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Re-presenting the railways of São Paulo state, Brazil, through media texts 1865-2003

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Resumen

Este artículo examina una selección de textos culturales brasileños de artistas y escritores, que describen el ferrocarril. Pretende facilitar una visión del modo en el que el ferrocarril fue recibido, interpretado y representado en el Estado de São Paulo, Brasil, a partir de la década de 1860. Con esta intención, se realiza una lectura de estos textos para presentar una historia alternativa del desarrollo del ferrocarril en São Paulo. El arte, la música, la ficción, el cine y la televisión, al igual que las historias escritas, revelan un continuo cuestionamiento de este modo de transporte. Se produce aquí un proceso de transculturación, según el término acuñado por Fernández Ortiz, o de *brasileñización*, de la tecnología importada del ferrocarril. En el artículo se sostiene que, para estos escritores, artistas, poetas y cineastas, este examen y evaluación constante del ferrocarril en São Paulo, Brasil, estuvo centrado en las dualidades modernidad/tradición y urbano/rural.

Palabras clave

Cambio tecnológico, Ferrocarriles, Impacto social, Patrimonio cultural

Códigos JEL

N7, O3, Z1

Abstract

This paper examines a selection of Brazilian cultural texts by artists and writers which feature the railway. The intention is to build an understanding of the manner in which the railway was received, interpreted and re-presented in the state of São Paulo, Brazil, from the 1860s onwards. A reading of these media texts is used to present an alternative history of the development of the railway in São Paulo. The art, music, fiction, film and television, and written histories reveal a sustained questioning of this form of transport. This is regarded as a process, after Fernando Ortiz, of transculturation – a Brazilianisation – of the imported technology of the railway ensemble. This paper observes that, for these writers, artists, poets and film makers, this consistent examination and evaluation of the railway in São Paulo, Brazil, has centred on the dualities of both modernity/tradition and urban/rural.

Key words

Technological change, Railways, Social impact, Cultural Heritage

JEL Codes

N7, O3, Z1

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1. Introduction

The railway in Brazil, since its inception in the 1850s, was widely regarded as the epitome of modernity. The Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre, writing in 1959, observed that from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, “both the locomotive and the sewing machine brought new cultural avenues to Brazilian progress, each one in its own field of endeavour”. Freyre went on to suggest that both rail travel and tailoring were somehow Brazilianised during the process of the transfer of technologies². It would also appear that within fifty years the image of the railway had become embedded in Brazilian society and its language: in 1928 Mário de Andrade noted that,

“Paulistas ... are the only really useful people in the country (which is why they are nicknamed ‘Locomotives’, because of their powerful energy)”³.

The two quotations above also suggest that the *idea* of the railway, and in this instance the locomotive in particular, had taken on a meaning in Brazilian society that connected it with progress, modernisation, and hard work. Railway historians, for example Eduardo David and Odilon Matos, generally share this view⁴. However this paper examines a range of cultural products to present an alternative historical narrative of

¹ The author thanks two anonymous referees for their constructive comments on a draft of this article.

² Freyre (2004 [1959]), p. 360.

³ Andrade (1984 [1928]), pp. 76-77.

⁴ David (1985) y Matos (1990).

Brazilian railway history, which suggests a persistent questioning and interrogation, by writers and artists, of the railway ensemble. The conclusion drawn is that, at best, these novels, films, songs and artworks present an ambivalent attitude towards this transport technology which came initially from Europe and later from the USA. This article seeks to highlight some of the dualities and tensions between modernity and tradition, and rural versus urban within the context of Brazilian railway history.

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This essay follows techniques used by Wolfgang Schivelbusch, and taken up by Michael Freeman, Ian Carter, Lynne Kirby, Peter Bishop, Martin Cooper, and Julie Wosk, amongst others⁵. Schivelbusch employed the heuristic of the “machine ensemble”, to embody the idea that the railway was “a machine consisting of the rails *and* of the vehicles running on them”⁶. He examined the early decades of railway travel in Europe and the USA from the 1830s to the 1890s, and he used sources such as fictional writing, technical and medical reports, travel writing, and art to support his argument. His aim was to investigate “the process of assimilation” of the railway into society⁷, and he observed that, “travel by rail, being pulled by the power of steam, was experienced as participation in an industrial process”⁸. This paper asserts that, in its cultural form, part of the ensemble includes the television shows, the movies, the paintings, the novels, the songs, and the poetry which express ideas and feelings about the physical forms of the railway⁹. These products have been chosen primarily because mention is made of rail travel, and secondly because each represents a contemporary figure in Brazilian culture across the periods in question. They are not intended to be exhaustive, and no claim is made that each writer or artist is solely representative of his/her era. However the aim is to initiate a debate on the manner in which the railway has been re-presented in these works and to indicate tendencies and examples of the range of reactions to railway technology.

2. The railway in Brazil and Informal Empire

This essay takes a timeline approach to the presentation of the selected media texts across the 150 years or so of the railways in Brazil¹⁰. Whilst acknowledging the problems surrounding periodisation¹¹, for convenience the historical account is here divided into a series of periods which largely follow political and social events in the country, in a similar manner employed by such Brazilian railway historians as Pedro

⁵ Schivelbusch (1986 [1979]), Wosk (1992), Kirby (1997), Freeman (1999), Carter (2001), Bishop (2002), Cooper (2011).

⁶ Schivelbusch (1986 (1979)), p. 17. Emphasis in original.

⁷ Schivelbusch (1986 (1979)), p. 199.

⁸ Schivelbusch (1986 (1979)), p. 72.

⁹ See Cooper (2011).

¹⁰ The texts included here are not exhaustive, but are intended to present a sample selection across the time periods in question. See Cooper (2011), pp. 34-35.

¹¹ Bentley (1996), p. 749.

Telles, Renê Schoppa and Eduardo David¹². This paper also limits itself to a consideration of railway lines in São Paulo state, rather than Brazil as a whole¹³. Other research in this field has already identified works by diverse cultural producers including Machado de Assis (novelist, Rio de Janeiro), Walter Salles (film director, Rio de Janeiro), Jorge Amado (novelist, northeastern Brazil), and Kleiton & Kledir (singer/songwriters, Rio Grande do Sul), amongst others¹⁴.

Railway technology, developed initially in Britain, was exported to other countries almost from the outset, creating what has been termed an informal railway empire¹⁵. In Brazil from the mid nineteenth century onwards, for example, London-registered companies and English-speaking engineers and managers came to work on a number of railway lines. Later these lines were acquired and operated by Brazilian engineers, managers and staff. This has resonances with the notion of transculturation, after Fernando Ortiz, which involves the “acquiring [of] another culture”, the “uprooting of a previous culture” and “the consequent creation of a new cultural phenomenon”¹⁶. This study thus highlights ways in which the railway has been re-presented (and re-created) in cultural products within Brazil. What remains consistent throughout this long period is the questioning of the railway technology; and the dualities presented by artists and writers: between modernity and tradition, and between urban and rural.

One of these tensions has been noted elsewhere. Brazilian literary analyst, Francisco Foot Hardman, considers the cultural effects of the building of a railway in the Amazon region between 1870 and 1912. The construction of the Estrada de Ferro Madeira-Mamoré claimed an estimated six thousand lives or more¹⁷. Yet Hardman regards the initial feelings of shock towards the modern railway technology to have largely disappeared by the late twentieth century in Brazil. From its reception in the late nineteenth century as a technology that was “a goddess of progress” the train, he says, had, at the end of the twentieth, become a child’s toy, an attraction in a theme park or a heritage steam ride¹⁸. The suggestion being that “the railway” has been dismissed more or less out of hand. This present essay comes to a more nuanced conclusion, and finds that the relevance and place of the railway has consistently been called into question for over a century and a half, but has refused to fade away as a subject in cultural products. On the one hand it has been presented by writers and artists as a possible icon of movement, and of progress, but on the other the problems of the lived urban experience and the threat to tradition have persisted within these portrayals. In doing so, many of the following examples reflect the dramatic growth of the city and the state of São Paulo between the 1850s and the 2000s.

¹² David (1985), Telles (1994), Schoppa (2004).

¹³ Cooper (2011), pp. 34-35.

¹⁴ These are examined in Cooper (2011), pp. 98-104, 162-166, 105-109, and 142-143.

¹⁵ Davis and Wilburn Jr (eds.) (1991), Carter (2001), p. 12.

¹⁶ Ortiz (1995 [1940]), pp. 102-103.

¹⁷ Ferreira (2005), p. 302.

¹⁸ Hardman (2005), pp. 51-52.

3. Early Railway Building – the era of Brazilian Empire to 1889

[176] Brazil achieved independence from Portugal in 1822 and the idea of the railway in Brazil is credited to the Emperor Dom Pedro II who, as a Europhile looked across the Atlantic for inspiration on how to “modernize” his country¹⁹. The concept of the railway as a potential form of transport in Brazil surfaced in 1835 in a government decree²⁰. Thomas Cochrane, a British man awarded one of the first railway concessions, is described (in an apparent act of Brazilianisation) by one railway historian as a homeopathic doctor and father-in-law of the writer José de Alencar²¹. Cochrane was the first to gain a concession from this decree, but his line was never built and it was in 1854 when the first line in Brazil was opened. This was the Estrada de Ferro [E. F.] de Petrópolis, a company led by the Barão de Mauá, which constructed the first 14.5 kilometres of railway to operate in Brazil, and ran from near the shoreline of the Baía de Guanabara, Rio de Janeiro, northwards towards the mountain and the imperial summer resort of Petrópolis²².

In the state of São Paulo the first railway to make an immediate impact economically, and culturally, was the São Paulo Railway (SPR), linking Jundiaí and the coffee plantations of the upland interior to the state capital and thence down the Serra do Mar to the Atlantic port of Santos²³. The government decree for the SPR was issued in 1855 and the line fully opened in 1867. The 1 in 12.5 gradient line, up from Santos to the top of the Alto de Serra, was doubled in 1900 when a second track was opened. As well as exports, it was to become one of the major routes for migration from Europe and Japan. Immigration began to increase steadily in the 1850s and grew to prominence after the abolition of slavery and in the first republic²⁴. Between 1887 and 1914, 2.7 million people travelled the Santos-São Paulo route, of who up to 1.5 million came from Italy²⁵.

Julie Wosk, examining the field of visual representations of the railway, identifies an age of trauma in railway art between the 1830s and the 1870s: “It was European caricaturists, much more than American artists, who rejected a sanguine view of steam transportation”²⁶. In Brazil, the newly-built SPR caused similar concerns in 1865 for a poet and journalist, Pedro Taques de Almeida Alvim. The derailment of one of the pre-inaugural trains on the SPR prompted a satirical reaction likening the ensemble of the

¹⁹ Schoppa (2004), pp. 37-38.

²⁰ Schoppa (2004), pp. 21-25.

²¹ David (1985), p. 6. For details of José de Alencar’s place in the Brazilian literary canon see: Johnson (2004). Dr Cochrane was a cousin of Lord Thomas Cochrane, 1775-1859, an admiral of the British Navy. See: Garcia (2000), p. 20.

²² Schoppa (2004), p. 25.

²³ Schoppa (2004), p. 23 and pp. 91-97.

²⁴ Fausto (1999), p. 118 and p. 166; Lamounier (2000), p. 26, note 89.

²⁵ Anon. (2006), Fausto (1999), p. 166 and p. 234.

²⁶ Wosk (1992), p. 36 and pp. 211-213.

locomotive and coaches to a “bichinho”; little more than an insect or mouse²⁷. The poem opens:

“The little thing runs away / Just like a firecracker: / It goes straight away to Santos / Smoking its cigar / Which looks like a chimney”²⁸.

It was, in Alvim’s eyes, an inauspicious day when on 6 September 1865 the ceremonial train between São Paulo and Santos left the tracks killing the driver and injuring a number of the distinguished guests, delaying the official opening by twenty-four hours.²⁹ He concludes that

“If you want a pleasant ride / There are plenty of horse and carts—without fear / Really cheap there at Sé”³⁰.

This questioning of the meaning, and social value, of the railway appears to have been broadly consistent, in the examples discussed here, across the period from the 1850s to the 2000s. “The railway” was subject to negotiations between and amongst various social groups. In various quarters there was a notion that in some way it was bringing something new and different to Brazil. For example, initially, it was a means for landowners and exporters to speed up the transfer of agricultural products such as sugar in the northeast and coffee in the Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo areas, from the farms and plantations down to the nearest ocean port and thence to world markets in North America and Europe. Meanwhile State regulators and foreign railway managers played a complex game, sometimes pitting profit motives against the control and promotion of the transport industry by those in political power³¹. Passengers, too, were being called upon to adapt to new forms of behaviour on this form of transport.

A more optimistic view of this emerging technology was given by the poet Castro Alves (1847-1871) in 1870 in his poem ‘O Livro e a América’ (The Book and America)³². In 1868, as a young student lawyer, he was studying in São Paulo³³. He saw the locomotive as the

“...king of the winds / - Rider of the thoughts, / - Proclaimer of the big light!...”³⁴.

His poem combined religious imagery with visions of the New World and Columbus, with veiled references to a holy place, a sacred quarter previously denied to the masses. But, for him, the steam train brought with it a technological and spiritual revo-

²⁷ Pedro Taques de Almeida Alvim (atrib), ‘O Bichinho Vai Correndo...’ in Calmon (1973), pp. 251-253.

²⁸ O bichinho vai correndo / Que parece um busca-pé: / Vai a Santos num momento / Fumegando o seu charuto / Com ares de chaminé. (All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted).

²⁹ Lavander Jr. and Mendes (2005), pp. 23-24.

³⁰ Quem quiser dar bons passeios / Tem carrinhos—sem receios / Bem baratos lá na Sé.

³¹ One state inspector in 1885-1887 was Adolpho Pinto, who later set down his reminiscences in his autobiography, Pinto (1970).

³² Alves (1997 [1870]), pp. 20-23.

³³ Rowe (2004), p. 151.

³⁴ ...“rei dos ventos” / —Ginete dos pensamentos, / —Arauto da grande luz!...

lution, allowing the experience of renewal, baptism and unrestricted access for the multitudes to previously sacred places in the temple. Such deification can be read as an early example of the type of reaction Hardman has described³⁵. The railway, between the 1850s and the 1950s, helped to redefine some of the geography of Brazil and in the state of São Paulo regions came to be known by the name of the railway company which ran through them³⁶.

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During the imperial period Britain had retained active commercial links with the independent Brazil³⁷, and it was to English and Scottish engineering companies that the majority of the railway building and construction contracts were given. In response began the task of securing state control of the foreign railway technology through both official legislation and its classification and physical description. In 1884, towards the end of Emperor Dom Pedro II's reign and five years before the creation of the republic, Francisco Picanço, an engineer and founder of *Revista de Engenharia*, published *Viação Ferrea do Brazil*, an alphabetical list of the states of Brazil and the railway lines in each state³⁸. His book of statistics also included lists of railway legislation for each company, and was to form the basis of many railway histories to be published in the decades to come³⁹.

There is evidence of a nationalistic tone to his writing, particularly when it came to the foreign-controlled SPR⁴⁰. Instead of using the English name of the line he called it the "Estrada de Ferro Santos a Jundiahy"⁴¹. This name was only adopted sixty-two years later in 1946 when the line transferred to Brazilian government control as the concession came to an end. Picanço pre-empted history by over half a century. Gilberto Freyre has noted that Brazil has a well-established tendency to "receive, assimilate, adopt, develop, recreate, and brazilianise foreign ideas"⁴², and in this example the British company appeared to be unable to properly establish its desired name in either Brazilian governmental documents or the press. There is evidence that foreign-owned utility companies were subjected to scrutiny by the national and provincial governments who had given the original concessions, as well as by the press⁴³. The British-owned railway company was often publicly criticised, particularly after rail accidents and resulting court cases. Company correspondence from 1871 showed attempts to make sure

³⁵ Hardman (2005), pp. 51-52.

³⁶ Mattoon Jr. (1977), p. 285, Cooper (2011), p. 258.

³⁷ Fausto (1999), p. 76 and p. 145. Between 1870 and 1873 some 40% of Brazilian exports went to Britain.

³⁸ Picanço (1884).

³⁹ Cooper (2011), p. 64.

⁴⁰ Picanço (1884), pp. 274-287.

⁴¹ Picanço (1884), pp. 274-287. This section of his book is titled 'E. F. de Santos a Jundiahy' [sic], with 'S. Paulo (Brazilian) Railway Company' in small letters under the section heading. The orthography is contemporary Brazilian Portuguese.

⁴² Freyre (2000 [1948]), p. 28.

⁴³ Lewis (1991), pp. 27-40, Summerhill (2003), pp. 34-57.

that staff consistently named the company correctly⁴⁴. Local expatriate managers were aware of the sensitivities of their passengers and the legislators, and appeared to realise that even the company's very identity was being challenged.

4. End of empire and the dawn of the republican age (1889-c1920)

Industrial growth in Brazil, coupled with railway expansion, began to accelerate after the abolition of slavery in 1888⁴⁵, and it was in this year that Júlio Ribeiro published his novel, *A Carne* (The Flesh), a work which drew heavily on the influence of France's Émile Zola⁴⁶. Ribeiro (1845-1890) was a self-taught linguist, the son of a North American father and Brazilian mother⁴⁷. He presented for his readers a description of the SPR and the descent of the Serra do Mar on the mountain section of the railway where train compositions were split into four carriages and taken down by brake cars and rope winding gear. For him the railway provided evidence for the rationality of technology which triumphed over Nature. Thus the railway in *A Carne* became an "...agent, not just of modernity, but also of modern social and political relations"⁴⁸. In political terms, "the railway of Júlio Ribeiro was, fundamentally, the expression of order and progress: the railway was republican"⁴⁹. Whilst Ribeiro did not explicitly mention the British managers, he did remind his readers that it was not Brazilian:

"The *Inglesa* railway from Santos to Jundiá is a grandiose monument to modern industry..."⁵⁰.

"...The service is regular and so well organised that for the most part there is just one track to serve trains coming up as well as going down. The line has been functioning for more than twenty one years and still there has not been a single disaster. Amazing, no?"⁵¹.

As the republican age approached, his novel suggested that there was a certain admiration for this British engineering, yet he remained non-committal by allowing readers to interpret for themselves the question "Amazing, no?". Many Brazilian railway engineers and writers reluctantly admired the British-run railway⁵². However, this

⁴⁴ Arquivo do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, SP, *E. F. Santos à Jundiá 1871-1872*, E00656, p. 41, D. M. Fox to Murray, 28 June 1871.

⁴⁵ Fausto (1999), pp. 172-175.

⁴⁶ Ribeiro (2002 [1888]).

⁴⁷ Veríssimo (1998 [1916]), p. 340 and p. 342.

⁴⁸ Martins (2004), p. 14.

⁴⁹ Martins (2004), p. 11.

⁵⁰ Ribeiro (2002 [1888]), p. 171. [A estrada de ferro inglesa de Santos a Jundiá é um monumento grandioso da indústria moderna...]

⁵¹ Ribeiro (2002 [1888]), p. 172. [...O serviço é regular e tão bem feito, que em grandes extensões há um único jogo de trilhos a servir tanto para a subida como para a descida. Funciona a linha há mais de vinte e um anos e ainda não se deu um só desastre. Pasmoso, não ?] In 1901 a second inclined plane was officially opened to cope with the increased demand. See: Lavander Jr. and Mendes (2005), p. 67.

⁵² Schoppa (2004), p. 95.

was largely masked by a persistent questioning of the railway ensemble, which continued into the twentieth century.

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Brazil became an independent republic in 1889 in a transition that was largely peaceful⁵³. By 1889 there were 66 railway companies and 9,500 kilometres of lines⁵⁴. The desire by writers to categorise and classify the growing transport networks continued. By the turn of the century the SPR had become so successful and profitable that an extra line was built on the mountain section of the railway to ease congestion. In 1901 an imposing city centre station was opened at Luz, later described as "...practically a piece of London carved into the centre of the capital of São Paulo State"⁵⁵, whilst Adolpho Pinto set about writing his descriptive history of transport in the state of São Paulo, published in 1903⁵⁶. In doing so he recast the history of the SPR, removing many references to the British owners and, again, was a writer who Brazilianised the name of the company in the process, consistently referring to the "estrada inglesa" and the "Companhia Inglesa"⁵⁷. Like Picanço twenty years previously, his work would be taken up by future historians and reused without questioning the facts and opinions contained in it⁵⁸.

Whilst Brazil was not directly involved in World War One, the financial impact of the lack of continuing European capital flows on some railway companies was dramatic. One of the victims was Percival Farquhar's Brazil Railway Company, The North American entrepreneur had during the first decade of the twentieth century built up substantial holdings in a number of railways, including the E. F. Sorocabana in São Paulo state, and by 1912 he controlled sixty percent of lines in the country⁵⁹. His financial control faltered from 1913 onwards as his companies went into receivership and many were taken over by Brazilian federal and state governments⁶⁰. Even so, for passengers, this period has seen substantial growth and rail routes now spread out from the coastal cities and ports into the interior, particularly in the southeast, and the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

5. The 1920s: Railway's golden age and Brazilian Modernism

Some of the most direct and sustained interrogation of the railway ensemble by writers and artists occurred during the 1920s. 1922 marked the inauguration of Modern Art Week in the city of São Paulo when a number of writers and artists declared the

⁵³ Fausto (1999), p. 148.

⁵⁴ Schoppa (2004), p. 31.

⁵⁵ Veiga (1991), p. 149.

⁵⁶ Pinto (1903).

⁵⁷ Pinto (1903), p. 117. Here, for example, he uses "ingleza" three times and only refers to the S. Paulo Railway when quoting directly from official contracts.

⁵⁸ Cooper (2011), p. 64.

⁵⁹ Schoppa (2004), p. 67; also see Gauld (1972).

⁶⁰ Gauld (1972), pp. 247-258.

start of their new cultural movement⁶¹. In particular, some of these artists revealed how they were inspired directly by the technological changes they were witnessing in the urban environment around them, using the subject of the railway as a means to highlight and discuss the tensions between its industrial modernity and the enduring traditions of Brazilian society. Elements of this interrogation of the railway ensemble have been noted in other countries, for example, in the case of England, "...the arrival of the railway revealed profound tensions between ideologies of landscape and ideologies of progress"⁶². In the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro the urban growth experienced in the late nineteenth century came about not through European-style capitalist development but through "the commercial expansion resulting from Brazil's increasing integration into the world market and the resulting increase in exports"⁶³. The railway, a key piece of technology in the exportation of agricultural produce, also emerged at this time but, for the Brazilian historian Emilia Viotti da Costa,

"The technological and scientific revolution that was associated with industrialisation and urbanisation in other parts of the world did not take place in Brazil, mostly because of its dependent position in the international market, the fragility of the internal market, the availability of cheap labor, and the importation of technology"⁶⁴.

That dependency is highlighted by Mário de Andrade in "Paisagem n. 4" (Landscape no. 4), a poem read during the 1922 Modern Art Week, which begins, "At the intersection the English cry of the São Paulo Railway... / But the windstorms of disillusion! The drop in coffee prices!", and later he laments, "Far away Brazil with her arms folded... / Oh! Maternal indifferences!..."⁶⁵. It is perhaps a call to arms, and an appeal to the Brazilian authorities to do something about the foreign-owned SPR. It can be read as a portrayal of São Paulo as a "gloomy landscape of... foreign-owned railways and disillusioned farmers..."⁶⁶. Further, Mário de Andrade appeared to have known that his exhortation for Brazil to defend itself against this foreign interference would not be heeded, and would be met with indifference.

This pointed questioning of the railway as an icon of modernity appeared to have become a repeated theme in a number of works by another Modernist artist. Tarsila do Amaral (1886-1973), perhaps Brazil's best known Modernist painter⁶⁷, studied art in Paris and returned in 1924 after the 1922 Modern Art Week to become involved in the new movement⁶⁸. She was married for a time to the writer Oswald de Andrade, one of the driving forces behind Brazilian Modernism⁶⁹. Evidence suggests that between 1924

⁶¹ Barnitz (2001), p. 57.

⁶² Murdoch (2003), p. 20; Carter (2001), pp. 263-264.

⁶³ Costa (2000), p. 194.

⁶⁴ Costa (2000), p. 200.

⁶⁵ Andrade (1968 [1922]), p. 75.

⁶⁶ Gonzalez and Treece (1992), p. 71.

⁶⁷ Canton (2003), p. 53, Vincent (2003), pp. 173-174.

⁶⁸ Ades (1989), p. 338.

⁶⁹ Ades (1989), pp. 132-134, Canton (2003), p. 53.

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and 1925 Tarsila was deeply influenced by the railway ensemble, producing at least four known works in oil on this theme⁷⁰. Most were painted almost immediately after her journey with Oswald, Mário and others by train through the southeastern states of Brazil in 1924⁷¹. In these works the railway, comprising stylised locomotives, carriages and signalling equipment, are consistently disconnected from the surrounding landscape⁷². On the one hand the arrival of modernity is presented in bold clear colours, yet on the other it does not blend in with either the urban or rural backdrops⁷³. Her use of colour, and her dislocation of the ensemble of the railway train and associated technology, suggested a deep-seated uneasiness about this modern technology. In her piece *Estrada de Ferro Central do Brasil* (EFCB) she demonstrated how the railway had actually stopped functioning and traditional life was quietly continuing in the background of Brazilian society. John Wylie says landscape can be regarded as “a representation or symbolisation of particular subjectivities, of particular cultural attitudes and values”⁷⁴. Tarsila appeared to be depicting technology, the railway, urban space, rural greenery and humanity as equally confusing within the context of the country where she lived.

Street protests and riots in both São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, sparked by either rising ticket prices, overcrowding or poor service, occurred at sporadic intervals over the course of the twentieth century⁷⁵. Strikes by transport workers, such as the 1906 action taken by telegraph operators with the Companhia Paulista railway which shut down services, only added to the misery of passengers⁷⁶. In the 1920s Tarsila’s audience for her artwork would have been her fellow Modernists and those select few of the elites who attended art galleries and exhibitions. In her work *São Paulo*, also painted in 1924, she reflected back to them the confusion of a rapidly expanding metropolis. In this piece the rail carriage appeared disconnected from the city landscape. Perhaps her work was striking a chord with those who were forced to use the metropolitan networks on a daily basis.

This analysis is at odds with a number of railway historians, who understand the development of the railway in Brazil as being closely linked to the economic changes underway from the mid 1800s to the late twentieth century and beyond. As such, for them, it was a symbol of progress and development from rural economy to industrial metropolis⁷⁷. However in 1927 Mário de Andrade declared that travel by railway constituted a “shameful Brazilian voyage” as if he was uncomfortable himself with the enactment of

⁷⁰ Cooper (2011), pp. 189-190. The ‘railway’ oils by Tarsila do Amaral are *Estrada de Ferro Central do Brasil* (1924), *São Paulo* (1924), *Barra do Pirai* (1924), and *A Gare* (1925).

⁷¹ Amaral (2003), p. 148. These pieces were initially shown together at various exhibitions in Brazil in the 1920s. They now hang in separate public and private art collections in Brazil.

⁷² Barnitz (2001), p. 58.

⁷³ Canton (2003), p. 77.

⁷⁴ Wylie (2007), p. 96.

⁷⁵ Moisés and Martinez-Alier (1980), Meade (1989).

⁷⁶ Fausto (2000), pp. 135-146.

⁷⁷ For example, see: Matos (1990), p. 143.

foreign railway technology in the domestic landscape⁷⁸. In his novel *Amar, Verbo Intransitivo* he poked fun at the behaviour of Brazilian families and their precocious children⁷⁹. In one scene an upper middle class family, members of the nouveau riche of São Paulo, settled into a Pullman carriage of the E. F. Central that was taking them on the all-day journey from Rio de Janeiro back home. The journey had been long and slow, some five hundred kilometres on the single track of the E. F. Central between Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and the joke encapsulated this physical distance through the naming of the stations passed through⁸⁰. It was significant that Mário de Andrade, a Modernist author, was writing about modern technology carrying a family that was attempting to retain its surface veneer of traditional values. The seats were covered in imitation leather, the windows had to be shut to stop the dust and hot cinders flying into the carriage, the temperature inside was gradually rising, and the discomfort became unbearable as the airless carriage lurched along and passengers bumped their heads.

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Overall, this story reveals a number of dualities inherent in the railway in Brazil. There is a tension between the traditional values of the Brazilian family and the modernity of the transport technology which appears to confront the respect and manners expected of children by their parents. Secondly, the father is confused in the semi-public space of the railway carriage which contains up to fifty strangers, including foreigners, about whether to treat it as part of the private home or the public street – a dialectic identified by Roberto DaMatta as central to understanding Brazilian life⁸¹. The journey started and finished in the two major cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo; in between were the small towns, villages and halts whose names evoked at best an indifferent response from the child's parents – serving to highlight the divide between the metropolis and the countryside–.

6. 1930 – 1964: The Vargas Era and beyond – state consolidation of the railways

In 1930 Getúlio Vargas became president of Brazil after a revolution which bought the first republic to an end, and under the authoritarian state regime that developed, governmental bodies eventually owned 52% of all railway lines, up from 20% in 1914⁸². The 'Estado Novo' (New State) of President Vargas, which lasted until 1945, introduced a systematic management of cultural production by national governmental organisations. and it was during and just after this period when many of the foreign-owned railway companies were taken under state control. The poet Manuel Bandeira (1886-1968) published *Trem de Ferro* in 1936 in which he drew attention to the threat on the one hand, that the modern railway technology posed to the lives of simple people in the countryside and on the other, the danger that by not catching the rushing train the

⁷⁸ Andrade (2002 [1927]), p. 125.

⁷⁹ Andrade (2002 [1927]), pp. 123-130.

⁸⁰ Adolpho Pinto, writing in 1903, said "The normal speed of passenger trains of 1.6 metre gauge, not including waiting time at stations, is 50 km/h" (1903), p. 113.

⁸¹ DaMatta (1991), pp. 63-73.

⁸² Schoppa (2004), p. 67, Fausto (1999), p. 196.

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rural person would be left behind in the advance of progress⁸³. For a short time as a young man he worked in the offices of the E. F. Sorocabana in São Paulo where his father also worked⁸⁴. The poem's use of repeated phrases and its rhythm when spoken aloud mimic the sound of the wheels of the train on the tracks: "café com pão, mantega não"⁸⁵ [coffee and bread, no butter]. The poem itself has become a popular classic and is a work which casts the railway as a dislocating force. Here Bandeira highlighted the duality of the railway: that modernity brought with it benefits of technological change, but could lead to alienation particularly in rural areas. This conflict appears to be a persistent tendency amongst cultural producers who feature the railway.

Electrification work on the SPR began in the early 1940s and it reverted to federal government ownership in 1946⁸⁶. 1945 to 1964 were known as the period of democratic experiment after the years of dictatorship, with Vargas becoming president again during this period (1952-1954)⁸⁷. The political challenge of modernising Brazil was taken up in earnest during the presidency of Juscelino Kubitschek between 1956-1960, who proclaimed "fifty years in five" of development, and oversaw a period of high growth and rapid transformations. A new capital city, Brasília, was built in 1956 and inaugurated in 1960⁸⁸. Across the nation many railway lines, with the exception of those in the state of São Paulo, remained isolated from one another due both to company organisation, routes and differences in gauges. The crime writer, Geraldo Ferraz, used the setting of Paranapiacaba, a railway town on the route of the SPR, to create his hard-boiled mystery *Doramundo* (1956)⁸⁹. The village, the main switching yard for the preparation of trains before their descent down the Serra do Mar, had long been known as "the English village". Today the clock tower at the station in Paranapiacaba is still known as "Big Ben", and the low lying mountain clouds are referred to as "London fog" each time they descend⁹⁰. Ferraz used the natural geography of the town at the top of the mountain range, and the strict company control to create the necessary claustrophobia required for his murders to take place. This novel, although located in a railway town, is not *about* the railway as such, but is read both as "a commentary on crime in its social context" and the way in which it is talked about⁹¹. The novel was turned into a film in 1976 that retained much of the claustrophobia by using black and white cinematography;

⁸³ Bandeira (1970), pp. 145-146, Rowe (2004), pp. 143-144.

⁸⁴ Bandeira (1970), p. xli.

⁸⁵ Bandeira (1970), pp. 145-146.

⁸⁶ Schoppa (2004), p. 97.

⁸⁷ Fausto (1999), p. 237 and p. 243.

⁸⁸ Fausto (1999), p. 253.

⁸⁹ Ferraz (1975 [1956]).

⁹⁰ Lavander Jr. and Mendes (2005), pp. 104-110, Small (1985), Buzelin, Coelho and Setti (2002), p. 75, Giesbrecht (2007),

⁹¹ Lindstrom (1993), pp. 77-78.

it also confined the railway to wide shots of locomotives on the SPR behind the opening credits⁹².

In 1957 a substantial number of separate railway companies were taken under control of a national company, the Rede Ferroviária Federal S/A (RFFSA), under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Transport. It had taken five years of study and planning, including a survey by a joint Brazilian-USA consultancy team, and the railway companies were grouped together under federal ownership as the RFFSA holding company was formed.⁹³ The former SPR, now known at this stage as the E. F. Santos à Jundiaí, became part of Region Four of this large organisation. In 1957, when the RFFSA was created, a poet wrote of his memories of turn-of-the-century city smells such as the coal and wood burnt by the locomotives of the SPR and the E. F. Sorocabana. Jorge Americano (1891-1969) was a lawyer and politician in São Paulo who, shortly after his retirement, published the second of three volumes of his memoirs which contained short stories, poems and vignettes of life in São Paulo. His poem “Cheiros que se Sentiam” (Evocative Smells) is a memory of São Paulo from the start of the twentieth century⁹⁴. It is presented as a list in free verse, and begins, “Of wood smoke from the locomotives of the Sorocabana, and the coal of the São Paulo Railway. / Of coffee roasted at home. / The acrid smell of animal detritus at the horse taxi ranks...”⁹⁵. From these opening lines of the poem we imagine a man who has recently retired from public life and who, from his relatively privileged upper class position, is romanticising about the São Paulo of his boyhood days. It is significant that his first line is about the smell of the locomotive. This he links directly to the smell of coffee at home. The railway is presented as the most important aspect of the city’s memory yet it is not being used for travelling. Americano evokes the railway as a smell of coal and burning wood: an emotion felt at some distance from the everyday reality of riding inside a carriage compartment or negotiating the bustle of a ticket office and the crowded platform. It is, for him, a distant memory; as if the train of the 1950s has lost this romantic touch – a reflection which supports Hardman’s view of the railway⁹⁶.

This ambivalence was sharpened, with a nationalistic stance, in 1962 in a railway industry magazine, where a visit by a member of the British royal family to Brazil became an opportunity to suggest that Brazilian managers of the SPR had, since 1946, run the operation more efficiently than the English ever did. In March 1962, during the post-Carnival weeks of Lent, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, husband of the reigning British monarch Queen Elizabeth II, walked down the steps of the Estação da Luz, an architectural memorial to the British informal empire constructed by English-speaking railway engineers and funded by shareholders in London and Europe. The magazine,

⁹² *Doramundo*, directed by João Batista de Andrade (Raiz Produções Cinematográficas, São Paulo, SP., 1976).

⁹³ Schoppa (2004), pp. 157-167.

⁹⁴ Americano (2004), pp. 169-171.

⁹⁵ “De fumaça de lenha das locomotivas da Sorocabana, e de carvão de pedra, da São Paulo Railway. / De café torrado em casa. / Cheiro acre de detritos de animais, nos estacionamentos de carros de aluguel.

⁹⁶ Hardman (2005), pp. 51-52.

Ferrovia, ran a picture of the prince, surrounded by railway managers and army officers, on its front page. Behind the scenes, and not mentioned by the magazine, litigation by British shareholders in search of financial compensation was rumbling on in the courts even as Prince Philip embarked on his official visit to Latin America. *Ferrovia* said in an editorial that the Prince was visiting to “revive and reinforce the ties of friendship that have always linked Brazilians and the English”⁹⁷. Yet it sarcastically referred to the former owners as “the sons of Glorious Albion”⁹⁸. The article then went on to observe that the subsequent transfer to Brazilian government ownership of this and other lines had improved the power of the railways even more.

7. The military era of the 1960s and 70s and the transition to democracy: railway decline and privatisation (1964 – 2003)

From 1964 Brazil was ruled by a succession of military governments who systematically closed down opportunities for free expression, sought to promote economic growth and continued to regard the railways as inefficient, loss-making operations⁹⁹. In 1965 Adoniran Barbosa (1910-1982) had a carnival hit with a samba tune, “Trem das Onze” (Eleven O’clock Train), about a chancer trying to use the imminent departure of a last train in a São Paulo city *bairro* at night to get away from his girlfriend¹⁰⁰. Even if the railways were now in decline here was a *malandro*¹⁰¹ who knew he could use the example of his ability to afford to be able to buy a train ticket to show off his relative wealth. The hero of the song is one of Brazil’s most enduring male stereotypes, the *malandro*: the loveable rogue who bends the rules yet has a heart of gold and a cheeky smile on his face¹⁰². Barbosa variously lived in Valinhos, Jundiaí, Santo André and central São Paulo; all towns and suburbs in the state with strong links to the railway, and his father worked for a time for the SPR¹⁰³. The song begins, “I can’t stay, not even a minute longer, with you / I’m sorry love, but it cannot be / I live in Jaçanã / If I miss this train / Which leaves now at eleven / The next is tomorrow morning...”¹⁰⁴. By association with the *malandro* character the railway takes on a double meaning. On the one hand, it is reliable and will take him back to his “mother”, yet on the other, it is being used as a means either to split with the woman or to spend a night with her. On a practical level, the urban and suburban railways were actually mistrusted by many in this period as rising levels of complaints about poor levels of service and punctuality both in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro culminated in three successive years of riots in the mid

⁹⁷ *Ferrovia*, Vol. XXVII (São Paulo, SP, February-April 1962), p. 2. Consulted in the RFFSA/SPR Archive, Luz, São Paulo, SP.

⁹⁸ *Ferrovia*, Vol. XXVII (São Paulo, SP, February-April 1962), p. 2.

⁹⁹ Fausto (1999), pp. 280-296.

¹⁰⁰ Adoniran Barbosa, ‘Trem das Onze’, in Gomes (1987), p. 64.

¹⁰¹ One possible English language rendering of “malandro” is “spiv”.

¹⁰² DaMatta (1991), 207-211. See also Oliven (1984), p. 110.

¹⁰³ Gomes (1987), pp. 16-17 and p. 86.

¹⁰⁴ Não posso ficar nem mais um minuto com você / sinto muito amor, mas não pode ser. / Moro em Jaçanã, / se eu perder esse trem / que sai agora as onze horas / só amanhã de manhã...

1970s¹⁰⁵. Yet as a romantic device, the train in Barbosa's hands is both an excuse and a weapon of seduction. Across the urban sprawl of São Paulo transport provision had been observed by researchers to have been distributed unevenly from the early 1970s onwards, adding to substantial income inequalities for residents who live far from rail routes¹⁰⁶. If the character in the song did, as he stated, live near a railway station, it could be imagined that he was relatively well-off and would be able to use the train to return safely after dark back home.

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The period from 1966 to the early 1970s marked an era of accelerated decline in the railway industry in Brazil. In 1966 the Ministry of Transport in Brasília set up an executive group, known by its acronym, GESFRA (Grupo Executivo para Substituição de Ferrovias e Ramais Antieconômicos), to identify lines to be closed. Up to 1971 some 7,400 kilometres had been closed to traffic as being "anti-economic", many of which were replaced by roads¹⁰⁷. In the big cities, meanwhile, demand continued to rise for urban passenger commuter services even as long distance passenger services continued to decline. For the artist Glauco de Moraes, in 1977, the technology of the locomotive was deeply problematic. He saw the railway ensemble as a gaudy metal arrangement that was obliterating the natural greenness of the landscape. For him the process of industrial advancement in Brazil, as represented by his pop-art image of a close-up view of two dirty and sun-bleached diesel locomotives from the São Paulo area, had stalled¹⁰⁸, a comment both on the railway industry and the prevailing political climate of the era. Meanwhile, elsewhere in the state of São Paulo a group of railway enthusiasts under the guidance of a Frenchman, Patrick Dollinger, were building a volunteer organisation, the ABPF, to make what would become an alternative expression of the railway in Brazil: one that was created by communities away from the direct influence of politicians¹⁰⁹. The ABPF now manages and operates a dozen or so short heritage steam railway rides at weekends in a number of states in Brazil. What their museums display is the travel experience itself, with the political influence of the state effectively removed¹¹⁰.

The military era in Brazil came to an end in 1984 with democratic elections which returned José Sarney as president in March 1985¹¹¹. The 1980s were characterised by economic dependency, inflation, and mounting foreign debt¹¹². Rail infrastructure investment declined in the 1980s as the effect of the world economic crises of the

¹⁰⁵ Moisés and Martinez-Alier (1980).

¹⁰⁶ Camargo and others (1978), p. 59.

¹⁰⁷ Schoppa (2004), pp. 178-179.

¹⁰⁸ Glauco Pinto de Moraes, *Locomotiva, engaste frontal-FEPASA* (1977, oil on canvas, 151 x 201 cm.) Museu de Arte Brasileira (MAB-FAAP), São Paulo, SP.

¹⁰⁹ Ribeiro (2007), p. 88.

¹¹⁰ Cooper (2011), pp. 241-274.

¹¹¹ Fausto (1999), p. 296

¹¹² Fausto (1999), pp. 314-320.

late 1970s fed through¹¹³. It was not until the presidencies of Fernando Henrique Cardoso from 1995 to 2002, and Luiz Inácio (Lula) da Silva from 2003 to 2010, that Brazil began to experience economic stability and sustained growth. The 1990s were also the decade of infrastructure privatisation, of which the railways played their full part from 1996 to 1998¹¹⁴. According to one commentator, the process resulted in “profound job losses” in the industry¹¹⁵. The route of the SPR was sold to MRS Logística which has remained, since then, one of the most profitable companies operating a number of freight operations in this region of Brazil. Urban passenger services in the greater São Paulo area remained in state control and were operated from 1995 by the CPTM (Companhia Paulista de Trens Metropolitanos), a company owned by the state government of São Paulo¹¹⁶.

Meanwhile, on television in 1999 *Terra Nostra*, a TV Globo *novela*, was using the image of a locomotive steaming through the São Paulo state countryside, taking Italian immigrants to a new life and new opportunities at the turn of the twentieth century¹¹⁷. The persistent use of the train in the opening credits, four times per night across six evenings of prime-time mass-market television served to consolidate the railway ensemble into the history of the development of Brazil as a modern nation. But at the same time, after Francisco Foot Hardman, the images of this antique steam locomotive and the grandiose Estação da Luz served to suggest that the railway was somehow yesterday’s technology¹¹⁸. That the actual locomotive used to film the title sequence of *Terra Nostra* was one of those operated by the ABPF at Campinas in the state of São Paulo cemented the hybrid meaning of the railway in Brazilian culture: a vehicle for personal and family memories away from the daily politics of Brazil in the twenty-first century.

The final cultural product to be considered here is the 2003 movie *De Passagem* (Passing By), which revealed the urban rail network of greater São Paulo to be a lonely, disorientating and de-humanising travel experience: a critical culmination of a century-and-a-half of re-presentations¹¹⁹. *De Passagem* was part of a realist genre in Brazilian cinema of the period which also included movies such as *Cidade de Deus* (City of God, 2002) and *Carandiru* (2003)¹²⁰. What these films had in common was a continuing discourse which revealed the chaos of daily life and “a determination to debunk the officially espoused myth of Brazil as an orderly, mature, ‘First-World’ nation”¹²¹. *De Passagem* is a “road movie” set in the city and based around the complexities and

¹¹³ Schoppa (2004), p. 189

¹¹⁴ Schoppa (2004), pp. 74-76.

¹¹⁵ Schoppa (2004), p. 76.

¹¹⁶ Lavander Jr. and Mendes (2005), p. 271; Schoppa (2004), pp. 92-97.

¹¹⁷ *Terra Nostra*, dir. Jayme Monjardim, script by Benedito Ruy Barbosa, TV Globo (Rio de Janeiro, RJ, 1999–2000).

¹¹⁸ Hardman (2005), pp. 51-52.

¹¹⁹ *De Passagem*, dir. Ricardo Elias, Raiz Produções (São Paulo, SP, 2003).

¹²⁰ Dennison and Shaw (2004), p. 234.

¹²¹ Dennison and Shaw (2004), p. 226.

limitations of urban public transport. The story concerns two young men who renew their childhood friendship as they travel the city in search of one of their companions who they believe to be dead after a drug killing. Their vulnerability is revealed when they discover that the map of the São Paulo metro and rail network does not reflect their understanding of the city's reality. Forced to admit defeat and retrace their steps the two friends wait forlornly on a platform as the city's train network envelopes them. The railway is revealed as a negative force in the big city: it refuses to allow individual expression or any degree of freedom. Passengers are confined and forced to follow the routes without any room for diversion. The film shows a human side to the struggle for life in São Paulo's poorer suburban neighbourhoods¹²², and it uncovers a massive urban sprawl that has at its heart a railway network which appears to suck human life into a web from which there is no escape without an emotional and introspective struggle. Above all it is a technology which retains dualities and demands to be questioned.

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8. Concluding Remarks

The manner in which a technology and means of transport originally imported from Britain was implemented in Brazil has been, as demonstrated in this essay, a matter for constant negotiation by cultural producers in Brazil. On the one hand it has been represented as a romantic vision, by Castro Alves and Jorge Americano for example, either as an icon of modernity or a wistful memory. However the majority of the material discussed here has characterised the railway as a complex and at times worrying technology which has appeared to provoke tensions between modernity and tradition, and between the urban and the rural. It would suggest that the history of the development of the railway in Brazil cannot be regarded as a simple continuous unopposed modernisation process. Further, the complexity of 'the railway' has meant that reducing any account of the period between the 1850s and the present day to economic or political analysis does not reflect the myriad of responses manifested towards the technology. This has been the position taken by this essay, which considers that "the railway" can never stand apart from its cultural meanings.

Evidence of the negotiation (or as Gilberto Freyre has called it, the "Brazilianisation") process has here been found in a number of media forms and it has manifested itself as a series of dualities: between urban and rural, tradition and modernity. By taking a selective approach to cultural media, and by examining each cultural product in turn, this study has built up an analysis of railway culture in the state of São Paulo in Brazil. The reaction to the railway in these cultural outputs appears to be at odds with the majority of historical accounts which take the railway as an icon of modernity. Writers and artists, this essay has argued, have consistently presented a more critical analysis of the railway in Brazil.

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¹²² Calil (2004), Merten (2004).

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