Unmasking the Metropolis: An Interrogation of Modernity in *Orfeu Negro/Black Orpheus* (1959)

**Abstract:** Through carnival’s protagonism and positioning within the metropolis, *Orfeu Negro* defamiliarizes the urban experience and depicts urban modernity as a hellish force through imagery of confinement, tense-filled editing schemes, vertical framing, and an aesthetics of darkness. Representing the modern forces of Rio’s institutional sites in mythic terms, Orfeu’s *katabasis* into the city’s infernal underworld exposes the hollowness of civil services, renders bankrupt the state facilitation of citizen welfare, and lays bare police oppression, crowd control, and racial divide. Via a nuanced rendition of Bakhtinian carnival, *Orfeu Negro* problematizes the status of modernity as a democratic project.

**Keywords:** *Orfeu Negro, Black Orpheus,* modernity, myth, carnival, Mikhail Bakhtin, carnivalesque, race, city, institutional sites.