Realism, Urban Conflict and Spatial Segregation in New Brazilian Cinema

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The University of Otago, Dunedin
Aotearoa/New Zealand
2012
Abstract

The New Brazilian Cinema (from the mid-1990s) has been celebrated as a period of re-birth for the national film industry. Not only has there been a considerable increase in film releases, but during this period, Brazilian cinema has also achieved expanded international acclaim. Although presenting diverse themes, these films tend to converge around explicit depictions of violence and poverty. Additionally, in order to secure commercial success, filmmakers associated with the New Brazilian Cinema have represented social and urban inequality through appropriation of diverse sources, ranging from earlier radical film movements to mainstream media aesthetics.

This thesis aims to both understand and challenge the construction of realism in New Brazilian Cinema by carefully examining the strategies employed in the films City of God (Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund, 2002), Carandiru (Hector Babenco, 2003) and Last Stop 174 (Bruno Barreto, 2008). Specifically, I hope to analyse the political and ideological implications of the films’ applications of strategies of aesthetic realism to locations associated with traditions of social realism. In this regard, the three main settings I will be examining in these films are the favela, prison and streets, all of which are constructed as segregated cinematic spaces, remote from other urban areas. Despite their supposed isolation, however, these settings are also represented as interconnected through the violence of their marginalised inhabitants who are depicted as being enclosed within a cycle of social and spatial exclusion.
To my family and friends in Brazil, for whom writing this thesis has meant that I have not been present during important moments in their lives.
Acknowledgements

I am extremely thankful to my supervisors Dr. Vijay Devadas and Dr. Kevin Fisher, for their mentorship, patient guidance and generous criticism during the process of writing this thesis.

I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to my mother for her unconditional support throughout my academic life.

This thesis would not have been possible without my husband Genaro, with whom I would travel to any corner of the world, and who has invited me to build a life with him in Aotearoa.

I am also truly indebted to Dr. Kathryn Lehman, for her vital inspiration, kind assistance and encouragement from the very beginning, even when this project was still a dream; and to Dr. Walescka Pino-Ojeda, for her warm-heart and motivated teachings about Latin America.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance provided by my friends Elizabeth, Emma and Sarah for their careful proofreading of this thesis.

I am truly grateful to my fellow post-graduate students and MFCO staff for creating an enjoyable study environment, and especially to Sally, Matthew and Peter for their empathy and support.

I would also like to acknowledge my friends from Dunedin: Anita, Isabel, Priya, Rowena and Melanie, who helped me deal with my homesickness, particularly on winter days.

I would like to thank the members of LAIFS (Latin American and Iberian Film Society) and ENLACES (Engaging Latin American Culture, Education and Students), especially Leandro, Julio, Carla, Amy, Jihe, Marcelo and Silvia for our insightful conversations about Latin American culture and cinema.

Thank you also to my filmmaker partners Clemie, Wallace, Marcondes, Diego and especially Marcelo, who generously provided me with most of the films analysed in this thesis; and to Luis, who kept me up-to-date with the political and social news in Brazil.

Finally, I am grateful to various friends and family members, especially my grandmother for her endless love and generosity; the “women’s tea group” for their enthusiasm about my travel overseas, and my very close friends Flávia, Nereida, Marcelo, Lucas and Aninha (in memory), all of whom I miss everyday.
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Introduction

The New Brazilian Cinema (from the 1990’s to the present) has witnessed the steady growth of a film industry based on the depiction of diverse national, cultural and regional themes. Despite this heterogeneity, the films from this period that have achieved the most critical and popular success, especially internationally, are those that cohere principally around graphic depictions of violence and poverty. Most of these films are set in socially excluded urban spaces and feature marginalised subjects as their main characters. These films can be situated within a broader group of contemporary Latin American films that, according to Christian León (2005), focus on the lives of marginalised people while avoiding sociological and historical interpretations of the phenomenon of marginalisation itself. León adds that these films accomplish this ideological sleight of hand by opting for an ambiguous and subjective perspective on events, implicitly condoning the violence they represent. He also argues that beyond the depiction of social issues, these films share the principal objective of reaching national and international markets. Accordingly, the theme of social and urban inequalities is presented through a combination of distinct cinematic traditions in order to produce commercially successful films. These influences range from past national film movements (especially Italian neo-realism and Cinema Novo) to mainstream media aesthetics (including television programs and Hollywood films).

This thesis focuses on three films from the New Brazilian Cinema that attempt to portray social marginalisation in the country’s largest cities: City of God (Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund, 2002) and Last Stop 174 (Bruno Barreto, 2008) both set in Rio de Janeiro; and Carandiru (Hector Babenco 2003), set in São Paulo. Although Brazilian metropolises are marked by urban and social diversity, depicting multi-ethnic neighbourhoods and complex relationships between different economic classes, the films listed above are mainly set in

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1 The term New Brazilian Cinema, adopted in this thesis, can be interpreted as an attempt to unify two recent periods of Brazilian Cinema. The first, Cinema da Retomada (1994 - 1998), refers to the first years of the so-called ‘rebirth’ of Brazilian cinema production. The second, Cinema Pós-retomada refers to the period from 1998 onwards, which is marked by an already established film production. These two expressions are normally used without an English translation. In some cases, Cinema da Retomada is used to refer to the entire contemporary Brazilian cinema from the 1990s onwards. I adopt the term New Brazilian Cinema in reference to the book The New Brazilian Cinema (2003), edited by Lucia Nagib, which consists of a collection of texts by the most influential Brazilian scholars, all of them discussing Brazilian films from 1994 – 2002.

2 A list of such films include, but is not limited to, titles such as Central Station (Central do Brasil, Walter Salles, 1998), Orfeu (Carlos Diegues, 1999), City of God (Cidade de Deus, Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund, 2002), Carandiru (Hector Babenco, 2003), City of Men (Cidade dos Homens, Paulo Moreli, 2007), Elite Squad 1 (Tropa de Elite 1, José Padilha, 2007), Last Stop 174 (Última parada 174, Bruno Barreto, 2008) and The Storyteller (O Contator de Histórias, Luiz Villaça, 2009).
In this thesis, these three cinematic spaces were chosen as key categories that organise these films’ content and form, as well as their relation to the Brazilian social context. As will be shown, the choice to analyse these three specific spaces is particularly relevant if one considers that they have been systematically associated as main sites of urban violence in Brazil not only in film, but also in other mass media such as television and newspapers (Malkin-Fontecchio 2009; Hamburger 2008; Mcilwaine and Moser 2007; Caldeira 2000). While marginalised people are brought to the centre of the narrative, these films portray them as confined within peripheral spaces of the city. Consequently, there is an overexposure of these spaces as they are repeatedly used as the main stage for crime and urban conflicts in representations of contemporary Brazilian society. From their first scenes, these films depict images of persecution, murder and aggression that associate protagonists with the threatening environments they inhabit. Images of violence are, therefore, essential to these film narratives, as they seem to be an intrinsic feature of the characters’ lives.

My selection of films took into consideration the significant recognition they had gained both nationally and internationally, and the fact that they were each submitted by the Brazilian Government to represent the country at the Academy Awards in the category of Best Foreign Language Film. All three films are also adapted from actual historical events and represent an attempt to portray social problems through the perspective of marginalised people and spaces. However, this thesis argues that, although claiming to depict the supposed reality of marginalised life, these films tend to fictionalise social realities. In order to do so, they rely on a group of cinematic strategies to construct realism, such as location shooting, non-professional actors, hand-held camera movement and the use of intertextual images. In the following three chapters, I demonstrate how these strategies are repeatedly employed in the representation of cinematic favelas, prisons and city streets.

To examine the construction of realism in these films, it is first necessary to qualify how I will be employing this loaded term, which has multiple and contested meanings throughout the history of the arts. Due to the scope of film theories and authors addressing the theme of realism, I will limit the use of this term to the specific form it takes in the New Brazilian Cinema films analysed in this thesis. In order to do so, it is first important to

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3 In Chapter One, I will discuss historical and contemporary meanings of the word favela. As will be seen, while it was originally the name of an endemic plant of the Northeast of Brazil, the term favela is used throughout the country to qualify poor residential areas as slums and shantytowns.

4 Armes (1974) argues that the issue of realism in cinema is as old as the earlier division between factual documentary (Lumiére) and fictional realism (Méliès). He cites a number of filmmakers and theorists that focus on the relationship between film and reality. Two important names are Siegfried Kracauer, who asserted the film’s obligation to record physical reality, and André Bazin, who advocated in favour of neorealist films over theatrical German expressionism and Soviet montage.

differentiate between two types of realism in film studies: “seamless realism” and “aesthetically motivated realism” (Hayward 2006, p. 334). The former relates to the continuity style of classical Hollywood films. In the case of such films, the editing establishes a coherent succession of shots, making many of the cinematic artifices invisible or at least unobtrusive to the main narrative. The main goal of these films is to create an illusion of realism. A cohesive definition of the second type of realism is problematic due to the variety of film movements (from Soviet cinema to British New Wave) considered aesthetically realist. Generally speaking, a common characteristic of many of these film movements is the aim of breaking the cinematic illusion, and acknowledging its artifices, or at least avoiding a manipulative depiction of reality. Another similarity is their inclination to forms of ‘social realism’, as they all share a commitment to raise awareness of social issues. In the case of New Brazilian Cinema films, I argue that these realist aesthetics imitate a documentary inflected style of filmmaking in order to create a convincing depiction of ‘real’ life. As a result, Brazilian films can be interpreted as a pastiche of previous realist film movements (such as the Italian neo-realist school), erasing any historical context and reducing their work to an index of aesthetic reference. My interpretation here relies on Fredric Jameson’s (1991, pp. 17-18) notion that postmodern pastiche enacts “a random cannibalization of all the styles of the past” without critical perspective of the traditions from which it borrows. He distinguishes pastiche from parody (another intertextual practice), arguing that pastiche lacks humour and irony because its ahistorical and non-temporal position prevents its self-conscious engagement with previous art works. Therefore, pastiche stands solely as a superficial combination of aesthetic styles.

Accordingly, this thesis analyses the construction of realism in the New Brazilian Cinema by taking into consideration a combination of influences from previous cinematic movements to contemporary mainstream media (such as Hollywood films, music videos and news broadcasts). Specific attention is given to comparing New Brazilian Cinema (mid-1990s onwards) to the Brazilian Cinema Novo movement (late 1950s to early 1970s). Influenced by Italian Neo-Realism and the French Nouvelle Vague, the Cinema Novo movement brought forth a particular mode of filmmaking that rejected Hollywood studio models and claimed a social function for cinema (Johnson 1987a). Its main objective was to communicate political discourses in order to raise popular consciousness against social and political exploitation. The Cinema Novo movement began and finished during the period of military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985. In an attempt to avoid state censorship, films from this movement relied heavily on allegories. Yet, despite international acclaim, Brazilian audiences often criticised Cinema Novo for being “too intellectual” (Johnson and Stam 1995, p. 380). New Brazilian
Cinema has also produced a wide range of films dealing with social inequality in the country. However, unlike Cinema Novo, the films studied in this thesis have avoided taking clear political positions. This turning away from explicit engagement with the social role of cinema has drawn criticism from film scholars such as Ivana Bentes (2003, p. 124), who argues that the revolutionary manifesto of Aesthetics of Hunger (Glauber Rocha 1965) has been replaced by a “cosmetics of hunger”. In other words, while filmmakers from the 1960s were concerned with showing the brutality of social deprivation, contemporary attempts endeavour to make poverty and injustice slick and entertaining.

This comparison between Cinema Novo and New Brazilian Cinema raises a fundamental question: if recent Brazilian films are not motivated by any clear revolutionary utopian ideal or explicit social or political commitment, why are they so interested in the theme of social exclusion? A straightforward answer is that while Cinema Novo became a reference for Brazilian and Latin American cinema because of its international success and critical acclaim, it lacked popularity among national audiences. Therefore, based again on León’s (2005) proposition, it is fair to argue that New Brazilian Cinema has aimed to repeat Cinema Novo’s international success by portraying social problems through commercial aesthetics that attract greater numbers of spectators. Even when films are based on real-life stories, such as the three main films studied in this thesis, their representations tend towards a more subjective perspective of the events, while avoiding broader political discourse.

As mentioned previously, another common characteristic of the New Brazilian Cinema films studied here is their emphatic focus on violence. The considerable attention Brazilian filmmakers have given to this theme is directly related to contemporary social realities. Since the 1980s, Brazilian society has witnessed a general increase in urban violence, leading to alarming numbers of murders in the 2000s. However, violence does not affect all sectors of the population equally. Murder rates are significantly higher among young and poor Afro-Brazilian men, and moreover, the phenomenon of violence is not just restricted to poor areas of the city. Rather, it has also become a daily issue for middle and high-class neighbourhoods (Caldeira 2000). The spread and omnipresence of violence in contemporary Brazil coincided with the interest in the production and consumption of films

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5 As an example of this impressive data, in 2003, more than 50 thousand people were murdered in Brazil; in other words, 140 homicides occurred per day (Souza and Lima 2006).

6 In 2010, the official number of murders in Brazil was 49,932. 70.6% of these were Afro-Brazilians. The number of young people (between the ages of 15 and 29) killed was 26,854, or 53.5% of the total number. From this, 74.6% were Afro-Brazilian and 91.3% were male (Ramos 2012). Although this data does not mention economic class, statistics from the Brazilian Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA 2008) reveal that when economic income and race are factors, the majority of socially disadvantaged people are Afro-Brazilians.
concerning this theme. However, in their exclusive focus on the lives of marginalised people, I will argue that these films paint a reductive picture of violence and urban conflict in contemporary society.

A common characteristic of the three films analysed in the thesis is that they reinforce stereotypes of ethnicity and class, reducing complex social realities in order to construct fixed identities for marginalised groups. Homi Bhabha (1983) argues that although the discursive construction of otherness is usually based on stereotyping, this is an ambivalent process involving simultaneous “recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences” (p. 23). Bhabha points to this ambiguous fascination/rejection as a twofold discursive relation that informs the construction of knowledge, hierarchy and surveillance of the Other/the different by dominating powers. Similarly, these films repeatedly depict marginalised people/spaces, overexposing them in order to make them knowable to an increasingly globalised audience. As a result, marginalised persons are simultaneously denied self-representation and fixed in/as spaces of otherness.

This thesis is organised into three chapters. In the first chapter, the cinematic space of the favela is examined from a historical perspective, focusing on the changes in representations of favelas in Brazilian cinema, from their romanticised portrayal of the 1930s-1950s to their overstated association with violence in New Brazilian Cinema films (mid-1990s onwards). This chapter is dedicated to showing how City of God’s national and international acclaim transformed it into a visual reference point for subsequent contemporary films depicting Brazilian favelas. The close analysis of City of God centres on the ways in which the film combines different cinematic strategies, from Italian neo-realism to ‘contemporary social realism’ as well as mainstream media (especially music videos and contemporary Hollywood films). This eclectic mix results in a pastiche that is a simultaneously jubilant yet violent portrayal of life in the favelas. To enhance my analysis, I then compare City of God to another recent Brazilian film, Elite Squad (2007), to argue that the latter can be interpreted as a direct response to the social problems presented in the former film. Although Elite Squad also focuses on favela violence, it does not attempt to depict it through an insider’s perspective. Rather, it adopts the outsider perspective of the police force.

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7 I adopt Homi Bhabha’s (1983, p. 18) notion of stereotype as “a form of knowledge and identification” that, while recognizing a fixed identity, needs also to be repeated over and over again in order to assure its fixity. He calls this a “process of ambivalence” by which stereotypes are reinforced through repetition because they can never be verified.

8 Contemporary social realism is used here in accordance with Hallam and Marshment’s (2000, p. 184) definition as “a discursive term used to describe films that aim to show the effects of environmental factors on the development of character through depictions that emphasize the relationship between location and identity”.

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that invades the *favela* to combat drug trafficking. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the real social impacts of *City of God* on the actual *favela* it claims to represent, as well as how the film has influenced public policies regarding poverty and violence in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

The second chapter centres on the cinematic prison and compares films from the *Cinema Novo* movement and New Brazilian Cinema. I demonstrate how the former represents prisoners as heroes fighting against authoritarian regimes, while the latter represents them as social deviants involved in violent crimes and drug trafficking. This is especially the case with *Carandiru* (2003), the key film analysed in this chapter. The cinematic prison in *Carandiru* is constructed in a similar way to the cinematic *favela* in *City of God*, reinforcing their proximity and similarity as spaces of social deviance. The chapter illustrates how many of *City of God*’s cinematic strategies also inform the construction of realism in *Carandiru*. My close analysis of this film relies on Michel Foucault’s notions of panopticism and punishment in prisons. Although Foucault’s critiques of the carceral system are useful to understand the overall problems depicted in *Carandiru*’s prison, I also argue that his description of the modern prison often contrasts with that of the Brazilian cinematic prison.

The third chapter discusses the cinematic street by focusing on the lives of homeless children. This chapter evaluates the influence of an acclaimed Brazilian film of the 1980s, *Pixote: The Law of the Weakest* (Hector Babenco 1981), on New Brazilian Cinema films that attempt to represent homeless children living on the streets. A close comparative analysis with *Last Stop 174* (Bruno Barreto 2008) reveals how the film, while claiming to depict the perspective of marginalised people, ends up reaffirming common ethnic and class stereotypes. By presenting marginalised people as principally responsible for their own social condition, the film avoids dealing with how Brazilian elite groups and institutions are directly responsible for social exclusion in the country. This chapter also re-examines the set of strategies used to construct realism from the previous chapters, demonstrating how they have become indicative of a trend in films focusing on urban violence in the Brazilian Cinema. A discussion about the relation between marginalised children’s struggle for social visibility and the exploitation of their image by contemporary cinema and television concludes the chapter.

In order to better contextualise my analysis of the three selected films, as well as the New Brazilian Cinema period as a whole, it will also be useful to take a step back and consider the economic, political and cultural elements that have shaped Brazil’s contemporary film policies. It is equally important to evaluate how practical political decisions (such as
specific incentive legislation for film production, notably the Rouanet and Audiovisual laws\(^9\) and changing economic contexts (such as the 1990s economic and political crisis) were directly or indirectly conducive to the production of specific films. My thesis does not presume to relate the whole recent history of Brazilian cinema, but I will attempt to identify some influential figures and decisive events that effectively played a role in the fate of recent filmmaking.

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In 1990, Fernando Collor, the first directly elected president of Brazil after more than twenty years of military dictatorship\(^10\), was dealing with numerous economic problems. Brazil, like all of Latin America, was suffering from hyperinflation, foreign debt and the liberalisation of the internal market with privatisation of state-owned companies and the reduction of government ‘interference’. In accordance with the neoliberal agenda, Collor made substantial reforms on cultural policies, as well. In the first months of his term of office, he dissolved the then recently created Ministry of Culture (1985), relegating it to the status of a department within the Ministry of Education; he closed the Embrasilme (State Film Agency), finished the Brazilian Cinema Foundation (in charge of film festivals and development of research and film conservation) and CONCINE (an institution that supervises cinematographic activities); and also ended the “Sarney Law”, created during José Sarney’s presidency, which was the first law based on the applications of tax breaks to cultural projects (Stam, Vieira and Xavier 1995; Ramos and Miranda 2000; Oricchio 2003; Nagib 2003). Although Collor was impeached on accusations of corruption and only stayed in power for two years, he completely destroyed the main institutions supporting the national film industry, leaving filmmakers and producers with few prospects for finance and distribution.

Around this time, Randal Johnson wrote a critical article titled “The Rise and Fall of Brazilian Cinema” (1991). As implied by the title, the author exposes the pessimistic atmosphere surrounding the situation in which the film industry found itself at that moment.

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\(^9\) These two new laws were created to encourage national film production. The Rouanet Law (No. 8.313), named after the law’s proponent Sergio Paulo Rouanet, was based on a tax credit to private investors. The Audiovisual Law (No. 8.586) allowed international and national corporations to invest up to 70 per cent of their tax credit of profits made in Brazil in film productions (Rêgo 2011, p. 38).

\(^10\) The official period of the Brazilian military regime was 1964-1985. The first civil president was elected indirectly by congressional vote in 1985, but he died of a heart attack before starting his term of office. Consequently, his vice-president assumed power and the first directly elected president of the post-military years in Brazil only came to power in 1989.
As he observes, the socio-economic situation in the country was very complicated after the political democratisation and liberalisation of the market. The economic recession had direct consequences for the national film industry, affecting production costs and causing a rise in equipment prices. The trend was called the ‘dollarisation’ of filmmaking, an allusion to the restrictions on imports adopted to protect an already ruined internal market (Johnson 1991). At the same time, the national industry suffered massive pressure from North American companies not only in the production market but also in the distribution and exhibition sectors within Brazil. Johnson (1991) observes that the totality of national film production was affected, with exhibitors facing bankruptcy, and resulting in the closing of many movie theatres.

Twenty years later, another influential article “The Fall and Rise of Brazilian Cinema” (Rêgo 2011) reworked Johnson’s pessimistic title to highlight the improvements in the national cinema. The inverted title points to the changes in the relationship between the state and Brazilian cinema, especially the former’s massive financial support of the latter in these last two decades. Regarding the important connection between the film industry and the economic, political and cultural environment, it is essential here to specify the singular element that enabled contemporary Brazilian cinema to strengthen itself. The financial support of the state has always been a crucial factor to the development of this industry, as it has hardly been self-sustaining. Added to improvements resulting from two incentive laws that encouraged private investment in films through tax breaks (Rouanet, 1992 and Audiovisual, 1993), another important initiative for supporting national cinema was the establishment of a prize called the “Brazilian Cinema Rescue Award” (during the years of 1993 to 1994). The prize was an attempt to distribute the remaining income from the state’s former film company, Embrasilme, among ninety film projects (short, medium and long length films) (Nagib 2002, p. 18). Arguably, the most important measure to boost national filmmaking was the establishment of a new state policy in 2001 that brought about the creation of a National Film Agency (ANCINE) responsible for the distribution of resources and protection of the internal market. Although the state has continued to be the main financial patron of the film production industry (both in tax breaks and in direct funding), private sponsors gained considerable prestige and profit: firstly, by having their names

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11 Exceptions are the silent cinema period, called the Golden Age (1908-1911), and Atlântida Studios (1942-1962), when Brazilian national cinema was popular and attracted significant audiences (Armes, 1987).

associated with cultural production (and nationally published as companies committed to the same) and, secondly, by becoming investors and partaking of any profit produced by the films (Kara-José 2007, p. 137).

Regarding this increase in Brazilian film production, it is noteworthy that there is a constant conflict between public incentives that should benefit projects that focus on cultural diversity and relevant social issues for the country and a competitive private market willing to sponsor only commercially successful films. In order to obtain funding from the government, a film usually has to have a social component in order to demonstrate its cultural role. On the other hand, when the film project wants to seek funding from private companies, filmmakers must also demonstrate commercial appeal within the entertainment industry. Pressured equally by state and market agendas, Brazilian cinema, in general, seems far from independent, alternating its content and style according to the demands of its sponsorship and the market.

As important as the state is to the revival of the national film industry, another leading player in the rise of Brazilian cinema is Globo Filmes, a profitable company that has steadily increased its market hegemony since it was created in 1998. This company has been so significantly influential that its inauguration is often used as a symbolic date to divide the two periods of Brazilian cinema. Globo Filmes has been involved with the production and/or distribution of New Brazilian Cinema’s most successful films, including City of God, Carandiru and Last Stop. To grasp the consequences of its hegemony for the contemporary film industry, it is necessary to understand why this particular company is doing so well economically. Producing their own projects and also co-producing independent films, the business model of Globo Filmes cannot be explained without referring the larger corporation behind it: Globo Organizations, one of the largest commercial mass media enterprises in the world (Conniff and McCann 1991). The most successful television channel owned by this conglomerate is TV Globo, available free to air in nearly every Brazilian house, reaching 98.44% of the national territory and 99.50% of the country’s population. TV Globo

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13 Between 1993 and 1998, Cinema da Retomada was a common expression to refer to the rebirth of Brazilian cinema after some years of inactivity. Far from denoting any kind of movement or unity, the use of this expression was rather an attempt to recognise a new phase of film production (Nagib 2005, p. 165). Following this recent process of redevelopment and restructure of the national cinema industry, the succeeding period, (1998 until today) became known as Cinema pós-retomada and is “characterised by global patterns such as concentration of ownership, franchising and co-productions between transnational partners” (Donoghue 2011). Like films of the revival period, post-revival films apparently have no common aesthetic styles or political discourses; furthermore, there is no visible consensus among their heterogeneous group of filmmakers.

14 Data extracted from Globo Organization official website: http://redeglobo.globo.com/TVG/0,,9648,00.html [accessed on 8th October 2011].
was created during the 1960s, benefiting from direct political support from the military regime and a financial partnership with the North American Company *Time-Life*. In the context of the dictatorship, the creation of a strong broadcasting network also helped the government’s nationalist aims of disseminating discourses of national identity and culture inside a continental country (Thomas 2000). On the other hand, from its deal with the American owned *Time-Life*, the Brazilian channel received technological capacity and assistance in addition to a considerable amount of investment, making the *Globo* empire so powerful that no other national channel could compete.

The influence of mass media on democratically elected governments is still very strong. This is evident in the country’s organization of two upcoming mega events, the FIFA football World Cup (2014) and the Olympic Games (2016). Since both events will place Brazil at the centre of international media coverage, they have already begun to influence public policies in the host cities, especially in places populated by marginalised people. These are usually thought of as violent spaces and, consequently, incompatible with the tourist images that the country wishes to project to the rest of the world. In order to superficially organise the urban space and hide social problems, a number of rapid and arbitrary public policies have been employed. The redevelopment of specific *favelas* to suit international expectations, for example, has resulted in their militarisation (occupation by permanent security forces) and in the relocation of a number of residents to remote areas of the city. In the case of the prisons, arbitrary imprisonment and delays in releasing those who have served out their full sentences, has contributed to the continuous increase of the carceral population. Finally, in the streets, practices of social cleansing have been leading to the institutionalisation of homeless children. In sum, beyond public commitments to deal with social problems and

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15 The website FRANCE 24 (2012) published that “The coolest *favela* in Rio may be sacrificed to make way for Olympics. Throughout Rio de Janeiro, which will host the FIFA World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in summer 2016, massive changes are afoot. The municipality has launched a large anti-crime operation in several favelas and is working on redeveloping the city’s main arteries. According to the Popular Committee of the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games, a total of 22,000 people will need to leave their current homes, and 8,000 of them have already been relocated.”

16 International Bar Association Human Rights Institute Report (2010) states that in 2009, “the National Council of Justice announced that out of the cases it has reviewed so far, one in five pre-trial detainees have been imprisoned irregularly”. Therefore, inmates have ended up spending “years in pre-trial detention” or have to remain incarcerated “after the expiry of their sentence due to bureaucratic incompetence”.

17 Since 2011, the city administration has adopted a public policy that authorises the police to collect children living in the streets and sends them to institutional homes. This attitude has been criticised as a brutal and palliative strategy for trying to solve the problem of homeless children (Human Rights Municipal Commission of Rio de Janeiro, 2012).
take advantage of international events to grow the economy and showcase Brazil as a successful developing country, the state, with its disregard of crucial social and ethnic inequality issues, has become an increasingly threatening force in these marginalised urban spaces.

This historical overview is an attempt to identify the influences of the state and media on the production of contemporary Brazilian cinema, as these two forces still play a leading role in the development of the film industry. In the following chapters, I analyse the cinematic spaces of favelas, prisons and streets in contemporary Brazilian films, and their construction of intertextual bridges between the fictional and the real world. In the attempt to understand these films on and beyond the screen, this thesis will provide an in-depth look at cinematic strategies that reinforce marginalised spaces/peoples as the main settings/agents of violence in contemporary Brazil.
Chapter One: Cinematic favela

The main goal of this chapter is to discuss the ways in which what can be termed cinematic realism has informed the representation\(^\text{18}\) of favelas (slums and shantytowns) in Brazilian films, especially those produced during the New Brazilian Cinema. Through a close analysis of the film City of God, I also pay particular attention to the way realism informs both film aesthetics and the representation of social reality. To further illustrate my arguments, I reserve the last section of this chapter for a comparative analysis of City of God and Elite Squad (José Padilha 2007), another contemporary Brazilian blockbuster based on violence and drug trafficking in a favela.

Both Brazilian and international scholars have raised important ethical and aesthetic questions in relation to films that attempt to offer ‘real life’ portrayals of Brazilian favelas. Due to City of God’s national and international success, recent publications have given this film particular attention; a good example being the book City of God in Several Voices, (Vieira 2005), which brings together divergent perspectives on the film. In order to contextualise my analysis of City of God, it is important to begin by offering a survey of the history of realism in the representations of favelas in Brazilian cinema.

1.1 Depictions of the favela: from Italian neo-realist influences to the New Brazilian Cinema

The word favela derives from the common name of a plant endemic to the Northeast of Brazil. Perlman (2010) argues that its contemporary use takes shape after soldiers began returning to the city of Rio de Janeiro following the War of Canudos (a conflict lasting from 1893 to 1897 in which the Brazilian Republican army crushed a pro-monarchist movement in the arid countryside of the region). Tired of waiting for the land they were promised as a reward for their bravery, soldiers began to raise provisional tents on the hills of the city. These places became known as favelas\(^\text{19}\), in allusion to a plant from the Northeast that also flourished in Rio’s highlands.

The term continues to be used in Brazil to indicate poor, unplanned and overpopulated urban occupations. In its pejorative sense, the word favela also identifies people that, because

\(^\text{18}\) The theme of representation here is addressed through Stuart Hall’s (1997) notion that images embody cultural codes that convey different meanings depending on the social and historical situation of an audience.

\(^\text{19}\) Perlman (2010) also cites a second version that associates the contemporary use of the word as a possible reference to the Monte Favela, a hill very close to the site of the War of Canudos.
of their social condition, should not be allowed to live in or near upper-middle class areas of the city. The inhabitants of favelas are frequently called favelados. This is an offensive term that, while carrying many distinct derogatory and racist meanings depending on the context, is always used to underscore a person’s place at the bottom of Brazilian society.

Favelas, especially those of the megalopolises of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, have been the main settings chosen by local and international films to approach the theme of social and urban inequality in Brazil. In 1935, pioneering Brazilian director Humberto Mauro produced one of the first depictions of a favela and its inhabitants in his Favela of My Loves (Favela dos meus amores). The film relied on a documentary style, using location shooting and non-professional actors (Stam 1997, p. 83). It is one of the first films in Brazilian cinema to portray Afro-descendants (mostly, samba dancers) and images of an actual favela (Rodrigues 2001). Although relying on what was then still a pioneering use of non-studio settings and non-professional actors, this film presents a romanticised portrayal of life in the favelas, reducing actual residents to stereotypical activities: carnival dancers, samba musicians and malandros (rogues).

In opposition to films that portray a romanticised image of the favela, other films from the 1950s until the late 1960s also attempted to represent its social problems. Among these, it is worth mentioning two acclaimed films by Nelson Pereira do Santos, often considered foundational works of Brazilian modern cinema (Xavier 2001, p. 9) and harbingers of the Cinema Novo movement: Rio 40 Degrees (Rio 40 graus, 1954) and Rio Northern Zone (Rio Zona Norte, 1957). Drawing heavily on influences from Italian neo-realism, both films aimed to give a detailed account of life on the favela hills. According to Nagib (2003), the city of Rio de Janeiro is the main character of Rio 40 Degrees. By depicting the space of the favela alongside wealthier parts of the city, the film pioneered a focus on the city’s internal tension between its poor and rich areas. In the case of Rio Northern Zone, the main characters are

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21 Due to his ambiguous location in-between the realms of law and crime, of poverty and wealth, the malandro character has been frequently used to discuss Brazilian national identity as a whole. I adopt here the English translation and the definition of malandro in accordance with the anthropologist Roberto da Matta, for whom “the rogue is a being out of place, dislocated from the formal rules that govern the social structure, relatively excluded from the labour market – indeed, we defined and represent him as one totally averse to work” (1991, p. 209).

22 The Cinema Novo movement (1950s - 1970s) was part of a broad artistic and cultural movement (including theatre, music, plastic arts and literature) that aimed to provoke social transformations by discussing and denouncing the social inequalities of the country. As Johnson (1984, p. 97) argues “it evolved through a number of discernible phases, each of which corresponds to a specific sociopolitical conjuncture”.

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Afro-Brazilian samba musicians living in the *favelas*. Stam (1997) argues that the film portrays these characters as exploited by wealthier white characters. In both films, there is a visible connection between class and ethnicity, especially in the way Afro-descendent *favela* residents struggle to resist socio-economic marginalisation and exploitation.

Another film about samba musicians, and certainly the most famous\(^{23}\) of these early representations of Brazilian *favelas*, is *Black Orpheus* (*Orfeu Negro*, 1959), by the French filmmaker Marcel Camus. The film, which won important prizes including an Academy Award for best foreign language film and the Cannes’ *Palm D’Or*, and helped to disseminate a specific image of Rio’s *favelas* as well as Brazilian sambas to worldwide audiences. However, its rather romanticised portrayal of the *favela* as a place of continuous happiness and singing was deeply criticised by subsequent generations of filmmakers. In this respect, Bentes points out that:

in *Orfeu Negro*, made after *Rio Zona Norte*, all historical and social context is abandoned. This is probably the reason why emergent Cinema Novo directors reacted so furiously against what they called the portrait of a ‘mythical’ Rio de Janeiro presented by the film. (2003, p.134)

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\(^{23}\) Hernandez-Rodrigues (2009, p. 112) states that *Black Orpheus* is possibly the most watched film portraying Brazil.
During the 1960s, Cinema Novo filmmakers made Favela Five Times (*Cinco Vezes Favela*, 1961)\(^{24}\), a project composed of five short films that collectively addressed social concerns by focusing on the unequal relationship between Rio’s bourgeoisie and favela residents. According to the film critic Jean-Claude Bernardet (2007, p. 44), the screening of *Favela Five Times* generated a multitude of local discussions regarding the borders between art and politics; including the conflicts between artistic freedom of expression and the pressures filmmakers at the time felt among themselves to produce politically engaged films.

The Cinema Novo movement also concerned itself with the ethical and aesthetic challenges of portraying poverty while avoiding the didacticisms and naiveties of the above-mentioned films. Johnson (1987, p. 92) adds that “the model of neorealism served Cinema Novo well as a production and aesthetic strategy, especially during the first phase of the movement, as filmmakers attempted to portray what they saw as the true face of Brazilian underdevelopment.”\(^{25}\) As the movement’s main representative, Glauber Rocha’s concern was to make films that challenged audiences to experience the effects of social exclusion and hunger, avoiding the folklorisation and victimisation with which Brazilian poverty was previously portrayed (Bentes 2003). To this end Cinema Novo drew on two basic features previously developed by two distinct European cinema movements: the Italian neo-realism’s use of non-professional actors and location shooting and the French New Wave’s production mode of “low-budget independently produced films” (Johnson and Stam 1995, p. 33). The favouring of European schools was, in part, a clear refusal of Hollywood models. In their attempt to avoid the artificially constructed images made on Hollywood studios sets, Cinema Novo directors tended to concentrate their productions in “the places where Brazil's social

\(^{24}\) The film is composed by five short films: *Um favelado* (Marcos Farias), *Zé da Cachorra* (Miguel Borges), *Escola de Samba, Alegria de Viver* (Carlos Diegues), *Couro de Gato* (Joaquim Pedro de Andrade) and *Pedreira de São Diego* (Leo Hirszman).

\(^{25}\) Johnson and Stam (1995) state that Cinema Novo has three distinctive phases, each of which express features of their respective historical contexts. The first phase (1960-64) relates to a moment of rising nationalism and economic development taking place in the country. Films such as *Barren Lives* (*Vidas Secas*, Nelson Pereira dos Santos 1963) and *The Guns* (*Os fuzis*, Ruy Guerra 1963) are centred on the hope of raising social consciousness among the people; therefore contributing to a process of socio-economic transformation or, in the recurrent words used by the time, to motivate a social revolution. The second phase (1964-1968) reflected on the failure of the Brazilian leftist movement after the military coup d’état. The most important film from this time was *Land in Anguish* (*Terra em Transe*, Glauber Rocha 1967), which portrayed the conflict between three important political figures: a middle class intellectual, a populist and a fascist, all of whom were contesting for political power over the people. The third phase corresponded to the most severe years of Military repression and censorship (1968-1973). Films during this era relied on allegories as the main mode of cinematic discourse. Important examples from this period include films such as *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman* (*Como era gostoso meu frânces*, Nelson Pereira dos Santos 1970) and *Macunaíma* (Joaquim Pedro de Andrade 1969).
contradictions appeared most dramatically”, including the *favelas* (Stam and Johnson 1979, p. 16).

Unlike *Cinema Novo* directors, whose representations of *favelas* were usually in clear accordance with their radical political agendas, contemporary Brazilian films set inside *favelas* (especially those from the New Brazilian Cinema) have rather unclear - or usually undeclared - political goals. Ismail Xavier (2003a) argues that recent images of poverty have lost much of the aesthetic ingenuity and political power of previous *Cinema Novo* films. It is worth noting how plots that emerged from the New Brazilian Cinema revolve around two key themes: drug trafficking, and its violent effects on local communities.26

In her article “The New Marginality”, Malkin-Fontecchio (2009) suggests a direct connection between recent films’ common focus on the theme of violence and the statistical increase of urban conflicts in Rio de Janeiro, especially after the rise of drug trafficking in the 1980s. The author highlights that even though murder rates have grown in the city as a whole, the numbers increase substantially when the data refers only to *favelas*. As a result of the growing social gap between rich and poor areas of the city, she suggests that tensions between different social classes became an inevitable and persistent theme in Brazilian cinema. Since then, filmmakers have often portrayed Rio de Janeiro as a city divided into two worlds: the low, plane and urban developed city of the citizens versus the high, hilly and hidden streets of illegal *favelas* and criminals.

Among the many contemporary representations of the *favela*, *City of God* managed to appeal to different audiences worldwide, becoming one of the most famous Brazilian films of all time. Its impact on local and international filmmakers cannot be underestimated. The film received four Academy Award nominations in 2004, among many other national and international prizes.27 As a consequence, the film eventually became one of the main representatives of the New Brazilian Cinema (Oricchio 2003). *City of God’s* success among

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27 It was part of the official selection of Cannes and won Best Foreign Language Film at the Chicago Film Critics Association Awards, Las Vegas Film Critics Society Awards, New York Film Critics Circle Awards, Southeastern Film Critics Association Awards, and the Toronto Film Critics Association Awards. Complete list of awards can be found on the Website Internet Movie Database. Available from: [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0317248/awards](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0317248/awards) [accessed on 12th September 2012].
worldwide critics and audiences is directly related to what has been considered a convincing representation of life in a contemporary Brazilian favela. By drawing on sophisticated editing techniques and other developments of mainstream filmmaking, City of God subordinated social concerns to entertainment. As will be discussed later, at least among scholars, this formula has proved to be as controversial as it has been successful.

Christian Léon (2005, p. 71) argues that City of God’s postmodern combination of and references to different cinematic traditions results in what can be considered a “pastiche”. Drawing on Jameson’s argument that postmodern artworks are no longer unified, but more likely a junction of multiple references, Léon argues that City of God’s fragmentary aesthetics integrates heterogeneous and even conflicting elements. For example, Léon points out that the film references distinct visual styles such as documentary, music video, gangster films and advertisement programs. As will be shown, as a result of this eclectic mix, the film also manages to disguise its commercial aims by highlighting its supposed social concerns.

1.2 The construction of realism in City of God

In terms of theme and form, the influence of Italian neo-realism in City of God is clear (Traverso 2007, Nagib 2007, Oliveira 2008). Issues such as unemployment, poverty and marginalisation, recurrent social themes of the Italian movement, prevail in Fernando Meirelles’ film. Aesthetically, City of God also relies on the use of location shooting, non-professional actors, hand-held cameras and natural light. These are characteristics present in Italian neo-realist films such as Bicycle Thieves (Ladri di Bicicletti, 1948), directed by Vittorio de Sica (Hayward 2006, p. 201). However, despite these similarities, it is reductive to classify City of God simply as a neo-realist film. The French film critic André Bazin (1971) points out that neo-realism is “more an ontological position than an aesthetic one” and, therefore, the “employment of its technical attributes like a recipe” would not necessarily produce neo-realist films (1971, p. 66). Indeed, Bazin’s definition of neo-realism focuses on its fundamental concern of conveying reality, thus limiting the manipulation of images to create the impression of a unified space. He argues that, although this reality is not captured integrally (but filtered by the film director), its cinematic presentation is able to restore the totality of the space. This is achieved mainly by respecting spatial and dramatic unity, which allows viewers to have autonomy to interpret and construct meaning from the images.28 Thus,

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28 In opposition to neo-realist films, Bazin criticises Soviet cinema because it relies on the use of montage, joining two different shots/spaces (breaking reality into pieces) in order to produce a determinate meaning. Therefore, in these films, the editing selects what should been seen. He adds that: “The originality of Italian neo-realism as compared with the chief schools of realism that
Bazin praised neo-realist films for a unified “ontological identity between the object and its photographic image” (1971, p. 98). According to this distinction, it is fair to say that *City of God*, although appropriating general characteristics of Italian neo-realism, also clearly departs from it. The film’s short-length shots, fast-paced narrative and discontinuous editing present a decidedly fragmented and contrived cinematic space. It does not permit viewers to wander around the images and analyse them. In this way, *City of God* displays more affinities with contemporary mainstream media (Hollywood films and television music programmes) than with any neo-realist film. In summary, although the film shares Italian neo-realism’s commitment of showing a “hidden reality” (Nagib 2004, 244), it seeks to do so with commercial entertainment ambitions, comparable to mainstream media. Beyond Italian neo-realist references, another approach to understanding *City of God* is by situating it within a group of films that Hallam and Marshment (2003) describe as illustrative of ‘contemporary social realism’, including titles such as *Boys N the Hood* (1991), *Once Were Warriors* (1994) and *La Haine* (1995). The authors classify these films by underlining their similarities as “set in economically marginalised communities” and fulfilling “realism’s traditional project of subjective incorporation” (2003, 197). Another characteristic is that these films also turn marginalised people into the main characters of their narratives. In this sense, they focus on the relationship between character and space, as well as on theme of urban life confinement and socio-economic segregation. This is precisely the case in *City of God*, where young people (most of them, Afro-Brazilian males) are represented as being confined to a *favela* with little opportunity of social or economic mobility. In the film, the *favela* is presented as a ghetto—a space of physical and symbolic immobility. In similar to the group of films cited by Hallam and Marshment, *City of God* also ends without resolving any of the social difficulties that have been presented and depicts a pessimistic overall portrayal of life in the *favela*. In terms of form, Hallam and Marshment argue that the visual style of contemporary social realist films varies significantly, and includes a range of influences from “European art cinema to advertising” (2003, 216). Similar to the hybrid forms of social realism described by these two authors, *City of God* can also be understood as a maze of cinematic influences.

*City of God*’s social realism is also manifested in the director’s explicit concern with building a historical narrative that supposedly reflects facts drawn from reality. At its release, preceded it and with the Soviet cinema, lies in never making reality the servant of some a priori point of view” (1977, p. 64). He also criticised the German expressionism that relied on theatrical decor, pointing out that “it did every kind of violence to the plastics of the image by way of sets and lighting” (1967, p. 26).

29 I adopt Jaffe’s (2012, p. 674) definition of ghetto “as a discursive space of immobility”.

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29 I adopt Jaffe’s (2012, p. 674) definition of ghetto “as a discursive space of immobility”.
the film was promoted as based on a true story, offering both an accurate and updated portrayal of life in Rio’s favelas. These bold claims, combined within an effective marketing campaign, contributed to the film’s enthusiastic reception not only among Brazilian spectators in general, but many intellectuals and film critics. For example, television journalist and film director Arnaldo Jabor stated at the time of the City of God’s release that it was “not only a film”, but rather “an important fact, a crucial statement, a borehole in our national conscience” (Jabor 2005, p. iii). The film is an adaptation of a 1997 book of the same name written by Brazilian poet Paulo Lins who lived in Cidade de Deus (City of God), a favela in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Lins’ childhood memories were the inspiration for the narrator of the film, Rocket. To write his novel, Lins relied on an ethnographic survey entitled “Crime and Criminality among Popular Classes”30, which he was involved with as a research assistant. Conducted by anthropologist Alba Zaluar, this research approached Rio de Janeiro’s criminality from a different perspective to that of mainstream media, by giving voice to favela residents. As a consequence, the research, the novel and the film all claim to be speaking ‘from inside’ the favela City of God.

The film is narrated from the perspective of Rocket. He is responsible not only for introducing and establishing connections between all other characters, but for explaining the drug dealing and also helping to construct the spectator’s point of view. In this sense, he is a strategic character bridging two social worlds: he is the voice from inside the favela but, at the same time, he speaks from outside its world of organised crime. In an intimate (often tragicomic) tone, Rocket’s narration guides spectators through the streets of City of God at the same time as he shares with them the two personal challenges he is currently facing: the quest to find a job and to lose his virginity. His voice-over, associated with flashbacks, expresses a form of subjective temporality. Rocket’s personal memories, added to the tales he hears from others, also reveal the transformations in the City of God during its three distinct decades.

The nostalgia and historical remoteness of the 1960s from the present is expressed through a cinematography and mise-en-scène that saturates the world in yellow tones and creates a “sense of naiveté reminiscent of many American Westerns” (Oppenheimer 2005, p. 27). The main characters of this first part of the film already have guns. However, they act differently from the future characters of the 1970s and 1980s because they do not intend to kill anyone. One could argue that they are depicted as analogous to the malandros (rogue) rather than cold-blooded criminals. The following decade, that of the 1970s, demonstrates how crime started to become a rule rather than an exception inside the favela. The film’s

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colour palate also changes to accentuate tones of blue and green and the “myriad colours” emphasises that this was a “happy time” for the teenagers (Oppenheimer 2005, 27). Drug dealing becomes the best path for making money and Li’l Zé, who is depicted as an unrepentant ‘bad guy’, takes control of the traffic trade by murdering anyone without fear of retaliation. The only one that can change his attitude is his best friend Benny, who, in contrast, is portrayed as a ‘good’ criminal. Set in the early 1980s, the third part of the film is centred on the conflict between the ‘bad’ Li’l Zé and Knockout, who was a ‘good guy’ until the day Li’l Zé rapes his girlfriend and kills members of his family. From this day on, motivated by his thirst for revenge, Knockout joins the rival gang fighting against Lil’ Zë. In this phase, cocaine replaces marijuana as the main source of revenue in the favela, creating an even bleaker social reality. The camera frequently loses focus and shakes, resembling documentary footage of contemporary war zones. In this last period, the actors representing drug dealers are younger than ever before.

Figure 1.2 City of God in the 1960s

Figure 1.3 City of God in the 1970s
At the end of the film, the youngest group, the Runts, kill Li’l Zé. This last scene is constructed in a way to clearly suggest that these children will be even more vicious criminals and die even younger than Li’l Zé. Although witnessing and documenting the murder with his still camera, Rocket chooses to release a photo to the press that only shows Li’l Zé’s corpse without any evidence of the killers. This option assures his own safety and reveals his “pragmatism” (Xavier 2007). Rocket is the only character that opts to rely on artistic talents (in his case, as a photographer) as a path for solving his personal problems. As such, he symbolically suggests that art might be a possible route for the *favela* residents to escape from violence.
Although audiences are aware that *City of God* is a work of fiction, the film has often been taken as an authentic portrayal of life in the *favela*. As Lucia Nagib (2006, p. 244) points out, this has less to do with the film’s “attempt at copying reality” than with its convincing way of producing it. I will now address elements of *mise-en-scène* and cinematography used as strategies to create realism in the film. I will also consider the use of intertextual references\(^{31}\) (Ott and Walter 2000, p. 437), such as the creative insertion and appropriation of television footage, as another aspect that enhances the film’s realism. The analysis of these strategies will result in a better understanding of how the film combines influences from Italian neo-realism and mainstream media to create a disturbing, yet engaging real-life drama. Later in this chapter, I will also analyse the way in which the film’s creative use of editing techniques directly imitates styles from contemporary television programs, specifically music videos.

The analysis of the film’s *mise-en-scène* will consider its four main elements: staging, setting, lighting and costume design/makeup (Bordwell and Thompson 2003). I will pay particular attention to the strategies of constructing realism in the film, starting with the film director’s preferred method for creating naturalistic performances. These resulted from a thoughtful and lengthy casting process conducted for more than one year, involving young non-professional actors. As director Fernando Meirelles (2005, p. 15) stated:

> I wanted the audience to look at Li’l Zé and actually see the real Li’l Zé, and not an actor playing a role. (…) Middle-class actors would not know how to interpret those characters. Besides, there were no young black or mulato actors in Brazil. I would have to find the cast in the favelas of Rio.

Meirelles’ justification resembles Vittorio De Sica’s joy when describing the main adult character in *Bicycle Thieves* as a true factory worker: “The way he moved, the way he sat down, his gestures with those hands of a working man and not an actor… everything about him was perfect” (cited in Bordwell and Thompson 2003, p. 485). However, the naturalistic performance of the actors in *City of God* cannot be reduced solely to their social backgrounds or unknown faces. Finding the right actors started with the interviewing of around two thousand people from many *favelas* throughout Rio de Janeiro. From this, four hundred were chosen to participate in an acting workshop, following which, two hundred people, including the main actors, were eventually selected to constitute the final cast. *City of God*’s acclaimed acting is, above all, the product of a careful and particular way of training the new actors. The

\(^{31}\) Ott and Walter (2000, p. 437) develop the concept as referring to “a stylistic device in which one text appropriates and integrates a fragment of another text.”
film’s dialogues and acting were chosen after several improvisation exercises, which helped to generate the ‘insider’s point of view’ that director Meirelles was looking for. More details on the performances themselves will come in the next section of this chapter, during the close analysis of a specific scene.

With regards to the second element of mise-en-scène, the setting, it is important to note *City of God*’s frequent use of location shooting. This strategy, characteristic of Italian neo-realist films, is described by the Italian journalist Alberto Lattuada as a way to “express life in its most convincing manner and with the harness of documentaries” (cited in Armes 1971, p. 67). Here, it should be mentioned that the outdoor scenes of *City of God* were shot in different favelas of Rio de Janeiro. As Nunes (2003) notes, the first part of the film was shot in a government housing project located in a neighbourhood called Nova Sepetiba, the second one in Cidade Alta, and only the final part was shot in Cidade de Deus (City of God). Although the actual locations varied geographically, the cinematic representation is artfully constructed to convince audiences that everything takes place only in the favela City of God. Since the cinematic space of the story remains the same, changes are perceived mainly from one historical period to another. During the film, the cinematic space undergoes some urban changes over the successive decades in which the narrative occurs. For example, during the 1960s, the space is still completely flat and marked by the wide streets of the original housing project. Yet, as time passes and social problems arise, the streets become narrower and the houses crowd together, suggesting the growth of the favela’s population and poverty. On the other hand, certain characteristics of the favela are intentionally represented as static. Regardless of the decade portrayed, for example, City of God is always represented as an ideal refuge for runaways and outlaws. Throughout the film, there is not a single establishing shot to contextualise the boundaries of City of God. The absence of any identifiable urban landmarks makes it impossible to recognise nearby neighbourhoods or tourist sights around the favela. It seems that the place is surrounded only by bush. Therefore, the cinematic space creates a division between the inside and the outside of the favela – as if Rio de Janeiro and City of God were isolated and discontinuous worlds.

The third element of mise-en-scène is the lighting. As a direct result of the frequent location shootings, the use of natural light prevails in the film. It is important, however, to add that the *City of God*’s natural lighting results from specific techniques originally created for the film, such as bathing the actors’ bodies in oil to make them shine under the tropical light. In this search to produce a believable portrayal of reality, *City of God*’s cinematographer, Charlone, stated that the “main concern was being real, being believable. It goes back to the roots of Neo-Realism, but it’s a new realism. We wanted to show this reality as faithfully as
we could” (cited in Oppenheimer 2005, p. 31). It should be noted that the lighting plays an important role “establishing the setting” in *City of God* (Barsam 2007, p. 102). The rapid changes in lighting between scenes emphasise abrupt changes in the mood of the film, reinforcing its violent plot. This is evident in the changes between the bright light of the scene of Rocket and Angelica talking on the beach and the darker light of the following scene in which Rocket is inside the *favela* buying drugs in his friend’s apartment. This contrast of lighting differentiates the calm and safe space of the beach from the unpredictable and risky cinematic *favela*.

The last elements of *mise-en-scène* analysed here are costume design and makeup. By the time of the film’s release, Meirelles proudly stated that the film’s co-director, Kátia Lund, was chiefly responsible for creating a sense of authenticity in these elements, by emulating a raw documentary style (Leão 2002). In order to enhance the impression of historical accuracy, the film employs a range of clothes and hairstyles corresponding to three different decades: from the end of the 1960s to the beginning of the 1980s. An example of the elaborate use of these elements is the scene of drug dealer Benny’s farewell party. The guests of this 1970s party dress in richly detailed, colourful t-shirts, bell-bottom trousers and Afro hairdos. Although Meirelles statement suggests that he intended the film to be seen as almost verging on a documentary, this scene clearly reveals the work of reconstituting costume design and make-up.

The most important element to the construction of realism in *City of God*’s cinematography is the use of a hand-held camera. This technique is employed in specific shots to produce shaking images and unexpected movements, increasing the tension of scenes. Within the fictional world, this strategy creates a sense that the camera is simultaneously participating in the scene as well as filming it. This technique allows for unrestricted camera movements, similar to the “freely-moving documentary style of photography” seen in Italian neo-realism (Shiel, 2006, p. 2). However, in contrast to the camera movement used in Italian neo-realism, the hand-held camera in *City of God* is not compromised by the spatial and temporal preservation of long takes. On the contrary, it is used to facilitate a number of cuts and different camera positions in the same scene. It accompanies actors’ emotions, allowing for the improvisation of both dialogues and actions, which offers more flexibility to engender naturalistic performances. This effect is frequently employed in violent scenes, where the unsteady and trembling camera seems to be alive, as if expressing an embodied situation within the world of the film. These improvised images are so inextricably bound to the fast paced action taking place that spectators often have the illusion of being inside the film, facing the same challenges and risks as the film’s characters. The scene in which the character
Uncle Sam attempts to sell guns to the drug dealer Li'l Zé is an example of this. Uncle Sam shows the guns explaining to Li'l Zé the differences between each model. The irregular camera intensifies the tension between the characters. It suggests the fact that Li'l Zé might have an outbreak of rage at any point, since he is increasingly unsatisfied with the gun models presented to him. In the end, Li'l Zé points to Uncle Sam asking him to leave the place without receiving any payment. Uncle Sam, nervously sweating, explains that he cannot leave the place empty-handed. Li’l Zé and his followers insist that he must leave. The hand-held camera creates a sense of giddiness reflecting the unpredictable actions of the drug dealer. Later in this chapter, I will focus more on the effects of hand-held cameras in a close analysis of the sequence, which I refer to as “The punishment of the Runts”.

The last strategy of realism, the use of intertextual references, relies mostly on an intentional combination of journalistic sources and fictional images. One example of this is the use of archive footage of a TV news bulletin from the 1980s, immediately followed by an interview with the character Knockout after he is arrested following his personal ‘war’ with Li’il Zé. In the film, the use of intertextual references 32, especially by incorporating journalistic images into the narrative, is clearly used to confirm the existence of fictional characters within a non-fictional social world. At the end of the film, the same interview with Knockout is repeated. However, this time, it is the actual person who inspired the fictional character that appears, not the actor. During these last moments, spectators are invited to identify the ‘real’ Knockout (who appears in the old journalistic images) as a type of ‘proof’ of the supposedly ‘true’ story of his life represented in the film. During the credits, another example is shown when the names and photos of the main actors are paired off with the photos and names of the actual people who inspired the film’s story.

Figure 1.6 TV news bulletin followed by an interview with the character Knockout

32 This strategy was already used in Lúcio Flávio, Passenger of Agony (Hector Babenco 1977). The film uses actual newspapers from the time, but replaces the photos of the real Lúcio Flávio with photos of the actor Reginaldo Farias (Johnson 1987b).
The film’s acclaimed construction of realism must, therefore, be understood as a result of the coordinated use of these strategies. Although this recurring and intentional incorporation of reality and fiction is visible during the entire film, it is possible to show how one specific scene, “The punishment of the Runts”, clearly combines at least four of the elements discussed: the use of location shooting, non-professional actors, natural light and hand-held cameras. The analysis of this scene will also serve to raise ethical issues related to the construction of the realism in this film.

1.3 Realism in the scene: “The punishment of the Runts”

Due to its high level of realism and violence, “The punishment of the Runts” is generally regarded as one of City of God’s most dramatic scenes (Carlsten 2005). In 2011, the North American website PopCrunch\(^3\) placed it (under the name of “Little Zé recruits”) on the first spot of a list of the “10 most disturbingly violent scenes in Hollywood history”. Below City of God’s images, the list situated those from renowned violent films such as Taxi Driver (Scorsese 1976), Saving Private Ryan (Steven Spielberg 1998) and Reservoir Dogs (Tarantino 1992). The website justified its decision by suggesting that the extreme level of cruelty portrayed in City of God was largely a result of the believability of the children’s acting.

The option to shoot the scene in an outdoor area, during daylight, adds to the depiction of the favela as a brutal and isolated space. It suggests that there is no need to conceal, under

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the cover of darkness, all the violent activities taking place daily within the favela’s perimeters. Li’l Zé, who is now a drug lord and the man in charge of executing the favela’s internal laws, decides to punish the Runts (a group of very young thieves) for robbing a local bakery. The disciplinary action is needed because one of drug trafficking’s rules is never to steal inside the favela in order to avoid the presence of the police. Li’l Zé brings a young follower with him, about eight years old, nicknamed Steak’n’Fries. The boy is still unaware that he will be attending his own initiation ritual: a symbolic transition from childhood to adulthood sealed by his first murder.

The scene starts with an aerial image of Li’l Zé and his entourage walking along a narrow street. A middle close-up shot shows that Steak'n'Fries is visibly happy walking alongside Li’l Zé’s gang. Their image is crosscut with the Runts talking and eating in a dead-end street. The abrupt hand-held camera movement that follows the Runts’ conversation foreshadows the tension of the upcoming meeting. As Li’l Zé walks, a few black cows appear in close up from behind him, partially covering the screen. The image of the animals seems to anticipate the following action, when Li’l Zé and his companions corral the Runts in the dead-end street, as if they were cowboys herding their cattle. The Runts do not have guns or other weapons with which to protect themselves, and the ability to run is their only tool for survival. Another aerial image reveals the spatial proximity between the two groups. Unaware of the dangers they are facing, the Runts remain joyfully talking among themselves. One of them mocks that “he will act as Li’l Zé”, killing everyone to assume the role of the favela’s drug lord. At this moment, Li’l Zé’s group arrives and tries to catch the children. Most of the Runts manage to run away quickly, either slipping through the small holes of a wooden fence or jumping over it. Fast-paced editing alternates images from different camera angles showing both the action from an aerial perspective and from the ground, where the chase takes place. At the end, only two children remain as prisoners, standing up against a near wall. One of them is around five years old. He wears red and white checkered shorts, a dirty white t-shirt embossed with red and blue horses and white shoes. To emphasise the character’s poor background, he is dressed in old clothes that visibly no longer fit his body, leaving his belly and most of his legs uncovered. The second boy is about seven, dressed in equally tiny striped blue and white shorts, a tight blue t-shirt with large horizontal navy-blue strips and white shoes.

A shaking hand-held camera, which follows the rhythm of the action, increases the tension of the scene. Character’s actions are shown from different camera angles; one focusing on the point of view of the youngest runt child; at its opposite side, a second one represents Li’ Zé’s group’s view of the scene; a third angle is placed in an aerial position, as if
it were the view from the terrace of an apartment nearby; while, lastly, a close up shows Steak’n’Fries’ emotional reactions. It is important to note that the soundtrack of this scene is reduced only to the direct sound composed by dialogues, bullet shots and screams. There is a complete absence of any non-diegetic sounds, such as songs to smooth character’s actions or a narrator’s voice-over. In many ways, the sound can be regarded as another strategy employed by Meirelles to amplify realism in this specific scene. As a clear result of this strategy, spectators experience a direct relationship with the actions portrayed, feeling that they are watching a live transmission.

As the scene unfolds, Li’l Zé explains to the two remaining Runts that they will be punished for all of the other runaways. The low camera angle showing the perspective of the younger boy emphasises the difference between his lower stature and the teenagers. Li’l Zé asks them if they would prefer to be shot on the foot or on the hand. In the reverse shot, the high angle of the camera posited over Lil’ Zé’s shoulder increases the children’s fragility at this moment. The two boys remain silent, as if they could not manage to answer the shocking dilemma put to them. Although they do not express it in words, their bodies reveal the panic they feel. As soon as the drug lord announces his sentence, the camera changes to focus on Steak’n’Fries’ emotions. He has an undeniably uncomfortable look on his face, and turns his back in order to avoid seeing the shooting. The fast-paced editing alternates between Steak’n’Fries’ more distant point of view of the action and Li’l Zé’s closer one. The camera slowly tilts down, lowering the image from the boys’ heads to their hands. The seven-year-old boy offers the palm of his right hand, silently stating his choice of punishment. The younger boy remains paralysed. Li’l Zé repeats his question in a more impatient tone of voice. The hand-held camera alternates speedily between Li’l Zé and the undecided boy. Finally, he manages to murmur “hand” and the camera stops and places a spotlight on their hands. Li’l Zé repeats ironically: “on the little hand!” Yet, against the boys’ decisions he decides to shoot them on their feet instead. As Li’l Zé strikes the older boy’s foot, the younger one cannot stop crying. Soon after, he is also shot in the foot and blood covers his white shoe. As he screams, Li'l Zé calls Steak'n'Fries, asking him to choose the boy he would prefer to kill. At this moment, Steak'n'Fries finally assumes his position inside the group. This is accentuated by a change in the camera position, which shows his perspective of the action. He walks closer to the boys, situating himself in the same position as Li'l Zé. The drug lord stays beside him, encouraging his initiation ritual. With visible tears in his eyes, and listening to the young boy’s desperate cries, Steak'n'Fries chooses to kill the older child. The gang celebrates Steak'n'Fries’ action, since he is now formally a member of Li’l Zé’s group and not a child anymore. The surviving young boy stays behind, mourning beside his dead friend’s body. Li’l
Zé grabs the wounded little boy and forces him to go away, warning him to walk without limping. Followed by a very unsteady camera, amidst fear and pain, the boy crawls out leaning on the walls of the narrow street.

Figure 1.8 Different camera angles in the scene “the punishment of Runts”

The performances of the young actors puzzled many spectators and critics, spurring comments and raising questions about the casting work, even leading to suggestions that the actors suffered from physical violence during the construction of the scene\(^{34}\). In this respect, casting coach Fatima Toledo recalls in an online interview (UOL 2009) that she was absurdly accused of having hammered the little boy’s foot as a way to make him cry. In order to dismiss such rumours, she explained that the emotional charge of this scene did not result from any premeditated cruelty. Rather, it derived from an unexpected mistake: rehearsing without using the elements that were a central part of the scene. Toledo explains that she learnt something during the process of making the film that she will never repeat again: “I had rehearsed with this child without putting him in contact with blood or bullet sounds, I will never do this again.” Toledo concludes that although she had already gone over the script with the actor, he became extremely disturbed in the actual filming of the scene, especially when he was finally put in contact with these two palpable symbols of violence. More than any previous training, thus, it was this improvised and unanticipated response from the young actor that created much of the emotion in the scene. Toledo’s mistake in this specific scene certainly benefited from the actor’s lack of experience and young age. Yet, it is noteworthy

\(^{34}\) Co-director Kátia Lund was questioned in an interview whether boys were really crying in this scene. However, she replied that the boys already had by the time an “understanding of theatre and interpretation” (Ribeiro 2002).
that the acclaimed overall acting results in *City of God* derives above all from Toledo’s long-established work in training Brazilian film actors; usually bringing them to limit situations, which are based on improvisation exercises and on the search for personal emotions, all of which try to build realistic acting by avoiding divisions between actors and characters\(^{35}\).

Yet, beyond Toledo’s professional talent and experience, the details involving the acting methodology used in *City of God* still begs the question of whether the film’s cruel portrayal of violence against poor children was not, in many ways, analogous to the violence non-professional actors suffered in making it. It must be remembered that, in many ways, a significant part of non-professional actors were representing their own personal histories. After all, many of them were actual residents of *favelas*, living under comparable conditions to the characters they portrayed. The reality of drug trafficking, guns and bullets were possibly a painful part of their memories, or even a still threatening aspect of their daily lives, when the film was being shot. In that regard, this strategy seems to exacerbate class stereotypes, helping to “erode the citizenship rights of those who already suffer race and class discrimination” (Peixoto 2007, p. 174). Thus, while apparently professional and non-violent from the point of view of the upper middle-class film crew, it is hard to measure the traumatic short and long-term impacts Toledo’s acting methodology might have caused for actors from the *favela*.

Thus, it is possible to argue that the sincere tears shed by the young actor in “The punishment of the Runts” should never be accepted as a valid strategy to increase any film’s realism. The details behind this scene\(^{36}\) reveal an ironic aspect in the making of *City of God*: in order to reveal a supposed authentic portrayal of life inside de *favela* the film repeats the violence it aims to represent and critique. Indeed, in addition to the violent images of the film, the relatively obscure behind-the-scenes arrangement reinforced differences between crew and actors. After all, it placed upper middle class filmmakers in an authoritative position in relation to the *favela* residents. In this respect, it can also be argued that Meirelles’ film bears


\(^{36}\) It is worth mentioning how Fitzgibbon (2011) has interpreted “The punishment of the Runts” in a rather different way from the technical and ethical issues I refer to. Specifically referring to the theme of representation, she argues that from this moment of the film, Li’l Zé, until then represented basically as a cruel guy, is transformed into a sort of protector and enforcer of law and order. She further suggests that Brazilian audiences probably identify with the disciplinary role given to Li’l Zé because most of them, usually coming from middle-class circles, have personal memories of being robbed or victims of other forms of aggression from delinquent children who live on the streets of big Brazilian cities.
analogies with many contemporary Brazilian sensationalist TV programs. Contrary to their self-declared goal of denouncing or ‘solving’ local crimes, these TV shows actually benefit and depend on Brazilian social problems and violence in order to boost their audience ratings. Similarly, it is not an overstatement to say that City of God also overexposed the misery of their (poor) non-professional actors to add authenticity to its images and, consequently, generate more audience interest.

In addition to the strategies to construct realism previously mentioned in the analysis of “The punishment of the Runts”, I will explore how City of God constructs a certain representation of the favela by drawing on mainstream media such as Hollywood cinema and television programs, especially MTV.

1.4 Mainstream aesthetics in the scene: “The story of the apartment”

In the article “Aesthetics and ethics in City of God: content fails, form talks”, João Melo (2006) has suggested that City of God resembles some of Scorsese’s and Tarantino’s films. Like these directors, Meirelles also shows urban violence through the use of carefully structured cinematography, art direction and soundtrack, all of which are blended into a frenetic narrative. Melo highlights City of God’s use of freeze frame shots, smooth and steady pans, tracking shots followed by music and violent actions concluding that City of God provides spectators with a kind of visual pleasure while making poverty a spectacle. He concludes by criticising the director for exploiting poverty with “fancy visual effects” (p. 478).

Meirelles, who is also a commercial director, is held responsible for having brought aspects of the music video or an “MTV style” to City of God. Critics such as Xavier (2003b), Vargas (2004) and Bentos (2005) have used the term “MTV style” to refer to films that rely on fast-paced narratives and quick cutting analogous to music videos and TV commercials. Ken Dancyger, in particular, defines MTV style’s influence on films as producing a suspension of time and space, in which the narrative tends to be overwhelmed by the creation of “feeling states” (2011, p. 168). Dancyger also suggests that since tone and mood are the most important aspects in these films, spectators tend to remember specific scenes more easily.

37 A clear example of Brazilian sensationalist programs is Domingo Legal, a weekly television show that centres on real life histories of marginalised people by emphasising their poverty and harsh situations (Krasnieuicz, Aita and Casali 2008/2009). Other examples include journalist programs such as Se Liga Bocão, Na Mira, Programa do Ratinho, Brasil Urgente and Que Vênha o Povo, all of which focus on violent episodes in poor/marginalised areas of cities and the exposition of socially disadvantaged people.
than the films’ main narratives. In another study, Dancyger (2010) adds that films informed by an “MTV style” of editing have their main narratives and leading characters intermingled with parallel stories: fragmenting their linear narratives, and opening them up to multi-layered worlds. This characteristic is also useful in understanding City of God’s editing approach. Indeed, even though a rather linear and constant voice-over structures City of God’s main narrative, many parallel storylines are equally important to the composition of its overall plot. The narrator of the film, Rocket, is usually responsible for creating these non-linear and digressive sub-plots. One notable example is when he begins to present his childhood memories. The main narrative, based on a personal account of his present life in the favela, gradually unfolds into a complex network of others characters: “That is Shaggy. To tell the story of City of God, I have to start with him. But in order to tell Shaggy’s story, I must tell the story of the Tender trio”. It can be said that these parallel storylines work as if they were short films inside the feature film, presenting their own main characters, and having particular tones and moods.

City of God does not rely on an “MTV style” as much as films such as Natural Born Killers (1994), which Dancyger chooses as a main example to illustrate how a film can resemble a collage of small video clips. Yet, his definition, especially in terms of editing effects, can still be productively used to analyse one of City of God’s set pieces, entitled “The story of the apartment”. This less than four-minute set piece attempts to show the historical development of drug trafficking from the inside of a small apartment. It compresses several years into one long sequence in which the framing remains static and the transitions are all handled through dissolves. Although the whole story happens in one space, as time passes, the setting changes from a residential apartment to a degraded drug hideout. Fitzgibbon (2011) notes that the narrator is responsible for presenting the development of drug trafficking until it becomes the main form of employment in the favelas, and a new capitalist domain. Physical changes in the apartment offer visual keys to understanding the growth of drug trafficking. They illustrate how a small home business gradually becomes a commercial-scale enterprise in terms of employees and profit.

In this set piece, the camera stands on the top of the back wall, giving the spectator a complete view of the apartment’s living room. There are no changes in the camera’s position, height or angle during the whole clip. Its position provides spectators with a complete yet immobilised gaze upon the actions that unfold in the apartment. The absence of camera movement has an unusual cinematic effect on viewers; it is as if they were seated in a traditional Italian theatre stage or witnessing the scene from a hidden hole on the wall. As characters move away from where the camera hangs, they become smaller since there are no
adjustments to reframe them from the background to the foreground again. In contrast, when they come closer to the camera, their bodies grow bigger until some of their body parts (including their heads) are cropped from the image as they extend beyond the edge of the frame. Due to its high position, the camera is able to show the apartment’s three doors simultaneously. These give characters access to the bedroom, exit door and bathroom. The three doors open or close depending on actions taking place in the background. Since the camera is immobilised, the rhythm of the scene comes mostly from editing effects. Dissolve and jump cuts accelerate the pace of the actions and the passing of time. The discontinuity of the editing is smoothed by non-diegetic music and also by the narrator’s voice. These sound elements, which follow the whole development of the scene, seem to compensate any excesses in the visual effects, becoming the scene’s main element of continuity.

The passing of time is marked not only by the re-arrangement of the space, but also by the number of dealers through whose hands the apartment passes. The first owner of the apartment is Mrs Zélia, a middle-aged widow. Her former partner, the teenage Big Boy, eventually kicks her out of the apartment. He transforms the residential apartment into an office, employing other teenagers from the favela to work for him in the drug market. When the police arrest Big Boy, Carrot, his best employee, takes over the apartment. However, as Carrot is superstitious about the ill-fated nature of the place, he decides to pass it on to another drug dealer, Blacky. The clip finishes with Li’l Zé claiming that he has assumed ownership of the place, integrating the “story of the apartment” into the film’s main narrative.

The story of the apartment is narrated by Rocket. He presents Mrs Zélia explaining that she began selling drugs in order to raise her daughters after her husband’s death. The apartment is quite dim, furnished with a white oven, table and chairs in the foreground, along with pink and wine-coloured armchairs in the middle ground. Due to the colours of the furniture, and especially because of the brownish walls and a cream curtain covering one third of the background, the overall tone of the living room is a pale yellow. This tone evokes a bygone period, distancing the old-fashioned apartment from the present time of the film’s narrator. Rocket continues by saying that Mrs Zélia, besides being a drug dealer, also accepted sexual favours from the young boys in exchange for drugs. In the exact moment Rocket reveals this other side of Mrs Zélia, a young boy appears in the background as a result of a dissolve effect. Mrs Zélia and the boy go inside the bedroom to effectuate their deal. The narrator explains that Big Boy was one of her favourite boys. Yet, because Mrs Zélia’s business was too amateur, it was easy for him to take over the ownership of the apartment. This paedophiliac and quasi-incestuous situation reinforces the degeneration of domestic life,
in which family space breaks down, rules and relations are confused, and the drug-trafficking gang takes up the function of a pseudo-family.

The wooden table, placed in the foreground of the screen, has both a functional and symbolic importance to the development of the entire scene. It is initially depicted basically as a dining table covered with a washed-out cloth on top of which sit plates, cutlery and pans. When Big Boy expels Mrs Zélia from her apartment, she desperately grabs the tablecloth as a last act of resistance. Pans, cutlery, a scale for weighing marijuana and even leather luggage fall and spread over the floor. It is possible to interpret the absence of the tablecloth as a sign of the transition to a professional drug-dealing environment, especially since the table loses its original eating function, becoming a place reserved for business.

As the scene unfolds, the degradation of the apartment is followed by the professionalisation of the drug trafficking in the favela. At the end of the scene, the walls are dirty, scratched and covered by tones of green and taupe. The furniture remaining is seen jumbled and spread around the apartment, except the oven and the table, which remain in the same position as in the days of Mrs Zélia. Despite the disorganisation, papers, magazines and a pencil over the tabletop suggest the continuation and progress of the drug business. After Big Boy’s arrest for not paying the police’s bribe, Carrot inherits everything from his boss, and passes the apartment to Blacky, who is now his most trusted worker. The narrator concludes “The story of the apartment” affirming that Blacky, following the path of every former manager, would not remain in his position for long.

Figure 1.9 The degradation of the apartment
It is important to note that audiences’ high tolerance of the fast editing and special effects in these scenes is probably linked to their prevalence in contemporary Hollywood films (Black 2002). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to cover all the literature focusing on how Hollywood has changed audiences’ perceptions and expectations of what is considered a realist narrative. However, it is worth citing Chapman’s studies of recent war films such as *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg 1998), which offer insights helpful in understanding recent Brazilian productions. Chapman regards the use of “non-realistic devices, including slow motion and unsynchronous sound effects” not as a threat to a film’s claim of producing realistic images. Rather, he says that this is part of a new trend from the 1990s known as hyper-realism, which “refers to an emphasis on realistic detail archived through special effects”. The author concludes by suggesting that “realism is a set of representational conventions that involve plausibility and recognition, showing events in a convincing way and in accordance with audiences’ general expectations” (Chapman 2008, pp. 29-30). In the case of *City of God*, the incorporation of music video aesthetics reflects the frequency and familiarity of audiences with the music video format, since they are used to watching similar effects on television on a daily basis. Familiar with reading fast-paced narratives and manipulated images; contemporary spectators do not see spectacles of violence as competing with realism. Rather, highly fictionalised and styled images in some ways reinforce the effect of realism, since they bear similarities with many contemporary television images produced by documentary and war reportages.

Up to this point, this chapter has discussed *City of God* mainly in terms of its aesthetic construction, focusing on its *mise-en-scène*, cinematography and editing. In order to complement my technical analysis, the next section focuses on the film’s representation of social reality. I also discuss the way the film’s national and worldwide success set the stage for subsequent representations of Brazilian *favelas* in general. Finally, I conclude by showing how the success of film also directly affected the Rio de Janeiro government’s social policy toward the actual *favela*, City of God.

1.5 The representation of *favelas*’ social reality

Although based on an ingenious non-linear narrative and retroactive sequencing of events, *City of God*’s script is basically concerned with offering a didactic account of how criminality grew inside the *favela* over the course of three decades. However, far from its ambition of linking multiple economic factors, social actors and historical periods at the root of Brazilian social problems, a close analysis reveals how the film actually offers a rather
reductive and biased representation of the dilemmas faced by those who live in Brazilian favelas. As mentioned before, the film’s decision to depict the favela basically as space isolated from the rest of Rio de Janeiro is itself an example of the film’s narrow gaze.

Figure 1.10 Scenes of gang conflicts and police intervention emphasise the urban confinement in City of God.

In addition to the geographical confinement, the film also produces a subtler, temporal isolation of the favela. Indeed, it is difficult to situate the local history of the favela within a broader timeline of Brazilian historical events. Apart from a typical military helmet used by a few police officers in the first part of the film, for example, there are no visual hints or dialogues referring to the military dictatorship occurring in Brazil at the time of the film’s narrative. In this way, the favela is isolated not only from the urban space but also from national history. The degeneration of life in the favela is simply blamed on the problem of drugs; it is never interpreted as one of the effects of years of military dictatorship (1964-1985) on Brazilian life.

In sum, because City of God’s series of events take place in this apparently self-confined space and ahistorical time, violence seems to have no external reasons. There is no attempt to challenge broader causes of poverty - certainly not restricted to this single favela - or the wider national and transnational networks benefiting from drug trafficking money.
Additionally, the film never mentions racism or other forms of ethnic/class discrimination, since it avoids any “explanation of why almost all the people in the favela are Afro-Brazilian and poor” (Vargas 2004, p. 444). The population of City of God is simply divided between supposedly ‘bad’ and ‘good’ guys, giving the impression that there are no sociological or historical causes for this association of criminality and poverty.

The construction of stereotypical and binary categories of favela residents seems to be another clear limitation in City of God’s ambition to represent the complexities of Brazilian social problems. This becomes clear in the way the film tends to emphasise how favela drug dealers, no matter what they do, are not able to overcome their ‘illegal’ lives, being somehow pre-destined to suffer punishments from their inescapable condition. This punitive and tragic way of interpreting criminality, which denies any alternative outcomes or redemption to the outlaws, is perfectly illustrated in the frustrated stories of Shaggy and Benny. These two characters are presented not only as brothers in the film, but also as men who share the same dream of one day leaving the favela and their criminal activities. Situated in two different decades of the film’s narrative, both brothers experience similar romantic stories. They both plan to leave the violence of the city behind in order to begin a new life on the countryside with their girlfriends. However, both of their dreams are interrupted by tragic deaths. The stories of the two brothers reinforce a seemingly unavoidable and sorrowful path, based on the impossibility of leaving the favela to live another life.

In order to enhance the film’s realism, the casting director decided to select two real life brothers, who clearly look alike, Jonathan and Phellipe Haagensen, to act respectively as brothers Shaggy and Benny. The first brother, Shaggy, falls in love with Berenice, a woman who is portrayed as being similar to him in terms of social class and ethnicity. Their perfect romantic match abruptly ends, though, when the police chase Shaggy and shoot him before he is able to escape through the dirt streets of the favela. The impossibility of being happy together recalls another recent Brazilian film, Orpheus (Orfeu, Carlos Diegues 1999), in which a carnival singer (Orpheus) falls in love with a new resident of the favela arriving from the countryside (Eurydice). Their romance also has a tragic finale, when she perishes at the hand of a drug dealer. Returning to City of God, Shaggy’s romantic tragedy is revived a few years later in the story of his younger brother. Benny also tries to leave the favela after meeting Angelica. Unlike Berenice, however, Angelica is neither a favela resident nor of African descent, but a white middle-class woman. Nonetheless, their dreams of living peacefully far away from the favela abruptly end when a drug dealer kills Benny.

A few years after City of God, another Brazilian film attempted to represent the still fairly taboo theme of love between individuals belonging to different social classes and ethnic
backgrounds. In *Once upon a time in Rio* (Breno Silveira 2008), the *favela* resident De lives a romantic story with a rich woman called Nina. They dream of moving from the troubled urban life of Rio de Janeiro to the bucolic beachside areas in Brazil’s Northeast region. Yet, their impossible romance is also eventually brought to an end when the police murder both of them. Unmistakably, all of the above films emphasise the impossibly of a happy (romantic) ending for residents of the *favela*. Although romantic stories are a recurrent theme of New Brazilian Cinema, it is symptomatic that the tragic (and usually violent) aspects of love are basically restricted to plots involving *favela* residents. This repeated enactment of the taboo against interracial and inter-class love, as well as the representation of rural Brazil as a desired yet unreachable place, reinforce the *favela*’s segregation from the urban space and official history. *Favela* characters are recurrently punished for trying to transcend the spatial and socioeconomic conditions of marginality.

Beyond the tragic plots with predictable deaths, *City of God*’s stereotyped construction of characters also has had detrimental outcomes for the inhabitants of the actual *favela* City of God. On account of this, famous Brazilian rapper MV Bill (himself a resident of City of God) went to the media to present ethical concerns regarding people’s associations between reality and representation as a consequence of the film. He highlighted the consequences of the film’s success for the real inhabitants of the current City of God: “They turned our people into stereotypes, and they have given them nothing in exchange. Even worse, they stereotyped them as fiction and sold it as if it were true” (Bill 2003, p. 123). Because of his celebrity status, the rapper was the only resident of City of God able to share his arguments on national television. Yet, other *favela* residents seem to confirm MV Bills’ statements in their interviews for the documentary *Ugly but Trendy* (Denise Garcia 2005). Although this film is about the funk music scene in Rio de Janeiro, it is based on several interviews with musicians from Rio’s *favelas*, including a number from City of God. While commenting on the popularity of funk, they also speak about the prejudices they have suffered (especially when trying to find jobs) when they mention that they live in City of God. This is clear evidence of the film’s impact on social perceptions of the actual *favela* it represents. One of the main goals of the documentary is to show how those living in *favelas* have to struggle against negative stereotypes, such as their supposed connection with drug trafficking and criminality in general. Although the film *City of God* (released three years before the interviews) is not specifically mentioned during the documentary, the testimonies of those from City of God clearly reveal that the images of criminality and violence disseminated by the film were, by then, already intermingled with their personal lives.
The confusion between actor and characters is not unique to *City of God*. There are frequent cases reported in Brazil of actors who are mistreated in public because they are mistaken for the characters they have played in film and television (especially actors who interpret ‘evil’ characters in popular soap-operas\(^{38}\)). This was the case of actor Jackson Antunes, who played the role of an aggressive and sexist husband who constantly beat his wife in the soap opera *A Favorita* (*The Favourite One*, 2008). The actor was attacked one day, when he was walking along the streets. The attack resulted in the exacerbation of Antunes’ pre-existing medical condition, forcing his admittance to hospital for several days (Ramos 2008). Aggressive responses from the public also abound when actors play non heteronormative characters, as was the case of actor André Golçalves, who played a homosexual called Sandro in the soap opera *The Next Victim* (*A Próxima Vítima*, 1995). While out walking one day, he was attacked and left injured by group of homophobic assailants who had mistaken him for his character (Alencar 2004, p. 91). Therefore, it is fair to argue that some Brazilians have trouble distinguishing between fiction and reality, frequently mistaking actors for characters (Van Tilburg, 1989, p. 53; Fernandes, 2006, p. 23). Based on the prevalence of such incidences, it is hard to imagine that *City of God*’s crew would not have considered the potential problems of using real people from an existing *favela* in Rio, especially considering that the film portrays the theme of contemporary violence in that city.

Another direct effect of the film’s box-office success is that the actual City of God became one of the recent attractions of Brazil’s most visited city. The irony is that the film’s construction of the *favela* as a violent place made it a site of international fascination. As a new tourist spot, the *favela* needed to be sufficiently policed in order to make it safe for visitors. Internationally infamous because of the film, City of God was one of the first *favelas* recently occupied by a permanent public security initiative called ‘Police Pacification Unit’. This initiative is part of the Brazilian government’s strategy to reclaim areas controlled by local drug dealers before two upcoming international events in Rio: the FIFA football World Cup in 2014, and the Olympic Games in 2016. The presence of the police unit in City of God, as well as in other *favelas* located near middle and upper class areas, is part of a public attempt to accomplish the so-called ‘pacification’ of *favelas* by means of intense use of the

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\(^{38}\) News report concerning actors who are mistaken for their characters and are injured feature constantly in the media. In 2012, at least two cases were reported. The actor Emiliano D’Avila who played the villain Lúcio in the soap opera *Brazil Avenue* (*Avenida Brasil*, 2012) was punched twice in the head by an old woman who complained that he should be in jail (Borges 2012). Another recent case was of the actress Leilah Moreno, who plays the antagonist Grace Kelly in the soap opera *That Kiss* (*Aquele Beijo*, 2012). She was hit on the head with a roll of newspapers by one enraged viewer and slapped on her forehead by another (Pradella 2012).
police force. The deliberate use of the term ‘pacification’ reinforces the stereotype of the favelas as spaces of violence.

At the beginning of 2011, president Obama’s visit to an already ‘pacified’ City of God became an opportunity for the Brazilian government to change the ill-famed image of the favela, showcasing it as a family-friendly and non-violent place. Among the many photos, the image of the North American president playing football with children wearing soccer uniforms could not be more emblematic in showing the world the ‘positive’ changes undertaken in the favela, as well as to promote the upcoming sporting event. This photo illustrates Douglas Kellner’s (2003) assertion that entertainment sectors influence politics by making authorities act in close relation with – if not informed by – mass media. Officially released by the White House, this photo can be interpreted as linking three important events: Obama’s official visit, the upcoming football World Cup and the so-called ‘pacification’ of City of God. Curiously, among its many layers of meaning, this photo is also clearly aimed at providing a renovated representation of the favela. Yet, in complete contrast to the film, City of God is now finally and fully integrated into the city and assisted by the state.

![Figure 1.11 Obama’s visit to City of God](image)

Unfortunately, the changes in the representation of the favela were not followed by similar changes for those who actually live there. In this sense, one could argue that the favela is only integrated through spectacle, but not in actuality. The permanent presence of the police inside the favela has been criticised by non-governmental organizations, such as Justiça Global (Global Justice), as well as scholars, including José Cláudio Alves (IHU On-Line, 2010) and Fernanda Canavêz (2012). The Rio government insists that the presence of the
police reduces criminality and drug trafficking. However critics claim that the police occupation, despite immediate results such as the increase of arrests, eventually leads to an overall growth of conflict between police officers and favela residents. It also results in the mass migration of people (and violence) from occupied favelas to less visible areas of the city. Far from helping marginalised people, critics accuse the government of a cloaked attempt to create a diaspora and depopulate the favela of its present inhabitants.

During the problematic decision to ‘occupy’ the favela City of God made by Rio’s governor in 2009, newspapers The Guardian released a sequence of photos of the police force invasion alongside photos of the film City of God. One of the pictures showed the actor and City of God resident Rubens Sabino da Silva, who played the drug dealer Blacky in the film. The photo shows him handcuffed and staring directly at the camera. A caption at the bottom of the image explains that the actor in actuality was being sent to prison after trying to steal a woman's purse. By presenting images of this favela resident mixed with scenes from the film he previously worked for, the English newspaper clearly opts not to differentiate the actor, Rubens, from his City of God character, Blacky. Once again, film and reality are conflated, making it increasingly difficult to distinguish between cinematic and journalistic images. In many ways, these images naturalise the brutal events taking place, and fashion reality into a sort of sequel or second episode of the film, which audiences are already prepared to watch from a comfortable distance. Ivana Bentes has raised important questions regarding the subtle connections between cinema and real events:

Does the cinema of the massacre of the poor prepare us for the real massacre that already happens and others to come, such as the American action films foresaw and produced the feelings of international terror and control and the claims for ‘infinite justice’? We hope it does not (Bentes 2005, p. 89).

In an effort to respond to Bentes’ provocation, it seems necessary to raise a second and more specific question: in what ways has contemporary realist cinema been anticipating or normalising different forms of violence? As we have seen, from its first productions to the present day, Brazilian cinema has produced several films concerned with the theme of violence in the favela. In their distinct ways, all of them also offered a kind of realist portrayal of Brazilian poverty. Yet, it can be argued, specifically regarding productions after the 1990s,

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The term ‘occupation’ (or sometimes ‘pacification’) has been officially used by the Brazilian government to refer to state-funded operations that are attempting to combat the drug trafficking inside favelas.
that part of their success in preparing us for watching violence (whether real massacres or not) is linked to the fact that their realist images are clearly blended with popular entertainment formats such as Hollywood cinema and music videos\(^{40}\). In this respect, it is worth mentioning another film often compared to *City of God: Elite Squad* (Padilha 2007), an action drama set in a *favela* of Rio de Janeiro that enjoyed worldwide box-office success. Director Padilha has publicly admitted similarities between his and Meirelles’ work and defended both films against what is often regarded as a political contradiction, namely, the way they intentionally use Hollywood strategies to approach Brazilian social problems:

This is the one thing the two movies have in common. There is a film ideology that says films about social issues should give the audience critical distance, in order to evaluate what’s going on … I think the great thing Fernando [Meirelles] did was say, ‘Let’s make a movie that has social content, but it’s gonna grab you by the balls.’ It's gonna be emotive, and we're going to run with it and you won’t have time to think while it goes on (Matheou 2010, p. 185).

Like *City of God, Elite Squad* claims to be based on a true story inspired by the book, *Elite da Tropa*, written by sociologist Luiz Eduardo Soares in collaboration with two former BOPE\(^{41}\) captains, Rodrigo Pimentel and André Batista. The latter two men inspire the main characters of the film, Captain Roberto Nascimento and the officer candidate André Matias. The script centres on the daily life of these two middle-class officers. However, since it also focuses on the violent conflict between police and drug dealers, most scenes are shot inside *favelas* where the policemen have to work. The film focuses on Nascimento’s dilemma of having to find someone to replace him after he decides to leave the ‘drug war’ because of his wife’s pregnancy. The film emphasises the way local police corruption, as well as high rates of drug consumption among upper and middle-class groups in Rio, challenge Nascimento’s last mission as a high-ranking and honest policeman: to protect the Pope on his visit to Rio de Janeiro.

\(^{40}\) More than just preparing audiences to accept/tolerate violence, critics have also suggested that *City of God’s* use of entertainment formats is precisely what makes it also an effective piece of social criticism. Armstrong (2011, p. 184), for example, has classified *City of God*, along with other Brazilian films, within the genre of urban über-dramas. He argues that all of these films avoid the use of conventional realism, since they mix documentary strategies with television and music video aesthetics. The author praises the hybridism in these films by affirming that: “Despite the violations of realist orthodoxy in über-dramas, this cinematic current is socially conscious and constructive, consonant with democracy and reflective of its imperfections”.

\(^{41}\) BOPE is an acronym for the Special Police Operations Battalion of the Rio de Janeiro military police.
Despite their many aesthetic and thematic parallels, it is worth pointing out that *Elite Squad* is a film clearly focused on portraying drug trafficking through the perspective of the police, and is grounded in their lives outside of the *favela*. The film is also affected by the severe tone of Nascimento’s voice-over, which sharply contrasts to Rocket’s sympathetic narration of *City of God*. Yet, more than emphasising *City of God* and *Elite Squad*’s visible similarities or expected differences, it is noteworthy that both films seem to complement each other in representing the contradictions and inequalities of Brazilian society.

![Figure 1.12 The *favela* through the perspective of the police](image12.jpg)

Released in the aftermath of *City of God*’s tremendous repercussions for Brazilian society, *Elite Squad* appears at times to provide a deliberate answer to the debates concerning poverty and violence raised by Meirelles’ film. However, far from any discussion of human rights or redistribution of wealth, *Elite Squad* portrays the BOPE (an elite troop of Rio’s military police, nationally known for its operations inside *favelas* and other socially excluded areas of the city) as being the only solution to combat the rival power of the *favela*’s drug trafficking. Although the BOPE is renowned for being one of the most violent organizations inside the Brazilian military police, the film portrays it as a heroic group of men fighting to restore ethics and order in society. Mixing social realism and contemporary mainstream media (especially Hollywood action films), *Elite Squad* was also a hit among national and international audiences, winning many prizes, including the Golden Bear Award in Berlin in 2008. As a direct effect of the film’s success, the BOPE managed to raise its reputation in the eyes of Brazilian audiences and media, which suddenly began to praise it as a reliable
institution, as a type of defiant exception inside a rotten and corrupt police force. Examples of this change are visible on reportage from popular right-wing Brazilian magazines (Veja and Época)\textsuperscript{42} made after the film’s release.

It is important to note how Brazilian mass media also played an important role in disseminating this heroic image of the BOPE, and in praising the ‘answers’ Elite Squad supposedly presented to Brazil’s social problems. When the film was released, for example, the extreme right-wing magazine Veja dedicated a cover story to discuss/advertise the film. Sousa (2009, p. 2) suggested that the magazine was praising the film “for its purported ‘realism’ in the depiction of Brazilian police and for a supposed ‘fair’ treatment of ‘reality’, as the cover announces that it treats ‘bandits like bandits’ and denounces drug users as ‘partners’ with drug dealers.” However, it is worth mentioning that, although explicitly promoting the film, Veja symptomatically avoided publishing images of any of Elite Squad’s actors on its front cover. Rather, it opted to post a photo of a real BOPE officer, emphasising the magazine’s aim to link the film with contemporary Brazilian reality. In the same way that favela residents were complaining about being mistaken for City of God’s characters, the strategy of the magazine encourages spectators of Elite Squad to identify BOPE’s officers as characters in the film. Unlike City of God, however, the blurred boundaries between fiction and reality in Elite Squad create a positive image of the police force.

An even more curious direct consequence of Elite Squad’s success with audiences and media reception has been the frequent appearance of the actual man who inspired the character captain Nascimento, Rodrigo Pimentel, on mainstream TV news. Because of his leadership in what is perceived as the positive role of the BOPE, local media has often called on him to share his opinions regarding issues of public security in the city of Rio de Janeiro. This figures as yet another interesting example of the unclear borders between fiction and reality. After all, the man who inspired Elite Squad’s captain received a rather unusual promotion for a former police officer: to become one of the main journalistic commentators of the police occupation of favelas such as Rocinha, Dona Marta and Cidade de Deus (City of God).

Despite being fictional constructions that make use of highly manipulative editing and explicit visual effects, contemporary Brazilian directors have been able to promote their works not only as offering a true portrayal of Brazilian social problems but, furthermore, as

\textsuperscript{42} Arnal’s (2010) comparative study of these two magazines demonstrates the opposite opinions regarding BOPE in two different periods. In 2000, both magazines emphasised the violence of the institution. In 2007, however, after Elite Squad was released, the BOPE was praised as a reliable and fair institution.
touching on their potential solutions. This chapter, however, has been devoted to challenging the construction of realism in cinematic favelas. Specifically, beyond the sincere and politically well-meaning attempts of depicting life in the favelas, I have argued that the privileged economic position of most film directors (and producers) prevents them from approaching more intricate and multifaceted events occurring in today’s favelas. As the foremost example, I emphasised the contradiction of how these so-called realist films, by focusing on individual stories, have symptomatically ignored the broader political, economic and media interests behind the occupations taking place in Rio de Janeiro. In this sense, it is fair to argue that the use of social realism added to entertainment aesthetics seems only to reinforce the social discrepancy between cinema crews and middle-class audiences on the one side and favela residents on the other, making poverty a commercial spectacle of otherness.

As will become clear in the next chapter, this issue is not only restricted to films about favelas, but also to most others attempting to approach socially excluded populations in Brazil. The next chapter focuses on recent films that claim to portray life inside Brazilian prisons. As will be shown, these films have also created other specific visual stereotypes that reinforce the criminalisation of poverty and normalise certain incarceration policies adopted today in Brazil.
Chapter Two: Cinematic prisons

All those lives destined to pass beneath any discourse and disappear without ever having been told were able to leave traces—brief, incisive, often enigmatic—only at the point of their instantaneous contact with power. So that it is doubtless impossible to ever grasp them again in themselves, as they might have been "in a free state"; they can no longer be separated out from the declamations, the tactical biases, the obligatory lies that power games and power relations presuppose.

(Foucault, 1979, p. 169)

In this chapter, I compare different cinematic representations of prisons from the Cinema Novo movement (late 1950s to early 1970s) to the New Brazilian Cinema (from mid-1990s onwards). Following the strategy used in the previous chapter, I conduct a detailed analysis of one key film from the New Brazilian Cinema, Carandiru (Hector Babenco, 2003). I illustrate how the film City of God (2002), addressed in the previous chapter, can be considered as a direct influence on Carandiru. This is evident in the commitment of both to a similar kind of cinematic realism, as well as in the spatial similarities between their cinematic representations of the favela and the prison. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the cinematic representation of the prison in relation to Brazilian contemporary social reality.

Although my close analysis relies on Michel Foucault’s (1977) notions of panopticism and punishment in prisons, I will also emphasise how Carandiru often contrasts with Foucault’s description of the modern prison. The cinematic prison in Carandiru is a chaotic and corrupt space ruled by internal powers (gangs of inmates). There is constant drug trafficking and executions conducted by inmates. Surveillance and punishment are not ultimately decided by the state’s guards, but by the inmates’ own rules. The prison, therefore, does not function as a disciplinary space in a strictly Foucauldian manner. In this sense, I argue that the cinematic space of Carandiru perverts the panoptic architecture of the prison, resembling the cinematic space of the favela analysed in Chapter One. As will be shown, this perversion demonstrates the fluid boundaries between the structure of incarceration and other spaces of social deviance, specifically the favela.

To situate my analysis, I begin by revisiting how the earlier Brazilian film movement Cinema Novo addressed the issue of social exclusion in the 1960s, as this influenced later New Brazilian Cinema films such as Carandiru. However, despite their similar themes, I
hope to demonstrate how both movements exhibit significant distinctions with regard to the representation of Brazilian prisons. One main difference, for example, is the tendency of contemporary cinema to avoid taking any explicit political position. As a result, these films avoid discussing how poverty and violence in Brazil are directly connected the country’s corrupt political and economic system. Rather, the marginalisation of characters is usually depicted through tragic personal stories, emphasising social exclusion mainly as an individual problem.

2.1 Representations of prisons: from Cinema Novo to the New Brazilian Cinema

It is possible to divide Brazilian films concerning prisons into two main groups. The first group is comprised of films about political prisoners fighting against an authoritarian state; most commonly films with reference to the authoritarian-populist government of president Getúlio Vargas (1937 – 1945) and to the military dictatorship (1964-1985). The second group of films focuses on social deviants (typically victims of social inequality) involved in urban violence and drug trafficking. From the first group, I highlight three important films directed by Cinema Novo filmmakers: The Case of the Naves Brothers (O Caso dos Irmãos Naves, 1967) directed by Luis Sérgio Person, The Conspirators (Os Inconfidentes, 1972) by Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, and Memories of Prison (Memórias do Cárcere, 1984) by Nelson Pereira do Santos. All were made during the Brazilian military dictatorship and claim to be based on real-life events. All these films’ main characters resist the violence of the authoritarian regime (the Vargas regime and the military dictatorship). By focusing on the lives of individual characters, these films portray the prison as a symbol of injustice and state oppression. The second group, all of which belong to the Brazilian New Brazilian Cinema, include films such as Midnight (O primeiro dia, 1999), Almost Brothers (Quase dois irmãos, 2002), Carandiru (2003), Estômago: a Gastronomic Story (Estômago, 2007), Time of Fear (Salve Geral, 2009) and 400 Against One – A Story of Organized Crime (400 contra 1. Uma história do crime organizado, 2010). All films in this second group share the use of prisons as the main setting and hoodlums as the main characters of their narratives.

Returning to the group of Cinema Novo films, The Case of the Naves Brothers (1967) is based on a notorious miscarriage of justice in Brazil in the 1930s (Braga, 2006). Two innocent brothers were accused by corrupt police officers of a crime they did not commit. In order to force their confession, the police brutally tortured the brothers and their family members. The film’s co-scriptwriter Jean Claude Bernardet (2004) points out that although the film is based on actual events, it does not attempt an accurate historical reconstitution of
what took place. Instead, the depiction of torture and injustice was an indirect way of denouncing the arbitrary state violence happening at the time the film was made. Although the Naves brothers were not political prisoners, the fact that they were innocent yet still condemned by an authoritarian regime acted as a perfect metaphor for what the prison represented during the military dictatorship. This is illustrated in the scenes of torture in the film. Long duration shots show the two brothers being viciously beaten, forced to ingest emetic drinks, hung upside down and made to listen to the screams of their mother and wives being tortured, which, consequently, leads to their forced confession. All of these images implicitly alluded to the police practice of torture under the military regime. This association with the present political situation is even stronger in the scene of the brothers’ judgment in court. The defence lawyer didactically explains that the state is organised to serve society. Consequently, as part of the state, the function of the police is to maintain law and order. He argues that in the case of the Naves brothers, however, the police tortured suspects and witnesses creating fear throughout society. He concludes that the police want to – but ultimately cannot – take the law into their own hands. Their attempt to do so inevitably results in violence against justice. The lawyer’s emphatic speech to the jury recalls the injustice faced by the brothers in the 1930s. More importantly, though, it also calls attention to those who were being tortured in prisons during the time of filming in the 1960s.

Figure 2.1 The explicit violence inflicted on the Naves brothers, leading to their forced confession.
The second film, *The Conspirators* (1972), is based on a historical seditionist movement called the *Inconfidência Mineira*. In 1789, Brazilian republicans planned a revolt against the colonial rule of the Portuguese Crown. The film was made in the years following the AI5 (Institutional Act Number Five, promulgated in 1968), a military decree that censured any artistic production that criticised the *status quo*. However, the military dictatorship could not censor a film based on one of the most important moments of national history, and whose script was made using extracts from official historical sources. This legitimate claim of historical accuracy protected the film from state censorship. But, if the film indeed refers to colonial events, it also manages to allude to the oppression and abuse of power at the time of filming. These allusions are implicit in the scenes where the conspirators are arrested and interrogated by members of the Portuguese Crown, especially the main conspirator, Tiradentes. As Johnson (1984, p. 40) points out, a “conspiratorial relationship between historical myth and contemporary reality” is created during the interrogation of Tiradentes. After all, he is a national hero who symbolises all Brazilians condemned for dreaming of political freedom, including the 1960s left-wing activists and guerrilla fighters. He is the only conspirator that does not regret betraying the Portuguese Crown. After hearing that he is condemned to be hanged, drawn and quartered, Tiradentes emphatically shouts: “if I had a thousand lives, a thousand lives I would give” [to the conspiracy]. Due to the strong censorship around the time of filming, the use of allegories was the main form of expressing political criticism. At the end of the film, black and white footage of a military parade is juxtaposed with an image of a piece of raw meat symbolising Tiradentes’ body. This old footage shows the celebrations of ‘Tiradentes Day’ with a voice-over explaining that people and government are united to pay homage to those who gave-up their lives for the love of their country. The abrupt cuts, from the old footage to the colourful image of red meat being chopped, suggests a connection between the carnage of the people occurring simultaneously with the euphoric national celebrations of the military.

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43 *The Conspirators* was made in the same year as the creation of a prize that gave Brazilian filmmakers an incentive to produce films based on literary works by deceased writers. With this prize, the Brazilian military aimed to prevent the production of films about the political situation at the moment (Hawken and Litewski 1983).
The Cinema Novo movement disbanded after years of military censorship\textsuperscript{44}. Nonetheless, films with social concerns such as political imprisonment continued to be produced by independent filmmakers. One of these was Memories of Prison (Memórias do Cárce, 1984) by Nelson Pereira do Santos\textsuperscript{45}. The film is based on the book of the same title by the renowned Brazilian novelist Graciliano Ramos. The author wrote it during his imprisonment in the late 1930s, during the same authoritarian Vargas Regime (1937-1945) in which the Naves brothers were arrested. Santos’ film is also marked by political-national metaphors. For example, the last scene of the film depicts a frail and sick Graciliano Ramos

\textsuperscript{44} Examples of films censored by the military regime are Land in Anguish (Glauber Rocha 1967) and Carlos Diegues’ The Heirs (Os Herdeiros, 1969). In both cases, the censorship affirms that these films were wake-up calls encouraging rebellion (Pinto 2006).

\textsuperscript{45} As Johnson (1984, p. 3) states, Cinema novo “as a coherent or unified movement” ends in 1973. The filmmaker Nelson Pereira dos Santos as well as the other main names of this movement, continued with their own careers.
after he was finally released from a penal colony. On the day of his departure, the prison director apologises for the bad conditions he endured while there. Graciliano replies that he will write a book describing his memories of the colony. The director complains that it was a mistake to imprison a writer. He orders all papers written by Graciliano to be confiscated before he leaves the prison. In a moving act of solidarity, each one of the prisoners hides pages of his writing under their clothes. The guards search for the papers in Graciliano’s luggage and on his person, yet they are unable to find anything. Most of the prisoners are illiterate. Yet, their complicity with Graciliano confirms that they recognise his words as representative of their own voices. He limps towards the front door of the colony. His physical weakness symbolises the traumas of a country, which has endured twenty years of military dictatorship. To celebrate his freedom, Graciliano throws his hat up into the air. The following image shows a boat surrounded by the immense sea and sky. This image of Graciliano’s freedom is a reference to the transformations undergone by the country when the film was made in 1984. Not without trauma, Brazil was finally returning to democracy.

![Figure 2.4 Guards unsuccessfully trying to find subversive papers on Graciliano’s body](image)

The cinematic prison of this first group of films (directed by *Cinema Novo* filmmakers) is remarkably different from the second group of films (New Brazilian Cinema). The significant historical changes Brazil underwent, from an authoritarian regime to neoliberal forms of governance, certainly contributed to this shift in the representations of prisons. Far from oppressed heroes, the New Brazilian Cinema tends to focus on poor/marginalised people inside prisons. These are usually *favela* residents, drug dealers and the homeless, who committed crimes such as murder, robbery and drug trafficking. In these films, the prison is not a metaphor of repression by authoritarian regimes, but a space for the
socially excluded/deviant. Hoodlums are usually the main characters of these films; however, they are not necessarily the villains of the story. As Ramos (2003) explains, in films from the New Brazilian Cinema:

the true villain has now become the nation as a whole (...). More specifically, the country’s institutional side is being accused. The police, in particular, are invariably presented as incompetent, corrupt and sordid as is the health service, public sanitation, administration services, etc. The constant demonstration of incompetence exacerbates the feeling of chaos (p. 66).

The prison in the film *Midnight* clearly exemplifies Ramos’ statement. Corrupt police help the main character escape from the prison during a riot, after he accepts to kill another prisoner, a thief who happens to be his close friend. Similar to the cinematic *favela* discussed in the previous chapter, the penitentiary system itself is the main character/villain of the film. It is represented in the form of the corrupt police, responsible for masterminding the murder. On the other hand, the outlaw is represented as a victim of social exclusion, forced into drug trafficking, as he has no other job opportunities. After serving in prison, he moves to the *favela* and as Taú (2005) notes, the outlaws in *Midnight* are only allowed to live in confined/exclusionary spaces, either in the prison or within the *favela*.

Most prison films from the New Brazilian Cinema have their plots set in contemporary times. A noticeable exception is *Almost Brothers* (Lucia Murat 2002), which starts during the military dictatorship (1964 - 1985) focusing on two old childhood friends who meet again in prison. One is a middle-class left-wing political activist and the other a drug dealer. The film endorses a common theory that the co-existence of educated political prisoners and economically marginalised people is a key factor in explaining the rise of criminal organisations inside Brazilian prisons. Malaquias (1999) explains that this happened because ordinary prisoners identified with other political prisoners’ (including socialist’s and urban guerrillas’) revolutionary ideas against the state. The ‘Red Command’ was unarguably the most powerful criminal organisation created inside the prison system during the military dictatorship. It was initially concerned with fighting against the horrific conditions of the prisons. As the years passed, however, it became Brazil’s largest criminal organisation, ruling drug trafficking activities in Rio de Janeiro and other cities. This is yet another demonstration of how Brazilian prisons have served as incubators for criminal organizations rather than institutions of reform.

The formation of the Red Command is the main theme of another recent film, *400 Against One – A Story of Organized Crime* (400 contra 1. Uma história do crime organizado, Nelson Duarte 2010). It narrates the formation of the crime organisation by portraying prison
inmates, who faced the violence of the military dictatorship. The film depicts the Red Command as an organisation initially founded on the principles of peace, justice and freedom, which used the money from bank robberies to help those imprisoned. The film’s director Caco Souza explains the organisation’s transformations over time: “If its roots are in collectivity and communism, today what prevails is individualism” (Clarke, 2010). In this sense it mirrors the shift to a neo-liberal state. The film shows the Red Command’s changes after the end of the country’s military dictatorship. It focuses on how the organisation grew by directly benefiting from drug trafficking and the use of violence against other competing criminal organisations.

These two groups of Brazilian films set in prisons share common themes of injustice, violence and repression. However, they develop their positions in very different ways. In the first group (Cinema Novo films), the cinematic prison is a space in which ideological struggles are explicit. There is an awareness of who is the main enemy (authoritarian regimes) responsible for the political and social problems of the country. Because of the censorship of artists’ criticisms of the state, these films often use the prison, which was one of the main institutions of repression, as a metaphor for the violence against those who disagree with the military dictatorship. In contrast, the cinematic prison in the second group of films (New Brazilian Cinema) is a place of social exclusion for marginalised people. They are victims of the system; yet, they are not fighting against a common enemy or challenging the causes of their misery. They lack the political consciousness and/or sense of solidarity displayed by the characters in the first group of films. The notions of class struggle and/or fight against economic-political oppression are absent. The criminal in this second group breaks norms, laws and social pacts without any ideological principles or regrets. The focus is on the individual (usually tragic) lives of prisoners. There are no collective metaphors that resonate with a social group of national/social exclusion.

While contemporary fictional narrative films have usually concentrated on the entertainment appeal of depicting social problems, documentary films have taken on the role of social analysis. A few examples of contemporary documentaries about life in prison include: Life Somewhere Else (Socorro nobre, 1996), The Little Prince’s Rap against the Wicked Souls (O Rap do Pequeno Príncipe contra as Almas Sebosas, 2000), Carandiru.doc (2003), Prisoner of the Iron Grid - Self Portraits (O prisioneiro da grade de ferro, 2003), Justice (Justiça - O Filme, 2004), O Cárcere e a Rua (2004), Behave (Juizo, 2007), A casa dos mortos (2009), Entre e luz e a sombra (2009) and Leite e ferro (2010). From this selected group, two are especially important to this chapter: Prisoner of the Iron Grid and
Both were filmed in Carandiru prison and released in 2003, the same location and year as the feature film *Carandiru*.

The first documentary, *Prisoner of the Iron Grid* (Paulo Sacramento 2003), approaches prison conditions through the perspective of the inmates. It does this by allowing them to use the camera and shoot the footage. Prior to the documentary, inmates went through a filming workshop. The insider’s perspective produces unexpected images. Inmates document the prison’s nightlife; they show the rats that infest the building and the sunrise from inside a cell. The opening scene of this documentary forms a dialogue with the final scene of the feature film *Carandiru*, as both were shot in the real prison before its demolition in 2002. The fictional film ends with the actual footage of the building collapsing. The documentary, in turn, shows the same footage in reverse mode, making the rubble of the prison rise back into place. In contrast to the feature film, the documentary seems to claim that not everything had been told yet about the actual prison Carandiru. The evocative image of the prison ‘coming back’ to life suggests that it is still necessary to hear and see its stories, especially through the perspective of actual inmates.

The second documentary, *Carandiru.doc* (Rita Buzzar 2003), follows the making of the fictional film *Carandiru*. However, it is not a mere behind the scenes peek at the feature film. Rather, it focuses on the tension between fiction and reality during the process of filmmaking. The documentary interlaces interviews with the film’s extras – many of whom are former inmates or relatives of inmates – as well as the film’s director and members of the crew. As Almendra (2007) points out, *Carandiru.doc*’s main issue is with the casting of humble people as *Carandiru*’s extras. It discusses the implications of hiring them to re-enact their own personal histories and social conditions in a fictional film. The documentary raises the important question of whether the film ends up re-enacting the stereotypes and violence it aims to denounce. This question touches on a key point of my future analysis of the cinematic realism in *Carandiru*, namely, the casting of humble people as a strategy to construct realism in the film.

The construction of *Carandiru*’s realism is similar to that of other Brazilian contemporary films, especially *City of God*. Firstly, these films make the same claim of being based on real-life events. Secondly, both films focus their narratives on a specific historical space, rather than on an individual character. Thirdly, they are also similar in terms of spatial representation, as the *Carandiru* prison was constructed in a similar way to the *City of God*’s favela. Specifically, the two films represent these spaces as geographically constricted and isolated from the rest of the urban landscape. This spatial segregation reinforces the idea of criminality restricted to specific areas of the city, normally the ones occupied by marginalised
and poor people. As will be shown, *Carandiru* also exemplifies the two basic components of prison representations found in other films of the New Brazilian Cinema. The first one is not to be at odds with an authoritarian state, nor to call for political or social changes. The second is to create a story based on police corruption, which appeals for the improvement of living conditions in prisons.

2.2 The construction of realism in *Carandiru*

Due to the increase of Brazilian penitentiary populations in the last two decades, recent years have seen a considerable increase in the number of documentaries and fictional features about Brazilian prisons. Recent statistics\(^\text{46}\) show that Brazil has the fourth highest prison population in the world. At the time of the 1992 massacre, Carandiru was the largest Latin American detention centre. Babenco’s film was released in 2003, one year after the prison’s demolition. Dias (2008, p. 71) points out that the film is a claim for a reflection on the “nation's memory”, calling attention to “policy brutality, unlawful executions, inhumane prison conditions and impunity” that surrounds the Brazilian justice system.

Before filming *Carandiru*, Argentine-Brazilian film director Hector Babenco made three pessimistic films about criminals and marginalised people inside prisons. The first, *Lúcio Flávio, Passenger of Agony* (*Lúcio Flávio, Passageiro da Agonia*, 1977), was based on a real-life bank robber murdered in prison for betraying a corrupt policeman. The second film, *Pixote, the Law of the Weakest* (*Pixote, a lei do mais fraco*, 1980), follows the story of an orphan struggling to survive in the streets of an urban metropolis after escaping from a violent juvenile reformatory. Babenco’s third film, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (*O beijo da mulher aranha*, 1985), focuses on the relationship between a homosexual accused of sexually abusing a child and a political prisoner who share the same prison cell. These three previous films made by Babenco exhibit the tragic endings and lack of narrative resolution also seen in *Carandiru*. In contrast to *Cinema Novo* films, Babenco’s prison films are not tools for social consciousness; they do not point to the possibility of changing society through politico-ideological struggles. In this sense, his films symbolise society itself as a prison, where individuals inevitably fail in their attempts to move out of marginalisation. Therefore, these films can be seen as symptomatic of what Foucault described as the “swarming of disciplinary mechanisms” (1977, p. 211), whereby not only state institutions, but members of society themselves, emulate and defend the structures of the prison in the name of a social order.

\(^{46}\) “World Prison Population List” shows Brazil behind Russia, China and the United States (Walmsley 2009).
Carandiru was a national blockbuster. It attracted 4.6 million spectators to Brazilian cinemas, surpassing City of God (2002) by more than a million viewers. Part of Carandiru’s box-office success is due to the fact that, like City of God, Carandiru is also based on a best-selling book, Carandiru Station (Estação Carandiru, 1999) by Dr Draúzio Varella. The book describes the author’s personal experience working as a volunteer in AIDS prevention inside the detention centre Carandiru in São Paulo. The book is an insider’s perspective of the prison from the point of view of a doctor. It focuses on his relationship with inmates and the stories they told him. By adopting a descriptive and succinct prose style, Varella presumes an impartial voice, and avoids taking up an explicit political position or making direct criticisms of the penal system. Pedrosa and Guareschi (2010) have criticised the doctor’s intention of passing as a neutral and purely objective narrator, masking the judgments present in his writing. As examples, the authors enumerate a list of animals the doctor constantly compares with Carandiru’s inmates, revealing his prejudice of seeing them as savages.

As in the book, the film is narrated through the perspective of the doctor. He is responsible for presenting the prisoners as they share their crimes with him. Interlaced with flashbacks of the prisoners’ memories, the film’s main narrative culminates in the representation of the infamous 1992 event known as the “Carandiru massacre” when military police killed 111 inmates following a riot. Both the book and the film conclude with Varella’s personal conclusions about the massacre: “There were no deaths among the policemen. The only ones who know what really happened are God, the police and the inmates. I only heard the latter” (1999, p. 295). The massacre scene is unarguably the most compelling and dramatic aspect of the film, though Babenco affirms that it was not the main motivation for reconstituting the story of Carandiru. In an interview conducted by Carvalho (2003), Babenco revealed his fascination with Varella's studies of the behaviour of Carandiru's prisoners. Informed by the research of primatologist Frans de Waal, the Brazilian doctor affirms in his book that humans – similar to chimpanzees and bonobos – are paradoxically less violent in overcrowded spaces. He adds that the increase of prison populations does not result in an increase of conflicts, since it demands cooperation among inmates. Babenco initially planned to start the film with a lecture scene describing examples of primate behaviour. It would be followed by the presentation of Carandiru’s characters and their stories. However, he states that such a scene became redundant, since the behaviour theory supported by Waal and Varella would be made evident throughout the film. It is arguable whether Babenco succeeded in demonstrating this hypothesis, considering the number of violent scenes among inmates. However, he justifies this apparent contradiction by arguing that the violence inside prisons is minor when compared to the crime rates of any poor neighbourhood of São Paulo.
(Carvalho 2003, p. 101). In this sense, Babenco uses crime rates as a social justification for the film’s indulgence in violence. However, the violence in his film, like that of City of God, is also an important contributor to its commercial success.

As previously mentioned, the analysis of Carandiru’s realism resembles that of City of God. Both films share similar subject matter: urban violence, drug trafficking and social exclusion. In line with other films from the New Brazilian Cinema dedicated to social issues, they also share a similar treatment of reality: the use of elaborate tactics to preserve entertainment value while, at the same time, claiming to display reality itself. These techniques include the use of elements of mise-en-scène (setting, staging, costume and make-up), cinematography (specifically, the handheld camera) and the display of intertextual images from television programs. As argued in Chapter One, this combination of elements reveals influences from diverse cinematic traditions, such as Italian neo-realism and contemporary Hollywood films.

The first element of mise-en-scène analysed here is the setting. Similar to City of God, any analysis of Carandiru must focus on the film’s use of location shooting and the recurrent strategy of incorporating documentary images of the real Carandiru prior to its demolition. Location shooting in the actual prison where the events took place enhances the film’s claim to realism. Carvalho (2003), however, recalls that the film was not fully shot inside Carandiru but also in a former prison known as the Hippodrome Jail (where Babenco had shot Kiss of the Spider Woman almost two decades earlier). In addition to the actual locations mentioned above, the interior scenes set in cells were shot in a film studio (Vera Cruz) in the countryside of São Paulo. Each cell was designed to be visually different from the next, emphasising the prisoners’ appropriation of space. The cinematic prison in Carandiru is actually a combination of these three discontinuous and independent settings: the actual Carandiru, the Hippodrome Jail and the film studio (Vera Cruz). This strategy reinforces the representation of the prison as a completely heterogeneous space with erratic architecture, where even the cell doors are different from each other. With the exception of the scenes set in the prison courtyard, the remaining internal settings within the prison resemble a labyrinth of dark and damp corridors. Freitas (2009) adds that the graffiti, drawings and posters on the internal walls of the reconstituted prison assume the role of a graphic testimony. Filling corridors and cells with pictorial information emphasises the prison’s particularised spaces. The final cinematic space of the prison was, therefore, not a mere direct consequence of location shooting, but an elaborate arrangement of different spaces and construction of setting designs. Again, Carandiru’s prison realism was constructed similarly to City of God’s, where the actual favela was not the main shooting location. This
allowed for the creation of a cinematic space that is profoundly different from the actual prison.

The scenes outside of the prison were shot in a number of urban locations, including the *favela* Parque Novo Mundo (Carvalho 2003). All of these outdoor scenes share a sense of emptiness and uninhabited space. Some examples include flashback scenes of the inmates’ memories as they share details of their lives before Carandiru with the doctor. The spaces of the flashback scenes are often isolated or private, with few people. The film’s contrast between the overcrowded prison and the unpopulated spaces of the city reinforces Varella and Waal’s behavioural theories, linking levels of violence to the spatial distribution of populations. The less crowded spaces in which they lived before prison are depicted as more violent than prison life itself. In this respect, the prison paradoxically becomes a sort of refuge from violent social life and, arguably, functions as a critique and indictment of contemporary Brazilian society.

The second element of *mise-en-scène* is the staging. In contrast to *City of God*’s use of non-professional actors, *Carandiru*’s main characters are portrayed by professionals. The realism in the latter film is thus constructed through a balanced combination of professional actors playing the main characters and amateur extras. This second group was comprised of former Carandiru inmates, family members of those killed during the massacre, as well as guards working in the actual prison. The film had more than a thousand extras, most of them cast in the final massacre scene. The documentary *Carandiru.doc* shows that during the filming of the massacre, a real conflict occurred involving the non-professional actors. Some of the extras interviewed reported that they saw physical and psychological aggression between policemen and inmates who served as extras. They reported that some extras (mainly those representing the police) were genuinely aggressive, pushing and kicking extras acting as prisoners (Almendra, 2007). This use of former inmates and their families to re-enact situations so close to their personal histories clearly contributed to the film’s realism as they had inside (and accurate) information of the massacre, giving a perspective on the episode to which only inmates and the police had access.

Despite its critique of state violence, however, it can be argued that *Carandiru* reproduces the situations of oppression it claims to criticise. Almendra argues that the extras in the film – people from the city’s poor peripheries – assume stereotypical roles that middle-upper class Brazilians generally reserve for them: either as violent policemen or as delinquent criminals. The extras were chosen to repeat the same violence in the film that they had already experienced in real life. In this sense, the film repeats the ethical problems of *City of God* analysed in Chapter One. Non-professional actors are called to represent the same social and
ethnic sector of society from which they originate. This has led to practical problems, since the stereotypes created in these films interfere with the actors’ own lives. As seen in *City of God*, several actors who played the role of violent *favela* residents lived in actual *favelas* and, therefore, were themselves typecast by society as violent people.

The preparation of the main characters in *Carandiru* involved immersion in the lived experience of the prison spaces. For example, a group of actors had to stay inside the Hippodrome (an old prison) for twenty-four hours to experience the intensity of prison confinement (Carvalho 2003). The actor playing the doctor in the film went to the actual Carandiru, disguised as a doctor, to study the daily activities of the prison’s actual doctor, Draúzio Varella. He observed Varella attending to some of the inmates. The actors who played the romantic couple, Lady Di and Too Bad, lived together in a cell of the Hippodrome for two days in order to develop their intimacy. The same actor playing Too Bad also did volunteer work in a hospital to develop his acting as an inmate nurse. He directly helped HIV positive patients and learned how to take blood. Although all of them were already professional actors, the film’s director thought that these learning experiences would enhance the film’s realism without having to include actual inmates in the main cast. Authenticity of behaviour is seen, for example, in actor Rodrigo Santoro’s role as Lady Di. The actor’s performance as a transsexual is extremely convincing. He behaves like a calm, sensible and well-educated person, speaking softly and with an economy of gestures. Although Rodrigo Santoro was successful in his realistic performance, he was criticised for replacing a real transvestite. Claudia Wonder (2008, p. 121), for example, criticises *Carandiru* by comparing its use of a heterosexual man to play the role of a transsexual to earlier years in Hollywood films in which white actors painted their faces to act as black characters. She adds that although transsexuals were invited to participate in acting workshops, they were not selected to work in the main cast of the film. The fact that Rodrigo Santoro – a young celebrity soap opera actor – was given the role was a deliberate strategy to enhance the film’s commercial potential. This clearly reaffirms Babenco’s conservative option to maximise his film’s public appeal with a famous heterosexual actor rather than taking the risk of displeasing audiences by employing an unknown transsexual.

The third element of *mise-en-scène* is the costume design and make-up, which were specifically designed for each inmate using various clothes, hairstyles and tattoos. The film’s official press release stated, “more than 700 different designs of tattoos grace the bodies of the leading and supporting actors, as well as the extras” (*Carandiru* press kit, 2003) \(^{47}\). Aside from

adorning their bodies, the tattoos also create a physical connection between the film’s cast and the bodies of real inmates. *Carandiru*’s use of diversified costumes contrasts to the common cinematic representations of prisoners dressed in standard uniforms. Although the majority of inmates wear light brown pants, their t-shirts vary. Some of the inmates seldom wear t-shirts thus displaying their extensive tattoos. This is the case of convicted murderer Dagger, whose tattoos cover most of his arms. Another inmate, Ezequiel, has a seahorse tattooed on his arm. He is a self-declared surfer. The tattoo, along with the surfboard he plays with inside the jail, reinforces his connection with the sea. This careful construction of heterogeneous make-up and costume in the film contributes to a convincing representation of the inmates’ bodies.

Similarly to *City of God*, *Carandiru*’s cinematography also relies on the use of the hand-held camera to create a documentary style of filmmaking, strengthening its construction of realism. The shaking effect resulting from this type of mobile framing reinforces the representation of *Carandiru* as a chaotic space. This strategy undermines spectators’ possibility of viewing from a safe distance, forcing an intimate connection with the subjects of the action. This strategy is already present in the film’s first scene, which starts with a conflict between two inmates. A group of prisoners led by the character Ebony tries to solve the problem. The camera alternates between the interior and exterior of cells where the inmates are fighting. The hand-held camera follows Ebony as he walks through the corridor. He looks through the grids of the cells to discover the reason behind the conflict. Prisoners are both inside and outside the cells at the same time. Ebony seizes one of the inmates from the corridor and puts him inside a cell. The irregular movement of the hand-held camera creates a sense of immersion. The camera’s (and consequently the viewer’s) position is not in a distant and protected position relative to the action. Rather, it is also physically imperilled. The camera movement resembles *City of God*’s “The punishment of the Runts” sequence, analysed in Chapter One. Both seem based on an improvised script in which the action is shot as it unfolds. The camera focuses on people speaking abruptly, shifting between framings and following the action with frenetic movements. The camera stabilises slightly only once the guards, the prison’s director and the doctor come into the corridor. After their arrival, the pace of the scene slows down. This shift in camera movement accentuates the end of the chaotic situation.

Another interesting example of the use of the hand-held camera is the scene depicting the killing of the inmate Zico. A group of inmates attacks Zico when he is talking with a character named Highness. They cover Zico’s face with a white blanket and take turns stabbing him. The scene is shot from two camera positions. One camera follows slightly behind the inmates as they move closer to Zico’s body, stabbing him repeatedly and passing
the knife on to the next inmate. This gives the feeling that the viewer is participating in the violent action, as they are forced closer and closer to the situation. The second camera position shows the action from behind Zico, in a close-up on each of the inmates’ faces as they stab him. The scene alternates between the two camera positions. This allows the viewer to experience the claustrophobic and horrified perspective of Zico, who is fenced between the two camera positions. Hand-held cameras are not used throughout the entire film. The main camera movements are the panning and tracking shot. The scenes shot outside the prison are interesting examples of this more conventional use of camera movement, which emphasises the ample and unrestricted spaces that directly contrast with the confined space of the prison. This distinction between the use of hand-held cameras and smooth camera movements increases the effect of disruption as the hand-held camera is used selectively in the film for expressive effect. Sudden camera movement and shaking are also a clear strategy to heighten realism. While creating an insider’s perspective of life in the prison, this type of camera movement became one of the main strategies to give the impression that scenes are filmed as they happen, without the need of rehearsal or premeditated plans.

A last strategy to construct realism is the use of intertextual references. These are mainly presented through television footage that inmates watch from inside their cells. A good example of this is the broadcast of a speech delivered by former Brazilian president Fernando Collor de Mello. Accused of corruption, Mello stepped down from office in 1992 after an impeachment movement. The image situates the Carandiru massacre within the context of a corrupt government. Although impeached, the former president was acquitted of criminal charges and never sent to prison. Therefore, the film also underlines the impunity of the country’s political elite, while people who have not even yet been found guilty of their alleged crimes languish in Carandiru. The journalistic footage reinforces the idea that Brazilian prisons are reserved only for ordinary people coming from lower socio-economic classes. This broadcast is displayed on the television inside the cell of the character Beard. He is an inmate who has been awaiting trial for five years. The use of this intertextual reference contrasts the fate of the poor and likely innocent man, who despite not receiving a proper trial is already serving time in jail, with that of the corrupt president who manages to maintain his freedom. As the scene unfolds, the contrast between the president’s image and the daily life of the inmates increases. Another inmate, Ezequiel, enters the cell where Beard and the drug dealer Zico live. Ezequiel appears to be asking for some more drugs, but is in fact begging to delay his payment. Zico furiously yells that he first needs to pay his debts. As the scene demonstrates, Ezequiel knows that his life is at risk if he does not pay Zico. It also reveals the prison's own rigorous justice system, juxtaposing its strict internal laws with the impunity of
the outside world, where a former president never repaid his debt to the country.

Figure 2.5 Inmate watching the corrupt Brazilian president Collor on television.

Another sequence of journalistic footage shown within the film is the arrival of the police at Carandiru to control an inmates’ riot. A small group of inmates gather around a television to watch the images from outside the prison. The voiceover of a famous television journalist, Sérgio Chapelin from Rede Globo news, describes Carandiru as the largest prison in Latin America. Aerial images show a police helicopter circling above the prison buildings. The journalist explains that the prison is completely overcrowded. It has the capacity to hold four thousand prisoners, but it currently contains almost twice as many. He adds that 300 police officers have invaded the prison with guns and gas bombs to quell the riot. This sequence is immediately followed by Ebony’s testimonial, which emulates a documentary style as he looks directly at the camera and narrates what he saw from a small window at the moment of the police invasion. His testimonial, based on a passage from Draúzio Varella’s book, offers a personal and emotional perspective of the event, while also confirming the journalist’s report on the television news. In this respect, the intertextual archival news footage integrates fictional and non-fictional representations: simultaneously showing the television narration and the drama and pain experienced by the film’s inmates.

Figure 2.6 Inmates watching the police occupation from a television.

Intertextual footage from a Brazilian soap opera is also used during the riot scene.
Two married inmates, Lady Di and Too Bad, are watching a famous Brazilian telenovela (soap opera) called *God Help Us* (*Deus nos Acuda*) produced by Rede Globo. They are watching a romantic encounter between the soap opera’s main characters. On an expensive cruise ship, the woman takes off her bathrobe and jumps into a large swimming pool. In the reaction shot, the man, sitting close to the pool, turns to see her. A well-known Latin song, *La Barca* sung by Mexican Luis Miguel, is playing in the background. It continues to play until the police invade the prison cell. The couple is no longer watching television, yet the soap opera’s song is still heard blended with the loud sound of shots outside their cell. Without explanation, the policeman leaves the cell in silence, without shooting them. In the following scene, the couple, looking directly at the camera, raises two hypotheses to explain the policeman’s decision. Firstly, they consider whether the policeman was not capable of shooting a woman (Ladi Di is a transsexual). Secondly, they propose that the strong love they feel for each other protected them. The use of intertextual references in this scene contrasts hetero-normative models of romantic love with the ‘deviant’ love of the couple inside the cell. This reinforces the representation of the prison as a space for social deviance. Finally, this intertextual reference also contrasts the fictional and affluent soap opera representation with the film’s harsh realism that claims to depict the violent Brazilian reality.

The point to emphasise is that, far from representing reality itself, *Carandiru* is a well-integrated combination of elements of *mise-en-scène*, cinematography and intertextual imagery that produces its sense of realism. In the following pages, I demonstrate that *Carandiru* not only utilises some of *City of God*’s strategies in the construction of realism, but that it also uses this film as its main point of reference. Specifically, I argue that the cinematic space of the prison in *Carandiru* is clearly informed by the representation of the *favela* in *City of God*. The analysis of the similarities of these two cinematic spaces will take into account Michel Foucault’s (1977) point that, within the modern world, the disciplinary structure of the prison migrated to broader social institutions and spaces.

2.3 The cinematic prison as a cinematic *favela*

As their titles suggest, the settings of *Carandiru* and *City of God* can be understood as the central figures in both films. Carandiru was the name of a real prison in São Paulo, in the same way that City of God is the name of a real *favela* in Rio de Janeiro. Both films also claim to be a real portrayal of life in these respective spaces. As a result, the films’ plots, and the characters’ ambitions and fears only become comprehensible through their relationships with the setting. Characters face a daily struggle to survive precisely due to the violent
internal disputes of the places in which they live. Although these settings are essential to the films, they are portrayed as isolated and independent from other parts of the city. This spatial segregation reinforces the representation of prison and favela as spaces of criminalities and social deviance in contrast to other areas of the city.

In Carandiru, it is only the opening scene that shows the spatial connection between the prison and the outside world. The film starts with a satellite photograph of Brazil’s largest city, São Paulo. Through the effect of a long, fast zoom-in, the camera closes in upon the site and then focuses in on one of the prison’s buildings. It then rapidly dives into the courtyard until the image fades into complete darkness. This strategy is used to confirm the real existence of the prison within the urban landscape. This shot is too rapid and superficial to reveal any identifiable boundaries of the prison or its neighbourhood. Although the actual Carandiru was situated in the centre of the city, the lack of images connecting it to the outside world provides no clue as to its actual location. In this sense, this opening shot is juxtaposed with the film’s tendency of treating the prison and rest of the city as parallel worlds. Similarly, the favela in City of God, the cinematic construction of the prison space subverts its real location. The scene in Carandiru where the elderly inmate Chico is finally released illustrates this artificial separation. Chico is allowed to leave the prison and passes through the last prison gate, saying goodbye to a fellow inmate, Ebony. In the courtyard, he turns right, disappearing through a different exit to the big green doorway in the front wall in the background. This scene suggests that he left the prison through an alternative exit that Ebony, as a prisoner, was not allowed to see. As the film depicts an insider’s perspective of the prison, the spectators are in a similar position to Ebony. No one is allowed to follow Chico in his first steps outside the prison. Given the central location of Carandiru, the undisclosed images of the prison’s boundaries would necessarily have to show a noisy and crowded area of the city. However, this would undermine the spatial segregation intended in the film. These spaces are intentionally treated as discontinuous in order to emphasise an imaginary division between the world inside and outside the walls. This segregation blocks the possibility of showing former inmates reintegrated into the urban landscape and its social life.

48 Brandão (2010, p. 489) describes the cinematic space of the prison and the favela as “labyrinths of ‘monsters’”. In her analogy, these two cinematic spaces are compared to the Minotaur’s labyrinth, where “a hoard of Theseus in uniforms” represent the police fighting against the prisoners and favela inhabitants. She uses the Greek tragedy to criticize the recurrent portrayal of the prison and the favela as shattered and inaccessible spaces.
By confining the viewer to an insider’s perspective, the only images from the outside world come from the inmates’ flashbacks and television footage. Exceptions are the scenes of the doctor inside the train returning home or going to work in Carandiru. These images of daily commutes to and from the prison reinforce the idea of a remote and isolated space that the doctor makes accessible to viewers through his journey. This mobility makes the doctor an “occasional voyeur” of the prison (Iverem 2007, p. 475). Similarly to Rocket, the mediator in City of God, the doctor also acts as a voice from inside the confined, marginalised space (favela/prison), but outside the world of crime. However, unlike Rocket, who represents the voice of the favela, the doctor is a voice from outside the prison. In this sense, it is arguable whether the doctor’s voice represents an insider’s perspective. In an interview, the real doctor Draúzio Varella admits that one of the reasons his book attained such success is because he did not use the prisoners’ language. He argues that the reader feels safer to enter the prison’s world being guided by a doctor’s voice (Varella 2002). The film follows the book’s strategy, prioritising the doctor’s perspective. In the final scene of the film, the image of the doctor...
going to work in Carandiru is followed by his voice-over. He compares the feeling of working in Carandiru with the black and white prison films that he saw during his childhood. This analogy, in part, explains the doctor’s fascination with the prison as personal rather than purely social and professional. It also situates Carandiru as another prison film made by people who, while never experiencing real life imprisonment, presume to understand its inner workings.

The cinematic reconstitution of Carandiru’s prison exhibits several other similarities with the favela in City of God. The prison’s corridors resemble the narrow streets of City of God’s favela. The prison’s cells, like the favela’s houses, are cramped. The characters are absorbed into an agitated daily life. In City of God, the constant fight for control of the drug trade means every favela resident is always at risk. In Carandiru, there is a lack of scenes showing the banality and tediousness of daily life in the prison. It avoids depicting routine activities such as collective meals. Each day is eventful: a famous singer performing and distributing condoms in the courtyard, the wedding of an inmate couple, football matches, and visits from the inmates’ families.

Figure 2.9 The prison’s corridors resemble the narrow streets of City of God’s favela.

Figure 2.10 Eventful daily life in the prison
Both films ignore the roots of violence by focusing on its effects, portraying prisons and favelas as ideal spaces for its spectacular enactment. Another similarity is the relative lack of police intervention in conflicts occurring in these two spaces. Both settings are depicted as spaces ruled by their own internal laws. In City of God, a policeman referring to the drug war between rival gangs declares: “let them kill themselves”. Police officers in Carandiru also consent to the inmates’ murders. This lack of intervention is evident in the doctor’s first day of work in Carandiru. The prison’s director explains to him that the “yellow wing” of the building is a prison within the prison. It is a place for prisoners afraid of being killed. The name “yellow wing” refers to their skin colour but also connotes cowardice, as they never go out to the courtyard, living confined inside their cells. The prison’s director describes them as traitors, hit men and/or rapists. That is, they are prisoners who feel the constant risk of being killed by other inmates. The prison is depicted as regulated by an internal revenge system, which takes precedence over the institutional penal system. After showing the newly arrived doctor around Carandiru, the prison’s director admits that the inmates are the real owners of the prison. Carandiru’s gangs of prisoners, similar to City of God’s cartel of drug dealers, act beyond any state jurisdiction. In both films, outlaws establish their own disciplinary rules, deciding when, how and who will be executed.

Carandiru and City of God also share a similar, stereotypical depiction of outlaws and poor Brazilians. There are recurrent connections drawn between poverty and crime. In both, characters involved in trafficking and consumption of drugs are normally Afro-Brazilians. However, like City of God, Carandiru does not try to explain or develop any justification for this association between poverty, ethnicity and criminality. Violence once again seems arbitrary, personal, and intrinsic to the nature of Afro-Brazilians; it is not shown to be an ultimate and desperate act resulting from their social exclusion. The depiction of crime in the film is related to two basic causes: money disputes and personal revenge. In both cases, the film focuses on the inmates' personal stories and clearly avoids expanding on the possible structural causes of recurrent violence within a determined social class or ethnic group.

Having now considered Carandiru's main strategies in the construction of realism and the similarities between the cinematic prison and favela, I will analyse two specific scenes from the film. I will draw on Foucault's notions of panopticism and punishment to enhance my interpretation of the film, as well as to underline differences between his descriptions of the modern prison and the film’s representation of Carandiru.
2.4 Panopticism in the scene “Carandiru at night”

David Gonthier’s (2006) book *American Prison Film Since 1930* is based on Foucault’s description of Bentham’s architectural prison project. He quotes Foucault:

> **The panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower one sees everything without ever been seen.** (Foucault quoted in Gonthier, p. 26)

For Gonthier, in terms of cinematic representation, the panopticon is realised through a specific camera movement: panning, which articulates a panoptic gaze. His close analyses of films such as *The Big House* (1930) and *Caged Heat* (1974) discuss how movements along the horizontal axis reveal the total space of the prison to create a panoramic view as the “omniscient eye of the institution” (p. 27). Studies of Brazilian prison films also frequently rely on Foucault’s theories, including many close analyses of *Carandiru* (Sousa, 2009; Almendra 2007; Gadea 2000). For example, Sousa, in line with Gonthier’s appropriation of Foucault, argues that the camera in *Carandiru* “frames the characters as a Panopticon” (2009, p. 171). She asserts that the camera assumes the role of surveillance, privileging a view from outside the cells. This induces spectators to observe characters as objects. Without discounting such analyses, I want to suggest that, in many instances, the depiction of the prison in *Carandiru* also challenges the idea of a panoptic architecture. Indeed, surveillance’s aim for total visibility is obstructed by the inmates’ physical appropriation of the space. This is evident in a scene I refer to as “Carandiru at night”. Although panning is a prevalent camera movement in the film, favouring Gonthier’s theory of a cinematic panopticon, I maintain that the panning in *Carandiru* reveals, instead, the impossibility of surveillance. Foucault describes panopticism inside the prison as being “at once surveillance and observation, security and knowledge, individualization and totalization, isolation and transparency.” (1977, p. 249). Building on his description, I argue that *Carandiru’s* chaotic space sharply contrasts to panoptic prisons that allow for an individual knowledge of each inmate.

The prison in the scene “Carandiru at night” is an opaque and inaccessible space. The scene begins with the doctor leaving the prison’s infirmary after his first day of work. The camera is completely stable. It slowly follows the doctor with a tracking movement. Non-diegetic drumming music and the lack of light add to the suspense of the scene. The doctor realises that the doorway outside and in front of the infirmary has already been closed. He
tries to force the rusty gate open but finds it is locked. He steps back, walking in the opposite direction, to find another exit. The only sound is the stamp of his footsteps. Shadows of cell bars cover the entire floor and walls. He hesitantly stops after the unexpected sight of an altar of saints and candles. The presence of this altar, which functions as religious shelter inside the institution’s common areas, reveals the prison’s corridors as spaces fully appropriated by the inmates. The doctor continues his walk, entering a new corridor even darker than the previous one. Yellow tones from the candles and green hues from the mouldy walls give the corridor mysterious tones. Sounds of fighting and arguing raise the doctor’s curiosity. He opens the small curtain of a cell to look inside through a round keyhole. Peeking through the small cavity, he sees seven inmates, each of whom watches a different show on their respective television. Blue light from the TV sets fills the keyhole. The doctor’s examination of inmates inside their cells is akin to the scientist’s use of microscopes to analyse problems (Sousa 2009, p. 173). The television images range from soccer games to reality shows. Concentrated on their own screens, the inmates do not even notice the presence of the doctor. The camera continues to follow the doctor’s movements. The dark and musty corridors are unpleasantly damp, resembling a subterranean labyrinth. The doctor stops at another cell and opens the curtain. A lonely inmate is cooking his own dinner. This time, however, the doctor no longer observes through the round lens of a single microscopic-like eyepiece. Rather, he uses both eyes to see through a rectangular window, reminiscent of a film spectator in a theatre. The reverse shot shows only the eyes of the doctor looking through the rectangular window in the cell door. In both cases, as a result of the doctor’s act of observing without being noticed, each inmate becomes an “object of information, never a subject in communication” (Foucault 1977, p. 200). Similar to the panopticon, the doctor's observation of inmates in their private space is only possible via a hidden action. However, the doctor is not in a safe position. He is lost and alone, still searching for a way to leave the prison. In this sense, the prison's panoptic structure has been altered by the inmates' use of curtains to cover cell doors and also by the lack of light along the corridors and inside the cells. This obstruction of seeing inside the cells is part of a larger pattern in the film. The narrow, unpredictable and labyrinthine corridors of the prison resemble the arrangement of streets in the favela.

The doctor eventually finds his way to the centre of the courtyard. His pale clothes blend in with the muddy floor and dirty walls surrounding the courtyard. He looks up at the high walls where he notices differently coloured lights through each barred window. Various items of bed linen and cloths hang on the bars of each window. The doctor’s view is the opposite of the panoptic view described by Foucault (1977, p. 202). He does not have a panoramic view from a central tower or backlighting to guard him. Rather, he is alone at the
bottom of the courtyard looking upwards, in a vulnerable position. While his observation of the prisoners does reflect a power-knowledge relationship, the doctor is the one that is now exposed and most likely being observed by others. The panning camera movement covers the entire courtyard. However, nothing can be identified because of the darkness and the inmates' cloths hanging from the windows. The doctor walks towards the exit door, knocking on the gates to attract the attention of a guard. He explains that he is a doctor who has stayed late in the infirmary. Initially the guard is suspicious. Revealing the institution’s lack of organisation, the guard warns him that if he cannot prove that he is truly the institution’s doctor, he will have to stay the night in the prison. This is an interesting reversal of positions in which the doctor definitely loses his privileged position as observer. He suddenly feels the risk of being absorbed into Carandiru’s world, to the point of becoming yet another prisoner. A group of inmates hidden in the dark courtyard approaches the doctor as he waits. Noticing them, the doctor looks around in search of help. The guard finally opens the door, apologising for the misunderstanding. He pulls the doctor out of the courtyard, promptly locking the gate. The group of inmates looks out at the doctor through the metallic grid of the gate. They ask him if he will come back the next day. He leaves the prison without answering.

In this scene, total surveillance is incompatible with the deteriorated and worn down buildings of the prison and with its fundamental architectural structure. The overcrowded cell combines all types of prisoners in the same space. It prevents any observation or knowledge of them as individuals. The doctor was able to see what was happening inside the cells only because he mistakenly took the personal risk of walking alone in the prison at night. This sequence also discloses the lack of disciplinary rules inside the prison. In most prison films, these rules are associated with common regimented times and activities, such as eating, sleeping and prisoners being confined to their cells. In Carandiru, conversely, comprehensive surveillance is unachievable. The prison is as complex, contradictory and multi-faceted a
space as Brazilian society itself.

In the next section, I will show how external forces displace the internal and self-ruling power of inmates. This process begins with a major riot in Carandiru, which neither inmates nor prison guards are able to control. It is the state governor who finally intervenes in the situation. This contradicts the prison’s autonomy portrayed in the film up to this point. The vertical and abrupt state intervention shows that inmates’ power did not exist without outside consent from a corrupt and indifferent government. Mirroring the brutal process of ‘pacification’ of the favelas mentioned in Chapter One, the same police now occupy the prison, executing and arresting people, putting an abrupt end to drug trafficking and internal powers of control.

2.5 Punishment in the scene: “Massacre’s survivors”

According to Foucault, the modern prison substitutes punishment based mainly on physical torture for a number of restrictions and deprivations within “an economy of suspended rights” (Foucault 1977, p. 11). Although this change did not eliminate a “certain degree of physical pain” (p. 16), it transferred the immediate punishment of the body to more effective penalties. In the case of Carandiru’s prison, however, this substitution is only partial, as modern and medieval tactics are both combined. This is evident in a scene I will refer to as the “Massacre’s survivors”. Following the brutal police raid, the corridors of the prison are littered with corpses and the floors covered in blood. The camera follows a police dog sniffing the floor. He stops in front of cat, a pet belonging to a now dead inmate. The camera also stops: dog and cat stand paralysed facing each other. The cat is small and weak beside the police officer’s German Sheppard. This is a metaphor for the massacre, the dog symbolising the fully armed police forces in contrast to the semi-naked prisoners who defended themselves with improvised knives. A hand-held camera follows the police force coming through the smoke. They strike the inmates’ cell door with sticks and violently order survivors to queue in the courtyard. Most inmates are in their underwear. The initial representation of a heterogeneous prison, with diversified inmates dressing in different shirts, is now homogenised by the arrival of the external power. Now, the prison resembles a battlefield where the state quells the inmates. In front of the police, outside of their houses/cells, the prisoners of Carandiru are unified as an indistinct mass of criminals. In this scene, the police ignore the “individualization of sentences” that Foucault (1977, p. 99) describes as an important aspect of the modern penal law, relying on medieval techniques of generalised punishment.
The policemen dressed in black uniforms merge with the damp and smoky-grey corridors. A policeman asks inmates to repeat aloud the police’s motto: “Long live the riot squad!” The survivors, in chorus, obey. The camera stays still as the inmates cross the frame in queue. The police appear to be counting the number of survivors. This act exemplifies their power-knowledge\textsuperscript{49} position over the inmates. Survivors sit on the courtyard floor with their heads between their knees. As they remain immobilised, a camera close to the floor follows a policeman walking around the prisoners with a dog on a leash. A few inmates remain standing in a queue while others lie down on the floor with their hands on their heads. This is the only scene of the film in which prisoners are organised in a uniformed space. This disciplinary action is a second form of punishment following the massacre. Clearly, there is a complete suspension of rights. In this scene, physical and psychological torture produces humiliation and forced obedience. In this way, the police occupation accomplishes one of the modern prison’s intentions of creating docile bodies, which join “the analysable body to the manipulative body” (Foucault 1997, p. 136). At least temporarily, the military power subjects inmates to the seemingly unlimited power of the state.

As night falls, a guard in the tower watches inmates who remain sitting in the same position. Unlike Foucault’s description of panoptic guards hidden by backlights (1977, p. 200), Carandiru’s guards are highly visible. Even in the tower, the guard is the first to be illuminated by the white light. In a bird’s eye view of the courtyard, the white light also makes visible a group of guards surrounding the prisoners, and illuminates a large image of the Virgin Mary painted on the prison’s wall. The white light focuses on the fragile and captured bodies of the inmates as if they were prisoners of war. This transformation of the status of the prisoners, from self-rulers of the prison to fragile hostages of the police occupation reinforces the power of the state. The blue tone of the image, along with the nostalgic and non-diegetic instrumental music, links the representation of the Brazilian prison to images of concentration camps, often seen in World War II films. The white goal post in the centre of the screen reminds the viewer of the prison’s transformation after the police invasion. The ludic and unregulated place where prisoners enjoyed football matches is now a strict concentration camp. As the inmates remain in their positions, the light changes, implying that the night has passed. The morning sun illuminates the prisoners. Their bodies are now the same colour as the dirt courtyard. All the external forces of surveillance and discipline, mostly absent during the initial parts of the film, clearly appear in this scene of the

\textsuperscript{49} Foucault (1977, p. 29) explains the intrinsic relation between power and knowledge, as “power relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of power.”
police occupation.

Figure 2.12 The police occupation of the prison

In *Carandiru’s* DVD extras, Babenco comments that the aerial images of the prisoners in the courtyard reference newspaper photographs released during the covering of the massacre. This reinforces the director’s claim of portraying facts as they happened while, at the same time, displaying and supplementing the film with a journalistic understanding of the crisis. This dramatically shifts the film’s initial perspective. Herlinghaus’ (2008, p. 600) article “Affectivity beyond ‘Bare Life’” argues that, with the massacre scene, the film’s “affective involvement is remade into a distancing aesthetic strategy”. This is underscored by the lack of any close-up showing recognisable characters and their facial expressions. In its quest to emulate the fairly well-known images of the police occupation, the subjective and emotional dimensions of the event are replaced by the creation of a journalistic report. As a consequence, any focus on the inmates’ individual suffering is avoided. Neither does *Carandiru* elucidate the main causes of the massacre. The film concludes without answering major questions, including who authorised the police to arbitrarily execute several inmates. Although he knew the name of the authorities responsible for the massacre, Babenco admits that he preferred to omit this information (Carvalho 2003). Babenco’s argument is consistent with his declaration that his intention was principally to make an entertaining rather a political film. In order to expand on Babenco’s statement and to complement my analysis of the film, the next section will focus on the relation between *Carandiru’s* representation of prisons and Brazilian social reality.

2.6 The representation of prisons’ social reality

The historical footage released as part of *Carandiru’s* DVD extras contrasts the model prison of Carandiru’s inaugural years with the chaotic and overcrowded contemporary Carandiru. Archival images from the 1920s show the original São Paulo penitentiary before its
expansion, when it became known as the Carandiru complex. It was then an example of cleanliness and organisation. Inmates had access to Portuguese, music and painting classes. They had physical education and could work. These black and white documentary images of the initial prison project stand in stark contrast to the later deterioration depicted in the film Carandiru. The documentary finishes with images of the original prison’s library and vegetable garden. It compares the 1920s prison to a school, emphasising the possibility of re-educating inmates. The prison is showcased as a well-regulated space and a model of modern incarceration practices.

A comparison of these two opposed representations of Carandiru raises the problem of trying to analyse the penal system from a chronological perspective, from an ordered past to a chaotic present. In this documentary, we have no evidence whether the then recently inaugurated prison was the rule or an exception inside the 1920s Brazilian prison system. Based on recent historiography of Brazilian prisons, for example, Teixeira (2008) contradicts the idea of earlier exemplary prisons by suggesting that the crisis of the Brazilian prison system began at the same time it was created. Overcrowding, non-separation between inmates of different ages, a high rate of crimes and violence were common features of Brazilian prisons from the beginning. This statement suggests that the Carandiru depicted on the documentary was either a piece of propaganda, or an exceptional case of a functioning prison inside an overall rotten prison system. It also contradicts the hypothesis proposed by primatologist Frans de Waal and developed by doctor Draúzio Varella (for whom the overcrowding of spaces reduces violence in places such as prisons), as the documentary shows a peaceful prison that has only small numbers of inmates. However, the documentary ignores specific problems of the initial prison model. Historian Cancelli (2005) argues that Carandiru was regarded in the past as a type of post card image of São Paulo. Yet, behind its fame as a disciplined and well-organised space, the strict rules of the prison resulted in high numbers of suicide attempts among inmates. This gloomy aspect of the inaugural prison is not included on Carandiru’s extras. Instead, the black and white footage gives a nostalgic impression that the penal system once worked without problems. These contradictory stories suggest that, although the prison exhibited many problems from its earliest days, the documentary only selected the positive aspects of the disciplinary institution. The comparison between the two prisons (past and present) results in the misleading idea that only the contemporary prison had problems. Michel Foucault (1977, p. 30) points out that, after observing the motivations behind different prison riots, he could note that at the same time that “[the riots] were revolts against an entire state of physical misery (…) they were also revolts against model prisons”. Foucault saw these apparently contradictory motivations as
proof that, beyond material conditions, the main cause of riots was the prison itself, as it functions as an instrument of power over inmates’ bodies. Drawing on his conclusion, the two cinematic prisons of the 1920s documentary and the contemporary fictional film bear one basic resemblance: both are spaces that impose on the prisoners’ body.

The film *Carandiru* does seem an accurate representation of the prison when compared with recent human rights reports. An institute monitoring penitentiary conditions in Brazil stated that “endemic overcrowding, filthy conditions of confinement, extreme heat, light deprivation and permanent lock-ups (factors with severe health consequences for inmates), along with pervasive violence persist” (International Bar Association 2010, p. 15). On the other hand, the film fails to mention the prevalent social background of the inmates. Esteves (2002) suggests that, to understand the internal problems of the prison, one should first understand the context of violence experienced by inmates before their imprisonment. This includes the deprivation of basic rights such as education, employment, habitation, health, nourishment and transportation. Socio-economic deprivations result in the lack of access to basic material necessities. Since these deprivations often affect only a “certain social class” (Foucault 1977, p. 275), it is not difficult to connect *favela* residents and other marginalised people to prisons. Although it is problematic to associate criminality directly to a specific social class, it is a fact that the majority of prisoners in Brazil are economically deprived people (Esteves, 2002). It is also problematic to understand criminality as only a consequence of the lack of basic resources. Bauman (1997, p. 40) explains that increases in criminality are “instead, the consumer society's own product, logically (if not legally) legitimate”. In this sense, violence becomes the main path for marginalised people to seize the expensive commodities extensively promoted inside capitalistic societies. Another important factor to understand the prevalent presence of poor people in prisons is the impunity and corruption among upper and middle class sectors of Brazilian society. On the one hand, Brazilian elites often avoid imprisonment by means of bribing and/or by relying on competent lawyers who manipulate gaps in the legislation. On the other hand, as Foucault declares, “law and justice do not hesitate to proclaim their necessary class dissymmetry” (p. 276). After all, the penal system itself was created to judge and condemn the ones that suffered from the lack of formal education and socio-economic deprivations. Once *Carandiru* opts to emphasise inmates’ diverse stories and social backgrounds, it makes it difficult to assume that all of them got involved in criminal activities as a result of their shared economic deprivation.

Although the film portrays the prison as a self-confined space, lacking interaction with the outside world, dominated by internal rules and with minimum state intervention, this depiction sharply contrasts with the reality of most Brazilian prisons. Similar to Foucault’s
analysis of the “carceral system”, Brazilian prisons also work as institutions closely connected with many other structures of society (1977, p. 271). This connection is evident in two direct consequences of the Carandiru massacre that were not shown in the film. The first one was the fact that Colonel Ubiratan Guimarães, who commanded the massacre, was elected to São Paulo’s state assembly in the year 2002. He deliberately used the number 111 - the exact number of deaths during the Carandiru massacre - to identify himself on the ballot paper (Folha Online, 2006b). Although polemic, this strategy proved successful, leading to his election to office. This confirms the impression that parts of Brazilian society actually approved of the barbaric police action inside the prison. This also suggests that, for certain social groups in Brazil, the event was a positive example of police action against criminals to protect society. For these groups, human rights are seen as a class privilege, which is not necessarily granted to criminalised people. In a notorious case of impunity, the colonel was found not guilty of the massacre because he was following superior orders. The second consequence of the Carandiru massacre was the formation of a powerful criminal organisation known as PCC (First Capital Command). It claims to have been created to avenge the infamous event and nowadays is strongly represented in the majority of prisons in São Paulo. Like other criminal organisations (such as the Red Command and Pure Third Command), PCC dictates the internal rules of many contemporary Brazilian prisons. As an organised power, it is responsible not only for advocating basic rights for inmates, such as proper places to sleep, but also for facilitating illegal activities such as the selling of drugs and guns inside the prison. The power of this organisation is not restricted to the space of the prison. It also exerts influence over many poor neighbourhoods of the city. In fact, the drug trafficking market in these communities directly finances PCC activities. This recalls a previous idea, mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, that the prison and the favela are interconnected spaces.

It is impossible to conceive of PCC’s increasing politico-economic power in isolation from the state’s corruption, especially in the form of police officers and politicians engaged in drug and gun contraband. Its growth also derives from the money pumped in as a result of the high rates of drug addicts among Brazil’s affluent classes. The PCC has been responsible for a series of riots in prisons in the state of São Paulo, as well as criminal actions resulting in the murder of police officers (Gilligan, 2006). The state often retaliates by commanding death squads to arbitrarily kill any supposed drug lord in the favelas. In contrast to the initial self-governing and isolated image of Carandiru, both the creation of PCC and the election of the

The Colonel was found dead in his own home in 2006. His girlfriend is the main suspect but the case still without resolution (Folha Online, 2006a).
Colonel who commanded the massacre clearly demonstrate the prison’s connection to the outside world. It also illustrates that prisons and *favelas* experience two similar forms of violence: maximum state interventions (in the form of occupation by death squads) and minimum interventions (transferring the local administration to criminal organisations and drug lords).

As previously discussed, Foucault's (1977) descriptions of the modern prison are not sufficient to understand specific problems of the contemporary Brazilian penitentiary system. However, the French philosopher’s conclusions are still appropriate to the overall understanding of the national prison’s major problems, many of which are depicted in *Carandiru*. In order to prove the general ineffectiveness of prisons, Foucault raises a number of arguments:

1. Prisons do not diminish the crime rate; 2. Detention causes recidivism; 3. The prison cannot fail to produce delinquents; 4. The prison makes possible, even encourages, the organization of a milieu of delinquents; 5. The conditions to which the free inmates are subjected necessarily condemn them to recidivism; 6. The prison indirectly produces delinquents by throwing the inmates family into destitution (pp. 265–268).

Indeed, his conclusions match the social reality of Brazilian prisons, whose increasing prison populations have led to the increase of crime rates and the empowerment of criminal organisations. The failure of the prison model is present throughout *Carandiru*. The scene in which Ebony’s son becomes an inmate sharing a cell with his father, for example, shows the perpetuation of criminality through subsequent family generations. The beginning of the film shows inmate Lula explaining his return to prison after killing a man his wife was dating during his previous period of imprisonment. The film thus replies to Foucault's provocative question: “is not the supposed failure part of the functioning of the prison?” (1977, p. 271). For Foucault, the overt objectives of the prison conceal its more covert objectives. The implied answer is that those who really benefit from these institutions are not the inmates. However, representations of the chaotic and corrupt prison model, both in films and television news, do not necessarily result in its rejection by society. Carvalho Filho (2004) argues that this type of information only increases spectators’ curiosity, and reinforces the image of prisons as a distant reality of otherness. He points out that these representations also support most of the populations’ belief that inmates themselves are the main cause for the deterioration of prisons. As a result, most citizens also defend stricter punitive rules and laws, such as the increase of imprisonment time. The depiction of the horrible prison conditions in Babenco’s film also provides evidence for those appealing for reforms in Brazilian prisons.
Many wish to bring back the model of reformative incarceration of the 1920s, when Carandiru was a supposed model of a prison, as presented in the DVD’s extras.

In summary: Carandiru’s hoodlums are not portrayed as heroes who break the law to challenge authoritarian regimes, as is the case in other contemporary Brazilian films (especially *City of God*). Neither are prisons used as metaphors to criticize the Brazilian authoritarian state. Rather, just as the cinematic *favela*, they are seen only as spaces of exclusion. Johnson (2006, p. 121) accurately states that, in the New Brazilian Cinema, “the cinema is no longer seen as a tool for consciousness-raising in a broader process of social transformation.” Despite their claim of realism, the social problems depicted in these films are better understood as an entertainment strategy meant to appeal to contemporary audiences. Although sharing similar social themes, current films do not share Cinema Novo’s aims for social, political and cultural change.

In the next chapter, I continue my analysis of recent Brazilian films about social exclusion by focusing on a film about homeless children in Brazil, *Last Stop 174* (*Última parada 174*, 2008). I compare the cinematic representation of those forced to live in the streets with that of *favela* residents and prison inmates. I also discuss a recurrent contradiction in these films: as much as they attempt to portray the complex and specific lives of marginalized individuals, they do so by reinforcing common stereotypes of violence.
Chapter Three: Cinematic streets

The first two chapters of this thesis have been devoted to analysing spatial segregation and confinement in cinematic representations of favelas and prisons. As argued, these representations fabricate a sense of geographical isolation by making these places seem disconnected from other parts of the city. At the same time, both cinematic favelas and prisons are associated with themes of widespread criminality and violence and, as a consequence, despite their supposed urban remoteness, the favela and the prison are represented as being interconnected. In this final chapter, I focus on a third space repeatedly used as a setting for violent plots featuring marginalised people: the streets. This space will be analysed in films that focus on homeless children working and/or living on the streets, a recurrent topic in Brazilian cinema. As will be discussed, these films follow children’s struggles to survive life not only on the streets, but also in favelas and prison-like spaces such as juvenile detention centres and reformatory schools.

The chapter examines representations of cinematic streets from an early 1950s film, *Rio 40 Degrees* (*Rio 40 Graus*, Nelson Pereira dos Santos 1954), to films from the New Brazilian Cinema (mid-1990s onwards). Particular attention is given to one of the most influential films featuring urban violence against homeless children: *Pixote: The Law of the Weakest* (*Pixote: A lei do mais fraco*, Hector Babenco 1981). I illustrate this by analysing references to *Pixote* seen in the construction of cinematic realism of a contemporary feature film, *Last Stop 174* (*Última parada 174*, Bruno Barreto 2008). By means of a close analysis of this film, I show how the construction of cinematic streets as a confined space, as well as the stereotypical depictions of marginalised people as violent criminals, are similar to those of cinematic *favelas* and prisons. The chapter concludes by considering the cinematic representations of life on the streets in relation to contemporary social reality in Brazil.

3.1 Homeless children in Brazilian cinema: from early representations to the legacy of *Pixote*.

The social phenomenon of children living on the streets is not recent in the context of Brazilian history. Widespread child homelessness dates back to the colonial sixteenth-

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century when Iberian and *mestizo* [mixed-race] children were abandoned by their impoverished families (Marcilio 2006). At the end of the nineteenth-century, the number of homeless children, especially those of African ancestry, increased substantially after the promulgation of two laws: the Free Womb Law (*Lei do Ventre Livre*, 1871), which freed the children born to slaves and the Golden Law (*Lei Áurea*, 1888), which formally freed the remaining slaves (Maricondi 1997). From then on, and as a direct result of the lack of state planning to integrate former slaves into free society, many Afro-Brazilian children ended up on the streets due to extreme poverty. In the twentieth-century, as the country went through a rapid process of industrialisation from the 1940s onwards, the number of homeless children only grew. This was largely a consequence of the abrupt, mass migration of families from rural areas to the growing cities in the search for job opportunities.

The theme of homeless children is not recent in Brazilian cinema either. *Rio 40 Degrees* (*Rio 40 Graus*, 1954) for example, directed by the *Cinema Novo* filmmaker Nelson Pereira dos Santos, focuses on a group of children from the *favela* selling peanuts in the streets of touristic parts of Rio de Janeiro. In an attempt to sell their daily quota, the boys roam around the city, each experiencing their own personal adventure: be it visiting the Zoo, acquiring money for a sick mother, running from an aggressive boss or running from a policeman. As some of the children have no proper family or house, the *favela* becomes their domestic realm, where they are able to live surrounded by friends and acquaintances. Therefore, despite their nomadic daily urban itineraries, homeless children in *Rio 40 Degrees* belong to the *favela* and not the streets.

This is made explicit in one of the film’s last scenes. After arresting the peanut seller Sujinho, a policeman goes to the *favela* to search for the boy’s family. He asks a group of youths gathered outside a house if any of them know the boy’s parents. They remain silent, insinuating that Sujinho is an orphan. The group begs the policeman to allow Sujinho to stay in the *favela*. He answers that he cannot leave the boy there, since he must take him to the officer responsible for orphans. A woman, who is watching the episode from her window, promptly enters the conversation. She insists that although the boy does not have parents, he is her son’s friend and lives in their house. This scene emphasises the solidarity among *favela* residents, as well as their lack of trust in the police and other state institutions. It represents

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52 Brazil was a formal colony of Portugal from the 16th until the 19th century. Independence from Portugal was declared in 1822. Despite the successful anti-colonial movement, however, slavery of Afro-Brazilians continued as an important economic activity, only being abolished in 1888.

53 As mentioned in Chapter One, this film is considered one of the harbingers of the *Cinema Novo* movement, which formally started in the late 1950s.
the favela as the only safe haven for poor orphans like Sujinho, where friends act as a substitute family.

The fact that homeless children reside inside the perimeters of the favela and not on the streets or in juvenile detention centres, is an important feature that distinguishes Rio 40 Degrees from later and even harsher representations of abandoned or orphaned children in Brazilian cinema. A quintessential example of these less optimistic representations is the film Pixote: The Law of the Weakest (Hector Babenco 1981), an internationally famous Brazilian film of the 1980s (Shaw 2003). Robert Stam (1997) situates Pixote within a group of other famous street urchin films such as Shoeshine (Sciuscià, Vittorio de Sica 1946), The Young and the Damned (Los Olvidados, Luis Buñuel 1950) and Salaam Bombay! (Mira Nair 1988). Stam compares Babenco’s with Buñuel’s films, arguing that they share a group of characteristics, including the use of “sociological documentation” as sources for creating the scripts, their “documentary-inflected” style and their “episodic structure” (p. 316). Despite their rather different socio-historical contexts54, all of the above mentioned street urchin films share this last characteristic. Firstly, the children become involved with petty crimes in order to survive on the streets. Consequently, they end up arrested by the police and sent to juvenile detention centres. The competitive and austere conditions of life in confinement leads them into fights and feuds with others inmates. At some moment in each of these street urchin films, the children manage to escape from imprisonment. However, their return to the streets is often tragic and without the chance of a better life.

Pixote shares a similar episodic structure with each one of these films. The Brazilian film follows a group of youths that manages to escape from a juvenile detention centre in the country’s largest city, São Paulo. They move to Rio de Janeiro in search of a better life. The group gets involved with drug trafficking in the hope of fast and easy profits, but the children are eventually deceived by customers who flee with the drugs without paying for them. In their second attempt to survive on the streets, they make a deal with a prostitute to rob her clients and share the profits with her. One night, however, in the middle of an unexpected

54 Cardullo (2002) states that Shoeshine reflects the image of impoverishment and chaos of Italian society after World War II. The author argues that, while the two leading boys are depicted as victims, the film does not blame society for their situation. On the contrary, society is also depicted as a victim because it is destroying its own future in the figure of the children. In the case of The Young and the Damned, Acevedo-Muñoz (1997, p.13) argues that, although the film is a social critique of contemporary Mexican urban society, it is mainly a critique of themes and visual conventions of classical cinema of Mexico. He points out that the film “directly addresses and questions an official idea of Mexican culture, an official imaginary of Mexican cinema”. Salaam Bombay! focuses on the life of one homeless child to represent myriads of children living on Indian’s streets. Bharucha (1989, p. 1275) criticises the film because it erases “complex historical forces and social relations”, resulting in “voyeuristic entertainment” that depicts poverty in a way that does not lead to rage or social confrontation.
fight with one of the prostitute’s foreign clients, the youngest boy of the group, Pixote, accidently kills his friend Dito. Following this, Pixote and the prostitute develop an ambiguous relationship of motherhood and sexual desire. Yet, after realising Pixote’s almost incestuous feelings toward her, the prostitute forces the boy to leave the house and return to the streets. The film ends without any resolution in regard to Pixote’s tragic, marginalised life and he remains alone in the streets of Rio de Janeiro. In this film, the streets are a metaphor for the world as a prison. The fact that the boys escape from the juvenile detention centre does not change their marginalised situation. Robert Stam and Randal Johnson (1995, p. 414) note that “the boys discover [that freedom] bears an uncanny resemblance to their previous confinement”. The clear parallels between life in prison and life on the streets suggest that the children are unable to free themselves from exclusion and marginalisation no matter where they go. *Pixote*’s cinematic streets are blind alleys, analogous to those seen in the films *Shoeshine*, *The Young and the Damned* and *Salaam Bombay!*

Made during the last years of the military dictatorship (1964-1985), *Pixote* claims to portray the social reality of homeless children in Brazil’s big cities. It was inspired by the non-fiction novel *Childhood of the Dead (A infância dos mortos, 1977)*, written by journalist José Louzeiro. The book focuses on an infamous incident of police brutality known as the *Camanducaia Operation* (Operação Camanducaia). In 1977, almost a hundred children were arrested in the streets and transported by bus from São Paulo to a cliff near Camanducaia (a small city in the State of Minas Gerais), where they were tortured and abandoned. Although the film does not mention this particular occurrence, names of characters were drawn from this book. Both the written and the visual narrative share the same theme: the repression and social drama of homeless children.

The film begins with director Hector Babenco talking directly to the camera in a *favela*, presenting statistics concerning the social condition of children in Brazil. Babenco explains that, at the time of the film, around three million homeless children existed in the country. The director’s presence in front of the camera adds an element of documentary style.

Johnson (1987b, p. 43) attests that there are too many differences between Louzeiro’s book and Babenco’s film to call it an adaptation. One of the main differences is the fact that the character Pixote dies in the first pages of book. Babenco states that the film probably retains only 30% of the book’s content (Carvalho 2003, p. 128).

Louzeiro investigated the episode as a journalist for the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* (Frontana, 1999). Unhappy with the military censorship of the newspapers, he wrote the non-fiction novel *Childhood of the Dead*. Louzeiro is also the writer of *Lúcio Flávio, Passenger of Agony* (1976).

At least 41 children completely disappeared. 52 survived and were arrested by Camanducaia police. In a clear case of impunity, nobody was found guilty of the operation (Louzeiro 1993).
to the film. The camera moves around the *favela* and shows Fernando Ramos Silva (who plays the role of the film’s protagonist, Pixote) and his real-life family outside their house. With the use of voice over, the director explains that the other children acting in the film belong to the same social class as Fernando. This didactic presentation reinforces the director’s claim of exposing the true conditions of marginalised children throughout the film. The previous chapters of this thesis analysed a set of strategies that create realism in Brazilian films about marginalised people. *Pixote* relies at least on two of these to articulate the film’s apparent ability to portray the reality of the streets. The first is the use of elements of *mise en scène* (non-professional actors and location shooting). The second is the display of intertextual references from television programs and films.

![Director Hector Babenco talking directly to the camera](image)

Scholars of Brazilian cinema suggest that *Pixote* served as a model for a number of contemporary films about marginalised people in Brazil. Prysthon and Carrero (2002), for example, compare *Pixote* to *City of God* (Meirelles 2002), considering both as hybrid films that aim to denounce social issues with entertainment aesthetics. As a result of this controversial but effective combination, both films achieved national and international success among general and specialised audiences, attracting 2.8 and 3.2 million spectators respectively. They also received a number of important prizes, including nominations for Golden Globe Awards for Best Foreign Language Film. Both films also had important political impacts at the time of their respective releases, including the attention of the

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58 I adopt Ira Jaffe’s (2008) definition of hybrid cinema as works resulting from “admixtures of diverse styles and genres as well as of disparate events and emotions” (p. 133).

59 *Pixote*’s complete list of awards can be found at: [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0082912/awards](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0082912/awards) [accessed on 8th October 2012]. A complete list of *City of God* awards is available here: [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0317248/awards](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0317248/awards) [accessed on 8th October 2012].
Brazilian presidents of each period. *Pixote* was filmed during the final years of the military dictatorship (1964-1985), provoking strong criticism from General João Batista Figueiredo (1979-1985). On the other hand, president Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (2002-2010) considered *City of God* an important wake-up call about the country’s problems, leading him to implement a social programme in the *favela* City of God (Chan and Vitali 2010).

Arguably, one of the most important legacies of *Pixote* in contemporary Brazilian cinema is the casting and training of non-professional actors from peripheral, poor neighbourhoods. This strategy, which has been widely adopted in recent films, was one of the main factors in *Pixote*’s success. The process of casting non-professional actors started with workshops run by Fatima Toledo⁶⁰ (the same acting coach who would work in *City of God* two decades later). As stated in the first chapter, Toledo’s work is mainly based on improvisation exercises that search for the expression of personal emotions, avoiding the division between actor and character. Her insightful approach is based on the notion that children do not necessary need literacy skills to be part of a film. During rehearsals, dialogues drawn from the original screenplay were combined with improvisation techniques, resulting in the creation of a dynamic, co-authored script. These practical exercises were then used as the basis for selecting the main actors. It was during this long process, involving more than a thousand initial candidates, that Fernando was selected as the film’s protagonist (Levine, 1999, p. 423). At the age of nine, displaying remarkably sad and photogenic eyes, the boy from the *favela* became nationally and internationally famous as the street urchin, Pixote.

Figure 3.2 Children acting as criminals in *Pixote* and *City of God*

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⁶⁰ Fatima Toledo is a famous cast coach, responsible for preparing actors based on her own methodology of casting in a number of Brazilian films such as *Central Station, Lower City, City of God, The Twelve Labours,* and *Elite Squad 1 and 2.*
Following the film’s success, Fernando made attempts to act in other films. However, lacking the literacy skills to memorise long dialogues, he failed to obtain new acting roles. After his momentary taste of fame, he began committing crimes and was arrested on several occasions. Louzeiro’s book *Pixote: the Law of the Strongest* (1993) suggests that Fernando presumed that committing crimes was the best possible way to recover his fame. In a television interview he accused the police of mistaking him for the character Pixote. He asked people to forget his famous role and to disassociate his image from that of a criminal. Family and friends revealed that Fernando developed a double personality during this period of his life: the aggressive criminal Pixote and the honest and calm Fernando (Venâncio, 1988).

In 1987, for still unknown reasons, the police killed Fernando with eight gunshots while he was hiding under a single bed (Levine, 1997). The actor’s death prompted much discussion about how Fernando, despite becoming famous, was never able to escape the image of a marginalised criminal associated with him after the film. Despite his temporary celebrity status, he died Pixote’s death. This theme is closely explored in the feature film *Who killed Pixote?* (José Joffily, 1996) based on the book *Pixote Never More* (*Pixote Nunca Mais*, 1988), written by Fernando’s wife, Cida Venâncio. This film suggests that, due to his outstanding representation of Pixote, Fernando never managed to avoid stereotypes linked to his social class. It also shows that he wanted to improve his living conditions by working as an actor in romantic films. His dream reflected his desire to be portrayed on the screen in another way, and to finally be disconnected from his marginalised context.

Fernando’s tragic death did not prevent the casting of non-professional actors from *favelas* and poor suburbs as lawbreakers in later films. In fact, this strategy has been systematically used in the New Brazilian Cinema, including in a number of films portraying homeless children. Examples include *Central Station* (*Central do Brasil*, Walter Salles, 1998), *Sun of Angels* (*Anjos do Sol*, Rudi Lagemann, 2006), *Querô* (Carlos Cortez, 2007), *Last Stop 174* (*Última parada 174*, Bruno Barreto, 2008) and *The Storyteller* (*Contator de Histórias*, Luiz Villaça, 2009). As will be discussed in a detailed analysis of *Last Stop 174*, the continued use of poor, amateur actors in Brazilian films (despite ethical issues) is linked to their proven ability to engender realistic performances. For example, despite Fernando’s personal tragedy, his acclaimed performances in *Pixote* resulted in national and international success and awards for the film. Like *Pixote*, all of the above films approach the theme of violence against abandoned or orphaned children. Most of their characters are destined to hide

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in favelas, to serve sentences in juvenile detention centres and, ultimately, to end up committing crimes in order to survive on the streets\textsuperscript{62}.

From this group of films, \textit{Central Station} (1998) and \textit{The Storyteller} (2009) depict characters that escape from this cycle of marginalisation by leaving the city. In \textit{Central Station}, the mother of Josué dies when she is hit by a bus, leaving him alone in front of a busy railway station in Rio de Janeiro. Josué decides to move back to the countryside where his father and long-lost brothers live. He naively seeks the help of Dora, a charlatan and retired teacher, who makes a living by pretending to write letters for illiterate people at Rio’s crowded Central Station. At first, she is only interested in the possibility of making a profit by selling the innocent orphan to Rio’s underworld market of organ peddlers. However, Dora’s personality gradually changes as she grows emotionally attached to the orphan and eventually tries to redeem herself by helping the boy find his family. The two travel together to the rural countryside, where Dora delivers the boy safely to his older brothers. The resolution of Josué’s return to the hinterlands clearly reiterates the two contrasting spaces in the film: the rural village, symbolising a place of family and happiness, and the cruel big city, a place marked by distrust and where violence is justified in the name of money. While opposing these two cinematic spaces, the film completely avoids opposing social classes. In this respect, Lúcia Nagib (2007, p. 41) notes that in \textit{Central Station} “class conflict, as well as a hypothetical, if at all existing, ruling class, remains outside the filmic space.” Here, people with less money are those who really exploit each other in the film, and poverty is represented as the main cause for social disadvantage.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure3.3.png}
\caption{Dora and Josué moving out of the city in \textit{Central Station}.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{62} It is noteworthy that, from this group of films, \textit{Sun of Angels} is unique for being the only one focusing on homeless girls. The brothel is its main cinematic space. The leading character, Maria, is an eight-year-old girl. After being sold by her parents, she is forced to work in a brothel in the north of the country. She eventually escapes to Rio de Janeiro in the hope of a better life. However, she soon finds herself again having to work as a prostitute. The film ends with Maria, completely alone, hitchhiking on the motorway with no particular destination.
The second film that presents migration as a possible solution to marginalisation is *The Storyteller*. The film depicts the trajectory of Roberto, whose mother, hoping for a better future for her child, brings him to a reformatory school in Belo Horizonte called FEBEM. However, because of the school’s hostile treatment of the children, Roberto decides to escape and live on the streets where he survives by committing petty crimes. Margherita, a French teacher researching homeless children in Brazil, empathises with the boy and becomes his friend. During her return to France, she decides to adopt Roberto and bring him to Europe. Like *Central Station*, migration is portrayed as a romantic solution to poverty. In this case, however, Roberto does not move to the idealised Brazilian countryside, but to a wealthy European country. As was seen in older films such as *Rio 40 Degrees* (1954), the return from the streets to the *favela* was often portrayed in positive terms, as a fraternity of friends. That is, despite material poverty, *favelas* were still rich in values and principles, based on solid networks of people who look after one another. Contemporary representations of homeless children do not allow for the same outcome, since the cinematic *favela* has become a place as violent as the streets. This has substantially changed film narratives involving homeless children in Brazil. In recent films, orphans and abandoned children do not have any spatial refuge to go to and are condemned to the incessant condition of runaways.

In order to better analyse these contemporary representations, it is important to understand *Pixote*’s discursive and stylistic legacy in the New Brazilian Cinema. The film critic Ismail Xavier (2003a, p. 60), for example, describes the orphan Josué from *Central Station* as the “new Pixote” of Brazilian cinema. The author notes, however, one crucial difference between the two characters: the fact that Josué is able to triumph by finding a substitute mother, the middle-aged Dora. She helps him leave the violent city and move to an idyllic town where he is reunited with his family. Pixote faces a contrasting destiny. The prostitute Sueli acts as his substitute mother, but this only adds to his personal tragedy. After an almost incestuous episode of breastfeeding, she rejects the boy by declaring that she is not fond of children. Forced to leave her house, Pixote walks alone on the train tracks with a gun attached to his waist. He has nowhere to go nor anyone else to go to as he is the only child remaining from his original group of friends. The scene emphasises the fragility and

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63 FEBEM - Fundação Estadual do Bem-Estar Social do Menor (State Foundation for the Well-being of Children).

64 Sueli embraces Pixote close to her nipple. As the boy sucks it, she feels his sexual desire and realises that he is not a little baby anymore. Kantaris (2003, p. 181) suggests this scene is a mixture of “sexuality and maternal desire in a highly confusing and destabilising way.”
loneliness of the boy. According to Epstein (1999, p. 382), this scene does not only represent the homeless children’s situation, but also shows that “street life becomes ultimately symbolic of the violence, neglect, and loneliness, to which most of the Brazilian people are subjected on a regular basis.” The film finishes with no indication of what becomes of Pixote in terms of social integration or life improvement. This pessimist end symbolises not only the character’s individual lack of hope. Rather, it serves as a national metaphor for a country marked by a hopeless future dominated by violence.

A similar image of a boy wandering aimlessly is seen in the film The Storyteller. The abandoned child, Roberto, lives on the streets after running away from a reformatory school. He is forcibly brought to an isolated railroad, where he is raped by a group of teenagers. Physically and emotionally devastated, Roberto walks along the train tracks. The reference is evident: he is following the same track once trailed by Pixote. He eventually stops and lies between the tracks. With the use of voice over, he explains that he is waiting for a train to run him over. However, the train takes another route and Roberto’s life is spared. Similar to Josué, Roberto also succeeds in finding a substitute mother when he is adopted by an affectionate foreigner and moves to France.
As analysed in the next section of this chapter, the theme of redemption through adoption is challenged in *Last Stop 174*. This film shows an initial victim of social violence actually becoming a murderer after experiencing a life of violence and exclusion in the big city of Rio de Janeiro. The film focuses on the life of the homeless child Sandro and follows his personal dramas. Like all other films cited here, Sandro never knew his father. After his mother is murdered, he runs away to live on the streets of Rio de Janeiro and quickly bonds with a group of homeless children. Like them, he begins to commit a series of petty crimes to survive on the streets. Walkiria, a caring middle-class white woman who works for an NGO, is one of the few characters in the film from a different social class to the main characters. Acting like a substitute mother, she assists homeless children by offering them food and emotional support. She unsuccessfully tries to change Sandro’s life by offering to teach him how to read and write. A twist in the film’s story occurs when a middle-aged Afro-Brazilian woman, Marisa (once a drug addict who had lost her child to a drug lord and now a Christian married to a pastor), reappears searching for her son. In the search for her son Alessandro, she mistakes Sandro for her lost child. Sandro does not reveal the truth and ends up living with her for a while, enjoying the comforts of a home and someone taking care of him. This stability is soon interrupted as Sandro continues to commit crimes, disappointing his adoptive mother. Neither Pixote’s substitute mother (the prostitute Sueli) nor Sandro’s adoptive mother (the Christian Marisa) dissuade these children from criminal activities or prevent them from experiencing threatening situations of exclusion in Brazil’s metropolises. Josué (who finds his family in the countryside) and Roberto (who moves to France) leave the cities where they were in danger. These relocations are the main reason for their success in reinventing their lives. On the other hand, there is no hope of improvement for the boys who remain in the
cinematic spaces of the street, *favela* and prison even for those who manage to be adopted, such as Sandro.

*Last Stop 174* shares with *Pixote* the same pessimistic representation of homeless children living on the streets. In the article “Exploitation for export” (1983), Hawken and Litewski criticise the sensationalism with which homeless children are portrayed in *Pixote*. They argue that the film focuses excessively on the violent situations experienced by the victims and that it lacks “a broader perspective on the economic and political relations which create that poverty” (p. 70). This is also the case of *Last Stop 174*, a film that completely avoids connecting poverty and violence to historical causes or to the manifest social inequalities of the country. Furthermore, both films also have in common an aesthetic realism that combines social issues with entertainment.

The next section details the construction of realism in *Last Stop 174* and focuses on the use of specific stylistic strategies that, while reinforcing the film’s claim of denouncing real life problems, also assures its commercial success. As seen in Chapter One, this apparently contradictory combination has been widely criticised at least since the release of *City of God*, yet it continues as a dominant trend in films from the New Brazilian Cinema about marginalised people. This persistence is certainly linked to Brazilian filmmakers’ concern with reaching national and international markets, as the denouncing of social ills/entertainment ‘formula’ has proven effective in attracting increasing number of spectators.

Figure 3.6 *City of God*’s reference for *Last Stop 174*
3.2 The construction of realism in *Last Stop 174*.

Directed by Bruno Barreto, *Last Stop 174* claims to be based on a true story of Sandro, an Afro-Brazilian boy who initially lives in the countryside with his mother. However, in the early years of Sandro’s life, his mother is murdered after a burglary in the family’s humble restaurant. The young boy cannot cope with this incident and, one day, instead of going to school, he flees to Rio de Janeiro. Alone and needy, Sandro comes across other homeless children sniffing glue. The film’s narrative follows the trajectory of a poor migrant child facing increasing marginalisation in the big city. Parallel to Sandro’s story, an account of another young boy, Alessandro, is presented. In contrast to Sandro, a drug dealer inside the *favela* has raised Alessandro. The two boys first meet as enemies when Sandro cannot pay off his drug debt to Alessandro. However, when they meet again in a juvenile detention centre, Sandro does not tell the officer that Alessandro is selling drugs. This act allows them to develop a strong friendship, even though they have distinct personalities. Alessandro is portrayed as a heartless delinquent bound to a life of crime, while the character of Sandro is disturbed and impulsive, lost in his dreams of becoming a famous rapper.

The film is based on a tragic actual event that happened in the year 2000. A man named Sandro hijacked a bus in Jardim Botânico, a wealthy neighbourhood in Rio de Janeiro. Elite police squads immediately arrived on the scene. This prompted the mainstream media’s interest in covering the situation, even through the use of helicopters to follow the action from an aerial perspective. The tense negotiations between the BOPE 66 police and the then unknown hijacker were broadcast in real-time to Brazilian TV and radio audiences. Throughout the day, most hostages were released, while a few were still held by the hijacker. Later that night, after hours of negotiations, the hijacker unexpectedly decided to leave the bus. He walked out using a woman as a human shield. However, as soon as he stepped off the bus, a BOPE officer decided to shoot him. The bullet accidently hit the female hostage, who died at the scene. The hijacker was thrown inside a police car and killed before arriving at the police station 67.

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65 Barreto is considered one the most accomplished Brazilian film directors of his generation, especially because of his light and commercially successful comedies. He directed the popular Brazilian film *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands* (1976), which was for decades the biggest box-office hit in the history of Brazilian cinema, with 10,735,305 spectators (Marques 2007, p. 145)

66 As mentioned in Chapter One, BOPE (Batalhão de Operações da Polícia Especial) is an acronym for Special Police Operations Battalion of the Rio de Janeiro Military Police.

67 The police were found not guilty for Sandro’s death. The defence argued that Sandro suffocated himself and the police had no intention of killing him (Folha Online 2002).
The media’s role during this event became the main subject of a Brazilian documentary, *Bus 174* (Ônibus 174, José Padilha and Felipe Lacerda, 2002). The film discusses both the visibility given to the hijacker Sandro and the way in which the police dealt with the situation. The documentary argues that this was the first time in Sandro’s life that he became important, not only to the media, but also to Brazilian society as a whole. The documentary is based on a dialogue between divergent voices, including police officers, boys from the street, intellectuals and Sandro’s family and friends. Police officers attributed their failure to the presence of the media, arguing that the live coverage created too much pressure and limited police action. Sandro’s friends argued that the presence of television cameras empowered and, for a while, protected the hijacker. Beyond divergent opinions, the presence of the media played a crucial role by allowing both the police and the hijacker to be viewed by thousands of people that day, through a live spectacle that lasted almost four hours. During this media coverage, the hijacker identified himself as a survivor from another infamous event that occurred seven years earlier in the streets of Rio de Janeiro, the Candelária Massacre when a group of policemen killed eight homeless children in 1993 (Penglase 1994). The documentary finishes by emphasising that, although a surviving victim of the previous massacre, Sandro only received attention from society and media when he hijacked the bus.

Due to the success of a previous documentary and the fact that the hijacking was widely publicised by the media, the feature film *Last Stop 174* faced the challenge of dealing with a fairly well-known story, one which was based on the inevitable death of the protagonist. The film can be regarded as a third version of the same story. It can be argued that in the first version, the live media transmission, the main focus was on the hostages. In the second version, the documentary, the leading role was given to the participation of the media. Finally, in the third version, the feature film, the story is centred on Sandro’s life. Nonetheless, even though the film is an attempt to show Sandro’s real life, it is difficult to ascertain whether it provides his perspective of the events that led to his death. The film uses strategies that enhance realism, clearly referencing famous contemporary Brazilian films. It focuses on marginalised people from the *favela* involved in drug trafficking (*City of God*, 2002), unprotected by state institutions (*Carandiru*, 2003) and persecuted by the police (*Elite Squad*, 2007). It also uses some actors from these films. For example, in clear reference to *Elite Squad*, André Ramiro (a BOPE officer in *Elite Squad*) also plays a similar police role in *Last Stop 174*. This strategy creates the impression that the film is a second episode of *Elite Squad*. After the documentary’s success, Padilla directed the feature film *Elite Squad* 2007. Bráulio Mantovani, the scriptwriter for *City of God* and *Elite Squad*, also wrote the script of *Last Stop 174*. 
Squad, as if the hijacking incident was just another working day to the BOPE officer. The actors that represent the leading characters (Sandro and Alessandro) had also previously worked in City of God. Actor Michel Gomes (who plays Sandro) played the child Benny in City of God, while Marcello Melo (Alessandro) was one of Li’l Zé’s followers. Another patent similarity is the centrality of drug addiction and criminality in the lives of the main characters of both films. A close analysis of Last Stop 174 reveals a series of strategies already used in City of God to construct realism. Among all the references to previous films in Last Stop 174, it is important to highlight the importance of City of God as a sort of template film, since it has shaped the way reality is represented in subsequent contemporary Brazilian cinema. The main strategies used in Last Stop 174, which were already present in City of God, are the use of non-professional actors, location shooting, hand-held camera and the display of images from television news and soap operas as intertextual references.

Figure 3.7 The same BOPE officer from Elite Squad commands the anti-hijack team on Last Stop 174

In order to prepare the non-professional actors, director Bruno Barreto organised workshops with children and teenagers from favelas and poor neighbourhoods. In an online interview (UOL 2008), he describes the long process of casting and rehearsing with them for over a period of eighteen months. Similar to the methodology used in Pixote and City of God, dialogues were improvised during the scenes, allowing the young actors to be confident and
spontaneous. In recent Brazilian filmography, the casting of marginalised people has become a convenient way of portraying characters who experience similar poor and socially-excluded conditions as the non-professional actors themselves. Although this strategy proved tragic for the main actor in *Pixote*, others have benefited from this market demand. As a result of the widespread use of non-professional actors in recent films, a few people from the *favela* actually had a chance to pursue careers in film and television soap operas. *Last Stop 174*, for example, hired a group of children and teenagers that had a background in cinema playing small roles in other films. In an interview⁷₀, Michel Gomes (the actor who played Sandro) confesses that he faced the worst humiliation of his life during the filming of *Last Stop 174*. During a coffee break, an old woman went to the place where he was resting and began beating him with an umbrella. He concludes that the only possible explanation for her punitive and impulsive actions is that she could not separate the actor from the real criminal Sandro. Although this is a specific episode, it reveals how many Brazilians have difficulty distinguishing between actors and characters, as discussed on Chapter One. It also confirms the power of recent cinematic representations in reinforcing common stereotypes of violence among marginalised social groups that these young actors belong to. In other words, the relative fame young Afro-Brazilian actors from *favelas* received by acting in these widely seen films about violence, paradoxically, also contributed to their ethnic/class marginalisation.

Aiming to create a convincing depiction of reality, *Last Stop 174* relies not only on casting marginalised people as the main actors, but also on shooting on location. Scenes portraying life in the *favela* were shot in Tavares Bastos and Curicica (Gazeta Digital 2009). Tavares Bastos is a *favela* situated in an affluent area of the city. It was selected as a setting for other recent films such as *Elite Squad* (2007) and *Incredible Hulk* (2008)⁷₁. This is directly related to the fact that the BOPE headquarters were situated inside this *favela* until 2010, thus, making it a safe place for non-residents. The second location, the *favela* Curicica, is also considered safe since it is located near the Globo’s television studio, the largest television production centre in Latin America (Dorado 2012). However, these were not the same *favelas* where Sandro lived in real life. The locations of Sandro’s *favelas* (Rato Molhado and Nova Holanda) were not situated in as convenient areas as those *favelas* chosen for the film. The


easiness with which the film substituted one place for another is based on the assumption that all favelas are alike. In other words, the construction of the cinematic favelas chooses to ignore specific and complex aspects of these urban spaces, opting rather to emphasise shared stereotypes related to violence and drug trafficking. Akin to the cinematic favela in City of God, this construction also prevents viewers from contextualising the boundaries of the favela. The most important locations of Last Stop 174 were, in fact, the city streets where two tragic events took place: the Candelária Massacre and the hijacking of the bus number 174 in the Jardim Botânico neighbourhood. Both are located in well-known tourist areas of Rio de Janeiro, which became even more famous after the events made national and international headlines. However, the film does not expose the surroundings of these two places. It never shows, for example, the extravagant houses of Jardim Botânico, nor does it identify the glossy commercial buildings around the Candelária cathedral. Location shooting in both the favelas and the streets restricts a multifaceted perspective of these places. Consequently, it also prevents spectators from learning about their boundaries and the complex social tensions in an urban context.

Similar to other Brazilian contemporary films, Last Stop 174 relies heavily on a third technique to construct its realism: the use of a hand-held camera. This generates the prevailing, unstable framing of the images, which is frequently enhanced by the use of camera zooms and abrupt cuts. The instability of the camera accentuates the impulsive personality of Sandro, as well as the brutal nature of his friend Alessandro. Like an action thriller, the fast pace of the film does not provide sufficient time for spectators to process the amount of violence on screen. An example of this accentuated use of the hand-held camera is the sequence in which a passenger catches the bus number 174. The camera follows this middle-aged man, who seats himself across the aisle from Sandro. The man stare at Sandro with a distrustful face. The camera assumes the point of view of the man. It analyses Sandro’s body and notices that he has a gun on his person. The subjective camera abruptly changes to show the man’s frightened expression. He leaves the bus, crosses a street, and approaches a police car to report on what he has just seen. In this case, the long take dispenses with the need for editing. It allows the camera to continually follow the man, creating a documentary style sequence during which unpredictable actions appear to be recorded as they happen.

The fourth and last important strategy of realism analysed here is the use of intertextual references from other forms of media. In Last Stop 174, images from print newspapers and different television programs - including soap operas, news, and music videos – are used to contextualise the historical moment of the narrative. This technique also creates a strong contrast between the fictional worlds of television melodramas, popular music and
the harsh realism of journalistic images covering crimes in the *favelas* and on the streets. The first example of intertextual referencing appears in the very beginning of *Last Stop 174*, as the film starts with a black screen reading: “A boy called Alessandro”. The first scene then depicts a romantic moment from the soap opera *Paradise* (*Paraiso, 1982*) playing on a television screen. A white, green-eyed man wearing a farmer’s hat talks to a blond-haired woman named Maria Rita. He confesses that he would have never married his wife, Rosinha, if Maria Rita had not chosen to become a nun. Although formally married, the man swears that he has not yet consummated his recent wedding with Rosinha. Maria Rita comforts him, saying that everything is fine because Rosinha also loves him. The man smiles, clearly pleased to hear that Maria Rita is implicitly confessing her love for him. The couple’s dialogue is followed by romantic music.

The camera slowly moves to the right of the television. It reveals a dilapidated house, as well as an Afro-Brazilian woman watching the TV, dressed only in a white t-shirt and drinking a glass of beer. The soap opera’s soundtrack mingles with the strident cry of a baby. The woman lights up a cigarette and starts to breastfeed the baby while she smokes. A few seconds later, an armed drug dealer breaks into the house demanding the money she has made from cocaine trafficking. The man shoots at the television and threatens to break the baby’s arm if she does not cooperate. After beating her repeatedly, he seizes the baby from the mother and expels her from the *favela*. She is forbidden from coming back, and condemned never to see her son again. In these very first minutes of the narrative, the film presents the characters’ universe. It associates poverty – particularly that of Afro-Brazilians *favela* residents – with the themes of drugs, violence and cruelty. The future of this baby seems predetermined, since he was born socially cursed by the original sins of a drugged mother and under the despotic laws of the drug traffickers.

It is interesting to contrast the soap opera’s and the *favela*’s romantic duos. In the fictional world of television, the white couple live a mutually respectful, platonic love story because the woman has become a nun. In contrast with this expression of noble principles and sentiments, the film shows the *favela* residents as brutal, virtueless and lacking basic moral conduct. The drug lord has no feeling other than hate towards the woman and her baby. Unlike the immaculate surroundings of Maria Rita and her admirer, the *favela* residents lack any dignity, integrity and self-respect. The scene clearly makes reference to previous contemporary films set in *favelas*, especially *City of God*. The drug lord’s performance and physical appearance is reminiscent of Little Zé and his gang’s aggressive behaviour. The
similarities are so evident that this scene can be interpreted as a pastiche\textsuperscript{72} of City of God. In effect, the scene does not present any artistic ingenuity or distinction since it is basically a visual quotation of a previous and recognisable cinematic favela. Although the film claims to present the perspective of its marginalised characters, it, in fact, portrays them as sole producers and victims of their own violence, reaffirming common ethnic and class stereotypes.

Another example of the use of intertextual references is the scene that introduces the character Sandro. He is at home watching the music video Portrait of a playboy (Retrato de um playboy, 2003), sung by Brazilian white rapper Gabriel Pensador. This popular song is about an irresponsible teenager who only cares about money and women. The ironic lyrics say that the playboy does not need to work, and behaves the way he wishes because he is “daddy’s little boy”. The use of this sarcastic expression emphasises the playboy’s futile life. Sandro enjoys the music video, which shows the reckless rapper and a group of teenagers driving a posh car and dancing. The voice of a friend calling out to Sandro through the window suddenly interrupts this moment of entertainment. He warns Sandro that someone is robbing his mother’s restaurant. Sandro immediately leaves the house to help her. The interruption of the music video by his friend’s worrying message reinforces the disparity between the playboy’s luxurious fictional world and Sandro’s threatening reality. The incorporation of the music video into this scene presents a wealthy world of alienation where white teenagers have comfortable lives, inheriting wealth and social status from their parents. In sharp contrast, the young Afro-Brazilian boy from the favela will be left with despair and anger after his mother is murdered in the restaurant. These contrasting stories are juxtaposed in this moment of the film to emphasise social class disparities in Brazil. Sandro’s positive impression of this music video can be interpreted as the main reason why, throughout the film, he repetitively states his dream of becoming a famous rapper.

As the narrative unfolds, Sandro eventually fulfils his dream of being famous. However, his celebrity status is not be related to his talents as a singer, but rather to his misfortune as a bus hijacker in a heavily guarded neighbourhood of Rio de Janeiro. The intense use of intertextual references in the hijacking scene relies not only on archived television footage but also on the creation of additional journalistic-style images. That is, in addition to the actual media coverage, the film created extra examples of national and

\textsuperscript{72} This term, as Dyer (2007, p. 7) states, has many definitions. Its use here is based on Jameson’s (1991) much-cited criticism of Pastiche as resembling a “blank parody”. Jameson points out that: “it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse” (p. 17).
international news footage of the event. This simulation is convincingly created through the use of voice-overs of many supposed journalists speaking not only in Portuguese but also in English, French, Spanish and Italian. The strategy to include foreign journalists adds an international relevance to a local event. In order to reinforce the simulation of journalistic images, the director also uses two different cameras. The result is images of very different qualities appearing during the same scene. The images from outside the bus were shot with a digital video camera, to replicate the well-publicised images that spectators had already seen both on television and in the documentary *Bus 174*, as mentioned earlier. The scenes set inside the bus, however, were shot using a Super 16mm camera, maintaining the same cinematography as the rest of the film. In contrast to the digital camera, the 16mm creates a more subjective perspective of the event by portraying the tension experienced inside the bus. This offers a view that no spectators had access to during the media coverage. At the end of the scene, these simulations of journalistic coverage are combined with aerial images from actual news footage. This strategy increases the effect of reportage, as if the film were a detailed live transmission of the event.

![Figure 3.8 An international journalist reporting live from the bus hijacking in Last Stop 174](image)

The use of intertextual references, the preference for non-professional actors and the use of location shooting and hand-held cameras are the main strategies for the construction of realism in *Last Stop 174*. Considering the combination of these cinematic elements, the next two sections will analyse two specific sequences of the film. In the first sequence, which I entitle “Returning to the streets”, I examine the construction of cinematic streets as a confined space similar to the cinematic *favela* and prison discussed in the previous chapters. My analysis of the second sequence, “Hijacking a bus,” focuses on the representation of Sandro as a violent criminal, reiterating the media discourse of the event.
3.3 The guarded city in the sequence: “Returning to the streets”

Teresa Caldeira argues in her book *City of Walls* (2000) that Brazilian metropolises are heterogeneous and complex spaces marked by a contradictory proximity that “leads to the refinement of separations in order to sustain perceptions of difference” (p. 74). The author suggests that public streets, which should be a natural space for meetings between different social groups, are instead key sites in which Brazilian segregation is expressed. In the maze of inequality between gated condominiums and *favelas*, the streets are seen as liminal spaces of crime. For wealthy classes, these are areas of vulnerability associated with the express risks of kidnapping⁷³, sexual assaults and/or robbery. In order to assure security for taxpaying citizens, the police heavily guard touristy and affluent areas of the city. Police officers often banish marginalised people (non-taxpayers) living and/or working on the streets with threats of physical aggression, imprisonment or death. This permanent social tension transforms most streets in Brazilian metropolises into a sort of enclosed space, squeezed in between rich areas guarded by private security and public spaces monitored by the state.

Although the cinematic streets of *Last Stop* 174 are clearly constructed as an enclosed space, the film does not focus on class conflicts or state repression. The film’s decision to avoid these issues is evident in the scene depicting the Candelária Massacre. This was a well-known ethnic and social cleansing operation brutally carried out by Rio’s state police⁷⁴. In the film, however, none of the killers are identified nor are their reasons to commit this crime made explicit. The few allusions to existing class conflicts that lead to the massacre are only hinted at. One scene, for example, shows shop owners visibly annoyed as they watch homeless children showering in a public fountain in front of their stores. In a subsequent scene, the NGO worker Walkiria warns Sandro that the neighbourhood is becoming dangerous for homeless children. She says that local shop owners are angry because the children are supposedly stealing from people and, as a result, inhibiting commerce. These two passages subtly suggest the shop owners’ likely involvement in the massacre, but it does not make any direct connection between them and the police.

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⁷³ Express kidnapping is a common type of kidnapping known as “*sequestro relâmpago*” that takes only a few minutes, in which armed robbers seize and force a person to go to an ATM to withdraw money.

⁷⁴ During the trial of the police officers accused of participating in the massacre, many alleged that they acted to avenge the police force. They defended themselves by arguing that a group of homeless children had thrown stones at a police vehicle earlier that day, in protest of the imprisonment of a friend who was caught using drugs on the streets (Ventura 1994).
The depiction of social isolation and confinement to a routine of violence in the cinematic streets of *Last Stop 174* recalls the cinematic *favela* of *City of God* and the cinematic prison of *Carandiru* analysed in the previous chapters. In fact, throughout *Last Stop 174*, the main character Sandro experiences violence inside all three urban cinematic spaces discussed in this thesis: *favela*, prison and streets. In the beginning, he and his family live in a *favela* in the Brazilian countryside. After his mother is murdered, Sandro moves to live on the streets of Rio de Janeiro. He stays there for seven years, until the Candelária Massacre, when his friends are killed. Afraid of the police, he hides in a *favela*. However, Sandro is eventually arrested for buying drugs, and is transferred to a juvenile detention centre. Managing to escape, he returns to the *favela* again, to live with his adoptive mother. One day, after a fight with a pastor (the adoptive mother’s husband) Sandro steals his handgun and the church’s money to buy cocaine. Sandro is back on the streets, completely alone, just as when he first ran away from home. However, now he is not unprotected but carrying a loaded firearm; he is not just inhaling glue, but completely addicted to cocaine.

The sequence “Returning to the streets” begins with Sandro sniffing cocaine on the balcony of an abandoned house. The camera turns to the left revealing an empty, dead-end, dirt road. In the background, the slow sound of a guitar accentuates the sadness of the scene. The isolated setting and melancholic music emphasise Sandro’s enclosed position, his absolute lack of alternatives. The camera follows his aimless walk, in close up of his right hand. His fingers move anxiously, touching each other in a nervous tick. This is an important representation of Sandro’s psychological trauma, developed after his mother’s murder. The camera then cuts to a high-angle position, showing that the road Sandro is walking on has changed from dirt to cement. As the boy crosses this symbolic border, he leaves the relatively hidden and safe area of the *favela* to enter the hostile urbanised perimeters of the city. A few pedestrians walk on the narrow cement pavement. A lonely car is parked at the bottom of the street. From a very high position, the camera shows a bunch of overlapping electric lines crossing the sky, resulting in an intricate web of cables. This image of a roof of dark wires adds to the impression of a confined space. In contrast to road movies, where spatial movement represents a journey of rediscovering life in far way places, Sandro’s mobility through the streets does not lead to personal liberation.

As Sandro leaves the *favela*, he enters the main streets of the city centre. The nostalgic guitar music in the background continues, but is now disturbed by the diegetic sound of honking cars, ambulance sirens and the buzz of other motor vehicles. As he walks, the camera maintains a medium close-up on Sandro’s apprehensive face. The use of a hand-held camera provides a jerky pace, approximating the viewer to the action. The camera position shifts from
a medium close-up of his face to a low-angle camera framing his profile. It reveals a background of skyscrapers surrounding Sandro. Fast, alternating cuts between these two camera positions increase the tension of the scene. The cinematic streets are presented as a hectic labyrinth of cars and people heading to multiple destinations. In contrast, Sandro is going nowhere. A random and purposeless walk through these streets seems his only objective. The film suddenly cuts to Sandro vomiting in the tiny, dirty toilet of a restaurant. The confined and degraded space, once again, reinforces Sandro’s lack of prospects. The boy sniffs the remaining cocaine. As he leaves the toilet, walking between dining tables, he accidently bumps a glass of beer, which shatters on the floor. The customer complains about Sandro’s lack of attention. Motionless, the boy stares at the glass pieces scattered over the floor. This is not the first time that he has broken a glass. In the beginning of the film, just before discovering his mother’s death, he had also dropped and broken a glass. The boy clearly believes his clumsy act in the restaurant to be a presage. During a previous scene, in which he is having dinner with his adoptive mother, a glass falls on the floor without breaking. Sandro tells her that if the cup had broken, he would have died and she would never be happy again. The glass is a recurrent motif in the film. It is always shot as a close-up, and represents the fragility of Sandro’s life, as well as his lack of control over his own fractured future.

In a medium close-up, the hand-held camera continues to follow Sandro through the frenzied streets. In the background, buses, cars and people are in permanent flux. The camera changes to a low-angle position, showing Sandro’s profile walking in the direction of the Candelária cathedral. These are the streets where Sandro came to sleep every night before the police massacred the homeless children who gathered there, including most of his close friends. The low camera position shows the distinctive geometric patterns of the black and white pavement typical of historical areas of Rio de Janeiro. This camera position highlights how these streets became a threatening symbol after the massacre. Sandro stops to glance at the area where he had once lived. As he begins to walk again, the camera changes to a very high-angle position. It shows him enclosed on the pathway, between the building’s pilasters and walls. The space is completely empty now. The image confirms the efficacy of ethnic and social cleansing actions, such as the Candelária Massacre, recurrently and illegally carried out as a way to remove marginalised people from touristy areas of Rio de Janeiro. The camera shows a medium close-up of Sandro’s disturbed face. He seems to recall the infamous episode, of which he was one of the survivors. The sound of a police car siren interrupts Sandro’s walk. A close-up reveals the panic in his face when he catches a glimpse of a police
car stopping in the traffic jam next to him. The boy immediately gets inside a bus to avoid being seen by the police.

Throughout the sequence “Returning to the streets”, Sandro is repeatedly framed in confined spaces such as the dead-end street in a favela, the tiny bathroom in the restaurant, the walkway where he had once lived and, finally, a bus. This cinematic containment reveals the streets as spaces of immobility. Sandro’s actions are restrained since his journey is not directed to any space of residence, work, consumption or leisure. He catches a bus out of fear of the police, not because he wants to connect or enjoy different areas of the city. In contrast to the rest of the passengers, his urban journey does not have an endpoint. As a survivor of the Candelária Massacre, Sandro is condemned both to live in and to run from the streets. The boy ends up sleeping inside the bus, making it his temporary shelter. During his nap, however, a passenger sees his gun and calls the police. When he wakes up, the police are already surrounding the bus, together with the local media, as well as hundreds of curious bystanders.

Figure 3.9 Urban confinement in Last Stop 174
The next section analyses the cinematic representation of Sandro as he hijacks the bus. It illustrates the ways in which the film, similar to the official media, reinforces the image of Sandro as a violent criminal. It also discusses how the film, as a strategy to attract a considerable audience, deliberately relies on the exploitation of violence as a key strategy to portray Sandro’s life.

3.4 The claim of visibility in the sequence: “Hijacking a bus”

Anthropologist Luis Eduardo Soares (2005) argues that violence committed by young and poor Afro-Brazilians needs to be understood as a cry for social attention. He explains that these youths are victims of social indifference and stigmatisation that make them invisible in society. The stigma of social exclusion, adds Soares, results in a pre-defined image of them, which erases individual differences and often justifies acts of discrimination by privileged social groups. Since they are only given importance when embodying a threat of violence, each of their firearms acts as “a passport for visibility” (Soares 2005, p. 215), producing fear in those who normally ignore them. In addition to temporary attention from society, the production of fear results in risks to their own lives. An example of this danger is represented in the tragic story of the character Sandro in Last Stop 174. As the film title suggests, the hijacking of the bus is his passport to social recognition and, at the same time, his final destination. As a narrative strategy, Last Stop 174 chooses to recount what is a relatively well-known story to the Brazilian public by adding Sandro’s perspective to the event. The film portrays him as an orphan that wants to become a famous rapper. People around him, such as his girlfriend (Soninha) and the social worker Walkiria, encourage Sandro to follow his dream. Instead of musical celebrity, however, the only time Sandro’s image is transmitted live by national and international mainstream media is when he hijacks the bus.

The sequence, which I call “Hijacking a bus”, begins when a police car parks in front of the bus, forcing it to stop. The hand-held camera shows Sandro inside the bus, walking to the head of the aisle. The bus driver and the ticket collector rapidly abandon the bus. The subjective camera creates an intimate effect, as if Sandro himself were filming the scene from inside the bus. The shaking images reflect his disorientation as he sees the police. Outside, two policemen point their guns at the bus and tell him to come out with his hands on his head. Sandro nervously closes the door of the bus. He points his gun at the passengers. The hand-held camera shifts to close-ups of the fearful faces of the hostages. A white woman in her 30s, colourfully dressed, uses her mobile phone to say that she is trapped in a bus robbery and will be late to work. When Sandro hears her describing him as a thief, he throws her mobile out of the bus window in anger. The fact that he throws away an otherwise valuable item emphasises
that Sandro did not intend to commit a robbery. However, people outside and inside the bus assume that he is just another menacing criminal. Although the bus was Sandro’s last alternative for public safety and mobility, it suddenly becomes another confined and threatening place.

He grabs a woman by the neck, pointing the gun to her head, and goes to the front of the bus. A policeman calls in his colleague for reinforcement. Sandro asks a well-dressed young white man to drive the bus. The man says that he does not know how to drive buses. Sandro asks what he has in the backpack. The man says that he has books because he is a university student. Sandro immediately releases him opening the bus door, and saying that he must be late for class. Sandro asks a second hostage, an Afro-Brazilian man in his 30s, if he knows how to drive a bus. The man says that he cannot drive, since he is just a bricklayer. He begs to be released as well, arguing that he is the head of his family. Sandro allows the man to go by jumping out a window. However, unlike the university student, the police do not let the bricklayer simply go away, instead asking what he is carrying in his bag. This differentiated treatment of the white middle-class student and the Afro-Brazilian worker infuriates Sandro. Although he treats both hostages similarly, the police rely on ethnic and social class stereotypes to distinguish between them. Sandro grabs a white woman’s hair and accuses the police of suspecting that the bricklayer was a criminal simply because of his skin colour. Although this passage is a critique of police discrimination, the fact that Sandro, an Afro-Brazilian himself, is violently seizing a white woman also reinforces racism. The film seems to illustrate that the police’s suspicion is well justified. After all, while the sequence shows through the bricklayer character that not every Afro-Brazilian is a criminal, it also reinforces their stereotype as potential outlaws, especially in the eyes of the police and white upper and middle classes.

As the sequence unfolds, Sandro beats a hostage’s head against a metal pole in the bus. She looks to the outside, where a public digital clock marks four in the afternoon. Through an abrupt zoom, the camera shows a group of policemen using traffic cones to close the street. The clock now indicates that an hour has passed. Talking directly to the camera, a journalist announces that she is live from Jardim Botânico street in Rio de Janeiro. As previously noted, the film simulates journalistic footage that references and reinforces the actual, well-publicised media images of the event. To assure its authenticity, these images were shot on digital video camera resulting in a low quality that contrasts with the images from inside the bus shot on Super 16mm.

As the sequence continues, Sandro asks the white woman hostage to follow him to one of the bus windows. In front of a group of police officers, Sandro shouts that this is not an
“action movie”. A BOPE officer negotiator replies, presenting himself as Capitan Souza. The officer asks him to release the hostage and Sandro agrees on the condition that the police give him money, a grenade and a driver in return. By distinguishing the real event from a fictional “action movie”, Sandro acknowledges the presence of the cameras while at the same time makes clear that he does not want to be mistaken for a fictional character. When Sandro shouts from inside the bus, he clearly addresses both the policemen and journalists. After all, the presence of the media gave him a chance of escaping alive, since it would be unlikely that the police would kill him during a live television transmission. Just as importantly, the media coverage offered him, who once dreamed of being a famous musician, his first opportunity to gain visibility in society. The sudden attention given to Sandro in the film makes apparent the abundance and exploitation of images of violence broadcast daily in contemporary Brazilian television news. In this sense, it would not be an overstatement to suggest that the film also reinforces the offensive journalistic coverage Sandro received at the time of the event. Additionally, the film also ends up supporting the media abuse of many other poor Afro-Brazilians that, like Sandro, only get their minutes of fame when their crimes are broadcast live on sensationalist television shows. One example of the film’s deliberate sensationalism is the decision to depict Sandro as an exaggeratedly aggressive and near-insane personality, which contradicts reports from those who actually had contact with him. During an interview with the newspaper O Dia, for example, hostage Janaina reveals that the actual Sandro was not as violent in person as he is portrayed in the film (Macedo 2010, p. 93). This misrepresentation reveals the director’s preference for a violent fictional character that would appeal to audiences instead of a more precise portrayal of the actual Sandro’s behaviour.

The sequence ends with Sandro leaving the bus holding a hostage as a human shield. She is a young Afro-Brazilian woman that declared herself a favela resident. While pointing his gun at the woman, Sandro asks the police to be released. At this moment, coming from his blind side, a BOPE officer shoots at him. The camera speed changes to slow motion, while melancholic music starts to play in the background. Sandro is not hit by the police bullet, which instead strikes the hostage. However, as a reflex, he immediately pulls the trigger and shoots the woman twice. The BOPE officers jump on Sandro and Capitan Souza shouts that the hijacker has killed the woman. His statement confirms the film’s option to represent Sandro as responsible for the hostage’s death. However, in actual event, the fact that the BOPE officer accidentally shot the hostage in the neck first could also have been the cause of death. While Sandro is the main character, at this moment, the film clearly assumes the police officers’ point of view of the event. The choice to accuse Sandro for the tragedy reinforces his stereotype as a violent criminal built up throughout the film narrative.
In the article “The Young and the Damned: Street Visions in Latin American Cinema”, Geoffrey Kantaris (2003) discusses the role of filmmaking in giving visibility to homeless children through images of violence. As an example, the author recalls *Pixote’s* scenes in which children watch violent images on television. At the same time, *Pixote* itself is a film that portrays children who commit and suffer from acts of violence. This creates a parallel between the violence on television and the violence in the children’s lives; as if the children were copying the same strategy used on television to call for society’s attention. Violence seems their only chance to attain visibility in society. Kantaris points out that the strategy of focusing excessively on violence in *Pixote* creates a fundamental problem: it does not really challenge the invisibility of the marginalised. Furthermore, it banalises violence against the socially excluded, as exemplified in *Pixote’s* shocking depiction of a rape inside the juvenile detention centre. In this scene, as the sexually assaulted young boy dies, the marginalised characters witnessing the scene are shown as being completely inured to such brutal violence. The blasé attitude of the children directly contrasts with the shocking images offered to the viewer. In this way, the film reinforces a sense of class separation, emotionally distancing high and middle-class spectators from the realities of the disadvantaged children. Stam and Johnson (1995, p. 414) argue that *Pixote’s* middle-class characters are “one dimensional figures” and that marginalised characters are reduced to “low-life types”. Since both groups of characters are “equally unworthy objects of identification”, the authors conclude that middle-class spectators cannot critically engage with the social issues raised in the film. Lacking identification with characters, spectators are not motivated to reflect on, or help to transform, the social problems being represented.

The same distancing occurs in *Last Stop 174*. The film’s narrative focuses on Sandro’s life, privileging his point-of-view of the action. However, he is depicted as a drug addict who is psychologically disturbed and lacks any control of his life. Similar to *Pixote*, the middle-class is represented through flat characters, preventing viewers from identifying themselves with them. Additionally, the film’s focus on Sandro’s life does not promote reflection on the broader and complex causes for his social exclusion. It depicts him instead as a direct product of a violent environment (the streets, the *favela* and prison) filled with marginalised people (especially the burglar that kills his mother). As a consequence, Sandro’s misery is shown as springing from individual misfortune, linked to a close circle of bad influences surrounding him. There are no connections made between his disadvantaged life and other Brazilian social groups (upper and middle-class), the government or private institutions.

The detailed analyses of *Pixote* and *Last Stop 174* presented in this chapter have contradicted the claims that these films portray events from the perspective of marginalised
groups. Rather, by relying on social stereotypes, these films depict marginalised Brazilians categorically as violent, drug addicted, orphaned, unemployed and/or criminal. Since most viewers are unlikely to self-identify with this collection of characteristics, these films tend to reinforce marginalised people’s image of otherness. At this point, it is useful to recall Homi Bhabha’s (1983, p. 18) discussion of “fixity” as a fundamental facet of the “ideological construction of otherness”, since it uses stereotyping as its main strategy. Bhabha argues, however, that the construction of stereotype needs to be understood as an ambivalent mode of representation. In his words, the stereotype “is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation” (p.27). In the case of cinematic representation of the streets, the complexity of marginalised life is simplified by ethnic and class stereotypes produced by dominant classes (filmmakers and producers).

Figure 3.10 Sandro is encircled by the police and the media

In the last section of this chapter, I will analyse the way in which Last Stop 174’s stereotypical representation of life on the streets forms a dialogue with contemporary Brazilian social reality. I will pay particular attention to public polices aimed at trying to prepare Brazilian cities for two major upcoming international sport events: the FIFA football World Cup and the Olympic Games. As will be discussed, these top-down (and usually violent) state
agendas have attempted to impose immediate solutions to the enduring social problem of homeless children in Brazil.

3.5 The representation of streets’ social reality

Recent official statistics\(^75\) reveal that almost 24 thousand children live on the streets of Brazil’s big cities\(^76\). They work shining shoes, selling popsicles, washing windshields and begging pedestrians and drivers for money at stoplights, among other activities. Although individual cases usually point to family disintegration and domestic violence as the main causes of homelessness among children\(^77\), this complex phenomenon cannot be fully understood without taking into account socio-economic inequalities and the politics of exclusion in the country. Problems resulting from a narrow comprehension of this phenomenon, for example, are clearly reflected in recent public policies adopted by the Rio de Janeiro Council. In 2011, the city administration signed a protocol authorising the institutionalisation of children living on the streets, especially drug addicts. Recent research by the Human Rights Municipal Commission of Rio de Janeiro (2012)\(^78\) shows that youths are taken by force from the streets and sent to temporary institutions, normally located in isolated and far away suburbs of the city. The internees are then kept on a compulsory pharmacological treatment for drug addiction\(^79\) and all of them are forbidden to return to the streets. After this, they are either taken back to their families or sent to a juvenile institution.

This arbitrary and violent public policy focuses on a rapid and direct elimination of the

\(^75\) This research was conducted by Meta Instituto de Pesquisa de Opinião (2011) in partnership with Secretaria de Direitos Humanos da Presidência da República (SDH) and Instituto de Desenvolvimento Sustentável (IDEST). Available from: [http://www.teleios.com.br/2011/239-mil-criancas-vivem-nas-ruas-em-todo-pais/] [accessed on 5\(^{th}\) September 2012].

\(^76\) It is noteworthy that these statistic results are lower than the ones presented by Babenco in *Pixote* (1981). Recent studies argue that this is due to the fact that, in the past, the cited numbers of street children were rarely derived from counting methods (Ennew 1994). The strategy of presenting an alarming piece of data regarding the theme of homelessness proved unsuccessful to human rights activists and, nowadays, institutions are more careful on releasing head-count studies (Benitez 2011). This is the first national census focused exclusively on children living on the streets of Brazil’s biggest cities.

\(^77\) Idem 76


\(^79\) The research points out that the time of confinement can vary from hours to years. The space is fully protected from escapes, with bars on the windows and high walls. During this period, the children do not have access to school and are heavily medicated.
problem of homelessness among children rather than challenging the long-term and deeper factors that produce it in the first place. The Human Rights Municipal Commission research confirms a longstanding approach to tackling poverty in Brazil, based on vertical, repressive state decisions that result in fast, palliative ethnic and social cleansing of the streets of Brazilian metropolises. Initiatives such as this have visibly increased in recent years, motivated by speculation in housing and property development markets boosted by two major up-comings international events that Brazil will host: the FIFA World Cup (2014) and the Olympics (2016)\(^8\).

Similar to actual public policies, fictional representations of homeless children in the New Brazilian Cinema also focus on personal problems rather than on the broader socio-economic contexts of the characters. For example, *Last Stop 174* is exemplary in its portrayal of street violence without addressing the causes of marginalisation. It never alludes to issues such as the lack of job opportunities, social and racial discrimination, economic inequalities or police corruption. The only middle-class character of the film is the caring social worker, Walkiria, confirming that class conflicts are not the source of the problems. The space of the marginalised is exclusively portrayed as dysfunctional, where children do not study but only rob and sniff glue. On the other hand, the middle-class, solely represented by Walkiria, is clearly committed to helping children get off the streets. This is illustrated in the scene in which Sandro, frustrating the expectations of those who still believe in him, rejects the opportunities to pursue further education insistently offered by Walkiria. The problem of children living on the streets is depicted as a vicious cycle: they are, simultaneously, victims and producers of their own social exclusion. Even during the depiction of the infamous Candelária massacre, the film loses the opportunity to expose the increasing problem of the paramilitary actions of “death squads” in Brazil\(^8\).

The theme of death squads is discussed in Teresa Caldeira’s book, *City of Wall* (2000). The author points out the contradiction between the recurrent “violence exercised” against alleged criminals and Brazilian “legislation that prohibits violent forms of punishment” (p.

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\(^8\) As a result, a specific law punishing the organisation of militias and death squads has been created in order to inhibit the visible increase of these types of crimes. The law was approved and is now waiting for the president’s promulgation (Piovesan 2012).
This inconsistency is shown at the end of *Last Stop 174*. After killing the hostage by mistake, the police arrest Sandro and throw him in the back of a police car. Instead of respecting his legal rights, however, three police officers asphyxiate him before they even arrive at the police station. In the next scene, some people are at a bar watching the television coverage of the hijacking. One of them comments: “this country needs the death penalty”. His words seem to authorise the illegal police action, as if the murdering of Sandro in some way ‘corrected’ the legal system, since capital punishment is forbidden in Brazil. The scene focuses on the clash between official laws and actual police practices in the country. Even if the film shows Sandro’s homicide, it completely protects the identity of the policemen. It does not go further than to reveal that they were found not guilty of their acts (because the murder was interpreted as accidental) and continued working for the police force of the city.

Although *Last Stop 174* features Sandro as its main character, the film does not challenge common stereotypes of homeless people. It continues to portray them as essentially delinquent drug addicts, and as the agents of their own marginalisation. While the film provides visibility to Sandro’s life of exclusion by focusing on violent episodes, it does not connect them with class or racial conflicts lived in the urban space. The three main settings of the film (*favela*, prison and streets) are constructed as segregated cinematic spaces, completely isolated from other urban areas. Finally, the representation of Sandro’s short life and tragic death only reaffirms filmmakers’ and viewers’ exploitative attraction to otherness.

This chapter has argued that films from the New Brazilian Cinema focusing on homeless children have appropriated stylistic and discursive strategies pioneered in *Pixote*. In particular, because of Brazil’s persisting social problems, the chapter showed how *Pixote’s* 1980s representation of life on the streets still serves as a useful point of reference for a contemporary film such as *Last Stop 174*. Similar to the former, the latter manages to create a voyeuristic and entertaining work based on a pessimist representation of life on the streets, in *favelas* and in prison. It is important to reaffirm that these representations are problematic since they reduce these cinematic spaces as the main settings of Brazilian violence while, simultaneously, disassociating affluent parts of the city from urban conflicts.
Conclusion

This thesis sought to explore the construction of realism in Brazilian contemporary films. In order to do so, through the close analyses of *City of God*, *Carandiru* and *Last Stop 174*, a group of recurring cinematic strategies were identified. These strategies have been regularly applied in many recent Brazilian films that deal with the subject matter of urban conflict and poverty. More than simply revealing a pattern in what can be referred to as ‘realist films’ of New Brazilian Cinema, the identification of these cinematic strategies has also aimed at discussing its implications in terms of cinematic representation. As previously discussed, the three main settings of these films – *favelas*, prisons and streets – are constructed as segregated cinematic spaces, isolated from other urban areas. Curiously, however, despite their supposed isolation from the rest of the city, these cinematic spaces are represented as interconnected with one another. The lives of marginalised people are thus depicted as enclosed in perpetual cycles of social and spatial exclusion. As much as they try, none are allowed to go beyond the confined perimeters of *favelas*, prisons and/or streets.

In the first chapter, cinematic strategies used in *City of God* to construct realism were discussed as a cinematic point of reference for the other two principal films studied in the thesis. It additionally showed the way in which the film’s combination of realism and entertainment aesthetics resulted in a pastiche of past and contemporary cinematic traditions, making poverty a commercial spectacle. The chapter also contextualised *City of God* as part of a long tradition of earlier Brazilian films focusing on the themes of poverty and violence. As a result, I suggested that the historically, privileged economic position of most of the country’s film directors (and producers) has prevented them from depicting more intricate and multifaceted images of the contemporary *favela*.

The second chapter compared *Cinema Novo* to the New Brazilian Cinema. This demonstrated the way in which the cinematic prison has lost its place in recent films as a metaphor for political criticism, a characteristic of films made during the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985). Although dealing with similar social themes, ideological ambiguity in New Brazilian Cinema films’ bears no resemblance to *Cinema Novo*’s self-declared aims of provoking social, political and aesthetic change. By focusing on the film *Carandiru*, this chapter elaborated on the theme of spatial segregation raised in Chapter One. Furthermore, it showed how both the cinematic prison and the *favela* are represented as geographically displaced from the urban space, while at the same time, they remain interconnected as contiguous and complementary spaces of criminality.

The third chapter demonstrated that although the cinematic streets are public and open
spaces, they paradoxically exhibit the same confined characteristics of favelas and prisons. The urban and marginalised homeless children depicted in films such as Last Stop 174, experience constant threats of violence inside juvenile centres and open settings. Their only chance at avoiding marginalisation is to escape the city itself. In addition, the chapter discussed the contradictory position of these films as they attempt to give visibility to homeless children by focusing primarily on violent episodes. Another issue is that, relying on ethnic and class stereotypes, these films reinforce the representation of favelas, prisons and streets, as the main settings of Brazilian violence, as well as the places were criminals reside. Since these films do not link contemporary marginalisation with the country’s historical and social dilemmas, the main characters are depicted as the producers of their own marginalisation.

In general, the close analysis of each one of these films revealed that, although they were able to gain the attention of audiences through the use of engaging realist aesthetics, they revealed a simplified view of urban marginalisation. Taking into account Homi Bhabha’s (1983, p. 34) provocative statement that the “stereotype is at once a substitute and a shadow”, this thesis has endeavoured to reveal the stereotypes repeated throughout these films aiming, above all, to draw attention to that which was lacking in them. Firstly to emphasise how the endless cycles of poverty and violence of cinematic spaces are very different from the dynamism and complexities of actual favelas, prisons and streets, in which residents also experience social mobility, work, leisure and educational opportunities. Secondly, far from isolation, the actual neighbourhoods around each one of these two spaces are connected with other areas of the city such as schools, hospitals and high and middle-class residences where favelas residents’ work as housekeepers, maids, plumbers, and also as lawyers, nurses, dentists, among many other skilled professions. Lastly, and most importantly, these films lack the critical perspectives of the actual people that occupy these three marginalised cinematic spaces. The inclusion of such perspectives would certainly point to other forms of violence, including interclass conflicts and socio-economic segregation. Furthermore, it could also reveal how, from the point of view of marginalised Afro-Brazilians, the places of extreme violence and criminality are situated not in the favelas but in the upper-middle class neighbourhoods where political decisions are being made.
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