

**Contemporary
Brazilian Cinema**
From Nelson
Pereira dos Santos
to Fernando
Mirelles



Dr. Hudson Moura
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Workshop on Contemporary Brazilian Cinema

Hudson Moura, PhD

The cinema of Brazil, as well as those of other Latin American countries such as Argentina and Mexico, experienced profound transformations in their production each time a new government came into power. Salles Gomes, the famous Brazilian critic, pointed out that Brazilian cinema has taken varied *trajectories* in dealing with its underdevelopment. In the last 50 years, Brazilian filmmakers have continually struggled against political and economic difficulties and have been negatively affected by censorship, lack of access to foundation and government grants, and uninterested audiences who are consumed by Hollywood films and mass television.

In the 1960s, the idea of *Cinema Novo* (Glauber Rocha, Ruy Guerra, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, among others) was to articulate political speech and conceptual issues related to the notions of class and national identity connected to formal innovations. Aesthetic rupture and social criticism were melded together. Since the end of the political regime of dictatorship in the mid 1980s, Brazilian filmmakers have a lot of difficulty connecting to the audiences and adapting their films to the new political perspective. The result of this uncertain period was the end of government funding and the decrease in the number of the film productions to almost zero.

In the mid 1990s, in attempting to communicate with larger audiences, filmmakers such as Fábio Barreto and Carla Camurati released into the market films that explored a variety of styles and genres influenced by the aesthetic of telenovelas and advertising TV spots. Thus, Brazilian cinema experienced one of the most remarkable rebirths in Latin America. In the *Cinema da Retomada*, a term that refers to films produced from 1995 to 2002, diversity and entertainment were what mattered. Filmmakers strived to create identification between the public and its self-image by reworking old concerns about cultural identity, national roots, and reenactment of history. Another issue was to document the political and social moment of the transformation of Brazilian society as depicted in the smash hits *Central Station* and *City of God*.

In fact, this moment of the renaissance of Brazilian cinema coincides with the moment of globalization, which involves the industrialization of the production, the opening of the market, the traffic of information and technology, the participation in diverse international festivals, and the access to foreign funding sources. At least, this was the moment when filmmakers such as Walter Salles, Fernando Meirelles, and José Padilha started to respond to globalization in cinematographic terms.

During this workshop, we will analyze film excerpts and discuss about local film production to understand the national issues and social and cultural contexts that affect Brazilian cinema. Today's international film co-production system in Brazil will also be discussed and compared to recent experiences in emergent cinemas from Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

Reading Suggestions:

JOHNSON, Randal and Robert Stam, eds. *Brazilian cinema*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1995.

NAGIB, Lucia, ed. *New Brazilian Cinema*. London, I.B. Tauris & Co., 2003.



- Violence and Poverty in Brazilian cinema:

Cultural aspects

Or

Media exploitation?



Misunderstanding Brazilian Cinema:

Cosmetic of hunger (popular concept in mid-1990s -- a play-word on Cinema Novo's manifesto called *Aesthetic of Hunger*) :

- too superficial in portraying reality;
- too perfect in composing beauty;
- too concerned about high quality images; or
- too cliché in narrating and creating stories

Nelson Pereira dos Santos: the emergence of modern cinema in Brazil



Glauber Rocha proclaimed that if the camera in *Rio, 40 Degrees* (1955) narrates earnestly and explains the tragedies, the miseries, and the contradictions of the great city, the camera in *Rio, Northern Zone* (1957) documents, questions, exposes, accumulates data, and studies the environment. Rocha considered these two films the predecessors of Cinema Novo. They show the *people* for the first time in a Brazilian screen instead of a representation or a convention of characters depicted in commercial cinema, such as the popular comedies of *chanchada* or the classical Hollywood films of the Vera Cruz studio.



Revival Cinema (Cinema da Retomada)

1995-2002



- Researchers and filmmakers cannot come to a consensus on what the word "revival" actually means.
- It could simply mean the revival of film production;
- or it could indicate a "revival" as in a social-aesthetic movement—as the Cinema Novo in the 1960s—or it could imply the revival of Cinema Novo itself.
- Some filmmakers refuse to talk about a recent cinematic movement in Brazil because there was no particular group aesthetic or shared ideas.
- This period has not proposed any kind of social or aesthetic break with the history of Brazilian cinema. In fact, there is a kind of continuation in the tradition since the 1940s that focuses on both Brazil's mythical places, sertão the Northeast and the favelas of cities.
- In fact many of those films deal with historical concerns depicting Brazilian biographies or national subjects.
- A significant number of Brazilian contemporary films present voice-over narration as a structural element.

How much telenovelas have influenced Brazilian cinema?



- Ismail Xavier states: Cinema da Retomada replaces Cinema Novo's ideological discourse about national identity by the “rhetoric of the winner” in the audiovisual battle led by the Brazilian TV network Globo.

Post-Retomada



- It seems safe to say—based on economical, aesthetic, production, performance criteria—that *City of God*, directed by Fernando Meirelles and produced by Walter Salles, started a new era in Brazilian cinema: the genre cinema.

Tropa de Elite 2

The Enemy Within

(BRA, 2010) dir. by José Padilha



Hand Out

Quotes:

- “Santos’ early films depict the brutal reality of the lives of *favelados*, in the slums of the big cities such as Rio de Janeiro, or of *retirantes* (migrants) fleeing the famine in the draught-stricken northeastern Brazil. [...] For Santos, filmmaking was revealed as just the camera and the people in front of it. Hence Glauber Rocha’s phrase, “a camera in hand and an idea in head” came later. [...] Thus, the documentary style is central in *Rio*, *40 Degrees* and *Rio, Northern Zone* in the way they depict the daily reality of Rio. In an attempt to capture this reality, Santos doesn’t mask incoherence or paradoxes by fictional effects. The role of the documentary in his films is just the opposite—to show this inability and to reaffirm its commitment to reality. The films present just a glimpse of controversial reality.” Hudson Moura, *Nelson Pereira dos Santos*, *Senses of Cinema* < <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2011/great-directors/nelson-pereira-dos-santos/> >
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- “The Latin hunger, therefore, is not only an alarming symptom: it is the nerve of its own society. There resides the tragic originality of the Cinema Novo before the world cinema: our originality is our hunger and our greatest misery is that, although this hunger is felt, it is not understood”. Glauber Rocha, *Aesthetic of Hunger* (1965)
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- “The people involved in the production and, to a great extent, in the consumption of Cinema Novo were young people who disassociated themselves from their origins as colonizers. [...] They saw themselves as representatives of the colonized, charged with a mediating function in the reaching of social equilibrium. In reality they were speaking and acting primarily for themselves. These limitations were clear in Cinema Novo. [...] Nevertheless, the significance of Cinema Novo was immense: it reflected and created a continuous and coherent audio-visual image of the absolute majority of the Brazilian people. Cinema Novo created a mythical universe made up of the impoverished interior, urban slums, lower class suburbs, fishing villages, dance halls, and the soccer stadium”. Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes, *Cinema: a trajectory within underdevelopment* (1973).
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- “Although today’s filmmakers are less convinced than *Cinema Novo* leaders about their posture vis-à-vis the national-popular issue. This is arguably due to their being displaced by the high-profile discourse on national identity incorporated, since the 1970s, by the rhetoric of the winner of the audio-visual battle in Brazil: the Globo Network. This TV channel now displays its hegemonic industrialized version of the national-popular issue in its *telenovelas* (soap-operas)”. Ismail Xavier, *Brazilian Cinema in the 1990s*.
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- “In contemporary cinema, violence does not come out of the search for justice [...] There emerges a form of drama that responds to a world of tactical confrontations that do not seem to fit into strategies larger than the struggle for survival. [...] Wanderers, traveling characters, unexpected cross-cultural encounters are frequent in today’s cinema, a kind of epochal symptom that Brazilian film comes to share even when it recounts events that took place in the past”. Ismail Xavier, *Brazilian Cinema in the 1990s*.