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# Recent Brazilian Cinema: Allegory/Metacinema/ Carnival

A new generation of Brazilian film-makers is emerging and films like Suzana Amaral's *A Hora da Estrela* (Hour of the Star), Sergio Resende's *O Homen da Capa Preta* (Man in the Black Cape), and Chico Botelho's *Cidade Oculta* (Hidden City) are attracting large popular audiences. Brazilian films are again winning international prizes ("Best Actress" for *Hour of the Star* at Berlin and for *Eu Sei que Vou te Amar* [I Know I'm Going to Love You] at Cannes). A Brazil-based director, Hector Babenco, is directing Jack Nicholson and Meryl Streep in a big-budget film in the United States. The Pompidou Center in Paris has mounted a major retrospective featuring more than two hundred films. Two major book-length studies have appeared—Randal Johnson's *Cinema Novo x 5* and Paulo Paraguna's collection *Le Cinéma Brésilien*. So it is perhaps an appropriate moment to review some of the major developments in Brazilian cinema over the last decade and a half.<sup>1</sup>

The first and most obvious point to make about recent Brazilian production is its remarkable and quite unprecedented *diversity*. While it was relatively easy to posit a unifying thread to account for early Cinema Novo—the call for national liberation in general and cinematic decolonization in particular—the present moment offers no such clarity. Brazilian cinema has become a much more dispersed and eclectic phenomenon. Even if one sets aside the soft and hard-core porn films and the popular childrens' films by "*Os Trapalhoes*" (roughly, the "Four Morons"), one is confronted with a wide spectrum of productions ranging from the work of veteran Cinema Novo directors (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Arnaldo Jabor, Carlos Diegues, Leon Hirszman, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, and Rui Guerra), and of the "sons and daughters" of Cinema Novo (Tizuka Yamasaki, Ana Carolina, Carlos Alberto Prates Cor-

reia, Jorge Bodansky, Lauro Escorel, Eduardo Escorel, Bruno and Fabio Barretto), to that of the Underground (Julio Bressane, Rogerio Sganzerla, Andrea Tonacci, Luiz Rosenberg Filho), and the new wave of young film-makers from São Paul (Chico Botelho, Djalma Limongi, Icaro Martins, Jose Antonio Garcia, Sergio Toledo, Wilson Barros, Sergio Bianchi, Carlos Reichenbach), not to mention scores of short fiction films and militant documentaries. Rather than a unifying thread, we can now establish little more than a common substratum of concern, a broad problematic of interrelated questions. Our goal here will not be to cover the entire spectrum (much of which remains unavailable to North American audiences) but rather to emphasize a number of salient trends.

In a recent essay, Fredric Jameson has argued that all Third-World texts are "necessarily allegorical," in that "even those texts invested with an apparently private or libidinal dynamic . . . necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory; the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society."<sup>2</sup> A case could easily be made, in this vein, that Brazilian films, even the most frivolous, have always been allegorical. A number of fifties *chanchadas*, for example, parody successful Hollywood films of the period in terms that allegorize both the "inferiority" of Brazilian cinema in relation to the dominant model and the impulse to transcend a condition imposed by economic dependency. The films of first-phase Cinema Novo, similarly, constitute "allegories of underdevelopment," where history is shown as the unfolding of a progressive teleological design and where an "aesthetic of hunger" turns scarcity itself in a signifier. The avant-garde films of the late sixties and early seventies, for example Rogerio Sganzerla's *Bandido da Luz Ver-*



BANDIDA DE LA LUZ VERMELHA (*Red Light Bandit*)

*melha* (*Red Light Bandit*, 1968), meanwhile, become allegorical in another, more modernist sense, as “fragmentary discourses” expressing a “crisis in representation,” where the very notion of historical and cinematic teleology becomes suspect.<sup>3</sup> The early sixties metaphor of hunger, evoking the victim finding self-redemption through Fanonian violence, gives way to the late sixties metaphor of an “aesthetic of garbage” as being appropriate to a Third World country picking through the leavings of an international system dominated by First World monopoly capitalism. The diverse strategies we will discuss—metacinema, carnivalization, “*abertura* naturalism,” and national allegory—can be seen as responses to a new historical juncture where there is little place for the messianic optimism of early Cinema Novo or the aggressive nihilism of “Marginal Cinema.”

### The Penchant for Metacinema

Brazilian cinema in the seventies and eighties shows a clear penchant for metacinema and reflexivity. We use these terms here in their broadest possible sense, to refer to films which foreground the film-maker, or the film’s inter-text, or its textual procedures, or its reception, or its production. One finds reflexivity, to take just a few examples from the most recent crop of films, in *Fulaninha* (What’s Her Name, 1986), David Neves’s film about a film-maker in love, in *Sonho Sem Fim* (Dream Without End, 1986), Lauro Escorel’s film about Brazilian film pioneer Eduardo Abelim, in *Bras Cubas* (1985), Julio Bressane’s reflexive adaptation of a Machado de Assis novel, as well as in the self-flaunting MGM-style artifice of Rui

Guerra’s *Malandro* (1986), the cinematic obsessions and stagey films-within-the-film of *Kiss of the Spider Women* (1985), in the metalinguistic exercises of popular composer Caetano’s *Cinema Falado* (Talking Cinema, 1986), in the mixed documentary/fiction modes and film-maker-within-the-film of Tizuka Yamasaki’s *Patriamada* (1985) and in the reflexion on documentary processes in Eduardo Coutinho’s *Cabra Marcado para Morrer* (Twenty Years After, 1984).

It is as if the film-maker, conscious of working with issues having a long history of formulation in a body of filmic and extra-filmic texts, becomes necessarily reflexive, dialoguing with the received body of belief and methodology, directly or indirectly discussing the cinema within the films. Each film becomes a methodological sample of a possible approach, at once “about” a subject and “about” itself. Here Brazilian cinema is in step, of course, with international cinema, with its ever-increasing tendency to reflexivity, whether modernist (early Godard), Brechtian (late Godard) or post-modernist (Steven Spielberg). But there are also national and continental specificities at work, rooted in the marginal and syncretic nature of the Latin American cultural experience. The Latin American artist/intellectual is almost necessarily bicultural, at once inside and outside, defined as at the margins yet thoroughly penetrated by the center. As the product of cultural and ethnic *mesticaje*, Brazil, especially, forms a veritable palimpsest of diasporas—blacks brought violently from Africa, indigenous peoples made alien in their own land, and immigrants from Europe, Asia and the Middle East (whence the appropriateness of the title of Tizuka Yamasaki’s first film, *Gaijin*—Japanese for “stranger”—in stressing the primordial foreignness of all Brazilians). As an (at least) tricultural people, Brazilians tend to be language- and culture-conscious, inhabiting a peculiar realm of irony where words and images are seldom taken at face value.

Whatever the root cause of the phenomenon, metacinema is ubiquitous in current Brazilian cinema. But even here we find a remarkable plurality. Among the most commercially oriented films, for example, metacinema takes the form of parodies of Hollywood films or American television programs. These parodies, as João Luiz Vieira points out in his definitive

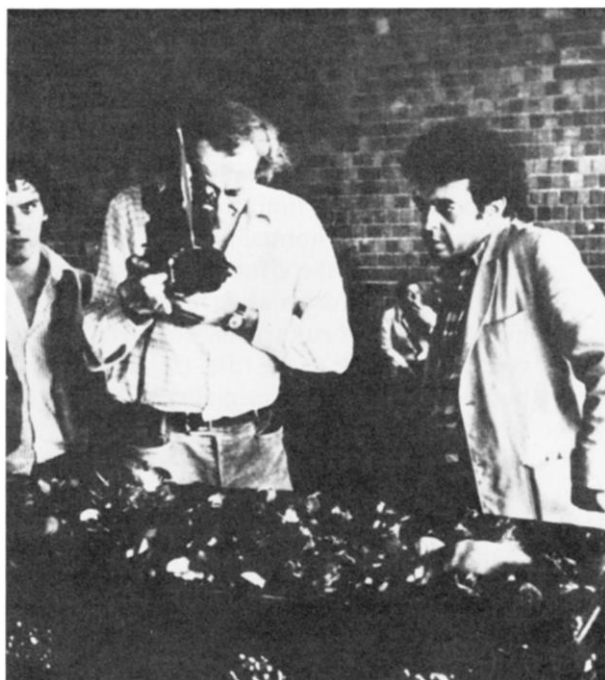
*Hegemony and Resistance: Carnival and Parody in Brazilian Cinema*, tend to take as their parodic object Hollywood high-tech spectacles rather than equally popular but less spectacular films such as *Love Story* or *Kramer versus Kramer*; they parody, in other words, precisely those films whose production values Brazilian film-makers could not possibly emulate. Many of the the most successful high-tech Hollywood films of the past fifteen year have attracted the parodic interest of Brazilian cineastes: *Bacalhau* (Codfish, 1976) parodies *Jaws*; *A Banana Mecânica* (The Mechanical Banana, 1973) parodies *Clockwork Orange*; *O Jeca contra o Capeta* (The Bumpkin Against the Devil, 1976) parodies *The Exorcist* and so forth. These films can properly be termed allegorical, as Vieira points out, in that they explicitly thematize the relatively weak position of Brazilian Cinema vis-à-vis Hollywood, either by directing laughter against dominant cinema in a kind of aesthetic exorcism or a part of a ritual of self-degradation.<sup>4</sup>

Metacinema is also a constant in the world of São Paulo film-maker Carlos Reichenbach, author, since 1968, of ten features and a number of short films. Reichenbach is well-known in Europe, where he is seen as a “tropical Fassbinder,” but only one of his films (*Liliane M*) has been shown in the United States. Because of the foregrounding of eroticism in his work, Reichenbach has often mistakenly been considered a porn director, but the real goal of what João Luiz Vieira calls Reichenbach’s “intellectual pornography,” is the critique and transvaluation of porn. His first feature, *Corrida em Busca de Amor* (Race for Love, 1971) was a raucous parody of American beach-party films which melded cinematic in-jokes with the anarchistic socialism of Proudhon and Bakunin. Within Reichenbach’s meta-pornography, eroticism is always distanced and voyeurism always short-circuited. In his episode for the film *Audácia*, for example, Reichenbach has a love-making couple repeatedly interrupt the “action” to discourse on the role of sexuality in the cinema. The Borgesian *Ilha dos Prazeres Proibidos* (Island of Forbidden Pleasure, 1979), presents its diegesis as a narrative emerging from a cheap erotic novel read by one of the characters. Another character, named Luc Moullet, confesses to having murdered Lemmy Caution in Godard’s *Alphaville*. The love

scenes, in this meta-porno-chanchada, are invariably more comic than titillating, as, for example, when we are shown sun-burned tourists pawing each other a beach picnic while lip-synching Nelson Eddy’s “Indian Love Call.”<sup>5</sup>

Nor does the documentary escape this meta-cinematic tendency. Glauber Rocha’s seminal film *Di* (1977), a documentary homage to the Brazilian painter Di Cavalcanti, had already reflexively mocked the conventional “art documentaries” favored by Brazil’s cultural bureaucrats, while Artur Omar’s *Triste Tropicó* (1974) had pioneered the “fictive documentary,” thus anticipating Woody Allen’s *Zelig* by more than a decade. In this pseudo-biographical tale about a Brazilian doctor whose voyage into the interior parodies Lévi-Strauss’s trip to Brazil, the director deploys documentary “evidence” in order to mock our naive faith in documentaries and their claims.<sup>6</sup> In seventies and eighties films, reflexivity becomes a kind of *political* obligation. Whereas sixties documentarists discoursed confidently about the “other” —worker, Indian, black—from a presumed superior position, seventies documentarists began to doubt their right and capacity to speak “for” the other. The “documentary” films of Artur Omar, in this sense, interrogate the very possibility of the cinema relaying without distortion a cultural experience alien to the film-

Glauber Rocha filming the deceased painter Di Cavalcanti in *Di*



maker. The title of his *Congo* (1972) seems to promise a conventional treatment of a typical documentary subject of the period—Afro-Brazilian folklore and specifically the Afro-Brazilian dance called “congo” or “congada,” yet the film itself offers *no* image referring to the film’s ostensible theme. The film’s real subject, then, is the impossibility, for the white urban intellectual film-maker, to truly apprehend that which is rural, black, and of the people. Other film-makers, disenchanted with the condescending sociologicistic approach, strive for a more dialogical and reciprocal relationship between observer and observed. Thus film-maker Andrea Tonacci, in his work for television, simultaneously registers the encounter of urban white Brazilians with freshly contacted indigenous groups *and* reflects on the recording of that encounter. In his latest films, in fact, he decides not to speak for the Indians but rather simply to share the equipment and let the Indians speak for themselves.

Two recent metacinematic fiction films deal with the role of sound in the cinema. Walter Rogerio’s *Voz do Brasil* (Voice of Brazil, 1981)—the title refers to a widely detested official radio program—foregrounds the difficulties of a young film-maker waiting for Embrafilme to finance his script. This drama is intercut with a series of episodes having no intrinsic link to the story except that they have to do with São Paulo film-making. One sequence shows an American television detective series being dubbed in Brazilian Portuguese in a sound studio. As the film loop of an action-packed scene passes on the screen, the dubbing technicians do their work and exchange trivialities. We are struck by the disjunction between the glamorous American stars on the screen and the ordinary Brazilians lending their voices. The provocation of the film, then, is to reveal the hidden face of the normally off-screen dubbers, rendering visible the effaced labor of a particular cinematic process while revealing the technical supports of cultural neocolonialism. The voice, to go back to the title, is that of Brazil, but the images and the mentality and corporate structure behind them are not. Icaro Martins and José Antonio Garcia’s *Estrela Nua* (Nude Star, 1985), meanwhile, parlays the issue of post-synchronization into a complex tale of exchanged identities. When the well-known actress Angela dies without having dubbed her

last film, the television dubber Gloria is called to lend her voice to the image of the original actress. She delights the film-makers by enacting the role as if truly possessed by the deceased actress’s spirit, until they realize that the possession has become quite literal and destructive, as Gloria’s life slowly comes to coincide with that of Angela, leading ultimately to her death. *Estrela Nua* proliferates in modish self-referential devices in the post-modernist mode of proxy sensibility, but what is finally most interesting is the film’s way of linking the technical question of post-synchronization to larger psychic questions of human identity, transference, and possession.

We find still another kind of metacinema in Rogerio Sganzerla’s documentary/fiction feature *Nem Tudo é Verdade* (It’s Not All True, 1985), a film which works through Sganzerla’s obsession with Orson Welles and specifically with the never-completed *It’s All True*, which Welles began filming during Rio’s 1942 Carnival and the lost footage of which was recently rediscovered in a Paramount warehouse. *It’s Not All True* recreates Welles’s Brazilian experience through a sound-image collage, combining documentary-style material (footage from *It’s All True*, footage of Welles in Rio, citations of *Citizen Kane* and *The Lady from Shanghai*, newspaper accounts, period photos, interviews with participants in the film) with staged reconstructions in which Brazilian avant-garde musician Arrigo Barnabe (who physically resembles the young Welles) plays Welles himself in his encounters with Brazilian celebrities and studio executives. Sganzerla portrays Welles as the rebellious victim of the Hollywood studio system, the press, and North American and Brazilian politicians. Welles’s utopian dream of real industrial and artistic collaboration between North and South America, Sganzerla suggests, violently challenged the neocolonial assumptions of the time.

A number of seventies and eighties films renew contact with the *chanchada*—the Rio-based musical comedies popular from the thirties through the fifties—now seen as the highest symbol of successful communication with the Brazilian public, the fount of a cinema at once nationalist, pragmatic, and popular. The process of revalorization of the *chanchada* began with Tropicalism’s aggressive leveling, in the late sixties, of high (erudite) and low (mass)

culture. Tropicalism, as it was expressed in music, theater, and film, provocatively mingled the folkloric and the industrial, the native and the foreign; its favored technique was the collage of disparate discourses, the result of a “cannibalistic” ingestion of the most heterogeneous cultural stimuli. The latter-day filmic incorporation of the *chanchada* dates from Sganzerla’s *Red Light Bandit* (1968) and Joaquim Pedro de Andrade’s *Macunaíma* (1969). The socially conscious recycling of *chanchada* strategies and actors enabled *Macunaíma*, especially, to realize a goal long inaccessible to Cinema Novo directors—the reconciliation of political and aesthetic avant-gardism with popular and box-office appeal.

The revalorization of the *chanchada* in the field of criticism and history, meanwhile, was furthered by film historian Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes, who argued, in his essay “Cinema: Trajectory of Underdevelopment,” that not only were the *chanchadas* of vital importance for having retained the loyalty of the Brazilian audience, but also that *all* Brazilian films, even the most imitative, remained authentically Brazilian, thanks to the Brazilian “creative incapacity for copying.” Now that the *chanchada* per se was dead, it becomes history and is therefore available for nostalgic or critical re-elaboration, a legitimate urban tradition to be incorporated much as rural folklore was incorporated by Cinema Novo in the early sixties. Within the filmic revitalization of the *chanchada*, we find a wide diversity of trends, for the *chanchada* is at times taken up in a romantic vein, as in Carlos Diegues’s *Quando O Carnaval Chegar* (When Carnival Comes, 1972), and at times in a conceptual-reflexive vein, as in Bressane’s stylistic exercises, and at still other times in a comic-parodic-erotic vein, as with Ivan Cardoso’s *Segredo da Mumia* (Secret of the Mummy, 1982) or *As Sete Vampiras* (The Seven Vampires, 1986). Cardoso favors a genre he himself dubs “*Terrir*”—a play on “*terror*” and “*rir*” (laugh)—which builds on cinematic codes already internalized by the spectator, specifically those of the classical horror film. *The Secret of the Mummy*, for example, synthesizes mock-citations of the horror film—lightning flashes, thunderclaps, sinister castles, torch-lit corridors with references to the American B-film, the Brazilian Underground, and the *chanchada*. (Here we have a kind of parody of par-

ody, since the *chanchada* was already parodic.) In a Brazilianized synthesis of Roger Corman and Mel Brooks, Ivan Cardoso gives new life to the clichés of the genre film, in what João Luiz Vieira calls the “vampirization” of pre-existing films and genres, whereby the new text absorbs and transforms the “blood” of other texts.<sup>8</sup>

### The Emblem of Carnival

The symbolic energies of carnival animate countless Brazilian films in the seventies and eighties. But this “recarnivalization” takes variegated form. At times the revolution itself is regarded a kind of carnival, as with Ze Celso’s Living-Theatre-like approach to an absurdist Brazilian theatrical classic, Oswald de Andrade’s *Rei da Vela* (King of the Candle, written in 1933, filmed in 1985) where the revolution becomes a fete or collective communion. More often, however, the film-makers are less concerned with militancy. They abandon the old puritanical-leftist equation of party/carnival with alienation and escapism, a tendency present, for example, in *Cinco Vezes Favela* (Five Times Favela, 1962) where the popular classes are exhorted to abandon the samba in favor of union militancy, and instead revalorize carnival as an emblem of national identity, a culturally rooted master-trope, the crystallization of a richly syncretic culture which still has a place for an orgiastic ritual at once sacred and profane. Carnival, in these films, is not simply metaphorical. Carnival, and Rio’s “samba schools,” are a quite literal presence in Walter Lima, Jr.’s *Lira do Delirio* (Delirious Lyre, 1978), Vera Figueredo’s *Samba da Criação do Mundo* (Samba of the Creation of the World, 1979), and Glauber Rocha’s *Idade da Terra* (Age of the Earth, 1980). In other cases, carnival forms part of the wider circulation of

LIRA DO DELIRIO (*Delirious Lyre*)





IDADE DE TERRA (*Age of the Earth*)

popular and erudite culture. The stories of Diegues's *Xica da Silva* (1976) and Walter Lima, Jr's *Chico Rei* (1982), for example, were first presented as samba-school pageants for Rio's carnival. Indeed, Diegues has said that he conceived both *Xica da Silva* and *Quilombo* (1984) as "samba enredos" (samba plots) i.e., as analogous in their procedures to the collection of songs, dances, costumes, and lyrics that form part of the popular narrative form called a samba-school presentation. Fernando Cony Campos's *Ladros de Cinema* (Cinema Thieves, 1977) foregrounds this analogy by having his *favelado* protagonists steal film-making equipment from American tourists visiting Rio for carnival. The *favelados* conceive the film they plan to make with the stolen equipment—about an abortive eighteenth-century revolt against Portuguese colonialism—as a kind of samba school narration.

At times carnival comes to form part of a larger recuperation of popular culture, a constellation of values which includes sensuality, *malandragem* (quick-witted hustling) popular religious practice, and even soccer. Early Cinema Novo films such as *Subterraneos do Futebol* (Subterranean Soccer, 1962) and *Garrincha, Alegria do Povo* (Garrincha, Joy of the People, 1963) tended to denounce soccer as a modern form of "bread and circuses" exploited by the ruling class to divert and demobilize the people. *Garrincha, Alegria do Povo*, for example, pointedly placed the World Cup loss of 1950 after the 1962 victory in order to emphasize the ephemeral and ultimately futile nature of such triumphs. Djalma Batista's *Asa Branca, Um Sonho Brasileiro* (White Wing, a Brazilian Dream, 1981), in contrast, sees soccer as a kind of positive energy invested in a creative dream. The film shows the problematic aspects of the

soccer-player protagonist's trajectory, revealing the limitations of the dream and the human price paid, but it also offers an uninhibited homage to the festive poetry of athletic contest. Other films emphasize the famous Brazilian *jeitinho* (street-smart transcendence or clever way out of apparently intractable problems) associated with the fast-thinking *melandro* (urban hustler). We find the *malandro* figure in the films of actor-turned-director Hugo Carvana, notably in his *Val Trabalho, Vagabundo* (Go to Work, You Bum, 1973) and *Se Segura, Malandro* (Cool It, Hustler, 1978), as well as in Rui Guerra's musical comedy, an adaptation of *Beggar's Opera*, entitled *Malandro* (1986).<sup>9</sup>

All these reapproximations with popular culture reflect an attempted identification, on the film-maker's part, with the more perennial features of Brazilian cultural life, a compromise formation which allows for a discussion of the function of the intellectual/film-maker and the possibility of assimilation to the people's world view. At its best, this strategy leads to a kind of popular-yet-pedagogic cinema which combines social critique with carnival-style joy. At times, it turns into the complacent affirmation of presumed Brazilian character traits and the Brazilian national style. Real conflicts are elided in favor of the celebration of the "cordiality" of the fun-loving Brazilian. Thus we find the "mythic" resolution of social conflicts, whether through the charm of Dona Flor and her imaginary way of keeping two husbands, or in the sudden terminal shift into parody in the musical-comedy happy end of Jabor's *Eu Te Amo*. At its worst, a superficial view of carnival celebrates the Brazilian capacity for political conciliation, mocked by Glauber Rocha as the historical tendency for the now repentant right to hold hands again with the now well-behaved left, while "*tudo acaba em samba*" (everything ends in the samba). The happy togetherness of the party, in this apolitical version of Bakhtin's subversive carnival, is the utopian horizon of a cinema with one eye on the samba and the other on the box office.

Two young directors, Ana Carolina and Carlos Alberto Prates Correia, emphasize humor and transgression—a quasi-carnivalization without ever reducing their films to calculatedly marketable products. Their work reconciles commercial viability, guaranteed by sensuality, humor, and technical competence, with risk-

Claudia  
Ohana  
in  
MALANDRO



taking and invention. Ana Carolina's first feature *Mar de Rosas* (Sea of Roses, 1977) anatomizes a grotesque family, consisting of squabbling parents and an anarcho-terrorist daughter with whom the film's sympathies obviously lie, all in an atmosphere of surreal banality à la Ionesco. Her second feature, *Das Tripas Coração* (idiomatically something like Bending over Backwards, 1980) analyzes a girls' school as a site of hypocrisy and sexual repression. The entire film consists of the extension into 100 minutes of film time of a government inspector's dream just before he signs the order to close the school.

The work of Carlos Alberto Prates Correia similarly reconciles the drive for auteurist expression with the constraints of the market. Prates Correia is from the state of Minas Gerais, land of (now exhausted) mineral wealth and the brilliant prose-poetry of Guimaraes Rosa, and his films often translate the peculiar beauty and somewhat archaic social life of the region. *Perdida* (Lost Woman, 1975) traces the trajectory of a country girl who leaves Minas to become a maid and prostitute in the city, registered in a style which fuses the understated frontality of Godard with the laconic flipness of the Brazilian Underground. The title of *Cabaret Mineiro* (Cabaret in Minas, 1980) is taken from a poem by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, and emphasizes the regional aspect of the film, which is set in the area of the old railroad lines, a reminder of the glory days of the region.

Around a tale of an elegant adventurer's love for a red-haired beauty, Prates Correia spins a tale of rural fantasies and eroticism. The cineaste acts as a kind of voyeur-stager of an audio-visual mosaic made up of langorous insinuations and interminable lazy afternoons. In *Noites de Sertão* (Sertão Nights, 1984)—here we are symptomatically far from the oppressed northeastern *sertão* of *Vidas Secas* and *Black God, White Devil*—he explores the universe of

MAR DE ROSAS (*Sea of Roses*)





the Minas plantation and its figurations of desire, foregrounding the conflict between patriarchal order and anarchic sexuality, in a filmic “translation” of the spirit of Guimarães Rosa.

The effort to develop a viable project of national entertainment is now mobilizing a new generation of film-makers who emerged from Cinema Novo and even from Marginal Cinema. This common project has led not only to a qualified return to the notion of spectatorial pleasure, but also to the heightening of technical standards, to more care with scriptwriting and to a dramaturgy and *mise-en-scène* closer to the high production values fostered by Brazilian television, which has now largely replaced Hollywood as the technical superego of Brazilian cinema. We find a less rigid approach to themes—seen by some as a relief from the repression of the orthodox left and its “ideological patrols” (in Carlos Diegues’s polemical phrase of the late seventies)—as film-makers demand the right to express their personal fantasies and utopias, whether in accord with the reigning ideological superego or not. Film-makers refuse the “advice” of those who call for greater sociological realism, and assert the right to treat “minor themes” and “local issues,” without making large-scale political statements or allegorical totalizations. At times, therefore, they opt to do nothing more than sensitively register the quotidian, whether melancholy as in Luiz Fernando Goulart’s *Marina* (1976), lyric as in Carlos Diegues’s *Chuvvas de Verão* (Summer Showers, 1978), comic as in David Neves’s *Muito Prazer* (Glad to Meet You, 1979), or amorous as in Jabor’s *Eu Te Amo* (1980) and *Eu Sei Que Vou Te Amar* (1986).

### Abertura Naturalism

The convergence, in the eighties, of a more commercially oriented cinema with the moment of political liberalization (“*abertura*”) led to a kind of “*abertura* naturalism” which focused not only on sex and violence but also on the repressed political experience of the two decades of dictatorship. The first tendency led to a proliferation of “explicit sex” films—hard-core exploitation films which made the *porno-chanchadas* look positively sentimental and authentically Brazilian in comparison—as well as to the existential-artsy intimist films of

Walter Hugo Khoury (e.g., *O Prisioneiro do Sexo* [Prisoner of Sex, 1983], where tortured neurotic males exorcize their erotic obsessions) and to the jet-set eroticism of Neville d’Almeida’s *Rio Babilonia* (1984), where the Rio elite and international stars shuttle in sports cars from orgy to orgy, all staged in palatially modernist houses invariably offering dazzling scenic views of Rio de Janeiro. The remembered experience of dictatorship, meanwhile, led to a new genre: detective thrillers focalizing themes related to political repression. Whereas the Cinema Novo-derived films of the seventies dealt with repression and physical violence through allegory, as in Nelson Pereira dos Santos *Um Azylo Muito Louco* (The Alienist, 1970), or through poeticized grotesquerie, as in Antonio Fontoura’s *Rainha Diaba* (Devil Queen, 1974), or through the detached observation typical of the “case study” approach of Eduardo Escorel’s *Ato de Violencia* (Act of Violence, 1980) the new films were frankly entertainment-oriented, favoring action-filled plots with “redeeming social value.” Hector Babenco’s *Lucio Flavio: O Passageiro da Agonia* (Lucia Flavio: Passenger of Agony, 1977) constitutes a particularly effective example of the genre. Babenco risked offending the junta’s censors by focusing on a controversial case involving police complicity with Rio’s notorious “death squads.” The film’s rhetoric, meanwhile, systematically opposes the “truth” of cinema to the “lies” of the print and electronic media. Naturalism becomes part of a seductive strategy associating cinematic spectacle with authenticity and even audacity in presenting the raw facts. Babenco’s *Pixote* (1980), in the same vein of *abertura* naturalism, follows some Brazilian slum kids, synecdochic samples of that country’s three million homeless children, from police round-up to reform school to a hazardous “freedom” on the streets. The first half of the film is set in a microcosmic detention center, a ritualized universe of authoritarian power trips and sordid sexual humiliations. Babenco exposes an array of real abuses by the authorities: exploitation, cover-ups, corruption, even murder. When *Pixote* and his friends escape, the film metamorphoses generically into a picaresque tale of tragicomic misadventures, filmed in a style of funky Third-World expressionism. Within a calloused milieu, we find epiphanies of tenderness: sexual connections



PIXOTE

made across lines of age, race, and class, along with the merging of the erotic with the lethal. “See if this makes you come,” taunt the kids as they poke a revolver in the face of a prostitute’s john. Although lacking in political analysis, *Pixote* does expose the abuses of governmental correctional institutions, and achieves, at its best, a convulsive beauty reminiscent of Buñuel’s *Los Olvidados*.<sup>10</sup>

Within this same naturalistic line, we also find less competent films where the social analysis is severely compromised by the felt need for traditional formulae: classical dramatic structure, Manichean schemas of heroes and villains, the imperative for constant “action.” Such is the case of Oswaldo Caldeira’s *O Bom Burgues* (*The Good Bourgeois*, 1983), based on the story of a wealthy businessman who gave financial and logistical support to the leftist guerrillas sought by the junta, as well as of the controversial *Para Frente Brasil* (*Forward Brazil*, 1983) by veteran film-maker Roberto Farias. Although the film provoked the wrath of the junta (and even triggered the fall of the then head of Embrafilme) by dramatizing the military apparatus of repression and torture, in fact the film is politically ambiguous in seeming to contrast local sadistic torturers with a benign and concerned federal government. Murillo Salles’s *Nunca Fomos Tão Felizes* (*Never Were We So Happy*, 1984), meanwhile, constitutes a more successful example within this tendency, in its story of a clandestine leftist militant forced to hide his own activities even from his own bewildered son. Here the interest is dislocated from the political drama per se to the psychological investigation of the son’s isolation and his truncated relationship to a father he cannot understand, as well as the implied com-

plementary dilemma of a father eager to love his son but prevented by political circumstance from doing so fully. Jorge Duran’s *A Cor do Seu Destino* (*The Color of Your Destiny*, 1987), finally, evokes the tormented psyches of Chilean exiles in Brazil, torn between affection for their new homeland and anguished nostalgia for a Chile brutalized by the Pinochet dictatorship.

To the extent to which larger social movements grow in strength the production of documentaries echoes, mediates, and even advances this process. The eighties bring, as a consequence, a strong harvest of feminist, black-liberationist, and workers’ films. A feminist perspective animates complex short fiction films such as Ines Castilho’s *Histerias* (1983) as well as big-budget historical spectacles such as Tizuka Yamasaki’s *Paràiba Mulher Macho* (1985). Homosexual love, meanwhile, is treated sympathetically in such films as Bruno Barretto’s *Beijo no Asfalto* (*Kiss on the Asphalt*, 1985), Sergio Amon’s *Aqueles Dois* (*Those Two*, 1985) and Sergio Toledo’s *Vera* (1987). The question of racism and black consciousness, finally, before emerging into the light of prestige productions like *Quilombo* and *Chico Rei*, was touched on by black actor-film-maker Antonio Pitanga in his *No Boca do Mundo* (*In the World’s Mouth*, 1977), and as a process of the affirmation of Afro-Brazilian culture, in the films of Zozimo Balbul (*Dia de Alforria*, *Day of Liberation*, 1981), Juana Elbein dos Santos (*Arte Sacra Negra I (Orixa Ninu Ile)*, 1978) and *Arte Negra Sacra II (Metamorfose das Maes Nago)*, 1979), Roberto Moura (*Sai Dessa, Exu*, 1973), Raquel Gerber (*Yle Xooque*, 1981) and Carlos Blajsblat (*Egun-gun*, 1982).

While Cinema Novo, despite its revolutionary concerns, had largely ignored the working class, we begin to discern, in the midseventies, the impart of workers’ struggles, partly as a result of the immense coming-to-consciousness and political mobilization of the workers in São Paulo culminating in the strikes which paralyzed the city in 1978. This theme too is expressed in a variety of styles and formats. João Batista de Andrade’s *O Homen Que Virou Suco* (*The Man Who Turned into Juice*, 1980) first-prize winner at the Moscow Film Festival, for example, develops a popular narrative tone, mingling humor with pathos in its story about

a worker who also writes *folhetos* (handout fiction). Thus the film treats, on another register, the theme often elaborated in the work of Nelson Pereira dos Santos—the distance between the cultural producer (a projection of the filmmaker himself) and his public.

A film which articulates all these themes—strikes, work conditions, political tensions, assassinations—and which received distribution in the United States, was Leon Hirszman's *Eles Nao Usam Black Tie* (They Don't Wear Black Tie, 1981). The film updates the fifties play of the same title by Gianfrancesco Guarnieri, who plays Otavio in the film, and filters it through an aesthetic reminiscent both of Italian neorealism and intensely political early Cinema Novo. Retroactively compensating for Cinema Novo's slighting of the working class—Cinema Novo always seemed to prefer those both lower (the *favelados*) and higher (the elite) on the social ladder—the film offers an impressive gallery of proletarian characters, ranging from the old leftist Otavio through the impatient radical Sartini to the courageous black unionist Braulin to the wavering but never completely despicable son Tião, along with the predictable assortment of scabs and informers. The film weaves a family story, which contrasts the militant father's lucidity with the son's opportunistic confusion, and the story of a strike—supporting, finally, a cautious nonadventurist militancy, disciplined and struggling for small local victories, while condemning the irrational excesses of the overly emotional radicals. Subtextually, the veteran militant film-maker “corrects” the lost generation of the dictatorship, and in this sense distorts history. For in fact, the São Paulo strikes were the product of a new generation typified by Luis Ignacio da Silva (the famous “Lula”) and his Workers' Party, rather than of the traditional left. But the realism of *Black Tie* consists, ultimately, in the dynamic of the characters rather than in strictly accurate historical depiction, and in this sense it manages to fuse political consciousness and popular emotion, marshalling the force of feeling in the service of enlightenment.<sup>11</sup>

The perspective on contemporary Brazil is somewhat different in the films of the post-Cinema Novo generation, largely from São Paulo, a generation accustomed to military rule but also initiated into the counter-culture of mind-bending drugs, polymorphous sexuality

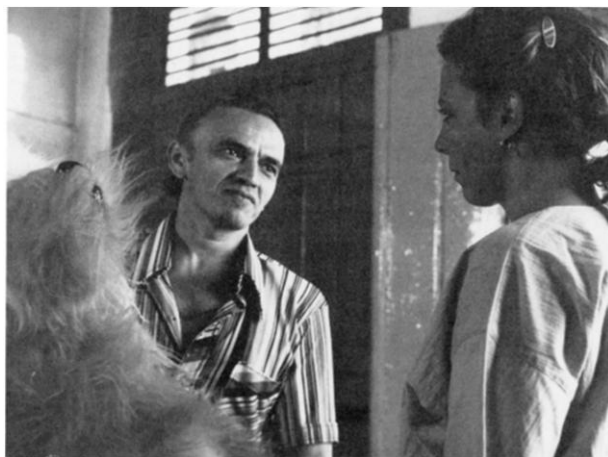
and anarchistic politics, eager for alternatives in all areas and ready to elaborate a vision of Brazil based on its experience of history. While not a “school” in the sense of Cinema Novo, the young São Paulo film-makers do share certain traits, notably a search to break out of isolation, to return to narrative fiction and the effective construction of audience identification, but without betraying the national culture. The film-makers follow a middle path between the didacticism of Cinema Novo and the provocations of the Underground. Rather than meta-cinematic deconstruction, the authors propose what Jean-Claude Bernardet calls a “false naturalism,” a pseudorealism which shows that it is aware that realism is a lie, a kind of representation which passes itself off as real but constantly de-realizes itself.<sup>12</sup> In this post-modernist cinema, the film-maker eschews grand ambitions in order to avoid grand disappointments, in a cinema which is more modest, more open, and more solicitous of the audience's affection. A finely realized example of this tendency is Chico Botelho's *Cidade Oculta* (Hidden City, 1986). As the title suggests, the city (São Paulo) is virtually the protagonist of the film. The scenario privileges night-time São Paulo, its punk-nihilist subcultures, its Karaoke bars and nightspots. *Cidade Oculta* portrays São Paulo as a synthesis of the world's cities, at times evoking New York, at times Tokyo (much of the film was shot in the Japanese neighborhood called “Liberdade”), and at times West Berlin—a cross, in filmic terms, of *Metropolis* and *Blade Runner*. José Roberto Eliezer's cinematography features

CIDADE OCULTA (*Hidden City*)



canted frames and off-balance *Touch of Evil*-like compositions and a metallicly shiny video-game aesthetic. The film's pastiche plot revolves around two-dimensional characters with quasi-allegorical names: the bandits "Angel" (Arrigo Barnabe) and "Jap" (Celo Saiki), the nightclub performer Shirley Shadow (Carla Camurati), in life-and-death struggle with a corrupt policeman named "Big Rat" (Claudio Mamberti). The film plays knowingly with an intertext which includes comic books, cabaret, musical comedy, music video, and *film noir*. *Cidade Oculta* appeals to a younger media-formed generation of Brazilians for whom Cinema Novo-style didacticism is largely irrelevant. Yet the film does not completely abandon social consciousness, which here takes the form of the satirical portrayal of the policeman, presented by the media as a heroic anti-drug fighters, but in fact a drug addict and mafioso. The sound track is propelled by the avant-gardist music of Arrigo Barnabe, a syncretic music which mingles the influence of samba, rock, jazz, and Stockhausen, Schoenberg, Bartok and *musique concrete*, and which forms a perfect musical analogue to the hyper-modern feeling of the story and images.

Another São Paulo film, Suzana Amaral's *A Hora de Estrela* (Hour of the Star 1985), garnered many international awards as well as enthusiastic reviews after its recent opening in New York. A rare Brazilian graduate of a North American film school (NYU, where her class-mates included Jim Jarmusch and Susan Seidelman), Amaral in some ways fits into the new era of film-making, both in the sense of her film's modest subject—the misadventures of an awkward, uneducated, virginal girl from the Northeast in the concrete jungle of São Paulo—and in its pseudonaturalist manner which melds a documentary flavor with the feeling of fable. The film discards the reflexive structure of the Clarice Lispector source novella—by which a sophisticated upper-class male narrator grapples with the problem of bringing to life a simple-hearted lower-class character—in favor of an unmediated third-person approach to its theme. The result is a kind of updated neorealism, but this time without neorealism's frequent lapses into melodrama. The film's protagonist, Macabea, can be seen as the latter-day descendent of the unglamorous and barely articulate characters of



A HORA DE ESTRELA (*Hour of the Star*)

certain first-phase Cinema Novo films, for example the peasant Fabiano in *Vidas Secas*. Her character is constructed by an array of sharply observed details: her modest way of undressing *under* the bedcovers, her way of wiping her nose on her blouse collar, her nibbling on fried chicken as she urinates into a wash basin, her passion for guava and cheese, her vain chewing of aspirins as a cure for spiritual malaise. Where the film differs from Cinema Novo is in its relative conventionality of technique (psychologized narration, shot/counter shot for dialogue), its refusal of all social allegory (Macabea exhibits not a trace of class-consciousness or incipient rebellion), and finally in its readiness to grant its central character a fantasy life, even if a truncated one. What the film achieves, finally, is an honest, often humorous lucidity within its self-defined limits.

### The Latter-Day Allegories of Cinema Novo

Cinema Novo has been relentlessly allegorical since its first films in the early sixties in the sense that it has always favored the filmic treatment of microcosmic situations which evoke Brazil as a whole, developing a fragmentary discourse to insinuate coded political messages. We find allegory, for example, in the millennial Marxism of Rocha's *Deus e Diabolo na Terra do Sol* (Black God, White Devil, 1964), in the synthetic political figures (*the populist, the fascist, the leftist intellectual*) of *Terra em Transe* (Land in Anguish, 1967), as well as in the "cannibalist" fables of *Macunaíma* and *Como Era Gostoso meu Francês* (How Tasty was my Frenchman, 1971). This allegorical tendency became exacerbated during the period of extreme political repression in the early seventies. Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, in *Os incon-*

*fidentes* (The Conspirators, 1972), for example, discussed the defeat of the left in contemporary Brazil by displacing current issues onto the events of another century, specifically the abortive eighteenth-century revolt against Portuguese colonialism. Leon Hirszman's *São Bernardo* (1973), meanwhile, adopted a literary classic set in the twenties to allegorize the fascism of the sixties and seventies, via a protagonist who, not unlike Brazil's military leaders of the period, comes to power through bribery and murder, and who, again like the regime, enriches himself at the expense of the majority.

Any number of seventies and eighties films by Cinema Novo veterans offer a globalizing vision of society as expressed in allegories of underdevelopment and modernization. Both Guerra/Xavier's *The Fall* (1978) and Jabor's *Tudo Bem* (Everything's Fine, 1977), for example, elaborate the metaphor of "construction" to make a general statement about Brazilian modernization. *The Fall's* story about hard-hat construction workers building Rio's subway system is made to speak more generally about the overall movement of Brazilian society in the era of a consumerist model of development, national integration via satellite transmission, huge foreign debt, and the restructuring of urban space wrought by advanced capitalist development. The same metaphor underlies the allegorical *Tudo Bem*, in which a bourgeois couple invites construction workers to remodel their Carioca apartment. As the construction workers and maids take over the apartment—the "slave quarters," in Glauber Rocha's felicitous phrase, "invade the Big House"—the apartment becomes a symbolic microcosm, the

site of interaction of opposing class discourses and interests.

Carlos Diegues's *Bye Bye Brazil* (1980) creates a kind of picaresque allegory in which the "Caravana Rolidei"—a motley troupe of ambulatory artists—wanders around Brazil to witness, not without melancholy, the advance of modernization heralded by a national television which flattens regional diversity and renders obsolescent the troupe's old-fashioned entertainment. Here the social contradictions compressed into a single apartment in *Tudo Bem* are anamorphically splayed out over the wide screen of the Amazon basin. Alongside its self-flauntingly theatrical core fiction, *Bye Bye Brazil* presents a kind of seismological documentary that registers the aftershocks of the "multinationalization" of the Brazilian subcontinent. *Bye Bye Brazil* (whose original title was also in English) provides visual confirmation of the Americanization pointed out in the lyrics of the title song: pinball machines in the jungle, Indian chiefs sporting designer jeans, backlands bands that sound like the Bee Gees. The central concerns (what is the current state of Brazil? What is popular culture? What is cultural colonialism? What is the relation between artist and public?) were largely inherited from earlier stages of Cinema Novo; what is new is only the lightness and humor with which the old themes are sounded.<sup>13</sup>

The metaphor of civil construction, familiar from *Tudo Bem* and *A Queda*, reappears in Glauber Rocha's *Idade da Terra* (1980), but this time in the Biblical image of the people exploited by Pharaohs in the edification of tombs. At the same time, the film emphasizes the immensity of the country, developing a geographical trope of capital importance in recent Brazilian cinema, suggesting that the present phase of its imaginary and its reflexion involves the exploration of new frontiers, and a desire to verify *in loco* the actual effects of third world capitalism in the service of national integration, a preoccupation present not only in *Idade da Terra*, *Bye Bye Brazil*, and *Iracema*, but also in a number of first features by young directors, as in the case of Raulino's *Noites Paraguaiois* (Paraguan Nights, 1981), Geraldo Moraes's *A Dificil Viagem* (The Difficult Journey, 1982) and Augusto Seva's *A Caminho das Indias* (On the Road to the Indies, 1982). This reaching out to the frontiers represents a historic return to

TUDO BEM (*Everything's Fine*)



one feature of the early Cinema Novo films. When Brazilian cinema wants to speak for Brazil as a whole, when it wants to speak of national identity, it continues to reach beyond the urban centers, where the film-makers live and work, to the strength and density of the “other Brazil”: the Northeast, the Amazon, the vast Brazil far from the wealthy and Europeanized South. When it wishes to speak of modernization as a global process, Brazilian cinema observes that process at its frontier points, at the very edges of the national experience, and even when it immerses itself in the city, it is to encounter the traces of the margins in the center, whether in the form of migrants from that other Brazil—thus we re-encounter the archaic within the modern—or in the form of the Northeasterners and obscure religious practices that invade the apartment of *Tudo Bem*, or the immigrant workers who build the subway in *A Queda*. In the hillbilly singers Ze Rico and Milionario who star in Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s *Estrada da Vida* (Road of Life, 1980) or the immigrants, soccer players, and prostitutes in countless films made in São Paulo.

At times the director finds the “other Brazil” in the historic past, as in Carlos Diegues’s *Quilombo* (1984). Here Diegues returns to the theme of his first feature *Ganga Zumba* (1963)—black resistance against slavery. Both films celebrate the historical reality of Palmares, the most spectacular and long-lived of the free communities, or *quilombos*, found-

ed by runaway slaves. A didactic saga based on fact, legend, and imaginative extrapolation, the film moves somewhat uneasily between historical reconstruction and musical comedy. What marks the film as sharing in the allegorical tendency is its desire to present Palmares, the first truly democratic and multiracial society in the western hemisphere, as a model for contemporary Brazil. One senses in *Quilombo* a nostalgic utopianism combined with a disenchantment with occidental political models, including a Marxism often guilty of a certain ethnocentrism. *Quilombo*, in this sense, treats a political dream which existed until it was destroyed by colonial violence, but whose memory can still nourish.

*Quilombo* is not the only latter-day Cinema Novo film to bring to fruition a project first conceived in the late fifties or early sixties. Such is the case as well of Hirszman’s *They Don’t Wear Black Tie*, Eduard Coutinho’s *Carbra Marcado para Morrer* and Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s *Memorias de Carcere* (Prison Memories). This last film, which is based on the prison memoirs of Brazilian novelist Graciliano Ramos, charts Ramos’s descent, in the late thirties, into the hell of the prisons of populist dictator Getulio Vargas. But simultaneous with this descent, the film displays a very different movement. With each successive attempt at systematic dehumanization, Ramos gains character and humanity through resistance. He becomes a more committed human being at the

QUILOMBO  
by  
Carlos  
Diegues



same time that he comes to appreciate his vocation as a writer. Within the abject promiscuity of the prison, he discovers what separated him, the progressive bourgeois intellectual, from the people. The Third World gulag becomes, for him, the scene of a purificatory rite. All the dramatic situations of the film are arranged around a central crescendo—the writer’s increasing participation in the life of the prison and the prisoners’ increasing collaboration in the work of the writer. The climax comes with the collective defense of the manuscript, now become a group patrimony. The film allegorizes the author’s vision of the role of the progressive artist, whose “witness” turns the common experience into remembered history, and thus offers a ringing endorsement of the vocation of literature—and by analogy, the cinema—as a critical register of social existence.

*Prison Memories* is allegorical in still another sense, in that it uses one set of events, which transpired in the thirties, to speak about another set of events. Just as the “joke” in *Vidas Secas* consists in its being set in the past, yet nothing has changed, so *Prison Memories* has everything to do with the Brazil of *abertura*. The prison’s “Freedom Radio” speaks of debts and bankers’ agreements, and a soldier tells the writer, in a transparent allusion to two decades of military rule, “It will take you civilians a good while to get rid of us.” The eagerness of the prisoners to come to decisions by vote evokes, for the Brazilian, the energetic 1984 campaign for direct presidential elections. The film begins and ends with the Brazilian national anthem, at a time when patriotism was back in style in Brazil, precisely because of redemocratization. The anthem marks the film as a microcosmic statement, suggesting that Brazil has the aspect of a prison, yet one whose prisoners will soon be freed.

Another key trope in the cinema of the past two decades has been the highway. The early sixties films—*Vidas Secas*, *Viramundo*, *Grande Cidade*—were already fascinated by the theme of internal migration from the impoverished interior. Rui Guerra’s *The Guns*, for example, was structured around the opposition between the urban world of weapons and trucks and the rural world of hunger and millennial religion, in a film which counterposed a documentary style, for the peasants, with a narrative fiction linked to the urban characters, with whom we identify



IRACEMA

as the “colonizers” of the rural world. Over a decade later, in Bodansky/Senna’s *Iracema* (1975), the story of a poor Indian girl (her name is an anagram on “America” and an allusion to a romantic nineteenth-century Indianist novel) we find a similar confrontation, again relayed by counterposed cinematic techniques. In this allegory of reflexive modernization, the confrontation crystallizes around the relation between the jingoistic truck driver Tião Brasil Grande (Big Brazil Sebastian) played by the actor Paulo Cesar Pereiro, and Iracema, the Indian girl played by the non-professional Edna di Cassia. Within this asymmetrical couple, Tião is active agent, initiator, entrepreneur; Iracema is acted upon, prostitute, commodity. Tião is associated with the pet project of the dictatorship, the Transamazonian Highway, and the modernizing nationalism it represents. He embodies the arrogant spirit of the “economic miracle” and the ill-advised Pharonic ambitions which led to a \$100-billion debt. The film develops a structural contrast between two filmic

approaches: first, that of cinema reportage with hand-held camera, registering the ecological devastation and human exploitation in the Amazon, and second, that of fictional and allegorical procedures involving the relationship of Tião and Iracema. In a total interpenetration of documentary and fiction (the actor Pereio pretends to be a truck driver around people who do not know him to be an actor) the film understatedly denounces the human toll of frontier “development.”

### Return to the Future: Twenty Years After

We may end our discussion of recent Brazilian cinema with a film which self-consciously reflects on the history of that cinema and which recapitulates many of the themes we have been developing. Eduardo Coutinho’s reflexive documentary *Cabra Marcado para Morrer*—literally “Man Marked for Death,” but translated into English as “Twenty Years After”—traces the historical trajectory of Brazil, and of Brazilian cinema, from the early sixties through 1984, the date of the film’s release. Coutinho’s initial project, conceived in the optimistic left-populist years before the 1964 coup d’état, was to dramatically reconstruct the real-life political assassination, in 1962, of the peasant leader João Pedro Teixeira. The performers were to be João Pedro’s comrades in work and struggle, the locale would be the actual site of the crime, and among the “actors” would be the deceased leader’s widow. The coup d’état interrupted the filming, however; the film-makers and peasant participants were dispersed and the material already shot was hidden. Almost two decades later, encouraged by the political liberalization of the eighties, the film-maker sought out the hidden footage and the original “performers.” In the present-day film, we watch the participants in the original film watching themselves in the 1964 film, bearing witness not only to the scars left by dictatorship but also to the continuity of popular struggle.

A key figure in *Twenty Years After* is João Pedro’s widow, Elizabete, who carried on her husband’s militancy, leading demonstrations and even travelling to Brasília to denounce his assassination. The film-maker discovers her living in another state, under another name, more or less cut off from former friends and much of her family—all necessary, as she explains, “in order not to be exterminated.” After suffering



Above: *CABRA MARCADO PARA MORRER*—Elizabete in 1964. Below: *Elizabete* in 1984.



extreme oppression, she is bruised but also resilient and even cautiously militant. With the film-maker’s help she re-encounters her family, reassumes her true name and reaffirms her political convictions. In her capacity for disappearing, surviving, and then reappearing, she resembles, as Brazilian critic Roberto Schwarz points out, the film-maker himself. The emotion generated by the film arises from the encounter of a committed film-maker with an authentic popular heroine, who, despite everything, manages to connect the dots of her political trajectory, just as the film-maker connects the dots of his cinematic project. In the renewed confluence of political cinema and popular struggle, both cineaste and peasant leader resume their struggle and mark their solidarity.

In *Cabra Marcado para Morrer*, the vastness of Brazil is defined by the space of an exemplary diaspora; the dispersion and disintegration of the family and the erasing of identity by repression. But the descent into hell is doubled by a reverse journey which leads, if not to paradise, at least to a historical situation where



questions can be posed again. Here, the cinema literally intervenes in the life of the oppressed, and the story of the film begun, interrupted, and now completed is mingled with the story of those with whom the film-maker dialogues. It is thanks to the filmic meeting between the film-maker and Elizabete that she emerges from the underground and recomposes her identity. Between *Cabra* 1964 and *Cabra* 1984, the same questions remain relevant—repression, squatter's rights, agrarian reform, unionization—but not in the same terms, just as the film is taken up again but in a different mode. The sixties meeting with the widow is paralleled by the highly didactic cinema of the staged sixties film—a *mélange* of *Salt of the Earth*-style realism, with hortatory dialogue and idealizing low-angles, and the heroicized image of the People promoted by the leftist Center of Popular Culture which sponsored the film. The eighties meeting with the widow takes place in the era of network television and the accumulated experience of the Brazilian documentary. The filmic language is more dialogical, less inclined to discourse omnisciently *about* the other, and more inclined to listen *to* and learn *from* the other. The film incorporates into its own process and editing the recuperation of identity. It adroitly articulates the procedures of the traditional documentary—and especially offscreen commentary—with more contemporary direct-cinema techniques—where we discern the presence of the television professional, Eduardo Coutinho, from the well-known network series “Globo Reporter.” We see his crew working within the frame, making us acutely aware of a film-in-the-process-of-being-made before our eyes. We have here, then, a summa of our themes: documentary report, metacinema, the voice of the other, intertextuality (here in the most literal sense), and the impact of history, in a synthesis at once political, social, anthropological, and filmic.

#### NOTES

1. See Randal Johnson, *Cinema Novo x 5: Masters of Contemporary Brazilian Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984) and *Le Cinema Bresilien*, ed. Paulo Antonio Paranagua (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 1987).
2. See Fredric Jameson, “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986).
3. These concepts are elaborated in Ismail Xavier, *Allegories of Underdevelopment: From the Aesthetics of Hunger to the Aesthetics of Garbage* (NYU dissertation, 1982), available through University Microfilms.
4. See João Luiz Vieira, *Hegemony and Resistance: Parody and*

*Carnival in Brazilian Cinema* (NYU dissertation, 1982).

5. For an informed and illuminating overview of Reichenbach's work, see João Luiz Vieira, “Reber with a Cause: The Films of Carlos Reichenbach, Jr.,” forthcoming in *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*.
6. For a detailed analysis of the Rocha film, see Randal Johnson, *Cinema Novo x 5*, pp. 152–155; for analyses of *Triste Tropic*, see Ismail Xavier, *Allegories of Underdevelopment* and Robert Stam, “On the Margins: Brazilian Avant-Garde Cinema,” in Randal Johnson and Robert Stam, *Brazilian Cinema* (East Brunswick: Associated University Presses, 1982).
7. See Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes, “Cinema: A Trajectory within Underdevelopment,” in Randal Johnson and Robert Stam, *Brazilian Cinema* (East Brunswick: Associated University Presses, 1982).
8. See João Luiz Vieira, “As Sete Vampiras: Transilvania Follies,” *Caderno de Critica* No. 2, Rio de Janeiro (November 1986).
9. The path which leads from Rui Guerra's *Os Fuzis* (The Guns, 1964) to *Malandro* exemplifies the trajectory of a number of Cinema Novo directors from anti-Hollywood aggressivity to a qualified return to the notion of spectatorial pleasure. While *Os Fuzis* features an austere sound track with virtually no diegetic or commentative music, *Malandro* features a lush musical comedy score. While the earlier film was shot *vérité*-style *in loco*, the latter film was shot within stylized studio decors. And while the earlier film showed hostility to the dominant model, *Malandro* reveals a kind of affection for the Hollywood film.
10. For a more detailed discussion of *Pixote*, see Robert Stam, “*Pixote*” in *Cineaste*, Vol. XII, No. 3 (1983).
11. For an interview with Leon Hirszman about *Black Tie*, see “Recovering Popular Emotion: An Interview with Leon Hirszman,” in *Cineaste*, Vol. XII, No. 2 (1984).
12. See Jean-Claude Bernardet, “Os Jovens Paulistas,” in Ismail Xavier, Jean-Claude Bernardet, Miguel Pereira, *O Desafio do Cinema* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1985).
13. For a more detailed analysis of *Bye Bye Brazil*, see Randal Johnson, *Cinema Novo x 5* (Austin: University of Texas Press 1984), pp. 83–90, and Robert Stam, “*Bye Bye Brazil*,” *Cineaste* Vol. XI, No. 1 (Winter 1980–81).

#### SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLE—POLISH STYLE

The “newest artistic project” of MTV director Zbigniew Rybczynski, a Polish exile who is almost as famous among his fans as Madonna, is called *Steps*. A press release announces that it is based on the famous “Odessa Steps” sequence from Sergei Eisenstein's classic film *Potemkin*, and “unites the contemporary elements of modern video with the original films’ [sic] dramatic footage.” The release goes on, “*Steps* features a middle-American tour group—portrayed in color—which pays a seemingly uneventful visit to the ominous black and white Odessa steps. Suddenly in a blaze of gunfire, the tourists find themselves thrust in the midst of a massacre of men, women and children by the Cossacks. Fortunately, casualties are limited to the Russian peasants in the black and white footage as the colorful world of the tourists, created by video technology, is integrated into the black and white world of the soldiers and peasants. The tourists are seen taking snapshots of dead bodies for their photo albums, then taking time out to eat ice cream with the soldiers. Contemporary views of truth and morality are thrown into sharp relief as this historic social revolution is viewed as just another staged spectacle on their tour itinerary.”