Hybridity and the Aesthetics of Garbage: the Case of Brazilian Cinema

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Cultural discourse in Latin America and the Caribbean has been fecund in neologistic aesthetics, both literary and cinematic: "*lo real maravilloso americano*" (Carpentier), the "aesthetics of hunger" (Glauber Rocha), "Cine imperfecto" (Julio García Espinosa), "the creative incapacity for copying" (Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes), the "aesthetics of garbage", (Rogerio Sganzerla), the "salamander" (as opposed to the Hollywood dinosaur) aesthetic (Paul Leduc), "termite terrorism" (Gilhermo del Toro), "anthropophagy" (the Brazilian Modernists), "Tropicalia" (Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso), "rasquachismo" (Tomás-Ibarra Frausto), and *santería* aesthetics (Arturo Lindsay). Most of these alternative aesthetics revalorize, by inversion, what had formerly been seen as negative, especially within colonialist discourse. Thus, ritual cannibalism, for centuries the very name of the savage, abject other, becomes with the Brazilian modernistas an anti-colonialist trope and a term of value. (Even "magic realism" inverts the colonial view of magic as irrational superstition.) At the same time, these aesthetics share the jujitsu trait of turning strategic weakness into tactical strength. By appropriating an existing discourse for their own ends, they deploy the force of the dominant against domination.[1]

Here, I would like to focus on three related aspects of these aesthetics, namely: 1) their constitutive hybridity; 2) their chronotopic multiplicity; and 3) their common motif of the redemption of detritus. After arguing the special qualifications of the cinema for realizing such a hybrid, multitemporal aesthetics, I will conclude with the case of the Brazilian "aesthetics of garbage" as the point of convergence of all our themes, specifically examining three films literally and figuratively "about" garbage.

First, let us look at hybridity. Although hybridity has been a perennial feature of art and cultural discourse in Latin America — highlighted in such

terms as *mestizaje, indigenismo, diversalite, creolite, raza cósmica* —, it has recently been recoded as a symptom of the postmodern, postcolonial and post-nationalist moment.[2] The valorization of hybridity, it should be noted, is itself a form of jujitsu, since within colonial discourse the question of hybridity was linked to the prejudice against race-mixing, the "degeneration of blood," and the putative infertility of mulattoes. But if the nationalist discourse of the 1960s drew sharp lines between First World and Third World, oppressor and oppressed, post-nationalist discourse replaces such binary dualisms with a more nuanced spectrum of subtle differentiations, in a new global regime where First World and Third World are mutually imbricated.[3] Notions of ontologically referential identity metamorphose into a conjunctural play of identifications. Purity gives way to "contamination." Rigid paradigms collapse into sliding metonymies. Erect, militant postures give way to an orgy of "positionalities." Once secure boundaries become more porous, an iconography of barbed-wire frontiers mutates into images of fluidity and crossing. A rhetoric of unsullied integrity gives way to miscegenated grammars and scrambled metaphors. A discourse of "media imperialism" gives way to reciprocity and "indigenization." Colonial tropes of irreconcilable dualism give way to postcolonial tropes drawing on the diverse modalities of mixedness: religious (syncretism); botanical (hybridity); linguistic (creolization) and human-genetic (*mestizaje*).

Although hybridity has existed wherever civilizations conflict, combine and synthesize, it reached a kind of violent paroxysm with the European colonization of the Americas. The *conquista* shaped a new world of practices and ideologies of mixing, making the Americas the scene of unprecedented combinations of indigenous peoples, Africans, and Europeans, and later of immigratory diasporas from all over the world. But hybridity has never been a peaceful encounter, a tension-free theme park; it has always been deeply entangled with colonial violence. While, for some, hybridity is lived as just another metaphor within a Derridean freeplay, for others it is alive as pain and visceral memory. Indeed, as a descriptive catch-all term, "hybridity" fails to discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity, such as colonial imposition (for example, the Catholic Church constructed on top of a destroyed Inca temple), or other interactions such as obligatory assimilation, political cooptation, cultural mimicry, commercial exploitation, top-down appropriation, bottom-up subversion. Hybridity, in other words, is power-laden and asymmetrical. Hybridity is also cooptable. In Latin America, national identity has often been *officially* articulated as hybrid, through hypocritically integrationist ideologies that have glossed over subtle racial hegemonies.

Brazilian composer-singer Gilberto Gil calls attention to the power-laden

nature of syncretism in his 1989 song "From Bob Dylan to Bob Marley: A Provocation Samba." The lyrics inform us that Bob Dylan, after converting to Christianity, made a reggae album, thus returning to the house of Israel by way of the Caribbean. The lyrics set into play a number of broad cultural parallels, between Jewish symbiology and Jamaican Rastafarianism, between the Inquisition's persecution of Jews (and Muslims) and the European suppression of African religions ("When the Africans arrived on these shores/ there was no freedom of religion"), ultimately contrasting the progressive syncretism of a Bob Marley (who died "because besides being Black he was also Jewish") with the alienation of a Michael Jackson, who "besides turning white...is becoming sad." Gil celebrates hybridity and syncretism, then, but articulates them in relation to the asymmetrical power relations engendered by colonialism. For oppressed people, artistic syncretism is not a game but a painful negotiation, an exercise, as the song's lyrics put it, both of "resistance" and "surrender."[4]

Secondly, let us look at chronotopic multiplicity. Current theoretical literature betrays a fascination with the notion of simultaneous, superimposed spatio-temporalities. The widely disseminated trope of the palimpsest, the parchment on which are inscribed the layered traces of diverse moments of past writing, contains within it this idea of multiple temporalities. The postmodern moment, similarly, is seen as chaotically plural and contradictory, while its aesthetics is seen as an aggregate of historically dated styles randomly reassembled in the present. But this oxymoronic space-time is not found only in *recent* theoretical literature. It was anticipated in Benjamin's "revolutionary nostalgia," in Ernst Bloch's conjugation of the now and the "not yet," in Braudel's multiple-speed view of history, in Althusser's "overdetermination" and "uneven development," in Raymond Williams's "residual and emergent" discourses, and Jameson's "nostalgia for the present." Bakhtinian dialogism, in the same vein, alludes to the temporally layered matrix of communicative utterances which "reach" the text not only through recognizable citations but also through a subtle process of dissemination. In a very suggestive formulation, Bakhtin evokes the multiple epochs intertextually "buried" in the work of Shakespeare. The "semantic treasures Shakespeare embedded in his works," Bakhtin writes:

> were created and collected through the centuries and even millennia: they lay hidden in the language, and not only in the literary language, but also in those strata of the popular language that before Shakespeare's time had not entered literature, in the diverse genres and forms of speech communication, in the forms of a mighty national culture (primarily

> carnival forms) that were shaped through millennia, in theatre-spectacle genres (mystery plays, farces, and so forth) in plots whose roots go back to prehistoric antiquity.[5]

Bakhtin thus points up the temporally palimpsestic nature of all artistic texts, seen within a millenial, *longue durée*.[6] Nor is this aesthetics the special preserve of canonical writers, since dialogism operates within all cultural production, whether literate or non-literate, highbrow or lowbrow. Rap music's aesthetics of sampling and cut n/ mix, for example, can be seen as a street-smart, low-budget embodiment of Bakhtin's theories of temporally embedded intertextuality, since rap's multiple strands derive from sources as diverse as African call-and-response patterns, disco, funk, the Last Poets, Gil Scott Heron, Muhammed Ali, doo-wop groups, skip rope rhymes, prison and army songs, signifying and "the dozens," all the way back to "the griots of Nigeria and Gambia."[7] Rap bears the stamp and rhythm of multiple times and meters; as in artistic collage or literary quotation, the sampled texts carry with them the time-connoted memory of their previous existences.

The third shared feature of these hybrid bricolage aesthetics is their common leitmotif of the strategic redemption of the low, the despised, the imperfect, and the "trashy" as part of a social overturning. This strategic redemption of the marginal also has echoes in the realms of high theory and cultural studies. One thinks, for example, of Derrida's recuperation of the marginalia of the classical philosophical text, of Bakhtin's exaltation of "redeeming filth" and of low "carnivalized" genres, of Benjamin's "trash of history" and his view of the work of art as constituting itself out of apparently insignificant fragments, of Deleuze-Guattari's recuperation of stigmatized psychic states such as schizophrenia, of Camp's ironic reappropriation of kitsch, of Cultural Studies' recuperation of sub-literary forms and "sub-cultural styles," and of James Scott's "weapons of the weak."

In the plastic arts, the "garbage girls" (Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Christy Rupp, Betty Beaumont) deploy waste disposal as a trampolin for art. Ukeles, for example, choreographed a "street ballet" of garbage trucks. (One is reminded of the "dance of the garbage can lids" in the Donen-Kelly musical *It's Always Fair Weather*.) Betty Beaumont makes installation art on toxic wastes using government surplus materials.[8] Joseph Cornell, similarly, turned the flotsam of daily life — broken dolls, paper cutouts, wine glasses, medicine bottles — into luminous, childlike collages. In the cinema, an "aesthetics of garbage" performs a kind of jujitsu by recuperating cinematic waste materials. For filmmakers without great resources, raw-footage minimalism reflects practical necessity as well as artistic strategy. In a film like *Hour of the Furnaces*, unpromising raw footage is transmogrified into art, as the alchemy

of sound-image montage transforms the base metals of titles, blank frames, and wild sound into the gold and silver of rhythmic virtuosity. Compilation filmmakers like Bruce Conner, Mark Rappaport, and Sherry Milner/Ernest Larsen rearrange and reedit preexisting filmic materials, while trying to fly below the radar of bourgeois legalities. Craig Baldwin, a San Francisco film programmer, reshapes outtakes and public domain materials into witty compilation films. In *Sonic Outlaws*, he and his collaborators argue for a media *detournement* which deploys the charismatic power of dominant media against itself, all the time displaying a royal disregard for the niceties of copywrite. Baldwin's anti-Columbus Quincentennial film *O No Coronado!* (1992), for example, demystifies the conquistador whose desperate search for the mythical Seven Cities of Cibola led him into a fruitless, murderous journey across what is now the American Southwest. To relate this calamitous epic, Baldwin deploys not only his own staged dramatizations, but also the detritus of the filmic archive: stock footage, pedagogical films, industrial documentaries, swashbucklers, tacky historical epics.

In an Afro-diasporic context, the "redemption of detritus" evokes another, historically fraught strategy, specifically the ways that dispossessed New World blacks have managed to transmogrify waste products into art. The Afro-diaspora, coming from artistically developed African cultures but now of freedom, education, and material possibilities, managed to tease beauty out of the very guts of deprivation, whether through the musical use of discarded oil barrels (the steel drums of Trinidad), the culinary use of throwaway parts of animals (soul food, *feijoada*), or the use in weaving of throwaway fabrics (quilting).[9] This "negation of the negation" also has to do with a special relationship to official history. As those whose history has been destroyed and misrepresented, as those whose very history has been dispersed and diasporized rather than lovingly memorialized, and as those whose history has often been told, danced and sung rather than written, furthermore, oppressed people have been obliged to recreate history out of scraps and remnants and debris. In aesthetic terms, these hand-me-down aesthetics and history-making embody an art of discontinuity — the heterogenous scraps making up a quilt, for example, incorporate diverse styles, time periods, and materials — whence their alignment with artistic modernism as an art of jazzistic "breaking" and discontinuity, and with postmodernism as an art of recycling and pastiche.[10]

Alternative aesthetics are multi-temporal in still another sense, in that they are often rooted in non-realist, often non-western cultural traditions featuring other historical rhythms, other narrative structures, and other attitudes toward the body and spirituality. By incorporating para-modern traditions into clearly modernizing or postmodernizing aesthetics, they problematize

facile dichotomies such as traditional and modern, realist and modernist, modernist and postmodernist. Indeed, the projection of Third World cultural practices as untouched by avant-guardist modernism or mass-mediated postmodernism often subliminally encodes a view of the Third World as "underdeveloped," or "developing," as if it lived in another time zone apart from the global system of the late capitalist world.[11] A different view would see all the "worlds" as living the same historical moment, in mixed modes of subordination or domination. Time in all the worlds is scrambled and palimpsestic, with the pre-modern, the modern, and the post-modern coexisting globally, although the "dominant" might vary from region to region.

The world's avant-gardes are characterized by a paradoxical and oxymoronic temporality. Just as the European avant-garde became "advanced" by drawing on the "primitive," so non-European artists, in an aesthetic version of "revolutionary nostalgia," have drawn on the most traditional elements of their cultures, elements less "pre-modern" (a term that embeds modernity as telos) than "para-modern." In the arts, the distinction archaic/modernist is often non-pertinent, in that both share a refusal of the conventions of mimetic realism. It is thus less a question of juxtaposing the archaic and the modern than deploying the archaic in order, paradoxically, to modernize, in a dissonant temporality which combines a past imaginary communitas with an equally imaginary future utopia. In their attempts to forge a liberating language, for example, alternative film traditions draw on para-modern phenomena such as popular religion and ritual magic. In African and Afro-diasporic films such as *Yeelen* (Senegal), *Jitt* (Zimbabwe), *Quartier Mozart* (Cameroun), *The Amulet of Ogum* (Brazil), *Patakin* (Cuba), *The Black Goddess* (Nigeria), and *The Gifted* (the United States), magical spirits become an aesthetic resource, a means for breaking away from the linear, cause-and-effect conventions of Aristotelian narrative poetics, a way of flying beyond the gravitational pull of verism, of defying the "gravity" of chronological time and literal space.

The cinema, I would argue, is ideally equipped to express cultural and temporal hybridity. The cinema is temporally hybrid, first of all, in an intertextual sense, in that it "inherits" all the art forms and millenial traditions associated with its diverse matters of expression. (The music or pictorial art of any historical period can be cited, or mimicked, within the cinema.) But the cinema is also temporally hybrid in another, more technical sense. As a technology of representation, the cinema mingles diverse times and spaces; it is produced in one constellation of times and spaces, it represents still another (diegetic) constellation of times and places, and is received in still another time and space (theatre, home, classroom). Film's conjunction of sound and

image means that each track not only presents two kinds of time, but also that they mutually inflect one another in a form of synchresis. Atemporal static shots can be inscribed with a temporality through sound.[12] The panoply of available cinematic techniques further multiplies these already multiple times and spaces. Superimposition redoubles the time and space, as do montage and multiple frames within the image. The capacity for palimpsestic overlays of images and sounds facilitated by the new computer and video technologies further amplify possibilities for fracture, rupture, polyphony. An electronic "quilting" can weave together sounds and images in ways that break with linear single-line narrative. The "normal" sequential flow can be disrupted and sidetracked to take account of simultaneity and parallelism. Rather than an Aristotelian sequence of exposition, identification, suspense, pathos and catharsis, the audio-visual text becomes a tapestry. These media are capable of chameleonic blendings à la *Zelig*, digital insertions à la *Forrest Gump*, and multiple images/sounds à la *Numéro Deux*. These new media can combine synthesized images with captured ones. They can promote a "threshold encounter" between Elton John and Louis Armstrong, as in the 1991 Diet Coke commercial, or allow Natalie Cole to sing with her long-departed father. Potentially, the audio-visual media are less bound by canonical institutional and aesthetic traditions; they make possible what Arlindo Machado calls the "hybridization of alternatives."

The cinema in particular, and audio-visual media in general, is in Bakhtinian terms "multichronotopic." Although Bakhtin develops his concept of the "chronotope" (from chronos, time, and topos, place) to suggest the inextricable relation between time and space in the novel, it also seems ideally suited to the cinema as a medium where "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out concrete whole." (It also spares us the absurdity of "choosing" between time and space as theoretical focus.) Bakhtin's description of the novel as the place where time "thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible" and where "space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" seems in some ways even more appropriate to film than to literature, for whereas literature plays itself out within a virtual, lexical space, the cinematic chronotope is quite literal, splayed out concretely across a screen with specific dimensions and unfolding in literal time (usually 24 frames per second), quite apart from the fictive time-space specific films might construct. Thus cinema embodies the inherent relationality of time (chronos) and space (topos); it is space temporalized and time spatialized, the site where time takes place and place takes time.

The multi-track nature of audio-visual media enables them to orchestrate multiple, even contradictory, histories, temporalities, and perspectives. They

offer not a "history channel," but rather multiple channels for multifocal, multiperspectival historical representation. What interests me especially here is a kind of matching between representations of the palimpsestic, multi-nation state and the cinema as a palimpsestic and polyvalent medium which can stage and perform a transgressive hybridity. Constitutively multiple, the cinema is ideally suited for staging what Néstor-García Canclini, in a very different context, calls "multi-temporal heterogeneity."[13] The obvious fact that dominant cinema has largely opted for a linear and homogenizing aesthetics, where track reinforces track within a Wagnerian totality, in no way effaces the equally salient truth that the cinema (and the new media) are infinitely rich in polyphonic potentialities.[14] The cinema makes it possible to stage temporalized cultural contradictions not only within the shot, through mise en scène, décor, costume, and so forth, but also through the interplay and contradictions between the diverse tracks, which can mutually shadow, jostle, undercut, haunt, and mutually relativize one another. Each track can develop its own velocity; the image can be accelerated while the music is slowed, or the soundtrack can be temporally layered by references to diverse historical periods. A culturally polyrhythmic, heterochronic, multi-velocity and contrapuntal cinema becomes a real possibility.

We catch a glimpse of these possibilities in Glauber Rocha's *Terra em Transe* (Land in Anguish, 1967), a baroque allegory about Brazilian politics, specifically the 1964 right-wing coup d'état which overthrew João Goulart. Set in the imaginary land of Eldorado, the film offers an irreverent, "unofficial" representation of Pedro Alvares Cabral, the Portuguese "discoverer" of Brazil. More important for our purposes, the film exploits temporal anachronism as a fundamental aesthetic resource. The right wing figure of the film (named Porfirio Díaz after the Mexican dictator) arrives from the sea with a flag and a crucifix, suggesting a foundational myth of national origins. Dressed in an anachronistic modern-day suit, Díaz is accompanied by a priest in a Catholic habit, a 16th century conquistador, and a symbolic feathered Indian. Díaz raises a silver chalice, in a ritual evoking Cabral's "first mass," but in an anachronistic manner which stresses the continuities between the conquest and contemporary oppression; the contemporary right-winger is portrayed as the latter-day heir of the conquistadores.

But Rocha further destabilizes time and space by making Africa a textual presence. The very aesthetics of the sequence, first of all, draws heavily from the Africanized forms of Rio's yearly samba pageant, with its polyrhythms, its extravagant costumes, and its contradictory forms of historical representation; indeed, the actor who plays the conquistador is Clóvis Bornay, a historian specialized in carnival "allegories," and a well-known figure from

Rio's carnival. Secondly, the mass is accompanied not by Christian religious music, but by Yoruba religious chants, evoking the "transe" of the Portuguese title. Rocha's suggestive referencing of African music, as if it had existed in Brazil prior to the arrival of Europeans, reminds us not only of the "continental drift" theory that sees South America and Africa as once having formed part of a single land mass, but also of the theories of Van Sertima and others that Africans arrived in the New World "before Columbus."[15] The music suggests that Africans, as those who shaped and were shaped by the Americas over centuries, are in some uncanny sense *also* indigenous to the region.[16] At the same time, the music enacts an ironic reversal, since the chants of exaltation are addressed to a reprehensible figure. Although Eurocentric discourse posits African religion as irrational, the film suggests that in fact it is the European elite embodied by Porfirio Díaz which is irrational, hysterical, entranced, almost demonic. The presence of a *mestiço* actor representing the Indian, furthermore, points to a frequent practice in Brazilian cinema during the silent period, when Indians, whose legal status as "wards of the state" prevented them from representing themselves, were often represented by blacks. While in the United States white actors performed in blackface, in Brazil blacks performed, as it were, in "redface." That the entire scene is a product of the narrator-protagonist's delirium as he lays dying, finally, as the past (the "discovery") and the future (the coup d'état) flash up before his eyes, adds still another temporalized layer of meaning. Here temporal contradiction becomes a spur to creativity. The scene's fractured and discontinuous aesthetics stages the drama of life in the colonial "contact zone," defined by Mary Louise Pratt as the space in which "subjects previously separated" encounter each other and "establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractible conflict."[17] Rocha's neo-baroque Afro-avant-guardist aesthetics here figures the discontinuous, dissonant, fractured history of the nation through equally dissonant images and sounds.

Brazilian cinema proliferates in the signs and tokens of hybridity, drawing on the relational processes of Brazil's diverse communities. Rather than merely reflect a pre-existing hybridity, Brazilian cinema actively hybridizes, it stages and performs hybridity, counterpointing cultural forces through surprising, even disconcerting juxtapositions and counterpoints. At its best, it orchestrates not a bland pluralism but rather a strong counterpoint between in some ways incommensurable yet nevertheless thoroughly co-implicated cultures. The opening sequence of *Macunaíma*, for example, shows a family whose names are indigenous, whose epidermic traits are African and European and *mestizo*, whose clothes are Portuguese and African, whose hut is indigenous and backwoods, and whose manner of giving birth is

indigenous. The plot of *Pagador de Promessas* (The Given Word, 1962) revolves around the conflicting values of Catholicism and *candomblé*, evoked through the manipulation of cultural symbols, setting in motion a cultural battle, for example, between *berimbau* (an African instrument consisting of a long bow, gourd and string) and church bell, thus synecdochically encapsulating a larger religious and political struggle. *Tent of Miracles* (1977) counterposes opera and samba to metaphorize the larger conflict between Bahia's white elite and its subjugated *mestizos*, between ruling-class science and Afro-inflected popular culture.

In the best Brazilian films, hybridity is not just a property of the cultural objects portrayed, but rather inheres in the film's very processes of enunciation, its mode of constituting itself as a text. The final shot of *Terra em Transe* exemplifies this process brilliantly. As we see the film's protagonist Paulo wielding a rifle in a Che-Guevara-like gesture of quixotic rebellion, we hear a soundtrack composed of Villa-Lobos, *candomblé* chants, samba, and machine-gun fire. The mix, in this feverish bricolage, is fundamentally unstable; the Villa-Lobos music never really synchronizes with the *candomblé* or the gunfire. We are reminded of Alejo Carpentier's gentle mockery of the innocuous juxtapositions of the European avant-guardists — for example, Lautreamont's "umbrella and a sewing machine" —, which he contrasts with the explosive counterpoints of indigenous, African, and European cultures thrown up daily by Latin American life and art, counterpoints where the tensions are never completely resolved or harmonized, where the cultural dialogue is tense, transgressive, not easily assimilated.

Another way that Brazilian culture is figured as a mixed site is through the motif of garbage. Garbage, in this sense, stands at the point of convergence of our three themes of hybridity, chronotopic multiplicity, and the redemption of detritus. Garbage is hybrid, first of all, as the diasporized, heterotopic site of the promiscuous mingling of rich and poor, center and periphery, the industrial and the artisanal, the domestic and the public, the durable and the transient, the organic and the inorganic, the national and the international, the local and the global. The ideal postmodern and postcolonial metaphor, garbage is mixed, syncretic, a radically decentered social text. It can also be seen as what Charles Jencks calls a "heteropolis" and Edward Soja, following Foucault, a "heterotopia," i.e., the juxtaposition in a real place of "several sites that are themselves incompatible."[18] As a place of buried memories and traces, meanwhile, garbage is an example of what David Harvey calls the "time-space compression" typical of the acceleration produced by contemporary technologies of transportation, communication and information. In Foucault's terms, garbage is "heterochronic"; it concentrates time in a circumscribed space. (Archeology, it has been suggested, is simply a

sophisticated form of garbology.)[19] The garbage pile can be seen as an archeological treasure trove precisely because of its concentrated, synecdochic, compressed character. As congealed history, garbage reveals a checkered past. As time materialized in space, it is coagulated sociality, a gooey distillation of society's contradictions.

As the quintessence of the negative — expressed in such phrases as "talking trash," "rubbish!" and "cesspool of contamination" —, garbage can be also be an object of artistic jujitsu and ironic reappropriation. An ecologically-aware recycling system in Australia calls itself "reverse garbage." (The subversive potential of garbage as metaphor is suggested in Thomas Pynchon's novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, where the heroine collects hints and traces that reveal the alternative network of W.A.S.T.E. as a kind of counterculture outside of the dominant channels of communication.) In aesthetic terms, garbage can be seen as an aleatory collage or surrealist enumeration, a case of the definitive by chance, a random pile of *objets trouvés* and *papiers collés*, a place of violent, surprising juxtapositions.[20]

Garbage, like death and excrement, is a great social leveller; the trysting point of the funky and the shi shi. It is the terminus for what Mary Douglas calls "matter out of place." In social terms, it is a truth-teller. As the lower stratum of the socius, the symbolic "bottom" of the body politic, garbage signals the return of the repressed; it is the place where used condoms, bloody tampons, infected needles and unwanted babies are left, the ultimate resting place of all that society both produces and represses, secretes and makes secret. The final shot of Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* (1950), we may recall, shows the corpse of the film's lumpen protagonist being unceremoniously dumped on a Mexico City garbage pile; the scene is echoed in Babenco's *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, where Molina's dead body is tossed on a garbage heap, while the voice-over presents the official lies about his death. Grossly material, garbage is society's id; it steams and smells below the threshold of ideological rationalization and sublimation. At the same time, garbage is reflective of social prestige; wealth and status are correlated with the capacity of a person (or a society) to discard commodities, i.e., to generate garbage. (The average American discards five pounds of garbage per day.)[21] Like hybridity, garbage too is power-laden. The power elite can gentrify a slum, make landfill a ground for luxury apartments, or dump toxic wastes in a poor neighborhood.[22] They can even recycle their own fat from rump to cheek in the form of plastic surgery.

It is one of the utopian, recombinant functions of art to work over dystopian, disagreeable and malodorous materials. Brazil's *udigrudi* (underground) filmmakers of the 1960s were the first, to my knowledge, to speak of the "aesthetics of garbage" (estetica do lixo). The movement's film-manifesto,

Sganzerla's *Red Light Bandit* (1968), began with a shot of young *favelados* dancing on burning garbage piles, pointedly underlined by the same *candomblé* music that begins Rocha's *Terra em Transe*. The films were made in the São Paulo neighborhood called "boca de lixo" (mouth of garbage), a red-light district named in diacritical contrast with the high-class red light district called "boca de luxo" (mouth of luxury). Brazilian plastic artist Regina Vater played on these references in her mid-1970s work "Luxo/Lixo" (Luxury/Garbage), where she photographically documented the quite different trash discarded in neighborhoods representing different social classes.

For the underground filmmakers, the garbage metaphor captured the sense of marginality, of being condemned to survive within scarcity, of being the dumping ground for transnational capitalism, of being obliged to recycle the materials of the dominant culture."[23] And if the early 1960s trope of hunger — as in Rocha's "aesthetics of hunger" — evokes the desperate will to dignity of the famished subject, token of the self-writ large of the third world nation itself, the trope of garbage is more decentered, post-modern, post-colonial. Three recent Brazilian documentaries directly address the theme of garbage. Eduardo Coutinho's *O Fio da Memoria* (The Thread of Memory, 1991), a film made as part of the centenary of abolition commemoration, reflects on the sequels of slavery in the present. Instead of history as a coherent, linear narrative, the film offers a history based on disjunctive scraps and fragments. Here, the interwoven strands or fragments taken together become emblematic of the fragmentary interwovenness of black life in Brazil. One strand consists of the diary of Gabriel Joaquim dos Santos, an elderly black man who had constructed his own dream house as a work of art made completely out of garbage and detritus: cracked tiles, broken plates, empty cans. For Gabriel, the city of Rio represents the "power of wealth," while his house, constructed from the "city's leftovers," represents the "power of poverty." Garbage thus becomes an ideal medium for those who themselves have been cast off, broken down, who have been "down in the dumps," who feel, as the blues line had it, "like a tin can on that old dumping ground." A transformative impulse takes an object considered worthless and turns it into something of value. Here, the restoration of the buried worth of a cast-off object analogizes the process of revealing the hidden worth of the despised, devalued artist himself.[24]

At the same time, we witness an example of a strategy of resourcefulness in a situation of scarcity. The trash of the haves becomes the treasure of the have nots; the dank and unsanitary is transmogrified into the sublime and the beautiful. What had been an eyesore is transformed into a sight for sore eyes. The burned-out light bulb, wasted icon of modern inventiveness, becomes an

emblem of beauty. With great improvisational flair, the poor, tentatively literate Gabriel appropriates the discarded products of industrial society for his own recreational purposes, in procedures which inadvertently evoke those of modernism and the avant-garde: the Formalists' "defamiliarization," the Cubists' "found objects," Brecht's "refunctioning," the situationists' "*detournement*." This recuperation of fragments also has a spiritual dimension in terms of African culture. Throughout West and Central Africa, "the rubbish heap is a metaphor for the grave, a point of contact with the world of the dead."[25] The broken vessels displayed on Kongo graves, Robert Farris Thompson informs us, serve as reminders that broken objects become whole again in the other world.[26]

The title of another "garbage" video, Coutinho's documentary *Boca de Lixo* (literally "mouth of garbage," but translated as "The Scavengers," 1992) directly links it to the "aesthetics of garbage," since its Portuguese title refers to the São Paulo red light district where the "garbage" films were produced. The film centers on impoverished Brazilians who survive thanks to a garbage dump outside of Rio, where they toil against the backdrop of the outstretched ever-merciful arms of the Christ of Corcovado. Here, the camera is witness to social misery. Ferreting through the garbage, the participants perform a triage of whatever is thrown up by the daily lottery of ordure, sorting out plastic from metal from food for animals. Since many of the faces are female and dark-skinned, the film reveals the feminization, and the racialization, of social misery. Here, we see the endpoint of an all-permeating logic of commodification, logical telos of the consumer society and its ethos of planned obsolescence. Garbage becomes the morning after of the romance of the new. (Italo Calvino's story "Invisible Cities" speaks of a city so enamored of the new that it discards all of its objects daily.) In the dump's squalid phantasmagoria, the same commodities that had been fetishized by advertising, dynamized by montage and haloed through backlighting, are now stripped of their aura of charismatic power. We are confronted with the seamy underside of globalization and its facile discourse of one world under a consumerist groove. The world of transnational capitalism and the "posts," we see, is more than ever a world of constant, daily immiseration. Here we see the hidden face of the global system, all the sublimated agonies masked by the euphoric nostrums of "neo-liberalism."

If *Thread of Memory* sees garbage as an artistic resource, *Boca de Lixo* reveals its human-existential dimension. Here, the garbage dwellers have names (Jurema, Enoch), nicknames ("Whiskers"), families, memories, and hopes. Rather than take a miserabilist approach, Coutinho shows us people who are inventive, ironic, and critical, who tell the director what to look at and how to interpret what he sees. While for Coutinho the stealing of others'

images for sensationalist purposes is the "original sin" of TV-reportage,[27] the garbage dwellers repeatedly insist that "Here nobody steals," as if responding to the accusations of imaginary middle-class interlocutors. Instead of the suspect pleasures of a condescending "sympathy," the middle-class spectator is obliged to confront vibrant people who dare to dream and to talk back and even criticize the filmmakers. The "natives," in this ethnography of garbage, are not the object but rather the agents of knowledge. At the end of the film, the participants watch themselves on a VCR, in a reflexive gesture which goes back to the African films of Jean Rouch and which is now familiar from "indigenous media." Rather than pathetic outcasts, the film's subjects exist on a continuum with Brazilian workers in general; they encapsulate the country as a whole; they have held other jobs, they have worked in other cities, they have labored in the homes of the elite. They have absorbed and processed the same media representations as everyone else. They have "lines out"" to the center; they disprove what Janice Perlman calls the "myth of marginality." A vernacular philosopher in the film tells the filmmakers that garbage is a beginning and an end in a cyclical principle of birth and rebirth — what goes around comes around. Garbage is shown as stored energy, containing in itself the seeds of its own transformation. Garbage becomes a form of social karma, the deferred rendezvous between those who can afford to waste and those who cannot afford not to save what has been wasted. Those who live off garbage also decorate their homes with it. While the elite wastes food almost as a matter of principle, the poor are obliged to lick their own plates, and those of others, clean.

Jorge Furtado's *Isle of Flowers* (1989) brings the "garbage aesthetics" into the postmodern era, while also demonstrating the cinema's capacity as a vehicle for political/aesthetic reflexion. Rather than an aestheticization of garbage, here garbage is both theme and formal strategy. Described by its author as a "letter to a Martian who knows nothing of the earth and its social systems," Furtado's short uses Monty Python-style animation, archival footage, and parodic/reflexive documentary techniques to indict the distribution of wealth and food around the world. The "isle of flowers" of the title is a Brazilian garbage dump where famished women and children, in groups of ten, are given five minutes to scrounge for food. But before we get to the garbage dump, we are given the itinerary of a tomato from farm to supermarket to bourgeois kitchen to garbage can to the "Isle of Flowers." Furtado's edited collage is structured as a social lexicon or glossary, or better, a surrealist enumeration of key words such as "pigs," "money," and "human beings." The definitions are interconnected and multi-chronotopic; they lead out into multiple historical frames and historical situations. In order to follow the trajectory of the tomato, we need to know the origin of money: "Money

was created in the seventh century before Christ. Christ was a Jew, and Jews are human beings." As the audience is still laughing from this abrupt transition, the film cuts directly to the photographic residue of the Holocaust, where Jews, garbage-like, are thrown into death-camp piles. (The Nazis, we are reminded, had their own morbid forms of recycling.) Throughout, the film moves back and forth between minimalist definitions of the human to the lofty ideal of freedom evoked by the film's final citation: "Freedom is a word the human dream feeds on, that no one can explain or fail to understand."

But this summary gives little sense of the experience of the film, of its play with documentary form and expectations. First, the film's visuals — old TV commercials, newspaper advertisements, health care manuals — themselves constitute a kind of throwaway, visual garbage. (In the silent period of cinema, we are reminded, films were seen as transient entertainments rather than artistic durables, and therefore as not worth saving; during the First World War they were even recycled for their lead content.) Many of the more banal shots — of pigs, of tomatoes, and so forth — are repeated, in defiance of the cinematic decorum which suggests that shots should be 1)beautiful, and 2)not repeated. Second, the film, whose preamble states that "this is not a fiction film," mocks the positivist mania for factual detail by offering useless, gratuitous precision: "We are in Belem Novo, city of Porto Alegre, state of Rio Grande do Sul. More precisely, at thirty degrees, twelve minutes and thirty seconds latitude south, and fifty one degrees eleven minutes and twenty three seconds longitude west." Third, the film mocks the apparatus and protocols of rationalist science, through absurd classificatory schemas — "Dona Anete is a Roman Catholic female biped mammal" and tautological syllogisms — "Mr. Suzuzki is Japanese, and therefore a human being." Fourth, the film parodies the conventions of the educational film, with its authoritative voice-over and quiz-like questions ("What is a history quiz?"). The overture music is a synthesized version of the theme song of "Voice of Brazil," the widely-detested official radio program that has been annoying Brazilians since the days of Vargas. Humor becomes a kind of trap; the spectator who begins by laughing ends up, if not crying, at least reflecting very seriously. Opposable thumbs and highly developed telencephalon, we are told, have given "human beings the possibility of making many improvements in their planet;" a shot of a nuclear explosion serves as illustration. Thanks to the universality of money, we are told, we are now "Free!;" a snippet of the "Hallelujah Chorus" punctuates the thought. Furtado invokes the old carnival motif of pigs and sausage, but with a political twist; here the pigs, given inequitable distribution down the food chain, eat better than people.[28] In this culinary recycling, we are given a social examination of garbage; the truth of a society is in its detritus. The socially peripheral points to the

symbolically central. Rather than having the margins invade the center as in carnival, here the center creates the margins, or better, there are no margins; the tomato links the urban bourgeois family to the rural poor via the sausage and the tomato within a web of global relationality.[29]

In these films, the garbage dump becomes a critical vantage point from which to view society as a whole. It reveals the social formation as seen "from below." As the overdetermined depot of social meanings, as a concentration of piled up signifiers, garbage is the place where hybrid, multi-chronotopic relations are reinvoiced and reinscribed. Garbage defines and illuminates the world; the trashcan, to recycle Trotsky's aphorism, *is* history. Garbage offers a data base of material culture off of which one can read social customs or values. Polysemic and multivocal, garbage can be seen literally — garbage as a source of food for poor people, garbage as the site of ecological disaster —, but it can also be read symptomatically, as a metaphorical figure for social indictment — poor people treated like garbage, garbage as the "dumping" of pharmaceutical products or of "canned" TV programs, slums (and jails) as human garbage dumps. These films reveal the "hidden transcripts" of garbage, reading it as an allegorical text to be deciphered, a form of social colonics where the truth of a society can be "read" in its waste products.

NOTES

1. This paper was first presented as a talk at the second installment of the "Hybrid Cultures and Transnational Identities" Conference held at U.C.L.A., March 7-8, 1997. The session was organized by Randal Johnson.
2. For those of us working in the area of Latin American culture, where "hybridity" and "*mestizaje*" have been critical commonplaces for decades, it is always a surprise to learn that Homi Bhabha, through no fault of his own, has been repeatedly "credited" with the concept of "hybridity."
3. For more on "post-Third Worldism," see Ella Shohat/Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994).
4. The mutually enriching collaborations between the diverse currents of Afro-diasporic music, yielding such hybrids as "samba reggae," "samba-rap," "jazz tango," "rap reggae" and "roforenge" (a blend of rock, forro, and merengue) in the Americas, offer examples of "lateral syncretism," i.e., syncretism on a "sideways" basis of rough equality. Diasporic musical cultures mingle with one another, while simultaneously also playing off the dominant media-disseminated tradition of First World, especially American, popular music, itself energized by Afro-diasporic traditions. An endlessly creative multidirectional flow of musical ideas thus moves back and forth around the "Black Atlantic", for example, between cool jazz and samba in bossa nova, between soul music and ska in reggae. Afro-diasporic music displays an anthropophagic capacity to absorb influences, including western influences, while still being driven by a culturally African bass-note.
5. M.M. Bakhtin, "Response to a Question from the *Novy Mir* editorial staff," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, p. 5.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

7. See David Toop, *The Rap Attack: African Jive to New York Hip Hop* (New York: Pluto Press, 1984).
8. See Lucy Lippard, "The Garbage Girls," in *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art* (New York: The New Press, 1995).
9. In his fascinating intervention at the "Hybrid Cultures and Transnational Identities" Conference, Teshome Gabriel showed slides of the salvage art of African-American artist Lefon Andrews, who uses paper bags as his canvas, and dry leaves for paint. Teshome demonstrated the method by showing the audience a paper bag and some leaves, revealing them to be the basic materials that went into the beautiful artifacts pictured in the slides.
10. The African-American environmental artist known as "Mr. Imagination" "has created bottle-cap thrones, paintbrush people, cast-off totems, and other pieces salvaged from his life as a performing street artist." See Charlene Cerny and Suzanne Seriff, eds. *Recycled, Reseen: Folk Art from the Global Scrap Heap* (New York: Harry N. Abrams [in conjunction with the Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe], 1996).
11. Commenting on the Afro-Brazilian musical group Olodum, which contributed to Paul Simon's compact disk *The Spirit of the Saints*, Caetano Veloso remarked in a recent interview that: "It is not Paul Simon who brings modernity to Olodum; no, Olodum is itself modern, innovative." See *Transition*, most recent issue.
12. See Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), especially the first chapter, "Projections of Sound on Image."
13. See Néstor-Garcia Canclini, *Culturas Híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1989).
14. Ella Shohat and I try to call attention to the vast corpus of films that explore these potentialities in our *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994).
15. See Ivan van Sertima, *They Came Before Columbus* (New York: Random House, 1975).
16. A 1992 samba pageant presentation, *Kizombo*, also called attention to the putative pre-Columbian arrival of Africans in the New World, both in the lyrics and through gigantic representations of the Mexican Olmec statues with their clearly Negroid features.
17. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 7.
18. See Christopher Jencks, *Heterotopolis: Los Angeles, the Riots and the Strange Beauty of Hetero-Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1993) and Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).
19. Another form of garbology is the study of celebrity garbage, for example that of Bob Dylan or O.J. Simpson, for purposes of psychological investigation.
20. For a survey of recycled art from around the world, see Charlene Cerny and Suzanne Seriff, *Recycled, Reseen...*
21. Artist Milenko Matanovic has developed a project called "Trash Hold," in which high-profile participants drag especially designed bags of their garbage around with them for a week, at the end of which the participants gather to recycle. See Lucy Lipard, *The Pink Glass Swan...*, p. 265.
22. For more on the discourse of garbage, see Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Judd H. Alexander, *In Defense of Garbage* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1993); William Rathje and Cullen Murphy, *Rubbish! The Archeology of Garbage* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992); and Katie Kelly, *Garbage: The History and Future of Garbage in America* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1973).
23. Ismail Xavier, *Allegories of Underdevelopment: From the "Aesthetics of Hunger" to the "Aesthetics of Garbage."* Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 1982.
24. My formulation obviously both echoes and Africanizes the language of Fredric Jameson's

well-known essay "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text*, No. 15 (Fall 1986).

25. See Wyatt MacGaffey, "The Black Loincloth and the Son of Nzambi Mpungu," in *Forms of Folklore in Africa: Narrative, Poetic, Gnomic, Dramatic* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), p. 78.
26. See Robert Farris Thompson and Joseph Cornet, *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds* (Washington: National Gallery, 1981), p. 179.
27. Quoted in *Revista USP*, No. 19 (September/October/November 1993), p. 148.
28. The pig, as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White point out, was despised for their specific habits: "its ability to digest its own and human faeces as well as other 'garbage'; its resistance to full domestication; its need to protect its tender skin from sunburn by wallowing in the mud." See *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).
29. Jorge Furtado's *Esta não e a sua Vida* (This is Not Your Life, 1992) prolongs the director's reflections on the nature of documentary, posing such questions: How does the documentarist find a topic? What does it mean to "know" about someone's life? How much has the spectator learned about someone's life by seeing a documentary? How do you film your subject?

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Quito-Ecuador, abril de 1998

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