

***City of God* in Several Voices:
Brazilian Social Cinema as Action**

Edited with an Introduction by
Else R P Vieira

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Introduction: Is the Camera Mightier than the Word?

Else R P Vieira

In January 2003, when *City of God*, directed by Fernando Meirelles and co-directed by Katia Lund, premièred in London, the BBC honoured me with an invitation to join him in a debate on the film. One week earlier, the launch of my own work – a virtual museum of the artefacts of the culture of landlessness in Brazil across various media (Vieira 2003) – had taken place in the House of Commons. Although we were pursuing different trajectories, our work converged in the sights and sounds of the dispossessed and socially excluded in Brazil. The interviewer's questions featured the film's great success and the heated political issues it raised on its release in Brazil the previous year; the possible connections between this and the landmark victory of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at the ballot box; the image of Brazil it portrayed; and what solution could be envisaged for the problem of marginalisation in Brazil. Part II of this book is in many ways an elaborated reply to these questions. Lula's own response to the film is the first of a series of statements on its social, political and aesthetic impact. This first President from the Workers' Party in Brazil's history watched *City of God* during his campaign; he expressed his view on the government's lost social role and insisted the then President screen the film. The anthropologist, political scientist and former National Secretary of Public Security Luiz Eduardo Soares elaborates on the tripod of neglect by the authorities, police brutality and the tyranny of the drug dealers who have settled in the *favelas* (slums, shantytowns) and have been attracting young children into the trade.

Cutting across hierarchies, social divides, and discursive frontiers, the book includes the views expressed by many diverse voices. The spokesman for the *favela* Cidade de Deus [City of God] discusses in three texts the view that the undeniable political benefits that the community derived from the film need to be weighed against the stigma created for those unrelated to the drug trade. Paulo Lins, who also grew up in Cidade de Deus and wrote the bestseller of the same name *City of God* (1997) that inspired the film, in turn spawned by an anthropological research project on criminality, offers a disclaimer to the view of this stigma, redirecting the polemics towards social mobilisation and the need for the creators of such social chaos to be ashamed, not the *favela*. Part II also features a survey of the publications that *City of God* has generated (Chapter 19). The impact of the film on television language, themes and patterns of beauty is the thrust of Leandro Rocha Saraiva's contribution, which further highlights the social fabric of the *favela* in the film's continuation in the television series *City of Men*, an off-shoot from the film, one episode of which was directed by Meirelles and Lund (Chapter 17). The original cast's contribution to this manuscript highlights their post-*City of God* engagement with film production as social and political action through the project *We in Cinema*, derived from their training as actors, to offer disadvantaged communities the empowering experience of film. It also projects the internationalisation of their platform through

the *Get Together* project and its international experience, *Get Together England* (Chapter 17). The first film they produced, during Lula's campaign, is eloquent. It reflects commotion in the country at the prospect of change but also the specific one of the *favela* responding to the experience of film. The original cast of *City of God* wanted to produce their own film but did not have any money. The very poor Rocinha *favelados* gathered whatever they could and backed the production. The film's three characters embody three political evils in their view indecision, authoritarianism and disguised authoritarianism while, through the themes of misery and social conflict, they enter into a dialogue with the now deceased exponent and main expositor of the political 1960s *Cinema Novo* [New Cinema], Glauber Rocha.

This book does not seek coherence where there can be no coherence. It does not seek a unifying discourse in its orchestration of Brazilian voices and reverberations in other countries. The dissenting voices were all invited to speak and I respect those who did not respond to the invitation. No attempt was made to incorporate only consensual voices. In fact, one of its objectives is to explore the polemics surrounding the film in Brazil and elaborate Lins's view that its social action is derived from the intense debates it generated on poverty, racism and violence.

The various processes involved in the making of the film are analysed in Part I. Co-producer Walter Salles¹ highlights the leading visual metaphor of *City of God*, whereby a most obscure character, a chicken, is singled out to represent a community or so many communities of people trapped in an unjust country (Chapter 1). A long statement by the director Meirelles covers the pre-production stage of *City of God*, including the writing of the script of a two-hour film out of the 700 pages of a panoramic novel with over 200 characters; it also explains in detail the very careful process of conveying realism through the cast, which eventually led to the search for and training of a number of amateur actors from the *favela*. But these *favela* actors were also expected to supplement what was in the script with their voices through the technique of improvisation, to the same extent that the professional actors were expected to 'de-interpret' their performance (Chapter 3). To this major issue of voice I will return while also advancing the view of the film as a palimpsest in which important traces of its teamwork production are inscribed.

Brazilian film is increasingly seen as the creator of conditions for the silent actors in society to articulate their own voice and for the 'filmless ones' to produce their own image. *Domésticas* [*Maids*] (2001) can be seen as Meirelles's first experimentation along these lines. His specific use of the technique of improvisation in *City of God*, in my view, could well be related to what Carlos Alberto Mattos, in another context, has referred to as the increasing demand that, in the last decade, Brazil has placed on its audio-visual production in terms of the authenticity of

¹ Walter Salles's career as a director features the award-winning *Central Station* (1998), *Behind the Sun* (2002) and *Motorcycle Diaries* (2004). In Britain his films have won a BAFTA Award for best film not in the English language.

the voice and of the image, to which its strong documentary tradition has responded with radical experimentations (2003). Those familiar with *Central Station* (Walter Salles, 1998) will remember the mass of illiterates who cannot benefit from the reach and power of writing, but whose voice and plight reverberate the world over as they dictate letters through the audio-visual medium. Fernando Meirelles follows the demand for authenticity in terms of actors, but, again in my view, asserts the film's social action also through the negotiation of the power of the voice.

City of God is a film also constituted by several discourses. In fact, it could be described as a mosaic of images or a palimpsest of voices adding new layers of meaning without erasing the previous ones. The book by Lins casts in fictional language the interviews he carried out in the *favela* as part of his anthropological research on criminality in Cidade de Deus under the directorship of Alba Zaluar. The analysis by Roberto Schwarz, a major literary critic who also advised Lins on editing matters, stresses its artistry in expressing an anthropological study on criminality, the demise of a major social type, the *malandro* (a Brazilian trickster) and the emergence of armed drug dealers. The evolution of the drug trade in Rio de Janeiro is taken up in Part III by a sociological study ranging from the equally folkloric numbers racketeers through to the invasion of the *favelas* by the armed gangs and, more recently still, by narco-guerrillas dispersed from Colombia and elsewhere (Chapter 21). But, returning to the book, Lins himself refers to the artistic and fictional voices which added rhythm, plot and suspense to the vast research he carried out not only in the *favela* but also in prisons, several newspapers and archives (Chapter 16). Lúcia Nagib, in her intersemiotic analysis (Chapter 5), reveals how the marked poetic language of the novel was masterfully transposed to the visual language of the film. Conversely, Leandro R. Saraiva's first contribution to this book advances the view that the demands of the film script entailed a loss of the anthropological substance and a shrinking of the immense social fabric of Lins's book.

City of God, according to Meirelles, was self-financed and conceived for a national audience. But, because of its later distribution by Miramax, it was eventually cast in the international circuit. Its avatars in fact epitomise the challenges increasingly faced by Brazilian cinema today: complying with the social pressures within and with the expectations of the market without. It also entailed a different apprehension of it; critics throughout the world have in fact identified a wide range of Latin American and international voices in the film. *City of God* in fact speaks many and at the same time no idioms. Orphanhood is the metaphor suggested by the critic Ruy Gardnier to express its affiliation to many traditions and at the same time to no one specific tradition. Such a syncretic dimension of its film language is enhanced as it draws upon a constellation of internationally recognisable film images. Juliet Line explores the sophisticated interweaving of Christian symbolism and Hollywood's dramatic techniques that, in her view, embellish the film, at the same time undermining its social critique; she also foregrounds the internationalisation of the *malandro* (Chapter 9). Following a reverse trajectory, Miranda Shaw interrogates the Anglo-Saxon critics' facile and exclusive framing of *City of God* within the gangster genre and how this

may have channelled a non-recognition of the important social and political tradition of Brazilian cinema embedded in it (Chapter 8). Jean Oppenheimer's very detailed study stresses how the camerawork achieves realistic effects, conveys a sense of change across the decades and constructs a visual poetics (Chapter 4). In her specific analysis of César Charlone's cinematography, she picks out, for example, the gas lorry hold-up, which evokes the gunmen of Westerns on horseback running alongside a stagecoach. Yet I would rely on Homi Bhabha to argue that there is a certain blurring of the western image when these 1960s boys rob the gas containers and the money to provide for the poor population. A social message is added to the western, deriving from the Brazilian tradition of 'honourable bandits' represented by the *cangaço*. This, in my view, is an example of what Bhabha calls mimicry (1994: 86) which permits identification of the image but disturbs, locates a crack that discloses what I would describe as the intentional ambivalence of *City of God* persistently breaking the audience's expectations. To this strange familiarity I will return.

City of God's production of social knowledge and its poetics of exhibiting violence in the *favela* are interrogated by the Brazilian critic Ivana Bentes who implies that it could have remained closer to the aesthetics advanced by the exponent of the 1960s *Cinema Novo*, Glauber Rocha (Chapter 10). Márcia Leite, in turn, presents an analysis of the films on the *favela*, ranging from major ones in *Cinema Novo* to others from the 1990s; her contention is that representations of the *favela* in Brazilian film tend very much to reflect the ideology of whoever is behind the camera (Chapter 20). Still contextualising the film within Brazilian cinema, Ismail Xavier focuses on productions from 2000 onwards and explores, through Buscapé, the thematic connection between *City of God* and other films in their endeavour to offer roads to humanising the country or to present images as alternatives to violence.

In 'Seen *God*' (below), I shall present an overall picture of the repercussions of the film, which does not pretend to be exhaustive but which highlights the multiple readings and framings it received beyond Brazil. It is hoped that the reader, by entering this polyphony, will also engage in the debate and assess the achievements of *City of God*. To what extent has it pushed the frontiers of the world's and of Brazilian film-making? By so doing, how successful has it been in advancing the social agenda of poverty, exclusion, violence, and racism? How successful has it been in partially using a universally recognisable film language to take a national reality across frontiers? What have been the consequences of its remarkable national mobilisation and international success for Cidade de Deus and other *favelas* in Brazil? What cinematic and social knowledge has it produced? Does the use of some of the conventions of an international film language clash with the demands on the audio-visual within Brazil?

I espouse Ismail Xavier's perception that *City of God* is another film in the commercial circuit that looks at life in extreme conditions and tries to show a road to liberation, while 'reflecting its own image of cinema as a means of salvation in the face of a social order of inequality, concentration of power and violence' (Chapter 12). Meirelles, in my view,

moves the social agenda forward with a different concept of the aesthetic, a different level of engagement, and a different view as to how to change history, but with a conviction shared with most Brazilians of the need to change. His starting point is not the revolutionary political platform as was the case with those in *Cinema Novo*. Yet he dedicated years of his life to the *City of God* project and put into it whatever money he had made in his previous career as a commercial director and his remarkable talent to draw attention to an object. Meirelles is an intuitive man of action. So the question to be addressed concerns not what his political views are but how the film conveys a message, how it mobilises and what it achieves. Ultimately, the question to be addressed concerns the achievement of the commercial film in advancing a social cause.

Throughout this introduction, I have been highlighting examples of the familiar rendered strange. I would like to suggest now, for future elaboration, that rather than shocking, he resorts to various forms of defamiliarisation [*ostranenie*], related to the perception of a work of art, as described by Šklovskij, as a typical device to render the familiar unfamiliar, thereby triggering non-automatic perceptions.² For Šklovskij, when we lose our sensation of the world, only new forms of art can change the mode of perception, for example, by displacing an object from its customary context. A pervasive pattern of recognition, non-recognition and mis-recognition in *City of God* impedes the automatic, uncritical view of a situation that now demands heightened perceptions. Three main producers of the effect of defamiliarisation, to which I later return, are in fact presented right at the beginning of the film: a floating voice unattached to a body on an imageless black screen; the narrator Buscapé shooting the audience; and the chicken whose human attributes are reminiscent of fables. These three plunge us into the world of the *favela*. Special effects of sight further expose this social wound in the body of Brazilian history, a wound which took on unimaginable proportions when ruthless armed drug dealers settled in the *favelas*. What the distant Brazilian ear cannot or does not want to hear is rendered eloquent by this remarkable technical production that stings the social conscience.

After 'Seen God', drawing upon the shuttle effect of my double residence in Brazil and Britain, I invite the non-Brazilian reader to share with me a passage into Rio, starting with my own awareness of a changed configuration in the city. Prompted by sounds or by images both seen and unseen in *City of God*, I shall point out possible entrées to the film in terms of its strategy of inviting the audience in but breaking its expectations. On this journey I shall highlight a crisis of authority and a shifting power system through the metaphor of a Christ-less Rio and through the politics of the (im)proper name; such an instability seems to signal a society undergoing profound changes. The floating voice in search of a body will address the need for a revision of the social actors in the Brazilian imaginary (in the Lacanian sense) and cultural theories. The imploring eyes of a chicken will be used to advance the view that the film frequently resorts to devices of defamiliarisation to break automatism in

² For a discussion of *ostranenie* and other concepts related to Šklovskij, see Steiner (1984: 44-67).

the perception of a reality that is now different. Other devices of defamiliarisation will be also pointed out as I suggest that the film may have been disturbing to many Brazilians as its powerful sounds and images strike a hard initial blow at two pillars of Brazil's imaginary and self-identity: that of a predominantly pacific country whose relations are based on cordiality; and that of flexibility in situations of conflict, of which the *malandro* [trickster] is so emblematic. It also interrogates Brazilian racial democracy (a third pillar of the country's imaginary). Resonant of Ionesco, my title, 'A Director in Search of One Hundred Black Actors', highlights the imbalance of a country that has an approximately 50 percent black population, which is reputed to have the second largest black population in the world, second only to Nigeria, yet suffers a drought of black actors. The workshops for the training of the actors will be analysed as the site for the creation of areas of permeability across the polarised class system of Brazil and for the negotiation of the power of the voice. A camera shooting the audience will focus on the politicisation of the look of the 'filmless' ones demanding 'to-be-looked-at-ness' and, by extension, 'to-be-listened-to-ness'. For this purpose, I here mobilise the politicised elaboration of the concept of the gaze by Laura Mulvey, but move it away from its psychoanalytic bias in terms of gender. It is like the Althusserian voice that hails the other who, by turning around, acknowledges the call (1971a: 163). The concept is here invested with a social reading and with the agency (not victimisation) of the one being looked at. It further suggests the removal of the walls, be they between image and audience, or the *favela* and the city. Finally, 'The Power and Pains of Visibility' addresses the political gains of the film vis-à-vis the sense of uncomfortable exposure.

This trajectory is in many ways a return to my earlier work on Carolina de Jesus (Vieira 1995), a poor, half-literate woman in the *favelas* of São Paulo who lived off paper collected from litter bins and who, in the late fifties, wrote herself into power – her diary, which was eventually published with the mediation of a reporter. Gayatri Spivak's challenge in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' was at the time and remains particularly illuminating for my purposes. When this national celebrity became an international one, St. Clair, her translator into English, for sure echoing the revolutionary ethos triggered by the Cuban Revolution, struck a prophetic note in his preface, 'If there should appear a Brazilian Fidel Castro, and if he should give these hungry illiterates guns...' (quoted in Vieira, 1995: 115). 'Not guns, not the immateriality of words the subaltern speaks' (Vieira, 1995: 115) is a self-quotation that reflects my contention that the pen is mightier than the s/word. Today the power of writing must contend with the power of high technology and the image. In this light, this introduction will be, in many ways, a rewording of the challenge *City of God* today poses to the audience – is the camera mightier than the word? Or the overpowering guns?

'Seen God': National and International Readings and Repercussions

This is the title of a preview of *City of God* which quotes part of the film's title and also hails it as Number 1 Absolute for the Toronto Festival (2002). This was found, at the time, amidst Kevin Smith's

writings, sent to Bráulio Mantovani and later to me. The Canadian critic Jeffrey Wells's punning with the religious dimension of the film's title is taken further as he suggests that it is a divine study of a self-enclosed criminal society and its sympathetically drawn characters. This 'descendant of the Warner Bros gangster films of the 1930s', 'with shootings a plenty', nonetheless surprises with a 'sad, sickening, emotionally crushing' ending, after 'a total turn on from start to finish'. Like Rio's Christ, the expected but unseen is the pattern that *City of God* establishes in the various film languages it speaks. Its ingenuity and artistry are as unequivocal as the certainty that it will be framed anew and will break with the audience's expectations in different countries.

The film's international success comes as no surprise to those already familiar with its calibre that garnered it the Cinema Brazil Grand Prize for best cinematography, director, editing, picture, screenplay, sound, and actor. It also received glowing praise in Cannes. If the film's success in the Anglophone world, where it was nominated for four Academy Awards, and won several other prestigious accolades,³ comes as no surprise, its categorisation does. When it was first launched in London, *The Guardian's* influential *Guide* listed it as the number one pick of the week – an astounding distinction considering the second and third films on the list: Scorsese's *Gangs of New York* and the second instalment of *The Lord of the Rings (The Two Towers)*. It described it as an 'outstanding Brazilian thriller that brings a freshness and energy to what's essentially a familiar story in an unfamiliar location'. This box-office success that outperformed *Goodfellas*, the film to which it is frequently compared, had other details added to its description in the *Guide*, such as 'exhilarating Brazilian thriller zipping through 20 years of youthful gang rivalry in Rio's poorest neighbourhood... the result is a blend of *Goodfellas*, Tarantino and *Amores Perros*'. The 'outlaw' point of view did not seem to be disconcerting to the British; for them, *City of God* was perhaps one more star in the constellation of films dealing with violence, but one that added a touch of originality to a well-worn theme. It was the familiar rendered strange.

The citation of one of the awards received in Cuba sets it squarely within the tradition of socially committed films: 'for approaching the explosive theme of social exclusion, using an ambitious, complex and involving style of narration, without moralising or condoning violence.'⁴ In the Havana Festival, the film also won the Glauber Rocha Award, a prize that aligns Fernando Meirelles's achievement with that of the most celebrated filmmaker of *Cinema Novo* (or perhaps of Brazilian Cinema),

³ In the United States: for best foreign language film from the New York Film Critics Circle and from the Las Vegas Film Critics Society; for best sound editing in a foreign feature from the Motion Picture Sound Editors; amongst others. In Britain: the British Independent Film Award for best foreign film. In Canada: the Toronto Film Critics Association Award and the Vancouver Film Critics Circle award for best foreign film. Data obtained from *The Internet Movie Database* (<http://www.imdb.com>).

⁴ In France a similar reading can be found, in what is considered an epic with Naturalistic parallels in Zola. See *Télerama* no. 2774, March 12th 2003, 38-9.

who was the theorist of the revolutionary *An Esthetic of Hunger*,⁵ which articulated the Brazilian departure from the glamorous Hollywood films of the 1960s towards a gritty social and political orientation.⁶ *Cinema Novo* is the movement in Brazilian Cinema with which Fernando Meirelles's *City of God* is most often compared.

Readings of the film by over three million Brazilians who saw it in the month following its première in August 2002 variously stressed criminality, sheer poverty, violence, or, if amalgamated, the explosive, perverse process of drugs and guns empowering a desiring mass of the destitute Brazilians. The eminent critic Ely Azeredo defined it as a 'film of rupture'. It was Azeredo, in 1961, who gave Brazilian filmography the designation *Cinema Novo* in reference to Glauber Rocha's *Barravento* [*The Turning Wind*]. In his contribution to this book, Azeredo points out that *City of God* is a fictional film that radicalises the drug peddler and user's point of view of the early *Cinema Novo* film by Ruy Guerra, *Os Cafajestes* [*The Unscrupulous Ones*]. He notes that, while rendering visible a new aesthetics that moves audio-visual products about the *favelas* away from the sequential narrative, from the documentary tradition, and from the demand to present a comprehensive picture, its outlaw point of view pulls the spectator into a web of interlocking stories and into the labyrinth of a ghetto-like *favela*. 'Mesmerised terror' is how Arnaldo Jabor summarises his response to the film in the preface to this book. Similar ambivalence reverberates in Azeredo's commentary that *City of God* is 'seductive, disconcerting, and sometimes shocking.' Ambivalence, in fact, seems to be the common denominator of Brazilians' responses to the strange familiarity of *City of God*.

The Favela: A Presence in a Christ-less Rio

Also in 2003, after a long absence, my eyes re-established contact with Rio, this glittering city in my native Brazil. Something unusual caught my attention – the marked symbolic presence of the *favela*, for decades an urban outsider, on the 'asphalt.' The trope of the asphalt has been given increasing currency as a class marker by those who live in the usually unpaved *favelas* uphill; it distinguishes the *favela* from the affluent urbanised areas benefiting from access to all services. As I stopped at the traditional Sunday handicraft fair in Ipanema – the neighbourhood in Rio celebrated for its upper class beach culture and beauty, epitomised by the tall and tanned 'Girl from Ipanema' – wherever I turned, in every size, style and hue, there were paintings of the *favelas*. Heading towards the beach, the canvases with the *favela* motif were still a most visible presence with the folkloric vendors swarming the city's black and white pavements. Strikingly, on the coastal avenues, very poor children, as quick as a lightning, while the light was red for the drivers,

⁵ For an understanding of *Cinema Novo* and the related aesthetics of hunger see chapters by Shaw, Bentes and Leite in this book. For the seminal texts on the two topics, which gave currency to the title in English as *An Esthetic of Hunger*, see Johnson, Randal and Stam, Robert (1995).

⁶ Glauber Rocha shares the orientation towards the social and the political in Latin America with other cineastes such as Fernando Birri, Fernando Solanas, Octavio Getino, and Julio García Espinosa.

were literally taking up the asphalt and displaying their juggling talents to those inside the cars. Each act was very brief, not much longer than one minute. It was not Carnival, these children were not dressed in costumes, they were not feigning wealth, they were not living the fantasy of seizure of power, and they were not occupying the street as a figurative space. Risking their lives in this radical traffic light performance, maybe they were and still are begging both for alms and recognition.

The cameras in many recent Brazilian films have been sweeping over the *favelas*, catching Brazil's and the world's eyes, making ever more visible the burgeoning of these quintessential sites of exclusion, as if they were self-contained cities within the metropolitan sprawls of São Paulo and Rio. Sophisticated technology brings the real to the life of the screen. Exclusion as a social *locus* is rendered visible in its magnitude and diversity even for the eye that does not want to see.

Favela is a word that shares with 'shantytown' or 'slum' the meaning of squalid habitation, or the class reference with shantytown, namely, the depressed area where the very poor live. But this book gives world currency to the word *favela* because it describes more than a geographic place inhabited by poverty; it highlights a number of other dimensions and connotations. It conveys a strong sense of marginalisation and the socio-economic condition of those disenfranchised by modernisation policies. The *favelados* or *favela* inhabitants are individuals 'who reproduce the fundamental inequality of Brazilian society ... and [who are] expressions of a restricted, hierarchised and fragmented citizenship' (Machado da Silva, 2002: 223-24). Vulnerability and extreme discomfort mark out their lives. They are those who have to cope with constant threats because, deprived of a place to live, they occupy space irregularly; they are thus exemplary of the survival strategy of the undesirables. The *favela*, in the eyes of many, is a cancer to be extirpated because it brings down the price of properties in the region. A 'museum of misery' or 'a controversial postcard' are the metaphorical terms Ivana Bentes has introduced for the *favela* as a not yet overcome historical stage of capitalism (Chapter 10). In turn, *neo-favela* entered current Portuguese through Paulo Lins and Roberto Schwarz (see Chapter 2) to denote the *favela* that displays all those features plus the armed drug traffic. 'Cityscapes of exclusion' is the term I have already advanced to account for the sheer size of the burgeoning *favelas* and the wall, real or symbolic, that separates them from residences in the more affluent parts of the cities.

Earlier representations of the *favela* have been condemned for having romanticised it, thematising the lively music and rhythms it produces; the celebrated film *Black Orpheus* by Camus (1959) is a case in point. It has also been glorified for the football talents it has produced. Many have perceived the *favela* as a Mecca for hedonism, even if this is the short-lived pleasure of Carnival. In fact, shifting representations of the *favela* somehow correspond to its own shifting dynamics and to the ethos surrounding those behind the camera, as Márcia Leite's panoramic analysis reveals (Chapter 20). Meirelles subsumes the two views in *City of God*. Violence is an undeniable presence in the *neo-favela*, but he also brings out its sense of *jouissance*: a place full of colour, ubiquitous music

and weekly balls. This representation, he declared to the Argentine newspaper *Clarín*, upset many middle class viewers in Brazil who expect depictions of the *favela* to be sad and poor (2003). This is yet another example of Meirelles's strategy of breaking automatic readings.

City of God is a name that evokes the prominent image of the Christ on a high hill as an icon of the city. But it is the *favela* that has become a major presence in a now Christ-less Rio. Deepening contradictions bedevil the lives of today's *favelados*. While the neo-liberal mode of capitalism has potentialised social exclusion and made economic inequality abysmal in Brazil, television (the sets are increasingly affordable or accessible) has democratised the appeal of consumption. Television seduces this 'miserable yet desiring mass', in the words of Arnaldo Jabor. Desire meets the power of arms and drugs, increasingly forced upon the small ones by the interests of the dealers. The tripod interest-power-desire is perversely closed. To name is to make exist, yet the figure of Christ does not make an appearance. City of God, the name of this *favela* on the western fringes of the city, was improperly called from the beginning a 'housing project'; it is in fact a very simple and very poor housing area constructed by Governor Carlos Lacerda between 1962 and 1965, and where Paulo Lins and his family were re-housed after the floods of 1966. Roberto Schwarz points out that it was the result of bungled planning by this reactionary Governor (Chapter 2). As Lins spins the social memory of City of God, he makes those deprived of the recognition warranted by a legalised residence symbolically exist as residents of the city. A common popular saying is that God is Brazilian. But the reality rendered visible and audible by the film deconstructs Brazilian popular memory. It will be recalled that, with great fervour, children in *City of God* hold hands and pray to the Lord before beginning a slaughter. The celebrated yet invisible image of the Christ might be witnessing, from the distant heights, a new generation of violence and drug traffic being born. But the blessed figure remains unseen in and from *City of God*.

City of God and the Politics of (Im)Proper Names

A profound irony inhabits the title of the book, which later becomes the title of the film, *City of God*. The *favela*, increasingly pushed into the state of a ghetto, continues to efface the 'proper' promised in the name of the 'housing project'.

The year 2003 is also a reference for Ruy Castro's book *Rio de Janeiro* (2003, English translation 2004). His playful survey of the history of Rio brings to light what I would refer to as the politics of misnaming Rio. He recounts how in the summer of 1502 the Portuguese fleet commanded by Gonçalo Coelho sailed into the Guanabara Bay for the first time; the Florentine chief pilot, Amerigo Vespucci, confused the bay with a river mouth and named it Rio de Janeiro, shortly after shortened to Rio. This same Vespucci saw in Rio a paradise-like masterpiece of nature.⁷

⁷ Here is Castro's account: 'a riotous display of hills and mountain-ranges, beaches, inlets, islands, dunes, sandbanks, mangrove swamps, lagoons and forests, all this under an endless blue sky [...] inhabited by happy, sunburnt and

Foreign eyes have in fact, for centuries, according to Castro, constructed an imaginary of the Marvellous City, ranging from an Eden to a kind of sexual Mecca. Yet, the subtitle *Carnival under Fire* and the prologue to his book bring out the real, striking the keynote that alterations in the panorama of the city no longer arise from foreigners' projections, but from a new presence, the projectiles of drug gangsters. As already prefigured by the title of the book, parallel to the festivity that epitomises pleasure and fantasy, the gangsters have unleashed a wave of violence in the city's outskirts, setting fire to buses staging shoot-outs with the police in the *favelas* and setting off cinema-like car chases (p. 1).

Not 'fantasy', but 'cavalry' is the word chosen by Soares to describe the tyrannical imposition of allegiance by the drug and arms dealers settled in the *favela*, drawing young addicts into the trade; a shift from 'blessings' to 'malediction', emblematic of the corrosion of values and of the inversion of the system of power in a community previously ruled by other forms of authority, finds a correlative in the now ironical undertone of its name (Chapter 14). 'The City of God and of the Devil', the title of his contribution, names a malevolent presence as a sharer in the power system of the city.

The tag to the name of the *favela* (the Devil) also carries a major echo for the Brazilian ear, that of Glauber Rocha's 1964 *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* [*Black God White Devil*]. It is sufficient for our purposes here to refer to its two alternative manifestations of power emerging in lieu of the ineffectual established ones: *cangaço* (social banditism), a marginal form of protection developed in the poorest areas of Brazil's Northeast, and Messianism, the social movement based on the conviction that a divine entity will be sent to spread justice and peace amongst men.

To the renegotiation of power, this time in the actors' workshop, we will return.

A Floating Voice in Search of a (Theoretical) Body

"Dadinho" o caralho, meu nome agora é Zé Pequeno, porra!
"Li'l Dice", my ass, my name now is Li'l Zé. Fuck it!"

The DVD version of *City of God* released in Brazil opens with the threatening sounds of a disembodied masculine voice over a black screen. The voice, attached to no particular bearer invades our reality; as Slavoj Žižek would have it, it 'flows freely in space, towards some addressee, function[ing] as a stain or blemish, interfere[ing] like a foreign body' (1999: 15). This initially meaningless presence without a body – a floating signifier, as it were – is later attached to that of the ruthless drug dealer Zé Pequeno [Li'l Zé], a tyrant, previously named Dadinho, who as a child had already 'killed his thirst to kill'. At 18 he is re-baptised in a *Quimbanda* rite of passage, a type of black magic that legitimises his

amoral people [...] who spent all their time singing and dancing in the sun [...] sleeping in hammocks by moonlight or in romantic straw huts' (pp. 9-12).

route to evil.⁸ He emerges from the ritual as Zé Pequeno, a change in name that unleashes all evil, imaginable and otherwise. His previous name, Dadinho, insinuates a certain playfulness in his taking chances with life. The christening, as it were, of Zé Pequeno is like an imprecation, which, through irony, foretells the magnitude of crimes to come. Besides trivialising death, Zé Pequeno introduces a menacing and profound change into the natural hierarchies and values of the *favela*. The small children's perception of the gangsters as idols is suggested in the film by the positioning of the camera, always shooting them from low angles (see Chapter 4). A perverse hierarchy in the drug business, built upon the exploitation of small children, begins with pre-adolescent delivery boys who are later promoted to lookouts, then to soldiers, and finally to managers, the boss's right hand.

Lúcia Nagib correlates (nick)naming and authoritarianism within the *favela* itself (Chapter 5). For her, those nicknames sum up the characters' lives and immobilise them within poverty's hierarchy while reflecting the prejudices of life described in ready-made phrases. I would like to supplement her point by drawing attention to one other detail, that of the mismatched names that also populate *City of God*. The Trio Ternura [Tenderness Trio], made up of the three bandits Cabeleira [Shaggy], Alicate [Clipper] and Marreco [Goose] achieve notoriety from a hold-up in a motel. Upon Zé Pequeno's death, he is soon replaced by Giant, a small child, whose mismatched name points to premature criminality, inasmuch as it foreshadows a long trajectory of marginality. The otherwise crude protocol of naming in the *favela* through a physical attribute – of which Cabeção [Melonhead] is but one example – can also be seen as a sign of the negation of individuality and social visibility outside the *favela*, which only exists in the press for the wrong reasons. Newsworthiness, albeit for the wrong reasons, renders those individuals notorious or, as Schwarz elaborates in Chapter 2 with reference to Lins's book, a perverse mechanism against social exclusion is set in motion when, through the media, inhuman acts take on positive value.

Renaming is also emblematic of a change in social ethos. At stake is a sense of transformation not only of Zé Pequeno's identity, but of the Brazilian social actors, more specifically that of the folkloric *malandro* (to whom we return). It also brings out shifting religious values, from the pervasive *Umbanda* (that restores the balance of energies) to the more surreptitious *Quimbanda* – that uses the same deities, but with opposite purposes – to promote the benefit of the individual through the destruction of the others. Film language has rendered palpable this anomalous floating voice of transformation. Yet this singularity deals a blow to the Brazilian ethos of cordiality and flexibility. Both the changing ethos and the new social actor demand that the country revisit some of the pillars of its national identity and broaden its epistemologies of the social.

Schwarz, who has contributed important scholarship on Brazilian

⁸ The more popular ritual of *Umbanda* or *Candomblé* in Afro-Brazilian culture, meant to restore to balance energies in disarray, would have been more natural and traditional in Brazil.

culture and its forms within the framework of the peripheral development of capitalism, has taken the lead and underlined the transformations of the older slum-world order under the pressure of the narco-traffic wars, and the parallel developments in police violence and corruption. Relying on Antonio Candido's 'Dialética da malandragem' ['Dialectic of Trickery'], Schwarz shows the early *malandro* to-and-fro between order and disorder; in a crescendo, the gangster emerges on the scene of the *neo-favela* (Chapter 2). Line picks up the thread and sees the early *malandros* in *City of God*, the Trio Ternura [Tenderness Trio], as initially sharing some of the features of the honourable bandits of the Northeast, the *cangaceiros* (Chapter 9). Soares, it will be recalled, stresses the new type of evil arising from the later combination of drugs and arms and the tyranny of the drug dealers (Chapter 14).

'Who is going to solve the problem?' and 'And on which budget', are questions taken up by Arnaldo Jabor as he revisits, in the preface to this book, his meditations on the film after first watching it. 'What theoretical framing?' is my own epistemological echo. Schwarz bridges power and class structures in his materialist analysis of the book that gave rise to the film (Chapter 2). The drug dealers exercise control over the *favela* but the opulence that the trade generates is not there; class exploitation is further implicit in his naming of other absences: 'the higher spheres of drug- and arms-trafficking and the military and political corruption that protect them' as well as 'the real-estate speculators and public administrators that ensure the *favela's* segregation from the rest of the city'. His description of the lifeless Little Joe (equivalent to Li'l Zé in the film), the once powerful gang leader in the *favela*, further suggest the potential of a class-race intersection:

Dead on the ground, the cunning, violent lord of life and death is a gap-toothed youngster, under-nourished and illiterate, often barefoot and in shorts, invariably dark-skinned in colour: the point on which all injustices of Brazilian society converge (Chapter 3).

The class-race intersection also punctuates Ismail Xavier's analysis of the film in 'Angels with dirty faces':

The film reveals the role played by the fabric of emotions spun from intense, frustrated desire bringing to the fore the resentment that lies beneath such shocking forms of aggression. It gives powerful expression to the feelings of class and racial disenfranchisement that create a subject under siege in a society swamped by images of glamour and sex appeal and a rhetoric of advertisements intent on the exploitation of mimetic desire, a rhetoric that gives elegant new forms to old associations of aggressive virility, the accumulation of goods and power (2003:30)

In his contribution to this volume Xavier highlights the intimidating drug dealer as a social symptom and 'as a sign of the victory

of the market over the State reduced to impotence' (his emphasis). This second analysis of *City of God*, however, pursues a different trajectory. Casting the film within a constellation of other Brazilian productions of the last years, he focuses on characters who, like Buscapé, manage to bypass the shortcut of drug-dealing as a way out of poverty.

The voice that anticipates the images of *City of God* lays bare not a wound but multiple wounds in the body of Brazilian history and cultural theory. Other voices will variously respond to the wound and to the wounded. But the first response does not come from a voice. It comes from a camera in the *favela*.

A Camera Shoots the Audience: Demanding Visibility and Technological Inclusion

As part of the new aesthetics ushered in by *City of God*, a camera, when the film starts, is aimed at the audience – shooting the viewers straight in the eye. Via the camera, the eyes of the audience return the look and a negotiation is set in motion. Looking at the audience through the viewer is the narrator Buscapé [Rocket], a Cidade de Deus boy. Through him, the audience is looked at and is unavoidably implicated in the images of the perverse encounter of dire poverty, drugs and arms; the audience becomes complicit with what is documented and presented. The camera becomes a weapon against the violence of non-recognition or mis-recognition. It is a demand for social visibility in the structure of the film. From then on, Buscapé is also the one who guides the spectator through the *favela* (see Meirelles, Chapter 3), delineating a path through its meaning and its characters, and at the same time constructing the symbolic power of the film and of the image, a point to which we return.

The camera is additionally a technological metaphor representing alternatives in life beyond dire poverty or drugs. Thinking of other protagonists in the film, mention is made of Bené [Benny], the 'good' bandit, the one who bears traces of humanity; hence his decision to abandon his life of drugs. Yet, at his farewell party he is shot dead, thus reiterating the recurring situation whereby there is little escape from evil and anonymity – even if your name invites you to do so. The good, the bad and the photographer (not the ugly...) is my own rendering of a society structured around excluding binaries, but which allows for a third that is empowered by technology to break the confines of class and race. For the *We in Cinema* project, film and technology are weapons against exclusion from job opportunities and to break down barriers between social classes. Technology becomes social intervention.

Technology is a point at which Fernando Meirelles departs radically from Glauber Rocha's hard-hitting films intended to 'break the paradise of inertia of the public', and shock them into awareness through the use of rudimentary equipment and techniques (Rocha, in Johnson and Stam, 1995: 179). Meirelles signals a new conception of representation, which is the use of sophisticated technologies to render visible and realistic the more intangible aspects of culture. Sound in Meirelles's film is also seductive. The samba tunes of this scene also grip the audience, making it feel a part of the action, until the initial scene strikes a note of

disaster and the audience retreats, only to slip back in when a change in scene recovers its grip. The overall thrust of Ivana Bentes' contention is that the film's aesthetics neutralises the shock. What I would like to suggest is that, even though the comparison between *City of God* and *Cinema Novo* yields interesting results, there is a sense in which Meirelles's production 40 years later can be seen within its own rules of representation and as a different way of approaching the social problems of Brazil.

A Feathered Protagonist: Defamiliarising Perception

In the initial scenes, the audience's look is also met with the imploring eyes of a chicken – her legs tied, her fate sealed as suggested by the sound of a knife being sharpened. This visual intrusion serves as yet another chronicle of a death foretold. That is, until something unexpected occurs. She breaks free of the strings round her legs and dashes off, believing that she is fleeing her fate – only to face the frantic chase of the armed gang under the command of Zé Pequeno. Walter Salles has described our feathered protagonist as a traumatised chicken in a crossfire. And he goes on to ascribe a symbolic meaning to the chicken: she stands for so many Brazilians trapped in an unjust country. With her eyes turned towards the audience, the chicken fixes the spectators in a plea to be looked at and looked after. The history of this trauma is thus never only the *favela's*; it shows that we are implicated in one another's trauma.

But there is another dimension to the chicken that brings us back to the strange familiarity that punctuates the film. This scene is, up to a point, a common one in Brazil, the preparation of the Sunday dish *frango ao molho pardo*, like *frango à cabidela* in Portugal, that is, chicken cooked in a sauce thickened with its own blood, which requires it to be slaughtered at the time of cooking. But this familiar scene is rendered unfamiliar as her fate is not the pan, but the crossfire of dealers or the police. It will be recalled that the British audience had its perception sharpened by the familiar story rendered strange by a change in setting; for the Brazilians the familiar setting was rendered unfamiliar by a change in film language. Katia Lund hints at this possibility when, in an interview with Vicente Lou in London, she states that film also provides the spectators with other ways of perceiving something or someone they have always looked at but not seen (2004: 21). The point of view of the chicken is a reminder of the effects achieved by fables through the use of animals endowed with human qualities to enable a distancing reflection on everyday life. These three not only invite the audience in – they plunge the Brazilian audience into the world of the *favela* at the same creating a distancing effect – they invite one to recognise and also to mis-recognise. In this way, the audience is invited to look at the *favela* with fresh eyes and to develop a critical stance on the situation.

A Director in Search of One Hundred Black Actors

Upon entering the *favela* Cidade de Deus, on the western fringes of Rio, one notices that its population is 95 percent black. This point is confirmed by *favela* spokesman, M V Bill, the founder in Cidade de Deus

of the political party PPPomar which stands for *Partido Popular Poder para a Maioria* [Popular Party Power to the Majority], the first political party for blacks in Brazil and increasingly one of the most important militant black groups in the country. It is also called *Partido Negro* [Black Party], and confronts racism as the basis for the marked social inequalities in the country. This eminently respected member of the *favela* community does not accept the label of artist, because he has not lost his sense of his social place, for which in fact he has been awarded prizes by UNESCO and also Rio's and Barcelona's Citizen of the Year. His objective is not to gain the world's recognition, but to struggle against the violence of the non-recognition of his community. As such, he has denounced the racism of, for example, television programmes that have only white actors. The exclusive membership of blacks in the PPPomar party is explained as the wish not to continue to have the rights of blacks defended by whites. *Trafficking Information*, his first CD, conveys the reality of his community from the point of view of the unhappiness of those who have no connection with the drug traffic, but who sleep on the floor at night for fear of stray bullets.

A different trajectory led Fernando Meirelles to a similar realisation of the under-representation of blacks in the Brazilian media. His policy differs from M V Bill's assertion of race and the exclusive membership of non-whites. Rather, Meirelles projects a class-race intersection. As he explains in Chapter 3, he wanted the spectator to have a direct relationship with the characters. And he wanted actors who would know how to interpret the characters, which presented a problem. Brazil, with its abundance of white, middle-class actors, has a dearth of young black and/or mulatto actors. As a result, Meirelles looked for talent in the *favela* communities of Rio, having short-listed 200 out of 1000 interviewed.

The review of *City of God* in *Black Filmmaker* (02/03) does not fulfil the promise of addressing the issue of race announced by the journal's name. Violence is the theme that it privileges. An earlier example of unfulfilled promises is Camus's *Black Orpheus*, a world-renowned film about Rio's *favelas*. The legend of Orpheus transposed to the *favelas* conveys music as a cultural force in a world full of passion; solidarity seems to fill the vacuum of racial politics. However, the film exoticises the black population by casting them as the exception, when, in fact, blacks account for about half of the country's population. Others have denounced Brazilian television for framing the blacks within sports or dance or in subaltern roles (maids, drivers, and so on). Brazilian film, in turn, tends to present caricatures or stereotypes of blacks.

Race in Brazil has historically intersected with class and determined the standard of living and all that socio-economic status entails: access to housing, education, health care, consumption. It has also produced certain stereotypes of criminality, licentiousness, *etcetera*. In fact, the racialisation of good and evil that has accompanied Brazilian history and to which the film draws attention seems to have passed unobserved by many. Such racial framing has been epitomised by the equation 'preto de alma branca' [black with a white soul]. *City of God* draws attention to the ideology of whitening as a road to virtue through

the 'good bandit'. Bené is a 'whitened black' whose decision to leave the life of drugs and arms is signalled by his dyed blonde hair. White 'outside' and wearing a fashionable shirt, he constructs the image of whiteness and glamour prioritised by society. Ironically (or deterministically?) he is shot dead before fulfilling his aspirations.

The review in *Film Comment* by Alcino Leite Neto has, in turn, stressed that the film's impact derives mostly from the performances in a film that features one of the largest black casts ever seen in a Brazilian film (2002: 11).

The *favelas* have been burgeoning with historically and successively marginalised people, the blacks being a case in point. But it is film as a reconstructive project that I shall be looking at with reference to the workshop.

The Actors' Workshop: Negotiating the Power of the Voice

The blacks are the most affected by the logic of capitalism's unequal and contradictory development which has hit Brazil hard and has accentuated the differentiation between those who have access to the modes of production and can contract wage labour and those (a large part of the country) who are impoverished. Capital does not recreate with the same intensity that it excludes.⁹ The actors' workshops in many ways straddle the asphalt-*favela* binary, creating a link between the entrepreneurial class, fully integrated into the capitalist system, and those who have been excluded by capital. Casting off the persona of the commercial director, Meirelles dived headlong into the daily training of actors in workshops in the *favelas* for months. There the country's social extremes – perhaps the country's most successful commercial director and those trapped by abject poverty – find a meeting point in performance art. He describes this process at length in Chapter 3.

This is perhaps also the place where the strategy of team working becomes visible and the traces of other voices are rendered audible. Katia Lund's knowledge of the codes of the *favela* resonates through the script and the training of the characters. This started in 1996 when Michael Jackson made a video in Rio and she mediated the negotiations with the drug trafficker Marcinho and the Inhabitants' Associations; this experience was the catalyst for her production of the documentary *Notícias de uma Guerra Particular* [News from a Personal War]. And then there is Guti Fraga's long-standing work with theatre in the *favelas*. This actor and stage manager was already living in the Vidigal *favela* and recognised that there was so much untapped talent there. Upon his return from New York, where he staged Marília Pera, he was inspired by the way that off-Broadway shows produced non-mainstream work with high artistic merit. He decided to set up an actors' workshop, *Nós do Morro* [Us from the Hill], which has now over 300 students. Success is based on the principle of intense training and a mixture of plays about life in the *favela* and the classics.

The pre-production workshops enabled the professionalisation of

⁹ This aspect of capitalism has been highlighted by Bernardo Mançano with reference to the rural landless workers (in Vieira, forthcoming).

these talented people from the *favela*. Implicit in their activities is the recognition of the source of creativity Brazilians derive from being great improvisers. But for them to find a channel into the world at large they need to go through the discipline of professionalising inborn gifts; 'controlled spontaneity' is the way Cristophe Narbonne describes the effect achieved (2003: 36). Meirelles also mentions their training to remain undisturbed by cameras glued to their faces. Conversely, in a two-way flow, the rigorous world outside learns to appreciate their creativity.

Half the word we say already belongs to someone else. This is the basic principle of dialogism established by Bakhtin which is apposite to describe the process whereby the pre-defined voice of the script opens itself to the voice of the other which empowers itself in the process. From another perspective, a certain resonance of Paulo Freire complements Bakhtin's dialogism with the articulation of the expression of the underprivileged (1998). For this Brazilian pedagogue, to speak the word is to generate words from the universe of the discourse of the oppressed. As the actors-cum-creators speak their words and listen to the words from their same circle of culture, they re-existentialise their world and position it in relation to another world. Crucial for Freire is reading the word to read the world. Improvisation, looked at from this perspective, is empowering; it enables the *favelados* to be co-creators of the script and narrators of their (hi)story.

The workshops established a pattern which, upon completion of the film, enabled the participants to start a film-making project as a reconstructive process: the *Nós do Cinema* [*We in Cinema*], a media-arts non-governmental organisation described in Chapter 18. In an attempt to reweave the fabric of a society that tends to exclude and disqualify the poor, the unequivocal trajectory of the *We in Cinema* project and of its off-shoot, the *Get Together* project, has been the development of integrative strategies and the search for solutions based on recognition and positive representation. The remarkable talent of the group, already evident in *City of God*, has been increasingly recognised in Brazil through the focus of the Project on positive representation. New life paths for many have thus been opened up. Suffice it to mention a few facts relating to those in the original cast and who make up the administrative body of today's *We in Cinema*. Luis Carlos Nascimento, the coordinator, has competed for the prize of distinguished work with technology as a weapon against social exclusion; he also conceived and implemented the project 'Theatre Literature' in schools, which, in addition to putting on performances, distributes books and promotes debates with the playwrights. Recently he directed the award-winning short film *Cidadão Silva* [*Citizen Silva*] (2003). Renato de Souza, the president of *We in Cinema*, is now finalising his internship in editing at Urca Films; he has long contributed to the *Ex-cola* Project aimed at rehabilitating the citizenship of street children, particularly those who sniff glue.¹⁰ He has

¹⁰ The pun in the name of the project is untranslatable into English, but an explanation renders explicit the agenda of presenting alternatives to drugs that feeds into this and into the *Nós do Cinema* projects in general: the word for school

also been an actor in feature films, including the award-winning *Quase Dois Irmãos* [*Almost Two Brothers*], and the TV series *Cidade dos Homens* [*City of Men*], recently aired by the BBC. Mention is also made of Leandro Firmino da Hora, Li'l Zé in *City of God*, who is today studying Biology at the Santa Úrsula University. He has worked as interviewer for the documentary on the actors of *City of Men*, among other roles in television, and has directed a polemical short film on medical neglect.

This examination of the outcomes of participation in *City of God* parallels another major debate in Brazil, namely the assignment of quotas for black people to give them greater access to University. Several studies have been conducted that reveal that the professional performance of blacks does not differ from that of whites, the same holding true for their incomes, once they manage to enter the job market. But the marked difference resides in the conditions of access for the blacks (whose race, as has been seen, also tends to be class-marked) to the job market; they lack social competitiveness. That access to the job market cannot be dissociated from mastering technology is the key idea of the *We in Cinema* group.

The widely seen and recognised talent and professionalism of the members of *We in Cinema* has altered racial and physical concepts of beauty and respectability. Thus, not only providing a life path for individuals, it also goes further, providing positive representation and constructive role models for millions. The efforts of the group, nationally and internationally, to promote a space for non-prejudiced engagement with disadvantaged groups, are also remarkable.

Ismail Xavier, in this book, presents the overall pattern into which this initiative fits, namely the politics of NGOs [Non-Governmental Organisations], which provide artistic training as a means of education for citizenship, a process that involves the individual's self-affirmation and the recovery of self-esteem. Further still, as exemplified by such characters as Buscapé or the mythological figure of Orpheus, he points out the important role of Brazilian film today in humanising barbarism.

The Voice from the Wound: The Power and Pain of Visibility

I was very moved when, on the last day of 2004, M V Bill, upon my request, dedicated some of his precious time to revisit his meditations on what he considers to be the major issues interconnecting the population of the *favela* Cidade de Deus and the film *City of God*. The thrust of his argument is that the film made the *favela* into a protagonist in world history, but no dialogue was established with the community beyond the actors. Two years before, at the height of the debate surrounding the film in Brazil, M V Bill had used the website *Viva Favela* and other media to draw attention to these issues. The first time he summoned the *favela* population – the prospective winner of the 'Oscar for violence' – for a collective interview was when the film was nominated for the Academy Award. He thinks that a more aggressive rhetoric was unavoidable in order to make the community move the discussion beyond

in Portuguese is *escola*, which is pronounced the same as *ex-cola*, meaning 'formerly glue'.

issues of verisimilitude between the film and the *favela*. Two days later he took the floor again. The more celebratory agenda was then the unprecedented mobilisation of all sectors of society and the number of new partnerships and official commitments in response to the first message.

But what was also wounding, in his view, was the way this reality was told. Visibility was given to the talented young ones in the actors' workshop but, contrary to the expectation of dialogue with the *favela* in general or with its political leadership, there was no sharing of a history of which they were protagonists. If their voice had been heard, in their view, the social focus of the film would have been enhanced; if greater contact had been established, the film would also have given them the chance to change their reality. They had also expected the film to be presented to the *favela* before premièring in the cinemas, but their lives were first exposed to the world, not to themselves.

Cidade de Deus, he stresses, is still waiting for an expression of affection from those involved in the film whose countless achievements include its having triggered changes in the reality it depicted. They do not expect individuals to solve the immensity of their problems, but, in their view, there could have been a gesture of recognition. It is this symbolic debt of the voice that the *favela* claims, a word of affection.

The film *City of God* has been perceived by many as an event that provoked the responses of institutionalized power and this is seen to highlight its role as a social film. But their interrogation of the government's policy is incisive. What Spivak has referred to as strategic essentialism (1984-5) seems to explain what gives force to this political voice from the wound. They refer to the government's granting of resources to 'the men of the asphalt' to narrate the history of a population that is not even granted the bare minimum of dental care. Will their story continue to be narrated by others? Why are the chances not given to them to become narrators themselves? Even if the *favelados* want to tell their own (hi)story, they lack competitiveness and never get the grants, so they will remain those forever narrated by anthropologists and film-makers.

A sorrowful voice of Otherness cries out from the wound, trying to tell the world of a reality or truth that was unavailable, signalling the moral discomfort of those in the *favela* who have no connection with the drug problem. The exposure of violence humiliated the self-esteem of the *favela*. Visibility can be a poison and a remedy. The film, which became an event in Brazil, in turn interacted with the best-selling book by Lins that preceded it, mobilising public authorities and the population. The cure, as in psychoanalytic processes, can only be attained through the disclosure of the object; it could only be obtained by making the wound available (Žižek, 1999: 272).

The Camera or the Word? Overpowering Guns

Carolina Maria de Jesus wrote in her diary:

'They', the unnamed crowd, understand, 'those who live and degrade themselves there in hunger, mud, litter and bed'; 'big-tummied children' and a 'thin dog' understand the misery 'better than us'. 'But they won't say anything. They cry, they scream, they fight, they love, love of all kinds, they swear, they commit suicide, they clench their stomachs, but they don't say anything (quoted in Vieira, 1995: 103).

Unlike the majority of illiterates living in the *favela* in the 1950s, who had their own sign-system but were aphasic towards or, perhaps, in the eyes of, the nation, those from Cidade de Deus and other *favelas* will speak to the nation. M V Bill, in fact, solicits class and racial identification and solidarity for a counter-hegemonic expression of the *favela*. They will also demand to-be-looked-at-ness and to-be-listened-to-ness. They will demand writing. And they will demand technology, the deficit of which has become a means of subalternisation.

Buscapé, through technology, establishes a link with the world outside and the *favela* City of God. He follows the path laid down by his predecessor, Paulo Lins, the writer who gave fictional expression to the social fabric in mutation of City of God, a pattern, in turn, previously established by the empowerment through writing of Carolina Maria de Jesus. In the meantime, the problems of exclusion she depicts have been aggravated. Many many more need to write themselves into being, as Henry Louis Gates Jr. would have it. Rendering the problem and the trauma explicit, as Meirelles has done, can be a step towards a solution. Yet the complexity of the problem demands many more voices and images, many more heads.

'Is the camera mightier than the word and the sword?' is the question that has hovered over our journey. The voices in this book, disparate as they may be, in unison seem to imply the need for the recovery of the social and political ethos. Cidade de Deus, before Paulo Lins's book, was an open letter that no one cared to read. The camera and the sound technology of Meirelles's *City of God* further hit our eyes and ears with the magnitude of the problem of dire poverty encountering drug traffic, in our days unimaginably aggravated as it has fallen into the hands of global narco-guerrillas. The power of Lins's writing must meet another constellation of accessible instruments of communication and of articulation of power. Many now also face the need to film themselves into being.

The *neo-favela's* demand for to-be-looked-at-ness implicates the Brazilian audience – but not only them – to position themselves in relation to the global problem of drugs and the historical vicissitudes that transformed the always poor but solidarity-driven, more hedonistic and folkloric *favela* depicted by the films of the 1950s and 1960s into a battleground of narco-traffic or, more recently, narco-guerrilla. But songs and words traffic information too.

Out of solidarity with all in a traumatised *favela* – and against the

'talking bullets' – the chorus of voices in this book speaks *with* them and with Meirelles's camera.

A Postscript: *We in Cinema* as Social Action

This book, conceived to mark the first visit to Britain of the original cast of *City of God*, looks at both *City of God* and the productions of the *We in Cinema* group as part of the tradition of cinema as social action in Brazil. For the visit, *We in Cinema* made a special short film, initially called *People Not in the News*, as part of the agenda in Brazil of providing visibility to those whose identity has been negatively constructed, to those devoid of an image, the 'filmless' ones. Along the way, the focus was redirected and the film is now called *Vida Nova com Favela* [*New Life with Favela*].

The short film, directed by Luis Carlos Nascimento, interpellates the governor of Rio who, in the 1960s, during the dictatorship, created a politics of exclusion and isolation of the *favela*, of which Cidade de Deus is an example. To remove one *favela* is to create another. Such policies, in turn, establish a dialogue with another process of modernisation based on the late 19th century positivist whitening of the black race which, it stands to reason, is a form of denial of race. The film spells out routes for the valorisation of the *favela* production and of racial affirmation. Its characters are a hamburger delivery boy, a Mãe-de-Santo (a figure from *Candomblé*, the Afro-Brazilian religious manifestation) and also the flag-bearer of the Mangueira Samba School. These influential characters have become a reference for the *favela* in that they embody the view that the world is possible. The delivery boy lives in the most violent community, the Complexo do Alemão, where Luis himself was born and grew up. This complex embodies 16 *favelas*, where over a million people live in 200,000 shacks. It displays the lowest level of human development in Rio.

Vida Nova com Favela bears traces of the autobiographical. A major problem that the director has faced in life, and which he shares with others in the *favela*, is that they could have their professional dreams, work hard towards them, but these were *a priori* aborted because their physical type did not conform to the images projected by society.

When asked about the impact of the *City of God* experience, he said that, above all, it made him realise that he could dream. Film enables one to become the protagonist of one's own dreams. One films today that one is, say, a teacher, and then begins to construct one's history from one's own dreams. For those actors, it is in the recovery of the possibility of being through acting that the social action of their cinema mostly resides.

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