

# TE2\_A0190184E\_NgoLiNingJeanette\_02.docx

*by* NGO LI NING JEANETTE e0325768

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**Submission date:** 16-Oct-2020 05:01PM (UTC+0800)

**Submission ID:** 1416965146

**File name:** TE2\_A0190184E\_NgoLiNingJeanette\_02.docx (19.09K)

**Word count:** 814

**Character count:** 4408

**Brazil (1985)**

*Brazil* (1985), set against a dystopian backdrop, is a satirical film depicting the struggle against an all-encompassing, totalitarian government. In the film, authority is consolidated and exercised via various government bodies under the “Ministry of Information”, where the protagonist Sam Lowry works as a low-ranking official under the Department of Records. Sam initially appears content with his position and is satisfied to go about his routine job obligations. However as the film progresses, Sam realizes that the bureaucratic, totalitarian system is a nightmarish one, and attempts to fight it. In the process, he discovers that the system is so entrenched that he has little choice but to conform and abide by the established regulations in order to achieve what he desires. As we follow along Sam’s journey, various social issues surface, such as the dehumanization of society characterized by a loss of individual freedom, rigid adherence to rules and regulations, abuse of power by the state apparatus, and what this signifies for the individual. In this film, Weber’s ideas of bureaucracy, capitalism, and how it relates to society are relevant and manifest themselves symbolically or otherwise.

The ruling regime closely follows that of a legal-rational authority as conceptualized by Weber. This form of authority, shaped by bureaucracy, heavily relies on written rules and procedures, where all actions are executed based on “instrumental rationality”. As in the film, Sam is recognized as a figure of authority only when he brandishes his new promotion pass or recites his official ID number. This points to how people are recognized for their public role rather than their private identity, essentially causing the erasure of one’s personal identity.

The state is also depicted as a totalitarian, omnipresent entity, implanting an extensive network of surveillance technologies such as vent ducts to consolidate information and exercise its authority over the people. These low-hanging, extremely visible ducts are present in all corners of society, from public establishments to private spaces at home, serving as a reminder

of perpetual state presence and the lack of individual privacy. These vent ducts are strictly maintained by state-employed technicians via “Central Services”, and is reminiscent of a larger, overarching state control over all aspects of society. Any deviant individual (such as freelance technicians like Harry Tuttle) thus constitutes a threat to state control and authority, and are hunted down by the state apparatus and tortured.

Such a system has cultivated a superficial and dehumanized society, where people are generally unfeeling and devoid of personal attachments. This is demonstrated by the lack of appropriate emotional responses in conventionally sensitive situations. For instance, when Sam visited Mrs. Buttle to offer a “refund check” for the wrongful arrest and death of her husband, he does not offer any form of emotional consolation for the grieving Mrs Buttle, and was instead only preoccupied with getting her to sign the paperwork needed so that he can complete his duties and leave. Sam was also quick to deny any involvement on his part in the botched arrest, by pointing out that the fault lies with another ministry department and not his. When terrorist attacks occur and people lay injured or dying in the background, we also see unperturbed diners nonchalantly continuing with their meals and conversations.

The lack of genuine social relations perhaps also relates to certain aspects of the Calvinist work ethic, which espouses hard work and fulfilment of one’s duties as a means to salvation, leaving little need to pay heed to anything else. This idea is reflected towards the end of the film, where even as Sam sits pleading for his friend Jack to save him, Jack was indifferent and ultimately, prioritized his public role and duty as a civil servant over his private role of being a friend. This supports Calvinist ideas that in such a society, there is no place for genuine personal “friendships” – these personal relations are all secondary in the face of duty.

Weber argues that bureaucracy constitutes the most rational way to organize human activity, and that systematic processes and organized hierarchies are necessary to maximize

efficiency and maintain order. However, this notion is contested in the film, in which bureaucracy and the accompanying paperwork becomes a stumbling block for efficiency instead. Mrs. Buttle and Jill are unable to extract any information about Mr. Buttle from the Ministry as they do not possess the paperwork required. The bureaucratic process also makes the system an extremely opaque one, allowing the Ministry to gain total power and control over the people and the information access system.

In conclusion, Brazil reflects many of Weber's ideas, such as his construct of a legal-rational authority. However, Weber's argument of bureaucracy as the most efficient and rational organizational system is contested in the film, which depicts bureaucracy as massive road block in getting anything done by the ordinary citizen, and indeed, by ministry officials themselves.

**Word Count: 800**

GRADEMARK REPORT

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FINAL GRADE

**/100**

GENERAL COMMENTS

**Instructor**

**Grade: A-/B+**

**Shivani Gupta**

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PAGE 1

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PAGE 2

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PAGE 3

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