

Passages: travelling in and out of film through Brazilian geography

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Passages: travelling in and out of film through
Brazilian geography

Passagens: caminhos cruzados entre o cinema
e a geografia brasileira

Lúcia Nagib¹

1 Professor in Film at the University of Reading. Director of the Centre for Film Aesthetics and Cultures (CFAC – Centre for Film Aesthetics and Cultures). PI of the AHRC-FAPESP funded project, "Towards an Intermedial History of Brazilian Cinema: Exploring Intermediality as a Historiographic Method". E-mail: l.nagib@reading.ac.uk.

Abstract

The relationship between cinema and the real is probably the most central and complex issue in film studies. In this article I shall attempt to address this issue by looking at a selection of films in which intermedial devices, that is, the utilisation within film of artforms such as painting, theatre and music, appear to function as a “passage” to political and social reality. Case studies will be drawn from the São Paulo and Pernambuco scenes, as represented by Beto Brant, Cláudio Assis, Tata Amaral, Paulo Caldas and Marcelo Luna, in order to demonstrate their shared values at a certain historical juncture and interconnectedness across Brazilian geography.

Keywords

Intermediality, Brazilian cinema, film studies.

Resumo

A relação entre o cinema e o real é provavelmente a questão mais central e complexa nos estudos cinematográficos. Neste artigo, tentarei abordar esta questão por meio da análise de uma seleção de filmes em que dispositivos intermediários, isso é, o emprego no interior do filme de formas artísticas como pintura, teatro e música, parecem funcionar como uma “passagem” para a realidade política e social. Para tanto, irei focalizar casos exemplares da produção de São Paulo e Pernambuco, representados por filmes de Beto Brant, Cláudio Assis, Tata Amaral, Paulo Caldas e Marcelo Luna, a fim de demonstrar os valores compartilhados por eles em determinado contexto histórico e os laços geográficos que estabeleceram através do Brasil.

Palavras-chave

Intermedialidade, cinema brasileiro, estudos de cinema.

The cinema seems poised to leave behind its function as a "medium" (for the representation of reality) in order to become a "life form" (and thus a reality in its own right).
(ELSAESSER; HANEGER, 2010, p. 12)

The relationship between cinema and the real is probably the most central and complex issue in film studies. In this article I shall attempt to address this issue by looking at a selection of films in which intermedial devices, that is, the utilisation within film of artforms such as painting, theatre and music, appear to function as a "passage" to political and social reality. Case studies will be drawn from the São Paulo and Pernambuco scenes, as represented by Beto Brant, Cláudio Assis, Tata Amaral, Paulo Caldas and Marcelo Luna, in order to demonstrate their shared values at a certain historical juncture and interconnectedness across Brazilian geography. Not accidentally, these are all prominent figures of what became known as Retomada do Cinema Brasileiro, or the Brazilian Film Revival, of the 1990s, which brought back to the agenda the question of national identity and Brazil's lingering social issues. The flourishing and diversification of independent filmmaking from that period onwards favoured not only a new approach to reality, but an emboldened use of the film medium that recognised and exposed its inextricable connections with other art and medial forms. The intermedial method is thus strategically poised to shed a new light on the ways in which these films not only represented but interfered with and transformed the world around them.

I am certainly not the first to sense the gravitas of the real in the state of inbetweenness that characterises cinema from its inception. Ágnes Pethő, for example, warns us that the medium is not just a vehicle for meaning, but physical content itself. She says: "theories of medium have [...] called attention to the way in which it is never directly the 'meaning' or the 'pure message' that we perceive in a communication but the material mediality of the signification which unavoidably shapes our constructions of meaning" (2009, p. 48). Richard Rushton (2011) goes even further by stating that films are not simply representation of reality or a "deficient and secondary mode of reality", but are reality themselves,

or in his words, “filmic reality”, given that everything we see and hear in a film instantly becomes part of our lived experience. Outside the medial sphere, critics such as Slavoj Žižek (2002) have identified the “kernel of the real” in the virtual form of film, a subject dear, for example, to semioticians and linguists such as Roman Jakobson, who highlights as one of cinema’s main properties the ability to combine sign and referent:

Is there a conflict between these two theses? According to one of them, film operates with things; according to the other, with signs...[T]he incompatibility of the two...was actually eliminated already by St. Augustine. This great thinker of the fifth century, who aptly distinguished between the object meant (*res*) and the sign (*signum*), taught that besides signs, whose essential task is to signify something, there exist objects that may be used in the function of signs. It is precisely things (visual and auditory), transformed into signs, that are the specific material of cinematic art. (JAKOBSON, 1987, p. 459)

In dialogue with these thoughts, my proposal in this article will be to investigate the material life that pulsates in the intersection between the film medium and the phenomenological real by focusing on the passage, the intersection, the fleeting moment where both film and life merge before becoming themselves again. This is the moment in which, I wish to claim, a film becomes artistic and political.

In his posthumous magnum opus *Das Passagenwerk* (in English, *The Arcades Project*), Walter Benjamin refers to old definitions of the Parisian Passages (or Arcades) as “a city, a world in miniature” (1999, p. 3). In its connective and agglutinary role, the Parisian passages are at once conducive and final, roads to somewhere else and sites of arrival for the purpose of commerce, socialisation and habitation. Thanks to their mixed, dialectical nature, they contain utopian elements regarding, on the one hand, the belief in modern life and the power of the machine (not least the photographic machine) and, on the other, the hope for a classless society (p. 4). Along the same lines, I would like to define my chosen case studies by their passages, which are movements towards an aim, but also points of arrival, sudden condensations of the real of ‘inbetweenness’, as defined

by Pethő, but also the locale of utopian connections bringing filmmakers together through the hope of a better society.

Realism as mode of production

Before progressing onto film analysis, a disclaimer is in order as refers to genre. In fact, all the films I have chosen to analyse here, though not exactly “popular”, can be described as conventional feature-length fiction films, intended for commercial distribution and exhibition at traditional outlets. The wisdom of my choice could be questioned in that the intersection between real life and film would seem much more evident in radical ventures such as expanded cinema experiments involving life performance or else works that provide comprehensive spectatorial immersion, such as Virtual Reality productions.

Indeed, most theories of cinematic realism are concerned with modes of exhibition and/or reception. This is because, regardless of their recording processes, audiovisual media can affect spectators through the so-called “reality effect” by means of graphic representations able to cause physical and emotional impact even when there is no representational realism at play, for example, when the physical impact on the spectator derives from animation or computer-generated images and sound (BLACK, 2002). Traditional 2D screenings of action films are perfectly capable of producing reality effects, but more advanced techniques, such as 3D projections, Imax environments and the more recent 4D virtual reality devices, have been specifically designed to enhance them. Whatever the case, however, reality effects are always more effects than reality, given the interdiction of actual spectatorial participation. Even Virtual Reality devices, though allowing the spectator to move their head freely and choose what to look at within a 360° spectrum, are unable to provide any kind of actual interaction. As Christian Metz was the first to note, there is an indelible fracture between seeing and being seen, in filmic experiences, due to the temporal gap between the act of shooting and that of viewing the film, and this is why, for Metz, the spectator’s position at any film screening is necessarily scopophilic (METZ, 1982, p. 61-65).

Another complicator is the difficulty to measure the effect of reality a film can produce. More dependent on technology than on art, such an effect tends to wear off with the medium's technical development and the competition it has to face with the human brain, which opposes a natural resistance to illusionism and eventually wins over it (see GRAU, 2003). A historical example is that of the audience members who purportedly fainted or ran away when first exposed to Lumière's *Arrival of a train at La Ciotat* (*L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*), in 1895, a film which has become perfectly innocuous to current-day spectators.

As for modes of exhibition, there is an undeniable political intent in the realistic endeavour of films involving live performance. Expanded cinema experiments are the ultimate expression of this category, insofar as they preserve the auratic *Einmaligkeit* (or uniqueness) held by Benjamin (1999) as the very definition of an artwork. However, for this same reason, they also have to relent on the recording and replicating properties of the film medium aimed at reaching the masses – the public without which, as Bazin (1967, p. 71) claimed, there is no cinema – as well as to the possibility of preserving their achievements to posterity. Film studies tools alone are therefore insufficient to address such phenomena.

As for modes of address, realism must forcibly be associated with the impression of reality elicited by what Baudry famously defined as the basic cinematographic apparatus (*l'appareil de base*), including the projector, the flat screen and the dark, collective auditorium. Despite film's vertiginous technological development since its invention and the multiplication of its uses, supports and platforms, the basic cinematographic apparatus as provided by the cinema auditorium has demonstrated extraordinary resilience, remaining for over a century the standard outlet for filmic experience. This endurance, I believe, is due to the comfort zone it affords the spectator between the reality effect and the natural brain resistance to total illusionism. It is moreover a space capable of accommodating a range of cinematic genres and styles, from classical narrative cinema of closure, devoted to eliciting an impression of reality, to mixed-genre

productions endowed with disruptive devices that draw attention to the reality of the medium, such as the films I am interested in here.

In contrast to the modes described above, my chosen case studies adhere to realism as *mode of production*, relying heavily on: the physical engagement on the part of crew and cast with the profilmic event; the near identity between the cast and their roles; real location shooting; and film's inherent indexical property. In them, the illusionistic fictional thread interweaves with documentary footage and crew and cast's direct interference with the historical world, aimed not only at highlighting the reality of the medium but also at producing, as well as reproducing, social reality. Needless to say, none of the modes above exist per se, a film relying on physical engagement at production point being only thus conceived for the specific reality effect it is expected to have on the spectator. Modes of production are however, I wish to argue, the only *objective* way of proofing and proving a film's intention, given the countless variables inflecting the ways in which films are subjectively perceived by each individual.

Realist encounters

Focusing therefore on modes of production, I would like to start by looking at the film *Delicate crime* (*Crime delicado*, Beto Brant, 2005), an accomplished example of the political circuit that connects film, the other arts and real life, to which I have devoted an entire chapter in my book *World cinema and the ethics of realism* (NAGIB, 2011, p. 157-176). The film's heightened level of intermediality begins with it being the screen adaptation of Sérgio Sant'Anna's eponymous novella, going on to change consecutively into theatre and painting without recognising frontiers between any of these different art forms. One of the film's narrative strands focuses on Inês, a young woman who has a disability both in the film and in real life. She models for a painter, José Torres Campana, played by recently-deceased Mexican diplomat Felipe Ehrenberg, who was also a painter in real life. At a certain point, Inês is shown posing for the film's key painting, called "Pas de deux". Painter and model are naked and engaged in different embraces

during which he draws the sketches which are subsequently transferred to the canvas. Both processes (the drawing of the sketches and the actual painting) are shot while in progress, that is, Ehrenberg produced this painting during the actual shooting of the film (Figure 1). Thus, what we see in this scene is the actors leaping out of representation and into a presentational regime in which the production of an artwork is concomitant with its reproduction.



Figure 1: In *Delicate Crime*, the production of an artwork is concomitant with its reproduction

The most startling aspect of the sequence of the painting of “Pas de deux” is that a real painter and a real model agreed to create an artwork in real life while simultaneously playing fictional characters in a film. The fact that this involved full nudity and physical intimacy between both, and that, to that end, the model, who is disabled in reality, had to remove her prosthetic leg before the camera, indicates the transformative effect the film necessarily had on the actors’ actual lives. The resulting picture has in its centre an erect penis placed next to a dilated vulva, implying that if the painting was real, so may have been the sexual arousal between painter and model. Suggestively, the male organ appears as substitute of the missing leg, filling in the representational gap that allows for art (and sex)

to become reality (Figure 2). The impact of the performance and its result on the actress becomes apparent when, within the film, she becomes a spectator of the resulting painting. Her sobs at this point look and are real (a fact confirmed by director Beto Brant in conversation with the author).



Figure 2: The painting 'Pas de deux' is a passage to reality in *Delicate Crime*

Delicate crime offers the opportunity to elaborate on another intermedial encounter connecting fiction and physical reality obtained by means of theatre. In the same way that we see painting in the making, the theatre plays shown in the film are extracts of real spectacles running in the city of São Paulo when the film was made, which, in turn, interweave with the fictional life story of Antônio Martins, a theatre critic played by established actor and the film's co-producer Marco Ricca. Fictional though this character is, he is also constantly interacting with real-life characters, not least the Pernambucan film director Cláudio Assis, who makes a cameo appearance as a rowdy jealous lover in a bar, in a short theatrical sketch for the sole enjoyment of Antônio Martins.

Assis's episode is part of three bar scenes based on sheer improvisation, as fiction increasingly loses ground to the document. In the three of them a renowned figure interacts with a non-professional or little-known actor: journalist Xico Sá and two actual transvestites; actor Adriano Stuart and an old drunkard; and the famously outrageous director Cláudio Assis and a lesser known theatre actress. The improvisation exercise with Assis is particularly effective in overlapping theatre performance, diegetic reality and real life. It consists of a couple sitting at a table engaged in a loud argument. Shot with the same frontal static camera as the other theatrical fragments previously shown, the scene gives us the initial impression of an extradiegetic excrescence within the plot. However, the quarrelling couple soon look at the camera and address someone off-frame. At that point a reverse shot shows us Antônio sitting at the counter opposite them as a silent observer, now revealed to be the originator of the point of view, occupying the position which a moment ago was that of the film spectator. The uncovering of the voyeur, who suddenly acquires the active role of reciprocating theatrical exhibitionism, not only ties in the bar scene to the plot, but disrupts its illusionistic representation. And indeed at the end male and female characters are revealed to be only joking, embrace each other and leave the premise. Theatre here is a passage to the reality of both the medium and the objective world.

Musical interludes

Assis's appearance in Brant's film is not accidental and indicates that both directors had been conversing through their films, not least by creating intermedial passages.

Both Brant and Assis had started in the film business in the dark era of the late 1980s and early 1990s in Brazil, when a stagnant film industry led to massive migration of filmmakers to the advertisement branch. Several of them devoted themselves to commercial music videos, working together with a blooming generation of popular musicians at the time, including Chico Science and Fred Zeroquatro in Pernambuco, O Rappa in Rio, and Titãs and Sabotage in São Paulo

(see FIGUEIRÔA, 2006 in this respect). It is both tragic and a testament to the violent society they were addressing that various of these musicians lost their lives (Sabotage and Chico Science among them) or were gravely injured (Marcelo Yuka, of O Rappa) while at the height of their productivity. Brant and Assis directly applied the skills acquired through music-video making to the social critique developed later in their feature-length films. To illustrate this point, I will now look at extracts from two concomitant films of 2002, made respectively by Brant and Assis: *The trespasser* (*O invasor*) and *Mango yellow* (*Amarelo manga*). These, in my view, ideally reflect the directors' connective aim, first by turning film into music, second by establishing relationships across characters and social classes, and lastly by nationalising and internationalising regional issues. The extracts I will address consist of "musical moments", as Amanda Mansur Nogueira (2014, p. 149) has referred to them, in which music takes centre stage whilst seemingly pausing the narrative thread. In contrast to the musical film genre, however, the function of music here is not to make room for an entertaining spectacle of dance, but to let the background imagery speak for itself. They are moments in which, in the words of Samuel Paiva (2016, p. 73), "musical language" prevails thanks to the recourse to music-video editing techniques. Two examples should suffice to illustrate this hypothesis.

In *The trespasser*, the title role of hitman Anísio is played by Paulo Miklos, a musician and member of the band Titãs for whom Brant had made music videos. Anísio is hired by a property developer to kill one of his partners. As well as fulfilling this commission with such an exceeding zeal that he also kills his victim's wife, Anísio manages to penetrate the property developer's luxurious home and seduce his daughter Marina. Anísio and Marina then embark on a journey through the poor periphery of São Paulo (the location is mainly the district of Brasilândia, in the Northern Zone), in a footage devoid of dialogue and edited in the pace of a rap by Sabotage, who is also a character in the film. The result is a sweeping *flânerie* that collects documentary snapshots in the pace of Sabotage's rap song, "Na Zona Sul", about the miserable Southern Zone of São Paulo and its

“difficult daily life” (Figure 3). At this point, thanks to the jump cuts, the *favela* appears as a natural continuation of the noble quarters of the city. The breaking of geographic boundaries caused by the brusque cuts results in striking and entirely recognisable evidence of the state of aesthetic communion among Brazilian urban social classes, despite the enormous economic gulf between them. The way that real life interweaves with fiction here, through a typically intermedial procedure combining film and music, was shockingly enhanced by the fact that Sabotage, the great revelation in the cast of *The trespasser*, was murdered soon after the opening of the film as a result of an ongoing gang war similar to those described in his songs.



Figure 3: A musical interlude as document in *The trespasser*

Now compare this to the following sequence in *Mango yellow* (*Amarelo manga*, Cláudio Assis, 2002), in which film's ability to dissect and scrutinise the entrails of society is again demonstrated in music-video style. Dunga, one of the film's central characters, leaves the hotel where he works as a cook and walks a long distance to deliver a malicious letter to the wife of the man he covets. In this sequence, yet again, devoid of dialogue, Dunga's brisk

pace matches the rhythm of the song “Dollywood”, by Lúcio Maia and Jorge du Peixe, former members of the band Nação Zumbi, led by the legendary founder of the Manguebeat movement, Chico Science, tragically deceased in 1997. The extra-diegetic music punctuates the description of the area Dunga traverses, with its coconut-water sellers, knick-knack shops and a bridge over the Capibaribe river, until suddenly, abandoning the character, the camera penetrates a favela, where mothers wander around with their children and a pregnant girl fetches water from a well for her laundry (Figure 4). This then changes to a car-mounted camera in higher speed, which, much in the way of the favela scene in *The trespasser*, runs through the shacks and then travels back to the hotel, now following the yellow car of one of its guests, the necrophile Isaac. The way in which colour – in this case the colour yellow – combines with real cityscapes and city dwellers, functioning as a connective thread of repulsive dirt and expansive life, is powerfully highlighted through the careful use of props and objects that transforms Recife into a live witness of Brazil’s social inequality, not least because yellow is often carefully placed against a faint green backdrop suggesting the Brazilian flag. The inspiration for the colour palette is literary and draws on writer Renato Carneiro de Campos, nominally cited and recited in the film in another scene, allying its verbal power to music as a conduit to material reality:

Yellow is the colour of the tables, the benches, the stools, the fish knife handles, the hoe and the sickle, the bull cart, of the yokes, of the old hats. Of the dried meat! Yellow of the diseases, of the children’s runny eyes, of the purulent wounds, of the spit, of the worms, of hepatitis, of diarrhoeas, of the rotten teeth. Interior time yellow. Old, washed out, sick.

In short, in both *The trespasser* and *Mango yellow* musical interludes combine real life and social critique in an inextricable manner, at moments in which film avers itself as passage, material inbetweenness and political intermediality.



Figure 4: A musical interlude as document in *Mango Yellow*

Intermedial activism

My next case study will be another exponent of the Retomada and post-Retomada periods, Tata Amaral. Her films *Antônia* (2006) and *Bring it inside* (*Trago comigo*, 2013), in particular, provide excellent material to reflect on intermediality as passage to social reality. The portrayal of art in the making by actual artists grounds these films firmly within their historical environment, changing them into a piece of activism or “artivism” as Amaral likes to call it, whilst committing casts and crews intellectually and physically to the causes defended in the fictional plot. Tata Amaral is notable for having consistently addressed the theme of female repression within the Brazilian working classes in groundbreaking films such as *Starry sky* (*Um céu de estelas*, 1996), the first instalment of a female trilogy including *Through the window* (*Através da janela*, 2000) and *Antônia*, the latter a feature-length film later expanded into a TV series. Famously, *A Starry sky* culminates in the murder of the male oppressor by the liberated woman, unleashing a string of Brazilian films leading to similar endings, such as *Latitude zero* (Toni Venturi, 2001) and *Up against them all* (*Contra todos*, Roberto Moreira, 2004), the latter featuring the same Leona Cavalli of *Starry sky*. But in order to properly evaluate Amaral’s contribution to Brazilian cinema and film history in

general, we need to move beyond readings that rely on representational strategies hinging on female role models to be emulated by a hypothetically ill-informed or naïve female spectator. Films are feminist not only when they “represent” strong women, but also when they engage with their causes in a wider social context at *production* stage, i.e. when they interfere and transform reality with and through the actions of their characters.

Let us look at how this system is activated in *Antônia*, the feature-length film. In her excellent book *Brazilian women’s filmmaking*, Leslie Marsh (2012) finds in this film the representation of “progressive woman/motherhood wherein women are not dependent on men or repressed by traditional gender roles”. This “uplifting, positive image of young people”, in Marsh’s words, is, however, one that required a reasonable amount of sanitation, for example, by keeping questions of drug trafficking and ensuing violence away from the story of that particular favela community. This fact has been celebrated as a “feminine difference” to male-oriented favela films such as *City of God* (SÁ, 2013) – and it is true that in her interviews Amaral herself never hesitates to define violence as essentially masculine. In my view, however, rather than its pedagogical and somewhat simplified representational message, the great contribution of *Antônia* is to have unveiled real hip-hop female singers (Negra Li, Leilah Moreno, Quelynah and MC Cindy) from the periphery of São Paulo, whose extraordinary performances offer irrefutable indexical evidence of their actual value. Their musicianship overrides representation, adding a further and more effective political dimension to the film. These are characters whose existence is entirely dependent on their context, as is made clear at the film’s very opening, as the girls emerge from between a hilly road and a favela community behind them (Figure 5). Having together through and for the film, these singers had their individual careers changed and boosted exponentially thanks to it, with obvious positive consequences also for their communities. *Antônia* is the commission by the culture secretary of Santo André – a city in greater São Paulo – to document female hip-hop singers in the region, and the film follows this documentary mission to the letter by describing

step by step how music emerges from daily-life occurrences until it becomes an independent work of art, including lyrics collectively imagined, dance steps rehearsed, backstage production, and the singers progressing from background vocalists to foreground leads.



Figure 5: Fictional characters emerge from a real context, in *Antônia*

The combination of film and politics in Amaral's work by means of showing art in the making, from its real raw material to the finished artistic product, is even more evident in another TV series, this time for Canal Brasil, *Bring it inside* (*Trago comigo*, drama series, 2009), which was turned into a single feature film seven years later, in 2016. Here, presentation and representation are neatly separated. Fiction is posited as an exercise in re-enactment of the plight of survivors from Brazil's military dictatorship atrocities from the late 1960s onwards. Demonstrating Amaral's freedom from gender constraints, the protagonist is now male, a character called Telmo, played by Carlos Roberto Ricelli in what is probably his best onscreen performance to date. A famous theatre director now retired, Telmo tries to fill in a gap in his memory about the character of Lia, a former clandestine guerrilla fighter like him. His attempt at putting together a play on the subject is interspersed with testimonials of actual victims of the dictatorship,

who retell on camera their experiences of prison and torture, as well as the death of their comrades and relatives. Margulies (2003, p. 220) states that:

Reenactment radically refocuses the issue of indexicality. The corroborating value of reenactment does depend on our knowledge that these particular feet walked these particular steps. But it is the intentional and fictional retracing that *enacted* lends to these faces and places an authenticating aura.

In *Bring it inside* indexicality pierces through the many layers of fiction-making which are exposed as such in the film, revealing the stages through which a story is constructed out of real facts. Shot in a real disused theatre, the once famous Teatro Brasileiro de Comédia, the film takes spectators by the hand through the entire process of auditioning the cast, rehearsing and dress-rehearsing scenes which are mirrored by the retelling on camera, by real victims, of similar stories, complete with their hesitations and memory gaps. Within the fable, Telmo is trying to deal with a sense that he might have unwittingly contributed to the death of his lover Lia, when under torture he confessed to a rendezvous with comrade Braga in a church, but chance meant that Braga had fallen ill and Lia went there instead and was caught by the hangmen.

Margulies (2003, p. 218) defines reenactment as “a repetition on camera of some mistaken behaviour, which it is the film’s work to put on trial”. As well as representing a tragic love story, Telmo’s acting is also a means for actual victims to attain atonement and justice through repairing their own untold and misremembered history which is placed alongside fiction in order to bring home to the spectator the artifice of any representation, but also the reality of the medium itself. The recourse to theatre functions here as a passage to the real, including the actors’ bodily commitment to the experience of torture in order to better apprehend and convey the victims’ plights. Needless to say, the entire process is a didactic and self-reflexive exposition of Amaral’s own filmmaking method, based on improvisation and identification between characters and actors, as well as on real location shooting. This method turned out to be immensely useful for

those who are to this day still fighting for the punishment of the perpetrators, and this is why Amaral decided to make a single feature film out of the series as a means to give continuation to the work of recovering the country's historical memory and of fighting for justice alongside the victims.

Given the speed with which conventional cinema is currently losing ground to other audio-visual forms, Tata Amaral is now more than ever engaged in diversifying her filmmaking activities and bringing them closer to real phenomena. An example is her recent episodic programme for TV Cultura, *Causando na rua*, a take on street art and activism named after an endearing popular slang, which literally translates to 'causing in the streets', i.e., directly interfering in the reality of São Paulo whilst interacting with it, for example, by mapping the city's hidden water courses or participating in artistic events and interventions focusing on gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Needless to say, women's causes feature high in the series, whose mode of production is multi-authorial and collaborative by definition.

In short, Tata Amaral's governing filmmaking principle seems to be the establishment of a strongly indexical relationship with reality in order to endow fiction with transformative effect, contributing to reconstruct history with all its contradictions and secure a better future for the country.

Geographical passages

To complete my analysis, I will now turn to one of the most eloquent intermedial encounters of political intent in Brazilian cinema, this time explicitly uniting São Paulo and Pernambuco and in perfect symmetry to my previous example of the encounter between Pernambucan Cláudio Assis and Paulistan Beto Brant. It is the documentary film *The little prince's rap against the wicked souls* (*O rap do pequeno príncipe contra as almas sebosas*), made in 2000 by Paulo Caldas and Marcelo Luna, just a couple of years before *The trespasser* and *Mango yellow*. The film focuses on a vigilante, or *justiceiro*, called Hélio José Muniz, currently in jail for his numerous killings, as well as on a character in all antipodal to him, Alexandre Garnizé, the drummer of hip-hop band Faces do

Subúrbio, who is devoted to educational and charitable work. Both characters hail from Camaragibe, a dormitory town in the periphery of Recife, where crime and impunity thrive, but where music offers, as suggested by Brito Gama (2012), the utopia of social change. One of the film's most poignant moment concerns a scene bringing together members of Pernambuco's Faces do Subúrbio and São Paulo's Racionais MC's, two famous bands. The scene starts with Mano Brown and Ice Blue, from Racionais MCs, sitting with friends and enjoying a typical northeastern meal of dried beef and boiled manioc on a roof terrace in Camaragibe. Whilst chatting about the record levels of criminality in São Paulo's Southern Zone, the two look down onto the sprawling favela landscape and identify each of its sections with favelas from that area of São Paulo. This preludes one of the most symbolic "passages" ever shot in Brazilian cinema, consisting of an aerial long take of around two minutes over the never-ending favelas around Recife, to the sound of rap *Salve*, composed by Edy Rock and Mano Brown, whose lyrics, uttered from the perspective of someone behind bars, salute the populations from favelas from São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte and Brasília. As the names of these communities are called out in an interminable list, space-time realism enabled by the long take offers indexical evidence of the connection of all Brazilian regions through their underbelly of poverty (Figure 6).



Figure 6: In *The little prince's rap against the wicked souls*, the aerial long take connects all Brazilian metropolitan regions through their underbelly of poverty

As Arthur Autran (2003) reminds us, aerial shots of favelas have a long history in Brazilian cinema, harking back to *Rio 40 degrees* (*Rio 40 graus*, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1955), and are invariably intended to define the country's national identity through its deprived territories. The extraordinary event in this particular long take is, however, its intermediality, through which, like in the other examples, music and poetry offer a passage to reality through the virtual medium of film. The lyrics suggest, at the end, that social change can only be attained through religion, by invoking the figure of a black Jesus who walked among beggars and lepers,² a miraculous solution that had already been dismissed as ineffective as far back as in 1964, in Glauber Rocha's *Black god, white devil* (*Deus e o diabo na terra do sol*). This however does not detract from the documentarian, physical truth provided by the interminable name calling of favelas across Brazil, the indexical images of real, continuous favelas, and not least the reality of death which this and so many favela films in Brazil are all about. Helinho, it must be noted, was the author of 44 deaths at the time of the film, and his ongoing trial had already sentenced him to 99 years in jail. He had actually "passed" 44 lives, the verb "passar" (or to pass) in Portuguese also meaning to kill or waste in the favela slang abundantly explored in the favela films made in those days (see NAGIB, 2007, p. 99-114, in this respect). By passing over to the other side of the prison walls through the conduit of music, the film puts us fleetingly in touch with the real utopia of art.

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2 The original verses say: "Eu acredito na palavra de um homem de pele escura, de cabelo crespo, que andava entre mendigos e leprosos, pregando a igualdade... Um homem chamado Jesus...", which would literally translate as: "I believe in the words of a man with dark skin and curly hair who walked among beggars and lepers, preaching equality... A man called Jesus..."

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