Stephanie Muir

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Dedication

For my father, John William Field (1915-1943] and the other John (1940-2006].

auteur

Contents

Factsheet

Cidade de Deus/ City of God   Fernando Meirelles, Katia Lund Brazil / France / USA 2002

Running time	130 minutes
Certificate	'R' in America and ·1s· in UK
Production company	02 Filmes and Videofilmes; Co-Production: Globo Films, Lumiere Studio Canal and Wild Bunch
Distributor	UK distributor Buena Vista International/Miramax

Key credits

Presented by Walter Salles and Donald K. Ranvaud
Produced by Andrea Barata Ribeiro and Mauricio Andrade Ramos; Co-produced by Vincent Maravel and Juliette Renaud
Director, Fernando Meirelles; Co-director: Ka tia Lund
Writer: Brau lio Mantovani from a novel by Paulo Lins
Editor: Dan iel Rezende
Directo r of Photography: Cesar Charlene
Art Director: Tule Peake
Costume Design: Bia Salgado, Ines Salgado
Music: Antonio Pinto, Ed Cortes

Cast

Alexandre Rodrigues	Buscape (Rocket!/ Wilson Rodrigues
Luis Otavio	Buscape Crian,a [Young Rocket!
Leandro Firmino da Hora	Ze Pequeno (Little Zel
Douglas Silva	Dadin ho (Little Dice!
Phellipe Haagensen	Bene
Michel de Souza Gomes	Bene Crian,a (Young Bene!
Jonathan Haagensen	Cabeleira [Shaggy !
Jefechand er Suplino	Alicate [C lipper !
Renato da Souza	Marreco [Goose!
Matheus Nachtergaele	Sandro Cenoura [Car roll
Seu J rge	Mane Galin ha [Kn ockou t Nedi
Mane Galin ha	Himself (archive footage!
Alice Braga	Angelica
Daniel Zettel	Thiago
Emerson Gomes	Barban tinh o [Young Stringy!
Edson Oliveira	Barba ntinho Adulto
Roberta Rodrigues	Berenice
Leandra Miranda	Luc ia Ma racana
Rubens Sabino	Neguinho (B lacky l
Darlan Cunha	File-com -Fritas [Steak and Fries!
Graziella Moretto	Marina Cintra
Sabrina Roas	Namorada do Galin ha [N ed s girlfriend!

Synopsis

Note about names, Brazilians often use nicknames or diminutives. The subtitles and much of the literature of the film use various translations of these. In this study the first time a character is referred to, both the name and its translation in the film credits are used. The exception made here is Bene and Thiago, for reasons that are obvious.

In the City of God, one of the slum s on the hills above Rio de Janeiro, Buscape [Rocket| wants to be a photog rapher. He runs into Ze Pequeno (Little Zel and his armed gang of children [the Runts]. He tells the stor ies of the City in flash back beg inn ing in the 1960s when his brother Marreco [Goose! tog ethe r with Cabeleira [Shaggy! and Alicate [Clipper! are known as The Tender Trio. They are ama te ur petty th ieves who plan to rob a brothel, t he Miami Motel. They take Dadinho [Little Dicel, the 9-year-old friend of Shaggy·s brother Bene , along to act as lookout. The robbery ends in a massacre. The Trio split up. Shaggy hides in Lucia Maracana· s house. He is very attracted to her daughter Berenice. Goose mee ts and flirts with the wife of Para iba (Shorty]. Shorty catches them in bed together. Goose runs away and finds Bene and Little Dice hiding out in an unfinished building. Shorty bur ies his wife alive, the police take him away. Shaggy and Berenice hijack a car at gunpo int. The car packs up. The police shoot Shaggy. A man ta kes photographs of the body. Rocket is envious of his camera.

The story moves forward to the 1970s. Rocket, still a virg in, takes photographs of his friends 'the Groovies· on the beach. He fa ncies Angelica but she has a boyfriend Thiago who has graduated from smoking dope to snort in g coke. Rocket goes to the apartment where Neguinho (Blackyl sells dope. Litt le Dice swaggers in. He has changed his name to Little Ze. He murdered the customers at the brothel and late r killed Goose. At 18 he is in the drugs business, hav ing killed all of the other dealers in the city except Sandro Cenoura (Carroll. Bene still attemp ts to keep Little Ze under control advoca ting negotiation rather than murder. Bene meets the Groovies and admires Thiago's style. He bleaches his hair, gets new clothes and transforms himself into a playboy.

After loosing his job at the Supermarket Rocket decides to do some ho ld ups with his friend Barbantinho (Stringy!. They board a bus plann ing to rob the fare collector Mane Galinha (Knockout Nedi. Ned, who is aga inst violence, advises them to study and get out of the City. The y don't go through with the robbery. Bene and Angelica are in love. The y plan to leave the City and live a life of peace in the country. At Bene's fare well party Ze is angry that his close friend is giving up the hood 's life for a woman. An argumen t breaks out and they struggle amongst the danc ers. Blacky, aiming to kill Ze, accidentally shoots Bene. Little Ze is jealous of Knockout Ned and wants Ned's girlfriend. His gang hold Ned down whilst Ze rapes her. Ned goes home in anguish. Ze goes to his house to kill him. His gang kill Ned's fat her, uncle and brother. Carrot comes by and offers Ned a gun and Ned takes it. Althoug h at first Ned does not want violence he and Carrot become involved in all out gang war with Ze, robbing banks and killing in order to buy bigger and better weapons.

Rocket gets a job delivering newspapers, go ing to the newspap er offices at night where he has a friend in the photo lab. The war continues with children fight ing on both sides. A boy Otto joins Ca rrot's gang. Ned is wou nded and arrested. Ze sees the TV news where Ned is being interviewed as a celebrity. He is furious that he is no t seen as the boss of the cit y. Th iago fetches Rocket who ta kes pictures of Ze posing with his gang . **Marina** , who works for the newspaper, finds the photos. Rocket sees his photographs on the front page of the newspaper. He thinks Ze will kill him. The journalists want Rocket to take more pictures. Rocket can't go back to the City, it's too risky. He has nowhere to sleep. Mar ina takes him back to her apartment where he takes his first hot shower and has his first sexual experience.

Carrot and his gang spring Ned from the hospita l. There is a pitched bat tle between the gangs and Rocket takes pictures for the newspaper. Ned is killed. Ze tries to round up the Runts to restart his business. They shoot him, the business is theirs! Rocket takes pictures of the body.

The photograph makes the front page. He is now **Wilson Rod rigues** , photographer.

Introduction
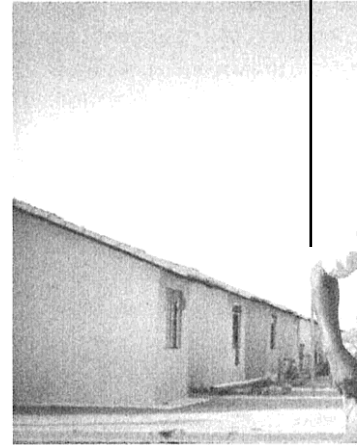
Brazil: Poverty and football as ·aesthetic *objects·*

In 1965 Glauber Rocha, one of the founders of Brazilian *Cinema Novo,* wrote:

> **Thus, while Latin America laments its general misery, the foreign**
> **onlooker cultivates the taste of that misery, not as a tragic symptom,**
> **but merely as an aesthetic object within his field of interest. The**
> **Latin American neither communicates his real misery to the**
> **·civilised' European, nor does the European truly comprehend the**
> **misery of the Latin Ame rican. This is the fundamental situation**
> **of the arts in Brazil today: many distortions, especially the formal**
> **exoticism that vulgarises social problems, have provoked a series**
> **of misunderstandings that involve not only art but also politics.**
> **For the European observer the process of artistic creation in the**
> **underdeveloped world is of interest only insofar as it satisfies a**
> **nostalgia for primitivism .'**

Rocha identified foreign audiences· consumption of Latin Ame rican misery as their 'nostalgia for primitivism· at a time when the availability of such films was limited. Cinema was one of the media that constructed a view of the underdeveloped world but the European and North American audience for the new Latin American cinema of the 1960s was a confined one. Films from national cinemas in a foreign language dealing with the social

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problems of the so called Third World did not receive wide distribution and were seen mainly by art house intellectuals and left wing film societies. The huge success of *City of God* reflects the popularity of a resurgent Latin American cinema in the twenty-first century. Mainstream audiences have flocked to films that are labelled· */a buena onda'* ['the good wave']. including *Amores Perras* [Alejandro Iiiarritu, 2000 Mexico], *Y Tu Mama Tambien* [Alfonso Cuaron, 2001 Mexico] and *The Motorcycle Diaries* [Walter Salles , 2004, USA/ Germany/ UK/ Argentina]. They seem set to rival the popularity enjoyed in recent years by Asian films, especially those from Hong Kong, reflecting the increasing globalisation of cinema.

The high profile that the films of 'la *buena onda'* enjoy can be seen to reflect both their difference and their similarity to Hollywood. *City of* God's comparison with the films of Martin Scorsese and Quentin Tarantino stresses its similarity to the Hollywood model. On the other hand critics have written of the film's depiction of Brazil's social problems as locating its roots in *Cinema Novo.* Much of the debate about the film centres on this duality - on the one hand provoking praise for its hard-hitting depiction of life in the *favelas* but on the other being accused of voyeurism in its depiction of violence. The flamboyant and stylish spectacle has been criticised as using a nation's poverty as entertainment, with the audience positioned as passive spectators of ghetto culture, its misery made palatable through MTV tricks.

The reception of the film

City of God did not take long to build itself an audience and critical acclaim. It made an immediate impact in May 2002 at the Cannes Film Festival where Andrew Pulver of *The Guardian* hailed it as ·straight-out-of-the-box masterwork'.[2] At the London Film Festival in October/ November 2002 *The Guardian 's* Peter Bradshaw was equally enthusiastic, describing it as a:

> **strongly emotive experience ...One of the most exciting , powerful and moving examples of New Latin American Cinema... thrilling and sophisticated filmmaking.**[3]

Nev Pierce, in the BBC Film Review, continued the superlatives:

> **Cinema doesn't get more exhilarating than this.**[4]

Released in the UK on 3 January 2003 it played on 76 screens and took £307,177 in its first weekend.

The critical praise continued:

> **Run, don't walk to the cinema , is all I can say...It's a movie with all the dials cranked up to 11, an overwhelming intoxicating assault on the senses, and a thriller so tense that you might have the red seat plush in front of you - or even some unfortunate's hair - gripped in both fists. (Peter Bradshaw)**[5]

> **This broad canvas brings a real sense of history.... bravura film making. (Paul Julian Smith)**[6]

> **Had *City of God* opened last week it would have been on my 10 best list of 2002. It will be a remarkable year that keeps this film off anyone's 2003 list. (Philip French)**[7]

> **An intoxicating shot of cinematic adrena line. (BBCi Films)**

The Edinburgh University Film Society placed it as their number one film:

> **Superlatives should not be restricted when describing this marvellous piece of filmmaking...City *of God* is a tour de force and the greatest film of the year by miles. (Chay Williamson)**

Other critics were even more direct :

> **If the first five minutes of *City of God* don't suck you in, it's time to scoop out your eyes and get new ones. (Sick-boy.com)**

In the US it was first seen at the Telluride Film Festival in August 2002. Its initial release on 17 January 2003 was limited to a mere 5 screens, and took $114,442. The rave reviews - 'Experience this devastating movie' [New *York Times].* 'A masterful symphonic piece of work· *[Boston Herald],* 'You'll be left reeling· *!Vanity Fair Magazine].* 'A fierce seductive enthralling trip' *[Time Magazine].·* sizzling. An absorbing epic' [US *Weekly],·* Anaction movie that moves like a rocket. *City of God* sizzles · [San *Jose Mercury News)* - provided a platform for a wider, if still very limited, release. In four weeks it was showing on 30 screens with takings of $1275,136. Eighteen months later the film had accumulated a gross of $7,563,397 . over twice its estimated budget. At the 76th Academy Awards in February 2004 it won Best Cinematography, Best Editing and Best Adapted

Screenplay nominations. Fernando Meirelles was nominated for Best Director.

In Brazil the film was released in September 2002. In three months it had attracted an audience of 3.2 million, a record for a Brazilian film. Its unprecedented popularity earned it a second release in February 2004. The film provoked debates, encouraged by Meirelles· visits to universities and unions. During the 2002 Brazilian Presidential Campaign the film was shown to the Brazilian cabinet. The successful candidate, Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva, told Meirelles that the film changed his policies. This can be compared with the special screening for the French Cabinet of *La Haine* [Mathieu Kassovitz, 1995) by the French Prime Minister Alain Juppe to highlight the problem of unemployment and deprivation in the Paris suburbs.

City of God: **An international film**

City of God is an example of Brazilian **national** cinema. It is also an **international** film that secured worldwide distribution through Miramax, a major distributo r. As noted, it illustrates the comparative accessibility of World Cinema, a label that previously denoted only a limited distribution in art cinemas of films made known through their success in film festivals. Its success can be examined through its relationship to mainstream cinema in terms of production values, genre and narrative. In examining its popularity, especially among film-goers between 18 and 25, it is necessary to consider how far *City of God* [and other ·good wave· films) use recognisable genre features and transport them to different and more colourful locations. However recognisable these genre features might be the themes of the film and concerns of the characters are in many ways very specific to their setting. The reputation gained by *City of God* was for much part that of a film that reveals the true facts about poverty in the slums of Rio de Janeiro and the endemic nature of the violence that accompanies it. Given the publicity it received, the nature of some of the rave reviews and the stated intention of the film-makers it can be studied as a political film with a message. At the same time it relies heavily on the artificiality of cinematic techniques and a complex narrative structure, not the realist style formerly associated with films about social deprivation. As such it enters into the debate around the form that a film's messages

should take, and whether such films should contain suggestions as to the possible origin and remedy of the social inequality they represent. It also becomes part of an enquiry very pertinent to much media product in the 21st century, about the nature of film-making and responsibility of the film-maker. The response of the audience in the developed world raises the question as to whether the violence and poverty of the underdeveloped and exploited world can be used as ·aesthetic objects', components in our ongoing search for entertainment.

NOTES:

1 Gla uber Rocha [l965l The Aesthetics of Hu nger first presented in Genoa and reproduced in Randall Johnson and Robert Stam l1982l Brazilian Cinema New York: Columbia University Press p.69

2 And rew Pulver "Follow that Chicken· The Guardian Friday May 24th 2002

3 Peter Bradshaw Preview of the Londo n Film Festival The Guardian Octobe r 30th 2002

4 Nev Pierce BBC Film Review December 2nd 2002

5 Peter Bradshaw The Guardian Friday January 3rd 2003

6 Paul Julian Smith Sight and Sound January 2003

7 Philip Frenc h "The Gang·sall Here" The Observer Sunday January 5th 2003

1. CONTEXT

1.1 STUDYING WORLD CINEMA

Cinema is, first and foremost, the projection of a cultural identity, which comes to life on the screen. It mirrors, or should mirror, this identity. But that is not all. It should also 'dream' it. Or make it flesh and blood, with all its contradictions. Unlike Europe, we are societies in which the question of identity has not yet crystallised. It is perhaps for this reason that we have such a need for cinema, so that we can see ourselves in the many conflicting mirrors that reflect us. (Walter Salles) [8]

Cinema is an incomparable vehicle for the assertion of cultural idiosyncrasy and the presentation of difference in a world where cultural variety is being rapidly assimilated into deadening, dehumanising monotony. (Julianne Burton) [9]

World Cinema as Art Cinema

The study of World Cinema is, more often than not, a study of national cinemas, and the different cultural identities that these reflect. These studies, however, have their roots in an **individual** rather than a **collective** identity as some of the first critical writings on such cinemas were around **authorship.** European and Asian directors such as Eisenstein, Renoir and Kurosawa were seen to be free of the constraints of the Hollywood Studio System and thus able to create personal works of art. Other critics considered World Cinema in terms of the important and influential **film movements** that developed outside the USA such as Italian Neo-Realism or the French New Wave. These were examined through their sense of 'difference·, both from Hollywood styles and conventions and from each other. Considered as high art rather than popular culture they projected an ·authentic· cultural identity.

The study of World Cinema as ·author·s·cinema with a fixed and unchanging meaning allowed it to be one of academic rigour using terms drawn from literary and artistic criticism. In order to fully understand and appreciate films as artistic masterpieces it was deemed necessary to acquire knowledge of their cultural, if not their spoken, language. Films

from national cinemas played to an elite audience who were educated to appreciate World Cinema as Art Cinema. Subtitles and ·serious· themes were supposedly an insurmountable barrier to mass appeal, an indication of their artistic status as ·great works·. The productions that received distribution to an international audience were those that had won awards at film festivals, not those that had necessarily drawn a popular audience in their own country of production. As a reflection of a particular country·s cultural identity they were that of a minority. Also those living outside the circumstances and even the count ries where such films were made often decided what was 'national" about such cinemas, what themes and images could represent them.

National cinema and national culture

The importance of c!nema as both a reflection of national cultu re and also as a contributor to the shaping of a nation·s culture is not contested. Its significance as a constructor of national identity is for both the home and the "foreign· audience. An illustration of this can be found by looking at the role played by British films during World War II. *The Heart of Britain* [1941], one of the documentaries made by Humphrey Jennings for the Crown Film Unit, constructed a national identity for three very different audiences. It showed the British that they were indeed courageous and resourceful and capable of withstanding the enemy. It communicated this spirit to the USA to persuade them that if they joined the war they would be fighting to help preserve such values. Lastly it informed the Nazis that their attempts to bomb Britain into surrende r would not succeed. Today it provides us with a way of accessing what we consider it was like to be British during the Blitz. It offers us a mediated glimpse of our history.

Visibly representing nation

Ideas about cultural and national identity crystallised in the nineteenth century when nationalism was an important concept. This becomes a key component of much nineteenth century art where paintings were able to 'dream · a particular identity using visual signifiers of coll ect ive abstract ideas. Works such as *The Haywain* [John Cons tab le, 1821, London National Gallery), *Liberty Leading the People* [Eugene Delac roix, 1830, Paris

Louvre!, *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri* [George Caleb Bingham, c.1845, New York Met ropol itan Museum of Art) each projected a particular distinctiveness - England 's 'green and pleasant land" untouched by the ravages of the Industrial Revol ution, France as the birthplace of revolution whose citizens would take arms to maintain it, American pioneering spirit and the life of the frontier. In the twentieth century cinema took over the task of visually representing national distinctiveness formerly illustrated by such paintings.

By way of contrast the twenty-first cent ury has been proposed as the era of **post-nationalism** where individua lity and distinctiveness are no long er paramount. **National media** !s uch as newspapers and TV) that const ruct a view of "their" world has been superseded by **global media** [internet and satellitel. These instantly transmit a flow of digital images to those who possess the hardware and have access to electric power, who can then take part in a globalised real-time interaction. Group identity becomes much more fluid as new technology encroaches former bounda ries. Information as well as people, capital and commodities circulate freely across the borders of the developed world. National studies are being replaced by **transnational** ones.[1o]

Globalisation: A contested concept?

To the majority of British film-goers, made more familiar and comfortable with American culture than they often are with their own, Hollywood films appea r to be the natural way for a story to be told. Their mass appeal was developed from the beginning as entertainment cinema made for a multilingual, multi-national audience. We can say that Hollywood films have had the ability to cross borders since their early silent days. This suggests that the term 'transnational cinema· could have always been app lied to it. This hybrid model, however circumspect, can be seen to be forever rene wing itself and, in doing so, maintaining its dominance. The cross fertilisation of film-makers, styles, themes and stars who have worked in the USA [such as F.W. Murnau in the 1920s, Fritz Lang in the 1940s, Douglas Sirk in the 1950s, John Woo in the 1990s] has contributed to the richness and longevity of the Hollywood film.

We might argue that the international images we now receive so freely are those that are selected to fit in with our already existing concepts of what actually constitutes the 'real world' or at least the cinematic real world as constructed by the Hollywood film. We could come to the conclusion that what is being promoted is a highly filtered version of a particular selected reality which has turned into a shared experience of fantasy. Film-goers experience these images of hybrid, multicultural products as a kind of cultural tourism reframed in relation to the generally understood model of the Hollywood film.

The international audience

Film-makers have to increasingly draw on assorted sources and traditions in order to gain access to different markets. Countries themselves can be set up as product placements, selling themselves as tourist destinations. The increase in **co-protluctions** reflects the **multinational's** need to diversify to maintain profits and the film industry's need to appeal to the widest possible audiences. The contexts in which the international audience receives these films can be very diverse. Not all audiences use films to broaden their knowledge of other cultures. It may be necessary for them to interpret them into a mode of expression that they are more familiar with - to make the foreign local. The American release of *La Haine* translated the name of the manic character Asterix as ·snoopy·, trading one unfamiliar comic book character for a familiar one, but also changing the meaning at the same time.

Thei variety of films in circulation is subject to the complexities of the international film industry, tied up with the flow of capital from one country to another. The import and export of films have been linked to the fluctuations of the exchange rate. After World War I German films were cheap to export because devaluation of the mark led to massive inflation. This led to a boom in the German film industry boosted by exports of films such as *Oas Kabinett des Or. Caligari I The Cabinet of Or. Caligari* [Robert Weine, 1919). In the late 1950s and early 1960s the New Wave in Eastern European cinema was inspired by the post-Stalinist thaw but also encouraged by the need to enter the Western markets that would provide valuable foreign currency.

Film festivals, for so long the showcase for World Cinema, are now big business. Their proliferation has ensured that they are kept fed with 'international' product. Recently released international films are seen to offer something different, their popularity accelerated by their availability on DVD and digital services. At the same time their success gives rise to the notion of 'globalised' movies - ones that are made for all audiences and all tastes, with the homogeneity that this might suggest.

Conceptions of nation: The people as source of culture

Concepts of nation and national identity centre round a group of people who share a common purpose. Studies by Gellner (1983).[11] Anderson (1983).[12] Hobsbawm (1990)[13] and Smith (1991)[14] offer reflections on how such groups might be constructed, and why this should be so. The shift that occurred in the late eighteenth century 'Age of Enlightenment' was given impetus by the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789. Democracy encouraged a notion of something called 'the people' who determined the governance of a country, as opposed to being ruled by those whose absolute power was conferred on them by a divine right.

'The people' were encouraged to think of themselves as a group whose decisions would affect all their lives. Assuming a group identity was necessary in order to define themselves, to decide who would be included. However, if a group identity is inclusive it is also exclusive and there are a variety of nations, people and identities. This is even more apparent in multi-racial countries with extreme levels of deprivation. The representations of these different groups in the films we see are constructed according to what the film-maker chooses to show us. They can disclose some aspects and suppress others. *City of God* has been described by one critic as 'an unforgettable epic portrayal of a people'.[15] The inhabitants of the Rio slums become representatives of a whole nation. Being identified as 'the people' can have negative connotations:

> **In Brazil the 'real' country evoked by the word 'povo· (people)**
> **is understood to be the dark skinned nation of the poor, the**
> **precariously literate and the ethnically stigmatised, in sum, the**
> **victims of diverse forms of exclusion. [Robert Stam, Joao Luiz Viera,**
> **Ismail Xavier)[16]**

Certainly the idea of power and control over their own lives is not relevant here, rather the opposite is true. The "real" people who are seen as the providers of the true culture of a nation can be those most excluded from its decision-making. To find the 'true' Brazil do we need to look at the people who are the subjects, not the makers, of the films? Is it they who are the makers of meaning, providers of the distinctiveness that will give us insight into a national culture?

Third World Cinema

The "Third World" status of Brazil has previously been an obstacle to making films that could reach wide audiences. Latin American cinema has been handicapped by the way international **film distribution** works. Multinational corporations in the developed world make decisions about how, or even if, the cultures of the underdeveloped world will be disseminated. In countries with a history of oppression these cultures as depicted in films are often characterised by themes of poverty and exploitation. This has sometimes led them to reject the conventions of Hollywood and other Western film industries in order to present their audiences what David Cook calls :

> **...new ways of seeing their socio-political reality. The ultimate goal of this process is the reclamation of authentic forms of national cultural expression long obscured by imposed foreign values .**[1]

Can these 'authentic forms' be easily absorbed and understood by foreign audiences? The history of Latin American film production suggests that there has been much debate about the depiction of their particular socio-political reality and the forms that such depictions should take.

1.2 LATIN AMERICAN CINEMA

The Latin American Market

After World War I Latin American cinema became increasingly dominated by the USA and national film production diminished. With the transition to sound in the 1930s only Mexico, Argentina and Brazil had large enough markets to secure the investment and capital needed to convert to the production of sound films. Hollywood exported not only dubbed versions of their own product but also made some films in Spanish and Portuguese.

In the early days of World War II Hollywood needed to fully exploit this South American market in order to offset their losses in Europe. There was also a necessity to counteract pro-Axis influence in Latin America. Hitler targeted the substantial German population in Brazil, and Mussolini sought support from the large number of Italians in countries such as Argentina. Spain and Portugal, both ruled by fascist dictators, had close linguistic and spiritual ties with the continent. Politically as well as economically the USA required South America to be on side.

In 1940 the Officer of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs [CIAA] was created to promote the Good Neighbour Policy and opened a Motion Picture Division under John Hay Whitney. In order to maximise the appeal of Hollywood movies the films had to do two things - provide a more sympathetic picture of Latin Americans [to counteract the villainous stereotype so prevalent in American films] and to produce motion pictures featuring Latin stars using Latin American themes and locations. Unlike cinema in some other so-called Third World countries cinema in Latin America developed close ties with Western culture through its association with Hollywood .

New Latin American Cinema

After World War II, however, domestic film production increased , especially in Mexico and Brazil. Rising nationalism and militancy manifested itself in the political movements of the 1950s and 6os. Attention focused on social and political change and from the early 1950s young Latin American directors explored the political potential of cinema. Films from Cuba, Argentina, Mexico and Brazil inspired debates around how they could represent a more authentic national identity and become an important weapon in both the instigation and reflection of social change. This was heralded as a new kind of cinema, using a documentary style that rejected the Hollywood type of studio-based production. In working with the minimum of equipment the film-maker could uncover a more genuine national identity previously obscured by the trappings of the studio film.

In the mid 1950s Fernando Birri founded the Documentary Film School at the National University of the Littoral in Santa Fe, Argentina, pioneering socially committed film-making in Latin America and the New Latin American Cinema [*Nuevo Cine Latino Americana*]. Birri himself was in no doubt as to the relationship between film and the reality it aimed to represent:

> **There are basically two kinds of filmmakers: one invents an imaginary reality; the other confronts an existing reality and attempts to understand it, criticise it, judge it, and finally, translate it into film...The new Latin American cinema movement, as it has evolved and spread over the length and breadth of Latin America during the past twenty years, has somehow justified those of us who decided so many years ago to seek out our own national reality and try to communicate it. Not to invent it, but to re-invent it: to interpret and transform it. (Fernando Birri)[18]**

The movement *Nuevo Cine Latino Americana* first made its appearance in Chile in 1967 at the Festival of Latin American Cinema held in Vina del Mar. It was committed to artistic innovation and encompassed both ideology and practice, producing written manifestos and essays as well as the films themselves.

Latin American films, shown at European Film festivals, were praised by European and North American critics and written about in film magazines as 'Art' Cinema. They represented not only a radical agenda but also a representation of national culture, under threat from the onslaught of American products in the 1960s.

Another Argentine, Fernando Solanas, together with Octavio Gelino from Spain, formulated the ideas of Third Cinema in the late 1960s. Again the emphasis was on film's potential influence in the political struggle. In Cuba Julio Garda Espinosa published his manifesto For *an Imperfect Cinema* in 1970.[19] He proposed an end to the separation between artist/intellectuals and the working people who made up the audience, echoing the Constructivist theories formulated after the Russian Revolution of 1917. Lenin had acknowledged cinema as the most important of all the arts. Latin American film-makers echoed this:

> **I know that cinema can't change the world, but I still feel that it's the most important means of expression in this century, because it directs itself to the emotions and the subconscious of the people. Cinema has not changed the world, but the way of understanding the world in this century. (Carlos Diegues)[20]**

Third Cinema

Film-makers, many of who had studied in Europe, took the Cuban revolution and Brazilian *Cinema Novo* as their model. In its opposition to mainstream practice, and perceived relevance to its indigenous culture, the movement drew on Italian Neo-Realism, and the kind of social documentary that British documentary film producer John Grierson had called the 'drama of the doorstep'. These kinds of film practices could produce low cost activist cinema, one that would remain true to its national roots. Directors, given more freedom than the Hollywood Studio system offered, did not have to appeal to a universal market and could address particularly relevant social issues.

The Manifesto by Solanas and Getino *Hacia un* Tercer *Cure I Towards a Third Cinema* was published in October 1969. It called for a new kind of cinema, one that was 'realist, national and popular'. They defined such a cinema in terms of its difference from Hollywood, not only in terms of its content but also in the way the films address their audience:

1. **First Cinema:** The 'industrial' cinema of classical Hollywood, a 'producer's' cinema that encouraged passive spectatorship.

2. **Second Cinema:** An individualist ·*auteur* cinema·, an intellectual practice that also positioned its audience as passive.

3. **Third Cinema:** A ·militant' socialist cinema which would interact with the audience and rouse the spectator to political action.

Film-makers as artists and intellectuals were part of an elite minority. They took over the task of representing the uneducated masses and giving them a voice, hitherto denied them, through their presentation on screen. They found themselves part of a continuing debate as to the form that radical films should take.

Radical cinema: Populist or popular?

> **Certain critics accuse us of making populist rather than popular cinema, arguing that a genuinely popular cinema must engage the people on a political level, furthering the cause of popular revolution (Nelson Pereira dos Santos)** [21]

For those who saw cinema as a vital agent of change it seemed necessary to oppose not only the politics and content but also the form of Hollywood cinema. In the 1920s Soviet film-makers Eisenstein and Vertov had championed **montage cinema** as a modernist revolutionary style that could radically dislocate previous ideas about film:

> **On the movie-house habitue the ordinary fiction film acts like a cigar or cigarette on a smoker. Intoxicated by the cine-nicotine, the spectator sucks from the screen the substance which sooths his nerves.**

> ....**To intoxicate and suggest - the essential method of the fiction film approximates it to a religious influence, and makes it possible after a certain time to keep man in a permanent state of over excited unconsciousness... Musical shows, theatrical and cine-theatrical performances and so on above all act upon the subconscious of the spectator or listener, distorting his protesting consciousness in every possible way. (Dziga Vertov, 1924)** [22]

The cinema in which these avant-garde ideas could flourish existed in a different climate to that of today. In the 1920s film was a medium of entertainment, but for some it was a part of the modernist sphere, used by avant-garde artists in the USSR and elsewhere to represent the break between the dead world of individual bourgeois art and the new dynamic mechanical world of the future. The mechanics of cinema encouraged film-makers to experiment with form. Much of the revolution relied on new· ways of seeing·. Latin America in the second half of the twentieth century had other conceptions to contend with. In the world of *Cinema Novo* and Third Cinema Hollywood films were part of a capitalist hegemony. Cinema had to be disassociated from its production values and way of story telling so that it could once more become part of the revolutionary avant-garde. Political film had not only something to say about the experience of real events but it was also able to examine what

it saw as their cause, and attempt to enter into an interactive dialogue with their audience. This kind of experimental narrative was at odds with the idea of its problems being solved by individual actions, or easy and conclusive closures.

In the twenty-first century, however, experimentation can be seen to have been appropriated through new technologies that enable film-makers to present the spectator with an array of effects and a plethora of possible meanings. Has the avant-garde been hijacked by the advertising industry and the music video?

1.3 BRAZILIAN CINEMA: BACKGROUND, HISTORY AND SETTING

Brazil: The 'distorted mirror image' of the USA

Brazil is part of the 'developing world' and the largest country in Latin America, covering about half the continent. It is the fifth largest country in the world in terms of both land area and its population of about 163.7 million. An estimated 20% of the population [32 million) live in absolute poverty. The disparity between those living below the poverty line [who receive 2% of the GOP) and the top 10% [who receive 50.6%) is greater than most other countries in the world.

In their comprehensive study Johnson and Stam [23] propose that, both historically and ethnically, Brazil is the country that most resembles the USA. The histories of both are those of colonisation by European powers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and almost genocidal subjection of the indigenous peoples . Both countries engaged in struggle for independence from their colonial masters, gained by America from the British in the eighteenth century and by Brazil from the Portuguese in the nineteenth century. Both economies were partly founded on the transport of slaves from the west coast of Africa, a practice abolished in the second half of the nineteenth century. Their multi-ethnic communities are today made up of the descendants of these slaves, together with immigrants from all over the world. The crucial difference, as Johnson and Stam point out, is that whereas American political independence led to their economic independence, Brazil became economically dependent and dominated by the USA in the twentieth century.

Brazil as setting

The Third World status of Brazil, with its inherent poverty and deprivation, was not the image that was used to represent the country in American films. Its climate, vegetation and colourful population provided the settings for escapist fare. In *Flying Down to Rio* [Thornton Freeland, 1933] RKO teamed Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers to dance the Carioca against a backdrop of what *Time Out* describes as ·non-stop opticals, which turn the film into a series of animated postcards'. The image it conjures up is of a land of_exotic landscapes and idyllic beaches forming the backdrop to hedonistic and sensual pleasures. This myth of a tropical paradise was personified in Carmen Miranda, the 'Brazilian Bombshell' and the best-known Brazilian star of the Studio Era. With the closing down of the European market during World War II Hollywood films needed to attract the Latin American auaience . Carmen Miranda musicals provided the settings that were thought to locate them in the South American film-goer's experience, as well as providing 'tropical' escapism for the North American spectator. Their locations varied - *Down Argentine Way* [Irving Cummings, 1940], *That Night in Rio* (Irving Cummings, 1941], *Weekend 1n Havana* (Walter Lang, 1941] - but their message was the same. South America was a playground and Carmen was its representative, with her thick accent, outrageous kitsch outfits, ·tutti-frutti' hat and toothy smile.

In 1946 Alfred Hitchcock used Rio as a back projection for Cary Grant's and Ingrid Bergman's perverse love affair in *Notorious.* When he needed so·mewhere that would suggest a world of danger and passion to his North American audience it was South America that he chose . The Rio balcony wit_h its view of Sugar Loaf Mountain was a fitting setting for a lingering kiss that defied the Hays Code. Rio also provided the backdrop for *Latin Lovers* [Mervyn Le Roy, 1953] that could suggest sex without showing it. The title promised dark excitement and again Brazil was the place_where such excitement was to be found. Wealthy Lana Turner indulged in a romance with an even wealthier Ricardo Montalban who pretended to be poor. In spite of numerous geographical and linguistic errors all ended happily. Being rich had not proved to be a barrier to love being Latin was a metaphor for sexual prowess.

Even the poor areas of Rio offered a chance for samba, spectacular design and visual splendour. *Orfeu Negro I Black Orpheus* [Marcel Camus, 1958,

France / Italy / Brazil] set the Orpheus legend amongst the *favelas* . Seen mainly from a European perspective the poverty seemed charming, the shacks appealing and the *favelados* happy. The vitality of the characters and the insistent beat sold the film. Post-war audiences looking for new experiences lapped up the striking images and the seductive music. The Cannes Jury were also enthusiastic, awarding it the Grand Prize in 1959.

In the late Bos and early 90s the tropics of Brazil provided stunning backdrops for European and American adventure films as in *The Mission* [Roland Joffe, 1986, UK]. *Cobra Verde* [Werner Herzog, 1988, West Germany) and *The Fifth Monkey* (Eric Rochat, 1990, US). The agenda had changed to one of concern about ecology. The fascination of the rain fore ss was accentuated by their acknowledged importance to global balance and the threat of their destruction.

1.4 EARLY BRAZILIAN CINEMA

The birth of cinema in Brazil

When it came to producing their own films Brazilians were doing so from the early days of cinema. The first showing of a motion picture (the onmograph ') in Brazil took place in Rio de Janeiro in July 1896, only seven months after the Lumieres· demonstration in Paris. Two years later Afonso Segreto was using film to record contemporary Brazilian society, the spectacular nature of its landscape and important national events. Lack of electrical power prevented their being widely shown, and cinema exhibition had to wait for the electrification of the country. When, after 1900, Brazilians were able to see their own films they made about 100 per year. These covered popular topics, including Brazil's first film about football in 1908. After 1911, however, imports of both American and European product led to the country becoming what Johnson and Stamd escribe as a 'tropical appendage of the North American market'. The Hollywood assembly line was looking for international outlets for its fiction films. In the face of this competition Brazilian production mainly confined itself to documentaries and newsreels.

Popular cinema was that produced by the USA. In the 1920s film-maker Humberto Mauro called for a specifically Brazilian cinema:

Cinema here in Brazil will have to emerge from our Brazilian milieu, with all its qualities and defects...If American cinema already accustomed us to the luxuriousness and the variety of its productions, it has not yet robbed us of our national enthusiasm for the faithful representations of everything that we are or that we wish to be.[2]4

These faithful representations included those of the slums. In 1934 Mauro went into the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro to make *Favela dos meus* amores/ *Favela of my Love,* a record of the everyday life he found there.

The coming of sound and the chanchada

The coming of sound appeared to give Brazilian films the lifeline they needed when the English language made Hollywood films incomprehensible to a Brazilian audirmce, although Hollywood counteracted this by dubbing films and even producing some in Spanish and Portuguese. In the 1930s there were some attempts to support the Brazilian industry through independent financing and quotas for local film production.

From the late 1930s to the 1950s Brazilian studios, including the Rio based Atlantida, produced an extremely popular low budget musical genre, the *chanchada* ['cultural trash') with its links to carnival and musical theatre. *Alo Alo Brasil* [Wallace Downey, Alberto Ribero, 1935) and *Alo Alo Carnival* [Ad_hemar Gonzaga, 1936) both starred Carmen Miranda. These presented a picture [albeit an idealised one) of Brazil to its home audience and were . popular with ordinary Brazilians who became the key consumers of these films.

Vera Cruz: The 'new Brazilian cinema'

Although *chanchadas* were hugely successful they were not considered to be serious representations of Brazilian culture. In 1949 Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, a Sao Paulo businessman, invited Alberto Cavalcanti to head the newly formed Vera Cruz film company. This was a studio set up to spearhead a ·new Brazilian Cinema· and make glamorous and sophisticated films that would rival the Hollywood Studio product or the European film, whilst at the same time remaining specifically Brazilian.

Vera Cruz made 18 films, including O *Cangaceiro* [Lima Barreto, 1953). This was a double prizewinner at Cannes and was widely distributed in 22 countries, fulfilling the aim of the studio to reach a world market. Despite this triumph, a large investment and Cavalcanti's undoubted credentials as a maker of French experimental films and British documentaries and features, success was not guaranteed. In terms of the national market even the cheapest films made at Vera Cruz were expensive. Described by Carlos Diegues as ·a bizarre structureless monster, without roots in our culture, nourishing itself on the dream of European cinema in an illiterate and impoverished Brazil'[25] the studio went bankrupt in 1954_

Nee-Realist theory and practices

In the mid 1950s ideas about Latin American identity and the way it was represented were undergoing change. The optimism that had begun with the election of Juscelino Kubitschek in 1955 was mirrored in economic expansion, industrialisation and foreign investment. Brasflia, the new capital, was the epitome of modernism designed by Brazilians Oscar Niemeyer and Lucio Costa. It provided the backdrop to discussions on national culture, fostered at Government level in part to disguise the increasingly polarising nature of Brazilian society.

Brazilian film-makers who had studied film in Rome returned to their native country having become familiar with both the theories and practice of Italian Neo-Realism. Location shooting and non-professional actors had been an economic necessity in post-war Italy, with its industry decimated by war. Italian cinema emerged from crisis by turning its back on gloss and depicting real life - the poverty and hardship suffered by the working and peasant class. Film-makers outside the control of the regular industry experienced creative freedom through making simple films. This simplicity, as well as being an economic necessity, was also ideologically sound.

Brazil's 'New Wave· also shares some characteristics with the French New Wave in its use of smaller, hand-held cameras, fast film and natural sound made possible through technical developments in cinematography and recording. Early New Wave films were low budget productions shot on location and could capture ·real' experiences.

The film-maker as auteur

Parallels can also be drawn with contemporary film criticism in France, Italy, Britain and the USA both in the way that film-makers conceived their films and critics received them. In the 1960s *auteur criticism* sought to evaluate and understand films by focusing on the director as maker of meaning. Whether working inside or outside the Hollywood production system *auteur* directors were those whose films were personal expressions of their individual personalities and particular concerns. Whereas, however, European *auteur* criticism placed value on the maker's ·art", Latin American film-makers were also defined by their political philosophy that challenged the mainstream. Latin American *auteurs* were ones with a political agenda, seen in terms of content and message rather than individual personality.

In Brazil, as in other Latin Ame rican countries, oppos ition to American dominance became opposition to Hollywood practices. Documentary film-makers, influenced by political events, made social documentaries dealing with domestic problems. Documentaries, however, were seen as **reflective,** a reproduction of events. A truly political agenda could only make its contribution to the struggle against colonialism through its **interpretation** of events - raising consciousness was not enough. Brazilian cinema became oppositional, film valued as an agent for social change rather than profit, able to confront and challenge. The escapism and resolution of the classic Hollywood narrative was subverted by the film-makers of the movement known as *Cinema Novo*.

1.5 CINEMA NOVO AND AFTER

Cinema Novo: 'an idea in your head and a camera in your hand' (Glauber Rocha)

From 1960 to 1964 the first phase of *Cinema Novo* established modern cinema in Brazil. It also transformed its image outside the country by reason of its critical success. The Brazil that it symbolised was not that of the new capital Brasilia, with its modernist sweeping surfaces, nor that of tropical paradise. *Cinema Novo·s* image of Brazil was one of exploitation, violence and deprivation.

Black God. White Devil: *a key* film *of* Cinema Novo·s *first phase*

Rio Zona Norte/ Rio North Zone (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1957). a film about the favelas, was one of the starting points of the movement. The first phase produced films such as *Vidas* Secas *I Barren Lives* (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1963). *Ganga* Zumba (Carlos Diegues, 1963) and *Deus eo Diabo na Terra do Sol I Black God, White Devil* (Glauber Rocha, 1964]. The latter film has been hailed as a response to Humbert Mauro·s call for a specifically Brazilian cinema by getting to 'the heart of Braz ilianity".[26] The film-makers were young, middle class and optimistic, inspired by the Cuban revolution of 1959 and especially the writings of Che Guevara. They saw the task of the political film-maker as reformist, leading the opposition. This could be done by revealing the truth of oppression to its oppressed audience through bleak and brutal images that would undermine previous representations through their depiction of a violen t reality. As Glauber Rocha declared in *The Aesthetics of Hunger,* "the normal behaviour of the starving is violence· .[27]

In 1964 the reformist government of Joao Goulart was overthrown by a military coup backed by the CIA. The second phase of *Cinema Novo* is inextricably linked with the defeat and failure of the left. Film-makers, questioning their own failure as makers of popular cinema, found. themselves in the position of many radicals - their films were about the working class but not "for" them. As Johnson and Stam put it: "If the masses were often on the screen, they were rarely in the audience· .[20] In

a market dominated by Hollywood any attempt to reach a mass audience had to compete by producing films with popular appeal if their political messages were to be effectively communicated. The films of this period examine this failure and include *Terra em transe I Land in Anguish* [Glauber Rocha, 1967). and *Fame de amor I Hunger for Love* [Nelson Pereira Dos Santos, 1968).

The coup-within-a-coup of 1968 resulted in the Fifth Institutio aAct that suspended civil rights and brought in rigorous censorship. Film-makers rejected realism and adopted a coded language of allegory and metaphor, using popular imagery as in *Dragao da maldade contra o Santo Guereuro I Antonio das Martes* (Glauber Rocha, 1968). Como era *gostoso meu Frances I How Tasty* was *my Little Frenchman* [Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1970) and *Macuna(ma* Uoaquim Pedro de Andrade, 1969). Carlos Diegues [29] noted· we didn·t look at things complacently. Nor did we content ourselves with lamenting the situation. We created a language out of this very repressio'n.· The language created became known as·cannibal tropicalism· using music and colour to create a flamboyant and kitsch visual style drawing on Brazilian popular culture. In the USA George A. Romero was also using cannibalism as a metaphor for oppression in *Night of the Living Dead* [1968) where the returning dead exact a terrible revenge, consuming those who repress them.

In the late 1960s Brazilian underground cinema *Udigrudi* rejected the emphasis on production values in a bid to return to the radical programme of *Cinema Novo.* Sometimes called Cinema de Lixo the low budget trash and garbage films parallel those being made in the USA by · underground film-makers such as John Waters *[Mondo Trasho,* 1970) and George Kuchar *(Hold me While I* "m *Naked,* 1966) with their anarchistic flouting of good taste and deliberately shocking content.

The repression of the military Government drove film-makers such as Rocha and Diegues into exile abroad. With censorship stifling political films the military regime encouraged the production of *pornochanchadas,* which offered the promise of titillation and exotic luxury in a world far removed from the slums of Rio.

Embrafilme

During the ten years between the collapse of the military Junta and the re-establishment of a directly elected Government the film industry was boosted by Government support for endorsed projects. In 1972 the Government established Embrafilme, the Brazilian state film company. Funded through a tax on tickets it redistributed the money raised to film producers, distributors and exhibitors. In 1974 film-maker Roberto Farias, the choice of the *Cinema* Novo directors, was made its director. He instituted a programme of co-productions with independent producers providing financing, production assistance and distribution and became the second largest distributor in Latin America. During the mid 1970s *Cinema Novo* directors such as Carlos Diegues and Nelson Pereira dos Santos worked with Embrafilme on projects designed to fulfil the idea of a popular cinema, one that would appeal to the masses through its use of spectacle.

By 1983 a significant proportion of films made in Brazil were supported by Government film enterprise and obtained an average of 35% of the market. Several were international hits such as Ooiia *Flore seus do,s maridos* / Ooiia *Flor and her Two Husbands* [Bruno Barreto, 1976]. *Mem6rias do carcere* / *Memories of Prison* [Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1984) and O *beijo da mi/her aranha I Kiss of the Spider Woman* [Hector Babenco, 1985).

From the mid 80s however cinema audiences fell. Severe economic recession impacted on the poor who formed the popular a_udience, and cinemas closed in impoverished parts of large towns and In rural areas. In 1990 President Fernando Collar de Mello dismantled Embraf1lme and Brazilian film suffered yet another crisis with a drastic drop In production. At the 1990 Cannes Film Festival director_Hector Babenco announced "Brazilian cinema is dead·. Fortunately this remark proved to be premature.

The 'rebirth of Brazilian cinema'

In 1992 President Itamar Franco brought in subsidies to save national cinema and created the Brazilian Cinema Rescue Award. By 1993 the new Audio Visual Law was passed which gave investors incentives .to put money into film production for Government approved projects. This

gave a new impetus to film production and between 1994 and 2000 Brazil produced nearly 200 feature films.

In 1998 President Fernando Henrique Cardoso initiated a programme designed to gain 20% of the home market in five years. This supported both film production and the modernisation of cinemas. In the 1980s Brazil produced only five or six feature films a year, but this has steadily increased so that in 2002 the country produced 45 features. Fernando Merielles, the director of *City of God,* has talked about the impact made by a new generation of film-makers.

The New Brazilian cinema of the 1990s revisited the themes of *Cinema Novo.* Directors such as Carlos Diegues had returned from exile to make films in Brazil, and the new generation became conscious of their legacy, although the political perspective of *Cinema Novo* was often missing. *Centro do Brasil I Central Station* [Walter Salles, 1998) won both the Golden Bear Awarq [Berlin) and the British Academy Film Award for best foreign film. It was also nominated for an Oscar for the Best Foreign Language Film, and its star Fernanda Montenegro was nominated for Best Actress. Much of the film was shot on location. Other successful films of this period were O *primeiro dia I Midnight* [Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas, 1999]. *Drfeu* [Carlos Diegues, 1999), *Abril Despedar;:ado I Behind the Sun* [Walter Salles, 2001) and *Carandiru* [Hector Babenco 2003).   ,

Carandiru was produced by Globo films, who also produced *City of God.* In 2003 Globo films also had some success with *Deus e Brasileiro/ God is Brazilian* [Carlos Diegues, 2003). Early that year the government of ·President Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva took office, with the support of many film-makers, artists and intellectuals. The new Government appointed people practised in the arts - the musician Gilberto Gil was made Minister of Culture and actor Jose Wilker became President of Riofilme, the agency for film production.

Production and distribution

In spite of these recent successes the Brazilian film industry still faces the problems shared by other **indigenous cinemas.** Their place in a competitive market remains somewhat precarious. Carlos Diegues

underlined these problems in his address to the Cinema Sub-Committee of the Brazilian Senate in June 2000.[30] He compared his home market to those of both France and the USA:

- **Brazil:** Population 160 million; yearly cinema admissions 70 million; number of cinemas 1,400.

- **France:** Population 50 million: yearly cinema admissions 155 million; number of cinemas 4000.

- **USA:** Population 300 million; yearly cinema admissions 1.3 billion; number of cinemas 24,000.

Only about 25% of the revenue for a feature film comes from the cinema box office, with up to 75% coming from alternative forms of distribution such as terrestrial and satellite TV and DVD. Brazilian films have had very limited access to these markets because American films, having covered their costs at home, are dubbed into Portuguese and shown on Brazilian TV at relatively low cost. This proves a cheaper alternative to the country producing its own programmes and TV stations have been reluctant to pay higher costs for a home product. The exchange is not reciprocal. What Brazil as an underdeveloped country can produce is determined by the developed world:

> **Political and economic realities of dependency inevitably condition the nature of Brazilian cultural production. The existing global distribution of power makes the First World nations of the west cultural 'transmitters' while it reduces Brazil and other Third World countries to 'receivers'. The flow of sounds and images tends to be unidirectional.**
>
> **Thus while Brazil is inundated with North American cultural products - from television series and Hollywood films to best sellers - Americans receive precious little of the vast Brazilian cultural production. (Johnson and Stam)** [31]

The one-way flow of images has contributed to the perception of countries such as Brazil having very little to offer, and it is also very selective in the images that countries such as Britain receive. It is interesting to speculate how the move to **digital projection,** which drastically cuts **distribution costs** and makes films instantly available, puts such countries in a more

advantageous position. Will Brazilian films become part of a downloaded ·two-way flow'?

1.6 *CITY OF GOD:* THE PRODUCERS

Anthropologist Paulo Lins, who grew up in the City of God, wrote the book on which the film was based. He began academic research on the drug dealers in the favelas and then turned this into a 700-page novel. It took him eight years to write and it became a best seller.

From novel to screen

Fernando Meirelles was a director of TV commercials and the founder of the 02 commercials company. He had experience of directing one feature film having co-directed *Domesticas* with Nando Olival in 2001. He read Lin·s novel and, coming from a middle class background in Sao Paulo, he acknowledged that he was ignorant of life in the *favelas*. Lin's account surprised him, revealing as it did the side of Rio hidden to comfortably off Brazilians, cushioned from the reality of life in the city's poro areas. Meirelles bought the film rights and wanted to make the film to bring attention to the poverty and deprivation of the slums. In an interview with *Slant* magazine [32] Meirelles said that at first he didn't want to film the book, as he didn't like action films, but the power of the story won him over He made the film for Brazilian audiences, describing it as "just a small film· and had no idea that it would be an international hit.

The task of paring down the multi-character novel (described by rc tics as 'Dickensia·n) was given to screenwriter Braulio Mantovani. *City of God* was financed by TV Globo, Brazil's biggest TV channel, and 02 Filmes, Brazil's biggest commercials company. Work started on character development and script in 1999. Shooting the film, with its cast of 150 and estimated budget of $3,300,000, took 10 months and finished in 2001. Sold to 62 countries, it achieved in excess of $30,000,000 [boxofficemojoc.om). The success of the film led to Mantovani being commissioned by TV Globo to write a TV miniseries *Cidade dos Homens I City of Men* set in the Dona Martela *favela* and featuring the same actors. An estimated 35 mil on viewers watched the first series.

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The directors: Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund

Fernando Meirelles was in charge of the images; Katia Lund helped in the character development and supervised the crew. When Meirelles bought the film rights he had no experience of the *favelas* and needed someone who knew their way around the area and could negotiate with the people who lived there. Together with Katia Lund he started the organisation ·*Nos do cinema· /We of the Cinema·*. This is a workshop project for boys from the *favelas*. Meirelles and Lund auditioned 2000 and chose 200 who they trained to be actors in the film. He is still supporting the project. Katia Lund, who also lives in Sao Paolo, used her experience to work with the amateur actors together with acting coach Fatima Toledo. She refers to herself as 'bi-cultural', as the daughter of middle class American parents who now feels herself to be Brazilian. In 1998 she was co-director with Joao Moreira Salles on *NotJ'cias de uma guerra particular I News From a Private War*. This is a documentary about the drug lords in the favelas. Whilst making the documentary she lived in the slums and interviewed the gang leaders. She had also been in charge of production for Michael Jackson's 'They Don't Care About Us' video in 1996, which was filmed In the Dona Marta *favela* in Rio and directed a music video for the Braz1l1an hip-hop artist Rappa that featured a cast of young actors from Videgal, another Rio *favela*.

She has spoken about being motivated by the wish to bring the social deprivation of the slums to public attention:

> **When I made the film, it was much more important to me to bring the issue [of urban violence] to debate because, in Brazil, no one was talking about these things.** [33]

The editor: Daniel Rezende

Daniel Rezende had previously worked with Meirelles on the post-production of commercials. *City of God* was his first fuU-length feature film and earned him a BAFTA Award for editing. In an interview with Channel 4 he spoke about the problems he faced:

> **It was definitely not an easy film to edit. As none of the actors had actually read the script all the scenes evolved from the actor's improvisations, and of course each one was unique.** [34]

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He described the use of digital technology as enabling him as editor to try out new creative ideas. Because the scenes were improvised he claimed that the editor's job was an important part of the creation of the characters and that a number of the interpretations were created at the cutting stage:

> **What we tried to do with the editing was attempt to use ·effects' whenever we thought that this could bring something extra to the sensation or emotion that we were aiming to evoke. If the situation is tense, and there's no time to think, we speed it up and make it even tenser. If the character is going to be important later, then we freeze the face to commit it to memory. If both things happen at the same time then we split the screen, so as not to lose anything.**

> **In the third part of the film, we especially welcomed anything out of the ordinary for the editing style. If a 'badly made' cut could increase levels of discomfort in the viewer then we incorporated it.**

In the same interview Daniel Rezende was asked whether he was surprised at the film's international success:

> **...the world is anxious about things that are different and exotic, particularly when it comes to the First World observing the poverty of the Third World.**

> **Really it must also be said that the success of a film in the world market sometimes has less to do with its quality and more to do with its distributors, and we ended up with a great international distributor.[35]**

The distributor: Miramax

The 'great international distributor' was Miramax, the company founded by Bob and Harvey Weinstein in 1979_ Their involvement with the films a continuation of successes they have had with international and so-called independent films. Beginning as promoters of rock and roll concerts their reputation as 'art film brats· was founded on their involvement with some of the most interesting and challenging films of the 1980s and early!990s . These included *Working Girls* [Lizzie Borden, 1986, US). *The Thin Blue Line* [Errol Morris, 1988, US]. *sex, lies, and videotape* [Steven Soderbergh,

1989, US). *Reservoir Dogs* [Quentin Tarantino, 1991, US). *The Crying Game* [Neil Jordan, 1992, UK] and *Clerks* [Kevin Smith, 1993, US].

In 1993 they sold the company to Disney for a reputed $?Om. With_the sale they moved from being independent distributors on the outs_ide of the industry to being on the inside, with some critically acclaimed hits such as *The Piano* [Jane Campion, 1993, Australia) and *Pulp F1ct10n* [Quentin Tarantino, 1994, US]. In 1994 Tarantino was given a deal by Harvey Weinstein to scout for 'interesting' films.

Subsequently there was a much publicised split with Disney culminati_ng in the fracas over the release of Michael Moore's controversial *Fahrenheit 9/11* [2004] which won the Palme d'Or at Cannes. Their success with international films continued with *Ying Xiong I Hero* [Zhang Y!mou, 2002, Hong Kong/ China].

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,8 Fernando Birri 1 1979] *The Roots of Documentary Realism* delivered al the First International Festival of _the New Latin American Cinema , Havana, and reproduced in Burton led] [1986) *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America* op.cit.p.11

19 Julio Garda Espinosa [1969)·For an Imperfect Cinema· published in Cine *Cubano* no 66/671970

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2l Nelson Pereira do Santos (1982) ..Toward a Popular Cinema·· Interview with Randal Johnson originally

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2. MACRO ELEMENTS

2.1 THE FRAMEWORK OF NARRATIVE

Before examining the process of narration in *City of God* it is useful to lay out the framewo rk of narrative as defined by various theorists.[36] The film can be used to illustrate the difference bet ween **narration** [the act and process of telling the story) and the **narrat ive** [what is actually recounted). These can be considered under various headings:

1. **Ord er:** The organisation of time. Some events we an ticipate, some are seen as they happen, some are seen as flashback.

2. **Duration:** The narr ative can expand, pause, skip over or summar ise events.

3. **Frequency:** Some events happen once and are narrated once , some happen once and are narrated several times, some happen several times and are narrated once, some happen several times and are narrated several times.

4. **Distance :** The relat ionship of narration to the text. Some events we are onl y told about, some are represen ted for us to see.

5. **Point of view:** We can know what the characters know , more than they know, or less than they know. The point of view can be omniscient and outside of the action. It can be the view of one character from a fixed or variable position, or can be from several viewpoints.

In order to understand this process we can look at the way that the **plot** (the order in which events are presented in the text) of the film unfolds in order to construct the *story* (the order in which the events actually occu rredi.3[7]

City of God uses the components of story telling in a complex way, manipulating the timeframe and utilising a single narrator to lead us through the film. We can exam ine the structure of the plot and the position of the first person narrator to differentiate between what Rocket experiences directly and what he could only know indirectly through hearsay and specu lation.

The Narrator

The narrator whose voiceover we hear sets up a particular relationship between his/herself and the text as it unfolds. S/he can be speculating on events before they occur, recounting them as they happen or reconstructing the story and events after they have taken place. S/he can be absent from the story [**heterodiegetic**], inside the narrative as first person narrator [**homodiegetic**) or be the principal character [**autodiegetic).**

2.2 NARRATIVE IN *CITY OF GOD*

City of God as process of narration

City of God tells its story from the point of view of Buscape/ Rocket who functions for most of the story as a homodiegetic narrator. Although a principal character he is for much of the film outside the action as an observer, a reporter. He reconstructs the events we see in a series of flashbacks. He is remembering things that have taken place; many of the events are not things he has actually seen. These include intimate moments such as Bene and Angelica making love and voicing their desires to each other to leave the city and lead a hippy life. They also include moments of violence such as the beating of Oona Zelia and the killing of Aristotle inside the Apartment, Ze Pequeno/ Little ze·s rape of Mane Galinha / Knockout Ned's girlfriend, and Ned's agony.

It is unclear how much of the story he could actually know but the modest self-effacing Rocket, who doesn't want trouble, becomes all knowing. The killings at the Miami Motel are presented initially as presumably the work of the Tender Trio, and it is only later that we are supplied with the information that it was Dadinho/ Little Dice who was the real killer. The events that take place inside the Apartment as it changes hands are outside Rocket's experience as are also the origin of Bene·se relationship with Thiago and the revelation of Otto's desire for revenge, but through him we witness them all. The use of the first person narrator places us in a particular position in regard to what we might describe as the narrative ·truth' of the film. The use of various **cinematic devices** that insert us into the text and privilege our understanding - **point of view, shot-reverse-shot, eyeline match** - are sometimes undercut by the voiceover that contradicts that position.

Rocket's *voiceover* is just one of the narrative devices used to construct the story. **Non-diegetic** information includes the superimposed title.s that set up each episode as a kind of chapter.[38] These titles, together with Rocket's comments, lead us from one section to the next.

The film deploys various **diegetic** devices such as newspaper headlines, photographs, TV interviews and music:

- Newspaper headlines tell us exactly what Paraiba / Sho.rty did_to his wife when he found her in bed with Cabaliera / Shaggy [Man Buries Wife Alive in the City of God']. They position Little Ze as a celebrity and inform us that 'The Self-Styled Boss of the City of God 1s Dead.

- Rocket's photographs echo his feelings for Angel ica, and document his relationship with the gang of Groovies. The photographs that Rocket takes of Little ze·s gang earn him a professional's camera, and his pictures of ze·s bribing the police and later of his dead body are Rocket's passport out of the *favela*.

- The TV interview with Ned is seen by Rocket and also by _Little Ze w o is jealous of Ned's fame and publicity. This acts as the trigger for Ze to send for Rocket to document his position and so that he can be acknowledged as the boss of the City.

- Oiagetic music documents the era. Bene dancing to James Brown's *Sex Machine* emphasises his newfound persona. *Kung Fu F1ght1ng,* a song about controlled power played at Bene·s farewell party, is an ironic counterpoint to the real violence that erupts there.

Information is given **cinematically** through many devices including **montage** sequences and **split screen** that allow two episodes to be seen at the same time. For example:

- At the party where Bene shows himself to be· the coolest hood in the City of God' split screen allows the crowded dance floor to _be invaded by Little ze on the left hand screen. The screen on the left 1s filtered in green and gradually wipes the warmer right hand screen away.

- At the beginning of the war between Ned and Ze the screen splits to show Ned on the left and File-com -Fritas / Steak and Fries on the

right. Steak is sent with a message for Sandro Cenoura / Carrot that if he kills Ned Ze will leave him alone. He appears in the left hand side with his message whilst Ze remains on the right.

Narrative structure

The plot starts very near the end of the story. This guarantees an understanding of the changed circumstances of the City, and lends the opening tale of the Tender Trio a kind of nostalgia as a more golden era. The overall tone, however, is one of despair, given an underlying poignancy because of its concluding statement that it is 'based on a true stor·y. There are few inferred events; the characters· background and previous experiences are sketchy and hardly reconstructed. Narrative gaps are filled in y returning to previous events.

The narrative presents us with heroes and villains who exhibit traits that we can interpret as either good or evil. Added to this the place itself is a corrupting presence, a setting that throws up circumstances over which most characters have little control. The character's desires form the driving force of the story; the conflicts that these desires provoke provide the drama:

- The Tender Trio's desire to get money leads to the robbery at the Miami Motel, pursuit by the law and eventually to the deaths of Shaggy and Goose.

- ze·s desire to satisfy his lust to kill, become the boss of the City and be acknowledged as such, leads to his war with Carrot.

- Bene·s desire to disassociate himself from the gangster's life leads to his argument with ze· and his accidenta I death.

- Ned's desire for revenge leads to his alliance with Carrot and his eventual death.

- Rocket's desire to lose his virginity, leave the City and become a photographer is the only one that has a positive outcome. The transformation of Rocket into Wilson Rodrigues makes him the only character who is seen to escape. The deaths of Ned and Ze aren't the reason that Rocket can leave although the photographs he takes are a part of his success.

Time and repetitions

The series of short tales, vignettes and ellipses manipulates narrative time and space. The plot moves backwards and forwards_spann1ng over a decade. The passage of time is indicated through two main devices on screen titles introduce the era [The Seventies) or tell us how m_uch time elapsed [Three Months Later]. shot transitions show time passing. Both devices accelerate events and skip over years, although there are few precise indications of the date and only a few indications of how much time has actually passed:

- A montage sequence of different low angle shots turns Little Dice from a boy to a man.

  Speeded up high angle shots look down on the carnage as ze·s gang takes over after his 'christening·.

- Wipes remove one set of images and replace them with others.

Some events are shown more than once. The second [or third₁ time changes our perception of the first or fills in missing information:

- The image of Rocket behind the grille with his camera is seen during the opening credits and also near the end of the film when the full irony of his situation becomes clear. The photogrnph that Rocket is taking is of ze bribing the police. That, together with his subsequent photographs of ze·s body, guarantees his futu re.

- The chicken chase that opens the film is initially seen as something fairly comic. It's bid for freedom means that it will not end_up as dinner. When we see it for a second time it precedes the final bloody shootout, which leaves the streets strewn with bodies and Knockout Ned, one of the main characters, dead.

- When Bene tells Ze he is leaving with Angelica as he has had enough of violence we see a sepia flashback to the early scene of them as children with their arms around each othe r. Their original closeness highlights the distance that has opened up between them, how far Bene has moved away.

  The Miami Motel incident is seen twice. The first time is in 'The Story of the Tender Trio' when Little Dice is keeping watch. The Trio rob the brothel. The camera then pans round dead bodies. 'The Story of Little

ze· replays the scene showing Dice keeping watch and then shooting at the window because he is bored, before cold bloodedly killing the brothel customers.

- Marreco / Go_ose, running away from the City to escape Shorty's wrah, finds Little Dice and Bene in one of the shacks under construction. We see the same incident replayed in 'The Story of Little ze· but this second time the scene plays on and we see the outcome as Little Dice shoots Goose.

- The e_ntry of Little Ze into the Apartment is seen three times. The first time he swaggers in while Rocket is buying dope from Neguinho / Blacky. The second time the scene is replayed is at the end of 'The Story of the Apartment'. The third time is in Little ze·s own story when it completes his take over of the City's businesses.

  When Ze desires the world to know how powerful he is he wants to have his photograph taken. None of his gang knows how to use the camera. There is a flashback to Bene·s farewell party where he gave Rocket the camera, before it was snatched away by ze in a jealous rage.

- Steak and Fries is used by Ze as a go between. When he dies Ned kneels_ by his body. We hear a sound flashback of Steak's voice repeating the words he spoke when accused of being just a kid: ·1 smoke, I snort, I've kil led and robbed. I'm a manl'

- The bank shoot-out where Ned kills the bank worker is seen for a second time as Otto confronts the man we thought he admired. We see that Otto was also present in the bank. Having come to meet his father he witnesses his fathe r's murder.

- Otto_joining the gang seen is also seen twice, the second time we realise that he has come there with the intention of killing Ned, his reasons for wanting to avenge his father's murder echo Ned's own.

Narrative deceits

During the course of the film the narrative poses many questions. What at first appear to be answers to these various questions often prove misleading. The narrative sometimes surprises or deceives us or starts in one mood and switches to another:

- The opening is that of a relaxed street party which segues into a confrontat ion and when replayed at the end of the film turns into a massacre.

- The raid on the Miam i Motel not only withhold s information but also suggests the Trio are murderers through the juxtaposition of shots. The slow pan round the dead bodies of the customers is preceded by shots of the Trio holding up the same customers and followed with a cut showing them getting away in a stolen car.

- When Thiago visits the City to buy cocaine Bene borrows Blacky's bike and chases after him. His association with Little Ze makes us fear the worst but he challenges Thiago to a race and at the conclusion asks where he bought his trainers.

- Rocket and Barbantinho / Stringy want to get money and are out to do a hold up. A man from Sao Paolo dri ves by, asks them the way to Barra and offers them a lift. He appears to be a soft touch; they seem to have it made. Cut to police searching the undergrowth near the roadside. They find what they are looking for - 'the body's over here' The forensic expert arrives. Because of the proximity of the shots we think the two boys have succumbed to violence and murdered the driver. Perhaps Rocket has been corrupted after all? A car drives by and slows down. It contains the man we supposed to be the victim, chatting to the two we thought were his assass ins. They look out the car window at the police, having no idea what has happened.

- The death of Ned comes from an unexpected quarte r. In flashback we see the bank raid where Ned first shot an innocent man. That man we now find out was Otto's fathe r. The flashback provides us with the 'missin g· shot of Otto with his fathe r·s body.

2.3 *CITY OF GOD* AND GENRE

Familiar genre conventions - guns and gangs in a city street

One of the most remarkable things that the arts can do is to take alien work - unknown to us by experience, shown only sketchingly by the media - and not only communicate them to us, but tangibly and forcibly to relate them to things we all go through. (Ian Maldron-Mantgani)[39]

One of the ways we relate to ·an alien work· - that is to a film from a culture_ about which we know very little - is by matching it with what we recognise as familiar **genre conventions.** The use of these conventions may account for *City of God's* popularity among mainstream Western audiences. This includes the young film-goers (available to see the 18 rated film through the wide availability of the DVD) whose experience of World Cinema is limited. Familiar patterns, structures and styles are given new impetus through different settings and locations.

City of God can be seen as reworking themes using genre devices also made familiar to a Brazilian audience though their consumption of Hollywood films in cinemas and on TV. For us as spectators with a limited knowledge of Brazil the events of the film may be outside our experience, but an understanding of American genre cinema enables us to relate what we see to things inside our cinematic experience. Reviewers laid the ground for this comparing *City of God* not only to Hollywood films that we know like a Brazilian underclass *GoodFellas*[40] but also successful

Ghettos, gangsters and gangs

From the opening we have indications of where the film will take us. The 'ghetto· film, located in the deprived area of a major city, links with the gangster film. With the appearance of boys with guns and a confrontation with the police we are in familiar territory. We anticipate violence, crime and its attendant rituals. We expect to see destructive masculine conflict, which will be resolved through action. Audiences can connect with the spate of films made in the early 1990s dealing with hoods and rival gangs in African American ghettos such as *Boyz 'N the Hood* (John Singleton, 1991), *New Jack City* (Mario van Peebles, 1991) and Juice (Ernest R. Dickerson, 1992). What we are not going to see, however, are any positive role models or ideas about the value of community. As the film progresses the importance of soundtrack, the race of the principal characters and the bravura visual style suggest the Blaxploitation films of the 1970s such as *Black Caesar* [Larry Cohen, 1973, US). The ghetto is not cool though, and the main characters are not sexually potent males in stylish clothes.

The central story charts the progress and eventual death of the gangster and, as has been stated, critics made comparisons with Hollywood films, particularly *GoodFellas*. The wish to overcome poverty and rise from rags to riches in order to share a piece of the American dream means getting out of the ghetto. Tony Montana's expensive dwelling in *Scarface* [Howard Hawks, 1932 and Brian de Palma, 1983) is hardly the rundown Apartment of *City of God*. The epic nature of the narrative also drew comparisons with *The Godfather* [Francis Ford Coppola, 1971) and *The Godfather Part II* [Francis Ford Coppola, 1974). A man like Michael Corleone is presented to us at first as essentially decent, sucked into crime through having to make a series of moral choices concerning family and loyalty. This is a far cry from *City of God* where children are not innocent and families hardly exist.

The appeal of the film to young audiences draws on other films they connect with. In its level of violence, episodic structure, aggressive colloquial language and emphasis on masculinity comparisons have been made between *City of God* and *Pulp Fiction* ['Tarantino·s influence is all over *City of* God'].[42] Meirelles has been quick to point out what he sees as the difference. He has stated that Tarantino uses violence as comedy and spectacle making the spectator want to be part of it. For him, a comparison doesn't take into account that Tarantino·s films have no political sense, and do not deal with social problems or issues.

Rocket's journey from boy to photographer covers a few of the aspects we might expect in the coming of age film, including his problems in losing his virginity and his unsuccessful plot to seduce Angelica. In such films authority figures often provide the obstacles that have to be overcome but the City is devoid of.authority figures, parents play no role, and the police are corrupt.

Three 'hood' films

We can also compare *City of God* with other international ghetto films. *The Harder they* Come [1972][43] depicts life in Kingston, Jamaica. The problems faced by Ivan. the central character. include those of trying to make it in the music business and dealing with cruel and corrupt employers. The setting of the film is the developing world; the location is the shantytown. . Ivan the innocent turns into the romantic gangster figure sung abo ut on the film's great soundtrack .

My Crazy Life I Mi Vida Loca[44] is set in Echo Park Los Angeles. a location that held similar dangers for its shooting crew as did the *favelas* of Rio. It tells the different stories of a group of Hispanic women and girls and the men they become involved with. Dealing with gang violence, real gang members from the neighbourhood play some of the parts, lending an air of authe nticity. The interest here is in the fact that the film is about women, the effect the violence has on them and the children they are left to bring up alone.

Perhaps the film that we can best compare *City of God* to is *La Haine ,*[45] another World Cinema film that is immensely popular with students and young audiences, in spite of the fact that the street lang uage has to be read as subtitles. Similarities can be found in its subject matter - that of soc al de privation in a disadvantaged suburb of a major city. The tone of the film and its markedly spectacular cinematic style resonate with is au d ience in a similar way. In common with *City of God La Haine* is also seen as a film with a message. The police are brutal and the film is unashamedly masculine in its concerns. although not without touches of humour. The ending of *La Haine* is ambiguous; there is little optimism for its remaining main characters. Is *City of God* any more hopeful and positive?

2.4 SETTING: THE RECREATION OF REALITY

The review that stated ·so au thentically immediate - that *City of God* prompted reforms in socio-economic policy'[46]· is typical of critics who pos tione d the film as one that had its basis in reality, whilst oft n at the same time receiving praise for its flamboyant style. Other critics use of the word a·ut h ent ic' suggested the film was not just a fictional work but was something that had ·real and genu ine· origins, moving it into the space occupied by the drama documentary and historical reconstructions:

> **Fierce, shocking, dazzling and wonderful. It's that rare film that manages to be seductively entertaining without ever compromising its authenticity and power. (Megan Turner)[47]**

> **It pulses with atmosphere and vibrates with authenticity. (Lisa Schwazbaum)[48]**

> **A potent and unexpected mixture of authenticity and flash. (Kenneth Turan)[49]**

> **There s' a casual authenticity to the performers and action that gives *City of God* a street-tough power. (Andrew Pulver)[50]**

The relationship of the film to real life, real people and real places stresses authenticity, a basis in ·actuality'. According to Meirelles *City of God* s the story from the inside, the ·other side' of life in Rio. He had permission from the community to film inside the slum . The final caption of *City of God* states 'Based on a true story·. This story is the one that 1s , the basis for L n's book. The final credits show photographs of the real Ze Pequeno ,Bene and Buscape accompanied with the names of the actors

who play them as well as black and white TV footage of an interview by Brazilian reporter Sergio Chapelin of the real Mane Galinha.

The association with the real slum dwellers has its basis in the casting of the film. In order to recreate the realism of Lins· book the director wanted to use non-professionals. Amateur actors, recruited from the *favelas,* were encouraged to improvise. Meirelles says he took the idea of improvisation from the work of Mike Leigh and Ken Loach, giving the actors an outline of the scene and encouraging them to use their own experiences and the language of the *favelas* to become the characters. To a certain extent many were playing themselves or aspects of themselves and '70% of what you see and hear on screen they created by themselves. This is what gives the film its sense of reality.'[51] This sets up a complicated relationship between the constructed fictional world and the real world of the slum. The scene in Marina·s apartment where Rocket is heard off screen commenting on taking his first shower was not scripted but was an impromptu remark, a comment by the actor Alexandre Rodrigues on his own situation. The decision to give Alexandre Rodrigues the camera so that he could shoot the final sequence from the 'real' viewpoint of his character also underlines the film's attempt to reconstruct reality.

The style of the film, which is made up of episodes that jolt backwards and forwards, is the antithesis of realism. Its frenetic camera work and restless movement are far removed from the long takes defined by Bazin and used in Italian Neo-Realist films. It is also far removed from the 'intimate· style of Mike Leigh and Ken Loach.

The Street Urchin Chronicle

The real world of the slum can be seen to exist in the film's performances and also its use of location. *City of God* can be read as a ·street urchin chronicle', set in a city in the developing world and featuring non-professional actors drawn from the subjects of the film themselves. Audiences and critics may approach them as sociological documents, giving them an insight into the problems that the protagonists face. Such films sometimes use an episodic structure to highlight the plight of children as the victims of poverty. Examples of such films include *Los Olvidados /The Young and the Damned I The Forgotten* [Luis Bunuel, 1950,

Mexico), *Pixote: A Lei do Mais Fraco* [Hector Babenco, 1981, Brazill *Salaam Bombay!* [Mira Nair, 1988, India/ France/ UK] and *Centro da Brasil I Central Station* [Walter Salles, 1998, Brazil/France].

For *Salaam Bombay'* Mira Nair cast her characters from a school she ran for street children. Eleven-year-old Shafiq Syed, a runaway from South India, played the lead character. The 'documentary· quality of the film was enhanced by the use of real locations, such as a brothel and a children's' home. In *Pixote* street boys in Sao Paolo play themselves in a story of harassment and police brutality. The script was derived from their ideas and contributions. The main character was acted by Fernando Ramos da Silva, who was shot dead by police in 1989 when he was aged 19. His brother died in the same way.

Setting: the tavelas

The location filming is another contributor to the perception of the film's authenticity. Rio de Janeiro is a densely populated city of 5.5 million inhabitants. By the mid 1990s one fifth of its population lived in about 560 overcrowded favelas on the hillsides around Rio. In the first years of the 20th century these were occupied by the descendants of African slaves, as well as returning soldiers and poor Portuguese immigrants. At first their depiction in films, novels and songs was romantic and lyrical, as in *Favela dos meus amores I Favela of my Love* [Humberto Mauro, 1934]. They were places of myth and legend, colour and samba in *Orfeu Negro* [Marcel Camus, 1959, France/ Italy/ Brazil]. From the 1950s the *favela* became a subject for socially motivated ·urban· cinema which depicted the reality of Brazil as in *Rio 40 graus I Rio 40 Degrees* [Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1955], *Rio Zona Norte I Rio North Zone* [Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1957), *Cinco vezes favela I Favela Five Times* [Miguel Borges, Carlos Diegues, Marcos Frazas, Leon Hirszman, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, 1962] and *Vidas secas I Barren Lives* [Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1963].

In the early 1960s large numbers of people travelled from the *sertao* [backwoods] country to the city, many of them fleeing drought in the North Eastern province of Bahia. They were housed in makeshift *barracos* [shacks]. Set apart from the rest of the city they were a place where the dispossessed could live separate lives, not troubling the other inhabitants

with the sight of their abject poverty. With their population of *favelados* growing twice as fast as that in the rest of the city the slums expanded rapidly, becoming ·no go· areas for the upper and middle classes as they degenerated into places of crime.

The images of poverty, violence and hopelessness are in negative contrast with that of Rio as a city of pleasure, carnival, samba and suntanned girls on the beaches of Ipanema and Copacabana. Now the *favelas* have become as symbolic of Rio de Janeiro as these famous beaches. These are dangerous places where over the past few years there have been twice as many homicides than in Los Angeles and New York.

The documentary *Noticias de uma guerra particular I News from a Private War* deals with the rise in drug dealing after the mid Bos, after in fact *City of God* ends . It depicts the conflicts between gangsters and the police that have escalated into all out war. The situation in the documentary is in, fact more horrific than that depicted in *City of God.* It describes a sharp rise in the number of homicides, with one person dying every half hour in Rio, and 100,000 people employed in drug trafficking. This traffic started out with marijuana for, as Paolo Lins says in the film, 'Cocaine was for rich people, not for the poor.·[52] The statements Lins makes in the documentary follow the trajectory of *City of God* in the way the situation has changed. The poor started out stealing gas, but didn't get anywhere: 'people always died but the press didn't take notice·. Now organised crime has made the situation worse, and the press takes notice. The harsh reality of *favela* life has been brought to the attention of the middle classes. Lins also compares the young men with guns to ·bandits and outlaws fighting back against the corruption of the police.

2.5 CHARACTERS

The complex three-story structure involves 13 major characters whose actions motivate the story, and at least 17 secondary characters who act as foils to the action. The rival gangs and the Runts contain some nameless characters.

As a multi character film with 10-12 year time span accentuating the epic nature we have seen that comparisons have been drawn with the two *Godfather* films and *GoodFellas.* These films, however, stress the nature

of relationships and psychological motivation, especially the two parts f *The Godfather* that build the narrative around the central core of the orleone family. *City of God* has no, or very few, personal details. The only families we see are those of Rocket and Ned and both play very minor roles. Characters are in many ways incomplete, two-dimensional. We know nothing, or next to nothing, about their backg round.

Buscape / Rocket

The central figure of Buscape / Rocket narrates the story. His nickname might suggest that he is explosive and fiery but that 1s mIslead!ng. The re is a difference between what he knows because he has witnessed 1t and what he surmises, in spite of the soothing voice of Alexandre Rodrigues persuad n g us that he has seen it all . He is the camera, the neutra_l recorder of events, documenting what comes w1th1n his field of v1s1on and also the story teller, the reconstructor of legends, passing on what he has heard. He is one of the few characters who is actually seen outside the City of God _ on the beach, in a van in the streets delivering newspapers in the newspaper office. His first sexual experience 1s not with a girl from the *favelas* but with Marina, a middle class woman in a comfortable apartment with a shower. Outside the privations of the slum he can function as a man and a human being.

Meirelles says that Rocket is a blend of Paulo Lins and the photographer Wilson Rodrigues, the central character of Lins· novel. For Me1relles he 1s the positive expression of hope, the one who escapes the trap of poverty and o ence . His way out of the slums is through photography; he decides to shoot pictures instead of people . Ironically he must go back there to take the pictures that will allow him to leave. He can't escape the *favelas;* his photographs are wanted because he can get shots that others cant.

His various encounters with Little Ze, which begin in their childhood, . keep them as parallel characters with little interaction. Rocket fears him, and with good reason, but it is Ze that provides him with his way out of the ghetto by posing for the photographs that document the drug lords . attitude and power. In this way Rocket remains associated with violence_, if not an active participant. His elder brother is an amateur criminal heading for a violent death; Rocket opts out of this although he does attempt to

embark on a life of crime when he loses his job in a supermarket because the manager suspects him of being in league with the Runts. He is, after all, a boy from the slums and therefore not to be trusted. Every time he tries to break the law, however, something happens to prevent him from being successful - a bus fare collector he plans to rob lets him through without paying then proceeds to give him advice, a 'foxy' girl sidetracks him by giving him her phone number, a man from Sao Paulo sets himself up as a victim by offering him a lift then instead of robbing him Rocket and Stringy engage in chat and end up by sharing a joint.

We first see Rocket behind a grille. Throughout the film he remains the outsider caught between the police and the gangsters. The story begins with him as goalkeeper, trying to stop the ball and failing. He is inept at football, later inept at crime, getting a girlfriend, taking revenge for his brother's rr:iurder. At Bene·s farewell disco he isn't one of the crowd. He is apart as he looks down and puts records on for others to dance to. He is singled out as studious by both his brother Goose and Ned, the fare collector who advises him to study to get out of the slum. His field of vision takes in very few family details. As a reporter he follows the tradition of *fave/a* characters who find their way out through art and the media.

Dadhino / Little Dice/ Ze Pequeno/ Little Ze

If Rocket represents hope through his ability to extricate himself from the slum then, in contrast, Ze is hopelessness. There is no way out for him except through death. He has to succeed within the *fave/a,* the only place where he can. He does not venture outside, or use his drug money to buy a life elsewhere. He does not have even the minimal background details of Rocket and Ned - no brothers, no family and no girlfriend.

We follow him throughout the **film** as he gains control and power through violence. We see him in the 1960s as a bullying child, then as a killer child, with no conscience and no fear. His take-over of the Apartment, the business and his leadership of the gang is through violent behaviour and mass murder. His wish to do this is fuelled by a desire for power and control. The initial killings at the Miami Motel are not to gain power, however, but for fun. He does it because he is bored. Therefore his way

out of the poverty trap is motivated by pure evil, not by need. He lacks any kind of charm and appears to have no redeeming features, although at one point Rocket tells us that he is ·gaining the respect' of the citizens. This could be because they all fear him; Rocket's commentary is not without irony. Ze appears incapable of feelings apart from rage and jealous y. This overwhelming jealousy is another motivating factor - he is furious when he sees the girl he fancies dancing with Ned and begins the confrontations that will eventually end in outright warfare, furious when he sees Bene give Rocket the camera because he feels he is losing the one person who cares for him. He kills Tuba because Tuba expressed some admiration for Ned, his enemy. His reaction to Bene·s death is one of incandescent and inarticulate rage and hatred of Angelica who took Bene from him. He dies when a child shoots him, a dreadful legacy of his own infantile violence.

Bene

In contrast with Little Ze, the epitome of the 'bad' gangster, Bene is a representation of a ·good' gangster. A man with a conscience who tries to curb some of Little ze·s violent behaviour, he is both charming and popu lar . Although he witnesses murder and is central to a violent gang what redeems him is his capability to love. Unlike Ze he is drawn to a life outside the ghetto. His way out is initially through trainers and clothes, the trappings of cool, and his role model is Thiago, the middle class white boy who hangs out on the beach. His relationship with Thiago shows his attraction to the outside life. He wants to buy into the material world that exists outside the slum. His desire to bond with a boy from a different class manifests itself in physical contact. He exhorts Thiago to measure him for the new clothes, showing his willingness to drop any defence and be unarmed and unthreatening. Bene turns himself into a playboy, like those who venture into the city to buy cocaine. He takes on a European appearance through dyeing his hair red like Thiago·s. At first he just wants to have a good time, to be 'the coolest hood in the City of God' so he moves over to become the grooviest of the Groovies, a dancing sex machine. His relationship with Angelica changes him; he no longer wants to be a hood, cool or otherwise. Their affair highlights the attraction between the more middle class white girl [her father is a sergeant] and the boy from the

favela. One of the women interviewed in the documenary *News* from a *Private War* comments on the way such girls are drawn to the outlaws of the slum.

Bene·s vision of escape echoes the earlier dream articulaed by his brother Shaggy. Both characters picture a life in the country where they can live with their girlfriends, 'grow pot and get high'. The hippy philosophy of peace and love transform him but, like Shaggy, Bene can't escape. Both men's attempts end in violent death.

Mane Galinha / Knockout Ned

First encountered as an object of ze·s envy, Ned is assured and handsome. He has lived outside the *favela* as he has done military service. His job as a bus fare collector also takes him into the outside world. Noted as the best marksman in his barracks, he does karate but has no thought of antagonising others. The rape of his girlfriend and the murder of his brother and father draw him back in. He contrasts with Ze in his appearance, a fact commented on by Rocket. Whereas Ned is tall and handsome Ze is *pequeno* [small]. Unlike Ze, who is given no motive other than inherent evil, Ned's fall into violence is motivated by the need for revenge. His move away from his stated doctrine of harmony and love (which he shares with Shaggy and Bene) into the world of death and destruction is almost inevitable.

Ned is the tragic hero of the Western, drawn into gang warfare, and forced fo use his physical prowess and skills as a marksman when he embarks on his quest for retribution. He has no choice but to prove himself through violence. Described by Rocket as a hero who takes on the bad guy, initially welcomed as some sort of saviour or champion by the inhabitants of the City of God, he is transformed into a kind of terrible avenging angel.

Transformations

All four of these characters are physically transformed within the course of the film. These transformations echo that taking place in the City itself. Rocket, Ze and Bene change from children to young men, Ned's decent into brutality turn him from a handsome amicable man into a ravaged

and gaunt avenger. Their transformations are sometimes accompanied by changes of name:

- At the end of the film Rocket has become Wilson Rodrigues, photographer, through contact with the outside world. His new name turns him into a serious professional, casting off his slum associations.

  Little Dice embarks on a life of crime and murder when still a child. His acquisition of power through his control over the drugs business builds on this previous persona. He undergoes an inverted christening that changes his name to Ze Pequeno, and moves into the big time, keeping the Apartment which itself echoes the trans formation of the City from dope to cocaine.

- Bene·s physical transformation is accompanied by his longing, like his brother Shaggy, to go back to the country, the *sertao.* He wants a peaceful uncomplicated life. Yet he is the centre of attention, the king of cool when he gratifies his wish to transform himself into a playboy. He models himself on the middle class kids who live outside the *favela* and visit it in search of drugs and are then drawn into its lifestyle.

- Ned becomes what he swore he would not, a hood, a killer and a man of violence. His assured good looks, commented on by Rocket, are wrecked by the lifestyle he is forced to adopt.

Thiago

Thiago acts as a kind of catalyst. He is initially one of the gang of Groovies, hanging out on the beach and smoking dope. He is Angelica's boyfriend who Rocket wants to keep out of the picture. His background is practically non-existent, presumably he lives outside the City. His clothes and style give him the trappings of the 'playboy· and are the initial lure for Bene's break with the gangster life and Little Ze. He forms the link with Rocket and it is Thiago who fetches him to take the photograph of ze·s gang that leads to Rocket securing his commission from the newspaper.

Sandro Cenoura / Carrot

He is ze·s deadly enemy because he controls part of the City. Carrot is a figure about whom we know very little, except that he was able to take over the Apartment and the business. His function in the narrative is sketchy but crucial. It is his entrance into the Apartment that shows the way basic human sympathies are corrupted when he kills Aristotle whom he thought of as a brother. He is the instigator of Ned's downfall, luring him into destructiveness.

The Tender Trio: Alicate / Clipper, Cabaleira / Shaggy, Marreco / Goose

The Tender Trio represent a different age of the *favela.* They are represented as a group of equals without a nominated bos-s they do things together. Their guns are toys, accessories to their bravado, used to threaten and posture and not to kill. Two of them meet violent deaths in the daylight. The qnly escape appears to be through the church.

The women

The definition of being a man offered by Steak and Fries is one who kills and robs. This is a film that centres on an aggressive definition of masculinity, even more of a male text than *La Haine.* The female characters have passive and peripheral roles. The women in the film Shorty's wife, Dona Zelia, Blacky·s unseen girlfriend and Ned's girlfriend - are there to be the recipients of male violence and are attacked, murdered and raped. Berenice and Angelica may reject this violence but they are sucked into it as observers and mourners. They 'disappear· from the narrative and what happens to them afterwards is of no consequence. Angelica, threatened by Ze, leaves Bene·s body and is not seen again. Berenice, who was given the gun, is seen fleetingly as a gangster·s moll. Marina·s function is to provide the bridge to Rocket's entry into manhood and the outside world.

2.6 THREE STORIES

In 1999 Carlos Diegues made *Orfeu,* a remake of *Orfeu Negro,* the Marcel

Camus film of 1959 that depicts the Rio *favelas* in a lyrical light. Diegues laid out his ideas about the three historical stages the favelas have passed through.[5] Built on the surrounding hills with views over the city and the sea at first the images that were seen in films and sung about In songs were poetic and romantic. The second stage, of violence_ and crime, was called by Oiegues 'the complaining phase· and likens living in th_e *favelas* as being 'close to hell' . The third stage began in the 90s [a fter *City of God* ends) and is the fight for affirmation and pride.

The three main parts of *City of God,* although linked through character and circumstance, can be seen as three separate narratives that echo the stages of the *favelas,* each telling its story in a different style which reflects the changing nature of the place. They can be used to illustrate the variety of options open to the film-maker when telling a story, drawing on already existing conventions.
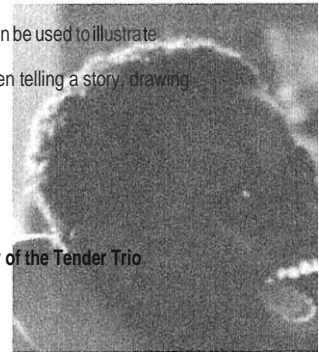
One: ·...but they were just amateurs' - The Story of the Tender Trio

"Tagging along were Little Dice and Bene, Shaggy's brother ..

The story of the Tender Trio begins the first Act of the film. It sets an almost romantic tone with its overall golden light. The Tender Trio are 6os outlaws, social bandits, echoing the *cangaceiros,* the revolutionary outsiders of earlier Brazilian films.

In the sixties as the *favelas* filled up with hungry and dispossessed people they became overcrowded and violent places. The story of the Ten_der Trio retains some of the romantic, warm imagery of the earlier poetic

representations but there is often a disjunction between the image we see _on scre_en and wha_twe hear Rocket say. The first story of the City of God 1s 1n a time of petty crime, featuring the exploits of small time hoods. As a response to the deprivation of the ghetto the characters are wayward rather than evil, the pace is slow. Shaggy, Clipper and Goose bicker _ amongst themselves as friends who have grown up together do. The _ s!tuat!o_nsthey get into are almost humorous. They indulge and tolerate L1We Dice_,the friend of Shaggy's brother Bene. The image of Bene and Dice with their arms round each other laughing will recur later in the film as a sepia coloured insert, the recollection of a lost, more innocent time.

The Tender Trio are amateur thieves. They have guns but they don·t shoot people, they take pot shots at footballs. They are almost heroes 20th?_century Robin Hoods, hijacking trucks with the cry of Who want gas. They echo the popular figures of the *sertao* dwellers from the backwoods_who migrated to the City and were often depicted as rebels and revolut1onar1es. Like these heroes the Trio redistribute wealth in the form of gas canisters which they hand out to the crowds who flock round the trucks. They take the Company's money and throw it in the air for the children of the *favela* to dive for. Robbery is like a game of dare; they flaunt their status out in the open.

The T_rio are dutiful sons even if they can·t be acknowledged as donors. Goose g1:es money to Rocket to give to their father "but don·t tell him it's from me. Rocket"s family live in a crowded single story dwelling in one of the rows being constructed to house the poor. Homeless people were relocated to these shacks. They arrived with all their worldly possessions bundled up 1n carts recalling images in early films such as *Orfeu Negro* of uncomplicated poverty, happy *favelados* . The *favelas* are about to become ove_rcrowded and violent places but in the streets a girl in a rocking chair smiles at us, kites fly in the air. Rocket"s narration acts as counterpoint to these images as he tells us:

> **We came to the City of God hoping to find paradise. There was no electricity, paved streets or transportation but for the powerful our problem s_didn't matter. We were too far removed from the picture postcard image of Rio de Janeiro.**

Rocket doesn·t want to follow his brother. He doesn·t want to be a hood or a policeman [we have just seen him caught between the two]. He·s scared

of getting shot. It isn·t cool to him. He and Stringy swim in a pool outside the City and talk about their aspirations for the future, away from violence.

When the Tender Trio rob the Miami Motel the people in the kitchen aren·t scared of them but tell them off. Various couples and triples are having sex and are annoyed but not frightened by the intruders. The Trio abandon the robbery when Dice shoots the window. They steal a car and prove themselves to be fairly incompetent but hardly dangerous as they squabble during their hurried exit.

Inserted into this caper the narrative takes a serious turn. The camera slowly pans around the Motel and then cuts to views of the bodies of slaughtered men and women who a few minutes before were remonstrating with the Trio. A slow pan accompanied by silence and then a wipe surveys the carnage. The dichotomy between what we see, what we suppose and what we learn later is set up here. The earlier mood is restored when the Trio crash the car, fairly comic in their ineptitude as hoods. They then split and go their different ways. The introduction of Shorty is also misleading. At first he appears to be there as just a stool pigeon who informs on them, a dodgy informer who introduces us to the corrupt police.

The Trio now cannot strut around the streets as they did before and later gangsters do. They have to go to ground. Shaggy takes refuge with L ucia Maracana. In the woods Goose and Clipper hide up a tree as the police look for them. Clipper has a vision of a small fish being swallowed by a large one. They are indeed small fish about to be swallowed by circumstances they can·t control. This vision determines him to take the alternative way to the gangsters' life and go back to the church.

Goose has to run the gamut of his father"s wrath. He wants better for his younger brother who he thinks is smart. He counsels his brother to study to get out of the slum, echoing Ned"s advice later in the film. Rocket"s separation from the hood"s life and promise that he wo·nt touch the gun is underlined by his brother"s humiliation at the hands of their angry father.

Shaggy·s refuge with Lucia Maracana and her daughter turns into a love s tor y . Shaggy is redeemed by love; Berenice doesn·t want a hood for a lover . Their affair is intercut with images of domesticity as Berenice dries the dishes. Outside the overall tones are warm pinks and browns;

dogs frolic in the roads, the rocking chair, now empty, promises repose
and peace. Three months pass. Shaggy dreams of an uncomplicated
life where he and Berenice can live out a country idyll, raising chickens,
growing pot and getting high. Later in the film Bene and Angelica will also
dream of this escape from the violence of the city to the simple values of
the countryside. To the dwellers of the *favela* in the 1960s, many of whom
had *come* from the country, the rural paradise was that of nostalgic
memory, recalled in songs and stories as a place where lost values could
be reclaimed. Against this nostalgic dream Rocket"s voiceover inserts
harsh realities. Police raid the slum. People get beaten up every day.

Goose is working selling fish. He indulges in a flirtation with Shorty's wife.
Shorty is watching them but he is just an informer, one who observes
and lets others act. When he catches Goose and his wife together the
situation is initially comic as, naked, Goose makes his exit rapidly through
the window and has to bargain with Rocket to get his shorts. He finds
Bene and Little Dice hiding out in a half constructed shack, but the full
consequences of this are only revealed later. Part of the brutal outcome
of Goose·s carefree sexual adventure becomes clear when we see Shorty
digging up the floor in his room and a tabloid headline proclaims "Man
Buries Wife Alive in the City of God·. Shorty has murdered his wife and is
taken away crying by the police who used him to get information.

The comparatively carefree life of the amateur bandits ends in tragedy.
Shaggy and Berenice attempt to flee. Amateur to the end Shaggy hijacks
a car that breaks down. He has to get out and push it. A high angle shot
shows the car with Berenice inside, driving up the middle of the road.
This is a classic final shot. The lovers are leaving the town to start a new
life. The camera is taking us out of the scene, signalling a high degree of
narrative closure. The only thing is, if s not the ending. Shaggy lies dead,
spread-eagled in high shot, a fallen cangaciero, entering into legend.
People gather round as a photographer documents the scene. Rocket
articulates his desire for a camera.

A new story begins. As Rocket and Stringy walk to school left to right as
boys in their shorts a blue car enters the frame on the right and crosses
to the left in front of them. This acts as a wipe that then reveals them as
young men in long trousers. The yellow tones of the 1960s give way to the
predominantly blue-grey of the 1970s, accompanied by a change in sound

from samba to funk. The last remnants of the Sixties are wiped away. The
Seventies have arrived and with them a new emphasis, a different story.

Two: 'Hold ups bring in chicken shit. The big bucks are in drugs' - The Story of Little Ze

l" ittle *Dice, my* arse. *My name* is *Little Ze now.··*

The middle story is of a changed *favela,* now a place of crime and
violent criminals. It illustrates Oiegues ·complaining phase· as the City's
inhabitants begin to experience not just poverty but the living hell of the
drug wars. Little Ze, the centre of the film, provides the missing pieces
for the first story [what happened at the Miami Motel, what happened to
Goose) and sets up the last [his enmity with Carrot and his jealousy of
Ned) . He encapsulates the hopelessness and violence of the corrupted
space. The *favela* may have become a rotten place, but he was always b.ad

Little ze·s story begins with his acting as lookout at the Miami Motel.
Whilst the Trio attempt to rob he is envious of their antics. Waiting at the
Motel he is bored by inactivity: "they"re having fun not me.· The missing
parts of the narrative are filled in by the image of the smiling child who
laughs as he executes the clients and staff. Rocket tells us "That night
Little Ze satisfied his thirst to kill.· The narrative has entered another
space, the bad seed, the evil child, not young men on an adventure.

After this excitement Dice/ Ze has to make do with petty crime as he and Bene make out as shoeshine boys and muggers on the streets of Rio. The final missing piece of the Trio's story recounts the murder of Goose. A montage of shots gives us six images that turn the boy Dice into the man Ze. His transformation follows the pattern of the rise of the gangster from poverty to drug lord complete with a retinue of followers. His rebirth is through a candlelit voodoo christening ceremony that evokes the dead. A priest in a wheelchair gives him a magic amulet that seals his pact with death and sanctifies his violent behaviour. God has forgotten him and he can gain power through Exu the devil, 'the light that shines forth'. The glimpse of slum dwellers wearing gold jewellery, with their cars and girls [including Berenice, now a real gangster's girlfriend) bears some relationship to the understood paraphernalia of the gangster film. Ze takes control by liquidating his enemies, paying off the police, taking over the Apartment aQd stabilising the area through fear so that playboys can feel safe buying their drugs there. His domain is not an extensive one, his power is localised. The gang members are mere accessories, and he is still seen in the now rundown Apartment. He is a sadistic psychopath whose frustration with the outside world manifests itself in his apparent enjoyment of torturing and killing children.

Ze wants full control but Bene, the person who he feels closest to, begins to be absorbed by the outside world that Ze isn·t seen to enter. Bene takes on the appearance and attitude of a groovy playboy and makes new acquaintances. Thiago can offer the style that Ze can't; Angelica can show him another way. ze·s hatred of Ned begins through his jealousy of Ned's easy and popular demeanour. Ze can only retaliate and compete by humiliating him.

Three: 'The slum had been purgatory. Now it was hell' - The Story of Knockout Ned

Carlos Diegues· ·complaining phase· was the time when living in the *favela* was close to hell. Story number three conforms to this. The brutality escalates and the results of the drug wars are seen in the high body count. During this period Ned turns from an upright citizen into a gaunt figure bent on revenge and corrupted by violence. Daniel Rezende has stated that the aims for this part of the film were for its overall feeling

'Just knowing me is enough to get you killed by Little Ze...

to be claustrophobic, with the characters hemmed into the tight spaces of the City and the overall tone becoming colder and dirtier. *City of God* becomes a combat film where the protagonists are surrounded and trapped by the enemy and there is really no way out. In contrast to this Rocket is seen in an atmosphere of normality and freedom - working In the newspaper office, riding around in the newspaper delivery van with the open aspect of the mountain in the distance.

Played by Seu Jorge, a cult singer in Brazil who sings on the soundtrack, Ned's attractiveness and charm are communicated from his first appearance on the bus. He is able to remain a sympathetic character in spite of his later actions because he is given motivation for what he does. Because we originally see him as basically good, we consider that it is the hell of the City that corrupts him. He is briefly allowed to have a family and a lover, even if their inclusion appears to be so that they c_an be the objects of ze·s violence and provide Ned with his motivation to kill. The stages of Ned's transition to brutality are seen in a swift montage. Three robberies are shown. The first in the gun store does not shed any blood as Ned stops anyone shooting. He then robs banks but his stated rule is no killing except in self-defence. The third time whip pans show the exception becoming the rule. The size of the guns increases as the fighting becomes more ferocious. We are reminded of the connection between the dimensions of the weapons and the exhibition of power In the Blaxploitation film of the 1970s.

Ned is one destructive character who is still seen to retain some humanity. He is visibly moved by the death of Steak and Fries and it is his mourning over the boy's body that leads to his capture by the police, the interes_t shown by the media, his appearance on TV and his notoriety. This Int erview, simulated within the film, is the one that accompanies the en_d credits. We are allowed to envisage Ned as a real person, the nearest thing to a tragic hero that the film offers us.

NOTES:

36 See Terry Eagleton [1983] on the work of Gerard Genette in Literary *Theory: An Introduction* Oxford: Blackwell

37 See David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson [1986] on Russian Forma lists in Film *Art: An Introduction* New York: Allred A Knopf

38 The Chapter headi ngs ,ell the story in themselves: The Sixties, The Story of the Tender Trio, Three Months Late r, The Seventies. The Story of the Apartment. The Story of Littl e Ze, A Sucke r-s Life, Flirting with Crime The Story of Kno cko ut Ned, The Beginn ing of the End .

39 Ian Maldron-Mantgani (10/1/2003) *The UK Critic* @http://www.ukcritic.com

40 Daniel Eth ering ton Chann el 4.com

41 ibid

42 Ed Gonz ales Slant magazine.com

43 *The Harder they* Come Perry Henzel 1972 Jamaica [International Films lnc l. Ava ilab le on VHS and DVD.

44 My *Crazy Life* l Mi *Vida Loca* Allison Anders 1993 US/ UK [Ch an nel 4 Fil ms/ Cinn eville Inc/ HBO/ Show case Ent erta inment). Available on VHS and DVD.

45 *La Haine* Matthieu Kassovitz 1995 France [Lanzennec /Canal Plus/La Sept). Available on VHS and DVD.

46 **ForeignFilms.com**

47 Megan Turner *New York Post*

48 Lisa Schwazbaum *Entertainment Weekly*

49 Kenneth Turan *LA Times*

50 Andrew Pulver *The Guardian* 24th May 2002

51 **FernandoMereilles interview with Ed Gonza les for *Slant* magazine @ http://www.slantmagaz ine .com**

52 **Paolo Li.ns interviewed in *Noticias de uma Guerra particular/ News from a Private War* (Kat ia Lund and** Jose Moreira Salles 1998). The documentary is in cluded as a fea ture on the DVD of *City of God.*

53 See the quote from Sergio Augusto from the press books of *Orfeu* in Lu cia Nagib (Ed) *The New Brazilian Cinema* **op.crt. p.162**

3. MICRO ELEMENTS

3.1 STYLE

One of the most noted things about *City of God* has been its cinematic style. In any study of this we need to look at how the **content** of the film [the **'macro' elements)** interacts with the components that make up the **form** [the **'micro' elements)** and help shape the meaning. Do we feel at times that the style overwhelms the substance - that our engagement with the film is purely one of reaction to the exhilarating images and sounds we are presented with? Far removed from the Neo-Realism of early *Cinema Novo's* quasi-documentary form, *City of* God's highly inventive stylisation relentlessly draws our attention to its own cont rivance .

What we might consider here is the way that the film represents a marked c hang e in its audience's way of reading a text. The style of the so-called 'cls ic realist film' evolved through devices such as smooth **continuity editing** with its use of **match cuts** used to construct an illusion that what we are seeing is unmediated. This so-called 'transparent' style flows in front of our eyes and apparently requires little effort on the part of the spectator. As noted, some of the responses to *City of God* enthused about the film's ·realism·. Realism, formerly associated with the long take and deep focus that allow the spectator to ·naturally ' absorb the material, here gives way to what some now perceive as the new virtual reality, associated with the ever increasing fragmentation of the world around us. This fragmented style, so apparent in *City of God ,* conforms to the way that we are now used to consum ing our entertainment; not as a flow but as a succession of jumpy and often disparate images - ad breaks inserted into a drama, MTV videos, skipping chapters on DVDs, channel hopping on our TVs, fast moving computer games. These appear to have become the new transparency and, for some [particularly the youngl. the required formula for viewing a film. The control buttons that we are able to use give us the illusion that we are in charge of the material, not just spectators but protagonists who can make decisions as to its outcome. How far this style lets us ·experience· the lives of the characters is debatable.

Mise-en-scene and cinematography

As the film depicts the changing nature of the slum the *favela* itself features as a major character. We see the City grow and change. The open environment where there are spaces to play football gives way to the closed one with the cramped and narrow streets confined by apartment blocks, tin roofed shacks and graffiti spattered walls. The characters become more and more hemmed in by the encroachment of these walls and barriers, their dimensions emphasised by overhead shots. The characters are imprisoned, the killings are speeded up. Things happen quickly here, life can be ended in a second.

The Runts are not seen playing football. They gather together in a corner to discuss· moving up· in the pecking order. There they can be trapped and tortured and no one intervenes. When Little Dice and Bene were delinquent children they could find a place where they could hide out to divide their spoils before being accosted by Goose. Their hide out is a shack under construction surrounded by outside space - Goose can leave and *move* freely, and only turns back because Dice calls him.

In the ?Os the only open spaces appear to be those outside the slum - the beach, the newspaper delivery van as it makes its way round the Rio streets at night. Even the 'inside· spaces outside the City are places of free movement - the newspaper offices and Marina·s apartment contrast with the Apartment and Ned's home.

The atmosphere created by lighting, cinematography and camera movement can be illustrated by looking at the disco scene where Bene is killed. Shots of the dancing crowd from the dancers· eye line contrast with high angle shots from Rocket's point of view as he puts discs on the turn table, emphasising his position as an observer and not a participant.

The party atmosphere is undercut by what we see inside and outside - Ze humiliates Ned at gunpoint as a nervous and jittery Blacky is coming to kill him. Thiago brings a friend to buy cocaine. The argument between Bene and Ze in the crowded space flashes back to a sepia image of them as boys. This then cuts to Bene's final dance, his argument and tussle with Ze and his shooting by Blacky. The single frame strobe effect, together with the unsettling zooms, disorient the spectator. We can't see what is happening but we can see and hear its effect. The violent visual assault sets up the subsequent scenes - the murder of Blacky by Carrot, the rape of Ned's girlfriend and the ensuing terrible mayhem at Ned's home.

Music: 'The heartbeat of Brazil'

Brazilian popular music is an important component of Brazilian cultural and social life. At the time when much of the population was illiterate songs emphasised the oral traditions of the poor and disadvantaged. Radical ideas could be represented by the sweet, subtle and seductive sounds. The military regime that ruled Brazil in the 1960s found such music threatening and musicians and singers such as Gilberto Gil were forced into exile.

Brazilian music therefore is the music of opposites, radical and popular, exciting and soothing, happy and sad. Brazilians describe it as *'saudade'* which can be translated as 'longing· or 'nostalgia'. The combination of Portuguese Fado, African rhythms, American jazz and traditional South American instruments such as the *cuica* and the *barimbau* gives the music a unique sound. The samba beat is particularly associated with the *favelas* 'in the head and feet of each person· and provides what has been said to be 'the heartbeat of Brazil'. The music then often acts in a similar way to Rocket's commentary, as a seductive counterpoint to the vio lent images. In many films the music underscores the mood of the drama played out on the screen. A tense, violent or emotional moment will be signalled and echoed by the sounds we hear. The music that accompanies the end credits of *City of God* is indeed *saudade,* leaving the audience with a feeling of nostalgia. How does this work against the carnage and deprivation we have been witnessing? Does it neutralise the impact of the film?

Editing: Kuleshov and Eisenstein

In an interview with Alex Bellas of *The Guardian* Katia Lund stated her case to be credited as the film's co-director. Her work was with the performers. Daniel Rezende has emphasised that his use of digital editing allowed him to experiment and try out new ideas. He claims that many

of the interpretations of the characters were created at the editing stage. This suggests that meaning was created through what we can identify as the Kuleshov effect, formulated in the early 1920s. Kuleshov maintained that it was the editor/director who took the shot footage and created the film through the way the shots were joined together. Different results could be obtained with the same footage. 54

Montage is used for emotional effect. The active and powerful way that it drives the narrative by combining different shots can be examined in terms of other theories used in early Soviet cinema. These were laid down by Eisenstein in 1923 in his essay *The Montage of Attractions* where he set out the importance of editing used not to **link** shots in **continuity** but to make them **collide** against each other to produce **shocks.** Eisenstein called these ·attractions· to stimulate audience response because ·the film derives its energy from the conscious mental leaps of the spectator'. He proposed that such shots opposed the illusionary realism of Hollywood because they stress the artificiality of the work. The spectators would not be deceived into thinking they were watching actuality, but would act as what he called ·co-creators· and be constantly reminded that the film was a construct. Opposing or colliding shots move from one mode to another - high to low angles, close up to long shots, movement within the frame left to right, right to left, up to down. **Long takes** allow the spectator to settle into the scene, **montage** jolts the spectator into a confrontation with the material, constantly removing and changing the image. We can illustrate this by looking at how the film begins.
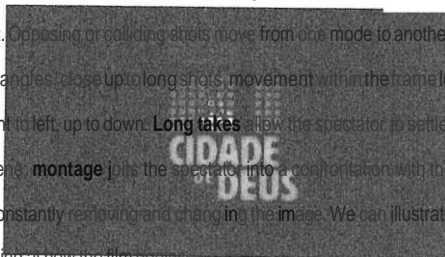
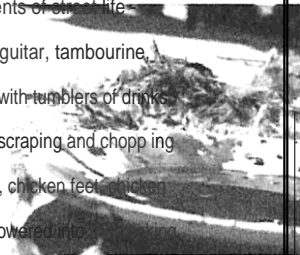**Confronting the material: The Flying Chicken**

The ·restless· style, characteristic of the whole film, announces itself from the start. The film begins not with the customary establishing shot but with flashes that illuminate a series of close ups - knife, hand and stone - with a cut to black between each shot. This is repeated five times in quick succession like a camera

flash bulb lighting the scene. The only sound is the knife being sharpened. Close ups of hands on the neck of a guitar coincide with the entry of the music, the samba that is associated with Brazil, but particularly with the culture of the slums. This sets up the location as a stereotypical tropical festive scene stressing its 'local colour· in fragments, making music, making food. These images could accompany a music video as accesso ries to the meaning, not prime makers of it.

Another photographic flash illuminates Rocket with his camera. He zooms out from behind a network of bars, which collapses down into his image. This is in fact a flash forward to the scene that will replay very near the end of the film, where we will see the reverse shot denied us here, that of Ze bribing the police after his gun battle with Ned and subsequent arrest. Rocket has been introduced as a key player in the drama, but still only a fragment.
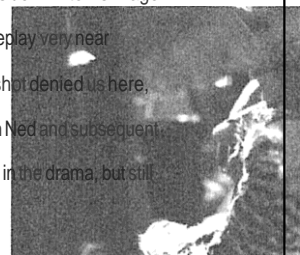
The series of tight close ups zooms in and out on further fragments of street life - faces, guitar, tambourine, hands with tumblers of drinks, hands scraping and chopp ing carrots, chicken feet, chicken being lowered into a cooking pot . The first mid shot of the film is of a live chicken on the table, tethered by its leg amidst piles of chicken feathers. The atmosphere is relaxed but the chicken is not.

A cut provides the first long establishing shot of the film. The chicken jumps down off the table making a bid for freedom. Brazilians describe a situation that appears to have taken off and be going but will soon crash to the ground as a ·flying chicken·. This apparent freedom is illusory - the chicke n might try to fly but it can·t get very far. A close up low level shot from the chicken's point of view shows a plate of

blood on the ground, a reminder of the chicken's fate.
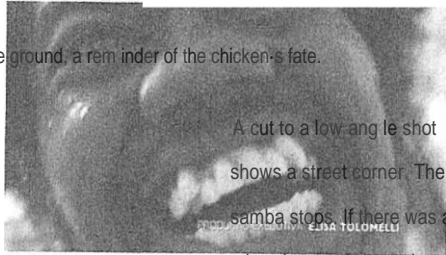
A cut to a low angle shot shows a street corner. The samba stops. If there was a relaxed atmosphere, we have left it behind. The chicken appears around the corner and a drum beat accompanies a cut to a close up of a man who we will later know as Little Ze. His exhortation to 'Go after that chicken!' begins the chase sequence of colliding shots - close ups followed by high shots. The music changes to a more urgent tempo.
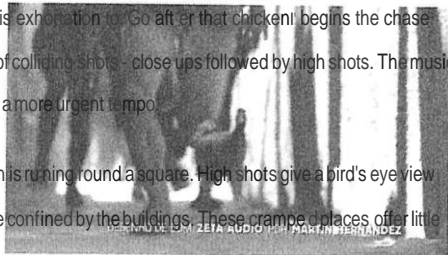
The chicken is running round a square. High shots give a bird's eye view of the space confined by the buildings. These cramped places offer little escape.

A sound cut, from music to silence accompanies an abrupt change to a different place. Rocket and Stringy, filmed from a low angle, walk down some steps. We hear their conversation about Rocket's quest for a photograph and his fear of Little Ze.

A cut back to the chase cont rasts with the more leisurely pace of the walking Rocket and Stringy. The chicken is running for its life pursued by Ze and his gang. If they catch the chicken they will kill it, if Ze catches Rocket he'll kill him. A fast tracking camera follows the chicken. The gang chase it, firing their guns into the

air. A police car arrives. The flying chicken is trapped between the police car that would run it over and the gang who would kill it, just as Rocket appears to be.
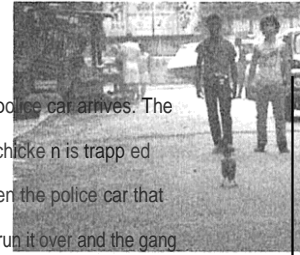
The circular shot: 'but in the City of God if you run away they get you'

The montage of con flicting shots and the collision of the fast paced editing now give way to the spectacular circling shots which will morph Rocket from a young man to a boy, and the *Favela* to its former days of low rise shacks and open spaces. The meeting up of two of the principal characters initiates the story, the circular shot will provide the bridge between what they were and what they will become. In the stand-off Rocket is in the middle with the police behind him and the gang in front, not part of either faction. This is a position he will maintain as the neutral voice of the film. Ze acts as if he doesn't know Rocket's name but the film will show several encounters between them covering a number of years. He first asked his name in the 60s when he demanded the football. As Little Dice he hung around with Rocket's brother Goose. Later we will see him kill Goose for pleasure. Rocket is also the person who has sealed ze·s notoriety by taking photographs of his gang that have made the front page of the newspapers. At the end of the film we will return to this scene and Rocket will take more pictures, only this time it will be of Ze bribing the police. We can remind ourselves that what we are seeing is Rocket's version of events. Is he trying to distance himsel f from any notion of familiarity with the 'motherfucking hood'?
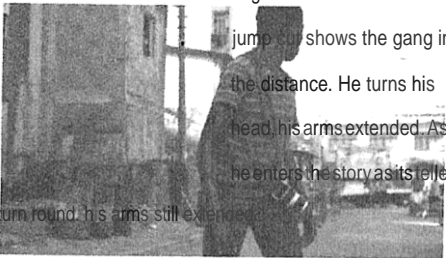
As Rocket, centre screen, goes for the chicken we cut to a mid shot from Rocket's point of view. The gang is in a line across the screen. Some of the guns are pointing at Rocke t. Thia go is one of the

gang. Thiago also knows Rocket, they both used to hang out with the 'Groovies· on the beach. He fetched Rocket to take photographs, now he points a gun at him.

To interrupt this action, take us into flashback and begin Rocket's commentary; we have a medium shot as he begins to turn his head. A jump cut shows the gang in the distance. He turns his head, his arms extended. As he enters the story as its teller he starts to turn round, his arms still extended.

The camera begins to revolve anti-clockwise. The background revolves clockwise. The camera revolves until it is in front of Rocket. he is the centre of the tale. The police are now behind. This 3600 turn is repeated, now out of focus.
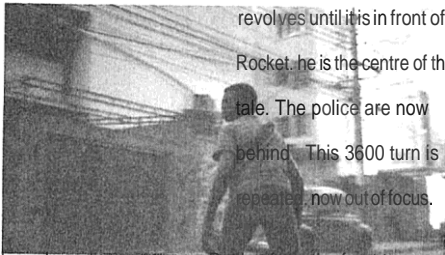
Cut to tilted angle, police with guns. Rocket from the front turns clockwise, the camera circles him clockwise until it is behind him again. Rocket is caught between the rock of the cops and the hard place of the gang. He can only observe the action.

The camera completes a second clockwise 3600 turn. Rocket centre screen. The scene dissolves into young Rocket, still centre screen, now dressed in a yellow shirt. The crowded buildings turn into one story simple shacks, the colour turns from cold grey-blue to warm yellow.

The camera movement continues in a third turn. The title on screen informs us its THE SIXTIES. The emphasis is on the circular. we will return to the opening scene and go beyond it. This scene when replayed will turn into a pitched and bloody battle but now instead of crowded streets there is open space. Rocket still has him arms out, not to catch a chicken but to try and stop a football. He is keeping goal. The ball is kicked and flies past him.
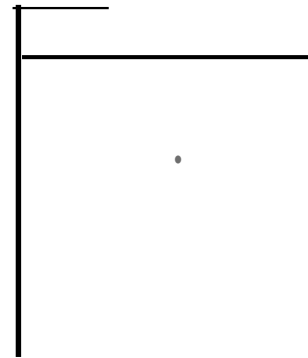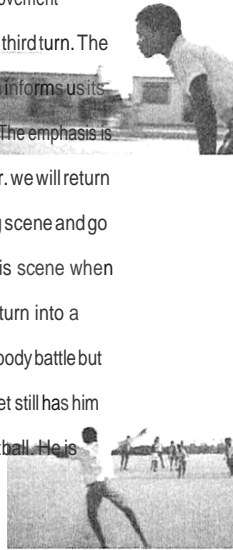
Contemplating the material: ·...the place was ill fated'

To contrast with this we can look at a different kind of editing and the use of the dissolve in 'The Story of the Apartment'. The scenes that precede this chapter take place outside. Rocket is on the beach with Angelica. He offers to go and get her a joint at Blacky's. In a series of cuts he goes from the beach to the Apartment through narrow streets of low shacks with tin roofs, now with apartment blocks in the background. We see long shots down alleyways, empty except for a mangy dog. Whip pans show his progress. A low angle looks up between apartments followed by a cut to a dark hallway with its peeling paint. Rocket has arrived. He goes down a dark corridor and knocks on a door. Cut to Blacky inside who opens the door. The Apartment consists of a living room containing a few pieces of furniture including a broken refrigerator; the walls are daubed with paint. At the back, on either side of the front door are a bedroom to the left and a bathroom to the right. where a basin and lavatory can be seen. This is a 'kitchen sink' setting worthy of a social realist film.

Rocket asks for a joint. While he is waiting there is a banging on the front door. Blacky pulls out a gun. Cut to the fixed long shot that will tell the story. The man we saw as the leader chasing the chicken at the beginning and confronting Rocket with a gun comes in with his followers. Blacky challenges him, 'You'd show up like this at my place?' The reply 'Who said it was your place?' begins 'The Story of the Apartment'.

As the story is told the camera stays in its fixed position. We are in a similar position to the spectators of early cinema, watching from a place in the stalls of a theatre. We will not enter the Apartment ourselves, or see things from the characters· points of view. This is in a marked contrast to the highly mobile style of most of the film. A wide angle lens and deep focus give an exaggerated perspective to the room where figures appear large in the foreground, small in the background. The story is told with a series of dissolves where people appear, disappear and reappear in different parts of the room. In the Apartment the characters watch themselves. The walls change colour, the furniture moves and objects change. The lighting gets darker and darker. The story appears like a series of tableaux, conjuring up Victorian genre paintings with their subjects taken from daily life, using this realism to tell moral tales such as *Past and Present* ![Augustus Egg, 1858, London, Tate Britain] or *A Hopeless Dawn* ![Frank Bramley, 1888, London, Tate Britain]. The double images where the characters are seen simultaneously in different parts of the room are also reminiscent of Early Renaissance paintings such as *The Adoration of the Magi* ![Gentile da Fabriano, 1423, Florence, Uffizi] where the Magi in the foreground worship the Christ Child as they make their way down the hill in the background. As usual Rocket guides us through the story that begins with the dissolve into a tidier, more homely version, with the overall colour of the warmer past. Here his narration becomes heterodiegetic, as he becomes the story teller outside the narrative.

The Apartment is mainly yellow, the predominant colour of the 6os *favela;* a table in the foreground right, a yellow curtain draped behind it conceals the lavatory from our view. The bedroom back left is tidier. As Oona Zelia fades in left and walks towards the camera her pace is leisurely, this is her home. She deals in drugs, also in special favours, a boy can be seen with her in the bedroom. The image of them on the right in the living room fades out. The movement between living room and bedroom is clear, as is the nature of the favours.

Big Boy is [...] guides in [...] in front right [...] attack her [...] and fade out of th[...] Boy is taking over by force. Whilst committing his ass[...] he appears bottom right impassively watching [...] spectacle. [...] leader who shows little emotion [...] curtain fades out. Big Boy has no need for such feminine trappings. Oona Zelia also fades out. She has disappeared, easily disposed of, like the other women in the favela.

Blacky and then Carrot fade into the picture. Carrot is at home in the apartment. Time passes, signalled by his change of T-shirt. As Aristotle fades into the scene someone is sitting to the far right packaging dope. He continues to do this through the scenes that follow. Although apparently unengaged with what is going on he, like us, is a witness to the dealings. His back is to us as though he is a fellow member of the audience. Whatever is going on is not passing unnoticed.
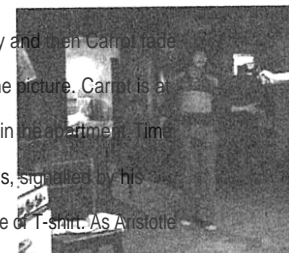
Carrot and Aristotle make an agreement but whilst they are doing so Big Boy appears large in the front left. He knows what is going on and now the screen is very dark. Big Boy's ultimatum leads to Aristotle's death. The

Apartment is now very dark indeed. Without changing camera positions the spectator just watches from a distance and listens to the story told by someone who wasn't there. We can have no illusion that we are participating in [and therefore having an influence on) the action. We are ready for the entrance of Little Ze.

NOTES:

54 For a explanation of Kuleshov's theories on editing see *Film Technique* Vsevelod Pudovkin 1929   ) as quoted 1n Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar [1981) *The Technique of Film Editing* Butterworth and Co.

4. MESSAGES AND VALUES

4.1 RECORDING VIOLENCE: THE CAMERA AND THE GUN

Wilson Rodrigues - pho to graph er. A neutral view of violence?

When the leftist government of Joao Goulart was overthrown in 1964, Glauber Rocha wrote of his determination to fight back using a camera, 'the only weapon I could master·. The verb 'to shoot' is used to describe both the firing of a weapon and the taking of a picture. A film that illustrates this is *Under Fire* [R oge r Spottiswoode, 1983, US).[5] The main characters are journalists sent to document the guerrilla war in Nicaragua. The film contrasts the detachment of looking through the lens as an objective reporter for whom the revolution is just another story to be covered and the involvement in the partisan struggle, looking through the sights of a gun. This opposition of the came ra and the gun is one of the themes of the film. The reporter journalist is a part but not a participant of the violence, but the photographs he takes contribute to the partisan struggle by making the outside world aware of what is tak ing place .

Buscape / Rocket, the documenter and voiceover in *City of God,* is based on the photographe r Wilson Rod rigues. He becomes Rodrigues at the end of the film and his association with photography enhances his ·neutral· view of events. The poverty and violence are seen through the viewfinder of his camera, he documents the final shootout. He is the one who informs us what is taking place both on a local level [the *City of God*

itself) and at a national level (the slums of Brazil. One of the interesting things about *City of God* is how it mixes the notion of the reporter with his objective camera that is able to reveal the truth of a sordid and violent area with the film's own highly manipulated and constructed style.

Violence: An alternative image

As noted Meirelles has stated that his intentions in making the film were to bring the terrible conditions of the *favelas* to the public's attention. He tried to avoid showing violence, but only the effects of the violence. He doesn't think he glamorised crime and in his defence might well have cited Glauber Rocha's *The Aesthetics of Hunger*.[56] Rocha wanted to give Latin America an affirmative image to counteract the negative image it had as Third World Cinema. He rejected the 'paternalistic' view of the poor as victims and argued for a new means of expressing suffering and poverty. This he suggested would be done by using violent images, although these would be symbolic, not the explicit violence of Hollywood movies. This ·unbearable power' would reject the stereotyped image so prevalent in Europe and the USA:

> **We rediscovered the whole tradition of the modernist movement in the 1920s, a very aggressive and anarchistic surrealist movement, which is known in Brazil as *Tropicalismo*. We did some research on Brazilian literary and musical traditions and we discovered that the Tropicalist style had an infinite range of possibilities for communicating with the public through a very violent, very aggressive language that derives from a kind of picaresque urban comedy.**

> **...we are searching for a means of communicating with the public through a language already familiar to them, one that uses many elements created by the people themselves. Though the process will be a long one, we believe we can achieve a genuinely Brazilian cinema that, since the structures are very similar, can also be a genuinely Latin American one. This naturally leads to a new acting style, new uses of color and forms of montage.**

> **For us, the violent elements typical of Brazilian films are a means of provoking the public out of its alienation...The European audience**

> **sees war films and other commercial movies where people are massacred, and everyone applauds. In a Latin American film, human life has great value, and death is not shown superficially, but in a very dramatic form... I intended that explosion of violence [in *Antonio das Martes*] to have a symbolic dimension to give the scene more meaning. If the audience leaves the theatre discussing the violence of the last scene, that is a good sign because it indicates that the film stimulated discussion and that other issues will also be raised...**

> **Almost all Brazilian films deal with political and social problems . Each has a different stance, but they use very different forms...**

> **In my case I have a particular preference for violent films because I like the epic genre.**

> **A people who have suffered centuries of oppression have many violent aspects: problems of hunger and psychological neuroses that come from social and economic circumstances . (Glauber Rocha)**

Violence is *City of* God's main theme and the driving force of the film. Shootings, beatings and rape form the core of the action. Children are in no way innocent; they can be the perpetrators alongside the young men. The film's attitude to the violence it portrays can be debated. We could point out that Rocket, the character through whose eyes we see the story and who we are invited to sympathise with, does not kill or hurt anyone. He promises Goose that he won't touch the gun (although he does take it with him on his abortive night of crime) and does not try to avenge his brother's murder when confronted with Little Ze in the Apartment. As has been noted the position of both narrator and photographic documenter tend to place Rocket outside, or to the side of, events. He finds his way out of the City but has to return to take the pictures that other photographers can't. Is violence necessary for him to succeed? Does his privileged position makes him part of it even if he is not a perpetrator? There is no recourse to the law as the police are corrupt. Is the solution to get out as Rocket does?

Bene, the ·coolest hood in the City of God', eventually rejects violence in favour of peace and love. However, this doesn't save him and his death is bound up with his rejection of ze·s values . In attempting to go he is also leaving his psychopathic friend without any restraining force. His leaving,

in whatever form, unleashes more terrible forces. Does the film see characters like Bene as unable to quit, even if they want to?

If we are looking for a positive resolution to the narrative we could find it in the outcome of Rocket's story. He is saved. The film ends in the late ?Os, early Bos but from then on the situation in the *favelas* has got much worse. In the 1960s children were playing football, at the end of the film children have killed the main gang leaders and the Runts are brandishing guns. They talk about killing everyone but their ambition seems naive and as such, more amusing than chilling. Does this ending turn the dark tone into a lighter one? Does Rocket's success provide the narrative with any kind of compensating values? What kind of messages does the film leave us wi.th at its conclusion? Reviewers and critics were for the most part pos!t!ve and even fulsome in their praise of the film·s messages but there were some who questioned the ethics of the whole project.

4.2 IS MISERY ENTERTAINING?

Much of the praise for *City of God* centred on its revelation to audiences of the scale of the violence and the extent of the problems of the *favelas*. This was seen as an intended social comment, a humanitarian and worthy position supporting the idea that the making of the film had been motivated by a wish for change:

> **Since the film's world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival Mereilles has used the film's unprecedented success as a platform to focus the world's attention on the darkness of Rio's slums, one of the most violent and dangerous places in South America. Take *City of God* then as a humanitarian effort, Mereilles attempt at globalising the horrors of the favelas for the sake of their potential emancipation. *City of God* has taken on a life of its own as a stirring work of political action. (Ed Gonzales J**s1

The Political Film Society linked the film with recent Brazilian history and the election of a left wing President :

> *City of God* **thus serves as a reminder of the horrors of an unbridled economic exploitation that motivated the Brazilian public to reject American backed rulers and to embrace a more democratic form of government.** 58

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Other critics, however, were not so positive. The timeframe of the film, the 1960s to perhaps the early Bos, coincides with a turbulent and bloody period in recent Brazilian history. When interviewed about the terrible situation in the *favelas* in *News from a Private War* [1998] Paulo Lins lays the blame on the 1964 coup, which overthrew the reformist government of Joao Goulart and replaced him with a military dictator. This ushered in a time when all opposition was brutally crushed and civil rights were suspended. Death squads backed and trained by the CIA, together with a corrupt police, helped the military keep their hold on the country until 1985. Many artists and intellectuals went into exile. *News from a Private War* is a documentary abo ut the present, and attempts to expla in the situation as it exists now in terms of what has happened in the past. *City of God* is a fictionalised story set in the recent past, but explanations and references to the past are minimal. They could be said to consist of chapter headings · The Sixties· and 'The Seventies· and some music from the period. The film has been criticised for what has been seen as its blinkered view of events; its only concession being Rocket's voiceover that explains the political decision to relocate the poor to government housing on the edge of Rio. This avoidance of any kind of historical perspective was one of the articulated doubts about the film. Other criticisms centred on its excessive style working to mask the seriousness of its content, lending glamour to the violence and making it at best palatable but at worst voyeuristic:

> **Meirelles' movie does express somewhat more the attitude of a mesmerised tourist than of a probing and angry investigator ... The combination of these elements, however, works to create an inappropriate coolness that erects barriers to any serious involvement with the film's protagonists. The result is a certain glamorising of the violence and a dehumanising of the films subjects...more akin to a mythological inferno than to its reality as the by-product of a bankrupt and irrational social order. (Joanne Laurier)[59]**

> **The truth is, no matter how energetic and professionally made *City of God* is, with all of its ready-made artiness, it reeks of a swindle. Its MTV-style editing pace and frantic camera work has by halfway through the film destroyed any possibility of engagement with the narrative and the characters. It's made to amaze and entertain, not**

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to provoke thought... Perhaps the reason why it is so popular is that in the end the film is a middle-class roller coaster ride in someone else's purgatory ... Bravado filmmaking? Yes. A masterpiece? *Never*. (Antonio Pasolini)[60]

I'm uncomfortable with Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund's *City of God* - not for its brutality, but for the slick cinematic treatment of that brutality. ...Neither about addictions or poverty, nor any of the social ills that create the situations documented in the picture, *City of God* is about children murdering children to a rollicking soundtrack and a parcel of slickified cinematic trickery. Artistic violence is escapist fare; marry it to actual historical tragedy and it becomes exploitation...The question of the picture isn't what to do with the *City of God,* but really why do anything when such cool movies can be _made from its suffering. Potentially a great film were it not based on fact, *City of God* makes a mistake in making human misery exhilarating - an invitation to rubberneck un-tempered by social responsibility, and the logical product of the widely held and cancerous belief that movies are really *ever* 'just' movies. (Walter Chaw)[61]

The lack of any wider context where the cond itions of the poor are presented as unable to be altered except by an individual getting out of the slums land leaving everyone else there] was also singled out for criticism, as was its fatalist opening ·!1 you run away, they'll get you and if you stay they·ll get you too·:

...this movie is almost too cool for its own good...Let's not pretend it's "important' from some moral or educational point of view ...the lack of a wider context makes the origin of all this mysterious, and in that way, untouchable and unchangeable. (Emilie Bicke rton)[62]

...How is a filmmaker to accurately portray a hellhole like *City of God* without placing it in a political and historical context, without perspective, without thinking about the past or the future? ... Undoubtedly *City of God* is sincere in its desire to call attention to the monstrous inhumanity perpetuated against Brazil's youth 'of the abyss·. However by virtue of its political and historical omissions, Meirelles' work runs the risk of reinforcing a social mood that views the conditions of the poor as wrenching but unalterable. This works

against a genuine understanding of the essence of life in the favelas, a prerequisite for pointing the way to the abolition of the social conditions that breed them. (Joanne Laurier)[63]

The legitimac y of using the poverty of the develo ping world for the entertainment and distraction of the west can be debated around other such criticisms of the depictions of the *favelas.* When *City of* Men was shown on BBC 4 in the autumn of 2004 it provoked a stinging criticism from *The* Guardian:

In fact the sole problem with *City of Men* is that it's entertaining first and ·worthy' second - in other words, and to quote Johnny Rotten out of context, it provides a cheap holiday in other people's misery. Like a heart-rending feature on Rwandan orphans in the middle of a glossy Sunday magazine, it gives pampered western milquetoasts like you and me a chance to feel somehow engaged with the world, to feel concerned, well-informed and sympathetic - but only from a safe distance. It might go well with a glass of pinot grigio, but no matter how much you like it, no matter how much you wring your hands and blub about how desperately sad the world is, unless you're *moved* to board a flight to Brazil with a 1,000-point plan of action in your pocket, all *you' ve* done is enjoy the spectacle. (Charlie Brooke rl[64]

In the music video 'They Don't Care About Us', shot by Katia Lund in the Oona Marta *Favela,* Michael Jackso n, a millionaire who lives in the utmost luxury, was filmed among the dispossessed in a slum. The song supposedly makes a social comment but Ivana Bentes has accused Jackson of appropriating the image of the slum and using what she describes as 'images of misery as a plus to his own image ...Jackson turns poverty into another banality' .[65] Has the use of such images in order to sell a song meant that we no longer find them disturbing or upsetting? In making comparisons between the New Brazilian Cinema and that of *Cinema Novo* it has been pointed out that *Cinema Novo* brought the situations of the poor and dispossessed of Brazil to publi c attent ion. What evidence is there that *City of God* does this?

4.3 AUDIENCE RESPONSES

Audiences as well as critics have expressed differing views of the film. These can also be divided into those who found the style, inventiveness, pace and sheer energy helped draw their attention to the situation the film was depicting, and those who found it extraneous, suggesting that it trivialised or romanticised a wretched situation. Internet sites, particularly IMDB User Comments,[66] provide the forums that allow film-goers to express these viewpoints in no uncertain terms. The following are just a few examples:

> *City of God* is a hard pill to swallow as it wallows in violence, offers up a hearty dose of moral ambiguity, an almost pornographic take on the criminals it depicts, and leaves the viewer with no real solution or hope that this cycle can ever conceivably come to an end...With its ultra-slick and highly addictive presentation, the film dupes unsuspecting viewers into witnessing all the depravity as well.

> Here in Brazil the film was quite controversial. Even if it is probably Brazil's biggest box office success...many people disliked the way it was made, highly stylistic and more concerned with action than with showing reality.

> The stylish presentation here I fear will make the gunplay intoxicating for some immature viewers.

> *Cidade de Deus* is so high on technique that by the end of it one wonders if it's actually based on a true story! It's kick ass but fails to make one feel anything for the characters.

> This film has left me completely cold and disgusted by the filmmakers intentions.

> Once again an entrepreneur has managed to turn the misery of the Brazilian slums into an exportable commodity. Slickly packaged within the ultra violent veneer of the post Tarantino gangster genre *City of God* is replete with bullets, bodies and just enough flesh to keep the international distributors happy.

In this 'style verses substance· debate, however, the responses that leap to the film's defence were definitely in the majority:

> I find it impossible to believe that anyone could walk out of that film without having been emotionally impacted. Perhaps it is because, coming from a generation that has grown up with MTV, I know how to prevent a shaky camera from distracting me from a story.

> The shaking camera I felt only added to the urban feel of the movie.

> A thought provoking film that is also riveting in its intensity. Please see it.

> If there 's one thing that makes this movie so unforgettable, it's the dramatic reality we witness.

> This outstanding story line is paired with a smart, witty script, great acting and some dazzling directing work. The package as a whole is brilliant.

> It simply radiates off of the screen in a way that few privileged films do each year.

Audience responses to a film which contains powerful material and has a stated agenda return us to the Third Cinema debates of the late 60s and 70s, the aims of *Cinema Novo*, ideas on popular cinema and the relationship of the film and the spectator.

Giving them knowledge, if not insight, into the deprivation of some communities in the developing world may change nothing. Raising debate, however, about the nature and power of cinema and the effect it may have on its spectators is perhaps the most important component of studying *City of God.*

NOTES,

55 *Under Fire* Roger Spottiswoode 1983 US [Orion/ Lion's Gate/ Greenberg Brothers[Available on VHS and DVD. 56

Glauber Rocha in an interview with Cuban filmmaker Miguel Torres, translated by Julian e Burton. First.. appeared in Cine *Cu bano*, no 60/6l/62 [1970l as -Enlr evista con Glauber_ Rocha sabre Antonio das Mortles and reproduced as Cinema Novo and the Dialectics of Popular Culture In Burton [ed] *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America* op.cit. pp.108, 109

57 Ed Gonzales, introduction to interview with Fernando Mereilles *Slant* Magazine.com

58 *Political* Film *Society@* http://www.geocities.com/- polfilms

59 Joanne Laurier "Sincere bu/ Avoiding Difficult Questions· *World Socialist Web Site@* http)/www. org/ articles/2004/mar2004/city_moJ .shtml

60 Antonio Pasolini /{amera *Co.UK* ia http://www.kamera.eo.uk/reviews_exlra/city_city_of_god.php

61 Walter Chaw *Freak Film Central* @ http J/www.filml reakcent ral.net/screenvews cityolgod .htm

62 Emilie Bickerton *Culture Wars* @h ttp://www.culturewar s.org.uk

63 **Joanne Laurier WSincere but Avoiding Difficult Questions.. *World Socialist Web Site* op.cit**

64 Charlie Snooker ·-screen Bu m·· in *The Guide/The Guardian* Oct 2nd 2004

65 Ivana Bentes in Lucia Nagib ledl I20031 *New Brazilian Cinema* p.123

66 The site@ http J/www.imdb.com/title/tt03 l'2l,8/usercomment s has as of March 2016 74 pages containing 734 comments. See also ht tp J/www.kamera .co.uk/reviews_extra/city _ol_god.l p p

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FILMOGRAPHY

This is a list in chronological orde r of the main films that feature in works on Brazilian cinema. Availability differs dramatically between territories, alt hough the upsurge in inte res t in the cinema of South Amer ica since the release of *City of God* means that more recent fi lms a re mor e widely available than prev iously.

Favela dos meus *amores I Favela of my Love* (Humberto Mauro, 1934. Brazil)

Af6 Af6 Brasil (Wal lace Dow ney / Albe rto Ribero, 1935, Brazil)

Al6 Al6 Carnival [Adhemar Go nzaga, 1936, Brazil]

O·Cangaceiro I The Bandit (Lima Barreto, 1953, Braz ill

Rio cuaranta graus *I Rio 40 Degrees* [Nelson Pereira Dos Santos, 1954, Brazill

Rio Zona Norte I Rio North Zone [Nelson Pereira Dos Santos, 1957. Braz ill

Orfeu Negro I Black Orpheus [Marcel Camus, 1958, France/ Italy/ Brazil]

Vidas Secas *I Barren Lives* (Nel son Pereira Dos Santo s, 1963, Brazill

Ganga Zumba [Ca rlos Diegues, 1963, Brazill

Oz Fuzis l The Guns [Ruy Guerra, 1964, Braz il / Argent in a)

Deus e *o Oiabo na Terra do Sol/ Black God, White Devil* (Glauber Rocha, 1964, Brazill

Terra em *Transe l Land* in *Anguish* (G lauber Rocha, 1967, Brazil)

Fame de Amor I Hunger for Love [Nelson Pereira Dos Santos, 1968, Brazill

Azyl/o muito louco I The Alienist [Nelson Pereira Dos Santos, 1969, Brazill

Antonio das Martes I Oragao da Maldade Contra o *Santo Guereirro* [Glauber Rocha, 1969, Brazill

Macunaíma /Joaquim Pedro de Audrade, 1969, Brazil]

Os herdeiros I The Heirs /Carlos Diegues, 1969, Brazil/

Como era gostoso o meu Frances I How Tasty was my Little Frenchman !Nelson Pereira Dos Santos, 1970, Brazil)

Iracema - Uma Transa Amazonica /Jorge Bodanzky / Orlando Senna, 1974, Brazil/ West Germany / France)

0 *Amu/eto de Ogum I The Amulet of Ogum* /Nelson Pereira Dos Santos, 1975, Brazil]

A Tenda dos Mi/agres /Nelson Pereira Dos Santos, 1975, Brazill

Dona Flore Seus Dois Maridos I Dona Flor and her two Husbands /Bruno Barreto, 1976, Brazil)

Xica da Silva !Carlos Diegues, 1976, Brazil]

Gaijin os caminos da /iberdade I Gaiju: The Road to Liberty /Tizuka Yamasaki, 1979, Brazil)

Ate a U/tima Gola I To the Last Drop /Sergio Rezende, 1980, Brazil)

Bye Bye Brasil !Carlos Diegues, 1980, Brazil/ France)

A idade da Terra I The Age of the Earth /Glauber Rocha, 1980, Brazil]

Giselle /Vitor di Mello, 1983, Brazill

Pixote a lei do mais fraco I Pixote /Hector Babenco, 1981, Brazil)

Gabriela /Bruno Barreto, 1983, Brazill

Qui/ombo /Carlos Diegues, 1984, Brazil/ France/

Mem6rias do Carcere I Memories of Prison !Nelson Pereira Dos Santos, 1984, Brazil]

Jubiaba /Nelson Pereira Dos Santos 1985, Brazil)

Aque/as Dais /Sergio Amon, 1985, Brazil)

A Hora da Estrela I House of the Star /Suzana Amaral, 1985, Brazil]

0 *Beijo da mi/her aranha I Kiss of the Spider Woman* /Hector Babenco, 1985, Brazill

A Opera do Malandra /Ruy Guerra, 1986, France/Brazil)

A Dama do Cine Shanghai I The Lady from the Shanghai Cinema IGuilherme de Arruda Prado, 1987, Brazill

Amazonia: Vozes da Fioresto I Amazonia: Voices from the Rainforest /Moni Aguirre/ Glen Switkes, 1991, Brazil/ US/ Columbia)

. *Carmen Miranda: Bananas is my Business* /Helena Solberg, 1994, Brazil/ US)

Carlota Joaquina, Princess of Brazil /Carla Camurati, 1995, Brazil]

Terra Estrangeira I Foreign Land /Walter Salles, 1995 Brazil]

Os Ma/adores /Beto Brant, 1997, Brazil]

Central do Brasil !Walter Salles/ Daniela Thomas, 1998, Brazil/France)

0 *primeiro dia I Midnight* /Walter Salles/ Daniela Thomas, 1999, France/ Brazil)

Noticias de uma Guerra particular I News from a Private War /Kata Lund/ Joao Moriera Salles, 1998, Brazil)

Orfeu /Carlos Diegues, 1999, Brazil)

Abril Despedaado I Behind the Sun /Walter Salles, 2001, Brazil/ France/ Switzerland)

Domesticas !Fernando Meirelles / Nanda Oliva[, 2001, Brazil]

Carandiru /Hector Babenco, 2003, Brazil/ Argentina/

Deus e Brasileiro I God is Brazilian !Carlos Diegues, 2003, Brazill

Nina /Heitor Dhalia, 2004 , Brazill