IBERO-AMERICAN SHORT FILMS ONLINE AS INDICATORS OF (TRANS)NATIONALISM IN WEB 2.0

by

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DEDICATION

To my (chosen) family in all senses, in all times; then, now, and forever.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT

This dissertation project explores the intersections of the evolution of Web 2.0, Ibero-American short films online, and metadata practices of national labeling in the digital age. By employing critical frameworks of global cinema studies, transnationalism, and critical metadata studies, this dissertation explores how frames of national identity are transposed onto short films that reside in institutional databases that foster global visibility and legitimacy through funding, access, viewership, and distribution. Three short films from Latin America and Spain serve as case studies to demonstrate how (trans)national material and the aesthetic developments introduced in Web 2.0 strengthen the interdependence of technological innovation and cultural debates of the posthuman digital citizen.

RESUMÉ EN FRANÇAIS

Ce projet de thèse explore les intersections entre l'évolution du Web 2.0, les courts métrages ibéro-américains en ligne et les pratiques de métadonnées de l'étiquetage national à l'ère numérique.En utilisant les cadres critiques des études sur le cinéma mondial, le transnationalisme et les études critiques sur les métadonnées, cette thèse explore comment les cadres de l'identité nationale sont transposés sur les courts métrages qui résident dans les bases de données institutionnelles qui favorisent la visibilité et la légitimité mondiales par le biais du financement, de l'accès, du visionnage et de la distribution. Trois courts métrages d'Amérique latine et d'Espagne servent d'études de cas pour démontrer comment le matériel (trans)national et les développements

esthétiques introduits dans le Web 2.0 renforcent l'interdépendance de l'innovation technologique et des débats culturels du citoyen numérique posthumain.

INDEX WORDS: Short film, film studies, transnationalism, metadata, web 2.0, cortometraje, information studies, digital humanities, posthumanism, *Reality 2.0* (2012) by Victor Orozco, *.Sub* (2013) by Jossie Malis Álvarez, *Hyper-Reality* (2016) by Keiichi Matsuda

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PREFACE:

FOUNDING AND ORGANIZING *ESPAÑAENCORTO*

I began to ponder national-belonging, short film, and the onset of Web 2.0 when I founded and organized the annual *EspañaEnCorto* short film festival in Atlanta and Athens, Georgia (United States) from 2008 to 2018. My impetus for founding *EspañaEnCorto* stemmed from an internship with the Spanish Ministry of Exterior Culture to promote study abroad and work abroad opportunities in Spain to American college students, so my mandate was to convey an appealing and relatable idea of Spain to outsiders. Short films were a convenient way to present a variety of stories and audio-visual experiences made by other university students and aspiring professional filmmakers. To my surprise, the first edition of the festival attracted a large audience from the Atlanta area, many of whom commented that it was their first time watching a film with subtitles or any type of film from Spain.

The initial aim of promoting 'Spanish' content for American audiences took an unexpected turn in the 2010 edition of the festival. After selecting ten films to screen in the program, the festival selection committee realized that we may have had a problem with our brand as a "Spanish Film Festival." The issue was that eight out of the ten selected shorts were either 1) not in Castilian Spanish and were instead using languages like English, French, Italian, Basque, Galician-Portuguese, Arabic, Mandarin, etc.; 2) filmed outside of Spain with (non) Spanish actors; or 3) made by filmmakers and animators who were not originally from Spain. As a result of this multinational, multicultural selection laying before me, I began reconsidering the original mandate that was steeped in Spanish national institutions and cultural promotion. After much discussion,

the committee decided to privilege the high quality of films over a harmonious concept of Spain for the festival, the committee screened the ten films regardless of the program's material or narrative connections to Spain.

Reflecting on the 2010 edition of the festival, the selection committee found themselves asking each other: "Is there a disconnect between our branding as a Spanish film festival and this selection?" "How is each film in some way *Spanish*? And what does '*Spanishness'* mean across different short films?" These interrogations refer to the deep attachments between the (independent) film industry and national belonging since (short) films that are festival-bound and catalogued online are prominently labeled and categorized by nation (Crofts 2000). This national label is an example of metadata, which is, briefly – "data about data" or "information about other information."[i] Upon closer examination, a metadata label is a fetishization of several aspects of filmmaking and storytelling. For example, the label of 'Spain' might point back to the national belonging of the filmmaker, the languages or dialects used in the film, the nationality of the principal actors, the origin of the majority funding source, or the territorial setting of the plot, etc.

In the case of the *EspañaEnCorto* festival, we had no pre-packaged response to the *Spanish-ness* of the short films except for the fact that we received the shorts from distributors based in the geopolitically recognized territory of Spain. The task of presenting some short films for audiences in the United States that made no territorial nor linguistic reference back to Spain uncovered a rift between the content of the short films and the material realities behind them which lay buried underneath a mere national label like 'Spain' or 'Spanish.' This dissonance of short film national content and material is not a fault in and of itself, but an opportunity to revise and update constructs of national belonging as it relates to filmmaking and diffusion after the millennium – especially as short films found a new home on the Internet.

Since I started *EspañaEnCorto* in 2008, only two years after YouTube's public debut, I witnessed a dramatic shift in short film content, techniques, themes, production collaborations, and distribution methods within the selection of shorts that I received annually from Spain. In the first few years of the festival, my distributors in Madrid, The Basque Country, and Castilla y León sent physical DVDs of short films and printed catalogues through international post which arrived several weeks after requesting them by e-mail. By the years 2010-2011, fewer catalogues were arriving by mail, and the festival's primary form of short film retrieval shifted into password protected links from Vimeo.com that led to downloadable HD files in a variety of screen size formats for theater projection. Publicity for *EspañaEnCorto* evolved from listserv emails, local newspaper ads, and paper flyers towards an increasingly paperless strategy of cross-promotion on social media between the festival, local groups of interest, the distributors, and the filmmakers' personal websites. As administrator of the festival's Facebook page, I received several messages from independent filmmakers throughout the year who sent hyperlinks to their latest short film project in hopes of a selection since they opted for self-promotion by cutting out the distributor as the middleman. This reflection is not to say that digital diffusion and publicity completely replaced the material ones, but that their coexistence meant that the infrastructures of regional distribution and small-scale festivals like *EspañaEnCorto* needed to adapt to new workflows, communication strategies, and an increasingly digital landscape of short films on the Web.

Having written this dissertation during the global COVID-19 pandemic, I witnessed yet another dramatic shift in online communication, workflow, and (short) filmmaking that relied heavily on available technologies and platforms of visibility which I will discuss further in my concluding remarks to this thesis. Having passed the *EspañaEnCorto* baton to colleagues at University of Georgia in 2018 (Dr. Martin Ward and Dr. Javier Cabezas), they have continued and

evolved the short film festival by presenting an online edition in Fall of 2020 and incorporating tools like online surveys and mobile voting for the attendees. I will always be grateful for my colleagues' input and hard work in organizing *EspañaEnCorto* and for the opportunities to engage with and reflect on the shifting landscape of short filmmaking during those years. This was the true inspiration of my dissertation research.

[i] This definition is a common point of departure since it stems from the etymological interpretation of metadata. I will expound upon metadata further in Chapter One.

INTRODUCTION:

IBERO-AMERICAN SHORT FILM AND PERCEPTIONS OF NATIONAL CINEMA

I. Introduction & key terms

This is a dissertation that is just as much about metadata as it is about short films. I discuss how content and form propel, inform, and betray one another, and how these processes reflect an untidy combination of human thinking and machine thinking in the Internet age. The implications for this topic across disciplines are vast, but my narrow point of entry into this discussion is in demonstrating how (trans)national labeling of Ibero-American short films manifests in the Participatory Web, and why national metadata can be both beneficial and detrimental for the visibility of independent short filmmakers and producers. Through critical argumentation, metadata annotation, mapping, and close analysis of select short films, I demonstrate how life online after the millennium optimistically amplified possibilities for short filmmaking and diffusion, and yet continued to perpetuate hierarchies and power structures at the most basic level of information access and presentation on the Web through national metadata. Since metadata is crucial to algorithms that power search engines and viewing suggestions on streaming platforms and applications which encourage visibility, hype, monetization, and renewal opportunities, it is worthwhile to explore the nuances of how the seeds of algorithms, metadata, contribute to how cultural products like short films continue to function as national cinema on the Web.

First, I will briefly define a few terms that I use frequently throughout the dissertation like Web 2.0, The Third Order of Information, online short film, Ibero-American, and (trans)national. Web 2.0 (also known as *Participatory Web* or the *Social Web*) was a term coined circa 2004 to

represent a new era of the Web taking shape in which the primary functions of the Internet shifted from searching and reading on static webpages in HTML toward networked participation in dynamic platforms across devices (computers, phones, tablets, wearables) (OECD). Web 2.0 is arguably ongoing as conversations abound of an impending Web 3.0 which boasts idealisms and lessons learned from the previous era like more personal data protection in a decentralized web structure (Kujur and Chhetri). Web 2.0 was revolutionary to (independent) filmmaking and distribution since its user-centered, participant-driven features enabled the popularization of user-upload and streaming sites like YouTube and Vimeo as well as the implementation of Cloud technology that transformed digital workflow and storage.[ii] The onset of Web 2.0 also fostered the Third Order of Information, which David Weinberger describes as an information era defined by digital technology that is unhindered by the limitations of materials and space (19-22). The Third Order of Information enables and even thrives off miscellany, disorderliness, and subjective thinking from digital and networked metadata that is negotiated between human thinking and machine learning (198).[iii]

While the precise definition of a short film (*cortometraje* in Spanish) is one of the most elusive and contested conundrums of any filmic genre, my definition of a short film in this dissertation is a fictional (or nonfictional) film product with a running time of less than thirty-minutes.[iv] Since short films were historically part of a larger program in vaudeville shows and then in theatres alongside feature films, short films must be brief enough to allow for a variety in a screening or performance agenda.[v] I choose not to impose narrative constraints on the definition of short film given its deep ties to experimentation, technique, technological novelty, and accessibility to amateur filmmakers. As the digital era of Web 2.0 has facilitated an onslaught of short new media genres like Vines, Stories, Reels, TikTok videos, GIFs, and more, the definition

of short film has become even more convoluted since many shorts incorporate techniques and themes of life online expressed in these new media formats.[vi] Thus, when I provide examples of online short films throughout the dissertation, I am referring to a short film that is either produced with online tools (*online born*) or filmed with a digital device and then posted online (*digital born*) and has been *claimed* as a short film on a database, in the metadata description, or in a festival program.[vii] [viii] By decentralizing the definition of a short film by length or generic guidelines, I choose to delegate that judgement to the filmmakers, users, webmasters, and festival programmers who recognize short films and perpetuate their definitions as they appear across different (digital) spaces.

By Ibero-American short film, I mean that the short film is associated either in full or in part with countries that are in the regions of Latin America and/or Iberia. I chose to use *Ibero-American* over Hispanic, Trans-Hispanic, or Spanish-language since these terms exclude non-Hispanophone populations and films made in other languages. While the term, Ibero-American, has its own problematic implications, the term is frequently operationalized in the cinema industry to express transnational collaboration and categorization in funding entities, festivals, and database collections.[ix] By embarking on a dissertation that interrogates national paradigms and hierarchies, I realize that the association of online short films with geographical regions like Iberia and/or Latin America is yet again leaning on subjective constructs of identity and belonging in the digital era. With this recognition fully in place, my aim is to pluralize and network at the national level since short films tend to operate in digital spaces that are often connected to regional or national institutions through funding, territories of production, auteurs, cultural content, or language association (Castillo 40-41). While the term Ibero-American is regionally specific, it is meant to cover much theoretical territory when applied to various aspects of short film national

affiliation like common languages and migration patterns and is also convenient to address the aspects of institutionalization like funding and distribution that dominates national cinema paradigms.

While I maintain the level of specificity at the national when I examine and illustrate different aspects of short film metadata, I keep in mind the subjectivity of the *nation* as a discursive and critical construct.[x] Ernest Renan's ground-breaking lecture from 1882, *Qu'est-ce q'une nation?* posits that the nation is comprised of both collective memory *and* of curated forgetfulness (3).[xi] More contemporary theorists in the 1980s like Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawn, and Benedict Anderson solidified the accepted critical frameworks of narration, discourse, and nation formation by asserting that nations are constructions of an *invented tradition* or an *imagined community*.[xii] For this dissertation, Benedict Anderson's anthropological approach to the nation as an imagined community is most useful since he perceives the overlap of technological advancement, media diffusion, and national narratives by pointing out that it is no accident that "print as commodity" coincided with the origins of the national consciousness in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (37). By applying Anderson's connection to the print-to-digital revolution approaching the millennium, the synergies between national and digital storytelling introduce another paradigm that encompasses massive socio-economic change through globalization, transnational migration and flows of capital, and the possibilities to access and produce influential content for audiences beyond regional and national boundaries.[xiii] Hence, when I use (trans)nationalism to describe short films on the Internet, I am accounting for the possibilities of the *either/or/and* that film production, distribution, and access entail in the digital age. For example, the (trans)national cultural product on the web could mean that those territories were expressed within the content and production of the film and/or perhaps at a later point when a film becomes significant to another cultural group

in another nation. In either way or in all ways, resources, people, ideas, and cultural audiences related to film are existing within and traversing beyond their imagined communities despite the very real existence of political borders.[xiv]

One of the main points I make throughout my argumentation and analysis is that nationalism (in a variety of metadata expressions that I will specify in subsequent chapters) maintains a strong foothold on cinema as a narrative object that is entangled with technological innovation and cultural messaging for both insiders and outsiders of the imagined community. Stemming from the ambiguous stance between local vs. global and regional vs. (trans)national are this dissertation's essential questions about short films and their national labels in the digital age of filmmaking and information which are: 1) What are the tensions between national belonging and Ibero-American short films that are born or housed online during Web 2.0? and 2) Who stands to lose or benefit from the ways that national metadata are presented in Ibero-American short films with Web 2.0 technologies? These interrogations appeal to theoretical arguments on national identity and global cinema studies as well as information studies and cyberculture practices in Web 2.0 which was a period of explosive change in the ways that audiences, creators, and users engaged with (short) filmmaking.

II. Historical ties between Ibero-American short film and nationhood

Allow me to historicize how short film and concepts of the nation have been intertwined since the earliest days of silent cinema and sound-synchronized films. Almost a century after the printing press made possible the mass diffusion of the written word, the emergence of motion pictures and cinema industries pushed forward more possibilities for the "show and tell" of national discourses domestically and abroad. Nuria Triana-Toribio's introduction to *Spanish National Cinema* drives home this connection: "Since nations are intimately tied up with narrative

acts, it seems inevitable that cinema, the most powerful narrative machine of the twentieth century, has had something to say in the formation of national identities, Spanish included" (6). As the default format of early cinematography, short film was thus at the origin of this new form of storytelling and representation during a crucial moment of modernization at the turn of the 20th century. Especially at the onset of synchronized sound cinematography in the late 1920s, (short) films quickly emerged as a popular and impactful narrative medium that burgeoning national cinema industries sought to fund, produce, and distribute idealized and stylized visions of a unified nation in addition to enforcing protectionary measures to retain domestic viewership (Felando 23).

In the cases of Ibero-American countries like Spain, Mexico and Cuba, the project of coopting and institutionalizing nationalized short film production occurred in three main phases during the twentieth century albeit through varied timings and procedures.[xv] The first phase (c. 1920s-1950s) was the creation of nationalized film institutions aimed to protect and promote domestic cinema production and diffusion. During this phase, short films became important cultural objects in the national project to inform the public of political events and ideologies, to fulfill screen quotas of domestic and international screenings, and to serve as the genre of up-and-coming filmmakers sanctioned by state funding and formulation (Cossalter 3). For example, Francoist Spain's recently formed nationalist film institution set forth a protectionary mandate in 1941 that obliged all theatres to screen Spanish shorts (mainly consisting of propaganda-style newsreels called NO-Dos) alongside the feature film. [xvi] [xvii] In Mexico, similar efforts were enforced to maintain aesthetic and economic control of their market since their first productions (short films) embraced a nonfiction documentary capture of its "landscapes, its indigenous cultures, and the political pomp and circumstance of President Porfirio Díaz's extended regime (1876-1910)" (Hershfield and Maciel 1). While Spain's national cinema industry was founded on

authoritarian control and censorship with short film at the helm of these protectionary measures, early Mexican national cinema institutions centered around staving off the neocolonialism of Hollywood's industrialization while simultaneously borrowing from their winning formulas.[xviii] [xix] [xx]

The second phase (c. 1960s-1970s) witnessed a parallelism between alternative cinema production alongside the continuation of nationalized film institutions and domestic initiatives like the founding of preparatory institutions, exhibition and archival spaces dedicated to cinema, and popularized journals and publications dedicated to both national and alternative cinemas. During this time, short films began to transition away from the theatres as mandated companion pieces and began to function as professionalization "calling-cards" for early-career filmmakers (Felando 7).[xxi] In the case of Cuban cinema, this period witnessed a complete nationalization of cinema production and revolutionary poetics of filmmaking.[xxii] [xxiii] In March of 1959, only three months after the Socialist Revolution, La Ley del Cine (Law 169) created the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográfica (ICAIC) and formalized the Cuban national cinema industry as a lever of the state's socialist project. Consequentially, short film became a crucial medium of *conscientización*[xxiv] of Socialist Cuba through the sanctioning of politically engaged filmmaking (Cossalter 3).[xxv]

The third phase (c. 1980s-1990s) represents a period of formalizing national and regional funding systems and contests for short film production despite few opportunities for commercial distribution or exhibition for national audiences. By this time, short films had been entirely replaced in theatres by advertisements and movie trailers, and short film programming on television was virtually non-existent (Felando 41). This lack of commercial distribution infrastructure in countries like Spain, for example, effectively pigeonholed the short film as a

steppingstone for filmmakers to demonstrate that they could make a more commercially viable product (such as a feature film), or pivot to other media industries like television, music videos, videogames, and commercials (de Unceta 436). In Mexico, the conundrum was similar, driving award-winning short filmmakers to make feature length films who would otherwise have preferred the short format (Secretaría de Cultura). In Cuba, funding for short film production became heavily reliant on foreign investment and sponsorship seeking an inside look at the late-stage socialist regime at the cost of individual creativity (Humphreys 2019).[xxvi] For short films, the international festival circuit became one of the only consistent venues for viewership before video streaming and online festivals and competitions became available during Web 2.0.

This twentieth century overview of the institutionalization of national cinema and short film in Mexico, Spain and Cuba is meant to highlight the shifts in how territories, ideologies, and centralized systems for (short) film production and distribution have become increasingly pluralized and dislocated as a new communication era was developing at the public debut of the Internet. When the World Wide Web went live in 1993, the ambitious albeit naive dreams of globalization and uncensored communication nourished the hopes of what an information superhighway could bring to each corner of the world.[xxvii] Politically, manifestations of transnationalism and open borders added to this optimism of post-colonialism and post-nationalism in the form of emblematic trade deals when the European Union was established in 1993 and NAFTA came into effect in 1994. [xxviii] The onset of a new communication era of the Web recalls the origins of cinematography nearly a century prior, creating new narrative genres for global audiences thanks to technological innovations. Recalling Anderson's connections between the revolution of the print press and the narrative of a nation, another communication paradigm at the onset of Internet and digital technologies unleashed new modes of storytelling within imagined

communities in an unprecedented cyberspace populated with users from all over the globe. In the subsequent chapters, I discuss how Ibero-American short films interact with different notions of national cinema in a digital landscape of production, access, and visibility online.

III. Perceiving short films as national: 6 aspects of national belonging explored

As Michael Chanan argues, "Cinema inevitably constitutes a site of ideological contestation over definitions of nation, state, people and country" (43). The flip side of Chanan's declaration is to perceive the contested critical landscape of defining cinema through the imagined and imperfect lens of the national. Since most contemporary short films are non-commercial products, their lifespan and accessibility to audiences are often mediated through national institutions, state-sponsored distribution houses, and as official selections in the international film festival circuit (Felando 37). In other words, following the life of a short film illuminates their structural embeddedness in nationally mediated proprietary media. Within these (online) databases, catalogues, and archives, short films are prominently featured by nation among other metadata like the name of the director, the year of release, a short description of the film, the main language of the film, and other relevant production details. While I broadly share Chanan's assertion of the cinematic object as a site of national ideological debate, I also perceive national categorization at various points of access and visibility that reinforce the short film as a national commodity on display for global audiences who are tuned into festival selections (Czach 76). So, while cinema products help construct expressions of nationhood, there are also articulations of the nation from its presentable metadata that determine the expressions and reception of film as a national commodity.

The tendency for national categories to precede and determine short film visibility boils down to the purpose of metadata: to inform and, in the digital age of information, to prioritize

which films are more visible to the user and which films are buried under more digital content. So why exactly is cinema, and especially short film, perceived as national cultural production? And what factors, if there are any consistent factors, determine a short film's national label? In this section of the Introduction, I briefly examine how short films could be critically tethered to a national label through six different features that I apply during my metadata analysis in Chapter Two. The first three categories deal with filmic production and material histories: i) director nationality; ii) institutional financing; iii) production location(s). And the last three features concern narrative content: iv) narrative settings; v) protagonist as the nation); and vi) language communities.

i. Director nationality

Hjort and Mackenzie's *Cinema and the Nation* (2005) explains that prior to the 1960s, the academic discipline of film studies widely and unquestionably recognized the study of national cinemas and their conjunction with *auteur theory.*[xxix] [xxx] Extending the lifeline of auteurism even further, Stephen Crofts' *Concepts of National Cinema* (2000) explains that perceptions of national cinema from the origins of the cinema auteur represents the "common sense notion" of critical film studies before the 1980s:[xxxi]

> The idea of national cinema has long informed the promotion of non-Hollywood cinemas. Along with the name of the director-*auteur*, it has served as a means by which non-Hollywood films – most commonly art films – have been labelled, distributed, and reviewed. As a marketing strategy, these national labels have promised varieties of 'otherness' – of what is culturally different from both Hollywood and the films of other importing countries. (Crofts 1)

What Crofts describes as common sense is the signature style of the auteur as a mode of branding national cinema for the art film audience who is generally looking on from the outside. This promise of cultural otherness is made good when the auteur either resides and makes films in their

country of origin or repeatedly refers to their native nation from the outside.[xxxii] For example, Luís Buñuel, arguably one of the most recognized Spanish auteurs along with Pedro Almodóvar, produced most of his films outside of his native Spain and in Mexico, where he became a citizen in 1949, yet his oeuvre largely addresses Spanish themes and references from his international reputation as an exiled, *enfant terrible*, Spanish auteur (Acevedo-Muñoz). On the other hand, Almodóvar has produced his films in a post-Franco, democratized Spain, where he has largely defined stylistic perceptions of Spanish national cinema for the international arthouse viewer.[xxxiii]

This association of national cinema and the auteur becomes problematic in short film production when many of their producers are film students, amateurs, or emerging professionals, and thus have not established a formal reputation or aesthetic. The general lack of stylistic content or brand could place more importance on the national origin or residency of the short film director but is frequently superseded by the national label behind institutional factors like funding and distribution. For example, Marina Seresesky's award-winning short film from 2013, *La Boda* about Cuban immigrants in Madrid is labeled 'Spanish' since it was funded by ICAA, filmed in Madrid, and distributed by MadridEnCorto. Marina Seresesky identifies as an Argentinean filmmaker who has emigrated to Spain and established her career there, but under these conditions, is she considered a Spanish auteur that helps shape an international consensus of Spanish national cinema or Argentinean cinema? Does her auteurism represent both nations and/or neither? While the commonsense notion of national cinema might superficially create stylistic bonds between critically acclaimed cinema masters and their country of origin, this tendency is often reductionist when considering the migrations and motivations of filmmakers who are often in search of institutional funding and infrastructure which is historically well-resourced and established in Western Europe and in North America.

ii. Institutional financing

One of the first reflexes for perceiving (short) cinema products as national is through institutional funding. Paul Willeman argues for this tendency to perceive national cinema through institutionalism: "It is my contention that the formation, imposition, and indeed the acceptance of or consent to 'a national identity' is to be tracked in the addressing dimension of institutions set up and maintained to select a cluster of 'differentaie…' (30). Outside of the Hollywood industrial complex and a few other privatized cinema conglomerates, national and regional cinema institutions comprise the bulk of short film financing and production support whether those institutions are film schools, government grants, studios, production companies, exhibitors, or distributors (Crofts 50). While the institutional actors might be regional or sub-regional (i.e., the Basque Country, Cataluña), their alliances with the nation-state's institutional network are steadfast at least in part through the funding procedures that source cultural products like short films. In this logic, short films made by Basque creators in Euskadi are most likely labeled as Spanish within international spaces of recognition like film festivals despite ongoing debates of national and language identity within Spain as a territory.[xxxiv]

The question of institutional funding and national affiliation is especially illuminating of colonial dynamics between Western Europe (including Iberia) and Latin America, including countries that are considered part of the Third World Cinema consortium like Cuba and Bolivia, for example (Crofts 48-49).[xxxv] One manifestation of this dynamic is through international film grants like the Hubert Bals Fund (HBF) based in Rotterdam which "has been especially helpful for filmmakers from countries where freedom of speech and a solid film infrastructure are lacking" ("About the Hubert Bals Fund" 2022).[xxxvi] Along with the extreme selectivity of filmmakers who receive HBF grants comes the promise of quality to deliver a certain type of global arthouse

aesthetic to viewers on the outside.[xxxvii] Thus, emerging (short) filmmakers from Latin America are often faced with a choice to persevere within meager, unstable, and stylistically stifling government infrastructures *or* to seek resources and opportunities elsewhere such as the previous example of Argentine director Marina Seresesky who emigrated to Spain and made her short film, *La Boda* with funding from Spanish institutions. With the eventual goal of aligning with more resourceful institutions, the opportunities that are available elsewhere for filmmakers from countries without consistent architectures of funding could mean enrolling in an education institution abroad to eventually qualify for state subsidies to gain visibility for highly selective international grant entities like the HBF or other reputable international film funds for Latin American filmmakers.[xxxviii] The drawback of this institutional alignment could mean a national label in tandem with the institution itself such as the aforementioned case of Marina Seresesky's *La Boda* which was disseminated as a Spanish short by the MadridEnCorto distribution house and nominated for a Spanish Goya award for 'Best Fiction Short Film' in 2012.

iii. Production Location(s)

Perceiving national affiliation through the territorial locations of (pre/post) production opens discussions about the material side of filmmaking concerning logistics, labor practices, and profit margins. Especially when considering how qualification for institutional financing may or may not require production within regional or national borders, the potential alignments and dislocations of filmic narrative settings and territories of production are revealing of the (trans)national power dynamics behind decisions based on cost-effectiveness and practicality.[xxxix] For example, Sophia McClennen's *Globalization and Latin American Cinema: A New Critical Paradigm* (2018) asks a daring question about one of the highest grossing films ever made of its time: "Is *Titanic* a Mexican film?" Her interrogation centers around the fact that despite the

premise of the film set primarily between the U.K. and the U.S. in the Atlantic Ocean, the predominance of the English language amongst the nearly all-white cast, the production funding from the United States, and the director's Canadian nationality, almost all the filming locations, manual labor on sets, and (post)production labor took place in Mexico (451). While McClennan's inquisition may seem trivial against the Hollywood production juggernaut, she is poking the bear to call out and recognize colonial dynamics stemming from the dissonance of public image and territories of production. In the end, the economic flows and publicity optics of *Titanic* are that of a Hollywood box-office sensation and not of Mexican national cinema. However, behind this international marketing strategy lie the political implications of a Mexican labor force sourced by Hollywood industries, and the invisible ties and disjunctions to physical territory reflect on the frictions between perceptions of national affiliations through narrative settings and actors versus that of production from conception to reception.

iv. Narrative settings

The remaining three attributes that I discuss concern the narrative content of short films as possible determinants of national cinema which does not necessarily operate separately from production or institutional attributes yet at times is in tension with them. As I discussed with McClennan's example of *Titanic* as a Mexican film based on film labor and production sites, there can be contrasts between where a film locates itself narratively and where it is produced territorially. I will provide another example of a short film from 2010 to foster critical dialogue about national affiliation through narrative content like settings, protagonists, and language communities: *Les (El Bosque),* is a World War II drama set in the Soviet Union by a Russian-born director, Aída Ramazánova, who began her cinema career in Spain. While the short was funded and produced in Spain, the film's dialogue is in Russian and features primarily Russian characters

except for the protagonist's love interest, who is a Spanish soldier. Nevertheless, the short film is labeled as 'Spain' online which aligns with where the film was funded, produced, and directed, yet differs from the narrative aspects of its setting in the Soviet Union which is strengthened by the film's Russian characters who speak in Russian with Spanish subtitles.[xl]

In the past few decades, film studies and spatial analysis have developed a stronger dialogue both methodologically and critically as Geographic Information Software (GIS) has become more networked, open-sourced, and user-friendly during Web 2.0.[xli] By tracing narrative locations and mapping them, territorial analysis occurring at several layers of specificity are reinforced as cinematic expressions of the regional or the national.[xlii] For example, films often contain establishing shots of outdoor locations like landscapes or emblematic monuments that are strategically placed to orient viewers with a nation, region, city, or neighborhood along with intertitles or on-screen text announcing a particular period and place.[xliii] Thereafter, scenes could take place within interior settings with specific decor and props or in studio spaces making use of green screen backdrops and special effects in post-production to induce a sense of location with cultural, historic, and linguistic connections to a national zeitgeist, even if the film is not actually made there. As most of *Les (El Bosque)* takes place in a forest, supposedly in the Soviet Union in the year 1942 as the intertitles indicate, despite being filmed in the forests of Aragón, Spain. Nevertheless, the narrative setting of a forest somewhere in the Soviet Union overrides the actual production location since the ambiguity of a 'natural' landscape absent of monumental markers or stylized infrastructure lacks any signage of inherent Spanishness. Narratively, *Les (El Bosque)* is a Soviet story with a Spanish soldier in its landscape rather than the story of a Russian filmmaker recreating a fiction in the woods of Aragón. In the end, however the film is perceived, the mise-en-scène of narrative setting is meant to foster or construct a spatial reference for spectators,

oftentimes affiliating them with a specific national or regional setting that is reinforced by language use and the character representation throughout the plot.

v. The Protagonist as the nation

Questions of character representation through gender, race, age, religion, language community, dress, sexual orientation, immigration status, or phenotype are central to understanding how film creates messaging surrounding national and cultural identity.[xliv] In the case of the two protagonists in the short film, *Les (El Bosque)*, Ana and Carlos are meant to represent two nations in conflict despite the developing romance between them. Ana (Lina Gorbaneva) is fair-skinned with blonde hair, icy blue eyes and dressed in a neutral-toned hand-knit shawl, is visually typecast as a native of the Soviet territory. On the other hand, Carlos (Rikar Gil) who has brown hair, olive skin and light brown eyes, is dressed in his blue military coat (indicative of the Spanish División Azul of World War II). For both domestic and international audiences, the casting and character portrayals are typecast for immediate recognition: this is a forbidden romance across enemy lines.[xlv] If Ana's and Carlos's phenotypes had been switched, for example, the tension holding the plot together would be disrupted since protagonists who pass as cultural insiders might not alert suspicion in a war zone.

In recent years, calls for increased diversity in casting have resounded during social justice hashtag movements like #OscarsSoWhite and the ground-breaking documentary on the lack of gender diversity in Hollywood, *This Changes Everything* (dir. Tom Donahue, 2018) that sparked ongoing research at the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media.[xlvi] [xlvii] These demands for change stem from the tendency of films to typecast nationhood through main characters that reflect the desires of those in power– namely white or light-skinned cisgender men. While the short films that I discuss throughout this dissertation are not subject to any direct pressure from high-powered

Hollywood producers, the visual messaging of protagonist representation both in the film and in its visual metadata (i.e., the film's poster) is deliberately cast to communicate both the cultural orientation of the story as well as target audiences in the domestic and international film festival circuit. In response to the growing diversity of filmmakers and the institutional funding available to them, short film protagonists that operate outside of national prototypes often reflect an aspect of the filmmaker's experience of difference such as Russian-born Aída Ramazanova's Soviet-Spanish love story or Argentine-native Marina Seresesky's immigrant-centered comedy in Madrid. In the end, despite calls for an increase in diverse casting and filmmakers, the bonds between representation and nationhood remain strong even if otherness signals cultural difference within an existing national milieu.

vi. Language communities

My last attribute of national affiliation in short film is through language use in film and through subtitling and/or dubbing which is almost always part of post-production.[xlviii] Between Iberia and in Latin America, both Portuguese and Spanish are considered shared languages spoken by large portions of the population. Thus, shorts made in Spanish and Portuguese could easily appeal to Ibero-American audiences across the Atlantic, yet language or speech communities deal with cohesions of specific accents, vocabulary, cultural references, and the associations that occur between language use and socioeconomic factors like race, class, gender, and education (Ebsworth 2010). Thus, language use and subtitling in short films potentializes at least two levels of address: cultural representation and target audience.

For example, the characters in *Les (El Bosque)* mostly communicate in Russian except for a few lines of dialogue in Spanish with a Castilian accent. The short comes with the availability of subtitles in Spanish or in English. So, while the representation of Soviet characters through Russian

dialogue amplifies the narrative setting as World War II Soviet Union (despite being filmed in Spain), the target audience of the short film is geared towards Hispanophone viewers as well as Anglophone audiences in festival settings. Still, Hispanophone viewers from Latin America, despite sharing a common language with Spain, are not culturally represented in a film like *Les (El Bosque)*. This phenomenon brings to the forefront the association of speech communities with the nation and how language use, subtitling, and dubbing in films can determine cultural insiders and outsiders when it comes to who is represented and to whom the story appeals. While a short film's national label is most likely not solely tied to the proportion of language use in the film and its ties back to a particular community or territory, dialogue and subtitling emphasize the national origins of characters, settings, and cultural address.

IV. What's in a label? National metadata in the digital era of Web 2.0

The purpose of examining the connections between national labeling and short film is not solely concerned with the formation of national cinema industries but with understanding *why* this bond between nation and cinema continues to prevail in festival circuits and online databases after the millennium. After having summarized six points of national affiliation within Ibero-American short films, my point of departure for examining alignments and disparities is through exactly which national label a short film is given in the first place. While detailed schematics of national labeling online might seem like an overindulgence, the need to examine the power of metadata inscriptions in short films points back to representation and visibility within a global landscape of short film production, access, and online participation. In just a few years, the shift from a 'read only' Web 1.0 to a networked, participatory Web 2.0 considerably narrowed the gap of both space and time in transatlantic short film diffusion, and, in many cases, cut out the middleman also

known as the regional or national distributor (Badal 2008). By creating more visibility of national expressions within Ibero-American short films, I want to emphasize that a split between a national label and potential transnational content is not a fault that should be corrected by an 'erase and replace' strategy, but an opportunity to question and potentialize the informatic paradigms that are now available to us in the digital era of filmmaking and access.

V. Dissertation layout

In this Introduction, I provided critical background on the historical ties between nation and short film by defining key terms, revising major phases of national short film institutionalization, and discussing six possible aspects of national affiliation in relation to Ibero-American cinema studies. In Chapter One, I situate short films in the digital age of the Web and advocate for pluralized and networked national metadata by providing examples of (trans)national dynamics despite how films are labeled and perceived as national during Web 2.0. During the Chapter Two, I analyze data sets of national metadata from an Ibero-American online database and visualize aspects of short film (trans)nationality through mapping. Chapter Three is dedicated to a close reading of three Ibero-American short films that demonstrate implications of globality, (trans)nationalism, and technological connectivity in both the narrative content and in the films' production. In the Conclusion, I discuss the implications of a posthuman paradigm for (trans)national short films on the Web and how the specificities of metadata continue to inform powerful algorithms during the intensification of online media consumption sparked by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The three short films selected as case studies throughout this dissertation, and featured for close reading in Chapter Three are: 1) *.Sub* (dir. Jossie Malis Álvarez, 2012); 2) *Hyper-Reality* (dir. Keiichi Matsuda, 2014); and 3) *Reality 2.0* (dir. Víctor Orozco, 2012). I chose these shorts

because they demonstrate the transnational qualities of online short films on the Participatory Web that occurs on at least two levels: the production behind the films that rely on Web 2.0 technologies *and* the content of the short films themselves which feature marginalized posthumans navigating through technologized societies that signal both local cultural specificities and global techno capitalism. Whether through transnational co-productions, plurilingual and multinational settings, or the transnational career of the filmmaker themselves, these short films represent a larger trend of how Ibero-American short films during Web 2.0 both lean *into* and *away from* national labeling and belonging.

[ii] These digital and participative characteristics of Web 2.0 are integral to what David Weinberger describes as the *third order of information*: "The third order is a digital order, not physical, and its affordances remove the limitations of physical categorization and propel us into new ways of thinking about how we order knowledge and things" (19). Metadata, an essential component of information organization, is a crucial component of interpreting national short films which I will analyze in extensive detail in the subsequent chapters.

[iii] See Chapter Three for a further explanation of Katherine Hayles's concept of *materiality of informatics*.

[iv] Cynthia Felando's *Discovering Short Films: The History and Style of Live-Action Fiction Shorts* (2015) examines both the history of short films (in the United States) and highlights narrative characteristics of shorts like narrative compression and intense endings. Felando also tackles the much-debated question of length in the definition of short film itself. She defines the short film broadly as a film that is under 90 minutes, or, shorter than the typical length of a feature film (10).

[v] For example, a short film of 50 minutes, while technically less than a feature film lasting 60 minutes, would rarely be shown at a festival, and in fact festival submission regulations often set limitations on length to allow for a diversified program (Felando 10).

[vi] See also MacEntee, Katie, et al., editors. *What's a Cellphilm: Integrating Mobile Phone Technology into Participatory Visual Research and Activism*. Sense, 2016.

[vii] The terms *online born* and *digital born* are also used interchangeably with *born online* and *born digital*.

[viii] I also include animated short film as an implied category of online short film since animation will make up a considerable portion of my metadata analysis corpus.

[ix] For example, the Programa Ibermedia, "el espacio audiovisual iberoamericano" (https://www.programaibermedia.com/), and numerous film festivals and awards venues such as the Ibero-American Animation Quirino Awards (https://premiosquirino.org/).

[x] Paul Willeman explains the necessity to address cinema at the level of the national: "As to cinema's industrial nature, that means that if the question of national specificity is posed in its proper context, the issue must be addressed at the level of national and governmental institutions, since these are the only ones in a position to inflect legislation and to redistribute tax revenues" (35).

[xi] Renan's assertion drives home the point that the concept of nation is based on selective memory from an elite group of narrators and not an implicit understanding that spontaneously manifests from geographical territory itself. One means of narrating the nation is through cultural production which both affirms and critiques the ongoing imaginary. Whether cultural narratives are visual, literary, performative, or critical, the collective understanding of the nation is the discourse found within cultural objects that are meant to stand in for the nation. Cinema follows course as a narrative medium that captures, curates, and projects movement, speech, setting, music, actors, and perspectives that align with or challenge a particular moment in history.

[xii] See Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso, 2006.

[xiii] Transnationalism is a term that is often housed in economics and is commonly known as globalization which was brought on in the latter half of the twentieth century due to the reduction in global transportation costs coupled with wireless and internet connection development. An ethnic studies interpretation of transnationalism examines models of diaspora communities and migration flows. Studies on digital diasporas house a cultural understanding of transnationalism in online communities, but my dissertation will lean more on applying transnationalism to film production online as a continuation of transnational cinema. Transnational cinema comprises both globalization and "the counter hegemonic responses of filmmakers from former colonial and third world countries" (Ezra and Rowden) in addition to the way that transnationalism can link people or institutions across nations. In the case of Ibero-American short films, the contemporary *cortometraje* online represents the complex relationship between a digital cultural product and national belonging defined across various factors like presentation, distribution, metadata, and filmic content. Transnationalism comes into play for online short films not necessarily because of co-productions or sponsorships, but in how short films are created, organized, and engaged with in cyberspace.

[xiv] "Although we can all agree that cultural zones are far from unified, homogenous spaces, this should not lead us to deny or unduly relativize the existence of borders. The existence of borders is very real, and although their meaning and function are changeable, their effectiveness has not diminished in the least" (Willeman 32).

[xv] In Cuba, for example, these following phases occur about a decade behind Mexico and Spain since their national cinema unification took place immediately following the Socialist Revolution in 1959 and remained a fixed entity throughout the Late Socialist era in Cuba (1980s-early 2000s).

[xvi] Also known as NO-DO (Noticiario y Documentales).

[xvii] This mandate and practice remained strictly in place until Spain's transition to democracy in the late 1970s (Tranche 80-85).

[xviii] To protect and stabilize the Mexican film industry, the government implemented legislation in 1929 that required foreign distributors to purchase at least one Mexican film per year to screen domestically. Despite the quota mandate, little action was enforced. In the same year, another decree was passed by the Mexican Bureau of Public Amusements to ensure the screening of at least two reels of film per week devoted to national themes, but the lack of local product made this difficult to enforce. The main reason that domestic filmmaking in Mexico was difficult to produce were the heavy taxes on anything from import fees, box office receipts, production costs, censorship fees, and absentee taxes on monies flowing outside of Mexico. The lethal combination of heavy taxation domestically and the global dominance of the Hollywood industry in the 1920s eclipsed national cinema production in Mexico so much that by 1928, "90 percent of all films exhibited throughout Mexico as well as in the rest of Latin American were produced in the United States" (Hershfield and Maciel 2).

[xix] Across the rest of Latin America, Mexican and Argentinean films proved the most popular and prolific in the region, yet the U.S. and European films still dominated the box offices (Cossalter 4).

[xx] Unlike Mexico and Spain, Cuba's national cinema industry struggled to maintain unity and stability until the Socialist Revolution of 1959, and most films screened in Cuba were imports from Mexico, Argentina, France, and the United States (Cosalter 4). Cuban filmmaking between 1938-1940, for example, included production companies such as PECUSA that only made six feature films, CHIC produced a handful of works, and Cuba Sono Films released a series of newsreels and some fictional shorts (Cumaná and Piñera 1999).

[xxi] After Franco's death and the socio-political changes that ensued in the 1970s, the obligatory mandate of projecting NO-DO shorts was abolished in 1976, although (non-newsreel) short films were still mandatory before the feature film in theatres. On the financing side for short film productions, this meant that short film projects that applied for state grants to fulfill the quota received funding without any checks on quality, length, or costs. As a result, theatres purchased short films "al peso," which meant that very little attention was paid to the quality and content of the short film itself, but rather the length – which was only meant to fill the necessary screen time of the program (de Unceta 434). This inevitably led to a decline in quality of short films in theatres, and, as a result, a general depreciation of the national short film for audiences.

[xxii] The 1960s and 1970s represented a major shift across Latin American political movements and cultural production including the proliferation of *arte comprometido* across disciplines. In film, the New Latin American Cinema and global Third Cinema movement was emblematic of an anti-Hollywood and anti-United States sentiment as told through politically engaged film projects. As detailed in their 1969 manifesto "Hacía un tercer cine" which was originally published in Cuban journal, *Tricontinental*, Argentinean filmmakers, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino explain that the new Latin American Cinema must be committed from the earliest stages of production to anti-imperialism and revolutionary causes. Solanas and Getino also expressed that alternative cinema was finally possible since New Latin American Cinema (also known as Cinema Novo in Brazil) embraced innovative technologies in the late 1960s like automatic light meters, improved audio/visual synchronization, the simplification of tape recorders and cameras, and rapid film that could be shot in natural light. Alternative cinema production during the Third Cinema

movement was ideologically focused on the resistance of the System with a capital "S" which was most certainly the Hollywood industry.

[xxiii] In Mexico, the 1960s and 1970s represented a period of civil unrest and turmoil along with the formation and consolidation of several important filmmakers thanks to Luis Echeverría's presidency in 1970 which, despite the suspicion of many who protested his political corruption and oppression, instilled a regeneration in the arts and culture industry of Mexico with the film industry as its focus. In 1971, *El Plan de Reestructuración de la Industria Cinematográfica* was implemented which included reforms and improvements like the establishment of three national cinema production companies; the founding of the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (CCC) as a film school; and the opening of the Cineteca Nacional.

[xxiv] *Conscientización* roughly translates to "consciousness-building" and refers to a Marxist unlearning process of Western capitalist values and alienation of labor.

[xxv] Embedded in the language of Law 169 was the clear recognition of cinema as powerful source of influence: "Cinema is the most powerful and suggestive medium of artistic expression and diffusion and the most direct and prolific educative vehicle for the popularization of ideas" ("Ley de creación del ICAIC"). My Translation in English. The original text in Spanish is as follows: "es el cine el más poderoso y sugestivo medio de expression artística y de divulgación y el más directo y extendido vehículo de educación y popularización de ideas."

[xxvi] Zoey Humphrey's text on Cuban cinema, *Fidel Between the Lines* (2019) explains that while the culmination of Cuba's Special Period in 1994 meant dire economic hardships for the island, which meant significant losses in state funding for cinema. Humphreys explains that this "led to a new dependence on international co-productions. These changes subjected filmmakers to market forces, but they also provided them with increased independence from the ICAIC" (6). In this sense, the outside gaze upon Cuban cinema production (one of the most insular and ideologically focused national cinema structures) reinforces the mystique and exoticism that viewers project onto national narratives from the cinematic margins or third-world cinema.

[xxvii] While other dates might also be relevant to the Internet's debut, I am choosing the date when Tim Berners-Lee released the source code for the world's first web browser and editor on April 30, 1993.

[xxviii] The North American Free Trade Agreement came into force on January 1, 1994, between Canada, Mexico, and the United States. The goal of NAFTA was to eliminate all tariff and non-tariff barriers or trade and investment between these three North American nations.

[xxix] Auteur theory is a framework which examines the life of the director and their life's work as a basis from which to analyze and critique the film.

[xxx] In other words, national cinemas were organized largely in terms of a consensus of 'great works' by globally-recognized cinema masters like Jean-Luc Godard with France; Passolini with Italy; Alfred Hitchcock with the U.S.; and Ingmar Bergman from Sweden (Hjort and Mackenzie 2).

[xxxi] While this "common sense" vision of national cinema as a non-Hollywood venture has persisted since the 1980s, several film studies theorists in recent decades have sought to complicate these discussions. Núria Triana-Toribio explains that this approach to seeing national cinema as a non-Hollywood auteur film has a stronghold in debates about Spanish cinema, but she puts this into question and debunks it by identifying and demystifying notions of *Spanishness* (*españolidad*) as it relates to cinema.

[xxxii] Núria Triana-Toribio explains about Spanish national cinema that *style* "can be taken to embody Spanish identity, but there is never total agreement on such a Spanish style and that from epoch to epoch, and as a result of external pressures, one style is promoted, another denigrated" (8).

[xxxiii] Marsha Kinder's *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* (1993) problematizes the concept of national cinema in Spain as a self-defining one and instead insists "every national film movement seeks to win legitimation as the 'valid' representative of its culture by striving for international recognition – the way revolutionary governments seek to be recognized by other nations" (6). Again, national cinema is meant to reinforce the selective vision of the nation that is not necessarily for the local viewer but for the international stage looking into the nation from the outside.

[xxxiv] My phone interview in August of 2021 with Txema Muñoz, longtime programmer at the Kimuak Filmoteka Vasca in Bilbao, solidified my interrogations on this dynamic. He explained that while Basque cultural production was considered a priority for short film programming at Kimuak, their ultimate alliances were with Spain as a national label when exporting and promoting cultural content abroad.

[xxxv] Not to be confused with Third Cinema, "Third World Cinema" refers to the filmmaking of countries outside the two dominant spheres that appeared after the Second World War (Hayward 389).

[xxxvi] **"**The Hubert Bals Fund of The International Film Festival Rotterdam is a curatorial fund dedicated to supporting filmmakers in every stage of the filmmaking process – from script development to post-production. (https://iffr.com/en/hubert-bals-fund).

[xxxvii] The global arthouse aesthetic is a pattern of cinema that is a result of First World philanthropy towards Third World cinema that often appear in World Cinema program sections "that hold the promise of enriching one's cultural capital by being exposed to 'less-privileged' realities" (Aguilar 2019). Glauber Rocha's manifesto *Aesthetic of Hunger* (1965) also comments on the colonial power dynamics within cinema production as "the foreign onlooker [cultivating] the taste of that misery, not as a tragic symptom, but merely as an aesthetic object within his field of interest" (see MacKenzie, Scott 218).

[xxxviii] For more examples of international funding opportunities geared toward Latin American and Latinx filmmakers, see www.Showmethefund.co/mapa-de-fondos. This is a knowledgebase (based in Brazil) to compile over 100 international funding opportunities for the audiovisual sector.

[xxxix] In Spain, for example, if (short)filmmakers propose film location sites in different autonomies of Spain, they qualify for additional funding from those other regional institutions (Personal Interview with Kimuak Filmoteka Programmer: Txema Muñoz, August 2021).

[xl] See additional metadata for *Les (El Bosque):* https://cortosdemetraje.com/les-el-bosque/

[xli] Geographers, Sébastien Caquard and Daniel Naud directly engage the spatial turn of film studies by mapping locatable attributes within narrative content, i.e., where the film takes place, where the action relocates, and any references of other locations even if they take place offscreen ("A Spatial Typology of Cinematographic Narratives" 2014).

[xlii] Another example of open-sourced cinema mapping is www.TheMovieMap.com which traces, documents, and even provides photographs of filming locations for hundreds of movies submitted by users and film fans.

[xliii] Establishing shots in filmmaking is when a production establishes the context of the scene by showing the relationship between its important figures and objects (https://cineglos.holycross.edu/glosario/t/#tomaestablecedora).

[xliv] A case in point is the longtime muses of Pedro Almodóvar, Antonio Banderas and Penelope Cruz, who are frequently cast as the stars of his sexy, Spanish tragicomedies for domestic audiences and, most certainly, for international audiences.

[xlv] The short film's cover bears an extreme close-up of both of their faces transposed onto the other, indicating the importance of their fusional connection despite their differences which are accentuated by the contrasting tones of their skin, hair, and eye color. Additional screenshots of *Les (El Bosque)* can be found here: https://dianatoucedo.com/projects/les-el-bosque/#&gid=2&pid=1.

[xlvi] See https://moveme.berkeley.edu/project/oscarssowhite/ for a contextualized description of #OscarsSoWhite.

[xlvii] See https://seejane.org/.

[xlviii] Exceptions to subtitling and/or dubbing during pre-production or production is when embedded subtitles are integral to the plot or if the film has metacinema commentary on subtitling or dubbing. An example of this is Jossie Malis Álvarez's science-fictional short film, *.Sub (2012)* and an homage to the Spanish dubbing industry, *Para Sonia* (dir. Sergio Milán, 2016).

CHAPTER ONE:

NATIONHOOD AND METADATA IN IBERO-AMERICAN SHORT FILMS DURING WEB 2.0

I. "Is this film actually *Spanish*?"

The following discussion on Ibero-American short film, Web 2.0 and the (dis)continuities of national paradigms departs with a particularly problematic example of national labeling during my years as a short film festival organizer. In the 2009 edition of the EspañaEnCorto festival, the audience's top rated short film was *Porque hay cosas que nunca se olvidan* (2008) by Argentinean director, Lucas Figueroa, produced by LMF Films based in Argentina, and funded by Spanish institutions.[xlix] Despite being labeled as Spanish, the entirety of the 13-minute short film was produced and set in Italy with Italian actors who spoke only Italian throughout the film.[l] Members of the audience noticed the disconnect between the national label and the short film itself, inquiring during the Q&A session: "Is this film actually *Spanish*?" This seemingly simple question brings to the forefront a larger discussion of how short films have undergone a shift from previous decades of functioning as cultural exports that narrate the nation into more transnational and digital objects on the Participatory Web after the millennium (Mulvey et al.; Villazana).

On the surface, the most direct response to "Is this film actually Spanish?" is likely based on the financial sponsorship of *Porque hay cosas que nunca se olvidan* since the funds are traceable to Spanish grant institutions. While state-sponsored funding could be a simple solution to identifying the national affiliation and label of short films in general, we cannot overlook the transactional components at work between cultural institutions from nations in Western Europe,

North America, and the Global South. Especially for national and independent (short) film, there are rewards both financial and reputational that benefit individuals and national institutions in the eyes of elite festival audiences and critics (Falicov; Mulvey et al 133; Ross). Beyond EspañaEnCorto, *Porque hay cosas que nunca se olvidan* was so successful that between 2008 and 2009, Figueroa's short film was inaugurated in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the most prized short film in history for having received over 300 awards at various film festivals around the world.[li] By way of sporting the label, Spain, the short film reaped global recognition 300 times over in festivals despite the film's narrative, linguistic and spatial disconnect from Spain. In addition, the fact that *Porque hay cosas que nunca se olvidan* won "Best Short Fiction Film" at the Spanish Goya Awards in 2008 as a short film made by an Argentinean in Italy with an all-Italian cast exemplifies how a national label can effectively smooth over transnational factors for the ultimate benefit of the Spanish national film industry.[lii]

A shallow notion of transnational co-productions or world cinema could imagine a short film like *Porque hay cosas que nunca se olvidan* as a symmetrical collaboration between Italy, Argentina, and Spain, but the dynamics between the three nations are not simply a mutually beneficial distribution of international resources (Shaw 88). To perceive the gradations of filmic transactions across borders, a more nuanced calibration is required concerning the stakeholders within the film's production and content. For example, how would its visibility change if this successful short film were labeled as Italian for its narrative content or Argentinean for the director's nationality and production company instead? Would this shift in national labeling be able to produce the same results without flipping the transnational power dynamic between Western Europe and Latin America? Most likely not. The implications of oversimplifying national belonging or characterizing transnational collaborations as 'equal' are, in fact, a form of filmic

colonialism that continues to manifest in the digital informational realm as metadata labeling and classification (La Barre and Inês de Novais Cordeiro; Ross).

Approaching the millennium, concepts of transnational cinema may have ominously predicted overly porous borders and the loss of national identity, but in fact a surprising number of short films indeed emphasize the national (Canclini; Middents 154). The explosion of digital filmmaking and online access after the millennium enabled short films like *Porque hay cosas que nunca se olvidan* to both lean *into* and *away from* national paradigms as cultural objects that have historically functioned as national narratives. In the case of *Porque hay cosas que nunca se olvidan*, transnational flows of people, ideas, resources, and distribution facilitated the short film's production and success in festivals and eventually on the Web. So why is it that cultural products like short films, with potentially numerous transnational factors within their making and expression, only export themselves as a national short film? And what is the determining factor of national affiliation of a short film in the digital age as many of these transactions and processes have become faster, lighter, more affordable, and less tethered to physical material and territories? Alternatively, if the label of *Porque Hay Cosas que Nunca se Olvidan* were that of Argentina or Italy, how could this change in metadata representation online acknowledge and make visible the various institutions and actors involved? Answering these queries demands a closer look at the connections and tensions between short film as national narrative, the institutions that foster this continuity, and the impending tidal wave of digital filmmaking and information architectures during Web 2.0 that shifted cinematic paradigms of the nation.

This chapter delves into arguments about evolving (trans)nationalisms of Ibero-American short films during the Web 2.0 era and why national metadata both perpetuates and departs from the institutions and narratives that have been historically associated with short films. I frame these

arguments through providing examples of three Ibero-American short films produced during Web 2.0 that appear throughout this dissertation as metadata mapping case studies in Chapter Two and through close reading analysis in Chapter Three: 1) *.Sub* (dir. Jossie Malis Álvarez, 2012); 2) *Hyper-Reality* (dir. Keiichi Matsuda, 2014); and 3) *Reality 2.0* (dir. Víctor Orozco, 2012). By mobilizing critical theory on Latin American online cultural production, (trans)national cinema studies, and metadata during Web 2.0 as posthuman knowledge organization, I advocate for a more nuanced and expansive understanding of (trans)national dynamics in short film metadata that is appropriately situated in the era of digital information and cultural production in Web 2.0.

The purpose of digging deeper into national metadata of short films produced during Web 2.0 is to complicate the theoretical tendency to either continue perceiving digital cultural objects as wholly national *or* imagining online cultural production like short filmmaking as having transcended national discourses in an egalitarian, post-national, globalized, collective cyberspace (Taylor and Pitman "Introduction," *Latin American Identify in Online Cultural Production*). The former characterization is a symptom of outdated, modernist conceptualizations of the nation, and the latter inclination points to the white-washed tendencies of assuming that information and knowledge organization is objective, factual, neutral, and universally applicable or accessible (Risam). A crucial place to find both the symptom and the solution to this problem of migrating outdated national discourses while acknowledging their formal functions lie within *metadata* as a convergence of information and identity construction for creators, viewers, distributors, and institutions alike.[liii] As I described with *Porque hay cosas que nunca se olvidan*, national labeling and metadata generates significance for short films and the stakeholders behind them in the form of recognition, financing, and global visibility. Within the evolving atmosphere of Web participation, platformization,[liv] and increased global access to the Internet, metadata becomes

highly influential as the most basic common denominator between information structures and critical discourses (Brody 34; La Barre and Inês de Novais Cordero 199).

II. The digitization of short film and metadata during Web 2.0

The tether between short film and its national label is one that should be easy enough to determine, but upon closer examination, it can be frayed and disassociated – especially considering the major shifts in communication and cultural production during the evolution of the Internet from Web 1.0 (the read-only web) to Web 2.0 (the read and write Web) which began circa 2004 (Cormode and Krishnamurthy; Blank and Reisdorf 537). Web 2.0 (also referred to as the *Social Web* or the *Participatory Web*) is largely characterized by reconfiguring the Web as a platform from which applications and social spaces can network various technologies, applications, and devices due to enhanced computer graphics and interface, open-source software, and increased broadband capacities (Castells xxvii). The gradual shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 meant that the Internet was evolving from a static cyberspace that was primarily accessed to search, read, and write in HTML toward a *Participatory Web* which hosted more dynamic and interactive platforms that could streamline content and user behavior across devices and platforms, store massive amounts of data in the Cloud, and enable participatory functions like sharing, (dis)liking, commenting, and the dissemination of user-created content (OECD).

The significance of Web 2.0 to short film more than any other point in Internet history lies in the digital capacity of short filmmaking and online dissemination that came with the technological advances and the increased global access to devices and technologies on multiple levels.[lv] Not only did the digital camera with filming capacities become more accessible and affordable, but the Apple iPhone debuted in 2007, allowing for an "all-in-one" device that allowed for easy "point-and-shoot" filming and sharing capabilities on a mobile data network (Cover 183).

Video upload and streaming platforms like Vimeo and YouTube were founded in 2004 and 2006 respectively, along with participative functions within these sites like user profiles, individually curated playlists, uploading and sharing capacities, and user-centered metadata creation like hashtags. As Internet users across the world began to create digital content on social platforms that was viewable and shareable, an explosion of user-generated videos and content ensued. For short film, digital film technologies offered more affordable options to expensive equipment and training, and a Web 2.0 cyberspace provided a global exhibition venue with dissemination alternatives to the institutional gatekeeping and strict selectivity of regional or national distribution houses and (inter)national film festivals (Badal; Chan; Ross).

During Web 2.0, short films not only migrated online as websites and platforms enabled user uploading, downloading, storage, and embedded streaming players, but short films began to be produced with digital means and reside in digital spaces. For individual users, this meant that nearly anyone with access to a camera and an Internet connection could in theory become a short filmmaker. For distributors and institutions searching for talent and acquisitions, this became a monumental task of sorting through masses of uploaded content in search for a diamond in the rough (Badal 192). Both the digital cinema revolution and the Third Order of Information during Web 2.0 impacted the prospects of institutionalized and highly independent short filmmaking in a variety of senses including techniques, distribution, viewership, funding, and communication across time, space, and platforms (Vernallis).

As content generation and participation online and across devices evolved rapidly during Web 2.0 years, the possibilities to collaborate across distances, time zones, and national borders shifted human workflow and how information is presented, accessed, and modified continuously (OECD). For short films as objects on the web, (trans)nationalism manifests not only because of

co-productions or sponsorships, but in how short films are created, organized, and engaged in cyberspace through metadata. For cultural objects like films or online short films, metadata is textual information that describes aspects of the object through print and/or digital means.[lvi] From his book titled *Metadata*, Jeffrey Pomerantz's definition of metadata emphasizes the temporality of data to evolve and shift when he claims that "metadata is a statement about a potentially informative object" (6). Hence, the importance of the *potentiality* of information drives home the point that data and its interpretation is not unquestionably fixed and that it can be broadened, nuanced, and developed over time.

For metadata, the Participatory Web meant that in addition to webmasters, institutional and industrial developers, users themselves could create metadata about objects online through tagging, commenting, and labeling uploaded content online (Brody 37). With a massive amount of data and objects being generated every day during Web 2.0 years, metadata on the web became part of the Third Order of Information which David Weinberger describes in *Everything is Miscellaneous: The Power of the new Digital Disorder* (2007).[lvii] In the Third Order of Information, the constraints of information organization became less reliant on print material and physical space as they move to the digital, and migrations between print and digital became even more prevalent and dynamic from the users themselves in Web 2.0 and not only by website administrators or librarians who were inputting metadata into databases (Weinberger 19-21).[lviii]

When the transitions between print to broadcast to hypertext to digital media occurred throughout the twentieth century and into the millennium, metadata has been an essential component of this information evolution at every stage. Jefferey Pomerantz describes the power of metadata as a nearly invisible force: "In the modern era of ubiquitous electronics, nearly every device you use relies on metadata or generates it, or both. But when metadata is doing its job well,

it just fades into the background, unnoticed and nearly invisible" (3). While metadata is the invisible structure that powers the participatory functions of the Web across devices and locations, the influence of metadata and its presentation online is indicative of how traditional notions of national belonging and short film are coming apart at the seams.[lix] This is because, at its core, metadata is not intuitively operating in tandem with human-created linguistics and semiotics. Rather, metadata is a unit of text characters that serves as input to machine algorithms to perform operations like sorting objects on databases and ranking results on the web (Brody 35-37; Pomerantz 48).[lx] Despite the reliance upon metadata as a descriptive source of information from which to base other networks of relation through search and tagging, the logical schemas of metadata labeling are highly subjective and interpretive based on a several variables across space, time, and the evolution of humanistic knowledges. In a metadata sense, subjective concepts and labels like 'nation' or 'nationality' must be unpacked and examined as definitions and processes inevitably shift between major communication and material revolutions such as the onset of Web 2.0.

Especially in the digital age in which real-time information can be instantly modified and seamlessly updated, the potentiality of metadata is more commonly accepted in dynamic platforms like apps, videogames, social media feeds, and online release events (Pomerantz 163). In theory, it could be argued that the more aligned *both* content and material metadata are within a particular nation, the stronger the communication of nationhood in that short film (Vukadin 7). By that same logic that the alignment of a short film's content and material increases the national identity and affiliation of a short film, is the national divergence of content and material metadata indicative of transnationalism? And, when short film and media metadata migrated from print to digital spaces online (ie. Internet Movie Database, institutional websites, social media pages), are viewers and

audiences able to perceive facets of transnational co-productions through the metadata that is presented to them?[lxi] I posit that short film national labels during Web 2.0 are overall too monolithic to represent how the genre evolved as the Internet became more participative and social. To understand how short films both leaned *into* and *away from* national constructs, we need to look deeper into both how metadata is presented online and how various factors in filmic content and material speak to (trans)national discourses.

Once we acknowledge that national cinematic paradigms continue to dominate institutional funding, access, and distribution that endured into the digital age of filmmaking and access online, we can begin perceiving the potential for erasure and colonization of national labeling based on Global South/Global North resources in the Internet age. While metadata is perhaps the smallest common denominator of this transnational tension online and in print, it is also ground-zero for the points of reference, access, and recognition that continues in festival circuits and institutional databases. These filmic accolades communicated through national labels in turn nourish key components of national cinema production like public support for cultural investments in the form of grants, professionalization programs, and infrastructure to produce and exhibit domestic cinema. Concerning national metadata, Web 2.0 characteristics accelerated the Third Order of Information in which both humans and machines train and influence each other to sort, predict, and generate content as the epistemologies of the future which is increasingly audiovisual over textual (Mersch and Muirhead). During Web 2.0, the foundation of these powerful tools of influence will eventually become the bedrock of artificial intelligence (AI) for Web 3.0 (the Semantic Web) and beyond.[lxii]

III. Ibero-American short films as examples of (trans)national contestation in Web 2.0

In the following section, I will discuss the details behind the national metadata of the three Ibero-American short films produced during Web 2.0 years and how these national alignments and (trans)national tensions point to larger critical discussions about the homogenization of the World Wide Web and the continuities of national cinema paradigms in the digital and information age.[lxiii] The three Ibero-American short films that re-occur as case studies in Chapter Two and Chapter Three: 1) *.Sub* (dir. Jossie Malis Álvarez, 2012); 2) *Hyper-Reality* (dir. Keiichi Matsuda, 2016); and 3) *Reality 2.0* (dir. Víctor Orozco, 2012), demonstrate the intricate relationship between national territory and cyberspace that occurs on at least two levels of filmic metadata. One of the aspects of national metadata that I examine is in the *content* of the short films themselves (i.e., actors, settings, spoken languages, aesthetics). The second aspect of national metadata that I look at deals with the *production* story behind the short film (i.e., director nationality, funding source, production location, material techniques, subtitling).[lxiv]

The essential questions guiding this discussion of metadata and (trans)national short film online are: 1) Why does nationhood and short film continue to be tightly bonded in the era of digital filmmaking and information access during Web 2.0? and 2) What do the tensions within national metadata in Ibero-American short films reveal about transnational dynamics and transactions in the digital age? All three short films exemplify tensions and divergences from a singular national affiliation through factors like online crowdfunding, transnational production sites, plurilingual and multinational settings and actors, or the migration patterns of the filmmaker themselves. Through examining multiple aspects of metadata and their national affiliations, these short films demonstrate how Web 2.0 technologies enabled filmmakers to lean into and away from national institutions at different stages of production and distribution resulting in transactional

dynamics between Western Europe and Latin America that are mutually beneficial in some respects and potentially unfair or delegitimized in others.

i. Reality 2.0 (2012)

Image 1.1: Screenshot of Reality 2.0's *metadata listed on director Víctor Orozco's website* https://Victororozco.com/reality.html (March 2022)

Beginning with Víctor Orozco's *Reality 2.0* (2012), the director describes the short film on his website as an attempt to unsuccessfully separate his connection with Mexican current events when he emigrated to Germany: "It was autumn when I arrived in Germany. I thought that in this exotic country I could distance myself a little bit from Mexico, but I was wrong. Drug traffickers managed to take me back in a ruthless way. A short, animated documentary about the drug-related violence in Mexico."[lxv] Narrated by Orozco himself in his Mexican dialect of Spanish with subtitles available in German and English, *Reality 2.0* is tagged and listed as both Mexican and German on Orozco's personal website, Vimeo, IMDB, YouTube, CortosDeMetraje.com, and on animation databases like Moebius Animación.[lxvi] As such, the *content* of the film is primarily affiliated with both Mexico and Germany since the narration (in Spanish) makes frequent references to both of the national spaces and discourses.[lxvii] While a binational co-production between Mexico and Germany appears like a sufficient explanation based on the film's narrative and language content, the production behind *Reality 2.0* surfaces more complex discussions about how Web 2.0 technologies influences film production and the ambiguous territoriality of cyberspace.

Reality 2.0 is considered *born-digital*, meaning that the filmic material originates in a digital format rather than a digital conversion of analogue film. In addition, Orozco's website labels *Reality 2.0* as an animated documentary since the film is comprised of mostly live-action footage mined from online clips as well as screen-captures of web browsing that are traced over with animation (rotoscope method). Not only is *Reality 2.0 born-digital*, but it could be considered almost entirely *born-online* since most of the material in the short film already existed as uploaded digital content that was remixed to create a new narrative. The material story behind *Reality 2.0* demonstrates that its national label is at least partially dislodged from physical territory, border transgressions, and actors since the Participatory Web has essentially become the medium of the film's content crowdsourced across individual feeds, streaming platforms, and screen captures of online browsing. However, to claim that digital content is entirely removed from physical territory or national discourses would be an overreach towards an idealized post-national webspace. Theorists like Catherine Frost argue that while the Internet and social relationships online do indeed forge social and political bonds that move beyond national borders, they do not have "the commitment or cohesiveness needed to underpin a demanding new mode of social and political relations" (14).

In contrast to the utopic ideals of the Open Web as a global village without borders, governance, censorship, and discrimination, John Marshall's interpretation of cyberspace discusses the nonuniform presence of the web and its influence by geopolitical, historical, developmental, and economic factors: "Not only does the online world affect cyberspace, but cyberspace changes the way offline space is used" (94). Especially by the onset of Web 2.0 after the millennium, the cause and effect of what happens online and what happens in real life became painstakingly apparent through the creation of new social phenomena like cyber-bullying and

trolling, yet also sparked waves of online activism through community forums, hashtag movements and viral campaigns (Chacón 4). So, while the Participatory Web 2.0 facilitated a cyberspace in which regular citizens across geographic, linguistic, national, and cultural communities could produce content and meaning without (apparent) direct censorship, the Internet also became the medium through which the cultural logic of late capitalism and globalization manifest through the control of major communication platforms, online transactions, data harvesting practices, and the homogenization of accessible information (Chacón 2). Therein lies the tension between metadata material and content as a site of contestation between a post-national cyberspace and the continuities of national discourses since one might assume that a born-digital and born-online short film might steer *away* from national narratives. In fact, *Reality 2.0* uses the Internet as a *medium* from which to narrate the state of a Mexican nation in crisis from the desktop browser of a Mexican immigrant living in Germany.

Even though *Reality 2.0* expresses Mexican and German national discourses through born-digital and born-online montage and animation techniques, Víctor Orozco's project is part of a long tradition of Latin American filmmakers who lean on transnational collaborations in the Global North to fund and distribute experimental (animated) short films (Chanan; Dennison). Jeffrey Middents's article, "The first rule of Latin American cinema is that you do not talk about Latin American cinema" argues that there is essentially no such thing as a Latin American film without the lingering presence of Europe or the United States (150-151). One of the historical factors that contributes to this concept is the wave of political exile from New Latin American Cinema filmmakers in the early 1970s whose leftist ideologies were embraced by French cinema publications *Cahiers du Cinema* and *Positif* and established the concept of Latin American film from the outside for viewers primarily outside the region (Middents 150-151). While Orozco did

not flee Mexico for any certain political purpose, his immigration to Germany was one of the main catalysts to become eligible for institutional sponsorship as a filmmaking student abroad. In Orozco's case, he produced the short film in Hamburg which was funded by the University of Fine Arts Hamburg (HFBK) and the Filmförderung Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein, a regional filmmaking support office. Institution-wise, *Reality 2.0* is firmly rooted in German cultural production structures even though it is narrated in Mexican Spanish and is almost entirely engaged with Mexican content online.

Playing into Middents' argument about European and North American implication of in Latin American cinema, *Reality 2.0* exemplifies the transnational components of this dynamic, but the power structures must be acknowledged within these transactions. Sophia McClennen's book, *Globalization and Latin American Cinema: A New Critical Paradigm* (2018) pushes back against the idea of clear "winners" and "losers" in transnational Latin American cinema productions (4), but short film deals with smaller budgets, lower stakes, and an even more dire distribution problem than feature films as they generally lack established international funding and dissemination structures. While distribution and visibility has always been a problem for short films, Debra Castillo makes a case for the migration of filmmakers and audiences online:

> Given the inherently conservative nature of feature films, which increasingly need to respond to the requirements of international cooperative agreements, it can no longer surprise us that some of the most exciting and innovative work in cinema in contemporary Latin America will never be found in cinemas; instead, it is available for viewing and downloading, on thousands of sites, to a wide, appreciative, if highly segmented, potential audience. (35)

While Castillo's statement is entirely accurate for truly independent short film like Keiichi Matsuda's *Hyper-Reality*, for example, *Reality 2.0* is a short film that, while born-digital and born-

online, still played by the rules of national or regional distributors since it was unavailable online while the short film circulated around festivals for up to two years after its release on average. In these cases, institutional distributors obligate exclusivity from short filmmakers which creates a "middleman" structure between creators and the freedom to show their work to an available public on YouTube or Vimeo, for example. While this practice has been changing in recent years as film markets have been shifting to accommodate simultaneous streaming and theatre releases, the constraints of institutional gatekeeping do exist for short films and all but nullify a more global and democratic public during the peak of a short film's lifespan.[lxviii]

The potentiality of national metadata comes further into play for *Reality 2.0* in the festival circuit when it collected numerous awards internationally between 2012 and 2014 which is a typical timeline for a short film's lifespan in festivals. The awards range from "Best Latin-American Short Film" at the Mar de Plata International Film Festival in Argentina (2012) to "Portrait of National Reality" at the Festival Brasileiro de Cinema Universitario (2014). The names of these awards and their respective film festivals indicate that national affiliations lean on categorizations that are not uniformly decided by a sole aspect of a film's metadata. For example, perceiving *Reality 2.0* as a Latin American film concentrates on Orozco's Mexican origins and the narrative content of the film while looking beyond its German institutional funding. In addition, the prize called "Portrait of National Reality" directly acknowledges *Reality 2.0* as a national narrative of Mexico even though it was assembled from various corners of cyberspace. From several different angles of recognition that took place after the film's release, *Reality 2.0*'s success as a transnational co-production between Mexico and Germany meant that Orozco gained international notoriety as a Mexican animator and documentarian who would go on to produce

more Latin American short films with German state-sponsorship that were selected, screened, and prized in festivals all over the world. [lxix]

In the case of *Reality 2.0*, Germany and Mexico share status as co-producers in their online national metadata label. Within this co-production, there appears to be a win-win situation at hand in which Germany is supporting Third World Cinema experimentalism on the world stage while Orozco gains recognition as a talented animator and director who is backed by institutions in the Global North.[lxx] The final victory, albeit trepidatious in a postcolonial sense, is that select audiences in festivals perceive the unobstructed otherness of a Latin American voice portraying the Drug War in Mexico as ruthlessly violent and chaotic from a cultural insider who lives abroad and forays back into his national space through online content. So, while *Reality 2.0* is positioned as both Mexican and German through national labeling and through a more nuanced examination of its metadata material and content, the power dynamics operating within the metadata contexts reveal the institutional rootedness in Germany against the migrations, assemblages, and remixing of narrative content found both in cyberspace and in reference to Mexico's national imaginary.

ii. Hyper-Reality (2016)

Image 1.2: The metadata for Hyper-Reality *on* https://cortosdemetraje.com/hyper-reality/ ; *Image 1.3: The metadata for* Hyper-Reality *on* https://www.shortoftheweek.com/2016/09/27/hyper-reality/

The production story behind Keiichi Matsuda's short film, *Hyper-Reality* (2016) is the reverse situation as that of Orozco's migration from Latin America to Europe as a catalyst for financial co-production. Based in the United Kingdom, Matsuda crowd-sourced most of his financing online via Kickstarter.com and traveled several times to Medellín, Colombia to make the film and animate it back in London. Without the need for institutional funding with strings and regulations attached, Matsuda's short film evades the tendency to affiliate *Hyper-Reality* with a specific national entity since numerous individuals contributed micro donations to the project. Having said that, the short film is listed as Colombian on databases like IMDB.com and CortosdeMetraje.com (Image 1.2) and "Made in the U.K." on the popular short film collection website, ShortoftheWeek.com (Image 1.3). Herein lies an online metadata debate between content and material that begs the following questions: Is this film rightfully Colombian or English? And is there even a need to provide a national label given its independence from national institutions? As a short film that was crowdfunded online, filmed within the territorial confines of one nation (Colombia), and post-produced in another (United Kingdom), *Hyper-Reality*'s material and content metadata speaks to the simultaneity of territory and locality that is both intimate and globalized though hyper-capitalism in cyberspace that became even more mobile on devices and platforms during Web 2.0.

Hyper-Reality (2016) is a hybrid of live action and 3D animation that speculates how the technologized human interacts with and perceives the city of Medellín, the second-largest metropolis in Colombia. The aesthetics of the short film reconstruct a videogame-like experience of a Latin American urban space that is overlain with brightly colored graphics, a busy electronic soundtrack with gamified sound effects, and playful interactive options from the first-person perspective of the protagonist who is a working-class Colombian woman named Juliana Restrepo.

Overwhelmed and oppressed by this immersive hyper-real existence, the plot is simple: Juliana wants to opt out and unplug from the game, but the consequences of that decision mean that she will lose all her cache as a digital citizen and become even more disenfranchised as a *homo sacer* in her society.[lxxi]

On the surface, *Hyper-Reality* is an augmented design exercise dressed in the trappings of a narrative short film, but one of the most overlooked aspects of the project is the dynamic, hybrid interplay of cultural and linguistic expressions of technology that dominate the six-minute filmic experience. For example, while the film technically takes place in Medellín, the aesthetics present a hyperreal cornucopia of cultural signage to the extent of creating a technologized 'non place' that reflects a webspace that is controlled by global corporations.[lxxii] In addition, there is a heavy presence of English throughout the film's integral subtitling as well as an anglicized corporate presence in the aesthetics which suggest neoliberal colonialism of the Latin American urban space through technology. For a film like *Hyper-Reality*, questions of national affiliation and metadata labeling are difficult to proclaim definitively since the narrative content takes place in Medellín and tells the story of a Colombian city-dweller. In addition, the overlay of web-based virtual images and animations upon the physical architecture of Medellín is both territorial and culturally localized yet indicative of globalized techno capitalism which aims to wash out and homogenize the local.

Since the director, Keiichi Matsuda is not Colombian nor Latin American but rather of Japanese descent living in the United Kingdom, the choice of the film's location, language, and filming in Medellín complicates the response to the question: "Is this film Colombian?" Matsuda's Japanese heritage and London residence may seem far-removed from the prospect of filming a

short in Colombia, but his decision to make a film in Medellín seems deliberate in his Kickstarter[lxxiii] promotional video when he explains:

> The film is going to be set in Medellín, Colombia. Medellín is a beautiful city with a troubled past dominated by gangs, drugs, and violence. In the last twenty years though, the city has transformed itself completely, and was last year awarded the title of most innovative city. I'm interested in how rapid, technological transformation could have impact on a culture which makes Medellín an ideal location. The city is going to be lovingly designed for the near future complete with its own laws, customs, and politics. (Matsuda 01:54-02:28)

In Matsuda's vision of Medellín articulated in the quotation above, the formerly troubled urban space is on the upswing thanks to technological innovation and improvement for all citizens. The technological ambience of *Hyper-Reality* is a mere step further to imagine the future of the Latin American city, liberated by technology and ubiquitous connectivity.

Matsuda's enthusiasm about rapid technological innovation and design in the Latin American urban space necessarily brings up critical conversations around the damaging effects of globalization promoted by the Internet when considering most Latin Americans have only started accessing the Web during the mobile revolution during Web 2.0.[lxxiv] The unease about cultural homogenization due to the *digital divide* created anxieties that new media technologies came packaged with the damaging effects of neoliberal globalization. [lxxv] Claire Taylor and Thea Pitman are cautious about these assumptions in their introduction to *Latin American Identity in Online Cultural Production* (2013): "The reduction of barriers of place, the speeding up of communications, the rapid dissemination of information via multiple channels, and the opportunity to create temporary and multiple alliances, have all contributed to making internet-based activities central to the workings of many *anti*-globalisation movements" (12). In other words, local identities on the Internet are not a purely subversive or passive, but rather an act of compliance

and opposition that is constantly negotiated with state-sponsored conceptualizations of identity (Taylor and Pitman 12). Likewise, *Hyper-Reality* demonstrates both the unique hybridization and power struggle between local customs and the neoliberal pervasiveness of big tech in both the production and narrative content of the short film.

Addressing Latin American cinema, Sophia McClennen proposes a framework of 'millennial globalization' which challenges the previous paradigms of globalization in the 1990s by theorists like Arjun Appadurai and Roland Robertson set up antagonisms of global "winners" and "losers" in the neoliberal economies of globalization. In response to this critical tendency oversimplification, McClennan explains that in the twenty-first century, these antagonisms that meant to predict the homogenizing effects of neoliberalism on "losing" countries do not appropriately describe how neoliberalism has diversified economies, and that this paradigm reflects cinema industries in Latin America between 1990-2016 (4).[lxxvi] While these two critical perspectives acknowledge that there is more to globalization than a polarization of haves and have-nots, McClennan sees a benefit to neoliberal economic influence into diversifying economies whereas Taylor and Pitman uphold the efforts of local cultural producers and communities as significant while they may remain peripheral. Positioned between these theoretical arguments as an independent short film, *Hyper-Reality* embodies some of both in that the project *does* signal an imposition of neoliberal capitalist design upon the Latin American cityscape yet is not entirely absent of Colombian cultural signage and input from local actors and storytellers.[lxxvii]

While Orozco's *Reality 2.0* exemplifies a transnational collaboration pattern of Latin American filmmakers garnishing funding from national institutions in the Global North, the opposite trajectory of Europeans and North Americans making 'parachute' films in Latin America is well-established with varying degrees of colonial impact and violence (i.e., Werner Herzog).[lxxviii]

While Matsuda's project was minimally invasive from a production standpoint since he worked closely with a Medellín-based production company called Fractal Media and filmed in public spaces with a mounted body camera, his decision to make the film in Medellín rather than in his hometown of London was a mixture of convenience and curiosity to explore the relationship between technology and society outside the liberal West (Interview, 15:10).[lxxix] In this circumstance, Matsuda's project intervenes as a real-time simulation of constant connectivity whose sounds and sights are transposed onto the Latin American city, although Matsuda himself is an outsider with convenient access to cultural insights and resources in Medellín.[lxxx] The resulting mash-up of modernity and modernization that *Hyper-Reality* accentuates through virtual layers animated on top of Medellín is what Nestor Canclini's classic text on hybridity articulates within the Latin American city. Furthering this aesthetic, the continual restructuring of the Latin American city, according to Canclini, is the increasing "audiovisual democracy" mediated through images transmitted into the public space by electronic technologies (211).

Despite Matsuda's careful attention to the hybridized aesthetics and cultural references that are specific to the Colombian metropolis, the extractable metadata from the film's embedded subtitles and in the film's web presence in English points to an alternative target audience outside of Hispanophone and Latin American online spaces. While the dialogue in the film is in Colombian Spanish and virtual signage and labels in the Medellín cityscape are primarily in Spanish, the ingrained subtitling in *Hyper-Reality* offers a simultaneous automatic translation that generates the English text when artificial intelligence bots speak to Juliana throughout the plot. These English subtitles most likely serve two purposes: the first being that Anglophone and Hispanophone viewers can more directly engage with the content that is immediately discernible through either audio or legible means; and the second being that a speculation of auto-generated subtitling in the

technologized Latin American city will prioritize English as a language which has traditionally dominated the global webspace (Risam). Playing into this point, *Hyper-Reality*'s web presence is described entirely by English metadata descriptions when it was released in 2016 on Vimeo and as a website owned by Keiichi Matsuda.[lxxxi] As a both a product and critique of the anglicization or homogenization of the web, *Hyper-Reality*'s potential national identity as a Colombian cultural product is multiplied through metadata factors that clearly signal intended audiences outside of a purely Colombian imaginary.[lxxxii]

In summary, the national metadata potential of *Hyper-Reality* invokes the globalized, capitalistic dynamics of technology that are functioning primarily outside of national institutions like state-sponsored grants and national/regional short film distributors. Instead, the transnational tensions of the crowdfunded short film lie within the details of how the film was produced and at what stages cultural and linguistic signage were incorporated and/or imposed onto the film's setting of Medellín as the technologized Latin American city. Since Matsuda is not Colombian nor Latin American but rather of Japanese descent living in the United Kingdom, the choice of the film's location, primary spoken language, and filming in Medellín complicates the assertion that *Hyper-Reality* is solely a Colombian or Latin American cultural product. While the fact that Matsuda animated the film in London and incorporated audio-visual components that are heavily influenced by global gaming culture and anglicized techno-capitalism could contribute to a collective fear that evolving global Internet technologies will homogenize and erase the local, the multidirectional collaboration between Matsuda and Medellín-based contributors do not present an idealized techno-utopia like Matsuda originally predicted in his Kickstarter campaign. Rather, the narrative plot and aesthetics of *Hyper-Reality* effectively portray the pitfalls of ubiquitous connectivity controlled by big tech and variously positioned field agents and stakeholders.

iii. .Sub (2012)

Image 1.4: The metadata listed for .Sub *on* https://cortosdemetraje.com/sub/

Jossie Malis Álvarez, director of *.Sub* (2012), is another example of a filmmaker from the Global South (Chile, Peru) who migrated to Spain and aligned with national institutions to finance and distribute his early short film projects.[lxxxiii] Like Orozco who also emigrated from Latin America to Europe before securing institutional funding for *Reality 2.0*, Malis Álvarez's transatlantic relocation toward financial establishment for his autonomous production company, Paramotion Films and funding eligibility in Spain is not coincidently in opposition to Matsuda's visits to Colombia having already crowdfunded *Hyper-Reality* online. This transnational flow is commonplace since most of the film distribution and exhibition power is in the Global North, and it is through consumption that culture remains visible and stable (Douglas and Isherwood 38). Stephanie Dennison adds to this assertion of institutional visibility by insisting that "it is no longer enough that Peruvians and Paraguayans, for example, *make* films (a difficult enough process for many smaller film industries): these films must be *seen* (and ideally by local, national and international audiences)" (16). Hence, in the effort for Latin American creators to be seen by the

world, the traditional passage to access established funding architectures and visibility is to traverse the Atlantic for institutional backing in Europe.[lxxxiv]

One of the common excuses behind the one-directional, patriarchal relationship between Iberia and Latin America is that there simply are not enough producers or resources outside of existing global cinema powerhouses when in fact the major architectures of funding and distribution are almost entirely controlled by traditional colonial powers in Western Europe and the Global North (Falicov 253). These are often the same nations that claim ownership in national labels when, in fact, the story is much more complicated and networked (Falicov; Barnabé). Tamara Falicov's work on *Programa Iberomedia*, the most successful film finance pool in Latin America, points out that even the well-meaning democratic measures that Iberomedia has incorporated into its selection and financing practices, the Spanish state-sponsored program "do[es] not transcend problems of paternalism and the inherent power dynamics that surface when there are inequalities of power and resources" (87). A similar dynamic occurs in other transnational film funds based in Europe like the Hubert Bals Fund (HBF) that provide resources for Third World Cinema producers in Latin America which, while successfully funding emerging cinema auteurs from the region, experience "the burden of representation" to produce "global arthouse aesthetic" films that cater to the expectations of elite audiences at film festivals (Chan; Mulvey et al; Ross). [lxxxv] [lxxxvi]

Beyond funding, the transnational collaborations between Iberia and Latin America manifest through the technical-artistic content of films also influences the distribution and commercial potential such as when Spanish actors play in Latin American storylines or vice versa yielding various results in visibility across borders. When Spaniards are more visible in Latin American films, for example, they tend to translate to more success and viewership in Spain's

wealthier market (Falicov 82). Oftentimes, the narrative effects of this collaboration within films reflect colonial and racist perceptions such as Latin Americans occupying working class or delinquent roles in Spanish settings and Spaniards taking on roles of pompous, entitled tourists or sympathetic guardians within Latin American settings.[lxxxvii] [lxxxviii] While transnational collaboration can be mutually beneficial through funding architectures and artistic-technical cooperation across borders and regions, the nuances of those benefits impinge on distribution and visibility which influences future opportunities as well as narrative messaging that perpetuates (stereotypical) national discourses from Latin America and Spain (Dennison 7).

Like Matsuda's narrative and aesthetic approach in *Hyper-Reality* yet opposite in directionality, Jossie Malis Álvarez created a speculative portrayal of a disenfranchised immigrant living in a technologized European cosmopolis not as a visiting filmmaker but as an immigrant himself. In the film, the African protagonist, Euyumi Bamako, receives a microchip implant which allows her to read the real-time subtitling of other citizens who speak other languages. The problem is that her own subtitles are illegible for others and her power of speech and comprehensibility is taken away since the narrative eventually reveals that she is undocumented. The science fictional premise of *.Sub* plays into the fantasy of a post-national society that posits technological egalitarianism yet the plot exposes the same hierarchical power structures of a pre-connected society. Featuring over nine different spoken languages in the film and highly international and ethnically diverse cast, the film's portrayal of a failed post-national project was ultimately supported by state-sponsored institutions if we examine the material metadata.

Since the short was filmed in Madrid, primarily funded by Spanish grant entity (ICAA), and distributed through MadridEnCorto, most of the production metadata aligns with its Spanish national label on websites like IMDB.com, CortosDeMetraje.com, and

LosMejoresCortos.com.[lxxxix] However, the multiplicity of languages used in the film suggests otherness from Spain since the dialogue ranges from German, French, English, Japanese, Punjaabi, Arabic, Russian and an unidentified African language that the protagonist speaks. De Higes-Andino et al claim that the emergence of multilingual or *polyglot* films being made in Spain have been on the rise due to the "deep impact immigration has had on Spanish society since the late 1980s," yet most polyglot films they studied provided subtitling for non-standard Spanish (outside of Spain) and no subtitling for standard Spanish, indicating a clear target audience within the Spanish national linguistic space (135). Interestingly enough, the subtitling for the short film online is only available in Castilian Spanish, Hexagonal French, and British English – which seems to cut into the point that *.Sub* is trying to make – that technology privileges certain languages and cultures who have historically maintained power.[xc]

Having won several awards internationally at film festivals, *.Sub* is labeled as a short film from Spain, presumably because of its shooting location in Madrid, the Spanish funding entities that supported the film, and its distributor, MadridEnCorto. Curiously enough, *.Sub* went on to win several awards in festival circuits in the months following its distribution by MadridEnCorto in 2013 including "Best International Fiction Short Film" in FIC Monterrey, Mexico, "Best International Film" at the International Human Rights Arts and Film Festival in Melbourne in Australia, and "Best International Film" at the RojasFest4 in Argentina. The irony of a Spanish short film having received several awards bearing the term 'international' speaks to the proprietorship within national labels against the narrative content in the short film. In the case of *.Sub*, the internationality of this science-fiction short film turns the idea of technological neutrality and cosmopolitanism on its head in the narrative premise which is real-time subtitling for all,

except for those who are undocumented or untranslatable (outside of the Indo-European or major Asian languages).

.Sub as a short film evades wholistic national categorization at several levels of its metadata through the director's origins in Latin America, a cast made up of first-generation immigrants, the critical tone of the plot against state-sponsored discrimination, the linguistic diversity of the film, and its recognition as a highly 'international' film in the festival circuit. However, other facets of material metadata align *.Sub* with Spain such as the short film's production site, financial backing, and distribution based in Madrid. Despite the national dissonance between the production and the content of *.Sub,* the metadata label claims Spanish nationality and Euro-centered subtitling in its continuous life on the web. The national metadata divergence within *.Sub* is deeply connected with the messaging behind the short film's premise: that any efforts to move beyond national paradigms in a technological age is deeply seated in tactics and processes that are state-sponsored and controlled.

IV. National metadata as commodification of short film institutionalism

As I have demonstrated with Ibero-American short films like *Porque hay cosas que nunca se olvidan* (2008), *Hyper-Reality* (2016), *.Sub* (2012), and *Reality 2.0* (2012), deterministic attempts to claim short films as wholly national or globalized quickly dissolve when considering deeper aspects of national metadata potential within filmic content and material. Looking deeper into the potential of national metadata expands the visibility of cultural objects like short films which have traditionally strong relationships with national institutions that are modified and complicated in the digital online era of Web 2.0. Underneath a national label, there are multiple actors involved including people, institutions, language communities, production companies, distributors, selection committees, and an unlimited potential as a digital object in an evolving

webspace. Unfortunately, by carrying over the hierarchical and monolithic nature of metadata labeling from the print to digital era, the commodification of these layers reinforces the power structures and inequalities on the World Wide Web starting with one of the smallest common denominators: metadata. So, the question remains: why does nationhood and short film continue to be so tightly bonded in the shift from analogue to digital filmmaking and information access during Web 2.0? The explanation relies on both economical and informational factors under the larger aegis of national institutions.

National institutions maintain a firm grasp on short filmmaking through infrastructural investments in film schools, funding architectures, distribution channels, and festivals (Willemen 30). And for Latin American filmmakers and creators like Orozco and Álvarez from nations that do not have traditionally strong institutional infrastructures for (short) film, alignments with better-resourced national institutions become crucial through transnational processes like emigration, regional funding entities, or technical-artistic collaborations (Dennison; McClennen). These transnational relationships are, in fact, transactional between players in the Global North and the Global South, and do not yield symmetrical results from all sides. For example, Matsuda's crowd-funded travels to Medellín to narrate and speculate technological designs located "outside" of the Liberal West in *Hyper-Reality* stand in contrast to the regulatory relationships between Latin American filmmakers and their European institutions that claim ownership through national labeling and distribution that directly affects future investments in state-sponsored cinema infrastructures.

The tensions between various aspects of national metadata are stitched into the particulars of locality based on production details and how the short film reads as a cultural narrative. Oftentimes, material and content metadata analysis uncover disparities that are not simply markers

of transnational collaboration but rather transactional flows that reflect colonial relationships and modernist national discourses. All the Ibero-American short films discussed in this chapter contained tensions between the national affiliation of narrative content in their film and how they were labeled through national metadata. Their commonality is the wielding of web-based technology to navigate quickly between cultural and national contexts through production and content. While *Reality 2.0* leans into distinguishing two national spaces through online material, *Hyper-Reality* and *.Sub* portray a hybrid, cosmopolitan premise of globalization and hyper-capitalization that extends the webspace into national territory. They do this in inverse ways: Matsuda projects hyper-capitalism through gamified design onto the metropolis in the Global South, and Malis Álvarez anticipates the pitfalls of a technologized, state-sponsored *Euro pudding*.[xci]

The informational bonds between nation and short film are expressed through online metadata that is often curated by individuals and teams acting on behalf of the same national institutions or corporate entities who maintain the economic power in cinema transactions (La Barre and Inês de Noveira Cordeiro). As textual code that both informs and forges important networks of visibility in the online digital age, metadata reveals how short films continue to operate within national frameworks and how they are departing from national constructs through online participation, tools, and methods. By performing critical metadata analysis across filmic content and material, metadata can also express how short films venture into ambiguous territoriality by wielding tools and content from a participatory cyberspace exemplified in *Hyper-Reality*'s crowdfunding, *Reality 2.0*'s crowd-sourced online content, and *.Sub*'s linguistic pluralism rooted in subtitling technologies. In brief, national labels matter for short films, and become even more crucial during Web 2.0 because, as metadata becomes an active ingredient of networked

participation in the form of tags and links, national labels become immediate pathways of potential access, distribution, and aggregation in online spaces.

The key to expanding national metadata is in understanding its potential to shift and evolve as new venues and audiences inevitably emerge as the digital age advances. While short films could conceivably travel the globe instantly through views and shares, it would be short-sighted to think that the attachments to nations and national belonging would lose importance just because Web 2.0 meant faster Internet speeds, multiple ways of connecting to the Web, more widespread penetration of Internet connections globally, and the prevalence of instantaneous collaboration methods such as Cloud storage technology. As websites began to shift towards more fluid web graphics and participatory functions during Web 2.0, national metadata on short film databases were not only searchable but became modifiable by tags input by viewers themselves and not just by institutional actors.[xcii] As I demonstrated with examples from the Introduction and in this chapter, a few steps of deeper inquiry reveal that there is no consistent, formulaic rationale to explain why a film listed with a particular national label or even listed as a co-production. Frequently, just below the surface of a singular national label lies a deeper storyline that is much more descriptive of the (trans)national nature of short film production and/or in the short film's content itself.

The next chapter attempts to systematically expand short film national metadata by interrogating which facets of short film online make it categorizable by nation. To formulate a more comprehensive answer to this question, I annotate several different aspects of metadata of short films housed in an Ibero-American short film database called CortosDeMetraje.com in order to dive deeper into nuances of national labeling.[xciii] By gathering samples from Web 2.0 years, the emerging (trans)national criteria from these data sets addresses two of the main questions

circulating in this dissertation which are: 1) Which factor most frequently bonds a short film to a particular nation according to more in-depth look at the metadata? and 2) What kinds of transactional patterns emerge regarding (trans)national short filmmaking in Spain and Latin America during Web 2.0? By annotating and mapping national metadata by 1) director's national origin; 2) national affiliation of spoken languages/dialects; 3) production location; 4) nationality of protagonist(s); 5) narrative setting of the film; and 6) origin(s) of funding, metadata maps communicate how Ibero-American short films during Web 2.0 years are labeled and marketed as national products despite transnational realities facilitated at least in part by the Web.

The ways in which content and material overlap and distinguish from each other will become a crucial component in my metadata collection, analysis, and presentation. While the availability of metadata can vary across platforms in terms of (un)reliability of labelling and tagging by users or web masters, the components of nationality that I am examining can be cross-checked and verified on the home site of the filmmaker or in the official distribution website if the labelling is unclear or unavailable. The imperfections and limitations of visible and invisible metadata online is not necessarily a quest to rectify or solve inadequate metadata. Rather, the challenge is to look further into the tensions of national labeling and short film during a crucial period of expansion online into Web 2.0.

[xlix] See http://www.lucasfigueroa.com/.

[l] Since the mission of *EspañaEnCorto* was to curate and exhibit the latest award-winning shorts from Spain, the selection committee felt no hesitation including *Porque hay cosas que nunca se olvidan* in the festival program since we received the short film from a Spanish distributor despite its Italian narrative content.

[li] See https://cortosdemetraje.com/cosas-nunca-se-olvidan/.

[lii] The Goya Awards are the main national film awards ceremony for Spain and is considered by many to be the Spanish equivalent of the Academy Awards in the United States (the Oscars).

[liii] Metadata literally means "about data" since "meta" originates from the Greek meaning, "about." Although the adoption of the term, metadata, is only decades old, metadata itself has existed for thousands of years as evidenced in

the *Pinakes* of 245 BC, which is considered to be the first library catalog for the Library of Alexandria. In the *Pinakes* scrolls, works from the library were listed by title, author's name, genre, biographical information about the author, a brief summary of the work, and the length of the work. These ancient functions of metadata are largely consistent with the types of metadata that are displayed in library catalogs within the card catalog system and on more current digital reference platforms (Pomerantz 7-8).

[liv] One of the key shifts of information processing during this transition is the platformization of the Internet that occurred during Web 2.0. The platformization of the web means the convenience of consistent personalization across applications and devices while gradually becoming more reliant on structures that are curated to influence behavior (Flew 9).

[lv] While Hollywood began to film digitally in the early 2000s, digitally shot films became more common than celluloid productions in the 2010s. Especially when the Red One camera was first introduced in 2007, its ability to capture up to 120 frames per second at 2K resolution (60 frames per second at 4K resolution), the quality of digital began to rival celluloid imaging. See Behar, M. "A Star Is Born: Digital Movie Cameras Couldn't Compete with Film-Until Now. the Red One Camera, a Lowcost, Hi-Def Miracle, Is Ready for Its Hollywood Close-Up." *Wired - San Francisco-*, vol. 16, no. 9, 2008, pp. 128–133.

[lvi] A common example of filmic metadata would be in a film festival program so that audiences can perceive information like the director's name, the length of the film, the year it was released, a short summary or tagline, the languages or available subtitles in the film, the national origin, among other features depending on space and the availability of information.

[lvii] Weinberger explains further, "Because computers store information in ways that have nothing to do with how we want it presented to us, we are freed from having to organize the original information the way we eventually want to get at it" (99). This concept is the foundation of a new order of information processing which Weinberger identifies as the Third Order or the Digital Order. He explains the difference between organizing material *atoms* from the previous orders that have limitations like decay, taking up space, and the ability to only exist in one place at a time. In the third order of information organization, content is digitized into *bits*, which are not bound by the same physical laws as material – allowing the structures around a digital object to be found at simultaneous locations by a variety of search processes.

[lviii] The use of languages to typify and classify objects, priority, and inter-relationships is at the core of machine intelligence all the way from binary code to more current programming languages that predict behaviors in real time. A pre-web example of this was the creation of the Dewey Decimal system for libraries that eventually migrated to a computerized platform, and then the universal barcode (UBC) system that is widely adopted across stores and cashier systems. As more information processing moved to computers (1960s) and eventually to networked communication across various access points (1980s), the amount of information that needed faster processing increased exponentially. As global economies grew and information flows accompanied these expansions, codified systems of organization became necessary to sort, market, distribute, and track a seemingly impossible amount of stuff - both material and digital. This deluge of content, production, and communications required more efficient organization systems for access and reference that both humans and machines encode and reproduce with machine intelligence.

[lix] Especially during the migration from print to digital and toward an increasingly accessible cyberspace after the millennium, the Participatory Web enabled the potential of metadata to extend beyond webmasters, depending on the judgement and categorization of the web users themselves. The incorporation of IMDB.com (Internet Movie Database) in 1996 represented a Web 1.0 attempt to create an informative infrastructure for all sorts of films despite barriers like limited commercial success, obscurity, length, and genre of videos.

[lix] IMDB.com is known for presenting detailed metadata about movies including summaries, biographies, release dates, box office information, and user critiques and reviews for registered users. As user-uploaded streaming sites like Vimeo.com and YouTube.com came onto the scene in 2004 and 2006 respectively, an explosion of user-generated content ensued.

[lx] For example, a national metadata label like "Chile" is not going to communicate the national essence of Chileanness to Google's API, but the textual unit will make connections that the word "Chile" is ranked and networked with other metadata and keywords like "Argentina" and "Peru" or even from a different sense of the word "chile" like "spice" or "pepper" that further influences the way that information is presented and accessed on the web.

[lxi] Take for example, the award-winning film, *Santa & Andrés* (2016) which was financed by the Hubert Bals Fund based in Rotterdam but is directed by Cuban filmmaker, Carlos Lechuga, and set in Havana with local actors. So, following the logic of financial origin and national affiliation: Would this film be labeled as Dutch on a streaming platform or online database? Upon a closer look on Internet Movie Database (IMDB), the film's page contains Switzerland directly under the title, but also includes a month and year of its release date next to the national label

since the film had its opening in Switzerland. Upon deeper investigation, the countries listed further down on the page that are in association with the film are Cuba, Colombia, and France. While more than four countries are listed in connection with this film, there is only one obvious connection to one of them based on setting, actors, languages, and the origin of the director: Cuba. There is also no mention of the Netherlands as the origin of the HBF grant. Again, any determinant of national labeling for films in online metadata is contradictory and questionable at best.

[lxii] The fallout from these consequences is already becoming apparent through racial bias in facial recognition algorithms, ableist web experiences, and linguistic prejudices, just to name a few examples. See Safiya Umoja Noble's. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York University Press, 2018.

[lxiii] In the Introduction, I layed out definitions of a short film and Web 2.0 and the aims of this dissertation which are to understand frameworks of the nation in Ibero-American short films online during the years of Web 2.0 (approx. 2004-2016). For the purpose of this chapter, I will reiterate that Web 2.0 (also referred to as the Social Web or the Participatory Web) is largely characterized by reconfiguring the Web as a platform from which applications and social spaces can network various technologies, applications and devices due to enhanced computer graphics and interface, open-source software, and increased broadband capacities (Castells 2009: xxvii). This expansion of web access coupled with the shift in usership from a "read-only", search functionality during Web 1.0 toward more networked participation in Web 2.0 both amplified and influenced cultural production and activities offline including short film production, distribution, and content.

[lxiv] Of all the possibilities of filmic metadata within a document or a (digital) reference text, certain aspects deal with the film's *content* while other aspects deal with the *material.* For example, languages used in the film (through dialogue, written signage, letters, etc.) deal with the film's content, since these details can be found within the actual narrative of the film. Material metadata is usually found with details describing the production of the film like the director's name or the site of production and can certainly evolve over time since material can exist before a film is made and be created after a film is released (i.e., additional subtitling or dubbing, a growing list of awards and prizes, re-released versions of the film, etc.).

[lxv] This description can be found on https://Victororozco.com/reality.html.

[lxvi] MoebiusAnimacion.com is an online archive of experimental animated shorts from Spain and Latin America.

[lxvii] Another possible national affiliation in the *Reality 2.0*'s content is the United States since subtitling is available in American English in addition to the fact that Orozco mentions George Bush, the War on Terror and the War on Drugs that exacerbated tense relations between the U.S. and Mexico.

[lxviii] "An interesting (but singular) example of successful showcasing of Latin American 'product' on the internet is the young Uruguayan filmmaker Federico Álvarez and his 2009 short film *Ataque de pánico* (Panic Attack). Álvarez uploaded his four and half minute video about a robot invasion of Montevideo onto YouTube in 2009. The short has received over 6.5 million views on YouTube, making it one of the most seen Latin American films of the decade. The Mexican film *Revolución*, 2010, made up of a series of 10 short films by Mexican directors, was viewable on YouTube for 48 hours, and reportedly took 100,000 hits outside of Mexico alone" (Dennison 17).

[lxix] Orozco's short films since Reality 2.0 are also Mexican and German co-productions: *32 R-bit* (2018) and his latest short film, *Revolykus* (2020).

[lxx] See Hayward 2000 for a definition of "Third World Cinema" which refers to the filmmaking of countries outside the two dominant spheres that appeared after the Second World War (389).

[lxxi] *Homo Sacer* is a Roman law concept that was re-appropriated by Giorgio Agamben to describe a person who is banned from society and could be killed by anyone since they are essentially determined to be outside the societal and cultural law. In Chapter 3, I opt for David Dalton's term, *Robo Sacer* to describe Juliana's subjectivity in the short film as a marginalized cyborg in the Latin American techno-city.

[lxxii] "Marc Augé's term for generic places such as bus depots, train stations, and airports which, however elaborate and grandiose, do not confer a feeling of place…Augé's argument is that the increasing prevalence of non-places on a global scale is an index of what he terms supermodernity, and the experience of them its defining characteristic. Non-places are not the cause of this epochal shift. The cause, though it is never actually named by Augé, is late capitalism." https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100237780

[lxxiii] Kickstarter is a web-based funding platform for creative projects. Contributors learn about projects through promotions and then contribute funding and resources through online monetary transfers.

[lxxiv] Claire Taylor and Thea Pitman's introduction to *Latin American Cyberculture and Cyberliterature* explain that the most generous statistics as of September 2006 indicate that around 15.1% of Latin Americans had direct access to the Internet compared to 69.1% of the United States population and 51.9% of the European Union population (5). Still, the massive increase of Internet usage in Latin America and in Mexico after 2006 indicate a surge in Internet participation in a web atmosphere that is largely shaped by neoliberal capitalist sentiments like a deregulated free market system.

[lxxv] The digital divide is a term commonly used to describe the gulf between those who have ready access to computers and the Internet, and those who do not.
[lxxvi] This globalization paradigm overlaps with Web 2.0 years, and while McClennan's research functions through funding data and statistics that speak to the materialist nature of her study, one aspect that McClennan leaves out, however, is the advent of the Web and its effects on (trans)national cinema production. Another key difference in McClennan's approach and that of this dissertation is the focus on independent short film rather than commercially successful feature films from Latin America.
[lxxvii] For example, Matsuda especially noticed the presence of Catholicism, Santeria, and other spiritual traditions co-existing in the city space and was taken aback by visual representations of a blood-covered Christ figure or a depiction of the Virgin Mary juxtaposed with popular culture advertisements including soccer players, superheroes, and soft drinks. Matsuda elaborated, "That kind of synthesis between these things that in the Global North and the Global West (whatever we want to call it) is not as … it somehow feels contradictory. You could either be into Science or be into Religion, but that was never the case before, and it does not seem to be the case in Colombia at all" (Personal interview, 18:30).
[lxxviii] When I say 'parachute' films, I mean that filmmakers from abroad make a point to make a film in a territory of lesser economic development with the advantages of comparatively inexpensive local labor, amateur, exoticized actors, a general lack of accountability and oversight, and with little effort to uphold post-production responsibilities or visibility for stakeholders in that same territory. German director, Werner Herzog's film, *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) is a prime example of this phenomenon which is detailed in the making-of documentary called *Burden of Dreams* (dir. Les Blank, 1982).
[lxxix] During our interview in April of 2019, Matsuda explained that his interest in technology and society often leads him back to the realization that most technological production comes from a very small section of society that can be geographically narrowed down to some parts of the United States (Silicon Valley) and, increasingly, parts of China. Baked into this technological production is the ideology of the liberal West, and Matsuda wanted to show something "…outside of that, and I don't really consider London to be outside of that. I could have chosen somewhere else, but I happened to visit the city at this time and was really taken by both the spirit of people wanting to be involved and thinking about the vision for their city, as well as the physicality of the city" (Interview, 15:20)
[lxxx] During my interview with Matsuda, I inquired about the Medellín-specific aesthetics of the film. I was curious about Matsuda's inclusion of virtual layers and animation that specifically referenced the space and Latin American interpretations of technology. Although Matsuda had visited Medellín five times since 2013 and was currently planning a trip to Buenos Aires at the time of our conversation, he had not visited other parts of Latin America. Matsuda's experience and access to the city were curated by his teammates at Fractal Media and local collaborators in the film industry who provided the linguistic and social know-how of filming locations and resources. With that said, Matsuda's comments indicated a special attention to Colombian aesthetics and traditions ingrained in the physicality of the city, features that he enhanced through the virtual layers.
[lxxxi] See Matsuda's website for *Hyper-Reality*: http://hyper-reality.co/
[lxxxii] Robert Holbert's "homogenization thesis" proclaims that "global culture is becoming standardized around a Western or American pattern and that this is based on the "development of information technology and global communications" (Holton 140-142).
[lxxxiii] Jossie Malis Álvarez, currently lives in Mallorca, Spain although he was born in Peru and identifies as Peruvian-Chilean. Before moving to Spain, he spent several years in the United States in New York and Florida, making for a highly transnational career in filmmaking and animation.
[lxxxiv] Michael Chanan's 'Latin American Cinema: From Underdevelopment to Postmodernism' recalls the history of transnational tensions of Latin American cinema production when he considers that the Latin American filmmakers of the 1960s rejected Hollywood and Europe yet 'served for the European as an imaginary other' (p. 42).
[lxxxv] **"**The Hubert Bals Fund of International Film Festival Rotterdam is a curatorial fund dedicated to supporting filmmakers in every stage of the filmmaking process – from script development to post-production. The HBF has been especially helpful for filmmakers from countries where freedom of speech and a solid film infrastructure are lacking" (https://iffr.com/en/hubert-bals-fund).
[lxxxvi] This "burden of representation" refers to the pressure to produce a certain type of film when international funding like HBF assumes the role as 'producer.' Known as "poverty porn" or "global art-house aesthetic," the tone of HBF produced films are meant for elite audiences who can comfortably perceive otherness that is aesthetically pleasing cinema about a life that they would never discover nor understand otherwise.
[lxxxvii] For example, the Argentine-directed short film that takes place in Madrid, *La Boda* (dir. Marina Seresesky, 2013) stars a Cuban immigrant who quits her job cleaning office buildings so that she can attend her daughter's wedding

which takes ends up taking place over a long-distance call in a pre-paid phone booth. The characters that exploit her and help her financially are Spanish. The characters that are supportive of her struggle morally are fellow immigrants. An exception to this tendency is the frequency of light-skinned Argentinean actors in Spanish narratives which points to a comfortable otherness that is close enough in both phenotype, language, and socioeconomic status (Apaoloza).

ICAA is the Instituto de la Cinematografía y de las Artes Audiovisuales and is a Spanish government entity of the Ministry of Culture & Sport founded in 1985. ICAA provided 10,000 Euros to *.Sub*'s production through Jossie Malis Álvarez's Madrid-based production company, Paramotion films.

https://infoicaa.mecd.es/CatalogoICAA/Peliculas/Detalle?Pelicula=144711

[xc] Of course, one must consider the labor and resource limitations of subtitling across many languages and the effect it can have on the meaning of content, especially for a small-budget production such as a short film. Subtitling translation concerns have been raised as international content crosses over linguistic boundaries on streaming platforms. For example, Netflix's most viewed series as of 2021, *Squid Game*, was called out for botched subtitling translations from Korean to English: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58787264

[xci] Dennison uses the informal term, "Europudding" to describe a television show or a film produced by and starring people from several different European nations and often considered to be lacking in coherence, authenticity, or individuality in "Debunking Neo-imperialism or Reaffirming Neo-colonialism? The Representation of Latin America in Recent Co-productions").

[xcii] While well-meaning in theory and practice, the rationale behind user labeling and tagging in the third order of information could be based on anything from a deep, personal knowledge of the film's production to an assumption about the film based on a viewer's opinion. See page 193 in David Weinberger's *Everything is Miscellaneous: The Power of the New Digital Disorder* for a discussion on user impulsiveness in the Semantic Web.

[xciii] Cortosdemetraje.com is an online database of short films from Spain and Latin America, and their mission is "crear el mejor catálogo web en español de "Cortometrajes online" (https://cortosdemetraje.com/).

CHAPTER TWO:

(TRANS)NATIONAL INQUIRIES OF IBERO-AMERICAN SHORT FILM:

A METADATA STUDY

> Wilkins divided the universe into forty categories or classes, which were then subdivisible into differences, subdivisible in turn into species. To each class he assigned a monosyllable of two letters; to each difference, a consonant; to each species, a vowel. For example, *de* means element; *deb*, the first of the elements, fire; a *deba*, a portion of the element of fire, a flame.
>
> - Jorge Luis Borges, "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins"

I. Attempting to taxonomize infinite digital potential

The epigraph of this chapter comes from Jorge Luis Borges's "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins," a brief text that describes the human instinct to create order, to organize, and to categorize as an attempt to understand the world around us that is always subject to the limitations of knowledge and technologies of the historical moment.[xciv] John Wilkins, a British scholar from the seventeenth century, undertook the Cartesian proposition of creating a new language to classify all quantities and categories to infinity. Just like Wilkins's attempt to create a universal reference code for all the objects and beings in the world in the form of print, the scope and complexity of encoded objects that exist online is equal parts essential to the user and absurd to assume unanimous accuracy.[xcv] As Web 2.0 brought the Third Order of Information further into the mainstream for consumer use and for crowd-sourced knowledge infrastructures like Wikipedia.org, the combination of digital methods *and* digital objects meant that previous confines of a material or print nature may have been removed, but new troubles emerged and persisted that reflect the limitations of human judgement and computational interpretation of subjective and constructed terminologies like that of the nation.

Decisions on where to organize digital objects and how to make them findable online is more than just a logistical conundrum, it is the basis of interpreting complex markers of identity like, in the case of this dissertation, national belonging or affiliation. In Web 2.0, the new, posthuman order of metadata for digital objects like short films created opportunities to untangle short films from institutional codes of national belonging through digital methods like user content creation, dissemination across platforms and devices, and folksonomies (user labeling and tagging).[xcvi] Unlike the analogue film era of (short) filmmaking, the physical barriers of both space and filming equipment began transitioning to lighter, more affordable production equipment and digital storage solutions like external hard drives and eventually cloud storage during the digital revolution of filmmaking that coincided with Web 2.0 years. With both cultural objects and the information age transitioning to digital spaces online, nearly every aspect of (short) filmmaking from financing to production to post-production could feasibly be conducted across distances and time zones. So, in an era of real-time collaboration and dissemination in a global cyberspace, do the previous doctrines of national cinemas apply?[xcvii] And if short films are still tightly bound to national institutions and narratives as Web 2.0 years advanced, how did the digital, participatory age of the Internet shift those alliances?

With the impending deluge of online content thanks to the participatory and networked technologies of Web 2.0 like uploading, sharing, streaming, and tagging, the conventional means of short film production and distribution through national and regional institutions in Latin America and Spain had an opportunity to break through the gatekeeping practices of distribution houses and film festival selections that often play into the prestige of national cultural products competing on the global stage (Chan 253). While this opportunity seemed ripe for the taking under the conditions of digital revolution on all sides of filmmaking and distribution, the deep

attachments between short film and national or regional institutions did not dissolve entirely but rather adapted to the digital space in the form of curated websites, databases, labeling, and cross-institutional promotion and marketing for film festivals (Díaz López 102-105). While those colonial and competitive dynamics between national film institutions might have changed how they interact online, the importance of national labeling perseveres for short films online despite the optimism for a global, post national, participatory web space at the time (Badal; Castillo).

As I have described throughout the dissertation thus far, the definition of metadata that I apply to my framework is not simply "data about data," but the *potential* of data about data (Pomerantz 21).[xcviii] In the context of metadata on the web, this potential means that during the lifespan of a digital object online, metadata can change, expand, or incorporate new meanings as different technologies become available or evolve.[xcix] This is the case with short films that reside in a database while applications and platforms develop around the Web in the meantime. For example, the capabilities developed during Web 2.0 to link and stream short films on social media platforms like Facebook or Instagram diffuses the short film across applications rather than solely relying on web traffic within the database itself. The inverse situation, which is embedding a short film that has been uploaded to YouTube or Vimeo within a database entry creates an opportunity to jump between platforms to discover the personal collections of filmmakers and their other projects.[c] This type of diffusion of digital objects in digital spaces through embedding, linking, and sharing across platforms became possible through new functions introduced during Web 2.0 like buttons labeled 'share' and 'like' which revolutionized how a short film exists, travels, gains popularity, and influences perspectives of national identity for viewers inside and outside the zeitgeist.[ci] [cii]

This chapter applies metadata annotation and GIS mapping to examine and demonstrate gradations of (trans)nationality from an online database of Ibero-American short films called CortosDeMetrajes.com, self-proclaimed as "La Web de Cortos Online."[ciii] The visual result of the national metadata study are three maps of short films produced during Web 2.0 years that shed light on more nuanced configurations of (trans)national affiliation. My operating hypothesis that I test in my metadata study is that Ibero-American short films become increasingly transnational as the Internet became more participatory and networked during Web 2.0, and that monolithic national labels are potentially superficial against expansions in short film metadata material and content. In addressing this hypothesis, my metadata study and visualization responds to questions which are attached to the broader goals of this dissertation: 1) What aligns a short film to a particular nation in the digital age? and 2) What do tensions between national labeling and (trans)national affiliations reveal about Ibero-American short films during Web 2.0? In the following sections of the chapter, I include a detailed description of my corpus and methodological design, contextualized observations during the data collection process, and images of the metadata maps with accompanying analysis that discusses (trans)national patterns and affiliations in Ibero-American online short film.

My efforts to pin down and contextualize expressions of national belonging in online short film are not meant to uncover a singular solution or to produce a comprehensive formula for future national labeling, but to expand the *potential* of metadata through annotation and visualization through mapping.[civ] This process of surfacing unexpressed metadata is meant to pluralize notions of belonging, territoriality, and the importance of production, content, and the reception of the film itself that is embedded within online metadata that often boils down to a singular national label. By demonstrating deeper potential of national metadata from an Ibero-American short film

database, patterns in transnational collaborations and movement in independent short filmmaking can come to light as a more nuanced understanding of how national labels still dominate the contemporary short film despite the novelties that the digital era of filmmaking and distribution brought forth. A biproduct of this tendency to nationalize short films for the sake of institutional organization, prestige, and archival memory is the continual influence of colonial power dynamics online between Latin America, the Global South and historically dominant cinema industries in the United States and Western Europe.

Especially when dealing with Ibero-American short films, there are longstanding colonial dynamics between Iberia and Latin America (as well as the United States and Latin America) that permeate cultural production like short film in the form of funding, prestige, and recognition on the global stage (Falicov "Film Funding Opportunities for Latin American Filmmakers"; Diestro-Dópido 108). So, if metadata expressions could visualize more national potential or pluralize the national affiliation of content and production within short films, colonial dynamics in filmmaking would not necessarily be resolved, but would be more apparent and contextualized for web users engaging with that content while browsing archives, databases, and curated collections online. For example, illustrating discrepancies in nationality between funding sources in Europe or the United States and film production labor and location in Latin America would not only create more access points of metadata in Latin America, but the specific values assigned to one nation or region within the same short film would help clarify colonial power structures that are baked into a singular national label.

Reflecting on Borges's "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins," the compulsion to categorize the world around us must evolve with the tools around us while simultaneously accepting the limitations inherent to the infrastructure. In the era of Web 2.0, metadata is an

essential component that tells the story of creation, curation, and reception of a short film. At times this story is straightforward and narrowly focused on a particular time and place, and, in other instances, the metadata context of a short film is indicative of a particular case or even a larger trend of short filmmaking during the Participatory Web era. Whichever way the metadata story unfolds, re-examining expressions of the national during the digitization of both short film and information during Web 2.0 forces users and stakeholders to recognize the contention between more global participation on the Web and how corporations and national institutions continue to harness and curate that participation at various levels including that of the national.[cv]

II. Mapping national metadata from CortosDeMetraje.com

My hypothesis, that national metadata labeling is potentially superficial and not indicative enough of an increasing transnationality of short films during Web 2.0 years, is the point of departure for my methodology of metadata annotation and mapping. Conducting a metadata study of a short film database is a project of considerable size since my data collection process required a close viewing of each film and cross-examination of the national affiliation of several production details.[cvi] In the interest of resources and consistency for the mapping portion of my methodology, I randomized samples of fifty short films for every five years during Web 2.0 (2005; 2010; 2015) and created spreadsheets to annotate the national metadata across seven different categories.[cvii] Those categories were: 1) The existing national label on CortosdeMetraje.com; 2) The national affiliation of the language(s) and dialect(s) used in the film; 3) The national origin(s) of the director; 4) The national origin(s) of the main actor(s) in the film; 5) The national source(s) of funding; 6) The national site(s) of film production; and 7) The national setting(s) during the film.

My rationale for choosing these seven different metadata aspects is based on investigating traits that communicate national affiliation within short film that are traceable to physical territory

(fictional settings, production sites), national cultural institutions (funding sources, existing national labels on the CDM database); constructs of national identity (origin of the director and protagonists in the film); and finally, language communities and belonging (languages used in the film).[cviii] In addition, these aspects of national affiliation stem from either metadata material or content– that is, material information about the short film's distribution or production qualities (where the film was made, who funded it, who made it, and how the film is labeled in distribution materials) versus the short film's narrative content (where the film is supposed to be set, who the protagonist portrays, and what languages are used during the film). By including both content and material national metadata within a corpus of Ibero-American short films during Web 2.0, my metadata study aims to create a more nuanced understanding of short film national affiliation to highlight potential alignments within a singular nation or, in contrast, uncover national disparities between short film content and material. Again, the purpose of this study is not to recreate a hierarchy of accurate national labeling in the digital landscape, but to approach contemporary Ibero-American short film and the question of nation from the material era that informed the beginnings of explosive digital content creation, networked diffusion, and the reworking of national cultural institutions from analogue to digital to online in tandem with user participation during Web 2.0.

Mapping and metadata analysis are methodologies that are typically housed in disciplines like Geography, Library Sciences, and Information Studies (Caquard and Fiset, "How Can We Map Stories?"). In film studies, where critical analysis is commonplace, methodologies that involve GIS are rarer but growing in importance as cinema research has taken a turn toward the spatial (Roberts and Hallam 4).[cix] In response to my broadest cultural question which is: " What aligns a short film to a particular nation in the digital age?" metadata analysis and mapping function

as Digital Humanities methodologies that examine larger data sets that human observation would interpret differently or less efficiently.[cx] Since Digital Humanities encourages the collaboration of humanistic and computational methods, I embrace this interdisciplinary research process as a response to the Third Order of Information that manages large amounts of data through a combination of both human judgement and computational reasoning. [cxi] [cxii]

Metadata and mapping are tightly intertwined theoretically and practically speaking. Jeffrey Pomerantz correlates these two concepts very clearly when he states, "Metadata is a map. Metadata is a means by which the complexity of an object is represented in a simpler form" (12). While granular detail behind the (trans)national metadata of a short film may be difficult to demonstrate on a broad scale, an exercise of cross-examination and annotation is useful to dig deeper into the story of metadata; and, in the case of this study, to specifically *locate* the metadata. So, if metadata is a type of map, then a map is also just a more visually recognizable form of metadata. This is because maps require metadata in the form of coordinates or locations that correspond with a particular feature, among many other possible types of spatial-temporal information. National and transnational affiliation of short films across different features of metadata is befitting of a global map programmed through GIS software, which also made significant technological gains during Web 2.0 years with the development of geotagging, open-source mapping, and *neography* which is when individuals make maps for their own use (Oxley 43-44).[cxiii] The co-evolution of digital filmmaking and participative web technologies are not coincidental for they are tightly connected, and short film is often an experimental expression of timely cultural and technological trends that reflect this interdependency.

While designing my data collection strategy, I needed to anticipate how to collect pluralized national metadata across seven different aspects and how to best format that data to

program mapping software. The process of creating a nuanced and pluralized version of metadata had its challenges that required modification of data input in my spreadsheets, significant troubleshooting with the GIS software, and finally, coming up with a simple hack to coax the GIS software into mapping messy data. One of the most interesting roadblocks that arose from programming a highly pluralistic map of national affiliation was the fact that metadata input and visualization is reliant on clean and consistent references. [cxiv] By plotting the three case studies that appear throughout this dissertation, *.Sub* (dir. Jossie Malis Álvarez, 2013) *Hyper-Reality* (dir. Keichii Matsuda, 2016), and *Reality 2.0* (dir. Víctor Orozco, 2012), I was able to test different data collection configurations and in Google's MyMaps GIS software to illustrate examples of transnational or binational Ibero-American short films that largely defy the conventions of national short film production and distribution.

For example, the short film *.Sub* features nine languages throughout the film, and annotating national affiliations for those languages would not be readable for a map if all of the items were in the same cell separated by commas or spaces. To communicate multiple locations that connect back to the same short film to the GIS tool, I created another short film entry for each additional nation for the 'Language' attribute (Image 2.1). For the map viewers to understand that multiple pins on the map might connect back to the same film, I would label the title as *.Sub* 1, *.Sub* 2, and so forth. When I would create a new row for the same short film in my excel spreadsheet, I was careful not to duplicate labeling across the other features to skew the data representation by creating more pinpoints on the map. Another example is *Hyper-Reality* which is labeled as a Colombian film online but was produced between two places: Medellín, Colombia and London, United Kingdom. Therefore, I would not repeat the input, 'Colombia' under the

'online label' feature when creating another row to accommodate the multiplicity of locations in another feature. [cxv]

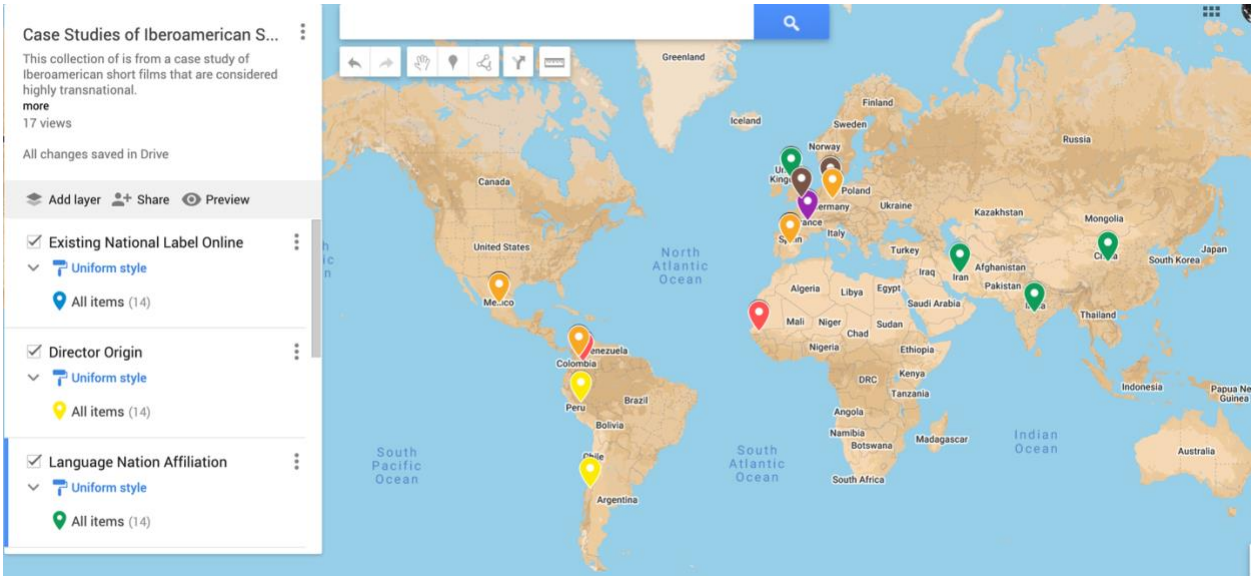

Image 2.1: Layered map of national metadata of 3 case studies: .Sub, Hyper-Reality & Reality 2.0 [cxvi]

As I describe in detail in Chapter One and in Chapter Three, my three case study films are considered transnational or binational because of both how they are produced, and the films' content depict posthuman digital citizenship that is both reliant on national territory and globalized influence through technologies. From the standpoint of my metadata collection and spreadsheet, *.Sub*, *Hyper-Reality*, and *Reality 2.0* still hold up as binational and transnational short films. When plotting this metadata on a map and color-coordinating the layers by their attribute of national affiliation, there are clues as to why these short films were labeled as they were online and what features are left out (Image 2.1). On the map of case studies that are featured in Image 2.2, each short film is pluralized across nations and continents in different ways. For example, the green plots across Asia signify the national affiliations of the languages used in the short film which is about immigration and live subtitling. The yellow plot points in Chile and Peru point back to the director, Jossie Malis Álvarez's bi-national origin which he describes in his biography online.

While these two attributes speak to different expressions of national affiliation that stem from content and material metadata, they still connect back to just one short film and stand in contrast to its existing label online (in blue) which is the first layer of data that is buried under the other plot points in Spain (Image 2.1).

With the three case study films, their international expansiveness was due in large part to the movements and migrations of the directors themselves, and the stories that they tell between these national spaces. Víctor Orozco's migration to Germany from Mexico implicates his film as a binational production between these two countries while funded by German institutions. *Hyper-Reality* director, Keiichi Matsuda's trips to Medellín, Colombia resulted in his collaboration with the production company, *Fractal Media*, on site to film the live-action scenes while the post-production animation took place in his London residence. Jossie Malis Álvarez, director of *.Sub*, describes his origins as Peruvian-Chilean in his biographies online, and has since immigrated to Mallorca, Spain before securing financial backing from Spain and producing a short film in Madrid about immigrants in Europe. Despite their international expansiveness on the map, the existing national labels of these three short films online tie back to either the filming location or the funding source despite the movement and migration of the people who made these stories possible like the national affiliation of the directors, protagonists, and the languages they use in the film. Little did I know at the time that my larger dataset from CortosdeMetraje.com would indicate largely the same patterns of nationalized production via funding and filming location versus globalized or transnational narratives through the movement of actors, the languages they speak, and the simulation of fictional or culturally homogenized settings.

In the following sections, I describe the CortosDeMetraje database as a website and my rationale for mining and annotating this corpus. Through some specific examples of short films on

the site, I will describe how I collected and annotated more national metadata for short films on these databases during Web 2.0 years (2005, 2010, 2015). I will also include examples of maps that I programmed with the samples of annotated short film national metadata. These maps are meant to be a useful visualization of (trans)national belonging based off more nuanced metadata including the nationality of funding sources and production location(s), the national origin of the director and principal actor, the setting of the film, and the spoken language(s) in the film. In my concluding remarks, I analyze the maps and corresponding data to address the response to my initial hypothesis which is that Ibero-American short films become less tethered to national institutions and narratives as digital filmmaking and Internet technologies evolved during Web 2.0.

III. Defining the corpus and its limitations: CortosdeMetraje.com

Cortos De Metraje: La Web de Cortos Online is a plentiful database of films from Spain and Latin America that features live-action and animated short films uploaded by users and filmmakers and that have won awards at festivals and/or achieved online popularity through likes, comments, and sharing. On the main page of the website, a few lines describe the goal of the database which is "to create the best web catalogue in Spanish of online short films."[cxvii] Their mission is ambitious, and their presentation is clearly derived from a strong attention to metadata and user participation.[cxviii] I selected the CortosDeMetraje.com database (hereafter referred to as CDM) as a corpus for its specificity toward aggregating Ibero-American short films online and its wielding of quintessential Web 2.0 technologies to promote participation and access through a variety of tools and features.[cxix]

CDM was launched during Web 2.0 (circa 2009) and originally functioned as a free, member-driven site for short filmmakers, actors, and producers to interact on a chat forum in

addition to a blog that was managed by the webmaster at the time. As the website transitioned from a networking forum to a short film database around 2012, CDM began amassing short films on its website that were accessible through multiple search functions that target short film metadata such as the national label, year of release, genre keywords, and other search descriptors like titles, actors, and directors that users can type into a search box to yield results. Compared to other short film databases that feature Spanish-language short films for language learners (www.FreeSpanishShorts.com) or genre-specific short films (www.MoebiusAnimacion.com), CDM is a large database of varied short films with consistent user traffic from both Spain and parts of Latin America (Image 2.3). Despite its bias towards Spain, which I will discuss further in this section, the CDM database is an apt case study for examining how, despite the new Web 2.0 technologies in the Third Order of Information, national labeling of digital cultural objects like short film perpetuates tendencies that are inherited from previous eras of nationalized cultural production between Spain, Latin America, and other dominant cinema industries (The United States, United Kingdom, and France). The fact that CDM's content during 2004-2015 is heavily Spain-centered, Eurocentric, and Anglophone while clearly targeting Ibero-American and Hispanophone audiences from across the globe speaks to the continual biases of aggregation, curation, and presentation of digital objects (online shorts) in a digital space.[cxx]

From a metadata standpoint, one of the most compelling features of the site is an open invitation for users to upload their own short films by declaring the importance of truly 'independent' filmmaking. On this section of the site, a message from the webmaster reassures amateur short filmmakers: "On many occasions, independent works are marked by a strong intimist and experimental component, more than of high production values, and these are the shorts that frequently transmit a message in a more direct way."[cxxi] With the only caveat being that the

film cannot contain pornography, the open form is an opportunity for independent users to upload their content and categorize the video with a free-response format rather than drop-down menus with pre-programmed options. The sole input item that requires a selection menu is for 'genre,' yet there are over fifty options with no limitation on how many genres can be selected simultaneously. As I will describe in more detail later, the invitation for users themselves to input and label metadata short films creates a sense of community investment in addition to powerful links within the database as well as out to other platforms on the Web, but there are errors and misnomers that occur when users input metadata based on a varying degree of knowledge or a subjective observation about the film itself.

A prime example of Web 2.0 user participation for (erroneous) metadata labeling and access is a word cloud on the front page of CDM comprised of user-input tags about the films. Word clouds, or in the case of CDM, *la nube* is a clear example of a folksonomy, which is a Web 2.0 participation feature in which users themselves create tags that are collectively gathered and illustrated in a common visualization to promote searchability and accessibility by a particular keyword (Peters and Becker).[cxxii] On *la nube*, tags that feature larger font indicate a greater number of films within that category, and smaller font indicates that fewer short films are tagged with that label.[cxxiii] Users can click on a particular tag in *la nube* and launch a search result page that presents all the short films that have been labeled by that tag despite the variation in other categories like genre, year, subtitles, etc. The existing word cloud collections in CDM of interest to this dissertation deal with attributes of national belonging like 'Nationality,' 'Language,' and 'Subtitles' (see Image 2.2). I will briefly analyze how users are labeling tags in these collections because these attributes came into play as I mined and annotated existing metadata in my samples from 2005, 2010, and 2015.

Image 2.2: [Screenshot of "La Nube" categories](): "Nationality, Language, Subtitles." Date: August 3, 2021.[cxxiv]

In Image 2.2, the three different collections of user-created tags are a helpful place to begin to understand the national and linguistic distribution of short films on the CDM database which is continually updated. For example, in the cloud collection labeled 'Nationality,' the tags of España (Spain), Estados Unidos (United States), México (Mexico), Reino Unido (United Kingdom), Francia (France), and Argentina appear in noticeably larger font than countries like Serbia or Turkia (Turkey). As CDM declares itself an Ibero-American database that is geared toward Hispanophone audiences, the prominence of national labels outside of Iberia and Latin America may seem surprising, but when considering the historical dominance of France, the United Kingdom, and the United States in the cinema industry, there are colonial implications at work in the database. While this bias is concerning considering the Spanish-speaking target audiences, the Ibero-American aims of the database against the small amount of (Hispanophone) nation tags from Latin America, I am reminded that the webmaster and the team behind CDM cannot be entirely to

blame for the overall prejudice of national content since users themselves are responsible for most of the short film uploads, metadata labeling, and sharing.

In Image 2.2, the colonial bias continues in the two other cloud collections of 'Idioma' (Language) and 'Subtítulos' (Subtitles) that highlight colonial languages found in Western Europe, North America, Iberia, and Latin America: Spanish, Catalán, Portuguese, English, and French. While the languages of available subtitles are more pluralized and feature stronger secondary categories like Chinese, Turkish, Polish, and Arabic, there are key differences in affiliating nationality to post-production features like subtitling versus the languages that are used in the film through signage, written text or spoken by the characters. Attaching national affiliation to available subtitles suggests that there are target audiences in different language groups who will enjoy access to the short films who may not otherwise be able to understand or hear the dialogue.[cxxv] While available subtitling does indicate metadata potential in how a short film reaches audiences, spoken languages in the film are stronger national affiliations when associating a short film's content potential national narratives.

The reliance of users to tag and label short films is a successful participative feature from Web 2.0, yet there are risks and trepidations of accuracy that arise and are exemplified in the collections of word clouds in Image 2.2.[cxxvi] By looking more closely at the category of 'Nationality,' the cloud reveals tags that appear more than once due to either spelling errors or labeling discrepancies between Spanish and/or other languages. For example, 'Singapur' and 'Singapore'; 'Lithuania' and 'Lituania,' 'Alemania' (Germany) and 'República Federal Alemana'. Another mislabeling incident that occurs is by tagging the national descriptor rather than the name of the country (i.e., 'Reino Unido' and 'Inglés'). While these misnomers are problematic from the perspective of search and organization, there are unique advantages to messy metadata, like

potential duplications across separate searches. At the end of David Weinberger's chapter titled "Messiness as a Virtue," he assures Web users in the Third Order of Information: "Every triple, every playlist, every hyperlink adds value to the mess. None diminishes that value because none actually cleans up the mess, just as uttering sentences does not use up language" (198). In other words, even though users themselves cannot be reliant to input accurate, consistent, and clean metadata, the overall effect of miscellany and duplication has benefits during Web 2.0 in that more objects can be more findable in more places and across languages, even if those are the technically in the 'wrong' places in a database.[cxxvii]

The metadata from the Word Cloud collections on the CDM site is visually appealing to the user and functional for search purposes, yet there are no apparent statistics from the database managers themselves aside from the ticker on the main page showing the total number of shorts in the collection. Thankfully, I was able to attain the excel spreadsheets of the CDM database between 2004-2015 from the director of communications for the site, Alejandro Ruiz. The ODS bases its statistics from a total of 2665 short films as of March 2021.[cxxviii] The statistics of the database from 2004-2015 are heavily biased towards Spain, comprising over 80% of the national labeling of the 2665 shorts. In addition, 80% of the shorts feature spoken Spanish, including shorts that feature Spanish among other languages, although most popularly alongside English (45 shorts). English is, in fact, the most dominant subtitling language in 33% of shorts on the database although not always a sole subtitling option as English appears amongst other subtitling languages (most commonly with Spanish and/or French). While most shorts on the CDM database sample do not feature subtitling (1,572 films), only 2 films are noted as being without spoken dialogue, which could rule out a lack of subtitling that corresponds with a lack of dialogue or simply point to

another metadata misnomer by interpreting shorts without dialogue as shorts without subtitles by default.

Despite significant bias towards western and colonial languages on CDM, one encouraging statistic revealed that the total amount of short films in the database increased consistently between 2004 and 2015. From just 80 uploaded shorts in 2004 to over 400 in 2015, the growing corpus of short films on CDM indicates growth in user site traffic as well as more prolific short filmmaking as digital filming technologies became more available, less expensive, and easier to share as Web 2.0 features evolved (del Puy Alvarado 33). Another explanation of this growth in the overall corpus is the possibility that users upload more current films rather than retro-inputting short films from previous years.[cxxix] In the growing overall corpus of the CDM database during this decade, however, the increase in shorts labeled 'Spain' are by far the most plentiful comprising 72 of the 85 shorts from 2005, and 310 of the 400 shorts from 2015. Immediately trailing Spain is the United States, comprising 135 of the total shorts from the 2005-2015 decade followed by Mexico at 70, Argentina at 63, the United Kingdom at 40, and Colombia at 18 short films. These statistics indicate bias within CDM that goes further than Spain in that the corpus is not entirely oriented toward Ibero-American national territories but rather towards historically dominant cinema industries from Europe, North America and Latin America that are perpetuated on "la Web de Cortos online."[cxxx]

One potential conclusion to draw from the disproportionately Spanish corpus from a user standpoint is the relationship between the target audience (Hispanophone users from Spain and Latin America) and location of users that regularly access the database. A SimilarWeb.com snapshot of CDM's website analytics from July 2021 (Image 2.3) shows that most of the user traffic comes from IP addresses based in Spain (34.14%). Not far behind Spain is web traffic from

Mexico (22.5%), followed by Argentina (8.7%), Colombia (6.53%), and Chile (4.74%) in the single digit percentiles. The statistics from the overall representation of short films on CDM (2004-2015) are indeed reflected in the national affiliation of user traffic except for the United States and the United Kingdom which are among the most plentiful nationalities of short films on the database. Mexico, Colombia, and Argentina are among the top national labels for short films on CDM (although far fewer than Spain and the United States), and the reflection of user traffic from these nations points to the possibility that these users are either uploading shorts themselves or are visiting the site in search of short films from their nation, region, or in their common language of Spanish.

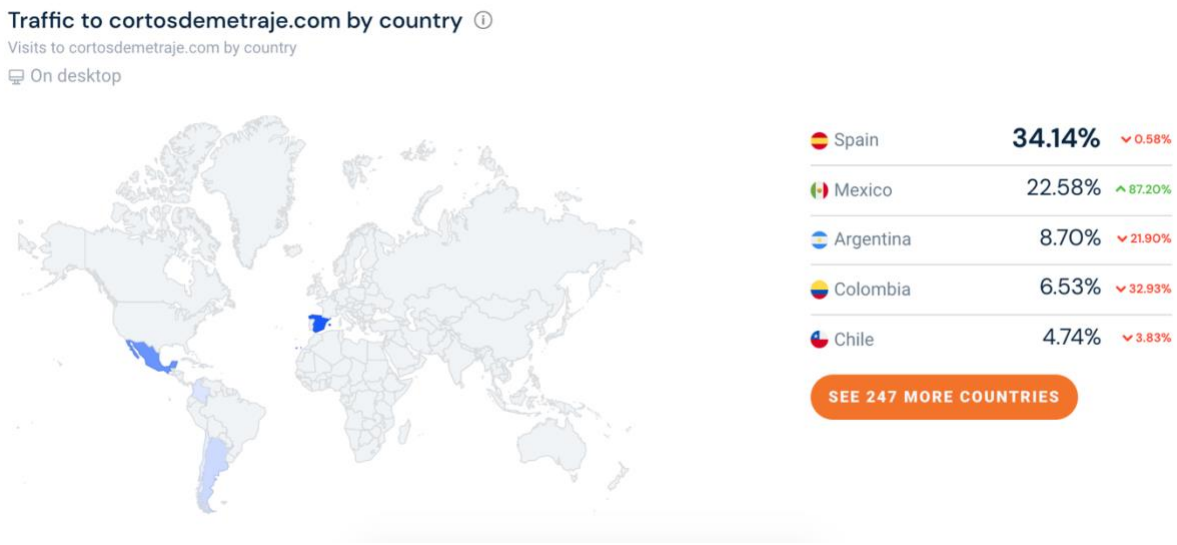

Image 2.3: Web Traffic statistics by nation to CDM, SimilarWeb.com snapshot from July 2021

A closer look at the CDM traffic source analytics reveals that approximately 85% of users are landing on the site through search, and 100% organic search at that (Image 2.4).[cxxxi] Since most website users do not look beyond the first page of search results, we can assume that CDM appears among the top search results.[cxxxii] In order to test this assumption, I used a private browsing window and searched the keyword, 'cortometraje' on Google's search engine. CortosDeMetraje.com appeared as the fourth search result after a Wikipedia.org article on 'cortometrajes' and two online

Spanish dictionary entries for 'cortometraje.'[cxxxiii] As the first database of shorts to appear on a search engine for such a common keyword as 'cortometraje,' CDM has a powerful impact for Hispanophone web users who are looking for short films through search engines. Ironically, however, the promises and realities of an Ibero-American short film database that is based in Spain and Western Europe reveal that CDM is not fulfilling its mission of facilitating a Hispanic or Ibero-American content source because it, in fact, plays host to a disproportionate number of short films from either Spain or majority Anglophone nations like the United States and the United Kingdom. So, while it is true that CDM attracts and hosts users, audiences, and short films from Hispanophone Iberia and Latin America, the outlying factor is the one-way street of French and Anglophone content in their site statistics against the absence of user traffic from those nations in the site's analytics.[cxxxiv]

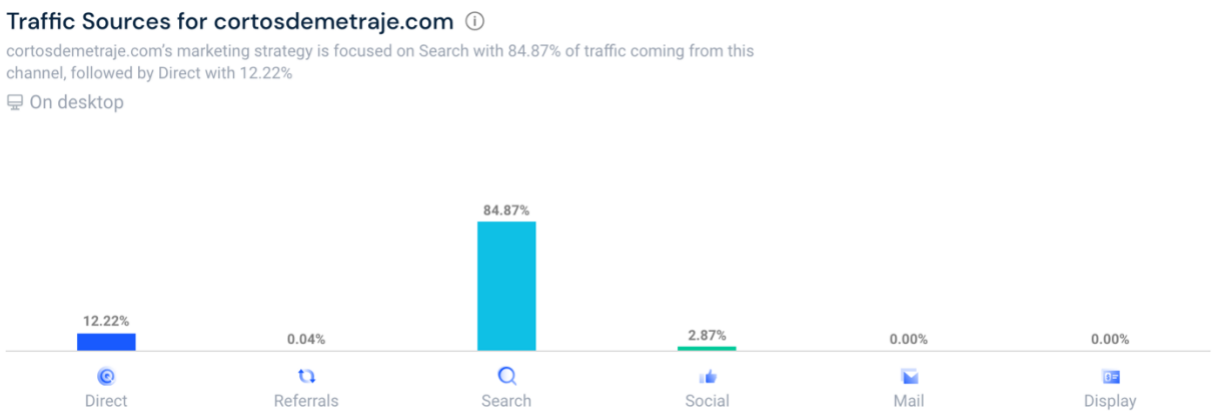

Image 2.4: Source of User Traffic to CDM, SimilarWeb.com snapshot from July 2021

To summarize my analysis of the CDM corpus, I recognize the bias of an Ibero-American online short film database towards Spanish, European, and Anglophone national cinema as the very impetus of my study to begin with: that the monolithic national labeling of online short films in the digital age is persistent and possibly superficial to the detriment of filmmakers, production

teams, and potential audiences as well.[cxxxv] One simple explanation of CDM's bias is the territorial location of the website operations which are based in Spain and historically tied to the Spanish short film industry in its former life as a professional forum. Alternatively, superficial, or erroneous national metadata could also explain a portion of the bias toward Spain, as user labeling may or may not consider additional features of national affiliation like the director's origin, the funding source, the filming location, and the nationality of the protagonist, for example.

True to form during the Third Order of Information, CDM is idealistic in its mission and disorderly in its presentation since the users are taking short film distribution into their own hands by uploading and labeling the metadata rather than relying on regional or national distributors to select and disseminate shorts to the festival circuit.[cxxxvi] CDM is a successful website in its volume and variety of shorts, consistent growth, and appeal to Hispanophone user traffic on search engines, yet the glaring absence of short films from outside of Western European and (neo)colonial Anglophone nations raises questions about how user-curated databases like CDM aim for and promise more web presence from the Global South and Hispanophone nations, but end up hosting the usual suspects of dominant national film industries during an era of digital cultural production that was supposed to be even more globally accessible and participative. All the data about the corpus that I have described thus far is dependent on the existing national labels and language metadata on the CDM database that may or may not represent the deeper contexts of national affiliation that occur through production details and narrative constructs. In the next section, I describe my data collection process from CDM and how the process of annotating national metadata from short films revealed disparities between national affiliation of content and production realities during Web 2.0 years (2005-2015).

IV. Data collection observations from CDM

A brief technical explanation of my data collection precedes a few specific examples of Ibero-American short films that demonstrate national metadata pluralization across my seven categories of national affiliation. Across three different spreadsheets of randomized samples (50 short films from the years 2005, 2010, and 2015), I mined the CDM database using the filter for 'Año'/'Year' while sorting the results by 'Título'/'Title' which appeared alphabetically. Within each entry that I mined on CDM, a box titled 'Ficha del video' listed the available metadata including the title, category, genre, duration, year, director's name, script-writers name, the main actors' names, the national label of the short, the spoken languages in the film, and the available subtitles.[cxxxvii] In my data collection spreadsheet, I included the original metadata from CDM for the short film category, genre, year, subtitling, and national label. The reason for keeping this original metadata from the database was to potentially correlate other variables with my annotated (trans)national metadata.[cxxxviii] After watching the film and cross-checking national affiliations across my seven features, I would record the data in the spreadsheet, at times having to create new inputs to record pluralized national metadata. In the 'notes' column of my spreadsheet, I described any curious or outlying details that I noticed about the film dealing with national affiliation and identity.[cxxxix]

As I discussed in the Introduction and Chapter One, short films have historically functioned as powerful national narratives for local and global audiences, and the close alignment of narrative content and production metadata in a short film strengthens the translation of national messaging on the screen. Allow me to provide a few examples of national metadata disparities that create tension with how short films are labeled by nation on CDM. I will first discuss an example of

national identity tension within Spain, and then broaden my scope to transnational dynamics between Latin America, Spain, and the United States.

El encendador cuántico (2015) is an example of a short film that is heavily aligned with the northeastern regional territory of Spain (Cataluña) through both content (languages spoken, protagonists, fictional setting) and production (director's origin, funding sources, filming location), but is it accurately labeled as 'Spain' on the CDM database? And, as CDM is dependent on user-uploading and tagging, we must consider the likely possibility that the filmmaker or user who submitted this short film decided to label this film as 'Spain' rather than 'Cataluña' as we saw examples of national tags and variations in the Word Cloud collections. In this case, questioning a broader national affiliation is pertinent considering Cataluña's separatist history with Spain as a national entity.[cxl] For this reason, I chose to aggregate my mapping points from the most specific point of knowledge which was, in the case of *El encendedor cuántico*, at the level of the region rather than the national or transnational.[cxli]

Within Spain as a national construct, regionalisms are reliant on their autonomous media and cultural industries produced in the dominant language by and for their language minority populations such as short film distributors in the Basque Country, Galicia, and Cataluña. While this tendency is meant to enforce diversity and difference within the national space, there are interests at work in aligning with the internationally recognized nation state.[cxlii] Mining the national metadata content of a short film like *El encendador cuántico* was critically and infrastructurally effective for my study because the process unpacked metadata that tells a deeper story about the cultural and linguistic specificities that lie beneath a monolithic national label. Although aggregating metadata across seven features did not reveal the film to be highly transnational, it specified the metadata potential of a short film that is simply labeled as 'Spain' on CDM. While

El encendedor cuántico from 2015 demonstrates how metadata annotation and mapping interrogates short film national belonging within Spain, more examples from 2005, 2010 and 2015 exemplify how my data collection unveiled short film production and content disparities between Spain and Latin America.

An example of national content and production metadata dissonance between Mexico, The United States, and Spain is a 2010 short film titled *Cuchillo, McGregor y el Vasco* (dir. David Zabala and Paul Urkijo Alijo).[cxliii] On CDM, the genre keywords for *Cuchillo, McGregor y el Vasco* are 'Western, Science-Fiction, Comedy, Drama,' and the descriptive summary indicates the narrative setting of the film which is near the border of Mexico and the United States.[cxliv] *Cuchillo, McGregor y el Vasco* is a fascinating example of a split in metadata content and material because, like several classic spaghetti-westerns, it simulates the Mexican border with the United States in its narrative content yet is filmed in Spain at a site that is meant to resemble the desert in Northern Mexico.[cxlv] The three bandits in the short film, Cuchillo Sánchez, Patxi (el Vasco), and the ruthless outlaw McGregor, are meant to be from different countries and actively discuss this as a point of rivalry. Patxi emigrated to Mexico from the Basque Country, Cuchillo himself is Mexican, and McGregor comes from 'el Norte' which means the United States (north of the Mexican border).[cxlvi]

In the interest of pluralizing national metadata across content and production, the national label of 'Spain' on CDM for *Cuchillo, McGregor y el Vasco* is, in fact, much more complex than it seems, and, again, not because of a transnational co-production which involves travel or financing from abroad. Instead, this short film is localized within La Rioja, Spain in its production, yet is narratively simulating an encounter between three nationalities in a replicated space of contention like the highly politicized borderlands between the U.S. and Mexico.[cxlvii] To make territorial matters even more interesting, the ending of the short film depicts of a flying saucer that

approaches the three characters and abducts McGregor, thereby eliminating Cuchillo's sworn enemy and explaining the disappearance of Paxti's sheep which he had previously pinned on McGregor.[cxlviii cxlix]

The breach between the national affiliation of narrative content and the production realities behind *Cuchillo, McGregor y el Vasco* is an example of how colonial dynamics between Spain, Mexico, and the United States are reimagined through short filmmaking in the digital age. By engaging short film tropes like parody, irony, generic mashups, and twist endings (Felando 2013), *Cuchillo, McGregor y el Vasco* leans on the transnational context of spaghetti westerns by filming in Spain with Spanish financing yet simulating a setting in the borderlands of Mexico and the United States. Furthermore, the co-existence and rivalry of Spanish, Mexican and American characters meant that the casting behind the roles required a Spaniard to pass as a 'McGregor' which, to an Anglophone viewer, would be immediately noticeable through the spoken dialogue.

Another example a short film with national metadata disparities between the United States and Latin America from my data collection and is titled *El SMS – un cortometraje de Coca-Cola* (2015). A handful of short films from my 2015 sample blurred the boundaries between advertisement and short film since the visual narrative was ultimately meant to highlight a product. In the case of *El SMS*, the product on showcase was an ice-cold bottle of Coca-Cola which was mentioned and displayed several times throughout the 8-minute short. The global commercial interests at hand are intensified when examining more closely how different features of national metadata interact in combination with the forthcoming Rio de Janeiro Summer Olympic Games in 2016. As a film that was sponsored by a global corporation (Coca-Cola), produced in Los Angeles, California with Brazilian and Lusophone actors and fictionally set in an upper-middle class neighborhood in Brazil, *El SMS* effectively simulates a Brazilian environment within the United

States to advertise a commercial product within an uplifting narrative about friendship, love, and acceptance under the social media hashtag #AmigodeVerdad.[cl] Considering the international consumer base of a worldwide event like the Olympics as well as Brazil's growing economic prowess in the early 2010s, the binational affiliations of *El SMS* demonstrate how national narratives do not have to be solely tethered to one nation to portray a specific representation of place, identity, and belonging to its own citizens. In the case of *El SMS,* American productions and corporate motivations are selling the idealizations of Brazilian-ness back to Brazilians themselves with the additional component of Coca-Cola product placement.[cli]

Unlike the low-budget production and aesthetics of *Cuchillo, McGregor and El Vasco* and most independent short films on the CDM database, *El SMS* is a sponsored production with a fictional narrative and a commercial objective which is to associate the Coca-Cola brand with universally relatable concepts like friendship, generosity, and young queer love to a target audience of Brazilian viewers. The commercial aspect of *El SMS* has a clear motivation in casting young Brazilians, presenting a story in Portuguese (with Spanish subtitles), and depicting a fictional setting that recreates an idealization of Latin American colonial architecture and design like colorful buildings with ornate moldings and entranceways, balconies and alleyways adorned with flower boxes and hanging plants, and festive decorations draped over a cobblestone plaza.[clii] By simulating a Brazilian urban environment and casting Brazilian actors, Coca-Cola's short film, *El SMS* plays on national affiliation through a locatable consumer base rather than as a cultural export meant for film festival audiences and global recognition. Expanding the national metadata in this film tells a binational story that poses as Brazilian for actors, language-use, and the plot's setting, yet is labeled on CDM as short film from the United States which is consistent in the national metadata for the origin of the director, the funding source, and the production site in Los Angeles.

One last example of national metadata disparity between Latin America and Spain is a short film from my 2005 data collection titled *El cojonudo.* This 19-minute dark comedy is labeled as a Uruguayan film on CDM and presents a different dynamic between Latin America and Spain from the other examples I described. The short film is produced and funded entirely in Uruguay with a Uruguayan cast, but the main character (played by a Uruguayan) is a Spanish bank robber who is mythically known as 'El Cojonudo.'[cliii] During the film's action, there is a noticeable difference in the audio quality when El Cojonudo speaks in a Castilian accent, which is due to the post-production dubbing of a Spanish voice actor indicated in the credits. Since el Cojonudo robs from the Uruguayan banks and is eventually captured, tortured, and killed by a deranged couple in the countryside, the revenge plot suggests that the choice of a Spanish character is not random and could symbolize poetic justice for a historical reputation of colonialism and exploitative economic practices (Dennison 7).

Across the examples of short films that I have described from my CDM data collection, the expansion of national metadata was a productive exercise in unpacking how short films can contain international or transnational dynamics while continuing to operate as national products online. While each short film represents different types of tensions between national production and content, the commonality across them is that their online labels on CDM align with three factors of production: the funding source, the director's origin, and the production site. In other words, the disparities between plural national metadata and monolithic national labeling reside within the short films' fictional content and the narrative construction of elsewhere.

V. Analysis of mapped CDM samples (2005, 2010, 2015)

Mapping short film national metadata on Google's MyMaps software presented its challenges especially since my objective was to document and illustrate a plurality of locations

across several features of national affiliation. However, once I was able to coax the software to accept my data input and plot points, the familiar format and scale of a world map allowed for the reimagination of national metadata as it expressed different aspects of short filmmaking and narrative content. As I previously described, I programmed one map per randomized sample for the years 2005, 2010 and 2015. Within each map, I created a new color-coded layer for each of the data collection columns that indicated a national location. In the maps pictured below, the national metadata is color coded uniformly as the following: 1) the CDM online label as blue; 2) language affiliation as green; 3) director's origin as red; 4) actor's origin as orange; 5) funding source as purple; 6) production location as yellow; 7) the film's setting as gray.[cliv]

Image 2.5: 2005 Sample from CDM (Online Label = Blue; Language = Green; Director Origin = Red; Actor = Orange; Funding = Purple; Production location = Yellow; Setting = Gray)[clv]

Image 2.6: 2010 Sample from CDM (Online Label = Blue; Language = Green; Director Origin = Red; Actor = Orange; Funding = Purple; Production location = Yellow; Setting = Gray)[clvi]

Image 2.7: 2015 Sample from CDM (Online Label = Blue; Language = Green; Director Origin = Red; Actor = Orange; Funding = Purple; Production location = Yellow; Setting = Gray)[clvii]

An initial comparison of the colored pins across the three maps (Images 2.5, 2.6, and 2.7) indicates that short film national metadata became more globally expansive between 2005 and 2015 but are not significantly more international across *all* types of national metadata. Since blue pins indicate the online national label on CDM and are the first layer after the base map, the prevalence of blue pins indicates that there is less diversion from the original national label

provided by the website since all layers (and colors) become hidden underneath the same plot. In the 2005 selection, there are 9 blue pins whereas in 2010 there are none. A closer look at the 2015 dataset reveals that, despite the 5 blue pins on the map, just 1 of the blue pins is a true indication of international difference since the other 4 pins are regional clarifications within a national space (i.e., an online label of 'Canada' with funding from Montreal and the film production in Vancouver). After factoring in the regional clarifications from 2015, the maps demonstrate that short film national metadata on CDM *does* become more globally expansive as Web 2.0 years progress.

There are more specific questions to explore from these maps like: Are there patterns of transnational production or narration within these selections of short film national metadata? What do these national discrepancies and uniformities generate about Ibero-American short films during Web 2.0? While the 2005 map shows a majority alignment with short film production and narrative content with the existing online label on CDM, the maps from 2010 and 2015 are more pluralized albeit in different aspects. The first aspect I cross examine is the online label with the funding source, which is typically the most common response when interrogating short film national belonging. Except for two films in 2010, funding origins generally *do* align with short film national labels and could be combined with additional funding from another institutional source that is almost always within the same nation.[clviii] Also in strong concordance with the existing national labels on CDM is the territorial location of short film production. So, both funding sources and production locations are heavily tied to the national labeling of short films on CDM across Web 2.0 years.

A closer look at the 2010 and 2015 maps do indicate, however, that the most divergent factors from the given national label of a short film has to do with the national identity of the

actors, the languages that are spoken during the film, and, to a lesser degree, the fictional settings of the shorts. As I discussed earlier with examples like *Cuchillo, McGregor y el Vasco* and *El SMS*, actors from the Global South (ie: Mexico and Brazil) in colonizing nations like the United States and Spain cooperate in a filmic simulation of elsewhere or in a dialogue set between national spaces. As a result, the actors' languages, accents, and physical features either complicate the national narrative of a short film or reimagine another nation altogether. What is interesting is that the prevalence of foreign actors does not tend to go both ways. While there is a prevalence of actors in films labeled 'Spain,' who were born outside of Spain and speak languages other than Spanish, there is not, however, hardly any cases within my samples in which a Spaniard or a North American actor appears in a short film that was produced in the Global South.[clix]

In conjunction with the presence of international actors, languages, and fictional settings is the appearance of shorts with (trans)national affiliations in Asia and Australia in the later years of the dataset (2010, 2015). Keeping in mind that CDM allows user uploading and labeling, there are instances of short films from the datasets that were thoroughly Chinese or Australian and are most likely remaining in the database because of their available subtitling in Spanish or English. There were, however, examples of shorts that engaged narratively with nations in Asia like Russia and Japan to varying degrees of authenticity. Like *El SMS* and *Cuchillo, McGregor y el Vasco*, the national settings in these short films are recreated through simulating landscapes and decorated interior settings enlivened by actors and languages that drive home national affiliation.

For example, two short films affiliate with Japan albeit through the recreation of Japanese interior aesthetics, actors, and language use. The short film, *Bondage* (2010) is set in Japan and uses Japanese actors who speak in Japanese yet was directed by a Spaniard with funding from Spain. Unlike *Les (El Bosque)* whose director is a Russian national representing a Spanish-Soviet

Union love story, the Spanish director's motivation to recreate an erotic thriller about Japanese bondage techniques was to pay tribute to the Japanese photographer, Nuboyushi Arashi.[clx] One more example from 2015 is a commercial short film shot for *Vogue España* called *La misma piel* that recreates a female-centered, high-fashion Tarantinesque aesthetic that recalls his 2003 box-office hit, *Kill Bill*.[clxi] While *La misma piel* was produced, funded, and directed in Spain for the purpose of promoting luxury apparel, the setting simulates Japan through Japanese interior design like sliding wooden doors, minimalist décor, and bamboo plants. One of the main actresses, who speaks a few lines of dialogue in Japanese, is originally from China, but was cast as a Japanese infidel playing opposite the Spanish femme fatale. While these two short films simulate a Japanese setting from Spain and with Spanish funding, there is a consistent split between where a film is created and where the narrative takes place. That is, the production details align most consistently with the national label, but the additional national metadata signaling other nations outside of Ibero-America stems from the film's narrative content like the fictional setting, actors, and spoken languages.[clxii]

Through metadata annotation and the maps that resulted from the aggregated data at the national level, I was able to more broadly understand which features consistently determine the national label of a short film during Web 2.0 which is the nationality of the funding source(s) and where the film was produced. In addition, these elements were almost always aligned within the same nation which strengthens the conclusion that short films nominally tied to a particular nation through material metadata rather than national affiliations within a film's narrative content. Another conclusion about short film national metadata that is notable across the three maps is that short films did indeed become more transnational as the years progressed (2005-2015) through the movement of people and institutional sponsorship of filmmakers including nations considered

outside of the Ibero-American regions. In other words, filmic institutions during Web 2.0 years remain entrenched in the national whereas the people that power short filmmaking (actors, creators, producers) are increasingly transnational and multilingual.

The evidence in this corpus that Ibero-American short film narrative content is less frequently aligned with national labeling while still highly grounded in national production speaks to a contradiction in how the digital age and the Internet was supposed to transcend national borders despite certain aspects of national centricity prevailing. In connection to the metadata and mapping study from CDM, which interrogates monolithic national labeling as Web 2.0 evolved the participative power of users and short filmmakers with an increasing access to digital technologies, the relevant aspect that comes to light is that, while funding and production infrastructures remained highly nationalized, the narrative aspect of short films became less tethered to the national. This phenomenon of institutional territoriality versus transnational narrative reflects a more globalized knowledge infrastructure of an evolving webspace where users become communicators and disseminators of their local experience in a national territory or region. While some stories create a transnational interaction from within a fictional space (*Cuchillo, McGregor y el Vasco* and *Les (El Bosque)*), others simulate another nation altogether with the motivation to reach consumer bases (*El SMS*) or to pay tribute to an existing aesthetic that operates outside of the national signifiers of the production metadata (*Bondage; La misma piel*).

By mapping both content and production national metadata across three datasets of short films from CDM during Web 2.0 years, the nuances of short film evolution at the onset of digital filmmaking demonstrate the internationalization of storytelling and narratives rather than the globalization of production itself. Within these international expressions of languages, actors, and narrative settings, there is also the indication of increased cultural and linguistic diversity that is

acceptable and fundable within regional or national systems. These diversities include actors who are born or have heritage from outside of the national imaginary, the inclusion of languages and accents other than the national standard, and the recreation of sceneries and landscapes that could pass as another national territory or space. While limited budgets and resources for short films might narrow the scope of filming locations and production to a particular nation or region, the (trans)national potential for narrating outside the boundaries of nationhood signal how the Internet age and Web 2.0 ushered forth an era of cosmopolitan digital citizenship in which users can navigate through sites and content across the globe in an instant (Díaz Lopez; De Unceta; Felando).

VI. Conclusive analysis of CDM samples (2005, 2010, 2015)

By comparison of the three CDM metadata maps, the Ibero-American short films from my randomized samples *did* become more transnational in the sense that several disparities in national metadata illustrate narrative diversity through setting, actors, and language communities. My original hypothesis about superficial national metadata and the colonial implications of national labeling was not as strong as I anticipated across my three randomized samples from CDM since there were few instances of transnational material qualities like funding and production location. While these results could indeed reflect the highly biased CDM corpus toward Spanish content and Spanish audiences, I chose to look deeper into what this kind of dataset communicates about online short film curation for a target audience of Hispanophone users. What I did find, instead, is that most national affiliation features dealing with production (except for subtitling) *do* align with their original label on CDM, and most accurately correlated with two main features: funding source and filming location. According to my data sets and the mapping visualization, the factors that were the most flexible from the given national label were the origin of the principal actors, a multiplicity of spoken languages, and the settings in the short film's narrative content.

While my original hypothesis of transnational metadata expansion did not manifest significantly, I consider this metadata collection and visualization exercise a success in other aspects. In watching the films and looking closely at both production details and narrative content dealing with location, territory, and national belonging, I was able to identify trends that are relevant to short filmmaking during Web 2.0. Earlier in the analysis, I discussed short films that actively simulate or recreate settings that are outside of the national affiliation of the production and funding. For these films, the metadata across several categories clearly indicates a discrepancy and is easily identified on the mapping software. However, there was also an increased frequency of short films that featured narratives without a particular indication of a place or location since the entirety of the plot takes place in one room with alternating tight shots between the main actors. From the standpoint of data collection, the notion of location and reference points for these short films become narrower and heavily tied to the actors and the language of the dialogue. For example, if two actors are speaking with each other in Spanish with a Castilian accent, they are most likely located in Spain. For the numerous films that followed that pattern, I annotated the film's setting as 'Spain' and felt that, if they production took place in Spain, that was a safe assumption from a data collection standpoint.

The prevalence of dialogue-heavy short films that take place in interior spaces is most likely motivated by a few explanations that are inherent to short filmmaking. Firstly, the low budgets of short films create limitations on movement and travel, especially when working with production teams, actors, and the necessary production equipment. By limiting the short film to only one scene, production time and financial resources are more efficient. Secondly, short films are oftentimes seeking industry validation whether it be through scriptwriting, special effects, genre specialization like comedy or horror, among other fronts. In short films that are especially

reliant on dialogue and acting, scriptwriting and storytelling is at the forefront since the plot rises and falls in the same circumstances and setting. One more explanation for this effect is the available technology of the time which was the beginning of HD digital filmmaking from commercially available digital cameras like the Canon SLR (2005-2010) and the Canon EOS (2011-2015).[clxiii] These cameras, especially the former, specialized in high quality close-up and microfocus shots which are ideal for dialogue scenes and evoking intensity and intimacy between two actors.[clxiv]

Another finding from my data collection from 2015 was seeing more short film narratives that exert signs of the digital evolution and online life. As digital cameras and devices became more prevalent and higher quality in the 2010s, statements during films like "made with an iPhone" (*Mermelada*, dir. José Meillinas, 2015) or "made with 4 different devices including a digital camera" (*Casa,* dir. Román Reyes, 2015) convey technological novelty as one of the motivators of the short film and its aesthetics. Other short films engage with digital cultural phenomenon like social media that is central to the plot like catfishing in *Fetiche* (dirs. Ángel Pazos and Pilar Onares, 2015), and Facebook popularity and influence in *Yo, Presidenta* (dir. Arantxa Echevarria, 2015).[clxv] In both aspects, the production and narrative content of an increasing number of short films during late Web 2.0 years embrace the digitization of culture and material. So, why are short films continually tied to national commodification as the Internet became more global, more participative, more inclusive during Web 2.0? The surrounding national metadata is indicative, indeed, of national belonging (financially, creatively, production-wise), but the narratives of the short films themselves are increasingly indicative of simultaneity that digital era fosters. This posthuman effect is that of existing between the private/interior space that is territorially locatable and global cosmopolitanism, visibility, and participation on the Web.

In response to the questions 1) What aligns a short film to a particular nation in the digital age? and 2) What do tensions between national labeling and (trans)national affiliations reveal about Ibero-American short films during Web 2.0? Ibero-American short films from CDM remain highly national products during Web 2.0 in large part due to their small budgets and relatively brief production periods. As digital cameras become more affordable and social media platforms enable new ways of creating, publishing, and disseminating shorts, short filmmaking becomes both a local venture while it becomes a globally available product on databases like CDM or on social media platforms like YouTube, Vimeo, Instagram, and others. Despite this global accessibility and availability, the limiting aspects of national metadata structures, even as a participatory act, can silo these products into European, Anglophone, and Hispanophone web spaces. Therefore, while short films act as national cinema products in and of themselves, the national metadata potential of their narrative content becomes more expansive in both directions: towards more regional specificities and in the simulation of national spaces and narratives that are outside of the territories of funding and production. As Web 2.0 technologies enabled ways for users to taxonomize and distribute short films across platforms and within databases like CDM, the locality and globality of Ibero-American online short films reflects the idealizations of categorizing digital objects that embody an evolving material and narrative infrastructure.

Through applying methodologies like metadata annotation and mapping of larger data sets, the combination of detailed data collection and broad visualization drives home the importance of both content *and* material when examining the transnational metadata potential of online objects like short films. In addition, web analytics of the CortosdeMetraje database helped determine how user traffic and user-uploaded content interact as reflections of either the national location of users or their common language (Spanish) spans across regions like Iberia and Latin America. While

my mapping methodology had its limitations and required modifications to accommodate the pluralities and simultaneities of transnational metadata, these challenges speak to the demands of purist categorizations and Anglocentric informatics in the interest of presentation and efficiency. By explaining my methodology and providing examples across all three datasets, I aim to open pathways to continue to examine how historically nationalized cultural products like short films exist and evolve in online spaces that are accessible to audiences around the world. In the Conclusion of this thesis, I include recommendations for more pluralistic and translingual metadata practices and directors for future study regarding national filmic metadata and (trans)national representation in the continually evolving webspace.

This chapter on metadata and (trans)national labeling of online short films departed with an epigraph from Jorge Luis Borges's short text, "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins." The lesson that Borges narrates through this brief anecdote about Wilkins is that while the infinity begs for classification, the methods and approaches are doomed to subjectivity and therefore are tragically uncharacteristic of the infinite possibilities that exist beyond the circumstances of time and space. Admittedly, the examination of knowledge orders in this chapter depends on the time, space, and materials that are bound to the historical moment of the Web as it lives and thrives currently. With the so-called Third Order of information which is characterized as digital disorder beyond the scope of human processing and organization, objects online must be treated as reflections of the posthuman paradigm which perpetuates them. In future generations, one can only speculate how information and digital objects will present themselves and interact with the web users and posthumans of tomorrow. By then, *we* will become the John Wilkins who was a victim to the historical shortcomings of his own subjective judgements.

In the next chapter, I will take up my three case studies again and perform a close reading that is grounded in the same tensions that this metadata study revealed: that national and territorial realities persist as technological advances promise more accessibility and cosmopolitism. I will analyze the filmic content and aesthetics of the short films, *.Sub* (dir. Jossie Malis-Álvarez, 2012), *Hyper-Reality* (dir. Keiichi Matsuda, 2016), and *Reality 2.0* (dir. Víctor Orozco, 2012) to discuss how the short films' production and narrative content portray the local and transnational experience of digital citizens who must navigate connected life in their respective techno-societies.

[xciv] Borges's short essay is a succinct commentary on the imperfections and abstractions of knowledge classification attempted by John Wilkins, who was conveniently removed from the fourteenth edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica*.
[xcv] Take, for example, the creation of the Universal Bar Code (UBC) system for grocery stores or the Dewey Decimal system which is still largely adhered to in North American libraries.
[xcvi] When I refer to the Third Order of Information as posthuman, I am leaning on the critical postures of Posthumanism that de-center the Human within a *materiality of informatics* (See N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*).
[xcvii] See Introduction for a summary of national cinema paradigms in the twentieth century.
[xcviii] See Chapter One for a detailed discussion about metadata of visual media including film and television.
[xcix] Changes in metadata potential also occur when Web 2.0 technologies like crowdfunding became available (i.e., GoFundMe.com, Kickstarter.com), thereby shifting typical funding structures for short films from institutional grants to a variety of individual backers from all over the World Wide Web. The short film *Hyper-Reality* (dir. Keichii Matsuda, 2016) is an example of crowdfunding since the director himself raised money on Kickstarter.com to fund a series of his speculative short films to illustrate the ideals of his master's thesis project on augmented reality architectures. While crowdfunding did exist in a pre-digital world, the ability to compile micro-investments through digital means is a novel technology that enables motivated creators or filmmakers to raise funding outside of cultural institutions, thus skirting any requisites or limitations on behalf of the national or regional institution. With the bulk of funding allocated into multiple private backers, the national affiliation of a short film like *Hyper-Reality* is not subject to traditional funding institutions to explain its national label, so why is *Hyper-Reality* listed as a Colombian film on IMDB.com if the director is of Japanese descent, living in London? To fully address this question, more metadata must be surfaced across several factors to express how short films rely on Web 2.0 technologies to expand its metadata potential online and challenge the conventional structures of national short film production and diffusion.
[c] YouTube.com and Vimeo.com are user-uploaded streaming platforms developed during Web 2.0.
[ci] Especially during the migration from print to digital and toward an increasingly accessible cyberspace after the millennium, the Participatory Web enabled the potential of metadata to extend beyond webmasters, depending on the judgement and categorization of the web users themselves. The incorporation of IMDB.com (Internet Movie Database) in 1996 represented a Web 1.0 attempt to create an informative infrastructure for all sorts of films despite barriers like limited commercial success, obscurity, length, and genre of videos. IMDB.com is known for presenting detailed metadata about movies including summaries, biographies, release dates, box office information, and user critiques and reviews for registered users. As user-uploaded streaming sites like Vimeo.com and YouTube.com came onto the scene in 2004 and 2006 respectively, an explosion of user-generated content ensued.
[cii] See Sharon Badal's chapter, "No Lifeguard on Duty: Internet and New Technology" in *Swimming Upstream: A Lifesaving Guide to Short Film Distribution.* Focal Press, 2008.

[ciii] "La Web de Cortos Online" translates to "The Web of Short Films Online" in English. See www.cortosdemetraje.com. Up until recently (c. 2021), the banner headline on Cortos de Metraje.com boasted that it was "the biggest selection of Ibero-American short films on the web."
[civ] See Sabharwal, Arjun. *Digital Curation in the Digital Humanities: Preserving and Promoting Archival and Special Collections*. Chandos Publishing, 2015.
[cv] In later Web 2.0 years, examples of national representation and marketing become explosive and even controversial at times, i.e., featuring characters of color on the digital cover of a series on a streaming platform to seduce viewers of that cultural or race group (also known as *click baiting*). These ethical questions of representation, transparency, and nuance are required as more producers and creators come on the scene. See Zarum, Lara. "Some Viewers Think Netflix is Targeting them by Race. Here's What to Know." *New York Times*. 23, October 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/23/arts/television/netflix-race-targeting-personalization.html.
[cvi] Metadata and topic modeling is a distant reading technique that applies machine learning to a large corpus of cultural objects to reveal commonalities and characteristics that may escape the subjective observation of humans. Distant reading and metadata analysis is widely discussed in the field of Digital Humanities by scholars like Franco Moretti, Andrew Piper, and Ted Underwood who apply machine learning to text-based corpuses of digitalized literature. For film, many of these same Digital Humanities techniques are difficult to replicate since "moving image materials are ill-served by the prevalent systems of organization designed for print materials" (La Barre and Novais Cordeiro 200).
[cvii] To randomize my samples, I used www.randomizer.org.
[cviii] For more detailed rationale and examples of these aspects of national filmic metadata, see the Introduction.
[cix] One example of cinema cartography is www.themoviemap.com which is an open-access, dynamic world map that allows filmmakers and production teams to label exactly where the film was made and, in some cases, where the narrative of the film takes place.
[cx] Franco Moretti, renowned Digital Humanities scholar, observes that maps function "as analytical tools [that bring] to light relations that would otherwise remain hidden" (Roberts and Hallam 3 footnote).
[cxi] The cooperation and friction between human and computational spheres of interpretation during the different phases of my study are entirely reflective of the problematic to begin with: that singular national labeling of short films is often not accurate enough to describe how short filmmaking shifted during Web 2.0. In other words, painting a messier picture of belonging, (trans)nationality, and representation is counter-intuitive to the historical information infrastructures that uphold cultural products like short films. While the misalignment and miscommunication of human and artificial intelligence is a longstanding phenomenon, the era of Web 2.0 is significant because, for the first time, both the metadata *and* the content became digitized (Weinberger 171). Unlike previous orders of information that relied on material records and physical space to store products and archives, the digital miscellany that is the Third Order of Information in Web 2.0 presents opportunities for both webmasters and users themselves to create relationships and categorizations online that were not available in previous information orders.
[cxii] Digital Humanities research is increasingly incorporating audiovisual data in media as it has been typically grounded in text analysis and digitized literature. See the special issue on "AudioVisual Data in DH." *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, Volume 15, No.1, 2021. http://digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/15/1/000541/000541.html.
[cxiii] GIS stands for Geographic Information Systems.
[cxiv] I determined that Google's MyMaps GIS software was the best at handling my untidy metadata input. MyMaps was consistently the most forgiving of my data and ended up being my tool of choice since my mapping project was more eager to visualize data rather than create interactive features that are more suited to ArcGIS and QGIS. One of the main reasons that my tests with ArcGIS and QGIS were not successful was because of metadata input needed to be "cleaned" of irregular or non-Anglophone data input. For example, accented characters like "Medellín," hyphens in "Hyper-Reality," or unrecognizable locations because of their spelling in Spanish like "Londres" instead of "London." Even after tidying the data of these nonconformities, which are indications of Anglocentric informatic biases in themselves, there were several "invisible" errors in the data that made my data unreadable in those GIS tools. Even still, the MyMaps tool was partially resistant to my spreadsheets, but finally conceded when I changed empty input cells to "Antarctica," which resulted in a pile of outlying pins at the bottom of the map yet with the advantage of plotting all the short films in the spreadsheet rather than leaving some items out inexplicably. While troubleshooting my messy data collection, a computer scientist suggested to input "Antarctica" for any problematic cells that was causing errors on MyMaps.
[cxv] See the Case-Studies Spreadsheet:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WWBloKpo8myTy_4SWGc4eAWRfWG7HJX_/view?usp=sharing
[cxvi] See the Case-Studies map:
https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/1/edit?mid=1xSoaiQorKk1ZEfia6mqSzhjd2GqP76Nc&usp=sharing

[cxvii] This is an English translation of the original tagline in Spanish: "Crear el mejor catálogo web en español de Cortometrajes Ibero-Americanos online" (www.CortosdeMetraje.com).
[cxviii] For example, the main page has a ticker that keeps a current count of all the films in the database: 5,769 short films, 484 videoclips and 744 web series episodes (as of 2021). Along the top bar, users can choose to browse films by top rankings, suggested keywords in a catalogue, user-generated tags in a word cloud, short film genres, and channels (curated playlists). To stay up on current events, the site hosts a blog in which each journal entry is searchable by date, title, and the number of views, likes, and comments. All these Web 2.0 features are meant to spark user participation in addition to hosting a large quantity of short films gathered through the identifier of the Spanish-speaking world that is broadly understood as Iberia and Latin America.
[cxix] From a user participation standpoint, CortosDeMetraje is comfortably nestled in Web 2.0 metadata technology. CDM is maximalist in its approach to presenting every opportunity for the user to stay on the site and interact with the content however they choose. As the user scrolls downward on the main page, the latest short films are presented in an attention-grabbing mosaic with a film still from the short accompanied by the title and the length of the film. Underneath this mosaic are category tiles with cover images. The categories include (in English): 1) Film (Live action); 2) Documentary; 3) Animation; 4) Music Videos; 5) Your Shorts; and 6) Web series. This multiplicity of genres and search options is one of the other main reasons I selected CDM as a corpus. Many short film databases are dedicated to a specific genre or type of short film like horror or animation, for example. CDM is clearly motivated to aggregate as many short films as possible so long that they are Ibero-American (meaning that they are in some way connected to Iberia and/or Latin America). During my data collection, I came across several films that had no connection to neither Iberia nor Latin America, and this is, again, most likely due to the open-submission format by individual users.
[cxx] See Risam, Roopika. 'Colonial Violence and the Postcolonial Digital Archive'. *New Digital Worlds: Postcolonial Digital Humanities in Theory, Praxis, and Pedagogy.*, Northwestern University Press, 2018, pp. 47–64, https://muse.jhu.edu/book/62714.
[cxxi] Original version in Spanish: "En muchas ocasiones, los trabajos independientes están marcados por un fuerte componente intimista y experimental, más que por altos valores de producción, y son estos cortos los que con frecuencia transmiten de una forma más directa su mensaje" (https://cortosdemetraje.com/vuestros-cortos/).
[cxxii] La Nube means "Cloud" in Spanish.
[cxxiii] See "La Nube" subpage on CDM: https://cortosdemetraje.com/la-nube/.
[cxxiv] See full screenshot of La Nube categories "Nationality, Language, Subtitles": https://drive.google.com/file/d/18oJmvVrV1CIeVqyL9jlj9kw98vYVmXur/view?usp=sharing
[cxxv] Short films with multiple languages used in them are tagged across those languages in the spreadsheet and separated by commas.
[cxxvi] Weinberger writes in his chapter on "Messiness as a virtue": "The folksonomies that are emerging bottom up are characterized by ambiguity, multiple classification, and sort-of-kind-of relationships" (196).
[cxxvii] There is a risk, however, that a small typo or misnomer could inadvertently bury a short film on the database albeit on one aspect only. Since the word cloud is aggregated across several metadata aspects and recognizes alternate spellings and language inputs by creating another tag, the short film would most likely be findable through another feature that was correctly labeled.
[cxxviii] ODS stands for Open Document Spreadsheet
[cxxix] Like I described earlier, CDM was formerly a blog and forum for the short film industry in Spain, so the option to upload shorts into the newly created database was not available until 2012.
[cxxx] During my e-mail communications with Alejandro Ruiz about the site's statistics, he was upfront about the bias towards Spanish short films in the CDM database. While Alejandro may have seen this partiality as a detriment to my data sampling, my estimation perceives this favoritism towards what is accessible locally, even digitally, while attempting, in theory, to maintain a broader reach towards Hispanophone short film production across the Atlantic.
[cxxxi] Organic search means that users are typing keywords into a search engine and clicking on the website's link that is listed as a search result.
[cxxxii] A SEO (Search Engine Optimization) study from 2021 indicated that only 25% of users look on the second page of search results on Google's search engine (https://www.webfx.com/seo/statistics/).
[cxxxiii] The advantage of using a private browser versus a normal browser is that my browsing history from previous sessions are not factored into a new search item and therefore will not influence the algorithms that produce search results.
[cxxxiv] Another indication that CDM is a recognized database for web users around the world is that around 12% of their traffic sources are direct hits, which means that users are typing "cortosdemetraje.com" into their browser rather than using keywords to produce search results (Image 2.4). Of the nearly 3% of traffic coming from Social Media sources,

a similar portion of users click on linked content to CDM through YouTube (41.57%) and Twitter (40.12%), with Facebook making up the remaining traffic from Social platforms (18.3%). This data on user traffic to CDM is meant to highlight that the overall distribution of content on the database dialogues with the national affiliation of users who are getting to the site and *how* they are getting there. That is, Hispanophone users yielding search results in Spanish direct them to CDM, and a similar distribution of short films reflect the audiences on the site who can, in turn, influence how the site continues to grow and is labeled through user-uploads, folksonomic tagging, metadata input, linking and sharing.

[cxxxv] Since a lack of commercial short film distribution has always plagued short film which has historically been an industry financed through regional and national institutions with a varying number of resources, it comes as no surprise the failure to present an even-spread of short films associated with Spain and all the countries in Latin America when the operations of the database itself are in Spain (Diestro-Dópido 99-113).

[cxxxvi] Up until recently, there were strict regulations against posting short films online while they were in circulation at festivals (usually 2 years) (Del Puy Alvarado 89). The transition into online festivals and streaming platforms in recent years has changed the traditional box-office release of commercial films and regulations of independent (short) films that were previously prohibited from launching online and in theatres simultaneously.

[cxxxvii] Nearly all these metadata listed in the *ficha del video* are functioning as tags since they are hyper-linked, meaning that users can click on them and land on a search results page with other films that are also linked with that metadata feature.

[cxxxviii] For example, to determine if animated films are more nationally flexible across categories than live action films since they are less reliant on physical settings and live actors for film production.

[cxxxix] For example, in my study, I examine different expressions of filmic metadata that is aggregated at the *national* level in response to the tendency for short film to encapsulate national narratives for global audiences at film festivals and, increasingly, in online databases and curated collections. However, whenever a precise location was apparent to me during my data collection, like a city or a specific region of a nation, I chose to record the most precise coordinate possible (i.e., Barcelona versus Spain – which often produces a pin in the center of Spain, which would be near Madrid). On a map, these pins still indicate that they are within national boundaries, but the regional clarification was also useful when considering cultural and linguistic specificity in some cases.

[cxl] As recently as 2017, a referendum in Cataluña took place to separate from Spain and was quickly suppressed by Spanish national guard forces.

[cxli] While regional metadata may be considered too specific for producing a label for the category of 'Nation' on an existing database, the reason for annotating my data this way is 1) to document, whenever possible, any cultural or territorial specificities within nationalized content and production metadata; and 2) to prepare more accurate data to program a location on the metadata map. For example, a metadata input labeled 'Spain' would place a pin in the middle of the country, Spain, which is approximately where Madrid, the national government's capitol, is located. If 'Cataluña' is the input, then the pin would appear in the northeastern corner of Spain, more accurately informing the viewer who may be interested in films associated with Cataluña as a region.

[cxlii] Like the relationship between Québec and Canada, the francophone cultural industry of Quebec operates relatively independently from Anglophone Canada yet is often categorized holistically as Canadian cinema or French-Canadian cinema in global film festival programs or on streaming platforms (i.e., Netflix, Kanopy, Crave, Prime Video). In fact, the appearance of Canadian cinema and Francophone Canadian content on major streaming platforms became a point of contention in 2018-2019 as the Canadian and Quebecois government donated millions of dollars to Netflix in the interest of pushing national content to users and viewers on the platform. In 2020, Netflix launched a call for Francophone Canadian projects that was perceived as a lackluster response to the non-binding donation on behalf of the Canadian and Quebecois taxpayers (https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1734683/taxe-netflix-gouvernement-federal).

[cxliii] The 13-minute short film is a generic mashup between a spaghetti western film and a science-fictional alien takeover. Around 2010, genre mashups were trending in popular media entertainment, and a significant portion of my random sample from CDM was comprised of thriller, horror, fantasy while also, in some cases, featuring keyword descriptors like 'dark comedy', 'mockumentary', and 'meta cinema.'

[cxliv] Through retro music, grainy texture and discoloration which is meant to simulate analogue film, the short film plays on the vintage feel of a spaghetti western production from the 1960s which are prime examples of transnational filmmaking to the ends of Hollywood success in the U.S. and around the world. Typically, spaghetti westerns were filmed in southern Spain and featured international actors from countries like the United States, Germany, and Italy. Oftentimes, spaghetti westerns were directed by Italians or Spaniards, and were highly popular amongst international audiences, but often narratively centered around the western United States.

[cxlv] In the case of *Cuchillo, McGregor y el Vasco*, the filming production took place in La Rioja, Spain.

[cxlvi] Despite these specific characterizations of nationhood, the actor who plays McGregor bears an accent from Spain despite his best efforts to speak Spanish like a *gringo* would in northern Mexico.
[cxlvii] Illustrating the national disparity in *Cuchillo, McGregor y el Vasco* became possible through my data collection, and it produced mapped plots in Spain for the following features: Online Label, Language, Director, Actor, Funding and Location. The short was mapped in Mexico for its fictional setting (Navarro), for the national origin of the actor who played Cuchillo, and as one of the Language locations as well since Cuchillo's accent authentically comes from Mexico. While there is no feature in my data collection for the fictional national affiliation of actors, I included in the notes column that one of the main characters is supposed to be American (McGregor), and that the actor who portrays him is from Spain. In this particular case of short filmmaking, three different nationalities are fictionally portrayed at odds with each other in a setting that communicates international political tension and lawlessness (the U.S. and Mexican border) before being subjected to the ultimate form of colonization which is that of a posthuman, extraterrestrial force with a particular vendetta against the American outlaw.
[cxlviii] Astute viewers might recall that earlier in the short, McGregor declares that he is headed across the border to Roswell (New Mexico), which is a tourist site reputed for UFO sightings, and could possibly explain either his interest in aliens or a preemptive strike on behalf of the aliens.
[cxlix] The additional component of an alien abduction is meant to be a comical and absurdist twist on the western genre, which is deeply tied to national narratives and disputes, yet the intervention of a posthuman, extraterrestrial force in extracting McGregor, "the American" from the territory poses a politically significant ending in which Mexicans and Basques stand in alliance with each other as Americans are removed from the equation. Here, there are three levels of colonization involved: 1) Spain (El vasco) as a former colonial power over Mexico (Cuchillo); 2) The United States (McGregor) as a neo-colonizer of Mexico; and 3) Extraterrestrial colonizers of the United States (McGregor) in Mexico. While locating extraterrestrials on MyMaps would be speculative at best, the narrative relationships between the U.S., Spain, and Mexico in *Cuchillo, McGregor y el Vasco* reflect both the historical context of spaghetti western films while, at the same time, reclaiming the power to tell the story in Spanish amongst Mexican and Basque characters through eliminating the dominance of American actors or Hollywood imperialism.
[cl] #AmigoDeVerdad translates loosely to "a true friend" in English.
[cli] While *El SMS* may have not been competing as a nationally funded short film at a film festival, its engagement with Brazilian content as a United States-based production raises questions about the transnational marketing power of short film and advertisement campaigns. For example, why did they choose to portray Brazil? Could the campaign not have been more marketable to Latin American audiences as a Hispanophone production? As a short film released online in 2015, the commercial impact of *El SMS* coincides with the anticipation of the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in which Coca-Cola has been a sponsor for nearly nine decades.
[clii] There are only a handful of wide or establishing shots in *El SMS* that demonstrate a landscape of any kind. Most settings in the short film are either indoors or utilizing a close focus that blurs much of the detail in the background.
[cliii] El "Cojonudo" is translated in English online as "Mr. Big Balls."
[cliv] When interacting with the live maps, users can select the color-coded layers individually or simultaneously which creates an effect of expansion across nations and continents, or, in some cases, signals a narrow continuity within a particular nation.
[clv] See the 2005 map:
https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/1/edit?mid=1hexu99CuWUzamIKepJrUhKhILOvZulsl&usp=sharing
[clvi] See the 2010 map:
https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/1/edit?mid=1DfuB51ejiczMQ1L504nwtRk4fgtHYmRJ&usp=sharing
[clvii] See the 2015 map:
https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/1/edit?mid=1fyYHKsEeYxwQL7vYkyPI_StDgMsoiSuc&usp=sharing
[clviii] There are advantages to regional co-productions for short film proposals like qualification for additional institutional funding (Dennison 185; Falicov, "Film Funding Opportunities for Latin American Filmmakers")
[clix] Even the Uruguayan short film, *El Cojonudo* (2005) casted all Uruguayan nationals and post-produced an audio dubbing of a Spanish accent for the main character. A singular example stands out from my 2010 sample called *Goliath* about a Mexican boxer. Goliath's director was born in Spain and raised in Mexico, but the funding source is from a production company located in Spain.
[clx] Nobuyoshi Araki is a Japanese photographer and contemporary artist professionally known by the mononym Arākī. He is known primarily for photography that blends eroticism and bondage in a fine art context.
[clxi] *Kill Bill* is a 2003 feature film directed by Quentin Tarantino starring Uma Thurman and David Carradine.
[clxii] Another example from 2010 is *Les (El Bosque)* which I describe in detail in the Introduction.
[clxiii] See the Canon Camera Museum for a detailed explanation of "The High-Definition Era" from 2005-2010: https://global.canon/en/c-museum/history/story11.html.

[clxiv] One example of a dialogue-based, close shot short film is *5 segundos* (dir. David González Rudiez): https://cortosdemetraje.com/5-segundos-2/.
[clxv] Catfishing is an informal term that indicates a deceptive activity in which a person creates a fictional persona on a social network and targets a specific victim.

CHAPTER THREE:

DIGITAL CITIZENS IN CRISIS:

CLOSE READINGS OF THREE IBERO-AMERICAN SHORTS

> Everything is becoming science fiction. From the margins of an almost invisible literature has sprung the intact reality of the 20th century.
> - J.G. Ballard, "Fictions of Every Kind"

I. (Trans)national metadata tensions in short film content

After examining a corpus of Ibero-American short films during Web 2.0 and identifying trends and trajectories in (trans)national metadata affiliation across a decade (2005-2015), my study found that short films were consistently tied to a particular nation through financial backing and production location while less tethered to national identifiers through narrative content like setting, language use, actors, and characters. In this chapter, I turn my attention to filmic content by performing close readings that are grounded in the same tensions that my metadata study revealed: that national and territorial realities persist within infrastructures as technological advances promise more accessibility, cosmopolitism, and even a sense of egalitarian post nationalism. From within the critical tension situation between persistent nationalisms and promises of digital globalism, I will analyze the filmic content of the short films, *.Sub* (dir. Jossie Malis-Álvarez, 2012), *Hyper-Reality* (dir. Keiichi Matsuda, 2016), and *Reality 2.0* (dir. Víctor Orozco, 2012) to discuss how the short films portray the overlaps and divergences between nationalized informatic frameworks and the illusion of a globalized technological network experienced by the posthuman protagonists.

I selected these three short films because they demonstrate the hybridization of national belonging and global digital citizenship that take place in an ever-connected technoscape. The

complexities of (trans)national digital citizenship are demonstrated in the short films' narrative content as well as in their aesthetics which recreate a hybrid world of virtual and material landscapes that recall and reference the platformization of the Internet during Web 2.0. By theorizing within critical frameworks of posthumanism and Internet studies, my close analysis of *.Sub, Reality 2.0,* and *Hyper-Reality* unveils how the failures and inequities of a (post)national society are embodied within the marginalized cyborg as a figure who is both tethered to national discourses and constantly connected to a globalized network. In these films, the illusion of a post national, neutral, or sovereign webspace becomes undone or even dangerous when the feedback loop of human behavior and machine learning becomes intrusive or glitched. This unsettling effect induces a crisis of the posthuman digital citizen who may or not be able to engineer resistance tactics within a system that is pitted against them.

As I have discussed throughout the dissertation, short films often act as timely reflections of cultural trends, technological advances, and experimental techniques and have historically functioned as national cultural exports meant to showcase for global audiences. As Web 2.0 technologies progressed and became more embedded into Internet usage, not only did short film production and distribution shift toward digitization but short film content began to reflect a society that was rapidly migrating to digital platforms and devices. Alongside this transition, speculation of the socio-political effects of constant connectivity and the unchecked hegemony of big tech conglomerates became mainstream through speculative fiction films and streaming series such as *Black Mirror* (2011), *Mr. Robot* (2015) and *Westworld* (2016). While short films are generally positioned outside the commercial box office and subscription streaming platforms, *.Sub* (2012), *Hyper-Reality* (2016), and *Reality 2.0* (2012) fall into step with these popularizing genres because of their recurrent themes like the technologization of the human body, consciousness, and

web-based animation aesthetics that reflect ongoing cultural debates about surveillance, privacy, oppression, and ubiquitous connectivity.[clxvi]

In Chapter One, I described in detail how all three of these short films are transnational in terms of funding, production, and access. In brief, *Hyper-Reality* was crowdfunded online through Kickstarter.com, filmed in Medellín, Colombia with a local production team and actors, post-produced and animated in London, United Kingdom, and directed by a Japanese-British architect named Keiichi Matsuda. [clxvii] *.Sub* was filmed in Madrid, Spain, directed by Peruvian-Chilean, Jossie Malis Álvarez, funded by Spanish and French audiovisual grant entities, and features over nine different languages spoken by multinational actors. *Reality 2.0* is a digital-born short film by Mexican animator, Víctor Orozco who assembled and animated the short film in Hamburg, Germany by rotoscoping desktop captures and user-generated clips harvested from YouTube.com. The transnationality of these short films in part thanks to Web 2.0 features like crowdfunding and crowdsourcing creates a sense of locality, place, belonging that is simultaneously shared and fragmented between physical territories and cyberspace, much like the Participatory Web and the Cloud technologies that help make networked digital platforms possible.[clxviii] Having performed a qualitative analysis of filmic material through metadata annotation and mapping during Chapter Two, this dissertation now enters a phase of close reading of filmic content as it relates to the global/national web space within the plot and aesthetics of *.Sub*, *Hyper-Reality*, and *Reality 2.0*. I will briefly summarize the three shorts before diving into theoretical terms to assist my filmic analysis.

II. Synopses of *Reality 2.0, .Sub,* and *Hyper-Reality*

Self-proclaimed as an *animadoc* or an animated documentary, *Reality 2.0* acts as a distorted mirror of an individual's content consumption and participation on Web 2.0 platforms that is made

with the very material that it reflects upon: crowdsourced video content and desktop recordings. *Reality 2.0* (dir. Víctor Orozco, 2012) is narrated by a young Mexican man who immigrated to Hamburg, Germany, and becomes obsessed with narco-violence in his home country by constantly checking narco-blogs, participating in chat forums about Mexican current events, and watching reaction videos of cartel executions on YouTube. The viewer witnesses a first-person perspective of the protagonists' transnational web voyeurism through an animated display of his desktop interface. The comparison that the narrator makes between the cold and rational zeitgeist of Germany versus the chaotic and macabre national character of Mexico creates a binational tension between the physical displacement of the narrator as an immigrant and his psychological immersion with his home country through participatory web praxis. The protagonists' posthumanism is not necessarily that of a technologized body, but that of an embodiment of curated content generated by Web 2.0 users around the world since the animated short film is primarily comprised of video screen captures that were crowdsourced with found footage from YouTube. This effect recreates the act of using the web to curate knowledge or create a vicarious experience of an event or place through tailored content consumption that is constantly presenting itself based on the user's online behaviors.

Made by an immigrant about an immigrant, *.Sub* (dir. Jossie Malis Álvarez, 2012) emulates the contradictions of the global/national webspace as it is centered on the technologization of the posthuman in the name of universal communication and accessibility when in reality the same technology is meant to reinforce national borders and citizenship. *.Sub* presents the fictional perspective of an African immigrant named Euyumi Bamako who is black and working class. She receives a government mandated micro-chip implant to be able to read subtitles across all the spoken languages in the speculative European cosmopolis. The problem is that her subtitles are

illegible to other characters in the film as well as the viewer. During her visit to the immigration office, it is revealed that Euyumi is undocumented, and she decides to search for an informal solution to her subtitles problem. After visiting a Japanese doctor and purchasing a nasal spray to bio-hack her faulty subtitles, Euyumi manages to speak in short sentences and seek underground employment, but her subtitles occasionally glitch with Japanese characters. In this film, Euyumi's existence is that of a digital non-citizen living in a society that aims to address linguistic pluralism and transnational immigration through biotechnologies like real-time subtitling. That system not only fails Euyumi who is not part of the cultural and linguistic systems of the Global North, but it directly endangers her by visibly marking her unlawful status. Instead, she must rely on the informal networks of posthuman market alternatives to address the oppressive circumstances of immigrant life in techno-society.

In speculating on globalized techno capitalism at its most extreme, *Hyper-Reality* (dir. Keiichi Matsuda, 2016) does not take place in one of the technological metropoles of the world, but instead depicts how the Colombian city of Medellín integrates and mandates consumer and civil incentive schemes that are powered by international tech corporations. *Hyper-Reality* is an immersive, first-person perspective of a working-class Colombian woman named Juliana Restrepo. She experiences the city of Medellín through an augmented reality (AR) interface that is constantly vivified by layers of gamified animation, sound effects, alerts, pop-up advertisements, and reminders to accumulate loyalty points and rewards. When her AR interface mistakes her for a male-bodied user/citizen, Juliana is directed to follow a pathway to prove her identity and is subsequently bio-hacked by an obscured entity. Hence, she is forced to reset her system and lose all her loyalty points in her applications, turning instead to a virtualized platform of the Catholic church to begin her life anew. In *Hyper-Reality*, the posthuman experience of being ubiquitously

connected without much choice of escape recreates an extreme scenario of the 'walled-garden' architecture of Web 2.0 platforms.[clxix] For Juliana, opting out of the AR system means becoming a type of *homo sacer* or non-citizen, having lost all access to her personal data after laboring within the constructs of virtual applications and platforms.[clxx]

All three short films that I discuss in this chapter employ hybrid techniques of live-action filming and animation to simulate the environment of a marginalized posthuman who struggles to function in a speculative techno-society. By analyzing short films that portray posthumans and cyborgs who are not white, elite, nor considered the 'ideal' citizen of a techno-society, this analysis highlights the dangers of racial, linguistic, gendered, and geographical bias that revolve around hegemonic information structures that constantly shape the lives of these speculative digital citizens who are either using existing Web 2.0 technologies or are only a few steps beyond into Web 3.0.[clxxi] As all three protagonists are from the Global South, both national narratives and global corporate hegemonies embedded in their experience of a networked web exemplifies how technologies are not born nor maintained as a neutral enterprise. In other words, these three short films expose how the idealistic notion of the post-national digital citizen conflicts with the nationalized systems that they must use to stay informed, participate, consume, and survive.

Akin to the potential consequences of monolithic national metadata for short film, there are risks of political fallout or devaluation for the invisible actors that exist outside of the labeled infrastructure of legitimacy, wealth, and power that largely continued from the analogue to the digital age of information. In the case of *.Sub*, *Hyper-Reality*, and *Reality 2.0*, the posthuman protagonists live in technologized black and brown bodies, and they cannot simply transcend the histories and contexts of oppression that have marked them. Instead, marginalized posthumans

must evade and resist xenophobic, racist, classist and sexist information systems disguised as a globalized, egalitarian, and neutral technological advancement.

III. The global/national posthuman reflected in the changing web

Typically, terms like posthumanism and nationalism have difficulty existing within the same critical conversation. There are several explanations for this hesitancy which include the notion that the critical posthuman subject is in resistance to humanist constructs like nationalism, patriotism, liberalism, and individualism (Braidotti 47).[clxxii] The belief that these constructs faded away in the Internet age stems from the illusion that technology is politically neutral or transcendent of humanity's shortcomings.[clxxiii] As renowned cyber feminist and Ecocritical theorist, Donna Haraway declares, "Technology is not neutral. We're inside of what we make, and it's inside of us. We're living in a world of connections - and it matters which ones get made and unmade."[clxxiv] In relation to technology and the Web, the term 'globalization' rendered synonymous with the weakening of the nation state in favor of neoliberalism and various forms of technocapitalism.[clxxv] Contributing to this relationship, globalization and transnationalism scholarship after the millennium fostered theoretical debates about the impending 'cyber-imperialism' and 'cyber-globalization' which is the anxiety that the global culture of the Internet (based on American and Western influences) would eventually homogenize local cultures (Taylor and Pitman 9). [clxxvi]

Pushback against purist and polarized theories of a cultural homogenization of the Web argued for a more varied approach toward examining global flows and new technologies that allow for the expression of new identities (Appadurai; Kellner). Situated between global influences and a particular territory that is saturated with national discourses is the connected user, posthuman, and digital citizen who embodies the "uncertain landscapes created in and through these

disjunctures" (Appadurai 43). So, to claim that posthumans transcend or operate outside frameworks of national belonging is to idealize the posthuman as a subject who is unmarked by national narratives, territories, and sociolinguistic realities. The subjectivity of a posthuman digital citizen is neither wholly committed to a nation nor perfectly egalitarian as a post national nomad. Rather, the posthuman is entirely reflective on the material and informatic systems that surround and condition them – imperfect, biased, racialized, marginalized, contradictory, and politicized among other factors that negate any façade of rational, scientific, and objective technologies that power the Web as we know it.

The admission that technological advances are deeply entangled with partisan constructs like nationhood and neocolonialism was not always broadly endorsed. In fact, militant optimism of a libertarian, minimally governed, borderless Open Web ran high in the early years of the Public Internet in the late 1990s. Open letters and web manifestos abounded about open standards, unbridled creativity, freedom of expression, and global democracy in a cyberspace where national borders would cease to exist (Ess). What this well-meaning but short-sighted naiveté signaled was a technological infrastructure that was largely built by and for the same hegemonic powers who have maintained an economic and political foothold since the (pre)colonial era.[clxxvii] During the 2010s, any remains of the Open Web began to dwindle as the market power of FAMGA (Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, Google, Amazon) began gatekeeping over 70% of all global Internet traffic (Flew 3).[clxxviii] What this means is that latecomers and new generations to the Internet have only ever experienced a cyberspace of corporate interest, walled gardens of data, and digital hyper-capitalism.[clxxix]

The imagination of the Internet as a singular, global, sovereign space is a dangerous assumption that upholds a false sense of freedom, expression, and egalitarianism for web users.

Hu Tung-Hui's *A Prehistory of the Cloud* (2015) aptly points out this illusion of oneness and universality regarding an Internet that had altered significantly during Web 2.0 years due to Cloud technologies: "There are multiple private Internets and clouds that parallel or shadow the public Internet, run by research universities, militaries, and even foreign countries that have built or are building 'walled garden' Internets" (xxi). He goes on to explain that the singular vision of the Internet or the Cloud perpetuates an idealism of a free and liberal society that aligns closely with U.S. ideologies at the height of their influence in the 1950s (xxi). Much like the idealization of post-World War II America, the selective memory of the United States as a free-market, deregulated land of opportunity for white cis men projects itself onto the Internet as a virgin frontier of cyberspace. Instead, the reality of multiple Internets means that any given web user navigates within an *illusion* of universal access and infinite opportunity as a global citizen of the World Wide Web.

The unveiling of the various Internets and underground pipelines of user data is just one step to understanding how a seemingly global, open web space is, in fact, highly orchestrated and curated for individuation.[clxxx] Thus, the posthuman citizen operates within the liminal space between an illusion of post-national, borderless cyberspace and an intimately tailored experience of the Internet. Cass Sunstein calls this individuation phenomenon the "Daily Me" which refers to a personalized newsfeed or information flow without the presence of contrarian or diverse perspectives in another type of public forum. In his 2002 book, *Republic.com,* Sunstein ominously predicts the dangers of information echo chambers that intensified during Web 2.0 and beyond: "The imagined world of innumerable, diverse editions of the 'Daily Me' is the furthest thing from a utopian dream, and it would create serious problems from the democratic point of view" (22). So, while the Web 2.0 user is posting statuses on social media and uploading photos and videos to

their YouTube accounts, algorithms and infrastructures are correlating demographic information about each user to form a curated, intimate experience of the Participatory Web. This feedback loop between users and machine processes creates posthuman subjectivity that is neither pure, wholistic, nor transcendent of politicized discourses. Rather, web users are posthuman digital citizens who are constantly shifting between illusions of intimate, non-consequential virtuality and the realities of data harvesting, surveillance, and consumeristic influence from global corporations and national narratives. At the crux of technological participation and consumerism during Web 2.0 is the posthuman who embodies global flows and local realities simultaneously with varying degrees of agency like the three protagonists in *.Sub*, *Hyper-Reality*, and *Reality 2.0*.

The posthuman who exists and operates within spaces that are charged with biased code, information, marketing strategies, and technological hardware cannot simply exist as a global citizen of a sovereign (cyber)territory.[clxxxi] Quite the opposite, posthumans are digital citizens who are simultaneously channeling local, national, and global constructs within a subjectivity that is programmed (at least in part) by stakeholders both corporate and political. This kind of existence does not mean, however, that posthumans or cyborgs are powerless, but that posthuman agency requires the seizure and modification of technological tools to bypass and evade oppression (Dalton 183). This theoretical stance of using the "master's tools" to gain power and agency manifests to varying degrees of success in *.Sub*, *Hyper-Reality*, and *Reality 2.0*, yet eventually yields limited results like re-opting into an oppressive network or being forced to navigate through society unofficially as a person or laborer who is vulnerable to exploitation.[clxxxii] While the three short films that I examine are categorized as science fiction or speculative fiction, the struggles that each posthuman protagonist endures is derivative and representative of how connected living bears *real* consequences for visibility, citizenship, and national belonging.

IV. The marginal posthuman as a digital citizen of biased information structures

Throughout this dissertation, I have referred to Web 2.0 as a paradigm of the *Third Order of Information* in which knowledge organization and information flows are collaborative between humans and nonhuman machine processing.[clxxxiii] An example of this that I have explored in the second chapter is the process by which metadata is input by humans, presented through devices and platforms, and activated by connected users as participants. A feedback loop develops when those user behaviors are registered by machines and humans to create more information pathways based on learned data.[clxxxiv] This very combination of thinking and productivity between humans and machines is precisely how theorist N. Katherine Hayles perceives that "we became posthuman" (6). Although Posthumanism is an interdisciplinary critical paradigm that is broadly understood as a de-centering of the human from epistemologies that embraced purist binaries like Nature vs. Culture (Braidotti; Haraway), Hayles's theorization of the posthuman is most useful in this dissertation because she unites the two approaches at hand in this close reading of short films: 1) the material shifts of information processing that implicate the posthuman's embodiment of global/national discourses; and 2) posthuman subjectivities that manifest within digital cultural products like short films that speculate on emerging technologies. [clxxxv]

In her seminal text, *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles lays out a framework for posthumanism that she calls the 'Materiality of Informatics.' In it, she insists that subjectivity is not solely comprised of discourses, like Foucault's post-structuralist arguments suggest, but that embodiment and incorporation of discourses must acknowledge the multidirectional flow of influence between bodies and cultures. [clxxxvi] This shift in logic is reflected in the debunked notion that the 'self' online is merely performative and somehow separate from the physical reality of the user offline. Put plainly, material bodies and information infrastructures are not immune to each

other in cyberspace.[clxxxvii] Furthermore, cyber narratives and infrastructures can mark and alter the physical world by influencing cognition and habits inscribed in the posthuman body. Hayles argues that this affective process takes place mutually in a feedback loop:

> When changes in incorporating practices take place, they are often linked with new technologies that affect how people use their bodies and experience space and time. Formed by technology at the same time that it creates technology, embodiment mediates between technology and discourse by creating new experiential frameworks that serve as boundary markers for the creation of corresponding discursive systems. (*How We Became Posthuman* 205)

Hayles clearly lays out the propulsive feedback loop of technology and discourse and how limitations, bias, and abstractions within them are baked into posthuman subjectivity. Unlike many popular science fictional depictions of androids, cyborgs, and robots as perfected humans with enhanced capabilities, Hayles's postulation of posthumanism is that of a subjectivity that is in constant flux with material shifts and technologies that mediate information. For example, the posthuman embodies learned software as cognitive habit and then produces content in step with that software, perhaps without any direct incorporation of technological hardware like wearables or microchips.[clxxxviii] While two of the posthuman protagonists (*Hyper-Reality*, *.Sub*) do include wearable or embedded technologies that configure their connectivity, *Reality 2.0* exhibits an assemblage of web activities that mimics the constant cognitive shift between the national constructs of home and place as it is presented through virtual information and media during Web 2.0.

Hayles's posthuman is not a just a subject of a speculative future, but that of a subjectivity which demonstrates how humans and machines continue to influence each other in a feedback loop. For example, the material shift from the read-and-write Web to a participatory, networked Web 2.0 not only affected how humans use the Internet, but also how disembodied information in

the digital sphere influenced cognition and bodies that contribute to posthuman subjectivity.[clxxxix] One of the key shifts of information processing during this transition is the *platformization* of the Internet that occurred during Web 2.0.[cxc] For the posthuman, the platformization of the web means the convenience of consistent personalization across applications and devices while gradually becoming more reliant on structures that are curated to influence behavior and even control bodies of digital citizens.[cxci] In the next sections and throughout my short film analysis, I will expand on how networked platforms introduced during Web 2.0 create silos of individuation and user data that are more broadly surveilled and manipulated to enforce consumer and civic behavior. For the posthuman protagonists in .*Sub*, *Hyper-Reality*, and *Reality 2.0*, the platformization of the Web is the common ground that incubates their sense of belonging and thus propels their decisions as Global South minorities who must navigate through a webspace that is designed to reinforce hegemonic discourses through nationalism and global technocapitalism.

Concerning posthuman subjectivity, Hayles privileges the technological process of *information* and its link with human consciousness over the idea of a technologized *body*. She illustrates her position by imagining the effect of the cybernetic 'black box' of information and its feedback loops created between the human and the machine. This results in a oneness/simultaneity of thinking between the human and the machine which embodies the posthuman and the decisions they make. This 'black box' analogy does not just live within science fiction, it is a description of how the digital era of Web 2.0 quickened the synchronization of human and machine cognition and production for the better and for the worse.[cxcii] For the digital citizen that is posthuman, the feedback loop that is instantaneously adjusting and pivoting to align with individual behavior creates a participatory space full of community-driven narratives that reinforce demographic constructs like nationality, religion, sex, class, race, language, etc. The posthuman protagonists in

all three short films in this chapter are subjected to this algorithmic loop of learned behaviors and real-time decision making regardless of material technology inside or outside their bodies. For example, the narrator in *Reality 2.0* uses a desktop computer interface to facilitate his obsession with online videoclips, blogs, and videogames about drug cartel violence in Mexico in order to maintain a cognitive connection with his homeland. With each click, rating, comment, share, and site visitation, his personalized webspace is more intricately connected with his posthuman subjectivity as a Mexican immigrant in Germany since this seemingly disembodied information that lives in cyberspace becomes part of the narrator's cognitive circuitry.

I mentioned consequences of Web platformization and participation for the better and for the worse because the posthuman or the cyborg often is subjected to a falsehood that they are humans who are enhanced, perfected, and immortalized through technology.[cxciii] While many interpretations of the cyborg or the posthuman across disciplines require an embodiment of technological hardware or software into the human body, the priority that Hayles reinforces in her theorization is the *like-mindedness* of information technology and human knowledge that is not immune to limitations of power and mortality. This imperfect and unidealized posthuman can relocate the cyborg within historicized contexts of race, class, gender, colonialism, and other forms of marginalization instead of constructing a universal body solely through discourse narratives (*How We Became Posthuman* 203). These are the critical grounds that contribute to perspectives on the posthuman in Latin America as a region that has been systematically colonized, neo-colonized, exploited, and disenfranchised by the global powers that control world governance and capitalism.

In response to the anglicization and westernization of scientific and technology discourses, cyborg and posthuman theorizations have emerged that engage with critical race theories and

social justice movements. In the Global South, the Latin American subject and the cyborg maintain a historically precarious relationship that may be read in the context of labor automation and oppressed subjects of technologies of violence during military dictatorships like Andrew Brown details in his book, *Cyborgs in Latin America* (2010). Brown differs the Latin American cyborg from European studies of the posthuman: "Latin America serves as an especially important case study as it adds the prism of technological transfer, of the post dictatorships, and the neoliberal policies of the 1990s that have served as the backdrop to the rapid introduction of Internet technologies" (4).[cxciv]

While Brown's theorization leans on political power structures to define the Latin American posthuman, another proposition of the Latin American cyborg by Mexican performance artist, Guillermo Gomez-Peña, seeks to reclaim ownership of technologies that are slippery, dangerous, home-made, and performative in the face of the colonizer. In his lo-fi web clip from 2011 titled *Border Interrogation,* Gomez-Peña sports futuristic glasses in the foreground and asks: "Have any of you ever fantasized about being from another race or culture? Which one?" This performance of the immigrant cyborg as an illegal 'alien' who is racialized and hopeful to traverse boundaries and borders is another example of the difference of Latin American appropriations of cyborg as posthuman subject. The hybridity of the Gomez-Peña's cyborg actor as simultaneous animal, human, machine, and extraterrestrial is a political subject that is difficult to define and capture – a stronger position for undermining oppression in systems that privilege neat and clear definitions, labels, searchability, and recall.

Gómez-Peña's border cyborg performance aligns with David Dalton's configuration of the Latin American *robo sacer*, which is a cybernetic response to Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer*.[cxcv] Dalton's *robo sacer* is a dehumanized, marginal human whose "identity is the way in which those

in power signal certain individuals as less than human due to their relationship – or lack thereof – with technology" (183). Dalton explains that the *robo sacer* subjectivity is that of an oppressed technologized body that is not seeking to transcend race and class like the postmodern cyborg, but that the *robo sacer* is able to appropriate the same technological tools that repress them to later make themselves understood in communities online and/or outside of the national space. In this sense, the *robo sacer* does not need to modernize themselves as mestizo, hybrid, or racially transcendent to access and use web technologies to their benefit.

Since the posthuman protagonists in *Hyper-Reality*, *.Sub*, and *Reality 2.0* operate within global/national circumstances that are related to both physical territory and virtual cyberspace, I consider how the critical posthuman has been theorized in both Western and Latin American contexts.[cxcvi] While I frequently engage with Dalton's *robo sacer* to analyze marginalized resistance tactics through technology, I ultimately lean on Hayles's posthuman framework since she engages with the organization of information in digital space (personalized digital platforms), and the embodiment of machine-thinking in the posthuman (incorporating technologies as habit and creation as materiality of informatics). In the following section, I will conduct close readings of the three Ibero-American short films in order of their release which coincides with their levels of technological immersion moving from desktop web use (*Reality 2.0*), to microchipped, real-time subtitling (*.Sub*) to a pervasive augmented reality interface (*Hyper-Reality*).

i. *Reality 2.0* (dir. Víctor Orozco, 2012)

As an animated film that is both born-digital and born-online through assembling and rotoscoping user-generated web clips, *Reality 2.0* recreates the web user's experience as a navigator and participant on sites and platforms that perpetuate content about narco-violence in Mexico. Described by Orozco himself as an *animadoc* (an animated documentary), *Reality 2.0*

comments on the primitive era of content generation in the earliest days of user-uploaded media during Web 2.0. During my personal interview with Orozco in June of 2020, he described how the onset of the Participatory Web and mobile connectivity affected his filmmaking practices:

> There are not even aesthetic norms that come with it, people are making content on the fly *como le sale de los huevos*. They take the phone and shoot, that's it. …Then I thought, OK what's my position as an artist? If I've been robbed of my unique ability to create content, then by necessity I've become a curator. Therefore, the work that conceptually defines my position as curator... I select material to then generate a new syntaxis of sorts... but with content that is created by other people, not just by me.
>
> (Orozco Personal Interview, 11:32-12:23).[cxcvii]

Just like the individuation effect of curated content for any given user on the web, Orozco manages to recreate this personalized experience as an animated documentary of real-life web praxis. That is, point-and-shoot videos from mobile phones from around the world were selected from Orozco's web experience, assembled, re-ordered, enhanced with animation, and streamlined into a migration narrative mediated through cyberspace.

Positioned between his physical location in Germany and his web voyeurism of Mexico, the protagonist in the film demonstrates how posthuman subjectivity is both entrenched with national discourses yet not wholly committed to one national identity over another. Rather, through web praxis, the protagonist engages with both Mexico and Germany through interaction with technology, space, and media. The protagonist of the film is most certainly based off the director, Víctor Orozco himself. As a Mexican immigrant living in Hamburg, Germany, Orozco remarked on his inspiration for the film which began in the year 2006 when drug trafficking related violence was intensifying in Mexico.[cxcviii] In our personal interview, he explained the contrast between front page news in Germany versus that of his home country:

> For me, since I was living in Germany in that year, it was a total shock. For example, I would open the newspaper and the front page had a story from Luxembourg about a fox playing with a ball in a

> park. I mean, that's the news here. The poor people don't even have news. Well, in Mexico every day in the news there are at least six people dead. So, by contrast, the reality of those news stories with that of the news cycle here in Europe that were so harmless, that bombardment in Mexico that began with shootings and deaths. So that was really the impetus behind *Reality 2.0*, that contrast. (Orozco Personal Interview, 12:57-13:30)

Curiously enough, the front-page news effect for the protagonist in *Reality 2.0* does not base itself off physical territory alone, but rather through the click pathways of the web user who navigates their "Daily Me" cyberspace in Web 2.0.[cxcix] Being seated in a certain territory as a web user, yet mentally engaging with content abroad is a cognitive contrast that is further enabled by Web 2.0 participative functions. Through the feedback loop of clicking, searching, and engaging with content, this posthuman effect creates a Mexican web space as an Internet user connecting from an IP address located within the German national territory. To make matters even more complicated, this transnational endeavor extends far beyond two national territories through platformization, that is, the physical location of YouTube servers and tech conglomerate data centers all over the world like those of Google and Apple, for example.[cc]

During the 11-minute film, the viewer comes to understand that while the protagonist of the film relocates to Germany,[cci] the content and history of his roots in Mexico continue to haunt him in the form of social media feeds, blogs, and chat forums dedicated to narco-violence and drug trafficking. The narrative voice explains that "I unwittingly transformed myself into a voyeuristic freak" (2:17) over a scene that features a video loading screen with a pixelated mouse curser clicking around the blank space.[ccii] This moment early in the film shows that the protagonist is in tension with the state of information in Germany versus that of Mexico which was in a full narco warfare crisis at the time. This feeling of impotency and concern on behalf of the protagonist means that he will create and obsess over an algorithmically designed web space that he perceives as

Mexican despite living in Germany as an immigrant and using Internet platforms that are physically housed all over the world. Regarding the protagonist's posthumanism, Hayles's "materiality of informatics" helps theorize how the multidirectional flow of information binds together events and online content that are virtually discursive yet materially grounded in national conflict (YouTube reaction videos, online gaming). Dalton's *robo sacer* posthuman subject grants visibility to the content creators who are typically housed outside of Western and Anglophone spaces like that of narcos who post videos and document their experiences on blogs whether they are performative or truthful.

The voice-in-off continues during the short film as the protagonist continues clicking on a blank page: "…but that allows me to immerse myself again in Mexican culture… but this time in an unconventional way" (2:21) that immediately precedes screen-captured footage of a YouTube page that plays a video called "Reaction to execution of Manuel Mendez Leyva" (Image 3.1). The web-savvy viewer would easily recognize the animated layout of YouTube and Web 2.0 features like the *reaction video* genre,[cciii] the number of views displayed, and the panel of suggested videos on the side based on a taxonomy of tags and user behavior. While the YouTube clip shows a group of young men staring directly into the camera, the real scene that they are watching through their own screen is an execution by narco-traffickers that has been posted online. As both the short film viewer and the first-person protagonist watch the video player, the horror and shock of a live-captured execution reaches the web user through the sound and subtitles from the YouTube video even though the actual footage is not shown.

In this scene, both the viewer and the protagonist experience an event twice and thrice removed from the violence that is framed within a cyberspace that had fewer regulations at the time to censor or limit graphic content.[cciv] In a purely directional sense, the viewer (sitting in for

the narrator) becomes the object of disgust, seen as a tourist or a *voyeur* in a corner of cyberspace that amplifies and normalizes violence in Mexican narco-warfare. This confrontational stance calls out a type of cyber-tourism that is removed from the physical danger of narcoviolence yet affords web users the privilege to temporarily look upon and engage with user-uploaded content from another location. Especially through the question of posthuman embodiment of virtual content and information, the reaction of gruesome violence through a screen clearly forges an alliance between clicking and viewing online content and experiencing bodily affect.

Image 3.1: Watching a reaction video on YouTube in Reality 2.0 *(02:38)*

The feedback loop between offline behaviors and online reactions exemplified in the reaction video scene reflects a posthuman order in which the technologization of the human is not a Terminator-like android but the ever-connected self that constructs worldviews and realities based on interactions and impulses available on the Participatory Web. Curiously, the filmic effect of projecting web voyeurism creates a type of closed-loop between filming, viewing, and web-usership. While many examples of cinematic voyeurism have played with this technique, the uncanny sensation of watching and being watched anonymously through screens is frequently

evoked in the emerging film genres of Internet Horror and Desktop Cinema.[ccv] This effect of blurring web viewership and usership creates an implication that remote observation is a participatory act that is neither neutral nor passive. The ability to 'like,' 'share,' and 'comment' on non-simulated violence and its shock value convert a private encounter on a personal device or during a connected session into a public recognition of *narcos* as emboldened Internet celebrities.[ccvi]

Another example of Web 2.0 praxis and global/national posthuman participation in *Reality 2.0* is through the transition from 2-bit videogames on an offline console into online video gameplay. While the tone of the narrator's voice calmly yet remorsefully describes the absorption of violence in Mexico as an explainable effect, the remixed and animated found footage continues to throw the viewer into a different scene every few seconds. A scene at the 7-minute mark animates a young boy playing a classic arcade game as the voice narrates: "The manipulation of fear by the Mexican government is similar to the one used by George Bush in his war against terrorism… and the drug trafficker's response has been similar to the one used by Al Qaeda" (7:01-7:24).[ccvii] As this sentence is uttered, the 2-bit shooter game changes to another arcade game featuring the Predator from the *Alien* franchise with more complex graphics and maps. At the mention of Al Qaeda, the 2-bit arcade game launches into an even more advanced first-person shooter (FPS) game in which the player must mercilessly spray bullets into enemies on sight. The combination of political narration comparing the War on Terror[ccviii] to the Mexican Drug War[ccix] and video gameplay highlights the dissipating distance between abstracted violence into uncanny realism as gaming graphics and simulations advance.

The narration continues as the game mode switches to other FPS games with smoother and more sophisticated graphics, indicating an upgrade in experiential violence through gaming

platforms. The next two video game scenes emphasize the closeness of first-person perspective of shooting and killing as a marker of success and winning. The lifeless, wounded bodies look more realistic, and the movements and timing in the video game worlds are more life-like or even hyperreal.[ccx] Orozco's narration seamlessly transitions to playing an audio clip of a recorded torture, signifying the slippery slope of gaming in a virtual space and the glorification of violence. Especially with the onset of online videogames and MMOs (Massively Multiplayer Online) during the Web 2.0 era, players around the world could connect to the same virtual worlds and play out scenarios and strategies as avatars. Without reiterating any alarmist arguments about video gameplay and inspired mass shootings, *Reality 2.0* uses the evolution of videogames to demonstrate an increased realism and likeness to narco warfare and experiential violence advancing from web voyeurism into online simulation behind the weapon.

The narration and aesthetics of *Reality 2.0* continually make the point that the experience of media online and the newfound ability to create and engage with online content forms a direct line of communication with those who are otherwise remotely located like the Mexican narrator who lives in Germany. The crux of the argument in *Reality 2.0* is summarized in the following sentences spoken over a section of the videogaming sequence: "Right now drug traffickers upload videos to YouTube where they interrogate, torture and execute hostages. In this media war, the drug traffickers express their feelings and their morale. They have developed their own aesthetic of horror. With this, they portray on the Internet their indisputable reality… this Reality 2.0 that is violently argued from the comfort of an Internet café" (7:24-7:45).[ccxi] As this quotation plainly describes, the narcos themselves are performing posthuman, or *robo sacer* subjectivities by reappropriating web tools and platforms to publicize their violence over figures of the state and the Mexican Drug War at large (politicians, police, betrayers). By dropping the viewer in the first-

person perspective of popular shoot-to-kill video games during this narration, *Reality 2.0* drives home the postulation that new media genres in the era of the Participatory Web like online videogames that simulate terroristic violence can co-exist seamlessly alongside web clips that show narcoterrorism take place. Beyond this, users are encouraged to participate not only in the consumption of this genre, but in game-play experience and content generation as the passivity of viewed/viewer paradigm is complicated and disrupted in this territory.

Another one of the essential media genres of Web 2.0, the web blog, became one of the main platforms that was weaponized by narcos and infiltrated by trolls and tourists who were constantly negotiating truths and false claims of explicit narcoviolence.[ccxii] Orozco's description of his initial investigation that led to *Reality 2.0* recounts his personal tourism in a blog space that highlighted the brutality coming out of Mexico during that time in comparison to the relative peace of his life in Germany. He explained that he came upon the blog of a Spanish scholar who was writing their dissertation on the Zetas narco-trafficking group in Mexico. Because of the number of mentions of the word, 'Zetas' in the online text, the blog soon became the number one search result on Google. In the comment section of the blog, users began posting their testimonies and local knowledge about Zetas in their region, and soon enough Zetas began to respond to and ignite disputes until the comment section converted into a cyber-battleground for narcos. While many visitors of the site suspected that some of the so-called narcos were in fact trolls or pirates, one of the self-proclaimed narcos threatened the life of a named police chief. Orozco explained in our interview, "Well then the next day the police chief was cut to pieces … it actually happened. Then, another narco would respond in the comments and make a threat and it would happen. It was like being a witness to a war that started online in the craziest way and in the most unlikely place like a doctoral student's blog" (14:30-16:09).

The direct consequences that Orozco describes between a public blog online and real-life violence offline call into question the connections between participation in cyberspace and physical territories. John Marshall reminds us of the multidirectional flows of cyberspace: "Cyberspace is influenced by geopolitical, historical, developmental, and economic factors; by the expansion and intensification of capitalism; by access factors and by its use. Not only does the online world affect cyberspace, but cyberspace changes the way offline space is used" (94). Just as Orozco describes of the metadata causing the SEO algorithm to display the doctoral student's blog as the first search result on Google, more traffic and participation propelled this corner of cyberspace to become a bulletin board of death threats, callouts, and disaster porn for passer-byers from all over the world.[ccxiii] Orozco's fascination with the audacity of narcos to publish intimate details of their personal lives led him to several narco blogs where he commented on the ease of geographically locating their posts and activities through applications like Google Earth.[ccxiv] For *Reality 2.0*, both the short film and the impetus behind it rely heavily on Web 2.0 praxis as a means to participate in transnational debates and testimonies through an individually curated information feed nourished by interactions and engagement with new media like web clips, web blogs, and online gaming.

While the gritty and wobbly animation style of *Reality 2.0* is meant to remix footage of 'real' experiences in Mexico with metaphorical scenes that document narcoviolence communicated on the Participatory Web, the overall mood of the short film is that of cynical nostalgia for the chaotic and macabre essence of Mexico against the cold and rational zeitgeist of Germany. Orozco's skill of curating sound, image, and animation style from web clips is the driving force of this anima-doc that contrasts the extreme violence occurring every day in Mexico against the calm security of Germany. The concluding narration declares this by elaborating on an

early observation in the film about the prevalence of rabbits in Germany as the final scene depicts a massive Mexican flag staked over a hill of mausoleums: "I've realized that the rats never evolved into rabbits in Germany. Instead, in Mexico, this surreal country, we managed to transform rabbits into rats" (10:15-10:25).[ccxv]

Víctor Orozco's *Reality 2.0* is a born-online short film that highlights the repercussions of the human-machine co-creation of a personalized experience in the Participatory Web and the tensions of belonging and locatedness. As a Mexican living in Germany, Orozco's constant comparison between national spaces and the sort of media they perpetuate is intensified by his deep dive into the newfound genres of Web 2.0 including user-uploaded web clips, web blogs, and online gaming. As both an animated documentary and a visual essay about the militarization of the ongoing Mexican Drug War since 2006, *Reality 2.0* not only shows and tells, but recruits the viewer, gamer, web user, politician, and narco into the same participative cyberspace as co-conspirators of violence both online and offline.

ii. .*Sub* (dir. Jossie Malis Álvarez, 2013)

The short film .*Sub (2012)* is only 13 minutes long, but the plot is jam-packed with messaging about the inequalities of web technologies that bear resemblance to Web 2.0 platforms. Much of the film is considered live-action, but there are specific elements of animation and computerized aesthetics that add to the science-fictional aspect of the short. For example, the inclusion of subtitling that is constantly referred to by the characters, freeze-frames with modem sounds and coded text, as well as an entire scene comprised of a desktop interface add to the feeling that the world of .*Sub* is a façade that is susceptible to those who code, program, and hack the systems. Through an implanted micro-chip, each immigrant in the fictional world of .*Sub* is marked, made cyborg, and proceeds to see and experience real-time translation technologies

through subtitling. In this sense, the posthuman's consciousness becomes a human-computer-interface (HCI) through which the viewer is merged with their first-person view during various scenes.[ccxvi] Neither autonomous nor private, the digital citizens in *.Sub* are constantly exposed to a centralized, networked system under state control of the microchip. In the case of the protagonist, Euyumi, her exposure as a non-citizen endangers her possibilities to remain and work in her society as an immigrant.

Since 2017, a developing landscape of speech recognition and live captioning has been introduced to Internet users with advanced processing speeds and speaker independence, making the magic of real-time captioning technology in *.Sub* more of a scientific prediction than a speculative fiction.[ccxvii] In the short film, the European state imposes a chip implant technology that enables live captioning of real-time translations in a narrative setting that is predominantly made up of immigrants. The protagonist herself, Euyumi, is an immigrant from an unnamed country in Africa, and spends the entirety of the film trying to fix her faulty chip implant which makes her subtitles appear as unintelligible glyphs for the other characters in the film. Most of the short film's action takes place in and out of immigration offices and in underground networks of immigrants, as Euyumi desperately looks for a way to short circuit the technology that exposes her informal status. Despite a somewhat satisfactory ending to the film, the (fictional) message is clear: state-sanctioned subtitling technology is enabling and accessible for citizens with a history of linguistic visibility on the Web and debilitating and potentially dangerous for non-citizens without the same historical privileges.

Euyumi's problems of citizen access and visibility in *.Sub* highlight the failures of an egalitarian, post national technocracy where she resides as an oppressed and illegible posthuman rather than a liberated one. In this sense, Euyumi is constantly operating as a posthuman in

response to the nationalized informatics that are seeking to oust her, yet she is performing as a *robo sacer* subjectivity to overhaul the systems and exist through and with alternative technologies. Her problems begin when she is told by a French-speaking bureaucrat that all foreigners must take their papers to an office called the Download Bureau to obtain legal subtitles. The next scene shows Euyumi losing her job as a janitor as her supervisor explains to her in Arabic that this was an order from administration, meaning that Euyumi's visit to the bureau exposed her undocumented status. Even as the viewer is still getting oriented with who speaks what language and how their subtitles gain access to communication, jobs, and immigration status, the invisible systems at work in *.Sub* mean that any sort of bureaucratic error or informality is digitally recorded through data harvesting and surveillance, universalized across platforms through Cloud-like technologies, and bears serious consequences for a posthuman digital citizen like Euyumi.

Another point to bear in mind is that all the bureaucratic figures who deal with Euyumi's immigration process are white and speak languages from Western Europe: German, Castilian Spanish, Hexagonal French, and British English. In contrast, the working-class characters in the film are brown and black and speak non-Indo-European languages like Arabic and Hindi.[ccxviii] The mere fact that the posthuman characters in the film are segregated by race, class, and possibilities of upward mobility point back to Hayles's posthuman notion of embodied materiality of informatics. In other words, the biased frameworks of technology and surveillance in *.Sub* are not only implanted into the body as a microchip, but inscribe and perpetuate bias through cognition and flow of information. In the film, the main way this flow of prejudiced code manifests is through subtitling. For Euyumi, the intersections of her marginality are additive in the technocratic universe of *.Sub* as a black, working class woman whose faulty subtitles are a dead giveaway of undocumented status.

The technological divisions between officialized systems of state power versus unofficial networks of subversion intensify when Euyumi decides to take her destiny into her own hands. In the interminable waiting room at the Download Bureau, Euyumi sees an ad in the newspaper that reads, "Subtitle Problems? We can fix that!" by a certain Dr. Hu. Exasperated, Euyumi leaves and makes a long bus trip to visit Dr. Hu in his office. The Japanese-speaking doctor holds up an anatomical model of a human skull while explaining how the microchip works. To jump start the subtitles activation, Dr. Hu prescribes Euyumi a Japanese technology nasal spray that she must only use once a day to eventually speak in basic sentences. He explains, "It's not the official technology but it works. Latins use it, Africans as well, Russians use it too." The fact that Dr. Hu lists off his typical customers and their regional belonging indicates that Euyumi is grouped amongst immigrant groups that often resort to informal solutions to their illegal status.

In addition, the irony behind Dr. Hu's Japanese nationality and language-group points to the fact that metropoles in Japan, Korea, and China have generally stayed in stride with Western Europe and U.S. technological advancement, and in many cases, set the pace for developing technologies and gadgets on the open market as well as the black market (Castells 61). In *.Sub*, Japanese black market technology in the form of a medicinal spray references stereotypes of non-western medicine which can be seen as quirky, magical, and outside of rational western scientific practices. For Euyumi, this is one more possible solution outside of the bureaucratic networks that implanted the microchip in the first place. As a *robo sacer*, or a marginal posthuman who is seen as less-than-human by Western and European technological powers, she decides to take a chance on it as a technological tool that is misunderstood or undetected by the official informatic structures of the state. As an immigrant-to-immigrant transaction, the posthuman agency in this scene moves

beyond national constructs as a way to forge solutions against informatic systems that aim to classify and officialize certain desirable subjects.

The climax of *.Sub* takes place around the 10-minute marker at the Download Bureau, when Euyumi is told by an Anglophone bureaucrat that she has an "illegal situation," and that the best course of action would be for her to return to her home country and apply again through the embassy. Euyumi's body language is that of frustration as she points to her nose (where the microchip was implanted), and then grabs her papers before storming out of the office. In the public bathroom, Euyumi finds the nasal spray in her purse and uses it several times in a row to induce an overdose. Back in the hallway, the atmosphere around her becomes lopsided, disorienting, and the music starts to slow down dramatically. Suddenly, the frame freezes and emits sounds of a modem mid-connection introducing a file path that types out a connection code. After a successful connection, the short film perspective enters a desktop mode with a blank identity form. The form is filled out with her name, an identity code, and the cursor clicks on a menu called "Subs" and selects the function "Activate." Curiously, the menu also shows other categories in the Subs menu that are highly subjective like "Region, Sex, Race, Religion, Legal Status" – in addition to functionalities with the subtitles itself like "Font, Language, Mute, Play, Stop, Jump in Time" (Image 3.2).

In this scene, the music stops, and the clock is set to 00:00, which makes for a parenthesis or third space in the live-action sequences of the short film. The viewer now peers into Euyumi's cognitive functions as if it were an operating system modeled after a Macintosh or Windows interface. Even if this desktop space were meant to access the micro-chip software only, the blend of qualifiers like race, sex, religion with user functionality and even short-cut keys suggest continuous influence between computer infrastructure and social constructs. The mix of languages

on the screen in Image 3.2 include different fonts, scripts, and identification numbers and codes. The effect of this multilingual co-mingling of code and phrasing on a singular interface highlights the basis of all languages as code, and that Euyumi's discursive thoughts are just another set of codes to hack. This plurilingual technological desktop screen is emblematic of a global web aesthetic that is also highly contingent on national qualifiers that are entirely non-nuanced like the Race, Sex, Region, Religion attributes in the menu. The ominous question that lingers is who or what is performing the modification to Euyumi's subtitling software? And how does the Japanese nasal spray kickstart this computational process?

Image 3.2: Euyumi Bamako's human-computer interface in .Sub*, 12:22*

In the final minute of *.Sub*, Euyumi is at a job interview to work at a small tailoring booth in a crowded marketplace. The lightning is warm and soft in contrast to the blue and harsh tones of the immigration bureau scenes. The tailor inquires in Hindi, "When can you start?" Euyumi replies, "Tomorrow Morning" with a smile on her face. When she speaks, we see her subtitles in Japanese characters, but that quickly glitches over into English with some missing characters. The result of Euyumi's nasal spray hack means that real-time subtitles have been re-routed through a Japanese infrastructure which masquerades as officiality. As the subtitle lingers, upbeat,

percussive music fades in and drowns out the scenery to commence the credit sequence. This final mood of humor and optimism suggests that, while Euyumi's nightmare of having illegible subtitles is temporarily over, she is still operating at a disadvantage by having over-simplified subtitles with unreliable glitch errors. The materialization of informatics is how Euyumi's posthuman body and cognition are the embodiment of an official system that has been modified or curtailed by other immigrants who are also marginalized in some way. By working for another immigrant and his small business in the end, Euyumi's situation is improved thanks to the help of unofficial and informal uses of technology that undermine the state's oppressive regulations. Despite the hopeful tone at the conclusion of the short film, one cannot help but speculate if Euyumi was able to realize her personal dream, or if this is indeed the best she can hope for as an undocumented immigrant. Regardless of the intended conclusion of *.Sub*, the overall outlook for the technologized immigrant body is bleak since it is not indicative of universal access to civic services and upper mobility in the light of day but rather an act of survival and 'getting by' in underground systems.

One last point about *.Sub* and its aesthetics is that the notion of technological imperialism as it extends beyond the premise of the film to directly implicate the viewer and their linguistic habits on the web. In the film, the other characters cannot read Euyumi's speech; but this same illegibility occurs through *the viewer* as well since they can only follow the film's multilingual dialogue through available subtitling.[ccxix] In a sense, the viewer is projected and detected within two places at once: in the pluralistic world of subtitle lingua franca as well as the viewing experience that requires subtitles as a transmitter of intelligibility. The availability of subtitling for the online viewer include Castilian Spanish, Hexagonal French, and British English – which seems to cut into the point that *.Sub* is trying to make – that technology privileges certain languages and cultures who have historically maintained power. Unless the viewer belongs to Euyumi's language

community, that viewer is most likely left to their own devices to decipher her emotions during the film which are mostly frustration, desperation, and finally, relief.

Hayles's posthuman subject embodies the imperfections of machine-human feedback in the film's glitched subtitles and points to larger discussions of technological biases that prevail between the so-called Global North and Global-South. Euyumi as a black woman from Africa is illegible to a system that boasts a post-lingual society thanks to microchipped subtitle technology, but this project has clearly failed the posthuman who must rely on bootleg solutions to function. The science fictional premise of *.Sub* is exemplary of a short film that plays into the fantasy of a post-national society that leans on technology to equalize opportunities and mobility while exposing the qualms of unchanged power structures of a pre-connected society.

iii. *Hyper-Reality* (2016)

Keiichi Matsuda's *Hyper-Reality* (2016) is a speculative short film that pushes boundaries between mobile connectivity and posthuman perspective within a technologized urban landscape in Colombia. In less than six minutes, the first-person, augmented reality (AR) perspective of Juliana, a working-class Colombian woman of color, exposes the dangers of ubiquitous connectivity powered by neoliberal consumerism steeped in gamified graphics and incentive schemes. The action of the film takes place in the city of Medellín, Colombia that has already gone through centuries of colonization and neo-colonization, and still another layer of technological colonization occurs through the imposition of AR graphics and architectures that have become integral to citizenship. Experienced in real-time, the HCI (Human Computer Interface) that operates Juliana's worldview is essential to her survival, safety, and career potential. In the city, everything from traffic lights to bus stop announcements to job opportunities are experienced through the virtual layers of the HCI. When Juliana questions the networked system itself and

expresses her existential anxieties within it, she is left with a difficult decision to opt out and lose loyalty points that she has accumulated in the applications that make up her personal AR interface.

Distinct from *.Sub*'s preoccupation with immigration status and *Reality 2.0*'s digital voyeurism between national spaces, *Hyper-Reality* evokes posthumanism and (trans)nationalism through an onslaught of digital consumerism in an augmented landscape infused with real-time interactivity for individual citizens.[ccxx] Presented with colorful graphics and playful sound effects, the apps in Juliana's mobile operating system brings rewards and consequences based on her willingness to participate in tasks and behaviors that accumulate loyalty points. Like the 'walled garden' infrastructure of many Web 2.0 platforms, the immersive applications in Juliana's worldview foster participation and input without the guarantee of protecting data or handing back control to the user if they decide to opt out. In *Hyper-Reality*, the virtual system of consumerism interfaced in the augmented Medellín is intimately integrated with the consciousness of the posthuman subject, Juliana. From her point of view throughout the film, the operating system accumulates points within applications for companies such as Juan Valdés, Nivea, Tampax and Éxito, the South American supermarket chain. This virtual transposition of global capitalism within and onto the body that is nourished by acts of loyalty to the neoliberal system is exemplary of the permeating and invasive reach of wearable computers that are incorporated into the body. In other words, the virtual is 'optional' in name alone – opting out means accepting the endangerment of navigating now-illegible public spaces and living outside an economy whose cost-of-entry is constant access to the digital citizen's personal data.

The following analysis will focus on how platforms and applications in Juliana's posthuman perspective create a fragmented sense of belonging within local territory (Medellín, Colombia) while simultaneously being influenced by digital incentives that communicate foreign

interests of economy and control. In *Hyper-Reality*, Juliana's posthuman subjectivity is not a liberated, post-national cyborg who is able to write her own destiny by wielding the power of available technologies. In fact, as a working-class woman of color, Juliana's posthumanism is contingent on her constant shift in attention, decisions, and movements as she operates in response to an immersive network that she must continually opt into for her basic needs. In the hyperreality of the short film, the co-mingling of material and digital technology is not distinct nor easily deciphered since the bodies of humans and non-human objects are coded through signals between the perception of the posthuman and networked cloud technologies that are adjusting in real-time. With invisible signals and data streaming back and forth between the connected user and the network, the digital citizen who inhabits an augmented city must occupy multiple spaces through a posthuman subjectivity.

In *Hyper-Reality*, Juliana navigates Medellín as a working-class citizen: she travels by bus, walks on busy streets with heavy traffic, and strolls through the supermarket running errands for a paying client. While these activities could be accomplished in any number of urban metropoles, the animation superimposed on the live-action footage incorporates cultural references that evoke a general Latin American– and at times a specifically Colombian– aesthetic imaginary. These references include Catholic iconography, Latin American brands and advertisements, touristic suggestions for Medellín, an electronic Latin soundtrack in several scenes, and most of the dialogue in Colombian Spanish.[ccxxi] These features situate the viewer in interchangeable urban spaces, while the virtual layers in the film communicate a technological atmosphere specific to Medellín. As Juliana's narrative unfolds, the intensity of everyday life in an augmented Medellín reveals a seamless continuation between her personalized desktop interface and the public space around her. By mixing the familiarity and comfort of the personal device or 'home screen' with

the real-time interaction of a technologized public space, the digital citizen in *Hyper-Reality* is constantly connected, networked, and supervised without clear boundaries of privacy.[ccxxii]

From the very first moments of the short film, the graphics and animation represent an overload of hyperreality in the form of a holographic videogame mid-play: the neon colors, the moving image and text, several layers of noise, sound effects, and background music that occur within the worldview of Juliana are meant to immerse the viewer to the point of over-stimulation. The protagonists' hands manipulate the movements of the virtual videogame graphics while she simultaneously receives multiple notifications from various applications organized into holographic windows in her 'screened' view (Image 3.3). The entirety of the short film is from this point of view in which the human eye perceives from the disappeared screen of augmented reality (AR). From this perspective, the viewer can experience the *umwelt* of the cyborg whose senses and cognitive processes are almost fully connected to a system while navigating according to Juliana's individual preferences.

Juliana's frustration with the oppressive AR system becomes obvious when she receives a call from her application guru, Job Monkey, who assures her that if she accumulates more loyalty points, she will find a more suitable job for her career preparation. In her frustration, she voice-dictates the queries: "¿Quién soy?" and "¿Adónde voy?" ("Who am I?" / "Where am I going?") into a Google search engine, only to receive very literal answers that show her a hologram of her official identity card as well as a grid map of her route on public transportation (Image 3.3). This mistranslation of her existential search is also a misunderstanding of her desires as a posthuman citizen-consumer. Additionally, the failure of the augmented system to accurately address Juliana's questions suggests that the systematic coding has a limited capacity to respond to her mental and emotional needs. Her annoyance is clear as she clicks her tongue and declares, "No es lo que quiero

decir." ("That's not what I meant.") (01:00). Juliana's internal debate over whether to reset her identity is interrupted when the bus arrives to her destination. She decides not to opt out of the system just yet, because it also means that all her earned points in her applications would be erased.

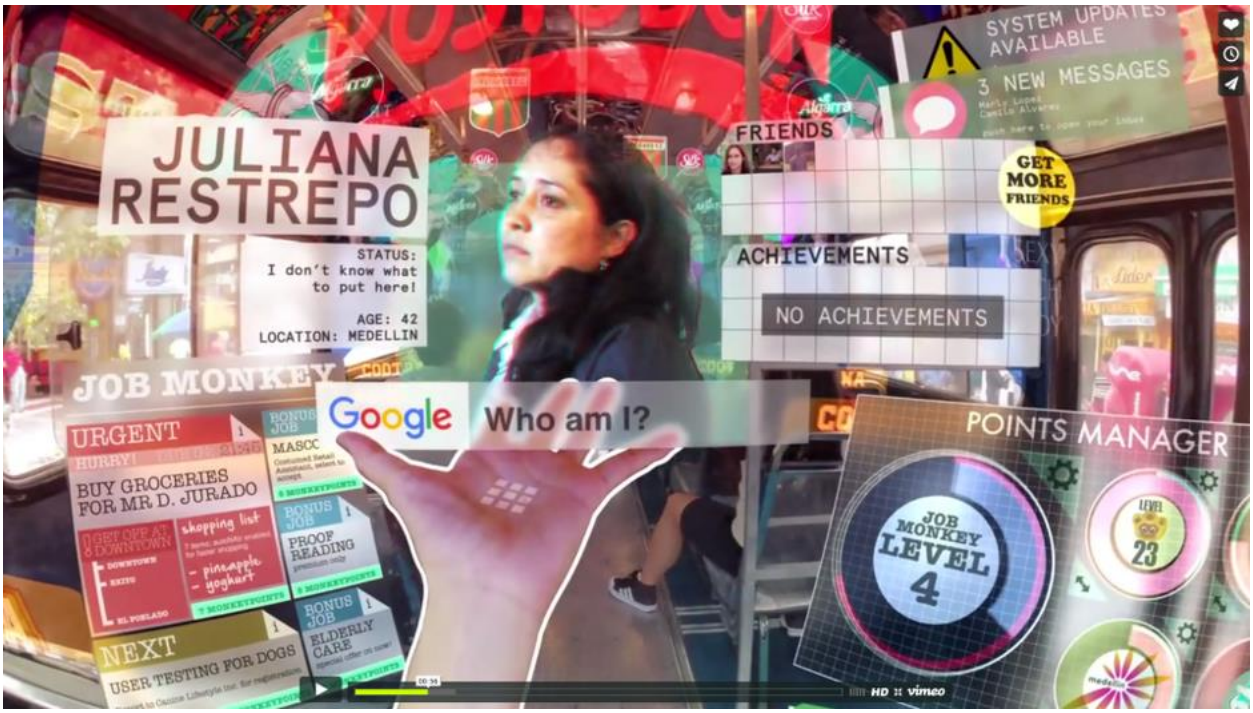

*Image 3.3: Juliana's first-person perspective and AR interface (*Hyper-Reality *00:56)*

The instantaneous stream of computerized information from all directions locates Juliana in a mapped public space, yet also dislodges her from a place of private belonging, as she is constantly surveilled by technologies that anticipate and suggest her next move. In Image 3.3, the background space of the public bus is altered with decorative and marketing graphics that the viewer assumes are visible to the other passengers through their own vision machines. In the foreground of Juliana's "Daily Me" vision is her personalized desktop with numerous applications, tasks, and indicators of her social cache as a citizen. Although Juliana's personal trajectory evokes a sense of confusion and disorientation – as suggested by her existential Google queries– her spatial itinerary is precisely mapped. These optimization tactics are meant to push Juliana along

the path of virtual achievement, consumerism, and behaviors that are suggested by algorithms and machine-learning in real time. Beyond Juliana's immediate vision is the depth of space and foresight of where she is going, what she will do, and how she will make decisions as a networked digital citizen.

At this point in the short film, Juliana's posthuman subjectivity is that of a highly controllable, impressionable digital citizen who operates within at least two layers of existence: the physical architecture of the city, and the virtual infrastructures overlain that are just as effective in determining her movements and decisions. Juliana is not a privileged posthuman in this world, and her marginality evokes Dalton's cyborg articulation of the Mexican *robo sacer* more than a postmodern cyborg of socialist feminism like Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* imagines. A reminder that Dalton's terminology stems from Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer*, who is a dehumanized subject that does not receive equal protection under the law ("Robo Sacer" 16). Dalton explains of the *robo sacer*: "This condition emerges from an array of institutionalized states of exception such as the transnational flows of bodies, capital, technology and labor; however, one key component of robo sacer identity is the way in which those in power signal certain individuals as less than human due to their relationship – or lack thereof – with technology" (183). Juliana is one of the robo sacers of *Hyper-Reality* since her reluctance and resistance to an imposed technological infrastructure that seeps into every aspect of her life is in tension with her desires for upward social mobility through work, status, and virtual rewards. It is only through error, glitch, and unofficial seizures of technology (the strategy of the under-esteemed and overlooked *robo sacer*), that Juliana's subjectivity is rattled, and she is forced to alter her relationship with the same system that is designed to oppress her.

In *Hyper-Reality*, the interaction between official coding and unofficial coding through glitched errors and hacking is the turning point of Juliana's apathy with her AR world. These technical interruptions first occur during a scene in a supermarket, which is a space full of messages and advertisements that shift according to the algorithms flowing as invisible code between the posthuman and nonhuman fruits and vegetables, all subjectivities representing an entanglement of human, technology, and nature. In the dairy aisle, a glitch in Juliana's augmented vision reveals digitally stratified gendered experiences of daily activities, when the system begins mistaking Juliana for a male-bodied posthuman named Emilio by directing incoming calls to him. This gender glitch goes further as Juliana picks up a yogurt carton and examines its AR advertising. When the system glitches and begins projecting a male-coded AR experience, the yogurt label reads in English: "MAN YOG: For real men only." Meanwhile, a sexy policewoman dancing with a gun appears in the shopping cart while the Reggaeton soundtrack raps the lines, "Dámelo, mami" / ("Give it to me, baby"). The yogurt that previously projected in Juliana's female-coded view read: "The new super food! Beautiful you: probiotic yogurt. We can help you lose weight!" Meanwhile, a lighthearted Bossanova soundtrack accompanies the advertisement experience (Image 3.4). The coded projection of gender binaries onto the posthuman demonstrates the persistence of purist categories even in the hyperreal space as Hayles describes of her posthuman subject who is cognitively bound to imperfect, informational discourses. As the system is clearly uncertain whether to target advertisements towards a cis-female or cis-male posthuman, Juliana's *robo sacer* subjectivity shows signs of illegibility and error as a digital citizen.

*Image 3.4: Juliana's female-coded AR immersion in the supermarket (*Hyper-Reality *02:51)*

Another interesting power-dynamic facilitated through AR immersion in the supermarket scene is the anglicization of the food labels, and the live-translation from Spanish audio to English captions throughout a call with a customer service agent. While this live-subtitling tactic broadens the online viewer base for the short film itself and embeds translation into the narrative of the film, the proliferation of English in the networked Latin American city mirrors the historical anglicization of the web in Latin America. There are even larger implications of *who* designed the augmented city and the objects within it, which is another nod to neocolonial and neoliberal relations between Latin America and its colonizers. While this coding is the flow of information that facilitates a livelier cooperation between objects and beings in immersive AR, it is also an architecture of power that watches, records, and learns about the most intimate habits and decisions of its subjects.

Still in the supermarket, Juliana's customer-service application assures her that they are working on the glitch and warn her that they are going to reboot her system. After Juliana repeats

her concern about losing her loyalty points, the brightly colored AR environment of the grocery aisle powers down, creating an eerie moment for the viewer as the once-vibrant scene is stripped of stimulation and adornment, as even the shop banners revert to QR barcodes indecipherable to the un-augmented human eye. When the music cuts, the only remaining sound is the cry of a baby from further down the aisle as Juliana sighs worriedly, a sonic reset that juxtaposes life within the system versus life outside of it. As the immersive system boots up again, much like the restarting process of a computer or device, the animation and applications of her digital world surround her again, and then Juliana is instructed to follow a highlighted path to verify her identity within the system at large. Once again, Juliana's subjectivity is dictated by the functionality and utility of her systems as a marginalized posthuman citizen whose systems are vulnerable to a hegemonic network.

The climax of the film occurs when Juliana obediently follows the highlighted path back into the busy streets of Medellín. A digitally cloaked figure approaches Juliana quickly and stabs her hand to extract a blood sample (Image 3.5). Placed in opposition to Juliana, the biohacker is in fact another *robo sacer* who manages to "use the very technologies that relegate them to the periphery to denaturalize the constructs of race, gender, and capital that facilitate their marginalization" (Dalton 183). Physically and politically, the biohacker embodies technology to evade, obscure, and create by modifying and composing in the code behind the infrastructure. The glitched ethereality of this biohacker figure wears a guise of repeating floral motifs and sampled pieces of the cement pavement, obscuring any type of solid form that would identify traits such as gender, age, or even an outline of a solid body. The digital noise of this posthuman body complicates the clear channels of information by interrupting the hegemonic codes of the augmented city and composing itself as fluid yet effective in resistance. The alliance of the

biohacker is ambiguous in that they could be working outside the AR system and disrupting their channels to collect biodata samples from vulnerable citizens, or they could be an agent of the state to punish disloyal and wavering digital citizens like Juliana (possibly triggered by her voice-dictated questions at the beginning of the film). Either way, the hacker in *Hyper-Reality* enjoys the anonymity of a skilled coder who is cloaked under the confusion of mixed signals.

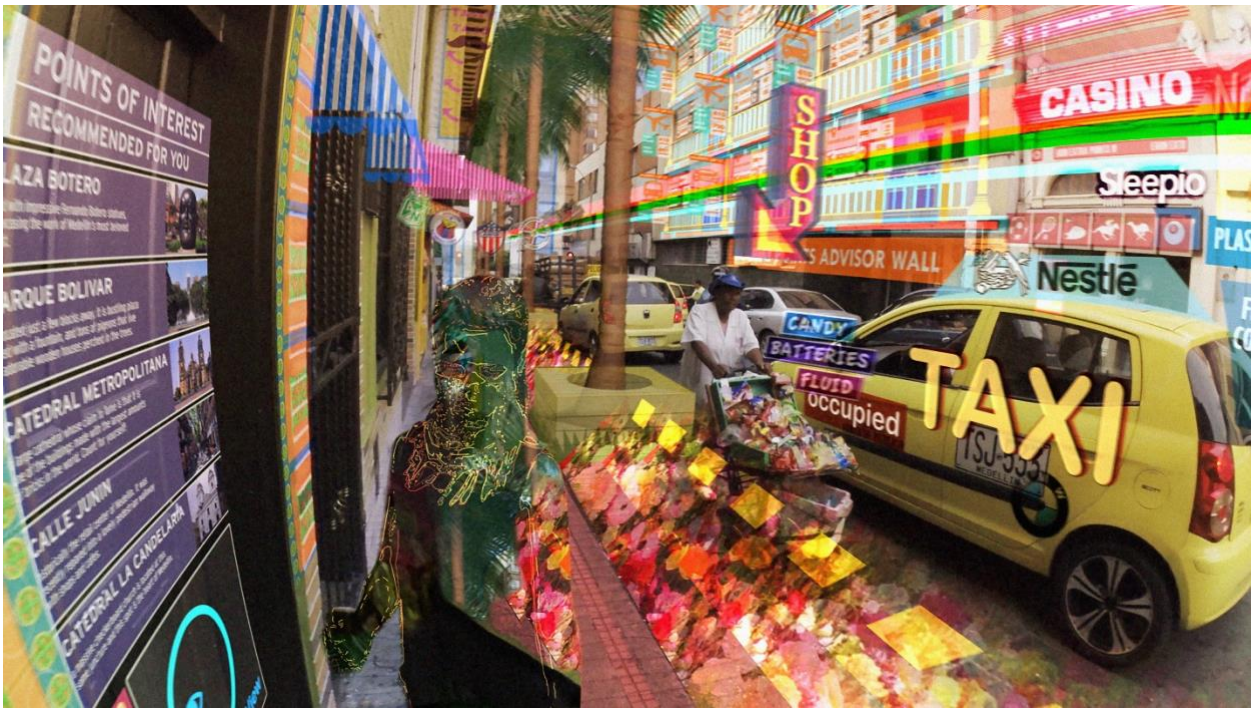

*Image 3.5: Juliana is hacked in the street by a digitally cloaked cyborg (*Hyper-Reality, *05:01)*

The contrast of Juliana's experience with that of the biohacker is highlighted in the final scene of the film when Juliana, desperate after resetting her identity in a panic, approaches a sidewalk altar of the Virgin and child, asking "¿Qué es eso?" ("What is that?"). Oddly enough, Juliana restarts her virtual participation within the Catholic Church by following the digital instructions to trace a cross before her, simultaneously a ritualistic Catholic gesture and the swipe movements commonly used to calibrate motion-sensing digital devices. In this scene, the hyperreal iconography of Catholicism mingles tropes of productivity within mobile apps and liturgical

tradition. The audiovisual portrayal of the Virgin and child features dancing celestial light, choral music, and cursive typography hoisted by angels (Image 3.6). Faced with the anxieties of marginality from the norms of the hyperreal, Juliana's newfound participation in the virtual Catholic Church reboots her passiveness and anxiety as an entrapped cyborg consumer, since she can see no other option.

*Image 3.6: Juliana's new AR immersion interface (*Hyper-Reality, *05:35)*

Keiichi Matsuda's speculative short film, *Hyper-Reality* presents two different modes of *robo sacer* subjectivity: the marginalized and oppressed Juliana, who views and interacts with a controlled system of consumerism, and the biohacker who disrupts codes and navigates freely within their own resistance script. Unlike the somewhat hopeful ending in *.Sub* that was a result of immigrant coalition hacks, *Hyper Reality* offers a gloomy simulation of what could come, or perhaps even a direct warning of the entrapment of identity, consumerism, and oppression that could accompany the total merge of human cognition with technological coding. By simulating

the split-vision of the Colombian cyborg in a networked space, the film's global speculation takes shape in Medellin rather than other metropoles like Tokyo that symbolize technological innovation to the outside world. The digital decor of the augmented Latin American city means that objects and subjects host another virtual layer which is culturally coded to predict, guide, motivate and interact with time and space that is both deep and instantaneous.

The plot of *Hyper-Reality* revolves around the consequences of poverty and oppression for Juliana who lives in a technologized urban space that perpetuates the hegemony of (neo)colonialism. Thus, Juliana is the posthuman subject who is caught in the crossfires of an imperfect world that is co-designed by human-machine processes controlled by certain nations and corporations. The aesthetics of *Hyper-Reality* (the soundtrack and effects, gamified animation graphics, and embedded subtitling) add to this contradictory and hybrid global and national experience: the dialogue is in Spanish, the subtitling is in English, and the graphics resemble Japanese videogame aesthetics with bright colors, cute emojis and characters, and a ludic soundscape. In tandem with the other, the plot and aesthetics of *Hyper-Reality* seem to respond to the following questions: "What would an unregulated, free-market web space look like if we let it come with us everywhere? And, what happens if we let it determine every move and decision we make?" While Juliana is fully immersed in an AR landscape projected through her vision, Web 2.0 on mobile devices are just a few steps behind Matsuda's speculative version of Medellín in *Hyper-Reality.*

V. Conclusion

The three short films analyzed in this chapter are examples of how narrating and portraying a speculative future is modeled after existing technologies during Web 2.0 like walled gardens, networked platforms, cloud storage and computing, and real-time algorithms trained by user

behavior and data harvesting. The posthuman protagonists from the three short films who navigate within these connected spaces, whether they be through a web browser, an enhanced vision activated by a micro-chip implant, or an immersive AR interface that gamifies the world around them, must be further nuanced as racialized, gendered, and marginalized posthumans since hegemonic influences like nationalism and global technocapitalism continually inform and propel connected living. During material and technological shifts during Web 2.0 years, discursive tensions were rife with optimisms of global connectivity as well as the fears of unchecked digital capitalism and online surveillance that accompany such an era. Filmic portrayals of posthumans operating within these discourses capture the decisions and consequences of bodily and cognitive affect, control, and resistance described in Hayles's *materiality of informatics* and Dalton's *robo sacer* subjectivity of the Global South.

In examining the narrative struggles of the posthuman protagonists in *.Sub*, *Hyper-Reality*, and *Reality 2.0*, close analysis uncovers how digital citizenship in the speculative future is not a post-national, egalitarian experience of a shared, global webspace. In fact, all three protagonists experience quite the opposite. Technological connectivity that is nationally or politically biased, surveilled, and globally corporatized is the impetus of their crises. To resolve their problems, peripheral or informal technology becomes the solution albeit temporary. In *Reality 2.0*, the narrator is able to articulate his cognitive split between his home country of Mexico and his immigration to Germany through sharing his 'Daily Me' webspace trained by his search behaviors and click pathways. In *.Sub*, Euyumi is able to bio hack her illegal subtitles and secure an underground job with her newfound accessibility to communication across languages. In *Hyper-Reality*, Juliana's conclusion is perhaps the least optimistic, as she reactively erases her previous

profile in the AR platform and restarts her profile within the virtual Catholic Church, which is yet another hegemonic system of biopolitics, colonialism, and exploitation.

While I situate this dissertation within Web 2.0 years as an era that altered short filmmaking and access in the Participatory Web, the three short films analyzed in this chapter anticipate several features of the Web 3.0 era of the late 2010s. Coined "the Semantic Web," Web 3.0 is driven by powerful AI technologies after decades of training algorithms to predict and suggest search results and services (Mersch and Muirhead). The "Daily Me" webspace of *Reality 2.0* has intensified to the fullest and has produced some of the most polarized political circumstances the world has ever seen. The rise of neo-nationalisms, fascisms, and authoritarianisms has manifested thanks in no small part to social media infrastructures that have become a hotbed for misinformation and radicalization. Questions of web participation for Internet users across non-dominant languages like Euyumi in *.Sub* have stimulated debates and standards to make institutional webpages more accessible and technology more multilingual. Finally, the vivified, gamified atmosphere of *Hyper-Reality* is no longer a science fictional fantasy as terminology like the Internet of Things (IoT) has become mainstream vocabulary, and VR and AR graphics become more sophisticated and devices more affordable each year.

During a phone interview with *Hyper-Reality* director, Keiichi Matsuda in April of 2019, he explained that he was in close contact with designers and developers in California who were in advanced stages of beta-testing contact lenses that would recreate a reality at the immersive level of his designs in *Hyper-Reality*.[ccxxiii] This forthcoming innovation recalls Matsuda's own words nearly a decade before in 2010 when Matsuda gave a lecture at the International Film School (IFS) in Cologne, Germany. He explained his approach to AR in his film projects:

> The type of AR that I'm interested in is Immersive AR. Rather than a smartphone and a webcam, it's AR in which you wear some sort of goggles or a head-up display that allows you to exist in a

> virtual world. AR is interesting because it combines VR with location awareness. AR can give us the ability to liberate data from screens and for it to exist in everyday life. The world we live in contains many virtual layers. With my background in architecture, this has interesting implications because it allows us to apply lessons that we learn from the Internet and to incorporate it into the city. We should think about that now and the complexities and problems that it's going to cause.
>
> (Matsuda, 04:20-05:10)

While Matsuda's curiosity and optimism about the potential of AR informed several short films that he went on to produce using a combination of live-action filming, animation, and graphic design, his call to action to contemplate and anticipate forthcoming consequences resounds as science fiction quickly becomes pre-science. In the next chapter, which is the conclusion of this dissertation, I will tie together the three preceding chapters on Ibero-American short films, (trans)national metadata, and posthuman narratives that evoke the (trans)national tensions and continuities within the Third Order of Information. I will also take the opportunity to provide recent examples of the intensification of the relationship between these three elements (especially throughout the COVID-19 global pandemic) and make recommendations for more pluralized national metadata for (short) films online.

[clxvi] Technologization is a transitive verb that means "to affect or alter by technology" (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/technologize#:~:text=transitive%20verb,affect%20or%20alter%20by%20technology).

[clxvii] Kickstarter is a web-based funding platform for creative projects. Contributors learn about projects through promotions and then contribute funding and resources through online monetary transfers.

[clxviii] Tung-Hui Hu's *A Prehistory of the Cloud* discusses the illusion of placelessness of digital networking and the high stakes of securing geographically located data storage: "Typically, scholars of communication tend to understand digital networks as enabling moves away from specific physical spaces… For the cloud's physicality and its virtuality likewise meet at the data center, the modern-day descendants of Starosielski's cable stations… These data centers produce a cloud that transcends national borders, but they are also rooted in specific geographies; they produce a set of secure pathways through an otherwise 'unsafe' Internet, but because they concentrate so much data, they also are among the most exposed sites for attack" (90-91).

[clxix] A Walled Garden is a "closed ecosystem in which all the operations are controlled by the ecosystem operator" (Poulpiquet).

[clxx] *Homo Sacer* is a Roman law concept that was re-appropriated by Giorgio Agamben to describe a person who is banned from society and could be killed by anyone since they are essentially determined to be outside the societal and cultural law.

[clxxi] Web 3.0 is also known as the Semantic Web which is characterized by the mass collection of user data and the intensification of online algorithms powered by artificial intelligence (Mersch & Muirhead, "What is Web 3.0 & Why it Matters," 2019: https://medium.com/fabric-ventures/what-is-web-3-0-why-it-matters-934eb07f3d2b).

[clxxii] Rosi Braidotti discusses the connections between Euro-centrism, Posthumanism, and Nationalism in her 2012 lecture titled *Posthuman Humanities:* "The issue of methodological nationalism is especially crucial in that it is in-built into the European Humanities' self-representation. Edward Said reminded us that Humanism must shed its smug Euro-centrism and become an adventure in difference and alternative cultural traditions. This shift of perspectives requires a prior consciousness-raising on the part of Humanities scholars: 'Humanists must recognise with some alarm that the politics of identity and the nationalistically grounded system of education remain at the core of what most of us actually do, despite changed boundaries and objects of research' (Said, 2004, p. 55)."

[clxxiii] An example of a controversial polemic between national belonging and posthuman robots is the world's first robot citizen, Sophia, who was granted citizenship in Saudi Arabia. "The citizenship issue was very controversial, with critics wondering why a humanoid robot received citizenship while women and foreign workers in the country have less rights, and many humans are practically stateless (e.g. Sini 2017)" (Parviainen & Coeckelbergh).

[clxxiv] This quotation is from Hari Kunzru's interview with Donna Haraway for the article, "You are Cyborg" for *Wired* in 1997.

[clxxv] Technocapitalism illustrates how the "rapid and unprecedented global flows of investment capital supported by innovations in software, communications, and electronics" function to "dynamize the accumulation of capital" (Suárez Vila, 2009, p. 19). Also, see page 11 in Taylor and Pitman's introduction to *Latin American Identity in Online Cultural Production*, 2013.

[clxxvi] For more about cyberglobalization, see Brier, David, and Marwan Kraidy (2001, p. 28)

[clxxvii] In the context of Iberoamerica, Internet penetration and connection speeds in Iberian metropoles like Porto, Lisboa, Madrid and Barcelona generally maintained pace with the rest of Western Europe whereas most of the population from Latin America began connecting during Web 2.0 years on mobile devices (Taylor and Pittman 5).

[clxxviii] The Open Web is characterized by several different factors including open source code, open standards, digital inclusion and free expression. The underlying principle across definitions is that the Open Web is a web space for by and for all its users, not just select governments or gatekeepers (Surman, "What is the open web and why is it important?" www.Yearofopen.org)

[clxxix] For Latin America, most Internet users have only ever connected to the web through a mobile device, which deepens the influence of applications and platforms to web usage and engagement that began during Web 2.0 years (*GSMA Latin American and Caribbean Report* 2018).

[clxxx] Tung Hui-Hu explains, "To make the intimacy of the user work, a user must be made to feel individual and private – even as millions of users share the same hard drives, computers, and data pipes underneath" (*A Prehistory of the Cloud*, p. 41).

[clxxxi] Equally as illusory is to imagine the Web 2.0 user as an equal-opportunity explorer of cyberspace that is completely open, neutral, and ripe for plucking knowledge and opportunities from an infinite number of places around the world. This is where the posthuman intervenes as a participant within a web space that is already infiltrated by corporate interests, national surveillance, and the technologies that enable them.

[clxxxii] See Audre Lorde's essay *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* (1984).

[clxxxiii] For a thorough overview of the Third Order of Information, see Chapter One.

[clxxxiv] Artificial intelligence is the process whereby humans are not directly involved in the deep learning based on data inputs. This is a key component in differentiating the phases of Web 2.0 as the Participatory Web and Web 3.0 as the Semantic Web (Mersch & Muirhead, "What is Web 3.0 & Why it Matters," 2019: https://medium.com/fabric-ventures/what-is-web-3-0-why-it-matters-934eb07f3d2b).

[clxxxv] Posthumanism has been an interdisciplinary critical field in development since the late 20th century and is frequently expressed in branches of Cultural Studies such as Ecocriticism, History of Science, Philosophy, Artificial Intelligence, Anthropology and Sociology.

[clxxxvi] See *History of Sexuality* by Michel Foucault (1990).

[clxxxvii] According to the Computer Security Resource Center glossary, "Cyberspace" is defined as "a global domain within the information environment consisteing of the interdependent network of information systems infrastructures, including the Internet, telecommunications networks, computer systems, and embedded processors and controllers" (www.csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/cyberspace).

[clxxxviii] This concept is similar to the idea of *extended cognition* which "takes the idea that your mind is 'on' your smartphone literally. It says that human cognitive states and processes sometimes spill outside our heads and into objects in our environment." (Sprevak 1).

[clxxxix] Another known version of this concept, based on the Extended Mind Hypothesis is called *Cognitive Extension* (Smart et al. 2009).

[cxc] The introduction of cloud technology and networking capabilities paved the way for the platformization of the Web (Flew 9).

[cxci] The migration from the Open Web of the late 1990s to the platformed and networked Web 2.0 after the millennium (c. 2004-2018) meant that users started engaging the Internet through what the digital marketing sphere refers to as the *walled garden*. The walled garden effect means that within apps and platforms, users create a personal account within a website which subsequently begins to collect personal data, learn from user behaviors, and perpetuate a personalized experience of that platform. However, if the user would like to leave that platform, the extraction, removal, or scrubbing of data is extremely difficult, creating an opt-in or locked-out scenario that often translates to the loss of data access and privacy regardless. The Participatory Web as a network of digital platforms means that an individual's personal data and web history can follow them from location to location, device to device (Poulpiquet).

[cxcii] Internet theorists, Grant Blank and Bianca Reisdorf's interpretation of Web 2.0 centers around the user's participation in platforms that is staged for collective contribution and promotion from users themselves. Keywords in their understanding of Web 2.0 usership include *network effects* ("the idea that some things are more valuable when more people participate") on *platforms* which are websites, apps, and social media spaces that allow for user-created content like photos, videos, blog entries, product and service reviews, or mashups (538-539). Hence, their definition of Web 2.0 is "using the internet to provide platforms through which network effects can emerge" (539). As the shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 essentially began expanding and troubling the model of mass communication on the information super-highway and fostering the polyphonic communication by the masses in participatory spaces, the network effects that take place on platforms in Web 2.0 carry powerful storytelling functions since many barriers of organization and collective action have been essentially removed.

[cxciii] This idea of the enhanced human would more accurately describe the Transhuman, or the Human+ paradigm (www.Humanityplus.org/transhumanism)

[cxciv] Internet penetration across Latin America did not achieve over 50% until Web 2.0 years (*GSMA Latin American and Caribbean Report* 2017).

[cxcv] In his main work "Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life" (1998), Giorgio Agamben analyzes an obscure figure of Roman law that poses that a man who committed a certain kind of crime was banned from society and his rights as a citizen were revoked. He would then become a "homo sacer" (sacred man). As a result, he could be killed by anybody, while his life on the other hand was deemed "sacred", so he could not be sacrificed in a ritual ceremony.

[cxcvi] I use the term, Western, cautiously to refer to developed economies and metropoles in Western Europe and North America.

[cxcvii] My personal interview with Víctor Orozco is featured in the edited volume, *Animation in Mexico: Children's and Family Cinema in the Age of NAFTA* (under contract with SUNY Press, forthcoming in 2023).

[cxcviii] Drug-trafficking cartels flourished during the decades that the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) was the single ruling governing party. When Vicente Fox of the PAN (Partido Acción Nacional) party broke this political streak in 2000, cartels ramped up violence against newly elected officials to establish their hold on the state. In 2006, President Felipe Calderón declared war on the cartels shortly after his election. With assistance from the United States, Calderón's militarized crackdown on cartels and drug kingpins in Mexico became a centerpiece of his tenure from 2006-2012. (cfr.org/backgrounder/mexicos-long-war-drugs-crime-and-cartels)

[cxcix] The groundwork for algorithmic catering that developed during Web 2.0 that became even more intensified during Web 3.0, also known as the Semantic Web (https://medium.com/fabric-ventures/what-is-web-3-0-why-it-matters-934eb07f3d2b).

[cc] Since YouTube was bought by Google in 2006, YouTube's servers are part of Google's modular data center facilities which are in high security locations in discreet locations around the world (https://www.geeksforgeeks.org/how-does-youtube-store-and-analyze-such-huge-amount-of-data/).

[cci] Based on the director, Víctor Orozco's move to attend film school in Hamburg, Germany.

[ccii] The short film is originally narrated in Spanish by Víctor Orozco who is Mexican. Subtitles are available in English. When I quote the film, I am using the text from the English subtitles.

[cciii] A reaction video is a user-uploaded clip that shows the faces of the viewer(s) as they watch other content that is usually of a shocking or comical nature.

[cciv] In fact, the reaction video genre is a way to skirt around regulations on YouTube through a second-hand experience of shocking or horrific content.

[ccv] Internet Horror and Desktop Cinema are genres that emerged in Web 2.0 years including the commercially successful *Unfriended* (2014), and the award-winning desktop film, *Searching* (2018). Since the COVID-19 global pandemic of 2020, screen-capture recording genres have crossed over heavily into the mainstream media experience including news broadcasts, commercials, and television programming.

[ccvi] Emily Hind's work on *El Blog del Narco* (BDN) discusses the popularity of narco content in the form of blogs, Facebook pages, and YouTube communities during Web 2.0 years, explaining that at the peak of BDN, unique visits to the site were clocking in at around three million per month (113). As one of the essential genres of Web 2.0 was

the weblog, the blog space was one of the main platforms that became weaponized by narcos and infiltrated by shifty pirates and tourists who were constantly negotiating truths and false claims of explicit narco violence. Hind explains in her chapter on *El Blog del Narco* that "piracy can turn complacent, and tourists can act out in contestatory manners, and thus pirates and tourists share unstable connotations" (Hind 113).

[ccvii] Original text in Spanish: "La instrumentalización del miedo por parte del gobierno Mexico se asemeja la utilizada por George Bush en su guerra contra el terrorismo. La respuesta del narco ha sido semejante a la que utilizó Al Qaeda."

[ccviii] "After the terrorist attacked of September 11, 2001, the Bush administration declared a worldwide 'war on terror,' involving open and covert military operations, new security legislation, efforts to block the financing of terrorism, and more. Qashington called on other states to join in the fight against terrorism asserting that 'either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.' Many goernments joined this campaign,often adopting harsh new laws, ligting long-standing legal protections and stepping up domestic policing and intelligence work" (Archive.Globalpolicy.org/war-on-terrorism.html).

[ccix] The Mexican drug war constitutes over a decade of militarized crackdown and pursuit of cartels and drug trade in Central America and across the border with the United States. Launched in 2006 by the Calderón presidency, the United States has funded billions of dollars towards these efforts in security and counter narcotics assistance. Still, Mexican drug cartels are the leading suppliers of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and other narcotics to the U.S. (cfr.org/backgrounder/mexicos-long-war-drugs-crime-and-cartels).

[ccx] The term, *Hyperreality* is the inability of the consciousness to be able to distinguish between reality and simulation of reality. In his famous postmodern text, "Simulacra and Simulation" (1981), Baudrillard describes the semiotic phase of the simulacrum which is simulation, or the state of signs with no signifiers or references of origin. Hyperreality is not only functional within language and semiotics but is also engaged with late capitalism because of commodity fetishism, or the alienation of the consumed product from the material and social processes that produce the item.

[ccxi] Original narration in Spanish: "Ahora, los narcos suben a YouTube videos donde interrogan, torturan y ejecutan rehenes. En esta guerra mediática, el narco expresa sus sentimientos y su moral y han desarrollado su propia estética del horror. Con esto, retratan por Internet su realidad inobjetable, esa realidad 2.0 que se argumentan desde la comodidad de un cibercafé a chingadazos."

[ccxii] One of the most popular narcoblogs was *El Blog del Narco* (www.blogdelnarco.com) which spanned just over three years from March 2, 2010, through October 14, 2013 (Hind 113)

[ccxiii] SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization, which is the algorithm behind determining search results tailored to individual users or devices.

[ccxiv] Oftentimes, some basic metadata forensics can unveil the locations of online users through IP address locations or even GPS functionality if they are connected through a smart phone.

[ccxv] Original narration in Spanish: "Me he dado cuenta que realmente las ratas nunca evolucionaron en conjeos en Alemania, sino que en Mexico, este país surrealista, nosotros hicimos que los conejos se transformaran en ratas."

[ccxvi] HCI (Human Computer Interface) is a term that director of Hyper-Reality, Keiichi Matsuda uses in his thesis from 2010, titled *Domesti/City: The Dislocated Home in Augmented Space.*

[ccxvii] "Automatic Speech Recognition – A Brief History of the Technology Development," B.H. Juang & Lawrence R. Rabiner, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, Rutgers University and the University of California, Santa Barbara

[ccxviii] The exception to this circumstance is a white couple in a waiting room who speak in Russian, and an underground doctor who speaks in Japanese.

[ccxix] There are possibilities to research and obtain user-created or alternative subtitles files (.srt and other formats) to open within a media player like VLC, but in the Vimeo.com player and on the MadridEnCorto distributor's DVD, only subtitles in French, Spanish & English are optional.

[ccxx] Several streaming series episodes evoke a similar speculation to Hyper-Reality. See *Black Mirror* Season 3, Episode 1, "Nosedive" as an example of digital citizenship tethered to participation in applications, loyalty programs, and real-time evaluation of individual behavior through ratings.

[ccxxi] While almost all the dialogue is in Colombian Spanish, the subtitling that is embedded into the animation of the film is in (British) English only.

[ccxxii] Keiichi Matsuda's thesis from 2010, titled *Domesti/City: The Dislocated Home in Augmented Space*, details the ins and outs of the augmented space and the empowerment of its *electronomads* that can "define their own use of space and subjective reading of the augmented city" (6). Only a few years before largescale efforts to create smart cities and introduce hyper-connectivity into metropoles around the globe, Matsuda's thesis promotes the dislocation of domesticity away from the private home space through ubiquity, thereby pushing the private space into the augmented city into a new domestic space that is open, shared, collaborative, and malleable through user-connectivity. In Matsuda's view, at the center of the convergence of domestic and public space is the human-city interface (HCI) which projects and interprets augmented reality (AR) in real-time.

[ccxxiii] This phone interview took place between Keiichi Matsuda and me, and is referenced in *Digital Encounters (2022).*

CONCLUSION:

PLURALIZING REDUCTIVE SUBJECTIVITIES IN (SHORT) FILM METADATA

> First, we build the tools, and thereafter our tools build us.
> - Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium Is the Massage*

I. On labels, legitimacy, and hidden subjectivities

Questions of legitimacy and visibility have circulated around my identity and privilege since the first time I checked a box indicating my 'race' on a standardized test in elementary school. While gathering data for this dissertation, I continued to uncover expressions of national identity behind their labels, and I realized that the questions driving my research hit closer to home than I had previously imagined. After marking "Hispanic, White," I was scrutinized for identifying as Latina despite having grown up in a bicultural and bilingual household as a first-generation Cuban American. As 'la rubia'[ccxxiv] of my family with the last name Bundy instead of my mother's surnames, Trelles Hernandez-Cartaya, the surface layers of my ethnic identity understandably communicate Anglophone whiteness. Admittedly, these visible attributes have offered me the immense privileges of whiteness in the United States and are also the same ones that create tensions with the labels that correspond with my hidden subjectivities as a Spanish-speaking Latina.

In brief, boxes and labels have gained me the affordances to self-identify in spaces of legitimacy just as much as they've reduced my visible subjectivities to a singular assumption without the space and power to tell my own story. The act of leaning into *and* away from the forms and labels that inform access, identify, and legitimacy is a delicate dance of understanding existing infrastructures and modifying them in ways that shed more light on subjectivities that lie beneath the surface. The common ground between these personal inquiries and the interrogations

throughout the dissertation is in uncovering how (visual) stories are told and how they are presented in a world where labels are quite literally powering the futures around us. The epigraph by Marshall MacLuhan puts it plainly; the technological tools that humans employ (i.e., metadata-powered algorithms) are eventually those same infrastructures that take hold and continue to define us as posthuman subjects.[ccxxv] As posthumans and citizens who are not yet living in a post national technoscape, we are still operating within the limitations of national labels in the era of Web 2.0 and the impending onset of Web 3.0.[ccxxvi]

II. Conclusive intersections of metadata analysis and close reading

Throughout this dissertation, I have discussed the importance of metadata as a textual expression of national cinema paradigms for Ibero-American short films in the Participatory era of Web 2.0. I applied critical metadata analysis in Chapter Two and close reading in Chapter Three to respond to the two main interrogations running through the dissertation: 1) What are the tensions between national belonging and Ibero-American short films that are born or housed online during Web 2.0? and 2) Who stands to lose or benefit from the ways that national metadata are presented in Ibero-American short films with Web 2.0 technologies? By confronting these questions with a two-fold approach, I identified intersections between how films are presented on the web as cultural objects and how they represent themselves as national narratives. In addition to the corpus of 150 short films in my metadata study, I engaged frequently with three case studies (*.Sub, Hyper-Reality*, and *Reality 2.0*) as emblematic representations of a cultural shift towards transnational filmmaking against monolithic national labels in the digital era of Web 2.0. While the three short films clearly demonstrated the potential dissonance between how films are made, how stories are depicted, and how films are represented as national products, the colonial dynamics within those tensions were the most interesting revelations to uncover through metadata analysis and close

reading. In summary, those colonial dynamics manifested through both the privilege of visibility and legitimization through Western European and North American filmic institutional financing in addition to the informational stronghold that those same institutions facilitate through (online) distribution and database management.

Firstly, the metadata study of Ibero-American short films on CortosdeMetraje.com (2005-2015) revealed by and large that the continuity of national institutionalism remained steadfast for Ibero-American short films despite the digitization era and informatic shift in Web 2.0. While the later years (2010, 2015) of my metadata study indicated a considerable uptick in short film production through the drastic increase in volume on CDM's database, the national labels of the sampled short films continued to be most frequently aligned with the national origin of the institutional financing entity and the filming locations which often corresponded with the territory of the financial source. Consequently, the continual grip of short film nationalism in the digital age is held steady by institutions that provide financing, set regulations on distribution, and partner with (online) film festivals which remain the main exhibition venue for shorts.

The conclusions from my metadata study also apply to the three case studies (.*Sub*, *Hyper-Reality*, and *Reality 2.0*) since their national label on CDM is aligned with the (institutional) financing and at least one of the locations of film (post)production.[ccxxvii] The overall relationship between national labeling and Ibero-American short films during Web 2.0 can be summarized as the following: film-related institutions remain territorially fastened whereas the *people* involved in making the films are more mobile across nations, regions, languages, and cultural communities. As a result, national cinema institutions continue to harness the power and resources to present short films in alignment with the financing nation's cultural promotion and legitimacy by the international film festival community. Both through print and digital metadata, institutions, and

state-subsidized databases like CortosDeMetraje.com are perpetuating the nationalization of short film by way of textual metadata despite the audiovisual stories within their content and production details that operate outside of those institutional determinants.[ccxxviii]

The nuances of transnational movement, institutional alignment, and national labeling are politically significant when considering that the trajectories of filmmakers are often unidirectional when considering Ibero-American short films. That is, film producers move from Latin America to Western Europe or North America, and in return, funding flows from those institutions in attempts to support cultural production from the Global South.[ccxxix] While fully acknowledging the colonial dynamics baked into an Ibero-American film industry, a broad portrait of 'winners' and 'losers' is not so simple, as theorists describe of Latin American cinema after the millennium (McClennen; Dennison, "Debunking Neo-Imperialism or Reaffirming Neo-Colonialism?"). When talented creators like Víctor Orozco (*Reality 2.0*) and Jossie Malis Álvarez (*.Sub*) move to countries with strong institutional infrastructures for filmmaking, state-sponsored resources impact both the filmmaker and the nation that funded the film. There are advantages for immigrants, residents, or foreign collaborators in aligning with national institutions who have access to resources and visibility, even if that means that the film will most likely not bear the nationality of their origins. In turn, national institutions stand to gain recognition for producing more diverse national content by promoting racial, linguistic, and socio-economic otherness through audiovisual storytelling like short films. The benefits and losses connected to visibility and legitimacy under national labels like 'Spain' or 'Germany' (*.Sub* and *Reality 2.0*) are oftentimes not apparent through metadata on the surface, and require a closer examination of who is involved in creating short films and how their narrative contents communicate (trans)national affiliations.

I discussed content across several short films throughout the first two chapters that demonstrated narrative or formal departures from their national labels, but I performed more detailed close readings on the three case studies (*.Sub, Hyper-Reality,* and *Reality 2.0*) to exemplify the interventions of technologization with digital citizenship and governance that goes deeper than metadata politics. The three short films contained tensions within their production and narrative stories and their national labels from an informatic standpoint, but most notably their narrative content was a metacommentary of posthuman subjectivity under state-sponsored techno capitalism. This is where the thru lines of metadata and (trans)nationalism intersect *within* films that foreground marginalized cyborgs who are not liberated by technological advancement but rather further entangled with false notions of free will in a supposedly globalized, post-national cyberspace. Interestingly, these three short films were produced by non-citizens of the film production territories that enabled their projects, yet the commentary on national surveillance and oppression by way of technological governance drives home the point that complex subjectivity is often reduced to benefit the objectives of the highest bidder (the state institution for non-citizen short film producers, the corporate tech conglomerate for the oppressed digital citizen).

The commonalities of nationalized short film and posthuman citizenship converge within the Third Order of Information (Web 2.0) that facilitates the feedback loop of information and embodiment by and for posthumans. Recalling N. Katherine Hayles's *materiality of informatics* that I engaged with in Chapter Three, posthumanism is both a discursive and material subjectivity that sheds light on the perpetual bias and illusion of the Web as a borderless, post-national cyberspace. From a metadata standpoint of Web 2.0, informatic infrastructures have not only migrated from print to digital but have evolved into participative platforms that both thrive on cumulative miscellany and highly nuanced specificity (Weinberger 198). For posthuman users on

the Web, this means that national labels do the work of reinforcing the subjectivity of objects like short film into digital spaces that are curated to provide visibility to (trans)national audiences. And in the infrastructure of the Participatory Web, metadata is the textual basis of forging the neural networks of machine intelligence (Pomerantz 154). While Web 2.0 evolutions of networked platforms fostered a growing number of short films and more creators from around the globe to make more films with diverse narrative content, the metadata did not necessarily reflect more of that diversity since institutions have largely controlled the distribution and (online) access of short films. Sadly, the disparity between transnational content and monolithic national labeling reflects the reductive nature of subjectivity that was migrated from print to digital to participative networks on the Web.

The unresolved gap between shallow national labels and deeper metadata in Ibero-American short film is not a lost cause. In more recent years of Web 2.0, metadata practices and search optimization on streaming platforms demonstrate that (short) films are expanding their expressions of (trans)nationalism in efforts to appeal to more diverse audiences. In the next section, I provide recommendations and examples as to how online metadata practices can enable short films to lean into national labels as pathways of access while acknowledging deeper (trans)national content to expand its visibility beyond the proprietaries of institutional funding. I also propose future directions for national metadata and content analysis of online (short) films through emerging digital humanities tools and methods.

III. Recommended metadata practices and future directions of study

As I discussed in the previous section, aligning with national labels and institutions is not a zero-sum game of colonial winners and colonized losers. After examining the metadata practices of databases like CDM and annotating six aspects of short film metadata, I double down on my

assertion that nearly all the films were labeled correctly in some way, just not in *enough* ways to express a more accurate (trans)national potential. Therefore, the problem lies in the reduction of national labels to the highest bidder which is most often the institution that provided financial support for the short film. In turn, the national funding entity reaps the benefits of visibility and prestige in both physical and online spaces where metadata is nourishing algorithms that prioritize curated search results and target audiences curtailed by commercial interests. So, how can database administrators and online users promote more plurality and diversity of (trans)national short films that is both nuanced and accessible? By returning to the textual seeds of the Web – metadata - the scales that have been historically tipped toward Anglophone, North American and Western European determinants can begin to incorporate more multilingual and (trans)national searchability for short films that have been largely pigeonholed as institutional national products.

My first suggestion is to promote *metadata folksonomies* that are supervised and maintained by metadata managers. One of the earliest democratic functions of Web 2.0 platforms is through open-source, user-created metadata labeling, or *folksonomies*. Defined as taxonomic practice by the public, and not necessarily by trained librarians or data managers, the folksonomy is as idyllic as it is imperfect from the standpoint of visualized and networked categorization. The benefits of folksonomies are that they are open-sourced, pluralized, and networked according to the input of users through the creation of hashtags and descriptive phrases, or selecting labels in lists or dropdown menus when uploading content. On institutional sites or databases like CDM, which are often subject to inconsistent budgets or cutbacks in the public sector, the downside of relying on folksonomies is the unpredictability of labels through misuse and error which affect its searchability and ability to network with other metadata.[ccxxx] In order to address and supervise the messy and subjective nature of folksonomies, platforms and databases would benefit from the

input of metadata managers to cross-check user practices, supervise anomalies, and update metadata collection methods according to user experience on the platform or website.[ccxxxi]

An example of a pragmatic solution for user-upload databases that enable metadata folksonomies is to offer more detailed ways of describing filmic (trans)national affiliation through follow-up inquiries or sub-categories that provide multiple options and prompts to 'select all that apply' or 'drop pins on the map' for questions like the following:

1) Where is the director from originally and where do they currently reside?
2) Where are the protagonists from and where do they currently reside?
3) Where was the film produced and shot?
4) What languages are used or referenced and to which nation(s) do the dialects refer?
5) In which nation(s) does the film's plot take place?
6) Where was the film financed or what national affiliations align with film's financial support structure?

Collecting metadata in this way would mean that the category of 'nation' in the film's metadata description could be significantly more pluralized and ideally present a pop-up map that details the (trans)nationality of the short film's affiliation across different factors dealing with both production and content. In addition, databases can borrow practices from other cinema folksonomy projects like TheMovieMap.com or even link short film location data through corresponding titles.[ccxxxii] By presenting networks of (trans)national belonging through supervised folksonomic metadata collection, national metadata crowdsourced by users and managed by metadata specialists is not only more accurate to the film's narrative content and production details, but will also create more visibility for nations and regions who have been historically underrepresented and invisible underneath the national labels of financing institutions, especially outside of Western Europe and North America.

My second suggestion to pluralize and nuance (trans)national metadata for short films is to facilitate more translingual filmic metadata to stimulate more access across regions, especially for films that already feature spoken languages and subtitling that differ from the cultural groups

targeted by their existing national label. This translingual inclusion project could expand transnationally or regionally depending on the objectives and target audiences of the website. CDM as a Spanish-language website, for example, is largely targeting Hispanophone audiences in both Spain and Latin America, and so they could include (automatized) metadata translations into Portuguese, Catalán, Euskadi, Haitian Creole, Quechua, Nahual, and other minority languages from the two regions. Within platforms that aim for a more global audience, translingual metadata could expand more widely with the appropriate resources to supervise precision such as metadata managers, linguists, and consistent user feedback to maintain cultural accuracy and authenticity.

Examples of this translingual metadata is already in practice across streaming platforms in recent years in popularized Netflix series' titles like *Cable Girls* (Spain, 2017-2020) and *Squid Game* (South Korea, 2021) which, despite their production locations outside of North America and Anglophone industries, are prominently suggested and presented with titles, metadata descriptors, subtitling, and dubbing options in English as well as several other languages that span the globe.[ccxxxiii] Again, for short film metadata on platforms or databases, the (automatized) translatability of metadata descriptors and titles require professional supervision on multiple levels of meaning, but the benefits of traversing linguistic exclusivity are numerous for both viewers and producers who are located outside of nations with established film industries that have historically dominated both physical and virtual spaces.[ccxxxiv]

In recent years, the field of Digital Humanities has paid more attention to methodologies and research on audiovisual products, and facial recognition technology is one such tool that I believe could be apt for examining additional national metadata from digital film posters or tiles on short film databases and streaming platforms.[ccxxxv] While my metadata and mapping study addressed a variety of features that deal with national affiliation found through existing metadata

and aggregated data during my collection process, one of the most appealing aspects of short film databases that can potentially communicate national belonging is through the cover image or the digital 'poster' of the short film. Oftentimes, these are ephemera that are contracted outside of the film production team to a graphic designer and are produced after the film is made or during post-production. This initial image is meant to attract the attention of viewers and communicate messages inherent to the tone or theme of the short film which contains much potential for national belonging and expression. Graphic features like font, landscape, and the actor's face on a short film poster can communicate the national/cultural orientation of the film or the target audience.[ccxxxvi] Conducting a metadata and mapping analysis of purely visual features would be difficult to control due to subjective interpretation and the inherent bias in many open-source facial recognition algorithms,[ccxxxvii] but the increasing availability of alternative text within images as well as an increased attention toward facial recognition algorithm bias could prove to be fruitful for additional analysis of protagonists who represent the 'face' of national narratives.

Another direction for future study for short film national metadata would be within film festival programs and selection archives. In light of the increasing prevalence of online film festivals and digital catalogues that are published on websites, there is potential for a compelling dataset of short films across different genres, languages, regions, and themes. The appeal of examining (trans)national metadata across certain film festivals is that selections can arrange themselves by nation or by region yet not necessarily confine the selections to a particular territory which creates an undeniable tension between domestic expressions of nationality against those from the outside. For example, international film festivals like GIFF in Guadalajara, Mexico curate films from all over the globe; the New Latin American Cinema Film Festival in Havana, Cuba focuses on films from the region; and the Quirino Ibero-Americano Animación Festival in

Tenerife, Spain showcases animated films from both Iberia and Latin America. By examining both the metadata from the nominated short films and their categories (i.e., Orozco's *Reality 2.0* winning 'Best Portrait of a Nation' in the Festival Brazileiro de Cinema Universitario), more layers of (trans)national metadata are accumulated within the space of the film festival and its promotional materials online. A particular challenge to anticipate for content-related metadata collection from festival selections is that a short film's lifespan in the film festival circuit usually lasts about two years which means that the short film will most likely not be viewable online during that time without special permissions.[ccxxxviii] This is usually due to the production company and distributor's regulations of exclusivity which will feature the short film's metadata and promotional material on its websites like trailers, digital posters, and official film stills.

At the turn of the 21st century, the onset of the Participatory Web (Web 2.0) had a vast impact on digital filmmaking and distribution online and enthusiasm ran high for more democratic access and visibility across a globally networked cyberspace. While short filmmaking and online production and consumption certainly did increase in volume and in transnational and translingual content as Web 2.0 progressed, the informatic infrastructure that labeled short films on the web (metadata) did not pluralize along with them, leaving a gap between the national representation of producers and their institutional financers in the Global North. As we look ahead to Web 3.0 (The Semantic Web) which is rapidly approaching, the lessons from Web 2.0 remind us that the posthuman idealism for a post national and egalitarian cyberspace, however well-intended, cannot usually keep pace with the taxonomic nature of informatics and its reliance on clean and orderly subjectivities like nationalism. The reliance on metadata and labels is not a complete digression, however, and creates opportunities for responsible and inclusive data practices by users and professionals who can inscribe and evaluate more complex subjectivities in parallel with

algorithmic automations. One of the first steps of harnessing more conscious agency in the materiality of informatics is through examining how both humans and artificial intelligence position objects to become reductive subjects in the first place through monolithic metadata. In the case of (short) films, if web tools offer both users and data managers the ability to pluralize, nuance, and present metadata in a more horizontal and networked fashion, then more producers and content from regions outside the traditionally dominant cinema industries will become more visible, legitimized, and included on the Web and its evolving iterations in the future.

[ccxxiv] "La rubia" means "the blonde" in Spanish.

[ccxxv] See McLuhan, Marshall, et al. *The Medium Is the Massage*. Bantam Books, 1967.

[ccxxvi] "Where Web 2.0 was driven by the advent of mobile, social and cloud, Web 3.0 is built largely on three new layers of technological innovation: edge computing, decentralised data networks and artificial intelligence." (Mersch & Muirhead, "What is Web 3.0 & Why it Matters," 2019: https://medium.com/fabric-ventures/what-is-web-3-0-why-it-matters-934eb07f3d2b).

[ccxxvii] *.Sub*, and *Reality 2.0* were funded by national institutions in Spain and Germany respectively and were produced within those territorial boundaries. In the case of online crowdfunding for Matsuda's *Hyper-Reality*, I consider his residency in the United Kingdom as the national territory where the funding was collected (in British Pounds) and allocated for (post)production. Matsuda filmed in Medellín, Colombia and post-produced the animation effects in his home studio back in London.

[ccxxviii] For example, even though *Hyper-Reality* was financed through online crowdfunding, the short film's representation online is still categorized by nationality that reflects its production location (Colombia) and its post-production location in the United Kingdom.

[ccxxix] See Falicov, Tamara. "'Cine en Construcción'/Films in Progress': How Spanish and Latin American Filmmakers Negotiate the Construction of a Globalized Art-House Aesthetic." *Transnational Cinemas*, vol. 4, no.2, 2013, pp.253-271.

[ccxxx] A folksonomy's limitations boil down to how that metadata is collected across certain categories that inform national affiliation or belonging that are eventually public facing metadata. For example, providing a drop-down menu to select a film's national category forces the user or institutional representative to choose one option rather than producing more nuanced replies that could be visualized through metadata networks or mapping functions.

[ccxxxi] Metadata managers are also referred to as database managers, website managers, and knowledge managers who demonstrate expertise in metadata and SEO (Search Engine Optimization) practices. For the sake of focusing on metadata, I refer to this role as a 'metadata manager.'

[ccxxxii] www.TheMovieMap.com is a depository of film locations in which users and movie fans can submit metadata and images that are mapped and searchable by title or location. The Movie Map was established in 2008.

[ccxxxiii] I acknowledge that most of the available languages correspond with nations who are historical colonizers like French, German, Mandarin, Japanese, Russian, etc. For this example, I am concentrating on the global expansiveness outside of North America and Western Europe. More work will always be needed to include minority languages and dialects on the Web.

[ccxxxiv] The potential problems of translation and dubbing run the risk of misrepresenting cultural narratives such as in the controversy over the English translations from Korean in the hit Netflix series, *Squid Game* (2021). See "*Squid*

Game subtitles 'change meaning' of Netflix show" BBC Newsbeat. 4 Oct 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58787264.

[ccxxxv] See the special issue of Digital Humanities Quarterly (DHQ) from 2021: *AudioVisual Data in DH:* http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/15/1/index.html.

[ccxxxvi] In the Third Order of Information and beyond, massive debate has surrounded the politicization and racialization of cover images for films, series, and content online. For example, featuring the face of a minor character who is Black to appeal to Black viewers whereas, in reality, almost all the characters in the series are white (https://www.wired.com/story/why-netflix-features-black-actors-promos-to-black-users/). Also, displaying the series' titles in English rather than in other languages may remove a barrier in advertising foreign content like *Cable Girls* rather than *Las chicas del cable* which is a Spanish production.

[ccxxxvii] See Arnold et al.'s article describing the application facial recognition algorithms to television sitcoms, *I Dream of Genie* and *BeWitched*: "Visual Style in Two Network Era Sitcoms." *Journal of Cultural Analytics*. vol. 4, no. 2. 2019. https://doi.org/10.22148/16.043.

[ccxxxviii] This has largely been the case in the past decades, but the simultaneous release online and in festivals is more frequent in recent years. Filmmakers can agree with the distributors to have a web-release with the condition that it may disqualify their film from being officially selected by some film festivals.

AFTERWORD:

COVID-19 AND THE INTENSIFICATION OF ONLINE CULTURAL CONSUMPTION

While this dissertation centered around the years of Web 2.0 which mainly comprises the first two decades in the 21st century, I began writing at the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic in March 2020 which produced profound and heart-breaking effects across the world to say the very least.[ccxxxix] As populations followed stay-at-home orders and practiced physical distancing, the onset of the pandemic kickstarted incentives to create online and remote solutions for work, entertainment, information access, and economies. In effect, COVID-19 brought forth the global population's next level of reliance and dependency on digital devices and network connectivity. While the idea of binging an online series was a well-established social phenomenon before the pandemic, the notion of "reaching the end of Netflix" added to conversations about the reality of confinement restrictions and the normalization of media consumption at home as a replacement for the in-person experience of entertainment.[ccxl] Even so, audiences turned to films to help them understand the pandemic as viewership for films like *Contagion* and *28 Days Later* jumped up in the viewing ranks on streaming sites whereas box-office bound films released directly on streaming platforms in the place of or in tandem with theatre releases.[ccxli]

In the film sector, COVID-related shutdowns sparked anxieties of the "death of cinema" as we know it. Dramatics aside, the mass transition from film events and presentations to online home-viewing took place virtually overnight as theatres closed their doors and film festivals cancelled, postponed, or scrambled to set up an online festival program. Likewise, film and

television production grinded to a halt before approving new protocols to safely continue shooting, always at risk of shutting down again with new infections. In the state-sponsored cultural sector, organizations and festivals were forced to cancel or postpone events or to shift activities to a virtual venue such as an online festival. Renowned film festivals such as South by Southwest (SXSW) agreed to stream their award-winning films on Amazon Prime,[ccxlii] and Cannes, Berlinale Film Festival, Telluride, and others teamed up to produce a digital film festival awards program on YouTube called *We are One: A Global Film Festival*. Consequently, the idea of online festivals went from a gimmicky, low-budget venture to a high-profile effort during a world crisis in which audiences are bound to their living rooms.[ccxliii]

Pushing back against "the death of cinema," problem-solving and technological solutions during the early stages of the pandemic kicked into high gear, temporarily creating a sub-genre of COVID films or COVID episodes that were excusably lo-fidelity given the constraints of desktop filming and poor audio quality on Zoom. As borders closed and foreign productions grinded to a halt, film production shifted towards solutions that were deeply dependent on digital tools and (remote) post-production like animation and visual effects. At the same time, film crews followed strict protocols of distancing, hygiene practices, and even created new positions for managing COVID regulations on set. For independent (short) filmmaking and content creation, calls for projects and funding shifted thematically and logistically into the digital and the remote, culminating in online exhibitions and festivals related to expressions of the pandemic around the world.

As I write this conclusion in the spring of 2022, the discourse of returning to "normal life" cannot be liberated from the remaining traumas of a global pandemic stricken with painful loss of life and time away from precious human contact. As for the resurrection of cinema consumption,

theatres have reopened with varying levels of safety measures whereas cultural events like screenings and festivals are conducting in-person events that often present options to participate virtually or in a hybrid format.[ccxliv] Clearly, habits of access and viewership have shifted in favor of virtual consumption but have not entirely replaced in-person entertainment events. After two years of developing online alternatives to cultural consumption in response to the pandemic's public health regulations, cinema has not died out but rather pluralized its potential lifelines. In many senses, these alternative points of filmic access are more democratic for viewers and content creators alike on social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, and in other senses, content is more restricted within subscription-based corporate platforms like Apple TV, Hulu, HBO, Amazon Prime Video, and Netflix. Considering the multiplicity of massive change undergone during COVID-19 and the spotlight on science-based solutions to the global health crisis, one resounding message has crystallized: (Post)humans need art and stories to help cope with crisis. Regarding storytelling in our ever-evolving digital landscape, (short) audiovisual narratives are now dominating the Web, and much attention is needed in how those stories are presented, attributed, and made accessible to the world through the impetus of the entire information ecosystem: metadata.

[ccxxxix] While I could spend several pages writing about the profound effects of the pandemic across economic, sociological, political, pedagogical, and public health sectors, I will concentrate on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected new media and short film production and consumption.

[ccxl] For cultural festival programmers who did not cancel their events altogether, the show must go on, yet the worry that artists and filmmakers have with the proliferation of free and open-access content available on digital platforms could create a dangerous precedence that artistic and cultural events always should be free of cost despite the negligence of government support.

[ccxli] Martin Scorcese's film *The Irishman* (2020) released on Netflix before theatrical releases in select cinemas. Several other films debuted online instead of at the box office like *Mulan* (dir. Niki Caro, 2020) on Disney+ and *Borat 2* (dir. Jason Woliner, 2020). See Bruney and Kirkland's "Here Are the 2020 Movies Streaming Online Early Due to the Coronavirus" *Esquire*. 2 Nov, 2020. https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/g31871914/movies-streaming-early-coronavirus/.

[ccxlii] See "Now Playing: The South by Southwest Film Festival, Sort of." *New York Times*, April 28, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/28/movies/sxsw-film-festival-amazon-prime.html

[ccxliii] "Streaming Wars: Crowded Market Grows Even Bigger as Film Festivals Explore Virtual Options." *IndieWire*, May 1, 2020. https://www.indiewire.com/2020/04/tribeca-youtube-free-film-festival-1202227512/ describes the event: **"**We Are One: A Global Film Festival, an unprecedented 10-day digital film festival taking place on YouTube, will launch May 29 at YouTube.com/WeAreOne. We Are One, which benefits the World Health Organization and other relief partners amid the ongoing pandemic, will encompass programming from 20 festivals, including Berlin, Cannes, Venice, Sundance, Toronto, New York, BFI London, Karlovy Vary, Locarno, and more. The entire festival will be free to viewers."

[ccxliv] For example, *Fantasia*, "America's largest genre festival" in Montreal, Canada, offered an online format of their film festival in 2020, and a hybrid format of festival lineup in Summer of 2021. Their busines model has since shifted its format to accommodate viewers who pay a one-time online pass for $75.00 CAD for access to all the online content. True to the hybrid format, some films and activities are offered in-person only. The organizers describe their approach for the festival in 2022: "Following 2021's cutting-edge virtual festival, Fantasia will now take place both virtually and in theatres for select screenings from August 5 to 25! We will continue to work with Festival Scope and Shift72 via their online festival platform, which offers studio-grade DRM and operates according to the Motion Picture Association of America's security standards. A handful of films will be shown in theatres, at the Imperial and at the Cinéma du Musée." (https://fantasiafestival.com/en/faq).

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