

**Dynamics of class, power, and space:
Situating *High-Rise* in the contemporary Brazilian documentary tradition**

by

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Abstract

From the *Cinema Novo* films in the 1960s to Eduardo Coutinho's documentaries such as *Peoes* (*Metalworkers*, 2004), *O Fim e o Principio* (*The End and the Beginning*, 2006), and *Babilonia 2000* (2001), many Brazilian documentaries have focused on the working-class to examine the consequences of living in a highly unequal society. By giving a voice to the marginalized, these Brazilian documentarians have tended to question the system which allows such discrepancies to take place in the country from the ground up. However, there is a recent trend of exploring the same issue by focusing on the top of the pyramid — films that investigate the mindset of those who are the most privileged.

The purpose of this thesis will be to investigate how power relations are examined in contemporary Brazilian documentary films that feature privileged voices. The study will map how power relations have been explored in modern Brazilian documentary tradition in order to contextualize current trends in the genre. Particularly, I will focus on the film *High-Rise* (2009), one of the first Brazilian documentaries to bring the elite to the forefront. In *High-Rise*, Gabriel Mascaro chose to interview only people who live in penthouses in the biggest cities in the country. Through interviews and various visual strategies, the film explores the spatial and political dynamics of the wealthy living in sheltered spaces. Though the subjects are seemingly unaware of the film's critique of their status, *High-Rise* is able to foreground issues of power, class, and space.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Introduction: Analyzing Class and Space from a New Angle in Brazilian Documentary	1
A Brief History of Brazilian Documentary	15
(Re)locating Power in Contemporary Brazilian Documentary	39
Concluding Thoughts	61
Bibliography	72

Introduction: Analyzing Class and Space from a New Angle in Brazilian Documentary

How does it feel to live in a luxurious penthouse in Brazil? At first glance, *High-Rise (Um Lugar ao Sol*, Gabriel Mascaro, 2009) seems like an attempt to answer that question. This Brazilian documentary is structured around the lives of people living in lavish apartments on the top floor of buildings in the cities of Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, and Recife. The film is the second documentary directed by Gabriel Mascaro, a filmmaker from Recife who went on to make *Defiant Brasilia* (2010), *Housemaids* (2012), *Neon Bull* (2015), among others. *High-Rise* features interviews with nine individuals and families who live in penthouses. Although the interviews are set inside their homes, the subjects' names and exact locations are not disclosed. They were contacted through a book that lists the most powerful and wealthy people in the country along with their personal information. However, the film goes beyond just examining the personal narratives of those people but argues against a model of urban development that privileges a small sector of society. *High-Rise* illustrates how economic power and space are related by featuring people living in an exclusive area of the city, spatially separated from everybody else.

In their interviews, the subjects list the perks of living so high up, emphasizing the benefit of privacy and safety. Most of the time, they seem to be clueless that they are engaging in any type of critical work. However, Mascaro creates a parallel narrative through cinematic strategies. The director emphasizes the magnitude of the buildings by using high and low angles and elevator tilt shots. With its accompanying slow, moody soundtrack and the sounds of construction noises, the film argues against social inequalities by exposing the results of the

unbridled urbanization. For instance, *High-Rise* shows us how the skyscrapers are shadowing the sea, and how invisible the rest of the city seems when you look from the penthouse.

High-Rise is a controversial documentary, as seen in the contrasting reviews it received. Writing for *Folha de Sao Paulo* (Brazil's largest newspaper), critic Inacio Araujo questions the strategies used in *High-Rise*, claiming that the film twisted a good idea with its arrogance.¹ He believes the film shows its subjects as either fools in awe, and even speculates whether the people interviewed for the documentary were chosen with the sole purpose of being ridiculed. On the other hand, Peter Debruge, in a *Variety* review, argues that "Mascaro and editor Marcelo Pedroso need hardly interfere in order to reveal the cloistered worldview of their privileged subjects."² Debruge sees the film as a philosophical meditation on economic privilege which explores how architecture adds a physical dimension to social inequality in Brazil.³ Both reviews see some of the statements made by the subjects in the film as absurd, although they differ when it comes to evaluating Mascaro's role in choosing them.

The fact that *High-Rise* features the elites makes the film stand out in the Brazilian documentary tradition. This issue is brought up by the scholar Victor Guimarães, who notes that even an experienced critic would have a hard time thinking of Brazilian documentaries that feature the elites, considering the long-standing tradition of the national cinema in calling attention to issues of the masses.⁴ Guimarães adds that the middle-class has been an occasional theme in Brazilian documentaries practice, while the elites encounter almost complete invisibility in the Brazilian non-fiction oeuvre. Guimarães also mentions a 2002 interview with Brazilian documentarist Joao Moreira Salles, who claims that the Brazil that is presented in Brazilian documentary is always different than the one in which the filmmakers live. Salles himself managed to provide the rare upper-class perspective in his documentary *Santiago* (2007),

named after its protagonist, who was Salles' former family butler. However, in *Santiago*, the critique comes in the form of *mea culpa* from the director, who reflects on his privileged origins while still maintaining Santiago as the focus of the film.

Therefore, *High-Rise* proposes a new way of looking at social inequality in Brazilian documentary. In order to explore this phenomenon more fully, this thesis includes a historical overview of how class dynamics have been represented within the Brazilian documentary tradition since it started. I then offer a detailed analysis of *High-Rise*, examining its specific strategies such as how the film explores elements of space and its intersections with class and power. Additionally, I expand on how *High-Rise* participates in emerging trends in Brazilian documentary, as well as highlight its connections to the current state of Brazilian cinema and politics.

Review of Literature

High-Rise has been the subject of several studies and film analyses. In this literature review, I will introduce scholarly discourse around the film, as well as the historical and cultural context that preceded and surrounded the documentary. A look at key documentary text, as well as specific Brazilian documentary history accounts, will allow this research proposal to open the conversation on how *High-Rise* fits into the broader field of Brazilian documentary.

Additionally, a brief overview of space politics will anchor this research on a theoretical framework.

Documentary practice

Documenting social reality

Scholarly discourse establishes the documentary tradition as more than just a form of documenting reality. For Bill Nichols, documentary films seek to not only address the historical

world but attempt to shape how we regard it. Therefore, non-fiction filmmakers go beyond just being impartial reporters.⁵ Ellis and McLane claim that documentary filmmakers record social and cultural phenomena they consider significant to inform us about people, events, places, institutions, and problems.⁶ Ellis and McLane explain that, by doing so, the filmmakers are trying to increase our understanding, interest, and sometimes sympathy for their subject. Barnouw illuminates the interpretive role of the filmmaker and how, even those who claim to be objective observers, are still making choices every step of the way which leads to a unique representation of reality according to his or her point of view.⁷

As Jean-Louis Comolli explains, documentary is not a stable category: “The term ‘documentary’ describes, to my mind, nothing other than a certain relationship with fiction whereas, when the film reaches the screen, the differences between ‘fiction’ and ‘documentary’ are only conventions, and appear, during the screening, almost totally muddled.”⁸ Nichols suggests that documentaries are not radically different from narrative film in its practice since both models frequently use similar conventions and strategies.⁹ The main disparities between both forms, then, take place in their methods - the processes which precede the screening of the film. Bottomore compares the relationship between fiction film and documentary to that between a newspaper report and a short story.¹⁰ He points out that, in both documentaries and newspapers, the reader or viewer will have a criterion of accuracy, more than an aesthetic one — he or she will try to figure out if what been said is the absolute truth.

The choice of the subjects featured in documentary films is crucial to the outcome of a documentary film since the subjects are not trained actors who can adapt to whatever the intent of the director is. According to Nichols, “Documentary filmmakers often favor individuals whose unschooled behavior before a camera conveys a sense of complexity and dept similar to

what we value in a trained actor's performance."¹¹ The author adds that documentary directors are drawn to charisma because that is something that attracts attention and holds our interest. This aspect is relevant to this thesis since *High-Rise* subverts the idea of creating sympathy towards its subjects, choosing to position them as a point of critique.

A Brief overview of Brazilian documentary film

Brazilian cinema production started shortly after Lumiere revealed the *cinématographe* in 1885, with the first screening taking place in Rio de Janeiro in 1896.¹² According to Johnson and Stam, in the early years, documentaries and newsreels about current local events fostered a public habit of frequent movie-going. Rodrigues mentions Afonso and Paschoal Segreto, Silvino dos Santos, and Luís Tomás Reis among the pioneers of documentary filmmaking in Brazil.¹³

Dennison and Shaw state that, in the first half of the twentieth century, documentary film in Brazil was influenced by a political shift in 1930, after the revolution that brought Getulio Vargas to power.¹⁴ Vargas' authoritarian inclinations prompted him to turn to the film industry as a way to broadcast a coherent image of the country to the rest of the world. He also intended to use film to promote patriotism among Brazilians. According to Dennison and Shaw, state-funded scientific documentaries through the 1930s were distributed for free in schools and cultural institutions.¹⁵ "Brazil's most famous annual celebration, carnival, was a source of inspiration for early film production, dating back to the silent era," note the authors.¹⁶ They go on to mention *Carnaval Cantado de 1933 no Rio de Janeiro* (*The 1933 Rio de Janeiro Carnival in Song*), which featured footage of carnival processions and costume balls as well as a young

Carmen Miranda performing in the studio. The authors believe that the Vargas regime did not provide real support for the film industry since it also censored the films through its Press and Propaganda Department.¹⁷

In the 1960s, *Cinema Novo* came to be a highly influential movement in Brazilian cinema. Avellar notes that the *Cinema Novo* filmmakers were concerned with presenting a realistic visage of Brazilian society, which made it arise largely within a documentary mode of production, with many of the first *Cinema Novo* films being documentaries.¹⁸ Although fiction eventually became the predominant mode in the movement, Avellar adds that *Cinema Novo* filmmakers continued producing non-fiction, citing Leon Hirszman's *Maioria Absoluta* (*Absolute Majority*, 1964), Paulo Cesar Saracenin's *Integracao Racial* (*Racial Integration*, 1964), Sergio Muniz's *O Povo do Velho Pedro* (*The People of Old Pedro*, 1964), among others, as defining documentaries produced at the time. Johnson and Stam define *Cinema Novo* as a movement that attempted to present a broad portrait of Brazilian society, highlighting its structural injustices, with the self-proclaimed purpose not only of informing but also provoking a reaction.¹⁹

Contemporary Brazilian Documentary

Furtado identifies a surge in contemporary documentary in Brazil after the country's re-democratization, which began in 1985 after twenty years of dictatorship.²⁰ The author adds that social and political circumstances after the end of the dictatorship, such as the ratification of Brazil's most progressive constitution in 1988, the ascension of the Worker's Party to the presidency in 2003 and the following reduction in poverty as other contributing historical factors that influenced the documentary practice. Furtado further states that innovative non-fiction films

emerged during the country's transition to democracy, citing Vladimir Carvalho, Vincent Carelli, Lucia Murat, and Eduardo Coutinho as prominent creators of the time.²¹

Silva and Cunha also affirm that Brazilian film production gained momentum in the 1990s, after re-democratization.²² According to the authors, there has also been a gradual increase in the number of films made in states other than Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Silva and Cunha attribute this decentralization to incentive laws for the film sector. They state that this change has attracted new approaches to the screen. According to Furtado, the implementation of funding laws was an important factor for the expansion of documentary in Brazil in the post-1990s, "particularly the 1993 Lei do Audiovisual, which makes private investments in cinema tax deductible."²³

When it comes to the approach most commonly taken by Brazilian filmmakers, Furtado mentions that contemporary Brazilian films tend to resist authoritative generalizations in favor of the particular, the singular, and often the personal and private. This trend can be seen in many of Coutinho's notable films, such as *Santo forte (The Mighty Spirit, 1999)*, *Peões (Metalworkers, 2004)*, and *Ultimas Conversas (Last conversations, 2015)*, all focusing on individual stories.²⁴ According to the author, the turn to the private sphere in Brazilian documentary reflects a changing approach to the socio-historic, which is increasingly addressed through the self-conscious and refracting lens of the individual, personal, and private experience.²⁵

Scholarly perspectives on High-Rise

A few scholars have discussed *High-Rise* as it addresses power and space, as I mentioned in my introductory section. For Guimarães, through looking at the dominant class, *High-Rise* exposes ideologies, opinions, and culture of those people.²⁶ The author adds that the film approaches political issues such as the relationship of the elites with other sectors of society, the

political power inherent to economic power in Brazil, the relationship with urban violence, and the increasing verticalization that has been taking place in the country. Also looking at how *High-Rise* examines power relations, Flores and Gomes discuss a scene in which a woman professed her dislike of hearing the domestic employees' noises at the house.²⁷ The authors go on to position it as a discourse that imposes spatial segregations between the elite and working-class as necessary to guarantee comfort and privacy for the former. Flores and Gomes say this spatial division alludes to the *casa grande* (masters house) and *senzala* (enslaved quarters) of the colonial times, which also marked a division of the public and private spheres for the upper class.

Lopes uses semiotics to analyze the film's strategy of subverting 'euphoric' content of the interviews by overlapping it with the 'dysphoric' content presented by the documentary, such as the construction scenes.²⁸ The author adds that the people interviewed for *High-Rise* sought self-promotion by participating in the film, but their goal was not met. The issue of the willingness of the subjects in the film to speak their minds seem to be a frequent topic in the writings about *High-Rise*. According to Allen, "Mascaro's encounter with the penthouse occupants, at a far remove from the streets bellow raises another crucial issue, that is, the negotiation of access to different social groups for filming opportunities and their willingness (or lack thereof) to expose themselves as documentary subjects."²⁹ The author describes the film as a rare and ambitious attempt to counteract a trend in Brazilian documentary of recurring to the more accessible working classes. Allen notes that *High-Rise* distinguishes itself from other attempts at showcasing wealthy lifestyles, such as Brazilian reality TV show *Mulheres Ricas* (2012) due to the relationship between filmmaker and subject. Mascaro approaches his subjects from a position of vulnerability since he is not a part of the exclusive social world depicted in the film and does not count on the weight of mass media influence.³⁰

Space and Brazilian landscapes

Urban mobility is one of the themes at the forefront of the national agenda in Brazil.³¹ According to Jesus, contemporary Brazilian cinema has produced a collection of films that take space, territories, and life in the city as constituent elements and often a leitmotif of its films.³² Jesus adds that space takes on a protagonist role, no longer being just the backdrop or scenery where narrative actions take place. Jesus cites *High-Rise* as an example of this phenomena, along with Mascaro's *Defiant Brasilia* (2010), Kleber Mendonca Filho's *Cold Tropics* (2009) and *Neighboring Sounds* (2012), Adirley Queiros' *Is the City One Only?* (2011), and *White Out, Black In* (2014). According to Jesus, these films unveil the city and its spatiality as constructing a potent group of social, political, and cultural relations that are very distant from presentations that portray the city as a place for shopping or happy and appealing encounters. In these films, the city is represented as a complex field of tension between diverse forces and powers.³³

The transition from a rural to an urban-based population constitutes one of the most significant transformations experienced by Brazilian society over the last century.³⁴ According to Allen, social disparities in mega-cities such as Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro are can be seen particularly in spatial terms, where access to certain basic amenities and rights may be determined by are or space one inhabits.³⁵ Allen identifies three spatial categories associated with varying degrees of social marginality: wasteland, carceral space and *favelas* (Brazilian slums).³⁶ "These are spaces that feature heavily in cultural production across both the domain of documentary and fiction and the discourse that surrounds them often centers upon notions of exclusion, absence, and lack," she adds.

Vaz da Costa and Alves da Costa look at how *High-Rise* examines politics of space. The authors believe the film opened possibilities to other filmmakers to discuss real estate

speculation and power relations among classes in Brazil.³⁷ The authors illuminate the ways in which *High-Rise* raises questions about interior and exterior space and the meanings of house and home; According to Vaz da Costa and Alves da Costa, in *High-Rise*, the apartment complex represents the home which is protected from the outside world and the space of the Other.³⁸

Literature on *High-Rise* has focused on different aspects of the films, but, so far, there has not been a study which takes a holistic approach to examine all the different layers through which the film can be studied, such as power, space, class, as well as the social and historical context in which the film is inserted. Additionally, there has not been a thorough investigation of the films which might have been influenced by *High-Rise* or that take on similar strategies. A more nuanced analysis of contradictions in *High-Rise* is necessary to unpack the complex power dynamics at play within the film.

The Social Space

Important work has been published about power dynamics that occur through space and urbanization. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre analyses space as more than just a physical conception. In his views, besides the physical space (logico-epistemological), there is also the mental space (theoretical practice) and the social space.³⁹ According to Lefebvre, the social space is a means of control, domination, and power, therefore, it is a part of the creation and maintenance of hegemony in society.⁴⁰ Lefebvre demonstrates how space is not a neutral element, but can, and should, be used as a point of analysis for class dynamics. Another important contribution to theories of space comes from David Harvey, particularly regarding urban studies. Harvey notes that in capitalist society, in particular, the intersecting command of money, time, and space forms a substantial nexus of social power that we cannot afford to ignore.⁴¹ According to Harvey, spatial and temporal practices always express some kind of class

or other social content and are can be the focus of intense social struggle.⁴² Additionally, Harvey defends the “right to the city,” which, in his view, a collective right to (re) shape the city in a more just way. According to Harvey, “Quality of urban life has become a commodity for those with money, as has the city itself in a world where consumerism, tourism, cultural and knowledge-based industries have become major aspects of urban political economy.”⁴³

Methodology

The purpose of this thesis is to dissect *High-Rise* as a critique of power, looking at the different elements presented by the film. The study will also position *High-Rise* in contemporary documentary and establish its uniqueness in the Brazilian documentary tradition. Additionally, this study will investigate the role of space politics in the discussion of power within the Brazilian reality. This investigation will also dissect the audiovisual strategies used by Mascaro to build up his argument and provoke an oppositional stance to his subjects’ accounts.

By investigating scholarly discourse on Brazilian documentary, this study will illuminate how *High-Rise* fits into the conversation of power and space in the genre. A historical approach to the documentary tradition will ground the research in order to identify *High-Rise*’s position in contemporary Brazilian cinema. Therefore, extensive research on scholarly and primary sources on Brazilian documentary was crucial to establishing the analysis, including an examination of recent publications such as Allen’s *Shifting Horizons: Urban Space and Social Difference in Contemporary Brazilian Documentary and Photography* and Furtado’s *Documentary Filmmaking in Contemporary Brazil: Cinematic Archives of the Present*, as well as essential writings such as Johnson and Stam’s *Brazilian Cinema*. Additionally, this thesis will look at critical perspectives on Brazilian film history found in Jean-Claude Bernadet publications, such as the book *Cineasta e Imagens do Povo (Filmmakers and Images of the People)*.

Furthermore, an analysis of popular discourse around the documentary will be necessary to elucidate the varying responses to the film, allowing for an understanding of its cultural significance on both national and global levels. Looking at press coverage in major Brazilian media organizations such as *Folha de Sao Paulo* and *GI* will illuminate how the film was understood by mainstream media. *High-Rise* was also widely discussed in specialized blogs; analyzing those reviews will provide knowledge about the reception of the film within the independent film scene. When it comes to foreign press coverage, the film was reviewed by *Variety* and *Cahiers du Cinema* after it was screened in international festivals, and these will also be integrated into the research.

A theoretical frame of critical studies will anchor the research in a critical approach to documentary film. This study will look at spatial politics as it is contextualized by David Harvey and Henri Lefebvre. Additionally, film theory will provide the necessary tools to draw a complete film analysis of *High-Rise* as well as other related documentaries. For instance, fundamental documentary texts such as Ellis and McLane's *A new history of documentary film* *Introduction to documentary* and Nichol's *Introduction to documentary* will ground the study.

This thesis presents a first chapter dedicated to a historical analysis of Brazilian documentary film, and a second chapter will comprise a complete textual analysis of *High-Rise* along with a look at scholarly and popular discourse about the film. A concluding chapter will look at the larger significance of the film, including an analysis of other documentaries that engage similar strategies.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this study will provide a better understanding of *High-Rise* as a cultural product, as well as its significance in the grand scheme of Brazilian cinema. Because this study

will include an investigation of the historical context in which this film is inserted, it will take a step further in positioning *High-Rise* as a pioneering documentary than what has already been done. This will also be the first attempt, to my knowledge, to identify emerging trends in Brazilian contemporary documentary which started with this film. By doing that, this thesis will also contribute to the overall comprehension of the ways in which Brazilian documentary has examined power. Furthermore, this study will strengthen the literature regarding unequal power dynamics in Brazil, and, in addition, contribute to the broader understanding of class issues.

¹ Inacio Araujo, “Crítica: Boa Ideia Vira Arrogância Em 'Um Lugar Ao Sol', De Mascaro” (“Review: Good Idea Becomes Arrogance in ‘High-Rise’), *Folha De Sao Paulo*, July 29, 2016, www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2016/07/1796387-boa-ideia-vira-arrogancia-em-um-lugar-ao-sol-de-mascaro.shtml.

² Peter Debruge, “High-Rise,” *Variety*, July 1, 2009.
<http://www.variety.com/2009/film/reviews/high-rise-1117940590>.

³ Debrudge, “High-Rise.”

⁴ Victor Guimarães, “Imagens da elite no documentário brasileiro contemporâneo: o desafio de filmar o inimigo em Um lugar ao sol, de Gabriel Mascaro,” *Imagofagia*, no. 4 (October 2011), 2.

⁵ Bill Nichols, *Introduction to documentary* (Indiana University Press, 2001), 26.

⁶ Jack Ellis and Betsy McLane, *A new history of documentary film* (Continuum, 2009), 2.

⁷ Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 313.

⁸ Jean-Louis Comolli, *Cinema against Spectacle: Technique and Ideology Revisited* (Amsterdam Univ. Press, 2015), 66.

⁹ Nichols. *Introduction to documentary*, 26.

¹⁰ Stephen Bottomore, “Introduction: Non-Fiction Film,” *Film History* 13, no. (2001): 116.

¹¹ Nichols. *Introduction to documentary*, 31.

¹² Randal Johnson and Robert Stam, *Brazilian Cinema* (Columbia University Press, 1995), 19.

¹³ Flavia Lima Rodrigues, “Uma Breve História Sobre o Cinema Documentário Brasileiro.” *CES Revista* 24, (2010): 10.

¹⁴ Stephanie Denninson and Lisa Shaw, *Popular Cinema in Brazil, 1930-2001* (Manchester University Press, 2004), 32.

¹⁵ Denninson and Shaw, *Popular Cinema in Brazil*, 31.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 35.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 33.

¹⁸ Jose Carlos Avellar, “Seeing, Hearing, Filming: Notes on the Brazilian Documentary.” In *Brazilian Cinema*, eds. Randal Johnson and Robert Stam. (Columbia Univ. Press, 1995), 328

¹⁹ John and Stam, *Brazilian Cinema*, 281-82.

²⁰ Gustavo Furtado, *Documentary Filmmaking in Contemporary Brazil: Cinematic Archives of the Present*. (Oxford University Press, 2019), 2.

²¹ Furtado, *Documentary Filmmaking in Contemporary Brazil*, 2.

- ²² Antonio Marcio Da Silva and Mariana Cunha, *Space and Subjectivity in Contemporary Brazilian Cinema* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
- ²³ Furtado, *Documentary Filmmaking in Contemporary Brazil*, 3.
- ²⁴ *Ibid*, 145.
- ²⁵ *Ibid*, 146.
- ²⁶ Victor Guimarães, “Imagens da elite no documentário brasileiro contemporâneo: o desafio de filmar o inimigo em Um lugar ao sol, de Gabriel Mascaro.” *Imagofagia*, no. 4 (October 2011), 5.
- ²⁷ Natália Martins Flores and Isaltina Maria de Azevedo Mello Gomes, “Os Espaços Do Eu e Do Outro: A Tematização Da Desigualdade Social No Documentário Brasileiro Um Lugar Ao Sol,” *Revista Digital de Cinema Documentário*, no. 21: 107.
- ²⁸ Monclar Lopes. "Análise de “um lugar ao sol”, documentário de Gabriel Mascaro, à luz da semiótica tensiva." *Policromias - Revista de Estudos do Discurso, Imagem e Som* 1, no 2 (April 2016): 120.
- ²⁹ Alice Louisa Allen, *Shifting Horizons: Urban Space and Social Difference in Contemporary Brazilian Documentary and Photography*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 119.
- ³⁰ Allen, *Shifting Horizons: Urban Space and Social Difference in Contemporary Brazilian Documentary and Photography*, 119.
- ³¹ Tori Holmes, “Capturing Brazilian Society in Movement: From Cordiality to Circulation and ‘Spaces between’ in Maria Augusta Ramos’s Futuro Junho.” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 24, no. 3, (2018): 369.
- ³² Eduardo de Jesus, “The reterritorializations of Urban Space in Brazilian Cinema,” in *Space and Subjectivity in Contemporary Brazilian Cinema*, eds Antonio Marcio Da Silva and Mariana Cunha (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 41.
- ³³ Jesus, “The reterritorializations of Urban Space in Brazilian Cinema,”41.
- ³⁴ Allen. *Shifting Horizons: Urban Space and Social Difference in Contemporary Brazilian Documentary and Photography*, 3.
- ³⁵ Allen, 2.
- ³⁶ Allen, 24.
- ³⁷ Maria Helena Braga Vaz da Costa and Wendell Marcel Alves da Costa. “O Outro e a Arquitetura Da Cidade: As Relações de Poder Em Um Lugar Ao Sol.” *Revista Digital de Cinema Documentário*, no. 21, (March 2017): 98.
- ³⁸ Vaz da Costa and Alves da Costa. “O Outro e a Arquitetura Da Cidade,”.
- ³⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace (The Production of Space)*, Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 11-12.
- ⁴⁰ Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*, 27.
- ⁴¹ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990), 226.
- ⁴² Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 239.
- ⁴³ David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (New York: Verso, 2012), 14.

A Brief History of Brazilian Documentary

This chapter will provide a historical overview of documentary filmmaking in Brazil, emphasizing its politics, its funding structure, technological developments, and its viewership. In addition, the chapter will address dominant themes in documentary representation including questions of agency and how filmmakers use their voices and the voices of others. This approach will contextualize the circumstances which preceded the production of *High-Rise* in order to situate the film in its contemporary moment and the larger history of Brazilian documentary practice.

The Silent Period

In order to understand the history of Brazilian documentary, it is necessary to also acknowledge the instability of the country's democracy and its socio-economic issues. Johnson and Stam highlight the country's economic dependency as a key factor in its cultural production.¹ Johnson and Stam argue that, while American culture is a massive influence on Brazilian culture, the opposite does not happen. Hollywood movies dominate theaters in Brazil, but Brazilian films rarely reach foreign audiences. Similarly, Schvarzman notes that "The first 50 years of filmmaking in Brazil were marked by one important fact: Brazilian Cinema was not what the country's spectators saw on screen."² Schvarzman refers to the fact that the national theaters were dominated by foreign productions in that period, and challenges faced by Brazilian filmmakers such as lack of funding and difficulty in appealing to the national audience.³ Therefore, this chapter will also layout the trajectory followed by the Brazilian film industry in order to be a part of the national identity. The documentary tradition had an important part in that

goal, as shown by this section, since it was the main form of Brazilian film production in the early years.

The advent of the cinema in Brazil happened in the wake of the modernizing period of the First Republic (1889-1894).⁴ In 1889, Brazil stopped being an Empire, after the proclamation of republic by Marechal Deodoro Fonseca, who became the country's first President. Conde explains that cinema was perceived as part of this landscape of modernity that came with the new power structure.⁵ The author further claims that "Filmmakers in Brazil adopted the imported cinematic medium to screen the country as modern nation."⁶ The first film screening in the country took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1896, with the first filmmaking equipment being introduced in 1898 by Afonso Segreto.⁷ According to Johnson and Stam, from 1900 to 1912, "Brazilian films dominated the internal market with documentaries and newsreels "made with amazing rapidity and dealing with current events of local interest."⁸ Goncalves points out that most of the Brazilian films at the time were made by European immigrants who would feature natural landscapes, costumes, and cultural traditions in the country.⁹ Italo-Brazilians Afonso and Paschoal Segreto, Portuguese-Brazilian Silvino dos Santos, and Luis Tomas Reis are cited by Rodrigues as some of the first filmmakers who captured moving images of Brazilian culture.

Conde argues that cinema in Brazil was initially associated with people in power, with the early documentaries focusing mainly on official events and featuring important social and political figures.¹⁰ Some examples include *O palácio de Catete* (*The Catete Palace*, 1900), *Piquenique na Ilha do Governador* (*Picnic at the Governors Island*, Afonso Segreto, 1900), and *Festejos do General Roca* (*General Roca Festivities*, Afonso Segreto, 1901).¹¹ The elites were also the main audience for the early films, and the newspapers of the period would often highlight all the important people who attended the screenings.¹² According to Johnson and

Stam, cinema-going only became a form of mass entertainment later, with increased urbanization and industrialization.¹³ This aspect of history illuminates how issues of class and power have been part of the evolution of cinema in Brazil from the beginning.

Early exhibitors in the country did not have a designated space for the screenings and would go to different places in Rio de Janeiro and other cities in the state to run the sessions.¹⁴ The first permanent exhibition hall was inaugurated in 1897 by Paschoal Segreto and Jose Roberto Cunha Salles. Johnson points out that the theater, Salao de Novidades, achieved great success, welcoming President Prudent de Moraes Neto in 1898 to one of its screenings.¹⁵ Paschoal Segreto was a key figure in the early years of cinema in Brazil, later partnering with his brother Afonso to produce and exhibit films. By the late 1910s, going to the movies was no longer considered an upper-class activity.¹⁶ Conde notes that cinema reached a new audience once exhibitors saw commercial advantages in opening it up to a broader fee-paying audience.¹⁷

Brazilian feature film production achieved some success between 1907 and 1911, a period known as the *Bela Época*.¹⁸ The *Bela Época* has been considered the Golden Age of Brazilian cinema, although research shows that the national fiction films still occupied only a portion of the market in that period.¹⁹ By 1912, the foreign films took over Brazilian theaters in a more definitive way. Brazilian productions, which lacked the financial resources of the North American and European productions, went off the screens. As explained by Johnson and Stam, “The foreign film became the standard by which all films were to be judged, thus rendering problematic the exhibition of the less technically polished Brazilian product.”²⁰

Johnson and Stam note that the documentaries and newsreels remained as the bulk of Brazilian cinema with the end of the *Bela Época*.²¹ The profit from the non-fiction practice, such as newsreels and propaganda films, also provided resources for the modest fiction production.²²

Precise numbers on the Brazilian films produced in the early years are not available, but some estimates are able to demonstrate the state of the Brazilian film industry in the early twentieth century. In the book *Film Industry in Brazil*, Johnson incorporates a comparison table that shows how the production of Brazilian documentaries outnumbered the fiction productions in almost every year between 1898 and 1930, with the only exceptions being the years of 1916 and 1930.²³ In some years, the disparity is particularly pronounced — in 1910, the chart registers 107 documentaries, eight fictions, and three newsreels.²⁴

Although the Brazilian film industry developed mostly in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, research shows that other states also had an important role in the conception of a national cinema. Particularly during the times when the Brazilian cinema was facing a deep crisis, the production developed outside of the Rio-Sao Paulo circuit was crucial to the maintenance of a Brazilian film industry. The state of Pernambuco (and its capital Recife), the birthplace of Gabriel Mascaro, was of those key locations where Brazilian films were being produced in the 1920s, along with places such as Minas Gerais and Rio Grande do Sul.²⁵ According to Araujo, Pernambuco was home to an important cycle of productions in the second half of the 1920s.²⁶ Many of those films were non-fiction films funded by the state government during Sérgio Loreto's term, between 1922 and 1926.²⁷ Those films would highlight public services that were being improved by the government, as well as official events and urban developments.²⁸

When it comes to the silent era of Brazilian documentary, Morettin points out that it is considered by film historians as an unexplored topic in Brazilian film history. He credits this issue partially to the difficulty in accessing the footage, which makes it hard to analyze content and style.²⁹ Conde states that early Latin American film, in general, has been overlooked by European and Anglo-American literature.³⁰ Like Morettin, Conde also mentions practical

difficulties when it comes to analyzing the material. According to Conde, fire at the Brazil's main film archives in 1957, 1969, and 1982, along with lack of preservation funds, had a drastic effect on the heritage of the period.³¹

Bernadet identifies an ideological interpretation of Brazilian film history which privileges feature-length fiction over short films and documentaries.³² According to the author, this perspective caused publications on Brazilian cinema to overlook an important part of film production, since feature-length fiction films were the exception during the early twentieth century.³³ The short length non-fiction film was the cinema form that allowed the national cinema to exist during the critical periods, such as the 1920s, directing funds and attention to film production.³⁴ Bernadet believes that the tendency to privilege the fiction film on cinema historiography stems from the fact that the traditional long fiction film came to be the most commercially successful form in the film industry. Therefore, other genres, such as animation, documentaries, and experimental films, turned into a "parenthesis" in its cinema history.³⁵ When it comes to the history of Brazilian cinema, the importance of the documentary tradition has not been fully recognized by historians.

The Educational Films (1930s – 1950s)

Once Getúlio Vargas became president in 1930, the state starts to play a defining role in Brazilian filmmaking. The populist Politian started to use cinema to promote his ideas and control the public narrative. As noted by Shaw, shaping a national consciousness was a central concern of the Vargas regime (1930 and 1945).³⁶ Shaw adds that the administration wanted to create a coherent image of Brazil both nationally and internationally as a way to promote national integration, which became challenging with the country's increasingly multi-ethnic demographic.³⁷ One of the measures taken by the Vargas regime to promote the national culture

was the creation of the INCE, the National Institute of Educational Cinema. According to Ramos, from the arrival of sound in the late 1920s until the arise of *Cinema Novo* in the 1960s, Brazilian documentary develops mostly around this institute.³⁸ “The INCE,” he states “is conceived by Roquette-Pinto within a particular view of non-fiction film that defines documentary as a scientific and pedagogical tool.”³⁹ Goncalves states that the institute had the goal of transmitting knowledge from the intellectual class to the less privileged part of the population.⁴⁰

The INCE manager, Humberto Mauro, emerged as the most important filmmaker of the period.⁴¹ Ramos notes that Mauro’s documentary films are generally in the shadow of this success with fiction cinema, and the director got involved with the genre after the arrival of sound had a negative effect on the Brazilian film industry.⁴² Mauro saw the invitation to manage the INCE as an opportunity to stabilize his filmmaking career.⁴³ During his time at the INCE, Mauro produced 345 educational short films - most of them depicting scientific research and experiments, with titles such as *Practical lesson of taxidermy* (1936), *Superficial muscles of the human being* (1936), and *Stomach extirpation* (1937).⁴⁴ The institute also produces documentaries about Brazilian folkloric and rural culture — Films like *Cantos de Trabalho* (1955) and *Meus Oito Anos* (1955) feature traditional Brazilian songs and highlight the country’s natural beauty. According to Ramos, “The function of documentary film appears to be related to the preservation of a disappearing culture and its traditions.”⁴⁵ Besides Mauro, other filmmakers also made documentaries through INCE. Goncalves cites the role of Jurandyr Noronha, who was extremely prolific between the 1930s and the 1970s.⁴⁶ The author highlights his feature film *Panorama do Cinema Brasileiro* (1968), which is essential to Brazilian film historiography.⁴⁷ Ramos argues that the INCE used the scientific film as a shield to defend documentary ideas.⁴⁸

By maintaining the scientific approach to its films, the institute avoided being affected by the authoritarian regime while still getting federal funding. The educational label also allowed the institute to remain as a part of the Ministry of Education and Health, escaping the propaganda activities of the Department of Press and Propaganda.⁴⁹

The Sociological Films: *Cinema Novo*, A New Cinema (1960s-1970s)

“*Cinema Novo* is not one film but an evolving complex of films that will ultimately make the public aware of its own misery,” declares Glauber Rocha, one of the main *Cinema Novo* directors.⁵⁰ In the 1960s, the *Cinema Novo* movement leads to an important shift in Brazilian documentary, with many filmmakers using cinema to address the deep social inequalities in the country. With *Cinema Novo*, a socially conscious cinema would come to be one of the pillars of the documentary tradition in the country. As noted by Johnson, “*Cinema Novo* arose in the late 1950s and early 1960s as part of a broad, heterogeneous movement of cultural transformation that involved theater, popular music, and literature, as well as the cinema.”⁵¹ The movement was influenced by Italian Neo-realism and French New Wave, as well as Eisenstein’s montage theory and documentarians such as Jean Rouch, Mario Ruspoli, Chris Marker and Francois Reichenback.⁵²

The arrival of documentarian Arne Sucksdorff in Brazil in 1962 was an important factor in the development of a new cinema style. According to Rodrigues, Sucksdorff went to the country to lead a documentary seminar that took place in Rio de Janeiro. The seminar was attended by emerging filmmakers such as Eduardo Escorel, Arnaldo Jabour, Luiz Carlos Saldanha, Vladimir Herzog, and others.⁵³ Rodrigues mentions that those young filmmakers had access for the first time to a 35mm camera, a Nagra recorder and an editing table – equipment which allowed for better mobility and direct sound recording.⁵⁴ The new technology had a direct

impact on the types of films produced by the filmmakers who went on to create the *Cinema Novo* movement. Adermann credits the new directions taken by documentary film in the 1950s and 1960s to a political radicalization, which, along with the new technologies, enabled those filmmakers to focus on the urban and rural underclass to whose demands cinema would ‘give voice.’⁵⁵

In the documentary tradition, the movement was influenced by *Cinema Verité* and Direct Cinema styles, while shifting away from the educational and scientific approach previously established. Films like *Maioria Absoluta* (*Absolute Majority*, 1964), directed by Leon Hirszman, *Integracao Racial* (*Racial Integration*, 1964), by Paulo Cesar Saraceni, and Arnaldo Jabour’s *O Circo* (*The Circus*, 1965), were produced following Direct Cinema techniques, which were taught by Sucksdorff to the young filmmakers.⁵⁶ These films discuss themes such as poverty, land distribution, race, and working conditions, seeking to cast light on these issues by illustrating the working-class struggles and presenting relevant facts and statistical data to back their arguments.

The documentaries *Arraial do Cabo* (1960), directed by Mário Carneiro and Paulo César Saraceni, and *Aruanda* (1960), directed by Linduarte Noronha, are generally considered to be precursors of the *Cinema Novo* movement.⁵⁷ Both films look at social issues as they relate to specific locations. In *Arraial do Cabo*, the director chronicles the changes in a small coastal town after the arrival of a new factory, which disrupts the daily lives of the local fishermen. The film captures the social transformations that came with industrialization. The poetic *Aruanda*, considered by Adermann an early forerunner of *Cinema Novo*’s infatuation with the rural north-east, explores the reality of a *quilombo* (the place where enslaved people took refuge, later habited by their descendants) in Paraiba.⁵⁸ The film uses voiceover, images of *quilombolas*

(people who lived at the *quilombos*) doing intense labor, and a powerful Brazilian folklore soundtrack to showcase the difficult conditions experienced by the quilombo inhabitants. The result is a poetic, but raw depiction of the *quilombolas*' lives. According to Ramos, *Aruanda* had a massive impact on the Brazilian audience at the time due to its topic and aesthetics.⁵⁹ The author adds that the film's impact is a statement to the important documentary tradition to the *Cinema Novo* movement.⁶⁰

Johnson and Stam classify *Cinema Novo* into three phases: A preparatory period running from 1954 to 1960; a first phase which ran from 1960 to 1964, the year of the military coup d'état in the country; a second phase from 1964 to 1968, and a third phase from 1968 to 1972, marked by an increase in the repression from the military regime.⁶¹ The authors emphasize the fact the filmmakers' political strategies and aesthetics were deeply influenced by these political events.⁶² The coup d'état is used here as a marker for a reason. The military regime, which lasted from 1964 to 1984, was a period of extreme repression and censorship, and many opponents were persecuted, arrested, and tortured.⁶³ The dictatorship also targeted the cultural production in Brazil, causing many artists to seek exile the from country, including the renowned musicians Caetano Veloso, Chico Buarque, and Gilberto Gil.⁶⁴ Johnson and Stam describe how the military government affected the film industry:

Military rule has often brutally affected filmmaking in Brazil. Cultural organizations like the Popular Center of Culture have been closed; some filmmakers have been arrested; others have gone into temporary exile. Censorship has physically mutilated certain film texts and prevented others from being disseminated. Self-censorship, meanwhile, has harmed Brazilian cinema in less visible but equally destructive ways.⁶⁵

Adermann states that, in the *Cinema Novo* documentaries, the director's interest goes beyond revealing the living conditions of the poor but seeks to transform the consciousness of the oppressed.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the author illuminates the strategies used by the filmmakers of the movement to denounce social injustice, saying "The documentary of *Cinema Novo* remains overall confined to the expository mode in which the filmmaker provides the spectator with an explanation of the footage seen, and the relation between the 'voice of the other' and the filmmaker intellectual's voiceover is still the vertical one between documentary evidence backing up the analytical truth of the argument."⁶⁷ In *Cineastas e as Imagens do Povo* (Filmmakers and images of the people), Jean-Claude Bernadet explores several *Cinema Novo* documentaries in order to define what he calls the "sociological model" — an approach to the non-fiction film commonly seen in the first half of the 1960s.⁶⁸ Bernadet states that footage of the people cannot be seen as their expression, but only a representation of the relationship established between filmmakers and the people. He goes on to say that the relationship is built not only through the themes of the film, but also by the language used by the film.⁶⁹ Documentaries such as *Viramundo* (1965), by Geraldo Sarno, *Maioria Absoluta* (Absolute Majority, 1964), by Leon Hirszman and Arnaldo Jabour's *A Opinião Pública* (Public Opinion, 1967) tried to understand social issues taking place in Brazil at the time. Bernadet argues that those films, along with others which were made around the same time, employ an intellectual distance when discussing working-class matters. These documentaries did that by presenting the "facts" and specialized opinion as an objective entity which guides the working-class subjects' voices. The author is interested not only in the strategies used by filmmakers to investigate the social issues, but on their social positions in relation to their subjects.⁷⁰ For instance, Bernadet

analyses all the different voices of *Viramundo*, a film about poor Northeastern workers who migrated to Sao Paulo looking for jobs. The author compares how the film presents the interviews with the migrant workers versus the voice of the narrator —while the first is seen as a point of view (which he calls “voices of experience), the latter is constructed as spokesperson of reality (labeled as “voices of knowledge”).⁷¹ Bernadet also points out the fact that, when talking to a businessman, the interviewer calls him “sir”, but he does not use the title when talking to the Northeastern workers.⁷² Bernadet’s analysis of *Cinema Novo* documentaries deepened the discussion on the nuances of class relations in Brazil and its representation on film.

Arnaldo Jabor’s *A Opiniao Publica* stands out among the *Cinema Novo* documentaries when it comes to class representation. The film is set in Rio de Janeiro and presents conversations with middle-class subjects about themes that range from politics to love and relationships. The narration demonstrates the film’s standpoint, stating “Everything you will see here is typical. We refrained from the exotic and the exceptional and looked for the usual situations, faces, voices, gestures.” The director, then, sees the middle-class as what is usual and standard. Therefore, anything else, such as the working-class subjects in a film like *Viramundo*, is seen as exotic. This positioning reveals that the filmmaker and the film’s audience belong to the same social class as the subjects in this film. The narration also explains that “When reflected on a screen, the things that seem common and eternal turn into strange and flawed.” *A Opiniao Publica*, much like *High-Rise*, seeks to expose its own subjects’ lack of social conscience. In *A Opiniao Publica*, unlike *Viramundo*, middle-class subjects are not there to provide knowledge but to act as a symbol of ignorance of a sector of society.

A Transitional Period: The 1970s and 1980s

In the 1970s the Brazilian documentary tradition, filmmakers started to question their own place inside the political struggle of the period. “Whereas 1960s documentarists discoursed confidently about otherized victims from a presumed superior position, 1970s documentarists began to doubt their own right or even capacity to speak ‘for’ the other,” explains Johnson and Stam.⁷³ Bernadet lists Arthur Omar’s *Congo* (1972), *Rito e Metamorfoses das Mães Nagô* (*Rituals and Metamorphoses of the Nago Mothers*), by Juana Elbein dos Santos, *Iao*, by Geraldo Sarno (1975), as documentaries that break with the sociological model.⁷⁴ These films, in the author’s view, do not turn their subjects into objects but engages in a more balanced relationship. In the case of *Rito e Metamorfoses das Mães Nagô*, for example, Bernadet believes that the film attempts to construct its perspective from the inside. The film explores a religious myth, the Nago, not by talking about it, but by showing the myth itself through natural imagery, like footage of birds and fish, which were known representations of the Nago.⁷⁵ Also a crucial work in the period was *Iracema* (1974), a fiction and non-fiction hybrid directed by Jorge Bodanzky and Orlando Senna. The film tells the story of an indigenous teenage girl who becomes a prostitute and meets a truck driver, and it was originally censored in the country until 1980 due to its critique of the government.⁷⁶ Adermann mentions other efforts to diversify the documentary form in the period:, citing films such as “In *Jardim Nova Bahia* (1971) and *Taruma* (1975), by Aloysio Raulino , which radicalize the gesture of ‘giving voice to the other’ by handing the camera over to the subject itself, and Glauber Rocha’s experimental *Di/Glauber* (1977), which focuses less on the funeral of the painter Di Cavalcanti than on the director’s own emotional responses.⁷⁷

The 1970s cinema reaction to the intellectual elite approach of the early 1960s can be seen with particular candor in the short film *Esses Onze Ai* (1978).⁷⁸ The film is a manifesto in defense of soccer as a national passion – the sport had been a target of critique in films such as *A Falecida* (*The Deceased Woman*, Leon Hirszman, 1965) and *Subterraneos do Futebol* (*Soccer Underground*, Maurice Capovilla, 1965).⁷⁹ In *Esses Onze Ai*, journalist Juliana Cuentro proudly claims, “O nosso futebol é a verdadeira estética da fome” (Our soccer is the true aesthetics of hunger) – alluding to filmmaker Glauber Rocha characterization of *Cinema Novo*.⁸⁰ However, Bernadet affirms that the film ultimately does not change the level of discourse, as it continues to be “about” rather than “of” the people.⁸¹

Another important film in the 1970s when it comes to class representation is *Retrato de Classe* (*Class Portrait*, 1977) by Gregório Bacic. The documentary revolves around a school reunion of a private institution in Sao Paulo. The film looks for students and the teacher from a class portrait taken 20 years earlier, seeking to understand their realities and the paths taken by them in that window of time. Like Michael Apter’s *Up* series (1964-2019), this film uses a group of students as a way to illustrate broader issues of society, but, in the case of *Retrato de Classe*, all the subjects have similar economic backgrounds.

In 1984, the release of Eduardo Coutinho’s final version of *Cabra Marcado para Morrer* (*20 Years Later*), represents a definitive shift in Brazilian documentary. In the film, the director explains that the production originally started in 1964, with the goal of exploring the life of João Pedro Teixeira, a leader of Peasant leagues in the state of Paraíba, who had been assassinated in 1962. The idea was to film a reenactment of Teixeira’s life events with a cast formed by nonprofessional actors who were also involved in peasant leagues, including Teixeira’s wife, who would play herself in the film. But 1964 was the year of the military coup d’état in Brazil,

and production was stopped by the army about a month after it started. The confrontation ended with several peasants being arrested, as well as some members of the crew. Film equipment, negatives, tapes, and scripts were all confiscated. Most of the printed negative was saved because it had been sent to the lab in Rio de Janeiro, and Coutinho was able to recover the original script as well.

By the early 1980s, when the dictatorship was coming to an end, the director decided to go back to Paraiba to finish the film. This time, he did not have a script and decided to conduct interviews with peasant league members and other people who knew Teixeira. The film revisits the original footage as well as new in-depth interviews with the characters involved in the events. Coutinho not only incorporates the original footage with the new materials through the editing, but also by showing the archival material to the subjects. According to Furtado, “By presenting the footage of the unfinished film to the peasants, Coutinho stages a cinematically mediated encounter between the past (which includes the unfinished film as well as interrupted life trajectories and political projects) and the present at a moment when the country had begun to transition to democracy.”⁸² Coutinho’s interview-based style and his approach to sharing his platform with the working class has had a massive impact on Brazilian documentary. His films depend on the relationship he developed with the subjects, with a focus on storytelling.

Bernadet believes that *Cabra marcado para morrer* would have changed how he wrote about filmmakers and the people in *Cineastas e Imagens do Povo* if he had seen the film before writing the book.⁸³ Bernadet notes that, unlike the *Cinema Novo* documentaries of the early 1960s, *Cabra* does not seek to educate the masses about their problems.⁸⁴ Coutinho’s film depicts a segment of the people that is already aware of their reality and is acting upon it.⁸⁵

According to Bernadet, *Cabra* is a landmark for Brazilian documentary, and it confirms many of the arguments he made in the publication.⁸⁶

Furtado reinforces that the film inaugurates a new era for Brazilian documentary – from the sociological model identified by Bernadet, to a dialogical approach.⁸⁷ In Coutinho's documentaries, the working-class subjects usually guide the narrative with their experiences. The voiceover in *Cabra* does not seek to present the “real,” or explain the stories told by the subjects, and is only there to express the director's own experiences and relevant information for contextualization purposes. In fact, there are no absolute truths in Coutinho's approach, but an invitation to see the world through his subjects' eyes.

Contemporary documentary and “Retomada” (1990s – present)

The 1990s saw a boom in Brazilian film production. The period is known as the “retomada” (re-emergence, or rebirth), and it is also known as the “Brazilian cinematic renaissance.”⁸⁸ Right before the *retomada*, another factor contributed to the crisis in the industry in 1990, with the election of Fernando Collor de Mello. The first president democratically elected after the country's military dictatorship withdrew all funding from the state film agency Embrafilme.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, Collor was impeached for corruption in 1992, and his vice-president, Itamar Franco, was able to give some oxygen to Brazilian cinema with the Audiovisual Law in 1993, which has been providing public funding to studio and independent cinema since then.⁹⁰

According to Pinazza, the Audiovisual Law and the subsequent Rouanet Law have subsidized nearly all Brazilian films since 1995.⁹¹ Pinazza also emphasizes the relevance the National Cinema Agency (ANCINE), created in 2001: “ANCINE has played a key role in the development of a film industry in Brazil, by dealing with private investors and promoting contests that give debut filmmakers and scriptwriters an opportunity to make films.”⁹² Furtado

believes that these public funding laws influenced the expansion of documentary in the post-1990. He also mentions other important factors that contributed to the diffusion of documentary, such as the emergence of more affordable digital technologies, the increased professionalization of documentary filmmakers, and the development of a documentary culture which includes film festivals, receptive audiences, and specialized publications and blogs.⁹³

Adermann sees a resurgence in terms of critical and box office success for Brazilian documentary in the 2000s, citing an increase in the national entries in the 'E tudo Verdade' festival, the biggest documentary festival in the country - from 45 titles in 1996 to over 400 in 2007.⁹⁴ He also mentions the cable channel DocTV, which specializes in non-fiction film and has broadcast over 120 Brazilian documentaries shot in all 27 states.⁹⁵ Ramos also sees a boom in the documentary tradition in the beginning of the twentieth-first century, stating: "Beginning in the first decade of the twenty-first century, documentaries have affirmed themselves in terms of quantity, as well as a leap in quality, as evidenced by the prominence that they've acquired on the theatrical circuit."⁹⁶ Furtado notes that, despite an increase in production and visibility, the documentary-viewing public is not sufficient to allow production to be independent from the support of the state.⁹⁷ "Its dependency on the state condemns Brazilian film production to cycles of booms and busts tied to the increase or decrease in government support," states the author.⁹⁸ The author goes on to say that, at the same time, documentary's relative marginality has given the filmmakers more freedom in terms of its forms, dramaturgies, topics, temporalities and modes of production.⁹⁹

According to Furtado, innovative documentary films emerged around the time of Brazil's transition to democracy, citing the works of Vladimir Carvalho, Vincent Carelli, Lucia Murat and Eduardo Coutinho.¹⁰⁰ Coutinho followed *Cabra marcado* with several other interview-centered

films, which, although did not get as much international recognition, were highly influential to the national documentary. *Santo Forte (The Mighty Spirit, 1999)*, *Edifício Master (Master: A Building in Copacabana, 2002)*, and *O Fim e o Princípio (The End and the Beginning, 2005)* are among his most crucial work. Later in his career, Coutinho also incorporated fiction elements in his films. In *Jogo de Cena (Play, 2007)*, ordinary women are invited to share their most dramatic life stories with the audience, which are also re-enacted by professional actresses. The film blurs the lines between fiction and the real by not letting the audience know right away who is telling a personal story and who is acting.

In an interview with the online magazine *Contra Campo*, Eduardo Coutinho addresses his views on cinema and class more directly. In the interview, he talks about the making of his film *Edifício Master (Master, a Building in Copacabana, 2002)*, which is about the residents of a building in the neighborhood of Copacabana, in Rio de Janeiro.

I did not want to make a film about the middle-class, but about an unknown universe. The challenge would be to extract interesting material from regular people. (...) It is much easier to make a film on the marginalized than about middle-class people. It is easier to talk about something distant from us than something close. And a place with the presence of violence and poverty, with picturesque visuals and the fact that the imagination of people who live in *favelas* is greater, you have what it takes to make a good film.¹⁰¹

Using a similar discourse to what is found in the narration of *A Opinião Pública*, Coutinho positions himself as a member of the middle-class, what he sees as the known reality,

while the world depicted in many of his films is the exceptional and exotic reality. For instance, the previous feature-length film Coutinho had released was *Babilônia 2000* (2000), in which his crew goes to *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro on New Year's Eve to ask the residents about their plans for the new millennium. In 1999, he made *Santo Forte* (The Might Spirit), an ethnographical work about religiosity in the *favela* Vila Parque da Cidade. The *favela* depicted in these films and the *sertão* (the interior region the Brazilian Northeast in which many people live in poverty) seen in *Cabra marcado para morrer* are the unknown universe Coutinho is referring to.

Thus, a significant portion of contemporary documentaries in Brazil deals with the social inequality seen in the country from a point of view of the privileged class. Ramos argues that these films come from a place of guilty class conscience that exposes the unease of the Brazilian middle-class with the country's social fracture.¹⁰² For example, *Santiago* (2007), directed by Joao Moreira Salles, deals with this complexity that accompanies the Brazil's class dynamics. In the film, the director, like Coutinho in *Cabra marcado*, uses archival footage of an earlier film he tried to make in the past.¹⁰³ The original footage, shot in the early 1900s, shows Salles interviewing Santiago, his family butler. In the final version, released after the death of Santiago, the director uses the voiceover to reflect on his own behavior in the interview. Salles critiques his past self, who, in his view, used his position of class superiority perform authority over Santiago.

Some other notable contemporary works in Brazilian documentary seek to gain access to marginalized spaces. For instance, in *Morros da Desordem* (*Hills of Disorder*, 2006), director Andrea Tonacci's uses reenactment, footage of Indigenous areas, and interviews to tell the story of an Indian who survived the massacre of his tribe. In *O prisioneiro da grade de ferro* (Paulo Sacramento, 2003), the director hands digital cameras to the inmates of a federal prison so they could film themselves and their surroundings. With a similar focus on the issues of social

inequality and crime, the film, *Notícias de uma Guerra Particular* (*News from a Personal War*, 1999), by Kátia Lund and João Moreira Salles, interview several people involved or affected by urban violence, from the police, drug traffickers, and people who live in *favelas* and end up in the middle of that conflict.

In addition to the socially conscious film, Adermann lists other trends that appeared in the contemporary practice, such as the biopic, the militant cinema, the films dealing with the indigenous communities, and the self-reflexive documentary.¹⁰⁴ In fact, Gonçalves notes that the personal, self-reflexive approach to documentary has been allowed by newer, lighter film equipment that have become available, facilitating the production of films such as *Um Passaporte Hungaro* (*Hungarian Passport*, 2003), by Sandra Kogut, and *33* (2003), by Kiko Goiffman (2003).¹⁰⁵ In *Passaporte Hungaro*, Kogut goes through the bureaucracy of getting her heritage recognized by the Hungarian government in order to obtain a Hungarian passport. In the film, the director takes the camera along to personal situations, such as lengthy negotiations with government employees, phone calls, family dinners and train rides.

Conclusion

In closing, this chapter has shown that the documentary tradition has been a crucial part of Brazilian cinema from its beginnings. At times, the genre was the main practice that kept the national film industry going. For example, in the early period of cinema, documentaries made for almost the totality of the national production, and scientific documentaries were able to keep filmmaker Humberto Mauro working during the Vargas era. Furthermore, I have presented the idea that class has been an important topic in documentary filmmaking, both directly (as in works such as *A Opinião Pública* and *Santiago*) and indirectly – in the early documentaries, what (and who) was not on the screen spoke volumes about the state of the practice at the time.

Also, as noted in this chapter, there have not been many documentary films that directly examine the middle-class, and even less of those that feature the elites. For this thesis, I chose to look at films such as *A Opinião Pública*, *Retrato de Classe*, and *Edifício Master* because they change the usual class dynamics and are possible influences to *High-Rise*. However, these films are the exception in the larger scope of Brazilian documentary.

Brazilian filmmakers have been addressing the “voice of the other” with more emphasis since the *Cinema Novo* movement and there has been much discussion on how to best use documentary film as a platform for social change. In the 1950s and 1960s, the filmmakers used the documentary form to educate the masses, raising awareness about social issues with the ultimate goal of provoking change. The voices of the other were always guided by the voice of a narrator who was the spokesperson of reality. That strategy started to evolve in the 1970s, with more filmmakers acknowledging that they did not know the whole truth, therefore, there was a necessity of shortening the distance between filmmaker and subject. Experimental films such as *Rito e Metamorfoses das Mães Nagô* and *Di/Glauber* also incorporated new ways of telling a story in a subjective way. In the contemporary tradition, the “other” becomes the main source of knowledge for the filmmakers, with the interview form emerging as the main element in many productions in the 1990s and 2000s. In a way, the filmmakers get closer to the spectators – instead of trying to explain what their subjects mean, they act as mediators who are also in the process of understating that new world. In the next chapter, we can examine the ways that *High-Rise* is part of this longer filmic tradition of exploring social-economic issues, while incorporating the dialogical approach that has been dominating the practice since the 1990s. The next chapter will also further the discussion on *High-Rise* as it relates to dynamics of space in the context of class disparities

- ¹ Randal Johnson and Robert Stam, *Brazilian Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 19.
- ² Sheila Schwarzman, “Early Years”, in *Directory of World Cinema: Brazil*, eds. Louis Bayman and Natalia Pinazza (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 39.
- ³ Schwarzman, “Early Years”, 39.
- ⁴ Maite Conde, “Cinema’s Milieu: Negotiating the movies’ public and popular dimensions in early twentieth-century Brazil”. *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 23, no 1 (October 2017): 278, doi: 10.1080/14701847.2017.1385217.
- ⁵ Conde, “Cinema’s Milieu,” 278.
- ⁶ Maite Conde, *Foundational films: Early cinema and modernity in Brazil* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 5.
- ⁷ Jonson and Stam, *Brazilian Cinema*, 19, and Jean-Claude Bernadet, *Historiografia Classica do Cinema Brasileiro* (Classic Historiography of Brazilian Cinema) (Sao Paulo: Annablume, 1995). The date 19, 1898 (which is considered the date when the first imagens were shot in the country) is also used as a starting point for Brazilian film. Bernadet argues that this date had been used for a long time to as a “birth certificate” for ideological reasons; He believes the date privileges production rather than the audience experience, a perspective which sees cinema only as filmmaking.
- ⁸ Johnson and Stam, *Brazilian Cinema*, 20.
- ⁹ Gustavo Soranz Goncalves, “Panorama do documentário brasileiro,” (“Brazilian documentary overview”) *Doc-Online: Digital Magazine on Documentary Cinema*, no. 1 (December 2006): 80.
- ¹⁰ Conde, “Cinema’s Milieu,” 280.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 279.
- ¹³ Johnson and Stam, *Brazilian Cinema*, 19.
- ¹⁴ Randal Jonhson, *The film industry in Brazil: Culture and the State*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987): 23.
- ¹⁵ Johnson, *Film Industry*, 25.
- ¹⁶ Conde, “Cinema’s Milieu,” 281.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ Johnson, *Film Industry*, 27.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.
- ²⁰ Johnson and Stam, *Brazilian Cinema*, 22.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ Johnson, *Film Industry*, 35.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ Johnson and Stam, *Brazilian Cinema*, 22.
- ²⁶ Luciana Correa Araujo. “O Cinema em Pernambuco (1900-1930)”. In *Nova história do cinema brasileiro - Volume 1 (New History of Brazilian Cinema – Volume 1)*, edited by Fernao Pessoa Ramos and Sheila Schwarzman. Edições Sesc SP. Kindle Edition.
- ²⁷ Araujo, “Cinema em Pernambuco”. At the time, those films were called “filmes naturais” (natural films), a term still used to describe that cycle of production.
- ²⁸ Araujo, “Cinema em Pernambuco.”

- ²⁹ Eduardo Victorio Morettin, “Dimensões históricas do documentário brasileiro no período silencioso” (“Historical perspectives on the Brazilian silent period documentary”), *Revista Brasileira de História* 25, no. 49 (June 2005): 125.
- ³⁰ Conde, *Foundational Films*, 21.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Bernadet, *Historiografia Clássica*, 17.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Ibid, 16.
- ³⁶ Lisa Shaw, “The Chanchada and Celluloid Visions of Brazilian Identity in the Vargas Era (1930–45)”, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 6, no. 1, (2000): 68.
- ³⁷ Shaw, “The Chanchada,” 68.
- ³⁸ Fernão Pessoa Ramos, “The Non-Fiction Films of Humberto Mauro”, Presented at *VIII Visible Evidence*, Utrech University, 2000.
- ³⁹ Ramos, “Humberto Mauro.”
- ⁴⁰ Goncalves, “Panorama do documentário brasileiro,” 82.
- ⁴¹ John and Stam, *Brazilian Cinema*, 24.
- ⁴² Ramos, “Humberto Mauro”.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Goncalves, “Panorama do documentário brasileiro,” 82
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Ramos, “Humberto Mauro.”
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Glauber Rocha, “An Esthetic of Hunger”. In *Brazilian Cinema*, edited by Randal Johnson and Robert Stam, (New York: Colombia University Press, 1995): 71.
- ⁵¹ Randal Johnson, *Cinema Novo X 5 Masters of Contemporary Brazilian Film*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984): 1.
- ⁵² Rodrigues, “Uma Breve História,” 67.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Adermann, “Documentary,” 190.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid, 83.
- ⁵⁷ Goncalves, “Panorama do documentário brasileiro,” 82
- ⁵⁸ Jens Andermann, “Documentary”. In *Directory of World Cinema: Brazil*, eds. by Louis Bayman and Natalia Pinazza, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013): 190.
- ⁵⁹ Fernão Pessoa Ramos, “Cinema Verdade no Brazil” (“Cinema Verite in brazil), In *Documentário no Brasil: Tradição e Transformação*, ed. Francisco Elinaldo Teixeira, (São Paulo: Summus, 2004): 82.
- ⁶⁰ Ramos, “Cinema Verdade no Brazil,” 82.
- ⁶¹ Johnson and Stam, *Brazilian Cinema*, 31.
- ⁶² Johnson and Stam, *Brazilian Cinema*, 31-32.
- ⁶³ Boris Fausto and Sergio Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, Translated by Arthur Brakel. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 274.

- ⁶⁴ James N. Green, *We Cannot Remain Silent: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).
- ⁶⁵ Johnson and Stam, *Brazilian Cinema*, 36.
- ⁶⁶ Adermann, “Documentary,” 190.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ Jean-Claude Bernadet, *Cineastas e Imagens do Povo (Filmmakers and Images of the People)*, (Sao Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2003).
- ⁶⁹ Bernadet, *Cineastas e as imagens do povo*, 9.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² Ibid, 25.
- ⁷³ Johnson and Stam, *Brazilian Cinema*, 410.
- ⁷⁴ Jean-Claude Bernadet, “The Voice of the Other: Brazilian Documentary in the 1970s”, In *The Social Documentary in Latin America*, ed. Julianne Burton, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990): 90.
- ⁷⁵ Bernadet, “The Voice of the Other: Brazilian Documentary in the 1970s”, 91.
- ⁷⁶ Aldana, “The land, the road, and the freedom to move on: the tension between documentary and fiction in *Iracema, uma transa amazônica*”, in *Political Documentary in Latin America*,
- ⁷⁷ Adermann, “Documentary”, 60.
- ⁷⁸ 11 is the number of soccer players in the field for each team. Therefore, the title would translate roughly to “These 11 guys over there”.
- ⁷⁹ Bernadet, “The Voice of the Other,” 92.
- ⁸⁰ Rocha, “Esthetics of Hunger.”
- ⁸¹ Bernadet, “The Voice of the Other”, 92.
- ⁸² Gustavo Furtado, *Documentary Filmmaking in Contemporary Brazil: Cinematic Archives of the Present*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019): 3.
- ⁸³ Bernadet, *Cineastas e Imagens do Povo*, 9. The first edition of the book was published in 1985, shortly after the release of *Cabra marcado para morrer*.
- ⁸⁴ Bernadet, *Cineastas e as imagens do povo*, 242.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid.
- ⁸⁶ Bernadet, Jean Claude. *Cineastas e as imagens do povo*. São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 2003, p. 9.
- ⁸⁷ Furtado, *Contemporary Brazil*, 18, and Bernadet, *Cineastas e Imagens do Povo*.
- ⁸⁸ Natalia Pinazza, “The Re-emergence of Brazilian Cinema: A Brief History”. In *Directory of World Cinema: Brazil*, edited by Louis Bayman and Natalia Pinazza, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013): 32.
- ⁸⁹ Pinazza, “The Re-emergence,” 32.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid.
- ⁹¹ Ibid.
- ⁹² Ibid.
- ⁹³ Furtado, *Contemporary Brazil*, 3.
- ⁹⁴ Adermann, “Documentary,” 189.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid.
- ⁹⁶ Fernao Pessoa Ramos, “Trends in contemporary Brazilian documentary,” in *Cruzamentos: Contemporary Brazilian Documentary*, University of California, Los Angeles, 2014.
- ⁹⁷ Furtado, *Contemporary Brazil*, 3.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 2.

¹⁰¹ Eduardo Coutinho, “Entrevista com Eduardo Coutinho” (Interview with Eduardo Coutinho), *Contracampo Revista de Cinema*, 2002.

¹⁰² Ramos, “Trends in contemporary Brazilian documentary,” 4-5.

¹⁰³ As mentioned by Ramos in “Trends in contemporary Brazilian documentary”, Salles and Coutinho used to work in the same production company, with Salles, with Salles acting a producer for many crucial films from Coutinho’s filmography. That helps to illuminate a similarity in language and approach of the two filmmakers, who, while having unique styles, both value dialogue in their documentaries.

¹⁰⁴ Adermann, “Documentary,” 191.

¹⁰⁵ Goncalves, “Panorama do documentário brasileiro,” 89.

(Re)locating Power in Contemporary Brazilian Documentary

“I’m so glad you’re making a documentary about something positive,” says one of the subjects of *High-Rise* (Gabriel Mascaro, 2009). “Other people are always making films about bad things — this is different,” he explains. By “bad things,” the interviewee is alluding to a tendency in Brazilian cinema to investigate the deep social issues that affect the country. The previous chapter showed that some of the most important moments in Brazilian film history included films that tried to explain, understand, and even solve some of these social problems. For example, filmmakers in the *Cinema Novo* sought to educate audiences about the misery that plagued the working-class, both through fiction and non-fiction. In the contemporary tradition, directors like Eduardo Coutinho and Joao Moreira Salles similarly examined social issues by positioning the Other as the main source of knowledge, as in *Babilonia 2000* (Eduardo Coutinho, 2001), *O fim e o Principio* (*The End and the Beginning*, Eduardo Coutinho, 2005), *Santiago* (Joao Moreira Salles, 2006), and *Notícias de uma Guerra Particular* (Joao Moreira Salles and Katia Lund, 1999).

High-Rise, however, focuses on the lives of people who live in luxurious penthouses in the Brazilian cities of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Recife. The film explores urbanization and class dynamics by focusing on the skyscrapers that shape the landscapes of these cities. As a result, *High-Rise* examines the intersection of class, space, and power by peeking behind the curtains of the Brazilian elites. This chapter will map the social and political landscape in which the film was produced, as well as identify connections with Brazilian contemporary films that explore similar themes. Furthermore, I will conduct a textual analysis of the film to demonstrate the strategies used by *High-Rise* to construct a critique of class differences and how they are

maintained in the urban space. The textual analysis will also expand the discussion on class politics and urbanization in Brazil.

Pernambuco: Home of independent cinema

High-Rise was produced in the aftermath of the *Retomada*. As shown in the previous chapter, the film industry in Brazil saw a boost in the 1990s through federal tax exemption and funding laws, and the production kept increasing in the twentieth-first century. Author Cleber Eduardo identifies the period of 2000-2015 as particularly favorable for young and newcomer filmmakers.¹ Indeed, Gabriel Mascaro released *High-Rise*, his second film, at 26 years old.² Moreover, by growing up and establishing a career in Pernambuco, the filmmaker was able to engage in a particularly flourishing film scene. In the 2000s, the state of Pernambuco became known for the development of its independent cinema. The state capital, Recife, is also the home to important street cinemas *Cinema da Fundacao* and *Cinema Sao Luis*. These theaters feature local films as well as independent and foreign productions that are outside of the mainstream. Additionally, film festivals such as *Janela Internacional do Cinema* and *Cine PE* contributed to the dissemination of film culture in the state. Pernambuco also offers its own funding programs in addition to the federal laws. In fact, *High-Rise* was distributed through the *Editais do Audiovisual do Governo de Pernambuco* (Pernambuco's Government Audiovisual Notice), which allowed the film to be distributed in theaters and festivals.³ *High-Rise*, for instance, was featured in such festivals as *Buenos Aires Independent Film Festival* (Argentina), *Festival Internacional de Documentales de Santiago* (Chile), *Los Angeles Film Festival* (USA) and *Janela Internacional do Cinema do Recife* (Brazil).

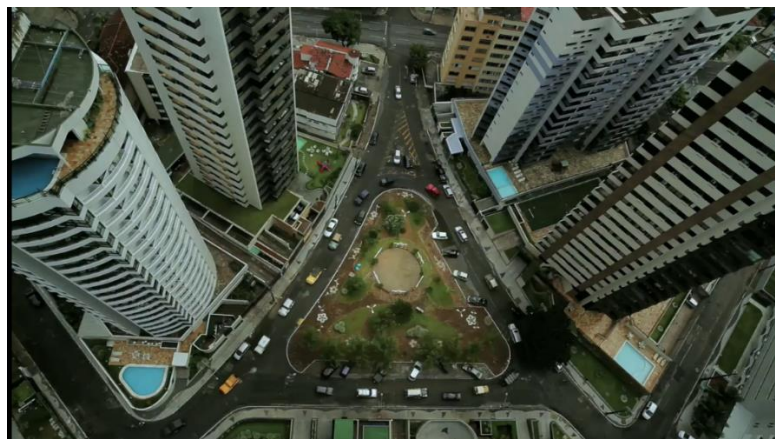
In 1997, the release of *Baile Perfumado* (*Perfumed Ball*) was considered the starting point of the recent wave of Pernambuco cinema. The film tells a true story of a Lebanese

photographer who was able to film the famous bandit leader Lampião. *Baile Perfumado*, directed by Paulo Caldas and Lírío Ferreira, achieved cult status and is considered a crucial film in the contemporary tradition. The wave of acclaimed films from Pernambuco continued with Claudio de Assis' *Amarelo Manga* (*Mango Yellow*, 2002) and *Baixio das Bestas* (*Bog of Beasts*, 2006), and Marcelo Gome's *Cinema, Aspirina e Uurubus* (*Cinema, Aspirins, and Vultures*, 2005). These films take a realist approach to tell the stories of marginalized characters in a world of misery, violence, heavily influenced by the *Cinema Novo* movement. In addition, they explore themes like sex, sexuality, and gender issues. In the documentary tradition, production in the state also achieved prominence not only with *High-Rise*, but also Marcelo Pedroso's *Pacific* (2009), Renata Pinheiro and Sergio Oliveira's *Estradeiros* (2011), and Adelina Pontual's *Rio Doce/CDU* (2011).

“If the year of 2009 planted a seed for the future of Brazilian documentary, that was the emergence in a larger scale of a new generation of filmmakers from Pernambuco willing to advance representations of middle-class with its paranoia and fantasies” says author Carlos Alberto Mattos, talking about the work of directors Marcelo Pedroso and Gabriel Mascaro.⁴ Specifically, Mattos is referring to *High-Rise* and *Pacific*, two documentaries that are connected in many ways. Not only were they released around the same time, but the *Pacific* director is also responsible for editing *High-Rise*. These filmmakers also worked together as co-directors of directed *KFZ-1348*, a documentary about the Volkswagen Beetle and its symbolism in Brazilian society. In *Pacific*, Marcelo Pedroso compiles home videos made by passengers of a cruise ship. The film crew embarked on the cruise and paid attention to people who were making these videos, but only by the end of the trip did they approach them to ask for the footage. The result is a work in which the subjects' performance is at the heart of the narrative. Although both films

engage with the idea of social privilege, subjects in *Pacific* are still in a different social position than the ones in *High-Rise*, who were later identified by the media as being well-known millionaires.⁵ Additionally, *Pacific* takes a more passive approach, since it only uses the footage produced by the cruise passengers.

Partially due to the fast-paced urbanization in Recife, issues of the politics of space have been at the center of the narrative in several films produced in Pernambuco, including Kleber Mendonca Filho's *Recife Frio* (*Cold Tropics*, 2009), *O Som ao Redor* (*Neighboring Sounds*, 2012), and *Aquarius*, Renata Pinheiro and Sergio Oliveira's *Praça Walt Disney* (*Walt Disney Square*, 2011), Marcelo Lordello's *Eles Voltam* (*They'll Come Back*, 2012), and Gabriel Mascaro's *Avenida Brasilia Formosa* (*Defiant Brasilia*, 2010). In fact, much has been said about films from Pernambuco and Recife as constituting a genre by itself.⁶ They all use the city not only as a location for the stories, but as a theme. The short documentary *Walt Disney Square*, for example, compares archive images with new footage to illustrate the transformations in the neighborhood of Boa Viagem, in Recife.



Walt Disney Square, 2011

Gabriel Mascaro continued to examine spatial dynamics in *Avenida Brasilia Formosa* (*Defiant Brasilia*, 2010), *High-Rise*'s successor. The docu-fiction hybrid focuses on a working-

class community that had to relocate in order to make way for a new highway. Later, he released *Domestica (Housemaids, 2012)*, a critically acclaimed documentary that explores the world of service workers. In *Housemaids*, Mascaro handed the cameras to seven teenagers so they could capture the routines of their respective housemaids, exposing the complex relationships that take place inside those homes. Similar to *Pacific*, the film had the strategy of using footage made by the subjects, but with a more polished outcome since the subjects in *Housemaids* were given cameras and tips on how to use them. Additionally, *Housemaids* was released in the same year the country discussed a new law that gave more rights to service workers, and its connection with an important political event lead the film to be part of a national conversation.⁷

Reception and political climate

High-Rise received several positive reviews from Brazilian left-leaning websites. In several articles, it is praised for exposing the ignorance of the elites. Cynara Menezes, who runs the blog *Socialista Morena (Brunette Socialist)*, summarizes the films as a “Mosaic of subjects that go from normal to grotesque,” adding that the people interviewed in *High-Rise* cause nervous laughter and feelings of disdain in the spectator.⁸ Writing for the independent website *Segunda Opinião (Second Opinion)*, Daniel Araujo states claims that *High-Rise* is a study of the Brazilian elites’ narrowmindedness. Araujo credits Mascaro with giving his subjects ample freedom to express their thoughts, and that any negative repercussions are a consequence of the subjects’ own actions.⁹ Similarly, Fernando Pardal applauds *High-Rise* in his review for *Esquerda Diário (Left Daily)*. Pardal claims that the film thrives through its subtleness, stating that the subjects’ way of seeing the world was enough to prove a point, and, therefore, Mascaro did not need to make a statement through his own discourse.¹⁰ A different take was made by Cesar Castanha, writing for *Revista Forum*. Castanha sees *High-Rise* as a film which holds

grudges against its subjects, seeking the caricature instead of the human.¹¹ The critic believes that *Pacific* is more effective in exploring class dynamics with its approach of handing the camera to the subjects.¹²

The fact that these reviews were written in political websites reflect the political climate in the country in the twentieth first century. *High-Rise* was released by the end of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who served between 2003 and 2010. He was the first progressive president after the country's re-democratization in the 1990s and became known for his welfare policies which changed the country's social dynamics. Lula became one of the most divisive figures in the country: although he achieved great popularity while he was president, he also attracted strong opponents due to his progressive policies as well as accusations of corruption against the Worker's Party. His election and re-election intensified class differences, particularly because the polls revealed the clear divide in demographics, with the poorer sector of society siding with Lula, while the wealthier voters increasingly rejected the politician. This climate of class conflict influenced cultural production in the country in the 2000s. In the fiction tradition, for example, several films include middle-class and elite characters who serve as antagonistic figures in the narrative including *Neighboring Sounds*, *Aquarius*, and *The Second Mother* (Anna Mullayert, 2016).

In the mainstream media, newspaper *Folha de Sao Paulo* published a short review by critic Inacio Araujo, who, like Castanha, believes the film fails by being too arrogant.¹³ On the *GI* website, which belongs to *Globo* network, Alysson Oliveira says that the *High-Rise* subjects' cluelessness is as big as the places they live in.¹⁴ Internationally, the film received some reviews as a result of being screened in festivals around the world. Peter Debrudge, for *Variety*, classifies the film as "humorous" and "vaguely absurd," and further states that, "In formal terms, *High-*

Rise feels loosely constructed, unfolding more according to whim than a rigorous structure befitting the rather academic nature of Mascaro's underlying philosophy."¹⁵ Writing for *Cahiers du Cinema*, critic Pedro Butcher briefly describes *High-Rise*, along with *Pacific*, as the most controversial documentaries in the Brazilian film festival *Mostra de Cinema de Tiradentes*.¹⁶

In summary, literature about *High-Rise* is very polarized. Although most scholars and critics see the film as providing an innovative approach to social critique in Brazilian cinema, others perceive it as being a pretentious attempt at ridiculing its own subjects. These critical tensions illustrate how the film is relevant in framing discussions on urbanization and class differences in Brazil. Its approach to the critique of class and space makes it a landmark for Brazilian documentary, and its controversial strategy of using interviews with wealthy people to make an argument makes it worthy of a further analysis.

Textual Analysis

The combination of grey concrete images and construction noises in the opening shot of *High-Rise* sets the tone of the film — this is a work about urban spaces. The documentary looks at the meanings we attach to where we live, and the material value of being in the highest points in the city. Mascaro illuminates the intersections of space, class, and power through talking-head interviews with people who live in penthouses. In the film, nine different individuals or families are interviewed inside their homes. The one thing they all have in common is the fact that they live in penthouses. Their choice of residence is also the main topic discussed in the interviews, which are juxtaposed with strategic shots of the high-rises and the world around them.

Current scholarship has placed *High-Rise* in a position of relevance in the contemporary documentary tradition due to its approach to urbanization and class dynamics. Much of the literature on *High-Rise* focuses on the fact that the film represents a rupture in the usual way of

approaching class differences in Brazilian cinema. In *Shifting Horizons: Urban Space and Social Difference in Contemporary Brazilian Documentary and Photography*, Amy Allen sees the film as a crucial attempt to balance the class representation in Brazilian documentary, which has mostly focused on the working-class.¹⁷ Similarly, Guimaraes believes that, if the middle-class has only been an occasional theme in Brazilian documentary, the elites are practically invisible in the national documentary practice.¹⁸ Thus, Guimaraes believes that *High-Rise* is a singular work due to its focus on the wealthiest group of people.¹⁹

It is worth noting that *High-Rise* goes beyond exploring a different social class than previous Brazilian documentaries. What sets it apart from a film such as Eduardo Coutinho's *Edificio Master* (2002)—the only film made by Coutinho featuring the middle-class—is the relationship established between the film and its subjects. Instead of seeing the subjects as a source of knowledge, like many filmmakers in the contemporary documentary practice, Mascaro takes on an oppositional viewpoint which is made evident through the montage. In the following analysis, I will examine the interview dynamics between director and subjects, as well as how the visual elements in the film help to develop a critique on urbanization and its effects on the city.

The interviews

The opening titles reveal that the production was able to contact the subjects through what the film describes as a “curious book” that lists the most powerful and wealthy people in the country along with their personal information. Out of the 125 penthouses dwellers identified among the addresses, nine individuals or families agreed to be interviewed on camera. The recruiting method alone serves as a filter for the people appearing in the documentary. By accepting the exposure that comes with opening their homes and publicly discussing their home

choices, the subjects are acknowledging the idea of living in a penthouse as a lifestyle. Not to mention, those are people that are comfortable with being presented as someone powerful. This is relevant for this documentary since the group of people being interviewed is more likely to be open about their privileges.

In *High-Rise*, most conversations address non-controversial topics. The director's choice of forging a conversation about trivial aspects of life is a crucial element of the documentary's strategy. Except for the occasional discussion about social issues (usually started by the subjects), the dialogues, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, consist of "positive" themes. The interviewees discuss what living in a penthouse means to them and describe at length all the benefits of being in that place. Also, they are being interviewed inside their own homes, which is another factor for the friendliness of the interviews. The relaxed circumstances allow them to feel safe to disclose their thoughts with the film crew. The subjects are more than willing to engage in the conversation, as if they were in an entertainment TV show. Although we do not listen to most of the questions asked by the director, it is safe to assume they did not have a provocative tone. In that sense, Mascaro is following the steps of Eduardo Coutinho, who famously was able to get his subjects to feel comfortable in front of the cameras.



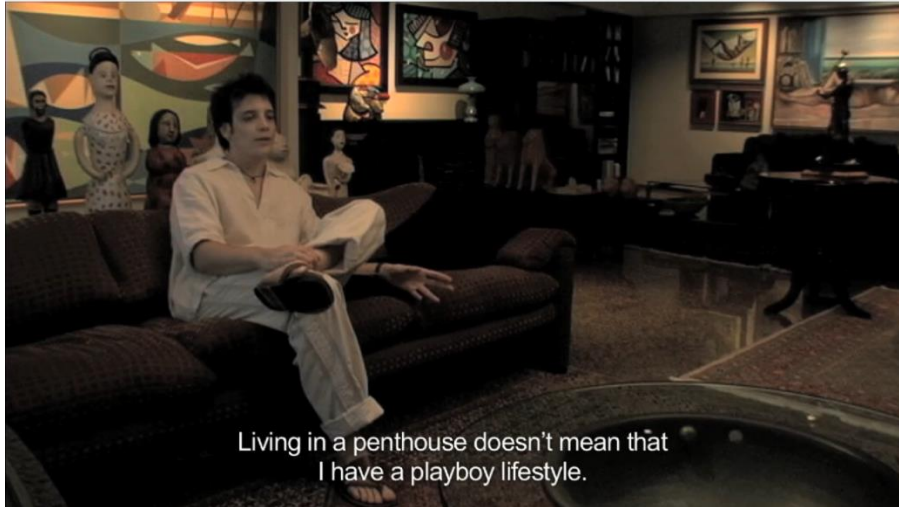
There is, however, a tension that permeates the entire film. Mascaro's voice is strongly present in the editing. There is a new layer of dialogue, then, that takes place between discourse and visual elements. The subjects experiencing a completely different conversation than what is perceived by the audience. The director juxtaposes audio of the subjects talking about the benefits of living in a high-rise with images that, at a first glance, are unrelated to what they are talking about. For example, as pictured above, when a subject is saying, "It's wonderful to be able to be able to open the window and have the ocean in front of you," the film cuts to a shot of work being done on the windows of a building. This dissonance between what is being said and what is being shown is repeated throughout the film. The music is a strong component of the narrative: slow and hypnotic, intensified by how it blends with loud construction and city noises, it adds to the notion that this is not a film about how wonderful it is to live in a penthouse.



As said by Mattos, *High-Rise* collects narratives of fear, social arrogance, and self-satisfaction.²⁰ That impression is caused by the rhetoric of people such as the nightclub owner and self-declared workaholic who seems to be particularly fond of the camera. He rants about people blaming their problems on the rich and says again and again how wonderful his lifestyle is, with travels, food, beautiful women, and, of course, his distinguished housing. He also goes on to say that society is divided into those who are wealthy and those who are not — Those in

first class, and those in the *senzala* (slave house), in coach. He says he feels bad about those who do not have nice cars. Mascaro asks him what power means to him, to which he responds by saying it is a wonderful pleasure, but it carries a great responsibility. While most of the subjects try to show humbleness when acknowledging their luxuries, he bluntly declares how proud he is of himself. The setting of his interview also sets it apart from the others. Since his penthouse is being renovated, the interview takes place in a small, gloomy office. He also seems to be more aware of what is being expected of him. For example, at one point he brushes off the argument that the problems in Brazil are caused by wealthy people, and his thoughts on society are voiced in a defensive tone.

The other subjects dance between hyper self-awareness and obliviousness. At times, they act like they need to explain themselves. The man who likes to throw parties says that he was not looking for status, but for a safe place that feels more like a house than an apartment. He is not even rich, in comparison to some of his neighbors, he says. Similarly, a young musician, who is seeking a law degree as a hobby, says he feels a weight on his conscious because he knows that that is not the reality of the rest of Brazil. Interviewed in his art-filled living room, he assumes a completely different posture than the man in the dark office. He sounds apologetic about his own wealth and tries to convey the fact that he, as a person, is not changed by the fact the he lives in such an upscale place. This denotes a level of awareness of how other people might perceive him — as if letting his wealth go over his head is the expected behavior for someone like him.



For others, a penthouse seems like the only way to live, with a woman claiming she would never trade it for a “normal” apartment. Another woman says that living so high up allows her to experience another reality. While she is saying that, there is a shot of the seafront from a window. The window nets in that shot add a layer of physical barrier that makes the rest of the city appear even further. She goes on to say that her home gives her a “sense of domination,” since she looks at everything from above. The perception one has of the world from living in a penthouse is a theme that comes up often. A couple at the beginning of the film talks about being more aware of the joys of being alive by living in a penthouse, and that nothing really matters. For them, that connection with nature allows them not to care about material things that much.



Additionally, there is a strong gospel of the penthouse in this film. Two different subjects talk about the idea of being closer to God as a result of living so high up. A mother-and-son combo seem very interested in the idea of the holy penthouse, because they believe they can talk to God more easily from where they are. The son is sat in the arm of the sofa, while his mother is petting a stuffed raccoon. He expresses his pride of his mother's accomplishments, because, according to him, she made her own dreams come true while so many only complain. The idea of meritocracy permeates this and other interviews. The luxury is always credited to hard work. Often, they will talk about the feeling of looking at everything from above.

Although it is possible to identify in *High-Rise* the contemporary documentary tradition of privileging the interview format, the film does not feature deep, personal stories from its subjects. Inadvertently, the subjects talk about their social status as if that is the main aspect of their personalities. For instance, in *Edificio Master*, the location is used as a method to select the subjects, but each interview navigates through different topics about the subjects' lives. In *High-Rise*, the subjects are invited to openly acknowledge their social status in a seemingly safe space, and they take that chance to show the best aspects of this lifestyle. It is a filtered reality, like strolling through social media, and it is hard to believe they can have a bad day after waking up and looking at the ocean from the top of a building.

Breaking barriers

All the subjects remain nameless throughout the movie, and they are not listed in the ending credits. This could be an indication that the relationship between Mascaro and his subjects is a complicated one. We also do not know in which city each person lives unless they say it, although it is possible to guess from certain shots (for example, one family has views of famous spots in Rio de Janeiro) and their accents. Even though we enter their homes, we still do

not know a whole lot about them as individuals. This negotiated access can be understood in the context of Allen's point that filmmakers in Brazil have been focusing on the working-class partly because they have more access to it.²¹ According to Allen, the wealthier sector tends to protect itself from scrutiny, and some people are able to get closer to that reality only because they are also part of that social class.²² Allen believes that *High-Rise* stands out precisely because its director and crew are not members of the elites, saying that "He [Gabriel Mascaro] is not a part of the exclusive social world depicted and he also lacks the weight of mass media influence enjoyed by those producing television."

There is, then, the question of how Mascaro was able to gain the trust of his upper-class subjects. The answer could be on his approach to the interviewees. Sometimes, we can hear the interaction between them and the director. Those moments are not clearly presented in the film, and it is necessary to turn up the volume to hear the voice of the director. At one point, Mascaro asks a family if the fact they live in a penthouse makes other people envious. The teenage boy then talks about how whenever he wants to give an impression, he lists "penthouse" as his address, rather than the apartment number. Mascaro laughs and jokingly says "Like when you're flirting." When another man talks about having huge parties in his apartment, Mascaro can be heard saying "So cool!", and when the same man offers him compliments on the fact that he is making a film about "positive things," the director simply says "Maravilha!" (Wonderful!) and ends the interview. There is an impression that the director was performing a different role while talking with the subjects. He talks to *them* differently than he talks to *us*. The relationship lacks the critical tension that is posed between the interviews and contrasting footage mentioned earlier. Avoiding a more inquisitive have been a strategy by the director and his crew to gain the

confidence of the subjects. However, it can be difficult to understand this relationship since these moments are presented incidentally and not clearly laid out in the film.

The only moment of direct conflict during an interview takes place when Mascaro talks to the mother and a son who are interviewed together. When they list the security measures taken to protect their home, such as security cameras inside the apartment, Mascaro points out that they are still alive, implying that all those security measures have worked. The mother, then, asks him to stop recording, which he does, but not without leaving the microphone on. We can hear her saying that she believes the interview should move in another direction. She then decides to leave the room. This scene takes place at the very end of the film, serving also as an indication that the subjects are now coming back to their secured, private spaces. The woman is able to interrupt the moment of scrutiny on her life as soon as she feels it does not serve any purpose for her. This incident strengthens the idea that the friendly tone of the interviews is crucial to obtaining access to those people and spaces. Additionally, it reveals some of the boundaries established by the subjects. The mother and son had been openly discussing all the benefits of living in a penthouse, such as the privacy they have and the fact they were able to “enjoy nature” in a different way. They also had just mentioned how they were planning to rent an airplane in order to witness an astronomical event more closely. As soon as the conversation takes on a more negative approach, such as the risks of accumulating very valuable possessions in one space, the interviewee feels threatened. The subjects in the films have an agenda of their own, which is to establish the superiority of having a certain level of economic power.

Archival and intertextual perspectives

Although the film does not feature detailed information about the subjects, some strategies are used to obtain more insights to the mindset of these people. For example, archival

footage is used to dive deeper into the penthouse world. A home video made by one of the subjects is included in the film. In the video, she proudly shows the view from her window which includes the very sought-after landscape of Christ the Redeemer at Rio de Janeiro and an impressive view of the city. “You lose your gaze along the horizon, so close, yet so far,” she reflects. On the other side, we can see the favela Morro de Santa Marta. While she is filming the tiny houses in Santa Marta, she goes on to talk about how the community invaded the hillside, did not preserve the environment, and isolated themselves with their own rules. Isolation, which is often seen as an advantage of living in a penthouse, is deemed as a negative aspect by the woman.

The only other moment when extra footage is added to the film is during the interview with the French woman who moved to Brazil. She mentions that she became enchanted with the country after watching *Black Orpheus* (1959), a film directed by the French filmmaker Marcel Camus. This is a work that influenced how the world perceived Brazilian culture. The film, which is a drama based on the Greek legend of Orpheus and Eurydice, is filled with music, dance, and presents a lively depiction of Brazilian *favelas*. As noted by Ramos, the film was seen by *Cinema Novo* filmmakers as a model of what not to do due to its folkloric representation of Brazilian culture.²³ By including shots of *Black Orpheus* and its colorful depiction of Brazil, Mascaro is indicating that the same location can be experienced differently by people, and the subject’s perception of the country reflects this romanticized version that she is able to experience because of her financial resources and class status.

Exploring the outside

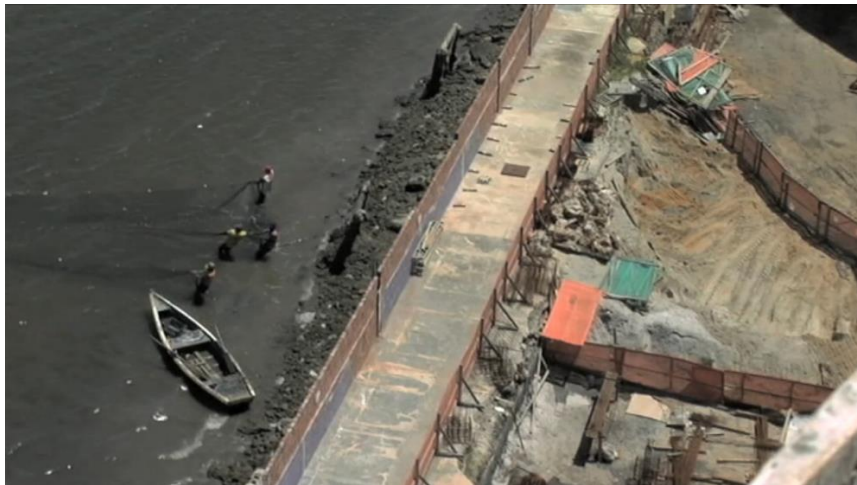
At the beginning of the film there is a scene, shot from above, of a construction worker maneuvering building material. The camera slowly moves up and it feels like the viewer is on an

elevator on the way to meet the protagonists of the film, leaving the “real” world of regular workers to the glamorous world of the luxurious apartments. The scene does not show the face of the construction worker, a choice that stands throughout the film. Those who are on the ground are always shot from a distance, blurry scenes, shadowed figures and unknown faces. More than anything, they are distant, as if they belong to a completely different world from the one inside the homes shown in the film. These shots provide the viewer a way to look at the city from the perspective of the subjects.



As a consequence of uncovering the advantages that come with inhabiting the most valuable homes, *High-Rise* reveals what other people might be missing. The people interviewed in the film have plenty of private space available to them, are generally safe from the urban violence, have a privileged view of the ocean, and do not have to hear the loud noises of the city. We see, from their windows, people having fun at the beach, far away from where the interviews are taking place. At some point, the young musician mentions that he prefers to enjoy his apartment pool than to go to the beach right in front of his building. He thinks it is too crowded and there are too many people and street vendors trying to sell things. Shortly after, the film show the fishermen working at the beach. Again, the external shots speak when the director does

not, particularly when they are ironically placed in contrast to the interviews. They are also the most aesthetically pleasing shots since the film faces some technical limitations in the internal shots. During the interviews, for example, the camera often refocuses in the middle of a sentence, or abruptly moves from one family member to another.



In his writings on space politics, David Harvey says that “Distance is both a barrier to, and a defense against, human interaction.”²⁴ For the subjects of *High-Rise*, distance offers privacy. That is considered one of the main benefits of being in such an exclusive housing by the penthouse residents. For the young musician, it means going to the pool with nobody watching. For one woman, it means having the laundry room away from the rest of the house. She also appreciates not being able to listen to the tingling of the pans in the kitchen that much — not that she has anything against the domestic workers, she insists. Privacy, in their view, also means not having to deal with the world around them. They mention not having to hear the upstairs neighbors, being away from the traffic and protected from the urban crime. “We watch this war without participating in it,” says the woman who lives next to a *favela* (slum).

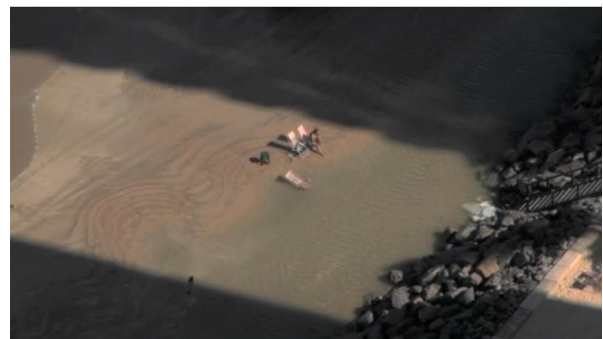
Space and urbanization

High-Rise explores the urbanization in the cities of Recife, Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro through strategic shots that reveal how the buildings dominate the city. The imagery of construction is also a constant in *High-Rise*, a reminder that the verticalization of the city is an ever-growing reality. The director uses high and low angles to illustrate the magnitude of those high-rises. Tilt shots from elevators—always going up—provide a similar perspective. These shots are reminiscent of *Arraial do Cabo* (1959), which also uses high and low angles and moving elevators to showcase the effects of urbanization. In *High-Rise*, these visual strategies have a clear message: the literal distance between the subjects and the ground reflects a metaphorical class distance. Vaz da Costa and Alves da Costa look at *High-Rise* as an important film in terms of spatial analysis precisely because the isolation provided by the penthouse represents the power held by the Brazilian elites.²⁵ According to the authors, the film illustrates what is left from the colonialism in the Brazilian society.²⁶ Additionally, the authors note that discourse employed by the subjects in the film reflect the image they have of themselves as being, literally and figuratively, above the “others.”²⁷

High-Rise's approach to space is aligned with ideas also explored in other Brazilian films. More than just a location, the city is figured as a character on screen. Jesus sees commonalities between *High-Rise* and works such as Mascaro's *Defiant Brasilia*, *Neighbouring Sounds*, and *White Out, Black In* (Adirley Queiroz, 2014), stating:

The city in these films is represented as a complex field of tension between diverse forces and powers that vie not only for visibility but also for the production of meaning and subjectivities, creating forms of resistance to the gestures of contemporary capitalism which try to turn the urban space into a target for manipulation.²⁸

As stated by Jesus, the city is a site of tension in *High-Rise*. Often, that tension happens through the editing, but, other times, it is much more pronounced. One of the subjects sees the fact that there are houses on top of hills (the slums) of nature. Her building, however, which is surrounded by greenery, is seen by her as an innate part of that environment. Like others featured in this documentary, the woman and her family appreciate the fact that they are surrounded by nature, like the woods, the ocean, or even the air. During those moments, the film makes sure to imply that this comes at a cost. For example, we can see that the buildings in front of the ocean cast shadows on the sea, interfering with the experience of people who want to enjoy that space as well. These shots are representative of the overarching argument of the film.



In his writings about the social space, Lefebvre states that, in addition to being a means of production, space is also a means of control, domination, and power.²⁹ Additionally, representations of relations of production, which subsume power relations, also occur in space.³⁰ Although one of the subjects in *High-Rise* says that the location “socializes” the view, since it allows several homes to share the same spot, it also hides it from other people. The film includes shots of the cities from a distance, and it is possible to see how the buildings form a wall in front of the ocean that changes the landscape completely for those who are behind them. It is clear the city was not designed to benefit people equally, and others must deal with the impact those high-

rises have on the city. *High-Rise* ends with an elevator tilt shot, and we can see other buildings reflected in the glass window. When seen from the top, the social abyss seems even deeper.

¹ Cleber Eduardo, “Continuidade expandida e o novo cinema autoral,” In *Nova história do cinema brasileiro - Volume 1 (New History of Brazilian Cinema – Volume 2)*, edited by Fernao Pessoa Ramos and Sheila Schwarzman. Edições Sesc SP. Kindle Edition.

² Gabriel Mascaro, “Bio,” Gabriel Mascaro, <https://pt.gabrielmascaro.com/Bio>.

³ Kleber Mendonca Filho, “Gabriel Mascaro / “Um Lugar ao Sol”,” *CinemaScópio*, April 11, 2009. <http://cinemascopiocannes.blogspot.com/2009/04/gabriel-mascaro-um-lugar-ao-sol.html>.

⁴ Carlos Alberto Mattos, “Documentario Contemporaneo (2000-2016),” In *Nova história do cinema brasileiro - Volume 1 (New History of Brazilian Cinema – Volume 2)*, edited by Fernao Pessoa Ramos and Sheila Schvarzma. São Paulo: Sesc, 2018. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Cleber Eduardo, “Continuidade Expandida,” Kindle Edition.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Alysson Oliveira, “Estreia: Filme 'Doméstica' investiga relação entre empregadas e patrões” (“Premiere: ‘Domestica’ movie investigates the relationship between housemaids and bosses”), *GI*, May 2, 2013, <http://g1.globo.com/pop-arte/cinema/noticia/2013/05/estreia-domestica-investiga-relacao-entre-empregadas-e-patroes.html>.

⁸ Cynara Menezes, “Cine Morena: Um Lugar ao Sol,” *Socialista Morena*, June 09, 2013, <http://www.socialistamorena.com.br/cine-morena-um-lugar-ao-sol>.

⁹ Daniel Araujo, “Um Lugar ao Sol: E um estudo sobre a miopia da elite brasileira” (*High-Rise: And a study on the brazilian elite’s blind side*), *Segunda Opinião*, September 17, 2018, <https://segundaopinioao.jor.br/um-lugar-ao-sol-e-um-estudo-sobre-miopia-da-elite-brasileira>.

¹⁰ Fernando Pardal, “*Um lugar ao sol*: um filme sobre “coisas positivas”” (*High-Rise: A film about “positive things”*), *Esquerda Diário*, August 8, 2015.

<http://www.esquerdadiario.com.br/Um-lugar-ao-sol-um-filme-sobre-coisas-positivas>.

¹¹ Cesar Castanha, ““Um Lugar ao Sol”, “Pacific” e a classe média ridicularizada” (“High-Rise”, “Pacific”, and the ridiculed middle-class), *Revista Forum*, June 30, 2015, <https://revistaforum.com.br/blogs/milosmorpha/um-lugar-ao-sol-pacific-e-classe-media-ridicularizada>.

¹² Castanha, ““Um Lugar ao Sol”, “Pacific” e a classe média ridicularizada.”

¹³ Inacio Araujo, “Crítica: Boa Ideia Vira Arrogância Em 'Um Lugar Ao Sol', De Mascaro”, *Folha De Sao Paulo*, July 29, 2016.

www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2016/07/1796387-boa-ideia-vira-arrogancia-em-um-lugar-ao-sol-de-mascaro.shtml.

¹⁴ Alysson Oliveira, “Documentário 'Um lugar ao sol' retrata contrastes sociais” (*High-Rise* documentary portrays social constrasts, *GI*, June 2, 2011, <http://g1.globo.com/pop-arte/noticia/2011/06/estreia-um-lugar-ao-sol-retrata-contrastes-sociais.html>.

¹⁵ Peter Debruge, “High-Rise,” *Variety*, July 1, 2009.

<http://www.variety.com/2009/film/reviews/high-rise-1117940590>.

¹⁶ Pedro Butcher, “Brésil: Le Nordeste à l’assaut de Tiradentes,” *Cahiers du Cinema*, April 2010, 52.

¹⁷ Alice Louisa Allen, *Shifting Horizons: Urban Space and Social Difference in Contemporary Brazilian Documentary and Photography* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 36.

¹⁸ Victor Guimaraes, “Imagens da elite no documentário brasileiro contemporâneo: o desafio de filmar o inimigo em Um lugar ao sol, de Gabriel Mascaro,” *Imagofagia*, no. 4, 2011.

¹⁹ Guimaraes, “Imagens da elite.”

²⁰ Mattos, “Documentario Contemporaneo,” Kindle Edition.

²¹ Allen, *Shifting Horizons*, 36.

²² Ibid.

²³ Fernao Pessoa Ramos, “A Retomada: Nação Inviável, Narcisismo às Avessas e Má Consciência” (The Rebirth: Unviable Nation, Reverse Narcissism, and Bad Conscience), In *Nova história do cinema brasileiro - Volume 2*. Edited by Fernao Pessoa Ramos and Sheila Schvarzma (São Paulo: Sesc, 2018), Kindle Edition.

²⁴ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990), 221-222.

²⁵ Maria Helena Braga Vaz da Costa and Wendell Marcel Alves da Costa. “O Outro e a Arquitetura Da Cidade: As Relações de Poder Em Um Lugar Ao Sol.” *Revista Digital de Cinema Documentário*, no. 21, (March 2017): 98.

²⁶ Vaz da Costa and Alves da Costa, “O Outro e a Arquitetura Da Cidade ” 98.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Eduardo de Jesus. “The reterritorializations of Urban Space in Brazilian Cinema,” in *Space and Subjectivity in Contemporary Brazilian Cinema*, eds Antonio Marcio Da Silva and Mariana Cunha (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 41.

²⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace (The Production of Space)*, Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 27.

³⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 33.

Concluding Thoughts

In a dystopian reality, the tropical city of Recife faces a drastic drop in temperature after it is hit by a meteorite. A family can be seen discussing the effects of that change on their lives. They live in the most expensive square feet of the city, right in front of the ocean. Originally, they explain, the family sought the location precisely because it provided them access to the ocean breeze, a very welcomed feature in the extreme summers. In an interview set inside their home, they show how they are adapting to the new climate. For example, the maid, who used to sleep in the tiny, airless room in the back of the apartment, had to switch bedrooms with the teenage son of the home's owners — the previously uncomfortable space turned into the most desired location in the apartment.



Cold Tropics, 2009

In that alternative reality, the scene could easily be a part of a *High-Rise* but instead belongs to the mockumentary *Recife Frio (Cold Tropics)* by Kleber Mendonca Filho. The short film, which was also released in 2009, adds to the argument made by *High-Rise* about how social inequality is produced and reproduced in the spatial dynamics of the city. Offering a critique of urbanization and social disparities in Brazil with the help from improbable collaborators, *High-*

Rise examines the intersection of class and space, bringing the penthouses close to the ground by opening the curtains of that world. Considering the film's relevance in the contemporary documentary tradition, this study has sought to situate *High-Rise* in Brazilian film history, while also considering the country's social and political context. Ultimately, this thesis has examined the strategies used by the film in order to illuminate how social inequality is reflected and disseminated through its engagement with the politics of space. Having analyzed the textual significances of *High-Rise* in detail in the prior chapter, I want to conclude by more fully situating *High-Rise* within Brazil's documentary tradition, while considering the significance and the uptake of its approaches to urban development and social class in contemporary Brazilian cinema. I will also propose some further lines of inquiry for continued research on Brazilian documentary.

High-Rise: a critical film in the Brazilian documentary tradition

In the second chapter of this thesis, I outlined important phases in the history of Brazilian documentary. By doing so, I was able to identify several trends that have marked the country's cinema. For instance, the research shows how social and political events affected the film industry and the documentary tradition in particular. Different governments have either propelled or hindered the national film industry according to their own interests, and oppressive regimes have silenced filmmakers at several points through the twentieth century. Also, this study has shown how funding programs and laws created in the 1990s helped to boost the national film industry, allowing not just an increase in the number of productions, but also the decentralization of filmmaking. By allowing funds to be distributed to different regions in the country, these initiatives helped to diversify the narratives in the film industry, which used to be concentrated in the southeastern cities of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. The making of a film such as *High-Rise*,

whose director and crew are from the northeastern city of Recife, might not have been possible without those public funding initiatives.

More importantly, this study has identified and examined a strong culture of discussing working-class people and issues in Brazilian cinema and particularly in its documentary tradition. For instance, the *Cinema Novo* filmmakers were very outspoken about the fact that they were making cinema intending to raise consciousness about the deep social issues affecting the country. As said by director Glauber Rocha, one of the main *Cinema Novo* filmmakers, the movement employed the “aesthetics of hunger” in order to educate the masses and provoke social change. As a result, the movement relied on the documentary tradition to carry out its awareness-raising, which generated a sequence of films that employ what Bernadet identifies as a sociological model.

¹ Particularly, in its first phase, the *Cinema Novo* documentaries incorporated an intellectual distance regarding its working-class audience and subjects. The films’ truth was presented through the narrations, which would offer the facts and figures, representing the “voice of knowledge.”¹ The working-class subjects were featured only as the “voices of experience,” whose discourse was validated (or not) by the narrator. By the 1970s and 1980s, documentarians started to engage with working-class subjects in a more profound way, diversifying its methods and seeking to showcase different realities by emphasizing the voices of those who were living it.

Eduardo Coutinho consolidated the notion of “giving voice” to the other by developing a filmography entirely based on interviews in which the subjects would provide in-depth accounts of their realities. His film *Cabra marcado para morrer (20 Years Later, 1984)* is a turning point in the Brazil due to its influence on the contemporary tradition, which is marked by works that

examine social issues by recognizing the socially located knowledge. Films like Paulo Sacramento's *O Prisioneiro da Grade de Ferro* (*The Prisoner of the Iron Bars*, 2003), Maria Augusta Ramos' *Serras da Desordem* (*The Hills of Disorder*, 2006), and Joao Moreira Salles and Katia Lund's *Noticias de uma Guerra Particular* (*News from a Personal War*, 1999) are immersed in sites like prisons, favelas, and indigenous communities in order to understand and report those realities.

The positioning of the "voice of the other," then, has been an important aspect of the Brazilian documentary. This thesis has elucidated different approaches used by filmmakers in order to examine social inequalities and include other people's narratives with the goal of casting light on those issues, while also considering the significance of the filmmaker's social position and its relevance in filmmaking. Much of filmmaking in Brazil (nevermind other countries with strong national cinema traditions) has been produced by middle-class white men. Therefore, there has been a reoccurring tendency for filmmaking practices to look at marginalized people from a distance, always as a world different from that of the privileged filmmaker. For example, in *Santiago*, director Moreira Salles looks at archived footage of his interview with his family's butler and criticizes his own arrogance and sense of authority towards Santiago. Even though the poor represent most of the population in the country, particularly in the twentieth century, Brazilian filmmakers tended to come from the privileged sectors using their advantage and access to resources to investigate the marginalized and oppressed. In the Brazilian industry, there has been also a concentration of filmmaking in the southeastern region, which explains the tendency to look at the northern regions as an exotic and othered reality.

Having said that, it is important to point out that *High-Rise* is not the first Brazilian documentary to narrate stories of people who were not in marginalized spaces. Albeit rare, some

Brazilian documentaries have attempted to examine the more privileged sectors in society. Documentaries such as Eduardo Coutinho's *Edifício Master* (*Master, a Building in Copacabana*, 2002), Arnaldo Jabor's *Opiniao Publica* (*A Public Opinion*, 1967) and Gregorio Bacic's *Retrato de Classe* (*Class Portrait*, 1977) are notable examples of this phenomenon. However, *High-Rise* stands out, even when compared to these films, because it features not just middle-classes, but the elites. Its mode of recruiting subjects through a book that lists powerful members of society ensured that the film featured people with significant wealth and influence. For instance, although *Edifício Master* is seen by director Eduardo Coutinho as his first comprehensive look at the middle-class, it is set in a twelve-store apartment complex with 23 apartments in each floor. That reality, although different than what was seen in films such as Coutinho's *Cabra marcado para morrer* and *Babilonia 2000*, is still far from paralleling the level of luxury experienced by subjects in *High-Rise*. In that sense, *High-Rise* comes full circle by looking at people such as those who were featured in the documentary films produced shortly after the arrival of cinema in the country in the 1890s. Back then, film-going was an activity for the elites, and documentaries and newsreels would also report on the renowned and powerful people of Brazilian society. Similarly, subjects interviewed for *Opiniao Publica*, which profiles the Brazilian middle-class in the context of the military dictatorship, were traditionally middle-class, enjoying more privileges than the poor, by not quite members of the penthouse-inhabitant elites.

Thus, *High-Rise* engages with trends commonly seen in the contemporary documentary tradition, such as the talking-head interview format, as well as talking to people in their homes, as seen in several films by Eduardo Coutinho and in *Cold Tropics*. *High-Rise*, however, employs specific strategies in order to gain access to the secluded space of the penthouses. For example, the interactions between the director and the subjects are friendly and laid back, and the themes

discussed between them are, at a first glance, non-confrontational. However, the film reveals its arguments in opposition to its subjects' discourse by using visual elements in juxtaposition to the interviews. Footage of the high-rises' shadows on the ocean, images from a distance of fishermen and construction workers are some examples of Mascaro's attempt at counterpointing his subjects. Moreover, the film incorporates sound elements that defy the discourse of the interviewees. Although the subjects will often brag about the wonders of living in a penthouse, the film's soundtrack includes a slow, somber music, as well as loud construction noises. Therefore, more than an examination of class, the film seeks to interrogate the politics of urban development by showing how spaces in the city are unjustly distributed among people. As evidenced by this study, urbanization has been an important theme in Brazilian cinema. In the documentary tradition, as well as the fiction realm, the city has appeared as more than just a location, but a site of conflicts. In *High-Rise*, the city is seen from above, as the film explores themes such as privacy, isolation, and dissonance.

High-Rise, then, marks the start of a new trend in the contemporary tradition which subverts strategies used by previous Brazilian film movements. If past documentaries sought to cast light on what went on in marginalized spaces, *High-Rise* uses similar strategies to bring its audience inside the spaces of the few and privileged. This thesis has demonstrated that *High-Rise* engages with the broader discussion on urbanization, space, and class dynamics in a way that is just being seen in Brazilian cultural cinema. All things considered, this analysis shows that *High-Rise* should be recognized as a landmark in the Brazilian documentary tradition.

Current state of Brazilian documentary and politics

This study also adds to the larger discussion on spatial issues and class in Brazil. The unbridled urbanization in some of the largest Brazilian cities ends up favoring the most privileged sectors of society. For instance, the construction of luxury skyscrapers in the seafront blocks that view as well as the ocean breeze from the rest of the city. In fact, several cities in the Brazilian Northeast limit the height of buildings in those locations in order to preserve the landscape. The city of Joao Pessoa, for example, forbids the construction of buildings with more than three floors in the seafront by law.¹ On the other hand, in Recife, not only are high-rises allowed, but construction companies detain a significant amount of power in the city. Social movements in opposition to that concentration of power have arisen in recent years, as seen in the movement *Ocupe Estelita (Occupy Estelita)*, which gained massive media attention in 2014.¹ The movement opposed the construction of twelve towers with up to 42 floors each in a public land at a historical area of the city. Furthermore, accounts of police brutality in favelas, particular in Rio de Janeiro, evidence the fact that there is a highly unjust treatment of people in those spaces due to institutionalized racism and classism. In September of 2019, the police murder of an 8-year old girl called Ágatha Félix in the favela Complexo do Alemão made headlines and caused public uproar. Therefore, discussions about social disparities and the intersection of class and space are not just necessary but urgent for Brazilian society.

Like *High-Rise*, some documentaries in the contemporary tradition propose new ways of critically examining the privileged in Brazil, complicating the power dynamics between directors and subjects. In *Camara de Espelhos* (2016), director Dea Ferraz invited men to discuss gender issues. The film found its subjects through a newspaper ad that offered a chance for men who

wanted to share their “opinions and reflections on the screen.” In the film, the subjects are reunited around a television, in a set which mimics a living room. They watch and comment on several videos which include footage from telenovelas, films, commercials, and protests, always tackling gender issues. The footage foments discussions among them on themes such as sex, relationships, division of labor, and motherhood. The director’s voice is presented through the footage, as she operates what is being shown on the TV according to what she hears from them. A notable moment happens at the end of the film, when the group watches a video from the Women’s March in which the protesters chant about oppression, sexual freedom, and feminism. Some of the women in the images are shirtless. As soon as the clip ends, one of the men says, “First of all, nice boobs.” Immediately after that, we hear Ferraz saying “Repeat the chants.” The camera fades, and we can only hear the women chanting, “The body is ours. It’s our choice. It’s for the women’s lives,” as the film fades out. Essentially, the film denounces gender oppression by focusing on the source of that oppression.

The contemporary tradition also continues to examine marginalized spaces. For instance, *Martirio* (Vincent Carelli, 2016) exposes the violence the struggles of the indigenous group Guarani-Kaiowá, and, in *Morro dos Prazeres (Hill of Pleasures, 2013)*, director Maria Augusta Ramos investigates the effects of a state-led police occupation in a favela of Rio de Janeiro. But the significant increase in the number of productions in the twentieth-first century allows for a broad variety of narratives, methods, and styles. Markedly, several films have been trying to delineate the complex political events which started with the June 2013 popular manifestations against corruption, followed up by the removal of President Dilma Rouseff from power. In *Futuro Junho (Future June, 2015)*, Maria Augusta Ramos investigates the 2013 protests as well as conflicts during preparations for the 2014 soccer World Cup. *O Processo (The Trial, 2018,*

Maria Augusta Ramos) offers a detailed and technical examination of the impeachment process of Dilma Rouseff. More recently, *The Edge of Democracy* incorporates a more personal approach, in which director Petra includes her personal experiences in the narration of what she sees as the rise and fall of the country's democratic institutions.

In 2019, with the inauguration of far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, the Brazilian film industry started to experience the effects of his conservative policies. In particular, he has threatened to close the national film agency Ancine unless he is allowed impose his ideological filter on the films that are funded by the agency.¹ In other words, censorship has returned as a real threat to filmmaking all over the country. Furthermore, the lack of funding could seriously jeopardize the independent filmmaking in Brazil, possibly silencing important voices for the cultural production. This study has engaged with themes that are relevant not only to Brazilian society but addresses concerns about urban rights and social inequality across the globe. As several nations are experiencing similar setbacks in their democracies and human rights, it is more important than ever to study films, and particularly documentaries, which seek to identify more strategic and incisive ways for looking into the dynamics of social inequalities as they manifest in urban issues and the colonization of space.

Future Questions on Brazilian Documentary Practices

This thesis has considered several topics regarding Brazilian cinema, class, and space. It also opens the discussion to further inquiries on these issues. *High-Rise* could be examined as it relates to other works by Gabriel Mascaro in order to identify how the director's style and strategies changed over the years. Particularly, his films *Housemaids* and *Defying Brasilia* also examine class and space using different methods. While *High-Rise* takes an oppositional approach to its subjects, these two subsequent documentaries feature people who, by the films'

structure, also share authorship of the film. For instance, in *Housemaids*, a film that also examines class dynamics, Mascaro handed the camera to the subjects and did not interact with them at all during the shootings. A comparative analysis could help to further the understanding on the outcomes to establishing these contrasting relationships with the subjects.

Moreover, a subsequent study could examine the politics of class and space in the broader scope of Brazilian cinema, including themes presented in its fiction films. In particular, class barriers are central to important contemporary films such as *Que Horas Ela Volta* (*The Second Mother*, Anna Muylaert, 2015) and *Casa Grande* (Fellipe Barbosa, 2014). Additionally, a comprehensive study of Latin American cinema and its visualization of spatial politics could contribute to the understanding of how urbanization and class politics influence filmmaking practices and narrative strategies in different countries.

Another area that could be expanded is the emergence of cinema made in the Northeastern region of Brazil. Historically, this region has been at the margin of socio-economic development in the country and it was a location sought but (mostly Southern and Southeastern) filmmakers who wanted to show the “exotic.” Increasingly, the region has been producing some of the most innovative and critically acclaimed films in the country. For instance, in 2019, the most praised and awarded Brazilian films were made in the Northeast: Gabriel Mascaro’s *Divino Amor* (*Divine Love*, 2019), which premiered at Sundance, the documentary *Estou Me Guardando para Quando o Carnaval Chegar* (*Waiting for the Carnival*, Marcelo Gomes, 2019), which premiered at the Berlin Film Festival and the Cannes-awarded *A Vida invisível* (*Invisible Life*, 2019), by Karim Aïnouz, and *Bacurau*, by Kleber Mendonca Filho and Juliano Dornalles. A historical analysis of cinema in the region is a crucial area of inquiry that needs to be expanded, as well as the outcomes of the increased democratization of cinema practice in Brazil.

¹ Jean-Claude Bernadet, *Cineastas e Imagens do Povo (Filmmakers and Images of the People)*, (Sao Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2003).

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