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Guilherme Carréra, *Brazilian Cinema and the Aesthetics of Ruins*
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At a time of crisis of the liberal democratic project throughout much of the Western world, the examination of 'ruins' in relation to the development/underdevelopment of nation-states emerges as a timely topic worthy of investigation through the cinematic lens of documentarists and filmmakers of both developed and developing countries alike. Notably, the examination of what constitutes a ruin – with its aesthetic of decay and marginalization – has been explored by various traditions of realism in different national cinemas, from Italian neo-realism to Iranian film, within a context where the filmmaker's camera focuses on the destruction of cities and sites in contrast to the nation's political and economic problems as well as its social inequalities.

In this sense, Guilherme Carréra's *Brazilian Cinema and the Aesthetics of Ruins* is not new within the topic that it aims to explore. Nonetheless it stands out as an original work which offers an important contribution to English and Brazilian scholarship on contemporary Brazilian cinema. Carréra's in-depth research and discussion of three groups of documentaries explores the theme of ruins through different cinematic schools and their concerns, such as their roots in in the classic Brazilian cinema movements *Cinema Novo.* A result of his PhD thesis and research at the Centre for Research and Education in Arts and Media (CREAM) at the University of Westminster, Carréra's book situates this analysis within a wider assessment of Brazilian cinematic tradition which has dealt with the notion of ruins as decay and destruction, from the *Tropicalia* movement to *Cinema Marginal.* The films that come under Carréra's object of analysis include *White Out, Black In* (2014), *ExPerimetral* (2016), *The Harbour* (2013), and *Corumbiara: they shoot Indians, don't they?* (2009). A series of Brazilian filmmakers who work on social documentaries have also been interviewed, including Ana Vaz and Daniel Santos.

Brazilian Cinema has always had a concern with using ruins as a metaphor through which broader issues of poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment can be examined. As Carréra states, the aim of the work is to explore an existentialist approach to the notion of ruins which is seen in connection to a national condition and the failure of the 'modern project' to develop Brazil. The book is divided into four parts to order to investigate the cinematic aesthetics of decadence explored by a set of contemporary social documentary texts. The first of the book's four parts provides an historical and critical overview of the aesthetics of ruins, from *Cinema Novo* to contemporary Brazilian documentary. Part two moves on to look at the (re)construction of Brasilia, the current capital, through the investigation of different approaches to cinematic realism, examining, for instance, the science fiction documentary of Ana Vaz and Rogerio Sganzerla's famous film *The Red Light Bandit* (1968), one of the main films of the *Cinema Marginal* movement which also flirted with *film noir* and the *pornochanchada* aesthetic (or 'sexploitation' films). Through a focus on the *Tropicalia* counterculture movement, which had among its popular culture influences the actress Carmen Miranda, known to be an icon of aesthetic exaggeration and largely associated with American stereotypes of the Brazilian *latina*, part three explores the first capital of Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, during the colonial period as well as the period from independence until 1960. Part four discusses representations of indigenous territories, such as Macunaima and Iracema*,* further exploring the emergence of indigenous media and film by investigating texts which include *Corumbiara* (2009) as well as *Tava, the House of Stone* (2012), *Two Villages, One Path* (2008), and *Guarani Exile* (2011).

In *Brazilian Cinema and the Aesthetics of Ruins,* Carréra investigates the positions of the filmmakers who engaged with notions of underdevelopment in their filmmaking, stating how this was explored by Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes in his 1973 seminal essay *Cinema: A trajectory within underdevelopment,* which examined underdevelopment within the history of Brazilian cinema. A key argument made here denotes a form of metalanguage for Brazilian cinema: mainly that the nation's filmmaking operates within the very reality of underdevelopment and does not encounter the

strength to break away from this pattern of decadence. Carréra, quoting Gomes, comments that: '[c]aught between the passivity of the bourgeois audience and the financial issues preventing production from rebounding, "Brazilian cinema does not have the strength to escape underdevelopment"' (p. 47). Gomes denounces the 'cultural colonialism' in which Brazilian cinema found itself inserted, due to the imposition of Hollywood and its aesthetics, which nonetheless one could argue is not particular to Brazilian film as such but to other national cinemas which operate within the orbit of North American cinema. Thus, as Carréra notes, 'both the form and the content bear the marks of underdevelopment', even with *Cinema Novo* being pointed out as a school which thematically denounced a bleak scenario of inequality whilst however being also caught up in a 'precarious mode of production' (p. 47).

Carréra thus conceptualizes 'underdevelopment' by borrowing from both Celso Furtado's (2009) definition as well as from Bresser-Perreira's understanding of Brazil as 'a national dependent society' (p. 24). He also drew from other scholarly analyses on cinema, including the work of academics such as Idelber Avelar's essay 'History, Neurosis, and Subjectivity: Gustavo Ferreyra's Rewriting of Neoliberal Ruins' in Michael E. Lazzara and Vicky Unruh's edited collection, *Telling Ruins in Latin America* (2012), which examines 'ruins' from various perspectives, from understanding it as *performance* to viewing it as a mode of destruction caused by modernity in the twentieth century.

Carréra's book asks what we aim to do with the 'ruins' and what we intend to put in its place. He also situates this within the particular context of Latin American development, making a contrast between the destruction of the 'old world' by the 'new world' as well as alluding to the old European continent and the post-war European ruin. Arguably, the use of ruins as an intellectual hypothesis to explain the social (and human) condition has been widely explored by artists, intellectuals, filmmakers, and scholars in their work across the Humanities and Social Sciences. Carréra also claims to develop the theoretical framework of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and his uneasy relationship with Brazil. Lévi-Strauss travelled to the Amazon in 1936,

taking photographs which explored indigenous themes and conducting ethnographic fieldwork with the tribes of the Mato Grosso area.

However Carréra does not only refer to ruins from a metaphorical or philosophical standpoint, but underscores the material reality of an accelerated disintegration of the country following the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the rise to power of populist far-right movements epitomized by the *Bolsonarista* political movement. Carréra discusses the fire and wreckage of Brazil's oldest historic National Museum in Rio as a symbol of this decay and of the overall collapse of the country, which he notes as having started to take place between 2015 and 2019. Carréra also criticizes what he calls the 'rotten modernization process and the savage neoliberal agenda' which not only causes high unemployment but also led to the acceleration of the process of destruction that was already part of Brazil's landscape of 'underdevelopment' (p. 22).

However, as a core theme that runs throughout the book and unites the cinematic aesthetics which it investigates, the examination of ruins as part of the legacy of underdevelopment in Brazil could have been further discussed through a postcolonial lens in view of the whole (de)colonization process of Latin America and Brazil in particular. It would have been good perhaps to have further explored the notion of 'ruination' as part of the wider Latin American legacy of European colonization, coupled with the social and political problems of the contemporary period that Carréra rightly identifies as being the driving motifs for the intensification of the nation's decadence. This is pinpointed, as stated previously, as being both an existentialist and metaphorical feeling as well as a sentiment, which makes its way through cinematic schools and documentary texts, as well as being manifested more materially in the landscape of Brazil and its political shifts. Carréra situates their own work within the tradition of social documentary in Latin America, nodding to the work of authors such as Julianne Burton's *The Social Documentary in Latin America* (1990) and the more recent Navarro and Rodriguez's *New Documentaries in Latin America* (2014). He also references classic Brazilian literature and other texts

that attempt to explore slavery and Brazil as a colony, such as Gilberto Frerye's *Casa Grande e Senzala* [*Masters and Slaves*] (1998) and Buarque de Holanda's *Roots of Brazil* (1995).

Carréra provides a critical and nuanced look at Brazilian cinema, avoiding the romanticization of schools closely identified with this aesthetics of decay and decadence, such as *Cinema Novo*. In his attempted examination of the structural inequalities in Brazil, he also assesses its strengths by showing the gruesome realities of Rio's *favelas* as well as the shocking scenarios of desolation and despair in the north-east of the country at a time of repression and military dictatorships. *Cinema Novo* has been represented by various nationally and internationally acclaimed filmmakers, such as Glauber Rocha and his well-known and critically acclaimed film *Terra en Transe* (1967), which captures the unique period of repression, poverty, and alienation in the dictatorship years in Brazil (1964-1985).

Carréra also states how *Cinema Novo* had a leading role as a Brazilian cinematic school which questioned for the first time the country's notion of progress and its thinking around development within the political context of the João Goulart government of the 1960s and the pressures for wider social and political change, which eventually led to military dictatorship. Carréra does not shy away from denouncing the limits of *Cinema Novo*'s project of 'political emancipation' (p. 48), given its roots in the mainly white and middle-class bourgeoisie of the urban landscape of Rio de Janeiro. The book nevertheless engages in the assessment of *Cinema Novo*'s revolutionary praxis, stating how it has sought to portray the country's inequalities and its links with another Brazilian filmmaking movement, *Cinema Marginal*, which also aimed to explore the vulnerable, the outsider, and the downtrodden.

Brazilian Cinema and the Aesthetics of Ruins is useful to readers with a knowledge of World Cinema as well as to those who are less familiar with core Brazilian cinematic traditions and how they have sought to engage with problems of social inequality, poverty, and underdevelopment**.** Carréra's dense, historically situated and in-depth examination of Brazilian social documentary films thus offers a more contemporary assessment of Brazilian filmmaking and sits alongside other

English language books in the field, such as Randal Johnson and Robert Stam's *Brazilian Cinema* (1982) – which also investigates classic films such as Nelson Perreira dos Santos' *Vidas Secas* – and Lucia Nagib's *New Brazilian Cinema* (2003). The latter explores the highlights of Brazilian cinema of the 1990s, a decade known as the renaissance of Brazilian film, with many films paying lip service to the *Cinema Novo* tradition but through a more contemporary, Hollywood lens which nonetheless underlined the concern with the country's political problems and its social inequalities. This was the case for Walter Salles' *Central Station* (1998), also heavily influenced by Italian neo-realism, and Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948). *Brazilian Cinema and the Aesthetics of Ruins* is a solid, well-researched, and developed book that will be very useful for students and scholars alike in disciplines from Film Studies to Brazilian and Latin American Studies, Politics, and Media and Communications.