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Abject Eroticism

The construction of (female) sexuality in *O Palácio dos Anjos* (1970)

Abstract: In the so-called *Boca do Lixo*, the *Garbage Mouth* of São Paulo, a number of films between aesthetic experimentation (*Cinema Marginal*) and commercial sexualization (*Pornochanchada*) became formative of the Brazilian cinema of the late 1960s and 1970s. In that context, filmmaker Walter Hugo Khouri represents an ambivalent figure: The poster child of the *Cinema da Boca do Lixo* for some but despised for his alienating aestheticization by others, his films evade all forms of strict categorization. Instead, they borrow aesthetic characteristics from different Brazilian film genres and combine them into something new. Based on Khouri's *O Palácio dos Anjos* (1970), the following text will argue that a paradigm of *abject eroticism* arises from the combination of elements from the popular *Pornochanchadas* with underground aesthetics of the *Cinema Marginal* and that this abject eroticism prevails both intimate and political spheres, subliminally addressed in the film.

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1. The Nature Romanticism of (Female) Sexuality

A nipple peeping into the image from the left edge of the frame; the close-up of a colorful beetle; floral ornaments belonging to the dresses of elegant women with large eyes; and the montage of hands, gestures, quick as lightning. During the opening credits of the Brazilian-French erotic drama *O Palácio dos Anjos*¹ (1970) directed by Walter Hugo Khouri, paintings from the Bulgarian artist Sonya Grassmann (who, then again, migrated to Brazil in 1950) introduce the viewers to a dreamlike world of latent eroticism. The eroticism that the audiovisual arrangement of the paintings transports is thereby closely linked to images of nature, Christian symbols of paradise and sin, and of course: the female body.

The framing, zooming, and montage techniques stress the soft waves of the women's hair, link it to the images of flowers and water and thereby situate the female bodies in an ideal imaginary space of comfort – not least for male gazing. The fragmented body parts of the women become the background for the names of male technicians, directors, musicians, and producers in the same manner as natural elements are used as such. Homoerotic poses of the women build the visual environment for the production companies Vera Cruz and Metro Goldwyn Mayer (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1: Homoerotic female availability during the opening credits

¹ Walter Hugo Khouri (1970): *The Palace of Angels*.

And yet, a moment of confrontation with the overidealized, nature-romantic sexuality surfaces in the montage of Grassmann's images, when a series of close-ups of female eyes, drawn in the scheme of childlike characteristics, appears. The women look back, directly and overtly into the camera, from left and right, gazing up and down, alone or together. For a brief moment, their gaze seems inescapable. The presumably male observer becomes the observed, surrounded by a crowd of anonymous, assertive women. Additionally, the dynamism of the montage counters the soft waving of the camera movements from before and frivolous facial expressions oppose the frivolous objectification of female sexuality through an ironic obscenity (Fig.2).



Fig. 2: Ironic inversion of the romanticization of female sexuality

The following article will discuss the tension between the commodification of – especially female – sexuality in Brazilian erotic films of the 1970s on the one hand and the subversion of such sexual consumerism within Brazilian erotic films on the other. Whereas the opening sequence of *O Palácio dos Anjos* constructs female sexuality as part of a natural, idealized setting of omni-available pleasure, the question of counter perspectives departing from that start will lead the subsequent analysis.

Arguing that the films of Walter Hugo Khouri (especially *O Palácio dos Anjos*) play an emblematic role in the negotiation of sexuality enacted in Brazilian cinema from that time, the subsequent text will consist of two parts: First, the text will give context information on the production circumstances of Brazilian erotic cinema in the 1970s, of Khouri as a film director and of *O Palácio dos Anjos*. The second part will then focus on the analysis of a particular scene from that film.

2. Films between Cinema Marginal and Pornochanchada

Walter Hugo Khouri was an important figure in the so-called *Cinema da Boca do Lixo*, which can be translated as *Cinema of the Garbage Mouth*. *Boca do Lixo* is the name for a central district in São Paulo near the *Estação da Luz*. Thanks to its location, the area was ideal for the fast production and distribution of films. Hence, in the 1960s and 1970s, it didn't just become famous for the conjunction of prostitution, drugs, and film production but became one of the most important sites for the Brazilian film industry: On average 30 % of Brazilian films from the 1970s came from the *Boca do Lixo*.² Despite its negative sound, the title *Mouth of Garbage* does not necessarily transport a devaluation but represents more of a self-designation as it appeared e.g. poetically in Rogério Sganzerla's *O Bandido da Luz Vermelha*³ (1968) – a key film from the *Cinema da Boca do Lixo*.⁴ It designates an assertion of trashy aesthetics, low production costs, and presumably inadequate subjects. It aligns with the idea of affirming one's underdevelopment instead of copying colonial shame, as the famous Brazilian film critic Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes notes:

A heterogeneous conglomerate of the nervous artists, the *Lixo* movement proposes an anarchistic culture and tends to transform the populace into rabble, the colonized into trash. This degraded subworld, traversed by grotesque processions, condemned to the absurd, mutilated by crime, sex, and exploitation, hopeless and fallacious, is, however, animated and redeemed by its inarticulate wrath.⁵

Meanwhile, the historical context of the rise of the *Cinema da Boca do Lixo* is highly ambivalent: on the one hand, harsh censorship politics and the persecution of presumed opponents through the military dictatorship that governed the country since 1964 and implemented systematic violence since 1968, characterized the decade. On the other hand, the cultural protectionism of the dictatorship led to the economic flourishing of national film production. That flourishing, however, was strongly oriented toward commercial success, which led to the dominance of erotic films, the so-called *Pornochanchadas*.

The term *Pornochanchada* developed out of film reviews in 1972, designating erotic films that critics sought to vilify as pornographic. However, the films called *Pornochanchada* at the beginning of the 1970s did not show any graphic sexual intercourse that might justify the designation. Mariana Baltar and Luiz Gomes argue that these films did not even show more sexuality than artistically valued Brazilian films from that time and that the label *Pornochanchada* was primarily a marker for presumably bad quality.⁶ The second part of the term – *Chanchada* – refers to musical comedies from Brazilian cinema of the 1950s. *Pornochanchadas* are no muscials.

² Abreu 2015a: 187.

³ Rogério Sganzerla (1968): *Red Light Bandit*.

⁴ Abreu 2012: 82.

⁵ Salles Gomes 1982 [1973]: 252–253.

⁶ Baltar/Gomes 2018: 101.

Instead, the reference to the *Chanchadas* works as a label for popular cinema. Copying the model of Italian erotic comedies at the beginning of the 1970s, *Pornochanchadas* generated numerous subgenres throughout the decade, departing from erotic dramas to *Cangaceiro* films and thrillers.

While the film production from Rio de Janeiro profited strongly from the state's film promotion through the national production company *Embrafilme*, the *Cinema da Boca do Lixo* from São Paulo became mostly known for the intersection between the precarious but aesthetically versed *Cinema Marginal* on the one and the popular but no less precarious genre of the *paulista Pornochanchada* on the other hand.

According to the Brazilian film scholar Fernão Ramos, the *Cinema Marginal* is characterized by the three elements of "aggression, stylization, and narrative fragmentation,"⁷ whereas the *Pornochanchadas* are defined by Nuno Cesar Abreu by their "cheap production costs + eroticism + catchy title."⁸ Despite of these differences, both types have in common that they are based on low budgets, often overtly trashy aesthetics, and body-focused film languages that constantly oscillate between attraction and repulsion.

Even though both genres are often discussed separately, contemporary scholars and former filmmakers from the *Boca do Lixo* increasingly started to highlight intersections. As Ozualdo Candeias (one of the most emblematic figures of the *Boca do Lixo* who constantly switched between the aesthetic language of the *Cinema Marginal* and the commercial style of the *Pornochanchadas*) describes in an interview conducted by Nuno Cesar Abreu:

I always thought of the *Cinema da Boca do Lixo* to be a unity. There's no fragmentation. What it did have, in the beginning, was that it depicted a type of cinema, which would be the marginals, and these marginals, after the first tapes, aligned themselves with any type of cinema. [...] Of course, some were better made, others were more this and that. But there was none of the fragmentation you mentioned.⁹

In this context, Walter Hugo Khouri is often referred to as the aestheticist of the *Boca do Lixo*. His films (e.g. *Noite Vazia* [1964])¹⁰ are compared to the works of Michelangelo Antonioni because they deal with the alienation of sexuality through modernity or to Ingmar Bergman due to their focus on the psychological layers of the characters. Even though Khouri works intensely with sexual depictions and

⁷ *A agressão, a estilização e a fragmentação narrativa*. Ramos 1987: 115. Quotes in Portuguese by Brazilian authors in this article are translated by the author.

⁸ *[P]rodução de baixo custo + erotismo + título apelativo*. Abreu 2015a: 38.

⁹ *Eu sempre achei o cinema da Boca do Lixo uma unidade. Não tem essa fragmentação. O que ele tinha, no começo, é que pintou um tipo de cinema, que seriam os marginais, e esses marginais, depois das primeiras fitas, se alinharam com qualquer tipo de cinema. [...] Claro que umas eram mais bem feitas, outras eram mais isto e aquilo. Mas não tem essa fragmentação que você falou*. Candeias, in: Abreu 2015b: 260.

¹⁰ Official English distribution title: *Men and Women*, literal translation: *Empty Night*.

themes – even moving into hardcore pornographic cinema in the 1980s – he is thereby positioned inside and outside of the usual domain of the erotic film production from the *Boca do Lixo*.

Khouri's films premiered at international festivals such as Cannes, were produced with more money than an average film from the *Boca do Lixo*, and had a higher aesthetic reputation. Thus, whereas Khouri can be seen as a very emblematic figure from the *Boca do Lixo*, sort of a poster child; he is often discussed in contrast to his colleagues, as Nuno Cesar Abreu notes:

Although Walter Hugo Khouri was not a filmmaker identified with the ethics, procedures, and practices of the *Boca do Lixo*, he projected his artistic personality onto that cinema. For many, he became a kind of benchmark for quality at all levels: for the themes, the films, the cast, the crew, for his cinematographic knowledge. And for his success.¹¹

However, while some praised Khouri for his refined artwork, many criticized him for his aestheticism, and argued that he avoided dealing with concrete political and social problems, as noted by Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes:

For him [Khouri], the right path for Brazilian cinema would be one of permanent and universal themes and feelings treated in a stubbornly aestheticizing way. His opponents demanded films defined in time and space, longed for human vibrations that were broader than those confined to aestheticism, and denounced Khouri's work as the embodiment of the most sterile detachment, or rather alienation since this is the common expression used in the debates that infatuate the Brazilian youth.¹²

Within that framework, *O Palácio dos Anjos* constitutes a vivid example of the ambivalences of the *Boca do Lixo* and the tensions between underground (*Cinema Marginal*) and consumerism (*Pornochanchada*). The title (*The Palace of Angels*) and the poster of the film play with spectator expectations connected to the eroticism of the *Pornochanchadas*. At the same time, Peter Overbeck, the cinematographer of the film, has worked in many films of the *Cinema Marginal* such as *O Bandido da Luz Vermelha* – as mentioned before, the exemplary film of the underground cinema. Consequently, the question arises of how these presumed contradictions play out aesthetically within the film.

¹¹ *Embora não seja um cineasta identificado com a ética, os procedimentos e as práticas da Boca do Lixo, Walter Hugo Khouri projetou sua personalidade artística sobre aquele cinema, tornando-se, para muitos, uma espécie de referência de qualidade em todos os níveis: pelos temas, pelos filmes, elenco, equipe, pelo conhecimento cinematográfico. E pelo sucesso.* Abreu 2015a: 25.

¹² *Para ele o caminho certo para o cinema brasileiro seria o de temas e sentimentos permanentes e universais tratados numa linha obstinadamente estetizante. Os adversários exigiam filmes definidos no tempo e no espaço, ansiavam por vibrações humanas mais amplas do que as circunscritas ao esteticismo, e denunciavam a obra de Khouri como encarnação do mais estéril alheamento, ou melhor, da alienação, já que é essa a expressão ritual utilizada nesses debates que apaixonam a juventude brasileira.* Salles Gomes 2016 [1963]: 268–269.

3. The Palace of Angels



Fig. 3: The poster of *O Palácio dos Anjos*

O Palácio dos Anjos tells the story of Bárbara (Geneviève Grad) who dreams of Europe, studying, and independence. At her workplace, she is sexually harassed by her boss Ricardo (Luc Merenda), who recklessly tries to force her into an affair. Ricardo invites her out and gives her presents but he also becomes violent once she refuses his offers. In the end, he proposes to give her money for sexual services but Bárbara refuses, once again.

Instead of accepting Ricardo's terms, she quits her job at the credit and investment company and opens up a luxury brothel together with her two friends and flatmates Mariazinha (Rossana Ghesa) and Ana Lúcia (Adriana Prieto). The name of the brothel, *O Palácio dos Anjos*, constitutes the name for the film. Bárbara steals the contact details of the clients from the investment company and uses them to build up her business. Hence, the possibility of prostitution was already on the table through Ricardo's offer but Bárbara rejected it to move on with it on her terms, as her own boss, in a self-determined manner.

In the subsequent plot, the film mostly centers on the relationship between Bárbara, Mariazinha, and Ana Lúzia. Even though set in a brothel, it becomes sort of a chamber play, where actual sex and the johns play a minor role. In the attempt to link facial expressions back to emotional spheres of dreams or anxieties, the cinematography focuses on close-ups of the faces of the women. However, it constantly seems to fail in this attempt. For example, many close-ups of Bárbara's

face are mounted with images of a cruise ship, creating dreamlike sequences that are connected to her aspirations of traveling to France. Yet, her facial expressions in those shots are highly inexpressive. Instead of underlining the emotionality that is supposed to be transported through the montage, her mimic counters the desire of the camera to dive into her emotional and psychological spheres. Her impassivity detains the camera and with it the spectator from entering her body and mind.

In the meantime, the relationship between the three women gradually shifts. Bárbara spends more and more common money on the furniture of the apartment and on luxury items, a behavior that her co-workers disapprove of. Mariazinha, who comes from a conservative family in the countryside, suffers increasingly from moral doubts about the sex work. Finally, the conflict between Bárbara's economically determined attitude and Mariazinha's moral and emotional concerns culminates in a scene where Mariazinha refuses to fulfill the violent phantasies of a male client. The scene marks a turning point, both narratively and aesthetically within the cinematographic setting, for which it is useful to discuss it in a more detailed manner.

4. Pornographic Panopticism and Emotional Disgust

The client has installed a pornographic film dispositive in one of the bedrooms. Bright spotlights aim at the bed, a camera is set up to film, and a TV shows the recording simultaneously in blue shades. While the john sets up the technical devices, Mariazinha is positioned on the bed. In contrast to him, she is already naked. When she puts on a blindfold, the scene additionally becomes panoptical: Supposedly watched from all angles, by both human and technical eyes, she cannot verify the observations anymore through her subjective gaze. Seeing and not seeing become components of a sadistic power play, which can be read as a reference to Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960) or – coming back to the Antonioni references mentioned before – to *Blow Up* (1966).

When the john starts touching her, Mariazinha rips off the blindfold and starts screaming “No!”. A fight between her and the persecutor follows before she runs out of the room. In the hallway she encounters Bárbara and while Mariazinha cries out that she cannot do what is expected from her, Bárbara assumes the well-known economically determined perspective: The man has paid, so someone has to deliver.

After a while, Bárbara decides to finish the job herself. The scene from before starts to repeat (Fig.4-5), only the two women have switched places. The john starts to undress her and shots of the technical apparatuses follow.



Fig. 4: The cinematographic setting



Fig. 5: Bárbara with the blindfold

In the subsequent shot, Mariazinha slightly opens the door. We see a close-up of her eyes, wet with tears. When the counter shot to her gaze follows, it becomes obvious that a jump in the diegetic time has taken place. Bárbara and the john sit on the bed, both naked. They watch the video from their previous intercourse. As typical for an erotic film, the actual sex has been skipped.

Bárbara is extensively joyful, laughing at what she sees, wiggling with her feet back and forth. By laughing at the sex scene, she counters both the violence and the seriousness of the previous setting. Her laughter seems to nullify the male desire since the lust of the john derived from the victimization of the woman. In consequence, the once active client becomes increasingly passive while watching the video of the intercourse, whereas Bárbara – now visually active again – regains her subjectivity.

At the same time, Mariazinha becomes a voyeur on the second level: She is peeping on Bárbara and the john peeping on their own sexuality, which had – on its part – been recorded through the peeping eye of the camera. Confronted with Bárbara's (performed) joy, Mariazinha runs off to the bathroom and starts to vomit in the sink. If the scene hasn't already been uncomfortable, it becomes so with the regurgitation. Mariazinha's emotional disgust towards the abusive client, the pornographic staging, and Bárbara expresses itself on a basic body level of revulsion.

Close-ups of Mariazinha's face are mounted with flashbacks in the montage: Shots of Bárbara with the blindfold laughing intensely are quickly assembled with shots of the camera, the light bulb, the screen, and – once again – the detailed depiction of Mariazinha's saliva. The choking noise traverses the montage sequence and is combined with abstract music that transports an undefinable threat. By connecting Mariazinha's present repulsion back to the images from the sexual encounter between Bárbara, the john, and the camera dispositive, the expression of disgust functions as a comment on the scene from before. Even if the scene may have been perceived as sensational, the introduction of Mariazinha as a third figure, a voyeur outside of the setting, reveals its intrinsic power dynamics to be nothing more than physically repulsive. The affective register of disgust thereby doesn't only comment on the scene from before, but even more importantly it comments on potential sensuality perceived by the spectator. This sensuality is marked as itself nauseating.



Fig. 6: The aesthetics of vomit – Mariazinha's saliva

In the context of the Brazilian *Pornochanchada*, the display of voyeuristic, violent sexual settings that put women in the role of a tormented body subjected to male desire is a common trope of eroticism. The beginning of the scene refers to this sort of setting – putting first Mariazinha and then Bárbara in the position of bearing the passiveness of not seeing while being observed through a patriarchal anthropomedial setting of sexual observation. The scene thereby runs the risk of reproducing a cinematographic setting that is based on visual and corporal violence against women. And yet, turning that setting over into overt disgust questions its intrinsic norms on the level of bodily sensations.

5. The Aesthetics of Vomit

Using disgust and strong bodily reactions, especially vomiting, as an aesthetic principle represents one of the main cinematic characteristics of the *Cinema Marginal* from the *Boca do Lixo*. According to this, Rogério Sganzerla (its most prominent representative) denoted his mission in the following:

By swallowing up developed cinema, I produce its immediate negation: the total pastiche, the self-redemptive copy, our only way out of the truth of underdevelopment [...], perverting the initial object into the final provocation of hunger: **the third world vomiting up lousy, free films.**¹³

¹³ *Devorando o cinema desenvolvido produz sua negação imediata: o pastiche total, a cópia auto-redentora, nossa única saída para saindo uma vez mais da verdade do subdesenvolvimento [...], pervertendo o objeto inicial na provocação final da fome: o terceiro mundo vomitando filmes péssimos e livres.* Sganzerla 1970, cited in: Ramos 1987: 74; accentuation HP.

In the statement about his cinematographic agenda, Sganzerla refers to the former leading figure of Brazilian *Cinema Novo*, Glauber Rocha. In his politically engaged cinematic vision, Rocha developed an *Aesthetics of Hunger* that would reflect the social and political conditions of underdevelopment in Brazil.¹⁴ The *Cinema Marginal* can be understood as a younger generation of filmmakers, dealing with the heritage of the *Cinema Novo* as an aesthetic program that once held a politically subversive potential, but then became norm-constituting. In that context, Sganzerla dismisses Rocha as “paternalistic” and “right-wing conservative.”¹⁵ He transforms the *Aesthetics of Hunger* into an *Aesthetics of Vomit*, turns pain into disgust, deficiency into aversion.

In *Cinema Marginal (1968-1973). A representação em seu limite*, the first and hence defining monograph on the *Cinema Marginal*, Fernão Ramos refers to Sganzerla’s aesthetics of vomit as a general characteristic of the Brazilian underground cinema of the 1970s. Ramos describes that kind of cinema as *abject cinema* and thereby links it back to Kristeva’s psychoanalytic concept: “Grossness, disgust, filth, dirt, degradation, in short, the whole ‘low’ universe makes up the typical diegesis of the marginal narrative.”¹⁶ In this universe of ‘low’ sensations vomit constitutes one of the main modes of expression:

‘Vomit’ is another moment that is privileged as an aversive image. Its remnants are often mirrored on the body in order to accentuate the repulsive aspect. The image of vomit (a tense and dramatically strong image), due to the very natural characteristics of the act of vomiting, is close to the lacerating scream so present in marginal narratives.¹⁷

Screaming and vomiting, the two expressions that Ramos refers to, are both modes of getting something aggressively out of one’s bodily system. The privileged place for those rejective actions is the mouth. At the same time, the mouth is also a place of erotic attraction. Both attraction and repulsion hence collapse in the mouth as the center of attention.

It is thus not surprising that in the scene described beforehand, the switching from the erotic register of the *Pornochanchada* to the abject film language of the *Cinema Marginal* is performed in, through, and out of the mouth. In her dissertation on Brazilian cinema, media scholar and filmmaker Anna-Sophie Philippi argues that Brazilian films from the 1970s show an intense interest in images of eating, spitting, teeth, etc., in short: close-ups of mouths in all situations and circumstances. Philippi

¹⁴ Rocha 1965.

¹⁵ Sganzerla 1970, cited in: Ramos 1987: 74.

¹⁶ *O nojo, o asco, a imundície, a porcaria, a degradação, enfim, todo o universo “baixo” compõe a diegese típica da narrativa marginal.* Ramos 1987: 116.

¹⁷ *O ‘vômito’ é outro instante privilegiado como imagem aversiva. Seus restos são muitas vezes espelhados pelo corpo com o intuito de accentuar o aspecto repulsivo. A imagem do vômito (uma imagem tensa e dramaticamente forte), pelas próprias características naturais do ato de vomitar, se aproxima do berro lacerante, tão presente na narrativa marginal.* Ibid.: 118.

connects that interest in the mouth back to a long tradition in Brazilian culture that circulates around principles of digestion and incorporation and that – as she argues – finds its renewal in the 1970s in what she calls “phagic images”.¹⁸

Since Oswald de Andrade published his *Anthropophagic Manifesto*¹⁹ and Tarsila do Amaral painted her famous *Abaporu* (which means *man-eater* in the language of the Tupi), both in 1928, the Brazilian modernist *Anthropophagic Movement* established a postcolonial cultural-political program connecting anthropophagy to principles of (re-)appropriation, reclamation, and identification. These ideas are still prevailing in Brazilian culture up to today, and as Philippi argues, got re-actualized in the 1970s in multiple dimensions. According to such a re-actualization, the disgust of the vomiting mouth is used as an aesthetic principle to counter power structures and viewing habits on a fundamentally physical layer in both, film examples of the *Cinema Marginal* and in *O Palácio dos Anjos*.

In *O Palácio dos Anjos* the merging of an erotic register of sensation with repulsion in a setting of self-reflexive audiovisual staging can be understood as a critique of sexual conventions of the *Pornochanchada*. A new aesthetic paradigm, something we may call *object eroticism* surfaces from the juncture of marginal and sexual film styles and enables a critique of the power relations of audiovisual eroticism from within an erotic scenario. If we consider Walter Hugo Khouri as an ambivalent figure of the *Boca do Lixo* in São Paulo who neither strictly aligned himself with the *Cinema Marginal*, nor with the erotic popular cinema of the *Pornochanchada* but who adapted principles from both genres and turned them into his own conglomeration, then the creation of an object eroticism becomes plausible.²⁰

Instead of being articulated through an analytical, intellectual mode of aesthetic distancing, this critique emerges from a physical sphere of bodily responses. The idealized images of nature-romantic female sexuality from the opening credits have shifted into a repulsive reaction toward the audiovisual fabrication of such images. While the third world vomits out bad but free films in the quotation from Sganzerla, Mariazinha vomits out all the implications brought to her through conventions of men producing audiovisual images of objectified, passive women.

¹⁸ Philippi 2023 (ongoing).

¹⁹ Andrade 2017 [1928].

²⁰ Especially in the 1960s, in the beginning of his career, Khouri was often discussed as part of a second generation of *Cinema Novo* filmmakers. Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes compares him to the former *Cinema Novo* representatives but as argued on the basis of Salles Gomes' statement in the beginning of this text, Khouri fit into that category of filmmakers just as little as in the movement of the *Cinema Marginal* or the group of *Pornochanchada* filmmakers. Due to his aestheticism and the occupation with universal themes, he was usually discussed in contrast to *Cinema Novo* directors just as much as in line with them.

6. Cinematic Discomfort

This shifting from comforting images of female sexual availability, situated in a heavenly world of constant nudity, floral ornaments, and attractive posing towards the physical rejection of such image production may be what film critic Philippe Leão names the *Cinema do Incômodo*, a *Cinema of Discomfort*, that he assigns to Walter Hugo Khouri's films in a short analysis: "Walter Hugo Khouri manages to absorb the aesthetics of explicit sex to transform them into a personal discomfort, a psychological discomfort."²¹ Even though the opinion of a young YouTube-film critic such as Leão might not be scientifically representative, Leão hits a nerve in his description of the discomfort in Khouri's films.

In his famous monograph on Brazilian cinema of the late 1960s, *Alegorias Do Subdesenvolvimento*²², Ismail Xavier denotes that "the best of Brazilian cinema refused the false wholeness and took on the uncomfortable task of internalizing the crisis."²³ In his analysis, Xavier describes Glauba Rocha's films as "radiography of uncomfortable themes"²⁴ and "uncomfortable political representatives".²⁵ The form of discomfort that Xavier assigns to the late *Cinema Novo* in those paragraphs is aligned with a high degree of intellectualism. In contrast, *O Palácio dos Anjos* transports a physical, sensual discomfort. It is not surprising that *Pornochanchadas* and erotic cinemas are mostly ignored in Xavier's descriptions since they don't fit into the intellectual resistance he emphasizes. Even though Xavier was very critical of the erotic film production, I want to argue that *O Palácio dos Anjos* offers a discomfort in Xavier's sense, refusing "a false wholeness" (ibid., 44) of totalizing film aesthetics.

Such discomfort can be conceptualized in terms of Sarah Ahmed's work on *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*:

It is, after all, pain or discomfort that return one's attention to the surfaces of the body as body [...]. To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins. One fits, and by fitting, the surfaces of bodies disappear from view. The disappearance of the surface is instructive: in feelings of comfort, bodies extend into spaces, and spaces extend into bodies. The sinking feeling involves a seamless space, or a space where you can't see the 'stitches' between bodies.²⁶

²¹ O Walter Hugo Khouri consegue absorver a essa estética de sexo explícito para transformar esse sexo em um incômodo pessoal, um incômodo psicológico. Leão 2018.

²² 2013 [1993], engl. transl.: *Allegories of Underdevelopment* [1997].

²³ [O] melhor do cinema brasileiro recusou, então, a falsa inteireza e assumiu a tarefa incômoda de internalizar a crise. Xavier 2013 [1993]: 32.

²⁴ Ibid.: 44.

²⁵ Ibid.: 120.

²⁶ Ahmed 2014 [2004]: 148.

In the transfer from Ahmed's analysis to film, this means that a comfortable film diminishes the border between the film's body and the human body. The spectator's body extends into the film's body and the film's body extends into the spectator's body. In contrast, discomfort in the film experience foregrounds bodily surfaces: One's skin becomes perceptible. The limits of the film and the human body rub against each other, mark their stitches or what we may call the *suture* between audiovisual techniques and human perception. An abject eroticism then leads to a form of cinematic discomfort that holds the spectator's skin in a tension between attraction and aversion. One's haptics come to the forefront, become obvious, and thereby reflexible.

This form of discomfort characterizes the eroticism in the films of Walter Hugo Khouri and especially in *O Palácio dos Anjos* to a very strong degree. Pervading many films of the *Boca do Lixo*, both associated with the *Cinema Marginal* and the *Pornochanchada*, such discomfort can be understood as a response to a cinema defined by political restrictions, harsh censorship, and high profits as outlined in Xavier's *Allegories of Underdevelopment*. Khouri's films are then not to be regarded as an exception from an otherwise smutty production phase but as films that make more clearly perceptible an unease that is emblematic of a high number of film documents from the *Cinema da Boca do Lixo* from the late 1960s and the 1970s. This cinematic discomfort brings together an affective with a political sphere in abject images of eroticism.

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Media Index

- Blow Up*. United Kingdom, Italy, USA 1966, Michelangelo Antonioni, 111 minutes.
- Noite Vazia* (Official English distribution title: *Men and Women*, literal translation: *Empty Night*). Brazil 1964, Walter Hugo Khouri, 91 minutes.
- Peeping Tom*. United Kingdom 1960. Michael Powell, 102 minutes.
- O Bandido da Luz Vermelha (Red Light Bandid)*. Brazil 1968, Rogério Sganzerla, 92 minutes.
- O Palácio dos Anjos (Palace of the Angels)*. Brazil, France 1970, Walter Hugo Khouri, 114 minutes.

List of Figures

Figure 1: Homoerotic female availability during the opening credits. Screenshot Walter Hugo Khouri (1970) *O Palácio dos Anjos*.

Figure 2: Ironic inversion of the romanticization of female sexuality. Screenshot Walter Hugo Khouri (1970) *O Palácio dos Anjos*.

Figure 3: The poster of *O Palácio dos Anjos*, <https://www.festival-cannes.com/en/f/o-palacio-dos-anjos/> (22.09.2023)

Figure 4: The cinematographic setting. Screenshot Walter Hugo Khouri (1970) *O Palácio dos Anjos*.

Figure 5: S Bárbara with the blindfold. Screenshot Walter Hugo Khouri (1970) *O Palácio dos Anjos*.

Figure 6: The aesthetics of vomit – Mariazinha's saliva. Screenshot Walter Hugo Khouri (1970) *O Palácio dos Anjos*.