

# Acknowledgments

As I grew into my teens, I eventually realized that the only time of the day I could be by myself at home was late into the night. Growing up without cable in San Antonio, Texas, my minimal options for entertainment forced me to be creative. During the school year, this was less of a worry, as I would usually watch the *Late Show with David Letterman* or *Saturday Night Live*. Or, maybe, reruns of *Cheers* or a syndicated show such as *Xena: Warrior Princess*. In the summer, I was dulled not only by the oppressive summer heat, but also an excess of free time. Reading proved difficult; I fell asleep. Playing video games eventually bored me as much the shows I had already seen. Listening to the BBC World Service on Texas Public Radio (KSTX 89.1) opened the world to me. But some of the shows, well, were directed to different audiences. What almost always proved to be a good bet for some good entertainment, especially on the weekends, were movies on Univisión (KWEX 41) and Telemundo (KVDA 60). Even though I did not yet speak Spanish, the strange plots of late-night movies such as *Asalto en Tijuana* (Assault in Tijuana, dir. Alfredo Gurrola, 1984) and *Nacido para matar* (Born to Kill, dir. Juan Manuel Herrera, 1986) were easy enough to follow. The sex and violence of Mexploitation and *narcocine* usually caught my eye, but occasionally I would watch an older movie such as *Una carta de amor* (*A Love Letter*, dir. Miguel Zacarías, 1943) and *El Profe* (*The Professor*, dir. Miguel M. Delgado, 1971). Not that I would have known who Jorge Negrete or Cantinflas, the films' stars, were. Not at first, at least. These may have not been the exact films I watched, although they were shown in San Antonio in the mid-1990s, but they were the kind of movies I first experienced in Spanish. And I more than kind of liked it.

I did not know that you could study cinema until I began writing my dissertation at the University of Texas at Austin. This seems improbable to me even today, but either through lack of exposure or understanding, I had never really considered the possibility. A chance conversation led to a meeting with Leo Zonn, a cultural geographer whose generosity not only turned my dissertation on its head, but also my career. In Nicolas Shumway, I was lucky to have an intellectual mentor who urged me to “ruin my dissertation however I [saw] fit.” My project, which examined the representation of Buenos Aires as place in different modes of cultural production in the 1920s and 1930s, was not the dissertation Professor Shumway might have wanted it to be, but it set the course for my last ten years of writing and teaching, if not my entire scholarly career. Like so many others working in today’s academia—so marked by precarity and casualization that more than a generation of scholarship, some of which would have been truly brilliant, has already been lost—my path has been rather more circuitous than I would have imagined that day I decided to write on the movies. At Denison University, I was fortunate to have as colleagues two other visiting assistant professors: Phillip Penix-Tadsen and Ana María Mutis. I will always admire and deeply appreciate their friendship, grace, and intellectual acuity. Their camaraderie got me through some dark times. In my next position, at Ball State University, I was encouraged to grow into my potential by Lisa Kuriscak and Chris Luke. Without their support, I am not sure if I would have continued my search for a real academic home. But I miss them dearly.

In my six years at Middlebury College, I have come to feel as if I am not only in my place, but also at home. I am especially grateful for my wonderful colleagues in Luso-Hispanic Studies, as well as our excellent students. Without Brandon Baird, Enrique García, Mario Higa, Fernando Rocha, and Patricia Saldarriaga, this book would have been much more difficult to write. This project benefited greatly from varying kinds of work done by my brilliant undergraduate research assistants Miles Meijer, James Scott, Soyibou Sylla, Melisa Topic, and Greyson Zatzick. I am also lucky to teach at an institution in which film and media studies is so vibrant. My colleagues Christian Keathley, Jason Mittell, David Miranda-Hardy, Ethan Murphy, and Louisa Stein in Film and Media Culture not only have pushed me to learn new ways of approaching teaching and writing about movies, but also new ways of thinking about film and media. Economic historians Leticia Arroyo Abad and Amanda Gregg were important sounding boards for ideas, some of

which would undergird this book. *Alton's Paradox* is what it is because I was fortunate enough to have institutional support for my research. I am a different scholar now than I was (or could have become) as a direct result of money invested by Middlebury College in research leaves, startup funds, professional development funds, and other kinds of grants. If funding for higher education had not been decimated throughout my life, cynically and systematically, we would see more young scholars throughout academic disciplines with the opportunity to grow into their intellectual potential. We might then live in a society that more greatly appreciates the exploration of the meaning of our human experience, as well as confronts the damage we have inflicted upon our environment. We can only hope for change. With deep budget cuts looming in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, I am fearful that few of us will have the opportunity to work on the kind of scholarship that makes possible books like *Alton's Paradox*.

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*Alton's Paradox* is a book whose most important figures make the most fleeting of appearances. My sons Sebastian, Lucas, and Isaac Poppe make me want to become the best version of myself, not only as a father but also as a man. Their names may appear only on this page, but they imbue this entire book. I simply do not have the words to express what the support and love of my wife, Erin Jones-Poppe, mean to me. You, Erin, made this book possible.