

Introduction

Listening to Others in Eduardo Coutinho's Documentary Cinema

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Eduardo Coutinho's entire body of documentary production, with more than twenty works (for television, on video, and on film) spanning half a century, centers on filmed encounters between himself and others and their exchange before a visible camera. Over the years Coutinho slowly removed everything that could distract from this encounter, leaving not much beyond voice and listening. He never hid the modes of production and always acknowledged the construction, mediation, and artificiality of the encounter, with its voices and acts of listening, and of documentary procedures and modes in general. This focus on encounters and exchanges between bodies as filmed by a camera and crew, homing in on voice, listening, and a reflexivity on the mediation of said encounter, is one of the most salient characteristics of Coutinho's oeuvre, as Latin American critics and filmmakers who perceive him as one of the looming figures of documentary in the region have pointed out. Between the early 1960s and 2015, when Coutinho passed away before completing *Últimas conversas* (*Last Conversations*, 2015), his hyper focalization on these three elements—voice, listening, and a reflexive presence of camera and crew—as the essentials of documentary became a minimalist aesthetic and an ethical practice.

Yet an attention to voice and listening, and a desire to film encounters and exchanges in a reflexive way, is not exclusive to Coutinho. These elements, in fact, are at the center of documentary at large, its histories,

practices, and changes on a global scale. Documentary has always been at least equally if not overly invested in the audible vis-à-vis the visible. A desire for stories, information, and knowledge has often mobilized the impulse for and production of documentary. Changing vocal conventions and experiments have conveyed these stories, information, and knowledge from the world via film. Whether using titles, voice-over, voice-of-God narration, interviews, or conversations, documentaries have thought they were offering the voice of the world to spectators since the earliest newsreels and silent documentaries. An interest in “giving voice” to those who otherwise have none in the public sphere has motivated many documentary films. Since the 1980s, documentary practitioners and critics have been signaling and reflecting on the impossibilities of authentic representation. As a result, they have created a range of formal devices, including the appearance of camera and crew on-screen, that reveal the means of production and explore the sonic and haptic possibilities of the genre.

“The category of voice has become central to documentary studies,” as Pooja Rangan notes (280), and has overtaken discussions on documentary cinema in the United States since the late 1980s to such an extent that it has also affected documentary production. With his 1983 essay “The Voice of Documentary,” Bill Nichols helped to spark this attention to the voice by stressing the verbal over the imagistic as the ethical and aesthetic drive of documentary. Yet, while he used the concept occasionally to refer to the actual speech of characters in films, he mostly employed voice as a metaphor for a film’s social point of view and the corresponding organization of materials to convey that viewpoint to the public. As Rangan astutely observes, this hyper focalization on voice as metaphor within documentary film studies has in fact paid little attention to voice itself in the context of a growing field of sound studies. This critical discourse also overlooks new frameworks for thinking about documentary that do not rely on the humanitarian and liberal paradigm of “giving voice” that has been key since at least the 1930s. Rangan turns to Trinh T. Minh-Ha’s early writings on documentary and authenticity, where the critic and filmmaker argues that “there is no such thing as documentary” (Trinh 29) if documentary is defined by its project of giving voice, since the voices in documentary are the product of mediations and therefore the fictional core of documentary when framed in such a way. In Rangan’s reading of the overdetermined centrality of voice to documentary studies and production, which often overlooks “speaking voices in documentary,” she proposes the concept of *audibility* as an organizational and theoretical vector for documentary studies. The concept of audibility

allows Rangan to offer a clearer definition of voice that remains expansive while also paying attention to what happens between the voices and those who receive them: “voice is the product of sonic forms and auditory practices that render sound meaningful and call into being practices of listening that resonate with those meanings” (282).

Rangan’s redefinition of the voice in documentary helps to frame this edited volume on Coutinho’s documentary practice. Like Rangan’s reconceptualization of voice, which invites a “relation or resonance . . . between these felt but often unspoken forms of speaking and listening” (282), the chapters in this collection examine the shaping of a listening ear that responds to the call of the documentary’s voice. Coutinho’s films are as much about the voices as about the listening, primarily his own but also ours as the films’ spectators, that these voices summon. By building on Minh-Ha’s earlier critique of documentary as an immediate and transparent expression of a true self, Rangan also allows us to think further about Coutinho’s attention to voice as an investment in the performatic manifestation of embodied acts. His films resist any belief in voice as heralding the emergence of hidden truths or revelations of a self. Coutinho’s documentaries never hide the camera, the director, or other crew members, and instead always make the mediated encounter visible to the audience. This reflexivity is coupled with a growing emphasis on long takes that make time and room for the character to take stage, as we see in the last shot in *Cabra marcado para morrer* (1964–1984) when Elizabeth Teixeira gives her last speech, or when the women and men speak to Coutinho in *Edificio Master* (2002).¹

Critics and scholars in Brazil and other places in Latin America have described Coutinho’s documentary practice as a “cinema of conversation” and “a savage anthropology” (Grupo Revbelando Imágenes), as a “cinema of relation” (Saraiva 558) and a body of work “based on the spoken word” (562), as an “intersubjective universe” (Xavier 612) created by a “master of interaction” (622), and as the “the libertarian insurrection of enunciation” (Bezerra 408).² These observations all point to one overarching ethical concern and aesthetic choice: an attention to conversation and enunciation by letting the voice run wild. Following these critics, we could state that the encounter, which took place on film between Coutinho and the people he filmed, was a becoming savage of anthropology precisely because the encounters and conversations between Coutinho and “others” took place with no desire to systematize, organize, or understand them, as classic anthropology and its visual counterpart, ethnographic film, have historically done. Instead, the encounters in Coutinho’s films took place so that the voice could unfurl,

without restrictions and in insurrection. This approach to the voice explains why Coutinho's documentaries are far from ethnographic cinema or news reporting, which closely relate to documentary but are distinct from it. Ethnographic and news reporting strategies and formulae are sometimes extremely close in Coutinho's documentaries, perhaps because of the years he spent working in news reporting before becoming a documentary filmmaker. The attention to the relation between the listener and the voice might raise the specter of a possible ethnographic drive in Coutinho, especially because of the socioeconomic, racial, and at times religious distance between him and the characters in his films, and the scholarly and critical use of the term "others" to refer to his characters. One distinction between documentary—and particularly Coutinho's documentaries—and ethnography and news reporting is that the latter forms operate to offer didactic information on predetermined topics, places, or peoples. Watching an ethnographic film or news coverage is meant to educate and to convey a truth to those watching. Coutinho does not approach the people he speaks to as anthropological subjects of study or as the "others" of a scientific inquiry. His humanism is critical of any belief in objective, scientific, or single truths. Coutinho approaches people for relation, resonance, or dissonance, and to participate, as a listener, in the appearance (or emergence) of fantastic characters in front of the camera.

The presence of the camera, at a close range, foments the performative dimension of the exposure. The camera functions as both a technological apparatus—it records, so that it can be archived and replayed—and a theatrical device that creates the scene of address. The camera's frame delimits a stage. In the setting of such a stage, the "I" lets go and breaks character—the character built over the course of her life given the set of norms and possibilities—and stages a revelation. Coutinho developed a film practice that waited for and listened to these moments of revelation. This is, as this volume suggests, Coutinho's *cinema of listening*.

Initially, Coutinho's filmed encounters were framed by the interview—a go-to strategy in television and beyond from the 1960s well into the 1990s. If we take the six films Coutinho made during the years he worked for *Globo Repórter* (1975–1984) as his first documentaries, the interview emerges as the nodular strategy through which he meets others and their worlds in at least three of those early films—*Seis dias de Ouricuri* (*Six Days in Ouricuri*, 1976), *O pistoleiro da Serra Talhada* (*The Gunman of the Serra Talhada*, 1976), and *Theodorico, o imperador do sertão* (*Theodorico, the Sertão Emperor*, 1978). Reflecting the emergence of his documentary practice during those years, Coutinho said that "[he] learned how to talk to people and how to

film” (qtd. in Lins, *O documentário* 20) when he worked for television—even when television, rightly so, was fiercely criticized as one of the sites of power where dictatorial rule, industrial sectors, and the bourgeoisie became entangled in Brazil at the time. The irony is worth stressing; during the military dictatorship, while working in the belly of the beast in one of the most reactionary and right-wing fields imaginable for a politically engaged artist, Coutinho learned to “talk to people,” to engage in conversation, and to listen, as Rielle Navitski and Krista Brune point out in their chapters in this book. Coutinho himself reflected on his years at Globo and the dictatorship in “Gaze in Documentary. Statement/Letter to Paulo Paranaguá,” an essay specifically translated into English for this book and included in the section “Coutinho in His Own Words.”

During his television years, the encounters occurred as interviews, as dictated by the journalism genre, but he nevertheless practiced the art of listening by allowing others to express themselves unscripted. As a result, the other emerged as a voice situated in the time of the encounter with Coutinho. For instance, in *Seis dias de Ouricuri*, a man from Brazil’s drought-stricken Northeast enumerates all the roots that the famished population had been forced to eat. The shot seems to go on for too long since Coutinho chose not to edit it, instead opening the encounter to the unexpected contingency of duration. According to João Moreira Salles, this sequence is the ground zero for all of Coutinho’s cinema as it indicates what will unfold in his documentary practice (Salles 368). To engage in conversation and learn to listen, Coutinho needed to abandon the interview so the encounter could be driven by the sensible appearance of the other, which takes time. This approach rejects orienting the other toward a preestablished script about whom they represent.

The interview was still present in Coutinho’s first and best-known documentary feature, *Cabra marcado para morrer* (1964–1984). The film was originally conceived during the director’s years with the Centro Popular de Cultura (CPC, People’s Cultural Center) as a fictionalized reenactment of events leading to northeastern peasant leader João Pedro Teixeira’s 1962 murder. Nonprofessional actors would play either themselves, as was the case with his widow, Elizabeth Teixeira, or key figures in these historical events. The 1964 military coup interrupted this initial production, with only about forty percent of the script shot. In 1981, Coutinho returned to northeastern Brazil to locate and interview the people involved in the 1964 fiction film. Coutinho wanted to know what had happened in their lives during the twenty-year hiatus, to listen to them, and to shift the film from fiction to

documentary. He was never interested in returning to the halted production of the fictionalized historical event, which he had questioned during the original shooting because of the disconnect between what the script expected in terms of voice and the people's real cadences and modalities of expressing themselves. He had placed the actors in straitjackets where they were meant to stand in for certain rural residents and Brazilian archetypes.

It was the voice of others as themselves—or whomever they wanted to be for the camera and for Coutinho and his minuscule crew—without a script that brought Coutinho's film back to life. His experience with interviews as a television reporter helped him to stage the encounter of the final film's opening sequence, where participants in 1981 watched footage that had survived from the original shoot. Building on his work at Globo, Coutinho included elements of the camera, equipment, and crew in the shooting, thus breaking the fourth wall and any illusion of objectivity. Like in *Seis dias de Ouricuri*, *Cabra marcado para morrer* features encounters that diverge from the interview format as the camera continued to film people while their voices go adrift in an act that destabilizes the implicit hierarchy of interviews. The chapters by Ashley Brock and Krista Brune in this volume offer readings of *Cabra* as, respectively, one of Coutinho's sertão films and a key political film.

By the 1990s, Coutinho's use of the interview as the framing device for encounters was replaced by unscripted and lengthy conversations. An important turning point toward the "cinema de conversa" occurred in *Santo forte* (*The Mighty Spirit*, 1999), which he shot in a Rio de Janeiro favela in the late 1990s. In 1997, he told film critic José Carlos Avellar that he wanted to make a film "baseado prioritariamente na fala de pessoas comuns, sem narração" (focused primarily on common people's speech, without narration). The Portuguese noun *fala*, from the verb *falar* (to speak), is usually translated as speech, but it can also mean utterance. Because utterances as speech acts carry social meanings and offer worlds rather than interiorities, they are always already dialogic. What is expressed in an utterance is traversed by extra-linguistic statements. Coutinho's documentaries attest to an interest, or even a passion, in *fala* as what cannot be contained by linguistic forms of expression. Given the fraying of the spoken and the deep non-linguistic forms of expression in this concept of *falas*, I prefer to translate the term as utterances, which suggests a less logocentric understanding of communication. *Falas* as utterances also signal the deep and often unknown historical layers present in the texture of any voice. Coutinho's films reveal the entire field of gestures and non-linguistic forms of expressions—interruptions, pauses,

twitches, repetitions, and so on—as forms of communication and relationality that offer a less scripted form of presence than verbal communication. Avellar supported Coutinho’s dream of capturing these *falas* and helped with the production by making video equipment and tapes accessible, which were key for the emergence of his “cinema of conversation.” On video, people could continue to talk freely for longer than on film, and Coutinho could record their silences, interruptions, and mistakes without feeling forced to edit because of the expense or film’s material limitations. The nonsignifying elements of utterances thus could be more easily depicted.

Almost every documentary Eduardo Coutinho directed between 1976 and 2014 was structured exclusively through different types of encounters, moving from interviews to conversations. The sole exception to this approach was his 2010 *Um dia na vida*, a ninety-six-minute montage from the nineteen hours of uninterrupted recording from eight channels of public television between October 1 and October 2, 2009. Coutinho only exhibited this rare film if he could lead a conversation with the audience immediately following the screening. Even this exception in his corpus kept the kernel of the encounter format—a conversation, an exchange, or a debate expressing opinions and formulating ideas—as integral to its format, albeit in a para-filmic manner. Along these lines, Adriana Johnson’s chapter in this book offers an in-depth study of *Um dia na vida* as an exception in Coutinho’s body of work and an invitation for para-filmic encounters.

As the personal encounters on film shifted from interviews to the surprising, errant, and erratic unscripted conversations, Coutinho discarded everything that distracted from the voice of the people he listened to while being recorded. He moved away from encountering and depicting others as types, examples, or illustrations of preestablished narratives. With this shift, he aimed to distance his work from abstract and didactic modes central to documentary and to move toward concrete singular lives that paid attention to visible and invisible materialities of being. This focus on voice, without décor, objects, and nondiegetic sound, made Coutinho less interested in capturing fascinating life stories and more interested in the expressive capacities of the body to perform and offer worlds. Critics have highlighted this elimination of everything except the voice as the “purification of the superfluous” (Mattos 27), the development of a “minimalist cinema” (Salles 374), and Coutinho himself as “the master listener” (Lins, “*Últimas conversas*” 44).

Coutinho’s attention to voice was interested in singularities or, following Adriana Cavarero’s theorization of the voice, the manifestation of

“the unique being of each human being” from which a “vocal ontology of uniqueness” can be perceived (173). Cavarero contrasts the ontology of uniqueness that voices offer to the “fictitious entities” (177) or universal categories that philosophy has designated as subjects or individuals. To experience the world through voice is to refuse types and forms that designate people as universal categories devoid of the physical presence of sentient bodies. A focus on singularities needs voice as the expansive audibility of a manifestation with its relations and resonances. Coutinho’s documentary practice is a cinema of unique singularities because it is a cinema of the voice, a cinema of conversation, and a cinema of listening.

Even when, in many cases, the subjects of Coutinho’s documentaries, the people he encounters and whose voices we encounter as spectators, overlap with figures of the “people”—the peasants in *Cabra marcado*, the favela dwellers in *Santo forte*, the steel factory workers in *Peões (Metalworkers, 2004)*—they never appear as types or as stand-ins for the opinion of a group they supposedly belong to, or as the voices of the until-then unheard. Coutinho’s documentaries do not take on the work of politics in the literal sense as a form of extension, repair, and compensation of the failure of democracy, be it because of authoritarian rule or because of its neoliberal structure. Instead, his films move away from the epic tales of transcendental collective subjects—the people—to forge the space for subjects to find their own voice and perform their own accounts, in their own way, with no preestablished narrative, aim, or purpose.

When Coutinho moves away from the interview format toward conversations as the exclusive technique for his growing documentary practice, he does so during the 1990s interview boom in Brazil and elsewhere. This global trend occurs in the context of a democratically stable moment with no extreme forms of social unrest in Brazil and the rest of Latin America. Instead, it is a period marked by returns to democracy in the region. Coutinho’s modification of the technique rehearses a critique of the norms through which the interview became a ready-made staple and an automatic strategy to supposedly include voices of the people in the aftermath of the military dictatorships that ravaged the region. Coutinho’s focus on a heterogeneity of voices through interviews became increasingly important in Brazil as a means to repair the social fabric torn apart by twenty-one years of dictatorship. It is also what distinguishes his work from that of Cinema Novo filmmakers such as Glauber Rocha, who, despite their dreams of a cinema for the people, were never able to engage horizontally with the people—or

others to themselves—as Coutinho did. Theirs was never a *cinema of listening*, but rather a cinema of vertical representation.

As the book's title indicates, listening to others is an overarching concern throughout Coutinho's career, and the chapters in this volume argue for the inseparable relationship of his films to histories of dictatorship and democratization in Brazil, which remain pressing issues today. An interest in everyday life of regular citizens has been particularly evident in Brazilian literature, culture, and arts in recent decades in relation to the promise of political and socioeconomic development and its subsequent crises or pitfalls. Coutinho represents a continuation of the mid-twentieth-century commitment to the "popular" in the projects of the CPC and Cinema Novo in Brazil as he traces the trajectory of the popular classes through his films of conversation. His documentaries illustrate both the promise of development and the failure of these governmental policies and practices to reach all segments and regions of Brazilian society. They also question the fundamental cornerstone of democracy: representation. His films maintain a political commitment, although varied in explicitness, over the decades as his work parallels the trajectory of Brazil: the military dictatorship; the transition to democracy; the segments of the sertão and the favelas often overlooked by forms of social, economic, and political development; the promise of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula) and the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT); and the deep inequalities and various difficulties that persist in the country. His belief in difference, conversation, self-presentation, and the plurality of voices as the basis for social life makes his work crucially relevant, even urgent. Voice is always a sign of relation. Coutinho's films offer an extended exercise of being in relation.

This attention to voice and listening, especially to the dynamics between those with a voice and those without one, has a complicated history in the context of Brazilian cinema from the 1960s to the 1990s. This thirst for hearing the "voice of the people," which partly explains the interview boom in the post-dictatorship years, dates to the 1960s, a period of Brazilian cinema best known on a global scale as the years of Cinema Novo. The "new" Brazilian cinema espoused what Glauber Rocha, the movement's best-known director and most prolific and brilliant theorist, called an "aesthetics of hunger." Rather than aestheticize Brazilian reality, films would show the hunger, poverty, inequality, and "ugliness," as Rocha wrote in his 1962 manifesto, of the structural problems at the intersection of political and aesthetic representation in Brazil. Rocha and his fellow filmmakers strove

to depict the reality of Brazil unadorned and without embellishments for international art film audiences. The reality, that is, of the Brazilian “people.”

Rocha’s *Terra em transe* (*Land in Anguish*, 1967), one of Cinema Novo’s most highly acclaimed and frequently written-about films, stages the crisis of this relationship between “the intellectual” and “the subaltern” in a hyperbolic and highly stylized form. The film also reveals the disconnect between populist politicians and the people whom they should represent. With its piercing critique and theatricalization of the political, revolutionary, and cultural failure to listen to others horizontally without paternalism, *Terra em transe* is one of the salient films that attempted to create a popular cinema by portraying popular figures and “real” concerns, such as the critical need for land reform. Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s *Vidas secas* (*Barren Lives*, 1963) and Rocha’s *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (*Black God, White Devil*, 1964) also exemplify this desire to depict problems plaguing the Brazilian people on-screen. Yet these films, with their cinematic language that challenged even cinephiles, were far removed from the audiovisual forms that impoverished and rural populations had access to and consumed at the time. At the level of film language, Coutinho’s documentary method offers a way to revise the legacy of Cinema Novo, whose epic and allegorical depictions of the people had troubled its potentially popular and political work.

Within Brazilian documentary production, Leon Hirszman, who served as one of Coutinho’s mentors and an executive producer of the interrupted 1964 film, elaborated on this disconnect between the artist and intellectual class and the people whose concerns they aimed to explore in, among other films, *Maioria absoluta* (*Absolute Majority*, 1964). Jean-Claude Bernardet pays attention to this tension in his important 2003 essay on *Cabra marcado*, “Victory Over the Ash Heap of History,” translated into English for this book as part of the section “Critical Insights from Coutinho’s Contemporaries.” The “absolute majority” of the film’s title references the illiterate Brazilians who, as the film’s voice-of-God narrator explains, make up the majority of the country’s population. These illiterate people speak directly about their lives, difficulties, and realities with no audible interview questions, while the middle-class people are shown as being interviewed. While *Maioria absoluta* subverts expectations about who can speak for themselves, the voice-of-God narration still drives the film’s structure. This narrator organizes voices and contingencies into a film that wants to make a point by performing the hierarchies between those who make sense of the world and those whose voices appear only to be interpreted or to prove a larger point.

In both documentary and fiction films in the 1960s in Brazil and elsewhere, filmmakers were, for the most part, not listening. There was an agenda, a political point to make, and a utopia to design, but the voices of the people were not there. Coutinho's initial foray into cinema with the CPC began with similar problems of providing nonprofessional actors with a script to play themselves in the historical reenactment of João Pedro Teixeira's life and death. Written by Coutinho, the script created problems because its language did not echo or make audible the ways people in the region expressed themselves. This established both a priori and a posteriori the seemingly inevitable hierarchical relationship between those who made use of and controlled the film technology and those who were filmed.

However, this difficult encounter was not a Brazilian problem or one that emerged during the 1960s. In an essay from 1938 considered part of the foundational bibliography of documentary studies, John Grierson wrote that films such as the British *Housing Problems* (directed by Edgar Anstey and Arthur Elton, 1935) "showed the common man, not in the romance of his calling, but in the more complex and intimate drama of his citizenship" (215). Film made audible and visible the nuanced realities of the "common man" by creating a work where "something speaks within it that touches the conscience . . . 'transforms' and will not let" (216) the spectator forget. Something, rather than someone, speaks, which is speech itself. As with all speech, it is made up of the difficult relationship between its conditions of possibility, the social and historical frames that limit it and precede it, and the self's attempt to tell their own story and to break those frames and limits. "Something speaks" in film that touches and transforms, but how and why does it touch and transform?

Beyond raising the question of true self-representation or of radical authorial renewal, Grierson's text suggests that an experience of touching, affecting, and transforming the spectator occurs with many documentaries *where people speak for themselves*. Touching indicates proximity, even when used as a metaphor. Being touched reinserts the body into all equations and speaks to the interaction between a body and something else, which unfolds in the realm of the sensorial where speech itself does not matter anymore and, thus, where the unexpected emerges. Polls, statistics, measurement, and other symbolic forms of representation—both political and aesthetic—cannot account for this sensorial experience. In cinematic terms, the contingent. Something speaks: the contingency that constitutes life in its unfolding. Coutinho's attention to the moments when a person speaking

with him in front of the camera begins to unexpectedly sing, as in *Edifício Master* or *Cabra marcado*, or his interest in the *fala* of children whose use of language has not yet been formatted, as he tells Jordana Berg in *Últimas conversas*, are some of his most salient attempts to allow the contingent to emerge and be filmed. This also sheds light on why Coutinho practiced the long take with such commitment: because the contingent can never be scripted or expected.

The emergence of documentary studies was partly grounded in this question of who speaks and who represents whom. In his 1974 *Documentary: A History of Non-fiction Film*, one of the first books dedicated to this subject, Erik Barnouw argued that documentaries at the time were focused on “talking people” (262). For Barnouw, one of the main differences between earlier documentaries and those of the 1960s and 1970s was that, in the first decades of sound film, the people and voices who were not “elitist spokesmen” (262) either were presented as nonspeaking subjects or, if they were present, were highly manipulated in the editing process. By the 1970s, those people began to take control away from the director and make the film their own. Something similar happens in Brazil. Early documentaries, like *São Paulo, sinfonia da metrópole* (*São Paulo, A Metropolitan Symphony*, 1929), show masses of workers, immigrants, and other “voiceless” or marginalized peoples moving in and about the city, without their own expressions. Hirszman’s *Maioria absoluta* and Coutinho’s *Cabra marcado*, as I suggested earlier, are attempts to change this.

In Brazil, the use of interviews as the staple for documentaries became pervasive in the decades following the return to democracy in the mid-1980s. Jean-Claude Bernardet, one of Brazil’s leading film scholars, diagnosed the overuse of the interview in Brazil by the 1990s as a naturalized habit and expectation. He linked the practice to a certain automation: “one no longer thinks of documentaries without interviews, and more often than not directing a question to the interviewee is like switching the automatic pilot on” (Bernardet 286). If the questioning is automatic, then the responses are also automatic and formulaic, which eliminates the possibility of unexpected expressions or moments of truth emerging from the exchange. The pervasiveness of the interview also points to the eager consumption of first-person accounts speaking directly, albeit mediated through audiovisual forms of video and film. The contradiction is rich: on the one hand, there is a desire for the appearance of real people addressing the camera, and on the other hand, those very images have been emptied out of any reality

because they speak to a formulaic repetition. Coutinho's conversations, with their interest in the contingent, offer a corrective to this saturation of the interview. In doing so, they are anything but formulaic.

The past decade has seen a renewed interest in Coutinho's work in the wake of his death on February 2, 2014. There have been colloquia and homages to his work in the United States and Brazil, notably the "Ocupação Eduardo Coutinho" exhibit at the Instituto Moreira Salles in 2020 and 2021. Retrospective series dedicated to Coutinho's films in Brazil and beyond have heightened the visibility and reach of his films. Critics have referenced his work in essays, edited volumes, and scholarly monographs about Brazilian and Latin American film and documentary cinema. Our volume, *Listening to Others: Eduardo Coutinho's Documentary Cinema*, engages with this interest in Coutinho's work by bringing together scholars of film studies, documentary studies, cultural studies, and Brazilian studies from both the United States and Latin America. The resulting edited collection offers the first English-language book dedicated solely to the Brazilian documentarian. *Listening to Others* addresses his early work, the politics of space in his films, the role of performance in his documentaries, his ethics of encounter, and his place within a larger global documentary moment. This plurality of critical voices echoes the multiplicity of Coutinho's work itself. Rather than remain rooted in his birthplace of São Paulo, Coutinho traversed Brazil to explore the quotidian rhythms, worldviews, and livelihoods of common people from different realities of Brazil. In doing so, he engaged in conversations that formed the basis of his practice.

This book presents twelve essays written by a roster of contemporary critics from diverse disciplinary formations. The chapters are divided into four thematically organized subsections. The first section, "Media Ecologies," features chapters by Jens Anderman, Ashley Brock, and Gustavo Procopio Furtado. These pieces explore distinct elements of Coutinho's engagement with place, mediation, and landscapes, whether environmental or audiovisual. The second section, "Politics and the Documentary Image," includes chapters by Krista Brune, Luz Horne, and Rielle Navitski. These chapters examine ideas of politics in Coutinho's films and their production circuits, methods, and images. The third section on "Performing the Self and Others," with pieces by Adriana Johnson, Brenno Kenji Kaneyasu, and Fernando Pérez Villalón, addresses questions of performance, enunciation, and the voice. The final section, "On Time and Endings," contains chapters by Bruno Carvalho, Nilo Couret, and Vinicius Navarro that consider concepts of

time, beginnings, endings, and the posthumous possibilities of Coutinho's work.

The political dimensions of Coutinho's early work and their echoes in later films are addressed in the chapters by Navitski and Brune. By listening with care and time to the particularities of language of his interlocutors, Coutinho captured daily life in distinct places of Brazil, such as landfills, favelas, the northeastern sertão, and the interior realms of apartments, theaters, and classrooms in Rio de Janeiro, as studied in the contributions by Brock and Andermann. Coutinho's attention to the voice and speech structures is a documentary practice grounded in the kernel of fiction at the naked heart of documentary, as Kenji Kaneyasu, Pérez Villalón, and Johnson analyze in their chapters. The ethical risks of this conversational approach, of this encounter with "the other," is taken up by Horne. Coutinho's distinctive documentary practice raises questions about his relationship with archival materials and temporalities of past and present, as Furtado, Navarro, and Couret examine in their pieces. A focus on ethical concerns and technical features of Coutinho's films invites comparisons between the Brazilian director and other documentarians, which Carvalho explores in his study of Coutinho in conversation with Errol Morris. These critical voices from the United States and Latin America underscore the multiplicity of linguistic expressions and quotidian experiences within the contemporary Brazil that Coutinho listened to and documented throughout his career.

Listening to Others concludes with two sections of translations of Brazilian texts by and about Coutinho written since the 1970s: "Coutinho in His Own Words," which offers a selection of essays and manifestos written by Coutinho himself, showcases his writings as a film critic and theorist; and "Critical Insights from Coutinho's Contemporaries," which features a selection of key early readings of his work by Ferreira Gullar, José Carlos Avellar, and Jean-Claude Bernardet, three of Brazil's most important film scholars, whose work is foundational and formative for current critics and scholars of Brazilian cinema, as the chapters in this book exemplify. These two sections are crucial for this volume's intellectual project, as neither Coutinho's writings nor the Brazilian critics' work have been sufficiently read and discussed by English-language scholarship. Coutinho's writings from the 1970s provide insight into his relationship with Latin American, Hollywood, and European cinema as a viewer, critic, and filmmaker. These pieces reveal his care as a listener and a creative interlocutor when engaging with the works of other directors, a practice that also guides his own filmmaking. The chapter by poet and critic Gullar, who was similarly active in the CPC, reminds readers of the dangerous climate within which Coutinho and others

attempted to effect political and social change through their art in Brazil of the 1960s. Avellar analyzes Coutinho's documentaries from the 1990s with an eye toward language, history, and social dynamics. Bernardet, the final critic featured in this section, reads *Cabra marcado* in relation to Brazil's dynamics of power and to contemporaneous Brazilian films and literature. Another piece by Bernardet situates Coutinho's more recent films within a documentary (or "reality") boom in film and literature of the late 1990s and early 2000s.

By pairing contemporary scholarly voices with earlier pieces by Coutinho and film critics, this volume underscores the historic importance and continued relevance of the filmmaker and his documentary cinema. The inclusion of essays and criticism written in Brazil during the first decades of Coutinho's production also recalls Coutinho's own interest in activating the archive in his films. His cinema listens carefully to stories of the past while also looking at that earlier temporality through recovered footage in *Cabra marcado*, newsreels and documentary clips in *Peões*, and photographs and other personal artifacts in *Edificio Master* and other films. For Coutinho and the interlocutors who recount their memories and stories in his films, the past informs the present. Yet fully living in and embodying this present is an urgent and necessary act, one that can allow for the filmic encounters between Coutinho and other people to arrive at greater empathy and understanding. In this current global moment of heightened political strife, racial injustice, and social unrest, watching Coutinho's films and engaging in critical dialogues about them allow for forms of resistance, hope, and perhaps even democratic collaboration. *Listening to Others* invites readers to enter these crucial conversations.

Notes

1. See my discussion of these dynamics in "Conversation and Duration in Eduardo Coutinho's Films."
2. Translations from Spanish and Portuguese are mine.

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