

## Lecture About Glauber Rocha

I was asked to give a lecture on Glauber Rocha at the National Museum of Modern Art on the occasion of an exhibition of contemporary Brazilian art called "Body Nostalgia" in 2004, and I gave a lecture on Brazilian cinema in general at that time. I was able to see quite a lot of Brazilian films at that time. What I found out there was that, in addition to commercially released Brazilian films, there was also a movement of films that were in sync with the cutting-edge parts of the world, but they had not made their way to Japan.

Compared to 2004, it is now possible to watch a great number of such films on the web, on Youtube, on video websites or by purchasing DVDs, so in that sense the environment has changed considerably for those who like such films. However, in terms of the level of theatrical release in Japan, not much has changed since I gave the lecture in 2004. Except for films that are commercially recognised by the Academy Awards, Sundance and other major film festivals, and released in North America and then distributed worldwide, there are not many cases of films coming directly to Japan. Unless Atheneé Français culture center or a voluntary distribution company organises a special feature like this, it is safe to say that there are very few cases of films coming directly to Japan.

In that case, Glauber Rocha is well known in Brazil and around the world as one of the leading directors of Brazilian cinema, but I wonder how his films would look in the context of the current situation. It is necessary to look at Rocha's films from the perspective of the current state of the visual image from a historical perspective. And whether we think of Rocha's films only in the context of current cinema, in Brazilian cinema, in Latin American cinema, in the context of world cinema history, or in the context of images in general, since we are now treating images as tools.

In this sense, the situation is quite complex, but at the same time, it is becoming easier to come into contact with images, so the quality of the images and sound is also important, but at least we are in a situation where we can see films that are not shown in this special screening. I would like to think about Rocha's films in this context.

So, looking at his first short film *Patio* and his last short film *Di Cavalcanti*, *Patio* has a man and a woman lying on a grid pattern, which moves in subtle ways, and the film is almost like a 1920s avant-garde film. It's a film. When it comes to *Di*, it's an intense alternating montage of the funeral of a friend's painter and the paintings, but it uses a lot of handheld camerawork, which causes blurring and out of focus, and the picture to be shown is not clear anymore. The viewer is not sure where to direct his or her gaze, and the gaze itself becomes obstructed. In other words, if you deliberately use a hand-held camera, you can't see what you can't see on a fixed screen, or the blurred colours shift, or the effect

is similar to action painting, or the outlines blur and the colours come to the fore, and so on. It becomes a document of the means.

If the first short film is a classic, the last short film is a contemporary film of its time. If you think about the path Glauber Rocha took, his first feature was the classic black-and-white contrasts of *Barravento*, but in *A Idade da Terra*, which you will see after this lecture, there are scenes of running and jump cuts with a hand-held camera, and it becomes difficult to keep up with the movement of the camera. In this sense, I think he was trying to show the movement itself from thing to thing in his films, from showing things clearly to showing what lies between things.

So, there is another period when Rocha was filming in Brazil and another period of exile in the 1970s. After *Antonio das Mortes*, which you saw before this lecture, he shot *Der Leone Have Sept Cabeças* in Africa, *Cabeças Cortadas* in Spain and *Claro* in Italy. For those three films, he was shooting outside the country, because he had already been in conflict with the regime since the 1960s, but when the military regime came to power, Rocha himself could no longer shoot in the country. In 1972-4, he made a film called *The History of Brazil* while travelling between Brazil and Cuba. This was a co-production between Renzo Rossellini/Rossellini's brother, and the Italian national broadcaster RAI. Before that, there was *Cancer*, an improvised film made in three days with the crew and cast of *Antonio das Mortes*.

Around the time of *Antonio das Mortes*, he met Jean Renoir. Renoir told Rocha that *Terra em Trance* was a good film, but that it would be better to shoot it with direct sound (according to Rocha, *Cahiers du Cinema* n.214, 1968), and he became more conscious of noisy sound. The music for *Cancer* was done by Gato Barbieri, who, as you may know, did the music for Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris*, and the song for *Cancer* is from *The Third World*, and on this album there is a song called 'Antonio das mortes', which is a tribute song to Rocha. And *Der Leone Have Sept Cabeças* was shot in Congo, and the film deals with the issue of colonialism, and *Cancer* is about young actors who are also in *Antonio...*, playing african migrants, and they have nowhere to go.

Glauber Rocha herself goes into exile and moves from one European country to another, and in Italy he met Carmelo Bene. Carmelo Bene was a representative of the Italian avant-garde theatre of 20th century and, as some of you may know, he published a book with the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze called 'superpositions'. So Carmelo Bene had something in common with Glauber Rocha: he used very intense and fast montage. The other thing is that they are commonly very influenced by Eisenstein. For example, Bene's *Salome*, which is now available on DVD so you can see it, is a 1972 film, a masterpiece of very dizzying montage and baroque colour beauty. Carmelo Bene is from Lecce, Italy, a region known for being at the crossroads of Turkish, Asian and European cultures. He has this kind of mixed, transnational culture in his backbone. In this respect, Glauber Rocha and he may have got on well together.

Because of their friendship, Bene appeared in a film called *Claro*, which Rocha made in 1976. I think Rocha was also inspired by Bene in terms of montage. You will see a fast montage like this at the beginning of *A Idade da Terra*, which you will see later. Of course, it is a Glauber-Rocha style, as it is handheld, but Carmelo Bene shot it with five 35 mm cameras on a set at Cinecittà, which was a very expensive time for Italian cinema. I think this shows the privileged environment of Italian cinema at that time, but I think the method that Rocha used, because it was not possible to use this kind of filming method in Brazilian cinema at that time, is what you can see in *A Idade da Terra*.

Another essential figure when discussing Rocha is Jean-Luc Godard. Godard cast Rocha in his own film *Vent d'est*. Some of you may have seen it in a special screening of the Dziga Vertov groupe. I think there was a reference to Rocha in his *Histoire(s) du Cinema...* together with John Cassavetes, to whom he dedicated 1B. You just quoted the scene where Rocha appeared in *Le vent d'est*. Godard started to use fast montages in his video works before *Histoire(s) du Cinema* in 1980s, but in the 1960s it was rather mainly long cut, fixed shot work. After appearing in *Le vent d'est*, Rocha went through a process of becoming more critical of Godard. However, if you follow Rocha's career, you can see that montage played a very important role. This montage was not an Eisenstein-style propaganda montage, but, as he says himself, he was aiming for a wild montage that packed all forms of art into one work, poetry, painting, theatre, novels, music, etc. into one work, and the conclusion of this was the film *A Idade da Terra*. The film was originally supposed to be shot and edited in different parts of the world, but it ended up being shot all over Brazil. The Brazilian version of the film, which is now available on DVD, says that all the scenes do not have a fixed beginning and end, and that the viewer can shuffle through the film and watch it from anywhere. In fact, that's the way it is on the DVD of the original version. In that sense, he had tried to make a film that is not bound by the traditional narrative format.

*A Idade da Terra* was presented at the Venezia International Film Festival in 1980, and although it was controversial, it did not win any awards. Theo Angelopoulos' *O Megalexandros/Alexander the Great* and John Cassavetes' *Gloria* won awards at that time, and Glauber Rocha denounced them in an interview with a local TV station. (1) And Rocha said that he approved of Cassavetes' film, but what was the point of giving an award to the most commercial film of them all, and that it was very academic with regard to Angelopoulos. Not only Rocha, but also Serge Daney, who was editing *Cahiers du Cinema* at the time, and Louis Skorecki, who was writing for *Libération*, claimed that Angelopoulos was an academic. On the other hand, they were defending Stavros Tornes (2), who had to leave the country to make films in exile in the same Greek cinema. Stavros Tornes' films are the kind of films that use a lot of rough handheld cuts, almost like trash movies. But Tornes is, on the other hand, ahead of his time, and in his film *Coatti*, a film that is both fiction and documentary in its own right, he constructs a scene as real time.

Angelopoulos' films were made with long shot-sequence shots that also were expensive...and, well, it was a common pattern to defend artists who were in a more difficult position and criticise those who were able to film domestically.

But the situation of the images at the moment doesn't require us to be on one side and condemn the other side at all. It is rather more reminiscent of the fact that Angelopoulos himself sympathised with Glauber Rocha by saying that Greece was also entering the third world (but then Angelopoulos was manipulated by the power games of the film festival as well). Depending on the situation at the time, it could be said that this happened because he was part of the festival culture. Marginal films were forced to compete with each other within the confines of the festival, and this led to a situation where they (and their defenders) were forced to criticise each other.

In the 1980s, the aim was to make the major visuals so clear and crisp that they were easy to understand, and television effectively replaced cinema as the major visual civilisation, relegating the experimental to an out-of-reach position. In Japan, for example, there is a special feature on Nikkatsu Roman Porno at a different theatre right now, and in the latter period of Tatsumi Kumashiro's career, many of his films were shot hand-held or at angles that were intentionally difficult to see. In *The Woman with red hair*, there were already scenes in which rain and wind were filmed through glass, but later on, with Shinji Somai, the images were filmed from a distance, making them even more difficult to see. In effect, amongst the major film-makers, there was a tendency to shoot marginal images. What this meant, I think, was that the camera and microphone that are now taking images, and the methods and origins of the images, are becoming visible in the images that are being made.

In other words, the work is also a documentary of the making of the work. Major images are mainly about conveying information on the one hand, so it is assumed that the technical means and methods should be invisible. So it is easier to manipulate viewers and audiences. In the 1970s and 1980s, before the end of the Cold War, major and minor images were clearly separated (more so than now), and this made the world seem more stable. Then came the collapse of the USSR regime, the Gulf War and the era of global restructuring that followed, and the power of how images can manipulate people came to the fore. So now we are in an era in which we are reassessing what the marginal images of the past have been doing, and in that case we need an attitude in the audience that allows us to consider how they were making images and how they were manipulating people, so that we can analyse them.

When Glauber Rocha was making *A Idade da Terra* in 1980, he said that he was making this for a future audience, not a current audience. In that sense, there is a Brazilian film website called [contracampo.com.br](http://contracampo.com.br), and when *A Idade da Terra* was restored and screened, there was a recording of a roundtable discussion, in which

one person said that this was a film for our time. In an age when methods of manipulating people are being discussed, when seemingly stable major images have excluded minor images, and when there was a kind of "mura/village" society, there was a major image that linked the sender and receiver of information as if they were not even using the means in order to stabilise that society. In contrast to this, I think it can be said that minor images provided a kind of means of resistance for future audiences. It is important to review such images now, but in the age when film will be replaced by digital technology, the hand-held images I mentioned at the beginning, with their blurring, out-of-focus, overexposure, etc., will disappear. Of course it is possible to create them by deliberately processing them, but basically digital has become the era of unintentionally transparent images, and I feel that in such an age of images, Glauber Rocha's films are the kind of visual works that should be reviewed.

Also important are Rocha's contemporaries, such as Paulo César Saraceni and Leon Hirtzmann, or the present-day filmmakers Julio Bressane and Eduardo Coutinho, who put the situation they are filming in their own work, where both the documentary and fictional aspects of the images Both sides of fiction come out (3), and there are still people who make films like that. In the past, these people were labelled as Brechtian, but nowadays labels mean nothing. From the perspective of media theory, we live in an age where it is becoming more important to subjectify the means, so I think it is important to look at them in terms of those who pioneered the way forward. Also, Raúl Ruiz from Chile, who died last year, and Argentine directors of the same period did important work in this period, so I think it should definitely be looked at again...

(1) Libertà! – Glauber Rocha entrevista Festival di Venezia 1980

(2) Stavros Tornes (1933~1988) filmed his work in Greece after his return in 1981.

(3) For example, Bressane's Sermões A História de António Vieira (1989) and Coutinho's As Canções (2011).

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