

Book Review

Bergfelder, Tim, Lisa Shaw, and João Luiz Vieira, editors. *Stars and Stardom in Brazilian Cinema*. Bergahn, 2017.

Film studies have come to occupy a central part of the curriculum in literature and culture departments, particularly in Anglophone universities. This trend is reflected in the growing number of monographs and edited volumes on Brazilian cinema that have appeared over the last decade. Whereas the indisputable pioneers and authorities (namely, Randall Johnson and Robert Stam) are based in North American universities, it is interesting that much of the recent work on Brazilian film (in English) is authored by scholars based in British universities. Works that have come out of the U.S. and Canada have tended to focus on thematic issues, such as Richard Gordon's two monographs, the first on filmic representations of colonial Latin America (*Cannibalizing the Colony: Cinematic Adaptations of Colonial Literature in Mexico and Brazil*, 2009) and the second on filmic representations of slavery (*Cinema, Slavery and Brazilian Nationalism*, 2015). In addition to a handful of articles in scholarly journals, a couple of books have assembled in a single volume essays on both Brazilian and Argentinian films, sometimes without a clear overarching criterion. There is also a growing interest in contemporary documentary cinema, a genre that has produced some of the most provocative films in the last twenty years. Some essays have been included in *Latin American Documentary Filmmaking: Major Works* (Foster, 2013) and in *Latin American Documentary Film in the New Millennium* (Arenillas and Lazzara, 2016). In addition, a special issue of *Film Quarterly* (2016) was dedicated to Eduardo Coutinho, the Brazilian master of documentary filmmaking.

Over the past decade, scholars working in the UK have nonetheless produced most in-depth, comprehensive studies that truly engage with film theory and the history of Brazilian cinema. Lúcia Nagib (U of Reading), for example, has edited *The New Brazilian Cinema* (2003) and, more recently, authored *Brazil on the Screen: Cinema Novo, New Cinema, Utopia* (2007). Maite Conde (U of

Cambridge) has offered a superb contribution with her *Consuming Visions: Cinema, Writing, and Modernity in Rio de Janeiro* (2011), one of the few works (along with Flora Sussekind's classic, *The Cinematographer of Letters*) to analyze the impact of early cinema on Brazilian literature. Conde also co-organized, with Stephanie Dennison, a collection of writings by Brazil's pioneering film critic Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes (*On Brazil and Global Cinema*, 2017), which, together with her forthcoming monograph (*Foundational Films: Cinema and Modernity in Brazil's First Republic, 1889-1930*), promises to become a fundamental resource for students of Brazilian cinema and culture. Lisa Shaw (U of Liverpool) has written widely on *chanchadas*, *teatro de revista* and, notably, on Carmem Miranda (2013). Other British critics who have made important contributions to the field include Stephanie Dennison (U of Leeds), Ben Hoff, Tatiana Heise (U of Glasgow), Charlotte Gleghorn (U of Edinburgh) and Natalia Pinazza (U of Birbeck). Many of these names are included, alongside Brazilian scholars, in *Stars and Stardom in Brazilian Cinema*. Some of the essays are offshoots of or overlap with previous work, but they are now discussed in a different context and within a new framework, one that the organizers refer to as "star studies."

One of the greatest qualities of this collection is its breadth. It aims to study the cultural meanings of celebrity actors and actresses such as Carmen Santos, Carmem Miranda, the duo Oscarito and Grande Otelo, Eliane Lage, Jesse Valadão, José Mojica Marins (alias Coffin Joe), Vera Fisher and Xuxa (contrasted with mixed-race brunettes such as Sônia Braga), Lázaro Ramos, Seu Jorge and Rodrigo Santoro. Some chapters take a broader approach, as Gleghorn's study of the rise and fate of non-professional actors from *Pixote* (1980) to *Linha de Passe* (2008). Others discuss the role of illustrated magazines such as *Cinearte*, *Para Todos*, *A Cena Muda* and *Cinelândia* in the production of a so-called "star system," and the ways in which they emulated Hollywood fan magazines while promoting a conservative ideal of masculinity and womanhood.

The first chapters on early Brazilian movies are particularly informative: Luciana Corrêa Araújo, for example, expands the discussion beyond the São Paulo-Rio de Janeiro axis of production to include what has been called the "Recife cycle" of the 1920s. The chapter is especially important insofar as it provides a historical ground for the study of the wave of contemporary films produced in Pernambuco since the late 1990s. It fulfills the most important aim

of the volume, which is precisely to provide the Anglophone reader with resources to study Brazilian cinema in a historical context.

With a few exceptions, most of the articles tend to be more informative than analytical. This is not necessarily a bad thing. I particularly enjoyed reading about the trajectory of Eliane Lage, married to the British producer Tom Payne, and how it sheds light to the role of the Vera Cruz Company during the 1950s. My favorite chapters, however, are at the center of the book: Luís Alberto Rocha Melo offers an excellent analysis of the film *Tudo Azul* (1952), a critique of stardom in radio and of the commercialization of carnival. His close reading of a scene with Marlene singing “Lata d’água” is especially illuminating, as it shows how *favela* realism started to be introduced in the cinematic imagination. Similarly, Rafael de Luna Freire offers a fascinating portrait of Jesse Valadão, from his humble origins and affiliations with the Communist Party, to his role (as an actor, producer and director) in the transition from the *chanchadas* to the new realistic style in the 1950s (including his relationship with the aesthetics of Cinema Novo), culminating with his late period as a prototypical Brazilian macho.

The editors’ introduction could have done a better job defining the terms “star,” “stardom” and “star system.” Considering its aim to be a comprehensive survey, it could also have filled in some of the gaps in the history of stardom that were not dealt with in the chapters, to include figures such as Procópio Ferreira, or other stars of *pornochanchada* beyond Vera Fisher, such as Helena Ramos, Sandra Brea, and David Cardoso. A discussion of *The Hour of the Star* (the novel and the film) and the uneven career of Marcélia Cartaxo could also add an interesting reading of the star system in Brazil. I also found that, considering the topic of the book, there are remarkably few images, and they play a secondary, merely illustrative role. Finally, I found the organization of the essays—immediately followed by endnotes, references and contributor’s bios—to be a bit unusual and confusing. These are details that do not diminish the quality of a book that is poised to become an essential resource for research in film studies and, particularly, for teaching Brazilian culture in English-speaking universities.

Cesar Braga-Pinto
Northwestern University