Passages to reality: the case of Brazilian cinema

Chapter 7

Passages to Reality: The Case of Brazilian Cinema

This chapter is a companion piece to the feature-length essay film *Passages: Travelling in and out of film through Brazilian geography* (Lúcia Nagib and Samuel Paiva, 2019), which provides a panoramic view that situates the films studied here within a larger canvas, encompassing other directors and films. Visioning *Passages* clarifies with sounds and images all the points made below.

The chapter crystallises the main issue at stake in Part II, that is, the utilisation within film of artforms such as painting, theatre, poetry and music as a bridge or a 'passage' to political and social reality. Such intermedial passages can be observed in productions from all over the world throughout film history, and the Ozu/Mizoguchi and Raúl Ruiz examples, studied respectively in Chapters 5 and 6, have already provided eloquent evidence of their widespread use. However, rather than focusing on individual artists and films, this chapter will address a national phenomenon, more specifically, selected works by filmmakers from the states of São Paulo (Beto Brant and Tata Amaral) and Pernambuco (Cláudio Assis/Hilton Lacerda, Paulo Caldas/Marcelo Luna), in Brazil, who over the years have bridged across their regions' very different social history and geographic situation by means of a shared artistic and political platform.

Not accidentally, these are all prominent figures of what became known as the Retomada do Cinema Brasileiro, or the Brazilian Film Revival from the mid-1990s onwards, whose echoes can still be felt today. As I have explained in previous writing (Nagib 2003; 2007; 2018), the Revival movement arose at an emblematic moment of democratic consolidation in the country, after twenty years of military dictatorship followed by the disastrous, but short-lived government of the first democratically-elected President, Fernando Collor de Mello, impeached for corruption in 1992. With the subsequent governments of Presidents Itamar Franco, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Luiz Inácio (Lula) da Silva and Dilma Roussef, incentive laws were introduced and developed that boosted a

production of near zero in the early 1990s to close to 200 feature-length films per year today. This was accompanied by a process of regionalisation that expanded film production, traditionally restricted to the metropolises of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, across other Brazilian states, such as Rio Grande do Sul, Minas Gerais, Ceará and Pernambuco, the latter having become in recent years a film hub of international standing.[1] Though widely heterogenous in terms of genres and styles, Revival films commingled in the desire to reassess questions of national identity and social inequality, once at the heart of the Cinema Novo movement of the 1960s and 70s, which they revisited through a less ideological lens, but an enhanced commitment to realism at the point of production. At the same time, the movement's independent character favoured an emboldened use of the film medium that recognised no borders 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.

Accordingly, my proposal in this chapter will be to investigate the material life that pulsates in the intersection between film and other media by focusing on the passage, 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. Privileged case studies will be: *Delicate crime* (*Crime delicado,* Beto Brant 2005), in which film and painting in progress produce an 'aesthetic symbiosis', in André Bazin's (1981) expression, conducive to realism; *The Trespasser* (*O invasor,* Beto Brant, 2002) and *Mango Yellow* (*Amarelo manga,* 2002, directed by Cláudio Assis on script by Hilton Lacerda), in which musical interludes function as a tool to document urban territories of poverty; *Rat Fever* (*Febre do rato,* 2011, directed by Cláudio Assis on script and poems by Hilton Lacerda), in which poetry is infused with material reality via the live exercise of its words and the artist's body itself; Tata Amaral's *Antônia* (2006), *Bring It Inside* (*Trago comigo,* 2009/2016) and TV series *Causing in the Streets* (*Causando na rua*), which promote what she calls 'artivism' by means of music, theatre and street art in the making; and *The Little Prince's Rap Against the Wicked Souls* (*O rap do pequeno*

príncipe contra as almas sebosas, 2000, by Paulo Caldas and Marcelo Luna), in which rap music unites all Brazilian metropolises through the common trope of geographic exclusion.

Though not exactly 'popular', these films are mostly conventional fiction or documentary features, intended for commercial distribution and exhibition at traditional outlets. Thus, the wisdom of this choice could be questioned, in that the intersection between real life and film would seem more evident in radical ventures, such as expanded cinema experiments involving live performance, or else works that provide comprehensive spectatorial immersion, such as Virtual Reality films. But this is where my argument aligns with a realist tradition harking back to Italian Neorealism, whose aim is to break the boundaries with the phenomenological world at the point of the film's production, rather than exhibition and consumption, 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. As well as drawing on these realist procedures, this corpus of films engages with other artworks in the making as an additional enabler of social change, as my analysis will hopefully demonstrate.

In conceptual terms, the idea of film as a vehicle or 'passage' is not new and derives from its own nature as a 'medium'. Already in the 1980s, Raymond Bellour (2012: loc 483) spoke of 'passages of the image' with reference to cinema's ever-evolving technological condition that posits it 'between the moving image and stasis, between analogical photography and its metamorphoses, between language and image'. Bellour's 'passages', inspired by the then emerging practice of videoart, prefigured what later became known as 'remediation' (Bolter and Grusin 1999), or the multiplication of supports that over the last decades has allowed cinema to break free from the film theatre and pervade museums, galleries, schools, offices, domestic and personal screens. The passages addressed in this chapter, however, do not refer to modes of exhibition and consumption, but take place at the point of production, by means of an interaction between film (whatever its support) and other artistic and medial forms that are themselves still in progress. Pethő (2011: 11) has aptly defined the role of the *tableau vivant* in a film as 'metalepsis', or a 'leap' from the virtual

world into material reality. The filmmakers addressed here are also striving for this leap by turning their cameras on the production of other artworks in order to capture their material quality. It is as if the technological medium of film, unique in its property to elicit perceptual realism and mimesis of the real world, needed the sensory, physical quality of other traditional arts in order to gain substance. Thus, resorting to other media within film becomes a journey of discovery, a means to collect documentary evidence of the objective world and change it for the better.

In further, philosophical, terms the word 'passages' has become indelibly associated with Walter Benjamin and *Das Passagen-Werk,* his monumental study of the passages, or commercial arcades, of Paris, translated into English as *The Arcades Project* (1999). Benjamin's work of a lifetime, left unfinished with his suicide in 1940, is not far from a total-artwork aspiration. Acknowledging that 'few things in the history of humanity are as well known to us as the history of Paris' (882), Benjamin set out to compile the *Urgeschichte,* or 'primal history', of the nineteenth century, despite 'the manifest interminability of the task' (Eiland and McLaughlin 1999: x), using the Parisian passages as a kind of time capsule. The thousands of citations and notes, organised to that end by the author in 'convolutes' (sheaf of notes) and preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, have for years baffled experts, such as the editor of *Das Passagen-Werk,* Rolf Tiedemann (1999: 929ff), who entertains the hypothesis that this might have been the work's final format envisaged by the author himself. If so, it would have been a kind of postmodern compendium avant la lettre, fragmentary, contradictory, never-ending, self-defeating. For the scope of this chapter, some of its recurrent ideas might nonetheless be illuminating, such as the condensation of past and present represented by the Parisian passages, with its shops of bric-a-brac combining different eras, in which Benjamin identifies the utopian elements of *Urgeschichte*:

> In the dream in which each epoch entertains images of its successor, the latter appears wedded to elements of primal history '*Urgeschichte'* – that is, to elements of a classless society. And the experiences of such a society – as stored in the unconscious of the

> collective – engender, through interpenetration with what is new, the utopia that has left its trace in a thousand configurations of life, from enduring edifices to passing fashions. (Benjamin 1999: 4-5)

The utopia Benjamin refers to here is Charles Fourier's 'phalanstery', or a city entirely formed of passages, which in this configuration become places of dwelling as well as of commerce (Benjamin 1999: 17). Thus, in the phalanstery, passages are at once conducive and final, roads to somewhere else and points of arrival, their mixed, dialectical nature combining the belief in modern life and the hope of a classless society. 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 (2011), as well as the locale of utopian connections that bring filmmakers together through the hope of a better society.

Aesthetic Symbioses

Delicate Crime, which has already been the object of my attention from a different angle in the book *World Cinema and the Ethics of Realism* (Nagib 2011: 157-176), is an accomplished example of the political circuit that connects film, the other arts and real life. 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.

Let us first look at the film's interaction with painting. One of the narrative strands in *Delicate Crime* focuses on Inês (Lilian Taublib), a young woman who lacks a leg 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 work of art, a picture called 'Pas de deux'. Painter and model are naked and

engaged in different embraces during which Ehrenberg draws the sketches that are subsequently transferred to the canvas. 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. Indeed, the most startling aspect of the sequence of the making of 'Pas de deux' is that a real painter and a non-professional actress 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 state of extreme vulnerability the actors placed themselves in for the sake of the film. But this is where an ethical commitment to the truth of the unpredictable event comes into play, one which engages crew and cast in a socially transformative project. Risk and personal sacrifice were part of such a project, which, for example, caused Felipe Ehrenberg to lose his diplomatic job as a result of his participation in the film. But it was also liberating, in particular for Taublib, who thanks to the film was able to definitively rid herself of her prosthetic leg, which she wore for cosmetic effect only (see Brant's testimonial in the film *Passages*). The impact of the process of painting on the actress can be gleaned from the film itself, when lying next to the completed work she is overcome with emotion; her sobs at this point look and are real, a fact confirmed by Brant in his interview for *Passages*.[2]

Painting in progress, in *Delicate Crime,* thus functions as a passage to real life insofar as film fuses with it, in a similar way to that described by André Bazin a propos of *The Mystery of Picasso* (*Le Mystère Picasso,* Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1956), in which he identifies 'an aesthetic symbiosis' between film and pictorial event (1981: 200):

> *The Mystery of Picasso* distinguishes itself radically from the usual didactic films about art made thus far. In fact, Clouzot's film does not explain Picasso, it shows him. (Bazin 1981: 193)[3]

A milestone in the history of documenting painting, *The Mystery of Picasso* is indeed a fitting comparison here for having registered, rather than Picasso's works, Picasso *at* work, by means of an entirely original method. In order to emphasise the 'mystery' behind artistic creation, a new kind of coloured ink was used that soaked through the paper, making the artist's strokes visible on the picture's reverse side. It is from this side that Picasso's act of painting was mostly shot, hiding the artist from view and allowing his artworks to magically materialise in front of the spectator. For Bazin, such a method is 'Bergsonian' because it relies on time, or *durée* (duration), rather than space. Bergson's (2018) notion of *durée* refers to an inner psychic time made of a heterogenous succession of moments, in opposition to an exterior space, which is homogenous and made of simultaneities. In Bergson's conception, whereas *durée* is dynamic and contains the past, space is static and can only reflect the present. For Bazin, the emphasis on *durée,* or a time continuum, in *The Mystery of Picasso,* completes the revolution started in previous films on painting by the likes of Alain Resnais (*Van Gogh,* 1948; *Gauguin,* 1950; *Guernica,* 1950) and Luciano Emmer (*Picasso,* 1955). These had already abolished the picture frame, 'whose disappearance identified the pictorial universe with the universe in general' (Bazin 1981: 194), but it was only a spatial revolution. In *The Mystery of Picasso,* a temporal revolution takes place thanks to the employment of long takes directed at the painting in the making. The fact that these shots were accelerated by means of cuts, to the point of showing two strokes on the paper taking place at the same time, does not, for Bazin (198), detract from the film's realism, for one must differentiate between 'trick' and 'falsification':

> Clouzot is not trying to deceive us. Only the absentminded, the foolish or those who know nothing about cinema could be at risk of not noticing the film's acceleration effects obtained by editing […] [Clouzot] understood and felt, as a filmmaker, the need of a spectacular time, and he utilised the concrete duration of the events to his own ends, but without denaturing them.

Another kind of realism Bazin (1981: 197) identifies in the film is 'uncertainty in pure state', or the unpredictable nature of the painting's final form as it evolves in time, creating 'suspense' for the opposite reason of violent action: 'literally here, nothing happens, nothing except the painting's duration' (197). Finally, the film is realist for Bazin for revealing the many layers of time contained in the painting, which are not 'the temporality a posteriori implied in the contemplation of the picture, but an ontological temporality implied in the picture's very nature'. He says: 'This we call "a painting" is just the ultimately arbitrary cessation of a series of metamorphoses that only cinema can capture in its nascent state'. (Bazin 1983: 122)

One could say that in *Delicate Crime* all these procedures and realisms are to be found, with their own original variations and contrasts. In the first place, the film sets out, not to contextualise the act of creation through a biographical approach to the painter, but to document how a painting comes into being, and in so doing attaining a 'symbiosis' with it, through which the act of painting becomes a passage to reality. No wonder this painting was the first sequence to be shot, though appearing towards the middle of the film, as Brant had to find 'the language for filming the making of the painting' which would define the film's entire aesthetic conception, as he states in *Passages*. The filming of a painting in progress is also at the root of *Delicate Crime*'s 'ontological temporality', tricked though it might be through montage, but faithful to the unpredictability of the artistic creation that generates suspense in reverse, in Bazin's terms, culminating with the arbitrary cessation of the painting's duration. Finally, the process of painting unveils the many temporal stages of its coming into being, in the Bergsonian sense of *durée*, from sketches on small sheets of paper to the projection on the large canvas, where different layers of colours and shapes are superimposed on one another. Thus, if the ready picture can only show its present state in space, film reveals its various past lives and metamorphoses in time.

The differences between *Delicate Crime* and *The Mysteries of Picasso* are however equally striking. In the latter the artificially sped-up process of painting increases not only 'suspense' in the

Bazinian meaning of the word, but the sense of magic and mystery. This resonates with the word 'genius', repeatedly employed by the voiceover narrator (Clousot himself) to describe the painter, suggesting, as Nead (2012: 37) points out, 'a cross-identification between painter and auteur filmmaker'. Nothing could be further from the ethos animating *Delicate Crime,* in which the painstaking, sweaty and uncomfortable process of posing and drawing is exposed. The painter sometimes forgets his original position with relation to the model and has to engage in several failed attempts at repositioning himself, to the model's annoyance; the model's arm goes numb, and the painter has to massage it back to life; breaks are taken so both painter and model can fan and recompose themselves etc. Picasso, on the contrary, states in *Mystery* that he could carry on painting around the clock if necessary, and the fluidity and automatism of his endless pictures are the film's very subject. When Clouzot's film finally 'defers to the corporeality of the mythic Picasso', in Nead's (31) words, he is presented naked from waist up, his short but muscular torso appearing as the full embodiment of 'male artistic creativity' (Nead 2012: 27), whereas in *Delicate Crime* fragility (not least the actress's disability), doubt and gender equality are all apparent.

In both films, eroticism is of the essence, though an important difference separates them here too. In *Delicate Crime,* the completed picture, 'Pas de deux', has at its centre an erect penis next to a dilated vulva, implying that if the painting was real, so must have been the sexual arousal between painter and model. The first of Picasso's paintings in progress also shows a naked painter depicting a naked model in close proximity with one another, implying an obvious sexual relationship between both. However, the act of painting itself is dominated by the sole figure of the artist, who is working exclusively from memory, without any models around, not even inanimate objects. What this demonstrates is that *Delicate Crime* brings creativity down to earth by means of a documentary realism that deconstructs the figure of the artistic genius. The effort here is towards demonstrating shared authorship and agency, also as relates to sex, rather than the artist's genius and sovereign eroticism, by highlighting the female model's opinions, feelings and personal contribution to the work, alongside that of the male artist.

Indeed, feminism is a most distinctive trait of *Delicate Crime* and its approach to reality, as can be noticed in another intermedial encounter obtained by means of theatre. In the same way that the film shows us painting in the making, extracts of real theatrical spectacles running in the city of São Paulo at the time are interwoven in it. The film's very opening is pure theatre, capturing with frontal framing a fragment of the play *Libertine Confraternity* (*Confraria libertina*), authored by playwright and theatre director Maurício Paroni de Castro, who was also one of the film's scriptwriters. A parody of psychoanalysis, it focuses on characters in a sadomasochistic situation leading to the liberation of the oppressed woman, whose chastity belt is unlocked by the figure of a dominatrix. Placed at the forefront of the plot, feminism then develops through extracts of another two plays. One of them is *Woyzeck*, the famous unfinished manuscript by Georg Büchner found after his death in 1837, in which the soldier Woyzeck accuses his wife Maria of adultery; the version shown here is an adaptation by Fernando Bonassi called *Woyzeck, o brasileiro,* or *Woyzeck, the Brazilian*. The other extract stems from *Leonor de Mendonça,* an 1846 play by Brazilian romantic poet Gonçalves Dias, in which a woman, Leonor, is again accused of adultery by her husband, D. Jaime. In both plays the female character is finally murdered by her husband. Female oppression being the subject of the three plays staged in the film migrates into fiction via the character of theatre critic Antônio Martins, who writes his reviews of them whilst obsessed with Inês and tormented with jealousy of her erotic-artistic relation with painter José Torres Campana. The film then evolves to a possible rape of Inês by Antônio, and she takes him to court on this charge, though the outcome of the court case is not revealed.

Whilst theatre is the channel through which reality migrates into fiction, it also brings fiction back to reality. Antônio is 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 improvised theatrical sketch. Assis's episode, an eloquent example of how Revival artists from São Paulo and Pernambuco conversed across the country's extensive territory, is part of three bar scenes based on sheer improvisation involving professional and non-professional actors. The

improvisation exercise with Assis is particularly effective in overlapping theatre performance, diegetic reality and real life. It consists of a couple (Assis and an aspiring actress, in the role of his lover) sitting at a table and 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 theatre critic 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 acknowledging 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 premises, with Assis explaining: 'This was just a jealousy scene'. Theatre here becomes a passage to the reality of both the film 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, when a stagnant film industry preceding the cinematic revival led to a massive migration of filmmakers to advertising. Several of them turned 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 de Janeiro, and Os Titãs and Sabotage in São Paulo (see in this respect Figueirôa 2006). Brant and Assis directly applied the skills acquired through music-video making to the social critique developed later in their feature films. To illustrate this point, I will now look at

extracts from two films made respectively by Brant and Assis in the same year of 2002: *The Trespasser* and *Mango Yellow*. 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 regional issues. The extracts I will address consist of 'musical moments', as Amanda Mansur Nogueira (2014: 149) has referred to them, in which music takes centre stage whilst seemingly pausing the narrative progression. In contrast to the musical film genre, however, the function of music here is to let the background imagery speak for itself, rather than making room for an entertaining spectacle of song and dance. They are moments in which, in the words of Samuel Paiva (2016: 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 Os 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 city's Northern Zone), in a footage devoid of dialogue and edited at the pace of a rap by Sabotage, who is also a character of the same name in the film. The result is a sweeping flânerie that collects documentary snapshots at the pace of Sabotage's rap song, 'Na Zona Sul', about the miserable Southern Zone of São Paulo (in all respects comparable to the Northern Zone where this passage was actually shot) and its 'difficult daily life'. At this point, thanks to the jump cuts, the *favela* appears as a natural continuation of the noble quarters of the city (see in this respect Nagib 2007: pp. 115ff). 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 typical 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 in his community, in every way similar to those described in his songs.

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, a homosexual and 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 in a car crash. 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. This then changes to a car-mounted camera at higher speed, which, much in the way of the favela scenes in *The Trespasser,* runs through the shacks and then travels back to the Texas hotel, the characters' headquarters, 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 (the capital city of Pernambuco) into a live witness to Brazil's social inequality, not least because yellow is often carefully placed against a green backdrop suggesting the Brazilian flag. The inspiration for the colour palette is literary and draws on writer Renato Carneiro de Campos, cited by name and recited in the film in a bar scene, when one of his prose-poems is read out loud by a customer, when poetry combines with 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.

Material Poetry

These musical interludes are, however, not necessarily wordless, and *Rat Fever,* directed by the same Cláudio Assis again in partnership with poet and screenwriter Hilton Lacerda, provides abundant evidence of this. The film opens with one of the most poignant intermedial passages in Brazilian cinema, one that inspired the opening of our essay film *Passages.* The camera on a boat slowly passes under one of the Capiberibe bridges and details at its margins the sprawling favela of stilt shacks, precariously balancing over the filthy water. Meanwhile, on the soundtrack, we hear the offscreen voice of Irandhir Santos, in the role of the marginal poet Zizo, with his deep, velvety voice, reciting one of his poems (authored by Lacerda in reality) which is soon joined by Jorge du Peixe's original composition for the film, with low synthesiser notes and slow rhythm marked by the bass. The poem goes:

> *The satellite orbiting the world,/ Abyss of appalling things,/ People barking out their dreams,/ Ornaments of errant colours./ Tepid neighbour and princess,/ Slender in her sane madness,/ Cries with jubilation, the suburb!/ Weeps the planet in terror,/ Squeezed into the skimpiest of skirts,/ The dolls, bandits, the crippled./ Abyssal world, colossal world./ Right there, behind the mangrove,/ Repose insomnia, the cutlass, the hack-saw,/ The grind, the*

bonking/ And the blood./ Abyss, dark world, bottomless hole./ Throbs the burden of your streets,/ Throbs the ruminant cry./ Cries of 'no', world and abyss./ Cries of 'no'! For my abyssal world.[4]

Poetry here constitutes an additional layer of intermedial passage, in organic association with the music and the images. The camera's patient curiosity in investigating this 'abyss of appalling things', this city 'slender in her sane madness' that 'cries with jubilation', inspired Samuel Paiva and me to embark on a similar trip through the Capibaribe, where we found and re-filmed the poverty and the dirt at its banks, but also the 'ornaments of errant colours' on the improvised housing, the iron embroidery of the bridges, the historical Cinema São Luiz, key to Pernambucan filmmakers of the past and present, to all of which we pay homage in the opening of our film *Passages. Rat Fever* is a typical expression of the Recife vernacular that signifies a 'state out of control', which in the film signifies the anarchic communal life Zizo presides over in his neighbourhood. But it also refers to leptospirosis, a disease transmitted through rats' urine which finds particular fertile ground in floodwater, a regular occurrence in Recife's mangrove zone, and *Rat Fever* investigates precisely this underbelly of society, where dirt and disease thrive, but also a particular kind of poetry inherent in the physical experience of that milieu. One of the most inventive and powerful erotic scenes in the film – which is permeated throughout with erotic content – is when Eneida, Zizo's passion, urinates in his hand, squatting on the edge of a boat parked on a canal. Shot in one single long take, the scene leaves no doubt about its authenticity, but also about the film's determination to change the lowest filth into poetry.

Rat Fever's storyline is not set in any specific time period. However, the choice of black and white stock – with the dazzling photography by one of Brazil's greatest DoPs, Walter Carvalho – and the art direction in the deft hands of Renata Pinheiro, who over the years has created a particular identity for Pernambucan cinema, among other elements, bring it close to the 1960s and 70s and the Marginal Poetry movement which spread around the country from the 1970s onwards. This

movement was part of what became known as the 'geração mimeógrafo', or the 'mimeograph generation', involving intellectuals of all kinds who, due to the censorship imposed by the military regime at the time, took to the mimeograph to print out their writings as an alternative means to spread their ideas. This was also the case of the 'marginal poets', who, unable to find commercial presses for their outputs, resorted to the mimeograph to print out and distribute them independently. The physicality of this mode of dissemination – which often included street recitals by the authors – is referenced throughout the film, starting with its initial credits, written in typical typewriter typeface, accompanied by the sound of a mimeograph press and shown as individual pages, in the form of 'slides', that succeed one another onscreen. More than a mannerism, this stylistic choice feeds into the construction of the character of Zizo himself, soon shown at work on a mimeograph, where he prints out, page by page, his independent newspaper, called 'Febre do Rato' (Rat Fever). His prose and poetry work is all self-produced in the same way, and self-distributed in brochures and pamphlets, often read out in the streets and bars, or on a microphone from his derelict car. Thus Zizo is not just a poet, but poetry itself, and accordingly he is at a certain point shown writing poetry across his face, torso and limbs.

Another connection of the story to the 1970s is the way Zizo congregates a community of like-minded people around him who share everything, from habitation to sexual partners. Zizo himself sees as his social mission to satisfy old ladies in the neighbourhood in need of love and sex, using a round, well-shaped tub in his workshop to that end. The camera, often placed above the scene and occupying the space where the ceiling should have been, or sliding in tracking shots through rooms without walls, emphasises the sense of pervasiveness across the neighbourhood. In fact, Zizo's is a 'collective' body, always semi-naked, exposed and, in the end, sacrificial. And it was equally the mission of the film to have the entire cast share this mode of thinking and behaviour, by making them engage physically with their respective characters to unimaginable degrees, starting with Irandhir Santos, whose readiness to lend his full body and soul to fictitious characters (here as elsewhere) has turned him into a quasi-mythical actor of contemporary Brazilian cinema. The same

could be said of other lead and supporting actors, such as Nanda Costa (Eneida), Mariana Nunes (Rosângela), Vitor Araújo (Oncinha) and Hugo Gial (Bira), whose stark-naked bodies are constantly under the camera's eye and whose roles include collective and cross-gender sex acts.

Still with reference to the film's timeframe, a parallel has been pointed out between the figure of Zizo and that of Paulo Martins, a poet and journalist in Glauber Rocha's landmark *Entranced Earth* (*Terra em transe,* 1967) (n/a 2012). Indeed, both characters make politics through poetry, which, for Pasolini, a major reference for Rocha, encapsulated cinema's 'fundamentally irrational nature' (Pasolini 2005: 172). Hilton Lacerda, in *Passages,* also describes cinema as a poetic language whose various parts must combine through editing. But the two films seem to be comparable on another more complex level that brings us close to the Russian formalists and their concept of *zaum.* Defended by poets such as Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh, *zaum* refers to a 'transrational language' in which the word becomes 'broader than its meaning' (Steiner 1984: 144ff). Thus, it does not represent the thing, but is the thing itself, in the same way that Zizo and Paulo Martins are defined by the poetry they recite.

An episode, in *Rat Fever,* is particularly enlightening of the objectification of poetry. Throughout the story, Eneida, a schoolgirl, rejects Zizo's courtship, though obviously intrigued by and drawn towards him. One day, in response to a poem he had sent to her, she visits his workshop in his absence and copies her entire naked body on a xerox machine, by pressing the different parts of it against the glass and triggering the scanner. Later, when he finds Eneida's different body parts printed out, Zizo climaxes by kissing and rubbing himself against the xerox machine. Here, the physicality of the copier and printed page serves as a poetic passage through which the virtual medium of film reaches material reality.

The political commitment of crew and cast, in *Rat Fever,* is exposed in the manner of a manifesto in the film's apotheotic end. The marginal community finally invades Recife's historical centre on Brazil's Independence Day, the 7th of September, when military parades traditionally take

place. Zizo climbs to the top of his car, recites a poem on a megaphone and invites all participants to undress. Eneida joins him on the top of the car, and when both are fully naked and most of the audience half undressed, a military police contingent breaks into the group, hitting them with batons and threatening them with shotguns and machine guns. In our film *Passages,* scriptwriter Hilton Lacerda explains that this was a real military intervention, prompted by someone in the neighbourhood who accused the actors of 'indecent exposure'. Though, in the fiction, Zizo is beaten unconscious by the police and thrown into the river, luckily no-one actually died or was hurt on the occasion, but the risk was real, and so was their courage to confront society and its defence structures in the name of the reality of film.

Intermedial Artivism

My next case study will be another exponent of the Revival and post-Revival periods, Tata Amaral. Her films *Antônia* and *Bring It Inside*, in particular, provide excellent material to reflect on intermediality as a 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), a Revival landmark and the first 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 with a similar narrative conception, 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* (and also of Assis's *Mango Yellow*). 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: 178) 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 (177) 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, in this case, the Brasilândia district, which Tata Amaral made sure to name as such, so as to attach documentary authenticity to the story, as she states in the film *Passages.* The importance of this context is made clear at the film's very opening, as the girls emerge from between a hilly road and a favela community behind them. Having come 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. At the origin of *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 background vocals that progress to foreground leads.

The combination of film and politics in Amaral's work by means of documenting 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* (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: 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 executioners.

Margulies (2003: 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 original facts as well as that of the medium itself. The recourse to theatre functions here as a passage to the real, including the theatre 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 through which, in our day, conventional cinema is losing ground to other audiovisual 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 whose title, an endearing popular slang, means 'causing in the streets', i.e. directly interfering in the reality of São Paulo whilst interacting with it, for example, through mapping out the city's hidden water courses or participating in artistic happenings 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,* 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 respects his opposite, 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 moments concerns a scene bringing together members of Pernambuco's Faces do Subúrbio and São Paulo's Racionais MCs, 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' (Salute), composed by the two characters, 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 to the connection of all Brazilian 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 Cinema Novo precursor *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, as in the other examples, music offers a passage to reality to the virtual medium of film. The lyrics suggest that social change can only be attained through religion, by invoking the figure of a black Jesus who walked among lepers, a miraculous solution that had already been dismissed as ineffective as far back as in 1964, in Glauber Rocha's Cinema Novo milestone *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 employed in the favela films made in those days (see Nagib 2007: 99-114). 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.

References

Autran, Arthur (n/d), 'O popular no documentário brasileiro contemporâneo'. Available on http://www.mnemocine.com.br/aruanda/arthurdocbras.htm, last consulted 21 August 2019.

Bazin, André (1981), 'Un film bergsonien : « Le Mystère Picasso »', in : André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma ?* Paris : Cerf, pp. 193-202.

_____ (1983), 'Le Mystère Picasso : Picasso, Clouzot et la métamorphose', in : André Bazin, *Le Cinéma français de la libération à la nouvelle vague (1945-1958),* edited by Jean Narboni. Paris : Cahiers du Cinéma, pp. 120-22.

Bellour, Raymond (2012), *La Querelle des Disopositifs : Cinéma – installations, expositions* (Kindle edition). Paris: P.O.L.

Benjamin, Walter (1999), *The Arcades Project,* translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA/London: Belknap Press.

Bergson, Henri (2018), *Time and Free Will* (Kindle edition). Musaicum Books.

Eiland, Howard and Kevin McLaughlin (1999), 'Translators' Foreword', in: Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA/London: The Belknap Press, pp. ix-xiv.

Figueirôa, Alexandre (n/d), 'O manguebeat cinematográfico de *Amarelo manga:* energia e lama nas telas', available on: http://www.portcom.intercom.org.br/pdfs/55235900046085500136345127971620371741.pdf, last consulted 21 August 2019.

Gama, Filipe Brito (2012), 'A música no documentário *O rap do pequeno príncipe contra as almas sebosas*', in *Actas III Congreso Internacional de la Asociación Argentina de Estudios de Cine Y Audiovisual – AsAECA,* pp. 1-16

Margulies, Ivone. (2003). 'Exemplary Bodies: Reenactment in *Love in the City, Sons,* and *Close Up*', in Ivone Margulies (ed.), *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema.* Durham/London: Duke University Press, pp. 217-244

Marsh, Leslie (2012), *Brazilian Women's Filmmaking: From Dictatorship to Democracy.* Champaign: University of Illinois Press.

Nagib, Lúcia (ed.) (2003), *The New Brazilian Cinema.* London/New York: IB Tauris.

_____ (2007), *Brazil on Screen: Cinema Novo, New Cinema, Utopia.* London/New York: IB Tauris.

_____ (2011), *World Cinema and the Ethics of Realism* (New York/London: Bloomsbury)

_____, Ramayana Lira de Souza and Alessandra Soares Brandão (eds.) (2018), Dossier: 'Brazilian cinema in the neoliberal age (O cinema brasileiro na era neoliberal)'. *Aniki: Portuguese Journal of the Moving Image*, 5 (2). AIM - AIM - Associação de Investigadores da Imagem em Movimento.

Nead, Lynda (2012), 'The Artist's Studio: The Affair of Art and Film', in: Angela Dalle Vacche (ed.), *Film, Art, New Media: Museum Without Walls?* Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 23-38.

Nogueira, Amanda Mansur (2014), *A brodagem no cinema em Pernambuco,* PhD thesis. Recife: Universidade Federal de Pernambuco.

Paiva, Samuel (2016), 'Cinema, intermidialidade e métodos historiográficos: o Árido Movie em Pernambuco'. *Significação,* v. 43, nº 45, pp. 64-82.

Pasolini, Pier Paolo (2005), *Heretical Empiricism,* translated by Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett. Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing.

Pethő, Ágnes (2009), '(Re)Mediating the Real: Paradoxes of an Intermedial Cinema of Immediacy'. *Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies*, 1, pp. 47-68

_____. 2011. *Cinema and Intermediality: The Passion for the In-Between* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars)

Rede Brasil Atual (2012), https://www.redebrasilatual.com.br/blogs/2012/06/claudio-assis-mostra-submundo-de-recife-e-dialoga-com-glauber-rocha-em-febre-do-rato/ , last consulted 22 August 2019.

Sá, Lúcia (2013), 'Filming Favelas: Space, Gender, and Everyday Life in *Cidade de Deus* and *Antônia,* in Kantaris, Geoffrey and Rory O'Bryen (eds.). 2013. *Latin American Popular Culture: Politics, Media, Affect* (Martlesham: Tamesis), pp. 167-186.

Steiner, Peter (1984), *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics.* Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press.

Tiedemann, Rolf (1999), 'Dialectics at a Standstill', in: Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA/London: The Belknap Press, pp. 929-45.

[1] All these achievements were enabled by a neoliberal regime which, with all its faults and shortcomings, made room for the undisturbed thriving of the arts and creativity in general. Unfortunately, this positive development is now under threat by the recently elected far-right government, which is implementing a nefarious agenda against artistic freedom, human rights and the environment.

[2] See full interview with Beto Brant for the film *Passages,* on: https://research.reading.ac.uk/intermidia/passages/ .

[3] The quotes from André Bazin's 'Un film bergsonien: "Le Mystère Picasso"' (1981) and 'Le Mystère Picasso: Picasso, Clouzot et la métamorphose' (1983) have been translated from French by the author. The former piece has been translated into English as 'A Bergsonian Film: *The Picasso Mystery*' (in: André Bazin (1997), *Bazin at Work: Major essays & Reviews from the Forties & Fifties.* New York: Routledge, pp. 211-20), however I went back to the original for my quotes for the sake of accuracy.

[4] In Portuguese: 'O satélite à volta do mundo,/ abismo de coisas medonhas,/ pessoas que ladram seu sono,/ enfeites de cores errantes./ Cálida vizinha e princesa,/ magra em sua sana loucura,/ grita de alegria, subúrbio!/ Chora de medo o planeta./ Metida em saias bem curtas./ Bonecas, ladrões, pernetas./ Mundo abismo, grande mundo./ Logo ali, por trás do mangue,/ descansa insone a faca, o serrote,/ o trabalho, o sexo/ e o sangue./

Abismo, mundo escuro, profundo buraco./ Lateja o fardo de tuas ruas,/ lateja o grito ruminante,/ gritos de 'não', mundo e abismo./ Gritos de 'não'! para o meu abismo mundo.' The translation above is a combination of the film's subtitles and corrections introduced by me.