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8) Review of the 10th Mostra Internacional do Filme Etnográfico do Rio de Janeiro

By Gema Juárez Allen and Johannes Sjöberg

Between the 13th and 22nd of September this year, university students and teachers, filmmakers and other film lovers in Rio de Janeiro, just curious about what an ethnographic film might be, abandoned the beaches of Ipanema and Copacabana. Instead they spent 10 exciting days running up and down Catete, a beautiful part of Rio's city centre, trying to make it to as many as possible of the 130 films screened at the 4 cinemas of the 10th Mostra Internacional do Filme Etnográfico.

The first Mostra (display) was held in 1993 on the initiative of Patrícia Monte-Mór and José Inacio Parente. Together with a group of students and ethnographic film aficionados, Patrícia and Inacio have organised the festival almost every year since. The main objective of the Mostra is to display the varied range of ethnographic productions, stretching from television series to 35 mm productions.

The variety of films screened at the festival is one of the most striking features of the Mostra. European ethnographic film festivals often show an urgency to define the genre in relation to other documentary films. The stringent selection process is regarded as an important part of the ongoing 'brand-building', as it continuously helps to redefine ethnographic film.

In contrast, the committee of the Mostra generously embraced most types of documentary films treating subjects familiar to ethnography. On one hand the 'ethnographic' quality of some of the films at the Mostra in Rio de Janeiro seemed diffuse, focusing on the subject of the film rather than on a particular gaze or treatment and thereby opening the concept of ethnographic cinema to cinema with a social bias. On the other hand the Mostra seems to have

achieved a goal that many other ethnographic film festivals fail to realise: it manages to bring visual anthropology to the broader audience.

The audience attracted by the Mostra created an almost carnivalesque atmosphere in the beautiful setting of Museu da Republica where most of the films were screened. This former palace hosts one of Rio's most visited cultural centres with a broad range of activities from capoeira (Brazilian martial art and dance) to classical theatre. The setting, and the free admission, ensured a considerable amount of casual visitors everyday. Most of the sessions were crowded with an audience captivated by the festival.

Out of the rich variety of films, *500 Almas* (500 Souls, 2005) and *Sobreviventes - Os Filhos da Guerra de Canudos* (Survivors - The Children of the Canudos War, 2004) should be mentioned. These Brazilian productions are both concerned with the reproduction of memory. *500 Almas* directed by filmmaker Joel Pizzini, is a brilliantly crafted 35 mm film about the Guatós, an indigenous group studied by Max Schmidt in the 1930s. The population was thought to be extinguished until a missionary found about 30 Guatós spread over a large area in the state of Matto Grosso. Pizzini describes *500 almas* as an 'ethnopoetic' essay. Image and sound are put together in a unique montage portraying the existential universe of the Guatós. The reconstruction of ties with the ancestral culture, particularly focusing on the role of language to retie those links, is described with delicacy.

Even though the Mostra in itself is non-competitive, there are some awards given by other organisations. One of these awards was granted to *Sobreviventes - Os Filhos da Guerra de Canudos* directed by Paulo Fontenelle. The film tells the story of the Canudos war, one of the saddest episodes in Brazilian history. In 1893 Antonio Conselheiro created a messianic community in Canudos situated in the sertão, a dry interior region of north eastern Brazil that is largely covered with scrubby upland forests. Canudos rapidly gained prosperity, as well as ferocious enemies: the church, the fazendeiros (plantation owners) and the Brazilian government. Violent repression led to two years of brave resistance that ended in destruction of the community. Most of Canudos' 25.000 inhabitants were killed when the village was destroyed. The film shows evocative images of the sertão and interviews with the sometimes over 100 year old people that survived the Canudos war as children. Memories of an attempt for change leading to brutal oppression are brought back, creating a very personal account about war, aging and the hardships of life in the sertão.

Besides the films, several lectures, workshops and debates ran parallel to the film program. Marc Henri Piault gave a tribute to Jean Rouch screening some of his films. Piault worked together with Rouch and is now carrying on the tradition of Rouch as the 'Président du Comité du Film Ethnographique' in Paris. Piault also plays an important role in the development of visual anthropology in Brazil, especially in Rio de Janeiro, where he has been teaching for many years.

Another reminder of Rouch's importance to the world of ethnographic filmmaking was a presentation held about Ateliers Varan, the famous French documentary film school officially launched by Jean Rouch in 1981. Varan favours observational cinema and teaches filmmaking to students from all over the world, often without any previous experience. Chantal Rousell, coordinator of the Ateliers, screened a variety of films showing that observational cinema still is alive and kicking among young filmmakers.

Workshops and debates about community videos and indigenous media received special attention at this Mostra, echoing the active Brazilian scene of participatory video. An ample variation of grass root media projects was presented. Among these projects, *Nós do Morro* especially deserves to be mentioned. *Nós do Morro* film school was created a few years ago by a group of young filmmakers in Vidigal, one of Rio de Janeiro's favelas, or slums. *Nós do Morro* literally means 'Us from the Mountain'. Since many of Rio's favelas are built along the mountain slopes, the word 'Morro' also carries the meaning of favela in Rio. The school, where former students now act as teachers, has created a new generation of filmmakers as well as award winning films. *Nós do Morro* represents just one of many recent initiatives of community video projects presented at the Mostra, demonstrating a blooming creativity and a quality that allows no paternalism.

Academic and media activist, Vincent Carelli, was also present at the debates of the Mostra. Carelli is well known for his participatory video projects with indigenous communities of Brazil. After his first experience of the Xikrin in the state of Pará at the age of sixteen, Carelli came to dedicate his life to indigenous advocacy. Disappointed at the Brazilian government's authoritarian and paternalistic attitude towards indians, Carelli spent many years working in non-governmental projects supporting indigenous communities to regain the power over their own images. Beginning as a photographer Carelli directed his attention towards filmmaking and found the video camera to be a useful tool for indian advocacy. In 2001 Carelli turned his by then well developed *Video nas aldeas* (Video in the Villages) project, into a NGO. The project would provide the means for indigenous communities to turn the video camera into a tool that would "enable the expression of their identity, reflecting their vision about themselves and about the world", as stated in the website of the project.

Video nas aldeas has provided several indigenous communities with video equipment as well professional film education. The project has resulted in a variety of indigenous media, such as films and television programs, as well as encounters among communities and a forum to discuss "conflicts and sustainable development in indigenous areas" (website).

Out of this brilliant production several films were shown at the Mostra. *Nguné Elü* (The Day when the Moon Menstruated) directed by Takumã and Maricá Kuikuro in 2004, follows a ritual taking place as the result of a moon eclipse. For the Kuikuro villagers in the Upper Xingu, an eclipse means that the moon is menstruating. As a result the world is transformed and must be awakened through rituals of song and dance.

Daritzé (Trainee Curator) directed and shot by Divino Tserewahú, shows the Wai'á ceremony of Aldeia Nova, a Xavante village at the São Marcos reservation. Through the hardships of rituals, young men are initiated into the spiritual world to develop their curative power. Dancing for days under a baking sun, they are taught and guarded by elders preventing them from resting or drinking water during daytime.

Both of these films are examples of the *Video nas aldeas* intention to approach "ritual and cultural traditions in complicity with the indians" (website). What is most striking is the feeling of intimacy mediated by the filmmaker. Just a few visual anthropologists manage to convey this relaxed and natural closeness to their protagonists through their films, even after living for several years in a community. Reaching a point of intimacy is even more important when conveying the meaning of a seemingly strange ritual. But even an indigenous filmmaker has to be able to shoulder the pedagogical responsibility traditionally claimed by the anthropologist. They have to observe with one eye from the inside and one from the outside in order to explain their own 'otherness'. Divino Tserewahú, Takumã and Maricá Kuikuro succeed with excellence in this performance of cultural acrobatics. Traditionally, participatory video making has been accused of insufficient technical and artistic quality. Judging from the films screened at the Mostra, the indigenous filmmakers participating in the *Video nas aldeas* project clearly demonstrates this not to be true.

Mostra Internacional do Filme Etnográfico has meant a lot for the awareness of ethnographic films in Brazil since it started in 1993. In the beginning of the 90's there wasn't any great interest for documentary films at all in Brazil, especially not for ethnographic films. Though there has been a massive revival of documentary filmmaking in Brazil during the past years ethnographic films are still fairly unknown. The people behind the Mostra are changing this by organising a variety of activities. A small archive of ethnographic films is at the disposal of universities as well as other institutions. Workshops in ethnographic filmmaking and university educations in visual anthropology have been initiated. Above all, by welcoming a large and varied audience to the screening of ethnographic films, the Mostra is gradually making the Brazilian film audience aware, not only of the variety of cultures that surround them, but also of alternative ways of displaying them.

Websites:

Ateliers Varan: www.ateliersvaran.com

Video nas aldeas (Video in the Villages): www.videonasaldeias.org.br