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Everyday Fashions, Urban Modernities & Unpolished Photographs:  
Claude Lévi-Strauss' Snapshots of São Paulo, 1935-7



'What astonished me in São Paulo in 1935, and in New York and Chicago in 1941, was not their newness, but the rapidity with which time's ravages had set in. I knew that these cities had started ten centuries behind our own, but I had not realised, somehow, that large areas in them were already fifty years old and were not ashamed to let it be seen. [São Paulo] had the air of an architectural leprosy, or a dream city run up for the cinema'.

— Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 1955

It is 1937 and a dark-haired woman in a horizontally striped, simple modern dress cut below the knee strides purposefully across the bustling Avenida São João in central São Paulo (Figure 1). Her streamlined ensemble is accessorised with black sandals and a neat felt hat. She gazes intently at the photographer whilst holding her young daughter tightly in her arms. Dressed all in white, the child looks beyond her mother's shoulder, fixated, not by the noisy motorcars rushing past and the sensation of speed that they incite, but by another pedestrian, who is wearing a dark hat and is almost entirely obscured from the viewer by her mother's figure. The child's father, to her right, wears a single-breasted loose-fitting dark suit with a chequered tie over a white shirt with wide lapels. His hair is neatly styled to the side and his gaze, like that of his wife, is fixed intently upon the photographer. There is a certain self-assurance in his body language as he allows his arms to swing nonchalantly by his sides. The couple's clothing is adorned with modernist prints, which are offset by the linear architectural façade that dwarfs the right-hand side of the photograph. This symbiotic relationship is emphasised by other visual indicators of modernity: electricity cables crisscrossing the sky and powering the Belle Époque street lighting, modern transportation, signs and billboards, and the seemingly infinite avenue that stretches towards the concrete-framed Edifício Martinelli, the first skyscraper to be built in Latin America in 1929. Directly in line with the Edifício Martinelli, to the left of the photograph, a man in a black fedora and leather shoes moves away from the viewer's gaze, the creases and folds of his crumpled linen suit accentuated by the spare, monochromatic palette. Photographed from behind, his dissonant mode of direction injects a sense of dynamism into this urban scene, resisting any notion of a linear pathway to modernity by exhibiting different speeds, modes of direction and ways of inhabiting the modern city. Pedestrians of different ages and ethnicities stand stationary on the side of the pavement, reminding the viewer that São Paulo is a city in constant flux and traversed by individuals of various generational, social, racial and economic backgrounds.

Look even closer at this highly visualised representation of a modernising São Paulo and the photograph reveals an added layer of complexity. We begin to observe signs that this 'dream city run up for the cinema', as the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss recalled in 1955, has been fractured by the very modern technology of the camera itself, which has been so indiscriminate in terms of what it has captured.<sup>1</sup> There is an excess of the everyday, which 'leaks out' of the photograph and disrupts its documentation of emerging social and metropolitan identities as seen in day-to-day lives on the street by capturing, quite literally, too much. We observe debris in the gutter, and a smattering of oil fracturing the clean, rational lines of the recently

built avenue. Ghostly figures populate the background. In the very centre of the photograph, two young women in puff-sleeved dresses can just about be glimpsed standing aboard the motorcar that speeds past. This myriad of contingent detail is something that the camera saw, but the photographer may not have spotted in the instance that the shutter was clicked. It is a detail that has risen to the grainy surface of the photograph later, waiting to be discovered by the inquisitive viewer. Christopher Pinney contends that the indexicality of the photographic medium always allows room for the possibility that something extraneous may enter into the camera lens; no matter how precautionary and punctilious the photographer is, the camera necessarily includes and it is 'precisely photography's inability to discriminate, its inability to exclude, that makes it so textured and fertile'.<sup>2</sup> Just as photographs 'leak out', documenting the unexpected or inadvertently providing the viewer with an overload of information, so too can fashion, which often communicates something different to what the wearer had envisioned in their mind, perhaps unintentionally revealing too much of an inner personality, desire or anxiety.<sup>3</sup> Fashion is a form of storytelling, after all, in much the same way that the researcher can muse speculatively on the biographies and narratives of the anonymous individuals who present themselves in dress, pose and expression to the photographic gaze. Indeed, as everyday cultural practices with no fixed outcome, both photography and fashion offer complex snapshots of the past that conceal many different layers and depths of meaning.<sup>4</sup>

I first encountered this particular snapshot in the bright photographic archive of the Instituto Moreira Salles on Avenida Paulista in São Paulo in July 2019, where it instantly seized my attention. Perhaps it is the directness of the protagonist's gaze, her clear sense of style and awareness of how to perform a 'look', the technical inadequacies of the photographer and the overall blurriness of the image which frustrates the viewer's ability to fully read the fashions documented in exact detail. All of this invests the photograph with an immediacy, an awareness in the viewer, perhaps, that this fleeting moment captured on film might act as a revelation of depth into the anonymous identities and sartorial histories of its very modern protagonists. As the Brazilian anthropologist and sociologist Renato Ortiz articulates, if modernity refers to 'the technological progress of cities, to their organisation and management, it is also a discourse, a "language" through which Latin Americans become aware of these changes'.<sup>5</sup> Fashion is both a discourse and a social dynamic of style change that involves a sense of novelty and renewal through which the now — otherwise known as modernity — is experienced and articulated.<sup>6</sup> Yet whilst modernity in Eurocentric discourses has tended to be equated with a linear narrative of progress and development, this anonymous photograph suggests that there are multiple subjectivities, and multiple modernities (or experiences of modernity), which operate far beyond the influence of Western Europe and North America, and are entangled within a new nexus of power relations. As Barbara Weinstein elucidates, the construction of a regional identity in São Paulo in the first half of the twentieth century favoured exceptionalism; it was inseparable from the city's 'ever more spectacular economic success story' as well as from crafted narratives that forged a direct correlation between 'whiteness and progress' and 'blackness and backwardness'.<sup>7</sup> We can begin to unravel the complex perspectives of *Paulistas* (those born in the city of São Paulo), during a period of immense change under the

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Pinney, 'Introduction: "How the Other Half..."', in *Photography's Other Histories*, ed. Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 1-14.

<sup>3</sup> This idea came directly from a conversation with Rebecca Arnold as part of Fashion Interpretations. It connects very closely to Hans Belting's assertion that 'We must address the image not only as a product of a given medium, be it photography, painting or video, but also as a product of ourselves, for we generate images of our own (dreams, imaginings, personal perceptions) that we play out against other images in the visible world.' Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body* (Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> This has led Martin Lister to make a distinction between the time 'in' and the time 'of' a photographic image. Whilst the former refers to the specific moment of exposure that is centred on the camera technology and the temporality which invests a photograph in the instance of its making, the latter refers to the time of photographs as physical objects in the world, how we put photographs to use and ascribe certain meanings to them. Martin Lister, 'The Times of Photography' in *Time, Media and Modernity*, ed. E Keightley (London: Palgrave 2012), pp. 45-68.

<sup>5</sup> Renato Ortiz, 'From Incomplete Modernity to World Modernity', in *Daedalus*, 129, no. 1 (2000), pp. 249-260.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Cheang worked upon this definition of fashion at a paper delivered at the Courtauld Institute of Art on 19th June 2017, entitled 'Transnational Fashion History: Some Problems in Chineseness'.

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Weinstein, *The Color of Modernity: São Paulo and the Making of Race and Nation in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 4-5.

<sup>1</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Russell (New York: Criterion, 1961), p. 135.



new regime of then-President Getúlio Vargas (1930-1945; 1951-1954), who responded to those transformations by fashioning their identities in and for the city. This single photograph enables us to engage with new interpretations of what it might mean to 'be modern' in São Paulo and to consider how certain mindsets, which frequently advocated identities that were white and European, intersected with questions of race and regionalism in the formation of national identity in Brazil.

It is the very complex nature of the photographic medium that has prompted Ariella Azoulay to stress that 'one needs to stop looking at the photograph and instead start watching it. The verb "to watch" is usually used for regarding phenomena or moving pictures. It entails dimensions of time and movement that need to be reinscribed in the interpretation of the still photographic image.'<sup>8</sup> If we are to watch this particular photograph then, what layers of meaning might we seek to unfold? Firstly, who are these anonymous yet stylish *Paulistas*, presumably a part of the new metropolitan bourgeois who had fashioned themselves from coffee wealth,<sup>9</sup> and were keen to distinguish themselves in dress, behaviour and perspective from the rest of Brazil?<sup>10</sup> How did the medium of photography, as a modern visual technology, capture the contemporary *Paulista* experience of urban modernity and new patterns of consumption centred on luxury goods imported from Britain and France, which were still understood to be the centre of 'civilisation'? To what extent did the camera bear witness to a specifically Brazilian experience of modernity, which was coloured by the violence and enduring influence of colonialism, but also provided room for deviation from a European model, as consumer items from abroad were necessarily adapted to suit local tastes?<sup>11</sup> What is the complex fabric of relations between those involved in the photographic act: the photographed subject, the photographer and the contemporary spectator? Finally, what additional meanings are encoded within this photograph when we are informed that the photographer was a 26-year-old Lévi-Strauss, who in 1934 was invited to teach Sociology at the University of São Paulo?<sup>12</sup>

This image forms part of a series of 44 original photographic negatives that were captured by Lévi-Strauss in São Paulo between 1935 and 1937.<sup>13</sup> Lévi-Strauss' enquiring documentation of urban, everyday life in São Paulo — the wealthiest and most industrialised state in all of Brazil — records a transitional phase in the history of the city, which he recalled in his celebrated travel narrative and memoir *Tristes Tropiques* (1955).<sup>14</sup> A selection of these photographs were published for the first time sixty years later in the rare photobook edited by Lévi-Strauss entitled *Saudades de São Paulo* (1996).<sup>15</sup> As has been well documented, Claude and Dina Lévi-Strauss travelled to Brazil in 1935 as part of a small cohort of young French academics invited to help establish the newly founded University of São Paulo.<sup>16</sup> For Lévi-Strauss, as Thomas Skidmore articulates, 'the job in Brazil meant that, with any luck, he would get to do his initial fieldwork among Indians. It would be his first ethnographic experience, his initiation into the discipline of anthropology.'<sup>17</sup> A little-known photograph published in *Saudades de São Paulo*, captures an elegant Dina Lévi-Strauss sporting a knitted, button-up cardigan with puff sleeves, a belted knee-length pencil skirt and a matching hat. The outfit seems somewhat at odds with the rural Brazilian setting, which sees the subject tentatively crossing a precarious-looking bridge comprised of a tree trunk, observed by the French historian Fernand Braudel, geographer

Pierre Monbeig and philosopher Jean Maugué. The men are equally dressed in what appears to be an array of modern, casual ensembles adapted for the "primitive" Brazilian wilderness, yet still maintaining some of the streamlined tailoring of the "civilized" European city. These photographs reiterate the significance of fashion as a visual marker of modernity, which travelled from France to Brazil and enabled a sense of efficiency and discipline to be recreated on arrival. They are also a potent reminder of the Eurocentric perspective in dress, mindset and attitude that these young academics are likely to have fostered on their arrival in Latin America, which invariably coloured to some degree their perception of Brazil and Brazilians. Nevertheless, Mark Sealy reinforces the insightful point that whilst photography functions within a 'slippery matrix of colonial power' — one which necessitates that we acknowledge Lévi-Strauss' power and privilege as a white European who had travelled from the "centre" to the so-called "periphery" — we must not discount the potential for images to be read against the grain and to provide 'other ways of seeing'.<sup>18</sup>

The Lévi-Strausses' arrival in Brazil as part of a transnational programme of cultural exchange must be contextualised within the specific context of the French-Brazilian "special relationship" which dates to the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>19</sup> France's failed attempt to colonise terrain in Latin America and create France Antarctique evolved into a pursuit of cultural hegemony in the region that found fertile breeding ground in Brazil, which imported French luxury fashion and consumer goods.<sup>20</sup> The opening of the English department store, Mappin, in São Paulo in 1913 attested to urban modernisation and the emerging consumer desires of bourgeois middle-class *Paulistas*, who sought luxury goods from afar with which to fashion their metropolitan identities.<sup>21</sup> São Paulo had benefited from a new bourgeoisie founded on coffee wealth, as well as a huge influx of immigrants from north-eastern Brazil, Italy, Spain, Germany and Japan: a body of labour who facilitated the reshaping of urban modern life. During a period of intense industrialisation and modernisation, the city rapidly transformed from a modest seat of coffee and agricultural production to Brazil's industrial and financial centre.<sup>22</sup> The resulting photographs taken by Lévi-Strauss nevertheless provide unique insight into the contradictions of a Brazilian modernity poised between the Old World and the New World, the past and the future, whilst illuminating how different representational modes reconfigure our understanding of fashion. While the young academic's camera captured newly built neighbourhoods, avenues, skyscrapers, modern transportation networks such as the *camarão* (the urban trolley car) and emerging patterns of consumption in the form of restaurants, cinemas, cafes and shops, he also documents cattle wandering through the streets, laundry drying on makeshift lines hung in dirt courtyards in the shadow of Modernist blocks, crumbling Belle Époque façades and general urban detritus. Despite the clear influences of modernity and industrialisation, São Paulo in 1935 was clearly still, as Emmanuel Loyer emphasises in her biography of the anthropologist, 'raucous, many-sided and seemed as if it were unfinished, as attested to by the photos he took with his Leica camera'.<sup>23</sup>

Lévi-Strauss' photographs are therefore 'textured images' — a term that I use to acknowledge Pinney's awareness of the amount of detail that can be extrapolated from a single photograph, as

<sup>8</sup> Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, the coffee boom in Brazil had dramatically shifted the political and cultural identity of the province of São Paulo. This intense economic and demographic change prompted a renewed regional identity and an emerging middle class in the city who identified as white, affluent and "European" — in direct opposition to Brazil's northeast, São Paulo's racial "Other".

<sup>10</sup> Rita Andrade, "Mappin Stores: Adding an English Touch to the São Paulo Fashion Scene," in *The Latin American Fashion Reader*, ed. Regina Root (London: Berg, 2005), pp. 176-187.

<sup>11</sup> Vivian Schelling and James Dunkerley, eds., *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America*, (New York: Verso, 2000). This edited collection of essays explores the different manifestations of what is understood to be a specifically Latin American experience of modernity.

<sup>12</sup> Silvano Santiago, "Lévi-Strauss's Journey to the Tropics," in *Portuguese Studies*, 22, no. 1 (2006), pp. 7-18.

<sup>13</sup> A selection of these images can be viewed online at "Claude Lévi-Strauss," Instituto Moreira Salles, accessed August 15, 2020, <https://ims.com.br/titular-colecao/claude-levi-strauss/>.

<sup>14</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Russell (New York: Criterion, 1961), p. 135.

<sup>15</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Saudades de São Paulo*, (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Luciana Martins has shed light on Dina Lévi-Strauss' contribution to Claude Lévi-Strauss' visual archive of Brazil, exploring her role in the making and presentation of their ethnographic fieldwork in Brazil. There is no substantial evidence, however, to suggest that she played a key role in the production of these images taken in São Paulo.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas E. Skidmore, "Lévi-Strauss, Braudel and Brazil: A Case of Mutual Influence" in *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 22, no. 3 (2003), pp. 340-349.

<sup>18</sup> Mark Sealy, *Decolonising the Camera: Photography in Racial Time*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, 2019), p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Skidmore, "Lévi-Strauss, Braudel and Brazil"

<sup>20</sup> As Edward A. Riedinger has acknowledged, France's desire to become 'the leader of the Latin cultural world' was augmented by the opening of the port of Rio de Janeiro in 1808, which paved the way for the importation of 'French customs and manners [...] Architecture and interior design [...] Banking, luxury retailing, elite social and culinary manners, and leisure indulgences'. Riedinger, "The Development of Brazilian Studies in France" in *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos*, 8, no. 2 (2001), pp. 439-453.

<sup>21</sup> Andrade, "Mappin Stores"

<sup>22</sup> David William Foster, "Downtown in São Paulo with Hildegard Rosenthal's Camera" in *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 42, no. 1 (2005), pp. 118-135.

<sup>23</sup> Emmanuel Loyer, *Lévi-Strauss: A Biography*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2018).

well as to hint at the tactile qualities of the photographic medium that are centred on the surface of the image itself.<sup>24</sup> As a distinct body of work, they stand out for their unfinished nature and the resulting surface variations that arise from technical deficiencies including blur, light leaks, badly exposed images. All of these 'problems' add to the patina of the resulting images and highlight the very material nature of the photographic medium that feels so fitting to the representation of fashion. Indeed, Lévi-Strauss spoke of his frustration with 'the physical and mechanical constraints of the camera', which provided the photographer with restricted options for omitting data from the outside world, especially when compared to the artist's ability to synthesise and edit out unwanted elements, and when taking into account the sensitivity of film, the number of subjects possible, the lighting, and the angle of view.<sup>25</sup> His photographs stand as a fascinating record of what can often be easily overlooked, thus acting as a conduit to the lived sartorial experiences of everyday Paulistas.<sup>26</sup> They are especially interesting since they counter the popular view that modernity in Brazil was driven entirely by bourgeois, middle-class experiences that looked to Europe and sought to recreate this in the Tropics; rather, we see how immigrants and workers from a broad spectrum of society engaged with fashion, sometimes getting it a little bit wrong as they negotiated the old alongside the new, the local with the foreign. A tantalising example can be seen in two separate photographs of young men (Figures 2 + 3), both of whom are walking alone in busy São Paulo, their outfits clearly informed by fashionable 'looks', yet their demeanours suggesting a slight awkwardness or discomfort in their new attire — possibly a tentativeness or hint of reserve in response to the newness of modernity and the prying gaze of Lévi-Strauss' camera.

The Lévi-Strauss photographs are distinguishable for their complexity and materiality amidst a much larger visual archive documenting fashion and urban modernity in São Paulo in the first half of the twentieth century. In the documentary film *São Paulo, Sinfonia da Metrópole* (1929), for example, Hungarian filmmakers Adalberto Kemeny and Rudolf Lustig emphasize the dynamism of a thriving metropolis undergoing a period of accelerated growth and industrialisation.<sup>27</sup> By experimenting with unconventional camera movements, montage, temporal rhythms, and the use of anonymous individuals on the street as protagonists — as can be seen in a film still of two elegant women shopping in carefully coordinated sporty ensembles and neat cloche hats, who turn to directly meet the camera's gaze — the directors capture the excitement of modern urban life and its everyday flows of pedestrians and vehicles against a backdrop of factories and skyscrapers, all presented in the fictitious time span of a single day in the life of the city.<sup>28</sup> Strikingly, as Christina Meneguello has argued, the film 'avoids any representation of the rusty outskirts of the city [and, in addition] refuses to represent nature, which appears only in its domesticated form, like in the pleasant gardens where a romantic couple takes a stroll'.<sup>29</sup> *São Paulo, Sinfonia da Metrópole* thus presents a polished, powerful and modern vision of the city and its inhabitants, employing the medium of film to emphasise the speed and intensity of modernity as a linear, temporal progression into the future. A similar vision of polished modernity is evident in the photographs produced by Swiss-born photographer Hildegard Rosenthal, for instance, in São Paulo in the late 1930s and early 1940s.<sup>30</sup> In one of her photographs, a stylishly dressed woman at the head of a queue

<sup>24</sup> Pinney, 'Introduction: "How the Other Half..."

<sup>25</sup> Christopher Pinney, *Photography and Anthropology*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), p. 105.

<sup>26</sup> It is worth noting that these photographs are distinct from the ethnographic photographs that Lévi-Strauss made of the Bororo and Kadiweu indigenous peoples when conducting fieldwork in Mato Grosso, Western Central Brazil, which focus very intently on their human subjects and are overly concerned with dress and bodily adornment as cultural texts to be unpacked.

<sup>27</sup> *São Paulo: sinfonia da metrópole* can be watched online at: <https://archive.org/details/SaoPauloASinfoniaDaMetrópoleRudolfRexLustigEAdalbertoKemeny1929Documentario> (accessed, august 2020)

<sup>28</sup> This poetic mode follows the avant-garde style of Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's much shorter documentary film *Manhatta* (1921) which can be viewed online at: [https://archive.org/details/Manhatta\\_1921](https://archive.org/details/Manhatta_1921)

<sup>29</sup> Christina Meneguello presents a useful overview of this film, which was inspired by Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927), in her chapter 'Kemeny and Lustig's *São Paulo: sinfonia da metrópole*' in *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity*, ed. by Steven Jacobs, Eva Hielscher and Anthony Kinik, (Routledge, 2018).

of people wears slingback sandals and a pleated dress, waiting to board the streamlined bus. The modernist lines of fashion and vehicle, smooth and simple, exemplify Rosenthal's rational approach to documenting a bustling city, seemingly devoid of dirt and rubbish. This approach, as well as the sense of potential and movement, is also exemplified by Thomaz Farkas' cinematic configurations of the São Paulo urban imaginary and its inhabitants.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast, a slightly overexposed photograph (Figure 4) taken by Lévi-Strauss on the Largo do Paçandu, in the historical centre of São Paulo, where the *Nossa Senhora do Rosario* church can be spotted on the left-hand side, enables us to see clearly his more nuanced vision of modernity. In the centre of the frame, a little blonde-haired girl with her back to us stands on the chequered pavement wearing white sandals, a dress with a ruffled collar and pom-poms, and a tall pointy hat. It is clearly carnival and assorted crowds in summer dresses, white linen suits and darker suits cross the road junction in various directions, injecting a sense of dynamism into the scene. A woman in the foreground wears black heeled shoes, sheer tights, a black suit with an elaborate brooch, a white lace blouse and a string of pearls. In her right hand she carries her handbag and a pair of gloves. We can't see her face, which is obscured by her hat. A man behind her is stationary, dressed in a suit, tie and fedora. A family of African descent with the mother in a dark robe, accompanied by her children in matching floral summer dresses, and a toddler in a striped playsuit, grasp the viewer's attention. Most enigmatic of the group is the young boy dressed in tailored shorts, a pale shirt and white socks with flip-flops, who turns to confront the camera. The architecture of the scene combines modernist blocks clad with scaffolding in a state of construction and Belle Époque buildings, palm trees and a tangle of electricity wires working their way across the top of the image. Rubbish peppers the clean, rational lines of the chequered pavement, whilst a stall selling pineapples occupies the centre of the frame. The sign for the municipal hotel, at the time one of the most elegant hotels in São Paulo, is clearly visible on the corner of Avenida São João where it joins Conselheiro Crispiniano. Lévi-Strauss' Leica camera, once again, has captured every indiscriminate detail, acting not so much as an agent of modernisation as an eyewitness to its contradictions, and problematising the story of modernity by underlining how acceleration and modernisation were inevitably crisscrossed with prolonged intervals of slowness and delay. It is carnival, and there is something carnivalesque about the image itself, which overloads the viewer with information, and the visual and material spectacle of Old World meets New World. We see a combination of the clean rational lines of the architecture and the pavement, versus the chaos and disorder of the everyday, as European styles are reinterpreted from the perspective of South America and the viewer is compelled to consider the co-presence of different timescapes and agendas in our understanding of modernity and modernisation.

What becomes clear is that Lévi-Strauss' gaze, and the unpolished nature of his resulting photographs, challenges the very premise of the photographic medium — specifically that its indexicality, as Roland Barthes emphasised in *Camera Lucida*, fixes a singular and unrepeatable moment in time — by reminding us instead of the complex fabric of relations, meanings and temporalities that are woven into any image.<sup>32</sup> By presenting an uncanny synchronicity

<sup>30</sup> A selection of these images can be viewed online at "Boom Town: São Paulo in the 1940s," Guardian, accessed September 13, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/gallery/2017/nov/28/sao-paulo-1940s-in-pictures-hildegard-rosenthal-photojournalism>.

<sup>31</sup> A selection of these images can be viewed online at "Thomas Farkas," Instituto Moreira Salles, accessed September 13, 2020, <https://ims.com.br/titular-colecao/thomaz-farkas/>.

<sup>32</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, (New York: Vintage Classics, 1993), p. 43.



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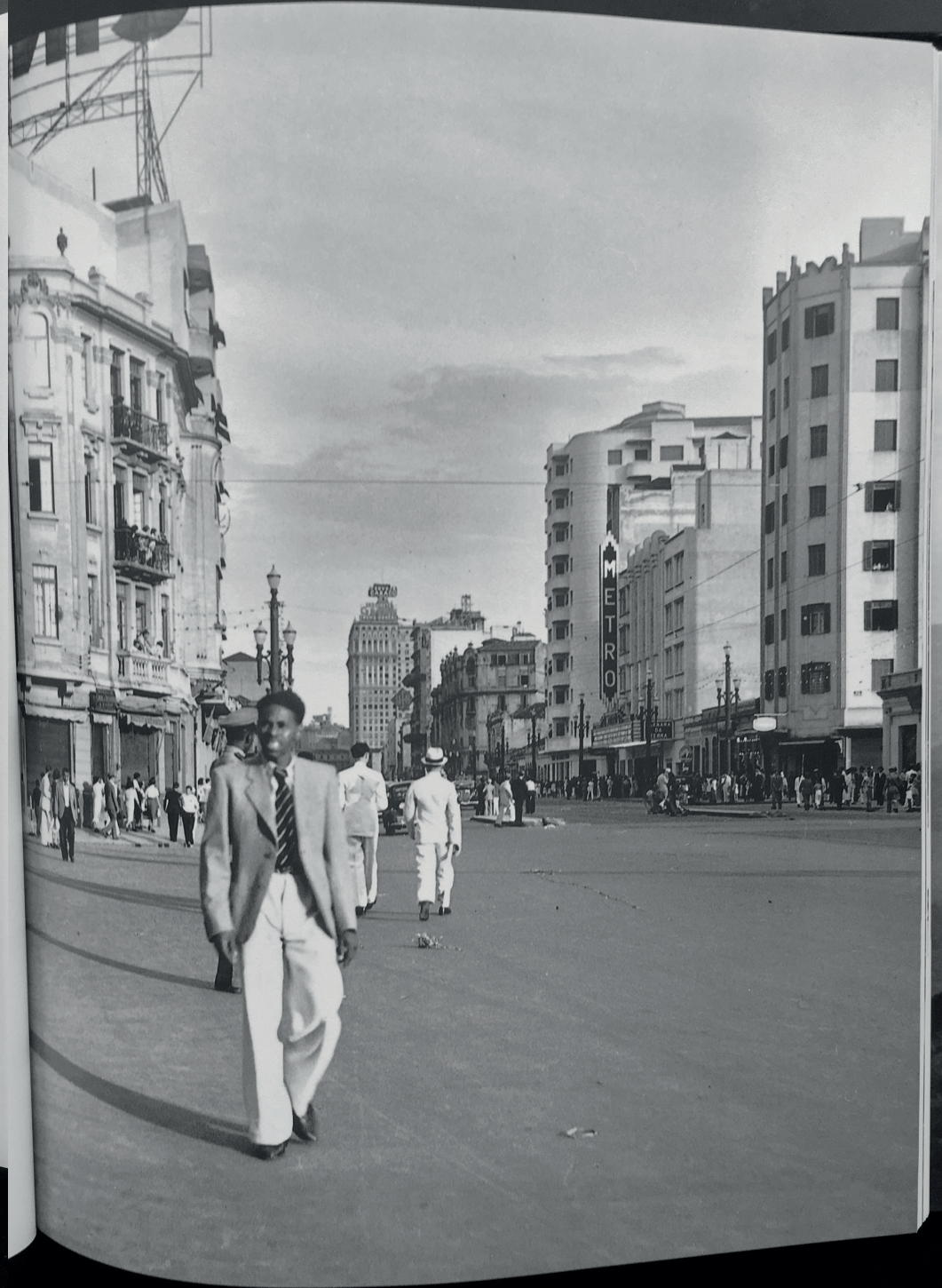


FIGURE-3



of past, present and future, his photographs of the urban imaginary constitute a rich resource for the fashion historian since they inhabit, in much the same way that fashion does, 'a curious affinity with unorthodox models of time', as Caroline Evans and Alessandra Vaccari have pointed out.<sup>33</sup> We are presented with an alternative perspective beyond that of Europe, and a means to recognise the cultural and historical significance of fashion as an embodied form of identity construction through which individuals and groups throughout the world present themselves in that world.<sup>34</sup> This is especially pertinent given how accustomed we have become, particularly in histories of Latin American fashion, to discussing Brazilian reliance on a European (predominantly French) fashion system.<sup>35</sup> In Lévi-Strauss' photographs, we gain a different perspective, which enables us to see how foreign consumer goods were adapted to suit local tastes, and how crucial fashionable ways of dressing were for all sectors of society in articulating their own urban imaginary in relation to the rapid changes taking place in São Paulo.

From his photographs it seems clear that the young Lévi-Strauss was astonished in the rapidly transforming and diverse cityscape of São Paulo, poised so pertinently between an agricultural past and a modern vision of an international future, not by its 'newness, but the rapidity with which time's ravages had set in'.

<sup>36</sup> His photographs, with their capturing of the contingent, the unobserved, the unstaged, all those elements usually removed from the formal world of the fashion shoot, are a tangible reminder that there are many different kinds of fashion systems operating throughout the world and multiple experiences of modernity possible. These modernities may take place at different speeds and thus be used to problematize our understanding of fashion time from a more holistic, global perspective. Lévi-Strauss' photographs offer new insights into the relationship between photography, dress innovations, temporality, modernities, and national and international identities, offering alternative fashion histories and speculative biographies of the anonymous wearers that he captures so candidly on film. By rewriting the sartorial past in a way that draws attention to an underrepresented fashion-producing region, Lévi-Strauss forces us to question what we know of the established Western European and North American canon of fashion that is so often privileged in academic scholarship and popular histories to date. Whether intentional or not, his images of São Paulo facilitate our reimagining of fashion history in a new direction that is overlapping and multi-layered, much like the photographs themselves.

<sup>33</sup> Caroline Evans and Alessandra Vaccari, "Introduction" in *Time in Fashion: Industrial, Antilinear and Uchronic Temporalities*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

<sup>34</sup> Cheryl Buckley and Hazel Clark, *Fashion and Everyday Life: London and New York*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

<sup>35</sup> Maria Do Carmo Teixeira Rainho and Maria Cristina Volpi, "Looking at Brazilian Fashion Studies: Fifty Years of Research and Teaching" in *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, 5, no. 1 (2018), pp. 211-226.

<sup>36</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Russell (New York: Criterion, 1961), p. 135.



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## Illustrations

All of the accompanying photographs are taken from reproductions produced in *Saudades de São Paulo* (1996). The originals were all taken by Lévi-Strauss in São Paulo between 1935 and 1937.