only shapes the meaning-making process; it is also affected by the circulation history the object carries with it. In this sense, actors have agency, and processes of circulation affect the network as much as the actor, because actors and networks are intertwined and co-constitutive with each other.

We want to underline here the efforts made by different groups to employ *Un chien andalou* as a tool for their specific artistic (or cultural, political, or social) goals. Even though these groups are quite diverse, they have often cooperated to screen the film without forming a consensus about its meaning, as Leigh Star has proposed for boundary objects. One result of this cooperation is the film’s long trajectory in terms of transnational circulation. A broad range of actors from disparate backgrounds have interacted with the film and established networks in order to maintain and renew its values, but in each context, the film has been comprehended and apprehended differently. Depending on the place, the film has been tagged as Surrealist, Spanish, and independent, as well as with other adjectives we will discuss. This adaptive ability comes from the agency of the film itself, which is capable of being understood from a range of different perspectives and points of view.

Even if tradition holds that “in the social sciences, agency is synonymous with being a person,” (Bronwyn Davies 1991, 42), from the perspective of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), agency is not limited to human beings; nonhuman entities are also endowed with it. Agencies are multiple and can only be traced through the actions they participate in. Without an observable effect on another object, we cannot identify any agencies. Thus, according to ANT, any actor or actant, human or nonhuman, has agency, even when it does not have a stable form or exhibits different figurations for the same action (Latour 2005, 54).

To understand how agency works in Actor-Network Theory, it is worth recalling the significance of the hyphen in “Actor Network,” which is intended to highlight the interdependence among actors, as well as the interdependence between

actors and networks. According to Latour (2005), an actor can be conceived of in two ways simultaneously, as a puppet and as a unity. The term “actor” was not chosen by coincidence: an actor (in theatre or film), when performing himself/herself, is intertwined with the text he/she is performing. In this metaphor, the text would be the network. Actors and actants, human or nonhuman, are driven by multiple kinds of agencies, and agency, in turn, “is manifest only in the relation of actors to each other” (Dwiartama and Rosin 2014, 32). Therefore, agency does not exist by itself; it functions only within interactions. Agency exists relationally, as a function of entities’ relationships to one another. Even when we conceive of them as puppets, actors are not just intermediaries but also mediators, because mediality is never a transparent and frictionless transmission; it always affects what is moved or transported through it.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, we conceive of cultural goods – films, in this case – as actors with agencies, and consequently, we think of them as mediators, like any other actor or actant.<sup>4</sup> Of course, films are not the only actors endowed with agency in the networks that we are interested in. Other potential actors or groups of actors include the venues in which the films were screened, the audiences that attended the screenings, the practices carried out by these audiences, the organisers who programmed the screenings, the people who rented or bought copies of the movie, the distribution companies, the posters and advertisements that announced the screenings, and even the press releases and other publications that were published before and after the screenings. Furthermore, the circulation of actors implies two kinds of transformation: of the actors themselves, and of the networks, because the two are co-constitutive of each other. This helps us to understand the costs associated with circulation, because the energy that is necessary to keep the system in motion can be traced back to these mutual modifications. A film – which we are treating as an actor – is transformed by

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<sup>3</sup> Regarding the accusation that directors treat actors like puppets, Latour offers this ironic comment: “So who is pulling the strings? Well, the puppets do in addition to their puppeteers. It does not mean that puppets are controlling their handlers – this would be simply reversing the order of causality – and of course no dialectic will do the trick either. It simply means that the interesting question at this point is not to decide who is acting and how but to shift from a certainty about action to an uncertainty about action – but to decide what is acting and how. As soon as we open again the full range of uncertainties about agencies, we recover the powerful intuition that lies at the origin of the social sciences. So, when sociologists are accused of treating actors as puppets, it should be taken as a compliment, provided they multiply strings and accept surprises about acting, handling, and manipulating” (Latour 2005, 60).

<sup>4</sup> Here, we are continuing the tradition of art historians like David Freedberg (1989) and W.J.T. Mitchell (1996), and anthropologists such as Alfred Gell (1998) and Philippe Descola (2015).

the network in which it circulates. Conversely, though, a network is constituted by the actors that take part in it. In our example, when a film is screened at a film club, other actors who are part of that club will either attend the screening or abstain from it. The movement focused around the film, which extends to incorporate other actors or/and actants, helps create the network's mechanics. It becomes a structural element of the network, and other movements also become a part of it. Thus, any movement or any action carried out within the network can potentially affect all the actors and actants involved in that network, even if it does not affect all the actors and actants in the same way. Moreover, any modifications that occur in any part of the network have the potential to reconstitute and transform the whole network. Therefore, we can see this systemic relation through Edgar Morin's paradigm of complexity, in which causality itself is understood to be complex (Morin, 2008).

Since we are interested in tracing the paths of these transformations, it will be fruitful to attend the process of cultural transfer. As we will demonstrate, the semantic layers that are added, removed, or modified during a film's circulation depend on the networks through which it circulates. In order to analyse circulation patterns that characterise the transnational networks of avant-garde films, we will examine how films are labelled for distribution and how they are described in press releases, promotional slogans, programming strategies, presentations, and conferences that surround their release. In other words, we will discuss how these films circulated during the interwar period through different spatial and temporal contexts.

Another condition that must be taken into account when studying the circulation of films is connectivity. As Sebastian Conrad puts it, focusing on exchanges and connections is one way of conducting research on global history (Conrad 2016). A wide variety of topics can be addressed through the study of interconnectedness, including diasporas, commercial exchanges, communication channels, and mediators who work as bridges of connection or as impassable barriers. For the purposes of this chapter, we propose the idea of connectivity as a condition that facilitates worldwide connections among actors and/or actants. This globalised framework offers us an opportunity to retrace connections – which Latour (2005) once called the main purpose of the social sciences – by crossing multiple scales or layers. As Conrad (2016) notes, the most interesting questions emerge at the intersection between local and global processes; that is, in the interaction of multiple scales. In other words, global connectivity is an opportunity to widen our networks of cultural exchange. For this purpose, we strive for a transnational perspective that can “look beyond national boundaries and seek to explore interconnections across borders” (Iriye 2012, 11).

Nevertheless, we will focus the geographical framework of our analysis on Europe and the Americas for a variety of reasons. Firstly, we will retrace the circulation of *Un chien andalou* in Europe, because the film was produced there. We will begin in France, where the film had its world premiere; then, we will turn our interest towards Spain to trace another aspect of the film's origins, since the creators were Spanish (and shaped by their Spanish upbringing). Finally, we will mention other places in Europe where the film was screened in order to provide more examples that illustrate how processes of cultural transfer developed, as well as how networks were built and used in other European frameworks. After considering Europe, we will turn to the circulation of *Un chien andalou* in Latin America, focusing mainly on Mexico and Argentina, the countries that had the most developed motion picture industries when the film first circulated. We will also explore its circulation in other Latin American countries such as Brazil or Uruguay. In 1929, when the film had its world premiere, there was frequent exchange between Europe and Latin America, especially among Ibero-American countries, which allowed the transnational circulation of avant-garde films and ideas to flourish.<sup>5</sup> *Un chien andalou* is a widely discussed film, but as we will see, most literature about it is anchored in the study of specific national cinemas, rather than a comparative framework. It therefore comes as no surprise that Latin American and European frameworks have not yet been compared or put in relation to each other in a study of the circulation of a specific film. While much has been written about *Un chien andalou* as an example of the Surrealist aesthetic and creative methodology, as a vehicle for psychoanalytic ideas, as Spanish film that draws its iconography from that national tradition, and as an impulse toward the modernization of the Spanish artistic field, in all these cases, the film has been mostly considered as finite, fixed, and final in its meaning. Furthermore, the film has largely been viewed as closed and passive, as if that meaning cannot be reshaped, changed, or affected by the networks the film circulates through. This ongoing change is exactly what the cultural transfer process envisions and theorises.

In fact, the transnational circulation of *Un chien andalou* was predetermined by the film's previous encounters with the public – an accumulation of semantic layers. Active participants in the wide network of alternative film culture were often highly aware of the film's reputation through texts and personal communication before they had even watched it. In other words, the notorious and scandalous stories surrounding *Un chien andalou* contributed to the fact

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<sup>5</sup> Dudley (2009), who proposes that film history has several phases, considers the twenties part of the “cosmopolitan phase”.

that the film could be used as a boundary object, because they offered specific (and diverse) interpretive possibilities to different groups. The adjective “avant-garde” was the most reliable label for film society organisers who wanted to screen *Un chien andalou*, and it assured the film’s circulation through film clubs in different countries and on different continents. As we will see, there was a transnational network of actors and actants surrounding film clubs, and there were specialised, interconnected subgenres of cinema that sustained this network over time. Nevertheless, even given the similarities and interests that actors within avant-garde networks shared and the connectivity among them, a film had to have the flexibility of a boundary object in order to be screened successfully in a diversity of contexts and attain transnational circulation. Thus, as we have outlined above, presenting *Un chien andalou* as a boundary object highlights the tendency toward cooperation without consensus (Leigh Star, Griesemer 1989) and the film’s ability to adopt diverse semantic layers. As with any other aesthetic object, we take into account the film’s active role in the meaning-making process of interpretation, which is carried out through production, distribution, circulation, exhibition, and contextualisation. This complex meaning-shaping process cannot be wholly accounted for by a single national framework, so we must shift our attention to its cross-national, cross-regional and cross-local effects. On the one hand, we will analyse the aforementioned process of circulation through our case study, retracing *Un chien andalou*’s transnational networks of exchange in order to unveil the actors and actants involved in those networks, from organisers and audience members to the venues where the film was screened. Through this case study, we will be able to consider the importance of networks of circulation in the meaning-making process surrounding a film. On the other hand, as part of our analysis of the processes of cultural transfer, we will also take into account reports and reactions that the film’s screenings provoked, in order to analyse how circulation through different cultural frameworks re-affected the meaning-making process.

Since we are interested in the transnational circulation of films,<sup>6</sup> we will consider these films not only as cultural objects, but also as economic goods and political instruments. As soon as films are treated as having political and economic impact, their connectivity becomes a potential source of power, while a lack of connectivity can be seen as a form of exclusion in the globalised world.<sup>7</sup>

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6 See Ezra and Rowden (2006); Durovicova and Newman (2009); Rawle (2018); and Garza, Doughty, and Shaw (2019).

7 This is not the only controversy regarding globalisation, of course; we could also mention many others, such as its economic, social, cultural or environmental implications.

As connectivity (i.e. the power to form connections) is still highly unevenly distributed, it is ethically important to remind ourselves that – because of this study’s wide geographical context – there is a huge disparity in available material from different regions. In the first place, many sources have not survived, some of them are hidden in such a way that one can only come across them by accident, and only a small portion have been made publicly available or used in historiographical studies.<sup>8</sup> Access to archives and data differs widely depending on geographical context.<sup>9</sup> For this reason, tracking the circulation of a Spanish film in Latin America is not easy,<sup>10</sup> not just because of our geographical location in Spain as researchers, but also because of the difficulty of completing an endeavour that has never been attempted before, such as an analysis of the transnational circulation of avant-garde films.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, our contribution attempts to make visible the role that these regions, wrongly called peripheries, have played in that circulation. Therefore, our research is also an effort to build a bridge between Europe and Latin America and facilitate connections between them.

Bruno Latour’s idea of immutable mobiles (1990) has been a major influence on us, as it contains a historical argument regarding specific media formats while also making claims about transnational power and the dynamics of development. In Latour’s terms, “immutability” refers to the notion that entities are stable, while

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**8** This situation has been further exacerbated by the global pandemic, because we have had to rely mainly on remote access.

**9** For example, in the United States, many specialised journals are digitised (see the Media History Digital Library; <https://mediahistoryproject.org/>), while in Latin America far fewer are, though there are variations by country and exceptions for popular journals. In Brazil, for instance, the most important daily paper (*Jornal do Brasil*, 1891–2010) has been digitised, while in Argentina not even the most important and enduring national newspaper (*La Nación*) is available online. In the European context, meanwhile, digitization varies greatly (see Domitor Journals Project; <https://domitor.org/journals/>). In many European countries, some important newspapers are available online in digital form while others are not; the same goes for specialised art journals. Even when sources are available in digital form, their quality varies: some have been processed using OCR so that one can search by keywords, while others are difficult to read. The metadata is often incomplete, missing altogether, or unusable because of the format, and often, sources were not found in the first place. Mostly, APIs are absent, so harvesting has to be done manually and cannot be automated. There are also countries in which none of the relevant sources are digitised and the only available material consists of secondary sources.

**10** We are aware of the various levels of disadvantage among Hispanic cultures, and Spain is not considered part of the Global South. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning the peripheral role Hispanic and Lusophone cultures have so far been relegated to in research on Modernity.

**11** Nicholas Poppe and Rielle Navitski’s book (2017) is an ambitious and exceptional piece of work that considers Latin America’s influential participation in the development of Occidental Modernity.



“mobility” implies that these same objects are also transportable. Both claims – and Latour makes this very clear – are not absolute; they must be considered in relation to other types of media. Compared to handwritten manuscripts, for instance, printed books are a relatively stable media, but the actual practices in the early centuries of printing were constantly evolving and contained many feedback loops, so their immutability is still relative (Schüttpelz 2009). When we consider the immutability of films, the same holds true: throughout their history, they have been subject to censorship, cut or edited to accommodate specific local policies, and physically worn out through repeated use, and musical accompaniment can sometimes vary according to means, audience, and venue, so there are a number of factors to take account of. Nevertheless, films have largely been seen as being immutable – and reproducible, as Walter Benjamin forcefully argues in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” Thus, despite the variability introduced by practices of circulation and exhibition, film still has a certain consistency and stability as an object, especially when it is described as a work of art. At the same time, mobility – as we have argued above – is not an effortless and sudden change of location; it always requires energy and labour. Therefore, the mobility of cultural objects comes at a price: transport fees, customs charges, rental fees, taxes, and duties, as well as expenditures of time and energy more generally. While the structure that an immutable mobile affords creates advantages for controlling time and space because of its stability and transportability, these benefits must be qualified by the efforts it requires to put these objects into circulation.

In discussions of the epistemology of avant-garde films like *Un chien andalou*, there is a tension between multiple different perspectives. On one side, we have the perspectives of interpretive flexibility and cultural transfer, which stress objects’ transformative adaptability; on the other side stands immutable mobility, which emphasises the durability of structures over time. Our analysis will describe and discuss these tensions, treating them less as contradictory than as dialectical thesis and antithesis: immutable mobility treats objects as having an ontological core that marks them as avant-garde films independently of their context. Boundary objectivity – in which an object’s meaning changes and adapts depending on the network it is part of – and the epistemology of the object from a cultural transfer point of view each adds an interpretative layer to the cultural object with each movement in its circulation. In truth, these approaches are just different perspectives on the same phenomenon, which are both useful. An object needs a certain interpretive flexibility to be able to circulate through different contexts; indeed such adaptability heightens its mobility. At the same time, a certain structural stability is necessary for an object to remain recognisable despite variations, and to allow for cooperation across different social and cultural worlds. In this sense, a

boundary object is an object that can mediate between worlds even when they do not have the same idea about it. We believe that immutable mobility, cultural transfer, and boundary objects are three useful categories that highlight different aspects of the object we are considering. Naturally, if one concentrates on the productivity of one of these aspects, the others move into the background. Rather than making ontological claims, our approach strategically employs these terms and theories.

With this in mind, we will now turn to our case study. Rather than presenting a full history of the reception of *Un chien andalou* – which would require a whole book – we will highlight certain moments and incidents that we consider important in relation to the theoretical perspective outlined in this opening section. Therefore, what follows is an exploratory and exemplary foray into transnational circulation patterns and various ways to understand them. The sources we have used to trace, study, and reconstruct the film's circulation patterns consist mainly of historical material (press articles from the period)<sup>12</sup> and secondary sources focused on the history of the film's screenings and the actors involved.

### 3 Case Study: The European Circulation of Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un chien andalou* (1929)

*Un chien andalou* premiered at Studio des Ursulines in Paris on 6 June 1929. The Surrealists, led by André Breton, were in attendance, and the great enthusiasm with which they received the film opened the doors for Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí to join their group. In the six months between the film's world premiere (6 June 1929) and its first screening in Madrid (8 December 1929), the film quickly took on a range of different connotations or semantic layers: Surrealist film, independent film, communist film, and incitement to violence.

The premiere in Paris provoked many reactions from intellectuals and members of the film industry: in reviews and statements in film and art journals, and in their private letters. The surge of reports on this first premiere in film journals was broad and transnational, with articles appearing in French, Spanish, and even English journals. Oswald Blakeston, author of the legendary

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<sup>12</sup> This research was conducted during the global Covid-19 pandemic, a period when researchers have not had the opportunity to do archival research due to reduced mobility and archival closures.

avant-garde journal *Close Up*, watched the film in a short film festival in Paris and wrote about it (Blakeston 1929). Our goal is not to give a detailed account of the film's screening history and the different reactions it received, because this has been done. For example, Ian Gibson (2013), Román Gubern and Paul Hammond (2012) have explored the reactions to the premiere and subsequent screenings of *Un chien andalou* in France and Spain in detail.

Before its Spanish release in Barcelona on 24 October 1929, *Un chien andalou* was screened at the First International Congress of Independent Film (Congrès international du cinéma indépendant, CICI), which took place in La Sarraz, Switzerland, in September 1929.<sup>13</sup> Between their other activities, the delegates at the congress collectively watched a number of avant-garde films in order to illustrate what they called the “independent cinema” (Archives 84 2000). Two aspects of *Un chien andalou*'s appearance at La Sarraz are important for our purposes. The first is the delegates' discussion about avant-garde cinema, which they called “independent cinema”; indeed, this discussion alone makes an argument for deepening the idea of films as boundary objects. The second is Salvador Dalí's statement about the screening of *Un chien andalou* at the congress, and the positive feedback it presumably received from Sergei Eisenstein. The different labels (avant-garde, independent, surrealist) the film was endowed with are interesting because each calls up a slightly different host of associations, destabilising the object in its semantic dimension (Hagener 2007). These attributions illustrate how the film functioned as a boundary object and, at the same time, how the cultural transfer process worked during the circulation process. At La Sarraz, the film was presented as an example of an “independent film,” so the organisers added a semantic layer to the object that was new at the time. *Un chien andalou* proved adaptable enough to be read both as part of the culture of independent film and that of avant-garde film.

As Palmira González has noted (1991, 336), Dalí published a provocative statement in the journal *Mirador* n<sup>o</sup> 39 (1929, 4) on the occasion of the screening of *Un chien andalou* in Barcelona. The painter described the success the film had enjoyed in Paris as something he and Buñuel disliked very much, since they saw it as an example of the snobbery of bourgeois audiences, who had become interested in anything that seemed new or strange as a consequence of the taste shaped by avant-garde journals and publications. He indicated that only two pieces of recognition they had received for the film mattered to him and Buñuel: the speech Eisenstein had given in La Sarraz and the agreement Dalí said they

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<sup>13</sup> Among the congress's many attendees were some famous proponents of film culture: Hans Richter, Walter Ruttmann, Ivor Montagu, Robert Aron, Jean George Auriol, Alberto Cavalcanti, Léon Moussinac, Sergej Eisenstein, Eduard Tissé, and many others.

had signed with the Republics of the Soviet Union to circulate and distribute it. Whether or not this supposed agreement was real,<sup>14</sup> and whether or not Eisenstein truly showed interest in the film, we have the account of Ernesto Giménez Caballero, who reported that of all the films that were screened in La Sarraz, *Un chien andalou* shocked audiences most. Giménez Caballero, who likely made the decision to screen *Un chien andalou* in Switzerland, wrote about it in *La Gaceta Literaria*, one of the most prestigious cultural journals of that time: “La película que más sorprendió fué [sic.] la española. Nadie esperaba de España un alarde semejante de técnica y espíritu. Como tampoco esperaba nadie que el Cineclub Español, fundado por *La Gaceta Literaria*, resultase el segundo en perfección de Europa, tras Holanda y exceptuando Francia [. . .]” (Caballero 1929, 435). [The most surprising film was the Spanish one. Nobody expected such a display of technique and spirit from Spain. Nor did anyone expect that the Spanish Cineclub, founded by *La Gaceta Literaria*, would turn out to be ranked the second-best in Europe after France and Holland.]

The confluence of communist ideals and an artistic cinematic language that Dalí proudly advertised became associated with *Un chien andalou*, adding another semantic layer to the film as it went through its circulatory process. From a cultural transfer perspective, when the film first premiered in Paris, it was already considered a Surrealist film by its authors, as Dalí told the journalist Pere Artigas when Artigas visited the film set for an interview (Gibson 2013, 318).<sup>15</sup> The film’s initial reception was not violent, even if Buñuel expected it to be after what had happened at the premiere of *La coquille et le clergyman* (FR 1927, Germaine Dulac);<sup>16</sup> nor was it associated with communist values. But in Madrid, as Gubern and Hammond have noted (2012, 325), the first screening was tumultuous. *Un chien andalou* was screened after *La chute de la maison Usher* (FR 1928, Jean Epstein) and *La fille de l’eau* (FR 1925, Jean Renoir) was supposed to follow; however, as Joan Piqueras wrote (December 15, 1929, 5), it was impossible to screen anything after the first two films. This sounds like a logical possibility, since Buñuel and Dalí had provocatively emphasised that the film was intended to incite violence. The screening in Madrid was organised by the Cineclub Español [Spanish Film Club] in the Cine Royalty on 8 December 1929, and the club’s

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**14** We could not find any evidence of this agreement.

**15** See “Un film d’En Dalí,” *Mirador* 17 (23 May 1929).

**16** In Buñuel’s telling, he was behind the curtains with some stones in his pockets, waiting for the audience and ready to throw the rocks at them if necessary. However, as Louis Aragon told Max Aub (Aub 1985, 361), this was probably just a fantasy. Buñuel was not seated behind the curtain, he was just anxiously waiting to see what the Surrealist group (the orthodox core of it, led by Breton) would think. Nothing violent happened.

director, the same Ernesto Giménez Caballero, offered Buñuel the possibility of saying some words before his film began. Dalí repeated what he had written in *La Révolution Surréaliste* 12 (15 December 1929), as told to Max Aub: the film was a desperate and passionate call to murder (Gubern and Hammond 2012, 325). Considered in the context of the cinema this might sound strange, yet in the context of the Surrealist group that Dalí and Buñuel had been accepted to, it becomes logical. The group gathered around André Breton was passing through a moment of ideological crisis as they reoriented their Second Surrealist Manifesto<sup>17</sup> around a more orthodox position aligned with the French Communist Party (Gubern and Hammond 2012, 20). Not only did Dalí's declarations (1929, published in *Mirador* 39) echo the direction of the Surrealist's second period, but his desperate call to murder was a continuation of the Bretonian declaration in the Second Manifesto: "The simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd." (Breton 1969, 125)

In his coverage of the Parisian reception of *Un chien andalou* for *La Gaceta Literaria*, the Spanish journalist named Eugenio Montes made nationalistic declarations about the directors' inherently Spanish talent, which had some basis in reality.<sup>18</sup> As many specialists have noted (Requena 2001, Castro 2001, Herrera 2007, Poyato 2008, Gibson 2013), *Un chien andalou* and its imaginary were partly a result of the creative environment that Dalí and Buñuel inhabited in the Residencia de Estudiantes [Student Residence] in Madrid. At the time, there were several Spanish artists, writers, and poets who either lived in or gathered around the Residencia, including Federico García Lorca, Gómez de la Serna, Maruja Mallo, José Moreno Villa, Rafael Alberti, Juan Ramón Jiménez, and many more. As many have pointed out, the concept of "lo putrefacto"<sup>19</sup> [the putrefied], which

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<sup>17</sup> The manifesto was published in the last issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* (1929) alongside the script of *Un chien andalou*. Buñuel and Breton had a memorable misunderstanding around the publication of the script: Buñuel had originally sent the script to *La Revue Cinématographique*, but when Breton became aware of this decision, he asked Buñuel to remove the script from that journal and publish it in *La Révolution Surréaliste* instead. See Gubern and Hammond (2012).

<sup>18</sup> The list of connotations *Un chien andalou* has been given by journalists is interminable, but among the most interesting is Eugenio Montes' assertion that the film is a show of the Spanish talent and the Spanish spirit. See Montes's article in *La Gaceta Literaria* 60 (15 June 1929).

<sup>19</sup> The group of artists – especially Dalí, Lorca, Buñuel and Pepín Bello – in La Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid used the term to refer to everything (almost always people and ideas) that they thought that was old, dead, or anachronistic (Rodrigo 1981, 83). The term was ultimately also associated with an ironic style used to make fun of the previous artistic generation (La Generación del '27) for old fashions and traditions ranging from the church and enlightened

undoubtedly plays a role in *Un chien andalou*, can be traced to the creative group around la Residencia de Estudiantes and is associated with Spanish culture. It is certainly true that Dalí and Buñuel were very interested in being part of the Surrealist group gathered around Breton.

In many, if not most European countries, *Un chien andalou* was not screened publicly until after World War II – partly because the distribution and exhibition of such a contentious film proved to be complicated and risky on many levels (due to censorship, police intervention, and protest from the Church and conservative circles), and partly because the arrival of sound films made silent films like Buñuel and Dalí's seem passé. Over time, however, the film became a classic, so screenings of it from the 1950s onwards were often framed differently. For example, in Sweden, a film club used *Un chien andalou* to recruit members, since the film was still officially banned and could only be screened within the confines of a club (see Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding 2010, 56). Exclusivity breeds demand, so the alleged “scandalous nature” of the film was often employed strategically to increase interest in the film. In the countries where it was screened publicly, the public debate followed the same pattern, as we will show.

In the first few countries where the film was screened after its French and Spanish premieres, the reaction followed a typical pattern. The case of the Netherlands illustrates this pattern: the film was screened on 28 and 29 November 1929 as part of a programme hosted by the Dutch Filmliga [Dutch Film League] in the movie theatre Filmtheater de Uitkijk. The film had been recommended by Mannus Franken, the Filmliga's Paris correspondent, but the film society's steering committee in the Netherlands did not like it at all (Linsen et al 1999, 91–97). They therefore took it out of the programme in the other local chapters of the Filmliga where the programme was slated to circulate (Rotterdam, Den Haag, Utrecht, Arnhem etc), giving rise to a brief controversy in the pages of the Filmliga's magazine (*Filmliga* 1929). In fact, the steering committee (*hoofdbestuur*) of the society described in great detail why the film had been bought and booked in the first place, before they had seen it. For the committee, Henrik Scholten wrote a scathing critique that characterises the film as wanting to cause a scandal at all costs: “This is not about pornography. Only about a bad film made by a powerless epigone with preconceived meaning, stupefied by an esoteric mystery and stemming from an inferior mind, unveiled with

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intellectuals to gentlemen and aristocratic manners. We find an example of “el putrefacto” in this latter sense in the scene with the donkey and the piano in *Un chien andalou*.

ostentatious complacency” (Scholten 480).<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, even in places that were wrongly considered marginal in the cultural hierarchy, such as Prague, people took notice of the film almost as soon as its international circulation began. In an article published in April 1930, the young Czech filmmaker Alexander Hackenschmied<sup>21</sup> wrote about independent film as a “world film movement” (Hackenschmied 1930) and listed Buñuel and Dalí among its important practitioners. Even if we cannot be sure the film had even been screened in Czechoslovakia when Hackenschmied wrote this, that only further underlines the rapidity with which such information surrounding *Un chien andalou* – labels, ideas, arguments – circulated.

## 4 *Un chien andalou*'s Latin American Circulation and Transnational Avant-Garde Networks

The violent reaction that *Un chien andalou* provoked in Madrid was echoed in another very different context: Buenos Aires. In a report for *La Gaceta Literaria* called “El ‘cineclub’ de Buenos Aires” [The Buenos Aires “film club”],<sup>22</sup> sent from Buenos Aires in 1929, Guillermo de Torre describes an incident surrounding the film. In his account, he briefly refers to the 15 films that were screened during the film club’s first season. Among the programmed films during that first season of the Cineclub de Buenos Aires, the only “pure” avant-garde films, according to Guillermo de Torre, were *L’Étoile de mer* (Man Ray, 1928) and *Un chien andalou*; this latter film, he wrote, “caused a certain scandal”.

*Un chien andalou* was screened in Buenos Aires (Argentina) on 7 August 1929 for the first time, and again on 16 August 1929. Both screenings were organised by the Cineclub de Buenos Aires (1929–1931), an association founded by the Amigos del Arte.<sup>23</sup> Buñuel and Dalí’s film was part of a programme of avant-garde cinema presented by the Romanian philosopher and artist Benjamin Fondane,

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20 This is our translation of Scholten’s original: “Van pornografie is hier geen sprake. Slechts van een slechte film, door een machteloos epigoontje gemaakt met de vooropgezette bedoeling, door een esoterisch raadseltje te épateeren, en van een met ostentatief welbehagen geopenbaarde, inférieure geest.”

21 After World War Two and his emigration to North America, Hackenschmied became a key figure of the U.S. avant-garde when he changed his name to Alexander Hammid and began to make films with his wife, Maya Deren.

22 See Guillermo de Torre, “El ‘Cineclub’ de Buenos Aires,” in *La Gaceta Literaria* 79 (1930).

23 See editions of *La Nación* from 7 and 17 August 1929. We are deeply indebted to Lucio Mafud, who kindly shared some press clippings with us, as we were unable to visit archives in Latin America due to the pandemic.

who had been invited to Buenos Aires by Victoria Ocampo. Ocampo, who was instrumental in bringing the films in the programme to Argentina,<sup>24</sup> had met Fondane in León Chestov's house when she visited Paris in 1929, accompanied by Ortega y Gasset (González Aguilar 2011, 12). On 6 August 1929, Fondane came to Amigos del Arte to present the films he had brought from Paris: *Un chien andalou* (Buñuel and Dalí, 1929); *L'Étoile de mer* (Man Ray, 1928); *Entr'acte* (René Clair, 1924); and fragments of *La Coquille et le Clergyman* (Dulac, 1928), *Le Cabaret épileptique* (Gad, 1928) and *La Perle* (Ursel, 1929). Fondane titled his presentation "Presentation of *films pures*: homage to Victoria Ocampo" ["Presentación de films puros: homenaje a Victoria Ocampo"].<sup>25</sup> Ocampo acted as a go-between, an indispensable link, but she is nevertheless largely forgotten in official histories. It is often women that perform the labour of building connections, yet they only appear at the margins, if at all. In any case, independently of their gender, mediators tend to be forgotten by history.

As Guillermo de Torre assessment in *La Gaceta Literaria* had it, at least some people who attended the screenings of *Un chien andalou* felt offended by the language of the avant-garde film – or perhaps, as Aguilar (2011) noted, by the film's erotic imprint. According to an account by the film columnist of *La Nación*, Benjamin Fondane framed the films as avant-garde films, as distinct from commercial films. While avant-garde films should be read as "film-poems," commercial ones were more like "film-novels". One term that was often used as a quasi-synonym for "avant-garde" was "cinéma pur," a concept that appears repeatedly in both Fondane's presentation and Guillermo de Torre's report for *La Gaceta Literaria* (1930), as well as in a review of the eighth session of the Cine-Club Español [Spanish Film Club], where *Un chien andalou* was screened (Piqueras 1929). In his presentation, Fondane defined "film pure" as a film that points towards pure technique – the goal is to experiment with all the camera's possibilities. He contrasted the cinematographic language developed and advanced by avant-garde filmmakers with commercial cinema based on what the *La Nación* columnist called "literary qualities," referring thereby to cinema's narrative form. It seems that these ideas did not convince the *La Nación* journalist, who described the "film pure" as an arbitrary, repugnant, confusing and sickening aesthetic form, and the set of images at the programme's first screening as meaningless and aimless (7 August 1929). His review of the second screening was even worse: titled "Los 'films' de vanguardia carecen de todo valor" ["The avant-garde 'films' lack

24 "En 1930, por iniciativa mía, llegaron a Buenos Aires los primeros films de Buñuel, René Clair, Man Ray". *Sur*, enero-diciembre 1974. Quoted after Martín Peña (2008, 63).

25 *Síntesis*, no. 28 (Septiembre 1929, p. 9–20). Quoted after Constantini (2008, 250).



any value”], its subtitle reads: “Forman un conjunto sin ingenio de recursos ya gastados” [The films do not have any ingenuity and are made from used-up resources] (17 August 1929, 11). The journalist blamed the avant-garde for basing their films on theoretical ideas that never appear on screen. He described the films themselves as visually poor and pretentious, childish, a folly show of primitive simplicity, cinematic vulgarity, bad taste, abuse of cinematographic resources, and outdated forms. The journalist dedicated a few words to *Un chien andalou*: for him, it was an example of rude sensuality, a sick paroxysm without any artistic value. At the end of his review, he refers to the audience and assures that “Y por fin ha llegado nuestro público en esta clase de espectáculos a un grado de conocimientos que no permite tolerar seriamente estas expediciones de ‘arte puro’, dejadas hace tiempo por ingenuas y deleznales” [Finally our audience is knowledgeable enough about these kinds of shows and does not seriously tolerate these expeditions of ‘pure art’, which were abandoned long ago as naive and despicable]. Perhaps, as Gonzalo Aguilar believes (2011, 12), the Argentinian public was not used to this avant-garde cinema, with its erotic undertones and its non-narrative focus, which stood in stark contrast to most films audiences in Buenos Aires routinely saw and enjoyed at that time. However, we believe that this unprepared cohort could have in fact been only a part of the audience, since for the circle of artists who were close to Amigos del Arte, the films in the “pur avant-garde” programme were likely not so unfamiliar. Long after the programme, artists and intellectuals associated with Amigos del Arte stayed in touch long with Fondane, who maintained correspondence with Victoria Ocampo, with whom he would later produce a film called *Tararira*, “probably one of the first experimental and avant-garde films produced in Argentina.” (Aguilar 2011, 17–18)<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, when the film was finally produced in 1936 in Buenos Aires, there was no audience for the film, so it was never released and is lost today. Fondane also wrote many texts for Ocampo’s journal *Sur*, which many of the recognized intellectuals and artists who gathered around Amigos del Arte contributed to.

When the film was released, there were, at least according to the reviews, two different receptions of *Un chien andalou* in Buenos Aires: one among the Amigos del Arte circle and another one by general audiences. This is probably an oversimplified way of dividing the audience, as there were almost certainly members of the “general audience” who liked the film and intellectuals who disliked it. However, despite the bad reviews the avant-garde film sessions received in *La Nación* – which is, after all, a right-wing newspaper – if we consider the programming for

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<sup>26</sup> For more information about *Tararira*, see Aguilar (2011), who attempts to reconstruct the plot of the film.

the other sessions organised by the Cineclub de Buenos Aires,<sup>27</sup> we can see that the programmers (and their audience) were fond of avant-garde cinema. Besides the films that Fondane imported, they screened a lot of Soviet cinema (Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Vertov) and other European avant-garde films, including René Clair's work, Ruttmann's *Berlin, Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (GER 1927, *Berlin. The Symphony of the Big City*), and Epstein's *La chute de la maison Usher*. Even if not all of the films screened at Amigos del Arte were as experimental as *Un chien andalou*, most of them had been made in opposition to the commercial cinema represented by Hollywood films – except for the slapstick films of Chaplin, Langdon, and Keaton, which used to circulate in the same networks as avant-garde films. Here, it is worth recalling that at that time, film critics and professionals in Argentina and Mexico – the countries with the largest film industries in Latin America at the time – were in the habit of contrasting American films (meaning Hollywood's commercial films) with other kind of films, such as *films purs* or artistic films. Their distinction had two purposes: first, to demonstrate that the American films that were mainly programmed in commercial cinema venues were neither the only kind of cinema existing in the world nor the most interesting. Secondly, these professionals wanted to boost their respective national film industries by lifting them up as examples of “good cinema”. From a cultural point of view, then, the audiences were naturally divided. On the one hand, there were elite film club audiences, and on the other hand, there were general audiences who went to commercial movie theatres and mostly watched commercial cinema. Even if film club audiences also attended commercial cinema venues at times, the reverse did not happen as often during that period as it would after the mass popularisation of film clubs during the fifties and sixties.<sup>28</sup> In other words, one audience was composed of elite groups with symbolic and economic capital who were able to buy copies of films, travel from Latin America to Europe, and organise artistic gatherings attended by diplomats, aristocrats, artists, and intellectuals. And the other, general audience attended commercial cinema venues and was not used to watch the kind of cinema that was considered avant-garde or experimental. This divide explains the split reactions to *Un chien andalou* in Buenos Aires and Mexico City.

Even if the circle of intellectuals around Amigos del Arte was similar to the group gathered around *La Gaceta Literaria* (and, therefore, to Buñuel's and Dalí's networks) from an artistic point of view, from a cultural transfer perspective the

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27 Some of these sessions are summed up by Couselo (2008).

28 See Clariana-Rodagut and Roig-Sanz, forthcoming (2022).

two should be differentiated. The two key notions that the film's Argentinian reception focused on were *cinéma pur* and scandal; other adjectives that had been attached to the film, such as "Spanish," "Surrealist," "violent," or "communist," were not mentioned during its circulation in Argentina. The "scandalous" label was added to the film after its Argentinian release, along with the "erotic" label. Until that moment, the film had not been considered sexually scandalous, which explains why Guillermo de Torre felt the need to mention the aforementioned incident (1930) in his *La Gaceta Literaria* article on the Argentinian premiere.<sup>29</sup> The film's association with "cinéma pur" came from the elitist and intellectual group gathered around the Amigos del Arte Association, while the popular press attached the adjective "scandalous" to it. *Un chien andalou's* associations with scandal lasted many years and had their origins in different places. On the occasion of the Dutch premiere in 1929, for example, we find a caricature titled "Un chien scandalou," referring to the scandal the film provoked among the audiences who attended its first screenings. As illustrated above, the film was at least partly charged with provoking a scandal for the sake of attracting attention. Today, the film is not considered obscene, but it is still considered provocative; somehow, the reaction is similar a century after its release. Now, we talk about avant-garde film instead of *cinéma pur*, and the latter term has almost disappeared, although it was still described an example of *cinéma pur* in an Uruguayan journal as late as 1951 (*Film* 1951).

*Un chien andalou* premiered on 17 May 1938 in Mexico, almost a decade after its Argentinian premiere. It is part of the first programme put on by 35 mm Cinema, a film club run by Lola Álvarez Bravo and others, and it took place in the Palacio de Bellas Artes [Palace of Fine Arts] in Mexico City. Unlike the Argentinians, no one in Mexico considered the film an example of "pure cinema," even though André Breton himself presented the film. Instead, the critic Xavier Villaurrutia applauded the film in the popular press for its sensuality, cruelty, and eroticism (Bradú 2012, 96). Efraín Huerta (2006, 171), who disliked the film, called it annoying in the same popular press, but he did not mention anything related to erotic scandal. Villaurrutia's comments may make an argument for considering the "scandal" label as an impulse to broaden the film's circulation – the promise of sexual scandal could be a way to attract audiences to the screenings. In any case, *Un chien andalou* worked as a boundary object between the Argentinian and Mexican frameworks of reception, since the actors who

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<sup>29</sup> Actually, in Spain, the film was regarded as "intense," which was how Spanish culture was often seen at that point, as compared to the culture in France, where the film was produced. This illustrates how prevalent the idea of national cinemas with specific characteristics was at the time.

took part in the circulation networks did not reach consensus on the meaning of the film, or even arrive at a moment of cooperation. In our exploration of how and why the film was able to circulate or stopped from circulating through specific networks, we must consider cooperation, since that aspect is needed to maintain any network of circulation; nodes have to share common ground to stay in contact. Leigh Star's concept of "cooperation without consensus" is crucial here because it offers a way to understand how at least some elements of the networks function. Villaurrutia, who was closely linked to 35 mm Cinema, did not approach *Un chien andalou* through the same "pur cinema" lens Fondane and the members of Amigos del Arte had applied to it. Yet despite these differences and the lack of consensus, the film continued circulating as a boundary object through avant-garde networks that were in turn intertwined with one another.

## 5 Conclusion

As our retracing of the circulatory networks of avant-garde film has demonstrated, it was an elite set of intellectuals and artists who were interested in watching *Un chien andalou* in both Europe and the Americas. The European examples we have explored are Madrid's Cine-Club Español, the Barcelona film club Sesiones Mirador, Paris's Surrealist group and specialised venues (Le Vieux Colombier, Studio 27, and Les Ursulines),<sup>30</sup> and the Netherlands Filmliga (at the Filmtheater de Uitkijk). Similar structural developments are visible in the Americas, where the film circulated through film-club networks like the Cineclub de Buenos Aires and the Amigos del Arte Association in Argentina, and the 35 mm Cinema in Mexico.<sup>31</sup> This pattern also recurred in Uruguay – the film club Cine Universitario premiered the film some time in 1950/1951,<sup>32</sup> and the Cine Club del Uruguay screened it in 1951.<sup>33</sup> Another interesting case study for potential future exploration could be Brazil, where the film premiered in the sixties at the Cine-teca do Museu de Arte Moderna [the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art] in Rio de Janeiro. The network of avant-garde film circulation also later expanded to include archives, which can be seen in some important respects as the historical

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**30** These were considered venues that screened the same films as the film clubs – "cinema independent," as they called it at the La Sarraz meeting in September 1929 (Cosandey and Tode 2000, 13).

**31** See Clariana-Rodagut (forthcoming 2022).

**32** See *Film 1* (1952).

**33** This account comes from Navitski (2021).

and institutional continuation of film clubs (Hagener 2014). The elite groups that organised sessions at film clubs, art cinema venues, or film archives usually had a specialised journal in which they expressed their ideas: *La Gaceta Literaria* and *Mirador* (Spain), *La Révolution Surréaliste* (France), *Sur* (Argentina), *Contemporáneos* (Mexico), *Cine Club* and *Film* (Uruguay), *Filmliga* (Netherlands), *Film und Volk* (Germany), among others. What is even more interesting is that these elite groups were not just important within their respective national film traditions, as histories of those traditions attest;<sup>34</sup> they also proved influential from a transnational perspective. By retracing the transnational relations between actors who participated in film clubs, we can evaluate their key contributions to the development of artistic Modernity, enabling the circulation of ideas, practices, and cultural goods, giving rise to creative exchanges, and fostering transnational creative environments. In this way, we propose that film clubs function as actors and actants whose transnational connections have enabled them to play an important role in the construction of Western Modernity. The human actors in those networks, who were artists and intellectuals, had similar profiles. They built the mechanics of the networks they were part of, making it possible for avant-garde films to circulate and taking active roles in the cultural transfer process through which those films were given specific labels. These processes also worked the other way, of course: actors and actants were impelled by the agency of avant-garde films to act and perform in certain ways, attending or participating in film screenings. The films, as actors, carried with them all the semantic labels they had accumulated through the circulation process, and their agency impelled other actors or actants to perform according to those labels. Moreover, as boundary objects, avant-garde films allowed transnational connections between different networks of actors and actants like the Spanish, French, Dutch, Mexican, and Argentinian networks in our case studies, thereby tracing a global avant-garde film network. Now that *Un chien andalou* is firmly established as an important part of film history after nearly a century of circulation, we can safely claim that it was its immutable form as an avant-garde film that enabled its mobility across time and space and assured its circulation through film societies' networks.

To date, scholars have not yet analysed the reception of films from a transnational perspective centred on connectivity. When these connections have been studied, the studies have generally focused on a specific bilateral relation (Spain-Argentina / Spain-Mexico / France-Argentina), rather than a multilateral

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<sup>34</sup> In several national histories, members of film clubs have been at least cited and mentioned, if not widely. See the example of Victoria Ocampo, Joan Piqueras, Giménez Caballero, André Breton or Manuel Álvarez Bravo, who received part of the credit for the work of his first wife, Lola Álvarez Bravo, who ran the 35 mm Cinema and other film clubs.

connection (Spain-France-Argentina-Mexico).<sup>35</sup> This multilateral connection has proven to be a fruitful case study for analysing circulation, since it has revealed the broad workings of the cultural transfer process and how those particular transnational networks were built. Through this broad lens, we have been able to trace where a particular film was first tagged with a particular label, which agencies boosted this action; and ultimately how the film's meaning-making process was affected during its circulation.

From another point of view, it is worth highlighting that in at least two Latin American countries (Argentina and Mexico) it was women who maintained the transnational networks. We have already mentioned Victoria Ocampo's work in Argentina; in Mexico, it was Lola Álvarez Bravo who played a relevant role.<sup>36</sup> Their contributions support Leigh Star's idea that attending to infrastructures when we map transnational networks will uncover the invisible role that women have historically played in the art field. Without those women's transnational social connections and their facility as cultural mediators (Roig-Sanz and Meylaerts 2018), films such as *Un chien andalou* could not have circulated as they did. There is a pressing need to emphasise their roles, in order to assign them the significance they truly had in the history of cinema.

In theoretical terms, the main idea we have explored in this chapter is the tension between the ontology of the object (avant-garde film), which appears immutable, and the epistemology of the object, which undergoes a resemantisation process through its transnational circulation. We have proposed Susan Leigh's term boundary objects and Bruno Latour's notion of immutable mobiles as useful tools for addressing the ontology of such an object (1990), basing our discussion on the hypothesis that the ontology of the object is neither rigid enough, from a structural point of view, to be used, comprehended, assessed, or analysed by just one group of likeminded people, nor so disorganised that different groups of people with diverse interests and geographical contexts cannot recognize it. The object's interpretative flexibility allows for the possibility of achieving cooperation without consensus among different groups, such as audiences, distributors, producers, and censors. Meanwhile, its immutable structure allows for mobility, because it is flexible yet consistent, ready to adapt to different local needs while still providing the object stability as a (artistic) work.

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<sup>35</sup> We would have liked to frame our case studies in smaller and more peripheral places (see Backström), but the digital divide we referred to above did not allow it. Furthermore, we would have preferred to take a decentred approach and account for relations among peripheral and less studied places (see Bäckström, Hjartarson 2014), but despite our efforts, this has so far only been possible to a small degree.

<sup>36</sup> See Clariana-Rodagut (forthcoming 2022).

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