

The Aesthetics of Hunger

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Dispensing with the informative introduction that has become so characteristic of discussions about Latin America, I prefer to discuss the relationship between our culture and 'civilised' culture in less limiting terms than those which characterise the analysis of the European observer. Thus, while Latin America laments its general misery, the foreign observer cultivates a taste for that misery, not as a tragic *symptom*, but merely as a formal element in his field of interest. The Latin American neither communicates his real misery to the 'civilised' man, nor does the 'civilised' man truly comprehend the misery of the Latin American.

Basically, this is the situation of the arts in Brazil. Until now, only lies elaborated from truth (the formal exoticism that vulgarises social problems) have been communicated in quantitative terms, provoking a series of misunderstandings which are not confined to the area of art but rather continue far beyond into the political domain. For the European observer, the process of artistic creation in the underdeveloped world is of interest only in so far as it satisfies his nostalgia for primitivism. This primitivism is generally presented as a hybrid form, disguised under the belated heritage of the 'civilised' world and poorly understood since it is imposed by colonial conditioning. Undeniably, Latin America remains a colony. What distinguishes yesterday's colonialism from today's is merely the more refined forms employed by the contemporary coloniser. Meanwhile, those who are preparing future domination try to replace these with even more subtle forms. The problem facing Latin America in international terms is still that of merely exchanging colonisers. Thus, our possible liberation is always a function of a new dependency.

This economic and political conditioning has led us to philosophical undernourishment and to impotence – sometimes conscious, other times not. The first engenders sterility; the second, hysteria. It is for this reason that hunger in Latin America is not simply an alarming symptom; it is the essence of our society. Herein lies 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 Europeans and the majority of Brazilians have failed to understand. For the European, it is a strange tropical surrealism. For the Brazilian, it is a national shame. He does not eat, but is ashamed to say so; and yet, he does not know where this hunger comes from. We know – since we made those ugly, sad films, those screaming, desperate

films in which reason has not always prevailed – that this hunger will not be assuaged by moderate government reforms and that the cloak of technicolor cannot hide, but rather only aggravates, its tumours. Therefore, only a culture of hunger can qualitatively surpass its own structures by undermining and destroying them. The most noble cultural manifestation of hunger is violence.

Cinema Novo reveals that violence is normal behaviour for the starving. The violence of a starving man is not a sign of a primitive mentality. Is Fabiano primitive? Is Antão primitive? Is Corisco primitive? Is the woman in *Porto das Caixas* primitive?

Cinema Novo teaches that the aesthetics of violence are revolutionary rather than primitive. The moment of violence is the moment when the coloniser becomes aware of the existence of the colonised. Only when he is confronted with violence can the coloniser understand, through horror, the strength of the culture he exploits. As long as he does not take up arms, the colonised man remains a slave. The first policeman had to die before the French became aware of the Algerians.

In moral terms, this violence is not filled with hatred; nor is it linked to the old, colonising humanism. The love that this violence encompasses is as brutal as violence itself, because it is not the kind of love which derives from complacency or contemplation, but rather a love of action and transformation.

The time when Cinema Novo had to explain itself in order to exist has passed. 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 processes of the Latin American continent. Because the New Cinema is a phenomenon belonging to new peoples everywhere and not a privileged entity of Brazil. Wherever there is a film-maker prepared to film the truth and to oppose the hypocrisy and repression of intellectual censorship, there will be the living spirit of Cinema Novo. Wherever there is a film-maker prepared to stand up against commercialism, exploitation, pornography and the tyranny of technique, there is to be found the living spirit of Cinema Novo. Wherever there is a film-maker, of any age or background, ready to place his cinema and his profession at the service of the great causes of his time, there will be the living

*Protagonists of Pereira dos Santos' *Vidas Secas*, Ruy Guerra's *Os fusis*, and Glauber Rocha's *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol*, respectively.

spirit of Cinema Novo. This is the correct definition which sets Cinema Novo apart from the commercial industry because the commitment of industrial cinema is to untruth and exploitation.

Cinema Novo's ability to integrate itself economically and industrially depends on freedom for Latin America. Cinema Novo makes every effort toward achieving this freedom, both in its own name and in that of its nearest and more far-flung participants – from the most ignorant to the most talented, from the weakest to the strongest. It is a moral question that will be reflected in our films, whether we're filming a man

or a house, no matter what detail is being observed. *It is not a single film but an evolving complex of films that will ultimately make the public aware of its own misery.*

For this reason, we do not have broader points of contact with the rest of world cinema, except for shared technical and artistic origins.

Cinema Novo is a project that has grown out of the politics of hunger and suffers, for that very reason, all the consequent weaknesses which are a product of its particular situation.

(translated by Burnes Hollyman and Randal Johnson)