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## **FILM AND VIDEO REVIEWS**

*A New Era*. Directed by **Boris Svartzman**. 2019. 71 minutes. Colour.

*A New Era* follows the struggle of Guanzhou's villagers — between 2008 and 2015 — against the eviction of their lands in order to build an 'ecological island' composed by a large number of buildings and urban infrastructures. Boris Svartzman filmed a located experience of these peasants' everyday life with expropriation threat, their resistance to urban planning, and how Chinese's authorities justify their urbanization.

This documentary is particularly relevant about showing people and environment on a change, by pressure. Urban developers are here supported by Chinese State. They are transforming an area mainly dedicated to family farming and wild-developing vegetation to a leisure and urban island committed to the recent and growing Chinese middle class. Both sides are observing these changes, and each other, men are coming everyday early in the morning close to the habitations in order to mark their presence and to put under pressure the last farmers of the land.

The remaining families are watching and hearing the sounds of works in progress, cranes, pneumatic drills, cement mixer trucks and notice every day the rise of improbable black and white high buildings on the horizon.

Authorities had started to destroy some of the houses of the village, justifying that they don't have building permit. The film shows how these destructions are part of a campaign of intimidation. Demolitions are surrounded by police officers and military units; protesters are regularly arrested.

Authorities are targeting the heart of the village in order to erase a sense of community and changing a village's life into a living among the ruins. Urban planners are making lousy deals with the less tenacious farmers and then unweave the community's unity, risen up against one another. This desolation is followed by another one: the knocking down of the meanings of words in order to achieve the authorities' aims.

*A New Era* shows silently the lack of meaning that is surrounding the idea of an ecological island for the authorities and urban developers. By putting side to side shoots taken from the new neighborhood and the ones from the point of view of remaining families, it highlights how the Guanzhou's project has no connection with the specificities — human or non-human — of such island. The long walks between destroyed houses in the village in which the filmmaker is taking us are like a wandering through museum, presenting a outlook of old Chinese world.

The Guanzhou's urban project seems to be one of these mega-city projects that is beyond all current justifications, besides real estate speculations. It embraces an on-trend concept, the ecology, without any ideological basis to it.

As one of the peasants says, the ideal of Chinese Communist Party is to put in people's minds that they are entering a new era, and the Guanzhou International Ecological Island is one of his paragons, a hollow shell idea as the late-capitalism produces it so well.

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*Diz a ela que me viu chorar (Let it burn).*  
Directed by **Maíra Bühler**. 2019. 82  
minutes. Colour. Produced by Klaxon  
Cultura.

In the centre of the largest city in South America, São Paulo, which is located in southeast Brazil, is a place known since the 1990s as *Cracolândia*, where the sale and use of drugs, especially crack, occur. The film directed by Maíra Bühler presents the daily life of drug addicts at the ‘Dom Pedro Park Social Hotel’, as the shelter for these people is known. The space was created by city hall as part of a harm-reduction policy. The dehumanisation that these individuals experience and the desire to understand the world from their point of view was the impetus for the creation of this film. The material is important to whoever is interested in the day-to-day aspects of such institutions and subjects, who are commonly represented as disabled, dangerous, or even ‘zombies’, according to the director. The film is also useful for ethnographic studies as well as urban studies addressing drugs and even the field of emotions.

The film depicts its characters without stooping to stereotypes, showing complex individuals with a chemical dependence living in situations of social vulnerability. Moments of conflict are shown, but also moments of togetherness and expressions of the suffering, anguish, affection, and dreams of each individual. The film records subjects in a ‘social hotel’ that serves as a shelter for drug addicts, offering a place to live and share experiences. The shelter is managed by professionals from diverse fields that ensure the operational functioning of the

place as well as the mediation of internal conflicts, the organisation of vacancies, and various logistic concerns. Although the film does not delve into the work routine of this team, we can see their presence briefly, as in pieces of a conversation about a fight between two residents as well as a moment of negotiation regarding a room exchange in order to take in a new family on its way to the shelter.

However, the fundamental issue of this film is precisely the fact that it avoids a focus merely on chemical dependence and the effects of drugs on these individuals. The director leaps this barrier and tells us about love and feelings in this context, presenting complex subjects and their daily experiences. Throughout the film, it is evident that the director’s focus is on the relationships of two couples, one of which involving two black women. The narrative is conducted mainly by documenting their daily practices, showing these people also when not under the effects of chemical substances, at moments when they express their feelings, talk, sing, and celebrate. The work is important because it presents moments of considerable closeness with these subjects, which reflects an interesting contribution from the director to this field.

There is a clear incentive for us to rethink current drug policies and prejudice, avoiding repression and compulsory hospitalisation as solutions. An example of this was the change in the management of the city of São Paulo after the municipal election that resulted in the exiting of Fernando Haddad (Workers’ Party) and the instillation of João Dória (the neoliberal ‘PSDB’ party), followed by his replacement by his vice Bruno Covas, who

made significant changes in this public policy over the years, such as the closure of a large part of the ‘social hotels’, leaving people on the streets and in the so-called ‘flow’ — a word that is used to designate a place (generally a street) with a larger concentration of individuals consuming drugs as well as selling them and other items. The current president, Bolsonaro, also changed national instructions to motivate abstinence from drug addicts, believing in other controversial processes based on hospitalisation. While harm-reduction policies are no longer part of the national drug policy, these people remain in a situation of social vulnerability.

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*Nightshift Spitalfields*. Directed by **Julius-Cezar MacQuarie** 2020. 10 minutes. Colour. Produced by Night workshop.

*Nightshift Spitalfields* focuses on Ali, a Bulgarian-Turkish migrant night worker, who does long nightshifts, often up to 16 hours, six nights a week, loading and transporting goods in London’s New Spitalfields night market. He is trapped between the impossibility to find a day job due to lack of English language skills, poor competencies in other areas of work, lack of free time to look for jobs and the tiredness imprinted on his body after five years of nightshifts. The film was shot mostly during 2015, the year when the filmmaker conducted night ethnography in this market and worked as a loader next to Ali.

This film makes visible a type of work and a category of migrant workers that even the emerging field of urban night studies obscures, despite their essential contribution to the economy and society. Night workers’ plight is brought to the foreground through the story of Ali, a migrant who has no choice but to do the ‘graveyard shift.’ Like Ali, many other migrants live invisible and precarious lives. They cannot take proper part in society and cannot organise to improve their conditions. They are just exhausted and worn down.

The turning point in the film is the threat of homelessness. Ali and his family, which includes two children and his pregnant wife, spend three nights in the emergency accommodation offered by the Metropolitan Police, while their housing application is being processed. In the end, the family is given accommodation in North London. Though they have a roof over their heads, they face new challenges. The pregnant wife and two children will have to commute to attend school. Ali will have to commute long hours to do the nightshift at Spitalfields in East London and rest in a one-room flat while the children play and the mother cooks and cleans. *Nightshift Spitalfields* narrates how this migrant manages to stoically rise above challenges and continue in this city.

The filmmaker sought a participatory approach throughout production, post-production and editing phases. It was Ali who chose the shooting angles, depending on how he drove the forklift within the market’s premises. More, he controlled the filming as he thought fit, via the GoPro camera installed on the roof of his forklift,

and decided what and whom to capture as he moved around the market. It was Ali who directed the camera at one of these co-workers, poking fun at how that man dozed off on the forklift while waiting for the customers and interrupting the monotony of the long nightshift. The protagonist-turned-filmmaker experimented with visual tools in a non-traditional documentary style, creating a poetic depiction of a gloomy working place.

Nightshift Spitalfields (2020) is the third short film in a trilogy about night work in London, next to *Invisible Lives* (2013) and *Nocturnal Lives* (2015). *Invisible Lives* documents the co-existence of formal and informal work, featuring night workers in the construction and hotelier industries, a sex worker on the street and a night market trader. *Nocturnal Lives* explores how people deal with sleeplessness while carrying out precarious labour at night. *Nightshift Spitalfields* condenses all the aspects of night work approached in the previous films through the story of one night worker. In all these films, the filmmaker allows his research participants to portray their lives, without much interference. However, MacQuarie gently points out the mainstream society's lack of engagement with these night workers' plight. Researchers of night, sleep, cities, migration, labour and precarity are likely to find this film useful.

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*Parque Oeste*. Directed by **Fabiana Assis**. 2018. 70 minutes. Colour.

In Latin America, the struggle over the right to housing is a constant in the various cities throughout the region. The documentary aims to show the collective resistance and resilience to a process of violent eviction and forced eradication that was imposed on many families in Parque Oeste Industrial (Goiania, Brazil) more than a decade ago, precisely in 2006. This film shows the path from the Parque Oeste to the 'Real Conquista' neighbourhood, the long and violent process that involved the struggle for an 'own house' in the city of Goiania.

The documentary highlights the right to housing as an inalienable right of human life. Through a reconstruction of public accounts and first-person stories, the film seeks to appeal to the viewer on two matters. Firstly, about the experience of a city devastated by political lies and police violence and, secondly, over the popular organization and struggle to create an affordable place to live. The tussle for land continues.

The film story is organized around the figure of Eronilde who narrates this journey from Parque Oeste to the 'Real Conquista' neighbourhood based on the experience of her husband Pedro, one of the leaders of the collective struggle for the right to housing in Parque Oeste. Pedro was murdered by the police forces amid the struggle for the right to land. Pedro and Wagner — the other lead member of the social movement also murdered — life testimonies become the repertoires for fighting and transform the pain into communal hope.

The visual narrative is articulated almost choreographically with a sound strategy to situate the observer in that place, in that unequal space. Progressively, we move from dark images with flashes of light, the sound of sirens, the crying, the shots and the songs at funerals to the neighbourhood under construction, the houses in project, the squares, the children leaving school, the music, the colours, the song of praise and the construction of a community library. A gentle passage that shows a deeply collective and collaborative work and commitment.

In this context, producing life seems almost an odyssey that confronts the political walls and the desires of a few: those local elites with exclusionary projects. The collective resistance faces a deepening of inequality manifested in the city's scarce infrastructure where the opposite of progress and development was the eviction.

The struggle as a long-term process is now embodied and mixture in this new neighbourhood named 'Real Conquista'. Perhaps one of the main conquests of this thread is to condense in 70 minutes several contemporary urban issues: inequality, violence, politics, lack of infrastructure and the right to housing. For this purpose, say those who are in the documentary, it is necessary to return to a premise stated in the constitution: the land must fulfil a social function.

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*Survivors*. Directed by **Arthur Pratt**. 2018. 84 minutes. Colour. Produced by WeOwn TV.

*Survivors* was made by a collective of West African filmmakers living in Freetown during a state of emergency caused by Ebola. The outbreak lasted 21 months (2014), and over 28,000 people were infected. Only half of the infected survived. The aim of the documentary is to celebrate the survivors of Ebola. The focus, as we will observe, is positive: to celebrate life. However, I have to confess that the vision of *Survivors* generates a strange feeling in me — now — that we are confined at home because CoVID-19 is a global issue. The images in the documentary resemble the ones we are living -deferred way- through the screens: people disinfect the streets, in 'space suits', double gloves and strange masks; health professionals without resources, who fight daily against their fears and with the terror of infecting their family: 'I have quarantined myself and I don't mingle too closely with them' explains Margaret (0:22:31-0:22:33). Army and police controlling, guarding, delimiting the territory in the Red-Zone and the politicians giving trivial lessons about life, using war terminologies to explain the emergency situation. The event of the virus is not only a personal, but a collective experience and transforms vision of *Survivors* into reflections that slide in the synchronic and diachronic line. This sense of belonging and non-strangeness generated by Otherness allows us to review the privileges of our lives (in greater or lesser measure) gender-andro-ethno-hetero-able-elite-age(centr)ism. CoVID-19

is teaching us humility (hopefully, it lasts), the meaning of fear, the crumbling of the securities as Ebola. ‘Ebola [...] touches my life, it's touched my faith, it touched the very foundation of my being’ (Arthur 0:03:35-0:03:37). We are forced not to respect traditions of burying our dead, sharing the mourning and happiness of a birth, taking care of our sick ones, but we can recover the value of life and being together. ‘I need to tell the World how my people survived Ebola — explains Arthur — We’ve seen people making sacrifices; sacrifices worthy of mention. These are the stories I want to tell’ (Arthur 0:05:23-0:05:43). Building on the daily practices of Arthur — Pastor and Filmmaker; Nengue — the senior ambulance driver, who has started voluntarily when Ebola started killing his people; Foday, twelve years old, who has been living on the street for 5 years, when his meets the father, he dies shortly after; and nurse Margaret, who attends in stores Emergency Ebola Treatment Center patients. With them, anthropological places are explored, that construct the identities of survivors/heroes/heroines: ‘[...] to see things happening; to see you contributing to making a change [...] in somebody’s life’ (1:21:38-1:22:11). *Survivors* shows with direct narration the fragmentation of the materials, the precariousness, the architectural and urban instability of Freetown (Kroo Bay Slum district). Without doubt, *Survivors* includes the lack of economic, environmental and political sustainability; the social inequalities in health, and the conflicts and international political ambiguities too. However, the aim is the presence of daily relational practices between the

interviewed subjects and their social groups, without ever falling into victimization or in the use of images to generate compassion. The documentary is thought and elaborated from within the Sierra Leone reality: the heroes and heroines who have fought for life and for the country, marked a change, focused on life. Their strategies, their beliefs, their way of moving forward: ‘in Sierra Leone we don’t have Spiderman, Superman or Capitan America. Our heroes are people who make sacrifices we can see’ (Arthur 1:08:19-1:08:36). They are visual narratives: interviews and visual fragments of where they live, work, their social and cultural contacts, their extended families. The city, observed from different perspectives of bird’s-eye view or ascending traveling mono cameras, is narrated through a characteristic dynamism and constant movement.

At last, as a weakness, I point out the lack of a gender perspective both in the ideation and in the shooting/development of the interviews. Being a Survivor as a woman is not the same as being a man.

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