

CULTURE AND THE MARKETPLACE

cinemateca brasileira

In the 1920's, when Humberto Mauro, hidden away in Cataguazes, produced his films, his efforts were concentrated almost totally on the creation of the film itself. On one occasion, he and several companions, including Pedro Comello, came to Rio de Janeiro in the hope of exhibiting his film in one of the city's theaters. Frequently, these efforts were unsuccessful, and, as a result, the only audience to view the work was restricted to the inhabitants of Cataguazes.

In the 1950's, the Vera Cruz Company organized its cinema production center, large studios were constructed and important contracts were signed. However, in purely economic terms, the intentions of the Company went only as far as the final details of the production process. As all are well aware, the Company handed over distribution rights to Columbia Pictures.

When the New Cinema appeared in the 1960's, another series of films was produced, but, following previous examples, the ultimate aim continued to be production itself.

A short time later, after the New Cinema had attained a certain maturity, an effort was made to enter the field of film marketing with the creation of a distribution company, called Difilm.

When the government decided to lend a hand to the national cinema industry through the creation of Embrafilme, the principal goal was once again production, and was destined to continue to be so

until a distributor could be created. Practically all the incentives given to the cinema on the part of the government have been concentrated upon the production sector. Such a policy makes one believe that the Brazilian cinema sees itself as a tree, which is somehow satisfied by the production of its fruits, with little or no regard for their fate. It does not matter whether they be eaten by some bird or picked by the occasional passerby.

However, the cinema is not a product of nature, but a human enterprise which has the fundamental objective of being projected upon a screen. Thus, the cinema process should be seen as a two stage affair: production, followed by projection. The second aspect of this process has only recently been given its merited importance, and it is exactly here that a fundamental change has taken place in the Brazilian cinema. When Embrafilme founded its distribution company, it began to understand that the logical consequence of the production of a film is its projection upon the screen. This can be seen by the fact that when one spoke of the Brazilian cinema, we almost automatically thought in terms of production, forgetting the essential three-tiered process of production-distribution-exhibition, a concept which has always been followed by the Americans (in 1910, when Zukor began to structure his companies), the French (the Hakim brothers, in 1930), Luís Severiano Ribeiro in Brazil in the 1950's (possessing his own theaters, he produced his own invariably successful films in the studios of Atlântida), and, finally, those Brazilians who, from 1908 to 1913, produced films for showing in the theaters which they themselves owned.

Just as television and the newspaper, the cinema screen is a mass-media — an instrument of communication — and not a supermarket shelf. This concept of the cinema as an instrument of mass

communication, which is implicit in the definition of cinema-art-industry — with its unlimited possibilities of reproduction and total access to the techniques of photography as characterized by Walter Benjamin — suffered a quantitative decline as a mass-media instrument, as a consequence of the advent of television.

With the passing of time, it came to be understood that, although the cinema is capable of reaching an audience infinitely smaller than that of television, it has played a vanguard role in terms of the discovery of this form of communication, so essential to the mass audio-visual culture which has characterized our 20th century. The means by which each of these two means of communication reach the spectator can be defined in terms of dimension, or the difference in scale between the television and the cinema screens.

Thus, the cinema should be seen as the creator of forms, later brought to the level of the masses by television, and, in this sense, it is obvious that the cinema, as a means of communication, cannot be looked down upon. As an example of this, we can cite the fact that it has been the cinema which has spread American civilization throughout the world during the 20th century, and this is further evidenced by the fact that, at the present time, the American cinema is going through a certain process of vital renewal.

In Brazil, this cultural vitality has always been restricted to the level of production. We have been at the task of cinema for 80 years, beginning, just as other countries did, with the documentary form ("naturals"), short silent films and, later on, feature films, both musicals and dramas. And it can be said that in all these phases — right up to today's *Dona Flor e seus Dois Maridos* — success has been achieved. However, this success has not been as great as was its

due, for we have always suffered from a lack of control over the productive means of success.

Here, two factors must be taken into consideration. In the first place, we have a guaranteed market, for the law grants us 112 days per year upon the screens of our nation's movie theaters. In the second place, the release of the American film *Jaws*, by the Cinema International Corporation, led to the important discovery that the market ceiling was four times higher than had been thought. This film showed that the Brazilian cinema market was not a one million dollar market, as had been previously imagined, but rather a six million dollar market, and this fact opened the eyes of many to the possibility of occupying a significant share of this market.

In this context, it is important to understand that the first goal of a country, in terms of the cinema, is to have a production which speaks the national language, without, at first, taking into account the greater or lesser commercial or cultural quality of the product. The spectator desires to see himself upon the screen, understand himself, probe the depths of his own spirit. The image on the screen is the image of the mythical Narcissus peering into the waters in search of his own identity. The relationship between the light which is thrown upon the screen and, as if through a mirror, reflected into the faces of the spectators as the image seen in the waters — the image of a nationality — is essential to the national cinema.

Today, we can see the examples of such countries as Germany, which once reached the heights of cinema production, trying frantically to restore its product to its previous state.

In Brazil, it can be said that, although for all practical purposes we did not light the olympic flame of the national cinema, today it threatens to transform itself into a great torch.

For a country to be able to produce a cinema product which speaks its own language, it is necessary that the terrain upon which this language is expressed be profoundly understood, and this terrain is nothing else but the cinema market. And it is in this explicit sense that I think it is valid to state that the *market is culture*, or, in other words, that the Brazilian cinema market is, objectively, the most simple form of Brazilian cinema culture expression.

Market consumption is an act of satisfaction. Culture is a reflection, the satisfaction of reflection. In a certain sense, this combination is the fundamental characteristic of the great moments of the cinema, moments which P. E. Salles Gomes has described as the occasions on which the spectator feels an urge "to race out into the streets shouting that, whether God exists or not, he (man himself) was made in his image and likeness".

The essential originality of the work of Embrafilme and the immense demonstration of vision given by the Ministry of Education and Culture in recent years consists in the fact that, while industrial expression has not been allowed a privileged position with regard to cultural expression, neither has the opposite been permitted. What has been done is that the two have been allowed to follow their natural evolution until coming together to form a harmonious whole.

When Carlos Diegues views *Xica da Silva*, in the burgeoning proletarian north of Rio de Janeiro, and terms the scene before him a "barbarian festival", it is at that moment that the barrier between culture and consumption is swept away. An anthropological ceremony is born and leisure is inexorably joined to the revelation of cultural information consequent upon industrial production. The cinema comes to grips with society and, once more, reconquers the position it had lost.