

Book Review

Furtado, Gustavo Procopio. *Documentary Filmmaking in Contemporary Brazil: Cinematic Archives of the Present.* Oxford UP, 2019.

In *Documentary Filmmaking in Contemporary Brazil: Cinematic Archives of the Present*, film and media studies scholar Gustavo Procopio Furtado makes an impressive contribution to the study of documentary films in Brazil. Consisting of three interrelated sections with two chapters each, the book engages with the concepts of *documentary* and *archive* from a variety of perspectives—combining socio-political and theoretical discussion with close analysis of a well-chosen selection of contemporary documentaries. An important component of Furtado’s approach is to place these “archival images” into dialogue with the “embodied present” of human subjects depicted in the films and spectators who engage with these representations (15). Through these practices of “remediation” (15), Furtado contends that documentary film simultaneously “epitomizes and escapes” the archival, constituting a threshold of “de-archivization” where past materials can be given new meaning in the present while simultaneously creating an archive of visual record for the future (9).

The first section, *Ethnographies of the Indigenous*, contrasts the “crisis of the ethnographic archive and the contact film” for non-indigenous directors with documentaries by indigenous filmmakers that rearticulate what indigeneity means for their communities in the present (43). In chapter 1, Furtado draws from Jacques Derrida’s notion of *archive fever* to examine the “salvage ethnography” practiced by non-indigenous filmmakers to produce archival images of indigenous communities that the directors themselves are complicit in destroying (38). Furtado problematizes the (neo)colonial logic of extraction and accumulation that undergirds these films, which ultimately express the ethnocentric desires of the directors and vacate indigenous subjectivity in both the past and the present. Chapter 2 examines films (co-)produced by indigenous directors connected with the *Vídeo nas Aldeias* collective that create an alternative “ethnographic archive” (51)—not an extractive accumulation of

images, but rather “interactions between a living present of indigenous life and the archive” (52). Furtado explores such questions as subjectivity in filmic representation, the relationship between archival and corporeal cultural memory for indigenous communities, and experimentation with cinematic form by indigenous filmmakers.

The second section, *Law, Evidence, Capture*, focuses on the relationship between law and the visibility of marginalized subjects in urban environments produced through dominant social and cinematic codes. Chapter 3 examines films by José Padilha, Maria Augusta Ramos, and Paulo Sacramento, all of whom explore different “sites of capture of marginalized subjects” in police encounters, prisons, the courtroom, and documentary cinema itself (86). Through close readings of the relationship between cinematic form and the mediatic and legal archives, Furtado explores how documentaries can approach marginalized subjects in innovative ways by “repositioning or rearranging already given distributions of visibility” (90). Chapter 4 analyzes the representation of marginalized subjects through the “shadow archives” and peripheral aurality traced in films by Adirley Queirós (131). Drawing from Michel de Certeau, Furtado reads the fictionalized plots and science-fiction aesthetic incorporated within documentary forms as “tactics of the invisible” (117) where marginalized subjects resist capture and imagine “bringing the state to justice” in a speculative future to come (135).

The final section, *Private Life (Going Public)*, examines the blurring of “home movies” and public documentary in films focused on domestic servants and memory of military dictatorship. Chapter 5 examines documentaries that revisit the “familial archive” in ways that seek to “invert the relationship between margins and center” (146). Furtado offers a poignant critique of the “archival logic of omission” that organizes João Moreiras Salles’s film *Santiago* (160), contrasting this self-serving appropriation of marginality with the exploration of “the sacrificial economy of domesticity and domestic servitude in Brazil” via the aesthetic frameworks of the home mode and melodrama in Consuelo Lins’s *Babás* and Gabriel Mascaro’s *Domésticas* (170). The primary contribution of chapter 6 is the detailed analysis of films by a younger generation of directors (Petra Costa, Flávia Castro, and Maria Clara Escobar) engaging with personal filmic and embodied archives of the dictatorial past and its effects. Furtado’s rich analysis of the cinematic techniques employed by these directors in their archival

work on “the fragmentary and incomplete inheritance of memory” (175) takes these films out of the purely testimonial realm to examine how “images move back and forth across the documentary, fictional, and art film borders” in order to produce meaning in the present (190).

While there are a number of important contributions made by Furtado in this book, the close analyses of cinematic form in documentary film is especially significant, highlighting how camera angles and tones, soundtracks, editing, sonic and visual cues, fictional components, and other aesthetic elements serve to construct and transmit meaning through archival images. These essential components to film production are often overlooked in anthropological or sociological approaches to documentaries as ethnographic archives, especially in the case of indigenous directors, and Furtado makes an important contribution that explores how indigenous filmmakers engage in “significant experimentation, taking the films far afield from the traditional forms of ethnographic representation” (62).

Despite the incisive analysis of films related to postdictatorial memory in chapter 6, this component is less conceptually connected to the focus on marginalized populations in the first two sections of the book. These films ultimately maintain the dominant archival memory practices related to dictatorship in Brazil, focused on middle-class victims from the political left who challenged the military regime, while excluding the experiences of marginalized subjects in (post)dictatorship. Furtado seems to recognize this disjunction in the epilogue, noting more recent documentaries that explore the murder of thousands of indigenous peoples during the dictatorship, such as *GRIN* by Roney Freitas and Isael Maxakali, and films by Rodrigo Mac Niven and Rodrigo Siqueira that connect postdictatorial memory with the violation of human rights and social justice issues for peripheral communities in the present.

Overall, *Documentary Filmmaking in Contemporary Brazil* makes an excellent contribution that is essential reading for scholars in cinema and media studies, indigenous studies, anthropology, a number of related fields in Brazilian cultural studies, and beyond.

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