

Ilana Schlaich  
Tschiptschin

*b*

# RASÍLIA IN THE AGE OF THE EARTH: NOTES FOR A FIGURAL ANALYSIS

## ABSTRACT

This article aims at providing elements for the interpretation of three different sequences of the film *A Idade da Terra* (*The Age of the Earth*), by Glauber Rocha, using the method of figural analysis developed by Philippe Dubois. The sequences selected are set in the city of Brasília. In this article we will analyze the city's role in the film's discourse as a way of constructing a myth of modernity and the way the characters act in the given space. Considering the fact that a conclusive analysis cannot be achieved in this article, its purpose is to propose new analytical perspectives on subsequent sequences and to draw comparisons between the imagery of *The Age of the Earth* and other movies by Glauber Rocha.

## KEYWORDS

Modern architecture. Cinema. Brasília. Figural analysis

## BRASÍLIA EN *LA EDAD DE LA TIERRA*: INDICACIONES PARA UN ANÁLISIS FIGURAL

### RESUMEN

El presente artículo pretende proponer elementos para la lectura e interpretación de tres secuencias de la película *A Idade da Terra*, de Glauber Rocha, utilizando el método de análisis figural, desarrollado por Philippe Dubois. Las secuencias analizadas se pasan en la ciudad de Brasília. Analizaremos la presencia de la ciudad en el discurso fílmico como construcción de un mito de modernidad y la interacción de los roles en el espacio. Considerando la imposibilidad de un análisis conclusivo en el presente artículo, se propone nuevas perspectivas de análisis de escenas subsiguientes y comparaciones entre eventos imagéticos en *A Idade da Terra* y otras películas de Glauber Rocha.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Arquitectura moderna. Cinema. Brasília. Análisis figural.

## BRASÍLIA EM *A IDADE DA TERRA*: APONTAMENTOS PARA UMA ANÁLISE FIGURAL

### RESUMO

Este artigo pretende apontar elementos para a leitura e interpretação de três sequências do filme *A Idade da Terra*, de Glauber Rocha, a partir do método de análise figural, tal como desenvolvido por Philippe Dubois (2012, p. 97–118)<sup>1</sup>. As sequências selecionadas são aquelas que têm a cidade de Brasília como locação no filme. Analisaremos a presença da cidade no discurso fílmico enquanto construção de um mito da modernidade e a interação dos personagens com o espaço circundante. Este ensaio abre caminho para a leitura de outras sequências do mesmo filme e a comparação entre os eventos de imagem de *A Idade da Terra* e outros filmes do diretor.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Arquitetura moderna. Cinema. Brasília. Análise figural.

*Brasília, this fantastic stage at the heart of the Brazilian Plateau, the source, irradiation, light of the Third World, a metaphor never achieved in history, yet that fulfills a feeling of greatness, the vision of paradise, that pyramid, this pyramid, which is the dramatic geometry of the social state, at the apex is power, below it the foundations and then the intricate labyrinths of the classist compromise, all of this in a theater, of course, the city and the jungle. Brasília is the eldorado, the golden one, what the Spanish and other visionaries pursued.* (Passage from the *Sermão do Planalto* (Sermon on the Plateau), by Glauber Rocha, in *The Age of the Earth*).

### BRASÍLIA, PILOT PLAN FOR A NEW AESTHETIC DESIGN

The transfer of the capital of the Republic from Rio de Janeiro to the center of the country, that is, to the central plateau, amounted to more than a gesture of facilitating national integration. The process, which was led by President Juscelino Kubitschek, was underpinned by a plan for modernization and progress that translated into selecting an architectural and urban plan that ushered in a new aesthetic design.

The power of the idea formulated in the designs of urban planner Lúcio Costa and architect Oscar Niemeyer was in forging an image of the future, ready for the nation, which viewed itself as underdeveloped and backward, to rediscover itself as being “*condemned to be modern*”, in the words of art critic Mário Pedrosa (1981, p. 304).

When he chaired the International Congress of Art Critics (AICA), held in 1959, Pedrosa expressed the conviction that the new capital would open up possibilities in the field of art: “*By making Brasília a collective work of art, we want to say that art is introduced into the life of our time, not just as an isolated work, but as a collection of the activities that create man*” (PEDROSA, 1981, p. 103).

Referring to Costa and Niemeyer’s plans, the German philosopher Max Bense<sup>2</sup> states that “*Brasília was born as the spatial expression of a sign in the form of city, the product of combining Cartesian rationalism and the atmosphere of the tropics*” (BENSE, 2009, p. 33).

Therefore, from Bense’s perspective, it was not a design, but rather, an *idea*, in a form that the urban planner took on a role that was less about planning than about “*being a fiction writer who coexisted on an emotional level with the world he imagined*”, as emphasized by the architect, Guilherme Wisnik (2009, p. 103). Technical and planning issues appeared to be secondary to what was fundamental, the poetic dimension, turning the Pilot Plan into a kind of founding myth for a modern nation.

This mythology was echoed in all Brazilian cultural production from the 1950s onward. In literature, the brothers Augusto and Haroldo de Campos

and Décio Pignatari publish *Plano-piloto para a poesia concreta* (Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry) in 1958. In visual art, Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica break with concepts such as shape and perspective, outside and inside, having been clearly influenced by architecture. In music, Brasília serves as a point of reference for the Tropicalism movement<sup>3</sup>.

The recently-inaugurated Capital appears as the backdrop in Gerson Tavares's film *Amor e desamor* (Love and Lovelessness) (1966) and is the subject of the essay film, *Brasília, Contradições de uma cidade* (Contradictions of a New City) (1968) by Joaquim Pedro de Andrade.

Glauber Rocha claims the influence of James Joyce, considered to be the precursor of concretism, in the creation of his first short film, *Pátio*, from 1959, in which Brasília already emerges as a referential element. “‘Olhos armados de ódio’ (Eyes Armed with Hatred), a Joycean experiment, served as the basis for accomplishing a film: *Pátio*, black versus white like in the SDJB<sup>4</sup>/ Papa<sup>5</sup>/ Clarke/Brasília.A chess board” (ROCHA, 2004, p. 328). On the other hand, he emphasizes the ebullience of the time regarding the foundation of a broad cultural movement:

*I absolutely defended Konkretiyztaz and Guimarães Rosa, LYTERATURA NACYONAL with a preference for any embezzlement in freetrade Brazylyia, the Greece of JK (Juscelino Kubitschek), dialectic splendor of João Cabral de Melo Netto, Oscar Niemeyer, Lúcio Costa, Antonio Carlos Jobim, Vinicius de Moraes, Jorjamado, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Mario Pedrosa, the Campos Brothers, Ferreira Gullar, Carlos Drumond de Andrade, Invention of Orpheus - Guimarães Rosa*<sup>6</sup> (ROCHA, 1977b, p. 10).

Twenty years later, Brasília is portrayed in Rocha's film *A Idade da Terra* (1980). Glauber's references to Brasília date back to before shooting the film. In 1977 he worked as contributor to the newspaper *Correio Brasiliense*, where he wrote about politics and culture. In an article published on April 7, 1977, he writes “Brazylyia Platform of Paradise (...). It is the most beautiful city in the world the great Truth enlightens You” (ROCHA, 1977a). In the same year, Glauber produced *Suplemento Alvorada* for o *Correio* with graphic artist Rogério Duarte. After completing *The Age of the Earth*, the filmmaker tells the *Tribuna da Bahia* on August 24, 1981 that: “Brasília was Brazil's cultural revolution; its construction enables Brazil to free itself of its complex in relation to colonialism. (...) Brasília was a kind of El Dorado, the possibility that Brazilians had to create something on their own”<sup>7</sup>.

### THE AGE OF THE EARTH, THE FILM

Glauber mentions his plan for *The Age of the Earth* for the very first time in a letter to Alfredo Guevara, president of the Instituto Cubano de Arte y Industria Cinematográfica (ICAIC, or Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry) dated September 1973 where he writes, “(...) I am going to try to produce my next film as fast as possible. The film is called *The Age of the Earth*,

and should be filmed in Africa, Asia, America and Europe. It is a very ambitious project, the greatest that has ever come out of my head" (BENTES, 1997, p. 466). Mexico, the United States, and countries in the Caribbean were also given consideration as possible filming sites.

Glauber tried to make the movie feasible in 1974 in Mexico. The script, in English, with the title *O Nascimento da Terra* (*The Birth of the World*), was conceived at the time as an adaptation of Eisenstein's script for *Que Viva Mexico!*, a film shot by the Russian filmmaker in the 1930s (GOMES, 1997, p. 273-280). However, the Mexican government refused to finance the project. Another reference appears in Glauber's letter to Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes, dated January 26, 1976, where he expresses that "*the script consists of five acts – in Eisensteinian pathetic fashion – and would be based on Que Viva Mexico!*" (BENTES, 1997, p. 560).

The filmmaker would not manage to shoot the film until between 1977 and 1978. It was the last film he made in Brazil after spending a long period abroad<sup>8</sup>. *The Age of the Earth* was shot in three cities: Salvador, Rio de Janeiro and Brasília – the three capitals of Brazil. Cut in a fragmented and discontinuous fashion, Glauber builds an allegory of the exploitation of the Third World by foreign capital, through which he gives rise to a plan for national and Latin American identity by revaluing the foundation myths (Amazon), the rituals of African ancestry (candomblé) and revolutionary ideals (rural and urban guerrillas), all of which are represented in the iconic shape of Christian myth.

The filmmaker's plan was for the film to have no pre-established sequence. The order for screening the film reels would be left up to the projectionist. The project never came through and the final editing of *The Age of the Earth* was taken care of by Ricardo Miranda. Presented at the Venice International Film Festival in 1980, the film was poorly received by the Italian critics:

*I think that what triggered the commotion here in Italy was not the film's content, as we would say in academic terms, but rather it's language, because the film has a different timeline, a different editing space (...) It is not experimentalism, but rather, the flow of the image, it is the editing that takes an uncontrollable course, like a river that flows by opening other possibilities. (...) The film really has no story, it is an audiovisual flow that addresses the Brazil of all times and of all ages. And it is a poem, it is not a theater, it is not a novel<sup>9</sup>.*

Glauber explains:

*In the film I show that the Christian myth, which is the solar myth, comes from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and that Europe kidnapped the true identity of Christ and imported a God. So, I said that since the film shows a black Christ played by Antonio Pitanga, a mystical fisherman Christ played by Jece Valadão shows what a Christ the Portuguese conqueror, Don Sebastião played by Tarcisio Meira, is and shows the warrior Ogum Lampião Christ played by Geraldo Del Rey. In other words, they are the four Horsemen of the Apocalypse who resurrect Christ in the Third World, retelling the myth through the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and the four horsemen of the Apocalypse whose*

*identities I reveal in the film. Almost as if it were a Third Testament, the film takes on a prophetic and really biblical and religious tone.*

As Ismail Xavier said:

*The Age of the Earth is once again marked by an attempt make a grand statement through the same search for meaning in the large picture of history in which the idea of national destiny fits - Glauber's tone is still that of salvation. And he, despite the fragmentary appearance, wants to be totalizing*<sup>10</sup> (MENDES, 2009, p. 33).

## ANALYTICAL METHOD

Glauber is one of the film directors of his generation who pushed the limits of the interconnections between cinema and politics the furthest. His view of the world was built up through cinema, as his relationship with the work of other filmmakers provided him with elements for thinking about the world. Therefore, the interconnection between cinema and politics will be the backdrop for the analysis, notwithstanding the fact that the intention of this work is not to give preference to that discussion<sup>11</sup>. The method applied is that of figural analysis<sup>12</sup>.

Studies devoted to the *figure* concern themselves with the phenomenal presence of things (human beings, objects) and the way they are set in a scene and mutate into forms. The figural, more so than the narrative, is what performs upon the perception and memory of the spectator what Elie Faure called "*chaos of visual events*"<sup>13</sup> starting to make up part of our "imaginary museum" (LEFEBVRE, 1997).

The figural is a "instance of image," a "visual event," something that occurs *to the image* and not *in the image*. Figural analysis aspires to build a discourse about how this "visual event" impacts the spectator in three dimensions: emotion, memory and imagination<sup>14</sup>.

This paper will take into account the presence of objects, props, sets, actors' gestures, colors, lighting, sounds, in short, the filmic forms created by Glauber - the filmmaker himself frequently and precisely voice-overs instructions and guidance for the actors' speech and movements and directs the camera and photography.

In the words of Jacques Aumont, Glauber was an inventor of forms: "*he invented narrative forms, images*" (AUMONT, 2010, p. 182). And "*it is forms that tell us finally what lies at the bottom of things*"<sup>15</sup>. Figural analysis therefore configures itself as a legitimate possibility for film analysis and for understanding and interpreting the cinema of Glauber Rocha<sup>16</sup>.

## SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### Sequence 1 - 0:01 to 4:02 (Figure 1)

Palácio da Alvorada (Dawn Palace) at sunrise. Modern architecture is set in contrast to the natural surroundings, outshined by the rising sun.

*Traveling* shot from the Palace to the cerrado with the sky saturated in yellow-gold hues, making the Palace disappear into the shade. The image is clearly divided by the horizon line, between the sky and the cerrado. The sunlight is refracted by the camera lens, rendering the image almost abstract. Lago Paranoá (Paranoá Lake) emerges from the left edge of the screen. The image starts turning green and clearing until it dissolves into yellow. Audio by Naná Vasconcelos<sup>17</sup> mixes drums, indigenous songs and animal sounds.

*The Age of the Earth* was Glauber's only film to be shot in CinemaScope, a feature to be highlighted insofar as, to Philippe Dubois "*experiencing the screen is clearly to every viewer one of the absolutely central and essential features of the cinematic experience*"<sup>18</sup>.

Dubois refers to the screen as the "*screen-form*", which is not simply a surface (that reflects) but an interface (that activates us). It is an experience that is simultaneously sensory, formal, spatial and narrative. CinemaScope is the specific *screen-form* for *The Age of the Earth* and defines the way that Brasília / Palácio da Alvorada appears in the opening shot and in other sequences<sup>19</sup>.

Figure 1: Sequence 1 - 0:01 to 4:02.  
Source: *The Age of the Earth* Film



Heirs of Glauber Rocha (www.copyrights.com.br)

In this sense, Palácio da Alvorada creates a relationship with the landscape and with the horizon - the geographical line that defines the boundary between the sky and the *cerrado* and is at the same time a metaphor of the eye that sketches the future. The CinemaScope format stresses horizontal space, which leads the viewer's eye beyond the contingencies of the present to the shot's background without, however, providing a vanishing point, thus creating a shot that has virtually no depth<sup>20</sup>.

In this first sequence, the shape of the *horizon*, the *chromatic shift*, the *emergence of sound* are relevant *sensitive events* that emphasize the power intrinsic to the architecture of the Palácio and make an impression on the viewer through the building's visual contour. It is worth remembering the analogy made by Elie Faure between cinema and architecture which refers to the analyzed sequence:

*Film is first and foremost plastic: it somehow represents architecture in motion that must remain in constant negotiation, in a dynamically continued balance in relation to the medium and the landscapes where it is erected and immersed* (FAURE, 2010, p. 27).

When analyzing the spatial relationship between nature and monument in Brasília, architecture critic Sophia Telles claims that:

*it is precisely nature that proves to be the reiterated original dimension, always inaugural. And it is this presence that finally configures the true meaning of the monument. Its design is the horizon line, which, since it is immanent in the still virgin surface, since it belongs to this world in perpetual dawn and denies any movement and vanishing point. Accordingly, the horizon line loses the dimension of depth. It is the mark of the surface and its measure. Brasília's circular horizon<sup>21</sup> seems not to open up the space of the landscape, but rather to shelter nature's role as the latent background for culture* (TELLES, 2012, p. 330)<sup>22</sup>.

Nature in Brasília appears in the *cerrado's* vastness in relation to the sky's blue or sun-drenched gold, whereas the Lake marks an interruption and defines a geographical point of reference. The camera's movement starts at the monument, moves through the *cerrado* and finishes at the lake. A movement that echoes previous gestures in the films that make up his Earth Trilogy<sup>23</sup>: in *Black God, White Devil* (*Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol*, literally God and the Devil in the Land of the Sun) the camera follows Manoel and Rosa's run through the brush of Northeastern Brazil and ends the movement at sea - which will one day become backlands; in *Entranced Earth* (*Terra em Transe*) it is the image of the sea that starts the movement going to the coast of Eldorado.

Whereas in *Black God, White Devil* earth is limited to the polygon of northeastern drought, in *Entranced Earth* there is a spatial expansion of the meaning of *earth*, which now refers to the country called Eldorado. However in *The Age of the Earth*, the spatial point of reference is the Third World - Latin America, Africa, Asia - the planet, Brazil: from the opening shot of Palácio da Alvorada to the space for the cosmogonic myth about the origin of the Earth, to the sequences set in the three capitals to the abstract space for partying and celebrating the rite<sup>24</sup>.

The outline of the Alvorada might even signal the tension between the start of the image, which is dominated by the curved shape of Niemeyer's columns and its dissolution in the saturated color, which leans toward



abstraction, almost like a picture, and the sound of drums, indigenous songs and animal sounds that echo primitive rites. The dawn plane/ the daybreak/ architectural monument/ shines upon the birth of the modern plan for the country whereas the sound foreshadows the cosmogonic myth of the birth of the world, which is played out by the Indian Christ in the following scenes.

A sequence of “volcanic explosions” inserted into the cuts produce a shock effect for the spectator and sharply interrupt the tenuous thread of the narrative: the big bang that inaugurates the Amazon sequence, the refracted light, the bursts of color, the black background across which silver rays travel, the breaking up of the plane in ultra-fast cuttings offer several examples<sup>25</sup>. The shock cutting and nuclear montage is like Eisenstein’s.

Between the long shot of dawn and the sequence of short shots that the introduce the planet’s destroyer and the Indian Christ surrounded by the Amazons, the transition is marked by an abstract image. A flash of light, a glowing globe spinning in the dark space, just like a cosmic big bang, setting up the following sequence. In Glauber, the Alvorada/dawn precedes the birth of the world.

### Sequence 2 - 36:46 to 47:00 (Figure 2)

Black background with bright, diagonal rays and silver circle (perhaps a moon). Transition to refracted light. A plane lands at the Brasília airport. This preamble announces the sequence dominated by the character Brahms. Brahms is met in the airport lobby by Black Christ/Pitanga, a journalist and congressman.

Driving along the monumental axis the camera makes a 90° sweep toward the Esplanade of the Ministries. Brahms, in a low-angle shot with a sky-blue background, has his hands raised in the pose of someone in control of the situation and talks into the microphone about universal peace and gold. In the airport lobby, Brahms drinks coffee and asserts his right to the company of prostitutes. The car drives by the Parliament building.

Brahms is surrounded as he is observed by the workers building the Theater. Billboards advertise supermarkets, banks and car dealerships. Glauber voice-overs a discussion on the rich world and the poor world. Workers move toward the camera. They cross in front of the camera from right to left and from left to right, and enter the theater.

Aerial shot of the cathedral. Brahms “scales” the statues of the four evangelists; Glauber intervenes to direct Brahms.

This sequence will highlight:

1. The gestures of Brahms’s character, played by Mauricio Valle;
2. The characters’ choreography: Brahms, the workers in Brasília, the black Christ;
3. The opposition of horizontal and vertical forms;
4. The visual events that make up a rupture with the figurative and the transparency of the narrative.

The sequence is dominated by Brahms’s presence, a character whose physical impersonation corresponds to the archetypal image of the U.S. capitalist: fat

Figure 2: Sequence 2 - 36:46 to 47:00.  
Source: *The Age of the Earth* Film.



Heirs of Glauber Rocha (www.copyrights.com.br)

pós-  
041

and blonde; whose sweeping and exaggerated gestures point to full control of the situation; and whose lewd lines and attitudes suggest a stance of disregard in relation to his interlocutors. As Ismaeil Xavier (1998, p. 153-184) shows, a grotesque figure who belongs to a certain literary tradition where the decay of social class and moral dissolution are associated, and who, in Glauber Rocha's modernization, is heavily marked by the gestures and physical forms staged by the Teatro Oficina (Theater Workshop) in *Rei da Vela* (The Candle King), a play by Oswald de Andrade. Regardless of the narrative, the *iconographic aspects* found in the physical traits and the sweeping and vulgar gestures would be enough for carrying out a *formal* analysis of the character.

As Ismail Xavier points out:

*Brahms's trip to Brazil - the residual narrative dimension - is the occasion for his display of family decadence, neurotic sex, cynical demagoguery, and personal sadness about a Nero behind his hedonism and fake blond hair, which is as fake as, or even more so, than everything surrounding the woman who accompanies him, a kind of courtesan who is attracted to power* (XAVIER, 1998, p. 153-184)<sup>26</sup>.

Brahms appears at 4 points:

### 1. Arrival at Brasília

After appearing for the first time in Rio de Janeiro, parading in the carnival next to the character of Tarcísio Meira, Brahms goes back to Brasília. He arrives by plane, the modern mode of transportation par excellence, and is met by Antonio Pitanga, playing the role of the black Christ, and by local "officials," a congressman and a journalist.

Upon his arrival in the center of power, the capitalist connects with the "local representative of the people," the congressman, and with the media, establishing a clear association between international capital and local power. The reference to signs of submission, recognized by the capitalist as the marks of the country's identity appear in the image - coffee, an export commodity - and in his lines - allusion to the woman as a prostitute and to the black man as a slave to the boss's sexual desire.

### 2. Drive through the new city: Congress and the Esplanade of the Ministries

Brahms travels down the monumental axis in a Ford Galaxie Landau from the 1970s - the official automobile used at time by representatives and senators, to which the "gringo" has full access. Then, a 90° sweep toward the Esplanade of the Ministries, suggesting that Brahms coasts about with the same ease in both the legislative and executive branches. In the surrounding area, the horizon line is broken by vertical elements. In terms of colors, the sky and earth, blue and green, are cut by the white volumes of the buildings, which impose themselves as signs of power and, simultaneously, as a futuristic environment, white volumes floating over the *cerrado*. On this drive, Brahms stages his crudeness through gestures and body posture.

Choosing Brasília for Brahms's visit to Brazil, to the detriment of the economic capital, São Paulo, seems to point to the fact that this is not a "business trip," nor a meeting of entrepreneurs, but rather of a collusion of interests, where

the government's direct intervention for ensuring good relations with the imperialist headquarters is the background of the sequence - just as the Ministries and the Congress buildings serve as the backdrop for the image.

### 3. Theater under construction

However, *commodities* and easy entertainment alone are not all that attract the foreigners who come to Brazil. Brahms is also in search of cheap labor. Before the theater under construction, he performs with unprofessional actors, who surround him with an attitude of curiosity or who come and go to finally enter into the pyramid theater. Unlike the famous photograph taken by Marcel Gautherot, where workers "scale" the dome of the Senate that is under construction, as if they were reaching the sky, here the workers are at the bottom of the pyramid theater, adopting a passive attitude, and they move as a group, as a herd, obeying the guidance that comes from behind the camera. The framing of the theater, always shot at a low angle, reinforces the analogy with the social pyramid, whose base is occupied by the workers. The presence of capital is emphasized by the panoramic shots in a sequence of billboards advertising supermarkets, car dealerships, and banks.

### 4. Cathedral Square

The flyby image of the cathedral opens the shot where Brahms tries to "scale" the statues of the four evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The bronze sculptures by Alfredo Ceschiatti and Dante Croce, each measuring three meters tall, are positioned to the left and right of the cathedral's main entrance. Brahms develops a choreography, running from one statue to another, with facial expressions and gestures that, in the history of painting, are reminiscent of paintings of the crucifixion. The camera closely examines his movement. In the soundtrack, the song *Brother*, by Jorge Benjor, sung in English, suggests a proximity between the character and Christ ("*Jesus Christ is my friend*"). The scene ends with a simulation of the Deposition of Christ (45:09): the framing makes the structure of the cathedral create a "crown of thorns" on the character's head, whereas his arms, open and raised toward the sky simulate a crucifixion without a cross, ending with absolution performed by the black Christ. The sounds of the city and the buildings of Brasília in the background bring the spectator back to reality. The back-and-forth between historical periods suggests a relationship between them, which is further intensified by the plasticity of Brahms's character, who sometimes appears as the antichrist or devil, while at other times he is the personification of U.S. imperialism, and still at others as a lewd Christ or as the father of Christ the warrior<sup>27</sup>.

#### Ruptures with the figural and with the transparency of the narrative:

1. The transitions between the scenes suggest shock montage, which has a visual impact on the spectator and are what Philippe Dubois calls the *effect of otherness*, which operates through *dissimilarity*<sup>28</sup>. These transitions highlight even more the discontinuous and fragmented nature of the editing, leading the spectator's experience to a type of vertigo.

1.1. The opening sequence is an abstract image (bright diagonal streaks and a silver circle that could be moon on a black background) which follows previous sequences - the ritual of the Amazons and the carnival parade - in which, for the first time of many in the film, the revolutionary potential of the parties and mythical trances becomes apparent<sup>29</sup>.

1.2. The transitions to the scenes on the runway and in the airport lobby, the light bursts created by opening the diaphragm, or the refracted light, producing luminous halos in the image, point to an anti-realist dimension, one that lends to the scene's opacity<sup>30</sup>.

2. Glauber's interference also points to a rupture with the scene's transparency.

2.1. In the discussion about the rich and the poor (41'50)<sup>31</sup>.

2.2. In the guidance given for the acting of Mauricio do Vale (39'06; 45'41; 46'39; 46'50), which is characterized by antinaturalism, as are the performances by other characters, whose lines are interrupted or repeated, with its recitative intonation.

3. The introduction of random elements in the montage: pain for no apparent reason in the actor Mauricio do Valle make up a narrative rupture in the narrative thread, which is quite weak as it is.

4. The performance of the characters: lines are abruptly interrupted or tirelessly repeated; the inflection of the voice is recitative.

### Sequence 3 - 1:18:43 to 1:19:35 (Figure 3)

An airplane flies by close to the TV tower. Black Christ, who is wearing a helmet and an African cloak, looks out at the city from the top of the tower and lifts a staff. Aerial view shows the slanting horizon line. Black Christ opens his arms in the shape of a cross; he returns to and reinterprets the Sermon on the Mount from the New Testament. *"Blessed are those who hunger, blessed are the poor, for one day they shall be free"*. He starts his lines standing and ends on his knees, taking off his helmet. Then, he lets out a scream and looks down at the tower's floor. The camera closes in on a hole in the sheet metal floor. The image becomes abstract (1:19:13), the focus is on the plane behind the circular hole (1:19:18). Nuclear montage: the sky, the hand holding the staff, a fragment of clothing. Another excerpt of the sermon: *"Blessed be the atomic bomb, the prostitute from Babylon, blessed be the criminals"*. Light bouncers produce a lighting effect on Christ's face and body, while the camera moves about frenetically, moving away from and moving in on the character. The camera explores the details of the body and the character's objects. The image of the Congress building seen from below closes the sequence and it is invaded by the sound of the recitation of the *The Lusiads* poem by Camões.

The excerpt selected starts and ends with images of Brasília. In the opening, an airplane flies over and circles the TV tower, and Brasília is seen from above, from a bird's-eye view. In the end, the Congress building is framed from below. The horizon line reappears by dividing the sky and the brush, but now it is subverted, on a diagonal. In contrast, vertical lines indicate the forms of authority, in its political dimension, the buildings of the ministries, and in its religious dimension, the staff of the black Christ.



The character who dominates the sequence is the Christ, played by Antonio Pitanga. His arms raised or open in a cross make up the shape that is repeated throughout the film by its characters, in the banner held by Pitanga, in the frame of the Museum of Sacred Art of Bahia, and that is found in several of Glauber's films<sup>32</sup>.

It is not, however, the European Christ of the catechism, but rather a black Christ, closer to the slaves brought by the colonizers, decorated with ritualistic objects, such as the mantle, the necklace made of wild boar teeth and the conch shell helmet. A Christ who, by being close to the demonstrations and popular rites, emerges in Glauber's allegory with revolutionary potential.

Figure 3: Sequence 3 - 1:18:43 to 1:19:35.  
Source: *The Age of the Earth* Film.



Heirs of Glauber Rocha (www.copyrights.com.br)

The camera fully explores Pitanga's body. In the choreography that the actor performs with his arms and body as he delivers his sermon, in the fluctuations of light projected with the use of light bouncers, in the dance that the camera performs through a succession of moves to and from his body, almost placing the lens on the actor's skin. The iconographic aspects that make up the character are fragmented in short shots in nuclear montage, the legacy of Eisenstein that Glauber develops in a rhythmic fashion, coming close to music and dance<sup>33</sup>.

Constantly present in the film, the cross and the airplane are shapes that make a strong connection to Lúcio Costa's Pilot Plan, which in the foundation text of the city plan he writes: "*Born from the primary gesture used by the person who wishes to mark or own a place: two axes crossing at a right angle, i.e., the very sign of the cross*" (COSTA, 1991).

In Brasília, the cross shape expresses a synthesis that is present in all Brazilian modern architecture and in the cinema of Glauber Rocha, between tradition and vanguard. The cross is the object used by the colonizer to take possession of something, marking a territory, whereas the airplane is a futuristic sign, a symbol of modernity and its image is used to express the utopia of man's freedom: "*The plane has given us the bird's-eye view. When the eye sees clearly, the mind can make a clear decision*" (CORBUSIER, 1987, p. 13).

The image of Brasília in *The Age of the Earth* - sometimes seen in aerial shots, other times driven through along its axis roads, yet always taking the horizon line as its point of reverence - echoes the creative perception of Lúcio Costa, as discussed by Sophia Telles:

*The embankment built virtually at the level of the horizon and the decision to move the Cathedral in order not to block the view of the Monumental Axis they end up reaffirming the image that Lúcio Costa provides this city: accessible by 'air and road,' in the heart of the hinterlands, which grants the civic center much less of a technical affirmation, a sign of progress in a new country, than of the emblematic character of its isolation in view of this "deserted cerrado exposed to an immense sky, as if on the high seas" (TELLES, 2012, p. 330).<sup>34</sup>*

## FINAL NOTES

In the sequences selected for analysis, two characters stand out: the capitalist Brahms and the black Christ. Their relationships with Brasília gives rise to the conflict between the actual city of the 1980s and Costa and Niemeyer's modern plan.

If in Glauber's film it is possible to evoke a category dear to the proponents of figural analysis, the blow-up detail would be to state that in *The Age of the Earth* it is capital itself, embodied in Brahms, that all the fissures of the nation's life are found, associating the local elite to US imperialism, both decaying in a process of deterioration (Brahms's constant fits of pain are physical evidence of this deterioration).

Resistance can only be expressed through trance, the new utopia is founded in the vitality of popular demonstrations - a far cry from the solutions

presented in the domestic political scene at the time, which Glauber viewed with mistrust and irony. The black Christ of the Third World is the antithesis of this deterioration in much the same way that the Christ born on the border between Asia and Africa was in former times the antithesis of the decaying Roman Empire.

Glauber Rocha's relationship with Brasília in *The Age of the Earth* is contradictory. On the one hand, the images show the utopic plan of a new city that does not clash with nature and that points to the future, the dawn of a new world, which is presented as a foundation myth, the result of a fusion between classical culture and the popular origin ritual.

On the other hand, Brasília appears as the center of a decaying power and the images suggest social inequality and the presence of international capital. Nevertheless, the vision for Brasília's potential as a fantastic city, the Eldorado, a utopia dreamed of by man for centuries has not been abandoned.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Notes from the course *As plasticidades espaciais da imagem cinematográfica: transparência (backprojection), sobre-impressão e splitscreen (Spatial plasticity of the cinematographic image: backprojection, superposition and splitscreen)*, taught in March and April 2016 at the School of Communication and Arts at the University of São Paulo (USP) will also be used as references.

<sup>2</sup> The German philosopher, Max Bense, who formulated an aesthetic thinking of semiotic and informational origin, came to Brazil on a number of occasions in the 60s and dedicated his book, *Inteligência brasileira*, to Aloisio Magalhães with whom he taught classes at School of Industrial Design at the State University of Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>3</sup> Caetano Veloso, for example, represents the Brasília occupied by generals in the album called *Tropicália: Sobre a cabeça os aviões, sob os meus pés os caminhões, apontam contra os chapados meu nariz. Airplanes are flying overhead, Below my feet trucks go ahead, But my nose points elsewhere instead. (Translation from Cadernos de Literatura em Tradução, no. 11, p. 370 accessed at <http://www.revistas.usp.br/clt/article/viewFile/49504/53589>). Eu organizo o movimento, eu oriento o carnaval, eu inauguro o monumento no planalto central do país. And I will, Leading the carnival today, and the opposition, after all, Unveil a monument someday, Right in the capital, of Brazil.*

<sup>4</sup> Suplemento Dominical do Jornal do Brasil, where the Neo-Concrete Manifesto was published in 1959.

<sup>5</sup> "Papa" might be a reference to Lygia Pape, misspelled as Papa.

<sup>6</sup> Translator's note: Rocha makes intentional spelling mistakes to wax ironic or to be endearing regarding several of the topics discussed, including: referring to concretism as Konkretiyztaz by using Ks instead of Cs and adopting a foreign suffix similar to ustaz, meaning teacher in Arabic; using capitals and replacing the i in National and Literature with y LYTERATURA NACYONAL; making a compound word of free trade: livrimportação; substituting y for i and z for s in the words Brasília and Grecia to create Brazylia and Grecya; and writing Jorge Amado as Jorjamado. In addition to this, Rocha makes reference to the major work of poetry by Jorge de Lima, *Invenção de Orfeu*, or *Invention of Orpheus*.

<sup>7</sup> ROCHA, Glauber. Tribuna da Bahia, Salvador, 24 de agosto de 1981.

<sup>8</sup> Glauber shot *Der Leone have sept cabeças* (The Lion Has Seven Heads) in Brazzaville, the Congo between 1969-1970, *Cabezas Cortadas* in Spain in 1970, and *Claro* in Italy, in 1975. Besides having participated as an actor Jean Luc Godard and Pierre Gorin's film, *Wind from the East*, in 1969; as co-director with Marco Medeiros of the film *História do Brasil*, which was started in Cuba in 1972 and edited in Italy in 1974; as an interviewer in *As armas e o povo*, a collective film about the Carnation Revolution in Portugal.

<sup>9</sup> Translation of the interview granted to journalist Luis Fernando Silva Pinto in Venice. Portuguese Transcription: "Eu acho que o que provocou o pau aqui na Itália não foi o conteúdo do filme, como se poderia dizer academicamente, foi a linguagem do filme, porque o filme tem um outro tempo, um outro espaço de montagem. (...) não é experimentalismo, é o fluxo da imagem, é a montagem que vai por caminhos incontroláveis, como um rio que corre abrindo outros baratos. (...) O filme realmente não tem nenhuma história, é um barato audiovisual, que fala do Brasil de todos os tempos e de todas as eras. É um poema, não é um teatro, não é um romance".



<sup>10</sup> In his "totalizing impulse," Glauber builds an aesthetic opposition between the sublime (expressed in the popular rites) and the grotesque (represented in the decaying bourgeoisie) (XAVIER, 1988, p. 159). It is a conflict whose resolution will define the destiny of humankind. Although, as Ismail shows, the teleology is not formally presented in *The Age of the Earth*, whose montage is discontinuous and fragmented, there is still an attempt to overcome this fragmentation. Starting there it is not possible point out a *contradiction* between the presence of popular rites and the teleological structure, but it is possible to observe that Glauber's cinema is always defined by his attempt to generalize.

<sup>11</sup> Several ideas in this paper originated from observations made by professor Mateus Araujo (ECA-USP), who contributed his precise and detailed studies about the relationships between Glauber Rocha's cinema and that of other filmmakers.

<sup>12</sup> The idea of figural refers to discussions in the fields of language and of the visual arts. In *Discours, Figure*, Jean-François Lyotard tries to find the figural in the space between discourse and figure, and thus invokes the poetry of Mallarmé. The ex-discursive power of the discourse, to Lyotard, is marked by the figure, which is defined as the visual form of the poem, the way it is inscribed in space. Lyotard also examines the illuminated manuscripts in the Bible of Saint Martial of Limoges and in the Bible of Moissac, considering them to be an enlightening example of the destabilization of the balance between discourse and figure. George Didi-Huberman's study of the Annunciations by Fra Angelico contrasts the figural with the iconographic reading of the images. However, figural analysis is applied to film studies mainly by Philippe Dubois. Notwithstanding his affinities with Lyotard and Didi-Huberman, this study will rely on Dubois's concepts.

<sup>13</sup> In his texts on "cineplastique," Elie Faure developed the concept of chaos, which Philippe Dubois considers anew under the name of "fulguration." The experience of fulguration, to him, takes place at two points: the first, at the point of chaos, strictly speaking; the second at the point of construction, which aims at thinking about one's values (DUBOIS, 2012, p. 109-110).

<sup>14</sup> "Processus is always in development, the Figural is, therefore, an achievement of the image, in other words, it appears as a flash of light, reveals a rupture in the fabric of representation, proceeds on to change or to alterity, and engenders immanent effects of intensive presence of the subject" (Idem, p. 113).

<sup>15</sup> In his "Histoire(s) de cinéma," 4A, Jean Luc Godard uses this definition for referring to Alfred Hitchcock that, according to him, "was the greatest creator of forms of the twentieth century" (AUMONT, 2010, p. 98).

<sup>16</sup> Although figural analysis is the method used in this essay, we notice a few times the need to make use references besides the figural for a more comprehensive reading of the selected sequences. This course of action is based on the belief that this procedure does not oppose figural analysis, instead, it complements it.

<sup>17</sup> *Amazonas* track on the record of the same name, dated 1973.

<sup>18</sup> Lecture on Cinema and Art, Cinusp, USP, April 13, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Throughout the movie, the screen-form leads the character's movement and determines how they occupy space. One example is the choreography sequence of Queen Aurora Madalena, played by Ana Maria Magalhães at 1:58:08.

<sup>20</sup> The opening shot is revisited at 26:05, between the Samba School parade at the Marquês de Sapucaí and the interview with Castelinho. The lighting marks the passage of time: the Palácio da Alvorada appears clearly in the midst of the cerrado's green to then plunge back into the shade, thus revealing the horizon line. At 1:20:04 the refracted light also echoes the opening shot in a key that is more abstract than the sound from the introduction in the first movement of Symphony no. 38, in D major, K504 "Prague" by W.A. Mozart. The circular object that appears in the image seems to be lens, indicating the use of superposition of images: The eye of the camera and the horizon; cinema and landscape.

<sup>21</sup> The "circular horizon of Brasília" is clearly shown in the aerial shots, at 1:17:43 and 1:18:44. In the black Christ sequence set on the TV tower, the horizon line dominates the background, just as it does in the scene where actor Ary Parrairos recites *The Lusiads* at 1:19:34. There is a constant contrast between the horizon and the vertical forms of the monuments, the TV tower and of the staff, which all evoke the signs of power in the political, media and religious dimensions. The use of reflectors can be clearly seen in this scene.

<sup>22</sup> The essay published in this volume is an excerpt of "Lúcio Costa, *monumentalidade e intimismo*" In: *Cadernos Novos Estudos Cebrap*, no. 25, São Paulo, October 1989, p. 90-94.

<sup>23</sup> The idea of an "Earth Trilogy" is mentioned in Glauber's letter to the US producer, Tom Luddy, dated July 16, 1981 (BENTES, 1997, p. 696).

<sup>24</sup> In the voice-over monologue in *The Age of the Earth*, Glauber again mentions "Eldorado" in referring to Brasília: "Brasília is the eldorado, el-dorado, that which the Spanish and other visionaries pursued".

<sup>25</sup> Philippe Dubois refers to the cinematographic “time-subject” when analyzing the film *Le Tempestaire* (*The Storm Healer*) by Jean Epstein. According to Dubois, the storm is the figure of the time-subject, that is worked by means of accelerating and descelerating and inverting the maritime images. In *The Age of the Earth*, we can say that the visual event is the “light-subject,” which is exemplified by the refracted light, saturation, “burst” images, and light-filled explosions.

<sup>26</sup> Translator’s note: translation of this passage is loosely based on Xavier, Ismail. *Allegories of Undevelopment: Aesthetics and Politics in Modern Brazilian Cinema*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. p. 258.

<sup>27</sup> The fragility of the analogy is evaluated by Ismail Xavier (1998): “the national present is diagnosed in such a way that it could inserted in a profile of world history, but in such a way that it ends up paying the price for an excessive generalization” (...) In this context, Brahms is the “figure who, through the wearing out of the paradigm ends up atrophying, which in *The Age of the Earth*, is lucid observation of the contemporary as a space for dissolving the boundaries and the emergency of new foci for political alignment. Although there is a nation as the setting of the film’s pilgrimage, it does not seem to have the information that is essential to the game” (Ibidem, p. 167).

<sup>28</sup> “The black shots of Marguerite Duras (...), the awe-inspiring moments of because of complete overexposure, are frontal transgressions of the figurative” (...) “instants that are at times infinite, but that shed light or stain, rupture or darken, in the figuration of films” (DUBOIS, 2012, p. 112).

<sup>29</sup> As Ismail Xavier points out, “*The Age of the Earth*, to this effect, sentences the elite of the world, which it hates, to death, bringing as an antidote inventory of the popular demonstrations that make up the space of dignity and vitality. In his totalizing impulse, he needs this opposition to associate the negative side of the present with something that seems to be struggling, even if the struggle is only shown from the perspective of morality and the clichés that attach the idea of decay to bodies and enable themselves to take the axis of sensuality as the dividing line between the two well-defined aesthetic camps: that of the sublime (popular) and that of the grotesque (bourgeoisie)”. Taken from *A Idade da Terra e sua visão mítica da decadência*. Revista Cinemais n° 13. Setembro/outubro 1998. p. 153-184.

<sup>30</sup> It is also reminiscent of other effects of figural presence, such as at 3’14, the scenes in which ruddy stains along the edge of the image caused by an unintentional fogging of the film were incorporated into movie. In Dubois’s description, “stains, swells, deformities, chemical or physical devouring that affect this or that frame of this or that piece of film, random events that affect the support and that it exposes in this way by themselves (...) in which the physical accidents endured by the film end up being registered as marks of time in the image, thus organizing with the figurative part, that is already there in the frame, unique combinations, flashing (caused by chance) in which the strange subtly mixes with the poetic” (DUBOIS, 2012, p. 113).

<sup>31</sup> “At the end of the twentieth century, the situation is as follows: there are rich capitalist countries and poor capitalist countries. There are rich socialist countries and poor socialist countries. In fact, what actually exists is the rich world and the poor world”.

<sup>32</sup> Raised or open arms in a cross shape appear as early as *O Patio*, *Black God*, *White Devil* and *Entranced Earth*, a frequently-seen image in the history of painting and which is part of the “imaginary museum” of the spectator.

<sup>33</sup> In the samba school parade sequence there is a rapid succession of shots and, according to Glauber’s directions, are cut to the “rhythm of the tambourine”. “The plastic is the art and expression is the form, either at rest or in motion, for all the means that humankind has. Cineplastique is likely to and will be increasingly more likely to come closer to music and dance. Even the more mediocre films unfold in a musical space” (FAURE, 2010, p. 27).

<sup>34</sup> The expressions between single quotation marks within Sophia Telles’s citation belong to Lúcio Costa, whose words have been translated differently here to what is published elsewhere, namely in in Philippou, Styliane. Oscar Niemeyer: Curves of Irreverence. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008, p. 233.

## REFERENCES

- AUMONT, Jacques. “O cinema é o último dispositivo que diz: ‘olhe’”, In: *Significação* n° 34, 2010.
- BENSE, Max. *Inteligência brasileira*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2009.
- BENTES, Ivana (org). *Glauber Rocha Cartas ao mundo*. São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 1997.
- CORBUSIER, Le. *Aircraft*. Madri: Abada Editores, 2003. p.96
- COSTA, Lúcio. *Relatório do Plano Piloto de Brasília*. Brasília: GDF, 1991.
- DUBOIS, Philippe. “Plasticidade e cinema: a questão do figural”. In: HUCHET, Stéphane (org). *Fragments de uma teoria da arte*, São Paulo: Edusp, 2012.
- FAURE, Elie. “Da Cineplástica”, In: *Função do cinema e das outras artes*. Lisboa: Texto & Grafia, 2010.
- GOMES, João Carlos Teixeira. *Glauber Rocha, esse vulcão*. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1997.

- LEFEBVRE, Martin. *Psycho: de la figure au musée imaginaire - théorie e pratique de l'acte de spectature*. Paris: L' Harmattan, 1997.
- MENDES, Adilson (org). *Encontros/Ismail Xavier*. Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azougue, 2009.
- PEDROSA, Mario. *Dos murais de Portinari aos espaços de Brasília*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981.
- ROCHA, Glauber. *Revolução do Cinema Novo*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004.
- ROCHA, Glauber. *Alvorada segundo Kyzto*. Correio Brasiliense, Caderno B, Brasília, 7 de abril de 1977a.
- ROCHA, Glauber. *Tribuna da Bahia*, Salvador, 24 de agosto de 1981.
- ROCHA, Glauber. *Riverão Sussuarana*. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1977b.
- TELLES, Sophia. "Brasília, o desenho da superfície", In: XAVIER, Alberto; KATINSKY, Julio (org.). *Brasília: antologia crítica*. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2012. p. 330. [The expressions between quotes in citation of Sophia Telles belong to Lucio Costa, which have been translated differently to what has been published elsewhere, namely in in Philippou, Styliane. Oscar Niemeyer: Curves of Irreverence. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. p. 233].
- WISNIK, Guilherme. "50 anos do Plano Piloto de Brasília", In: *Estado crítico: à deriva nas cidades*. São Paulo: PubliFolha, 2009.
- XAVIER, Ismail. A idade da terra e sua visão mítica da decadência. *Revista Cinemas*, nº 13, Rio de Janeiro, out 1988.

### Author's note

This article is the result of the course "As Plasticidades Espaciais da Imagem Cinematográfica: Transparência (Backprojection), Sobre-impressão e Splitscreen", taught by Philippe Dubois (Department of Cinema and Audiovisuals at the University of Paris 3 - Sorbonne Nouvelle) and coordinated by Professor Ismail Xavier (Department of Cinema, Radio and Television at the School of Communication and Arts at the University of São Paulo). The article is part of the research involved in the Master's thesis "Brasília e suas representações na cultura brasileira" (School of Architecture and Urbanism - University of São Paulo), which is supervised by Luis Antonio Jorge.

### Editor's note

Date of submission: 07/31/2016

Acceptance: 10/12/2016

Translation: John Ellis

Review: Izolina Rosa

---

### Ilana Schlaich Tschiptschin

University of São Paulo. School of Architecture and Urbanism (FAUUSP).

<http://lattes.cnpq.br/5014274195442152>

[ilana.tschiptschin@gmail.com](mailto:ilana.tschiptschin@gmail.com)