



Rafael Cardoso. *Modernity in Black and White: Art and Image, Race and Identity in Brazil, 1890-1945.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 282 pp. \$40.00, e-book, ISBN 978-1-108-68035-6.

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Rafael Cardoso's *Modernity in Black and White: Art and Image, Race and Identity in Brazil, 1890-1945* offers a reconsideration of Brazil's cultural history during the Old Republic (1889-1930) and the first administration of Getúlio Vargas (1930-45) that places the popular press at its center. Cardoso contends that illustrated magazines published in Rio de Janeiro (the nation's capital at the time) embodied modernist aesthetics decades before the famous *Semana de Arte Moderna* (Modern Art Week) held in São Paulo in 1922. Furthermore, these publications grappled extensively if often problematically with issues of race that were addressed only superficially by the Anthropophagist movement of the late twenties (which involved key figures of the *Semana de Arte Moderna* like Oswald de Andrade), despite its celebrated call for the devouring and digestion of both colonial and indigenous influences as a model for Brazilian cultural production.

This first thesis does not seem overly polemical from this reviewer's vantage point as a scholar of Latin American cinema and visual culture. As early as 1987 Flora Süssekind (whom Cardoso cites) contested the prevailing classification of turn-of-the-century writers like João do Rio, who worked first and foremost as professional journalists, as "premodernist." Instead, she posits their work as defined by encounters with novel techno-

logies like film and experiences of urban modernity more broadly.[1] Nevertheless, *Modernity in Black and White's* focus on the visual dimensions of the popular press is a welcome one, and Cardoso's deep dive into print sources lends his revisions to prevailing understandings of early twentieth-century Brazilian culture undeniable weight.

Cardoso develops his two interconnected lines of argument through five case studies organized more or less chronologically. Three of the book's chapters trace visual tropes with a privileged relationship to conceptions of Brazilian identity and modernity, including the favela (chapter 1), Carnival and its bohemian ethos (chapter 2), and images of idealized racial types (chapter 5). Its third and fourth chapters offer, respectively, an overview of novel print technologies and art nouveau influences in Rio de Janeiro magazines and a focused analysis of the *Semana de Arte Moderna* and the Anthropophagist group as mediated by illustrated periodicals.

In keeping with Cardoso's efforts to expand our understanding of modernism by challenging distinctions between high and low culture, the book's opening chapter explores images of the favela in both the fine arts and the popular press during the period of its emergence as a cause for public concern, roughly from 1890 to 1930. His examples range from academic paintings that depic-

ted these informal communities as picturesque vestiges of rural life in urban space to political cartoons that either praised or critiqued officials' unsuccessful efforts to raze them and the spate of photographs and caricatures generated by Italian futurist F. T. Marinetti's famous visit to Rio's favelas in an effort to understand the nation's racial particularities, a source of bewilderment and embarrassment for elite Brazilians. The chapter also traces the growing association between Blackness and the favela in Brazilian visual culture, suggesting that the offensive caricatures of Afro-Brazilian favela dwellers that appeared in illustrated magazines starting in the 1910s have much in common with São Paulo modernist Tarsila do Amaral's well-known painting *Morro da Favela* (1924), which presents its residents as exclusively Black and renders them as simplified social types rather than individuals.

Covering an overlapping if briefer historical period (1903-13), *Modernity in Black and White's* second chapter explores the cross-pollination between the Rio de Janeiro art establishment (represented by two academies, the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes and the Liceu de Artes e Ofícios), illustrated magazines, and the annual Carnival festivities during a transitional period predating the rise of *escolas de samba* (samba schools) in the 1930s. Cardoso reconstructs the social circle surrounding the visual artists and prominent dandies Raul Pederneras and Calixto Cordeiro (who used the pseudonym K. Lixto), who were best known as caricaturists, and Helios Seelinger. Seelinger's 1903 painting *Bohemia*, analyzed in detail in the text, offers an idealized vision of their milieu, in which writers, painters, and stage performers mingled with little regard for class divides or traditional distinctions between legitimate and popular art, tendencies that Cardoso hails as signs of artistic modernity. Whether artists worked directly for Carnival societies, like K. Lixto, who designed floats for annual pageants, or used the festivities as a pretext for semi-abstract explorations of color and form, such as painters Arthur Timotheo da

Costa and Rodolpho Chambelland, Carnival's blurring of racial and class boundaries energized Brazilian art in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

The study's third chapter, "The Printing of Modern Life," reminds us that while we typically associate modernism in the visual arts with geometric abstraction, art nouveau's decorative, organic aesthetic and sinuous lines were also considered novel and distinctly modern at the turn of the twentieth century. Cardoso charts how art nouveau aesthetics and technological developments like half-tone photographic reproductions and multicolor printing shaped little magazines like *Atheneida* and *Kósmos* before filtering into mass-circulation periodicals like *Careta*, *Fon Fon!*, *O Malho*, and *Para Todos...*, giving rise to a ubiquitous, accessible form of modernism.

Cardoso then turns to the Semana de Arte Moderna and the Anthropophagist group, contrasting the extensive and usually celebratory attention they have been accorded by scholars with press accounts from the period. When they did not ignore them altogether, mainstream newspapers and magazines often proved skeptical of the São Paulo modernists' exploits, at times dismissing the provocations of the Anthropophagists as acts of self-exoticization for a European gaze. Journalist Alvaro Moreyra, who covered the Anthropophagist movement's activities extensively in the popular magazine *Para Todos...*, was an outlier among his colleagues who helped secure the group's public reputation. Although the movement's own periodical, *Revista de Antropofagia*, devoted ample space for visual experiments, it rarely engaged with questions of race, and when it did, its tone was often flippant or outright insulting.

By contrast, during the Vargas era the complexities of Brazilian racial identity took center stage as artists aligned themselves with anthropologists and statisticians' (unscientific) efforts to establish clear racial taxonomies for the nation,

which were often mapped onto the opposition between coastal cities and the *sertão* (backlands). Cardoso examines plans for a never-completed statue of the “Brazilian man” slated to be erected in front of the modernist edifice that housed the Ministry of Education and Health; the paintings of Candido Portinari, which offered idealized visions of multiracial Brazilians at work that echoed both Mexican muralism and Italian Fascist art; and the work of Ukrainian-born artist Dimitri Ismailovitch, whose enigmatic portraits of indigenous people and Afro-Brazilians highlighted the impossibility of reducing Brazil’s demographic heterogeneity to a single racial type.

As it delves into some of the most iconic tropes and artistic movements of Brazilian culture in the first half of the twentieth century, *Modernity in Black and White*’s imagined readership is not always fully clear. The first chapter offers a succinct account of the favela’s development both as social phenomenon and visual trope that seems ideally suited to students or scholars with limited familiarity with Brazil, though trained Brazilianists will also appreciate the rich array of concrete examples reproduced and analyzed in the text. By contrast, a fourth chapter on the São Paulo modernists seems to assume a reader conversant not only with the basic principles of the Anthropophagist movement, but also with Tarsila’s[2] paintings *A negra* (The Black woman, 1923) and *Antropofagia* (1928), whose visual similarities, Cardoso persuasively argues, have contributed to a misleading perception of the Anthropophagist movement as a mere continuation of the Semana de Arte Moderna. These references are far from obscure, but the limited context provided renders the nature of *Modernity in Black and White*’s intervention less evident to the casual reader. Furthermore, while the book’s critique of São Paulo modernists as (for the most part) white, aristocratic cosmopolitans is well taken (if not exactly controversial), it also glosses over some of these figures’ complexities. For instance, Tarsila’s 1933 painting *Operários* (Workers), which places lines

of workers representing varied racial and ethnic backgrounds against factory smokestacks, completed after a trip to the Soviet Union, seems like a logical point of contact with the material addressed in the study’s final chapter, and one that perhaps complicates the narrative of her career the book presents. While occasional strident passages threaten to obscure some of the nuances of its subjects, *Modernity in Black and White*’s rich archive of early twentieth-century visual culture reminds us to question even the most entrenched narratives of Brazilian national identity.

Notes

[1]. Flora Süssekind, *Cinematógrafo de letras: Literatura, técnica e modernização no Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1987). An English-language edition of the book appeared in 1996.

[2]. Tarsila, like many important Brazilian figures in Brazilian culture, is typically referred to by first name by scholars.

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