**BFI Workshop on DEPTH OF FIELD, CLASS CONFLICT AND THE LATIN AMERICAN CINEMA OF DOMESTIC SERVICE**

Latin American films focused on the relationship between employers and live-in domestic workers have abounded over the last twenty years. Hailing from countries as diverse as Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Argentina and Peru, this cycle of films, often referred to as the “cinema of domestic work/service”, can be in part explained by the increased formalisation and regulation of domestic work in Latin America. The list of films pertaining to this cycle is as extensive as is the diversity of styles and genres they mobilise. However, a remarkably consistent feature can be discerned in many such films, namely their recourse to the depth of field technique to convey the interaction between employers and live-in housekeepers sharing the same physical space.

Depth of field is one of the most widely debated concepts in film theory, going back to André Bazin’s foundational writings on the topic in the 1940s and 1950s. For Bazin, the utilisation of recessive planes in the image by directors such as Jean Renoir, Orson Welles and William Wyler meant more autonomy and freedom on the part of the spectator in the process of scanning and apprehending the image, which refused to congeal into a definitive meaning and thus preserved the ‘ambiguity’ of reality. At the same time, the concept of depth as it relates to class conflict within domestic spaces is not infrequently mobilised on a vertical axis in the cinema: one can think of the ‘upstairs-downstairs’ British tradition, but also the recent South Korean smash hit *Parasite* (2019, Bong Joon-ho), in which verticality is a central conceit and structuring principle.

In combining recent Latin American films, the question of class and Bazinian film theory, this workshop will explore how and whether a regional cinema can make us reassess solidified theoretical concepts. Are Bazin’s ideas applicable to these films? To what extent does the socio-cultural specificity of the institution of domestic work in Latin America, rooted as it is in racialised, gendered and architecturally determined configurations, require a locally attuned and historically sensitive intervention, one that may, in turn, help illuminate the way depth is activated in the recent cinema of domestic service? To answer these questions, we will analyse clips from a select group of films, including Lucrecia Martel’s *The Headless Woman* (2008), Anna Muylaert’s *The Second Mother* (2015), Kleber Mendonça Filho’s *Aquarius* (2016) and Alfonso Cuarón’s *Roma* (2018).

**Reading Suggestions**

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Redrobe, Karen, and Jeff Scheible. 2020. ‘Depths of the Moving Image: Perception, Spectatorship, and Film Theory’. In *Deep Mediations: Thinking Space in Cinema and Digital Cultures*, edited by Karen Redrobe and Jeff Scheible. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 1-11.

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