

Paiva, Samuel; Schvarzman, Sheila (Org.) *Viagem ao cinema silencioso do Brasil*

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Rio de Janeiro: Editorial Azougue, 2011. 310p.

This work written by cinema researchers who have been meeting frequently since 2002 to watch silent movies in *Cinemateca Brasileira* is very welcome. To start with, there is a lesson in method: the writing of the book was born out of the experience of seeing these films and the need to better understand them, considering the meaning of image and its relationship with reality. In this way, their memory is reordered and updating. The book begins with a study of the current state of exploration, restoration and preservation of these films in Brazil, ranging from catalogues to criticism, passing through materiality and access. The collection is designed as a cataloged and changeable set, since it can be expand and re-dimensioned. Under the auspices of memory, the documentary maker Guiomar Ramos and Guiomar Rocha Álvares presented their impressions after watching *Voyage de nos souverains au Brésil* (1920) because Guiomar witnessed as a young man this royal visit. The film triggers the memory, bringing to the fore the political culture of the time. Mauro Alice, in turn, described his interest in using the same film and *Lembranças de velhos*¹ to write a screenplay. The book presents a commented mapping of *Atualidades Gaúchas*, the important catalogue of the films available in the *Cinemateca*, and the remarkable *Relatório*, written by Major Reis on his trip to New York, taken from the collection of Embrafilme – and now at the *Cinemateca*. Major Reis explained the negotiations and strategies to show in the U.S. the film *Os sertões*, produced in the expeditions of Colonel Rondon. He said in U.S. foreign films were “almost prevented.” “Reduced to non-cinema theater matters,” the films were displayed as *educational films*. His pioneering ethnographic film was exhibited on an educated and scientific circuit, brokered by Colonel Theodore Roosevelt. In the text tensions produced in the world by colonialism transpire. Cinearte’s repudiation of *Naturaes* and

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Cavadores is painful to note. Cinearte condemned the presence of blacks, Indians, *Caboclos*, and traces of Congo in films, a “racist attitude,” seeking instead an image of modern Brazil, afterwards glimpsed in *Cinédia*. Following this a range of professional and procedures were belittled. The recall and visibility of these films are correlated and strong themes in the book; both by recovering its historical constitution between 1896 and 1934, the moment of the consolidation of cinema as a medium of mass communication and entertainment, and by nuancing the perspectives of social subjects entangled therein.

The book deals with some fundamental questions about the subject with discrepancies and disagreements. It dialogues with the critics Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes, Maria Rita Galvão and Jean-Claude Bernardet, and with the notion of *primeiro cinema* in the perspective of Tom Gunning and Charles Musser. It is a cinema fascinated by its own attraction and capacity to be exposed, embedded in the representation of everyday life and charmed by it. Highlighted in it is the process of the cosmopolitanization of images and expository practices. However, the following are not rulers of its intelligibility: the lack of a systematic and polished cinematic language, technical progress or the national focus. As a result for these researchers it is worth indicating the materiality of the film and locating places, circuits, display times. There is a difference between showing *No Paiz das Amazonas* (1922) at the Odeon or at the Palais and showing it as part of the International Exhibition of 1922, always in Rio de Janeiro. However, most of the movies seen in Brazil, mostly from 1912 onwards, were foreign. From the production done in Brazil, using the vocabulary of professionals of the time, what preponderated were *natural* and the *posed*. In several passages, the authors distinguish *natural*, *current*, *arrangement*, *travelogue* and *posed* in the terms and implications of the time, exploiting ambiguities and specificities.

Some authors discuss the film genre. In part, they explore the reception and development of genres, incorporating cinematographic models without merely copying. Alfredo Supia discusses science fiction and highlights the receipt of its iconography and its imagery in *natural* and *posed* films – the former reinforcing scientific verisimilitude. Luciana Araujo questions the change of the dramaturgical figure of the hero, from the good guy to the heartthrob, by comparing the American *Tol'able David* (1921) and Humberto Mauro's *Tesouro perdido* (1927), observing this change in movies made in São Paulo and Pernambuco. In their plots what counted was less the construction of the hero and more the reaffirmation of the figure of the *senhor* – understood by

the author in the wake of Joaquim Nabuco. The social relations dictated by the master-slave dialectic explain this dissociation between hero and heartthrob. Sheila Schwarzman maps the production of *travelogue* in Cornélio Pires in the condition of images that are also traded, which show the continuity of certain social types and of the grandeur of the *Paulista* – people from São Paulo. In terms of social representation, Luciene Pizoqueiro deals with the female figure in three Paulista films centered on bourgeois and family sociability. They show the role of the elite in the city of São Paulo for designating habits and framing shapes and gestures, as well as their strategies to crystallize their identity.

Moreover, the films also act as a constitutive element of the geographic imagination of the nation. Eduardo Morettin looks at the creation of wealth and the place of nature in *No País das Amazonas, Terra Encantada* and *No Rastro do Eldorado* by Silvino Santos, scrutinizing the meanings of its production and exhibition during the cycle commemorating the centenary of the Independence of Brazil in 1922. This geographic imagination resurfaces in Ana Lobato and Paulo Menezes, who explore the mounting of a map designating interior/coastline, country/city, the country's borders and simultaneously insert Brazil, as a nation and symbolically, in the global context. The Fabri sisters unravel the bonds between *A Real Nave Itália no Rio Grande do Sul* by Benjamin Camozato and the itinerant exhibition brought by the ship *Regia Nave Italia* to several Brazilian ports, propagating fascist iconography, the political imagery of fascism, the eugenics discourse, and the enthusiasm of the Brazilian press. The film, now having fallen into bits, was essentially aimed at the Italian public. Some articles address in a timely form the feelings of belonging and its mechanisms, such as the *patriotic feeling* of the Fabris, or the *ceremonious respect* of Cornélio Pires for large properties.

On different scales, some articles problematize the relationship between films seen with poor images and the real. They indicate the strength of the *performance* in this filmography, as in the case of Major Reis taking possession, through the image, of the frontier, capturing it with its peoples for the national state. The issue is less the “authenticity of the image,” Flavia Cesarino Costa argues, than the “story happening visually” in front of the camera. In this condition, involuntary situations, even unwanted ones, leaked out. Images exposed the so-called ‘Brazilian delay’ fought against by Cinearte, which proposed the creation of a filmography of the modern. In turn, the mediations with the real implied the dialogue with eighteenth-century images, photographs both Brazilian and foreign, denoting the frequency of the world of images that precedes the emergence of cinema. In general this imagistic eighteenth-century

repertoire became inextricably entwined with the journey, to the extent that it results from and represents places visited, often inscribed in the colonial logic of recognition of the world and its possession, by helping to establish the continuous, fast, simultaneous *en masse* movement of images on a worldwide scale. The photo helped to establish a perception of there and here, the local and the global, the image that documents and the object. It was in itself a mediator. Here, the notion of *journey* acquires, throughout the reading, interlocking senses: the image captured on the trip, the *travelogue* genre, the theme of travel in films, the heavy transit of images weaving together diverse relationships between themselves in their exhibition. It alludes to the conditions – and the actual experience – of watching movies in those circumstances and today. The journey, moreover, reveals the attitude on the part of researchers to embark on this aesthetic, academic and cinematographic experience.

Based on this book, it is possible to reflect on the place that the body takes up in these relationships between image and reality to consider Luciana Araujo's conclusions about the centrality of the body in the films of Major Reis and in the films commented on by Pizoqueiro. Or about the potency of the ritual of power, according to Paul Emile, to generate images that are capable of representing it in celebrations of varied magnitude, from the funeral of Rio Branco to the Centennial of Independence. Overall, the reader is surprised by the conservative political agenda of these films in relation to themes, the treatment of images, narrativization, reception, and the negotiations carried out, because both at the limit and in the steady drip, they portrayed everyday social inequality and showed in common sense a perception modulated by the notion of race – expedient to justify such inequality. Questions arise in me: did movies like *São Paulo: sinfonia da metrópole* (1929) sound bolder than they have appeared so far? Is there no need to establish the connections between the generation of *cavadores* and *Cinearte*? Are there more clues in the intelligent *Baile perfumado* (1997) to understand this production both in terms of the image, at the moment it is made, and its transformation into a power currency and in its recollection?

NOTE

¹ See BOSI, Ecléa. *Memória e sociedade: lembranças de velhos*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1994.