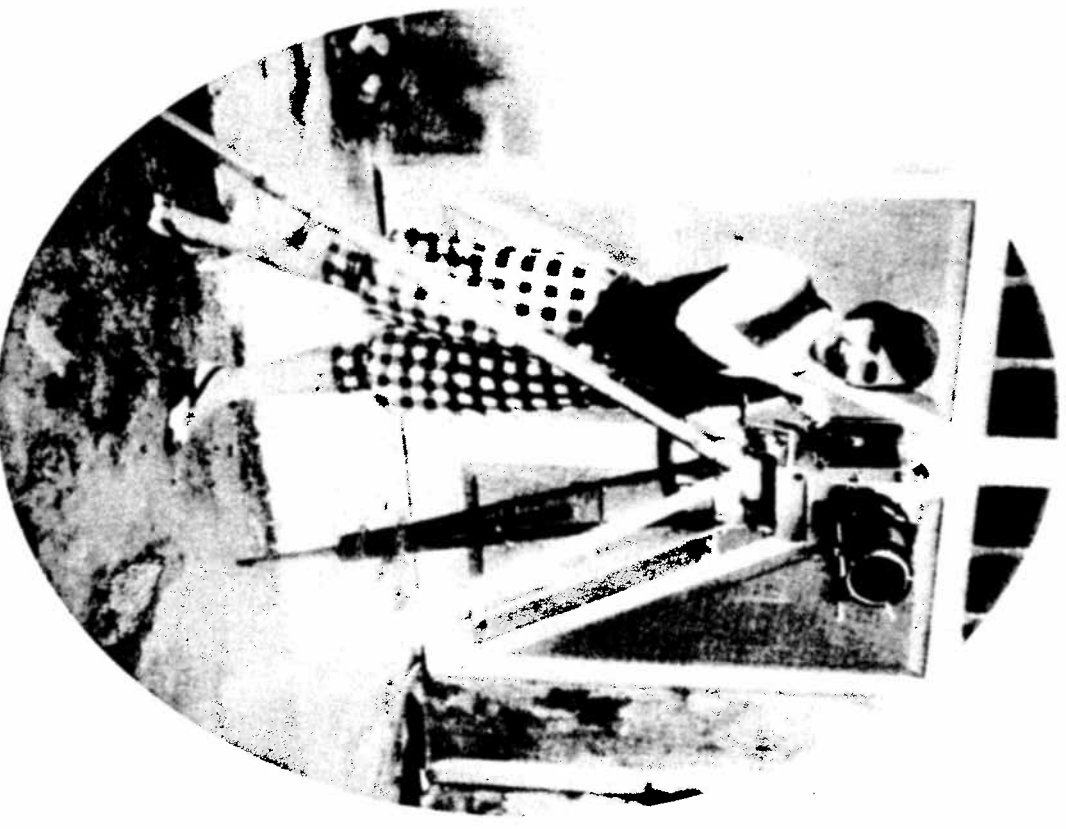


Brazilian Cinema

Expanded Edition

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Editors



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Introduction

"An Esthetic of Hunger" was first presented in Genoa, Italy, in January, 1965, as part of a retrospective survey of Latin American cinema. It was published in *Revista Crítica da Cultura Brasileira* in July, 1965, and was subsequently translated into French and published in *Positif* as "L'esthétique de la violence." Although written during the second phase of Cinema Novo, Glauber Rocha's manifesto sheds light on the first phase as well. In the notes to the Portuguese version, Rocha sums up the films of the first phase: "From *Arandá* to *Barren Lives*, Cinema Novo has narrated, described, poetized, discussed, analyzed, and stimulated the themes of hunger: characters eating dirt and roots, characters stealing to eat, characters killing to eat, characters fleeing to eat." Rocha contrasts Cinema Novo and its "gallery of starving people" with what he calls "digestive" cinema: "films about rich people with pretty houses riding in luxurious automobiles; cheerful, fast-paced, empty films with purely industrial objectives." In tones that recall Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Rocha denounces Brazil's neo-colonial oppression, calling on Brazilians to take both their political and cinematic destiny in their own hands. Like Fanon, Rocha sees violence as the authentic cultural expression of a hungry people. Rejecting the condescending praise of European critics who are merely "nostalgic for primitivism," Rocha proudly asserts the international stature and importance of the Cinema Novo movement. But the truly seminal contribution of this essay was to call for a style appropriate to the real Brazil, to articulate a social thematic together with a production strategy into a truly revolutionary esthetic.

"An Esthetic of Hunger" GLAUBER ROCHA

Dispensing with the informative introduction so characteristic of discussions about Latin America, I prefer to examine the relationship between our culture and "civilized" culture in broader terms than those of the European observer. Thus, while Latin America laments its general misery, the foreign onlooker cultivates the taste of that misery, not as a tragic *symploze*, but merely as an esthetic object within his field of interest. The Latin American neither communicates his real misery to the "civilized" European, nor does the European truly comprehend the misery of the Latin American.

This is the fundamental situation of the arts in Brazil today: many distortions, especially the formal exoticism that vulgarizes social problems, have provoked a series of misunderstandings that involve not only art but also politics. For the European observer the process of artistic creation in the underdeveloped world is of interest only insofar as it satisfies a nostalgia for primitivism. This primitivism is generally presented as a hybrid form, disguised under the belated heritage of the "civilized world," a heritage poorly understood since it is imposed by colonial conditioning. Latin America remains, undeniably, a colony, and what distinguishes yesterday's colonialism from today's colonialism is merely the more polished form of the colonizer and the more subtle forms of those who are preparing future domination. The international problem of Latin America is still a case of merely exchanging colonizers. Our possible liberation will probably come, therefore, in the form of a new dependency.



Os Inconfidentes (1971)

This economic and political conditioning has led us to philosophical weakness and impotence that engenders sterility when conscious and hysteria when unconscious. It is for this reason that the hunger of Latin America is not simply an alarming symptom: it is the essence of our society. There resides the tragic originality of Cinema Novo in relation to world cinema. Our originality is our hunger and our greatest misery is that this hunger is felt but not intellectually understood.

We understand the hunger that the European and the majority of Brazilians have not understood. For the European it is a strange tropical surrealism. For the Brazilian it is a national shame. He does not eat, but he is ashamed to say so; and yet, he does not know where this hunger comes from. We know—since we made these sad, ugly films, these screaming, desperate films where reason does not always prevail—that this hunger will not be cured by moderate governmental reforms and that the cloak of technicolor cannot hide, but only aggravates, its tumors. Therefore, only a culture of hunger, weakening its own structures, can surpass itself qualitatively; the most noble cultural manifestation of hunger is violence.

Cinema Novo shows that the normal behavior of the starving is violence; and the violence of the starving is not primitive. Is Fabiano [in *Barren Lives*] primitive? Is Antão [in *Ganga Zumba*] primitive? Is Corisco [in *Black God, White Devil*] primitive? Is the woman in *Porto das Caixas* primitive?

From Cinema Novo it should be learned that an esthetic of violence, before being primitive, is revolutionary. It is the initial moment when the colonizer becomes aware of the colonized. Only when confronted with violence does the colonizer understand, through horror, the strength of the culture he exploits. As long as they do not take up arms, the colonized remain slaves; a first policeman had to die for the French to become aware of the Algerians.

From a moral position this violence is not filled with hatred just as it is not linked to the old colonizing humanism. The love that this violence encompasses is as brutal as the violence itself because it is not a love of complacency or contemplation but rather of action and transformation.

The time has long passed since Cinema Novo had to justify its existence. Cinema Novo is an ongoing process of exploration that is making our thinking clearer, freeing us from the debilitating delirium of hunger. Cinema Novo cannot develop effectively while it remains marginal to the economic and cultural process of the Latin American continent. Cinema Novo is a phenomenon of new peoples everywhere and not a privilege of Brazil. Wherever one finds filmmakers prepared to film the truth and oppose the hypocrisy and repression of intellectual censorship there is the living spirit of Cinema Novo; wherever filmmakers, of whatever age or background, place their cameras and their profession in the service of the great causes of our time there is the spirit of Cinema Novo. This is the definition of the movement and through this definition Cinema Novo sets

itself apart from the commercial industry because the commitment of Industrial Cinema is to untruth and exploitation. The economic and industrial integration of Cinema Novo depends on the freedom of Latin America. Cinema Novo devotes itself entirely to this freedom, in its own name, and in the name of all its participants, from the most ignorant to the most talented, from the weakest to the strongest. It is this ethical question that will be reflected in our work, in the way we film a person or a house, in the details that we choose, in the moral that we choose to teach. Cinema Novo is not one film but an evolving complex of films that will ultimately make the public aware of its own misery.

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Translated by Randal Johnson and Burnes Hollyman