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SLUMS ON SCREEN

WORLD CINEMA AND THE PLANET OF SLUMS

IGOR KRSTIĆ

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Introduction

Ever since the term ‘slum’ emerged in Victorian England to describe overcrowded neighbourhoods overflowing with impoverished migrants, images and stories about the appalling living, housing or social conditions in such city areas have constantly returned to haunt us. Yet, slums, often perceived as the world’s most miserable habitats, have not only been a historically recurring, but also a transnational concern for filmmakers. One could even say that we are today in possession of a ‘global archive’ of moving images that depict life in the slums of various cities across the planet. Filmmakers with different concerns north as well as south of the equator produced a vast amount of audiovisual material about the slums of New York, London or Paris in the early twentieth century, while today the focus is on Lagos, Rio de Janeiro or Mumbai. Considering that by the turn of the millennium near to one billion people called slums their home – a number which suggests that it is not an exaggeration to describe our planet in Mike Davis’ words as a *Planet of Slums* (2007) – and taking into account that filmmakers have repeatedly tried to engage with what in different geo-cultural regions is labelled as shantytown, *Elendsviertel* (German), *gecekondu* (Turkey), *favela* (Brazil), *chawl* (India), or *bidonville* (Francophone Africa), a study of how life on our ‘planet of slums’ has been depicted on screen is long overdue.

Accordingly then, the major research question driving this book is how life in our ‘planet of slums’ has been represented on screen. More precisely, it is driven by the question of how the present relates to the past, of how the various films and media practices that imagine how life in the slums is today, relate to their historical predecessors. This is a question that has evolved with the observation that media history has frequently overlapped with social history since the time of Charles Dickens. However, as slums have now become a phenomenon of (mega)cities that are predominantly located in the global South rather than in London, New York or Paris, one is almost obliged

to address this question beyond its historical dimensions, that is, widen its scope according to its global, or rather, globalising dimensions. This book therefore reconstructs two such globalising developments and tries to weave them together: firstly, accelerated urbanisation and the concomitant rise of a ‘planet of slums’, and secondly, the expansion of a transnationally interconnected film culture – a research field that is by now associated with the term ‘world cinema’. In reconstructing these two developments, this book looks at the globalisation of slums from a cultural perspective and approaches the globalisation of film culture through focusing on a topic that today is not only a growing concern for urban planners, humanitarian organisations and politicians but also for a variety of filmmakers across the world.

‘THE GENTLEST OF PREDATIONS’?

For a study that is concerned with actual film examples, it seems natural to focus primarily on what kind of styles, forms or aesthetics filmmakers were deploying to convey what life is like in our ‘planet of slums’. However, with regard to this topic it is equally important to address questions that lie beyond notions of aesthetics, form or style, because the very existence of slums is in most cases already tied to various interrelated (local, national or larger) political nexuses, power relations or social histories. Unsurprisingly therefore, audiovisual depictions of life in the slums were indeed often discussed in relation to political or ethical issues, rather than just as a purely aesthetic kind of problem or topic. In fact, filmmakers who disseminated images and stories from the world’s most impoverished places were often either lauded or criticised for their (lack of) ethical responsibility as image- and story-makers. In other words, when it comes to this topic one cannot isolate aesthetics from political and ethical concerns; instead one needs to consider them as indissolubly entangled.

In the broader field of cultural studies – through which film studies emerged as an academic discipline in the 1970s – entanglements between the arts, media and politics have been widely and thoroughly discussed. Feminist, Foucault-inspired and neo-Marxist approaches emerged to enable a critical examination of class, race and gender representations, together with how ‘the poor’, the ‘working class’, or the ‘underclass’ were depicted in popular film and TV. Indeed, critics (whether influenced by such critical strands in the academic world or not) repeatedly pointed particularly to the problematic ‘politics of representation’ in films that narrate stories from the slums, often highlighting that they need to be considered as instances of ‘slumming’, or, by extension, of ‘poverty tourism’ or ‘social voyeurism’. Most vehemently, this kind of criticism was recently directed towards two extraordinarily popular

films that have been viewed by millions: the eight-time Academy Award winner *Slumdog Millionaire* (Danny Boyle, 2008), infamously criticised for being a form of ‘poverty porn’, and the Brazilian cult film *Cidade de Deus* (*City of God*; Fernando Meirelles, 2002), accused for its ‘cosmetics of hunger’ (see Chapters 8 and 9).

To quote what is possibly the most symptomatic example for this kind of criticism, dating back to the 1970s, Susan Sontag attacked the far less popular genre of social documentary photography along similar lines in her essay collection *On Photography* thus:

Social misery has inspired the comfortably-off with the urge to take pictures, the gentlest of predations, in order to document a hidden reality, that is, a reality hidden from them . . . Gazing on other people’s reality with curiosity, with detachment, with professionalism, the ubiquitous photographer operates as if that activity transcends class interests as if its perspective is universal . . . Photography conceived as social documentation was an instrument of that essentially middle-class attitude, both zealous and merely tolerant, both curious and indifferent, called humanism – which found slums the most enthralling of decors. (1977: 55–6)

For Sontag the supposedly humanist documentation of social misery through the distanced gaze of the camera, what she calls ‘the gentlest of predations’, equals a form of voyeurism that is often described as ‘slumming’. She assumes that an outsider, a non-slum-dweller with a middle-class background, necessarily always has a touristic (or voyeuristic) attitude towards the supposed spectacle of social misery. Additionally, she contends that the photographer is always unavoidably detached and distanced and thus not empathically involved with the subject he or she depicts, because of his/her higher social background. Yet, Sontag’s critique not only attacks the medium’s ‘customary users’, but, implicitly, also the medium itself. Her critique questions whether photography is the appropriate medium with which to convey issues like urban poverty. For her, it seems, visual media ultimately turn slums into nothing more than ‘enthralling decors’.

In the mid-nineteenth century, however, graphic illustrations of slum-dwellers were criticised for their lack of decent illustrative evidence, or in other words, for lacking in documentary realism, rather than for being examples of social voyeurism (see Chapter 2). In fact, ever since the time of Charles Dickens, not only literary but also audiovisual representations of life in the slums have almost inextricably been linked to historically shifting notions of realism and the documentary mode of representation; and at least since the establishment of a more serious film criticism in specialised journals, critics have repeatedly either rejected or praised films about ‘the poor’,

‘the marginalised’ or ‘the dispossessed’ for their (social) voyeurism or their (documentary) realism. Yet, where exactly should one draw the line between voyeurism and realism or, for that matter, between ethically responsible filmmaking and a voyeuristic exploitation of social misery?

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

It goes without saying that it is crucial to critically scrutinise the ethical and political implications of the way filmmakers approached slums, slum-dwellers or slum life on screen. However, drawing binary distinctions between ethical and unethical ways of representing sensitive topics like urban poverty is, in my opinion, a rather arbitrary matter, since such critical postures often tend to simplify more complex phenomena. The most general perspective that I apply in this book can therefore be defined as the acknowledgment of complexity, or, better put, the acknowledgement of ‘global complexity’ (Urry 2002), as a given, and to treat a set of carefully selected examples accordingly. So instead of trying to apply a meta-narrative, a grand theory or any other kind of encompassing or comprehensive approach, I will attempt to historicise a set of examples from different historical periods and geo-cultural regions, with the aim of providing a perspective on ‘world cinema’s planet of slums’ that is neither theoretically nor *weltanschaulich* one-sided or predetermined.

For this reason, but also because the topic of slum representations is one that is tightly connected to both social and cultural globalisation processes, I have taken the book’s guiding approach from what Robert Stam and Ella Shohat call in their groundbreaking *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* a ‘polycentric’, rather than a Eurocentric or nation-state based, ‘vision on the world’, which, they suggest, globalises multiculturalism in a more ‘relational and radical’ way (1994: 48). Shohat and Stam introduced the term ‘polycentric multiculturalism’ to provide what was then a much needed alternative approach to the study of an increasingly globalising, and therefore also increasingly multicultural, media landscape with all its asymmetrical power relations, diverse cultural traditions and historical burdens (of colonialism and racism in particular). They published *Unthinking Eurocentrism* at an important time – the beginning of the 1990s – when post-structuralist and post-colonial criticisms of representing ‘other’ cultures in Western literary, pictorial and also cinematic traditions (led by the likes of Stuart Hall, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha or Edward W. Said) reached a peak in academic debates across universities in the Western world. Considering the historical significance of its publication, Shohat and Stam suggested the term ‘polycentrism’ less to describe a (technocratic, de-politicised, neutral) vision on the world, but rather to introduce a genuinely politicised principle that enables

one to study, at least hypothetically, globalising media cultures in a genuinely non-Eurocentric way.

Apart from its deliberate rejection of a specific European tradition of looking at other, non-Western cultures, a polycentric vision on the world also obliges one to *think* radically differently, that is, to use many (Greek: *polys*) rather than binary analytical perspectives – one of the most problematic principles of the European thinking tradition, as post-structuralist and post-colonial thinkers taught us. And apart from its original political purpose as an alternative to the use of arbitrary binarisms, polycentrism is also, in my opinion, a particularly useful concept for the study of complex global phenomena, such as world cinema and cityward migration, in a dynamic or relational way. It can, on the one hand, provide a perspective on world cinema that acknowledges it as a dynamic, globalising phenomenon with many, rather than few, cultural centres. On the other hand, it can also serve as a less static vision on a social world in perennial movement, since vast migration streams from the global countryside to the world's now manifold urban centres continuously (re-)shape what is often conceived in more static terms as a world divided into developed, developing and underdeveloped regions. Most importantly, the notion of polycentrism compels one to not only think in terms of interrelated centres or networks on a global scale but, perhaps even more challenging, in terms of perennial exchanges between the local and the global.

A polycentric approach can therefore also be used as a method to redress older notions of 'world cinema' (see also Chapter 1), particularly to provide, in a study like this one, geo-regional diversity by considering non-Western films that have been previously neglected. By applying polycentrism in this way, not only as a perspective but also as an inclusive approach to world cinema, I aim to offer *one* among, admittedly, many other possible ways of approaching an increasingly important topic in world cinema, but not so much in the sense of a global survey. In fact, in my opinion, the notion of polycentrism vehemently contradicts the notion of a 'global survey', particularly since it emphatically fails to provide a comprehensive, all-encompassing perspective, which a 'survey' ultimately promises to provide. This is a point that is also emphasised by the editors of the recent volume *Theorizing World Cinema*. Building on Shohat and Stam they argue for a 'polycentric approach to world cinema' which aims at avoiding the

light touch of 'surveys' or overviews that convey a 'world in a nutshell' by compressing whole countries and even continents in a few chapters, in order to fulfill the ultimately impossible task of defining uniform modes of address, distribution and reception across thousands of the most varied and contrasting outputs. (Nagib, Perriam, and Dudrah 2012: xxii)

If we consider that a country like India, for example, today produces more than one thousand feature films a year, creating a survey-like global overview of ‘world cinema’s planet of slums’ is indeed going to be an impossible task. Rather than generalising about how slums have been represented in specific local, national or even continental film cultures in order to convey the world in a nutshell – for instance by providing individual chapters on Indian, Brazilian, South African or on East European, Southeast Asian or North American film traditions – this book attempts to avoid such totalising accounts, which always have a tendency to create static viewpoints of the world by narrowing down on arbitrarily demarcated (local, national or regional) film cultures. Instead, by applying a polycentric approach – an approach that is genuinely relational (or indeed, transnational), rather than only hypothetically comprehensive – I hope to attain a more dynamic picture of the ‘world cinema’s planet of slums’, a picture that nevertheless outlines some significant tendencies beyond the historically, locally or film-specific.

Yet, how exactly ought a ‘polycentric approach to world cinema’ proceed and what kind of methodology should one apply? Shohat and Stam have in fact given an answer to this question. They contend that the prefix ‘poly’ in polycentrism (from the Greek *polýs*, translated as ‘many’) does not simply ‘refer to a finite list of centers of power but rather introduces a systematic principle of *differentiation, relationality, and linkage*’ (1994: 48; emphasis added). So, for Shohat and Stam polycentrism is not merely a politicised ‘vision of the world’ (and, by extension, of world cinema). They also suggest that it is also a ‘systematic principle’ which does not simply imply to set many (*polýs*) cases next to each other, but which introduces a specific way of thinking in terms of relations, links and interconnections. For the study of world cinema – and, by extension, of ‘world cinema’s planet of slums’ – these principles could be defined as follows: *differentiating* (or close reading), to outline the socio-historically, culturally and film-specific of a set of carefully selected case examples; *tracing linkages* between these examples, that is, across both geographical borders and historical periods; *comparing* them, in order to outline significant differences and similarities between these stand-alone, but nevertheless interconnected cases.

MAJOR ARGUMENTS AND AIMS

Before outlining the structure of this book and the rationale for the selection of its main case studies in more detail, I would first like to briefly summarise four major arguments that provide the foundations of this study and to which I will return not only in Chapter 1, but repeatedly throughout the book. Firstly, life in the slums is one of the historically most recurring topics of

world cinema, particularly because media and social histories have frequently overlapped and intertwined when slums were at stake. But even though it is closely related to another prominent and frequently discussed academic topic that describes such a mutual relationship between on and off screen spaces, the ‘cinematic city’ (see Chapter 1) the ‘cinematic slum’ has virtually been ignored by film scholars to date. To speculate on the reasons for disregarding slums as a valuable film studies-related research topic is beyond the scope of this work but, based on the research presented in this book, we can state that slums and cinema share a history of mutually entangled relations. Even before the ‘birth of cinema’, social history and media histories frequently overlapped. This alone should justify approaching the topic from a perspective that interrogates ‘world cinema’ not only as a geographical but also as a historical entity, which is why this book will investigate examples of ‘slums on screen’ from as far back as 1890. However, because the ‘planet of slums’ is too diverse (in both its historical and topographic appearances), there is, in my opinion, no finite way of defining slums in a generalising way as a specific category of ‘urban space’, since, to take just one example, a Victorian inner-city slum is a totally different kind of urban space than a *favela* on the outskirts of a contemporary Brazilian megacity. Accordingly, I claim that one has to resist the temptation to narrowly define what one might call ‘the slum film’ or ‘the cinematic slum’ *a priori* as a specific kind of cinematic space or generic category. Equally, I argue, one needs to resist the temptation to define cinematic spaces in general solemnly as ‘representational’ ones. It is therefore important to address the relations between the social sciences (which have been studying the conditions in slums since the times of Friedrich Engels) and film studies, as well as the many possible relations between pro-filmic and filmic spaces. It is also crucial that we look at and consider relations between social or lived spaces (which slums, in the most general sense, ultimately are) and representational spaces on screen, in order to approach ‘world cinema’s planet of slums’ in as differentiated a way as possible.

Secondly, even though they have been contested and often ambivalently defined categories in film theory and criticism, this book re-evaluates the repeated historical emergences, specific formulations as well as the various definitions of documentary and realist modes of representation in cinema, because they have historically been of pivotal importance to filmmakers addressing life in the slums on screen. While there are historically a vast number of examples that cannot be described in a conventional sense as either ‘documentary’ or ‘realist’ – and this specifically pertains to popular films like *Cidade de Deus* and *Slumdog Millionaire* – these two representational modes have been significant since the emergence of both urban slums and cinematic screens, and for several reasons. Documentary modes of representation were already in the late nineteenth century employed to support calls for social

reforms with visual evidence of 'how the poor live'. The stylistic features and filmmaking practices of what we today associate with cinematic realism developed a few decades later, that is, during the interwar period. However, realism also developed in cross-fertilisation with documentary practices and became (particularly with the profound impact of Italian neorealism on filmmakers in the developing world) a preferred style of filmmakers who would tell us stories about poverty-stricken characters at the fringes of cities. That these modes of representation are the most significant ones when it comes to this subject has also to do with the fact that many filmmakers, as well as film critics, perceive(d) realism as an ethical and therefore appropriate way to tackle social themes such as life in the slums. Similarly, documentary images have, since the nineteenth century, been understood by social reformers as useful tools, because they provided the much-needed visual evidence that could convince a middle-class public about the urgent need for social reforms. They were also understood as appropriate tools for semi-sociological studies, surveys and investigations about urban poverty and later as *the* crucial mode of representation to communicate socio-politically relevant topics to audiences. While there is obviously a vast amount of literature on both documentary and neorealism, this book primarily draws on some of its classical definitions, as provided by for instance André Bazin or Bill Nichols.

The third argument relates to questions about film (and media) historiography and can be summarised as follows: documentary and realism are modes that return cyclically in different forms throughout film history; they have repeatedly been modified by filmmakers in response to historically changing screen-spectator relations so that the way slums have been approached has equally gone through various permutations. Understood in this sense, one cannot regard realism as a long extinct historical film movement, nor documentary as a narrowly defined genre. Both should rather be considered as malleable modes of representation that are intrinsically linked to the technological basis of audiovisual recording media. They have therefore cyclically (re)appeared, disappeared and reappeared in different forms throughout film history. In other words, these modes have for various reasons repeatedly been recovered, but at the same time often been significantly modified in response to changing screen-spectator relations. This argument is drawn from Foucault-inspired approaches to film and media history, and especially from the 'New Film History' school which, since the 1980s, has repeatedly emphasised that specific re/presentational strategies – for example frontal staging ('breaking the fourth wall') or the use of (uncut) long takes – cyclically (re)appear, disappear and re-appear in a non-teleological manner throughout film history. It also draws on the notion of 'remediation' (Bolter and Grusin 2000) and on an intermedial understanding of film history, that is, it draws on the insight that cinema is best conceived as part of an interrelated network of different media

that are influencing, shaping and transforming each other. According to this understanding of (the history of) cinema one can think of filmmaking as a creative media practice that continuously responds to, re-deploys or attempts to reform older practices in response to changing media technologies, environments and viewing habits. This is a way of looking at cinema which ultimately also casts light on how certain historically recurring topics, such as life in the urban slums, have continuously been revisited and refashioned by filmmakers throughout the decades.

The fourth major argument relates to the binary opposition between the global and the local and entails a rather geographical dimension: it asserts that documentary and realism constitute key modes in world cinema, since they were often employed by socially committed or politically engaged film movements which sometimes had a global impact. However, since slums are in each case a distinctly local topic, these global currents have often been modified in response to specific local contexts. In other words, this study approaches films that convey life in the slums as products of a perpetual push-pull between local conditions and broader film historical developments. Through referring to and extending on recent scholarship – presented in such volumes as *Global Neorealism: Transnational History of a Film Style* (Giovacchini and Sklar 2012) or *The Grierson Effect: Tracing Documentary's International Movement* (Druick and Williams 2014) – this book traces the international impact, or transnational ‘travels’, of specific styles, movements, waves or currents that have all been related to the development of documentary and/or realism: the British Documentary Movement since the 1930s, Italian neorealism since the 1940s, cinéma vérité since the 1960s, various Latin American film movements, often subsumed under the term ‘Third Cinema’, since the 1960s and 1970s, and most recently the Danish Dogma 95 movement since the mid-1990s. Since the living, housing or social conditions in the world’s slums are not only socio-political, but also distinctly local topics, these globally travelling currents have not simply been adapted, but often significantly modified according to a specific local context, as, for instance, in the case of Italian neorealism, which has been re-appropriated across the globe in sometimes completely different ways (see Chapter 4). This last argument draws from new approaches to world cinema as a polycentric phenomenon – as proposed in the above-mentioned volume *Theorizing World Cinema*. Yet, it also draws from the notion that filmmakers who operate in realist or documentary modes might reach for a global audience, but mostly claim to reproduce representations of a particular place and its people.

According to a ‘polycentric approach to world cinema’ and derived from the major arguments presented above, the central aims of the book can be summarised as follows:

- to discuss the relations between social/urban and cinematic spaces and *resist the lure of providing an a priori definition* of the ‘cinematic slum’;
- to ensure *geo-regional diversity and a non-Eurocentric perspective* by integrating non-Western films and/or cinematic cities that have previously been neglected;
- to derive prevalent aesthetic strategies of representing slums through *close readings* of representative examples;
- to *contextualise and historicise*, that is, to work out how socio-historical and/or media- and film-historical dynamics impact on the chosen examples;
- to *compare*, in order to trace historical/transnational relations and linkages on a genuinely polycentric world cinema map;
- to consider the mutations, creolisations and modifications of the *many types of documentary and (neo)realist* modes of representation;
- to interrogate the *impact of new media technologies on screen-spectator relations* from a perspective that assumes that cinema evolves as part of a network of interrelated media practices;
- to trace *recurring cycles in film history*, rather than to look for a teleology or evolution;
- to *outline general tendencies or key paradigms* of slum representations on screen, beyond the historically, locally or film-specific.

SELECTION OF FILMS AND CHAPTER OUTLINE

In order to conclude this introduction, I will provide a brief overview of the following nine chapters, in order to clarify the book’s approach, aims and structural organisation in more detail, but also the rationale for the selection of specific examples as case studies. Chapter 1 (Slums on and off Screen) introduces readers to some of the larger conceptual frameworks that are relevant to this book, especially centred on the key terms ‘planet of slums’, ‘cinematic city’, ‘representation’ and ‘world cinema’. While it is necessary to first discuss how ‘slums’ have been defined, and what exactly Mike Davis’s notion of a ‘planet of slums’ implies, it is of critical importance to discuss the relation between off- and on-screen space, and more concretely, between urban space and cinema. The chapter therefore opens with a guiding question: how to bring the social sciences into an interdisciplinary dialogue with the study of film? Referring to a debate in which the social sciences have entered into an interdisciplinary dialogue with film studies – revitalised in the 1990s with the emergence of the so-called ‘spatial turn’ in the humanities, and often referred to as the ‘cinematic city’ paradigm – the chapter proposes an extension to the ‘cinematic city’ by proposing to consider non-Western films and (mega) cities that have previously been neglected in this debate. This is followed by a

discussion of the important concept of ‘representation’ and how to approach slums – an urban space common to both Western and non-Western cities and cinemas – as re-presentational spaces on screen. This chapter then concludes by arguing that a critical re-evaluation of the notion of ‘world cinema’ as a both geographical and historical entity is an appropriate way to approach the representation of slums on screen. More substantially, it proposes a cyclical rather than teleological, intermedial rather than medium-specific and polycentric rather than nation-based understanding of world cinema, in which many types of documentary and realist currents (waves or movements) have been repeatedly adopted and modified across the globe.

After this introductory chapter, the book is divided into two larger parts: Part One is titled Global Currents, whereas Part Two is devoted to its Local Expressions. Generally speaking, the first part ought to serve as a mirror to the second and *vice versa*. What I hope to accomplish with this division is not only a faithful translation of my methodological approach into a book structure, but also an illustration of how world cinema has dealt with one of the most recurring cinematic sites in various different, but ultimately interconnected ways. Part One (Chapters 2–7) thus engages with more general tendencies (or ‘currents’) in world cinema as well as with the case examples. As in each study of this scale, the reasons for selecting particular examples over others must be carefully weighed. In this case, the *general rationale* for the selection was film and/or media historical significance – admittedly a criterion that is empirically hard to measure – as well as geo-regional diversity. Through the close reading, comparison and contextualisation of ‘representative examples’ that depict life in the slums of (mega)cities on almost all of the globe’s continents (except for Australia), the book attempts to honour its polycentric approach to world cinema.

The more *specific rationale* for the film selection in Part One, however, is tightly connected to this part’s structural organisation itself. It progresses in steps or chapters from the 1890s to the 2000s and is therefore chronologically organised, but it neither adheres to a linear, teleological (from . . . to) understanding of film history, nor to a medium-specific one that excludes supposedly pre-cinematic devices, such as magic lantern lectures, or supposedly post-cinematic ones, like interactive web-documentaries. While the principles of differentiation, relationality and linkage run throughout Part One as a methodological thread, each of the chapters features at least one case example which is situated in its particular historical period. These periods are to be understood as contextual frameworks but also as constitutive phases in which important transnational film- or media-historical tendencies emerge. The case studies remain, however, the major focus of each chapter, which is why Chapters 2–7 each begin with a close reading of a scene or a sequence. They were chosen for the way in which they are representative for an historical

period in which, I argue, a new prevalent theme, strategy or process emerges that establishes a key paradigm of the representation of slums on screen.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century (Chapter 2: Sensational Remediations), it is a specific technological or media historical process (remediation) that is paradigmatic for an era in which various different media uses and social developments interlace to establish a genre (social documentary photography) that will be constitutive for the representation of slums, both on and off screen. Accordingly, the chapter takes the year 1900 as a vantage point and tackles the question of how, by that time, the slum has become a topic of high visibility in various media, from the boulevard press to magic lantern 'slum shows' and the new medium of cinema. The chapter traces the parallel multiplication of both slums and screen media in the nineteenth century by reconstructing how reformer-journalists, photographers, magic lantern lecturers and filmmakers imaged and imagined life in the slums of Western metropolises to which rural migrants increasingly flocked. The chapter's case example, *How The Other Half Lives* (Jacob Riis, 1890), is a book as well as a magic lantern show that comprises images of the notorious Five Points neighbourhood in turn-of-the-century New York. Historians of photography regard it as a pioneering work of 'social documentary photography' because of the innovative way in which Riis's uses novel photographic methods and technologies to depict hitherto neglected aspects of urban life – that is, the lack of proper housing for the urban poor.

In the interwar period (Chapter 3: Documentary Mappings), it is now also a filmic rather than a merely photographic strategy (cognitive mapping) that constitutes this era's key paradigm. This substantially affects the formation of a sub-genre that will become crucial for representing slum life in the decades to come: the social documentary film. The chapter introduces the notion that documentary film can be a form of cognitive mapping (or of ordering, surveying and controlling space) and asks why it was especially urban space that became documentary film's first major subject. It roughly focuses on the 1920s and 1930s as a constitutive phase of the genre and on how slums have been represented in early documentary film. *Housing Problems* (Arthur Elton and E.H. Anstey, 1935) is selected here as the case example because a number of documentary scholars have repeatedly emphasised that this short film is a milestone of its genre. On the one hand, the film presents the 'housing problems' of London's Stepney in a classical expository, voice-of-authority style – a style that has by now become standard practice for television documentaries – but it is also notable for its pioneering use of recorded interviews, in which Stepney's slum-dwellers address their audience directly.

In the postwar era (Chapter 4: Neorealist Narratives), a narrative figure (the homeless street kid) appears as this era's key paradigm together with an aesthetics (neorealism) that draws from both documentary and fiction filmmaking

– both of which will become crucial for ‘world cinema’s planet of slums’. The chapter focuses therefore on how neorealism can be defined as a so-called *documentario narrativo* (‘narrativised documentary’) and why it became a globalised (or glocalised) film style, particularly for socially engaged filmmakers in the global South. The chapter’s main example, Luis Buñuel’s *Los Olvidados* (*The Young and the Damned*; 1950), is a fictional account of a boy’s struggle for survival and motherly love in a Mexico City slum. It also effectively represents a variety of postwar films that have profoundly been influenced by Italian neorealism. This body of films has, like *Los Olvidados*, often narrated stories about poverty-stricken characters; it has also very often used the perspective of (street) children – a narrative device that is still often employed today, for example in films like *Slumdog Millionaire* or *Cidade de Deus*.

In the 1960s and 1970s (Chapter 5: Third Docufictions), it is a social, rather than merely a technical or aesthetic strategy of filmmaking (conflictual or cooperative encounters between races, classes or genders) that will become this era’s key paradigm for a politically challenging way of dealing with urban poverty on screen, particularly in what used to be called the ‘Third World’. Acknowledging neorealism’s profound impact on filmmakers in the global South, this chapter discusses how documentary and fictional modes become more self-consciously blurred or juxtaposed in two significant movements of world cinema, *cinéma vérité* and Third Cinema. Furthermore, it compares how slums were depicted through white and black, Western and non-Western, as well as through male and female eyes. More specifically, it focuses on two outstanding films from that era: Jean Rouch’s *Moi, un noir* (*Me, a Black*; 1958) – a *cinéma vérité*-style ethnofiction on the everyday life of Nigerian immigrants to Abidjan and one of the major influences for some filmmakers of the French *Nouvelle Vague* – and Sara Gómez’ *De Cierta Manera* (*One Way or Another*; 1974), an essayistic ‘docudrama’ that examines the Cuban government’s slum removal policies in Havana, a film that was edited by a key figure of Third Cinema, Julio Garca Espinosa.

In the 1980s and 1990s (Chapter 6: Postmodern Bricolages), a now *post*-modern key paradigm (bricolage) emerges and puts the traditional claims of realist and documentary practices in doubt. The chapter first outlines how postmodern thought and cultural practice influenced world cinema tendencies from the 1970 and 1980s. It also highlights the practice of bricolage in particular because the building strategies and living environments of slum-dwellers have themselves often been described by architects, sociologists, as well as by some artists, as a form of bricolage. This chapter’s case example, Emir Kusturica’s *Dom za vešanje* (*Time of the Gypsies*; 1989), is a good example of the aesthetics of bricolage in cinema and is therefore a significant demonstration of a postmodern take on slums. This is because it mixes what are apparently contradictory notions of magic and realism to depict the life of a scattered Roma

family living on the outskirts of Skopje. This chapter will also discuss various other examples that can be considered as genuinely postmodern films on slums – from Asia and Europe to South America – to describe how, during this era, filmmakers both struggle with and reclaim documentary and realist modes of representation to address the lives of slum-dwellers across an expanding ‘planet of slums’.

Around the millennium (Chapter 7: Digital Realisms), a confluence of yet another media historical process with a now truly global world cinema tradition – the supposedly contradictory confluence of digital imaging technologies with documentary and/or realism – constitutes a contemporary key paradigm of ‘world cinema’s planet of slums’. This chapter summarises what some film scholars perceive as a *post*-postmodern tendency in world cinema: the ‘return to the Real’. It provides two case studies to demonstrate how, despite postmodernism and the digital turn, some contemporary filmmakers return to realist or documentary styles and filmmaking practices to present life in today’s ‘planet of slums’. Firstly, the chapter focuses on a movement of independent Philippine directors (the so-called ‘Philippine New Wave’) who have been compared to Dogma 95. These filmmakers, who often have to rely on minimal budgets, have produced a substantial amount of films that are set in Manila’s slums. The second case study provides an auteurist reading of a series of films that have been widely discussed by critics and film scholars: Pedro Costa’s *The Fontainhas Trilogy*, which consists of the films *Ossos* (*Bones*, 1997), *No Quarto da Vanda* (*In Vanda’s Room*, 2000) and *Juventude em Marcha* (*Colossal Youth*, 2006), all of which focus on different characters/inhabitants from Fontainhas, which is now a demolished slum on the outskirts of Lisbon. This reading connects Costa’s filmmaking philosophy to the trilogy’s ‘digital realism’.

My choice to emphasise a more local and less global perspective in the second part of the book (Part Two: Local Expressions), is, as already mentioned, linked to the book’s polycentric approach. The selection of this part’s key examples is, however, related less to their historical and more to their contemporary significance. For this reason, I only briefly discuss some of the most important Indian and Brazilian films, which were either set in Rio de Janeiro’s *favelas* or Bombay’s/Mumbai’s slums, to illustrate how they can be regarded as local expressions of those global, historical currents. The respective Chapters 8 (*Favelas on Screen*) and 9 (*Bombay Cinema*) will, in this way, outline how slums have been a recurring topic of the ‘cinematic cities’ of Rio de Janeiro and Bombay or Mumbai. Not by coincidence therefore, so my argument goes, can two modern ‘world cinema classics’ that are the major focus of this part, *Cidade de Deus* and *Slumdog Millionaire*, be regarded as both global and local at the same time. Whereas the former’s worldwide reputation has steadily grown since its release in 2002, the latter was an instant and surpris-

ing box office hit all over the world, turning the film into a global blockbuster phenomenon. However, there are also some striking parallels between these films when it comes to their reception, since they were both criticised for exploiting the misery of slums for commercial means. My analysis takes this critical reception as a starting point and then investigates how the films operate aesthetically. More precisely, I investigate how both films mix strategies used in contemporary or 'post-classical' Hollywood cinema with locally specific cinema traditions (*Cinema Novo* and *Bombay Cinema*). Moreover, I argue that both films represent palimpsestic approaches to their respective cinematic cities, by which I mean that both these films treat their local city slums as (archeological) 'media sites', rather than as (unmediated) *terrae incognitae*. In this way, both films seem to challenge traditional notions of 'realism', suggesting that this malleable concept needs to be redefined in the digital age, especially with regard to the film's major target audience, young people who use digital media devices on an everyday basis.

The book's conclusion will look at the past through the prism of the present: it will summarise the most important contemporary currents of slum representation on screen, as discussed throughout Chapters 2 to 9, and relate them to their historical predecessors – a strategy that quasi reverses the chronological approach applied throughout the book. It will also look back to Susan Sontag's assessment of social voyeurism, or 'slumming' through cameras, as well as to the changing notions of documentary and realism by interrogating what role cameras together with still or moving images play in our digital era today. Hence, the conclusion focuses on this book's major preoccupation, on how the present corresponds with the past, and concludes with a final argument which is that our 'planet of slums' has, for better or worse, become a hypermediated *topos*, an 'archeological' media site, so to speak. Accordingly, many filmmakers of the digital era treat this hypermediated site in a palimpsestic way, re-writing or re-mediating its stored stories and images in sometimes highly imaginative, sometimes provocative ways. These filmmakers are not necessarily (re)turning to slums in order to look voyeuristically at the world's 'Other Half' with fascination or disgust, and neither with a reformist or socialist political agenda in mind, but rather, I argue, to challenge our preconceived notions of documentary realism, as well as our way of looking at life on our planet of slums.

Slums on and off Screen

[T]he major sites of cultural globalization in the twenty-first century are the emerging megacities of what used to be called the Third World.

Andreas Huyssen

With the development of the social sciences in the nineteenth century, cities as well as their slums have become an important subject of research and exploration. Film scholars have, however, only recently begun to explore the historical relations between cinema and cities, and hitherto rather neglected to study likewise relations between cinema and slums. The central question is how to bring disciplines based on the exegesis of empirical data, such as sociology, in connection with film studies, a discipline that was rather concerned with studying film as a ‘language’ of artistic expression (narrative, *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, editing, and so on) or with exegesis, the reading of films according to a specific hermeneutic method (psychoanalysis, feminism, semiotics, structuralism, narratology, etc.)? Mark Shiel discusses questions like these and argues that the ‘interdisciplinary contact between Film Studies and Sociology (among other disciplines, including Cultural Studies, Geography, and Urban Studies) can be profoundly useful and fruitful in addressing key issues which the two disciplines share (or ought to share)’ (2001: 2).

There have been a number of such ‘useful and fruitful’ dialogues between these disciplines (the Frankfurt School being the most prominent example),¹ but also between the social sciences and film or media *practice*. In fact, social science insights, concepts or methods (e.g. environmental determinism, culture of poverty, participatory observation) did often have an impact on how slums and slum-dwellers have been represented on screen. This book does not, however, attempt to do ‘sociology through the projector’,² and neither do I suggest that cinematic representations of slums are always examples of some

kind of ‘applied sociology’. It is rather that in some cases (such as with regard to *How The Other Half Lives*, *Housing Problems*, *Moi, un noir* or *De Cierta Manera*) strong connections to the social sciences are evident, while others (like for instance *Cidade de Deus*) invite interpretants – often social scientists themselves – to draw analogies to social theories or concepts. Generally speaking one can say that the intersections between the social sciences and media or film practice are important to consider when it comes to the topic of this study, which therefore suggests that one needs to outline how slums have been defined or ‘framed’ *off* screen, before discussing the cinematic ‘framing’ of slums *on* screen. Apart from that, the following chapter ought to induce readers also to some of the most important terms of debate referred to in this book, particularly in relation to the notions of a ‘planet of slums’ and the ‘cinematic city’, as well as with regard to the very concept of ‘representation’ itself and ‘world cinema’. In this way, the chapter also ought to further explain the *raison d’être* behind the book’s polycentric approach, major arguments and aims.

PLANET OF SLUMS

According to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), by the end of the twentieth century close to one billion people called slums their home – that is thirty-two percent of the world’s urban population.³ Considering this immense figure, the prominent urbanist Nezar AlSayyad (2004) has proposed to regard ‘urban informality’ – one of the most frequently used terms to describe the conditions of slum life by sociologists today – as a ‘new way of life’ since informal ways of working and dwelling in cities are by now so widespread and ordinary that it needs to be considered and conceptualised as such.⁴ However, until very recently, sociologists defined slums rather negatively, for instance as places in which various ‘social problems’ exist, or what the scholars of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology described already in the 1930s as processes of ‘social disorganization’.⁵ According to AlSayyad, previous thinking about ‘urban informality’ was often centred on the keyword ‘poverty’. Accordingly, slums were conceived as places that are populated by the (economically) ‘poor’, the (socially) ‘wretched’ or the (politically) ‘disenfranchised’. Unfortunately, such classical notions promoted the reproduction of always the same images (stereotypes) of life in the slums – for instance of domestic or religious violence, criminality or drug abuse, which apparently continuously thrive on an everyday basis in such places – leading to very generalising assumptions of the like that ‘social disorganization’ processes are common features to all slums.

An attempt at avoiding the reproduction of such stereotypical images by providing more differentiated ones was presented in the first global assessment

of slums, *The Challenge of Slums* (2003) – an international survey based on the collection of a vast quantity of empirical data, conducted by various sociologists from around the world and commissioned by the UN-HABITAT. Rejecting previous explanatory and descriptive models, the survey's authors have narrowed down five key characteristics of slums in more neutral terms. They are, according to them, characterised by 1) inadequate access to safe water, 2) inadequate access to sanitation and other infrastructure, 3) the poor structural quality of housing, 4) overcrowding and 5) an insecure residential status for its inhabitant.⁶ Thus, according to the UN-HABITAT, conditions concerning housing, dwelling and infrastructure are crucial to consider, not only as key definitional characteristics but, in the first instance, for the residents of slums themselves. Most essentially, dwelling in slums is here defined as a (legally) insecure way of living. This is because in the majority of cases, slum-dwellers do not own the land on which they live and are therefore constantly threatened with homelessness; governmental or municipal schemes that aim at eradicating their existence can be implemented at any time. As a result, slum-dwellers are often denied citizen rights and legal access to sanitation, water and other infrastructural facilities (such as electricity) and therefore often regarded by official bodies as 'informal' inhabitants of 'irregular' squatter settlements.

Nevertheless, the UN-HABITAT report also outlines that their use of the term 'slum' is not entirely unproblematic, since it was used in English language vernaculars in a derogatory way; by using it in written or spoken accounts the term often triggered stigmatisations and negative perceptions. Apart from 'poverty' and 'social problems', in its most benevolent forms today these negative perceptions include notions like despair, bleakness or a life without much hope and opportunity. Yet, the UN-HABITAT report makes an important distinction regarding this particular perception. In distinguishing between two broad classes of slums, namely between progressive *slums of hope* and degenerating *slums of despair*, the authors aim at highlighting that, in fact, migrating to a city can in many cases offer better life opportunities than remaining in the countryside. The anthropologist Janice Perlman has poignantly put it in her study on Brazilian *favelas*: 'Some of these migrants are "pushed" off the land by starvation, subjugation, and suffering, just as others are "pulled" toward the city by the lure of opportunity . . . people keep coming – and what they are leaving behind is worse' (2010: 44). Whereas the *slums of despair*, often associated with dilapidated inner-city areas, are defined by the UN-HABITAT as declining neighbourhoods 'in which environmental conditions and domestic services are undergoing a process of degeneration', *slums of hope* are 'progressive settlements, which are characterized by new, normally self-built structures, usually illegal (e.g. squatters) that are in, or have recently been through, a process of development, consolidation and improvement' (2003: 9).⁷

The term 'slum' also underwent various semantic shifts throughout history. It was popularised – with all its pejorative connotations – from at least the 1830s by journalists and writers and widely used in Anglophone countries as a more or less official term until approximately the 1930s. During this time it gained its current meaning, that is of 'a crowded district of a town or city . . . inhabited by people of a low class or by the very poor', as the Oxford English Dictionary states.⁸ The word then gradually disappeared after World War II from governmental or municipal discourses through the commitment of social activist or reformist groups to be replaced by more neutral terms such as 'neighbourhood' or 'community' in order to counter the negative stigmatisation of poor urban areas and their inhabitants. Yet, the authors of the UN-HABITAT contend that 'polite' terms such as 'community', even though politically more correct, often remained mere euphemisms and 'served to maintain rather than counteract the negative prejudices against slum-dwellers' (2003: 9). The major reason for excavating the word 'slum' by the UN-HABITAT is thus, in the first instance, to counter such euphemisms and to challenge policy makers; that is to draw their attention towards previous failures and to confront them with the shortcomings of municipal governance, organisation and planning that led to policies that were either ignoring or repeatedly demolishing ('bulldozing') slums. In other words, the authors of the report intentionally use the term 'slum' as an eye-opener for those responsible for improving living conditions in urban areas which have been neglected and left underdeveloped for too long.

Another reason why the UN-HABITAT re-utilises the term 'slum' for the twenty-first century is of equal importance for this study. According to the report, since the 1950s, at the same time when the term gradually vanishes from official English language discourses, slums increasingly become a global phenomenon on an unprecedented scale. Many scholars ascribe this to demographical world population trends, or what is sometimes termed the 'population explosion'.⁹ Others emphasise the accelerated urbanisation (or 'urban expansion') of especially South American, Asian and African countries, essentially caused by vast rural-urban migration streams since the postwar era. As a result of these developments, estimates suggest that from around the year 2007 more than half of the world's population lives in cities, outnumbering the rural one, which for many social scientists who research demographic changes marks an important transformation of global dimensions. Yet, as Perlman remarks – in a chapter tellingly titled 'The World Goes to the City' – there have actually been two major transformations in progress since the 1950s: 'If the first major transformation marking this era is the one from a rural to an urban world, the second is the transformation from North to South: a total reversal in the locus of the world's major cities from the highly industrialised countries of the North to the developing countries

of the South' (2010: 45).¹⁰ The UN-HABITAT estimates that today's one billion slum-dwellers live in around 200,000 slums, most of them located in African, South American and Asian urban areas – a 28-fold increase from the estimated thirty-five million slum-dwellers in 1957. This global expansion of slums can also be illustrated with a variety of terms used in different languages and in a range of world regions, countries and cities to describe overcrowded squatter settlements: from *bidonvilles*, *taudis* or *quartiers irréguliers* in French, *barraca*, *barrio marginal*, *villa miseria* or *colonias populares* in the Spanish speaking world, to *trushchobi* in Russian, *umjondolo* in Zulu, *mudun safi* in Arabic and *gecekondulu* in Turkey.¹¹ The sheer number of slums and the multitude of terms that label them illustrates that one can indeed speak of a 'planet of slums'.

However, for Mike Davis, who coined this phrase in a *New Left Review* article from 2004, today's 'planet of slums' is not merely an outcome of a natural demographic change or development, the 'population explosion' in the global South; it has rather political dimensions beyond demographic as well as beyond local, municipal or national decision-making processes. Written in response, or rather as an extension to UN-HABITAT's survey, Davis sketches in his later published book *The Planet of Slums* in the first instance the macro-political and macro-economic reasons for the exponential rise of slums. Unlike the authors of the UN-HABITAT report, Davis is far less concerned with empirical data; he also does not believe that there are any 'slums of hope' as the UN-HABITAT would make us believe. Instead he provides a much gloomier picture – one might even call it a dystopic future vision of a 'planet in despair'. For Davis, slums are first urban spaces of social exclusion populated by the planet's surplus population – redundant people who are relegated to a life without any hope and opportunity. Davis blames the gradual abandonment of the welfare state and the orchestrated enforcement of a neoliberal capitalist system for the exponential rise of this surplus population all over the world. More specifically, he blames the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) that have been imposed on developing countries by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) since the 1970s.¹² Davis explains the reasons for the 'mass production of slums' thus: '[R]apid urban growth in the context of structural adjustment, currency devaluation, and state retrenchment has been an inevitable recipe for the mass production of slums . . . Since 1970, slum growth everywhere in the South has outpaced urbanization *per se*' (2007: 17).

Similar to Davis, other notable sociologists also point to the expansion of 'global capitalism' to explain the existence of today's planet of slums. Manuel Castells, for example, speaks of a Fourth World emerging from a new 'geography of social exclusion', which, he thinks, 'is inseparable from the rise of informational, global capitalism' (1998: 165).¹³ In his *Wasted Lives: Modernity*

and *Its Outcasts*, Zygmunt Bauman claims that not only capitalism, but modernity itself is to blame, that is, the tendency of modern, strictly bureaucratised societies to create zones of exclusion, since they are based on the instrumental rationality of ordering strategies (on sorting and culling, including and excluding), hence constantly organising who is deemed ‘useful’ and who is not. Consequently, the outcome of such ordering processes is that surplus places such as slums emerge, in which modernity’s ‘outcasts’, superfluous to modern societies, are dumped like waste on waste disposal sites, or as Baumann puts it: ‘The production of “human waste” . . . is an inevitable outcome of modernization, and an inseparable accompaniment of modernity. It is an inescapable side-effect of order-building’ (2004: 5). In Bauman’s view slums are ultimately nothing more than dumping grounds for what in modern societies is considered as useless ‘human waste’.

Slavoj Žižek shares this view, since he believes that slum-dwellers are the “‘living dead” of global capitalism’, dwelling ‘in the twilight zone of slums’ (2008: 425). Nevertheless, unlike Bauman, Castells or Davis, Žižek believes that new forms of social awareness could emerge from the ‘global shantytowns’, not unlike the Marxist notion of a proletarian class-consciousness. For Žižek, slum-dwellers are, in this sense, potentially a new revolutionary ‘counter-class to the other newly emerging class, the so-called “symbolic class” (managers, journalists and PR people, academics, artists, and so on)’ (2008: 425). He argues further that while ‘slum-dwellers are literally a collection of those who are “part of no-part”, the “supernumerary” element of a society, excluded from the benefits of citizenship; the uprooted and the dispossessed, those who, in effect, “have nothing to lose but their chains”’, he also believes that slum-dwellers are ‘freed from all substantial ties; dwelling in a free space, outside state police regulation . . . they are “thrown” into a situation where they have to invent some mode of being-together, and simultaneously deprived of any support in traditional ways of life’ (2008: 424–5). In other words, slums are for Žižek anarchic or ‘free spaces’ – unframed, since they have been freed from all (historical, ideological/capitalist or bureaucratic) ties.

However, if these ‘free spaces’ (Žižek) are, for better or worse, a result of a ‘new geography of social exclusion’ (Castells), the question arises how to define these *spaces* more precisely? During the last three decades an increasing prominence is given to the category of space in the study of both culture and society, which is sometimes referred to as the ‘spatial turn’. This turn to examining notions of (geographic, topographic or urban) space was launched by geographers who were increasingly questioning that space is a neutral category and instead turned their attention to ‘how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology’, as Edward Soja

has famously put it (1989: 6). Hence, the major assumption of those recent studies in human (made) geography is that space is not a static, ideology-free, or neutral entity, but a dynamic, political and social one, continuously shaped and re-shaped by power interests or a specific historical dispositif.¹⁴ From this critical perspective, the ‘production’ of urban space is always linked to questions of political, juridical and economic power interests, struggle or contest, such as who has the right to own city space and who ought to shape, build or remediate it (citizens, politicians, investors, and so on).

Consequently, the spatial turn has facilitated new approaches to the study of urban space, of which the so-called Los Angeles School of Urbanism (to which Edward Soja and Mike Davis are often ascribed) is one of the most important representative, but also scholars like Doreen Massey, John Tomlinson or Marc Augé. When thinking the category of space in more neutral terms, slums could at first be described as places which are inextricably connected to their respective urban space as well as to the city’s *hinterland*, since, as Doreen Massey contends in more general terms, ‘the identity of a place does not derive from some internalized history. It derives, in large part, precisely from the specificity of its interactions with “the outside”’ (2003:169). In keeping with Massey’s argument, the ‘identity’ of a specific slum derives then not from some internalised history, but from interactions with the rest of a city (which provides either adequate or inadequate access to job markets, infrastructure, cultural activities, etc.) or the city region’s *hinterland* (through the constant influx of mostly rural migrants). Considering today’s ubiquitous accessibility to television, computers and mobile communication devices, as well as their influence on popular culture, particularly on musical trends (from samba and reggae to hip hop), one can equally argue that slum-dwellers do participate in an interaction with the global outside. This contradicts the notion that slums are the world’s ‘dumping grounds’ and that their inhabitants are completely excluded from the world at large. As the cultural sociologist John Tomlinson has argued in his *Globalization and Culture* (1999), slum-dwellers might be considered as the ‘losers of globalisation’ in all sorts of ways, but that does not mean that they are excluded from its effects.¹⁵

Tomlinson’s and Massey’s conceptions of (marginal) places and localities contradict a specific, very common perception of slums: that they are places that are in one way or another more isolated, excluded or even (ideologically) ‘freer’ than other places. Yet, even though one should perceive each slum as a particular kind of place that is shaped by the ‘specificity of its interactions with the outside’, there have frequently been attempts to apply space types or concepts in order to frame slums and their inhabitants in rather essentialising ways. None of these, in my opinion, can be used without contradiction: for example that slums are perceived as being radically ‘other spaces’ or

heterotopoi – an idea derived from one of Michel Foucault’s (1986) spatial concepts – that function according to their own rules, such as prisons; or as dystopic places inhabited by ‘non-citizens’ or *homo sacer*, as derived from Giorgio Agamben’s (1998) re-interpretation of a figure of ancient Roman law, according to which slum-dwellers could be defined as social outcasts who live ‘bare’, animal-like lives; as supermodern ‘non-places’, as defined by Marc Augé (1995), which are de-humanised, transitory places of passage and constant change; or simply as highly ‘contested urban spaces’ that are subjected to continuous capitalist power struggles over the purchase of ever more precious urban space.

From a less dystopian point of view, the two latter concepts might qualify as the most sensible categories. Slums might indeed be perceived as elusive urban ‘non-places’, since they are constantly transforming; and they can be regarded as highly contested urban spaces because they usually rise in growing or economically thriving cities in which space becomes increasingly scarce. Additionally, slums are continuously framed and unframed (or labelled and mislabelled) by outside observers, shaped and re-shaped through their ‘specific interactions with the outside’ (Massey), destroyed by local authorities in search for vacant territories of urban planning schemes, and built up again by ever increasing masses of cityward migrating rural populations or other migrants. Yet, on the other hand, not each and every slum is such a contested urban space, since many of them are simply neglected by their local governments, urban planners and NGOs alike. Besides, slums can be located at the peripheries or in the middle of cities, they can vary in topographic shape and form, have long histories or short time spans of existence, be inhabited by a homogenous group of a single marginalised ethnicity or by a heterogeneous multitude of many different ethnic groups. In some cases, peaceful communal bonds are formed in slums, but in others there can also be ethnic unrest, religiously motivated hatred or drug-gang related turf wars.

In short, my argument is that essentialising categories are hardly applicable to frame the ‘planet of slums’ in a generalising way, or as the sociologist Loïc Wacquant has put it so fittingly:

[U]rban marginality is not everywhere woven of the same cloth, and, all things considered, there is nothing surprising in that. The *generic mechanisms* that produce it, like the *specific forms* it assumes, become fully intelligible once one takes caution to embed them in the historical matrix of class, state and space characteristic of each society at a given epoch. It follows that we must develop more complex and more differentiated pictures of the ‘wretched of the city’ if we wish accurately to capture their social predicament and elucidate their collective fate in different national contexts. (2008: 1–2)

With Wacquant one can therefore argue that instead of ‘framing’ slums in an essentialising way, ‘we must develop more complex and more differentiated pictures’. Consequently, and with regard to the topic of this book, one also has to develop more complex and differentiated notions of how slums were ‘pictured’ (or framed) in world cinema. Moreover, it is instructive to first discuss the ways in which scholars approached a very close topic, that of the relationship of the cinema to cities, since this can lead us to the question of how one can approach cinema’s relationship to slums.

CINEMATIC (MEGA)CITIES

In his essay ‘Cities, Real and Imagined’ (2001) Geoffrey Nowell-Smith claims that throughout film history the ‘city film’ emerged as a distinct genre. Having its early predecessors in iconic films like Dziga Vertov’s ‘city symphony’ *The Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), *Metropolis* (Lang 1927) or *Sunrise* (Murnau 1927), cityscapes have later not only become a preferred setting for classical Hollywood film noir and gangster films, but also a frequent location of Italian neorealist films in the immediate postwar era (see Chapter 4). Nowell-Smith distinguishes thereby between two types which evolved during the first half of the twentieth century: films that are entirely shot on location and therefore display a physical relation to a concrete, nameable and identifiable city, very often named in the title as, for example, in films like *Roma, città aperta* (Rome, *Open City*; Rossellini 1945); the other type consists of films that recreate a cityscape in a studio as a setting, often providing a rather undifferentiated urban space as décor, which has often been the case in Hollywood’s classical film noir, but also, for instance in Lang’s groundbreaking *Metropolis*. Yet, this real/imagined binary is a rather problematic one, since films that are supposedly set in a real, identifiable city can, for various reasons, contain locations that aren’t part of that particular city at all (e.g. the ‘city symphony’ *The Man With a Movie Camera*, which is shot in three different Russian cities to create a rather virtual urban space on screen). On the other hand, in a film like *Gangs of New York* (Scorsese 2002), a historically concrete urban space, New York’s Five Points neighbourhood of the 1860s, is entirely recreated in a studio as a set, and that is, to confuse matters further, in Rome’s famous studio *Cinecittà* – which is literally translated from Italian as ‘cinema city’.

Cities can have a more complex relation to cinema, however, because they are a spatial form of social organisation, while cinema is ‘a peculiarly spatial form of culture’ (Shiel 2001: 5). Some scholars have therefore argued that since films can shape images of particular cities, one ought to conceptualise the mutual interdependencies between cinema and cities, rather than just the genre of the ‘city film’ as such. For this reason, these scholars have argued that

one ought to ask how cities were shaped by cinematic imagery and *vice versa*, in what ways urban modes of experience contributed not only to the emergence of specific genres like the ‘city film’, but to cinema as a cultural form in general. This scholarly discourse has sometimes been labelled the ‘cinema/city nexus’ and more often as the ‘cinematic city’ – a phrase coined by the cultural geographer David B. Clarke. Indeed, with the spatial turn that was inaugurated by cultural geographers like Clarke, questions regarding space in cinema have more and more frequently been addressed. While some film scholars have recently approached the representation of landscapes, villages or rural worlds on screen, the most frequently studied space in film scholarly debates of the last two decades is, without any doubt, the urban one. Accordingly, a wide range of monographs and volumes have dealt with what Thomas Elsaesser has described as the ‘cinematic city paradigm’ (2008: 92).¹⁶ Yet this rising interest in studying the cinematic city was not a genuinely film scholarly debate. The cinematic city was, more often than not, approached by urbanists, cultural geographers, architecture scholars, sociologists and film scholars alike. It has thus become a truly interdisciplinary academic endeavour.¹⁷

The origins of this interdisciplinary effort can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century and, in particular, to theories on the relationship between urban modernity and the cinema as modernity’s most significant cultural expression. More substantially, it can be traced back to the influential writings of Walter Benjamin that should, for this reason, be summarised briefly. For Benjamin, cinema was able to not only depict but also literally express aspects of ‘urbanism as a mode of life’ (Louis Wirth), that is, an urban experience of being continuously exposed to disjointed sensory stimuli. He regarded this peculiar ‘experience’ of modern life as an experience (*Erlebnis*) that is immediately sensed or lived, rather than as a distanced kind of experience (in the sense of *Erfahrung*) that presupposes rational, cool observation.¹⁸ Benjamin stresses therefore the mutual relations between the experience of modernity in the city (Benjamin foregrounds the *Erlebnis* of constant stress, trauma and especially ‘shock’ in city traffic) and the viewing experience, the *Erlebnis* without *Erfahrung*, in cinema. Since modern city life creates a daily assault on the human sensory apparatus, modern cultural forms like cinema translate these – particularly through montage – into sensory cinematic viewing *Erlebnisse* and are so much more effective in ‘representing’ them than traditional forms of art, such as painting or literature.¹⁹ In other words, for Benjamin cinema was able to register and convey the disjointed shock *Erlebnisse* of urban life. What Benjamin emphasised was that ‘cultural transformations register shifts in sense perception’, as David B. Clarke put it (1997: 2). Consequently, for Benjamin ‘the spectacle of the cinema both drew upon and contributed to the increased pace of modern city life, whilst also helping to normalize the frantic, disadjusted rhythms of the city’ (Clarke 1997: 3).

It was Clarke who rediscovered Benjamin's discourse on the cinema/city nexus in the late 1990s. In his introduction to the inaugurating volume of the now postmodern cinema/city discourse, *The Cinematic City*, Clarke outlines the mutual interdependences between cinematic representations and the spatial geographies of cities, when he claims that 'the city has undeniably been shaped by the cinematic form, just as cinema owes much of its nature to the historical development of the city' (1997: 2). Clarke's thesis is essentially inspired by Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum, which describes how in capitalist societies social (but also material, architectural or spatial) realities increasingly become indistinguishable from their mediated representations, or as Baudrillard himself has formulated it with regard to American cities: 'An American city seems to have stepped right out of the movies. To grasp its secret, you should not, then, begin with the city and move inward toward the screen; you should begin with the screen and move outward toward the city' (1988: 56). Similar postmodern views on the interchangeability of the original and the copy – or cities and screens – are shared by a number of other scholars. Paul Virilio argues, for example, that 'since the beginning of the twentieth century (. . .) the screen abruptly became the city square, the crossroads of all media' (1991: 25). AlSayyad has a similar Baudrillardian assumption when he writes that 'the real city and the reel city reference each other simultaneously, in an act of mutual representation and definition' (2006: 15). And, on the birth of cinema, Guliana Bruno puts it thus: 'Film was a product of the era of the metropolis, expressing an urban viewpoint from the very origin of its history. The city is present as *mise en abyme*' (2008b: 14).

Such bold statements can perhaps be applied to a handful of Western 'cinematic cities', like Los Angeles, New York, London, Paris, Rome or Berlin – cities that have been *the* major centres of film culture and commerce throughout the twentieth century, and for this reason the subject of both, modern and postmodern urbanist theories (from Louis Wirth to Edward Soja). These pivotal cities were, beyond that, settings of numerous films that were products of the 'era of the metropolis' (Bruno), such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, or products of the 'era of the simulacrum' (Baudrillard), like Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). How then should we think about the relationship between non-Western cities and cinema, especially since some of them are about to become themselves the new centres of film culture and commerce in the twenty-first century? Andreas Huyssen, for example, argues that 'the major sites of cultural globalisation in the twenty-first century are the emerging megacities of what used to be called the Third World rather than the ever more musealized cities of Europe or the overanalyzed cities of New York (as modernist space) and Los Angeles (as postmodernist space)' (2008: 14). This is especially true if one considers that it is a city like Mumbai that today holds one of the largest entertainment economies in the world, distributing its

cultural products, especially films, not only to Western countries, but also to Eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America.

Nevertheless, 'non-Western cities remain inadequately debated in relation to film', as Ranjani Mazumdar claims. Even though 'the lack of work on the cinematic city may now change as theoretical engagement with the cinematic city grows, a deeper exploration of the uneven articulation of urban modernity across different cities of the world still remains to be done' (2007: xix, xxxi). Mazumdar furthermore contends that there are major differences between Western and South Asian, and by extension any other larger (mega)city of what used to be called the Third World and that is the ubiquitous presence of rural life forms. The acknowledgement of the 'rural other' is a crucial point in the history of what Mazumdar terms Bombay Cinema, what is more commonly known as Bollywood (see Chapter 9). Colin McArthur has in turn argued that 'there are few more useful structures than the historically far-reaching country/city opposition for understanding the way in which cities have been represented in film'; he furthermore outlines that the 'great historical debate about the relative virtues of the country and city would be replayed in the films of many European and non-European societies in the face of the inexorable drift of peasants into cities throughout the world' (1997: 40, 39). Yet, both Mazumdar and McArthur agree that the country-city opposition is rather useful for studying films of previous decades. Today there is instead a clearly identifiable shift towards a 'greater acknowledgement, even centrality, of urban space' (Mazumdar 2007: xx).

A similar argument has been advanced with regard to recent Latin American cinema, where Geoffrey Kantaris perceives a recent 'massive upsurge of urban cinema' (Kantaris 2002). Similar to Mazumdar, Kantaris interprets recent Latin American cinema as allegorical expressions of transformed urban experiences in rapidly expanding (mega)cities like Mexico City, São Paulo, or Buenos Aires, all of which are, he claims, increasingly shaped by the new 'geographies of social exclusion' (Castells). Turning to African cinema, Jonathan Haynes has observed that the Lagos-based Nollywood film industry – after Bollywood the second-largest in the world in terms of the number of films produced per year – is also shifting towards becoming a genuinely urban cinema. 'Many of the films have traditional village settings; some are set in the historical past; many are self-consciously "traditional." But most are set in Nigeria's cities, above all in Lagos, with its freeways and potholed streets, its apartment blocks and slums' (2000: 2). Generally speaking, one can say that the massive upsurge of urban cinema in Latin America, Asia and Africa corresponds with what Janice Perlman has observed as the two major transformations since the 1950s: the transformation from a rural to an urban world and the simultaneous shift from an urbanising North to an urbanising South.

RE- / PRESENTING SLUMS ON SCREEN

Consequently, the cinematic city discourse ought to be extended to non-Western cinematic (mega)cities. Yet, how should one approach slums – an urban space common to both Western and non-Western, as well as to modern and postmodern cities – as on-screen spaces? How can lived space be represented in the space of a shot? How can one define the relation between various settings in a sequence of shots? And, more generally, how can one approach ‘the mapping of lived environment on film’ (Shiel 2001: 5)? In fact, since cinema is a peculiarly spatial form of culture, the organisation of space on screen is pivotal on more than one level. For once, in cinema space is designed in an aesthetically encoded way through the specific use of cinematic techniques. Screen space is, in this sense, always a matter of what French critics termed *mise-en-scène* (‘putting into a scene’), that is a director’s decisions with regard to framing, such as shot scales and angles, but also with regard to shot lengths, the use of properties, the movement of actors in the frame or the positioning of the static or moving camera in relation to what is filmed, and so on. Understood in spatial terms, the purpose of *mise-en-scène* is to set out the spaces of the smallest narrative or structural unit of a film. Editing, on the other hand, fragments screen spaces into bits and pieces which spectators then recreate as a three-dimensional spaces in their minds. The perception of cinematic space consists thereby of a central contradiction, because spectators can perceive the flat surface of the screen image as a three-dimensional (depth of field) space. This characteristic is sometimes also described as the ‘illusionistic’ feature of the cinematic image – its ability to create an illusionistic *representation* (in the sense of likeness, copy or model) of the world. Yet, this is not necessarily always the case, since certain types of cinemas can also make viewers aware of the fact that the image on screen is merely a two-dimensional flat surface, which is also sometimes defined as anti-illusionistic or *presentational* screen space.

Through introducing the distinction between *presentation* and *representation*, some film and media scholars pointed to the crucial difference between showing and telling a story – referring to the Aristotelian distinction between *mimesis* (showing) and *diegesis* (telling) – accentuating the fact that showing is to telling what presentation is to representation. This classical distinction was not only employed by film scholars but also by narratologists and performance scholars to illustrate how stories can either be told or shown. As for cinema, one can say that a presentational mode is often evident in films that do not necessarily ‘tell a story’. In such ‘non-diegetic’ forms of cinema the process of mediation acquires the quality of a more present, interactive or performative exchange between the screen and its spectators, rather than an illusionistic quality in which on-screen images represent (in the sense of ‘stand for’) ‘either the “real” world of objects, people or events, or . . . imaginary worlds

of fictional objects, people and events', as Stuart Hall famously put it (1997: 17). In other words, the presentational mode creates a 'reality' of the present act of viewing, rather than standing for another 'reality' that has existed in the past and/or at some other place. Consequently, this distinction implies a fundamental difference in the way spectators are addressed, which also alters the spatial (as well as temporal) coordinates on screen. If spectators are addressed as physically present (in the presentational mode), on-screen space acquires a more interactive quality since spectators are asked to participate in its construction during the act of viewing. If spectators are not directly addressed and assumed to be physically absent (in the representational mode), spatial coordinates acquire a rather illusionistic quality of coherence and homogeneity, since the viewer enters into the illusionistic world of another space and time in which fictional characters pretend that no one is watching.

In keeping at first with this distinction, slum-screen relations can either be a matter of *representations* (slums as illusionistic/diegetic on-screen spaces) or of *presentations* (slums as non-illusionistic/non-diegetic on-screen spaces). Accordingly, one could establish a 'typology of slum films' to distinguish between a number of types, which I would like to illustrate with this book's examples:

1. Some examples discussed in this book aim at presenting a particular slum in a non-illusionistic way, such as New York's Five Points in *How The Other Half Lives*, London's Stepney in *Housing Problems*, or Abidjan's Treichville in *Moi, un noir*. In these cases the living, social or environmental conditions in the slums are the major focus of attention.
2. Other examples are explicitly representational in the sense that a specific slum is one of the main settings of a diegetic world. Here spectators are often asked to identify with the (spatial, cognitive or emotional) perspective of a main character, such as with Jamal in *Slumdog Millionaire*, Rocket in *Cidade de Deus*, Pedro in *Los Olvidados* or Perhan in *Dom za vešanje*. Often these types of films provide, to a greater or lesser degree, a subjectivisation of diegetic space, because spectators enter the respective fictional world through a character's subjective point of view.
3. In the third type, films both present a particular slum as the film's *true* main subject – such as Rio de Janeiro's Cidade de Deus in *Cidade de Deus*, Abidjan's Treichville in *Moi, un noir*, Lisbon's Fontainhas in *The Fontainhas Trilogy* or Manila's Quiapo in *Tirador* (Mendoza 2007) – while also and simultaneously appearing to be the setting of a diegetic (or semi-diegetic) world. These types of films weave multiple rather than singular stories and/or characters into their plots, which suggest that their primary objective is to represent the place, or a cross-section of the community itself.

4. The last type would, on the surface, not qualify to be included in this book at all since it consists of films in which the slum is largely absent (or off-screen), because it was for example demolished and its residents re-settled or expelled. But even though the slum in these films is neither presented nor represented visually, it is still 'present' as a structuring absence, as an off-screen space that impacts on the character's current situations, manners and/or psyche, as in *De Certa Manera* or the last part of the trilogy on Fontainhas, *Juventude em Marcha*.

Often however, binary distinctions between a representational and a presentational logic – and by extension, between on- and off-screen spaces, subjectively imagined or objectively 'out there' – are rather problematic and difficult to maintain. In other words, even though the distinction between representation and presentation is of importance for this study, I would rather suggest to approach the 're-/presentation' of slums on screen neither in an essentialising way (in the sense of providing an *a priori* typology of the type outlined above), nor by applying a model that assumes either/or binarisms such as diegetic versus non-diegetic, illusionistic versus non-illusionistic, representational versus presentational.

How then to approach the representation of slums on screen throughout history and across geographical space without applying such an *a priori* typology and binary distinctions? Lúcia Nagib has proposed that '[c]ontextual knowledge of films has already produced a great number of original theoretical approaches and is certainly the best way of escaping the traps of binarisms' (2006: 36). In keeping with this argument, the best way to 'escape the traps of binarisms' is to study the chosen examples individually as well as through their contexts, their 'specific interactions with the outside' (to borrow the expression used by Massey) or to quote Wacquant once again: '[O]nce one takes caution to embed them in the historical matrix of class, state and space characteristic of each society at a given epoch', one can 'develop more complex and more differentiated pictures of the "wretched of the city"' (2008: 1–2). As I have argued in the Introduction, we can similarly develop 'more complex and more differentiated pictures' of 'world cinema's planet of slums' by looking at world cinema from a polycentric perspective, particularly by considering its complex push-pull relationships between the example and the context, the specific and the general, the local and the global. However, before doing so, the final section of this introductory chapter will furthermore discuss how such a novel, polycentric notion of 'world cinema' needs to be understood.

 WORLD CINEMA

Jyostna Kapur and Keith Wagner have argued that cinema has always been a 'localized expression of a globalized integration; a process that has been well under way since the birth of cinema but is now more fully radicalized' (2011: 6). Yet, the fact that cinema has always been a global (rather than exclusively Western) phenomenon has often been neglected in many film studies and history textbooks. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson have therefore maintained that countries outside North America and Western Europe have wrongfully been ignored by film historians and add figures to prove this point: already in the mid-1950s, only about thirty-five percent of the 2,800 feature films that were produced across the world came from the United States and Western Europe; the rest came from Japan, the Soviet Union, Mexico, India, Egypt and from other less developed countries. They argue that such 'a stunning growth in film production in the developing countries is one of the major events in film history' (2009: 358). Considering that from the mid-1950s onwards film production in the global South gradually begins to outnumber that in the North – mirroring, of course, the other major historical event: the shift from an urbanising North to an urbanising South – Bordwell and Thompson imply that film scholars should now re-think film history with regard to the processes of globalisation. Yet, how have film scholars narrated the history of film, and by extension, the history of world cinema, until recently and without considering the dynamics of globalisation?

One could summarise the narratives of older models according to a scheme that was proposed by Thomas Elsaesser. As he argues in his essay 'The New Film History as Media Archeology' (2004), canonical film histories often revolved around either polarising, alternating or, most frequently, evolutionary narratives, which used either chronological-organic (childhood, maturity, decline and rebirth) or chronological-teleological (from . . . to) models or metaphors to narrate a thoroughly linear evolution of film.²⁰ As tempting as these narratives might have been, they were also deeply flawed and, as Elsaesser suggests, full of contradictions or arbitrary constructions. Inspired by the work of Michel Foucault, film historians in the late 1970s who had, for the first time, gained access to film archives so that they could verify empirically the early 'evolution' of cinema as it was recounted in previous accounts, perceived an increased need to uncover these contradictions or, in other words, to deconstruct the assumptions and paradigms of previous models. Ever since then, scholars who have been ascribed to the so-called 'New Film History' school have continuously re-written 'old film history'.²¹ Based particularly on the study of early cinema, they discovered non-teleological rather than linear developments in film history, 'encouraging us to think of film history generally as a series of parallel (or "parallax") histories, organized around a number of

shifting parameters which tend to repeat themselves periodically' (Elsaesser 2004: 84).

An increasing number of scholars also question whether film history ought to be approached from a medium-specific perspective at all, or whether one needs to conceptualise its historical development rather in terms of 'intermediality', that is, in relation to other media. From such an 'intermedial' perspective, cinema has always interacted, referred to, hybridised or linked with other media and arts such as painting, photography, literature, theatre or, more recently, with TV, the internet or computer games.²² More recent approaches to film history have therefore also been inspired by what some scholars term an 'archeological approach' to media history – to which Elsaesser's essay title, 'The New Film History as Media Archeology', already points. Erkki Huhtamo is the most well-known representative of this 'media archeological approach'. According to him, media archeologists study not singular, but mutually inter-related media practices, thereby revealing that specific media were always part of an intertwined network of various media practices.²³ Accordingly, just like for the 'New Film History' school, for media archeologists there is no unilinear teleological stream towards an abstract point in the future, but rather a multiplicity of co-existing (or parallel) streams, that 'tend to repeat themselves periodically' (Elsaesser), or as Huhtamo argues, media archeology is 'a way of studying recurring cyclical phenomena that (re)appear and disappear and reappear over and over again in media history and somehow seem to transcend specific historical contexts' (1997: 222).

Huhtamo proposes a hybrid model that incorporates previously ignored media practices, ways of viewing or technological devices to outline that they are not long extinct, but 'recurring cyclical phenomena that (re)appear and disappear and reappear over and over again'. Hence, for him, the supposed first-time appearance of a 'new' media practice is therefore usually a re-appearance (and usually a modification) of an 'old' one, which ultimately leads to acknowledging that there are no beginnings, no supposed 'births' and 'rebirths', no point of origin – only *remediations*, to resort to Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's terminology. In a media historical model similar to Huhtamo's, Bolter and Grusin argue that 'remediation' is 'the representation of one medium in another' (2000: 45). They argue that it is also a logic through which new media refashion, improve or reform old media (e.g. video games remediate cinema; cinema remediates novels, photography and theatre; photography remediates paintings etc.), and old media refashion themselves (or reform themselves) to respond to the challenges of new media (cinema remediates the interactive logic of new media such as video games, or the internet etc.). Considering the study of audiovisual media, this means that their histories are less to be conceptualised within (medium-specific) genealogical family trees, but rather in terms of a 'genealogy of affiliations'

(Bolter and Grusin 2000: 55), or what Elsaesser calls ‘family relations’ – ‘belonging together, but neither causally or teleologically related to each other’ (2004: 93).

Another dominant model, to which Elsaesser, Huhtamo, Bolter and Grusin do not refer, was to present separate family trees or teleological narratives of *national* film traditions only. With the recent ‘transnational turn’ in film studies, however, such national frameworks have increasingly been put into question. Yet, with the questioning of the notion of ‘national cinema’ also came a questioning of previous notions of ‘world cinema’, since it was previously used as an umbrella term to subsume different national or regional cinemas. This was a strategy that mapped the heterogeneous world of cinema according to national or regional film ‘traditions’, often practised in film studies overviews and introductions.²⁴ Not coincidentally, the term ‘world cinema’ has therefore been at the centre of attempts to globalise film studies, as the recent volumes *Remapping World Cinema* (Dennison and Lim 2006), *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives* (Đurovičová and Newman 2011) or *Theorizing World Cinema* (Nagib, Perriam, and Dudrah 2012) testify. In a programmatic essay, Dudley Andrew has proposed to ‘re-map’ the traditional world cinema maps of previous textbooks, suggesting a new ‘Atlas of World Cinema’. For Andrew, previous world cinema maps ‘have by and large been genealogical trees, one tree per country’, but ‘[t]heir elaborate root and branch structures are seldom shown as intermingled’ (2006: 21). Andrew’s ‘atlas of world cinema’ includes therefore multiple types of maps that acknowledge the ‘intermingling’ of film cultures on various levels and on a transnational scale.

The overall aim of these recent ‘world cinema re-mappings’ is, however, to think not only beyond national traditions in terms of ‘transnational intermingling’, ‘hybridisation’ or ‘global cultural flows’, but also in terms of de-centring the traditional Hollywood or Eurocentric perspectives in film studies. This is in the first instance because the term ‘world cinema’ has often been used to differentiate between Hollywood and ‘other cinemas’ (minor, subaltern or peripheral ones), in other words, between Hollywood and ‘the rest of the world’. Reminiscent of what Elsaesser described as the norm/deviancy model, the umbrella term ‘world cinema’ has often been used in a negative way, either to frame ‘alternative cinemas’ of deviation or resistance (to the mainstream) or simply to designate what is ‘non-Hollywood’ as, for example, Lúcia Nagib recounts in her programmatic essay ‘Towards a positive definition of World Cinema’ (2006). Accordingly, some scholars have proposed that film studies needs to ‘de-westernise’ itself in order to question its traditional Hollywood- and Eurocentric bias. In their introduction to *De-Westernizing Film Studies* Saer Maty Bâ and Will Higbee propose therefore to re-think how ‘local, national, and regional film cultures “connect” globally, seeking polycentric, multi-directional, non-essentialized alternatives to Eurocentric theoretic-

cal and historical perspectives found in film as both an artistic medium and an academic field of study' (2012: 1). Among other things, such a de-centring, de-essentialising and de-westernising of film studies implies that we must, as Bâ and Higbee suggest, think beyond binary explanatory models that assume unidirectional impositions of dominant modes of representation – classical Hollywood and/or European art cinema – onto supposedly 'peripheral' cinemas. Instead, one needs to acknowledge that world cinema is less accurately described with a centre/periphery model, but rather as a de-centred (or complex) phenomenon.

From such a de-westernised perspective, one in which there are no convenient centre/periphery models to apply, one could argue that cinema was from its beginning not simply a unidirectionally globalised phenomenon (from the centre to the periphery) but, rather, a *polycentric* one. As already mentioned, the notion of polycentrism was introduced to the study of film and media culture by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam in their *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* – a book that particularly focuses on cinema in the so-called 'Third World' and which is, for many world cinema scholars, an inaugurating key text.²⁵ Unlike the traditional centre-versus-periphery vision, for Shohat and Stam a polycentric vision implies that 'the world has many dynamic cultural locations, many possible vantage points' (1994: 48) and not a finite list of centres of power. If one applies Shohat and Stam's insight to describe the dynamics of transnational exchange in world cinema, one could say that world cinema is a genuinely 'polycentric phenomenon with peaks of creation in different places and periods' (Nagib, Perriam, and Dudrah 2012: xxii). Such 'peaks of creation' can manifest themselves in national 'new waves' that literally contaminate new waves elsewhere and so create unexpected dialogues between distant film cultures.

However, such a polycentric vision also implies that transnational connections emanate from many dynamic *locations* or *places*, which relates to what Kapur and Wagner suggest, that cinema has always been a globalised medium of 'localized expressions'. In this sense, we can think of cinema as a medium that has always expressed, to a greater or lesser degree, the culturally specific peculiarities of a place and its people, even though it was at the same time also always part of a global process. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, for example, contends that although the term 'national cinema' is highly questionable, the 'placing of cinemas in geographic locations respects certain basic facts about how cinema operates. Cinemas are not footloose. Films tend to be set and shot in particular countries . . . They also tend . . . to construct a semantic universe which makes their place of origin a central point of reference' (Nowell-Smith 2008: 112). Andrew has formulated a similar view towards the end of his 'An Atlas of World Cinema':

The study of world cinema should let us *know the territory differently*, whatever territory it is that the film comes from or concerns. Today, amidst digital confections tempting filmmakers and audiences to escape to the land of the virtual, world cinema brings us back precisely to Earth, on which many worlds are lived and perceived concurrently. A certain cinema continues to remind us of the intricate rapport, both tactile and relational, that makes up ‘Life on Earth’ . . . (2006: 28)

For Andrew, certain cinemas ‘do reach toward and respond to an international gaze’ (2006: 28), but can also ‘let us know *the territory differently*’. This is what Andrew describes as the ‘perpetual push-pull between local conditions and broader cosmos’ (2006: 26) – akin to what in globalisation studies is known as *glocalisation*.²⁶ Such a dynamic view of ‘certain cinemas’ that emerge in the perpetual push-pull between the local and the global implies the necessity to study both transnational film cultural connections as well as their locally specific contexts.

To use the maritime and riverine metaphors used in both globalisation and film studies, global ‘waves’, ‘flows’, ‘streams’, or ‘currents’ can travel across national borders, but in that process always become a matter of a ‘localised expression’; in other words, filmmakers are often localising, translating or modifying these currents.²⁷ Such maritime and riverine metaphors are especially applicable when it comes to the two most crucial modes of representing slums in world cinema, which are simultaneously also two of its most persistent transnational ‘currents’ – and which Andrew would define as those ‘certain cinemas’ that bring ‘us back precisely to Earth’: the complex and winding currents of documentary and realist modes of cinematic representation. These globalising modes are historically not only closely related – in the sense that they repeatedly coalesce into or fork from one other, like river currents – but they can also be considered as templates that served a variety of filmmakers across the world to adopt and modify their formal elements into locally specific ways of expression.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has outlined the *raison d’être* behind the book’s polycentric approach, major arguments and aims as presented in the Introduction. It was thereby merging relevant debates from the social sciences (particularly from urban and globalisation studies), cultural, media and film studies, especially with regard to this book’s key terms of debate: the ‘planet of slums’, the ‘cinematic city’, the issue of ‘representation’ and the notion of ‘world cinema’. As this chapter has shown, slums and their inhabitants have been

prone to stereotypical perceptions, but have also been continuously framed and unframed (or labelled and mislabelled) by sociologists. More recent sociological accounts, however, try to find less generalising notions to define the diversity of slums, but remain nevertheless critical when explaining the more recent rise of a 'planet of slums' within the framework of globalisation. These principles – avoiding generalisations and considering the historical dynamics of globalisation – are also useful, I argue, when approaching 'world cinema's planet of slums'. For once, the relation between off-screen space (lived or social) and on-screen space (re-/presentational or cinematic) is too complex and varied to be defined in essentialising ways or via binary distinctions. Secondly, I argue, that a polycentric approach to analysing representative examples and their interactions with global currents and historical cycles of documentary forms and realist styles in world cinema is one way of avoiding the use of *a priori* binarisms and essentialisations. For this reason a critical re-evaluation of the notion of 'world cinema' as a both geographical *and* historical phenomenon is an unavoidable prerequisite for this study. As I have outlined above, I suggest we regard 'world cinema' through the prism of recent scholarship as 1) a polycentric phenomenon, that was 2) continuously (re-)shaped through interactions with other media as well as by 3) the cyclical recurrences, adaptations and creolisations of a variety of documentary and realist currents in local contexts. To conclude, when it comes to 'world cinema's planet of slums', it is most useful to combine close readings with contextualisation, that is, to trace the complex and winding currents of documentary and realist modes of representation across time and space *with* representative examples.

NOTES

1. For an overview of the numerous contacts between 'Sociology and Film' cf. Tudor 2000.
2. I am referring here to a book title: *Sociology through the Projector* (Diken and Bagge-Laustsen 2007).
3. The UN-HABITAT has estimated that there were 924 million slum-dwellers in 2001 (2003: vi).
4. AlSayyad (2004) borrows and re-writes the notion of 'Urbanism as a Mode of Life' that was coined by one of the preeminent representatives of the classical Chicago School of Urban Sociology, Louis Wirth (1938).
5. Besides their research interest in 'urbanism as a mode of life', the Chicago School was also interested in the effects of cityward migration. They proposed a hierarchical centre-periphery model according to which recently urbanised migrants undergo a transformative behavioural cycle: from invasion (of a city's periphery), survival, assimilation, and adaptation to cooperation (with the city's established populations). According to AlSayyad, *Man's Struggle For Shelter in an Urbanizing World* (Abrams 1964), one of the first books that deals with Third World cities, provides a good example of how the assumptions of the Chicago School were indiscriminately applied to explain why 'new

- urban migrants often failed to complete the transformative cycle and hence, for a variety of structural reasons, became squatters' (AlSayyad 2004: 9).
6. See UN-HABITAT 2003: 12.
 7. The journalist Doug Sanders (2010) has used the term 'arrival city' in his book of the same title in a similar way, namely to counter negative perceptions about slums as 'final destinations' of despair.
 8. 'slum', def. 2a, *OED* (*OED* refers in the following to the Oxford English Dictionary Online).
 9. Cf. UN-HABITAT 2003: xxxi.
 10. Perlman recounts that in 1950 only three out of the ten largest cities were located in the global South (Shanghai, Buenos Aires and Calcutta), but by 1990 only three were located in the global North, that is, Tokyo, Los Angeles and New York (2010: 45).
 11. A wide-ranging, 'global' inventory of terms is presented in UN-HABITAT 2003: 9–10. Accordingly, the term 'slum', as used by the UN-HABITAT, ought to be understood as an umbrella term, which describes overcrowded squatter settlements located in urban areas that lack basic facilities and infrastructure all over the world. I use this very notion of the term 'slum' as an umbrella term throughout this book.
 12. SAPs are economic policies introduced by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in which receiving loans or obtaining lower interest rates on already existing loans is only granted under certain conditions (sometimes also called the 'Washington Consensus'). Only if the respective country implements free market policies, for instance through the reduction of trade barriers and the deregulation of its economy, is it allowed to receive loans. This policy has been criticised more recently not only by Keynesian economists but, most prominently perhaps, by de Soto (2000) and Stiglitz (2002).
 13. Castells predominantly uses the term 'network societies' to emphasise how crucial information and communication technologies have become today. In the chapter 'The Rise of the Fourth World: Informational Capitalism, Poverty, and Social Exclusion' (1998: 69–170) Castells explains how the rise of the information age in the global North led to mass pauperisation and an increasing number of socially excluded people elsewhere.
 14. The spatial turn has its origins in Marxist thought on the ideological 'production of space' (Henri Lefebvre), but also in Michel Foucault's analysis of inscriptions of power relations and disciplinary control into institutional spaces such as prisons, hospitals or schools. According to Foucault, a 'dispositif' essentially regulates knowledge structures (discourses), as well as their materialisation (for instance in the form of architecture), the said as well as the unsaid, thus maintaining and legitimising existing power relations.
 15. Tomlinson puts it as follows: '[E]ven those marginalised groups for whom 'locality is destiny' experience a transformed locality into which the wider world intrudes more and more. They may in all sorts of ways be the 'losers' of globalisation, but this does not mean that they are excluded from its effects, that they are consigned to cultural backwaters out of the mainstream of global modernity.' (1999: 133).
 16. To list some examples, some of which I will return to throughout this book: a historical perspective on the representation of specific urban spaces in cinema is provided with regard to Italian cities by Bruno (2008a) and Shiel (2006), with regard to Indian cities by Mazumdar (2007) and Kaarsholm (2007) and with regard to American cities by Massood (2003). Others either include examples of cities from all over the world or theorise the intersections between cinema and urban space by including levels of production, distribution and exhibition, e.g. in Webber and Wilson (2008) or AlSayyad (2006).
 17. Perhaps the most notable example for a non-film scholarly approach to this

- interdisciplinary ‘meeting place’ is Nezar AlSayyad’s *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern from Reel to Real*. AlSayyad studies ‘the cinematic city through the lens of urbanisation and the tropes of rising urbanity’ and provides, as he contends, a ‘cinematic epistemology of the city’, an attempt to ‘make the urban a fundamental part of cinematic discourse and to raise film to its proper status as an analytical tool of urban discourse’ (2006: 1, 4).
18. In the German language there are two terms to describe an ‘experience’, either in terms of an *Erlebnis* or an *Erfahrung*. For a discussion of this distinction with regard to Benjamin and cinema cf. Elsaesser 2009b.
 19. This notion is best expressed in an oft-quoted passage from Benjamin’s seminal essay ‘The Work of Art in Times of Technological Reproduction’, where he described ‘the shock effect of film’, which corresponds ‘to profound changes in the apparatus of apperception – changes that are experienced on the scale of private existence by each passerby in big-city traffic . . .’ (2008: 53).
 20. To summarise these narrative models: 1) the polarising narrative has a norm/deviancy explanatory framework. In these accounts classical Hollywood cinema is the norm and all other cinematic styles (neorealism, avant-garde, European art cinema, Third Cinema, documentary) are deviants from this norm. 2) The alternating narrative describes film history in terms of a struggle or an alternating pendulum swing between, to use one example, (outdoor, location-shot) realism and (indoor, studio-shot) illusionism. The most predominant narrative that film historians applied was, according to Elsaesser, 3) an evolutionary or teleological one, in which film progresses towards a predetermined future *telos*, relying thereby on an ontological definition of the medium (as illusionist, realist etc.).
 21. New Film History initially focused on revising canonical histories of early cinema – the phase roughly from the mid-1890s to World War I. Tom Gunning’s seminal essay ‘The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde’ (1990) criticised the dominant paradigm in film theory that defined the ‘essence’ of cinema as a (representational, illusionist) storytelling medium, arguing instead that early film practices (such as the ‘cinema of attractions’) should not be considered as immature and long extinct, but as a constantly re-appearing practice in its own right.
 22. While the term ‘intermedia’ was coined already in the 1960s by the artists Dick Higgins, the academic study of ‘intermediality’ developed particularly in German literary departments in the 1990s. It was initially thought of as an extension to Julia Kristeva’s well-known concept of intertextuality to study the relations between and the hybridisations of different media.
 23. With regard to film that is for instance its multifaceted links to the history of projection, to other forms of (popular) culture besides the novel or theatre, or to other audio/visual practices besides photography.
 24. Examples of such traditionally organised textbooks on world cinema are for instance *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (Nowell-Smith 1996), *Traditions in World Cinema* (Badley, Palmer and Schneider 2006) or *Contemporary World Cinema: Europe, the Middle East, East Asia and South Asia* (Chaudhuri 2006).
 25. Cf. Nagib, Perriam, and Dudrah 2012: xxii; Dennison and Lim 2006: 6.
 26. The term ‘glocalisation’ originated in the field of marketing, yet, as Ulfried Reichardt contends, it is nevertheless a useful term to describe the transnational transfer of cultural forms, since globalisation and the locally specific do not necessarily exclude one another. Cultural developments, forms or patterns, which spread globally are, as Reichardt maintains, usually adjusted to a local context and are thereby selectively re-interpreted. In

- other words, glocalisation describes how cultural forms travel globally and become altered and modified when they meet locally specific circumstances (cf. Reichardt 2010: 57; 107).
27. Apart from the frequently used maritime metaphor of the 'wave' to describe newly emerging film movements that 'splash over' national borders (cf. Nowell-Smith 2013), Bazin has used a riverine metaphor to explain 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema' (2005b: 31). Appadurai (1996) has, on the other hand, described how processes of globalisation create 'global cultural flows' of migrants, technologies, money, ideas and media. Likewise, Baumann (2000) has argued that globalisation produces a 'liquid modernity', in which traditional (solid) certainties vanish, which forces individuals to adjust to more fluid concepts of identity.

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PART ONE

Global Currents

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Sensational Remediations

By the end of the [nineteenth] century the slum – tied to a panoply of issues (jobs, crime, disease, race, social justice) – had become a topic of high visibility. This development coincided with the birth of movies . . .

Douglas Muzzio and Thomas Halper

A photograph depicts a moment in a narrow back alley. A series of figures stare back at the camera. One bearded man carries a thick metal pole, ready to use it, it seems. Another man, much younger and closer to the camera, is trying to look as laid-back as possible but still can not conceal his strain. Another young man, perched on the railings of a staircase further in the background, smokes a cigarette and looks more suspiciously at the camera and his operator. They appear to be guarding the secrets of this alley in which eleven (or are there twelve?) more people are looking straight at the photographer. Are they posing for him? Or did they just happen to be in the alley when the photographer decided to take a picture there, curious, perhaps, to see the apparatus at work? Suspicious, perhaps, of its power to disclose what better remains concealed? The upper part of the image gives the impression of cleanliness and fresh air, as it is mostly covered with laundry stretched between buildings. This part of the image is reminiscent of romantic sceneries from Italian cities like Naples, famous for their similarly narrow alleyways. However, this particular big city alley does not invoke any notions of romanticism. The image suggests that this is a tough man's world – or back-alley – even though we can also see a few women in it. One of these female figures seems to disappear from the setting like a ghost, as if expelled from the frame during exposure time. Another ghostly figure of what appears to be a lonely (or abandoned?) young girl stands on the railings of another staircase in the background of the image. Yet, while men occupy (or guard) the space aggressively and women and children (dis)appear like ghosts at the fringes, the very centre of the photograph displays an utterly repulsive scenario: a dead animal is strewn across the alley's dirty ground.

This is one possible description of the famous 1888 photograph ‘Bandit’s Roost’, which is part of this chapter’s main example: Jacob Riis’s photo-book *How the Other Half Lives* on the appalling conditions in some of New York’s worst neighbourhoods. The image introduces us to some important topics that are relevant for both the written and visual representations of the slum in the nineteenth century, especially issues regarding hygiene as well as the supposed links between poverty and criminal behaviour. It also hints at supposedly more modern concerns regarding the politics of representation, such as the nexus between looking and being-looked-at, (social) voyeurism and (performative) exhibitionism. The photograph reveals more than the alley’s inhabitants want us to see, or so at least it seems. Yet it also documents a place and its people and invites observers to look closer at a place urban strollers would probably rather have chosen to ignore altogether. In this way, ‘Bandit’s Roost’ leads us to the very heart of the difficult and sometimes paradoxical ethics and politics of ‘social documentary photography’ – a genre that emerges with photographers like Jacob Riis towards the end of the nineteenth century.

However, this chapter will not only trace the emergence of social documentary photography as a paradigmatic genre of slum representations. It will also outline how, with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, a graphic and later photographic slum imagery emerges, which arises parallel with the so-called reform movement. This was nourished by a colonial-anthropological imaginary and scientific gaze which perceived the slum as a *terra incognita* that had to be explored, analysed and classified. Processes of ‘remediation’, set in motion by novel inventions in the print industry as well as by inventors of photographic or screening devices, led to an unprecedented multiplication of slum imagery towards the end of the nineteenth century. Turn-of-the-century metropolitan visual culture was, in fact, saturated with photorealistic or documentary – and for this reason, at least in the eye of the nineteenth century middle-class spectator, also sensational – images of impoverished immigrants and working class families living under appalling conditions in big city slums. The guiding question driving this chapter is therefore how and why, towards the end of the nineteenth century media history and social history overlapped in such a way that the slum became a truly ‘hypermediated’ topic of urban visual (and screen) culture in the Western world. The chapter will for this reason trace the parallel development of both visual/screen media and urban slums from the 1850s until the ‘birth’ of cinema, but it will also ask whether ‘history returns’ with regard to today’s (digitally) hypermediated planet of slums.

GRAPHIC TO PHOTOGRAPHIC STEREOTYPING

As already mentioned, the semantic meaning of the term 'slum' originates in the early nineteenth century in Western metropolises, and more precisely, in the increasingly industrialised and growing cities of the United Kingdom, especially London, Liverpool, Glasgow, and Manchester. In these cities, overpopulated urban neighbourhoods with poor sanitary conditions increasingly came to be labelled as 'slums'. The word originally described a 'room', but underwent a shift in meaning around the 1820s to refer to streets and alleys in overcrowded city districts that are inhabited by the very poor.¹ It was soon popularised by journalists and writers during the first half of the nineteenth century to describe a 'back alley' or 'streets of poor people' by novelists, journalists or satirists like Pierce Egan or Charles Dickens in, for instance, their 'slum satires' *Life in London* (1869) and *Bleak House* (1852–3). Thus, at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, a popular discourse on slums emerged: writers and journalists published essays, short or serial stories and reportages in newspapers and magazines. In these, they described the conditions of these 'destitute places', and the people who inhabited them, migrants from the countryside who flocked the cities for work. At the same time, the term 'slum' was transformed from simply denoting a topographic 'place' into connoting a discursive topic of investigation and imagination for fiction and nonfiction writers.

In his study *The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London*, Anthony Wohl states that 'in the first half of the nineteenth century there was no clear analysis of the housing conditions of the working classes for there was no precise and well defined appreciation of housing as a social issue' (2002: 10). Even though housing remained an underappreciated topic, one can nevertheless say that from approximately 1850 the demand for a more detailed analysis of slums and the people who inhabited them emerged. Such an analysis was provided by Friedrich Engels in his groundbreaking study *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) – which focused, among many other things, also on the housing conditions in Manchester's slums – as well as by Henry Mayhew in his four-part volume *London Labor and the London Poor* (1851 and 1861) – both considered as pioneering works of urban sociology, and by extension, of slums. As for the latter, Mayhew cooperated with photographer Richard Beard, who used a photographic process developed by Louis Daguerre and Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in the 1830s, to document the street and slum life in London, namely daguerreotype images – direct positives made in the camera on a silvered copper plate. Mayhew's painstakingly detailed written portrayals of individual slum-dwellers were based on supposedly original transcriptions of interviews, whereas Beard's pictures sought to illustrate those characters.

However, due to the technological impossibility of reproducing (and printing) daguerreotype plates, the images had to be re-drawn by hand and then printed via woodcut engravings, which, according to Alma Davenport, resulted in illustrations that ‘were far from a precise representation of the original images’; instead, they showed ‘lifeless figures, standing stiffly against sketchy backgrounds’ (1991: 42). For this reason, the illustrations looked like a reproduction from the engraver’s imagination. They were, in short, a *graphic* reproduction of stereotypes. However, the same can be said about Mayhew’s written portrayals of slum-dwellers, as they equally built on an already existing discourse on slums, proliferated by the growing newspaper, journal and magazine culture of that time. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have identified such prevailing slum discourses in Mayhew’s portrayals of the urban poor. According to them, Mayhew’s description of slum-dwellers implies a semantics that connects it to romantic Victorian notions of the poor, in which slum-dwellers served as objects of both disgust and fascination. Consequently, ‘Mayhew fixates upon bone-grubbers, rag-gatherers, “pure”-finders (collectors of dog shit), sewer-hunters, mud-larks, dustmen, scavengers, crossing-sweepers, rat-killers, prostitutes, thieves, swindlers, beggars and cheats’ (Stallybrass and White 1986: 129–30). In short, he fixates on depicting slum-dwellers as generic poverty or stereo-‘types’.

Although Mayhew has sometimes been labelled as the ‘sociological Dickens’ (Lindner 2004: 15), he does not truly fit the criteria of a modern-day sociologist. Other scholars referred to Mayhew more fittingly as a ‘reformer-journalist’, and hence as a representative of the reform movement with a distinct Christian moralist agenda. Rolf Lindner has observed that reform movements which tackled social issues (in Germany termed *Soziale Frage* or in France *question sociale*) arose after the cholera epidemic hit Western metropolises in the years 1831–2. The epidemic caused fear and panic among city dwellers, while physicians observed that the plague originated in the slums where it caused the most casualties (cf. Lindner 2004: 23–26). Many nineteenth-century reformist writings on slums have therefore dealt with notions of hygiene. Edwin Chadwick’s (1843) reports on the sanitary conditions in English cities are a striking example, but so too is the work of Charles Dickens, who published several reformist articles on the subject of health and sanitation in the slums.² However, despite these ethical calls by reformers like Dickens, slums were often linked to issues of hygiene and health, which was in turn linked to moralistic notions of sin, vice and evil, since the term ‘filth’ was also used to describe either lower class people or people with moral deficiencies. In Stallybrass and White’s account, this biblical/Babylonian chain of associations – filth-contamination-sins – constitutes much of nineteenth-century slum discourses in reformer-journalist writings. Thus, city topographies (clean versus filthy neighbourhoods) and issues of Christian morality

(good versus bad people) were put into direct correspondence: slums were not only filthy, but also home to people of low moral standards. James Grant, for instance, in his *The Great Metropolis* writes symptomatically that in ‘the great majority of cases, the scenes of wretchedness which occur in the families of the lower classes, are the result of intemperate and improvident habits’ (1837: 152). The major dichotomy structuring mid-nineteenth-century discourses on slum-dwellers implied an anthropological hierarchy, since it distinguished between two unequal races: civilised and cultivated citizens and filthy, sub-human nomads (or ‘wandering tribes’).³

It therefore comes as no surprise that reformist writing had a close affinity to the emerging discipline of anthropology. While colonial anthropologists mapped the world according to its ‘civilised’ and ‘uncivilised’ regions, reformer-journalists mapped ‘the city in terms of dirt and cleanliness [and] tended to repeat the discourse of colonial anthropology’, as Stallybrass and White contend. They add that ‘the nineteenth-century sanitary reformers mapped out the same division across the city’s topography, separating the suburb from the slum, the respectable from the “nomad” along the same lines’ (1986: 131). This colonial-anthropological imaginary was essentially nourished by travel reportages of colonial explorers. The reformer-journalist who sought to document the conditions of big city slums was in turn an ‘urban explorer’ – one of the most frequently used terms to describe this nineteenth-century phenomenon.⁴ Another popular reformist book on slums, George R. Sims’ *How the Poor Live* (1883) is, for example, indeed a ‘travelogue’ as much as an anthropological exploration. Sims explored the slums of London as if it were the ‘dark continent’ in front of the doorstep and accordingly starts his travelogue as follows: ‘In these pages I propose to record the results of a journey with pen and pencil into a region which lies at our own doors – into a dark continent that is within easy walking distance of the General Post Office’ (1883: 3).

Many reformer-journalists perceived and understood themselves as ‘explorers’; they were driven by colonial fantasies to explore the ‘dangerous neighbourhoods’, the *terrae incognitae* inhabited by the ‘wandering tribes’. Urban exploration was thus part of a colonialist culture of discovery and adventure towards the end of the ‘age of explorations’. Slums were in turn perceived as the last blank spots on colonial maps, directly in front of the doorstep. It is therefore perhaps no coincidence that Mayhew’s and Beard’s ‘exploration’ of London’s slums not only builds on an already existing colonial-anthropological discourse, but also on pre-existing ways of looking at ‘the Other’. While Beard’s images imply a scopic regime, in which ‘the bourgeois *spectator* surveyed and classified his own antithesis’, Mayhew’s ‘social analysis is inseparable from his *scophilia*’ (Stallybrass and White 1986: 128, 130; emphasis added). One can therefore say that Mayhew’s and Beard’s visual and written representations

of slum-dwellers have already been a form of remediation, that is, a remediation of pre-existing images of otherness – which is why Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s dictum that ‘all mediation is remediation’ (2000: 55) would apply here, only that, in Beard’s case it was, technically speaking, a form of remediation in which a new medium (daguerreotypes) appears in an old one (graphic drawings), rather than the other way round.

London Labor and the London Poor also marks a first significant junction (or confluence) of social and media history, because the reform movement as well as first photographic technologies (daguerreotypes) emerged almost simultaneously. It is therefore important to stress that this novel technology, which was used by Beard to create photographic images of slum-dwellers was already linked to the notion of social documentation. By using journalistic or sociological methods (interviews) and new visual technologies (daguerreotypes), Mayhew’s and Beard’s picture-book aimed in the first place at ‘documenting’ slum conditions, no matter how stereotypical and graphic their representations in fact were. *London Labor and the London Poor* therefore also provides a good example of how towards the second half of the nineteenth century a graphic visual culture steadily transforms into a photographic one – a transition that also includes a shift from a visual culture primarily based on typography and iconicity to a culture increasingly shaped by the ‘indexicality’ of photographic images.⁵ Accordingly, the famous French film critic and major theorist of cinematic realism, André Bazin, remarked in a footnote of his famous essay on the ‘Ontology of the Photographic Image’ that it:

would be interesting . . . to study, in the illustrated magazines of 1890–1910, the rivalry between photographic reporting and the use of drawings. The latter, in particular, satisfied the baroque need for the dramatic. A feeling for the photographic document developed only gradually. (2005d: 11)

This ‘rivalry’ between graphic and photographic images had already by the 1880s started to become a feature of print culture in the Western world. Not coincidentally, the photographic depiction of slums stands at the beginning of the photographic era in print culture, since images of poverty and wretchedness ran counter to the prevailing ‘baroque need for the dramatic’, as Bazin puts it. In other words, such images contradicted a visual culture saturated with scenic imagery of the picturesque, since the nineteenth-century viewer might have perceived the photographic precision and intensity of documentary black-and-white imagery as too scientific, cold and emotionally detached. Indeed, symptomatic for this neither/nor situation of the evolving photographic medium is a picture taken of a slum, namely ‘A Scene in Shantytown’ (Newton 1880) – the first reproduction of a photograph with a full tonal range

in a newspaper. 'A Scene in Shantytown' displays a 'baroque need for the dramatic', since it shows a scene of squalor set against the dramatic background of emerging clouds. While it is still influenced by a predominantly graphic print culture, it nevertheless also displays features that announce the documentary (or indexical) qualities of the photographic medium.⁶ It is perhaps not a coincidence that, of all things, it is the image of a shantytown that stands at the beginning of the photographic era in print culture, because images of everyday poverty and wretchedness ('in front of the doorstep') ran counter to this prevailing 'baroque need for the dramatic'. However, 'A Scene in Shantytown', in a way, provided the nineteenth century reader/observer a first 'feeling for the photographic document' (Bazin). Even though they might have perceived the photographic precision and intensity of this black-and-white image as too scientific, cold and emotionally detached, it did still also satisfy their (viewing) expectations.

With the improvement of (photographic and printing) technologies during the latter part of the nineteenth century, a process begins to take place that can be described as the multiplication of photorealistic slum imagery. In other words, a remediation of *graphic into photographic imagery* of slums begins to take place. Simultaneously, slum photography as a distinct sub-genre, becomes a truly transnational phenomenon in the subsequent decades. One could list numerous examples, ranging from North American to Russian cities, in which turn-of-the-century photographers start to photographically document impoverished neighbourhoods.⁷ The Scottish photographer Thomas Annan for instance, who took *Photographs Of The Old Closes and Streets of Glasgow* (1879), was commissioned by the Glasgow City Improvement Trust to document the condition of some of Glasgow's most dilapidated slum areas. An example from a non-British European city is a collection of 118 photographs of homeless people, immigrants and slum-dwellers by Kai Michelsen, which are the subject of a documentary called *Et andet København 1870-1910* (*The Other Copenhagen 1870 - 1910*; Brage and Erichsen 1980). Heinrich Zille has photographed the overcrowded housing and living conditions of the urban poor in turn-of-the-century Berlin, whereas Emil Kläger and Hermann Drawe explored, in 1904, the densely populated sewers of Vienna – an underground slum – by specially employing two new technological inventions, the handheld camera and artificial flashlight. Kläger and Drawe adopted this method of slum exploration from one of the most debated turn-of-the-century photojournalists, Jacob August Riis, who is frequently described as a revolutionary figure in the history of social documentary photography and whose photo-book, *How The Other Half Lives* will, for this reason, be discussed in more detail in the following paragraph.

HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES (1890)

How the Other Half Lives is subtitled with *Studies among the Tenements of New York*, which already announces a scientific and evidentiary claim – although the book might have been far better described as a ‘photographic essay’, as for example W. J. T. Mitchell (1994: 285–7) proposed. Riis’s book contained, just like *London Labor and the London Poor*, engravings as illustrations, but also seventeen photographs reproduced in halftone. Most probably because of its vivid, photographic rather than graphic illustrations, the book became an instant success, turning Riis into a well-known figure of American public life during the Progressive Era. Theodore Roosevelt, who became Police Commissioner of New York around 1890, admired *How the Other Half Lives* and called Riis ‘the best American’ he ever knew, even though he was an immigrant from Denmark (qtd in Czitrom and Yochelson 2007: 3). Riis’s popularity, especially among liberal-minded middle class Americans, was nevertheless not coincidental, since it mirrors the Progressive Era as a period in which political activism (e.g. the suffragette movement) and issues of social reform (e.g. the temperance movement) took central importance in public debates. Riis’s reformist efforts proved therefore to be of actual consequence, since he pushed for slum clearance campaigns, the improvement of housing conditions, the building of sewers, schools, playgrounds and recreational parks in poor neighbourhoods. The Mulberry Bend, an area in the infamous Five Points slum of Lower Manhattan and the setting of most of Riis’s photographs was, for example, demolished and turned into the Mulberry Bend Park, thanks to Riis’s book.

How the Other Half Lives is in fact the first of several of Riis’s photo-books that address life in the slums of New York and includes not only images but also texts that are partly based on previously published newspaper articles.⁸ In his very first newspaper article that included images of slums, ‘Flashes from the Slums’ (*New York Sun*, 1888), Riis not only reports from the slums, but explicitly also announces his new innovative documentary technique, namely his use of the recent invention of the flashlight. Together with some of his (amateur photographer) friends, Riis documented the alleys and tenements of New York’s slum-dwellers with artificial light, made possible by the ignition of magnesium flash powder, because he intended to catch the slum ‘off guard’. He therefore went into the slums not only during the night, but also disguised as a *flâneur*, as he writes in his autobiography *The Making of an American*: ‘I liked to walk, for I saw the slum when off its guard’ (Riis 2007: 95). Some of Riis’s most arresting photographs indeed appear to frame slum-dwellers caught ‘off guard’. For this reason, and unlike the obviously staged and manipulated ‘poverty type’ images by previous photographers, Riis’s images display a sense of the ad hoc, spontaneous and non-manipulated – an early form of



Figure 2.1 ‘Five Cents a Spot’: overcrowded rooms and slum-dwellers ‘caught off guard’.

candid photography. The images frequently show people in their sleeping rooms, bedazzled by their sudden exposure to Riis’s flashlight. Even though most of the photographs seem to be staged and manipulated (for instance the above discussed ‘Bandit’s Roost’), in most cases they nevertheless distinguish themselves clearly from earlier ‘poverty type’ images. That is because for Riis, it was as important to depict both, the slum’s conditions – details like dirty floors, but also the lack of space in rundown apartment houses, narrow alleys and overcrowded sleeping rooms – *as well as* the sorely afflicted faces and bodies of the men, women and children who had to endure these conditions. This is how Riis distinguished himself from earlier pictorial traditions: he placed a different emphasis on the documentary value of the photographic medium.

Consequently, most of Riis’s photographs are long shots that frame slum-dwellers in relation to their environment – a shot scale which is still used today to emphasise the environment in which people or characters dwell. The inhabitants of the tenements are often framed off-centre to emphasise the housing conditions and surrounding objects, rather than to provide portraits of ‘poverty types’. Repeatedly then, Riis’s images not only frame slum-dwellers in overcrowded rooms that obviously lack space, but also objects, such as socks in worn-out shoes, stacked suitcases or hanging bags that seem to ‘poke through’ the image to grab the observers’ attention (which could be described as the *punctum* aspect of this photograph), as in ‘Five Cents a Spot’ (Fig. 2.1).⁹ In another famous image, ‘Street Arabs in Sleeping Quarters’, Riis frames sleeping street kids holed up in a corner that appears to be the entrance to a basement. In both examples he highlights the neighbourhood’s lack of space and the inhumane dwelling and sleeping conditions that, according to him, come with such poverty. In the text which accompanies these

images – structured in twenty-five chapters that begin with the ‘Genesis of the Tenement’, describe the situation in ‘The Down Town Back Alleys’ or ‘The Cheap Lodging-Houses’, before concluding with ‘How the Case Stands’ – Riis lists, for instance, figures of high mortality rates, caused by repugnant sanitation circumstances, overcrowding and bad housing. So what Riis intended to ‘expose’ with his flashlight and carefully framed compositions was first people set amidst their housing environment, while he argued in the texts that it is urban environments of degradation – rather than defects of character – that necessarily leads people into bad behaviour and crime. Rather than ascribing moral deficiencies to individuals or ‘types’, Riis outlined the importance of environmental factors. For this reason, Daniel Czitrom argues that ‘his entire book could be read as a plea for understanding how the tenement environment itself deformed character’ (2007: 116). The ‘environmental determinist’ argument that better housing/living conditions would produce better people, was crucial for Riis, and indeed influenced policy-making on the issue of housing in the decades to come; it led to slum clearance campaigns and the establishment of public or social housing projects, not only in the US but also elsewhere.¹⁰

Nonetheless, despite the novel documentary/realist aesthetics of *How the Other Half Lives* and Riis’s reformist/environmental determinist approach at explaining the moral vices emanating from the slums, his work also displays some significant continuities to earlier, picturesque poverty type traditions, especially because it legitimises class distinctions. As David Leviatin points out: ‘Looking at the misfortunes of others – even the picturesque and romantic images of the 1870s and 1880s that preceded and competed with Riis’s more realistic view – helped the members of the new urban middle class to distinguish and define themselves’ (qtd in Gandal 1997: 20). As the title of Riis’s book already suggests, it was ‘the Other Half’ that became subject of a penetrating camera and flashlight exposure. The privileged half that was invited to gaze from a safe distance at a ‘dark continent’ in front of their doorsteps, a *terra incognita* of dark alleys and poorly lit rooms ‘illuminated’ by a flashlight was, in turn, the affluent middle-class spectator. It is in this sense that Riis’s ethnic and class-related stereotyping/*othering* of slum-dwellers represents a continuation of the nineteenth-century journalistic genre of colonial travelogues and quasi-sociological explorations.¹¹ Not by coincidence, therefore, have the stereotyping of slum-dwellers and the voyeuristic subtexts of *How the Other Half Lives* been criticised by some contemporary scholars but so too have, by extension, its surveillance aspects. W. J. T. Mitchell has, for example, described the (unintended) connotations of Riis’s images – their implicit ideology – as follows: ‘The photographs may be “evidence” for propositions quite at odds with the official uses that Riis wants to put them’, Mitchell claims, but for him the beholder of the image is nevertheless ‘presented with an uncomfortable question: is the political, epistemological power of these images (their ‘shock’

value) a justification for the violence that accompanies their production?' (1994: 286).

Mitchell criticises Riis's (violent) production methods, not only his 'invasive' method of intruding into private spaces but also his collaboration with the police, which turns these images, in a real sense into 'surveillance photographs' (Mitchell 1994: 87).¹² Other critics have also emphasised this production context. Mark Seltzer, for instance, has argued that a variety of nineteenth-century visual and non-visual 'realisms' – realist novels, mug shots of criminals or, indeed, Riis's photographs – partake in a 'logistics of realism'. These written and visual representations have supported the exercise of disciplinary control of an urban underworld that was perceived as dangerous or disruptive to the middle-class social order. He therefore claims that the 'realist vision of the urban underworld involves a disciplinary relation between seeing (seeing and being seen) and the exercising of power. The realist investment in seeing entails a policing of the real' (1987: 85). For him, *How The Other Half Lives* ultimately shows us only 'how the one half looks', rather than 'how the other half lives' – a look that aims at controlling, policing and surveilling not only the criminal underworld but the urban poor at large. Yet Seltzer's and Mitchell's critique needs to be at least partly put into context since Riis was himself an unemployed immigrant who lived in Five Points before obtaining a job as a police journalist. In this sense, his photographic gaze at the 'other half' is not an entirely dispassionate/analytic look from the perspective of the (policing) 'better half', which also puts his environmental determinist argument into perspective.

Without ignoring its ideologically and morally ambivalent sub- and contexts, *How the Other Half Lives* has also been praised by recent critics, especially when interpreted within a more media technological context. Peter Hales has argued that it is because of Riis that a less celebratory vision of American cities emerges; before this time, urban photography had primarily focused on the architectural splendour and monumental *grandeur* of American cityscapes. Notwithstanding Riis's ingenuity, this is, Hales argues, first a result of several technological innovations that emerge around 1890: the introduction of supersensitive dry plate technology and flexible film into the professional and amateur marketplace, the development of artificial light, as well as cheap, easy to use cameras that integrated these technologies (see Hales 2005: 271). The most influential of these technological inventions was the emergence of hand-held cameras around 1900, as they enabled not only journalists, but also amateurs to photographically depict previously unexplored terrains.¹³ One of the most important representatives of the already mentioned 'New Film History' school (see Chapter 1), Tom Gunning, has discussed this 'democratisation' of photographic practices in turn-of-the-century urban culture via a discussion of slum photography and what he calls the (pre-cinematic) emergence of the

'documentary impulse'. In his essay 'Embarrassing Evidence: The Detective Camera and the Documentary Impulse', Gunning emphasises how 'the combined simplicity and portability literally put cameras in the hands of an enormously larger segment of the population, creating a new, more extensive realm of amateur photography to compete with the already established professionals' (1999: 47). Initially advertised as the 'detective camera', these new handheld cameras were aimed for a distinctive group of buyers: police photographers, private eyes and reformer or muckraking journalists, just like Riis. Contrary to later photographers such as the Austrians Kläger and Drawe, Riis himself did not have a handheld camera but only artificial light and dry plate technology at his disposal. However, the importance of the handheld camera needs to be mentioned at this point because it were amateur photographers like Riis – who described himself also as such¹⁴ – for whom the first handheld cameras were produced.

According to Gunning, the 'documentary impulse' originates (long before the term 'documentary' was associated with a film genre) with the emergence of such cheap and simple handheld (or 'detective') photo cameras. The apparatus enabled reformer-journalists to navigate the 'dangerous neighbourhoods' as explorers/detectives and to produce embarrassing (documentary) evidence for the 'good cause'. Lightweight or handheld (photo and movie) cameras, as well as the 'documentary impulse' that accompanies it, are indeed a recurring aspect of this book, since they are inextricably linked to location shooting in the slums. In the postwar period, improved lightweight cameras – previously used for newsreels about World War II – facilitated the shooting on location in the streets of Rome, Mexico City or Rio de Janeiro, which allowed the global spread of neorealism as a *documentario narrativo* (see Chapter 4). In the early 1960s, lightweight 16 mm cameras with integrated sound equipment facilitated a 'rebirth' of documentary filmmaking and what has been termed direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* (see Chapter 5). Since the 1980s, the introduction of cheap and easy to use video cameras onto the world market by Sony – initially intended for private use, the filming of family gatherings, holidays or weddings, etc. – has spurred the production of documentary films among indigenous cultures. And finally, with the arrival of cheap cameras in the late 1990s (see Chapter 7), still and moving images depicting slums have become commonplace features of our contemporary screen culture, whether they are produced and distributed by professional documentary filmmakers or photographers, TV crews, NGO activists, slum tourists or by slum-dwellers themselves. In other words, the documentary impulse to explore, depict or disclose the conditions of 'dangerous', impoverished or previously inaccessible city areas was often enabled and facilitated by continuous technological improvements and modifications of the handheld camera since 1900.

The Portuguese arthouse filmmaker Pedro Costa, who has filmed with

a small (digital video) camera in Lisbon's Fontainhas, has cited Riis's *How The Other Half Lives* as one of his major inspirations (see Chapter 7). But *How The Other Half Lives* has not only influenced arthouse filmmakers, it has also become a feature of today's popular culture, for instance with the BBC America-produced TV series *Copper* (Tom Fontana, Will Rokos; 2012-15): Riis's photo-book was, according to the series' producers, one of the major historical references for the recreation of Five Points as the series' main setting. In Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York* there is an even more sophisticated reference to both *How The Other Half Lives* as well as to the persistent significance of handheld cameras, spanning an arc from the 'detective camera' to the handheld Steadicam of today's CGI-created blockbuster cinema.¹⁵ The film's production designer (Dante Ferretti) used Riis's photographs as the source material for the reproduction of Five Points as a film set (and perhaps not coincidentally in the infamous *Cinecittà*, the Rome-based film studio which translates as 'cinema city' and in which some Italian neorealist directors shot interior scenes). One hundred and eight minutes into the film, we see a replication of one of Riis's most famous images, the already discussed 'Bandit's Roost' – which, in *How The Other Half Lives* is described as one of Five Points most notorious Italian back-alleys – in a shot that is almost true to the original.¹⁶ In it Scorsese's long-year cinematographer, Michael Ballhaus, navigates with a Steadicam through one of the recreated alleys of Five Points, while some of the film's characters directly look into the camera, replicating Riis's original (Fig. 2.2). At the end of this mobile long take, we see that the Steadicam has assumed the main character's (Amsterdam Vallon, played by Leonardo Di Caprio) point of view. Riis's



Figure 2.2 In *Gangs of New York* a Steadicam assumes the POV of the film's main character and enters into Riis's 'Bandit's Roost'.

documentary image of posing 'bandits' in a nineteenth-century New York alley has thus been remediated into a subjective POV-shot in a twenty-first century gangster epic.

Scorsese's/Ballhaus's mobile long take can, in this sense, be understood as a good illustration for what Richard Grusin calls, in reference to Bazin, a 'post-photographic ontology', in which cinema is no longer a 'photographic mediation of an unmediated world that exists prior to and independent of its being filmed but rather [a] remediation of an already mediated world' (2007: 211). This point is also made by new media theorist Lev Manovich, who contends that today any 'image that you desire probably already exists on the internet or in some database . . . the problem today is no longer how to create the right image, but how to find an already existing one' (2001: 291). However, one can also say that the Steadicam, and with it the film's spectators, 'immerse' or 'go into' the image 'Bandit's Roost', which illustrates a changing conception of the screen image in times of digital media. Immersion comes from the Latin *immegere* (to 'plunge' or 'dip into') and is today often used as a metaphor to describe the experience of 'plunging into' virtual reality (VR) environments, such as computer games.¹⁷ As Kurt Vanhoutte and Nele Wynants argue, in contrast to the 'two-dimensional linear perspective of the viewer looking at an image in drawing, painting and photography, the immersive perspective enables the viewer to see from within the image' (2010: 47). In other words, in contemporary cinema some filmmakers, like Scorsese, not only remediate pre-existing imagery, but refigure it according to the logic of new media, since, as Manovich puts it, the 'new media image is something the user actively goes into' (2001: 183), rather than something a passive observer simply 'looks at'. This is one way in which contemporary cinema responds to the challenges of new media and the transformation of viewing habits, but how did social reformers like Jacob Riis respond to them around 1900?

SCREENING SPECTACLES OF 'THE REAL'

The multiplication of slum imagery at the end of the nineteenth century, spurred on by new technologies, ought to be situated within the context of transforming viewing habits as well. This transformation is closely related to a more general transformation of the public sphere: the emergence of a predominantly urban popular mass culture. Metropolitan citizens increasingly sought to not only read spectacular stories of crime and vice emanating from the slums, but also found pleasure in gazing at the spectacular sights that slums seemed to have offered. Many photographers, writers or journalists implicitly or explicitly responded to these new spectatorial demands and desires. Keith

Gandal has emphasised exactly that aspect, namely what he calls the ‘spectacularization of turn-of-the-century slums’ by popular culture. He argues that turn-of-the-century journalistic and literary discourses as well as graphic or photographic images of slums, circulating in magazines, newspapers and novels, not only reflect the decline of previous representational conventions – sentimentalist, picturesque and moralistic poverty depictions – but also the rise of a modern aesthetics of excitement and spectacle: ‘In the course of the 1890s, the slum emerged as a spectacle in the popular arts of representation: the urban poor were discovered as fresh topic by police reporters, novelists, photographers, true-crime writers, muckrakers, and social reformers’ (1997: 8).

The enthusiasm of turn-of-the-century photographers to produce photorealistic pictures of urban slums was met by a growing spectatorial appetite for visual attractions of ‘the Real’. In other words, slums provided a vital source for stories and images of a popular culture that was obsessed with what one might call ‘the spectacle of reality’. Vanessa R. Schwartz has combined the seemingly contradictory notions of the ‘spectacular’ and ‘the Real’ to describe what, to her opinion, was a fundamental element of the origins of modern popular culture and which ultimately led to the immense popularity and appeal of cinema: an emerging ‘public taste for reality’. Schwartz shows in her *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (1998) how this ‘public taste for reality’ emerged first and foremost as a touristic phenomenon in turn-of-the-century metropolises such as Paris. This ‘public taste for reality’ was facilitated by the growing spectacularisation of newspaper reporting (e.g. the emergence of the boulevard press) and the exhibition of what Schwartz describes as ‘realist attractions’.¹⁸ It comes as no surprise therefore that ‘slumming’ emerged as a popular tourist activity for middle-class urbanites in turn-of-the-century metropolises, satisfying this emerging ‘desire for the real as spectacle’, transforming the slum into such a ‘realist attraction’ as, for example, two recent monographs by Seth Koven (2004) and Chad Heap (2009) illustrate. With Schwartz one can argue that the touristic activity of slumming was inextricably linked to an emerging urban popular culture that was obsessed with ‘realist attractions’. Metropolitan, middle-class *flâneurs* not only sought these realist attractions in the slums but also in magic lantern shows, panorama exhibitions of exotic faraway places or in novel fair-ground attractions, such as the moving image peep shows of Thomas Edison’s Kinematoscope.

The connection of photorealistic slum imagery to this emerging ‘public taste for reality’ as touristic spectacle is evident when one takes a closer look at how Riis initially presented his photographic work to the public. Before *How The Other Half Lives* was published, Riis had already toured with a magic lantern show through the United States, presenting stereopticon pictures of

New York's slum life.¹⁹ *The Battle with the Slum: Illustrated by scores of original Stereopticon pictures of New York City life* was the title of one of Riis's magic lantern shows, in which he used 'two projectors that created images about ten feet square' (Stange 1989: 2), to lecture 'before civic improvement associations, upper-class social clubs, church congregations, reform groups, academic meetings and conventions, and reform organizations' (Hales 2005: 273). The photography historian Maren Stange emphasises that Riis's 'stereopticon lectures' have not only been a serious endeavor, a reformist project, but that they also used the rhetoric of 'spectacle and tourism in regard to New York's slums' (1989: 17). Similarly, Gandal contends that Riis 'perceived not just vice that needed to be shunned and stamped out, as the middle class was used to thinking, but alternative customs and exotic sights that provided excitement and enjoyment' (1997: 13). Another example for such a crossover between visual entertainment and instructive education is the magic lantern 'slum show' *Slum Life in Our Great Cities* (1892), produced and marketed by the Riley Brothers in Britain (Fig. 2.3).²⁰ This presentation was accompanied by a less reformist and more sensationalist lecture; it generated spectacular stereopticon projections of Liverpool's slum life on a set of fifty-two hand-coloured photographic slides. The lecturers of that 'slum show' not only announced their claim for documentary verisimilitude, but also their mode of production on the playbill: 'The set of lantern slides for which this Lecture was written have been photographed direct from Life in the slums, by means of a special Detective or Hand

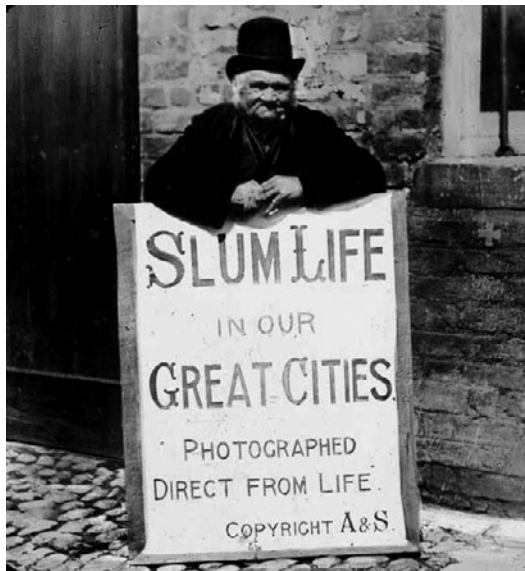


Figure 2.3 The first slide of the magic lantern 'slum show' *Slum Life in Our Great Cities*.

Not for distribution or resale. For personal use only.

camera' (qtd in Gunning 1999: 51). So this lecture proclaimed its value as a sensational attraction right from the beginning, by announcing both its novel documentary technique ('direct from Life in the slums') as well as its voyeuristic or paparazzi qualities (detective camera).

Through illustrating their rhetoric of reform with photorealistic images of slums on screen, Riis and other magic lantern presenters not only aimed to educate, but also to shock and emotionally engage their audiences through an exhibitionist act of display. This makes such lantern shows not only an ambivalent mixture between reformist ideology (or part of a 'discourse of sobriety', as the documentary scholar Bill Nichols would put it) and popular entertainment (or a form of voyeuristic slumming), but indeed a predecessor of the exhibitionist aesthetics of presentation in what Tom Gunning has called 'the cinema of attractions'. For Gunning, in fact, early 'audiences went to exhibitions to see machines demonstrated . . . rather than to view films. It was the Cinématographe, the Biograph or the Vitascope that were advertized', not the 'content' on screen, the films themselves (1990: 58). Hence, the real marvel for early cinema audiences was less to watch, for example, workers leaving a factory, but the spectacle of moving images.²¹ In keeping with this line of argument, one can say that the true attraction of lantern slum shows was similar: photorealistic images of the spectacular sights of wretchedness in the *terrae incognitae* on the doorstep as well as the documentary technology of capturing it. The appeal of magic lantern shows like *Slum Life in Our Great Cities* was its exhibitionist aesthetics of display, of exhibiting both media technologies as well as touristic/voyeuristic views of slum life. In Riis's case, it was his pioneering use of flashlight photography that offered his audiences the marvel of viewing photorealistic, ten-foot square images of slum-dwellers 'caught off guard' and which satisfied their desire for 'realist attractions'.

The early cinema of attractions was, as Bolter and Grusin argue, 'immediate and hypermediated at the same time. The members of the audience oscillated between a sense of immediacy and an awareness of that sense' (2000: 155). The same could be said about magic lantern slum shows: these remediations (of slum images onto screen) not only generated the marvel of watching a new way of looking at things on display (photorealistic documentary images), but also created novel, exciting viewing experiences of immediacy. As Christopher Carter fittingly puts it: with his magic lantern shows 'Riis lent sensory immediacy to the tenement problem' (2008: 118). Joseph B. Entin argues in a similar way: he proposes that turn-of-the-century popular visual culture generated 'sensational' viewing experiences (in the sense of an 'exciting experience' or a 'sensory stimulation'), often by displaying 'low', 'exotic', and 'alien' figures (immigrants and slum dwellers, criminals and cabaret dancers), or in other words, the abject 'bodies of the dispossessed', which also aimed at violently shattering the *blasé* attitude of a by and large middle-class audience. In a

similar line of argument, Gunning has shown that the Victorian middle-class etiquette of proper posture and behaviour were threatened by its possible exposure to a now, potentially, ubiquitous detective camera and this generated fears of surveillance, of being caught 'off guard'. Middle-class spectators could, on the other hand, distinguish themselves from the 'Other Half' in such magic lantern slum shows. Images of slum-dwellers in awkward situations, for example while sleeping, were violating Victorian codes of restrained posture and body control and so it was reassuring to look at those images from a safe distance, i.e. on screen (see Gunning 1999: 60-1). In this sense the screened images of slum-dwellers also served as a pedagogical tool, aiming to further discipline the Victorian body by showing the bodies of immigrants – the 'Other Half' – caught 'off guard'.

MULTI- AND REMEDIATED SLUM IMAGES

Ever since Richard Beard in the 1850s, a vast number of photographers have explored the slums of rapidly industrialising European and North American cities. They captured them with cameras and were dedicated to exploring, documenting and exhibiting the moral vices, living and working conditions, or everyday habits of the poor and disadvantaged. These photographers were also driven, by and large, by an impulse to 'reform' in the double meaning of the word. According to Bolter and Grusin's definition of remediation, whenever a new medium is introduced, users (in this case the slum daguerreotypists, photographers and magic lantern lecturers) expect that it will improve (or reform) the flaws of an older medium and will deliver representations of reality that are more transparent or immediate. As 'remediation' etymologically means 'reform', it is interesting to observe that the slum has not only been the subject of the reforming impulses of users of new media technologies (from daguerreotypes to magic lantern shows), but also of the rhetoric of social reform.²² And so, with regard to nineteenth-century slum mediations, the 'logic of remediation' has a double meaning: reformer-journalists did not only plea for social reforms – the improvement of sanitary, housing and moral conditions in the slums – but they also continuously reformed their use of (old and new) media technologies. They aimed to present images to a middle-class public that desired ever more immediate (or sensational, in the sense of 'sensually stimulating') viewing experiences.

However, the remediation of slum images continued beyond the 1890s. Carter explains that around the turn of the century 'photography and print underwent the sort of process that Bolter describes as "remediation": they were mediated again in a documentary form that swiftly became a cultural commonplace' (2008: 118). Similarly, around the turn of the century, the slum

became a cultural commonplace, a truly multi- and remediated one. Magic lantern 'slum shows' screened not only documentary images of slums but they also referenced popular fiction and non-fiction – that is journalistic sketches, essayistic travelogues or naturalistic novels – of the urban exploration variant, which by this time had already become well-established genres, thoroughly enjoyed as a thrilling read by the middle-class readership.²³ Gunning therefore sees magic lantern lectures on slum life as a parallel addition to these kind of popular urban exploration genres, which must have been quite familiar to middle-class audiences in turn-of-the-century metropolises (see Gunning 1999: 52). Stange equally emphasises that slums were an all too familiar sight and subject for turn-of-the-century spectators, because they were part of a 'traditional and familiar panoply of popular visual displays and diversions enjoyed by middle-class audiences' (1989: 276). To repeat Gunning's cinema of attractions argument, it is also in this sense that the familiar images and stories from the slums – either gathered through slumming expeditions, the theatre, the reading of novels or journalistic sketches, crime stories and reformist writings in newspapers and illustrated magazines – were not necessarily the main attraction of these slum shows, but rather the new technologies of (re)mediation.

Since magic lantern shows presented photorealistic slum imagery for the first time on screen, they brought this already well-established journalistic and literary topic ultimately into the realm of early cinema. This is because magic lantern shows 'continued to be used in conjunction with cinema proper during the years 1900–5 when the cinema was establishing itself as a new mass medium of entertainment and instruction'; they 'continued for a long time to be shown in close conjunction with film screenings' (Cherchi-Usai 1996: 6). Even as late as 1907, Riis still toured with his magic lantern show, *The Battle of the Slums*, competing with the novel attractions of the nickelodeon pictures (see Sloan 1988: 36). Consequently, the slum, as a media topic, meandered around 1900 back and forth, from old to new media. Nevertheless, from around 1900, the popularity of magic lantern shows steadily declined and was replaced by cinema, the 'new mass medium of entertainment and instruction', since turn-of-the-century filmmakers were as fascinated with the sights, vices and moral lectures learned from the slums, as were their photographic predecessors or contemporaries. Hence, with the birth of movies, the slum remained a 'topic of high visibility', as Douglas Muzzio and Thomas Halper fittingly put it:²⁴

By the end of the century the slum – tied to a panoply of issues (jobs, crime, disease, race, social justice) – had become a topic of high visibility. This development coincided with the birth of movies, which, almost from their beginning, have served as one of the most powerful formats in the national discourse on cities, addressing such central issues as the causes of urban poverty and the composition and character of the urban

poor – issues with implications for policy more potent than mere facticity. (2001: 3–4)

The slum also remained a ‘topic of high visibility’ beyond the US–American context and this can be illustrated by a recently released DVD, an archival collection of mostly European lantern slides and early films, entitled *Screening the Poor 1888–1914* (Edition Filmmuseum 2011).²⁵ This digitalised collection of magic lantern slides and early films illustrates not only how slum-related topics were remediated into early films, but also how both the filmmaker’s and lantern lecturer’s concerns were often less focused on documentary facticity but, rather, somewhere between the political agendas of reformist pedagogy and popular entertainment. The DVD is accordingly broken down into seven sections, organised by the following topics: slumming, children in misery, child labour, the drink and temperance movement, charity and social care, the perils of wage labour and escape. Familiar tropes of reformist writings on urban poverty, such as the dangers of alcoholism, the Dickensian motif of the orphaned child or a dying mother and her helpless child, first appear in magic lantern shows with painted slides like *The Magic Wand* (York & Son 1889) or *Billy’s Rose* (York & Son 1888). These were accompanied by texts from the aforementioned George R. Sims, before they were re-made/remediated into short films, such as in the French Pathé production *Deux petits Jésus* (*The Foundling*; Denola 1910). One film in the collection that could be designated as a documentary in the modern sense is *Comment les pauvres mangent à Paris* (*How the Poor Dine in Paris*; Pathé 1910). According to the DVD’s booklet, *How the Poor Dine in Paris* is ‘the first film reportage about the “clochards” of Paris’. Classified under the ‘slumming’ section of the DVD, this film shows impressions of poverty-stricken *clochards* living in the streets of Paris in a series of discontinuous shots. In this way it makes reference to the tradition of the urban exploration genre of George R. Sims or the social documentary photography of Jacob Riis and to what Nichols would describe as the expository mode of displaying ‘how the poor’ live, eat, sleep, etc. These kinds of films were predecessors of documentary films proper and were, at that time, labelled as ‘actuality films’ (or, as the Lumière Brothers called them, *les actualités*). However, the argument that can be made for pre-cinematic magic lantern slum shows can also be made for such early cinematic slum *actualités* because, as Gunning has emphasised, in this early period ‘actuality films constituted the main product of the cinema rather than fiction filmmaking, and the motion picture camera itself remained the focus of attention’ (1999: 47).

That the actual attraction lies in the technological *how* of the (re-)presentation rather than in its content – hence, that the ‘medium is the message’, as Marshall McLuhan would have put it – is an important insight into the actual function and logic of remediation processes. In other words,

remediations do not necessarily provide novel sights, but rather novel ways of experiencing these sights. In this respect Riis's magic lantern shows, as well as early actuality films, generated a sense of astonishment in which audiences marvelled at how new technologies could be used to generate new forms of 'sensory immediacy to the tenement problem' (Carter 2008: 118). This historically recurring logic can be illustrated by comparing Riis's multimodal (or multimedia) presentations of documentary images (in illustrated newspapers, in a photo-book format, as well as via stereopticon slides on screen) with an equally multimodal presentation of slum images by Jonas Bendiksen, a contemporary social documentary photographer who works with digital technologies, which simultaneously illustrates Carter's thesis that 'the digital age represents not the onset but the recent flourishing of multimodality, a historical accumulation rather than a beginning' (2008: 118). Bendiksen's *The Places We Live* – published in 2008 as a photo-book, a website and within the framework of a touring multimedia exhibition – largely consists of pictures of slum-dwellers. Like *How The Other Half Lives*, the photo-book provides a combination of written information and imagery, but this time with panoramic folding images of slum exteriors and interiors in four cities across the world: Mumbai, Caracas, Nairobi, and Jakarta. *The Places We Live* thus highlights the notion of a 'planet of slums' rather than that it attempts an apparently scientific visual documentation of slum conditions in a single city. Yet, like the announcement of the technological novelty of flash photography in Riis's newspapers articles (as 'flashes from the slums'), in the introduction to the photo-book *The Places We Live*, the journalist Philip Gourevitch praises Bendiksen's 'immersion in the slums' as 'a new way to make a camera take us through our eyes to an experience of complete sensory immersion, so that we can experience a photograph, not only as a picture, but also as something we can hear and smell and taste' (Bendiksen 2008). The achievement of 'complete sensory immersion', of having the feeling of 'being there' as if one were able not only to see, but also to hear, smell and taste the slums, is, however, even more accentuated in both the website (www.theplaceswelive.com) and the touring multimedia exhibition. And in both cases, it is not so much the 'artistry' of the photographer that lends a 'new' sensory immediacy to the global urban 'tenement problem', but rather the new possibilities of digital media technologies.

The website provides information and statistics (of population numbers, geographical location, topographic shape, etc.), gathered from such sources as UN-HABITAT's *The Challenge of Slums*. Through a point-and-click interface the user advances to a world map where one can navigate to the respective cities and enter their slums. A set of establishing shots of slum exteriors with additional, now local instead of global, information introduces us to, for instance, Dharavi in Mumbai. Now users can choose from four households and virtually enter the private interiors of various slum housings, shacks and



Figure 2.4 A navigable 360-degree panorama of ‘The Arori Household’ in Kibera, Nairobi on theplaceswelive.com.

tenements that in some cases resemble some of Riis’s images (Fig. 2.4). Hence, not unlike Riis, Bendiksen intrudes with his camera into the often cramped and improvised sleeping and/or living rooms of slum-dwellers. Yet, contrary to Riis’s careful ‘framing’ of slum-dwellers and their living environments – that ultimately provokes a viewer to ask what remains outside the frame – Bendiksen’s images are panoramas that present these interiors as apparently ‘frameless surroundings’ in the most literal sense: the images are navigable in a 360 degree circle. Additionally, users now actually hear the (English-dubbed) slum-dwellers speaking about their families, their own biographies and financial situation, whether they feel that their particular slum is a slum of hope or of despair and whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied with their current housing conditions, which lends an additional ‘sensory immediacy’ to life in the slums. Bendiksen’s images are, moreover, digitally reworked to aestheticise the colourful shack environments, transforming them into picturesque panoramas, which illustrates Lev Manovich’s thesis that digital imagery, at least in this case, is a ‘sub-genre of painting’, rather than an ‘indexical media technology’ (2001: 295).

The touring multimedia exhibition focuses finally, and most vigorously, on the experience of sensory immediacy and illustrates another of Manovich’s theses, namely that we today live in ‘the society of the screen’ (2001: 94). Unlike Riis’s lantern shows, the multimedia exhibition, *The Places We Live*,

creates not merely a quasi-cinematic experience for its visitors – a ‘window on the world’ of squatters – but rather immerses them as ‘experiencers’ into a ‘windowed world’ of virtual (slum) realities through the use of life-size images on life-size screens. The curators describe the technology, shape and aim of the exhibition as follows:

Life-size images and audio segments in the exhibition help create the experience of a personal encounter with the slum dwellers. Each slum is represented by one room, where all four walls are built out of rear-projection canvas. Each room contains a cycle displaying five households. For each one, a sound recording containing statements from the inhabitants is showered down from the overhead speakers. Between each display of a household, images and soundscapes of the outside environment surround the visitor. (Bendiksen ‘Exhibition’)

Hence, the screens/households ought to be literally ‘inhabited’ by the visitors, since the exhibition invites them to slip for a moment into the shacks (and lives) of slum-dwellers. The multimedia exhibition is, in this sense, another remediation effort (in the sense of ‘reform’), not only because it suggests – unlike, say, a photo-book, or even cinema – a ‘complete sensory immersion’, a more personal or intimate encounter with the live of slum-dwellers, but also because it promises in this way to reform ‘our’ encounter with ‘the Other’, which is discernible from the exhibition’s title. As if referencing *How The Other Half Lives*, *The Places We Live* reforms the binary ‘us’ versus ‘them’ logic of looking at the ‘Other Half’ through emphasising that the ‘planet of slums’ consists of places that ‘we’ inhabit together (even though the title’s ‘we’ refers in the first instance to the speaking slum-dwellers). Yet, despite such benevolent (media-) reformist intentions, the ‘we’, the apparent interpersonal encounter, remains, of course, purely virtual. The exhibition’s visitors become instead virtual, rather than actual slum tourists, suggesting that the only places ‘we’ may inhabit and share together in today’s digitally interconnected, but socially divided world are, indeed, those ‘slums on screen’.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has shown that a ‘documentary impulse’ (Gunning) to disclose urban pauperisation by means of visual media emerges in the second half of the nineteenth century. This impulse has been closely related to the evolution of imaging, printing and screening technologies and their use as devices for reproducing (documentary) evidence to advocate social reforms.²⁶ The manifold documentations of urban poverty across the industrialising metropolises

of the Western world – of which this chapter’s main example, Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives*, is one of the most representative examples – sometimes facilitated social or housing reforms, but they often also legitimised racial and social power relations. Apart from its morally ambivalent ideological context, the emerging genre of ‘social documentary photography’ has also often been understood by its contemporaries as a scientific investigation or as a ‘study’ of ‘other’, alien races, cultures and ethnicities ‘at the doorstep’ – closely linking the genre to the paradigms of nineteenth-century scientific empiricism and the emerging social sciences. The documentary mode was, however, also understood as a ‘mediator’ between the realm of science and the realm of culture (such as in magic lantern ‘slum shows’). In this way, the reformers’ desire to ‘reform’ or improve both slum conditions and slum representations led, between 1850 and 1900, to a confluence of media and social history: slums were mediated and remediated across different kinds of media, from the written word to photography, magic lantern shows and cinema, thereby creating ever new ‘sensational’ views of ‘the Other Half’ – a logic that returns in today’s digitalised ‘planet of slums’.

NOTES

1. Some have traced the etymological roots of the word ‘slum’ to Irish slang, where it used to describe ‘a bleak or destitute place’ (Cassidy 2007: 267).
2. Dickens could, in fact, be labelled as the ‘literary Mayhew’, since he also blurred imagination with semi-sociological observation for the good, reformist cause, when he maintains that he ‘systematically tried to turn fiction to the good account of showing the preventable wretchedness and misery in which the mass of people dwell, and of expressing . . . that the reform of their habitations must precede all other reforms . . .’ (qtd in Wohl 2002: 11).
3. *London Labor and the London Poor* begins with a chapter entitled ‘Of wandering tribes in general’, in which Mayhew distinguishes between these two ‘races’.
4. Although most scholars use the term ‘urban explorer’, some also use the term ‘social explorer’ (see for instance Keating 1976).
5. ‘Indexicality’ refers to a classical theoretical debate in film and photography theory, which needs to be explained at this point as I will return to it throughout the book. It gained currency through Peter Wollen’s assessment of André Bazin’s discussion of ‘The Ontology of the Photographic Image’ (2005d). In this seminal essay, Bazin famously compared photographic images with death masks, Egyptian mummies (‘the mummy complex’), bullet holes or footprints to describe photography as a plastic art, capable of ‘embalming’ what it depicts. This essay as well as his ‘The Myth of Total Cinema’ (2005c) introduced what many have since referred to as Bazin’s realist ontology of cinema. For Bazin, cinema is the quintessential realist medium, as it adds movement to the static photographic image to recreate ‘the world in its own image’ (2005d: 21). In adapting Charles Sanders Peirce’s triadic linguistic model of how signs denote their objects, Peter Wollen translated Bazin’s ontology into Peirce’s definition of the index, while

simultaneously bringing Bazin's ontology into a semiotic context (Wollen 1972: 116–54). According to Pierce's system, the *index* is (as opposed to *symbol* and *icon*) a sign (or signifier) that connects to its object (or to the signified) through a causal (spatial or temporal) physical link, like smoke that is causally linked to fire signals or bullet holes that are causally linked to bullets and firearms.

6. Ironically, however, 'A Scene in Shantytown' appeared in 1880 in the *New York Daily Graphic* to advertise new innovations in printing, rather than to illustrate squalid housing conditions.
7. An overview of slum photographers around 1900 provides the illustrated catalogue of an exhibition organised by the Museum of Vienna (Schwarz, Szeless and Wögenstein 2007).
8. Riis published two additional photo-books on slums, *The Children of the Poor* (1892) and *The Battle with the Slum* (1901).
9. In his classical work on photography, *Camera Lucida* (1981), Roland Barthes claims that there is a paradoxical double inscription, a 'real unreality', that is most characteristic for photography as a medium. For him a photograph is able to convey readable signs that can be translated into meaning and therefore 'studied' as such (the *studium* aspects of a photographic image), but they can also acquire an indexical quality, which he terms *punctum* – details or minutia that evade meaning and from which reality is literally 'poking through' the image, stabbing the observer like an arrow.
10. Hoffmann has traced the idealism of social housing policies and slum clearance campaigns to an overly optimistic belief in environmental determinism: 'The idealism of public housing advocates has often taken the form of environmental determinism, a belief that an ideal or improved residential environment will better the behavior as well as the condition of its inhabitants' (1996: 423–4). See also Chapter 3, where I discuss environmental determinism in relation to *Housing Problems*.
11. Additionally, Riis finds flaws in nearly every ethnic minority that immigrated in great numbers to the US at that time, whether Polish, Jewish, Italian, Russian, Chinese, or Irish, indicating Riis's problematic ethnic bias. He also maps New York's slums according to their ethnic composition – in the chapters titled 'Jewtown', 'Chinatown', 'The Italian in New York' and 'The Color Line in New York'.
12. Riis was a police reporter who shot images of crime scenes for the *New York Tribune*. He was also allowed to join night-time police raids in the slums, a circumstance which supports Mitchell's and Seltzer's critique.
13. This is closely related to the appearance of Kodak's first handheld camera (the so-called 'Brownie') and the company's infamous slogan, 'You push the button, we do the rest!' which became an enormous commercial success around 1900.
14. Riis has put it in his autobiography as follows: 'I am downright sorry to confess here that I am no good at all as a photographer, for I would like to be' (2007 106–7).
15. Although most of the scenes in *Gangs of New York* were shot on 35 mm, the film also features forty-five computer-generated shots.
16. Scorsese, who is of course known for his quasi 'archeological' interest in film history, and also for excavating and preserving early films, has stated in an interview that his crew 'built an alley from the photograph Bandit's Roost and went right through the alley with a Steadicam . . . We used a number of Riis photographs to build the sets' (Baker 2001: 50).
17. Similar to the findings of Bolter and Grusin, *New Film History* and to those of media archeologists like Erkki Huhtamo, the art historian Oliver Grau has uncovered historical predecessors to our contemporary visual culture – a visual culture that is, according to him, much better characterized with key words such as 'interactive', 'telepresent' or 'immersive' than with older notions like 'representational' or 'illusionist'. Grau argues that

'immersive art' is nothing new or original to the digital age, tracing it as far back as to the frescoes of a villa in Pompeii. See his *Virtual Art* (2003), which is tellingly subtitled *From Illusion to Immersion*. I will return to notions such as 'interactivity' or 'immersion' throughout the book to describe the modes of address of some of the more recent examples.

18. One of Schwartz' most captivating examples for this emerging 'desire for the real as spectacle' is how the exhibition of dead bodies in the Paris Morgue became an immensely popular tourist attraction for urban strollers. Schwartz' other examples include dioramas, panoramas and wax museums.
19. Photographic lantern shows were in the US known as 'stereopticon pictures' and were first introduced in the 1850s. A stereopticon was a magic lantern with two lenses, the projected pictures were usually photographs printed on glass. Stereopticon pictures did not produce three-dimensional images as the name of the device might suggest; the two lenses were merely used to dissolve smoothly between images (cf. Clee 2005: 84).
20. The Riley Brothers from Bradford were one of the largest mass producers of lantern slides at that time.
21. According to Gunning early cinema's basic characteristic was its 'ability to *show*', rather than to tell something; it is a cinema of 'exhibitionist confrontation rather than of diegetic absorption' (1990: 57).
22. The Latin term *remediatio* describes the process of curing or healing, but it can also be used to describe a process of reform, that is, as 'remedying or correcting something' ('remediation,' def. 1, *OED*).
23. Some of the most prominent examples for turn-of-the-century books that address slum life as a fictional or non-fictional topic are Arthur Morrison's novel *A Child of the Jago* (1896), Stephen Crane's novel *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) and Jack London's social reportage *The People of the Abyss* (1903). For an astute analysis of turn-of-the-century journalistic sketches on slums see Entin 2001.
24. Muzzio and Halper discuss a number of early American films that address urban poverty from around 1900 to the 1930s, some of which were directed by the most innovative American filmmaker of that time, D. W. Griffith. They argue that before 1910, poverty-stricken characters were either ridiculed (e.g. in Griffith's *Deceived Slumming Party*, 1908) or portrayed in a one-dimensional way, but a shift occurs thereafter: filmmakers increasingly employ more complex, often melodramatically charged plots to depict social problems like homelessness, race relations or immigration, for instance in films like *Broken Blossoms* (Griffith, 1919). However, at least since Griffith's *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (1912) – partly shot on location and with actual gang members from New York's Lower East Side – the criminal underworld becomes the most dominant *sujet* of American films that are set in slums, which, however, virtually disappear after World War II from both American screens and cities, only to return as studio recreations in historical gangster epics like *Gangs of New York*. Cf. Sloan 1988, who provides a genealogy of the 'social problem film' in early American cinema.
25. The DVD was co-produced by *Deutsches Filminstitut* and *Filmmuseum München* and is an outcome of the 'Screen1900 Project' that was organised by the University of Trier.
26. As Maren Stange puts it: '[T]hroughout the nineteenth century, the documentary mode testified both to the existence of painful social facts and to the reformers' special expertise in ameliorating them, thus reassuring a liberal middle class that social oversight was both its duty and its right' (1989: xiii).

Documentary Mappings

Documentary creates its own cognitive map of the world . . .

Michael Chanan

A plain title card informs us about the film's directors, cameraman and sound recordist, while a restrained, elderly voice explains its general topic from off-screen: 'A great deal these days is written about the slums. This film is going to introduce you to some of the people really concerned'. As if to emphasise that even though the topic is an old one, and the way it is presented here is supposedly different and new, the narrator's restrained voice opens the film with a reference to the written word, perhaps referring to recent sociological studies or newspaper articles. This prosaic introduction continues with a similarly neutral opening image, suggesting that we are entering here a world of hard facts and objective knowledge (or are we?). A simple fade-out to a black screen is followed by a fade-in to an establishing wide shot from a rooftop. It provides an almost comprehensive view of Stepney – a working-class neighbourhood in London. The camera's elevated position suggests that we can observe (and also judge?) those living below from a safe distance. 'Down there' we see a street that leads up to a church. At the opposite side of the frame the smoking chimney of a factory forms a perfect symmetrical antipode to the steeple, suggesting that these people's lives oscillate only between humdrum working days and the Sunday mass. A low angle morning sun casts huge shadows of the neighbourhood's buildings, foreshadowing, so to speak, the film's environmental determinist (or is it a propagandist?) plea: to demolish these rundown, shadowy tenements and to relocate their inhabitants to new, brighter buildings. A pan follows. The camera now frames workers on a construction site. So we have a problem, and its solution, all in one shot.

The opening shot of *Housing Problems* introduces us to some of the major issues discussed in this chapter, in particular the issue of 'mapping' urban

space in early documentary film. All of the filmmakers' choices – the symmetrical alignment of factory and church, the perspective-of-god camera position, the decision to film in the morning hours, the pan to the construction site – announce a certain ideological construction, or indeed, a certain 'cognitive mapping' (to use a term introduced by the literary critic Fredric Jameson¹), of London's Stepney and its inhabitants. Despite their emphasis on documentary sobriety, neutrality and objectivity, the filmmakers provide a perfectly constructed opening image of Stepney in order to propose a solution to London's severe 'housing problems'. In this sense, *Housing Problems* represents a continuation of nineteenth-century representations of 'the Other Half', only by other means, that is. Just like *Housing Problems*'s auditory, visual and ultimately also cognitive 'perspective-of-god', the nineteenth-century social reformers as well as their audience, the liberal middle class, equally believed that 'social oversight was both [their] duty and [their] right' (Stange 1998: xiii). Consequently, 'urban explorers' and early social scientists produced not only written surveys, but also a vast amount of photographic imagery and, in the case of the social reformer Charles Booth, even so-called 'poverty maps', to produce such 'oversights' of bursting cities like London.²

Visual maps attempt to represent the multidimensional totality of a lived space on a two-dimensional flat surface. The reduction of multiple dimensions to merely two is not only a cartographic practice, but also a characteristic of the cinematic representation of space. However, cinema is in this sense not only linked to cartography's illusion of totality and oversight. As a visual imaging technology it contains the power of surveillance; it can be used to produce visual, or indeed 'cognitive maps' that order, survey, or control spaces and places. Cinema's problematic proximity to technologies of surveillance is a particularly important issue for documentary filmmaking, as Michael Renov has emphasised.³ This critical observation has also been made by other documentary scholars, for instance by Michael Chanan, who explains that

documentary is not shot in the studios but on location . . . In the process, documentary creates its own cognitive map of the world . . . Like all cognitive maps, the places are real but the angles from which they're seen and the ways of moving around and between them derive from the map-maker's own criteria – cultural, social, imaginary and symbolic. (2007: 78)

Chanan furthermore claims that cinema constituted at the beginning of the twentieth century 'a new form of cognitive mapping', and since cinema was a genuinely urban phenomenon, 'the city becomes its first natural subject' (2007: 84). In keeping with this argument, this chapter will outline early documentary film's cognitive mapping of urban space with a distinct focus on how

slums have been mapped in two types (or currents) of documentary evolving in this constitutive phase of the genre: in (social avant-gardist) ‘city symphonies’ and (Griersonian) ‘social documentaries’. In both cases this chapter will trace the dis-/continuities which link and differentiate this form of slum representation to earlier and later forms. However, it is particularly the latter type that will be of importance, since its particular form (and its implicit cognitive predisposition) is not only still a template for documentary filmmaking on social issues to this day (which will be exemplified with a recent example at the end of this chapter), but has also been a strong influence on politically engaged filmmakers in the global South after 1945.⁴

CITY SYMPHONIES AND THE ‘SOCIAL AVANT-GARDE’

According to Jack Ellis and Betsy McLane, there are four ‘traditions’ feeding into the emergence of the documentary film as a genre in the 1920s and 1930s, among which they believe is a ‘continental realist’ tradition which inspired a range of European avant-garde artists to experiment with the new medium’s documentary (rather than fictional or dramatic) capacities.⁵ Indeed, one can say that at least some of the artists who were part of the numerous avant-garde movements in the 1920s and 1930s – from Formalism in Russia to Surrealism in France and the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) in Germany – were partly inspired by the ‘realistic’ qualities of the new medium. Documentary, as a distinct film practice, emerged, however, not only as a new artistic practice to experiment with, but also and most essentially, through debates among European artists, intellectuals and writers about the nature and function of non-fiction film. These debates were held in the so-called *ciné-clubs* and film societies but also in journals, periodicals, magazines or newspapers. This contributed to what Malte Hagener has described as the first truly ‘international film culture’. The ‘pronounced internationalism of the avant-garde movement’ (2007: 25) had a distinct European context, since it evolved in the major European metropolises of that era – Paris, Berlin and London. These cities became the ‘major nodes in the network that made up the European avant-garde of the interwar period’ (2007: 26).

This distinctly international (or indeed ‘polycentric’) avant-garde movement made the city one of its major themes, especially in so-called ‘city symphonies’, which provided ‘the ultimate metaphor of and for the modern life in the city’ (Hagener 2007: 27). City symphonies were not simply a sub-genre of early documentary; they made the quintessential site of modernity, the city, the major topic of the quintessential media technology of modernity, cinema, which is why in this case one can argue with Hagener (and by extension, also

with Benjamin and Clarke, see Chapter 1) that city symphonies established a *mise en abyme* relationship between cinema and the modern urban experience.⁶ In other words, city symphonies implicitly emphasised that cities and cinema mirror each other *ad infinitum*, since they reproduced the ‘shock-effects’ of modern city life. Chanan argues in a similar fashion, since he observes that these avant-garde documentaries of the 1920s respond ‘to a deeper need for the portrayal of the city as both metaphor and embodiment of the modern world’ (2007: 82). For Chanan, the depicted city thereby became ‘more than the appearance of its physical locations and activities that go on there, but the networks that conjoin and feed them, and which the city dweller feels and senses as much as sees’ (2007: 82).

However, what exactly are city symphonies and how do they approach (or map) urban space concretely? Some of the best known examples of this international sub-genre are Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (*Berlin: The Symphony of a Great City*; 1927), Alberto Cavalcanti’s *Rien que les heures* (*Nothing But the Hours*; 1926), or *Manhatta* (1921) by Paul Strader and Charles Sheerer. According to Bill Nichols, these films are formidable examples of the ‘poetic mode’, since they represent reality ‘in terms of a series of fragments, subjective impressions, incoherent acts, and loose associations’ (2001: 103). The poetic mode of city symphonies displays, according to him, the following key characteristics: no coherent storylines, characters or plots, and rather a focus on patterns, movements and objects; shots are loosely connected in an associative, non-continuous way, since they are not stitched together according to the rules of continuity; the editing is instead rhythmic, akin to musical or symphonic compositions; and it generally aims to illustrate subjective impressions, moods or the poetics of a theme (such as the theme of urban modernity). For Nichols, the poetic mode of city symphonies responds to the apprehension that the ‘modernist event no longer seemed to make sense in traditional narrative, realist terms’ (2001: 103); instead, they rather stressed the fragmentary character of urban modernity, denying (narrative) coherence and refusing to provide (dramatic) closures.

Manhatta and *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* both illustrate the aesthetics of the poetic mode. The former is a ten-minute short film, shot and edited by a painter and a photographer. It structures its sixty-five shots according to a poem by Walt Whitman (a lyric hymn to New York, entitled ‘Mannahatta’, which refers to the native name of the island). Whitman’s verses are displayed via intertitles and do not provide a causal, but rather a loose, associative connection to the following set of shots, which largely depict the modern marvels of urban architecture and industrialisation in the beautiful ‘city nested in bays’ (Whitman), which thus provides a true antithesis to Jacob Riis’s vision of New York. Even though it is not a film about a European city, *Manhatta* represents the earliest example of a city symphony. However, the generic

term ‘city symphony’ was derived instead from the later mentioned example, the seventy-five-minute film *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, which was directed by a painter, Walter Ruttmann. It is one of the rare examples for an avant-garde feature-length documentary that was explicitly made for theatrical exhibitions in cinemas. It can be regarded as this sub-genre’s paradigm example, as it displays some key features that can also be found in the other ‘city symphonies’: a symphonic, or musical, shape, that consists of minor and major motifs and variations of these motifs; a prototypical from-dawn-to-dusk (or a day in the life of a city) structure; and rhythmic editing that varies in pace according to the displayed content. In fact, the innovative editing strategies are this film’s major aspect, for example when the film displays the bustle of everyday life in Berlin’s streets, squares and jammed traffic intersections in fast-edited sequences, which are interrupted by long takes during the peaceful tranquillity of the afternoon hours. Through its focus on ‘the kinaesthetics of the city’, on the energy, pace and movements of both city life and imagery, *Berlin: The Symphony of a Great City*, in fact, perfectly illustrates Benjamin’s *Erlebnis*-thesis, that ‘the spectacle of the cinema both drew upon and contributed to the increased pace of modern city life’ (Clarke 1997: 3).

However, there were also a number of avant-garde inspired documentary films with a distinct focus on social issues such as urban or rural poverty, for example Jean Vigo’s *À propos de Nice* (1930), Joris Ivens’s *Misère au Borinage* (*Poverty in Borinage*; 1933) or Luis Buñuel’s *Las Hurdes: Tierra Sin Pan*, which are perhaps best described as prime examples of an emerging ‘social avant-garde’ (Chanan 2007: 82). A formidable example for a poetic documentary that is part of this ‘social avant-garde’ movement is *La Zone: au pays des chiffonniers* (*The Zone: The Rag-pickers’ Country*; 1927) by Georges Lacombe, which was also distributed under the release title *The Slum Belt*. This twenty-eight-minute film focuses primarily on Parisian rag-pickers (*chiffonniers*), who recycle the waste produced by the inner city bourgeoisie living in the rich *arrondissements*, while simultaneously portraying the Parisian ‘slum belt’ on the outskirts of the city – at that time labelled *La Zone*, rather than *banlieues*. The film literally maps the ‘rag-pickers’ country’ in the opening sequence: the first intertitle reads ‘On earth there are still little known regions . . .’, before a series of nine long shots, arranged in lap dissolves, introduce the viewers to the slum belt’s alleyways, visually mapping ‘la zone’ accordingly as a fortified place of ‘Otherness’.

After informing the viewer that the little known region we ‘are going to see . . . is located several kilometers from . . .’ the *Place de la Concorde*, a short segment displays an animated map that shows the traditional fortifications surrounding Paris. Geographically excluded from the inner city, so the animated map suggests, are the outskirts beyond these fortifications, the no-man’s land of ‘LA ZONE’, as the intertitle reads in capital letters (Fig. 3.1). The film then



Figure 3.1 Mapping the Parisian 'slum belt' in *La Zone: au pays des chiffonniers*.

introduces us to the working day of a rag-picker team, consisting of a woman and two men with the following intertitle: 'The life of chiffonniers. Five o'clock in the morning'. These episodically organised scenes show documentary images of the 'slum belt', but also how slum-dwellers recycle refuse: from collecting it in the streets to discharging and selling it. In between, several scenes introduce us to numerous personalities, such as street urchins, an old woman who houses stray dogs and cats (the 'Mère aux chiens') or Loïse Weber (aka 'la Goulue' or the 'Queen of Montmartre'), a former can-can dancer and star of the *Moulin Rouge*, who, after the decline of her career, was forced to sell cigarettes and live in a caravan. In contrast to the aforementioned *How the Poor Dine in Paris* (see Chapter 2), stylistically *La Zone* displays the typical features of city symphonies and the poetic documentary mode: it assembles its shots in a poetic manner to provide moods and impressions of the 'slum belt' of Paris and a day in the life of its rag-pickers, while structuring it according to the typical morning-to-day (or sunrise-to-sunset) structure of city symphonies.

For some French artists rag-picking was, however, more than just another job for poverty-stricken people; the rag-picker symbolised a paradigmatic figure of both, urban modernity as well as poetry, most notably for Charles Baudelaire, who described their jobs as follows: 'He sorts things out and selects judiciously; he collects, like a miser guarding a treasure, refuse which will assume the shape of useful or gratifying objects' (qtd in Benjamin 2006: 108). Walter Benjamin interprets Baudelaire's description of the work of rag-pickers in his essays on Charles Baudelaire as 'one extended metaphor for the poetic method, as Baudelaire practiced it. Ragpicker and poet: both are concerned with refuse' (2006: 108). In this Benjaminian sense one can read Lacombe's *La Zone* not only as a film that simply 'depicts' poetic impressions of a day in the life of Parisian slum-dwellers; it can also be read as an allegory for the poetic documentary mode itself, since it establishes a *mise en abyme*-relationship between the poetic methods of city symphonies (of reassembling the visual fragments of a city through editing and montage) and the act of recycling the fragments of urban waste.

GRIERSON'S 'SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY'

The 'social avant-garde' drew its inspirations not only from the poetic mode of city symphonies. *La Zone's* imagery, for instance, also draws from (or remediates) social documentary photography of Paris, which by the end of the 1920s was an already established photographic genre (more specifically, *La Zone* drew from Eugène Atget's turn-of-the-century images of, among other things, rag-pickers and their shacks on the outskirts of Paris). The genealogy of this photographic genre was traced back by numerous photography historians to nineteenth-century slum photographers. In his classic *The History of Photography* (1937) – the first historiographic account of hundred years of photography history – Beaumont Newhall, for example, outlines a development which, according to him, began with Jacob Riis. In his version, this genealogy continued through to Lewis W. Hine's documentations of child labour in American factories (discussed by Roland Barthes in his *Camera Lucida*) and the photographic essays on New York's slums by Aaron Siskind, up to the infamous photographs of the American depression era, which were sponsored by the Farm Security Administration (FSA).

The work of the FSA photographers Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans or Jack Delano have widely been discussed within the framework of social documentary photography as a genre, but also with regard to the ideological problems of photographic poverty representation, most notably by Susan Sontag. In her aforementioned 1977 essay collection *On Photography* – which together with Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, are the most influential, classical theory books on photography – Sontag described these depression-era photographs as a form of slumming, and thus, as a continuation of the culture of social voyeurism that characterised late nineteenth-century slum photography (see Introduction). Yet, during the 1920s and 1930s the term 'documentary' became rather associated with the new medium of film. Moreover, in this period, 'documentary' increasingly became consolidated as a genre, and thus was recognised as a genre in its own right. It is commonly agreed among scholars that this consolidation was most notably advanced by the work of the 'British Documentary Movement', more commonly known as the GPO Film Unit.⁷

Almost each and every textbook on documentary film mentions that it was the inaugurator and chief spokesman of the GPO Film Unit, the famous Scottish film critic, theorist and producer John Grierson, who used the term 'documentary' for the first time: in a review for *The New York Sun* Grierson hailed Robert Flaherty's second film for having 'documentary value'. Flaherty's films were essentially ethnographic travel expeditions, which narrated the everyday lives of local natives, such as an Inuit family in the Arctic (in *Nanook of the North*, 1922) or the inhabitants of the pacific island of Samoa

(in *Moana*, 1926). His films were immensely popular with the public, but also criticised for romanticising the figure of the ‘noble savage’. In the light of this critique, one can regard Flaherty’s films as a continuation of nineteenth-century ethnographic travelogues, providing spectators with touristic views of exotic, faraway places and cultures. This is important to mention because Grierson coined the term ‘documentary’ from *documentaire* – a term that was used by French journalists to label written accounts of colonial travel expeditions, which, according to Samantha Lay, ‘connects directly to a body of nineteenth-century literature termed “The Unknown England” texts, whose middle and upper class authors wrote about the hitherto unknown areas of working class Britain’ (2002: 41). Hence, Lay links Flaherty’s ethnographic *documentaires* to nineteenth-century British reformer-journalists (or urban explorers) like Henry Mayhew, George Sims or Charles Booth, but she could have also referred to photographic slum explorers like Jacob Riis.

A similar connection, albeit this time between Grierson’s notion of the ‘social documentary’ and such nineteenth-century travelogues, was outlined by Kathryn and Philip Dodd. They compare the stated intention of the urban explorer George Sims – to travel ‘into a dark continent that is within easy walking distance of the General Post Office’ – with Grierson’s desire to ‘travel dangerously into the jungles of Middlesborough and the Clyde’ (qtd in Dodd 1996: 41). Through drawing on the British tradition of nineteenth-century urban explorers, Grierson’s model of social documentary, however, envisioned a significant departure, both in purpose and content, from Flaherty’s ethnographic *documentaires*. Even though he employed Flaherty at his GPO Unit, Grierson outlines the dangers and potentials of the documentary genre in response to Flaherty as follows: ‘Beware the ends of the earth and the exotic: the drama is on your doorstep, wherever the slums are; wherever there is malnutrition, wherever there is exploitation and cruelty’ (qtd in Blaikie 2010: 65). Hence, for Grierson the drama was right on the doorstep, in the slums, rather than at ‘the ends of the earth’, in exotic faraway places as Samoa or the Arctic.

In this way, Grierson drew not only from Britain’s urban explorers, but also from the ‘continental realist’ urban poets and especially from the avant-garde’s focus on the city theme. In his ‘minor manifesto of beliefs’, ‘First Principles of Documentary’ (1932–4), Grierson argues that *Berlin: The Symphony of a Great City* ‘initiated the more modern fashion of finding documentary material on one’s doorstep . . . in events which have no novelty of the unknown, or romance of noble savage on exotic landscape’ (1976: 23). For Grierson ‘realist documentary, with its streets and cities and slums and markets and exchanges and factories, has given itself the job of making poetry where no poet has gone before it, and where no ends, sufficient for the purpose of art, are easily observed’ (1976: 25). In articles and manifestos like these, Grierson called for a new form of documentary that acknowledges its social responsibility to inform

and educate audiences. In other words, unlike for Flaherty, ‘documentary’ was for Grierson, ‘applied (urban) sociology’ rather than ‘applied ethnology’; and unlike for the continental avant-gardists, he understood it less as a (visually poetic) art form and more as a communication medium that could facilitate social reforms through its power to convey socially or politically relevant messages. This understanding of ‘documentary’ was, of course, also facilitated by the advent of sound, which, in turn, obliterated the avant-garde movement.

Grierson derived his theory of social documentary from the social democratic rather than Marxist idea that societies ought to be cohesive and unified through a social bond held together by the corporate body of the state. Even though this explains why the Grierson-led documentary movement was state-sponsored, it did not necessarily imply for Grierson that documentary ought to function as a propagandist mouthpiece of a social democratic state and hence, that state authorities shall not be criticised or that existing social problems shall not be addressed. He was rather interested in communicating how the ruling class depend on the labour of the working class – as in *Industrial Britain* (Flaherty 1931) or *Night Mail* (Watt and Wright 1936) – but also in contributing to forming a notion of the British nation as a unified socio-political *Gemeinschaft* – as in *Listen to Britain* (Jennings and McAllister 1942) or *Land of Promise* (Rotha 1946).⁸

This shows that Grierson’s major intention was social, rather than aesthetic – or as another filmmaker of the GPO Film Unit, Basil Wright, has put it, the ‘primary interest of the true documentary director is sociological’ (qtd in Lay 2002: 42). However, in more aesthetic terms Grierson understood documentary as a ‘creative treatment of actuality’ and this definition, which is often referred to, sums up his idea of documentary film *practice*. Actuality footage ought to be treated (edited, commented on or interpreted) creatively, but serve a certain socio-political purpose, especially the purpose of educating audiences into becoming informed citizens to create social cohesion. Correspondingly, the socio-political purpose of documentary film, social (or national) cohesion, mirrored in Grierson’s ideas for the documentary film form: the films of the GPO Film Unit were sometimes poetic (such as *Night Mail* or *Listen to Britain*), but more often than not they were expository, persuasive and educational.

Grierson’s notions of documentary’s purpose relates thereby to another etymological root of the term ‘documentary’ that even reaches further back than the French *documentaire*: the Latin *docere* (‘to teach’) connects the genre, as Grierson envisioned it, to educational instruction. However, this etymological link between documentary and education via the Latin term *docere* also connects the Griersonian social documentary model to expository ‘how the poor . . .’ magic lantern lectures and the reform movement of the nineteenth century. Nichols has described the Griersonian type of documentary

accordingly as the 'expository mode', which makes the connection to reformist lantern lectures and their expository mode of educating a middle class public 'how the poor live' even more evident. Tom Gunning has equally pointed to this historical connection, since he has argued that the reformist lecture, illustrated by magic lantern slides, 'clearly parallels later social film documentaries' (1999: 51). Hence, for Gunning, social documentary films returned to (and by extension, modified) certain features that were already present in reformist lantern lectures – a point which I would like to illustrate with a closer analysis of *Housing Problems*, a documentary made by two filmmakers who were employed by Grierson and which represents a paradigmatic example of the way expository documentaries map urban space.

HOUSING PROBLEMS (1935)

Housing Problems was described as a 'template' for the British Documentary Movement (Winston 1995: 43) and as an almost prototypical example for what Nichols coined as the 'expository' documentary mode (1991: 37). Filmed and produced by Arthur Elton and Edgar H. Anstey, the thirteen-minute long film was shown to British audiences, similar to a newsreel presentation, as an interlude ahead of a feature film. It focuses, in a similar fashion as *How The Other Half Lives*, primarily on the issue of dwelling and inadequate housing, as the title of the film already suggests. Additionally, it provides a striking example for several formal elements of the 'expository mode'. Firstly, it attempts to both show and explain 'how the poor live', while simultaneously outlining an environmental determinist argument in favour of a governmental policy which sought to clear the slums of London's Stepney. Secondly, the rhetoric of the short film's argument is embedded within a skilfully developed three-part-structure of argumentative persuasion, in which the word-over-image principle prevails. Assembled in a fashion which Nichols describes as 'evidentiary editing' (2001: 107), images often merely function as visual evidences for the spoken word. Thirdly, and as the title also suggests, it displays the so-called 'problem-solution'-schema, which is according to Nichols (1991: 38) another prototypical principle of the expository mode. Additionally, however, the filmmakers – or documentary mapmakers – aim at visually mapping the slum by juxtaposing wide with close distance shots to create an aesthetically cohesive cognitive map of Stepney.

Accordingly, the two-minute long first part of *Housing Problems* is an exposition that introduces the 'housing problem'. Right after the opening shot which gives us a visual perspective-of-god on Stepney (as described in detail at the beginning of this chapter), another off-screen voice, this time that of a slightly younger but equally concerned middle-class authority figure, the

Chairman of the Stepney Housing Committee, explains the ‘problem of the slum’ as follows:

The problem of the slum faces us because in the early days rows upon rows of ugly, badly designed houses were hastily put up to provide accommodation to the ever increasing army of workers which poured in from the country to the towns. Here are some pictures of typical slum architecture.⁹

Through this voice-of-god exposition by a designated expert, the film introduces us to what Nichols has described as the ‘institutional matrix for expository documentaries’ (2001: 37), which authorises and organises this documentary mode’s ‘discourse of sobriety’ (which is one of Nichol’s more general definitions of documentary). This exposition furthermore aims at explaining/framing the slum problem in more detail (or in closer proximity), while displaying evidence, ‘some pictures of typical slum architecture’, with the evidentiary editing technique. In other words, this introductory part aims to display ‘how the poor live’ by providing visual evidence. Yet, ‘how the poor live’ is not only shown visually (via close-ups of collapsed roofs, filthy corners, crooked stairs, blown plaster, rat-infested corridors, etc.), but is also made more palpable through interviews with actual slum-dwellers, who are introduced by their names and who recount their problems (e.g. how their housing conditions affect the health conditions of their children) during the five-minute long middle section of the film. Several of the slum’s inhabitants are framed up front, often via high-angle, medium-long shots and in their private interiors (Fig. 3.2). They speak directly to the camera while responding to an off-screen interrogator. In the last part of the film the filmmakers provide us with the solution – a re-housing scheme presented with a miniature model of multi-storey flats together with existing public housing facilities – before they return to the problem: the old, deteriorating Stepney slums which are shown in a series of shots at the end of the film. This climax emphasises the filmmakers’ environmental determinist argument (the need for a slum clearance campaign to upgrade Stepney’s inhabitants into a middle-class-like environment) in the most transparent way.

The most frequently mentioned innovation of *Housing Problems* is its idea to let ‘ordinary people’ address their audience directly. This was groundbreaking for its time and has, as the film’s co-director Arthur Elton later put it, since become standard practice for ‘television representation, only long before television’ (qtd in Crothall 1999: 340). Nichols has formulated it as follows: ‘The words of actual workers appeared on British screens for the first time, a sensational achievement in the days long before television and reality TV’ (2001: 139). This ‘sensational achievement’ was, of course, an outcome of the novel



Figure 3.2 Looking down on one of Stepney's inhabitants in *Housing Problems*.

possibilities of sound reproduction in theatres. Besides this, one of the major trademarks of the Grierson-led Film Unit was its innovative use of sound, its 'creative treatment' of direct speech, sound effects, noises and music. Even though written accounts of interviews with slum-dwellers had been – since Henry Mayhew's time – a thoroughly established form of (sociological) slum surveys and studies, *Housing Problems* is with regard to its use of new sound technologies indeed highly innovative: audiences could now actually hear slum-dwellers talking, thus providing not only a closer screen-spectator relationship, but also a novel form of 'sensory immediacy to the tenement problem'.

Yet, despite this 'groundbreaking' innovation, *Housing Problems* was criticised as an industrial propaganda film because it was financed by the *Gas, Light and Coke Company*. The main argument or solution that the film promotes, that is of re-settling slum-dwellers into newly built social housing facilities, served the company's own interest to increase private consumption of gas. Above that, the film was also criticised for its portrayal of slum-dwellers as victims. As Kathryn and Philip Dodd emphasise, despite the filmmaker's groundbreaking idea to let ordinary people speak for the first time in front of a camera, 'the film shows . . . that those people need our help and that we have nothing to fear if we provide them with better homes' (1996: 43). The depiction of slum-dwellers as victims addressing an affluent middle class spectator for help is also consolidated in visual terms, as the camera always keeps a safe distance; the spectator is never given a visual point of view of the slum-dwellers themselves. Instead, the spectator is invited to gaze voyeuristically

at the more or less spectacular details of poverty-ridden homes, of abject housing conditions and dirty corners from a supposedly neutral point of view which displays close similarities to the voyeuristic spectator positioning of nineteenth-century lantern slum shows.¹⁰

The peculiar way of framing Stepney's slum-dwellers from a high angle (Fig. 3.2) is particularly revealing, since they disclose the filmmaker's intentions to set slum-dwellers against the background of their rooms in order to emphasise the environment of their dwelling conditions. However, this kind of framing – often used in classical Hollywood cinematography as a convention to frame helpless, victimised or powerless characters – makes the interviewed slum-dwellers indeed appear to be helpless, small and weak. In other words, the camera literally looks down at them, or as the second director of the film, Edgar Anstey, has himself put it, it looks at 'poor, suffering characters' (qtd in Crothall 1999: 346). Additionally, the lighting in these statically framed interview shots is kept low-key on purpose to let the rooms (in a manner reminiscent of German expressionist cinema) appear to be uncanny. As a consequence Stepney's residents appear as ghostly figures, neither dead nor alive, neither present nor absent, dwelling in unhealthy, claustrophobic environments, which supports the view that *Housing Problems* is 'the victim documentary *par excellence*' (Winston 1995: 43).

Geoffrey Crothall has argued that *Housing Problems* is not a particularly realistic documentary. But, contrary to what canonical documentary textbooks recount, Crothall claims that it is also not unique for its time. In fact, during the 1930s, many British (and also American¹¹) propaganda films promoted slum clearance campaigns, whether financed by the government, local authorities, concerned philanthropists or lobby groups as the *Gas, Light and Coke Company*. Both *The Great Crusade* (Watts 1936) or *Kensington Calling* (Kensington Housing Trust 1930) for example, are such films; whereas the former largely focuses on the fate of poor children, endorsing a 'crusade' against the conditions in the slums, the latter provides stark imagery of slum interiors, intended for pedagogical use in the local community of Kensington. Crothall observes that all of these slum clearance films sought to depict the grim reality of the slums, but 'the one area in which *Housing Problems* . . . distinguishes itself . . . is in its conceit and deception' (1999: 340). In fact, Crothall contends that *Housing Problems* is the only slum documentary of the 1930s that completely ignores its political context – that of the British government's large-scale slum clearance campaign which aimed to re-settle 1.3 million slum-dwellers by the year 1938 – a plan that was never implemented as, by 1945 the German *Luftwaffe* had destroyed large areas of urban, working-class housing. Crothall therefore contends that *Housing Problems* is as much a propaganda film as any of the other slum documentaries of that decade and that it offers no significantly different perspective. 'Official government

propaganda, Griersonian realism and local documentaries on slum clearance may have differed in specifics', Crothall argues, but their main aim 'reflected the dominant social Darwinist and environmental determinist concerns of the period, the belief that degenerate populations could be regenerated by placing them in the correct environment' (1999: 356).

The 'problem' of *Housing Problems*, so to speak, is thus its embeddedness in an ideological context, a set of beliefs concerning the issue of slum dwelling from a prejudiced class perspective which perceived slum-dwellers as inferior, passive and powerless victims. However, and related to that, another 'problem' of *Housing Problems* is its very mode of representation, since the expository mode 'emphasises the impression of objectivity and well-sustained judgment . . . in compliance with the categories and concepts accepted as given or true in a specific time and place, or with a dominant ideology of common sense' (Nichols 1991: 35). Hence, a set of supposedly commonsensical beliefs and prejudiced views on slum-dwellers as victims ideologically intertwines with the film's formal elements. This is especially evident if one considers how, during the documentary's last part, not only are the miniature models, but also the interiors of newly built social housing, shown in a more favourable light, displaying well-lit and clean rooms with open windows, indicating fresh air and open spaces. Additionally, and now framed from a low angle to enhance his status of respectability (the camera/viewer literally 'looks up' to him), the caretaker of such a social housing facility addresses the audience directly with a sincere voice, leaning confidently against a wall as he explains his daily routine of sweeping staircases and courtyards (Fig. 3.3). In this way, the film's mise-en-scène, particularly its lighting and framing, as well as the persuasive rhetoric of the voice-over, all aimed at convincing viewers of the urgent necessity to solve 'the problem of the slums', by creating a clear division between the normal and abnormal, the conventional and unconventional, dirt and cleanliness, the detestable problem and its respectable solution. And yet it also creates a division between 'the better' and 'the Other' half, between the middle class (or middle class-like houses) and slum-dwellers (or claustrophobic slum dwellings), much like in Riis's exposures of the dark, uncanny slums of turn-of-the-century New York City.

With the establishment of such binary oppositions, the film vigorously propagates the governmental-industrial solution to the 'housing problem': to re-locate slum-dwellers to hygienic and respectable living environments, similar to the environmental determinist solutions offered by Jacob Riis. This narrative of redemption from depravation in the slums through 'upgrading' its inhabitants into middle class-like housing environments, was a dominant one during large parts of the twentieth century. In fact, from the 1920s onwards, modernist architects and urban planners conceptualised and built the so-called superblocks, *superquadras*, habitation units, *Plattenbauten* or *residenciales públicos*, while politicians presented them as modern solutions to the old 'housing

problems', not only in Europe and North America, but almost all over the world. Nevertheless, as the editor of the recent volume *Ambivalent Spaces: Memory and Oblivion in Modern Social Architecture* claims, these 'global dreams' to create biopolitical utopias for the urban working classes – the most significant social laboratories of modernist architecture in the twentieth century – eventually became today's ghettos, *banlieues* or *Problembezirke*, or in other words, new synonyms for urban Otherness (Lizardi Pollock 2012: 8).

SLUMS WIDE & CLOSE

Today's TV documentaries operating in the expository mode often display similar strategies of representing slums, which are now predominantly located in the sprawling cities of the global South. Yet, there are also significant differences to both the style and representation of the 'slum problem' – a point that can be illustrated with a 2011 BBC World News report which addresses a slum rehabilitation programme in Mumbai.¹² Like the classic *Housing Problem*, this three-and-a-half-minute TV report equally displays a wide angle/close-up strategy to map, both stylistically and in terms of content, the problems in Mumbai's – and Asia's – largest slum, Dharavi. It opens with a wide angle establishing shot from a perspective-of-god, displaying the roofs and overcrowded streets of Dharavi with a tilt. An off-screen narrator introduces Dharavi as follows: 'Deep in the heart of Mumbai, in Asia's largest slum, the wheels of change are spinning'. The wheel-of-change metaphor is then visually represented via close and medium shots of a Dharavi potter called Mavjibhaj Jetheva and his spinning potter's wheel – a typical feature of evidentiary editing in expository documentaries. Like *Housing Problems*, the report then presents us with an English-dubbed interview with the potter who works and sells his pottery in Dharavi's narrow alleys. Yet, unlike *Housing Problems* the off-screen narrator is not white and male, but a female BBC correspondent who studied in Sydney and Berkeley before joining the BBC. Unlike in *Housing Problems*, in which the (white, male, middle-class) voice-of-god narrator(s) remain invisible, her actual, bodily presence becomes a feature of the report itself, since she is later shown reporting on-screen in the middle of an angry crowd of 'thousands' of protesting Dharavi inhabitants.

The angry protesters indeed symbolise what the 'wheels of change' metaphor refers to: a change in the class-consciousness of slum-dwellers, as Slavoj Žižek would put it. Yet, there is also a change in representation, not only regarding the now visible female on-screen narrator; the slum-dwellers are now neither represented as pitiful victims of slum conditions, nor as overly agreeable pushovers for governmental or industrial re-settlement schemes. In other words, the reported 'problem' is not the appalling sanitary condition of

a slum but, on the contrary, it is exactly the solution that is offered in *Housing Problems*: the re-settlement of slum-dwellers into low-cost residential blocks. Consequently, the report presents us with the conflict between slum-dwellers and slum re-developers via interviews from both sides. Talking-head shots show, for instance, the architect Mukesh Mehta, who promotes his Dharavi redevelopment scheme, as well as slum-dwellers like the potter Mavjibhaj Jetheva, who states with an expression of anger on his face that he is 'not ready to leave this place. I've lived here my whole life. My workshop is here and it is in the centre of town. I won't leave and go anywhere else'. Like *Housing Problems*, the report also visualises Mehta's new schemes with a now computer-animated model of low-cost residential blocks which private investors would build in cooperation with public state and municipal institutions.¹³ Yet, the model also visualises that the remaining space would be used for erecting high-rise company buildings, visually indicating a spatial/cultural clash between what Žižek described as the neoliberal symbolic class of managers and bankers and the new protesting class of slum-dwellers. The BBC report concludes with an argument that Manish Chalana has put forward in an article on Mumbai's contested urban spaces: that for slum-dwellers 'rehabilitation into high rise apartments might ensure better services, but it does not guarantee better quality of life', since such housing blocks would destroy 'the informal economy on which many families rely' to survive (2010: 33–4). To conclude this brief comparison, generally speaking one can say that in *Housing Problems* a partial (or propagandistic) view aims at persuading audiences into accepting a governmental slum clearance campaign, whereas today's expository documentaries – at least in the case of the BBC – aim, rather, at achieving 'well-balanced reporting' by providing at least two perspectives on 'housing problems'.

The expository mode has become one of many other adopted templates of a much more heterogeneous documentary scene today. For example, in applying Nichol's six major modes of documentary representation – poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive and performative – modalities of documentary filmmaking that address the slum-related topics today range from conventional TV reports to highly reflexive (*Ónibus 174 / Bus 174*; Padilha 2002) or resolutely participatory (*Ghosts of Cité Soleil*; Leth and Lončarević 2006) feature-length documentaries that are shown at documentary film festivals. Yet, more often than not, some of the most innovative feature-length documentaries on slum life rather mix several modes to create multilayered approaches to their respective subjects. *Megacities* (Glawogger 1998), for example, is a poetic (mega)city symphony that follows the daily lives of trash scavengers, street kids or hustlers in New York, Mumbai, Moscow and Mexico City and is thus also an observational documentary (since it renounces any voice-over commentary). *Born into*

Brothels: Calcutta's Red Light Kids (Briski and Kauffmann 2004) is, on the other hand, essentially a participatory documentary (the filmmaker interacts with children from Calcutta's slums who are provided with cameras to shoot portraits of their mothers, prostitutes from Calcutta's red light district), but it is also a reflexive (with regard to its use of cameras) and an expository one (through its use of voice-of-authority commentary). *Waste Land* (Walker, Jardim and Harley 2010) is a documentary that mixes performative and participatory modes because it follows a Brazilian artist who encourages waste-pickers working on a gigantic dumping ground to become artists themselves. However, even though filmmakers today seem to constantly push the genre into new directions – which is why many believe that we are today witnessing 'documentary's golden age' – its expository variant is, due to television, still the most dominant worldwide, whether in the form of short BBC reports, like the one on Mumbai's Dharavi discussed above, or in the form of multi-part documentary series like Al Jazeera's *The Slum* (2014) – a six-part series on Manila's notorious neighborhood Tondo.

In order to outline the discontinuities/continuities of this dominant documentary mode, this chapter concludes with another comparison between *Housing Problems* and a contemporary example which not only uses prototypical features of the expository mode – the problem-solution schema or the wide angle/close-up strategy – but which also is a case of multimodal hybridisation: *Lagos Wide & Close* (2005), an interactive DVD by Bregtje van der Haak. On the surface, this audiovisual representation of the former Nigerian capital Lagos might qualify as a modern day 'megacity symphony' but since Lagos is home to one of the largest slum populations worldwide – an estimated two out of three of the city's fifteen million residents live in slums¹⁴ – it largely maps the city's slums which was also the major interest of the research project behind the film. The DVD is based on a Harvard research project (the Harvard Project on the City) that investigates the effects of globalisation on cities under the direction of the renowned Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas. The self-proclaimed mission of the research project was, according to Koolhaas, to understand the city's innovative self-organisation – or 'how Lagos works', rather than 'how the poor live' – despite the city's lack of infrastructure, the deficiencies of the public sector and its unregulated, unplanned and sprawling growth. *Lagos Wide & Close* provides the viewer with an 'institutional framework' for its discourse of sobriety on an academic subject (the effects of globalisation on cities), as it is connected to the educational framework of university-funded research. In this sense, the DVD is less a stand-alone film but rather, it provides additional audiovisual material for what Koolhaas has described as a 'paradigmatic case-study of a city at the forefront of globalizing modernity' (2001: 652), which he and his colleagues supplied with a number of other written and audiovisual material on the city of Lagos.¹⁵ So the DVD

primarily addresses university-educated, Western spectators and is embedded, like some of its nineteenth- and twentieth-century predecessors, in a sociological 'survey' or 'study'.

Yet, the DVD is subtitled with 'An Interactive Journey into an Explosive City', and thus also promotes itself as a touristic, albeit interactive, 'journey' into an unknown land, the *terra incognita* of an 'exploding' sub-Saharan megacity. The notion of exploring and mapping an unknown territory was articulated by Koolhaas himself, who described Lagos as a city that was largely ignored by Western observers. Put differently, for Koolhaas, Lagos is not like London; it is an unmapped urban space since it lacks a city archive with written or audiovisual documents that show how the city was transformed throughout the decades.¹⁶ However, this perception of the city ignores the fact that Lagos is home to one of the largest film industries in the world, the video-based Nollywood film industry, which was in turn largely ignored by Western film scholarship until very recently. Koolhaas's perception of Lagos as an unmapped/unmediated city thus displays an almost colonial conception of Lagos as a Third-World urban *terra incognita* and, above that, a disregard and ignorance for home-grown media productions. Joseph Godlewski has therefore described *Lagos Wide & Close* as a form of touristic slumming, rather than an attempt to truly understand the dynamics of the city of Lagos, its political and economic contexts, its historical development or its multifaceted film culture and media scene. Koolhaas's audiovisual exploration of the city charts, instead, 'the architect's tourist-like fascination as he travels around the city' (2010: 8). For this reason, Godlewski says that *Lagos Wide & Close* has 'much more in common with music videos or television commercials, in that they serve to entertain rather than provide a critical understanding of the environments they ostensibly document' (2010: 9).

Apart from its institutional/educational framework, its disregard of socio-historical (and media) context and the touristic/voyeuristic undertones, *Lagos Wide & Close* also displays similarities to *Housing Problems* on the level of style. As the DVD's title already suggests, *Lagos Wide & Close* hyperbolises the binary wide angle/close-up strategy we have already encountered in *Housing Problems*: on the visual level, the DVD menu offers the interactive option to either view Lagos from a (helicopter) perspective-of-god angle, in which the camera pans from aerial distance over the informal structures of the city, or from up close, in which one follows the city's inhabitants from a more intimate street-level perspective, provided by the cameraman's immersion in the bustle of the city's everyday life with a handheld DV camera. Accordingly, the DVD's booklet informs the user that the 'information on this DVD has been organised according to distance. *Lagos Wide & Close* presents intimate encounters with the city and its people on the one hand, and a more removed perspective of Lagos on the other'. Additionally, the DVD's menu offers three different

audio tracks: 1) comments by Koolhaas, 2) talks with inhabitants, 3) sounds of the city. These can be combined by choice with the two visual options. In combination, the DVD's users could thus watch three different kinds of documentaries in a subsequent order. Even though the DVD's general framework is expository with informational content provided by an 'expert', users can also switch to participatory (in which the camera/documentary filmmakers interact with Lagos's citizens) and observational modes (in which neither expert nor ordinary people comment on the audio track) at will.

Lagos Wide & Close is then an interactive and multimodal new media object (since it has also been 'remediated' into an interactive web documentary; see Fig. 3.3), but its voice-of-god style audio-track of one of its options, narrated by an 'expert', provides us nevertheless with the prototypical problem/solution structure of the argument-based expository mode. The major argument which Koolhaas puts forward is to regard the supposed problem (informality, chaos, unregulated sprawl), not as a problem, but as a solution for how rapidly expanding cities – whether in the global North or South – can organise themselves. This argument is also visually illustrated: the city's traffic chaos is repeatedly filmed through prisms, which lets the traffic junctions appear to have self-similar patterns, reminding the viewer of images of fractal geometries and hinting at the chaos theory notion that underneath the unregulated disorder of informal economies hides a self-organising principle (Fig. 3.3). Such a visual mapping of 'how the city of Lagos works' is, then, less a mapping of a problem, but more of a model city 'at the forefront of globalizing modernity', or as Koolhaas formulates it: 'Lagos is not catching up with us. Rather, we may be catching up with Lagos' (2001: 652). Like *The Places We Live, Lagos*

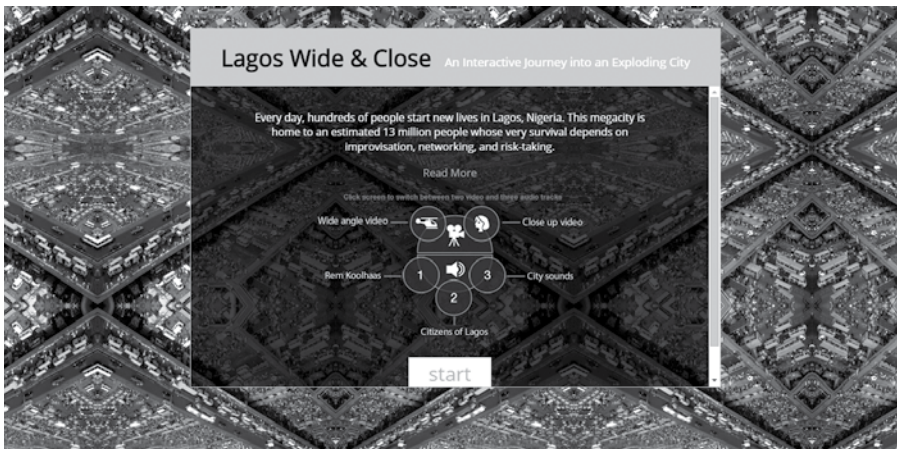


Figure 3.3 *Lagos Wide & Close* as an interactive web documentary on lagos.ubmarinechannel.com.

Wide & Close displays therefore a significant – albeit controversial¹⁷ – change of perception on the topic – or rather, social science topic – of slums. It also is a remediation of that topic into a digital medium, but, similar to *The Places We Live*, this remediation does not attempt to solve how one ought to represent slums on screen: instead of choosing a distance (wide or close), address (educational or touristic), or mode of representation (participatory, observational or expository), it presents these as interactive options from which one can choose.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter continued to trace the development of the documentary mode of representation and its relation to urban slums after the ‘birth of cinema’, highlighting the problematic notion of ‘mapping’ as a paradigm that emerges together with the documentary genre in cinema’s early years. In doing so, the chapter has first outlined how cities became the ‘first natural subject’ (Chanan) of early documentaries. In so-called ‘city symphonies’ urban space has been fragmented and re-assembled to create poetic impressions of modern cities like Berlin, London or Paris – simultaneously the most important centres of experimental avant-garde movements. However, a ‘social avant-garde’ was also emerging during this period, best exemplified by Georges Lacombe’s 1928 film about the daily lives of rag-pickers living in the Parisian ‘slum belt’, *La Zone*. This ‘social avant-garde’ was, however, less influential for future documentary filmmaking on slums than the British GPO Film Unit, led by John Grierson. Premised on the notion that an expository kind of documentary has the power to propagate social reforms and/or showcase a society’s ‘true heroes’ (its ordinary people and workers) and so contribute to social cohesion and unity, Grierson employed filmmakers who sought to put these ideas into practice, among them Arthur Elton and Edgar H. Anstey, who produced this chapter’s main example, *Housing Problems*. The film exemplifies some of Grierson’s ideas, particularly with regard to its social democratic politics (giving ordinary people a voice). Yet, its visual style reveals how embedded it is in a specific ideological context, its ‘cognitive mapping’ of Stepney according to a certain (middle-class, authoritarian) set of values. This makes *Housing Problems* an ethically ambivalent film, connecting it to the similarly ambivalent, but ‘pre-cinematic’ attempts of social reformers like Jacob Riis. Today’s documentary filmmakers have become more sensitive towards issues of representation. However some of the aesthetic strategies featured in *Housing Problems* still appear in conventional TV or other documentaries on slums, particularly the problematic (sociological and apparently scientific) mapping of urban poverty from both the ideological and visual ‘perspective-of-god’.

NOTES

1. Jameson (1991: 49) derived his concept of ‘cognitive mapping’, in fact, from a book on cities, that is from Kevin Lynch’s *The Image of the City* (1960). Lynch argued that citizens are increasingly unable to map modern cities in their minds, since traditional points of orientation have vanished, which results in feelings of disorientation.
2. Booth’s multi-volumed *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1903) includes statistical data and written surveys of working-class life in turn-of-the-century London, as well as maps of the city’s districts, charting London as a socially stratified space. Since slums are today often anonymous blank spots on city maps, the production of ‘poverty maps’ is, more than ever, in practice today. They are deployed by NGOs and social scientists, but also by municipal governments, often with the purpose of improving the governance and policing of slum areas. As another form of remediation, however, modern-day poverty maps are generated in a technologically much more sophisticated way than in Booth’s days: so-called geographic information systems (GIS) use databases and computer software (e.g. *PovMap*, a software promoted by the World Bank) to transform statistical data into modern-day poverty maps.
3. Michael Renov, with Zygmunt Bauman, has put it thus in his *Subject of Documentary*: ‘Documentary has, from its inception, been tied up with modernism. If, as Zygmunt Bauman has suggested, the modernist dream was for “a unified, managed and controlled space” achieved through “projects of global social engineering, [and] the search for universal standards of truth, justice and beauty,” documentary has served as a willing handmaiden.’ (2004: 130–1)
4. See also Chapters 4 and 5 or the recent volume *The Grierson Effect: Tracing Documentary’s International Movement*, in which the editors express their aim to examine the global ‘Grierson effect’, hence, the international influence of John Grierson on documentary film-making culture in a number of key countries and regions’ (Druick and Williams 2014: 9) – among them also Latin America, to which I will return in more detail in Chapter 5.
5. In their *A New History of Documentary Film* (2005: 5–6), Ellis and McLane summarise three other traditions that became constitutive for the formation of the documentary film as a genre in the 1920s and 1930s: the naturalist (romantic) tradition, the newsreel tradition and the propaganda tradition, that originates in the belief that cinema is a political tool, leading, among various other examples, to the Soviet montage cinema but also, in some ways, to John Grierson’s notion of the ‘social documentary’.
6. Echoing the Benjaminian arguments of a David B. Clarke, Malte Hagener argues that ‘the city symphony became the most celebrated genre of the avant-garde and something of a fad in the late 1920s as it provided a *mise-en-abyme* and allegory of the conditions that had brought the avant-garde movement into existence. The city viewed through the lens of the technologically most advanced medium focused on contradictions inherent in the avant-garde. The city as an allegory and shorthand of modern life with all its social and economic factors that contributed to it became the most decisive factor in avant-garde activity’ (2007: 33).
7. Ellis and McLane note that most ‘of the characteristics we associate with the term documentary and see evident in the films to which it is applied were present by the mid-thirties’ (2005: 4), while Chanan contends that the ‘concepts and practices of documentary film go back to the 1920s’, it is ‘consolidated in Britain during the 1930s at the GPO Film Unit under the leadership of John Grierson’ (1997: 203). In 1933 the movement that was gradually forming around John Grierson became part of the General Post Office, which is why it is today primarily referred to as the GPO Film Unit.

8. Ian Aitken has summarised Grierson's theory along similar lines: 'Grierson's theory of documentary film . . . was premised on the belief that the documentary film could both play a vital role in preserving social stability and act as an effective medium of communication between the state and the public . . . However . . . Grierson argued that, during the 1930s, the agents of state (the government and ruling class) had turned against the needs of the people . . . This led Grierson to argue that the documentary film must both criticize the agents of state and represent the interests of the exploited working classes. Grierson's theory of documentary film, therefore, was motivated by a desire to reshape British society in closer accord with an ideal of ethical social cohesion and unity.' (2006: 522–3)
9. Transcribed by the author.
10. The famous Dutch documentary pioneer Joris Ivens thought that there 'have been cases in the history of documentary when photographers became so fascinated by dirt that the result was the dirt looked interesting and strange, not something repellent to the audience. In my opinion . . . *Housing Problems* fell into this error of exotic dirt. You could not smell these London slums' (qtd in Foxon 2006: 44).
11. *The City* (Steiner and van Dyke 1939) is an example of an early American documentary on housing conditions in overcrowded cities. Rhetorically, it promotes an idea similar to *Housing Problems* – 'a plea for town-planning and housing', as the opening titles announce – 'contrasting the poor housing conditions in big city slums with the idyllic new city of Greenbelt, a suburban small town in proximity to Baltimore.'
12. I refer here to a BBC World News report by the journalist Del Irani, which is available on YouTube: *Del Irani – BBC News Report on Mumbai Slum Rehabilitation*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOlg-q4LSoE> (last accessed 5 August 2015).
13. Dharavi is located near Mumbai's financial district and, with its one million inhabitants, is considered to be one of the largest slums in Asia. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the Dharavi case has been the subject of heated debates among scholars (of architecture and urban planning in particular), and not only of local but also of international media, politicians and NGOs. In short, it is a truly 'hypermediated' and 'contested urban space'.
14. Cf. IRIN 2006.
15. Besides a number of edited volumes, this includes another documentary: *Lagos/Koolhaas* (Haak 2002).
16. As Koolhaas states in an interview, 'No one has looked at the African city, or at Lagos, for a very long time. And because there is a general lack of knowledge about how the city works – no information, no archives – we needed to grope our way through Lagos and build our own insights' (Koolhaas 2005: 8).
17. Koolhaas's optimistic views on informality as a self-organising principle have been criticised for ignoring the sufferings of the poor (cf. Gandy 2005).

Neorealist Narratives

The post-war period has greatly increased the situations which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe. These were ‘any spaces whatever’ . . .

Gilles Deleuze

A group of boys chant ‘Olé, olé, olé!’. They seem to be around 10 to 12 years old; some of them are perhaps younger, others slightly older. From a safe distance we see them playing a game in a vacant square. It is bullfighting – also an adult’s game, of course, but a violent one that involves the killing of an animal. We are in Mexico City, as an off-screen narrator has informed us during the film’s prologue. The setting reveals that we are probably in the middle of an inner city area and the camera angle forces us to look at the bullfighting boys as well as at the square and what’s in it: there is a ladder, some barrels, wooden boxes, a pillar – objects that have once been in use, but are now discarded. This is a square that has been forgotten by the city authorities – as forgotten as the boys who are playing in it. There is a wall in the foreground, swiftly assembled it seems, built from random stones and planks. At first the camera remains behind this wall to frame the square with a master shot as a whole – distanced, cold, neutral – continuing the documentary-like prologue to the film. But a brisk cut follows and we are suddenly amidst the action, suggesting that we are now entering a less dispassionate world. Accordingly, the camera now provides us with a more unusual – or cinematic – perspective: it looks up from near the ground, making the kids (and their bullfight) appear to be perilously large. The next cuts bring us even closer to the action; point of view shots enable us to assume the visual perspective of the boys. We see the bull and the matador up close, as if through their eyes. The older boy, pretending to be the matador, looks provocatively into the camera, ready and prepared to stab the younger boy – who is playing a raging bull – to death.

The sequence of *Los Olvidados* described above functions like a condensed metaphor for the rest of the film, in which an older boy, like a matador, constantly provokes and finally kills a younger boy, who gets more and more infuriated with the older boy and the world around him. It also introduces us to what Gilles Deleuze has identified as the abandoned ‘any-spaces-whatever’ of postwar cities in ruin, featuring prominently in many films of that period – only that in this case it is a city that has been less ruined by bombs than by the authorities’ sheer neglect of ‘certain neighbourhoods’. On a more stylistic level, however, it is also symptomatic for a tension (or interplay) that the film upholds throughout: the tension between documentary realism and the techniques of cinematic story-telling, and in particular, cinema’s power to engage us with the subjectivity of a character – in this case children – to let us assume his or her (visual, cognitive, emotional) view of the diegetic world in question. This tension between the sensitivity of an observational documentarian and the urge to nevertheless tell a melodramatic story, involving characters with irrational passions and fatal desires, is crucial for understanding a film movement widely known as Italian neorealism. This chapter outlines why that is so and thereby sketches neorealism’s multifaceted links to the documentary genre.

Moreover, this chapter will also outline neorealism’s global impact. During the interwar period film cultures, film movements and individual filmmakers continued to develop (reform, re-appropriate or transform) realist styles on a transnational scale. What changes after 1945 however, is that a (neo)realist style of filmmaking also emerges across less developed regions of the world. Ever since then, many films which are either set in slums or feature slum-dwellers as protagonists, display affinities to the neorealist style and mode of production. The second question tackled in this chapter is therefore, why did the neorealist style of filmmaking became so appealing to filmmakers across the world, particularly to those filmmakers who were tackling subjects like life in the urban slums? In their introduction to *Global Neorealism: Transnational History of a Film Style*, Giovacchini and Sklar provide a fairly simple, but nevertheless convincing answer: ‘what intrigued Indian, African, or Latin American filmmakers about Italian neorealism was its mode of production’ (2012: 11). Nelson Pereira dos Santos, one of the main figures in the Brazilian version of neorealist cinema during the 1950s, explained it similarly: ‘Without neorealism, we would have never started, and I think no country with a weak film economy could have made self-portraying films, were it not for that precedent’ (qtd in Rich 1997: 275). In other words, one of the possible answers to the above question is that it was the affordable mode of production which made neorealist cinema so appealing to filmmakers of the so-called ‘Third World’. Since this mode of production was essentially derived from documentary filmmaking, the following paragraph will first discuss neorealism’s close ties to the

documentary genre (particularly to the Griersonian type of documentary), before outlining its travels across the planet, and particularly its travels across the emerging 'planet of slums'.

NEOREALISM AS *DOCUMENTARIO NARRATIVO*

Theorists like André Bazin or Gilles Deleuze perceived neorealism less as a continuation of previously established modes of representation, but rather as a radical break with the 'old realism' of the interwar period (sometimes also described as the theory of the 'classical-modern divide'). But previous accounts regarded the early films of Roberto Rossellini, Luchino Visconti or Vittorio De Sica, not only as radically novel, as a 'modern' or alternative film movement (that is, as an alternative movement to classical Hollywood's studio-star system), but also as a genuinely *national* phenomenon that was the result of the Italian postwar situation. Similar traditional perceptions and accounts have been recently attacked by film scholars, who now rather outline neorealism's *transnational* origins as well as its hybridity, that is, its overlapping and intermingling with other forms, styles and currents that preceded it. Movements elsewhere, as the Griersonian documentary school in Britain or Poetic Realism in France, developed distinctly realist practices long before World War II.¹ Significantly, they paved the way for the Italian postwar movement. In Germany and Austria, for example, the art movement *Neue Sachlichkeit* generated a wide variety of films that were not only opposed to the overly theatrical acting and staging styles of German expressionism, but also tackled the *Soziale Frage*.² In fact, one can say that the social or reformist documentary tradition has been as influential to the *Neue Sachlichkeit* as Grierson's idea of the social documentary was to neorealism. Paul Willemsen has drawn this latter connection and explains that 'both neorealism and the British documentary were examples of an artisanal, relatively low-cost cinema working with a mixture of public and private funds' (1989: 5). In other words, the artisanal, often publicly funded documentary mode of production, served as a template for many neorealist filmmakers who, struggling to find funding for their films in the postwar era, had to rely on amateur rather than professional actors, shoot on location rather than in film studios and use the technology available to hand, rather than spend money on costly stock, lighting and camera equipment.

Beyond this rather pragmatic explanation, the film scholar Luca Caminati has recently outlined the neorealist's links to the documentary mode, and particularly to the British Documentary Movement, in more detail. In his 'The Role of Documentary Film in the Formation of the Neorealist Cinema', Caminati emphasises that neorealism is actually an aesthetically hybrid form

with no national points of origin and that it emerged, not unlike the avant-garde of the 1920s, from international dialogues and exchanges among a wide variety of European and, by extension, non-European filmmakers. In the 1930s they were already concerned with questions of documentary realism or, as Caminati puts it: ‘This historic neorealism (the actual cinematic movement) is a culmination of a long process of rapprochement between art and reality in the Italian and European *weltanschauung*’ (2012: 58). For Caminati, it is especially important to consider the institutional context surrounding the supposed ‘origins’ of neorealism in the 1930s, during the Mussolini era. Due to the Fascist regime’s propaganda efforts, the institutionalised Italian film scene of that time, subsidised by the Fascist regime, shared the worldwide interest in documentary (and propaganda) films. The writers of the most influential Italian film journal *Bianco e nero* thoroughly discussed the films of John Grierson and the GPO Film Unit, highlighting the importance of documentary for the development of Italian national cinema. This journal was not only a critical platform for those who later became neorealist directors and scriptwriters; it was also published by Italy’s national film school, the *Centro sperimentale di cinematografia* (‘Experimental Film Centre’), where some of these directors and scriptwriters studied. The *Centro*’s teachers and students had, in fact, a keen interest in what the Brazilian-born filmmaker Alberto Cavalcanti has termed *documentario narrativo*, which is best translated as ‘narrativised documentary’. But who was Alberto Cavalcanti and what kind of film form did his notion of *documentario narrativo* describe?

It is important to highlight Cavalcanti’s cosmopolitan biography at this point, since, during the 1920s and 1930s, he not only embodied the role of a transnational mediator between various film cultures, but also the role of an instructor and teacher of various technological and stylistic innovations which were important for the neorealist movement.³ Born in Rio de Janeiro, but with Italian origins, Cavalcanti migrated to France in the late 1920s during the heyday of the avant-garde film movement, where he directed his first film, the aforementioned city symphony *Rien que les heures*. After working for Paramount in Paris, where he participated in producing the studio’s first talkies, he established a reputation as an expert for the creative use of sound in film. For this reason Cavalcanti was employed by John Grierson in London, who was looking for such an expert to instruct the filmmakers of his GPO Film Unit in the new technologies and aesthetic possibilities of sound cinema. Caminati claims that it was due to Cavalcanti that the *documentario narrativo* developed into an established and formalised mode of filmmaking at the GPO Film Unit (2012: 58). Alongside Grierson, he became one of the leading figures of the British Documentary Movement, and that is not only because of his expertise in the use of sound technology, but also because he pushed the British filmmakers into gradually rejecting Griersonian notions of pedagogical

didacticism – best exemplified in *Housing Problems* – in favour of telling stories which would appeal to audiences on a more emotional, less pedagogical level. In short, contrary to Grierson, Cavalcanti favoured a narrative approach to documentary filmmaking.

Since Grierson himself, as well as Grierson-trained technicians and filmmakers, travelled to other countries to help establish national schools of documentary filmmaking, Cavalcanti did the same.⁴ He travelled to Rome to lecture about this new genre he was developing in London. Cavalcanti also contributed essays to *Bianco e nero*, in which he argued that the *documentario narrativo* had its origins in the ethnographic ‘docufictions’ of a Robert Flaherty. Accordingly, he conceptualised his preferred mode of film as a hybrid between fiction and non-fiction filmmaking, in which, just like in Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*, non-professional actors play characters in a scripted story that is shot on location. In this way, Caminati emphasises ‘Cavalcanti’s role as a moderniser of the Italian documentary scene’ (2012: 59), and describes how he played a key role at the *Centro*, where he seems to have found a fertile ground and enthusiastic admirers among students and teachers for his ideas. Through the cosmopolitan figure of Alberto Cavalcanti and his notion of *documentario narrativo* as a hybrid between fiction and nonfiction filmmaking, the social documentary–neorealism (or London–Rome) connection becomes historically more substantial than those previous assumptions which defined neorealism in a rather vague way as ‘documentary-like’. In fact, Caminati contends that the term ‘neorealism’ itself was first applied in reference to the Griersonian documentary (2012: 57). He furthermore argues that during the 1930s, the *documentario narrativo* became a transnational ‘cultural battlefield’ between fictional and nonfictional modes of filmmaking, as well as a ‘progenitor to neorealism’ (Caminati 2012: 54). This point is important to consider since the most common denominator of many slum-set films since 1945 is their hybridisation, play, or even reflexivity regarding fictional and nonfictional modes of filmmaking (see also Chapters 5 and 7).

TRAVELLING NEOREALISM(S)

Apart from the historical and production-related connections to the documentary genre outlined above, one also has to consider the perhaps more substantial socio-historical causes for the emergence of the neorealist movement in Italy to answer the question of why neorealism became a truly global film style. Robert Stam, for instance, clarifies the most commonsensical socio-historical context for its emergence as follows: ‘postwar film realism emerged from the smoke and ruins of European cities’ (2000: 73). Although not particularly interested in socio-historical contextualisation, Deleuze has equally

claimed that postwar cinema was a reaction to the emergence of new urban spaces ‘which we no longer know how to describe’; these new urban spaces were ‘deserted but inhabited, disused warehouses, waste ground, cities in the course of demolition or reconstruction . . . in these any-spaces-whatever a new race of characters was stirring, kind of mutant: they saw rather than acted, they were seers’ (1989: xi). The French philosopher had already discussed what he means by ‘any-spaces-whatever’ in his first book on cinema, *Cinema I: The Movement Image* (1986: 111–14), defining it as a virtual space divorced from any specific socio-historical coordinates – the Hollywood conception of cinematic space, so to speak, in which settings or social spaces serve first and foremost a diegetic or character-centred function. In his *Cinema II: The Time Image*, however, the term re-appears in a slightly different fashion, namely as a description of postwar cityscapes in ruin, which Deleuze now regards as ‘real’ any-spaces-whatever.

In order to comprehend his understanding of the term ‘any-spaces-whatever’ more thoroughly, we should briefly recount Deleuze’s theory of the ‘time image’. For Deleuze, after World War II causal and chronological links between images (or shots) give way to non-causal and non-chronological links in certain films; with it the chain linking perception–affection–action exercised in the films of classical Hollywood, enters into a crisis and leads to the emergence of such ‘time images’. In neorealist films such time images are, for example, long takes that show characters strolling, wandering or journeying through (ruined) cityscapes, without clear-cut relations to a character-centred action in the film’s plot. For Deleuze, the neorealist’s emphasis on often aimless journeys and long takes is evidence that there is now a blockage in the causal chain that links perception with affection and action. This results in a ‘cinema of the seer’ (rather than of the agent), which is a direct outcome of the character’s environment – urban spaces ‘which we no longer know how to describe’, the postwar ‘any-spaces-whatever’, in which situations appear to which ‘we no longer know how to react’. In short, for Deleuze the peculiar style of neorealist films is not only a result of the specific historical moment in which they appear, but also the outcome of radically transformed urban spaces.

Many films that were dubbed as ‘neorealist’ were indeed often set in postwar cities which were either in ruin or in the process of reconstruction, but they were sometimes also set on a city’s fringes, its outskirts and slum-like neighbourhoods. In 1948 the Italian director Stefano Vanzina stated that ‘if you set your story in the outskirts of the city, you will soon be able to grab [a critical] victory’ (qtd in Giovacchini and Sklar 2012: 4). More recently, Mark Shiel has analysed the urban settings of many or – as he calculates – more than half of all neorealist films in his monograph *Italian Neorealism*, which is tellingly subtitled ‘Rebuilding the Cinematic City’. He argues that an understanding of the Italian city, particularly its postwar modernisation processes,

is key to an understanding of neorealist films. For Shiel, ‘one of the most important continuous concerns of neorealist cinema was with the city and with the process of modernization – for example, post-war reconstruction, industrialization, secularization and rural-to-urban migration – of which the city was the clearest expression’ (2006: 15). Even in neorealist films set in rural Italy, seemingly remote from any rebuilding or modernising processes, such as *La terra trema* (Visconti 1948), *Riso Amaro* (*Bitter Rice*; de Santis 1949) or *Stromboli* (Rossellini 1949), the city is, as Shiel argues, ‘present as a “structuring absence”, as an off-screen space to which characters depart or from which they arrive’ (2006: 15). A similar observation can be made for neorealism-inspired films from other parts of the world, and the last shot of Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s *Vidas Secas* (*Barren Lives*; 1963) is perhaps the best example with which to illustrate this point. Entirely set in the rural lands of the desert-like Brazilian north-east, the *sertão*, a long take at the end of the film shows how a family of four migrates towards an endless horizon, where at the end, according to the epilogue, they will arrive in a southern Brazilian ‘city of hope’, most probably Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo. Here, as in other neorealism-inspired films that depict the hardships of survival in poverty-stricken villages, the ‘cities of hope’ are indeed present as a structuring absence. One could also say that the off-screen space of postwar films which are entirely set in poor rural regions are in fact the ‘slums of hope’, because it was (and still is) the slum which predominantly became the destination of peasants migrating towards the city in the global South, or as Mike Davis has so fittingly put it: ‘Slums, of course, originate in the global countryside’ (2004: 27).

From *Stromboli* in Italy to *Vidas Secas* in Brazil and *Pather Panchali* in India (*Song of the Little Road*; Satyajit Ray, 1955), one can argue that neorealism had a profound effect on how postwar filmmakers tackled life in the ‘global countryside’. The same can be said about the representation of cities, or as Colin McArthur has put it: ‘one has to confront the inflection given to such representations [of the city] by the massive international influence of Italian Neo-Realism on films made at that time’ (1997: 40). Differences between cities are of course as striking as the specific cultural and socio-historical dynamics that shape them. Nevertheless, in the immediate postwar period there were some striking analogies between many cities of the global South. In growing urban centres such as Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City, Bombay, or Manila, various reasons facilitated the increase of urban populations, among them, and most significantly, the industrialisation and modernisation efforts by national, regional or municipal governments. As already mentioned in Chapter 1, Janice Perlman has proposed to regard the 1950s as a turning point decade which announces the major transformation towards a less rural and predominantly urbanised global South (2010: 45). Hence, the postwar era is yet another junction in which media and social history overlap, because it

is not only a period of watershed for film historians but for urbanists too. It announces the beginning of a major global transformation in which the cities of the global South start to grow on an unprecedented scale and with them, the number of slums too. At the same time, in many countries of the global South – although not everywhere in equal measure – the agricultural sector was neglected and left unprotected to the forces of modernisation, which resulted in the impoverishment of rural populations and hence led to massive waves of cityward migration.

The stories and images of Italian neorealist films that were set in the ‘any-spaces-whatever’ of ruined Italian cities, in which impoverished, dislocated or unemployed characters walked, wandered or journeyed through ruined cityscapes, seeking food and work, did have in turn a profound effect on filmmakers in the global South, who found similar conditions and life stories at the fringes of their expanding cities. Thus Robert Stam provides another possible reason for the spread of the neorealist style in Latin America and beyond, adding a rather geo-political explanatory framework:

The way for filmic third-worldism was prepared, in Latin America at least, by the popularity of Italian neo-realism, partially facilitated by Italian immigrant populations but also by certain analogies between the Italian social situation and that of Latin America. The social geography of Italy, divided into rich North and poor South, uncannily homologized the world at large. Indeed, there was a good deal of cross-fertilisation between Italian neo-realism and film theory and practice in Latin America (and elsewhere, for example the case of Satyajit Ray in India and Youssef Chahine in Egypt). (2000: 93)

The analogy between the economic and social inequalities of the world at large (the North-South divide) and Italy’s social division, split geographically into a wealthy, urban-industrialised north above Rome, and an impoverished, rural-agrarian south – the so-called *mezzogiorno* – is thus another framework through which one can explain the spread of neorealism in the global South.

As Stam suggests, it was either because of the work of transnational mediators, immigrants and travellers from or to Europe who were involved in the business, teaching or making of films, or by their screening at newly established film festivals in the global South – for example, at the first ‘International Film Festival’ of India in 1952 in Bombay – that the films of Rossellini, De Sica and Visconti soon travelled around the postwar and/or post-colonial world. Apart from India, many filmmakers from other parts of the global South adopted the neorealist style and mode of production in the postwar period. They narrated fictional stories that were sometimes based on novels and short stories and sometimes on actual events and ‘found stories’. Their

main characters were impoverished farmers, cityward migrating fathers, sons and families, homeless street urchins or starving slum-dwellers. To list some of the most representative examples, the following were set in Rio de Janeiro: *Rio 40 Graus* (*Rio 100 Degrees*; Santos 1955) and *Rio Zona Norte* (*Rio, Northern Zone*; Santos 1957); in Mexico City: *Los Olvidados*; in Buenos Aires: *Barrio Gris* (*Grey Neighbourhood*; Soffici 1954); in Santa Fé: *Los inundados* (*The Flooded Ones*; Birri 1962); in Calcutta: *Do Bigha Zamin* (*Two Acres of Land*; Roy 1953); in Bombay: *Boot Polish* (Arora 1954); in Manila: *Anak Dalita* (*The Ruins*; Avellana 1956); in Johannesburg: *Come Back, Africa* (Rogosin 1960) and in Dakar: *Borom Sarret* (*The Wagoner*, Sembéne 1966). As this list shows, the neorealist style – a style that utilises non-professional actors and real locations for often melodramatically charged fictional narratives – has been deemed appropriate for tackling topics like urban poverty and has therefore been welcomed by many emerging filmmakers in the global South.

Nevertheless, the aesthetical, ethical or political intentions that those filmmakers may or may not have had – whether inspired by the possibilities of low-cost modes of production or not – differ in each case, for each director and within each cultural context. Even though many of the films listed above share a similar set of characters, plotlines and motifs, they are, from an aesthetical perspective, as heterogeneous as these films' urban settings. In fact, whether a film was regarded as 'neorealist' or not was a hotly debated subject during the 1950s: whereas *Do Bigha Zamin*, for instance, incorporates Bollywood-typical musical sequences to entertain its audience – setting parts of its story in a studio-recreated Calcutta slum – *Barrio Gris* adapts elements of the film noir genre, while most of its cast nevertheless consists of non-professional actors acting a scripted story that was shot on location in an Argentine *villa miseria*. Some of these, at times, paradoxical cases are discussed in the aforementioned volumes on global neorealism (Ruberto and Wilson 2007; Giovacchini and Sklar 2012; see Chapter 2). As its editors claim, neorealism travelled across the world and has continuously been globalised or creolised, which is why one has to consider a film's specific context, production, cultural or socio-historical, in each case. A good example of how the neorealist style was adopted, transformed and modified according to a specific context is Luis Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* – a film which is, as I claim, just like *How The Other Half Lives* and *Housing Problems*, a representative example of slum representations on screen.

LOS OLVIDADOS (1950)

Mark Polizzotti has argued that poverty is a rather secondary theme in *Los Olvidados*; its main theme is the lack of basic human needs: 'Although set in

the slums . . . *Los Olvidados* is not a film about poverty or juvenile delinquency . . . The real subject of the film is a lack of sustenance – defined as food, love or human dignity’ (2006: 11). *Los Olvidados* is aptly translated as ‘The Forgotten Ones’, which puts an emphasis on what Polizzotti believes to have identified as the film’s central theme. The film focuses largely on a boy called Pedro, who is essentially ‘forgotten’ by his own uncaring mother and for whose affection and care the boy yearns. While Pedro is rejected by his mother, he is plagued by an older boy called Jaibo, who is an escapee from a juvenile jail and the leader of a youth gang. Pedro’s acquaintance with Jaibo is fatal because the older boy seems to be the cause of all Pedro’s misfortunes, which ultimately lead to his death. But the film does not narrate a clichéd story of an innocent child who becomes the victim of exploitative characters; rather, it narrates a story of incomprehensible contingencies and mysterious paradoxes, in which fatal misfortunes, misconceptions and chance encounters eventually lead to the film’s bleak ending.

The central plot is therefore, like many other neorealist films, structured around loosely connected episodes, which accentuate contingency rather than cause-and-effect. These contingencies start to unfold when Jaibo kills another boy, whom he holds responsible for bringing him to jail. Pedro witnesses the crime but is talked into keeping quiet about it. Later, Jaibo has an affair with Pedro’s mother, which establishes him, despite his minor age, as an Oedipal rival to Pedro. The film’s Oedipal symbolism is even more accentuated when Jaibo steals a knife from a blacksmith, Pedro’s employer. Wrongly accused of stealing the knife, it is Pedro instead of Jaibo who is sent to a reformatory for juvenile delinquents. Towards the end, an accidental encounter on the street results in a fight between the two rivals during which Pedro is murdered by Jaibo who in turn, accidentally runs into the police, who kill him too. The last scene of the film offers no cathartic resolution, but instead shows, in one of the film’s most memorable shots, how Pedro’s dead body is thrown off a donkey into a ditch filled with detritus – which not only metaphorises the film’s *Olvidados*-theme, but also Zygmunt Baumann’s thesis of the redundancy of ‘wasted lives’ in the global shantytowns/dumping grounds.

Upon its initial release, *Los Olvidados* was received with hostility from Mexican critics; they were offended by the film’s uncompromising portrayal of Mexico City’s social problems by a non-Mexican filmmaker. The film was even withdrawn from circulation in Mexican cinemas after only two days. However, although *Los Olvidados* was made by an immigrant ‘foreigner’, it shared the same hostile reception as neorealist films elsewhere: Italian directors were attacked by Italian critics, and even by some politicians, for their apparently distorted portrayal of the dirty underbelly of Italian society in a similar way.⁵ Yet, precisely because of its ‘politically incorrect’ representation of amoral behaviour in Mexico City’s slums – of adults displaying

sexually deviant rather than age-appropriate responsible behaviour, of senseless rather than justified violence, and of delinquent rather than innocent children – *Los Olvidados* was described by more benevolent critics of that time, perhaps surprisingly, as a ‘documentary’ on urban poverty and juvenile delinquency.⁶ As Julie Jones, in her essay ‘Interpreting Reality: *Los Olvidados* and the Documentary Mode’ recounts, the director himself contributed to the reception of the film as a ‘factual document’ since he repeatedly claimed its documentary value. According to his statements, Buñuel researched for *Los Olvidados* ‘like a sociologist’, claiming to have acquired a scientific expertise on the topic. Buñuel legitimated his ‘scientific’ authority as a documentarist of Mexico City’s slums through creating an equivalent paratextual discourse: he recounted to journalists how he gathered newspaper articles, read archival files from a reformatory, interviewed social workers, went to a juvenile court to base his films on facts and documentary sources. Even the film’s drastic ending is based on a documentary source – a newspaper account of the discovery of the dead body of a twelve-year old boy on a garbage dump (Jones 2005: 22). Additionally, he presented himself as a quasi-anthropologist (or participatory observer) of Mexico City’s slums, where he ‘spent almost six months getting to know those poor neighborhoods’ and where he ‘saw things many journalists knew nothing about’ (qtd in Jones 2005: 22).

The film has also been interpreted as a harsh critique on the contemporary political situation in Mexico. As an émigré from Spain, Buñuel’s arrival in Mexico coincided with the beginning of a postwar policy by the Mexican government under the presidency of Miguel Alemán (1946–52), which pushed for industrialisation and modernisation, encouraging foreign investment (most notably by the US), but simultaneously abandoning social programmes such as land reforms. This inevitably led to what other cities in the global South witnessed during the postwar era: how rural migrants were flocking into big cities in increasingly greater numbers. The outcome of this policy – also referred to as *alemanismo* – was particularly visible in the country’s capital, whose population number almost doubled within ten years (between 1940 and 1950, from 1.7 to 3.1 million). *Los Olvidados* indeed addresses this political context from the beginning and tellingly, the film opens like an expository documentary in the Griersonian fashion. A voice-of-god narrator introduces the spectator to what Mike Davis has described more than half a century later as ‘the planet of slums’. After a newsreel-like montage of documentary shots, displaying the well-known city skylines of New York, London and Paris, the final shot shows us a perspective-of-god skyline of Mexico City with a pan, while the off-screen narrator explains the global dimension of the film’s topic as follows:

Almost every capital, like New York, Paris, London, hides behind its wealth, poverty-stricken homes where poorly-fed children, deprived

of health or school, are doomed to criminality. Society tries to provide a cure. Success for its efforts remains very limited. The future is not bound to the present: The day will come when children rights are respected. Mexico, that large modern city, is no exception to the rule. This film shows the real life. It's not optimistic. The solution to this problem is left to the forces of progress.⁷

One can find these kind of documentary-like opening sequences, accompanied by an explanatory voice-over also in other neorealism-inspired films from that era, such as for instance in *Barrio Gris*, in which the setting of the film, a 'grey' *villa miseria*, is introduced in a more poetic, and less moderate tone by a voice-of-god narrator. This kind of expository introduction was of course a convention that was also frequently used in Hollywood films of that time. However, the opening titles of *Los Olvidados* emphasise that 'the film shows the real life', that it 'is based on true facts' and that 'no character is fictional', as if to alert the audience, that what is about to follow is not 'just another story' from the slums. Like the establishing shots in *Housing Problems*, where a 'housing problem' is introduced, *Los Olvidados* introduces the 'social problem' of children turning to crime. In contrast to *Housing Problems*, however, the narrator already announces the film's open-endedness, that the story that is about to follow is too 'real' to offer any dramatically constructed ('positive') solutions; these are left to the 'forces of progress' to find. In other words, this exposition announces that *Los Olvidados* is some form of narrativised documentary, a *documentario narrativo*. The film also displays some typical features of neorealist uses of mise-en-scène and cinematography: apart from the film's episodic narrative structure which highlights the contingencies of everyday-life situations, the exterior scenes were all shot on location. In addition, Buñuel frequently used long shots, long takes and depth of field photography to emphasise a Bazinian form of spatial realism; and non-professional actors – boys from the slums, who were trained to act specifically for the film – perform most of the film's characters. Some of the film's shots are furthermore dissociated from a strictly character-centred mise-en-scène, since they often frame the film's characters from long distances, just like in the above described opening shot, accentuating what Deleuze has described as urban 'any-spaces-whatever'. In this way the viewers are repeatedly asked to divert their attention away from the story and contemplate the sights of Mexico City's urban wastelands (Fig. 4.1).

Buñuel himself explained his aesthetic approach in *Los Olvidados* as follows: 'My film is entirely based on real cases. I tried to expose the wretched condition of the poor in real terms, because I loathe films that make the poor romantic and sweet' (qtd in Polizzotti 2006: 33). In this statement Buñuel not only emphasises the documentary character of his film, but also refers to the so-called 'classical Mexican cinema', which resembled (in its style and



Figure 4.1 A long shot setting Jaibo amidst Mexico City's 'any-spaces-whatever' in *Los Olvidados*.

mode of production) the classical Hollywood genre/star-system. Mexican national cinema thrived in the period from the 1930s to the late 1950s, which is why it has been labelled as the 'golden age' of this country's film industry. Buñuel's antipathy against the style, look, and nationalist rhetoric of classical Mexican cinema was especially directed towards folkloristic and romanticised depictions of the country's peasantry and impoverished lower classes, as for instance in *Nosotros Los Pobres* (*We, The Poor Ones*, Ismail Rodríguez 1948). This context explains Buñuel's perhaps contradictory insistence on the documentary value of his film. The Mexican film scholar Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz has emphasised this aspect, putting *Los Olvidados* firmly into the context of Mexican national cinema. In his study *Buñuel and Mexico: The Crisis of National Cinema* Acevedo-Muñoz explains that *Los Olvidados* actually fell into an era of crisis and transition, since the ideals of the Mexican Revolution (1910–20) seemed to lose all their utopian potential for reform in the face of *alemanismo*. While classical Mexican cinema still celebrated those revolutionary ideals, Buñuel thought of them as worn-out ideological clichés. *Los Olvidados* rejects the established clichés of Mexican cinema, as well as its (nationalist) ideals and values in the face of radically transforming social realities (particularly the increase of urban poverty). In this way, *Los Olvidados*

‘directly addresses and attacks the official idea of Mexican culture, the official shape of Mexican cinema that was part of the post-revolutionary cultural project’ (Acevedo-Muñoz 2006: 67).

Acevedo-Muñoz furthermore claims that in previous scholarship, the Mexican (cultural and socio-historical) context of Buñuel’s Mexico-set films was often completely ignored. Most of his films, including *Los Olvidados*, were rather discussed within an auteurist framework. This is especially due to Buñuel’s surrealist avant-garde films, *Un Chien Andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*; 1929) and the scandalous *L’Âge D’Or* (*The Golden Age*; 1930), which do not display any social realist themes in an obvious sense. Nevertheless, Buñuel wasn’t unfamiliar with social topics like poverty. His third film, *Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan* (*Land without Bread*, 1932), is a ‘study of human geography’, as the prologue to the film announces. It is, hence, a documentary, and seemingly at first, one that uses a classical expository mode to explain poverty in the so-called Las Hurdes region in Spain. It focuses on, among other things, ill-nourished or dying children – issues that relate closely to *Los Olvidados*. In many ways *Las Hurdes* initially reminds one of the ethnographic travelogues of a Robert Flaherty. At the beginning, the film’s voice-of-god narrator highlights the exotic backwardness and remoteness of the region, and includes furthermore – like Flaherty’s ethnographic travelogues – many staged, re-enacted and manipulated scenes. But unlike Flaherty’s films, Buñuel also inserts almost surreal images of cruelty and wretchedness, hyperbolising the stereotypical perception of Las Hurdes as a ‘bad and hidden place’.⁸ This strategy was interpreted by some scholars as a reflexive attempt to expose the documentarists’ voyeuristic gaze of ‘looking at’/othering alien cultures, for instance by Vivian Sobchack, who puts it in her reading of *Las Hurdes* as follows:

What we conventionally see *documented* by the camera is misery, poverty, illness, and death. But what the film also documents – what it shows us and unconventionally makes us aware of in its unfolding – is the *documenting* of the Hurdanos, the turning them into objects from which films are made. (1998: 73)

In other words, Sobchack suggests that *Las Hurdes* should rather be considered a ‘reflexive documentary’ (Nichols) on the ethnographic documentary film and less as an attempt to ‘objectively’ document the impoverished Hurdanos.

But why this excursion to *Las Hurdes*? In my opinion, one can read *Los Olvidados* equally as a reflexive film, but reflexive with regard to neorealism. While the film introduces itself quite explicitly as a *documentario narrativo*, as it progresses it rather becomes an examination of how one could define notions of (neo)realism in a quite unorthodox way. Even though he admired the films of a Vittorio De Sica, and although *Los Olvidados* clearly adopts the neoreal-

ist style and mode of production, Buñuel himself has openly rejected the overly simplified characters and storylines of some neorealist films, because of their inclination to melodrama and their tendency to fall into sentimental clichés (for example, the portrayal of the poor as innocent victims). He also complained that the neorealist's 'attempts to represent reality fail precisely because they lack poetry and a sense of mystery' (Jones 2005: 24). Much has therefore been written about those 'poetic' and 'mysterious' elements in *Los Olvidados* that apparently do not fit the neorealist paradigm. Film scholars have referred specifically to two examples, quite untypical for neorealism, and by extension, untypical for the conventions of fictional filmmaking of that time: first, an extended dream scene and second, a number of shots that most explicitly violate the conventions of fiction filmmaking in a Brechtian way, namely shots in which characters break the so-called 'fourth wall' by looking straight into the camera.⁹ The most obvious example for the violation of this rule is a shot in which Pedro throws an egg into the camera's lens, heightening the spectator's awareness of the camera's presence in an otherwise illusionistic, diegetic world. Not only is the documentary character of the film emphasised by Pedro's angry egg throwing and thus that 'no character is fictional', but also that the spectators off-screen are directly involved in the misfortunes of the characters on-screen. So it is that he, as 'the film's forgotten one', carries the burden of representing 'the real forgotten ones', those forgotten by the audience who is watching his story in the comfortable setting of a movie theatre.

In the three-minute long dream scene, dissolves, slow motion effects and low-key lighting are used to create an uncanny atmosphere, which stylistically does not really resemble surrealism but rather German expressionism. Here, *mise-en-scène* was used as an 'expression' of inner, psychic realities, rather than to accentuate the 'realism' of a spatial setting. But more importantly the scene focuses on surreal objects and thus also opens up a play of signifiers, which makes it subject to a psycho-semiotic interpretation. Through partly subjective POV-shots we see Pedro's nightmarish visions, which include objects that can be interpreted as symbols for his unconscious, such as a chunk of meat, feathers and chicken, while we also see a wounded Jaibo hiding under Pedro's bed, hysterically laughing and tugging the chunk of meat which Pedro's mother (an unreal, virgin-like creature dressed in a white nightgown) offers to Pedro. Yet, what this chunk of meat symbolises remains somewhat inexplicable to the viewer (does it signify a mother's ripped-out womb?), as does Pedro's egg throwing or the ubiquitous chicken, which re-appear throughout the film. For a psychoanalyst, or a dream interpreter, this particular dream scene could encode both Pedro's suppressed desires as well as the film's central topic, abandonment. In a Lacanian psychoanalytic interpretation for instance, the chunk of raw meat would perhaps stand for 'the Real', not so much 'the Real' of social realities, but of psychic registers – an object that

connotes a traumatic kernel which cannot be translated into what Lacan has termed the ‘Symbolic Order’, a language of signification.¹⁰ In this Lacanian sense, the raw meat would symbolise Pedro’s traumatic and inexplicable alienation from his mother – a traumatic split that cannot be integrated into a meaningful signification or comprehensible narrative. It therefore visualises what Slavoj Žižek discovered as a recurring motif in many of Buñuel’s films, namely that ‘a whole series of Buñuel’s films . . . are built around the same central motif of the – to use Buñuel’s own words – “non-explainable impossibility of the fulfillment of a simple desire”’ (1989: 194). In this case, this ‘simple desire’ is Pedro’s yearning for love, nourishment and affection from his mother, which seems, for inexplicable reasons, impossible to have fulfilled.

Apart from the dream scene, however, there is throughout the film a play with such non-explainable, ambiguous symbols and uncanny atmospheres. For instance, at about the mid-point of the film, after forty minutes screen time, we see in a shot preceding Jaibo’s theft of the knife, a cross (foreshadowing Pedro’s death or rather Jaibo’s sin?) carefully framed in the foreground in a typically neorealist device, the depth of field shot (Fig. 4.2). In the background, Jaibo enters the blacksmith’s workshop, in which Pedro has found a job. The scene’s props (cross, hammer, anvil), its dramatic *chiaroscuro* lighting – illuminated only with what appears to be natural back- and cove lighting – as well as the smoke that spirals upwards from the fireplace produces an uncanny and menacing atmosphere, as if to signify that what is about to happen in the plot – the theft of the knife – is an archetypal, almost mythic incident. This



Figure 4.2 Pedro and Jaibo are framed behind a cross in a depth of field shot in *Los Olvidados*.
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incident will eventually separate Pedro physically from his mother and lead him into the reformatory. On a stylistic level, however, this (studio-shot) scene resembles the (equally studio-shot) dream scene's expressionist aesthetics and atmosphere, in contrast to the location-shot exterior scenes, which display a rather harsh, unpolished documentary-like imagery. In other words, by utilising similar cinematographic styles in dream and key scenes like this one, Buñuel purposefully blurs clear-cut distinctions between inner and outer realities, the (visible, transparent) social 'Real' and the (invisible, non-explainable) psychic 'Real'.

Another feature that is quite unlike the neorealist tendency to characterise its protagonists in simple, easily comprehensible ways – hence, its tendency to narrate melodramatic, sentimental storylines with clichéd characterisations of 'poverty types' as societal victims – is the film's ambiguous characterisation of its figures. At times, their irrational behaviour, particularly the street kids' outbursts of violence, seems to have no psychologically reasonable motive. In this way, the irrational images in Pedro's nightmare visions become in a sense more 'rational' (or expository) than the documentary-like depictions of what are, at times, surreal cruelties of everyday life: for example, the robbery of an old blind man called Don Carmelo and the senseless beating of a legless man on a dolly by Jaibo and his gang. These figures, victims of juvenile violence, also refer to important themes of the film: blindness refers to the 'los olvidados'-theme (forgotten since not seen), while the beating of a legless man inverts the notion of the innocent victim, since he is, after all, beaten by supposedly innocent children. Whether adult or minor, almost all the characters of *Los Olvidados* are somewhere between violence, cold-heartedness, ignorance (or blindness) and the yearning for love, nurture and affection (or their ability to 'see' what is lacking), even the main protagonist and his only apparently evil double, Jaibo.

André Bazin also highlighted this latter aspect in a review tellingly entitled 'Cruelty and Love in Los Olvidados'. Since Bazin's concept of realism was a flexible one, it might not come as a surprise that he praised *Los Olvidados* for its realism, precisely *because* of the film's mysterious atmospheres, ambiguous characters and surreal nightmare scenes. It is in this sense that one can understand the realism of *Los Olvidados* as both a (Bazinian) realism of the visible and a (Buñuelian) realism of the invisible; a realism which understands film as a visual medium that is able to function as a 'window on the world', but also one that is able to penetrate and see what lies behind the visible surface (the characters's inner lives) – which is why Buñuel has sometimes also been described as a 'realist of the unconscious' (qtd in Jones 2005: 25). Furthermore, the film's reflexive play with on- and off-screen space, expressive versus naturalistic mise-en-scène is undoubtedly an artistic approach to cinema, rather than a documentary-like effort to 'applied sociology'. In this

sense *Los Olvidados* seems to epitomise Bazin's notion of realism, which he defined in his essay 'An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism' as follows: 'realism in art can only be achieved in one way – through artifice' (2005a: 26).

WORLD CINEMA'S FIGURE OF THE STREET KID

Los Olvidados also features one of the most recurring preoccupations of world cinema, its focus on the subjectivity of children. From the films of Vittorio De Sica to those of François Truffaut and Abbas Kiarostami, children have repeatedly appeared as main protagonists in a wide variety of films across the world. However, with *Los Olvidados*, a slightly different figure comes into view, that of the street kid, and it is this figure which connects postwar cinematic representations of slums in fiction films with many contemporary ones. In films that feature street kids as main protagonists the viewer is often invited to look at the environment of the slum from the street kid's point of view. Most of these films are, however, not literally first-person point-of-view narratives; it is rather that if a film frequently employs the point of view of a street kid, we are invited to look at the world of adults through the eyes of a child. Such films employ the subjective point of view of the street kid to varying degrees and at different parts of the plot, which leads, in certain cases to what Edward Branigan described as the 'inevitable subjectivization of film space'.¹¹ However, before turning to these films and their 'subjectivization of film space', we need to ask which other narrative function could the figure of the child carry out in fictional films?

Deleuze has, for instance, related the figure of the child in cinema to his theory of the time image, which appears with postwar neorealism and establishes a 'cinema of the seer'. Deleuze's explanation for the frequent appearance of the child in neorealist cinema and beyond is as follows: 'The role of the child in neorealism has been pointed out, notably in De Sica (and later in France with Truffaut); this is because in the adult world, the child is affected by certain motor helplessness, but one which makes him all the more capable of seeing and hearing' (1989: 3). Hence, because children are affected by a 'certain motor helplessness' and are therefore not capable of performing the Hollywoodian, sensory-motor chain of perception-affection-action in the adult world, Deleuze thinks that certain modern filmmakers have been interested in the figure of the child as a seer (and hearer). To illustrate Deleuze's point with a neorealist classic: in Roberto Rossellini's *Germania anno zero* (1948) the thirteen-year-old main character, Edmund, has to take care of his family because his father is bedridden from illness. Due to his father's 'inactivity' Edmund is forced to act and enter the world of adults. The camera follows him as he wanders through the streets that are filled with rubble, trying to gather

food and money for his family and thereby becoming indeed a 'street kid'. Inevitably he faces, due to his age, insurmountable obstacles in the shape of rejecting, selfish or manipulative adults and exploitative older teens. Exposed to these insurmountable situations in the any-spaces-whatever of postwar Berlin, as well as facing the difficult situation at home, Edmund slips into a spiral of unfortunate chance encounters and bad decisions which lead him to the unspeakable act of murdering his father. To return to the Deleuzian interpretation, however, it is especially during the opening and last parts of the film that the figure of Edmund acquires the role of a 'seer' (and hearer), because the demoralising situations as well as his burden of guilt (for killing his father) become triggers for his aimless, meandering journeys through Berlin's war-torn cityscape. Sacked, rejected, left alone and condemned to the role of a passive observer, Edmund, the 'child seer', becomes a medium through which the camera/spectator is able to contemplate the pure 'optical and sound situations' (Deleuze 1989: 3) of postwar Berlin.¹²

Taking a contemporary Argentine film as an example, in his *Deleuze and World Cinemas* David Martin-Jones extends Deleuze's arguments and contends that the child-seer essentially 'encounters history in the making'; they are 'characters directly encountering contemporary social and political mutations . . . mutating along with these historically shifting contexts' (2011: 74). The socio-historical mutations in a given location – in the case of Pedro in *Los Olvidados*, the mutations of Mexico City into an 'arrival city' (to use an expression coined by the journalist Doug Sanders, 2010) during the 1950s – are thus not simply a backdrop or a setting. These are the environments which directly shape these street kids, who evolve from childhood innocence to witness and experience the brutal realities of adult life in postwar Germany, postwar Italy and indeed, in the slum-ridden postwar cities of the global South. The 'mutation' from childhood innocence to adulthood, however, has been a recurrent narrative structure in literature as well as in film history: since the so-called German *Bildungsroman* of the eighteenth century, the figure of the child becoming an adult by experiencing his or her rite of passage has become a well-established genre in literature as well as in film, where it is more commonly labelled as the 'coming-of-age film'. Yet, how did the figure of the child experiencing his or her rite of passage in the slums feature in films?

The criminal, orphaned or abandoned 'slum child' had already become a commonplace literary character in early Victorian literature, most notably with Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1838). Like in Dickens' novel, in prewar cinematic depictions of the homeless orphan or abandoned street kid from the slums (of which Chaplin's *The Kid* from 1921 might be the most well-known one), the optimistic notions of the *Bildungsroman*, of education through life experience, always seem to have offered a possibility of escaping the wretched conditions in the slums. However, many scholars have argued that with

neorealism another, more pessimistic image of the abandoned child appears on screen. This is an image that has its literary predecessors in Arthur Morrison's *Child of the Jago* (1896), where, as opposed to *Oliver Twist*'s ending, the child protagonist, Dicky Perrot, fails to escape the criminal underclass and dies. Bazin has for instance emphasised that, much like in Morrison's novel, the prime originality of *Los Olvidados* is its deviation from an archetypal (or clichéd) narrative schema: the innocent child, struggling with the evil effects of poverty, is saved by the possibility of re-education through love, trust, and work (1982: 51–2). The more pessimistic outlook on children which emerges with films like *Germania anno zero* might in turn be explained by the crisis of disrupted education caused by the impact of World War II on families and their children which also led to an increase of childhood mortality and orphanhood.¹³

Whereas in *Oliver Twist* – adapted in 1948 by David Lean shortly after the end of the war – it is still possible to escape the slums through 're-education', in neorealist films, such as in *Los Olvidados*, the child's re-education (in this case, in the farm school) fails. Pedro dies and ends up on a garbage dump, as do two teenage protagonists of a more recent film that explicitly alludes to both neorealism and *Los Olvidados*' theme of the redundancy of wasted lives, *Gomorra* (Garrone 2008).¹⁴ In *Germania anno zero* Edmund ends his life by committing suicide: he jumps off a building into the rumble and debris of Berlin's destroyed houses – as does the teenage protagonist Rodrigo towards the end of the Columbian film *Rodrigo D: no futuro* (*Rodrigo D: no future*; Gaviria 1990), which is set in the *barrios* of 1980s Medellín (Fig. 4.3). In these films the passage towards adulthood ends in tragedy; neorealist films not only dramatise the postwar crisis of masculinity but also the crisis of education caused by the effects of dislocation and social and emotional neglect.

Hence, with *Los Olvidados* a new figure appears and has, most vigorously, continued to re-appear in world cinema since the 1980s. In fact, the street kid's visual or narrative point of view, through which the viewer can perceive the mutating socio-historical realities of 'arrival cities' in the global South, persists as a recurring device in a vast number of more contemporary films, from *Pixote* (Babenco 1981), *Salaam Bombay!* (Nair 1988) and *Dom za vešanje* to *Tsotsi* (Hood 2005), *Kibera Kid* (Collet 2005), *Tribu* (*Tribe*, Libirian 2007), *Cidade de Deus* or *Slumdog Millionaire*. The protagonists of these films have been portrayed as parentless orphans or, just like Pedro, as socially and emotionally abandoned street kids. In more recent examples, their living environments have also been depicted as violent, exploitative or criminal, which has, in turn, put an emphasis on the fragility of life and on violent deaths in the slums. Yet, why does the street kid appear as a figure in world cinema since the 1980s with such a vengeance, particularly south of the equator? One explanation might, perhaps, be an obvious socio-historical one: the frequent appearance of the



Figure 4.3 Medellín seen from Rodrigo's perspective, before he commits suicide in *Rodrigo D: no futuro*.

street kid in films points to yet another fundamental socio-historical 'mutation' and is thus not merely an aesthetic choice, trend or tendency. Based on the age structure of Third World cities, Mike Davis estimates that 'at least half of the slum population is under the age of 20' (2004: 13); the number of homeless street kids is, on the other hand, currently estimated to be roughly 100 million.¹⁵ It therefore comes as no surprise that many socially committed filmmakers in the global South made what were, at times, the very short lives of homeless or abandoned street kids a prevalent world cinema topic.

With *Los Olvidados* it has almost become a convention that actual children and teenagers from the slums are trained by filmmakers to more or less reenact their own life experiences in front of a camera. João Luiz Vieira therefore believes that such conventions have, by now, created a true world cinema genre, that is, what he describes as the 'transnational genre of the street urchin film' (2011: 227). With Vieira we can argue that the figure of the street kid (or street urchin) and its portrayal by minor, non-professional 'social actors' from the slums not only transnationally connects various slum-set films from different cities, countries and continents, but that it is also a historically recurring feature that links postwar neorealism to contemporary world cinema.¹⁶ Yet, according to Vieira, we can also see other generic conventions operating in

world cinema's 'street urchin film', most notably the convention of providing the prototypical spectator of such films, who is usually Western, educated and keen on art cinema, an identification with the subjectivity of 'the Other': the Third World street kid. Vieira therefore asks how contemporary films may avoid

representing their so-called Third World subjects merely as 'The Other?': How do these filmic texts succeed in representing the dynamism of a more transnational economic reality and avoid an anachronistic specular regime in which the Third World is constructed for, and subjected to, the gaze of the First World? (227)

These and similar questions will be addressed in the analysis of the most popular contemporary street kid films, the modern 'world cinema classics', *Cidade de Deus* and *Slumdog Millionaire* (see Chapters 8 and 9).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has outlined how the intertwining currents of documentary and realist cinemas coalesced as a form of *documentario narrativo* in the postwar neorealist movement – the major paradigm of slum representation which distinguishes this period. As a hybrid between fiction and non-fiction, neorealism has especially appealed to filmmakers who aimed at telling stories about ordinary, poverty-stricken people, despite insufficient budgets. And because of their emphasis on characters that are not only 'set in', but 'come out' of neglected or ruined urban spaces, neorealist films have travelled across national and even continental borders, reaching developing film countries and their urban centres in India, Brazil or Mexico through émigrés, international mediators or cosmopolitan filmmakers, thus becoming one of the very first truly 'global', or 'world cinema' styles. However, and according to another major argument of this book, neorealism has not simply been adopted, but in many cases creatively re-interpreted and creolised according to local (cultural or social) contexts – a process for which *Los Olvidados* stands as a representative example. Beyond that, *Los Olvidados* can also be regarded as a symptomatic case for many slum-related films that have followed afterwards, since it features the street kid as its (narrative) focaliser, through which the diegetic world of the slum becomes (at least partly) subjectivised; a strategy that has been employed repeatedly throughout film history.

NOTES

1. Many scholars have, for instance, outlined these neorealist filmmaker's close ties to Poetic Realism – a French film movement of the 1930s, which brought forth iconic directors like Jean Vigo, Pierre Chenal or Jean Renoir. They were not only shooting on location and with non-professional actors but they were also interested in immigrants and working-class characters (*Toni* Renoir 1935), or the Parisian 'slum belt' (*La Rue sans nom; The Street without a Name*; Chenal 1934).
2. *Menschen am Sonntag (People on Sunday*; Robert Siodmak and Edgar G. Ulmer, 1930), often regarded as a film that is influenced by *Neue Sachlichkeit*, can in many ways also be regarded as a prime example of a genuinely neorealist film that pre-dates Italian neorealism. Generally speaking, the *Neue Sachlichkeit* displayed close affinities to the objectivity claims and styles of the still-evolving documentary genre. In cinema, this movement facilitated, however, mostly fictional stories about characters from the German or Austrian *lumpenproletariat* – for instance in *Die freudlose Gasse (Joyless Street*; Pabst 1925) or *Die Verrufenen (Lamprecht 1925)*, which was distributed abroad with the title *Slums of Berlin*. Already before the release of Pabst's and Lamprecht's classics, films like *Das Kinderelend in Wien (Vienna's Suffering Children, 1919)*, a state-funded, truly reformist documentary, rather than a fiction film, emphasised, among other things, the rundown housing conditions in Vienna, as did another Austrian precursor to the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, *Durch die Quartiere des Elends und Verbrechens (Through the Quarters of Poverty and Crime*; Robert Land, 1920), which was based on Emil Kläger's social documentary photographs (see Chapter 2).
3. A detailed account of Cavalcanti's life is provided in Aitken 2000.
4. Cf. Druick and Williams 2014.
5. Gulio Andreotti criticised De Sica for 'washing Italy's dirty laundry in public'. He introduced the 'Andreotti law' that could deny a film an export license on the pretext that it slandered Italy.
6. Cf. Jones 2005: 27–8. 'Juvenile delinquency' was fast becoming a touchstone in many other nations during the postwar era. The topic consequently also entered popular culture, most famously in Hollywood's so-called teenpics' (e.g. *Rebel Without a Cause*, Ray 1955).
7. Transcribed by the author.
8. The stereotypisation of the Hurdanos as filthy, savage and morally degraded has been commonplace in Spanish public discourse. Some have thought that Buñuel's film only verifies these stereotypes. The film has therefore been the object of much debate regarding its politics of representation (cf. Jones 2005: 18).
9. In her video essay on *Los Olvidados* – 'Cinematic Direct Address Part Two: You Looking at Me?' (2013) – Catherine Grant identifies about 20 shots in which characters look straight into the camera.
10. In a discussion of films by David Lynch, whose films could indeed be described as 'Buñuelian' in spirit, Žižek states that one 'definition of the Lacanian Real is that it is the flayed body, the palpitation of the raw, skinless, red flesh' (2005: 116).
11. Related to the issue of first-person narration in cinema is indeed the problem of point of view (POV) – an important, since frequently debated, but not unambiguously defined topic in narratology and film studies, which is why it needs a very brief excursion to derive a working definition. On the simplest level, POV can signify a representation of what a character sees, as in the so-called POV-shot, which is also an important subset of the so-called eyeline match technique that is used in the continuity editing system to align spectators with what a diegetic character sees (such an alignment can also be suggested via

other camera positions, e.g. over-the-shoulder shots). On a more general level, however, narratologists refer to POV also as the (subjective) point of view of the narration itself. Edward Branigan defined 'subjective narration' in his *Point of View in the Cinema* as a 'specific instance or level of narration where the telling is *attributed* to a character in the narrative and received by us *as if* we were in the situation of a character' (1984: 73).

According to Branigan, through the frequent use of such devices as POV-shots, eyeline matches and over-the-shoulder shots, the viewer is not only put into an 'as if' situation to identify with the subjective point of view of a diegetic character; the film automatically also provides an 'inevitable subjectivization of film space' (1984: 130).

12. Fischer criticised Deleuze's concept of the child as a weak observer, because it 'reeks of an imaginary discourse about youth, particularly because children, even in Italian neorealism, are anything but simply weak or passive' (2012: 33).
13. Cf. Sorlin 2008.
14. *Gomorra* displays typical neorealist devices: it features uncut long takes, often following its characters in an observational manner through the rundown alleys of Scampia; most of the cast consists of non-professional actors; it is shot on location in Scampia; it consists of several loosely connected episodes, which, among other things, feature teenagers who are killed by the local mafia.
15. 100 million is the most frequently mentioned number provided by organisations like UNICEF. Even though the 'exact number of street children is impossible to quantify . . . the figure almost certainly runs into tens of millions across the world' (UNICEF 2005: 40-1).
16. Traverso similarly outlines the transnationality of the street kid figure in the 'cinematic migrations' between Italy and Brazil. In his view, the 'shared interest in the theme of children amid sociohistorical turmoil' connects postwar neorealism with contemporary Brazilian films like *Cidade de Deus*, which 'challenge the myth of the innocent child' (2007: 178).

Third Docufictions

The other global culture . . . has its social roots in the huge migration from the rural Third World to the trench towns of the planet.

Michael Denning

We see an image, saturated with warm, sunny colours. It is a hot day in a busy city. A tractor passes through the frame. Its driver looks over his shoulder to get a glimpse of the cameraman who is positioned near a junction. However, it is not the lively traffic in the centre, but a young black man crouching at the very margin of the shot's frame, to which the French narrator – obviously an educated man with authority – draws our attention: 'Each day, young people, like the characters of this film, arrive in the cities of Africa . . . They know how to do nothing and everything. They are one of the new illnesses of the new African cities: unemployed youth'. Like the tractor driver, the young black man also looks straight into the camera; we are once again in the realm of the documentary genre, or are we? The following shot shows us three young men instead of just one, who are all crouching at the edge of the very same street. Now the camera focuses exclusively on this group of black youths who, supposedly, have migrated from the African countryside to this busy city in search of jobs. One of the figures looks up at the man behind the camera before lying down to sunbath, as if to make sure he is doing the right thing. Is he following the filmmaker's instructions? Now we see a shot – and its reverse shot – that show them having a conversation but we do not hear their voices or see their faces clearly. A shadow created by the camerama is covering them while the shaky, handheld camera insists on the authenticity of the scene. Is this a chance encounter between a filmmaker and three young men or a staged scene to emphasise the filmmaker's statements? Fact or fiction, it is not entirely obvious.

This sequence of shots from the opening of Jean Rouch's *Moi, un noir* provides an apt illustration of the notion of 'docufiction' (or, in this case, of

‘ethnofiction’) – another hybrid form that is, unlike neorealism, identified by audiences immediately as a ‘documentary’ of some sort. This way of making films flourished in the 1960s and 1970s and was particularly deployed by filmmakers who were associated with so-called ‘new wave’ cinemas. As this chapter will show, *Moi, un noir* has been an inspirational film for the most influential of these new waves, the French *Nouvelle Vague*. Yet, considering that the setting of *Moi, un noir* is Ivory Coast’s capital Abidjan – at that time still part of the French colonial empire – the opening of this ‘ethnofiction’ also highlights a more social aspect of that era: the rise of rural–urban migration streams into the (mega)cities of the so-called ‘Third World’. Just like in the previous chapters, this one will trace the intersections between social and cultural globalisation processes, between the emerging planet of slums and the ‘new waves’ of world cinema, only this time during a period that is perhaps best described as ‘the age of the three worlds’ – an age in which the world was imagined to be divided into three separate socio-political spheres: a capitalist First, a communist Second, and a decolonising Third World.

According to the cultural historian Michael Denning (who studied the intersections between social and cultural globalisation processes in what he coined ‘the age of the three worlds’), ‘displaced peasants created the vast informal economies of the global shantytown, the global barrio, the global ghetto’ (2004: 28). However, the global shantytowns also constituted the social roots of another, alternative ‘global culture’, as Denning claims. Opposed to the rising, ‘First Worldist’, culture of commodity aesthetics, distributed globally through transnational corporations (but also, for instance, through Hollywood), this other ‘Third Worldist’, global culture has its aesthetic roots ‘in one of the first explicitly international cultural movements, the worldwide movement of plebeian artists and writers to create a proletarian culture, a socialist realism’ (2004: 31–2). In the realm of cinema this international movement was created through the direct links ‘between the pioneering cinematic alternatives to Hollywood (the Left-inspired Italian neo-realism) and the various Third World cinemas (*cinema nuevos*) of the age of three worlds’ (2004: 33). The following chapter will uncover some of these transnational links against the backdrop of ‘the massive urbanisation of the world’. I will thereby compare how slums were represented by the coloniser and the colonised and, by extension, through ‘first’ and ‘third’, male and female eyes, and trace how in both cases the globalising currents of documentary and realist cinemas have been further modified. More specifically, this chapter will compare two significant film movements and films of that era: cinéma vérité (*Moi, un noir*) and Third Cinema (*De Cierta Manera*). In both cases, a new prevalent paradigm emerges, but this time less in the form of a process (e.g. remediation), a strategy (e.g. cognitive mapping), or a narrative figure (e.g. the street kid), but more in the form of (conflictual or cooperative) encounters.

 THE 'TRUTH OF THE ENCOUNTER'

Cinéma vérité was a documentary movement that has been influential beyond the 'age of the three worlds' as well as beyond the documentary genre. It was essentially the result of several interrelated developments. From the point of view of its mode of production, documentary, very much like neorealist cinema until around 1960, was restricted by the constraints of the technology available at that time. Sound had to be re-recorded or dubbed, apparently natural settings were often set up, and interior scenes were, more often than not, shot in studio settings. These were common restrictions for filmmakers at that time, but they hampered documentary filmmakers in particular. Since around 1960, however, technological developments made synchronous sound recording possible, enabling filmmakers to become more mobile. Additionally, the introduction of cheap and portable 16 mm cameras, light enough to be raised on the shoulder and of faster lenses and film stocks which made the need for artificial light obsolete, were particularly groundbreaking for documentary filmmaking. One can say that sync-sound location shooting returned documentary to 'what it previously never possessed, namely the instrument of direct speech' (Chanan 2007: 88). The now feasible on-location synchronisation of sound and image, as well as yet another improvement of the apparatus into a handheld device, triggered a true rebirth of documentary filmmaking.

This rebirth of the documentary around 1960 was ascribed to the emergence of two documentary movements in North America and Europe: 'direct cinema' (the films of Richard Leacock, Donn Alan Pennebaker or the Maysles Brothers) and what the French sociologist Edgar Morin termed *cinéma vérité* (French for 'film truth').¹ Quite to the contrary of direct cinema's non-intrusive, 'observational' approach to documentary, the idea of *cinéma vérité* favoured the filmmaker's participatory involvement in the filmmaking process, emphasising in this way 'the *truth of an encounter* rather than the absolute or unhampered truth' (Nichols 2001: 118; emphasis added). Hence, diametrically opposed to the notion of direct cinema, the idea of *cinéma vérité* implied that it was exactly through the (on- or off-screen, staged or chance) encounter between a filmmaker and a filmed subject that some form of truth could be revealed which would otherwise (in the absence of a camera or a filmmaker) be concealed. Edgar Morin's collaborator, Jean Rouch, consequently remarked that *cinéma vérité* 'designates not "pure truth" but the particular truth of the recorded images and sounds – a filmic truth, a *ciné-vérité*' (2002: 98); in other words, *cinéma vérité* 'does not mean the cinema of truth, but the truth of cinema' (2002: 167).

This notion of 'ciné-truth' needs to be explained further, since it constitutes a theory of (documentary) cinema that is crucial for understanding not only this chapter's main example, but also later examples (see Chapter 7). Morin

and Rouch believed that the presence of a recording camera creates situations in which people confess, act out or perform truths that they would not reveal or admit in everyday life situations. It is for this reason that Nichols proposed to describe this specific type of documentary as participatory, because 'if there is a truth here it is the truth of a form of interaction that would not exist were it not for the camera. . . In participatory documentary, what we see is what we can see only when a camera, or filmmaker, is there instead of ourselves' (2001: 118). Accordingly, filmmakers who adhere to the *cinéma vérité* method believe in 'the truth of the encounter'. This idea is directly opposed to direct cinema's fly-on-the-wall approach to preserving the spatiotemporal integrity of the pro-filmic event, for instance through long takes. The difference can be partly explained by appreciating that direct cinema derived its inspiration from journalism's claims to objectivity whereas *cinéma vérité* drew from the social science method of 'participatory observation'.

Morin, a trained sociologist, collaborated with Rouch, a trained anthropologist, in what became the essential *cinéma vérité* film, *Cronique d'un été* (*Chronicle of a Summer*; 1961). However, the film has a distinct anthropological framework, since Rouch was the more experienced filmmaker of the two; he had been using a camera for his ethnographic field studies since the 1940s. Rouch is therefore often referred to as a 'pioneer' of visual anthropology as well as of a form of documentary that emphasises interactive participation, exchange and collaboration between filmmakers and what in films like *Cronique d'un été* can only be described as 'social actors'. The term 'social actor' is particularly applicable to this form of documentary filmmaking, because with *cinéma vérité* it does indeed become questionable whether one can describe subjects in front of the camera as 'filmed subjects', characters or as 'role players', who enact or re-enact everyday life situations. In this sense, the truth of *cinéma vérité* is thus akin to 'psychoanalytic truth, that is, precisely that which is hidden or repressed and comes to the surface in this roles that people play in front of the camera', as Morin has put it (qtd in Vatulescu 2006: 213). In other words, Rouch and Morin envisioned *cinéma vérité* as a form of communal psychodrama between actors and filmmakers.

Most of Rouch's ethnographic films were shot in rural Africa, exploring tribal or shamanic rituals such as possession cults. As rituals (trance dances, for example) are closely related to the idea that 'acting out' can lead to the acknowledgment of some inner truth, Rouch believed that the presence of a camera could, in everyday-life situations, lead to something akin to what he observed in such rituals: a performative way of expressing repressed desires, anxieties or even other parts of one's identity. *Moi, un noir*, a seventy-minute colour film, is both a good example of this idea but also an exception in Rouch's oeuvre, because it does not explore the traditional folklore of tribal rituals, but modern African city life instead. The film nevertheless demonstrates Rouch's

emphasis on the ‘truth of the encounter’, since it is essentially the result of an encounter between him, a white, Western ethnographic filmmaker and a black, African, recently urbanised slum-dweller.

MOI, UN NOIR (1958)

For this reason, *Moi, un noir* is a distinctly modern ethnographic film because, rather than depicting a classical ethnographic subject, it focuses on everyday life in the city, and more specifically, on a group of black youth, who live in an impoverished district of Abidjan, a West African ‘arrival city’ for rural migrants in search for jobs.² Moreover, the film is also formally modern since, as I have already mentioned, it can not only be regarded as a major inspiration for the *Nouvelle Vague*, but also as intentionally playful docu- or ‘ethno-fiction’, rather than as a classical documentary investing in a factual, scientific or objective discourse of sobriety. This is because Rouch thought that

fiction is the only way to penetrate reality – the means of sociology remain exterior ones. In *Moi, un noir* I wanted to show an African city – Treichville. I could have made a documentary full of figures and observations. That would have been deathly boring. So I told a story with characters, their adventures and their dreams. And I didn’t hesitate to introduce the dimensions of the imaginary, of the unreal . . . the whole problem is to maintain a certain sincerity toward the spectator, never to mask the fact that this is a film . . . (qtd in Eaton 1971: 8)

The film’s story primarily focuses on one central character/social actor, Oumarou Ganda, who gives himself the nickname Edward G. Robinson, after the Hollywood actor. This suggests the theme of role-playing. Ganda introduces his peers, whose nicknames are similarly derived from American and French film stars of that period (e.g. Dorothy Lamour or Eddie Constantine) which refers to what Rouch has called the ‘dimensions of the imaginary’ (the characters’ dreams of being famous); it also implicitly signifies that the audience enters the semi-diegetic world of an ‘ethno-fiction’.

Like his friends, Ganda is an immigrant from the Nigerian countryside who is trying to find work in Abidjan (the city’s population increased tenfold between 1950 and 1970, from 50,000 to 500,000) which, at the time of filming, was still a colonial port city in French West Africa.³ Most of the film, however, is set on ‘the other side’ of Abidjan, as the film’s narrator puts it. While the city centre was mainly inhabited by the (white) French colonial rulers and administrators, the film portrays a predominantly black suburb called Treichville (which, simultaneously, was the intended original title of the film). The film



Figure 5.1 Oumarou Ganda presents us his neighbourhood Treichville at the beginning of *Moi, un noir*.

narrates how Ganda and his young friends live, enjoy life, search for jobs and/or marriageable partners in Treichville, how they essentially try to manoeuvre through everyday life with high hopes but meagre circumstances. However, the identity of the narrator is the film's most important aspect – one could say it's most captivating enigma – since it is the main character, Ganda himself, who swiftly takes over the role of the narrator by recounting the hopes, dreams and aspirations in life of him and his friends. He also presents Treichville (Fig. 5.1) – its boxing scene, amusement localities, prostitutes, football games, weekend festivities, and so forth – using what appear to be unscripted, spontaneously improvised comments, re-enacted dialogues, and a stream-of-consciousness-like first-person narration which directly addresses the audience.⁴

Ad hoc improvisation is emphasised still further by the film's style: the use of an often shaky, handheld camera which seems to move through the streets of Treichville rather randomly, than with a sense of purpose; the lack of proper lighting in sparsely-lit interiors, such as shabby night clubs or amateur boxing clubs; the frequent use of jump cuts that make the scenes appear to be arranged in a discontinuous, spontaneously assembled order, disturbing at times the spatiotemporal continuity within or between scenes.⁵ The film's overall structure also appears to be spontaneously assembled, as it is made up

of loosely connected episodes that show how the group spends an ordinary week, from Monday to Sunday. Ganda introduces us to his daily routine as a dock-worker, then presents Treichville and his friends (through voice-over descriptions and re-enacted spoken dialogues, in which he mimics both male and female voices), before he finally leads his audience into his clique's leisure activities at night-time, on the beach and over the concluding weekend. Throughout the film, Ganda seems to enjoy his life in Treichville, imagining his future life as a boxer, or telling us lightheartedly about his hopes and dreams for a better future. But after failed attempts to hook up with a girl he calls Dorothy Lamour, after the Hollywood actress, the film narrows down towards a climactic ending. In this, he recalls his traumatic experiences as a soldier for the French colonial army in Vietnam during the First Indochina War, recounting and enacting how his fellow comrades were, all of a sudden, hit by bullets or grenades. This final scene reverses the initial appearance or performance of Ganda as a happy-go-lucky immigrant, as well as his initial self-portrait as a fake character who emulates Edward G. Robinson. Ganda recognises his 'true inner self', that he is a traumatised war veteran who was abandoned by his disappointed father because he/they lost the war. In other words, this climax relates to cinéma vérité's notion that the presence of a camera can reveal hidden or repressed truths, in this case, the inner truth that Ganda's 'role playing' ultimately only disguises a wounded subjectivity marked by a painful past.

The film's style, narrative structure, as well as its (mostly) subjective voice-over narration opens up the crucial question about the actual narrator of the film, or to formulate it in a different way: who is the true auteur of *Moi, un noir*?²⁶ The question of authorship and, by extension, questions such as 'who really speaks here?', 'who is the true narrator?' and, ultimately, 'whose film is it after all?', are most important to consider in an analysis of *Moi, un noir*. The ambivalence regarding the film's authorship is already implied in the film's alternating modes of address during the opening sequence, since an off-screen voice-over exposition introduces the city of Abidjan and the (ethnographic) topic of cityward migration by the supposedly 'real' auteur of the film, Jean Rouch. He explains, in the manner of an authority figure with an academic background, that the city is divided into three parts of which Treichville is the 'arrival city' for immigrants from Nigeria. However, Rouch also provides a textbook-like introduction of *how to read* his film, explaining the film's mode of production, introducing the theme of role-playing, the film's 'hero' and the vérité notion of film as a psychoanalytic mirror for 'self-realisation' in his opening commentary. Shortly after this truly expository introduction, we see Ganda/Robinson on screen for the first time, introducing himself and Treichville (Fig. 5.1) equally via voice-over, but in a less arid and more desperate tone:

Oh my God! How complicated life is and how sad. There are others who are well housed, well fed, and are even closer to God because they live in two story buildings. And I . . . I live on the other side. I live in Treichville. We are housed in shacks, houses that are not well made, like the others. Our lives are different.⁷

Considering the alternation of (apparently objective and subjective) narrator voices and the film's mode of production, Steven Ungar asks in his essay on *Moi, un noir* the fitting question 'Whose voice? Whose film?', while introducing his analysis with the following quotation by Gilles Deleuze: 'It may be objected that Jean Rouch can only with difficulty be considered a third world author, but no one has done so much to put the West to flight, to flee himself, to break with a cinema of ethnology and say *Moi, un noir*' (1989: 223). Deleuze indicates that the *moi* of the film is the *moi* of the ethnographer Jean Rouch, since he believes that Rouch 'flees from himself', and by extension, from a 'cinema of ethnology', while in this process 'becoming' a *noir*. On the other hand, Deleuze also contends that African cinema – and by this he does not mean the cinema of Jean Rouch – is not, 'as the West would like, a cinema which dances, but a cinema which talks, a cinema of the speech-act' (1989: 222). Considering that its soundtrack is indeed full of 'speech-acts' of a constantly speaking 'noir', how can we define then *Moi, un noir*'s speech-act, or put differently, the film's *enunciation*, more precisely? Is it a film which conceals its speaker(s) or one that openly admits its polyphonic nature; one that presents, to put it into the words of the French linguist Émile Benveniste, a *histoire* or a *discours* of its subject matter?⁸ These questions are indeed of importance, because they imply an ideological problem, especially when we consider the film's historical production context: a French director films an ethnographic film about the lives of slum-dwellers in a Western African country that was still colonised by French occupiers.⁹ Considering this historical context, and thus Rouch's ideologically problematic 'speaking position', the question arises of whether the film promotes the point of view (the *histoire*) of the coloniser towards the colonised; of whether it is a film in which a French ethnographer 'looks at' the ethnographic 'Other' from outside, or whether a *noir* slum-dweller represents himself and his community from the inside? So, who exactly is the *moi* in *Moi, un noir*?

To answer that question, it is most helpful to look at the film's specific production context more closely. Documentary scholars have described Rouch's approach to documentary filmmaking not only as participatory, but sometimes also as an interactive or collaborative feedback method.¹⁰ In the case of *Moi, un noir*, Rouch spent several months filming Ganda and his friends, thereby establishing intimate relationships with them. The material was shown to Ganda and he then provided Rouch with feedback during the dubbing of the film. The voice-over narration was then recorded in a collaborative effort by

both Ganda and Rouch; while Rouch outlined a loose script, Ganda improvised and amended it, where necessary, in a sound studio. Thus, both Rouch and Ganda were to a greater or lesser extent involved in the production and post-production of the film, since Ganda narrated, performed and provided feedback, whereas Rouch scripted, filmed and edited it. In an interview, Rouch highlighted the film's novelty of having a 'speaking *noir*', but equally that the film is in fact the result of a collaborative encounter (between the ethnographer and his subject as well as between black and white):

I realise that for many people, *Moi, un noir* represented something quite new in cinema, in respect to the relationship between whites and blacks. The film is really about my discovery of Oumarou Ganda . . . *Moi, un noir* was the result of an encounter of two people . . . It was the first time that a *noir* was speaking on film – and he was speaking about his own life, or rather about images of his own life. (Rouch 2002: 139–40)

Still, Ganda later complained that Rouch exaggerated certain parts of his biography and admitted that he did not like the film, because the overall *histoire* – Ganda's trajectory from false identity (role-playing) to true self-discovery (admitting a trauma) – is highly problematic.¹¹ Even though the film does not hide that this is (ethno-)fiction, Ganda's character development is ultimately indeed a more or less Westernised construct of the psyche of 'the Other'. Perhaps because he was so dissatisfied with the end result, Ganda became one of the first important black auteurs of African cinema, alongside other important black African filmmakers of that time (e.g. Ousmane Sembène). So Ganda began directing his very own images of life in Africa (until his premature death in 1981). Taking Ganda's (real) biography into account, one can argue that *Moi, un noir* is more ambivalent, that it is not simply Western (ethno-)fiction, but also a film about self-empowerment since, in the process of filming, the slum-dweller 'becomes' an auteur himself. Bearing in mind that Deleuze proposed to regard *Moi, un noir* as a film in which 'becoming' is a major issue, one could thus say that the film represents a twofold process of becoming, or, as Deleuze puts it, a 'double becoming', through which 'the real characters become another by storytelling, but the author, too, himself becomes another' (1989: 223).¹² To reformulate Deleuze's insight, *Moi, un noir* represents a process of (collaborative) 'double becoming', in the sense that the white ethnographer/auteur becomes another and the slum-dweller a film director/auteur.¹³

Moi, un noir represents a paradigmatic case for later examples, since the film's mode of production and address, as well as its ambivalence with regard to questions of enunciation and auteurism remain important aspects of contemporary films – particularly those in which actual slum-dwellers narrate their or

the film's story themselves. For example, in *Cidade de Deus* the fictional character Rocket, a *favelado*, is indeed the film's narrator, actor-performer as well as the (cinematic) presenter of his neighbourhood, the 'arrival city' Cidade de Deus in Rio de Janeiro. Whether intended as an allusion by director Fernando Meirelles or not, *Cidade de Deus* shares several similarities with *Moi, un noir*. Yet, apart from the similarities with regard to narrative technique – the performative presentation of a neighbourhood by a slum-dweller – or with regard to certain scenes – for example a day at the beach with the main character's friends and love interest – there is another striking parallel between these two otherwise very different films that are almost half a century apart: whereas in *Moi, un noir*, Ganda's 'true' self-discovery leads him to 'become' a filmmaker, in *Cidade de Deus* Rocket discovers his 'true' vocation as a photographer. The major difference between these two films is, however, related to notions of reflexivity: in *Moi, un noir* 'true self-discovery' – becoming a producer and not merely a subject of images – is not represented on screen whereas it is in *Cidade de Deus* (see Chapter 8).

(THIRD) CINEMA AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT

The above-mentioned Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembène who is often labelled as the 'father of African film', was the first black African director to gain international attention. He famously criticised Jean Rouch in a historical confrontation between the two directors in 1965 for 'looking at' Africans 'as if they were insects'. However, Sembène admitted to Rouch that there is

a film of yours that I love, that I've defended, and will continue to defend. It is *Moi, un noir*. In principle, an African could have done it, but none of us at the time had the necessary conditions to realise it. I believe that there needs to be a sequel to *Moi, un noir* . . . I feel that up to now two films of value have been made on Africa: your *Moi un noir* and *Come Back Africa*. (qtd in Cervoni 2008: 4)

Come Back Africa, a stylistic crossover between neorealist and ethnographic film, set in Johannesburg's infamous Sophiatown, was filmed and produced by a white American filmmaker, Lionel Rogosin. However, as Sembène's statement above already hints, *Come Back Africa* as well as *Moi, un noir* were of pivotal importance for the development of one of the most important cinematic forms on the African continent: the docudrama. The 'sequels' to *Moi, un noir* and *Come Back Africa*, docudramas made by black Africans about black Africans, were then provided by such figures as Ganda and Sembène during the 1960s and 1970s, when African nation states gradually gained inde-

pendence from their former colonisers. Since the colonial authorities mostly produced educational documentaries, voice-of-god style expository documentary was fiercely rejected by African filmmakers in the post-independence phase: 'Soon, African filmmakers realised that their audience hankered after fictionally driven stories more than reality-based narratives, which led them to embracing the documentary drama genre' (Mhando 2006: 14). Sembène is a good example of this shift, since his 'early films are clearly influenced by neorealism's mixing of documentary and fictional styles through the use of nonprofessional actors, location shooting, and episodic narrative structures' (Rodowick 1997: 162). This neorealism-enabled move from (colonial) expository documentaries to (post-colonial) docudramas also entailed a political aspect, particularly in the case of Sembène: while he believed that African films should educate the illiterate and poor, he also thought that they should tell entertaining stories of self-empowerment to reach this audience. The form of the docudrama was in this sense not merely understood as a formal exercise, but first and foremost as a political instrument.

Whether one calls it ethnofiction, docudrama, docufiction or *documentario narrativo*, the use of such hybrid forms as political tools was, however, not an exclusively African stance at that time. In Latin America for instance, another cosmopolitan mediator, the Argentine filmmaker Fernando Birri – who, not coincidentally passed through his filmmaking education at the *Centro* in Rome – founded the first Latin American documentary film school in his native Santa Fé. The first project he embarked on with his students was *Tire dié* (*Throw me a Dime*; 1958), a thirty-three-minute film about the inhabitants of *villa miserias* on the outskirts of Santa Fé; a crossover between docudrama and a participatory, collaborative documentary project. Like in *Moi, un noir*, only the opening sequence of the film is expository; it announces that *Tire dié* is 'the first Latin American social survey film', while a voice-of-god narrator supplies us with empirical data. Yet, while the camera pans above the city's formal neighbourhoods ('la ciudad organizada') from a helicopter perspective-of-god, match cuts gradually take us towards the city's outskirts and into the everyday life of trash-pickers and street kids on street-level, thereby becoming less an expository depiction of 'how the poor live' but rather a *cinéma vérité*-like interaction between interviewers (fifty-nine students of Birri's film school, who remain off-screen) and interviewees (slum-dwellers, who were dubbed by professional actors).¹⁴

Similar to Sembène, the 'father of African cinema', Birri was also dubbed as a 'father of . . .', that is, as the 'father of *nuovo cine latinoamericano*' (New Latin American Cinema) and *Tire dié* as this movement's inaugurating impulse.¹⁵ This genealogical/oedipal metaphor was also applied to Jean Rouch, since his use of unscripted dialogue, improvisation, the shaky handheld camera and jump cuts, had a profound impact on the French *Nouvelle Vague*, and

especially on Jean-Luc Godard, who, after the release of his debut film *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*; 1960) – a true exercise of unscripted, cinéma vérité-like improvisation – was labelled by critics as the ‘Jean Rouch of contemporary France’ (qtd in Ungar 2007: 121). As this inaugurating film of the *Nouvelle Vague* bears much in common with *Moi, un noir*, it was in turn Rouch who was then labelled the ‘father of the *Nouvelle Vague*’.¹⁶ The use of such terms is usually rather metaphorical and ultimately only points to the search by film historians for the ‘true’ roots of national, or in the case of Birri even continental, cinemas – hence, their search for ‘founding fathers’, ‘pioneers’ or ‘inventors’ of this or that wave, technique or style. Nevertheless, what these labels illustrate is that documentary had a profound impact on the so-called ‘new wave’ cinemas of the 1960s and 1970s.

Along with the French *Nouvelle Vague*, other new wave cinemas surfaced in Europe, Japan and North America; but parallel to these currents north of the equator, other numerous currents emerged in the global South, albeit within an altogether different geo-political context and with different (more radically leftist) political intentions.¹⁷ What Deleuze described in reference to Rouch as the question of ‘third world authorship’, or what exactly a ‘third-worldist film’ might be, increasingly become major issues of ideological, intellectual and polemical debates in the 1960s, as the above quoted statement by Ousmane Sembène about *Moi, un noir*, that ‘in principle an African should have made it’, indicates. It is also in this sense that one can say that filmmakers like Rouch and Birri laid the foundations – not in the sense of ‘founding’ them – for new wave movements in the global South; in the case of *Moi, un noir*, most literally by empowering a black African to become a filmmaker himself, and in the case of *Tire dié*, by introducing what becomes one of the major stylistic and thematic preoccupations of not only Latin American filmmakers in the 1960s and 1970s: the many variants of a cinéma vérité-like docufictional mode, as well as political and social (‘Third World’) issues such as poverty, homelessness, and marginalisation, or more generally ‘underdevelopment’. Accordingly, in his manifesto ‘Cinema and Underdevelopment’ (first published in 1963), Birri claimed that the filmmakers of the ‘Third World’ ought to apply ‘the humanistic ideals behind neorealism and the social documentary to the context of underdevelopment’ (Chanan 1997: 209). Consequently, Birri proposed to film ‘underdevelopment with the optic of the people’ because otherwise cinema becomes merely an ‘accomplice of underdevelopment’ (1997: 94).

Birri’s ‘Cinema and Underdevelopment’ was one of several influential film manifesto-essays which asked for a radical transformation of cinema in the ‘Third World’, or better put, for a revolution of filmmaking practice and objectives in the global South. Another of these influential film manifesto-essays is ‘Aesthetic of Hunger’ (first published in 1965) by Glauber Rocha, in which one of the most radical Brazilian directors called for a ‘hungry’ cinema

of 'sad and ugly films' (Rocha 1997: 60), and, as the title of this manifesto already suggests, a cinema which turns poverty into an aesthetic strategy as well as into a mode of production (see also Chapter 8). The most influential of these film manifesto-essays was arguably 'Towards a Third Cinema' (first published in 1967) by the Argentine directors Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, originally published in a Cuban leftist magazine called *Tricontinental*. According to its leftist publication context, the manifesto called for a 'cinema of subversion . . . that prepares the terrain for the revolution to become reality' (Solanas and Getino 1997: 36). These manifestos articulated a Third-Worldist cinematic current that is best defined as a radical and, in some cases, militant politicisation of film culture in some countries of the global South during the 1960s. This resonated with the political turmoil of a polarised Cold War era and the struggles between numerous colonial, military or dictatorial regimes and their – by and large – leftist antagonists, ranging from the Philippines to Algeria, and from Vietnam, Cuba, and Chile to Brazil.

Mike Wayne has therefore defined Third Cinema broadly as a 'body of theory and filmmaking practice committed to social and cultural emancipation' (2001: 5). To put it within the terminology introduced by Getino and Solanas: an emancipation from the *cultural* dominance of 'First Cinema' (classical, generically produced, star-dominated Hollywood cinema and other mainstream cinemas around the world) and 'Second Cinema' (European and non-European art cinema), as well as an emancipation from the economic dependence on the capitalist metropolitan centres of the First World. Yet, Latin American manifesto-essays, like the ones by Birri, Rocha, Getino and Solanas, were only the tip of an iceberg. Manifesto-essays calling for a reformed national or international film aesthetics – for a radical politicisation of film-making from the point of view of the people, the oppressed, colonised and marginalised – emerged in a truly polycentric fashion from virtually every corner of the globe during that time, from Latin America to the Arab world.¹⁸ Nevertheless, since Third Cinema as a term and concept originated in Latin America it is not surprising that its theoretical discourse was by and large dominated by, in particular, Argentinean, Brazilian and Cuban critics, filmmakers and intellectuals. Equally, scholarly attention has been largely directed towards the *nuovo cine latinoamericano*, most notably on the films of the Argentine *Grupo Cine Liberation*, the Brazilian *Cinema Novo* and post-revolutionary Cuban cinema.¹⁹

As these movements suggest, Third Cinema was not merely a matter of manifesto-essays, claims and theories, but also a practice of political filmmaking with an obvious footing in the documentary genre. The Brazilian director Carlos Diegues observed for instance that one of the major features of the *Cinema Novo* movement was its (re-)discovery of the documentary form, since they have 'taken their cameras and gone out into the streets, the country, and

the beaches in search of the Brazilian people, the peasant, the worker, the fisherman, the slum dweller' (1995: 66). The importance of the documentary form was also highlighted by Getino and Solanas, because for them the 'cinema known as documentary . . . is perhaps the main basis of revolutionary filmmaking' (1997: 46). It comes therefore not as a surprise that the most frequently discussed, and arguably most influential films of the Third Cinema movement, are – in terms of their filmmaking practice – based on the 'cinema known as documentary'. Consequently, Chanan observes that part of the originality of Latin American fiction films of that period 'derived from their incorporation of documentary techniques and styles' (1997: 202), or to repeat Willemsen: the revolutionary film practices of the 1960s and 1970s 'drew on the ideals of such far from revolutionary currents as Italian neo-realism and Grierson's notion of the social documentary' (1989: 225).²⁰

In keeping with Chanan's and Willemsen's arguments one can say that in the formation of the politically engaged Third Cinema movements, the docu-fictional form held a central position, or to quote from Julio García Espinosa's Cuban recipe for revolutionary filmmaking, 'For an Imperfect Cinema' (first published in 1969):

Imperfect cinema can make use of the documentary or the fictional mode, or both. It can use whatever genre, or all genres . . . These questions are indifferent to it, since they do not represent its real alternatives or problems, and much less its real goals. These are not the battles or polemics it is interested in sparking. (1997: 81)

Hence, for Espinosa 'imperfect cinema' is a cinema that is not merely technologically and stylistically 'imperfect' (in the sense that its mode of production is unpolished, ad hoc or even amateurish), but rather indifferent to questions of technological quality, genre or modalities of representation; it is rather keen on communicating issues that matter to ordinary people, in a similar way in which Grierson defined the purpose of social documentary (see Chapter 3). This is not a coincidental connection, since not only Birri, but also other important Third Cinema filmmakers, such as the Cubans Tomás Gutiérrez Alea or indeed also Julio García Espinosa, studied at the *Centro* in Rome. Just like Birri, these two Cuban filmmakers founded a documentary film school – the ICAIC (*Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos*) – to spread the ideas of Grierson and Cavalcanti to a new generation of Cuban filmmakers.²¹ Sara Gómez' docudrama *De Cierta Manera* is a more or less direct outcome of these transnational cross-fertilisations and in this sense a representative for the Cuban version of Third Cinema – or what Espinosa preferred to call 'imperfect cinema'. Yet, the film is also representative for a Third Cinema attempt to address the slum as a topic: it juxtaposes the ideals of the Cuban Revolution – the most crucial

political event that ultimately led to the Third Cinema movements in Latin America – with the difficult new lives of relocated slum-dwellers in Havana. Juxtaposition (or contrast, confrontation and comparison) is also a formal method of this film, since it continuously juxtaposes its documentary parts with a melodramatic frame story that narrates a fictional encounter between a former slum-dweller and a newly appointed schoolteacher.

DE CIERTA MANERA (1974)

De Cierta Manera owes its Third Cinema form to the *Centro* classmates Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa, who both edited the film, because the film's director, Sara Gómez – an Afro-Cuban female director in an otherwise thoroughly male and white dominated Latin American film scene – suddenly died of an acute asthma attack. Perhaps because of these unfortunate post-production circumstances, the film indeed exemplifies, as a collaborative effort between several filmmakers, what Espinosa proposed to call 'imperfect cinema'. Sara Gómez' auteurist perspective is nevertheless also significantly inscribed, since the film examines not only issues of class, but also of gender and race relations. Simultaneously, the question of 'marginality', why it exists, persists, and which problems it causes in a post-revolutionary society striving for social, racial and gender equality is examined in a docufictional manner to engage the viewer both intellectually and emotionally with the predicaments of urban poverty in Cuba.²²

Largely set in a neighbourhood of newly built social housing facilities – a fictitious place euphemistically named 'Miraflores' (translated from Spanish as 'sight of flowers') – the film primarily tells the (equally fictional) love story between two residents of this neighbourhood. A middle class, university-educated teacher named Yolanda falls in love with the bus factory worker Mario, who led the life of a lightheaded rogue before falling in love with Yolanda. The couple gradually faces relationship problems caused by their different social backgrounds as well as by the new demands of a society that strives for social equality. Some of these difficulties stem from the fact that the other (both real and fictitious) protagonists of the film – some of which are played by professional, others by non-professional actors – were once inhabitants of an actual slum on the outskirts of Havana known as 'Las Yaguas', which was razed by the Cuban government in 1961.²³ Consequently, while we see the opening credits, the film's first shots consist of rapidly edited juxtapositions of archival footage from Las Yaguas and images of workers on a construction site building new houses, presumably the houses of Miraflores. This opening introduces that the film's main focus is the juxtaposition of the 'old' with the 'new', and more concretely the revolutionary government's housing reform

policy and the problems arising from the re-settlement of slum-dwellers into public housing facilities. These problems, however, are also mirrored in the more personal love story: while Yolanda has problems to educate the neighbourhood's children, echoing the difficulties of the Cuban government's literacy campaign in the 'worst neighbourhoods' (initiated by Fidel Castro in 1960), Mario, on the other hand, struggles with both, his ties to the slum where he grew up and with his co-workers in the bus factory, who fear that he estranges himself from them because of his new upper-class girlfriend.

While narrating this fictional love story of class difference, the film frequently inserts documentary segments, introducing 'real' characters and displaying footage of 'real' events. However, many scenes purposefully present borderline cases between documentary and fiction and are therefore indistinguishable with regard to their claim for authenticity. For example, in the film's opening sequence a medium close-up shows what at the surface seems to be a classical documentary device, a talking-head interview with a female school-teacher, who seemingly responds to an unseen interviewer. Yet, as the viewer only understands in retrospect, the interview turns out to be an enacted introduction of the fictional character Yolanda by a professional actress with the very same first name (Yolanda Cuellar, Fig. 5.2).²⁴ In this interview Yolanda expresses her feelings, but also a sense of bewilderment regarding the problems she faces among the former slum-dwellers:



Figure 5.2 Interview with the teacher Yolanda whose real name is Yolanda in *De Cierta Manera*.

How I feel here? Not particularly well. I studied in Tope, Mina, Tarara. Then I moved to this place. This is all very strange for me. I didn't know of things like that before. I thought these things do not exist anymore.²⁵

Subsequently, the film's editors juxtapose documentary footage of Latin American shantytowns, street kids and slum-dwellers with a short extract from *Tire dié*, while alternating female and male voice-over narrators introduce the broader subject of the film as follows:

In the whole capitalist world, and especially in the underdeveloped countries, there exists a social class with clearly identifiable features. The breeding ground on which this social class emerged is unemployment. Merciless capitalist competition causes chronic underemployment, so that these people became their society's outcasts. They are excluded from the producing parts of society and can only find shelter in the slums, which are placed like poverty-belts around the metropolises of our times.²⁶

This expository introduction is reminiscent of the one we encountered in *Housing Problems*, *Los Olvidados* and *Moi, un noir*. Yet, unlike in these films, in *De Cierta Manera* a Marxist explanation is advanced to explain the existence of slums: capitalist competition causes underemployment which in turn leads to spatial exclusion and slum-belts surrounding the inner cities – a typical feature for a Third Cinema film, since it provides the viewer right from the beginning with a politicised (Marxist) explanatory framework.

The film's (docufictional) mode of production is – as Bertolt Brecht would have it – announced right away, since the opening credits alert the viewer that what is about to follow is a 'a film about real people, and some fictitious ones'; the credits then display name lists of 'actors', as well as of 'real persons', 'workers of the factory Omnibus Girón' (Mario and his co-workers) and 'teachers and residents' of the Miraflores neighbourhood, which itself is, as mentioned already, a partly fictitious and partly real place. The strategy of interweaving documentary and fictional segments is moreover maintained throughout the film, for instance when, some eight minutes into the film, we see a scene in which Mario and Yolanda get to know each other: set on a lush hill outside the city, Mario recounts his life and admits that he holds a secret, after which intertitles interrupt the scene abruptly, announcing that what is about to follow is an *Análisis documental*, a 'documentary analysis' of a religious cult called *Abacua* – an all-male religious society – of which Mario is a secret member. Reminiscent of Jean Rouch's ethnographic films on rituals in African tribes, the short 'documentary analysis' segment explains how this patriarchal cult was imported by Western African slaves which, in a process of

transculturation, intermingled with a European version of *machismo* stemming from Cuba's Spanish immigrants – the *machismo* of 'Spanish sailors from the marginal sectors', as the female narrator recounts. It then explains the cult's belief system and how it essentially feeds on a disregard for women. With it, the segment tries to explain the background of Mario's machismo, his chauvinistic conduct of male honour, bonding, and ill-treatment of women, while visually accompanying it with historical drawings of Spanish sailors and ethnographic sounds and images of the *Abacú* rituals (e.g. the killing of a sheep which represents women as traitors, accompanied by drums). The narrator furthermore claims that these kinds of anachronistic 'cults of the male' prevent the integration of large parts of the (at least male) marginal populations into the revolutionary modernisation efforts, since they pose a looming threat to a society that thrives for social and gender equality.

One can say that a similar thesis underpins also other parts of the film's documentary *discours*, as Andrea Morris in her analysis of the film suggests. For Morris, the film draws 'attention to the problematic nature of the integration of 'marginal' sectors into the revolution, a process that is complicated by the ties between culture and place' (2012: 121). These ties to culture (Afro-Cuban religious cults) and place (the former slums) are, as the filmmaker(s) suggest, essentially also the reason why despite the government's attempts at improving the living conditions for the *marginals* (the environmental determinist approach to social reform), 'typical features' of marginality continue to persist in social housing projects like Miraflores.²⁷ These 'typical features' are outlined in another expository segment some fifty-two minutes into the film. While visually displaying the rubble of destroyed houses, which metaphorically alludes to a state rather than a place of deterioration, a female voice-over introduces recent results of a sociological survey on 'marginal groups':

Sociological studies accompany the destruction of slums and the re-settlement of its inhabitants into newly built housing projects. In these new neighborhoods, the culture of marginal groups sometimes comes to life again. The sociological research helps to identify aspects of this problem in more detail.²⁸

What follows then is a list of problems that persist in social housing blocks like Miraflores, which, as the narrator suggests, originate in the 'culture of marginal groups'. To prove this point, the narrator recalls statistics about crime rates, unstable marriages, the number of single-mother families and school dropouts, emphasising that these numbers reflect the 'typical features' of marginal cultures.

The film's reference to 'culture' as an explanatory framework for persisting conditions of social marginality is aimed at providing a glimpse into a sup-

posed ‘slum mentality’ (rather than slum life). As Morris points out (2012: 132–4), this culturalist explanation reminds on what the American anthropologist Oscar Lewis famously coined the ‘culture of poverty’. Lewis indeed conducted anthropological research in Havana’s Las Yaguas (which might have been known to Gómez, who was a student of ethnography before becoming a documentary filmmaker).²⁹ His controversial culture of poverty-thesis was at that time, through the 1960s and 1970s, a major touchstone of debate not only among intellectuals, scholars and policy makers in Latin America, but also for instance in the US.³⁰ In his *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in The Culture Of Poverty* (1959), Lewis outlined about seventy interrelated social, economic and psychological traits common among poor populations which, as Lewis believed, were transferred within families through generations. Hence, the culture of poverty was for Lewis a ‘way of life that is passed down from generation to generation along family lines’ (Lewis 1969: 187). Poverty was for Lewis therefore a form of ‘subculture’, caused by both, external (stigmatisation, unemployment, and so on) as well as internal (the culture of poverty) factors. In other words, the culture of poverty was for Lewis a self-organising principle, which leaves poor families poor over generations. Among those traits Lewis listed was for instance also ‘belief in sorcery and spiritualism’, the clinging to pre-modern religious cults among the poor – a feature highlighted in *De Cierta Manera*’s segment on the *Abacué* cult.

Yet, in a scene some fifty-five minutes into the film, the filmmaker’s overall strategy becomes more evident: the continuous juxtaposition of documentary and fictional parts to create tensions, contrasts and contradictions (which puts *De Cierta Manera* into the realm of the essay film, rather than of educational propaganda or Marxist agit-prop). Almost directly following the ‘sociological analysis’ of the culture of poverty that causes, as the narrator has unambiguously emphasised, unstable marriages and high divorce rates, Mario asks Yolanda if she would marry ‘a guy like him’. Even though he doesn’t receive a straight answer to this question, it nevertheless highlights the filmmaker’s strategy to continuously set (melodramatic) scenes in contrast to (documentary) segments. As the English translation of the title of the film (‘one way or another’) already suggests, this dialectical editing strategy serves rather to engage spectators rather than to provide a coherent explanation or resolution to a problem. In what could be said is an inverted Eisensteinian dialectical strategy of montage, the film tries to disclose the contradictions of Cuba’s post-revolutionary social order (rather than to celebrate the country’s achievements or ideology). As Ruby Rich has fittingly put it, *De Cierta Manera* tells ‘a story, in short, of unresolved contradictions’ (1997: 280). These unresolved contradictions are firstly formal ones, in that they implicitly do not give an answer to the question which mode – the fictional or the documentary one – provides a more truthful version of the many layers of social reality in this real/fictitious

Havana neighbourhood. But secondly, the film also does not attempt to resolve the contradictions arising from the clash between socialist utopia (Miraflores) and the social realities (and mentalities) of the *marginals*. The (real and fictitious) protagonists of the film find themselves in a contradictory neither/nor-situation; neither in the old state of marginal living conditions, nor yet fully integrated in the new socialist utopia of class, gender and race equality.

The film's frequent cut-ins to wrecking balls which are destroying old buildings is to provide allegorical images for this neither-here-nor-there situation of the Miraflores residents, in-between the destruction (of their old neighbourhood Las Yaguas) and the reconstruction (of the new Miraflores). This notion of in-betweenness is shown in several scenes throughout the film, particularly in those that display the efforts of the community to improve the neighbourhood, for example the collective repairing of houses, clearing of streets, general gardening and so on. One can say that the frequently inserted scenes and shots of destruction and construction are overly obvious allegorical devices for the Cuban nation at large, being in-between the (socialist) attempts of destroying old social stratifications and the renewal/reform of a society in which the excluded *marginals* ought to become included members of the revolutionary project – and that is especially through proper (re-)education and (re-)housing. Similarly allegorical then, the relationship between the two main characters, Mario, the former slum-dweller, and Yolanda, the teacher who educates children to become literate, is therefore not coincidentally the major focal point through which the contradictions of a society in-between the old and the new are negotiated in a dramatised way: the film suggests that they are both forced to transform their old habits and attitudes in order to meet their new private as well as their new social situation in a society that is itself in the process of transformation.

According to a famous thesis by literary critic Fredric Jameson, Third-Worldist literature (and by extension Third-Worldist cinema) is 'necessarily allegorical'; even apparently private stories – or as in the case of *De Cierta Manera*, intimate relationships – 'project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society' (1986: 69). Building on Jameson's controversial assessment (which was vehemently criticised for its generalising assumption to interpret all Third-Worldist literary texts as allegorical in nature), not only Shohat and Stam believe that allegory nevertheless provides a 'productive category for dealing with many Third Worldist films' (1994: 271).³¹ For instance, Ismail Xavier has discussed the aesthetics and politics of Brazil's *Cinema Novo* movement as *Allegories of Underdevelopment*. His explanation for the use of allegory in Brazilian films of the 1960s and 1970s reads as follows:

[T]he image of the world becomes complex, and the tendency is . . . to allegorize, that is, to condense an endless number of questions and experiences into a few individual characters whose life courses, nevertheless, represent a national fate, the destiny of an ethnic group or of a class. (1997: 15)

Hence, in an increasingly complex world Brazilian *Cinema Novo* filmmakers responded with totalising national allegories, Xavier contends. According to him these filmic allegories made underdevelopment – the stigma haunting most of the decolonising Latin American, African and Asian countries of that time – their major theme.³²

However, *De Cierta Manera*'s allegorical devices do not necessarily display a totalising simplification of the complexities of post-revolutionary Cuba. The 'allegorical romance' between Yolanda and Mario rather provides an additional layer in the film's many-layered attempt to examine Cuba's efforts to integrate the *marginals* into the revolutionary project. It comes then as no surprise that one of the major features of *De Cierta Manera* is not an emphasis on (totalising, allegorical) resolutions, but rather on struggle, on unresolved (political) antagonisms – or conflictual encounters. This notion becomes especially evident in scenes where people or groups of people quarrel, debate and have disputes, as if the neighbourhood's in-betweenness constantly causes a set of evolving contradictions that are essentially irresolvable, as Rich has put it. In fact, before the opening credits juxtapose documentary images of Las Yaguas with construction sites, the film initially opens with a dramatised scene in which Mario accuses one of his colleagues of lying in the middle of an employee meeting. Throughout the film a number of other scenes show such public quarrels and debates among workers. Yet, these quarrels arise not only in public, but also in private contexts (between Yolanda and other teachers, her pupil's parents or with Mario). The prevalent topic of these quarrels is the issue of responsibility, either socio-political (towards the revolution, the Cuban nation, Miraflores, the factory, the school) or private (towards friends, lovers or family members). Hence, unlike in *Moi, un noir*, in which the not particularly peaceful encounter between Rouch and Ganda is suppressed and hidden under a 'fake' (constructed) narrative 'from . . . to' structure of character development, in *De Cierta Manera* conflictual encounters are openly exposed and remain unresolved to the very end of the film. Here, Mario and Yolanda are shown constantly quarrelling, debating and arguing in an extremely long take as they walk towards a horizon of newly-built social housing blocks.

With regard to the topic of this study then, the most innovative aspect of *De Cierta Manera* is not exclusively to be found in its experimentation with fictional and documentary modes, the film's permanent 'struggle between authenticity and falsehood' (Chanan 2004: 333). Even though the film's

docufictional form indeed relates to its content – its emphasis on societal contradictions and irresolvable struggles – the film implicitly also questions the possibilities of totalising allegorical representations in which individuals allegorise ‘types’ of a society at large (for example, illiterate slum-dwellers and educated teachers, working-class and middle-class, male and female). Yet, one can also argue that in this sense *De Cierta Manera* not only exercises the stylistic strategies of imperfect cinema, but it also provides an ‘allegory for imperfections’ itself, so to speak: it dramatises an imperfect encounter between imperfect individuals in a society that is as imperfect as the film itself.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter the method of contrast and comparison has been highlighted more vigorously, in order to illustrate the major paradigm of slum representation identified for ‘the age of the three worlds’ (Denning), that is, the encounter between individuals belonging to (literally or apparently) ‘different worlds’. It has shifted its focus from the ‘First’ towards what is now labelled as the ‘Third World’ because, during these watershed decades – the 1960s and 1970s – not only did world cinema modernise itself in the form of numerous often highly politicised, and predominantly leftist ‘new waves’ but so, too, did the (mega)cities of the global South. As is shown in *Moi, un noir*, rural migrants, full of hopes for and dreams of a better future flocked to these cities in search of jobs. These intersections between social and film history on a global scale, hence, between the emergence of a largely leftist international film culture and the massive urbanisation of the ‘Third World’, are thus not coincidental, and neither is the reliance on the documentary genre as primary mode of addressing urban poverty on film. Whether theorised or labelled as ethno-fiction, docu-drama, cinéma vérité or Imperfect Cinema, these hybrid ‘docu-fictional’ forms share their (transnational) links with earlier movements (neorealism and the Grierosinian documentary, in particular). However, they will also re-appear in yet another modified form in the digital era and in places other than Havana or Abidjan (see Chapter 7).

NOTES

1. Cf. Nowell-Smith, who argues that whether ‘in the form of cinéma vérité or direct cinema, the revolution was very dependent on the development of new technology’ (2013: 85). Accordingly, Morin declared in 1960 that a new cinéma vérité was possible, in which film was now finally able to convey ‘the authenticity of life as it is lived’ (2002: 229), thanks to the novel possibilities of sync-sound location shooting.

2. Steven Ungar contends that the film is a significant watershed for ethnographic film, since modernity in *Moi, un noir* 'extends from image to process; that is, from scenes of daily life . . . to Rouch's efforts to relocate filmed ethnography from 'folkloric' rural settings to urban spaces' (2007: 112).
3. According to the UN-HABITAT, 'the growth of Abidjan – and, therefore, its slums – is associated with three phases. During the first phase, from the 1930s to the 1950s, Abidjan was set up as the colonial capital, economically linked to the Abidjan–Niger railway. The town consisted of three areas: the administrative centre and European quarters of Le Plateau, and two African districts: Treichville and Adjamé' (2003: 200).
4. This seemingly improvised audio narration, as well as ambient sounds (of traffic noise, music, buzz in pubs, etc.) has been added to the film in a studio. This has been necessary because Rouch still lacked the technology for sync-sound recording. Even though this circumstance adds to the film's unpolished make up, it severely contradicts the idea of ad hoc improvisation.
5. The frequent jump cuts were perhaps consciously used by Rouch to give the impression of ad hoc improvisation, but they are most definitely also the result of available technology. Rouch filmed with a lightweight, spring-wound, 16 mm, non-reflex, non-sound Bell and Howell camera, which was used at that time by amateurs and only allowed for a maximum shot length of about twenty seconds.
6. I am referring to *Cahiers du Cinéma*'s auteur theory, which was the emerging film theory of the time when *Moi, un noir* was produced. Highly influential on a transnational scale, but especially in France, the critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* argued that (good, well made) films express a director's personal creative vision, especially through his/her creative use (or mastery) of cinematography, mise-en-scène and editing.
7. Transcribed by the author.
8. Enunciation (in French *énoncé*, translated as 'utterance') is a concept in linguistics that was first introduced by Émile Benveniste (1971). This concept was applied by film semioticians, most notably by Christian Metz, to describe how a film's narrator inscribes himself through pronouns such as 'I' or 'me' in the filmic text (in our example the *moi* of the film's title, as well as the *moi* of the narrator's voice), often providing in this way a direct (me-you) mode of address to the spectator. Messages that display an explicit speaker were defined by Benveniste as instances of *discours*, whereas messages without explicit reference to a speaker as *histoire*. Marxist film theory identified the mode of *histoire* with ideological deception, or in other words, with the apparently omniscient mode of narration in classical Hollywood cinema. In this ideological sense, the mode of *histoire* conceals the speaker and effaces its marks of enunciation so providing the illusion that the film 'tells itself'. In progressive, avant-gardist or modernist films, it was argued, the mode of *discours* prevails, as these kinds of films openly disclose their narrators/speaker(s). For a critique of this Marxist theory of enunciation with regard to cinema see Bordwell 1985: 21–6.
9. With regard to the film's historical production context, one should perhaps mention that French intellectuals, and also filmmakers, had already begun to question France's role as a colonial power in Africa, racist stereotypes about black people and similar issues by the early 1950s, so that *Moi, un noir* is less an exception and more a product of its time. The best filmic example that laid the grounds for *Moi, un noir* is the essay film *Les Statues meurent aussi* (*Statues also die*; Marker, Resnais, Cloque; 1953).
10. See Nichols 1991: 44–65.
11. See Ungar 2007: 119.
12. 'Becoming' is a recurring concept in Deleuze's oeuvre and essentially one that challenges

- fixed notions like 'being' and 'identity'. It describes neither a final state nor an interim phase, but rather the constant dynamism of change.
13. This destabilisation of the figure of the auteur in *Moi, un noir* was also highlighted by Dudley Andrew, who explains that 'the "director" handed authorial control over to that film's ostensible 'subjects'. These unemployed youths in the slums of Abidjan adopt the names of stars (Eddie Constantine, Dorothy Lamour) and narrate their own stories. Rouch follows rather than directs them, while putting together what can only with qualification be called his own film. Such examples confound the notion of auteurism . . .' (2010: 121-122). For Ungar, in turn, the film's enunciation is undoubtedly African and not Western, colonialist or Eurocentric, since the film 'promoted a cinematic practice for and by Africans to which Rouch and Ganda were committed, each in his own way' (2007: 121).
 14. Julianne Burton has therefore argued that, not unlike *Moi, un noir*, *Tire dié* was a collaborative group effort that 'sought the synchronous self-presentation of social actors' (1990: 52).
 15. See Rich 1997: 278.
 16. Godard initially intended to name his first feature film *Moi, un blanc* and stated in an 1982 interview that *Moi, un noir* affected him a lot (see Ungar 2007: 121). *À bout de souffle* references *Moi, un noir* quite directly, since its protagonist models his life on Hollywood gangsters like Humphrey Bogart which is similar to Ganda's idolisation of Edward G. Robinson.
 17. Shohat and Stam explain that while these new wave cinemas in the global South 'came in the wake of the European 'new' movements – neorealism, *nouvelle vague* – their politics were far to the left of their European counterparts. The manifestoes of the 1960s and 1970s valorised alternative, independent, anti-imperialist cinema more concerned with provocation and militancy than with auteurist expression or consumerist satisfaction' (1994: 248).
 18. In the Arab world these were manifestos such as the Egyptian 'Movement of the New Cinema', and 'Alternative Cinema' or the 'First Manifesto for a Palestinian Cinema' (see Willemen 1989: 226).
 19. A notable exception is the volume *Rethinking Third Cinema*, which has aimed to 'recontextualise the project of Third Cinema' (Guneratne 2003: 6).
 20. Apart from neorealism and the Griersonian documentary, the pivotal influence of Bertolt Brecht's theories on political (or epic) theatre should be mentioned as well. Brecht argued that for art to be political it has to use *Verfremdungstechniken* (distancing devices) – for example, distancing the audience from the illusionary effects of fictional narratives, e.g. by including the means of production or by breaking the 'fourth wall' between the performance (on stage/screen) and the audience (off stage/screen). These are all techniques that have been used by political filmmakers ever since. Brecht also maintained that 'the camera is a sociologist' (qtd in Curran 2009: 323), by which he implicitly highlighted the benefits of the documentary genre to record pro-filmic events, directly address its audiences as well as to disclose exploitative (e.g. bourgeois, capitalist, colonial) structures and so contribute to serving the oppressed in their class struggle.
 21. Historically, the rebirth of documentary coincided with the Cuban revolution in 1959 and thanks to the establishment of the ICAIC (which was founded in the very same year) documentaries became Cuban cinema's most distinguished trademark in the decades to come. All Cuban films from then on were funded by the regime, which perceived film as 'the art par excellence in our country'. Accordingly, the ICAIC produced the astonishing number of 900 documentaries, 112 feature-length movies and 1,300 newsreels during the

- 1960s, which is why this era is sometimes described as the golden decade of Cuban cinema (cf. Burton 1997 or Chanan 1997).
22. Among other political reforms (e.g. racial and gender equality, universal health care), the Cuban government also initiated housing reforms and the re-settlement of slum-dwellers into public housing projects in the 1960s.
 23. Louis Pérez describes Las Yaguas as ‘crowded with tens of thousands of poor, unemployed, unemployable, living in squalor and destitution, eight to a room in hovels of tin sheeting and cardboard without sanitary facilities, garbage collection, sidewalks, or street lighting, and increasingly without hope’ (1988: 308).
 24. This is also a distinct feature of many neorealist films, for instance of *Germania anno zero*, where the non-professional actor Edmund Moeschke plays the fictional character Edmund Kohler.
 25. Transcribed by the author.
 26. Transcribed by the author.
 27. Douglas Butterworth (1980) recounts in his anthropological study of a Cuban social housing project called ‘Buena Ventura’ (trans. as ‘good fortune’ and thus reminiscent of Gómez’ fictional Miraflores) that, among other things, its residents – former slum-dwellers of Las Yaguas – wished to have their old houses back, since they felt that a sense of community had been lost in their new settlement. Butterworth thus highlights the many-layered difficulties and contradictions of governmental slum policies like *De Cierta Manera* does.
 28. Transcribed by the author.
 29. Lewis was appointed by the Cuban government in 1968 to study how Las Yaguas’s slum-dwellers cope with their new social housings in Havana. As Lewis believed that poverty could be defeated in socialist societies like Cuba, the Cuban government was initially favourable towards his research stay. However, when his research proved that the ‘culture of poverty’ still persists, he was accused of being a CIA agent and expelled from the country.
 30. Based on Lewis’s thesis, Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote in 1965 the so-called ‘Moynihan Report’ which spurred debates about racial segregation and the US-American social welfare system.
 31. A critique of Jameson’s thesis provides Ahmad (1986).
 32. Burton points out that the most recurrent subjects of ICAIC’s documentaries in the post-revolutionary era were either historical events or underdevelopment (1990: 128).

Postmodern Bricolages

How can cinema effectively speak about people's experiences in a world saturated by manipulated images?

Ismail Xavier

A bride turns towards the camera and we see her face up close. The title of the film is superimposed on this image, as well as the announcement that we are about to see a 'ljubavni film' . . . a love story. Ironically, however, the next scene shows the exact opposite of what we would expect from a romantic love story. The bride insults her groom, who lies motionless on a pushcart. He drank too much. 'You destroyed my life', she screams at him. The camera follows this tragicomic wedding procession until it stops in front of a man with very bad teeth. He carries a broken umbrella, but it is not raining. In the background we see and hear geese, while the man looks straight into the camera and addresses us directly. It appears that he has escaped from a psychiatric asylum: 'They are poisoning my brain – they want to destroy my life. But I fled. I am not insane!' He then talks about his people, 'the Gypsies', and how God has abandoned them. The title sequence sets in. A long take in the form of an uncut tracking shot introduces us to the film's producers, actors and, in particular, to its main setting: Skopje's Šuto Orizari. The slow-moving camera first follows the geese and then several characters as they criss-cross each other in the neighbourhood's dirt-covered streets. We see a boy pulling a sheep, a musical band on a cart that consists of a violinist and an accordionist, then a gambler strolling sluggishly away from a group of card players after losing all his money (another 'destroyed life'). Finally, a well-dressed man who is dragging a pig across the frame appears and is replaced, once again, by the bizarre wedding procession that opened the film. A wild mixture of disparate events, things, sounds, people and animals are put together in one single shot; a kaleidoscopic pastiche of various Roma stereotypes or familiar sights that are observable in any other poverty-stricken neighbourhood of our dirt-covered 'planet of slums'?

Dom za vešanje, better known as *Time of the Gypsies* – this chapter’s main example – mixes a variety of popular myths, well-known images and even stereotypes about Roma people into its plot, for which it was criticised by various viewers and reviewers. However, despite, or even because of the film’s apparently problematic politics of representation, one can say that it is also symptomatic for a postmodern take on slum life. It uses the strategies of quotation, irony, parody and pastiche to portray a place and its people not so much in an authentic way, but rather through the images and stories we already have of them. One could argue that this is postmodern cinema’s main innovation with regard to representing slum-dwellers on screen; but this is also its major ethical problem. However, most of the examples that qualify as genuinely postmodern cinematic takes on slum life rely equally often on the (apparently ethically far less problematic) stylistic strategies of neorealist and/or documentary cinemas: e.g. uncut long takes, on-location shooting with locals and the use of non-professional actors as social actors, who speak in regional dialects. This contradictory mix of stylistic elements in postmodern films on slums, as well as their ethical dilemmas, will be discussed in the following chapter, which mainly focuses on examples from the 1970s and 1980s. The technique of ‘bricolage’ is thereby presented as this era’s key paradigm, as it describes a cultural *as well as* an architectural method that was used by both (postmodern) filmmakers and slum-dwellers.

The French term ‘bricolage’ is usually defined as a hands-on, DIY-technique that creates a construction from a diverse range of materials or sources; hence, it describes a technique that puts something together by using any material that happens to be available. Materials like recycled plastic, cement blocks or scrap wood are often the only resources that happen to be available in a specific urban or semi-urban area for slum-dwellers.¹ To describe slum-dwellers as ‘bricoleurs’ and their living environment as a result of a complex bricolage of ad hoc building and re-cycling strategies – and, by extension, as an even more complex bricolage of informal connections to water, electricity and sanitation networks – is, however, not entirely without problems. The distinction between formal (planned, constructed, engineered) and informal (ad hoc, spontaneous, DIY) building and living strategies, not only implies a (juridical, administrative or political) discourse on legality and illegality, but also an understanding of the ‘informal’ as an inferior practice. Such or similar dichotomies are questioned in postmodern thought, as this chapter will outline in more detail. However, it will also outline how filmmakers from Japan, the Philippines, Latin America or from Eastern Europe used techniques such as bricolage not merely to convey the hazards of living on the margins of increasingly overcrowded (mega)cities on screen, but also to either recycle, parody or criticise the already existing images of and stories about our ‘planet of slums’.

POSTMODERNISM, BRICOLAGE AND 'IMPURE CINEMA'

How can one define postmodernism in more general terms but also with regard to world cinema? It can, in fact, be defined in many different ways: for example, in the widest sense, as a condition which, as the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard famously claimed, explains why people become increasingly sceptical towards the truthfulness of universalising theories, or what he termed 'les grands récits', the great historical metanarratives (of enlightenment, historical progress, modernity, class struggle, etc.) – a process which has only been consolidated with the gradual collapse of the bipolar Cold War system during the 1980s; or as a certain mindset that philosophically poses questions about modernist, but also about other metaphysical, ontological or epistemological assumptions that now seem to have lost their value; as a new way of life that is significantly different from the way people lived before; as a 'period' in art history that came after ('post') modernism in a wide variety of arts, ranging from painting, photography and literature to music, theatre and the cinema; and it can further be defined as a novel aesthetic or 'style' that these various art forms share. Whichever definition one refers to, generally one can say that not only the postmodern condition, but also postmodern thought and cultural practice influenced both paradigms in film theory and certain tendencies in world cinema.

However, the term 'postmodernism' initially emerged not so much from debates about (film) culture, but rather with regard to architectural styles. That is to say, it emerged with the critique on modernist architectural designs and only later influenced thinkers of culture, as for instance in the case of Fredric Jameson, who outlines this occurrence in his *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (see 1991: 1). In contrast to Jameson, Mike Davis, however, suggests that the term 'postmodern' could also be used to describe a less formal kind of architecture. As one third of the urban world today squats in spontaneously erected huts, rather than in buildings made of steel and glass, 'postmodern' designs, Davis contends, could be more frequently found on the outskirts, rather than in the capitalist centres of our planet's cities. Considering this, the visionary projects of architectural high modernism – the 'form-follows-function' designs of Walter Gropius, Oscar Niemeyer or Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, of which the 'biopolitical utopias' of the superblocks, *Plattenbauten* or *residenciales públicos* are possibly their most functionalised expressions – can today really only be considered as utopias from the past. These futuristic dreams of how cities may look in the future are now facing the grim twenty-first century realities of what Mike Davis calls 'postmodern slums'.² What Davis implies is that one might characterise slum-dwelling as a truly *postmodern* rather than *pre-modern* way of living and/or building which is closely related to the technique of bricolage.

Similarly, some contemporary installation artists – who have created a number of art exhibitions in which slum tenements were turned into objects of art³ – suggest that slum-dwelling is a highly creative (or indeed postmodern) way of living. The architectural historian Patricio del Real has observed how these artists criticise the arbitrariness of dichotomies like formal/informal and hence the problematic binarisms provided by the social sciences to define slums as a negative kind of habitat (2008: 92). These artists perceive the slum-dweller not simply as an ‘informal’ citizen of ‘irregular’ squatter settlements, or as a passive victim of global capitalism, but rather as an active *bricoleur*, and his or her way of being in the world as bricolage’ (2008: 85).

In the academic discourse, the term ‘bricolage’ was first introduced by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. In *The Savage Mind* Lévi-Strauss established a relationship between the realm of building, architecture and craftsmanship and the realm of culture, more precisely ‘mythic thought as a kind of intellectual “bricolage”’ (1966: 19). Challenging the widespread stereotypes about the intellectually poor ‘savage’, his/her ‘ineptitude for abstract thought’ (1966: 1), Lévi-Strauss introduced the notion of bricolage not as a subordinate, but rather as a different kind of thought – one that is not based on Western notions of abstraction, but grounded in the concrete, in objects of the material world, furthermore suggesting that as a (scientific, cultural or architectural) method, bricolage empowers those with fewer resources. However, Lévi-Strauss also insisted that in its original French use (as *bricoler*, ‘to tinker’) bricolage denotes the exact opposite of planned, conceptual or engineered construction, and in regard to modes of thinking, the opposite of abstract, analytic and conceptual reasoning. This dichotomy has been famously criticised by Jacques Derrida, because if

one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one’s concepts from the text of a heritage that is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur*. The engineer, whom Lévi-Strauss opposes to the *bricoleur*, should be the one to construct the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon. In this sense the engineer is a myth. (1987: 400)

Derrida’s criticism of Lévi-Strauss’s ‘structuralist’ approach – his (implicitly hierarchical) construction of a structural opposition between *bricoleur* and engineer, mythical and rational thought – not only showcases his deconstructive reading method, but it also provides a post-modern/post-structuralist definition of ‘texts’. According to Derrida a text is always *bricoleur*, or to put it in the terminology of semiotics: a text consists of a ‘play of signifiers’ that have arbitrary relations to their referents. This definition of texts relates to the idea of the ‘death of the author’ (Barthes), hence the death of a notion (or myth)

of literary authorship that assumes an all-controlling constructor of a ‘totality of language, syntax, and lexicon’, to put it in the words of Derrida. Following the likes of Barthes and Derrida, postmodern film theorists declared cinematic auteurism to be as dead as literary authorship, assuming that ‘filmic texts’ are as *bricoleur* as literary ones.

Related to the ‘death of the author’-postulate is the concept of intertextuality introduced by another important figure of postmodern/poststructuralist theory, Julia Kristeva.⁴ Both terms, bricolage and intertextuality, served thinkers and critics not only to conceptualise how texts are essentially and always a bricolage of multiple voices – a ‘mosaic of quotations’ (Kristeva), rather than the output of one single author – but also to describe a prevalent technique, a dominant stylistic element of postmodern cultural practice: the borrowing and re-use of texts, discourses and quotations from a large cultural-historical archive. These techniques become important features of postmodern architecture as well as of literature, painting, popular culture (film, television, music) and certain fashion and youth subcultures (e.g. punk and DIY-movements). Some of these stylistic elements have been outlined by Linda Hutcheon, albeit largely in regard to literature. In her *Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) she contends that notions like intertextuality, bricolage and the death of the author translate into certain typically postmodern literary strategies: self-reflexivity (a text’s reflection on its constructed nature, its play of signifiers), pastiche (the imitation, adaptation and appropriation of previous texts), parody (the mocking of literary conventions) or irony (in order to distance the reader from the sobriety, generic conventions or the constructed nature of a text). For Hutcheon, such literary techniques produce so-called ‘metafictions’, fiction that makes either itself or some other work of fiction its primary subject matter. As a postmodern form *par excellence*, metafiction expresses the postmodern scepticism towards the truthfulness of ‘grand narratives’ in literary terms. For this reason they blur (or deconstruct) epistemological binaries that are not only constitutive for (realist) literature, but also for other ‘discourses of sobriety’, to use Nichols’s expression. Among other things, metafiction blurs distinctions between the supposedly original and the copy, between the truth and lies, the real and the imagined, fact and fiction, or story and history, in order to reveal that such binary distinctions are nothing more than arbitrary constructions.

In film theory, postmodern scepticism turned towards the supposedly ‘referential function of the images’ as well as towards the notion that ‘seeing is believing’. It led to an attack on notions of (Bazinian) realism and the documentary-typical claims to factual authenticity and truth (*vérité*). While the documentary was increasingly regarded as ‘just another form of fiction’ (Chanan 2008: 3), notions of cinematic realism were attacked via poststructuralist, neo-Marxist and semiotic film theories, most vigorously by the writers

of the British film journal *Screen*.⁵ In short, postmodern thought initiated a wholesome rejection of the understanding of film as a realist ‘window on the world’, an ‘indexical media technology’ or a ‘social document’, which figures such as Grierson, Bazin, Morin or Brecht previously advocated. What the writers of *Screen* and other journals advocated instead was a constructivist view of cinema that regarded ‘realism’ as nothing more than an *effect* of representation. Echoing the interrelatedness of realist film practices with realist film theory in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, one can argue that film theory’s ‘attack on realism in the name of reflexivity and intertextuality’ (Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis 1992: 184) also reverberated with postmodern film practices since the 1960s.

However, practices like bricolage, intertextuality and reflexivity are not exclusively postmodern ones. Undoubtedly, neorealist filmmakers strongly believed that the medium is able to reproduce pro-filmic phenomena, that the ‘camera is a sociologist’ (Brecht), as we have seen in the case of *Los Olvidados*. Yet, Buñel’s film also questions such notions of realism, since it is unable to give insights into the realm of the human psyche. In *Moi, un noir*, the *cinéma vérité* notion of cinematic ‘truth’ as a ‘truth of the encounter’ is turned into a challenge of the ethnographer’s voice(-of-god), while emphasising the voice(s) of ‘the Others’, thereby destabilising the idea of authorship, which anticipates the notion of the ‘death of the author’ and the idea that a ‘filmic text’ consists of a polyphony of voices, representing a *discours* rather than a *histoire*. Moreover, Sara Gómez’ *De Cierta Manera* not only incorporates intertextual references (e.g. to *Tire dié*), but also assembles documentary and fictional modes into what many think is a genuinely postmodern form, the ‘docudrama’. Hence, while the films of Buñel, Rouch or Gómez all emphasise, to varying degrees, notions of cinematic realism and/or truth, they also destabilise such notions.

Similarly, the concept of ‘impure cinema’ could be seen as a genuinely postmodern notion *avant la lettre* as, historically, it appeared long before related notions such as bricolage or intertextuality. It was introduced by André Bazin in his essay ‘Pour un cinéma impur: défense de l’adaptation’ (first published in 1951), which has been translated into English as ‘In Defense of Mixed Cinema’ (2005e), probably to avoid politically incorrect connotations that the word ‘impurity’ might entail. Correctly translated, Bazin argues for an ‘impure’ cinema, that is, a cinema that is not ‘purely’ cinematic, but, to use a modern term, intermedial. For this reason, Bazin not only argued for a positive evaluation of adaptations (a genre which was regarded by ‘purists’ as genuinely uncinematic), but also, more generally, in favour of cinema’s ability to adapt, borrow and imitate the ‘traditonal arts’ of literature, painting, music and theatre. Bazin’s concept of ‘impure cinema’ is applicable to a set of films from the 1970s, in which the slum becomes such a genuinely ‘impure’ – in the sense of bricoleur, intertextual or intermedial – *topos* of representation in world

cinema.⁶ In other words, these films reject an understanding of cinema that solemnly defines it as a device to reproduce pro-filmic events, and by extension specific places and their people, emphasising instead the notion of impurity/intermediality. Akira Kurosawa's *Dodes'ka-den* (1970), Ettore Scola's *Brutti, sporchi e cattivi* (*Ugly, Dirty and Bad*; 1976), or Lino Brocca's series of films set in Manila's slums, *Maynila: Sa mga kuko ng limanag* (*The Claws of Light*; 1975), *Insiang* (1976), and *Jaguar* (1979) can serve as examples of such films. However, what these films from very different places all have in common is not only a strong emphasis on the 'impurity' of cinema, but also on notions of 'impurity' in the most literal sense.

A POLYCENTRIC 'AESTHETICS OF GARBAGE'

Dodes'ka-den was Akira Kurosawa's first film in colour and it focuses on not one, but multiple, proverbially 'colourful' characters.⁷ It weaves their stories together in loosely connected episodes to provide a 'fresco' of a community who live atop a giant garbage dump on the outskirts of Tokyo. The most striking feature of *Dodes'ka-den* is, however, not so much its narrative structure, but rather its painterly cinematography and excessively artificial mise-en-scène. Through it Kurosawa creates a 'fantastically-vivid palette', transforming 'the trash-filled wasteland in which the film is set into a place of wondrous, recycled beauty, decorating it with brightly coloured plastic, clothing, painted surfaces and, covering the walls [with] . . . hand-drawn illustrations', as John Berra has fittingly put it (2010: 139). *Dodes'ka-den* then exemplifies Bazin's notion of cinema as an 'impure' art form, not only because it is an adaption of several short stories, but also because it emphasises cinema's intermedial mixing with other arts, particularly with the art of painting. However, and perhaps provocatively, the film's painterly quality is achieved through 'recycling' images of life on a giant garbage dump into cinematic *tableau vivants*: long takes and long shots carefully frame this 'trash-filled wasteland' and its inhabitants and, in this way, reference art history: from the Japanese tradition of religious mural paintings to calligraphy or Renaissance perspective (Fig. 6.1). In spite of the use of long takes and long shots – typical markers of realism – and despite the fact that it was shot on location with a cast largely consisting of local, non-professional actors, the film does not even pretend to be an observational or 'realistic' depiction of a slum on the outskirts of Tokyo; instead, the urban spaces that we see are most obviously the result of artistic imagination. Additionally, Kurosawa's use of colour cinematography which seamlessly blends with the frequent insertion of mural paintings into the mise-en-scène, creates painterly rather than naturalistic images. Hence, Kurosawa's use of mise-en-scène as a form of *tableau vivant* and of cinematography as a



Figure 6.1 Recycling life on a giant garbage dump into painterly images in *Dodes'ka-den*.

proverbially 'colourful' art form makes *Dodes'ka-den* a truly artistic attempt at representing a Tokyo slum, rather than a 'social document' of its misery.

Ettore Scola's characterisation of slum-dwellers as *Brutti, sporchi e cattivi* ('ugly, dirty and bad') refers to the notion of 'impurity' quite literally. Mostly set in a slum on a hill overlooking the picturesque view of Rome, the film depicts the lives of a poverty-stricken family of four generations, all of whose eighteen members live under one roof. While the film primarily centres on the family's patriarch, it showcases how its members earn their living mainly through theft and prostitution and how they crave for capitalist consumer goods, such as fancy cars and colour TV sets. The characterisation of these poverty-stricken slum-dwellers is thus blatantly provocative: they are portrayed as promiscuous, greedy, lecherous and driven by nothing better than mindless egotism and materialist values. *Brutti, sporchi e cattivi* is, however, not merely a provocation, but also an instance of postmodern irony, in the sense of a metafictional parody of Italian neorealist representations of the poor as the morally 'pure', noble and innocent victims of an exploitative society, as for example in the films of Vittorio De Sica.⁸ However, contrary to *Los Olvidados*, Scola represents these slum-dwellers not ambiguously, but as hyperbolically grotesque. The film thereby alludes, seemingly, to the Bakhtinian trope of the 'grotesque body' (Bakhtin 1984), that is, to literary (stereo-)types and figures, rather than that it attempts an authentic representation of slum-dwellers living on the outskirts of Rome; these figures are fixated on (ugly, dirty and bad)

bodily excesses, on eating, drinking, defecating and particularly on sex, which indicates a truly carnivalesque parody on the dominant (cinematic) versions of representational 'realism' in Italy and in world cinema: neorealism.

Lino Brocka's films are set in what is still one of Manila's most notorious slums, the garbage-infested Tondo, and were produced during the dictatorial regime of Ferdinand Marcos. They display on the surface a typically neorealist style and mode of production. However, while these films are shot on location in Tondo, neorealism is mixed with popular cultural motifs and narrative structures, for example a revenge-plot borrowed from 1970s Asian B-movies (in *Insiang*). Like some of the anti-illusionist (or Brechtian) melodramas of the New German Cinema director Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Brocka was concerned with the characters' 'micropolitics of desire', their power struggles over domination and subordination. He portrayed a rather allegorical world of bi-polarity, in which Tondo's slum-dwellers were characterised as either pitiful victims or inhumane victimisers. However, at the end the victims turn against their victimisers with shocking brutality, turning melodrama into a hyperbolic revenge plot.⁹ Brocka who, like Fassbinder was a great admirer of the Hollywood melodrama, especially of Douglas Sirk, hyperbolised in these ways the usually suppressed victim/victimiser schemas of the (in this case, home-grown Philippine TV) melodrama. Moreover, Hong Kong action and martial arts cinema and elements of Hollywood film noir and gangster films (in *Jaguar* and *Maynila: Sa mga kuko ng liwanag*) are equally distinct features of some of Brocka's films. Hence, one can say that his films are not only set in the trash-filled world of Tondo, but also 'recycle' elements of cultural trash into an impure bricolage.

Brocka's bricolage of disparate styles and genres was also a strategy to avoid the censorship of the Marcos regime.¹⁰ His films can in this sense also be regarded as a Philippine version of a politically engaged 'imperfect cinema': they were political even though essentially 'energised by the "low" forms of popular culture', as Stam has put it in an essay that is programmatically entitled 'Beyond Third Cinema: The Aesthetics of Hybridity' (2003: 31). Even though the mixing of the low with the high are continuous concerns in Latin American cinema, Stam argues in this essay that in the shift from Third to postmodern cinematic practices in Latin America '[p]urity gives way to "contamination"' (2003: 32–3); or in other words, notions of realism give way to notions of impurity.¹¹ Stam, however, discussing Brazilian films first and foremost, furthermore observes a reoccurring *leitmotif* and a prevailing aesthetics in postmodern Latin America cinema. This recurring leitmotif is, according to him, the 'redemption of the detritus', the emancipation of the low, the despised, the imperfect, the 'trashy' as part of a cinematic strategy of overturning both cultural and social hierarchies.¹² The prevailing aesthetics emerging from this carnivalesque trope is for Stam an 'aesthetics of garbage', closely related to the practice of bricolage.

Here, the collection and re-cycling of garbage, in the most literal sense but also as a metaphor for a cinematic strategy (of collecting and re-cycling found footage, forgotten films, popular culture trash, etc.), becomes a recurring motif in, and strategy of, Brazilian films since the 1990s.¹³

However, this paradoxical neologism (in Portuguese *estetica do lixo*) originally stems from Brazilian *udigrudi* (Portuguese for ‘underground’) filmmakers of the 1960s. At that time it provided yet another counter-aesthetics to the dominant European and American cinemas. Similar to what Stam calls the ‘jujitsu’ strategies of creating neologistic aesthetics – such as ‘aesthetics of hunger’¹⁴ – into self-empowering strategies for filmmakers on the periphery of both world cinema and global capitalism, the ‘aesthetics of garbage’ emerged as a self-empowering strategy for *udigrudi* filmmakers who tried to capture ‘the sense of marginality, of being condemned to survive within scarcity, of being the dumping ground of transnational capitalism, of being obliged to recycle the materials of dominant culture’ (Stam 2003: 42).¹⁵ Ultimately therefore garbage is, for Stam, the ideal postmodern and post-colonial metaphor, since garbage

is hybrid, first of all, as the disaporised, heterotopic site of the promiscuous mingling of rich and poor, center and periphery, the industrial and the artisanal, the domestic and the public, the durable and the transient, the organic and the inorganic, the national and the international, the local and the global. The ideal postmodern and postcolonial metaphor, garbage is mixed, syncretic, a radically decentred social text. (2003: 40)

In this sense the notion of a bricoleur ‘aesthetics of garbage’ can explain cinematic strategies beyond the *udigrudi* movement of the 1960s, as Stam claims.

As Stam primarily focuses on Brazilian cinema, one could claim that it is no surprise that the cinematic output of a culture whose traditions are historically so rooted in carnival, repeatedly returns to the ‘redemption of the detritus’ as a *leitmotif*. Nonetheless, the notion of an ‘aesthetics of garbage’ provides a useful frame which can be applied to a wide variety of postmodern films that have represented the slum as a *topos*, ranging far beyond the Brazilian and even Latin American context. It is then rather a transnational, or to use Stam’s own concept, a ‘polycentric aesthetics of garbage’: Kurosawa’s *Dodes’ka-den* transforms scenes of life in the middle of Tokyo’s ‘trash-filled waste-land’ into painterly images and thereby inverts classical hierarchies between what is art and what is trash by mixing them together; Scola’s *Brutti, sporchi e cattivi* inverts Italian neorealist notions of the poor as pure, noble and innocent victims and in this way alludes to the Bakhtinian trope of the grotesque, ‘ugly, dirty and bad’ body. Brocka’s films, although energised by popular culture trash, turn the trash-filled neighbourhood of Tondo not only into a cinematic

topos but also into a political topic. Whether set in the ‘trash-filled’ landscapes on Rome’s and Tokyo’s outskirts, or in those of Manila’s Tondo, all of these films consciously employ a strategy that could be defined with Stam as an ‘aesthetics of garbage’ that aims to invert, mix or overturn the high and the low. However, other filmmakers used similar postmodern strategies in the subsequent decades, most notably Emir Kusturica in his *Dom za vešanje*, and this will be discussed in the following paragraph as an example of postmodern cinema and its related aesthetics (of bricolage, impurity, or garbage).

DOM ZA VEŠANJE (1988)

Dom za vešanje is a 135-minute film that essentially tells a coming-of-age story. Through the figure of an adolescent boy, the film provides a subjectivisation of diegetic space through which the viewer enters the (inner and outer) world of Perhan, the main character who has lively dreams and telekinetic abilities. While the plot largely presents stages of Perhan’s trajectory from child- to adulthood in a rather linear chain of events (classically structured in three acts), the film’s set-up introduces a broader *personage* that consists of Perhan’s scattered patchwork family: his crippled younger half-sister Danira, his gambling-addicted and debt-ridden uncle Merdžan and his grandmother Hatidža, all of whom inhabit a small, soon-to-disappear shack in the so-called ‘Šuto Orizari’ community – an impoverished neighbourhood on the outskirts of Skopje, and arguably the biggest Roma settlement in Europe.¹⁶ After thirty-five minutes screen time, the film’s second act is initiated when Perhan is forced to leave Šuto Orizari to embark on a journey in order to earn money for a new home and his half-sister’s surgery. This money is promised to him by Ahmed, who becomes his surrogate father, but turns out instead to be the ‘godfather’ of a Mafia organisation. Ahmed buys Roma children from poor families across Yugoslavia and forces them to work as pickpockets, prostitutes and street beggars in Milan; he is, in this sense, like Fagin in Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*.¹⁷ Towards the film’s mid-point, however, this Dickensian coming-of-age tale gradually turns into a gangster film with the typical rise-and-fall story of Oedipal rivalries and thus becomes, in a way, a Roma/Balkan version of Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Godfather* (1972). After earning riches as Ahmed’s most trusted accomplice, Perhan returns to Šuto Orizari – now mature and following in his surrogate father’s footsteps, as the new Michael Corleone of child traffickers – ready to marry his childhood love Azra. But when he suspects that Azra has been made pregnant by his uncle and after he discovers that Ahmed, whom he ‘trusted more than god’, never planned to build a new house for his grandmother and finance a surgery for Danira, Perhan’s faith in the trustworthiness of (surrogate) fathers and lovers falls into pieces. During

the film's final act, his bitterness turns into vengeance and he murders Ahmed with his telekinetic abilities. However, Perhan's coming-of-age ends with his own death too because, in the end, he gets shot by Ahmed's henchmen.

The film has often been perceived to have two parts, separated by a mid-point, in which Perhan gradually turns into a gangster and forever leaves the world of childhood innocence. Yet, even though the film's second part rather demystifies Roma life and climaxes with the death of the protagonist, the film's director has been heavily criticised for romanticising the Roma people. Additionally, and as already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, he was suspected to have merely re-shuffled clichéd images and negative stereotypes about Roma as petty thieves and as a people who cling to superstitious beliefs. But this criticism is at least partly based on a misconception since it referred to the more generalising English release title, which suggests that the film is an entirely allegorical tale about 'the Gypsies' as a people. Even though, the film also addresses a different (or 'other') sense of time, a mythopoetic or cyclical one, the original title of the film (trans. as 'house for hanging') refers in the first instance to the protagonist's sense of place rather than to his sense of time. The original title really alludes to notions like uprootedness, homelessness and home-seeking. In other words, since the film focuses on the main character's rite of passage, while he travels across both symbolic and real borders (from child- to adulthood, from East to West), *Dom za vešanje* can be read through such concepts as liminality, hybridity and deterritorialisation – concepts that have been used by post-colonial cultural theorists like Homi K. Bhabha or by anthropologists as Arjun Appadurai – to describe the underlying theme of the film: the loosening of ties between place and culture and its effects on an individual's sense of subjectivity.¹⁸

Hamid Naficy has applied these concepts to define what he believes is *An Accented Cinema* – a cinema of exilic or diasporic filmmakers that addresses themes like deterritorialisation with a (cinematic) 'accent'. In a chapter entitled 'Journeying, Border Crossing, and Identity Crossing' he introduces a wide body of such 'accented films' (2001: 222–88) and argues that Kusturica's film primarily deals 'with the uncertainties of deterritorialization and homelessness' (2001: 228); he further contends that home-seeking, homelessness and homecoming journeys are basically 'deterritorialization and reterritorialization journeys' that 'take a number of forms, and they cross many borders – not only physical and geographic but also psychological, metaphorical, social, and cultural borders' (2001: 222). While Kusturica cannot be described as an exilic or diasporic filmmaker, *Dom za vešanje* nevertheless crosses many such borders and makes, as a homelessness, home-seeking and homecoming narrative, processes of de- and reterritorialisation one of its major themes. The film can in this sense be described as a narrative about a deterritorialised boy with a hybrid identity (Perhan is the illegitimate child of his late Roma mother and



Figure 6.2 ‘House for hanging’: a deterritorialised shack and a now homeless patchwork family in *Dom za vešanje*.

an unknown Yugoslav army soldier), who traverses the liminal world between child- and adulthood, forced by necessity to lead the life of a modern-day nomad in the equally liminal ‘twilight zones’ that are created by international criminal organisations such as the one of Ahmed. Deterritorialisation is also presented as a central metaphor in the film’s most iconic scene: after thirty-five minutes screen time and nearing the first plot point, the family’s shack is literally ripped up and out of the soil during a violent storm by Perhan’s debt-ridden uncle and ends up hanging in the air from an electricity cable. Thus, Perhan’s home is quite literally uprooted or ‘deterritorialised’ (Fig. 6.2).¹⁹

Like the examples discussed above, in which ‘trash-filled’ places were represented through a corresponding ‘aesthetics of garbage’, Kusturica’s film really blends form and content, style and narrative together, because deterritorialisation, in a way, also really animates practices like bricolage. The director himself described the bricolage aesthetics of *Dom za vešanje* as an effort to put ‘unpredictable ingredients together . . . there is a combination of slapstick, the burlesque, the serious etc. My obsession is to mix Bruce Lee and Ingmar Bergmann [because] I respect and accept the idea of genre mixing’ (Kusturica 2010).²⁰ In the same interview, he furthermore expresses his belief that if cinema is to survive as an art form in-between video, television, music

and literature at the end of the twentieth century, it can only do so as a bricolage mixture of disparate 'ingredients'. While these statements explain the film's 'impure' aesthetics, they also resonate with the film's representation of the Šuto Orizari dwellers: of their bricolage homes, DIY-patchworked from a diverse range of materials; of their blending of life-styles between traditional and modern and of their syncretistic belief system which mixes Christian and Muslim faiths together.

Mixing is a central feature of the film's style, because *Dom za vešanje* brings together two apparently conflicting notions, those of magic and realism. Realism is, on the one hand, achieved through location shooting, the use of local, non-professional actors and the frequent employment of the long take, as for instance in the opening sequence described at the beginning of this chapter. Furthermore, the language spoken on the soundtrack adds to the film's emphasis on the neorealist tradition since the characters speak in the Romany language mixed with a specific Macedonian regional dialect. This, Naficy would claim, is a marker of 'accented cinema' in the most literal sense, namely as 'a cinema with an accent'. However, these (neo)realist elements are at times mixed with magical ones, most notably in a scene in the film's final act, in which Azra gives birth to her son. When she delivers the baby, she magically levitates up into the air, while at the same time a passenger train passes by in the background (Fig. 6.3). This is a felicitous cinematic image for both impure cinema as well as magic realism, as it mixes well-known motifs from art as well as film history: Marc Chagall's surrealist motif of floating brides with cinema's most iconic marker of documentary realism since the Lumière Brothers, the train.²¹

The film also features surrealist dream scenes and thereby partly makes reference to *Los Olvidados* (the name 'Perhan' could be interpreted as a reference to *Los Olvidados*'s 'Pedro', and Perhan's turkey as a reference to the many chickens in Buñuel's film). Perhan's dreams are frequently woven into the plot at decisive points on his journey to adulthood. His awakening sexuality, his traumatic separation from home and from the mother he never knew, feature in a symbolically encoded way in the dream scenes of *Dom za vešanje*. As in Buñuel's film, these dream scenes illustrate the subconscious of the main character's inner life and blend, at times, his desires with the world of Roma spirituality. For instance, after about twenty-five minutes screen time, in the very first of these scenes, Perhan dreams of being in a Roma spring festivity, the so-called 'Đurđevdan' (St George's Day) – a syncretistic mixture between a Slavic-orthodox and a Muslim festivity.²² The dream scene serves, at first, as a visual illustration of Perhan's awakening sexuality, but it also hints at the Romany 'collective unconscious', because it showcases the cyclical rather than linear 'time of the gypsies'.²³ In this particular dream scene the half-naked Perhan and Azra discover their sexuality in springtime: they float on a boat on



Figure 6.3 Magic realism: Chagall's surrealist motif of the levitating bride referenced in *Dom za vešanje*.

the river Vardar in which Roma ritualistically celebrate the Đurdevdan while carrying lighted torches. However, this scene neither depicts how Macedonian Roma celebrate Đurdevdan in a realistic (or ethnographic) way, nor solely in the manner of a surrealist dream. It is in fact a reference and homage to a scene in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Andrey Rublyov* (*Andrei Rublev*; 1966) – a film about a painter of religious icons set in early fifteenth-century Russia – in which naked pagans perform a springtime ritual alongside a river, while carrying lighted torches.²⁴

Kusturica stated that his film 'belongs entirely to the world of Garcíá Marquez and other Latin American writers who built their art on the irrationality and poverty of the people' (qtd in Horton 1998: 178), with which he refers to the world of magic realist literature. Magic realism is usually defined as a strategy that mixes realist and fantastic (or surrealist) elements in a post-modern manner, placing in abeyance the opposition between a rational (or modern, enlightened, literate) and a magical (or pre-modern, superstitious, oral) view of the world. For Stam, magic realism is similar to the notion of an 'aesthetics of garbage', another Bakhtinian/post-colonial 'jujitsu strategy', because it 'inverts the colonial view of magic as irrational superstition' (2003: 32). Understood in Stam's sense, the film not only narrates a 'from . . . to' plot trajectory – from the dream-like spiritual world of Romany culture to the capi-

talist realities of Western metropolises – but also inverts the notion of modernity as a superior way of life, since in the film's binary semantic scheme the West stands for alienation, exploitation and death, whereas the Macedonian Roma community stands for life-giving sensual spirituality. This 'cognitive mapping' of a divided Europe along the lines of a West versus East polarity is indeed questionable and reminds one of an orientalist imaginary which equates the East (in this case Roma culture) with superstition, sensuality and the irrational. However, since the film's narrative point of view is subjective, we see its diegetic world, and with it this imaginary map of Europe, through the eyes of a boy experiencing his rite of passage. As the plot develops and Perhan matures, the West-East polarity is turned upside down, since with Ahmed's betrayal the boy's home and native culture demystifies for the protagonist; it becomes a place in which (capitalist) exploitation is a part of everyday life as everywhere else. In this sense, the film takes us through the protagonist's point of view not only on a de- and reterritorialisation journey of homeseeking, but also on a journey from enchantment (youth, innocence and magic) to disenchantment (maturity, death and realism).

Whether with regard to the way certain scenes were filmed, or with respect to its plot, characters and visual motifs, the film not only mixes magic with realism but creates a truly nomadic, or transcultural pastiche of quotations from various cinematic and cultural traditions. A range of film scholars discovered this dense tissue of intertextual allusions in most of Kusturica's films. According to Dina Iordanova and Andrew Horton, in *Dom za vešanje* intertextual references can be found to iconic filmmakers like Andrei Tarkovsky, Charlie Chaplin, Jean-Luc Godard or Orson Welles, neorealist and post-neorealist cinema (De Sica's *Miracolo a Milano*, 1951; Fellini's *Amarcord*, 1973), classical and post-classical Hollywood (Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath*, 1940; Coppola's *Godfather*), the French *Nouvelle Vague* (Godard's *A bout de souffle*) or to the Yugoslav Black Wave (Petrović's *Skupljači Perija / I Even Met Happy Gypsies*; 1967).²⁵ Hence, apart from *Los Olvidados* and *Andrey Rublyov*, the film alludes in a typically postmodern manner to diverse world cinema traditions, for instance through referencing visual motifs (such as chicken/turkey), utilising verbal puns (such as Pedro/Perhan) and through alluding to scenes from other films (such as the pagan ritual in *Andrey Rublyov*). Furthermore, the film not only re-appropriates the jujitsu strategy of Latin American magic realism into a cinematic strategy of mixing neorealism with surrealism, but also blends several generic plot structures: a coming-of-age narrative is mixed with the rise-and-fall (or trust-and-betrayal) structure of the Hollywood gangster film and a narrative about child exploitation borrowed from Dickens. Finally, the film also references paintings (Marc Chagall, Andrei Rublev) and blends traditional Romany music with modern synthesiser scores and Yugoslav rock songs to create what can only be described as an audiovisual spectacle of cinematic

impurity. Considering these multiple cultural, stylistic and even religious ‘border crossings’ and the film’s focus on a ‘patchwork’ family, *Dom za vešanje* provides a good example for a postmodern bricolage aesthetics, or as Horton puts it: ‘Taken together, all of these intertextual, Hollywood, European and other national cinematic “quotes” strongly suggest that Kusturica wishes his film to be taken as a member of a club that includes not only Hollywood but world cinema itself’ (1998: 181). With Naficy, in turn, one could perhaps describe *Dom za vešanje* more accurately as an instance of deterritorialised world cinema with a Balkan accent.

POSTMODERN LIVES AT THE PERIPHERIES

While the films of Kusturica, Kurosawa, Scola and Brocka have been nominated and awarded at international film festivals, this current of addressing the slum via an impure ‘aesthetics of garbage’ cannot be described as a dominant one on a global scale. Rather, it was adopted during the 1970s and 1980s by a few well-known festival directors – outstanding auteurs who understood film as an art form and/or who were inspired by postmodern thought and cultural practice.²⁶ However, another global current of how the slum has been addressed in world cinema since the 1980s is already visible in Kusturica’s attempt to blend the fantastic with (neo)realist elements. This other current relates to the latter, to the ethical concerns and practices of neo-realist and documentary cinema (which becomes an even more widespread tendency after the digital turn; see Chapter 7). One could argue that the influence of postmodern thought and practice on socially engaged filmmakers from the global South was less profound, perhaps because it was deemed inappropriate to address social issues such as poverty in the slums. But why is that the case?

One possible answer could be that postmodern cinematic practices – irony, reflexivity, pastiche, the play with intertextual allusions – became more and more commercialised, a common practice in Hollywood cinema, mainstream TV, advertisement as well as a distinct feature of popular culture. One of the most influential critics of these postmodern cultural and media currents was the already mentioned Marxist literary critic Fredric Jameson, who described how postmodernism ought to be understood ‘not as a style but rather as a cultural dominant’ (1991: 4), in which a superficial culture of the image, commodified and hypermediated, pervades not only almost all the arts, but also our daily lives. One could therefore argue with Jameson that it is for these reasons in particular that many socially or politically engaged filmmakers did not turn to postmodern cinematic styles, which, in their opinion, merely re-shuffled the surface appearances and images of a distinctly apolitical popular culture.

Another possible answer, however, is that the ‘historical chain of realist film cycles has never really been disrupted’, since ‘with the collapse of the socialist utopia, realism continued to thrive’ in minimalist form in Iran, as observational realism in Taiwan, in epic dimensions in China, and so forth (Nagib and Mello 2009: xiv–xv). For once, this is because since the 1980s the dominant influence of post-/modernist art cinema à la Kurosawa on filmmakers from other parts of the world was in retreat as, for instance, Dudley Andrew argues (2011: 75–80). For him, it was the changing role of European film festivals (Cannes, Berlin and Venice in particular) as important nodes in a network of an increasingly globalising film culture, which shaped this world cinema tendency. These film festivals were transformed from ‘international’ into ‘world cinema’ festivals during the 1980s as these festivals’ programmers were increasingly disinterested in the formal experiments of the modernist type and/or the intertextual playfulness of postmodernist films. Instead, films from formerly ‘peripheral’ cinema countries which displayed a sense of local authenticity became festival hits.

The new focus of the major film festivals facilitated new realist currents in world cinema, originating this time not from its traditional centres, such as Rio, Tokyo or Rome, but rather from its edges. In other words, in the 1980s a double process of centralisation (through the increasing importance of European film festivals) and de-centralisation (of important world cinema currents from the ‘periphery’) took place. As Andrew puts it, ‘films from places never before thought of as cinematically interesting or viable surprised Western cinephiles: Taiwan, the PRC, Senegal, Mali, Iran. As for Europe, the most vibrant works could be expected now from its edges, from Yugoslavia on one side and from Ireland on the other’ (2011: 77). Hence, one can say that since the 1980s a new generation of filmmakers ‘from the periphery’, which displayed a stark affinity towards documentary or realist practices and styles, became influential at a time when postmodern scepticism towards these notions was still very well alive elsewhere.²⁷

Nevertheless, these novel realist currents are best described as realism(s) with a critical sensibility towards ‘the postmodern’, understood here in the Jamesonian sense; a realism which critically reflects on the mediatisation and commodification of everyday life, especially in regard to the increasing importance of cinema, television and popular culture. Regarding this tendency in postmodern culture, Ismail Xavier asks the following crucial question:

How can cinema effectively speak about people’s experiences in a world saturated by manipulated images? One solution has been to insert ‘safeguards’ in the film: that is, to make the spectator aware of the process of production, to teach him/her how to read images . . . I am referring to a tradition set by modern cinema that finds its continuity in works

like Kiarostami's, for instance, where we find an original combination of realism and self-reference worked out within a particular national context marked by the contradiction between tradition and modernity. (2003: 40)

During the 1980s and 1990s, some filmmakers of what now becomes more and more labelled as 'world cinema' (like Abbas Kiarostami) did employ what Xavier describes as a 'combination of realism and self-reference'. They displayed a reflexive or critical stance towards either the (cinematic) image or the (televisual and cinematic) mediatisation of everyday life. The topic that I want to foreground in the following brief discussion of three paradigmatic films of that era is, however, less what Xavier describes as the contradiction between tradition and modernity in 'underdeveloped' regions of the world, but more the lives of teenagers at the peripheries of sprawling (mega)cities in the global South. These films address the impact of cinema, television and popular culture on teenage lives in a realist way, but in each instance they implicitly give different answers to the question of how cinema can still 'effectively speak about people's experiences in a world saturated by manipulated images'.

The first example is Hector Babenco's *Pixote* (1981), which portrays the fictional character Pixote, who escapes the dreadful conditions of a juvenile reform school, only to get caught up in a truly horrible life of petty crime, pimping and prostitution, while searching for a surrogate family. The film's opening scene introduces the main character explicitly as a non-professional child actor who plays the ten-year-old Pixote throughout the film. It does so in a classical documentary fashion: just like in a BBC documentary, the film's actual director, Hector Babenco, stands on a hill giving the viewer statistics and figures about his country's homeless children. An establishing pan provides us with an overview of the environment in which Pixote has grown up, an overcrowded *favela* on the outskirts of São Paulo. Yet, in the film's famous ending, this TV-like documentary opening is, in a way, inverted: the televisual image is now a real screen image, but its documentary value has become corrupted. Here we see how Pixote (who has lost his ties to his mother) tries to emulate life as he sees it through the imagery of scantily dressed women dancing on a Brazilian TV show. The framing and editing style of this scene juxtaposes mediated and real scenes of female prostitution/commodification. Reverse editing between Pixote's face and the TV screen suggests that we are, like voyeurs, witnessing a perverse inversion of this TV imagery in a prostitute's apartment. After watching those glossy images on screen, Pixote yearns to replace his absent mother with the prostitute Sueli, who has, in turn, lost a child during pregnancy; she offers him her nipple to suck on, before pushing him away with the words, 'I'm not your mother!'. This scene is central to the

film because TV's imagery of sex, crime and violence and its influence on a group of dislocated street kids is a recurring motif in *Pixote*, which is why Stephen Hart has suggested that they have an 'unmediated vision of the filmic image' (2004: 96).

In a similar way, Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay!* (1988) follows the life of a group of adolescent street kids amidst a world of drug dealers, pimps and prostitutes and displays, like *Pixote*, a thoroughly observational, or neorealist style, because it was shot on location and with non-professional child actors. The film primarily plots the story of the street kid Krishna, who is forced to leave his family and migrate from the countryside to Bombay in order to earn money. However, this typically neorealist *topos* is continuously juxtaposed with postmodern reflexivity, since the film confronts the viewer with the ubiquitous presence of the imaginary world of Bollywood.²⁸ The harsh social realities which the street kids of *Salaam Bombay!* experience are as present in their lives as the mediascapes of the Bollywood film industry. The street kids constantly mock, re-invent or immerse themselves in a world of Bollywood scenes and song-and-dance numbers, not so much to escape, but rather to define their deterritorialised identities by performing the (male or female) role models that are offered by Bollywood's star system. In other words, the film shows that when these boys migrate from rural villages to increasingly overcrowded megacities like Bombay, they not only experience a crisis of identity but they also find answers to these crises through becoming immersed in the metropolitan glitz and glamour of the mega- and media-city Bombay. Although *Salaam Bombay!* employs traditional neorealist elements, it thus also reflects on how deterritorialised adolescents invent their fragile identities through role-playing – through immersing themselves in the imagery and mediated dream worlds of a Bollywood's (postmodern) commodity culture.

A final example for this tendency is the aforementioned *Rodrigo D.: no futuro* (see Chapter 4). Gaviria's film also reflects on the influence of popular and consumer culture on impoverished teenagers living in slums. The film narrates episodes in the life of Rodrigo, who lives in the wastelands of Medellín's *barrios*. Like the two other examples, the film is shot on location and with non-professional actors. Yet, the most direct allusion to the neorealist tradition is the film's title itself, for it refers to Vittorio De Sica's neorealist classic *Umberto D.* Unlike in *Umberto D.*, in which a lonely, elderly man with a bleak pension tries to retain his dignity and yearns for companionship, *Rodrigo D.: no futuro* portrays the life of a lonely seventeen-year-old, trying to retain his dignity without money and companionship amidst Medellín's murderers, kidnappers, and petty criminals during the ascendancy of drug trafficker Pablo Escobar. Hence, Gaviria purposefully draws an analogy between an elderly person and a teenage boy, both, however, with 'no future', which is also consolidated in the film's concluding scene: both

films end with a suicide attempt, but while Umberto is saved by his dog, nobody saves Rodrigo from jumping off a high-riser to his death. Apart from its uncanny proximity to real life,²⁹ the ‘no futuro’ in Gaviria’s film has an additional meaning: it also refers to the infamous slogan of the 1970s British punk movement, ‘No Future’, which was notoriously used by the *Sex Pistols* in their 1977 hit ‘God Save the Queen’. Rodrigo actually dreams of becoming a drummer in a punk band, just as the street kids of *Salaam Bombay!* dream of becoming Bollywood dancers. Yet, unlike in Nair’s film, in *Rodrigo D.: no futuro*, the main character adopts an identity that already implies a critical stance towards a postmodern consumer culture. Hence, the anti-establishment critique of postmodern Western subcultures like punk is, in *Rodrigo D.: no futuro*, re-contextualised in the Colombian setting, in which there is ‘no future’ for teenagers growing up in *barrios* that are governed by drug cartels and everyday violence.³⁰

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has identified a key paradigm of the postmodern era of cinematic slum representations, a bricolage ‘aesthetics of garbage’ (Stam), which was deployed by filmmakers in different countries and to varying degrees. Understood as postmodern metaphors *par excellence*, ‘bricolage’ and ‘garbage’ (and related concepts such as ‘intertextuality or ‘impurity’’) have been utilised as creative strategies to yield a subversive (or carnivalesque) aesthetics that elevates the supposedly low, despised or abject into objects/*topoi* of art/cinema. The slum, as a setting, has thereby become itself a cinematic *topos* (or commonplace) of world cinema, which corresponds with the postmodern critique of a supposedly naïve and outdated belief in documentary realism. However, since the 1980s the focus of some filmmakers shifts from such a postmodern ‘aesthetics of garbage’ to a revitalised engagement with the new ‘any-spaces-whatever’ of an expanding planet of slums. These films display a ‘combination of realism and self-reference’ (Xavier): they acknowledge the new role of mediated/televisual imagery, especially for those teenagers who live at the margins of society. To use Siegfried Kracauer’s famous definition of (realist) cinema as a device to ‘redeem physical reality’, these filmmakers have been trying to ‘redeem’ the historically inherited, but vehemently questioned (ethical, social and political) concerns of realist and documentary cinemas into the postmodern age, without turning a blind eye towards the postmodern realities of an increasingly consumer-oriented metropolitan global South – a now increasingly globalised ‘Third-World culture’ that has been ‘gratefully absorbed by the international entertainment industry’, as Fredric Jameson has put it (1992: 187).

NOTES

1. To give one example of modern-day bricolage techniques used by slum-dwellers, Davis describes Cairo's 'City of the Dead', in which 'one million poor people use Mameluke tombs as prefabricated housing components' (2007: 33).
2. As Davis puts it, 'the cities of the future, rather than being made out of glass and steel as envisioned by earlier generations of urbanists, are instead largely constructed out of crude brick, straw, recycled plastic, cement blocks and scrap wood. Instead of cities of light soaring toward heaven, much of the twenty-first-century urban world squats in squalor, surrounded by pollution, excrement, and decay. Indeed, the one billion city-dwellers who inhabit *postmodern slums* might well look back with envy at the ruins of the sturdy mud homes of Catal Huyok in Anatolia, erected at the dawn of life nine thousand years ago' (2007: 19; emphasis added).
3. Real (2008) primarily discusses the work of Marjetica Potrč and Jesús Palomino. Their exhibition of slum tenements as art objects have been presented in the Palais de Tokyo in Paris in 2006 (Potrč) and in an open lot in a rapidly changing area of Barcelona in 1998 (Palomino). Real also mentions other art exhibitions that addressed slum life in a similar way, e.g. those by Carlos Garaicoa (Cuba), Grupo Grafito (Colombia), Franklin Cassar (Brazil), Meyer Vaisman (Venezuela), and Felix Schramm (Germany).
4. Kristeva derived the concept in turn from Mikhail Bakhtin's (1982) notion of 'dialogical' texts. Her famous definition of intertextuality is that 'any text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another' (1980: 66).
5. Colin MacCabe puts it as follows: '*Screen* has participated actively in . . . one crucial area of discussion, namely realism . . . The problems of realism occur in an acute and critical form in the cinema, and perhaps no single topic concentrates so many of the developments that have taken place in film theory' (1986: 179).
6. I use here the term *topos* (Greek for 'place', but in the Aristotelian sense also for 'commonplace') to indicate that slums are conceived in some of these films as cinematic, or media *topoi* (in the sense of worn-out commonplaces).
7. The film weaves together several short stories by the Japanese author Shugoro Yamamoto. The title itself is an onomatopoeic expression used by one of the film's character, a mentally disabled boy, who mimics the sound of a train.
8. Bondanella describes the film fittingly as 'metacinematic', echoing Hutcheon's notion of 'metafiction', when he comments that in 'the film's ironic and metacinematic conclusion . . . Scola offers us quite a different view of a future with a family of eighteen trapped in an inferno of ignorance and poverty' (2009: 209).
9. As Josè Capino puts it in regard to *Insiang*, the film's 'slum dwellers have neither heart nor hope. They are more fundamentally dispossessed than their counterparts in film melodramas from other "underdeveloped" nations. Without any redeeming qualities – except perhaps for an instinctive will to live – the members of Insiang's household turn out to be as rotten as the trash on Smoky Mountain, the monumental garbage heap that looms over them throughout' (Capino 2011).
10. However, since Brocka's films combined brutal scenes of revenge with a '*cinéma vérité* approach to poverty', it rendered his films 'subversive in the eyes of Marcos and his watchdogs' (Francia 1987: 214). In 1981 location shooting in Tondo has indeed been forbidden by the Marcos regime, arguably the regime's direct reaction to Brocka's films.
11. This is a view that is also shared by Michael Chanan, who outlines a similar shift from 'third' to 'postmodern' cinema in an essay that is symptomatically titled 'Latin American Cinema: From Underdevelopment to Postmodernism' (2006).

12. 'The redemption of the detritus' as a leitmotif refers, once again, to Bakhtin and his notion of carnivalesque inversions of the high and the low (see Bakhtin 1984).
13. Stam discusses three Brazilian documentaries which directly address garbage as a theme: *O Fio da Memoria (The Thread of Memory)*; Coutinho 1991), *Boca de Lixo (The Scavengers)*; Coutinho 1992) and *Ilha das flores (Isle of Flowers)*; Furtado 1989). One might add that garbage is a continuous topic of Brazilian cinema, for example more recently in documentaries like *Estamira* (Prado 2004) and *Waste Land* (Walker 2010).
14. Stam refers here to the Japanese martial art strategy (*jujitsu*) of turning the opponent's force against himself and argues that such neologistic '*jujitsu* aesthetics', which called for underdeveloped, hungry or Third (-Worldist) films 'revalorize by inversion what had formerly been seen as negative, especially within colonialist discourse' (2003: 32).
15. A similar definition is given by John Fiske with regard to the concept of bricolage, since 'in capitalist societies bricolage is the means by which the subordinated make their own culture out of the resources of the "other"' (2010: 119).
16. The population of Šuto Orizari is estimated to be around 35,000. The 'Šutka', as the municipality is nicknamed by its inhabitants, is located on the city's northwestern outskirts and was initially erected as a camp for people who have lost their homes due to a severe earthquake in 1963. At about the same time and for almost the same reasons (a natural disaster), the *conjunto* Cidade de Deus was built in Rio de Janeiro (see Chapter 8).
17. Despite its obvious references to Dickensian motifs, this part of the story is actually based on media reports about the abduction of Yugoslav Roma children by mafia organisations.
18. 'Deterritorialisation' is a term that was introduced by Deleuze and Guattari, but it is also used more and more frequently by globalisation scholars to describe notions such as 'dislocation', 'delocalisation' or 'displacement'. Perhaps the most notable of these was the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, who defined it as 'one of the central forces of the modern world' (1996: 37). For Appadurai, deterritorialisation describes, in the first place, a force that destabilises the supposedly natural ties between a place and its culture, rendering these ties as imagined or in flux.
19. The shot of the hanging house later became the poster of the 'punk opera' *Les Temps des Gitans*, which premiered at the Paris National Opera in 2007. Nicholas Rombes has, in fact, defined a new tendency in world cinema since the mid 1990s as *New Punk Cinema*, a cinema that is 'animated by the spirit of punk' (2005: 3) – a label which could also be applied to the films of Emir Kusturica, who in his youth was the bassist of a punk band. Kusturica's connection to punk is also evident with regard to his filmic bricolage practice, since bricolage is an essential characteristic of punk, influencing both its music and its lifestyle (cf. Hebidge 1979).
20. Transcribed by the author.
21. However, this might also be another reference to the films of Andrei Tarkovsky, since levitating women appear as a recurring motif in his *Solaris* (1972), *Zerkalo (The Mirror)*, 1975) and *Offret (Sacrifice)*, 1986).
22. St George's Day is referred to in the film as 'Hederlezi' which is in turn the Muslim name for this religious festivity.
23. The film suggests that the cycle of the seasons simultaneously represents the cycle of life: from awakening consciousness and sexuality (spring), to maturity and working-life (summer), elderly age (autumn) and death (winter).
24. In Tarkovsky's film the scene is not a dream, but rather dream-like; it shows Rublev witnessing how non-Christian pagans, undressed and with burning torches, perform a spring time ritual to celebrate their sexuality.

25. For an extended list of allusions in *Dom za vešanje* cf. Iordanova 2002: 132–50 and Horton 1998: 178–82.
26. Kusturica won the ‘Best Director’ award at Cannes for his *Time of the Gypsies* in 1989, as did Scola for his *Brutti, sporchi e cattivi* in 1976. Brocka’s *Insiang* was the first Philippine film to enter the competition at Cannes, while *Jaguar* was nominated for the *Palme d’Or* in 1980. Kurosawa’s *Dodes’ka-den* was nominated for the Academy Award category ‘Best foreign language film’ in 1972.
27. One of the most striking examples is the Iranian New Wave. Jafar Panahi has for instance proclaimed that the ‘Iranian cinema treats social subjects’, and because ‘you’re showing social problems, you want to be more realistic and give the actual, the real aesthetics of the situation . . . Whatever shows the truth of the society, in a very artistic way – that will find its own neo-realism’ (qtd in Giovacchini and Sklar 2012: 3). The discovery and promotion of this new Iranian ‘neo-realism’ by Western cinephiles and international film festivals since the 1980s proved to be of crucial importance to other world cinema waves and currents that followed. Hence, one can say that the Iranian New Wave literally ‘infected’ several other new waves in supposedly ‘peripheral’ film nations, such as Senegal, China or, most recently, Romania.
28. The juxtaposition of Bollywood with the lives of newly urbanised Bombay slum-dwellers is simultaneously a theme which Nair – initially a student of sociology before she turned to making observational documentaries – had already explored in one of her previous documentaries about strip dancers and prostitutes, *India Cabaret* (1985). Appadurai described *India Cabaret* as an ‘ethnodrama’ in the tradition of Jean Rouch, in which actor-performers emulate their screen heroes. According to him, Nair’s film reveals that the strip dancers’ deterritorialised identities are shaped by Bollywood dream worlds and Western consumer culture (1996: 61).
29. The film’s end credits warn us that this fictional tale is not far from reality, and not in the sense of a postmodern irony: during filming four teenage actors with ‘no future’ died – a destiny shared by two other teenage actors mentioned in this chapter, Pixote (played by Fernando Ramos da Silva) and *Dom za vešanje*’s Perhan (played by Davor Dujmović); da Silva was killed by the police aged nineteen and Dujmović (tellingly) hanged himself at the age of twenty-nine.
30. Geoffrey Kantaris has therefore argued that *Rodrigo D.: no futuro* allegorises the postmodern culture of ‘no future’ (and, according to Jameson, no history) in ‘the context of a whole generation of teenage boys whose lives are so marked by violence . . . that they rarely make it into their twenties. Gaviria’s film ruthlessly displaces the 1970s British punk maxim “No Future” . . . to become a startling allegory for the *invisible* violence underlying perhaps an unspoken condition of “our” postmodernity. . . . The postmodern culture of no culture generates a future of no future. The slogan “No Future” . . . rhetorically emphasises the link suggested here between a throwaway society and the abolition of both past and future’ (Kantaris 1998).

Digital Realisms

To address realism in world cinema today . . . means engaging with what has been termed the ‘ontological turn’, the ‘return of the real’, the presence and agency of ‘things’.

Thomas Elsaesser

Three films about Fontainhas . . . a neighbourhood that does not exist any more, since it has been bulldozed by the local authorities. The first film opens with a medium close-up of a teenage girl. Her name is Tina. She sits in a shadowy corner of a room, probably her own room, on the edge of an old bed. There is a pillow, a blanket and the shabby wall in the background; nothing else is in the frame. Tina looks fragile, defenceless, exhausted. For forty-five seconds we look at this bleak image of her sitting there. She looks back at us, straight into the camera. Then she looks down, hiding feelings of shame perhaps. Finally she leans her head against the wall, too tired, it seems, to sustain our gaze or that of the camera any longer. The opening shot of the second film is equally static and once again we are offered a glimpse into the private world of a bleak bedroom. This time we see two slightly older women sitting on a bed. It is Vanda and her alarmingly emaciated sister Zita. Both of them are drug addicts. They are chatting, coughing and smoking heroin. It looks like a daily routine, almost lifeless. These are, it seems, two more exhausted women in another shabby apartment that is sparsely lit and meagrely furnished. But the quality of the image is now crisper, sharper, more colourful, since it has been shot on digital video. The third opening image is also shot with a digital video camera, but it has a different motif. Now we remain outside and look instead at the façades of tremendously rundown buildings. We see them at night-time as they radiate a sense of mystery or even horror. Because it is digital, the image looks like a gothic painting; in fact, it is hauntingly beautiful, even though it frames badly deteriorated apartments. The horror that these buildings possibly contain is emphasised by the sound that shatters the tranquillity: that of furniture being tossed out of a window.

The next shot shows a woman throwing her husband's furniture out of the apartment. Her name is Clotilde . . . another exhausted woman.

Tina, Vanda, Zita and Clotilde are the major female protagonists in Pedro Costa's films *Ossos*, *No Quarto da Vanda* and *Juventude em Marcha*, which are the following chapter's main examples. All of them were actual inhabitants of what once was Fontainhas, a rundown slum on the outskirts of Lisbon. However, those three films – sometimes also labelled as the *Fontainhas Trilogy* – do not exclusively portray these exhausted, apparently lifeless women. They also attempt to portray the neighbourhood itself, its community, past and present, as well as its spaces and places, its dilapidated buildings, half-empty apartments and unpaved streets. Hence, they preserve in recorded sounds and images the memories of a place and the people who once lived in it. Beyond this, Costa's trilogy is also an appropriate subject by which to study what effects the transition from analogue to digital filmmaking had on notions of (a now revitalised, but modified kind of) realism in world cinema – a style of filmmaking that has been deployed by Costa in an almost hyperbolic way. Lúcia Nagib and Cecília Mello observe in their introduction to the volume *Realism and the Audiovisual Media* that since the mid-1990s – at about the same time as filmmakers began using digital recording devices – realist film practices return in the form of numerous new movements, new waves or 'new cinemas' across the globe. According to them, world cinema's *post*-postmodern 'realist revival' kick started with the Danish Dogma 95 movement in particular, which 'signalled the end of irony and intertextuality, and the re-establishment of moving image's ties with objective reality'.¹ The new realist waves that came to the surface in Denmark, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Lithuania, Romania and many other countries from the mid-1990s onwards are, according to Nagib and Mello, clear evidence of a 'return to the Real'. (Nagib and Mello 2009: ivx).

The following chapter will outline what Nagib and Mello describe as a *post*-postmodern 'return to the Real' in world cinema against the background of the digital turn to describe one of this era's key paradigms as 'digital realism'. Yet, it will also compare two different kinds of 'digital realisms' in cinemas that distinguish themselves specifically through their camera work and editing styles, the first of which is related to movements like Dogme 95, and the other to films like those of Pedro Costa. The former can be related to the docufictional *cinéma vérité*-style of the French *Nouvelle Vague*, since it is an explicitly ad hoc, non-scripted type of cinema that experiments with minimalistic narrative structures and unconventional editing techniques, while exclusively relying on location shooting, the use of often shaky, handheld cameras and natural lighting to enhance its 'reality-effect'. The latter could be defined with Paul Julian Smith as contemporary 'festival films', which 'employ little camera

movement and extended takes without edits; they tell casual or oblique stories, often elliptical and inconclusive; and they often cast non-professionals' (2012: 72). Accordingly, the first case study of this chapter focuses on a 'new wave', and more precisely on the mostly digitally-shot films of a group of independent Philippine filmmakers, who have made life in the slums of Manila the preferred topic of many of their films since around the year 2000. The second case study is the 'festival trilogy' by Pedro Costa, who traces in his films the transformation (and destruction) of Fontainhas from 1997 to 2006, while simultaneously switching from analogue to digital filmmaking in the process.

'RETURN TO THE REAL'²

The 'return to the Real' not only signalled what Nagib and Mello claim is an end of irony and intertextuality, but it also came at roughly the same time as digital media technologies increasingly became standard equipment in filmmaking. Digital video cameras as well as computer software for image corrections or editing soon became standard tools for filmmakers across the world, whether they produced blockbusters and genre movies or independent arthouse films and documentaries. However, the technological particulars of digital imaging media question exactly what Nagib and Mello describe as the 'moving image's ties with objective reality', its indexicality – the 'ontology of the photographic image'.³ These doubts towards the indexicality of digital images were most vigorously expressed by theorists such as David Rodowick, Lev Manovich or Richard Grusin.⁴ However, these inadequacies of digital images – their supposed lack of indexical ties to 'objective reality' – are disputed by some academics,⁵ and, more importantly, outwardly ignored by many contemporary filmmakers who work with digital imaging technologies. To put it as Nagib does, some contemporary filmmakers do not seem to mourn the (hypothetical or real) loss of indexicality, but instead resort 'to the digital for realistic ends'; in fact, Nagib describes that the digital has even 'enabled the shooting of films on locations and among populations which would otherwise be inaccessible to audiovisual reproduction' (2011: 7).

The transition from a photographic to a post-photographic visual culture towards the end of the twentieth century echoes the previous *fin-de-siècle*, in which documentary forms developed with the transition from graphic to photographic imagery. But the question that needs to be asked is: in what ways are or were older cultural forms (like painting around 1900 or cinema today) affected by such technological changes? And with regard to the study in hand, it poses the question of how the confluence between a technological development (the digital turn) is related to a new 'tendency' in contemporary world

cinema (the ‘return to the Real’)? Nicholas Rombes argues in his *Cinema in the Digital Age* that this confluence is less of a paradox, but that both the digital turn and the realist revival, are actually directly related to each other, since it is, according to him, ‘no coincidence that the Dogme 95 movement – with its preference for disorder, for shaky, degraded images, for imperfection – emerged at the dawn of the digital era, an era that promised precisely the opposite: clarity, high definition, a sort of hyperclarified reality’. For Rombes ‘there is a tendency in digital media – and cinema especially – to reassert imperfection, flaws, an aura of human mistakes to counterbalance the logic of perfection that pervades the digital’ (2009: 1). What could be described as the entertainment industries’ ‘obsession with realism’ (to use an expression by Bazin), and hence its obsession with creating hyperreal diegetic worlds via the use of the computer – a ‘hyperclarified reality’, as Rombes puts it – seemingly finds an alternative development, a ‘counterbalance to the logic of perfection’ in the recent resurgence of a less ‘perfect’ digital realism in world cinema.

Rombes attributes this to ‘the ruptures and gaps that have opened up as cinema transitions from the traditional analogue apparatus to the digital’, which has made ‘an unexpected resurgence of humanism – with all its mistakes, imperfections and flaws – that acts as a sort of countermeasure to the numerical clarity and disembodiment of the digital code’ possible (2009: 8). This new, digital ‘imperfect cinema’ which emerged with movements like Dogma 95 is, in fact, a worldwide phenomenon and not only came into being with the aforementioned ‘new waves’, but also within various other independent film cultures across the globe.⁶ Rombes argues elsewhere that these independent films offer ‘an often brutal mixture of underground, avant-garde technique and mainstream . . . that wove together cinematic traditions that included the French New Wave, Italian Neorealism and *cinéma vérité*’; the parallel that can be drawn to 1960s new wave cinemas (and particularly to *cinéma vérité*) is thereby in the first instance a technological one, because ‘[d]igital cameras and desktop editing have made it possible for a greater number of people than ever before to make film’, so that ‘digital cinema has opened up striking alternatives to Hollywood’s multimillion dollar productions, in the same way that 8 mm and 16 mm film had done in the past’ (2005: 2).

Apart from the *cinéma vérité*-style of the Dogma 95 movement and its worldwide followers and/or contemporaries, a resurgence of a different kind of (digital) realism can also be witnessed in what Smith has proposed to call the ‘festival film’ – a world cinema current which employs the traditional markers of neorealist cinema (long takes, long shots, static framing, episodic narratives, inconclusive endings, and so on).⁷ This type of film is an equally widespread contemporary tendency and is evident in the work of frequently awarded film festival directors such as Kim Ki-duk, Apichatpong Weerasethaku, Michael

Haneke, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Gus van Sant or the already mentioned Abbas Kiarostami. The works of these very different directors often share almost all the stylistic and narrative elements described by Smith. With regard to this type of realism in such 'festival films', Elsaesser explains that

[t]o address realism in world cinema today . . . means engaging with what has been termed the 'ontological turn', the 'return of the real', the presence and agency of "things". On the agenda is a new materiality, a new concern and respect for reference in the visual media, after half a century of mourning the loss of the real, and complaining about or celebrating simulacra, copies without originals, hypermediality and mediatisation. (2009c: 5)

Thus, for Elsaesser, the (*post*-postmodern) realism in contemporary festival films ought to be discussed within the framework of what has been termed the 'return of the Real' (a return to the use of classical realist cinematic devices as well as to social, ethnographic or mundane topics), the 'ontological turn' (these filmmaker's renewed interest in the ontology of the photographic image), and the phenomenological presence and agency of 'things' (objects like houses, goods or even media devices that acquire a diegetic agency or a non-diegetic presence in such films). Elsaesser maintains that what this is all pointing to is ultimately a renewed 'concern and respect for reference in the visual media'. However, despite this new concern and respect for reference (or indexicality), most of these directors, paradoxically or not, turned throughout the 2000s to shooting and producing their films with digital technology.

The digital turn also finds a (third) parallel tendency in yet another 'rebirth of the documentary' since the 1990s. However, while in the 1960s sync-sound recording and 16mm handheld cameras facilitated the emergence of such movements as *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema, most documentary filmmakers of the digital age rather prefer multimodal approaches to the documentary form (see also Chapter 3). Related to that, this resurgence (or second rebirth) of the documentary occurs on both, big and small screens, either as theatrical feature films – produced and distributed by new companies which specialise in feature documentaries for the big screen (for example *Dogwoof*) and that are made by the new 'stars' of the international documentary scene (e.g. Errol Morris, Michael Moore, Joshua Oppenheimer, Werner Herzog) – or as artisanal, low-budget projects that are made by semi-professionals or amateurs, who release their work on internet platforms like *YouTube*, *Vimeo* or *Doc Alliance Films*. Chanan emphasises that this resurgence of the documentary onto big and small screens in times of digital video and desktop editing is 'either a reaction to the inadequacies of mainstream cinema, or to the inanities of television, and . . . it has something

to do with the costs of documentary production decreasing because of digital video' (2007: 7).

Either way, one can argue with Nagib, Rombes, Elsaesser and Chanan that there indeed *is* a confluence between 'the digital turn' and 'the return to the Real', or to put it differently: with the digital revolution filmmakers who distinctly emphasised realist or documentary modes of representation, emerged in a polycentric fashion since around the mid-1990s 'to reclaim the real for its radical potential' (Shiel 2006: 127). Not coincidentally, many of these filmmakers frequently addressed slum life as a topic through which, to rephrase Rombes, the 'mistakes, imperfections and flaws' of contemporary societies are perhaps more evident than anywhere else. More often than not these by and large artisanal, independent, or underground filmmakers, groups and/or collectives were not only enabled, but truly enthusiastic about the new possibilities offered by digital media technologies, without mourning the supposed loss of indexicality in the digital image. While limited to mostly minimal budgets, governmental or public funding, the use of cheap DV cameras and/or computerised post-production and exhibition, digital technologies literally freed these filmmakers to shoot and distribute their socially committed or politically engaged slum-, *barrio*-, *favela*- or shantytown-set films. To illustrate this point, the following sections will examine two representative examples – the Philippine New Wave and Pedro Costa's *Fontainhas Trilogy* – since they can serve to demonstrate how the digital 'return to the Real' is both a global current as well as a local expression. However, the case examples will be approached through differing analytical perspectives: the Philippine New Wave will be discussed as a collective film movement, that is, through deriving similarities from a larger body of films, whereas the sub-chapter which then follows will present an auteurist reading of Pedro Costa's *Fontainhas Trilogy*.

THE PHILIPPINE NEW WAVE

Independent film movements in countries like the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia or Singapore gradually evolved at about the same time when similar developments took place elsewhere, namely when in 'Europe and North America, filmmakers started in the late 1990s to experiment with the possibilities of digital video'. With a slight delay, digital equipment 'became available in Southeast Asia, and this was the beginning of the Indie Revolution that we are witnessing today' (Baumgärtel 2012: 3). The major reason for the emergence of this new independent scene – the Southeast Asian 'Indie revolution' – was, according to Tilman Baumgärtel, that 'this new generation of filmmakers has been empowered by the easy and cheap access to digital video . . . Due to digital cinema technology, they now have the opportunity to produce

their alternative and often very personal works' (2012: 2). Hence, this new wave of Southeast Asian cinemas consists by and large of a new generation of independent filmmakers, some of whom were recently awarded at prestigious film festivals, bringing this 'microcinema', as Baumgärtel calls it, into the spotlight of the international film scene.⁸ Considering its recent achievements and experiments with novel forms of filmmaking, Baumgärtel insists that the rise of Southeast Asian independent cinema 'is one of the most significant developments in World Cinema right now' (2012: 6).

The Indie revolution in the Philippines is, however, 'not a film movement' in the traditional sense, as the subtitle of the documentary *Philippine New Wave: This is Not a Film Movement* (2010) by Khavn de la Cruz suggests; and that is in both senses of the phrase: firstly, because these directors predominantly work with digital video rather than with celluloid 'film' and secondly, because this group of independent filmmakers can hardly be called a 'generation' nor subsumed under a unified 'movement'. Nevertheless, in the following paragraph I will highlight some prevailing features of a select body of slum-set films, which were made by filmmakers who could be described as the most outstanding representatives of the digital Indie revolution in the Philippines: Jeffrey Jeturian (born 1959), Brillante Mendoza (born 1960), Jim Libirian (born 1966), Auraeus Solito (born 1969) and Khavn de la Cruz (born 1973).⁹ As diverse as these filmmakers's visions of the cinematic medium and their individual stylistic approaches are, the most prevalent feature of this body of films is that, apart from the almost exclusive use of handheld DV cameras and the willingness to break the rules of mainstream filmmaking in the spirit of *Dogma 95*, there is a remarkable focus on what Rombes has described as imperfections, mistakes and flaws. In other words, these filmmakers share a certain sensibility towards what is imperfect (both aesthetically and socio-politically), and particularly towards what is imperfect, wrongful or unjust in the city of Manila. It is thus no coincidence that the city's sprawling slums are the preferred setting of many of these independent Philippine films.

Some scholars have pointed to a national tradition of alternative and independent filmmaking upon which these Philippine filmmakers build, by referring for instance to Fredric Jameson, who has observed that 'Philippine cinema has a vibrant tradition of social realism' (1992: 190). In the 1970s, a new generation of 'social realist' filmmakers (or what to some is the Philippine version of Third Cinema) set out to modernise their country's film culture by returning to social realist themes, which were already present in neorealist inspired Philippine cinema of the postwar era. A key figure of that generation was the already-mentioned Lino Brocka (see Chapter 6), but also Ishmael Bernal, who mixed, just as Brocka did, genre elements with a neorealist style, for example in his *Manila By Night (City after Dark)* (1980) – a portrayal of Manila's nightlife, its prostitutes and drug scene, partly set in the city's slums. Directors such

as Bernal and Brocka had a profound impact on today's 'generation' of digital filmmakers who, since around 2000 have returned to the slums of Manila to shoot their independent films. This new 'generation' addresses social issues in a far less politically subversive or allegorical way than the previous 'social realist' generation.¹⁰ This is partly due to a radically transformed socio-political and economic situation; the Philippines are by now a democracy and in the 1990s the country adopted a neo-liberal economic system, witnessing an increased accumulation of wealth, while leaving behind its former status as an underdeveloped 'Third World' dictatorship. However, it is essentially because of its economic policies that the country has also witnessed a massive resurgence of rural-urban migration and with it a widening gap between the rich and the poor during the last two decades. This is most visible in the country's capital, where according to the UN-HABITAT, today approximately one third of Metro Manila's total population (2.5 out of 9.4 million), lives in often heavily overcrowded slums which lack basic infrastructure and sanitation facilities (2003: 215–16). Considering that urban poverty is a persistent and a growing, rather than a vanishing problem, it comes as no surprise that many of these digital 'underground' filmmakers explore, just like some of their Third Cinema predecessors, life in the slums of Manila.

In so doing, they often provide a sometimes subtle, often outright critique of the city's neoliberal economic climate (capitalist cycles of exploitation, a culture of materialism or ruthless greed and egotism), its 'imperfect' political and juridical system (corruption among politicians, the police or judges) and what kind of personal impacts these systemic and institutional flaws have on Manila's most disadvantaged citizens.¹¹ One of the older filmmakers of this new wave 'generation', Jeffrey Jeturian, emphasises this point in a paradigmatic way as follows: 'What interests me are personal stories, intimate stories. But in the process, I would also like to capture the political and social background of my characters' (Jeturian 2001). Through narrating stories that involve instances of sexual exploitation (in Jeturian's *Pila-balde/ Fetch A Pail of Water*; 1999) and sexual (or homophobic) discrimination (in Aureus Solito's *Ang pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros/The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros*; 2005), gambling (in Jeturian's *Kubrador/The Bet Collector*; 2006), youth and gang violence (in Jim Libirian's *Tribu*), petty thievery (in Brillante Mendoza's *Tirador/Slingshot*; 2007) or homicide and the misuse of institutional power (in Brillante Mendoza's *Lola*; 2009), these new wave directors often focus on the interrelations between the private/intimate and the 'imperfections' of the Philippine society at large. The characters these directors portray are, however, far from innocent victims of their socio-political or economic circumstances as David Bordwell, for instance, has observed with regard to *Tirador*, a film that reminded him 'of *Los Olvidados*, both in its unsentimental treatment of the poor and its political critique' (Bordwell 2007).

The 'unsentimental treatment of the poor', their ambiguous characterisation as neither innocent victims nor ruthless victimisers, is another such consistent preoccupation that these filmmakers share.

These shared features are also an outcome of these films' modes of production. For instance, the ambivalent characters Bordwell observed with regard to *Tirador* are in this case, as well as in a number of other films, partly embodied by non-professional actors picked from Manila's slums. In Jim Libiran's *Tribu*, fifty-two actual gang members from Tondo – also the setting of Brocka's films – make up the most of the film's cast. Libiran, who himself grew up in Tondo, described his script- and filmmaking strategy therefore as a form of 'mimesis-as-diegesis' to achieve, in his own words, a more 'vivid' way of storytelling through location shooting with what he calls 'found actors' and 'the inclusion of many real-world objects' into the plot (Libiran 2011: 68). In this way, he emphasises the practices and concerns of many other new wave or *cinéma vérité*-style cinemas: the use of non-professional 'social actors', unscripted dialogues, an ad-hoc style of handheld (or DIY) filmmaking on location, and, most notably, a concern to disclose 'truths' that would be otherwise disclosed were it not be filmed with a camera.¹² Brillante Mendoza, in turn, even described his *Tirador* as a film that is shot in the spirit of *cinéma vérité*, emphasising however, that his film is not only meticulously researched, but also fiction not documentary, since most of the scenes were pre-scripted and the cast consisted of a mixture of professional and non-professional actors. In both these cases, the distinctions between a documentary and a fictional mode of representation are deliberately blurred, because even in the case of *Tirador* the original aim of the director was to shoot a documentary, rather than to tell a fictional story.¹³ Generally one can say that many of these Philippine new wave films derive their stories (as well as their 'found' actors, props and settings) from a documentary approach to filmmaking, rather than that these stories are wholly invented before the actual shoot. This is a way of cinematic storytelling that, much in the spirit of *cinéma vérité*, heavily relies on these filmmakers' collaboration with the local community, which so becomes a vital part of their films, rather than merely 'extras'. It is a way of producing films that puts its faith into the creative energies of ordinary people, but also into the liberating forces of independent filmmaking.

The principles behind this mode of production are perhaps best summarised in Khavn de la Cruz' 'Digital Dekalogo: A Manifesto for a Filmless Philippines'. In this manifesto Cruz proclaims that 'film is dead' in order to then outline ten rules of independent digital 'film'-making for the Philippines. Reminiscent of past underground movements and manifestos elsewhere, such as Glauber Rocha's plea for an 'aesthetics of hunger', but also much in the spirit of Dogma 95's 'Vow of Chastity', Cruz' 'Digital Dekalogo' calls for non-generic, ad-hoc and non-scripted filmmaking with minimal budgets

and centred on the actual shoot, rather than on scripts, props, designed sets and a professional crew.¹⁴ The use of digital video is for Cruz not merely a technological device, since ‘with its qualities of mobility, flexibility, intimacy, and accessibility, [it] is the apt medium for a Third World Country like the Philippines. Ironically, the digital revolution has reduced the emphasis on technology and has reasserted the centrality of the filmmaker’ (2012: 123). Indeed, films like *Kubrador*, *Tirador*, *Ang pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* or *Tribu* perfectly illustrate that the ‘digital has often enabled the shooting of films on locations and among populations which would otherwise be inaccessible to audiovisual reproduction’ (Nagib 2011: 7). They also illustrate that digital video, with its kinaesthetic qualities of ‘mobility, flexibility, intimacy and accessibility’ (Cruz), is a liberating device, in the way that it reestablishes the central importance of creativity in the process of filmmaking.

Regardless whether analogue or digital, the handheld camera device enabled the shooting of still and moving images in crowded, remote or previously inaccessible areas like slums. As already outlined, this historical arc spans from the 1890’s ‘detective camera’ to its rediscovery by independent filmmakers in the digital age (see also Chapter 2). Movements such as *Dogma 95* or the Philippine New Wave produce similar claims to ‘vérité’ via the handheld camera device. In *Dogma’s Festen (The Celebration; Vinterberg 1998)* for example, the blurry, pixilated look of digital video images, combined with the use of the shaky, handheld camera, provides the impression that the viewer is a witness to amateur footage shot by one of the family’s members at a family festivity, since these video cameras were initially promoted and sold for exactly that purpose, the private recording of weddings, family vacations or other family gatherings. Similarly, in Brillante Mendoza’s *Tirador*, the shaky, handheld camera features prominently throughout the film, especially in the opening sequence, where the viewer follows an actual police raid in the slums during sleeping hours (the film here also references a similar raid scene in Lino Brocka’s *Jaguar*). Illuminated only by pocket lamps, the handheld camera hectically follows the policemen through the labyrinthine alleys, corridors and shacks of Manila’s Quiapo neighborhood, so that the spectator literally participates (in a way like Riis, as a recording police reporter) in chasing down its delinquent inhabitants. What Bolter and Grusin would call a claim to ‘immediacy’, or what Anne Jerslev has described as *Dogma 95’s* ‘aesthetics of presence and immediacy in time (now) as well as in space (here)’ (2002: 48) is, no doubt, enhanced through such a highly kinetic or purposefully (or supposedly) amateurish use of handheld DV cameras. This (performative) way of using the camera is also a way of insinuating on cinema’s ‘unlimited power’ to convey the reality of a specific place and its people, as Lúcia Nagib has so fittingly put it (2011: 32). It is, to use Nagib’s own term, a *physical realism* that is produced by this way of filmmaking.

However, in *Tirador*, *Lola* or *Ang pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* one can also observe another kind of realism, and that is in the form of a phenomenological ‘return of things’ in these film’s mise-en-scènes and narratives – a filmmaking strategy that focuses on material objects, or to quote Jim Libirian once more, one that includes ‘many real-world objects or events into the characters’ field-of-convenience’, in order to create a form of ‘mimesis-as-diegesis’ (Libirian 2011: 68). What Elsaesser has described as a new interest in the ‘presence and agency of things’ (2009c: 5) finds in the films of the Philippine New Wave a renewed focus on the presence of garbage. Hence, garbage, and by extension filth, faeces, open sewers and scrapped things, designate here not so much an aesthetic, but constitute simply what there is – they simply make up a significant part of the real-world objects in the slums. In the opening scene of *Ang pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* for example, the camera follows things, such as free-floating plastic bags, which are driven by the slow movement of garbage-infested water in the slum’s open sewer. Then the film’s main protagonist, a homosexual teenager, picks up a flower that is floating in the middle of the garbage. Thus, the film’s opening introduces not so much an ‘aesthetics of garbage’, but simply *what there is*, a single object of beauty amidst scrapped things. Similarly, during the opening of *Lola* (Tagalog for ‘grandmother’) the camera follows a lola’s/grandmother’s repeated attempts to light a candle at the spot where her grandchild was murdered, while the monsoon season’s stormy weather prevents her from doing so. At the same time, we see discarded newspaper snatches, plastic wraps and cups floating freely in the air, and all the while we hear nothing but the wind, as if to announce this film’s stylistic mode (the free-floating camera) and its thematic preoccupation with the tenacious resistance of the Real: in particular the rainy weather and its effects, the permanent flooding of streets and shacks in a Manila neighbourhood called Malaba, which is built near the bay and which lacks a functioning sewerage system.

In some of these films things, objects or goods also acquire an agency on their own. In *Tirador* (translated as ‘thieves’) ‘things’ are not simply ‘what there is’, but they are also diegetic agents in that they connect the residents of Manila’s Quiapo neighbourhood. The film has a distinct focus on the circulation of objects, more precisely the exchange of stolen goods among some of the neighbourhood’s residents, such as necklaces, bicycles or ventilators (Fig. 7.1), but also a focus on the illegal exchange of stolen electronic and digital entertainment and communication devices, such as DVD players and cell phones. In one of the film’s more extended scenes, a woman’s false teeth (acquired through the disposal of such stolen goods), take central stage when they accidentally vanish down the kitchen sink. The camera then follows her hysterical search in the slum’s open sewers, as if to insist that her life depends on retrieving it from the squalor in the sewer. Whether one interprets this as a critique

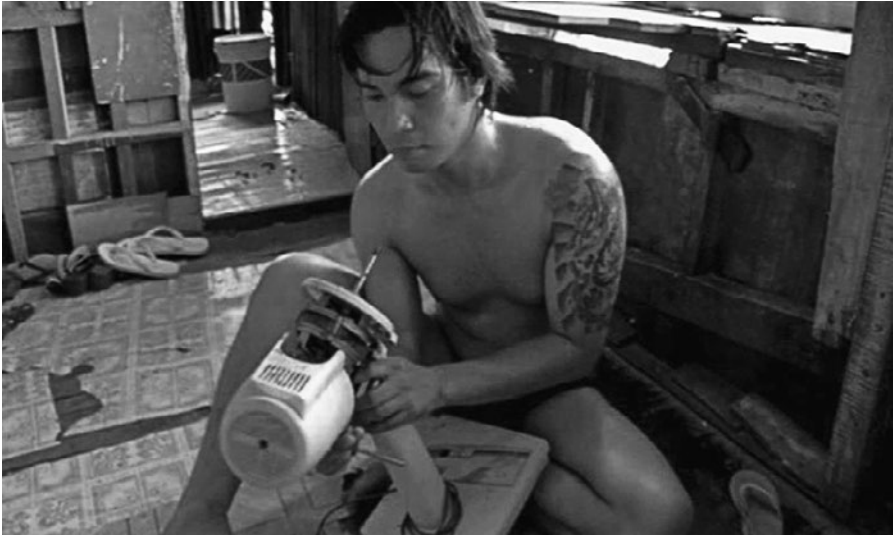


Figure 7.1 Stolen consumer goods interconnect the inhabitants of Manila's Quiapo in *Tirador*.

on the fetishes of a 'materialist world' in a neoliberal throwaway society, as a realist depiction of the urban poor's garbage-infested environment, or as an unsentimental representation of their dependency on stolen or scrapped consumer goods for their survival, *Tirador* suggests that the inhabitants of Quiapo are interconnected through these material objects rather than in traditional ways, through friendships, personal relationships or family bonds – which prompted some critics to describe the film as emotionally distant.¹⁵ Instead, the objects rather than the characters acquire agency: Quiapo's residents are driven by the circulation of these material objects through (diegetic) space and time, more often than through classical psychological conflicts, desires or goals.

Considering this, one can say that in some films of the Philippine New Wave a 'return to the Real' is evident. These films focus on 'real people, real societies, real cities' (Shiel 2006: 127), and ultimately, 'real things', rather than on issues of representation. This is particularly discernible when one takes the filmmakers' emphasis on a physical and collaborative mode of production into account – a way of filmmaking that goes back to the new wave cinemas of the 1960s or to the notion of *cinéma vérité*, but is now only enhanced through DV cameras. This way of filmmaking emphasises the ad hoc and the spontaneous; it relies on 'found' actors, stories and real-world objects, rather than on pre-designed characters, stories and sets. As a result, the stories these characters enact are not confined to any conventional (or generic) storytelling patterns and, in turn, the slums of Manila not only become settings for such stories.

Instead, the reliance on 'found' stories and real-world objects approximates to a (physical) realism which Jim Libirian has fittingly described as a form of 'mimesis-as-diegesis'. This suggests that the filmmakers of the Philippine New Wave strongly believe in cinema's 'unlimited power' to convey the reality of life in the slums and that they display a renewed concern and respect for reference in the visual media.

PEDRO COSTA'S *FONTAINHAS TRILOGY* (1997–2006)

A similar, but at the same time very different confluence between the digital turn and the 'return to the Real' can be detected in Pedro Costa's three films set in Fontainhas. This neighbourhood was located on the northern outskirts of Lisbon and was mostly inhabited by immigrants from former Portuguese colonies in Africa and the Cape Verde Islands; it has now been demolished and replaced by social housing facilities. In content thus similar to *De Certa Manera*, Pedro Costa traces in his 'docufictions' *Ossos*, *No Quarto da Vanda* and *Juventude Em Marcha* the slow, but steady demolition of a slum and the re-settlement of its inhabitants into new housing facilities.¹⁶ In other words, the main protagonist of the *Fontainhas Trilogy* is Fontainhas itself. Costa thereby not only shifts from using classical 35 mm film material (in *Ossos*) to DV (in the two latter films), but also from 'telling a story' to portraying everyday life in a radically non-diegetic fashion. Unlike in most of the films of the 'digital underground' in the Philippines, the stylistic features of the *Fontainhas Trilogy* are inherited rather from Italian neorealism than from cinéma vérité.¹⁷ Instead of the kinaesthetics, mobility and bodily immersion via the shaky DV camera, Costa relies exclusively in all his Fontainhas-set films on the opposite, namely on keeping a certain distance and tranquility through persistently static, fixed framing and the frequent use of the uncut long take.

The imagery of his films was perceived by critics paradoxically as both highly aestheticised and at the same time as documentary-like. These images of wretchedness in Fontainhas remind us at times of painterly tableaux or still-lives. This is because scenes of everyday life which are often presented in such motionless, uncut takes which last for an unusually long time, are from film to film gradually de-linked from any narrative cohesion. Some of the stylistic elements that Costa uses to create these kind of images were elevated by Bazin and Deleuze for their potential to represent the spatial properties of reality and to approximate the temporal *durée* of everyday life. It will therefore be especially revealing to focus on these two cinematic parameters, space and time, in the *Fontainhas Trilogy*. Yet, apart from the trilogy's style, its mode of production – an increasingly close, almost intimate co-operation between filmmaker

and non-professional actors – testifies to the director's year-long struggle to rediscover cinema's ethical potential (after it has supposedly been lost due to postmodernism), that is, its ability to convey, disclose or uncover the reality of a community and the lives of its people. Hence, in order to uncover the trilogy's stylistic features in more depth, it is enlightening to simultaneously also outline Costa's development as an auteur, particularly, that is, his development towards rediscovering the ethical potentials of the cinematic medium. Tracing this development is, in my opinion, the key to hermeneutically uncover the cinematic language of the *Fontainhas Trilogy*, but it also draws a trajectory from analogue to digital cinema, as well as from postmodernism to 'the return to the Real'.

An important part of this trajectory is Costa's previous feature film *Casa de Lava* (*Down to Earth*; 1994), which was shot with a cast of largely non-professional actors on one of the earliest territories of Portuguese colonialism, the volcanic island of Fogo on the Cape Verdes. *Casa de Lava's* plot is quite deliberately borrowed from another film, from *I Walked With A Zombie* (Tourneur 1943) – a horror film with noir elements, set on the Caribbean Islands. Apart from this reference to Tourneur, Costa also alludes to characters, scenes and the mise-en-scènes of other films.¹⁸ In this sense, *Casa de Lava* seems, at first, a good example of a postmodern 'mosaic of quotations' since essentially it is, like *Dom za vešanje*, a remake which blends elements of different genres with intertextual allusions to other films. However, from an auteurist perspective one can read the film's main character, the white, middle-class nurse Mariana – who is on a journey of self-discovery – as the director's stand-in, his *alter ego*. *Casa de Lava* represents in this sense an allegory for the director's own 'journey of self-discovery'. More precisely, the encounter between the director, a white, university-educated Portuguese filmmaker with a middle-class background, and the largely impoverished, illiterate and predominantly black African locals living in a former Portuguese colony, becomes a transformative experience for him – at least that is if one believes Costa's own statements. In interviews he has described his experience of filming with non-professional actors on the Cape Verde Islands as a trigger for a personal and vocational crisis, claiming that he went through what could be interpreted as a kind of hagiographic trajectory of crisis, transformation and redemption.¹⁹ The film's English release title, *Down to Earth*, seems then misleading at first, but from this (hagiographic) point of view it actually describes the filmmaker's trajectory from postmodernism to realism in a nutshell; hence, the director's vocational crisis and his re-discovery of the ethical potentials of the cinematic medium to convey the reality of a place and its people. This can also be discerned in *Casa de Lava's* meandering style, as if the director (who is in crisis) cannot decide whether his film ought to tell a fictional story about a nurse as a remake with allusions to film history, or if it rather ought to be a non-fictional depiction of the island of Fogo.²⁰

The major impulse for Costa's shift to abandon narrative in favour of a 'non-narrative portraiture of both places and people' (Rosenbaum 2008), and ultimately the major impulse for the first film of the *Fontainhas Trilogy*, *Ossos*, manifests when the director encounters the locals of Fogo on a daily basis. While shooting *Casa de Lava*, the island's locals asked him to send letters to their emigrated relatives in Portugal, most of who lived in Fontainhas, as Costa discovered when he returned to Lisbon.²¹ Volker Pantenburg describes the way in which Costa's recollection of his role as a postman between the former Portuguese colony and Fontainhas indicates a shift from postmodernism to realism in Costa's oeuvre as follows:

Costa's recollection indicates a shift on several levels: from the film-historical references of . . . *Casa de Lava* to the social reality of Fontainhas, from fiction to documentary, from working under "professional" conditions to working in small communities akin to family contexts. The roots in film history . . . are at the time of making the trilogy complemented by a method that draws its energy from a particular location – Fontainhas – and the non-professional actors that Costa has been collaborating with ever since *Casa de Lava*, in *Ossos*, *In Vanda's Room* and *Colossal Youth*. (Pantenburg 2010)

It is indeed what Pantenburg describes as the 'family context' of the mode of production in the latter Fontainhas-set films, which radically departs from Costa's earlier films. Costa worked with a relatively big budget, a script, shooting schedule, extensive equipment and an army of professional crew members while filming *Casa de Lava* and also *Ossos*, but with *No Quarto da Vanda* he gets rid of all of these elements to work solemnly with a single Panasonic DVX 100 mini-DV camera and mirrors as minimal lighting equipment. Indeed, most of the time he is the only crew member, as he spends an extended time at the location of the shoot. This shift to minimising the production process and intensifying the collaboration with the Fontainhas community essentially occurs (in Costa's hagiographic tale) when he discovers, during the shoot of *Ossos*, that for an ethical depiction of a place and its people, the director has to 'become' (in a Deleuzian sense) a local himself. Such a process of becoming and transformation also implies a dismantling of such dichotomies as 'Self' versus 'Other', filming versus filmed subject and, ultimately, the dichotomy between documentary and fiction too; this process becomes noticeable in *Ossos*.

In an auteurist reading of the *Fontainhas Trilogy*, *Ossos*, then, forms the second pivotal junction in the director's hagiographic tale. Now, there are no obvious references to film history and no professional actors any more, but a familiar story is still told – as Costa has put it, a story that reminds us

of the melodramas of poverty in early cinema.²² The film is indeed largely ‘silent’: the scenes have very little or no dialogue; sound effects and noises are reduced to a minimum and the story is told almost exclusively through gestures, facial expressions and bodily movements (although even those are reduced to a minimum). The story is, accordingly, quite thin and told in a loose and episodic fashion, focusing especially on Tina, an exhausted, suicidal teenage mother of a newborn child, who tries to get rid of her unwanted son. Her unemployed boyfriend rescues the infant, but then desperately tries to get rid of his son himself, by trying to sell him, by leaving him at a nurse’s house or by delivering him to a local prostitute. *Ossos* seems, like *Casa de Lava*, to be ambiguous, meandering as it does between documentary and fiction and leaving it to the viewer to decide whether one witnesses a portrayal of a neighbourhood and its people, or a (silent film-like) story of utter destitute and complete despair in the slums.

The impression one gets of a pending in-betweenness is because the film represents, for once, another (imperfect) imbalance, this time between narrating a story and a more distinct focus on the (labyrinthine) spatial topography of a place, Fontainhas; on its interior and exterior spaces, its walled alleys, streets and street corners, as well as its private living and sleeping rooms, kitchens or gathering places. The repetitions and alternations of the minimal, elliptic storyline, hence, the father’s repeated attempts to get rid of his son, is continuously supplied with alternating repetitions of statically framed shots that present rather than represent the Fontainhas neighbourhood, strengthening the impression of a labyrinthine neighbourhood in which people get/are lost. In other words, in *Ossos* Fontainhas is not merely a setting for a story, a ‘diegetic world’, but rather it acquires the quality of a figurative space. This figurative quality is achieved through the deliberate repetition and alternation of statically composed long shots of similar motives, often bird’s eye shots from a rooftop perspective, framing the slum’s crossroads, or shots that frame the entry into Fontainhas (marked by a busy road and a light tower), courtyards and especially half-closed front and room doors. In this way *Ossos*’s screen space becomes figurative (as opposed to the diegetic spaces of more conventional fiction films), since it focuses on the geometrical/topographical ‘design’ of Fontainhas, its walls, lines, textures and shapes – similar to how a sculptor would work on a sculpture.

Additionally, these repetitive shots mostly frame transitory spaces and places, where the neighborhood’s residents/the film’s characters change directions and cross thresholds, enter and exit Fontainhas, their houses or their private rooms. Costa deliberately constructs Fontainhas as such an on-screen space of liminality. The door, open or closed, but mostly half-closed, is thereby the most recurring visual motif in *Ossos*, since it indicates the notion of liminality quite literally (Fig. 7.2). However, the visual motif of the door



Figure 7.2 The recurring motif of the half-closed door in *Ossos*.

can also be interpreted in another way, that is, as a transitory entry and exit device for viewers, signifying their entry into, or exit out of the diegetic world of a film. Indeed, Costa himself has emphasised the meaning of the door in *Ossos* as, first and foremost, a narratological device. In a lecture to Tokyo film students – ‘A Closed Door That Leaves Us Guessing’ (2007) – he argued for cinema as an ‘art of absence’, that is a cinema which, in a metaphorical sense, shuts the door to a (diegetic or non-diegetic) world for the viewer, leaving him/her guessing what really happens behind these closed doors. What is absent in *Ossos*, Costa then argues, is the viewer himself, since he or she is denied a smooth entry into a constructed world. Costa distinguishes between a cinema that opens its doors, such as classical Hollywood, and a cinema that closes its doors, or, as in the case of *Ossos*, a cinema that leaves the doors half-shut. Whereas in the ‘cinema of open doors’ the diegetic world becomes completely transparent for the viewer, in the latter it keeps the viewer in a state of limbo, or as Costa has put it, ‘[a]fterwards, I didn’t know if [*Ossos*] had become a documentary or if it was still fiction, but I know there’s a closed door that leaves us guessing’ (Costa 2007). Thus, in *Ossos* the viewer is placed on the threshold between fiction and documentary, diegesis (representation) and mimesis (figurativeness). Costa’s aim to lock out the viewer is, ultimately then, a question of ethics, as the closing of doors denies a film’s spectator a smooth entry into a (fictional) world of a filmmaker’s constructions of a place and its people.

However, it seems that Costa was not entirely satisfied with the way he approached Fontainhas in *Ossos*, since *No Quarto da Vanda*, the first film Costa shot on digital video and without a crew, is – even more radically – a film that in this metaphorical sense completely shuts the doors to a diegetic world altogether. Instead the film opens the door literally wide open to ‘Vanda’s room’, a (non-diegetic) world of drug abuse, self-destruction and apathy. While Fontainhas is being demolished by the local authorities, the film centres on one room (Vanda’s room) and on one main character or social actor, Vanda Duarte (who played a fictional character named Clotilde in *Ossos* and whose real name is Vanda Duarte). Vanda spends most of her days and most of her time in her bedroom, chatting with her sister Zita about everyday life, while incessantly smoking heroin. As *The Guardian*’s Peter Bradshaw has fittingly put it, Costa ‘favours interminably long shots, long silences, long aimless semi-audible conversations between semi-comatose drug addicts: like watching a Big Brother live feed direct from some of the most poverty-stricken places in Europe’ (Bradshaw 2009). Hence, while the spatial focus shifts from *Ossos*’s topographic/figurative presentation of Fontainhas to one single location as a kind of gravitational centre – a last shelter amidst destruction, ‘Vanda’s room’ – there is, as Bradshaw indicates, also a shift of focus to the auditory aspects of the now digital medium. Apart from the ‘long silences’ and the ‘long aimless semi-audible conversations’, Costa now makes the audience constantly aware of on- and off-screen noises: Vanda’s seemingly never-ending smoker’s cough, her unbearable choking, the squeaking of rats, the crumbling of debris and the sound of wrecking balls and bulldozers tearing down the neighbourhood. Instead of a modern ‘silent film’, we now have a film full of seemingly random sounds, but even less meaningful dialogue.

The motif of destruction and decay, and ultimately, the motif of death, are omnipresent in *No Quarto da Vanda*’s mise-en-scène and soundscape, as if Costa continues here with his ‘remakes’ of zombie movies. His characters/slum-dwellers appear literally as the “‘living dead” of global capitalism’, dwelling ‘in the twilight zone of slums’, to resort to Slavoj Žižek’s definition of slum-dwellers (2008: 425). These living-dead residents of Fontainhas appear to be absent-minded, zombie-like lost souls, who are mentally and physically marked by the excessive abuse of drugs and forced to live ‘in ghost houses other people left empty’ as another of the film’s characters, Vanda’s childhood friend Nhurro, states. The sparsely lit interiors of the soon-abandoned ‘ghost-town’ or ‘twilight zone’ of Fontainhas acquire both photographic (or indexical) and painterly (or phantasmagorical) qualities at the same time. This is because Costa’s use of digital video produces hyperclear (or hyper-real) imagery, which reminds the viewer of a pixilated ‘Big Brother live feed’ (Bradshaw), but which also paradoxically, at times, gives the impression of Renaissance *chiaroscuro* paintings of a Caravaggio or Vermeer – an observation that has been

made by numerous critics. Metaphorically speaking, both these hyper-real and painterly images show undead bodies living in half-empty ghost houses that are, themselves, in the middle of being destroyed. One could say that Costa's artistic strategy to highlight the documentary as well as the painterly qualities of the digital medium at once aims at 'redeeming a physical reality' (Kracauer) that is highly fragile, that is, redeeming the transient, soon-to-be-vanished twilight zones of a decomposing slum, its half-abandoned rooms and the ailing bodies of its inhabitants, into objects of art. As the French philosopher Jacques Rancière has famously put it, Costa

never misses an opportunity to transform the living spaces of these miserable people into objects of art. A plastic water bottle, a knife, a glass, a few objects left on the table in a squatted apartment: there you have, under a light that strokes the set, the occasion for a beautiful still life. As night descends on this space without electricity, two small candles placed on the same table lend to the miserable conversations or to the needle sessions the allure of a chiaroscuro from the Dutch Golden Age. (Rancière 2009)

Apart from this 'aestheticisation of poverty' through artistic framing, lighting and mise-en-scène, Costa's excessively hyperbolic use of long takes – which



Figure 7.3 Unbearably long but chiaroscuro-lit still life of a dying world in *No Quarto da Vanda*.

are in the most literal sense ‘unbearably long’ – shift the viewer’s attention to a more temporal experience of figurativeness. Hence, contrary to *Ossos*, in which space is figurative, it is now time that in *No Quarto da Vanda* acquires such a plastic or tangible dimension. The very first take of the film already announces this strategy, since its duration lasts more than five minutes: while nothing extraordinary is done or said, we see Vanda and her sister sitting on a bed in Vanda’s room, coughing, chatting and smoking heroin (Fig. 7.3). The number of these long takes is reduced to a minimum throughout the film’s 171 minutes running time. Since these takes are extended to such an unorthodox degree, time is not fragmented and subjugated to the rules of continuity editing in order to tell a story, but seemingly unfolds in ‘real time’, disassociating the images from cause-and-effect relations. In this sense, *No Quarto da Vanda* not only drastically denies its viewers the comfort of a conventional viewing experience, it also approximates, in the most radical sense, to the Bergsonian idea of *durée* and the Deleuzian ‘time image’, aiming at persistently and steadily chronicling both a bodily and architectural (self)destruction by turning misery into art and art into ‘miserably’ long takes. Yet, through the recurring motifs of decay, death and destruction, Costa’s conception of the cinematic image also refers to Bazin’s ‘mummy complex’ – Bazin’s notion to regard photography as a plastic art that is capable of embalming the dead, of defying the transience of life. Costa indeed referred to the photographic documentary tradition of slum representations to find inspiration for his highly aestheticised imagery, namely to Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives*.²³ However, unlike in Riis’s photographic ‘framings of the poor’, in Costa’s hyperbolic long takes it is not only objects that ‘poke through the image’, but also time that pierces the viewer and so acquires a sensory immediacy, since the viewer experiences it as a sensible presence (or ‘present time’). The *durée* of the in-between – the twilight time in between destruction and re-settlement – becomes in this way a sensory cinematic experience, since the film attempts to ‘embalm’ the dying world of Fontainhas and, simultaneously, let the spectator ‘feel’ that this world is in the process of dying.

The last film of the trilogy, *Juventude em Marcha*, shares a similar ‘realism of the senses’ – as Tiago de Luca (2012) has called it – following on from Costa’s hyperbolic use of the long take and his radical refusal to tell any kind of story, albeit that this time, the place itself, Fontainhas, is absent, and instead the past, the memories of Fontainhas, become ‘present’. The film focuses on Ventura, a 75-year-old retired construction worker, who spends his retirement days visiting his former neighbours in the ‘social blocks’ – among them for instance the recovering Vanda Duarte who is now supplied with methadone by the state. In what initially seems to be an age-related, delusional search for his lost ‘children’, Ventura connects, through his visits, his paternal age and (his imagined or real family) relations, the now scattered community as a kind of ‘founding

father' of Fontainhas. However, Ventura also connects Costa's oeuvre, since he emigrated from the Cap Verdes Islands to Lisbon in the 1970s, exactly at the time when Fontainhas was self-built by construction workers such as Ventura, and at about the same time when the Cape Verdes gained their independence from Portugal (5 July 1975). Thus, through the figure of Ventura, Costa establishes an arc that spans from *Casa de Lava* to *Juventude em Marcha*, from colonialism to social housing blocks, and simultaneously condenses the history of the now vanished Fontainhas.

What Costa has described in an interview as the film's double-movement – between moving backwards and forwards, the past and the present²⁴ – illustrates a final meandering between two seemingly opposed poles. In *Casa de Lava* it was a meandering movement between the singular (individual journey) and the general (national allegory); in *Ossos* it was between the outside (space and topography) and the inside (character psychology); in *No Quarto da Vanda* between presence (life) and absence (death) but in *Juventude em Marcha* it is a meandering between the old and the new, and ultimately, as the title suggests, between backward-looking age and forward-marching youth (the Portuguese title of the film is correctly translated as 'youth on the march'). Yet, *Juventude em Marcha* puts these dichotomies into a state of limbo once again: 'the new' stands for destruction, because the social housing blocks, built by strangers this time, destroy the communal connections established throughout time,



Figure 7.4 De-centred framing of Vanda and Ventura against the background of their new social housing blocks in *Juventude em Marcha*.

which kept the self-built Fontainhas community alive, in spite of its poverty, despair and misery. Costa visualises this critique (of modernist and functional, but soulless social housing architecture) in *Juventude em Marcha* through an often de-centred framing of his long takes, in which the bodies of Vanda, Ventura and the others are constantly set against the alienating backgrounds of the form-follows-function architecture of the social housing blocks (Fig. 7.4). Additionally, while Ventura visits ‘his children’, we witness how they gradually become disconnected from each other, how they lose a sense of community.

Rancière claims that Costa’s films become political precisely because they employ an overly aestheticised imagery, rather than providing the viewer with a critique in the form of an ‘explanation’ – narrative, expository or any other kind. For instance, with regard to *No Quarto da Vanda* he states that by

setting aside the ‘explanations’ of the economical and social reasons of the existence of the shanty town and of its destruction the film sets forth what is specifically political: the confrontation between the power and the impotence of a body, the confrontation between a life and its possibilities. (Rancière 2008)

The same could be said for *Juventude em Marcha*, which has neither a narrative nor sets forth an explanation but shows, instead, a confrontation between powerless bodies and possibilities (for empowerment) which, however, have been buried in the past. These buried possibilities are, in fact, an important political context of *Juventude em Marcha*, as the film constantly flashes back to the time of the Portuguese ‘Carnation Revolution’ in April 1974, which brought democracy to Portugal, the end of the dictatorship and the end of the wars in the colonies. These flashbacks are to showcase Ventura’s role as a construction worker during a time of hope (and youth, that is on the march), a time in which Ventura built the houses, museums and government buildings in which Portugal’s affluent middle class (the young students of 1974, who went marching on the streets to overthrow the dictatorship and colonialism) today dwells, enjoys culture, and decides where those who built those buildings, immigrants like Ventura, are forced to dwell today. Hence, Costa’s film suggests that the 1974 revolution was an utter failure, since it did not include people like Ventura, leading instead to their social abandonment and spatial exclusion in rundown places as Fontainhas.

However, the film switches to the 1970s via ‘flashbacks’ that are not recognisable as such in a conventional sense. In other words, the film deliberately plays with indeterminate and multiple temporalities that are continuously blended into trans-historical ‘time images’, so to speak. Very few hints in the film’s mise-en-scène (for instance, clothing) and soundtrack (1970s

revolutionary songs and radio news) signify these pseudo-flashbacks, since they are intended to confuse the viewer and let him or her contemplate instead the film's (time-less) images. This refusal to use clearly identifiable flashbacks that sets forth a comprehensible socio-political critique, which juxtaposes the utopian ideals of the past with the shocking inequalities of the present, reveals a strategy that privileges 'memory over chronology, circularity over linearity', and so makes '(sense-) perception a major issue' (Elsaesser 2009c: 4). With Elsaesser one can then, in turn, argue that *Juventude em Marcha* makes the sense-perception of Fontainhas its major issue. A similar point is made by Rancière, who contends that Costa's films belong to the 'aesthetic regime of art'. Unlike the overly political messages of, for example, Third Cinema filmmakers, Pedro Costa's 'docufictions' are overly 'aesthetic' (derived here from the Greek *aísthēsis*, which translates as 'feeling, perceiving, sensing'), but are therefore even more political. For Rancière, Costa's films represent a more accurate way of demonstrating 'what art can be and can do today' in order to be political, since they 'rework the frame of our perceptions and the dynamism of our affects' (Rancière 2008).

'REALISM OF THE SENSES'

What new approaches to the representation of slums can we then find in these two types of 'digital realisms'? In the films of the Philippine New Wave there is a focus on movement, but less on the linear, progressive movement of a story, more on the movement of the camera and of things, objects and goods, displaying what Lúcia Nagib has called a 'physical realism'. This – a presentational (or performative) rather than a representational mode of filmmaking – is what provides realism through the filmmakers' and actors' collaboration and physical engagement with the material world surrounding them (hence, this is not a filmmaker dispassionately 'looking at' reality, but an embodied participation with the social and material world depicted).²⁵ This *cinéma vérité*-like collaborative commitment to 'the truth about the land and the people' (Nagib 2011: 32) is, in the case of the Philippine New Wave, enforced by the use of lightweight DV cameras. For these independent filmmakers the handheld camera enables fluidity, kinesis and mobility as a way of recording ('looking at') slum life, but also of 'being in the world' *with* slum-dwellers. Hence, digital recording devices are enabling them to be physically involved with the lives of their (social) actors, as well as with their real-life material surroundings; and this is both a mode of production as well as a stylistic feature of these films. In Costa's films there is, on the contrary, no emphasis on movement or kinesis, but on stasis and still lifes. This is why the *Fontainhas Trilogy* displays quiet different markers of world cinema's return to notions of realism; a

realism that is perhaps less ‘physical’ from the point of view of its mode of production, but nevertheless ‘sensual’ since it challenges the viewer’s perception of (cinematic) time and space. This is, in the first instance, a result of Costa’s patient observation of the visual, auditory and material details of everyday life in Fontainhas, which in turn provokes a way of viewing that requires, in equal measure, enduring patience, attentiveness and a willingness to contemplate images and sounds, material objects and (powerless) bodies, within carefully-crafted static shots.

To elaborate on this point a bit further, it is revealing to resort to what Tiago de Luca and Thomas Elsaesser observed as a new tendency in contemporary world cinema. Luca claims that this tendency is best defined as a new ‘realism of the senses’, since ‘through the hyperbolic application of the long take and other time-stretching devices, materiality is primarily conveyed as non-conceptual, sensuous phenomena’ (2012: 199). For him, in films that resort to such a hyperbolic use of the long take, like the ones by Pedro Costa, the material world (of bodies, objects, rooms, houses, and so on) does not serve a character-centred plot. In this type of cinema, objects do not become carriers of narrative signification and neither are rooms, houses or places merely ‘settings’. In other words, objects, places, rooms or houses do not acquire ‘conceptual’ meanings, in the sense that they ‘stand for’, ‘refer to’ or indeed ‘represent’ something. There is neither a ‘useful’ (for instance, diegetically important) nor a ‘surplus’ materiality. Instead, as Luca emphasises, the material world is simply what there is; for him, the hyperbolic application of the long take and the simultaneous refusal to tell a story not only ‘presentifies the material world’ (2012: 200), but also enforces what he claims is a ‘realism of the senses’. Luca’s thesis apparently contradicts Costa’s idea of cinema as an ‘art of absence’, favouring the idea of cinema as an art of ‘pure presence’, that is, a pure presence of both materiality and present (not past) time, paradoxically enhanced, not diminished, by the use of digital video.

Elsaesser has approached this apparent paradox from a slightly different angle. For him, the paradoxical logic of today’s (digital) long take cinema implies a *post*-ontological (or post-Bazinian) version of realism (‘ontology mark two’, as Elsaesser calls it); a realism which, on the one hand, displays, like in Costa’s films, all the traditional stylistic features of realist cinema – static, fixed frames and the long shot-long take combination – but, on the other hand, significantly departs from the traditional ontological truth, or indeed, presence claims of this kind of realist aesthetics. Hence, this type of cinema, like the postmodern type, *also* ‘shares the general skepticism towards ontological versions of photographic realism’, yet it does not make us doubt the veracity of images ‘in order to show up the evidence of our eyes for being deceptive, illusory or unreliable (the old post-modern paradigm)’, but rather attempts to ‘extend perception beyond the visual register, in order to expose or engage the

body as a total perceptual surface, while deploying other sense-perceptions – notably touch and hearing – as at least equally relevant to the cinematic experience’ (Elsaesser 2009c: 5). This turn towards a realism of the senses that ‘extends perception beyond the visual register’ is particularly noticeable in *No Quarto da Vanda*. What we see – the zombie-like, ailing bodies of Vanda and Zita Duarte and the dying world of Fontainhas, (a cinema of immateriality or absence) – is in contrast to what we sense or feel, a sense of *durée*, of time passing, and of things, bodies and houses present (a cinema of pure presence).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The confluence of the digital with differing approaches to cinematic realism has spurred new screen–spectator relations. As this chapter’s case examples, the Philippine New Wave and the *Fontainhas Trilogy*, have shown, such films address more consciously the spectator’s sensory perception *beyond* the visual register only, simultaneously displaying a renewed interest in the referential function of images and ‘the truth about the land and the people’ (Nagib). To put it differently, these films attempt a ‘re-materialisation of the filmic signifiers’ (Elsaesser 1998: 205). One could also describe this as a shift from representation to presentation, or from deterritorialised representations of slum images in postmodern cinema to re-territorialised presentations of actual slums in digital cinema – at least in a type of cinema that, once again, attempts to convey the ‘radical potential’ (Shiel) of real people, real places and real things on the moving image. The digital image, an image that is supposedly a simulacrum without any substance or materiality (Rodowick), paradoxically triggers this ‘return to the Real’ in today’s independent (festival, art or new wave) cinemas. These filmmakers also use digital technologies to reanimate a political kind of cinema that has been declared dead, turning their films into acts of resistance to the ‘digital confections’ (Andrew) of today’s entertainment industries as well as to the blatant social inequalities on our ‘planet of slums’. The question that now remains to be asked is: are slums represented in a less ethical way in supposedly mainstream films of the digital era? This question must specifically be addressed to *Cidade de Deus* and *Slumdog Millionaire*, both of which have been accused by some critics for simply being ‘digital confections’ in which slums only figure as ‘enthraling decors’ (Sontag) for generic (gangster or love) stories.

NOTES

1. In their influential *Dogma 95* manifesto a group of independent Danish filmmakers – who understood themselves as a film collective rather than as a movement – proposed ten rules (or dogmas) for filmmaking (their so-called ‘Vow of Chastity’) that radically opposed both postmodern aesthetics and mainstream filmmaking. They called for a cinema that ought to return to the ethical values of neorealism and, perhaps more evidently, to a *cinéma vérité*-style of filmmaking. Anne Jerslev, however, maintains that ‘there are obvious references to Italian neorealism in *Dogma 95* and von Trier mentions neorealism in his diary as well . . . The interesting thing to me seems to be that *Dogma 95* dictates a set of minimalistic technical and narrative rules to which the profilmic has to subjugate itself thereby formulating a broader film aesthetics founded in a notion of realism and the real. The specific *Dogma* version of realism is directed towards the accentuation of a certain aspect of the ontology of the moving image, namely the photographic presence, the indexical aspect of the image’ (2002: 47–8). See also Jerslev (2002: 47) for a reprint of the manifesto.
2. The phrase ‘return to the Real’, to which Nagib and Mello resort to describe ‘world cinema’s realist revival’, is a variation of the phrase ‘the return of the Real’, introduced by the American art historian Hal Foster. In his *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* Foster questions the critical models that have governed art theory since the postmodern era, a semiotic or textual model of reading art. Yet, he also observes a new tendency in the avant-garde art of the 1980s and 1990s (particularly in the works of Cindy Sherman and Duane Hanson), which, according to him, turns away from what he calls ‘simulacral art’ towards the Real, in the form of either (wounded or traumatised) bodies or quasi-ethnographic observation.
3. Bazin’s ‘ontological’ claim for cinema as a medium that has the ability to reproduce reality ‘in its own image’ is grounded on the assumption that photographic images have a physical, causal or existential link to objects in reality. This claim has been repeatedly rejected in film theory, most vigorously perhaps with the psycho-semiotic turn (*Screen theory*) in the 1970s and since the 1990s by theoreticians of the digital image, such as David Rodowick, Richard Grusin or Lev Manovich. Since digital images can be manipulated at will, Bazin’s ontological claims for cinema as a realist medium are radically pulled in for questioning, as Rodowick for example argues (2007: 10–11). Manovich even thinks that because of this, cinema is today ‘no longer an indexical media technology, but, rather, a subgenre of painting’ (2001: 295). And Grusin argues that with the arrival of the digital image we have entered a ‘post-photographic ontology’, because images have become now a ‘remediation of an already mediated world’, rather than a reproduction of reality ‘in its own image’ (2007: 211).
4. I have also outlined this elsewhere (see Krstić 2012).
5. See for instance Belton 2004.
6. Apart from *Dogma 95* in Denmark and the Philippine New Wave, independent cinemas that have been spurred by the digital turn can be found from China – Li Yang’s *Mángjǐng* (*Blind Shaft*; 2003) and *Máng shān* (*Blind Mountain*; 2007) – to the US – *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick and Sánchez 1999) or *Gummo* (Korine 1997). See also Rombes 2005 and 2009.
7. Thomas Elsaesser suggests a few other terms for this type of cinema, such as ‘independent cinema’, ‘international art cinema’, ‘new national cinema’ or ‘festival auteur cinema’ (2009c: 5). In the following, I resort to Smith’s suggestion to call this specific type of cinema the ‘festival film’, to indicate its primary exhibition and distribution context as well as to avoid historically charged film terms such as ‘auteur cinema’ or ‘art cinema’.

8. Apichatpong Weerasethakul won the Golden Palm for his *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2009) and Brillante Mendoza won the Best Director award for his *Kinatay* (2009) at Cannes.
9. All these filmmakers recently won awards at international film festivals such as FAMAS (Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences Award), the Berlinale, at Cannes, Sundance in Montréal or in Rotterdam.
10. Cameron Bailey has put it as follows: ‘Consciously or not, these Filipino directors have revitalised the long-dormant notion of Third Cinema . . . But where Third Cinema rejected on political grounds both the Hollywood model and its counterpoint in European art cinema, the practice in Manila is not nearly so doctrinate . . . by redefining the practice of naturalism and exploiting the accessibility of new technology, Manila’s best young filmmakers have turned disadvantages into useful tools.’ (qtd in Baumgärtel 2012: 6).
11. See Lim (2011) for a more in-depth analysis of Jeturian’s films as a critique of neoliberal capitalism and its social effects in the Philippines.
12. To quote Libirian in full: ‘When I begin the process of story – be it research, writing or actual shoot – I do not think in terms of fiction or documentary. I only think of truth (as experienced or perceived), and how it can be instantiated. My use of “found” actors, is an extension of, and an experimentation on, the found story writing method . . . There, we are encouraged to raise the level of ‘mimesis-as-diegesis’ to attain a more vivid narratology. In writing, this means the inclusion of many real-world objects or events into the characters’ “field-of-convenience”.’ (Libirian 2011: 68)
13. See interview with the director in Mendoza 2007.
14. To quote some of Cruz’ instructions: ‘Your digital camera will not turn you into an instant Von Trier, Figgis, or Soderbergh. Your attitude towards film-making should be that of an amateur: half-serious, playful, light, not heavy, thus without baggage. There are no mistakes. The important thing is you learn . . . Work within a minimised budget, cast, crew, location, and shooting schedule. Artificial lighting is not a necessity. The story is king. Everything else follows . . . Work with what you have. Release the bricoleur within. You are not a studio. Accept your present condition. Start here . . . Forget celebrities. Fuck the star system. Work only with those who are willing to work with you, and those who are dedicated to the craft. Avoid pretentious hangers-on with hidden agendas. Use a lie detector if needed . . . If you are alone, do not worry. Digital technology has reduced the crew into an option, rather than a must’ (2012: 123).
15. A *New York Times* critic remarked for instance that ‘*Tirador* achieves raw social commentary for the price of emotional distance. Portrayed entirely without sentiment, everyone here is equally abject, from the crushed victim of a human stampede to the starving baby playing in its own feces’ (Catsoulis 2010).
16. The films of the *Fontainhas Trilogy* have been labelled as ‘docufictions’ by some re/ viewers, albeit that this classification is difficult to maintain for all three films.
17. Costa has particularly referred to Robert Bresson as one of his major influences. Bresson’s style is indeed similar to Costa’s, since he frequently employs static long takes and a motionless camera work to devalue the centrality of a diegetic story-world in favour of real-life people, objects and spaces. Bresson is regarded by some even as the ‘father of’ such festival films, or, to use another frequently used term, of the type of ‘slow cinema’ to which the films of Béla Tarr or Apichatpong Weerasethaku can also be ascribed to.
18. For instance to *Les Yeux sans visages* (*Eyes Without a Face*; Franju 1960). See also Pantenburg for a discussion of *Casa de Lava*’s references.
19. Costa has stated in an interview that *Casa de Lava* was his ‘mini-*Apocalypse Now*’ (cf. Costa 2009). This comparison makes sense in so far as it relates to Coppola’s personal

- crisis while filming *Apocalypse Now* in Cambodia – vividly depicted in *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* (Bahr, Hickenlooper and Coppola 1991).
20. Jonathan Rosenbaum has put it poignantly, as follows: ‘*Casa de Lava* may be the film of Costa’s that poses the most constant and furious tug of war between Hollywood narrative and the non-narrative portraiture of both places and people, staging an almost epic battle between the two.’ (Rosenbaum 2008)
 21. Accordingly, the DVD release of the three Fontainhas films by the Criterion Collection has been titled *Letters from Fontainhas* (2010), to indicate that they are the audiovisual return-letters Costa sent back to the Cape Verdes, since many of the Fontainhas inhabitants were illiterate.
 22. See Costa 2007.
 23. See Pantenburg 2010. Costa stated in a number of interviews that *How The Other Half Lives* was an inspiration for *No Quarto da Vanda* as well as for *Juventude em Marcha* and that ‘Riis is somebody who should meet Vanda and Ventura’ (Foundas 2009). In his latest film, *Cavalo Dinheiro* (*Horse Money*, 2014), in which he focuses almost exclusively on Ventura’s inner life and painful memories, Costa pays an even more obvious homage to Jacob Riis, since the film opens with a montage sequence that features a series of photographs taken from *How The Other Half Lives*.
 24. See Costa 2011.
 25. Nagib explains her notion of ‘physical realism’ as follows: ‘[B]odily commitment on the part of both crews and casts starts precisely with the belief in the reality of the material world, which goes hand in hand with a belief in cinema’s unlimited power to convey this reality. Moved by this belief, crews and casts feel not only enabled, but morally obliged to express the truth, not any truth, but the truth about the land and the people the film is focusing on through a fictional plot.’ (2011: 32)

PART TWO

Local Expressions

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Favelas on Screen

[The *sertão* and the *favela*] are both real and symbolic lands which to a large degree invoke Brazilian imagery; they are lands in crisis.

Ivana Bentes

The term *favela* originally referred to a plant, that is, to bushes with spiked leaves and oil-yielding nuts that are able to survive on stony soil. In this sense, the term has a double meaning since, like ‘their namesake, the *favela* communities thrive on little and provide sustenance to many’ (Perlman 2010: 24). However, the term also refers to a mountain and a historical event: soldiers who fought in the so-called ‘Guerra de Canudos’ (1895–6) – a counterinsurgency against a rebellion that took place near a hill called ‘Morro da Favella’ and which counts as the largest civil war on Brazilian soil – returned to Rio, where they waited for payments and land grants promised to them by the government. While waiting, the soldiers pitched their tents alongside recently freed slaves and displaced plantation workers, who were already camping on a hill called Morro de Providência. These soldiers renamed the hill ‘Morro da Favella’ because there were bushes there, which reminded them of the *favela* bushes in Canudos. From then on, when it designated ‘a specific place, *favela* became eventually the general denomination of an urban phenomenon typical of Rio’s development from the 1920s on, whereby settlers built precarious homes in land they did not own’ (Valladares 2009: 2). It is for this reason that in the 1920s, *favela* became a generic term for squatter communities, shantytowns, slums and all types of informal, illegal or irregular settlements in Rio used by the locals but also by the city administration or social scientists. Today an estimated nineteen per cent of Rio de Janeiro’s population, over one million people, live in around one thousand *favelas* – the largest *favela* population of all Brazilian cities.¹

Favelas have also been a major theme and important setting of many

Brazilian films. Its first appearance in a movie reaches back almost as far as to the emergence of the term itself. Similarly, the *sertão* – the vast, semi-arid, and contrary to the crowded *favelas*, underpopulated spaces of the northeastern *hinterland* of Brazil – has continuously reappeared throughout the decades as a major film location. In fact, the intolerable social and environmental conditions of the *sertão* are closely related to the growth of Rio de Janeiro and other Brazilian cities in the country's south, or as Ivana Bentes puts it: '*Favelas* are like a *sertão* within the city, because *favelas* are where migrants from the *sertão* moved to in search of a better life . . . The fascinating quality of the geography and landscape of the *sertão* finds its urban counterpart in the outskirts and slums' (2003: 128–9). As this chapter will show, the *favela* is indeed inseparable from the *sertão*, both as real and symbolic landscapes, on- and off-screen. Contemporary films that address the *sertão/favela*-theme do, however, often pay reference to the symbolic rather than the real landscapes of their historical predecessors. It is for this reason that the following chapter is divided into two parts; the first will briefly reconstruct a history of important *favela*-set films as 'local expressions' of the hitherto outlined 'global currents', and, after this, the second part will present an in-depth analysis of *Cidade de Deus*, which, as I will argue, is a representative example for another key paradigm of slum representations in the digital age.

FAVELAS ON SCREEN

Film scholars such as Ivana Bentes, Ismail Xavier, Robert Stam or Lúcia Nagib have repeatedly emphasised how recurring cinematic images around the *sertão/favela*-theme have produced some of the most iconic films of Brazilian film history. Even though it is therefore difficult to separate the one from the other, Brazilian cinema's continuous historical returns to the *favela* as a symbolic 'landscape in crisis' (Bentes) can be summed up as follows: 1) a romanticising phase, in which *favelas* appear as decorative settings for popular Brazilian musicals, the so-called *chanchadas*; 2) a neorealist phase, where the *favela* gradually turns into an important film location for stories about characters that struggle for survival in Brazil's big cities; 3) a *Cinema Novo* phase, in which *favela* life becomes a politicised topic; 4) a New Brazilian Cinema phase, in which the theme of violence predominates.

Romanticising the *favela*'s misery

Favela dos Meus Amores (*Favela of my Loves*; Mauro 1935) was one of the first films set in a *favela*. Shot in Rio's oldest *favela*, the above-mentioned Morro de Providência, it features 300 *passistas* (carnival samba dancers) and tells the story

of the establishment of a cabaret. It is also notable for its documentary-style location shooting and its use of non-professional actors (actual *passistas*), long before the arrival of neorealism. Although the film's director, Humberto Mauro, was known, in particular, for directing carnival musicals, in his later career he directed hundreds of educational documentary shorts for Brazil's National Institute of Educational Cinema.² Nevertheless, despite its documentary appeal, *Favela dos Meus Amores* is a good example of the initially close relationship between *favelas* and the culture of samba in Brazil's cinematic imaginations – a relationship which Bentes describes as 'romanticizing the favelas' misery' – in which the '*favela* (former *sertão*) population is "pillaged" by the coastal, asphalt people [a Brazilian vernacular for the middle class], thus showing a kind of romantic masochism of misery that finds an escape through art, popular culture, carnival and samba' (2003: 129). Indeed, the theme of redemption from poverty through popular culture and the arts, particularly through music, is a recurrent motif in many *favela*-set films.

Many early Brazilian films, in which the *favela* appears as a setting, display a strong fascination with the exoticism of samba culture, as Robert Stam explains:

It was . . . in the 1930s that cinema first began to examine the *favelas* of Rio, the place of origins of the *samba de morro* (samba of the hills) . . . In the early decades of the century, samba was socially despised and even repressed . . . It was thus in the poor milieus that we find the origins of the Afro-inflected popular music. (1997: 81)

As Stam recounts, samba is a musical style that exemplifies what he calls a 'tropical multiculturalism', since it evolved from a process in which various European and African musical styles merged and converged. Parallel to the emergence of the first commercial samba songs in the 1920s, the samba-*favela*-cinema connection was established with the so-called *chanchadas* (transl. as 'trash' or 'mess'). The *chanchadas* were, like samba, a multicultural hybrid: even though they were a genuinely Brazilian film genre influenced by the cultural universe of carnival, they were modelled on classical Hollywood musicals. They dominated the cinematic production in Brazil from the emergence of sound cinema in the 1930s through to the late 1950s and established escapist dreamscapes, thus providing a romanticised imagery of samba/carnival culture, and ultimately also of life in the urban *favelas*. Those 'trashy' musicals featured stars like Carmen Miranda, but also one of the very few black stars of early Brazilian cinema, Sebastião Bernardes Souza Prata, better known as 'Grande Otelo', who became the 'king of the *chanchadas*' and a lone representative of black Brazil on screen.³

Towards the end of the 1950s, world cinema increasingly discovered race as

an important theme, as we have seen with *Moi, un noir* (see Chapter 5). In Brazil it was the best-known samba-carnival-*favela* film to date, *Orfeu Negro* (*Black Orpheus*; 1959) by Marcel Camus, which brought this theme most resolutely to screen. The film targeted primarily an art cinema audience in the West, since it was, as the title already suggests, an adaptation of the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice with an all-black cast, rather than just another ‘trashy’ *chanchada*. However, numerous critics pointed to this film’s problematic representation of blackness and the *favela*. In a chapter tellingly titled ‘The Black Paradise’ (2007: 83–97), Nagib describes Camus’s film as an idyllic utopia in Technicolor, promoting a paradise vision of Rio’s *favelas* and marginalised blackness. Similarly, Bentes describes the cinematic mapping of Rio’s *favelas* in *Orfeu Negro* as a ‘crazy non-realistic geography’ in which the ‘*favela* on the hill is presented in the film as a mythical and paradisiacal place where poverty is glamorous, even desirable . . . the use of colours and landscapes, all contribute to creating an imagined community, constructed by foreign eyes’ (2003: 134). And in a comparison between *Orfeu Negro* and *West Side Story* (Robbins and Wise 1961), Stam finally describes the film as a sophisticated form of slumming, in which the combination of music (samba/Leonard Bernstein) and myth or literary canon (Orpheus and Eurydice/Romeo and Juliet) facilitates a depoliticised representation of Brazilian/US-American slums (1997: 174). All of these critical perceptions of *Orfeu Negro* are justified, especially when considering that urban poverty as well as the economic, social and political marginalisation of Brazil’s black population were imperative social issues during the 1950s.⁴

Neorealist anti-*chanchadas*

By the late 1950s a steady decline of the popularity of *chanchadas* set in, partly due to the rise of television and with it the failed dream of establishing an entertainment industry based on the Hollywood studio system (best exemplified with the bankruptcy of the film studio Companhia Vera Cruz). The decline of the *chanchada* and the advent of television opened up new possibilities for a younger generation of filmmakers to explore non-commercial film practices, such as location shooting with non-professional actors. Even though two congresses for Brazilian cinema (held in 1952 in São Paulo and in Rio de Janeiro) laid the foundations for a large-scale transformation of Brazilian cinema in the postwar period towards neorealism, it was, in practice, Nelson Pereira dos Santos above all who made films in the neorealist spirit. Shot on location in Rio and with a non-professional cast, both of his influential *favela*-set films, *Rio 40 Graus* (*Rio, 100 Degrees*; 1955) and *Rio Zona Norte* (*Rio, Northern Zone*; 1957), could be described as important precursors to the *Cinema Novo* movement.

Inspired by such (neorealist city) films as Rossellini’s *Roma città aperta*, *Rio 40 Graus* portrays in the first instance the city of Rio itself. The story begins and

ends in the *favela* Morro do Cabaçu. It first follows five young peanut-sellers on their 'sales trip' through Rio's well-known tourist destinations, the Copacabana Beach, the Sugar Loaf, Corcovado, Quinta Boa Vista and the Maracanã football stadium. The film's episodic plot structure attempts to portray a cross-section of Rio's population; it intertwines stories of the city's *asfalto* and *favela* inhabitants, who accidentally meet or clash on a hot Sunday afternoon (the title 'Rio, 100 Degrees' refers to both Rio's hot climate and to its social tensions). Each episode starts at a touristic locale, represented as a casual meeting (or melting) place from which a different story emerges. However, unlike *Orfeu Negro*, the touristic locales of *Rio 40 Graus* are not depicted as utopian (or multicultural) paradises; they are governed by the ruthless laws of market capitalism, in which a general pattern of exploitation emerges – the exploitation of the peanut-selling boys by their boss, of soccer players by their managers, of the samba school dancers and singers by their sponsors – whereby the 'exploited tend to have darker faces than the exploiters' (Stam 1997: 160). Although the film does not explicitly criticise Brazil as a racist society, it emphasises the city's social frontiers between *asfalto* and *favela* and already anticipates in this way the notion of Rio as a *cidade partida* ('divided city'), a phrase coined in 1994 by the journalist Zuenir Ventura in a book of the same title.⁵

Race and blackness do, however, play a more significant role in dos Santos's second crucial *favela* film, *Rio Zona Norte*. Its title refers to Rio's northern *favelas* on the city's outskirts, even though the film itself features neither the city of Rio nor its *favelas* as a major theme. *Rio Zona Norte* is rather more concerned with the life of what in Brazilian vernaculars is known as a *malandro* (a street dandy). Grande Otelo embodies this figure, an unemployed and illiterate but musically gifted black samba composer, who dreams of earning money through music, but in the course faces a series of calamities – reminding the viewer somewhat of the Bible's *Book of Job*. In the opening scene, the main character travels on a train to the city's northern zone, but a fateful accident brings him into a hospital. While he faces death, he recalls events through flashbacks that recount how he loses his son (who is found assassinated), his house and his wife. Additionally, he is ruthlessly exploited by egoist middlemen in a predominantly white music industry – such as Maurício, who pretends to be his collaborator, but in fact steals his samba songs and sells them to the highest bidder without crediting the author. In a similar way to *Rio 40 Graus*, dos Santos once again employs an episodic narrative structure to showcase the theme of exploitation, the curse of fateful accidents and the powerlessness of marginalised individuals facing irresolvable situations. *Rio Zona Norte* works therefore, as Bentes contends, as a kind of anti-*chanchada* (2003: 131); it gives a more socially rooted version of the 'Black Orpheus'-theme, and ends with the message: 'They want to make you into a despised nobody, but the *favelas* don't forget you'. Thus, the film ends with the still somewhat

romantic notion that music will triumph over death and that the community of the *favela* will succeed over 'them', the *asfalto* and its white, middle-class values of ruthless individualism and market capitalism.⁶

Cinema Novo's aesthetics of hunger

Following dos Santos's anti-*chanchadas*, Brazilian cinema moved towards a more radical direction, not only politically but also aesthetically. In the early 1960s Brazilian filmmakers gradually rejected neorealism's tendency to romanticise the poor as noble victims – a criticism that was also put forward by Luis Buñel (see Chapter 4). It was especially Glauber Rocha who explained the goals, demands and critique of this new generation of Brazilian filmmakers, who came to be known as *Cinema Novo* ('new cinema'). He did so not only through his films – most notably in his *sertão* epic *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (*Black God, White Devil*; 1964) –, but most vigorously with his influential manifesto 'Aesthetic of Hunger', which is sometimes also referred to as 'Aesthetic of Violence'. This manifesto-essay had a massive influence on Brazilian and Third Cinema filmmakers, but it also is, as the title of the essay already suggests, particularly important with regard to the topic of this book. Rocha's manifesto emerged within a global context of (not only art- or cinema-related) revolutionary movements in the 1960s, for the political struggles of the 'Third World' had a profound effect on leftist filmmakers and film movements worldwide, most notably in Latin America. However, as it was first published in 1965, one year after the *coup d'état*, when the Brazilian military overthrew Brazil's democratically elected government, Rocha's manifesto can also be read as a vindication of a largely leftist *Cinema Novo* movement. Having been profoundly inspired by the socialist revolution in Cuba, Rocha and his *Cinema Novo* compatriots essentially drew from Marxist and post-colonial ideas to spur on a new way of filmmaking – one that radically rejected 'the mainstream', particularly with regard to Brazil's colonial past, as well as in regard to representing society's outcasts, Brazil's poor, illiterate and dispossessed. Hence, Rocha's plea for a new cinema that not simply 'depicts' hunger and the violence resulting from it, but *is* simultaneously hungry and violent itself too, can be understood as a plea to aggressively 'decolonise' the nation's dominant fictions of itself. In his manifesto he therefore demands that a 'new Brazilian cinema', a 'cinema novo', ought to depict

characters eating dirt, characters eating roots, characters stealing to eat, characters killing to eat, characters fleeing to eat, dirty ugly and starving characters living in dirty ugly dark houses . . . only a culture of hunger, drenched in its own structures, can take a qualitative leap. And the noblest cultural manifestation of hunger is violence . . . For Cinema

Novo, the precise behaviour of the hungry is violence, and his violence is not primitivism . . . Cinema Novo: more than primitive and revolutionary, it is an aesthetic of violence. (1997: 59-61)

Rocha's plea for a violent cinema with 'dirty, ugly and starving' characters and without Technicolor patches (referencing thereby *Orfeu Negro*), is a harsh criticism of Western (especially Hollywoodian) representations of Latin American cultures as primitive, backward and anti-modern; but it is also a criticism of overly folkloric depictions of the wretched, excluded and starving populations by Brazil's own cultural mainstream. As Stam puts it, the 'third worldist manifestos contrasted the new cinema not only with Hollywood, but also with their own countries' commercial traditions, now viewed as "bourgeois", "alienated", and "colonized"' (2000: 101). Instead of proposing a 'nationalist' cinema, which advocates a (clean, developed and beautiful) Brazil, Rocha favours a 'dirty' aesthetics, which returns the violence of the colonialist gaze aggressively and simultaneously hits the nerve of its own society. Hence, *Cinema Novo's* 'imperfect' images and stories of hunger – as well as of violence, rage or anger as an expression of hunger – are for Rocha not only counter-images to First World fantasies of cultural superiority, but also mirror-images to Latin American societies that are disavowing their own social antagonisms and contradictions.

Cinema Novo's most direct engagement with *favelas* is the collective work of five young film students, the anthology (or omnibus) film *Cinco Vezes Favela* (*Five Times Favelas*; 1962), which Rocha included in his list of important *Cinema Novo* films.⁷ Rocha described *Cinco Vezes Favela* as the 'demagogic' film of the movement, and indeed its aim was to promote 'the politicization and awareness of the popular masses' (Leite 2005: 155). However, the film's overtly obvious demagogic mission – which also perfectly illustrates Rocha's famous motto for political filmmaking, 'an idea in the head and a camera in the hand' – was criticised for a lack of maturity and real-life connection. As Jean-Claude Bernadet puts it: 'each director begins his film with a given vision of society already schematised in terms of problems which derive more from the reading of sociology books than from a direct contact with the reality they would film: the favela' (qtd in Leite 2005: 156). Even though the students might have derived their ideas of *favela* life in the first instance from reading sociology books, the five short films nonetheless explore various important facets of its subject matter: carnival as a distraction from poverty and political emancipation, 'housing problems' and the threat of expulsion, child labour and animal abuse. The main theme of the five films in this way echoes the main theme of *De Certa Manera* (see Chapter 5): the conflictual encounters between the *favela* community – which is threatened by capitalist greed, corruption or exploitative structures – and the world of the *asfalto*. However, as a 'pedagogic lesson' with Marxist overtones, the films suggest that the solidarity

of the people and the sense of community between the *favelados* is the only way out of misery.

New Brazilian Cinema's 're-takes'

One of these five young directors, who was involved in the production of *Cinco Vezes Favela*, was Carlos Diegues. He directed a remake of *Orfeu Negro*, titled *Orfeu*, in 1999, while claiming in a manifesto-like statement that today *favelados* ought to be represented in a positive light to counter the negative stereotypes circulating in Brazil's mainstream media, which depict *favela*'s now predominantly as increasingly dangerous neighbourhoods, marked by excessive police and drug gang-related violence. Diegues's *Orfeu* clearly emphasises this positive view of the *favela* and modernises its image, as Nagib points out. According to her, the film's most innovative aspect is that it 'celebrates the creativity of a community, which, despite its poverty, is capable of dictating musical trends' (2007: 93). The rediscovery of the *favela* as a cinematic 'landscape in crisis' in New Brazilian Cinema, of which Diegues's *Orfeu* is among one of the first examples, corresponds with a general recovery of the Brazilian film industry, which has also been described as *retomada* (Portuguese for 'retake'), hence, as a 'rebirth' of this nation's film industry.

The 'death' of the Brazilian film industry and its following silence is closely related to the sudden closure of the state public enterprise Embrafilme in 1990, which brought the national film production to a complete halt for the next two years. Before that, in the 1970s and 1980s, during the reign of the conservative military regime, Brazilian film went through several post-*Cinema Novo* periods, of which the *Cinema Marginal* (1969–73) is important to mention – an *udigrudi* movement, which more radically focused on socially dysfunctional or outcast characters (the '*marginals*') and utilised the 'aesthetics of garbage' (see Chapter 6) through re-cycling trash genres and topics, such as *chanchadas*, horror-movies, porn or cannibalism, in order to encode subtle messages, subverting thereby the censorship of the military regime. In this phase Embrafilme played a key role, since it financed film productions during that time. However, they also heavily censored films, forcing some *Cinema Novo* filmmakers, among them for example Glauber Rocha, into exile. Nonetheless (and paradoxically perhaps), Embrafilme also financed the projects of former *Cinema Novo* filmmakers as well as politically more ambitious films, for example the already discussed *Pixote* (see Chapter 6), to which a 'sequel' presents another good example for Brazilian cinema's recovery after 1992: the investigative documentary *Quem matou Pixote? (Who Killed Pixote?)* (Joffily 1996), which traces the tragic destiny of the child actor Fernando Ramos da Silva, who played *Pixote* and who was frequently arrested, tortured and in 1987 gunned down by the police.

The examples of the *Orfeu Negro* 're-take' *Orfeu* and the sequel to *Pixote*, *Quem matou Pixote?*, show that many contemporary films of the so-called 'New Brazilian Cinema' era entered into dialogues with the past, especially with *Cinema Novo*, since as 'a central part of Brazilian film history, *Cinema Novo* is an obligatory point of reference' (Johnson 2006: 9). A striking example for this cross-generational dialogue is *5 x Favela, Agora por Nós Mesmos* (*5 x Favela, Now by Ourselves*; 2010), a remake of *Cinco Vezes Favela*, but this time filmed by seven young *favelados*, who were trained in a workshop by professional Brazilian directors, such as Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Fernando Meirelles and Walter Salles. The dialogical quality of recent Brazilian films has been pointed out by a number of scholars, but there have also been quite a few scholars who described the wave of new *favela*-set films and documentaries as part of world cinema's 'return to the Real'. Beatriz Jaguaribe for example argues that 'both recent documentaries and fictional productions on the *favela* have not only catered to large audiences, but also more importantly they have established an interpretive code of realism that allowed them to become focal points of discussion concerning the reality of Brazilian cities' (2007: 101). For her, the 'aesthetics of realism' of the new *favela*-set films is closely related to a 'rising interest in documentary films, biographies and journalistic accounts of first hand experiences in places of social hardship' (2007: 106).

What is most striking about New Brazilian Cinema's 'return to the *favela*' is that most of its directors are operating in both documentary as well as fictional modes of representation, echoing thereby the New Philippine Wave (see Chapter 7). Kátia Lund co-directed both the documentary *Notícias de uma Guerra Particular* (*News from a Personal War*; Lund and Salles 1999) as well as *Cidade de Deus*; José Padilha, director of the acclaimed *favela*-set fiction film *Tropa de Elite* (*Elite Squad*; 2007), previously produced the well-known documentary *Ônibus 174* (*Bus 174*, 2002), which critically reflects the mass media's stigmatisation of Rio's street kids; an internationally acclaimed 're-take' of the *sertão*-theme, *Central do Brasil* (*Central Station*; 1998), is based on a documentary by the same director, Walter Salles's *Socorro Nobre* (*Life Somewhere Else*; 1995); and Fernando Meirelles was asked by a TV station to shoot a documentary about the *Cidade de Deus* (*Golden Gate*, 2001), six months before shooting *Cidade de Deus*, which he used to test future locations and cast members. One can even say that to most of the contemporary *favela*-set fiction films there was a documentary attached as seed or mirror, which one can attribute to two trends in particular: the contemporary filmmakers' dialogue with *Cinema Novo*, as well as to the international revival of documentary film since the digital revolution in the mid-1990s (see also Chapter 7).⁸

Between 1995 and 2004 more than forty feature-length documentaries opened in Brazilian cinemas. Since then numerous documentaries have depicted various aspects of *favela* life, from its musical scene (*Favela Rising*,

Zimbalist 2005; *Favela on Blast*, Pentz and HBL 2008), dysfunctional families and absent fathers (*Meninas/Teen Mothers*; Werneck 2006), to malnutrition (*Garapa*; Padilha 2009) and the everyday life of garbage collectors (*Estamira; Waste Land*). Another of these more recent documentaries, *Babilônia 2000* (Coutinho 2000), tries to convey the hopes, dreams and fears of *favelados* from a *favela* called Babilônia. Filmed on 31 December 1999, the recently-deceased Eduardo Coutinho listens to numerous *favela* inhabitants in this portrait-style documentary. They are framed via static long shots as Coutinho invites us to listen too and in this way directly confronts us with a multiplicity of life stories (rather than with just a fictional story), people (rather than just characters) and voices (rather than a single voice-of-God) from the hills – which is why some commentators described Coutinho’s style of documentary filmmaking as ‘conversational cinema’. Jaguaribe sees in *Babilônia 2000*, as well as in the other *favela* documentaries made by Coutinho – *Santo forte (Strong Saint, 1999)* and *Santa Marta – duas semanas no morro (Santa Marta – Two Weeks on the Hill, 1987)* – formidable examples for an ethically responsible representation of slums, since they resist ‘the spectacularization of the real undertaken by reality shows and sensationalist media coverage’ (2007: 114). This is also due to Coutinho’s (Brechtian) method of revealing the film’s means of production, but also because of his belief in the ‘truth of the encounter’, akin to Rouch’s idea of *cinéma vérité* (see Chapter 5). The *favelados* are allowed to tell their stories or to perform in front of the camera, but also to reflect on their role as performers of mediated *favelas*; as one ‘social actor’ in *Babilônia 2000* comments: ‘Every month, if I’m not wrong, there are, let’s say . . . three to four foreign teams shooting films here’.⁹ Unlike Coutinho’s films, not only do *favela*-related TV and news programmes, but also the majority of recent (nationally or internationally produced) *favela* documentaries depict the *favela* as a spectacle, rather than their inhabitants’s life stories, fears or aspirations in life. More specifically, they focus on the violent spectacles of drug wars – what Rio’s locals call the ‘endless war’ between drug gangs and the police – as do films like *Cidade de Deus*, which have simultaneously gathered huge audience numbers across the world.

Bentes famously coined this tendency in recent Brazilian cinema the ‘cosmetics of hunger’, indicating a shift from *Cinema Novo*’s ‘aesthetic of hunger’ to a de-politicised fetishisation of the *favela* as a consumer product for globalised media markets. The leftist politics of the ‘aesthetic of hunger’, Bentes argues, has been displaced by a consumerist advertisement aesthetics. The violence unleashed by the ‘endless war’ between drug gangs and the police is depicted in these films just as senseless killing has been in recent Hollywood action films. The impact that this kind of screen violence has on the viewer is similar to the kind of impact that real drugs have on the drug user, Bentes implicitly argues: both serve as hallucinatory, sensory stimulants to distract

from society's real problems. Given their emphasis on violence as a sensory stimulant, the causes, effect and conditions of poverty are in turn completely left out of these films. Additionally, *favela* misery is turned into '*favela chic*' – an imagery that celebrates and gamourises the surface appearances of poverty. Thus, for Bentes Brazilian cinema shifts

from the 'aesthetics' to the 'cosmetics of hunger'. . . This is a trend that is not new, to deal with complex and difficult themes, such as the representation of favelas . . . [through] using . . . the language of entertainment films . . . as well as a kind of narrative based on action and what is spectacular . . . The problem is that a modish treatment of images, when confronted with social themes, tends to create a 'package' that neutralises any potential to disturb . . . leaving only the sensorial impact. (2005: 84–5)

According to Bentes or Jaguaribe, films like *Cidade de Deus* lack any commitment to the ethics of representation, unlike the more sensitive films of an Eduardo Coutinho for instance. This is a point that has also been made by Melanie Gilligan, who called the Brazilian media's exploitation of poverty a form of 'slumsplotation'. She suggests that the giant media conglomerate (and Brazil's biggest TV station) *Globo* – which not only co-produced *Cidade de Deus*, but also a TV drama spin-off called *Cidade dos Homens* (*City of Men*, 2002–5)¹⁰ – exploits *favela* culture for commercial purposes. Gilligan therefore proposes that instead of discussing whether films like *Cidade de Deus* are realistic or non-realistic 'representations' of *favela* life, one should approach the 'fascination with mediation in these films' (2006: 30).

CIDADE DE DEUS (2002)

The title of this chapter's main example refers to the actual Rio de Janeiro neighbourhood 'Cidade de Deus' – a name that was coined by the 'city's' locals. The film reconstructs the neighbourhood's history throughout three decades, from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. Located in Rio's western zone, *Cidade de Deus* was initially built between 1962 and 1965 as a so-called *conjunto*, a housing project for the poor, homeless and dispossessed. But from at least the 1980s, *favela* communities in Rio (and elsewhere) have suffered from the bloody turf wars between rival drug gangs and the police. Paulo Lins's semiautobiographical novel *City of God*, on which the film is based, sketches this trajectory: from a social housing community that lives in one-story huts at the outskirts of Rio and which resembles a village to an alienating urban place that is marked by an abundance of violence and that consist of prefabricated multistorey buildings, which is why the narrator calls it 'a neo-slum of concrete' (Lins 2006: 6).¹¹ One of the novel's most

memorable characters, the drug lord Tiny (Li'l Zé in the film), shares a similar view when it comes to labelling his neighbourhood:

Projects my ass! This is a *favela*! That's right, a *favela*, and one hell of a *favela* at that! The only thing that's changed is the shacks, which didn't have electricity or running water, and here it's all houses and apartments . . . If *favelas*'ve got dens a shitload of hoods, blacks and poor bastards, then this is also a *favela* – Tiny's *favela*. (2006: 216)

Mainly because of passages like these, in which Lins displays a mastery of capturing the *favelados*'s idiosyncratic 'street language' in an authentic way, the release of his novel in 1997 has been celebrated as a 'major event' (Schwarz 2001: 104). Similarly, Lúcia Nagib described Lins's novel as a landmark publication, which, together with films like *Orfeu*, not only kick-started Brazilian cinema's *favela* film wave, but which also gave 'expression to an issue that is today central to Brazilian society and politics' (2007: 101). Yet, Meirelles's adaptation has nevertheless provoked controversy regarding the ethics of *favela* representation, even though this has predominantly been among Brazilian rather than international film critics and re/viewers. The most pervasive question that continuously appears in numerous of these critical assessments is whether the 'image' of the *favela*, as advanced by the film, manipulates, falsifies or distorts the true 'reality' of *favela* life.¹² As Jaguaribe has fittingly put it, the film became 'the focal point of a battle of representations concerning the real, the fabrication of society, the viability of cities, and the nature of violence' (2007: 112). In other words, from both an aesthetic as well as an ethical perspective, *Cidade de Deus* has provoked debates regarding the nature of 'realism', in the most broadest sense.

The film's cinematographer César Charlone has claimed that the film actually promotes a 'new' kind of realism: 'I have shot eight other films, and this is the first one in which the main concern was being real, being believable. It goes back to the roots of neorealism, but it's a new realism. We wanted to show this reality as faithfully as we could' (qtd in Oppenheimer 2005: 84). This 'new realism', as Charlone calls it, could best be described by what Eleftheria Thanouli (2009) has defined as a 'hypermediated realism' in contemporary cinema, allowing the filmmakers to make extensive use of digital technologies (for example, digital editing, split-screens, graphic dissolves, post-produced colour correction), but also to simultaneously rely on more traditional realist and documentary practices (for example, a handheld camera-style of shooting on location and with non-professional actors).¹³ Thanouli furthermore contends that *Cidade de Deus* is a prime example for a 'post-classical poetics in world cinema'. She argues that *Cidade de Deus* and likewise films, such as *Oldboy* (Park 2003), *Fight Club* (Fincher 1999), *Amélie* (Jeunet 2001) or *Chungking Express* (Wong 1994),

refigure classical conceptions of cinematic space and time, while responding to changing screen-spectator relations and viewing habits in the digital age. However, Thanouli's claim, that these films deploy a 'hypermediated realism', which 'favors the practice of remediation and the use of intermedia layering' (2009: 176), is of particular interest here. Through a focus on selected key scenes, the following paragraphs will analyse the film's narrative structure, its mode of address, as well as some of its most striking stylistic elements to uncover the film's 'hypermediated realism', as well as its way of representing Rio's *conjunto* turned neo-favela Cidade de Deus in more detail.

Modular narration and 'mode of monstration'

Cidade de Deus has been described by some of its re/viewers as 'shocking' or 'disturbing' because some scenes feature minors on senseless killing-sprees; however, the film was also described as 'beautifully shot' or 'perfectly crafted'. This ambivalent impression is mirrored in the film's overall narrative structure, since it is, on the surface, composed like a classical three-part drama with a beginning, a middle and an end, which nevertheless does not adhere to the principles of classical narrative cinema (a chronological string of causally connected events). In fact, a film like *Cidade de Deus* perfectly illustrates the thesis that cinema of the digital age experiments with new modes of spectatorial address and narration by employing what Manovich has called a 'database narrative'¹⁴ or what Allan Cameron has more systematically outlined as 'modular narratives'. Cameron argues that the general characteristics of modular narratives offer 'a series of disarticulated narrative pieces, often arranged in radically achronological ways via flash-forwards, overt repetition or a destabilization of the relationship between present and past' (2008: 1). He outlines four types of such modular narratives, of which the anachronic (non-chronological) type is the most common one today. For Cameron, the anachronic type of modular narrative destabilises 'the hierarchy of first narratives and second narratives, so that no one temporal thread is able to establish clear dominance' (2008: 6), and that is especially through its frequent employment of flashbacks or (rarer) flash-forwards. As such an anachronic modular narrative *Cidade de Deus* indeed destabilises the hierarchy between primary and secondary narratives: even though the film's *story* recounts a 'history' of a neighbourhood in a chronological fashion (with a beginning, a middle and an end), the film's *plot* organises this story/history through frequently switching between a variety of (small and big) stories, which involve several (minor and major) characters in a non-chronological fashion. In other words, instead of organising the *favela*'s story/history chronologically, the film's anachronic plot includes time loops, jump-forwards and -backwards or even flashbacks within flashbacks. In this way, the film's 'classical' (three-part)

structure is continuously interrupted by the insertion of smaller narrative 'mini-modules'.

Such a narrative mini-module is the film's opening scene, which introduces the film's subjective narration, since it centres on the off-screen narrator and the on-screen character, Rocket. Echoing the narrative strategy of *Moi, un noir* (see Chapter 5), Rocket is thus both narrator and character. In an almost omniscient fashion, he comments off-screen on plot events and provides us with story information we do not see displayed or mentioned in the plot. Simultaneously, Rocket is also a character, although rather a 'participant observer' than an active, goal-oriented protagonist. Recounting the *favela's* key events in its history of crime and gang violence, Rocket's point of view subjectifies the film's diegetic space and imagines the *favela's* 'his-story' according to his vision – and by extension, if one regards Rocket as an *alter ego* of Paulo Lins, according to the author's vision. The three-part historical trajectory of drugs and violence in the Cidade de Deus unfolds as follows: from 1) harmless banditry (in the 1960s), to 2) the emergence of marijuana and later cocaine drug trade (in the 1970s), culminating in 3) brutal turf wars and shoot-outs with police units (in the 1980s). As Nagib pointed out, the three-part structure of the film entails the desire to create a sense of completeness and balance (2007: 110), since it counters the modular fragmentation of the story through an emphasis on a classical, chronological 'history'. She thereby points to the film's emphasis on the word 'story' (in Portuguese *história* means both 'story' and 'history'), because the film is deliberately divided into three main 'stories' (which are introduced with intertitles at the respective parts of the plot): 1) 'The Story of the Tender Trio'; 2) 'The Story of Li'l Ze' and 3) 'The Story of Knockout Ned'. These stories/parts are each presented as well as designed in a different way, and that is through changing cinematographic styles (for example by a digitally manipulated colour palette), corresponding with the respective story content (the gradual acceleration of violent events), transforming the narrative into an almost mythological tale in which the *favela* descends from 1) paradise and 2) purgatory to 3) hell, accentuating the notion of an unstoppable spiral of violence.

Accordingly, the film's major visual motifs are spirals and loops. These motifs are already introduced in the opening scene, since the first flashback is instigated by Rocket's comment that 'it has always been like that', implying an eternal return of the same. Repeated swish pans, moving from left to right on Rocket's body, gradually transit into a swift camera movement that circulates the narrator's/main character's body, before a graphic dissolve takes us from the 1980s back to the year 1968, in which the circular camera movement slowly comes to a halt. Such motifs of circularity/eternal returns are mirrored in the film's story content (rather than plot structure), since the *favela* gradually descends into a fatal spiral of violence, in which one violent event (e.g. a

massacre or a rape) leads to the next one (e.g. policemen shooting the wrong perpetrator), and so on. The narrative functions in this sense also like a slipstream, pulling the spectator into a spiral of accelerating violent events, which increasingly make no sense and are therefore gradually disassociated from a logical cause-and-effect chain structure (in which a murder would instigate a revenge or a police investigation); instead, violence increasingly becomes a disjointed event/*Erlebnis* in itself, rather than an 'effect' that is connected to a clearly identifiable cause.

Rocket could also be regarded as an on-screen representative of the directors, cameramen and editors of the film; as Nagib has emphasised, Rocket 'organizes, with his voice-over, the facts that make up the narrative, dictating at whim the freeze-frames, flashbacks and fast forwards, zooms, and long shots, thus exposing the mechanics of digital editing' (2007:113). The role of Rocket as an on-screen double of author, director and particularly of the film's editor is exposed when, after the opening sequence and at the beginning of the first part, Rocket is asked diegetically to identify himself; the frame freezes and he apologises extradiegetically with the words: 'I am sorry, I forgot to introduce myself'. Then the frame unfreezes and he answers, 'I am Rocket' – in other words, Rocket directly addresses his audience as physically present. Thanouli has therefore suggested that the film's mode of narration is, in fact, *presentational*, since the narrator explicitly manipulates the spatiotemporal coordinates of the film without concealing it to his audience: 'From the first few minutes, it becomes evident that this character is in full charge of narrating, openly addressing the audience and manipulating the images at will' (2009: 164). Hence, Nagib and Thanouli suggest that not only the very act of enunciation/narration, but also the manipulation of images via digital editing is openly exposed to the audience through the narrator/manipulator Rocket. He could even be regarded as a (at times very cool and laid-back) lecturer, since he not only narrates, but also explains, comments and summarises, which is similar to what André Gaudreault has called the 'paradigm of monstration' – a distinct feature of the early cinema of attractions.¹⁵

A return to the exhibitionist features and practices of early cinema in contemporary popular cinema has been observed by a number of film scholars, and indeed, *Cidade de Deus* has a lot in common with the way stories, images and the 'marvels' of new technologies were exposed in early cinema. Just as how Rocket 'shows off' the new potentials of digital filmmaking, the 'attractions' displayed by the 'monstrators' of early cinema have also been of a technological nature; they were 'showing off' the marvels of moving images, close-ups, dissolves, superimpositions, slow motion, reverse motion, multiple exposures, and so on. As Gunning puts it, 'the early showmen exhibitors exerted a great deal of control over the shows they presented, actually re-editing the films' (1990: 58) – a description which could also be applied to the showman/exhibitor Rocket

and his monstration of (the) *Cidade de Deus*. Most importantly, however, the cinema of attractions is, to repeat Bolter and Grusin, ‘immediate and hypermediated at the same time. The members of the audience oscillated between a sense of immediacy and an awareness of that sense’ (2000: 155). To stay with this line of argument, one can say that *Cidade de Deus*’ mode of address is both *representational* and *presentational*: even though the film narrates a fictional story of a diegetic world in which spectators are asked to immerse themselves cognitively and emotionally through the eyes of the main protagonist, the very same figure also ‘monstrates’ us this world in a hypermediated fashion in his role as the film’s narrator, addressing thereby the spectator’s knowledge that what he or she sees is a film that uses devices such as cameras, flashbacks or digital editing. In other words, *Cidade de Deus* lets the viewer oscillate ‘between a sense of immediacy and an awareness of that sense’.

Flashes (and knives) from the slums

Emphasising the awareness of the act of looking (at *favela* images) is what *Cidade de Deus* achieves through its mode of monstration, that is through exposing its very technological or cinematic devices. Right from the beginning, the film introduces this notion and simultaneously its main theme (the representation of violence). The four-minute long opening sequence holds, in fact, a key to interpreting these central thematic and stylistic features. A chicken hunt (filmed with a shaky, handheld 16 mm camera) is the film’s inaugurating action sequence, but also its central enigma, its ‘meta-text’, to use the term Elsaesser and Buckland have proposed with regard to film openings.¹⁶ Accompanied by samba music, fast-edited and with images that remind one of 1990s MTV-style music videos that are shot in ‘Third World’ countries, the very first seconds of the film introduce the spectator to an audiovisual *tour de force*.¹⁷ While we see the film’s credits on a black screen, very short takes feature extreme close-ups of a butcher’s knife, sharpened for slaughtering the chicken (that later escapes), and of drums, a guitar, samba-dancing girls in flip-flops, and the grinning faces of the teenage drug dealers of the *Cidade de Deus*, among them their *chefão* Li’l Zé, preparing the ingredients for the chicken menu, carrots and caipirinha. These close-ups of instruments, faces, feet, food and knife are cross-cut in a montage of high velocity, matching the frantic rhythm of the samba music.

However, apart from these first ‘flashes from the slums’, the opening sequence also features a real photographic flashlight, since it shows an image of Rocket ‘shooting’ a picture of the camera/screen with a flashlight (Fig. 8.1). Introducing, in this way, the film’s mode of monstration, the camera’s flashlight both addresses and dazzles the audience’s scopophilic pleasure of ‘looking at’ images from the *Cidade de Deus*, as Rocket also shoots a picture of



Figure 8.1 'Flashes from the Slums': Rocket 'shoots' a picture during the fast-edited opening sequence of *Cidade de Deus*.

the letters 'Cidade de Deus', which are superimposed onto his body at a rapid pace. This overture to the following chicken hunt – the meal that escapes the hoodlums – metaphorically comments on the film's central theme: its *representation of violence* is inverted here into a self-reflexive gesture that also addresses the *violence of representation*. Through visual puns that suggest analogies between a camera-shot and a gun-shot, or between knife cuts and montage cuts, the film's central theme of violence is from the beginning put into connection with *how* violence is represented in cinema (with a camera, editing and sounds), while also juxtaposed with stereotypical images of the samba-*favela*-cinema association. Hence, this dense meta-textual opening (which can be seen as a cluster for the film's overall semantics and syntax) suggests that the film self-consciously reflects the nexus between audiovisual representation, spectatorship and (violent) media stigmatisation of *favelados*

It is this, the opening sequence's staccato-like 'cuts', its fast-paced montage of disjointed images, that initially shocks or 'pierces' the spectator – to resort to Walter Benjamin's notion of modernity's 'shock' aesthetics and Roland Barthes' idea of the *punctum*. Nagib has described how the linguistic realism of Lins's novel (e.g. its characters' frenetic staccato of vernacular curses) translates into *Cidade de Deus*'s 'cinematic language', emphasising thereby the nexus between the film's editing and its violence theme.¹⁸ Above that, for her the film adopts the novel's strategies of condensation via such dense semantic clusters which sequences like the opening contain. This kind of semantic/syntactic condensation is, for instance, continued after the chicken hunt ends: Rocket is, like the chicken, caught up in a Western-like duel between two

'gangs' (one consisting of policemen, the other of teenage drug dealers), before the initial flashback relocates the action from the early 1980s back to the late 1960s; at the same time, Rocket narrates from off-screen that 'a picture might have changed my life, but in the City of God, if you run you're dead, if you stay, you're dead again', thereby establishing the film's leitmotif of entrapment. This leitmotif can be interpreted as a comment on the inescapability of death and the feeling of imprisonment felt by many *favelados* facing turf wars and war-like sieges in the *favela*. The Western-like duel situation between two (hyper-masculine) gangs – in which Rocket and the chicken are entrapped – is therefore not only a key scene in the film's plot, but a most striking metaphor for how *favela* inhabitants perceive the 'endless war', that is, as a trap.

Sonia Christina Lino has interpreted the analogy between the chicken and the film's narrator from a gender perspective. In her 'Birds That Cannot Fly: Childhood and Youth in *City of God*' she contends that the film draws a connection between the chicken (that cannot fly) and the film's narrator (who cannot escape the *favela*). The chicken (*galinha*) features prominently in Brazilian proverbs, derogatory expressions and vernacular language. The most common vernacular meaning associated with *galinha* – and one might add, not only in Latin American cultures – is that of an 'apathetic, cowardly, and weak person' (Lino 2006: 135); in short, *galinha* stands for weak masculinity. Indeed, Rocket portrays himself repeatedly as 'cowardly and weak', a frightened chicken in the midst of a social milieu with values of 'hypermasculinity' – a phrase used by Paulo Lins's former research supervisor, the anthropologist Alba Zaluar, who defined it as a 'warrior ethos' of virility among adolescents, who, even if not involved in a drug gang, admire and identify with the merciless drug lords (Zaluar 2010: 19–21). Rocket shows/presents situations in which he is mocked for being useless in a football game, in which he is dropped by a girl since rivalled and outdone by Li'l Zés right-hand man, Benny, or where he is scared to death when he holds a gun in his hand, trying to imitate hoodlums like Li'l Zé, as he tries (unsuccessfully) to hold up a grocery shop. Thus he fails in all possible role models for masculine identity that a hypermasculine environment (and football culture) can offer to a young boy, which leaves him no other option than to become the *favela*'s participant observer (just like Paulo Lins in his real role as anthropological research assistant to Alba Zaluar). Yet, through the motif of the chicken *Cidade de Deus* also refers to a central motif of *Los Olvidados* (see Chapter 4). Both films focus on street kids turning to a life of crime, but they also include this motif, which features in *Los Olvidados* not only in Pedro's nightmarish dream; it continuously re-appears, almost like a curse, throughout *Los Olvidados*, particularly in scenes where brutal violence and murder occurs. Hence, 'the birds that cannot fly' have to fear for their lives in *Los Olvidados* too, as they are permanently threatened by the local hoodlums who want to eat them for dinner.

Cinematic City of God

The centrality of the chicken motif could be also interpreted as a reference to the centrality of rural life for the *favela* community. The initial flashback explicitly points to the notion that the spectator is now a witness to Rocket's childhood memories of a genuinely rural, less urban world in the late 1960s. The film's twenty-eight minute long first part, entitled 'The Story of the Tender Trio', introduces the viewer to just such a small, village-like neighbourhood with unfinished one-storey dwellings, unpaved roads and immigrants arriving daily from other (destroyed) *favelas* and the *sertão* on trucks (Fig. 8.2). This tone of nostalgia results from the fact that we witness a childhood memory which corresponds to the film's (digitally manipulated) atmospheric cinematography which emulates this tone: a warm, yellow, almost golden glow of clay on dusty streets is the dominant range of colour in this part, depicting the sun-drenched 'golden age' of the *conjunto* Cidade de Deus as a genuine *sertão* community on the outskirts of a big city; a rural village, rather than an urban community. Furthermore, the first part of the film is predominantly shot with a static camera which frames its characters via such devices as goalposts of a football pitch or the bars of a truck, in order to emphasise the notion of the (classically static, fixed) frame (Fig. 8.2). In addition, it also features frequent aerial wide shots of the streets and shacks of the *conjunto* (Fig. 8.3), as well as slow-moving dolly and tripod shots, pans and long takes. This 'classical' mise-en-scène, camera and editing work accentuates the notion that we are witnessing a mediated memory, a genuinely 'cinematographic' imagination of a bygone era from a past (cinematic) age. César Charlone accordingly explains the stylistic features of the film's first part thus:

We used wide-open (Zeiss Superspeed) lenses . . . because in this section of the film the city itself is the main character and we wanted to show the geography. It's the only time you really see wide shots of the favela. We favoured classical compositions and almost always set the camera on a tripod or dolly . . . Nothing in this section was handheld. (qtd in Oppenheimer 2005: 27)

The notion of classicism also corresponds with the first part's story content, as it features rather classical dramatic scenes that mainly consist of rather long dialogues, featuring (unlike in the following parts of the film), traditional Oedipal conflicts between fathers and sons, or between authority figures (the police) and the 'outlaws' (rather than drug dealers) of the 'Tender Trio'. Finally, a 'classical' star-crossed love relationship, a doomed romance between an outlaw called Goose (who is Rocket's older brother) and a neighbourhood girl concludes the part tragically, as Goose fails to escape the police and gets shot, thus repeating the film's leitmotif of entrapment.



Figures 8.2 and 8.3 Cinematic *City of God*: classical low-angle framing of *cangaceiros* and a wide angle crane shot of the village-like *Cidade de Deus*.

The stylistic and narrative elements in the first part of the film contribute to the *conjunto*'s depiction as a rural, pre-modern community, in which adolescence meant rebelling against the establishment's patriarchal order and young couples dreamt of escaping in search of a better life. The nostalgic tone and atmosphere refers to the already mentioned theme of a childhood's 'paradise

lost', but also to what Fredric Jameson identified as postmodern 'nostalgia films'.¹⁹ On the surface it seems that in the film's first part many characteristics apply to the notion of the 'nostalgia film'. One can for instance argue that the film's first part not only alludes to *Cidade de Deus*' 'golden age', but also to that of Brazilian cinema, merging them both into a 'cinematic city of god'. *Cinema Novo*'s 1960s *sertão* films are present in the form of the figure of the *cangaceiro* (a peasant and 'social bandit' from the *sertão*), as glorified in Glauber Rocha's above mentioned *Cinema Novo* classic *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol*. With the reference to *cangaceiro* figures, the film introduces the theme of social banditry, since the members of the 'Tender Trio' are indeed portrayed as 'larger-than-life', Robin Hood-like bandits: they steal gas canisters from trucks and distribute their stolen goods to the *conjunto*'s newly arrived immigrants. To enhance this impression, cinematographer César Charlone also very often framed the Trio from low angle camera positions (Fig. 8.2).²⁰ As in *Cinema Novo*'s idolisation of the *cangaceiros* as social bandits whose violence had some legitimacy as an answer to social injustice, the Tender Trio's violent behaviour is more of an answer to their living conditions in an impoverished immigrant community than a form of adolescent role-playing. In this sense the three gang members are portrayed as a mix of the immortal and legendary figure of the *cangaceiro* from the *sertões* and the all too mortal figure of the unemployed urban *malandro*, who features prominently in some samba-favela films. Thus, the film's first part alludes to the classical (*Cinema Novo*) representation of both *sertão* and *favela*, most obviously through its main figures, who are, equally, a blend of the rural and the urban.

In this sense, Rocket's flashback memories, and with it the first part's narrative and stylistic features can be regarded as constructs of both nostalgic memories and cinematic imagery, which actually consists of a mosaic of allusions. However, the first part's mode of nostalgia is intentional, not so much because of the film's overall 'postmodern style', but rather because of the narrator's present state. To explain this point further, Ismail Xavier has argued in another context that contemporary Brazilian cinema is full of characters whose discomfort stems from the fact that they are stuck in the past, precisely because they are trapped in the present in a struggle for survival which, increasingly, becomes fragmented, incomprehensible and beyond their control (2003: 49-50). This is an adequate description of Rocket's speaking position too, in-between an incomprehensible turf war that gradually spins out of control. In other words, because the 1980s *favela* is in out of balance and the narrator is trapped in a situation he wants to escape, the 1960s *conjunto* is imagined as an Eden in balance. The *Cidade de Deus* becomes thus an 'imagined community', and more precisely, a 'cinematic city of god'. Yet, the following parts of the film will show how the destructive forces of (urban, capitalist) modernity will shatter the way the *favela* community is imagined.

A windowed view on drug trafficking

Apart from the 'Tender Trio', the first part introduces several other characters, among them younger boys who idolise the Trio, especially Li'l Dice (who later re-names himself into Zé) and Benny – the two main protagonists of the film's second part. A key incident and first dramatic turning point, which foreshadows the second part (and the community's descent into purgatory, so to speak), is instigated by Li'l Dice, when he proposes to the Trio a plan to hold up a motel/brothel, which turns into a bloody massacre. The perpetrator of this incident is revealed later (in the second part) via a narrative loop backwards in time, when Rocket introduces 'The Story of Li'l Zé' as a flashback within the overall flashback: Li'l Dice, who has been demoted by the 'Tender Trio' to a mere look-out, massacres the couples, prostitutes and their customers in a senseless killing spree in order to be taken more seriously by the older boys. This flashback to the motel/brothel incident is inserted in the plot just before another crucial turning point, which elevates the now adolescent Li'l Dice and his companion Benny from petty thieves to the *favela's* major drug lords, entitled 'The Story of the Apartment'.

As a typical device for a 'modular narrative', this story within a story (or flashback within a flashback) consists of several shots or camera set up scenes, but merely of one static and can be read in fact as another meta-text sequence, suggesting, not unlike the condensed semantics and syntax of the opening, a reading for the whole film. The metacommentary by Rocket, that 'the place was ill-fated', summarises the essence of this two-and-a-half-minute long 'story' of a drug joint, which itself condenses a period which lasts several years in which new drug dealers are constantly replaced by force or handover, which eventually leads to Li'l Zé's takeover. Stylistically, the scene consists of slow, computer-generated dissolves, which continuously layer one static shot upon the next and so lets the depiction of the apartment's history appear to be a kind of ghost show (Fig. 8.4). We watch, in chronological fashion, the ghostly appearances and disappearances of new apartment dwellers, drug bosses, managers and delivery boys as through a window (on the world of a drug joint). Accompanied by Rocket's cool voice-over narration and an even cooler Bossa Nova-style lounge music, the sequence allows the viewer to relax for a moment and distance him- or herself from the 'spiral of violence' that he or she was sucked into before. The digitally edited graphic dissolves illustrate in this way Manovich's thesis that digital imagery is more graphic than photographic; that cinematic imagery has become less indexical and more painterly through digitalisation. In this sense, the apartment sequence can be interpreted as a mirror within, as a self-relexive (or *mise-en-abyme*) device which invites the viewer to draw an analogy to the overall style of *Cidade de Deus*: the film's new (or hypermediated) kind of realism which blends photographic images with



Figure 8.4 Painting in time: dissolves layer shots upon shots to condense time and the drug trade's transformation from the traditional exchange of goods to a capitalist venture.

digital ones and in which a 'window on the world' (of a drug joint) transforms through numerous dissolves into a 'windowed world' (of a *favela's* history), a (post-) photographic painting in time.

The enclosed space of the apartment also corresponds with the representation of the *favela* as an increasingly claustrophobic place, a trap. Yet, there is another self-reflexive dimension to the apartment sequence since it also condenses how the film represents the *favela's* transition from the 1960s to the 1980s in regard to its informal economy. As we see the slow dissolves, the sequence narrates the transition of the *favela's* drug trade from traditional to modern: at the beginning there is a traditional exchange of goods for services or gifts, when a woman called Dona Zelia (the original occupant of the apartment) distributes drugs to boys in exchange for 'special services'. Gradually the apartment develops into a small-scale enterprise for selling marijuana in the neighbourhood, as Big Boy and Carrot 'employ' neighbourhood kids as drug dealers to distribute their commodity; at the end we witness Li'l Dice's (now named Li'l Zé) takeover and his establishment of a larger-scale business for cocaine trafficking beyond the borders of the Cidade de Deus, which speeds up the apartment's turnover of capital through quasi-Fordist principles of production and distribution.²¹ The apartment sequence and the following explanation of the informal, yet thoroughly organised capitalist system of drug dealing by Rocket – its territorial labour division and serial production – condenses how the film represents the *favela's* evolution itself, that is, from semi-rural community to urban 'neo-*favela*'. The film's following sequences illustrate, in fact, how drug trafficking becomes *the* major driving force in the neo-*favela*: it allows the *favelados* to become economically independent, but

also more 'integrated' in the *asfalto* parts of the city, that is, through the city's drug-consuming middle-class teenagers and students (and these *favela-asfalto* encounters are therefore not coincidentally the major theme of the film's second part).

The neo-favela out of control

During the forty-five minute long second part, an increasing number of scenes are shot with a handheld camera, but the filmmakers also still follow the rules of classical cinematography and continuity editing, indicating a transitory phase. Additionally, the colour palette turns from yellow and gold to colourful blue and green. During the 1970s 'psychedelic phase', where most of the characters (except Li'l Zé) seem to be hooked on either marijuana or cocaine, the *favela* approaches the *asfalto*; we see Rocket hanging out with students on the Copacabana beach, and Benny, Li'l Zé's right-hand man, befriending a group of students from Rio's *asfalto*. The soundtrack in this part switches from samba to 1970s black American funk; the kids now listen to James Brown and Carl Douglas, indicating that the *favela* is now part of a globalising popular culture, but also suggesting a new racial consciousness of the predominantly black *favelados*. All this is due to the new riches the drug trade brings to at least some of the *favelados*, and so the film sketches a loosening of the *favela*'s spatial, social and cultural borders. Nevertheless, some of the characters, particularly Benny and Rocket, are subsequently 're-territorialised' through their *favela* stigma. They both attempt but cannot escape the *favela* to become part of the city's middle-class and/or job market. Thus, the film suggests that the forces of modernisation/globalisation seem to connect slum-dwellers only via culture (music) or informal economies (the drug trade) to the rest of the (formal) city and world. Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge-Laustsen describe this poignantly in their analysis of *Cidade de Deus* as follows: 'Those who attempt to escape fail . . . Those who traverse the inside-outside divide through strategies of hybridisation are denied existence . . . There is no outside if one is not a Michael Jordan or an Eddie Murphy' (2007: 58).

Nagib, on the other hand, suggests that the film interprets the *favela*'s moment of modernisation, and consequently its transition from *favela* to neo-*favela*, by the 'real and symbolic rupture' of guns (2007: 111). Modernity (or reality) thus comes to the *favela* like a shock, abruptly like a bullet, and violently ruptures (or pierces) its drug-induced 'psychedelic age' of supposedly borderless (or global) connections. The gun-shot at the end of a scene titled 'Benny's Farewell' is, in this sense, not merely a dramatic turning point (since it instigates the film's last part), but also a symbolic rupture which introduces the *favela*'s definite 'farewell' from paradise and its relentless descent into hell, and which results in a brutal turf war between Li'l Zé's and Carrot's drug

gangs. Accompanied by disco hits like 'Kung Fu Fighting', the party escalates and ends in tragedy: Benny gets shot under the intense flashing of the disco's strobe lights. The fragmentation of images caused by the strobe light, the so-called 'stroboscopic effect' in which missing images have to be filled out by the spectator's imagination, also announces the style of the film's last part, in which both cinematography and editing appear to be more fragmented and do not provide any coherent continuity or spatial overviews of the *favela* any longer.²² One can say that the flashes of the stroboscope announce the film's / the *favela*'s loss of (visual and societal) control: as the *favela* descends into crime and violence it also becomes increasingly difficult, so the film suggests, to make sense of these events in terms of a cohesive narrative.

Hence, the *favela* becomes now a modern, 'urban' space and the way in which it is represented corresponds to the way Benjamin described the *Erlebnis*-situation of modern city life, that is, in terms of fragmentary perception and disjointed shocks. Moreover, the *favela* becomes a place with claustrophobic dimensions, where the streets take on the inscrutable qualities of a labyrinth. The colours get darker, predominantly black and grey, as the number of sparsely-lit interior and night-time shots increase. The frequent use of close-ups (instead of wide shots) and documentary-like hand-held camera work (instead of tripod and dolly) contribute to enhancing the fragmentary character of scenes where tension, confusion and violence predominate. The loss of control over the visual field corresponds with the loss of societal control, with the *favela*'s regression 'to the state of nature. Favela life becomes a life outside the city, civilisation and normality, a life characterised by the lack of law, irrational violence, perversion and despotism' (Diken and Bagge-Laustsen 2007: 60).

Cinematic city of violence

While violence is not an exception any more, but the rule in the film's final part – pointing to the notion that the *favela* is now entering a 'state of exception' – the film's plot increasingly narrows on the *favela*'s turf war and on Rocket and his role as the *favela*'s photographer. The spectators learn that Rocket wants to become a photographer quite early on in the plot – that is, when his brother Goose gets shot in the final scene of the first part. From here on, when we see a police photographer taking a picture of Goose's dead body, the camera acquires a central diegetic and motivic role. This is nowhere more evident than towards the film's end, when the narrative takes a loop backwards (or a jump forwards) to the opening sequence that is called 'The Beginning of the End', which simultaneously closes the film's overall circle. Here, once again, we see Rocket standing – like the chicken – in the crossfire of a Western-like duel between Li'l Zé's gang and policemen. The circular camera movement from



Figure 8.5 Street kids with guns and cameras in the climax of *Cidade de Deus*.

the opening sequence is now repeated, but this time with an extreme close-up of the photo camera Rocket holds in his hands, a detail which is missing in the opening sequence. While the film's cameraman (César Charlone) zooms onto Rocket's 'handheld camera' with his own handheld camera, we see an alternating in-and-out-of-focus play, in which either the drug gang's or policemen's guns and/or Rocket's camera are in or out of focus in the frame's fore- or background (Fig. 8.5). After the policemen flee because they feel overpowered by the drug gang's greater firepower, Li'l Zé asks Rocket to 'shoot' a photo of his victorious gang. Yet, at the very moment Rocket snaps the photo, we hear a gun-shot from off-screen, followed by a reaction-shot which shows us how one of the gang's members gets wounded. In other words, the shot-reaction-shot from camera to wounded body, as well as the sound/image synchronisation of camera trigger and gun-shot, explicitly draws on the notion that the camera is (or can be) a deadly weapon.

This equation between guns and cameras suggests that the film wants us to consider the close links between violence and visual representation (or between cinema and the 'violence of representation'). However, the film's third part also establishes the more optimistic notion that visual representation is, or can be, a 'weapon' to improve society, that is, in this case, to free the *favelados* from the tyranny of the 'endless war', since it is one of Rocket's photographs, published in a local newspaper, that prompts the police to hunt down Li'l Zé and his gang. Such media visibility is deadly for the *favela's* despot: he becomes vulnerable not only to the police but also to a gang of even younger street kids, the so-called 'Runts', who shoot him down in a 'Soviet attack' (and in this way continue the spiral of violence into the next generation). Hence,

in *Cidade de Deus* the camera/picture acquires a diegetic agency as a ‘weapon’ that leads to either freedom or death, since a picture has changed Rocket’s (and the community’s) life for the better, while it ends Li’l Zé’s. This belief in the camera as a weapon for (social) change resonates also with the utopian claims of the *Cinema Novo* movement. For Rocha the ‘aesthetic of hunger’ was indeed essentially an ‘aesthetic of violence’, since violence was for him a force that could liberate the powerless *marginals* not only from oppressive social structures, but also from the ‘violence of representation’ itself, from colonial gazes and images ‘othering’ them as ‘dispised nobodys’, to use the phrase spoken by Grande Otelo in *Rio Zona Norte*. However, one can equally argue that contrary to Rocha’s ideas for a liberated cinema, *Cidade de Deus*’s ‘aesthetic of violence’ is not liberating at all; that instead it is rather like Hollywoodian ‘effect cinema’ which aims to shock its spectators for no other reason than to create sensory thrills.

Seen from this point of view, *Cidade de Deus* takes part in a more general tendency of popular cinema, particularly in popular male action, horror, crime or gangster film genres. Like many contemporary films of these genres, *Cidade de Deus* probes the ethical limits of representing violence on screen, and that is through its violent content – in the form of graphic displays of wounded and dead bodies, massacres committed by minors and even the killing of children by children²³ – as well as through its style, the film’s audiovisual design. But one could also argue with Asbjørn Grønstad that the

act of violence in the cinema is an event that, like Barthes’s *punctum*, pierces the viewer. In the sense that violence often punctures, or punctuates, the image . . . it also seems to pierce the process of narration itself, marking it off as a special instance of signification . . . More than perhaps any other textual event, violence makes us aware of our own act of watching. (2008: 13)

Looked at from this rather narratological point of view, violence might also function like Barthes’ *punctum* in *Cidade de Deus*, since violence, as Grønstad rightly argues, pierces the process of narration and ‘makes us aware of our own act of watching’ – and this is what the camera-gun analogy as a reflexive device *also* points to.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

As this chapter has shown, *favelas* have been (alongside the *sertão*) one of the most recurring ‘symbolic landscapes’ (Bentes) of Brazilian cinema which has produced films like *Rio Zona Norte*, *Cinco Vezes Favela*, *Pixote* or *Tropa*

de Elite, that are some of world cinema's most memorable 'local expressions' of 'global currents' like neorealism or Third Cinema. Key directors such as Nelson Pereira dos Santos or Glauber Rocha have not only been responsible for producing these memorable films, but they have also stimulated vital ideas and ways of thinking about how filmmakers ought to address the lives of 'dirty ugly and starving characters' (Rocha). Contemporary examples like *Cidade de Deus* enter into a dialogue with these earlier films and ideas, particularly with the radical ideas of the *Cinema Novo* movement and, as in this case, with Rocha's notion of an 'aesthetic of hunger'. *Cidade de Deus* does not necessarily turn the 'aesthetic of hunger' into a 'cosmetics of hunger' (Bentes), but it is still a politically and ethically rather ambivalent film, which resonates with its (equally ambivalent) style, best described as a hypermediated form of realism (Thanouli). Although the film bares, in an almost Brechtian sense, several of its stylistic and narratological devices (the diegetic agency of cameras, how digital editing is exposed, the mode of monstration and a 'windowed world'), it does not distance its spectators from the scopophilic pleasures of watching (digitally enhanced) *favela* images, which confirm the most stereotypical perceptions of the *favela* as a violent hell on earth. However, one can say that during its second and third parts, the film does accelerate to 'pierce' its spectators. By unleashing an 'assault' on their senses via rapidly edited (or stroboscopic) 'flashes from the slums', audiovisual gun-shots and graphic scenes of massacred bodies, the film creates bodily 'shocks' for the spectator – to use Benjamin's expression for the *Erlebnis*-situation in both modern city life and cinema. Taking this and its (self-) reflections on cinema and violence into account, *Cidade de Deus* does not simply aim at recounting a history from traditional *conjunto* to modern neoslum, or from paradise to hell. Instead, it rather aims to create an immersive experience of a 'cinematic city of god' that gradually disintegrates to become a hypermediated *Erlebnis* of a 'cinematic city of violence' – and so becomes a modified version of both cinematic realism and Rocha's plea for an 'aesthetic of violence' in the digital age.

NOTES

1. Cf. Perlman 2010: 52.
2. Mauro himself claimed that Brazil was the ideal country for the documentary, 'because the raw material is everywhere' (qtd in Avellar 2003: 246).
3. The name refers to Shakespeare's *Othello*, since Prata was a more or less isolated black figure within a predominantly white film industry.
4. In the 1950s, hence, around the time the romanticised image of the *favela* flourished in Brazilian popular culture and in films like *Orfeu Negro*, Rio de Janeiro had a tremendous population growth rate of forty-two per cent (cf. Perlman 2010:51). As for race, Perlman

- contends that ‘a much higher percent of Rio’s total black population live in *favelas* than do whites’ (2010: 170).
5. The term *cidade partida* gained currency in public discourses and has since been widely regarded as an accurate description of Rio de Janeiro. According to that, Rio could be mapped from a perspective-of-god viewpoint as a fractured city with both visible and invisible demarcations that separate the city into *favelas* and *asfalto*, rich and poor areas, most literally through walls, gates, security guards or surveillance cameras.
 6. Bentes therefore situates both of dos Santos’s films at the crossroads between the romantic phase and a new realism, because *Rio 40 Graus*, as well as *Rio Zona Norte*, are both ‘lyrical films, but they are also full of realism’ (2005: 90).
 7. The five short films are the following: (1) Marcos Farias’s *Um Favelado*, (2) Miguel Borges’s *Zé da Cachorra*, (3) Joaquim Pedro de Andrade’s *Cuoro de Gato*, (4) Carlos Diegues’s *Escola de Samba, Alegria de Viver* and (5) Leon Hirszman’s *Pedreira de São Diogo*.
 8. As Amir Labaki, founder of Rio’s ‘It’s All True’ documentary festival, points out, ‘the revival of Brazilian film production . . . is marked by a new trend towards non-fiction. Brazil already boasts a rigorous tradition of documentary film-making . . . It is interesting that this dialogue [with the past] also fertilised Brazilian film production in the period marked by a production “revival”, which started in 1995’ (2003: 97–8).
 9. For an excellent analysis of recent Brazilian *favela* films with regard to aspects of social invisibility, performativity and the media, see Fischer-Homberger 2012.
 10. In 1998 *Globo* created a subdivision dedicated to the co-production of feature films (*Globo Filmes*), which made it possible for Brazilian films to rival Hollywood’s dominance in the domestic market, especially through *Globo*’s immense marketing and distribution capabilities in Brazil.
 11. The novel’s author, Paulo Lins, grew up in Cidade de Deus, but he was also a research assistant to the prominent Brazilian anthropologist Alba Zaluar. The novel was originally published in Portuguese in 1997 with the title *Cidade de Deus*, but to avoid confusion I will use the English title for the novel and the Portuguese one for the film.
 12. Cf. Melo 2004 and Bill 2005.
 13. *Cidade de Deus* was shot on both 16 and 35 mm, but the film material was scanned and digitalised in post-production with the so-called ‘digital intermediate’ process, which made it possible to manipulate the film’s colours, image resolution, editing and sound on the computer. In this sense the film is a good example of what Manovich would call a ‘post-photographic live-action film’. On the other hand, the film’s production context is also fairly ‘traditional’, in the sense that the filmmakers cast 350 non-professional actors from Rio’s *favelas* who were trained in workshops before shooting, because the directors were looking for an authentic cast. As for location shooting, even though the film was not shot in the actual Cidade de Deus, it is mostly shot ‘on location’ in a neighbouring *favela*. However, the first part of the film, which is set in the 1960s, is largely shot on a film set, a designed recreation of the 1960s *conjunto* Cidade de Deus.
 14. Manovich describes ‘database narratives’ as films that depart from chronological narrative structures and consist instead of segments (for example scenes, modules, parts) that are assembled (as if from a database) into non-chronological plot structures (2001: 213–43).
 15. André Gaudreault has described early cinema’s ‘paradigm of monstration’ as follows: ‘Once the person filming assumed the right to intervene in the profilmic and create complicity among the subjects being filmed . . . we enter headfirst into the paradigm of monstration . . . Similarly, when the person filming intervenes in the filmic [or] when the cinematographer, while shooting, suspends filming by using the stop-camera technique – we also find ourselves in the realm of monstration’ (2011: 58).

16. Elsaesser and Buckland have emphasised that the opening of films 'take on a privileged role, being in a sense that part which sets up the terms of the system . . . It is a kind of meta-text in the sense that by introducing us to the rules of the game, it shows us how a film wants to be read and how it needs to be understood' (2002: 46–7).
17. While Meirelles worked as a director of advertisement spots, his co-director Kátia Lund participated in the production of Spike Lee's Michael Jackson video *They Don't Care About Us* (1996), shot in the *favela* Santa Marta, which could be interpreted as a paratext to this upbeat opening sequence.
18. Nagib puts it as follows: 'The violence is contained in the form of the film, especially in the editing . . . The frenetic rhythm of the novel is translated into the quick-fire cuts of digital editing, in the style of an advertisement or music video . . . Paulo Lins's great achievement was precisely to find a language with which to portray the encounter between the most violent modernity and the narrative power of the myth. As a consequence of the bullets and the brusque cuts, the tale is not fragmented but is rather shrunk and condensed' (2007: 109).
19. According to Jameson, 'nostalgia films' represent the past in depthless, superficial, and glossy images that recycle history through citation and pastiche, devoid of any critical or in-depth examination of history (e.g. class struggles, oppression of women, race discrimination). For Jameson, the nostalgia film is a typical product of a postmodern culture, in which even history becomes a commodity (see Jameson 1991: 279–96).
20. The film's cinematographer César Charlone emphasises that 'because the younger kids looked at these guys as heroes, we frequently shot the trio from low angles to give them a slightly heroic air' (qtd in Oppenheimer 2005: 27).
21. After Li'l Zé's takeover, Rocket explains via voice-over how the thoroughly capitalist system of modern drug trafficking works: 'Selling drugs is like any other business. The supplier delivers the merchandise, which is then packed on the premises. It's done in an assembly line. Boring as hell . . . You can even make a career in dealing drugs. The kids start out as delivery boys. They're paid to run errands and take messages. Then they become lookouts . . . Later, you become a dealer . . . Moving up the ladder you have the 'soldier'. And if the guy is good at maths, he can become a manager, the boss's right-hand man' (transcribed by the author).
22. Meirelles explains that for 'this part of the story, we did not respect anything. The camera was shaking and frequently out of focus – not to be stylish, but because César [Charlone] would be in a room with seven or eight people, panning and zooming from speaker to speaker or capturing reaction shots. The mood at this point is cold, tense and monochromatic – like an opium trip' (qtd in Oppenheimer 2005: 28).
23. In one of the film's most shocking scenes, Li'l Zé forces a child to kill another child.

Bombay Cinema

The most persistent image of Bombay is the cheek-by-jowl coexistence of skyscrapers and slums . . .

Ranjani Mazumdar

Unlike Rio de Janeiro, a city that has been labelled as a *cidade partida*, Mumbai has, instead, been described as a *Maximum City* – a phrase coined by the journalist Suketu Mehta in a book of the same title – that is, a city of ‘maximum extremes’. In Mumbai slums are visible everywhere; they are located in the midst of the city’s centre and are not, or not exclusively, moved away to peripheral zones, on hills, or sealed off by walls, as they are in Rio de Janeiro. In short, unlike Rio, Mumbai is perceived as a city in which the rich and the poor, rural migrants and cosmopolitan urbanites, ‘slumdogs’ and millionaires live side by side, rather than segregated from each other.¹ The city is thus marked by the stark contrasts between its rich and poor citizens, who live close together in a densely populated metropolitan region that is now occupied by 18.5 million people. In its central district, ‘Greater Mumbai’, the population density reaches an average of 29,000 persons per square kilometre – according to estimates, the highest in the world – whereas 50 to 60 per cent (or more than six million people) live in approximately 2,000 pavement settlements, *zoppad-pattis*, *bustees*, *chawls* or slums, located near dumping grounds, beside railway tracks or in similarly vacant areas. Yet even though the city’s majority population consists of slum-dwellers, they occupy merely 8 per cent of the city’s land.² Mike Davis has therefore described Mumbai as ‘the global capital of slum dwellers’ (2007: 23), while some journalists nicknamed the city ‘Slumbay’ to hint at its melting-pot nature, in which extreme inequalities meet extreme scarcity of space.

One might argue that given these differences between Rio de Janeiro and Mumbai, it is no coincidence that the two main examples discussed in the final

chapters of this book depict their respective urban spaces in very different ways. While *Cidade de Deus* recounts the history of drug-related violence in one of Rio de Janeiro's (symbolically) enclosed and (physically) far removed *favelas*, the story in *Slumdog Millionaire* mainly takes place in the middle of the 'global capital of slum dwellers'. The story recounts the lives of three orphaned street kids who continuously lose and find themselves via modern media and communication devices such as the television, mobile phones or the internet. Considering Mumbai's immense population, Jamal's quest to find his lost brother Salim and his childhood love Latika resembles a quest to find the proverbial needles in a haystack, but the film also refers in this way, perhaps more subtly, to Suketu Mehta's book *Maximum City*, which is subtitled with *Bombay Lost and Found*.³ The depiction of Mumbai as a confusing and labyrinthine city, and by extension as vastly overcrowded and full of extreme social contrasts is, however, nothing specifically new or genuine to Danny Boyle's film. In fact, the old Bombay as well as the new Mumbai have continuously been represented – whether in the visual arts, popular media or in written accounts – as an overcrowded city of contrasts and compressed spaces. However, it is popular culture in particular that has repeatedly recycled the image of Bombay as an urban space that is marked by the 'cheek-by-jowl coexistence of skyscrapers and slums'.⁴ 'Bombay Cinema' – a term that describes both an industry as well as a 'cinematic city' – has contributed significantly to shaping this very image of the city, which is why the following paragraph will recount some of its historically most significant film examples as 'local expressions' of 'global currents'. The second paragraph will then show that despite their very different plots and settings, *Slumdog Millionaire*, like *Cidade de Deus*, enters into a dialogue with an audiovisual 'archive of the city', while similarly employing a hypermediated form of realism to create a physical viewing experience, rather than a realistic 'representation of' Mumbai, its slums or the fate of its street children.

BOMBAY CINEMA

Bombay's slums have never been completely ignored by 'popular Hindi cinema', which is better known to us as 'Bollywood'.⁵ This instance has been highlighted by some prominent scholars of Bombay Cinema, such as Ranjani Mazumdar or Madhava Prasad. The following paragraph will outline with them and via significant film examples, how Bombay Cinema's relationship to 'the global capital of slum dwellers' evolved throughout the decades. According to Prasad and Mazumdar one can distinguish three distinct historical periods, in each of which a new significant paradigm appears: 1) since India's independence in 1947, a predominant dichotomy emerges, the one between the village and the city, through which the city's slums emerge for the

first time as filmic spaces that nostalgically recall a traditional rural life; 2) in the 1970s and 1980s a shift occurs and the 'official city' is now contrasted with the 'unintended city' off the grid; 3) since the beginning of the 1990s urban poverty practically disappears as a topic of popular Hindi cinema, but the slum remains a key setting of a new type of urban gangster film.

Village versus city

Prasad has argued that the village-to-city journey is one of the most recurring narrative structures of post-Independence Bombay cinema (2007: 83–4). As in Brazilian cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, the cinematically imagined *hinterland* was a major theme of Hindi cinema. However, in India, unlike in Brazil, it was not the journey from a very specific rural to an equally specific urban space (from the *sertão* to the *favelas*) that was a recurring plot motif, but rather the juxtaposition of rather generic conceptions of 'the village' and 'the city'. Both national cinemas of that period share a crucial encounter with neorealism in the postwar period. In 1952 Italian neorealist films were shown at a newly set up international film festival in Bombay (see also Chapter 4). Indian film historians have frequently pointed to the importance of that event for the filmmakers of the so-called 'Parallel Cinema' movement, which consisted mainly of Bengali filmmakers and whose headquarters was in Calcutta; among these were Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, and especially Satyajit Ray. His *Apu Trilogy* (1955–9) is commonly considered to be Indian cinema's first 'world cinema classic' and it does indeed negotiate the village-city dichotomy rather poetically through location shooting, long takes and the use of non-professional actors. Ray's, Ghatak's and Sen's encounter with neorealism in the early 1950s challenged the already well-established commercial film industry, which is why this generation of Indian filmmakers was considered a 'parallel' movement to the dominance of the largely Bombay- and Calcutta-based commercial film industry.⁶

Yet, in his essay on 'the neorealist encounter in India', Moinak Biswas emphasises that the Bombay-based popular Hindi cinema already addressed socially sensitive issues long before the arrival of neorealism, that is, during the 'golden age' of the studio era. These mainstream films – for example *Devdas* (Barua 1936), *Achoot Kanya* (*The Untouchable Girl*; Osten 1936) or *Kismet* (*Fate*; Mukherjee 1943) – have sometimes also been described as 'studio Socials'. They became the most popular genre of the Indian studio system, because they often employed melodramatic stories to address themes like socially prohibited love affairs, or, more generally, 'rural poverty, urban unemployment, and working-class politics' (Biswas 2007: 78). According to Biswas, these 'studio Socials' displayed a tendency towards realist aesthetics, and responded to profound socio-political changes and upheavals in the post-Independence era, among them the cityward migration and the expansion of

slums in the subcontinent's larger cities.⁷ Ashis Nandy provides, however, a different framework for reading Indian cinema's preoccupation with the theme of the village-to-city-journey. He argues that popular Hindi cinema has frequently borrowed the exile-and-journey plots of classical Hindu epics, in particular the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, so that the village-to-city plot structure became a prominent feature of such films. Nandy argues that 'certain core concerns and anxieties of Indian civilisation have come to be reflected in the journey from the village to the city, and from the city to the village' (2001: 7); further, he maintains that 'as a result, the slum is left forever trying to re-invoke a remembered village under different guises. What looks like a slum turns out to be, on closer scrutiny, a village that has survived the seductive glitter of the city' (2001: 19–20).

What Nandy calls a 'remembered village' is an accurate description of some key films that address the lives of slum- and pavement-dwellers in the 1950s, particularly the films of director-actor Raj Kapoor, whose films draw from both neorealism and elements of classical epics, and thus truly represent 'local expressions' of global currents. Widely known as 'India's Charlie Chaplin', Kapoor became immensely popular with his embodiment of the figure of the *tapori* ('vagabond') in *Awaara* (*The Tramp*; 1951) – a figure that also reappears at the dawn of Italian neorealism with Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943). Kapoor's films do indeed feature village-to-city-journeys and highlight the notion of the slum and pavement as a 'remembered village'. Apart from *Awaara*, it was *Shree 420* (*Mr. 420*, 1955) in particular that epitomised this notion. Rashmi Varma argues that '*Shree 420* was an incredibly powerful narrative in 1950s India. Its plot commented on the hopes and desires of countless migrants who flocked to the city looking for both economic opportunity and social justice' (2004: 68). Yet the film's most memorable shot condenses not only the notion of the 'remembered village': the camera first shows us a footpath where we see *taporis* and pavement-dwellers who have recently arrived in Bombay from the countryside – but afterwards it pans upwards, without a cut, to the mansions of the rich, thus representing in just one shot the 'Maximum City' of extreme social contrasts and compressed spaces.

Another crucial film of that era was, however, not directed, but merely produced by Kapoor. *Boot Polish* (Arora 1954) features two siblings as the main characters Belu and Bhola, who are forced to become beggars on the streets of Bombay since they lost their mother. Even though the film is, as almost all popular Hindi films, filled with song-and-dance sequences and melodramatic pathos, the film reminds on Vittoria De Sica's *Sciuscià* (*Shoeshine*, 1946), which is why Rajadhyaksha and Willemen comment that *Boot Polish* 'established a realist precedent' for films like *Salaam Bombay!* (2002: 335). Kapoor's 1950s films were thus not only influenced by Italian neorealism, but they also

anticipated certain recurring thematic preoccupations of Bombay Cinema: the village-to-city journey as a structuring principle, which was borrowed from the classical Indian epics, the notion of the pavement as a 'remembered village' and a set of characters, particularly vagabonds and orphaned street kids, who also appeared in neorealist movies at that time – the character types who re-appear in *Slumdog Millionaire* too.

Official versus unintended city

In the 1970s a new figure as well as another predominant plot structure emerges in popular Hindi cinema: the figure of the 'angry young man' and the rivalry between two brothers who are following different paths in life, a right and a wrong one – both of whom re-appear in *Slumdog Millionaire* as well. Nandy argues that this pattern is (as the village-to-city journey) borrowed from Hindu mythology, because it features prominently in the *Mahabharata* epic that depicts the rivalry between two gods, the brothers Karna and Arjuna. It is especially the character of the anti-hero Karna, the wronged, abandoned and ill-treated brother, who continued to haunt India's popular culture in the last century, as Nandy elaborates (2001: 28–41). He furthermore observes that attempts to reinterpret Karna in popular Hindi cinema as a 'wronged hero, victimised by an unjust society, obdurately hostile to the norms of equity, have recurred . . . Popular culture has returned to the myth . . . with vigour . . . Karna and Arjuna cast their shadows on a number of characters and plots in the commercial cinema' (2001: 34).

Yash Chopra's *Deewar* (*The Wall*, 1975) employs exactly this mythical plot structure, but sets it in a modern urban setting, 1970s Bombay. The most famous of all Bollywood actors, Amithab Bachchan, portrays the anti-hero in *Deewar*, an inwardly brooding and occasionally outwardly exploding character called Vijay – the prototypical 'angry young man' of popular Hindi cinema. Bachchan's portrayal of Vijay transfers the mythical deity Karna into a physically violent urban character, and, more significantly, into a slum- and pavement-dweller. The stigma of Vijay's childhood years on Bombay's pavements haunts him throughout his life, and, as Mazumdar claims, 'explains every action and decision he is taking'; for her, the development of Vijay's character offers quasi-sociological explanations for a life of crime and all 'these explanations are grounded in the memory and experience of urban poverty, homelessness and deprivation' (2007: 15). Hence, whereas in the 1950s the 'footpath' (as the pavement is called in *Deewar*) was a 'remembered village', in *Deewar* it acquires mythological dimensions through its reference to the *Mahabharata*. Yet, even though these mythologising aspects are present, *Deewar* also provides a 'sociology of urban poverty' (Mazumdar 2007: 15), for it dramatically conveys the tense emotions (the anger of the 'man on the

street') and the aggressive atmosphere that gave rise to urban street protests, strikes and working-class rebellion in Bombay in the 1970s.

For Prasad, the 1970s 'were a period in which Bombay inscribed itself into the cinematic register of urban life in its own right, coming out of the shadow of the city-country equation' (2007: 88). Nevertheless, through films like *Deewar*, a next major binary is negotiated, the one between the official and the 'unintended city', and that is from the perspective of the pavement.⁸ This 'streetside aesthetics' (Prasad 2007: 92) is visually and dramatically inscribed in some films of that period, as they provide a 'subaltern' subject or viewing position on the city from below: a vision of the city seen through the eyes of beggars as in *Shaan* (Sippy 1980), slum-dwellers as in *Chakra* (Dharmaraj 1981), *Nayakan* (Ratman 1987) and *Dharavi* (Mishra 1992), and street children as in *Salaam Bombay!* (see also Chapter 6). Unlike films such as *Deewar*, which employ mythological narrative structures, pathos and melodrama, these films could rather be described as Bombay Cinema's versions of Third Cinema – sometimes also labelled as India's 'Middle Cinema'. Although they radicalise certain notions that have already been explored by popular films like *Deewar*, their major aim was to make the invisibles visible, to give voice to the silenced subalterns, rather than to hybridise myth with modern urban life.

While almost all of these 'Middle Cinema' films still employ the village-to-city-journey as a background to their narratives, they also apply a (neo) realist, sometimes even observational documentary approach to narrate stories from the slums of Bombay. Both historical contextualisation and psychological explanations are in turn absent from films like *Salaam Bombay!* because of their observational approach. The causes for marginalisation (e.g. the caste system), the reasons for rural-urban migration (e.g. the exploitation of peasants by landowners), or pressing political topics of that time (for example, repeated slum clearance campaigns by local authorities), are not mentioned or shown in these films, not even in the form of allegorical characters. Prasad argues, therefore, that in these films 'the realist imperative leads to a loss of certainty about the identity of the exploiters: the sordid lives of slum-dwellers in *Chakra* or *Dharavi* for instance, seem to have their inbuilt tendency towards disaster and tragedy' (2007: 94). In these two films the rage, whether directed against an unjust social system or against the 'official city', has vanished and this is thus unlike the 'angry man' cycle of popular 1970s films. Instead, this cinematic 'sociology of urban poverty' invests in observation, but simultaneously loses the anger against the oppressors, exploiters or an unjust social (caste) system.

Geo-televisual Bollywood versus gangland Mumbai

In the 1990s, slums virtually disappear as a significant setting from popular Hindi cinema.⁹ This is in stark contrast to Brazilian cinema's simultaneous

wave of *favela*-set films and documentaries. The reasons for Bombay Cinema's sudden abandonment of social topics lie in a set of interrelated economical, political and technological changes, which facilitated not only a different socio-political climate in the city, but also, as the film scholar Anustup Basu has called it, a new 'geo-televisual aesthetics' of its films. According to him, the advent of a neoliberal market economy in the 1990s together with the emergence of a borderless networked system of electronic communication media, established an 'exchange of sights and sounds across global distances' as an aesthetic principle of Bombay Cinema (2010: 52). Some of the most iconic films of this era literally assemble televisual images from the advertising, tourism, fashion, music and film industry, so that the 'geo-televisual can be seen in hundreds of films in the period' (Basu 2010: 73). Contrary to the juxtaposition of binary oppositions in the neorealism-inspired films of the 1950s and the 'angry man' cycle of the 1970s, the conflicting opposites (particularly the one between traditional family values and modern Western consumer culture) are now blurred and eclectically assembled.¹⁰ As a paradoxical consequence, popular Hindi films of the 1990s become more rooted than ever in traditional family values, but they also valorise modern (or Western) consumer culture, creating a geo-televisual *masala*, so to speak – a hybridisation of values, but also of various generic codes, styles and narrative patterns.¹¹ The roots of this new 'geo-televisual' aesthetic reside, as Basu claims, in the liberalisation of the media industry and the subsequent arrival of cable and satellite TV in the early 1990s. For Basu, therefore, popular Hindi cinema and the 'new media' world have, since the 1990s, entered into an 'electrified field of exchange' (2010: 5).

In a similar line of argument, Mazumdar has claimed that 'decorative panoramic interiors' are by now a common feature of the most dominant genre of Bombay Cinema in this contemporary period: the family melodrama. Whereas from the 1970s to the 1980s location shooting was the norm and Bombay's unintended, marginal or working-class spaces – its slums, factories, docks, and so on – were explored extensively, since the 1990s filmmakers have retreated into studio settings. For Mazumdar these studio-set family melodramas predominantly display panoramic interior sceneries, which are juxtaposed with the panoramic sceneries of exotic faraway locations, which she claims, re-creates Bombay – now Mumbai – as a simulacrum of a global city, a virtual global city: 'The new panoramic interior combines design techniques with architectural space to create a "virtual city" in which the contemporary "global" family could reinvent "Indianness" and modernity' (2007: 110). However, in Mazumdar's allegorical reading these new kind of panorama aesthetics express a significant transformation of the urban experience: the accelerated flow of images, sounds, and signs of a rapidly expanding consumer culture – Mumbai's flourishing fashion, music, and television industries – contributes to a new form of panoramic 'surface culture' of the city itself.

From this point of view one can argue that, from the beginning of the 1990s, films enter into a *mise-en-abyme* relationship if they are set in the city of Mumbai: in a Baudrillardian sense, the real city has today become indistinguishable from its virtual images, not only since the Mumbai-based film industry produces a staggering amount of films a year, but also because the city's own surface culture has been transformed. Basu puts this point across poignantly with the following words: 'The city – with its manifold electronic terminals, data flows, image flickers, borderless connections, and varied pulsations of information – has itself become the screen' (2010: 99). Mazumdar uses the term 'delirium' to describe this new Mumbai experience, but still emphasises that the 'delirium of everyday life has come to India in the context of increasing migration, growing urban inequality, and an increased visibility of the destitute in the streets of the Indian city' (2007: xxii). And so, while the number of slums and pavement-dwellers in Mumbai continues to grow, Bombay Cinema seems to ignore social topics like poverty and homelessness, which were once one of its major hallmarks.

However, this statement is not entirely true, since the 'unintended city' re-appears elsewhere on screen, in films that depict the rise of Mumbai's informal economy and its criminal underworld. With the appearance of cult films such as Ram Gopal Varma's *Satya* (*Truth*, 1998), *Company* (2002) or Anurag Kashyap's *Black Friday* (2004), Bombay Cinema witnessed an unprecedented new wave of gangster films that explored Mumbai's underworld. For Prasad, this new cycle of gangster films represent the persistent 'resistance of the real' in Bombay Cinema, (re)connecting it to the 'streetside aesthetics' of the 1970s and 1980s (2007: 96). Mazumdar, on the other hand, contends that these films allegorise the spatial decline of a 'city in crisis', providing allegorical 'counternarratives' to the image of a neoliberal 'global city' as provided in recent Bollywood family melodramas:

If the drama of global consumption unfolds in a city where the majority continues to live in very difficult conditions, gangster cinema provides a counternarrative to the designed interior city by drawing on the mythology of the underworld. These films do not adopt a simple form of classical realism to narrate the decline of the city, but rather move into the heart of the urban labyrinth like an allegorical journey, through which the city of ruin emerges to express catastrophe, despair, and permanent crisis. (2007: 149–50)

Unlike the panoramic interiors of the geo-televisual Bollywood style, these 'counternarratives' to the mainstream employ location shooting with handheld cameras in densely populated alleys, claustrophobic hutments, abandoned factories or half-constructed buildings – a filmmaking strategy that was also

employed in *Slumdog Millionaire*. For Mazumdar, these films thus display a noirish sensitivity towards the shapes, forms and textures of urban space, and thereby create narratives that allegorise Mumbai's spatial (and with it, its social and ethnic) crisis, rather than its panoramic 'surface culture'.

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE (2008)

One of the ironies of the *Slumdog Phenomenon* – to quote the title of a recent anthology (Gehlawat 2013) – is that the film was initially underestimated by its producers and therefore relegated to become a mere direct-to-DVD release, which prompted some critics to describe the film itself as a 'slumdog millionaire' (if one considers DVD markets as 'film industry's slums', that is). However, its immense box office success is not only due to its surprising victory at the Academy Awards (where the film won eight Oscars), but is of course also an outcome of high-concept marketing strategies by its producers. Advertised as a 'feel-good-movie', *Slumdog Millionaire* was co-produced by the Hollywood studios Warner Brothers and Twentieth Century Fox.¹² Unsurprisingly therefore, a number of re/viewers criticised *Slumdog Millionaire* precisely for being such an unashamedly commercial product. Given the film's serious social topic some critics even felt so disgusted by it that they described it as a form of 'poverty porn', which resembles the very similar angry responses to *Cidade de Deus* and its supposed 'cosmetics of hunger'. The prominent Indian novelist Arundhati Roy, for instance, claimed in her article 'Nothing sells like Poverty' that 'the film de-contextualises poverty – by making poverty an epic prop, it disassociates poverty from the poor. It makes India's poverty a landscape, like a desert or a mountain range, an exotic beach, god-given, not man-made' (Roy 2009). Although many critics remarked that the film lacks authenticity, plausibility and realism, thereby targeting the film's fairy-tale-like rags-to-riches storyline and its Hollywood-like happy ending, Roy dismisses such concerns, together with the question of whether foreigners (like Danny Boyle) can comprehend the social realities of India/Mumbai at all. Instead, she points primarily to the film's troublesome aesthetics, to its overly extravagant portrayal of poverty with stylised images, which were 'designed' decisively for a global audience – in other words, to the film's lack of a 'realist style' rather than to its lack of a realistic narrative.

Seen in a more favourable light, one could describe all of Danny Boyle's previous films, from *Trainspotting* (1997) to *Sunshine* (2007), as genre-bending hybrids that challenge traditional notions of realism, but still claim a certain authenticity towards their subject matter. Not unlike her argument for *Cidade de Deus*, Eleftheria Thanouli, for instance, observes that *Trainspotting* displays a genuinely 'post-classical' poetics that deploys a form of 'hypermediated

realism' in which graphic spaces, varying paces of editing and a high narrative self-consciousness contribute to the film's intention to seek 'an authentic approach to drug addiction from the point of view of the drug addicts'; as a result, 'the notion of hypermediacy proves to be extremely accommodating for representing their turbulent emotional states' (2009: 102). A similar argument for such a hypermediated form of realism can be made for *Slumdog Millionaire*. For once, the film was largely shot on location with a mixed cast of professional (Bollywood) and non-professional (child) actors, utilising, above that, an often documentary-like handheld camera style.¹³ However, the digital 'look' and design of *Slumdog Millionaire* does not translate into any kind of traditional realism, and with its overtly fairy-tale-like rags-to-riches plot, it does not pretend to be a realistic 'representation of' (the city of Mumbai, its slums, the life of orphaned street kids etc.) either. I therefore propose to apply a similar perspective as in my reading of *Cidade de Deus*: rather than asking whether the film *represents* Mumbai and its slums in a realistic or non-realistic way, the following paragraphs will inquire after the film's *presentational* aesthetics and address its 'hypermediated' form of realism. The notion of hypermediacy is evident because the film recycles the city's imagery, the 'cinematic city', by utilising motifs, themes and styles of three major Bombay Cinema genres: 1) contemporary gangster and cop films, 2) the Bollywood family melodrama and 3) the homeless/street kid film. However, just like in the previous chapter on *Cidade de Deus*, the following paragraphs will also ask whether and how the film creates an immersive 'reality effect' for its audience, that is, how the film refigures notions of realism and screen-spectator relations in the digital age.

Q & A, or the rules of the game

One way of engaging spectators into an immersive viewing experience is related to aspects of narration. The film's narrative is largely based on a picaresque novel, Vikas Swarup's *Q & A* (2005), which explores, as the film does, the relation between the world of screens (Bollywood and television) and the lives of street kids.¹⁴ The scriptwriter's decision to tightly interweave *Slumdog Millionaire*'s plot with the well-known game rules of the *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* television show, is also borrowed from Swarup's novel. In the film, however, the game/quiz show is not only a classical frame story in that it establishes a semi-testimonial framework for the protagonist's flashback memories, but it also functions like a *mise en abyme*: the host not only plays a cognitive game with the character, but the film also plays a narratological game with the audience. The cinema-game analogy was put forward in recent explorations of complex narratives in contemporary cinema, most notably by Thomas Elsaesser in his essay on so-called 'Mind-Game Films' (2009a) like *Memento* (Nolan 2000), *The Game* (Fincher 1997) or *A Beautiful Mind*

(Howard 2001). As Elsaesser argues, these films experiment with narrative structures and spectator address in times of demographic, technological and economic changes within the institution cinema, because classical modes of representation are deemed less and less appropriate for engaging viewers, especially younger ones, in times of digitalisation, computer games and online social networks. While emphasising the cognitive aspects of the narratological puzzles those films employ, Elsaesser excavates some early predecessors of those films by referring to 1910s German *Preisrätselfilme* (translated from German as 'prize-puzzle films') (2009a: 16–17). The participatory qualities of the interactive uses of screen media link contemporary cinematic experiments of the digital age not only to televisual game shows, but thus also to some forgotten notions of early cinema as a medium of gaming.

In *Slumdog Millionaire* the host announces the start of the game with the words 'Let's play!', thereby addressing the (fictitious) television audience, but also declaring, in a way, that the film's (real) audience will now also enter into a world of quiz show/film narration game rules. Each of the nine game show questions introduces a narrative segment – a 'narrative module', as Cameron puts it – of the film, a flashback to one of the protagonist's life experiences that answer the film's meta-question: how did Jamal Malik, a *chai-wallah* from the slums of Mumbai, manage to answer this particular question (and the next one, and so on)? This meta-puzzle is displayed at the very beginning of the film, offering multiple-choice answers in the manner of the quiz show: A: He cheated; B: He's lucky; C: He's a genius; D: It is written. Answer D finally appears as the 'correct' answer at the end of the film, which is suggestive of *dharma*, the transcendental principle of the ultimate Hindu Law. *Dharma* forms a substantial part of the Bollywood family melodrama, where the fate of lovers is decided by a written destiny (or *kismet*) rather than by unwritten luck.¹⁵ Thus, 'it is written' designates the film as a Bollywood-inspired tale, or perhaps more aptly, as a fable. Yet how is this fable presented? David Bordwell has claimed that despite its stylistic 'flamboyance' (2011: 221), *Slumdog Millionaire* is not the slightest bit innovative in terms of its narrative structure, or in other words, according to Bordwell the film is not 'post-classical' at all. Bordwell therefore highlights the film's old-fashioned, textbook-like classical features:

1. Chronology: Jamal's life – the fabula/story – is told via flashbacks, but nevertheless in chronological order.
2. Double plotline: Jamal's romantic quest for Latika intertwines with his performance at the quiz show.
3. A goal-oriented protagonist: Jamal's goal to retrieve Latika.
4. The question/answer or enigma/resolution schema.¹⁶

The fourth point, as Bordwell illustrates, is essentially a feature of all cinematic narration from the point of view of cognitivist film theory, of which Bordwell is a major representative. He points to the model of the question/answer pattern of cinematic narration, which was put forward by another representative of cognitivism in film theory, Noël Carroll. Carroll claims that this pattern is a universal principle of filmic narration: 'to narrate by generating questions internal to the film that subsequent scenes answer is a distinctive form of narration . . . it is the most characteristic approach in movies' (1996: 89). The question/answer pattern of *Slumdog Millionaire*'s narrative is not only based on a novel with exactly that structure and title (Swarup's *Q & A*), but is also embedded in a genuinely cinematic double plotline via a double interrogation: the quiz show host interrogates Jamal's knowledge while the police officers interrogate Jamal's life experiences. So, while one set of questions revolves around cognitive memory (visual observation and literary knowledge) of stars from movies, writers of songs, characters in novels, and so on, the other set of questions revolves around felt memory (lived experience), for example, the loss of the mother, the break with his brother Salim, the quest for Latika. The police officers therefore ask questions such as 'what happened with the girl?' or 'how did you manage to enter the quiz show?' – questions which relate to what Carroll describes as the hermeneutic work of audiences while watching a narrative film to make sense of a causally connected chain of events.

A further point, not mentioned by Bordwell, is the doubling or mirroring of scenes, another classical feature of narrative cinema that film scholar Raymond Bellour described as the repetition-resolution effect.¹⁷ This effect functions along a chain of alternating narrative devices – repetitions and variations of codes, scenes or events – in order to reach a sense of symmetry, and hence, closure, which all classical narratives try to achieve. A good example for illustrating this feature is the repetition/alternation, or more precisely the 'mirroring' of the first toilet scene (in which the young Jamal tries to obtain an autograph by Amitabh Bachchan) towards the end of the film. Here the quiz show host admits that he is a 'slumdog' himself and tries to deceive Jamal into answering the wrong question. The image we see of Jamal, sitting on the toilet, is literally inverted, or put upside down, in order to emphasise the notion of repetition and alternation. In addition, the toilet-mirror itself features prominently as a blackboard for the host's wrong clue, in order to emphasise the 'mirroring' of the previous toilet scene from the beginning of the film. On a semantic level, the first toilet scene emphasises the *imaginary* glamour and otherworldly appeal of the Bollywood industry and its 'untouchable' stars (Amitabh Bachchan), whereas the second toilet scene functions as an inverted mirror, showing the *real* substance of the entertainment industry – and by extension Bollywood – as a 'dirty business' (bearing in mind that Amitabh Bachchan was and still is the real host of the Indian

version of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*). The inversion thus functions along the binary codes of the larger narrative unit, which were established in the first toilet scene – dirt/shit versus glitz and glamour, poor versus rich, fabricated versus real. Yet, the semantic binaries are first established, then negotiated (or inverted) and at the end resolved in a climax, which is another essential deep structure of narration from a structuralist point of view. This climax – the frontally staged Bollywoodian song-and-dance sequence at the end of the movie – establishes again the ‘writtenness’ of the film, its status as a fabricated (feel-good and game) ‘show’.

Thus, *Slumdog Millionaire*’s narrative ‘rules of the game’ appear to function along well-established principles of classical narration: questions and answers, repetitions and resolutions, resolved binaries, double plotlines, goal-oriented protagonists and a chronological chain of events. Nevertheless, the film’s narrative also functions like an interactive game. Audience participation is achieved not necessarily by the uncertainty of the film’s outcome (its unwrittenness) but rather through *exposing* – making explicit – the basic mechanisms of cinematic narration itself, the question/answer pattern in particular. This refers to what Thanouli has described as the high self-consciousness, knowledgeability and communicativeness of post-classical cinematic narration (2009: 136–44). *Slumdog Millionaire* overtly announces its constructedness by emphasising its ‘writtenness’. Equally, the film demonstrates the ‘most characteristic approach in movies’ (Carroll), the hermeneutic question/answer pattern of narration; it gives obvious hints to the repetition-resolution effect by exposing its status as an inverted mirror, as for example in the toilet scenes; and it makes the double plotline explicit through the doubling of the interrogation scenario. Therefore, *Slumdog Millionaire*’s narration is not only highly knowledgeable, but also highly communicative with the audience; unlike in classical narratives, it does not conceal, but openly communicates its deeper narrative structures.

A passage to Bombay Cinema

Just as in *Cidade de Deus*, the opening sequence of *Slumdog Millionaire* can be read as a metatext for the whole film, since it not only introduces the film’s narrative structure, but also its major syntactic and semantic features. The importance of opening sequences as metatexts relates to fairly classical script-writing and filmmaking practices and Boyle is well aware of this tradition, when he points in an interview to a statement made by the British director David Lean: ‘I believe in what David Lean once said, that you must reveal the ambition of your film within the first five minutes’ (2009a). Yet, unlike the opening sequence of David Lean’s adaptation of E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* (1984) – to which Boyle indirectly refers – the opening of *Slumdog Millionaire* was supposed ‘to be a slap in the face about what you might be

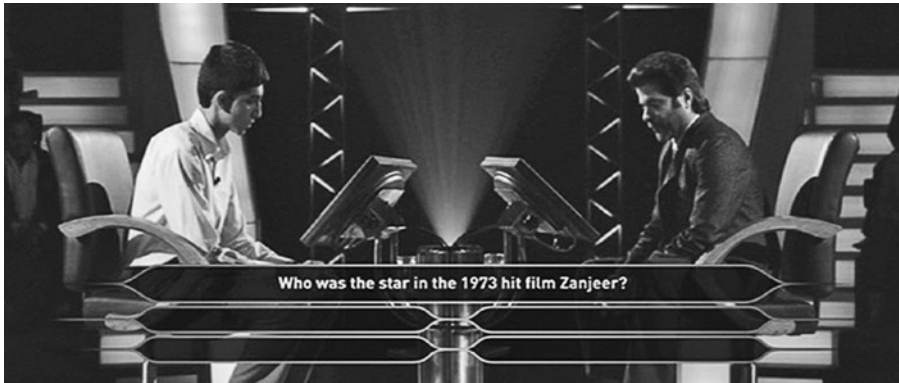


Figure 9.1 Q&A that introduces the stars and films of Bombay Cinema and the aesthetic principle of genre blending in *Slumdog Millionaire*.

expecting' (Boyle 2009a). A comparison to Lean's opening in *Passage to India* can prove this point: the film begins with a young British woman window-shopping in the rainy streets of 1920s London; she then stops and gazes, fascinated, into the shop window of a travel agency. Before she books her ship ticket to India, she contemplates pictures of India that show well-known tourist attractions such as the Taj Mahal, but also images of a more sinister, mysterious India, such as the Barabar Caves (referred to in both film and novel as 'Marabar Caves'). The travel agent believes that she will have an 'interesting voyage', after which she finally books her ticket – a passage – to India, as does the Western/British audience, because with the next shot we are already in the midst of a colonial military parade which welcomes the viceroy, as well as the audience, to a sun-drenched India during the British Raj. In this way the film works like a tourist and a time-travel trip, like 'British Raj tourism', so to speak. Lean's film immediately establishes India as an 'other' place onto which we can project our Western imaginations, a touristic scenery for 'window-shopping' with all its orientalist pleasures and dangers. However, it simultaneously also establishes the notion that we are merely looking at *images* of India through the main protagonist's eyes.

So how does Boyle's opening differ from Lean's and provide a 'slap-in-the-face' rather than a smooth passage? In *Slumdog Millionaire*, the twelve-minute (rather than only five-minute) long opening sequence climaxes with the first question of the quiz show – 'Who was the star in the 1973 hit film *Zanjeer*?' (Fig. 9.1) – and its subsequent answer, illustrated through a flashback to one of Jamal's early childhood experiences, where he has to dive through human excrement, in order to get an autograph by Amithab Bachchan – the star of the 1973 hit film *Zanjeer*. Juxtaposing the glamorous world of Bollywood with the stinking mess of the slum's public toilets captures *the* representational

cliché of the ‘city of extremes’. Nevertheless, it does so in such a hyperbolic way that this scene ought, instead, to be interpreted within the context of the literary tradition of the carnivalesque and its corresponding concepts, the grotesque (defecating, eating, fornicating) body, as described by Mikhail Bakhtin, who claims that excrements are, in fact, ‘the most suitable substance for the degrading of all that is exalted’ (1984: 152). Translated into the context of Hindi mainstream culture, the hegemonic ideology of representing the city as a global, cosmopolitan one that is clean, dirt- and slum-free through its decorative panoramic interiors is hyperbolically inverted in the film’s first toilet scene – it represents a carnivalesque inversion of official culture, a ‘degradation of the exalted’ and thus a slap-in-the-face in the first instance to middle-class Hindi audiences.

Yet, what the opening sequence also tries to achieve – besides surprising the expectations of at least some of its audience – is to provide a ‘dialogical passage to Bombay Cinema’, rather than, as in Lean’s film, to Western images of India.¹⁸ The first opening shots show Jamal being interrogated by the two police officers, but these shots are already dialogical. Those familiar with recent Bombay Cinema gangster films will recognise the two actors: Irfan Khan not only played a role as a street kid in Mira Nair’s *Salaam Bombay!*, but also in an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* set in Mumbai’s underworld, *Maqbool* (Bhardaj 2003), in which Khan reinterprets Macbeth as an underworld don; the other police inspector is played by Saurabh Shukla, who is not only known as an actor, but also as the scriptwriter of the film which initiated Bombay Cinema’s gangster film cycle, Ram Gopal Varma’s *Satya*. Thus, both actors do not belong to the Bollywood family melodrama tradition, but to the more realist gangster cycle in contemporary Bombay Cinema. Above that, the interrogation scene is directly alluding to the opening scene of Anurag Kashyap’s *Black Friday* – a cop thriller about the police investigations surrounding the 1992–3 Hindu-Muslim riots and bombings. Here the Hindu police interrogate a Muslim witness, but they suspect him of lying; in *Slumdog Millionaire* the police inspectors suspect a Muslim ‘slumdog’ of cheating. The allusion is accentuated through the interrogation scenes’ visual style: in both openings the images are digitally altered to take on brownish-golden colours; and in both openings we see extreme close-ups of the wet faces of the interrogated who have both been humiliated by water dunking and by resounding slaps in the face.

Unlike the police officers, the host of the show is played by a well-known Bollywood actor, Anil Kapoor, who is recognisable as such from his overly dramatic and emotive acting – the so-called ‘histrionic’ acting style of Bollywood actors – as if to point to well-known figures that appear in the two major Bombay Cinema genres since the 1990s: the gritty realism of gangster/cop films and the overstated pathos of the Bollywood family melodrama. Not coincidentally, and related to that, the opening sequence includes two iconic

images that repeatedly recur as flashbacks and/or flash-forwards in the film: (impure) money and (pure) romance. While at one point we see slow-motion images of a bathtub filled with banknotes (a flash-forward), at another we see a shot of Latika in front of a departing train at Mumbai's Victoria Terminus station (a flashback). Both of those shots foreshadow events that are yet to come in the plot and refer to the film's generic intertexts, the gangster film (and its dirty money motif) and the Bollywood melodrama (and its missed train/appointment motif). It comes as no surprise, that the play with references to actors-as-icons, as well as the introduction of leitmotifs along generic codes, culminates at the end of the opening sequence in the quiz show's first question about an iconic Bollywood actor (Amithab Bachchan) and a 1970s genre film (the cop and the gangster film *Zanjeer*).¹⁹

Bachchan did indeed appear in all the televisual and cinematic genres alluded to in the opening sequence of *Slumdog Millionaire*. He starred as 'angry man' in 1970s urban gangster and cop films such as *Zanjeer* or *Deewar*; he was the first host of the Indian *Millionaire* show, and he frequently appears in Bollywood family melodramas, such as *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (*Sometimes happy, sometimes sad*; Johar 2001) or *Veer-Zaara* (Chopra 2004) – here most recently as a patriarchal father figure. In many respects, Bachchan's career mirrors the trajectory from the 1970s 'streetside aesthetics' (Prasad) to contemporary Bollywood's 'geo-televisual aesthetics' (Basu), and so he epitomises the 'popular', not only as an iconic star, but also as a dialogical reference. To Western (and other, non-Indian) audiences this play with references to iconic stars, scenes of recent and past cop and gangster films, as well as to generic codes of Bollywood family melodramas will, in most cases, pass unnoticed. The quiz question at the end of the opening sequence could therefore be read as a 'dialogical passage' to the film's stylistic feature of genre blending. It announces a dialogue with the audience, in the sense that it openly exposes the film's dialogue with Indian popular culture. Hence, the quiz question ('Who was the star of the 1973 hit film *Zanjeer*?') is, implicitly, an answer to another question: how does the film operate aesthetically? The 'correct' answer would be through its blending of generic codes, structures and motifs of Bombay Cinema. However, the opening sequence exposes the film's aesthetic principle of genre blending also through inserting footage from films featuring Bachchan (when Jamal sits in the toilet house), as well as at its end, when we see a doubling up of (digital) screen and (classical) canvas, that is when Jamal's brother Salim sells Bachchan's autograph to a projectionist who works in a movie theatre. Here the camera aligns with the cinema's projector that shows another 'angry man' movie, *Ram Balram* (Anand 1980) – a film that features Amithab Bachchan as one of two orphaned brothers.

A kinaesthetics of the Maximum City

From a 'world cinema' point of view, it might also, therefore, not be a coincidence that the opening sequence's fast-edited chase through the slums ends in a schoolroom, and also not that the very last question of the quiz show refers to a French novelist, to Alexandre Dumas. Here, it seems, Boyle pays homage to François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959), a film that in turn, pays homage to the theoretician of realism in cinema, André Bazin, as well as to Rossellini's neorealist masterpiece *Germania anno zero*. Since *The 400 Blows*' protagonist, Antoine, plagiarises passages from an Honoré de Balzac novel (through which Truffaut has ironically commented on his own practice of cinéophile citations, allusions and homage), Boyle seems to quite consciously allude to this cinéophile 'hall of mirrors'. However, the films of the *Nouvelle Vague*, and particularly films like *The 400 Blows*, also capture the peculiar atmosphere and energy of their locations, in this case the Paris of the late 1950s. But does *Slumdog Millionaire* connect to this tradition, does it attempt to capture the atmosphere and energy of the 'Maximum City' in the 2000s, and if so, how?

The film's scriptwriter Simon Beaufoy explained that the opening sequence was, in fact, inspired by the city itself, particularly the (actual) close proximity between the public toilets in Juhu – where most of the film's slum scenes were shot – and the neighbourhood's airport. Beaufoy even contends that this circumstance was the major inspiration for his *Slumdog Millionaire* script:

Every morning, the poorest people in the world sit doing their business watching the richest people in the world fly in to do their business. Nothing could sum up the Mumbai experience more perfectly. I didn't quite know how or why, but I was sure I had found the first scene of *Slumdog Millionaire*. (Beaufoy 2008)

While Beaufoy here emphasises the extreme unevenness of 'doing business' for the city's rich and poor, the central ambition of filmmaker and scriptwriter can indeed be best described as capturing one of the most striking features of the 'Mumbai experience' as perceived by the filmmakers: the extreme contrast between rich and poor as they live side by side in a densely populated space of an emerging global metropolitan region. Boyle has also spoken about his 'Mumbai experience' in various interviews as a major inspiration for the film. He has likewise pointed to the city's paradoxes and contradictions, but also to what he perceived as a city in constant transition, as in statements like the following: 'It's just exploding. It's like Las Vegas or New York being built on the top of what was absolute, abject poverty, and the city is in fast-forward. And when you get there, you have to jump and start running with it' (Boyle 2008). Yet, Boyle has also stated that he usually has a series of films that he wants his

actors to watch before starting to shoot a film (he describes these three films as ‘very inspiring’: *Black Friday*, *Satya* and *Company*), while he adds, ‘with “Slumdog”, we wanted to create an approach that the city would dictate’ (qtd in Kaufman 2009). In other words, both city and ‘cinematic city’ inspired both director and crew while filming.

As already mentioned, recent gangster films explore the ‘Maximum City’ in a new way, accentuating the city’s overcrowded density, and thereby responding to what many believe is a city in crisis. Contrary to the visually stunning panoramic exteriors and the decorative interiors of the Bollywood mainstream, these gangster films provide a spatial exploration of urban disintegration through location shooting. A good example for this spatial exploration is Anurag Kashyap’s *Black Friday*. Kashyap, who was also the co-scriptwriter of *Satya*, explained in an interview that the exploration of urban space is central to his scriptwriting strategy.¹⁹ This strategy was cinematically translated into a powerful five-minute sequence in *Black Friday*, in which several policemen chase a Muslim suspect through the narrow alleys of Dharavi. The policemen’s chase of the ‘slumdog’ brothers through the densely populated, labyrinthine alleys of Juhu at the beginning of *Slumdog Millionaire* is, in turn, another direct reference to *Black Friday*. The chase through the city and its slums has, in fact, become a common motif in recent gangster films in Bombay Cinema. *Satya*, for instance, also features a chase scene in the opening sequence. As the camera follows gang members who are being pursued by the police, the city’s narrow alleys, crowded slums, open drains and half-constructed buildings become visible – so revealing the ‘unintended city’, the one which is off-the-map. In a similar way, *Slumdog Millionaire*’s camera frequently pans over the city and shows off-the-map areas: an abandoned railway flyover in Central Mumbai where the street kids gather, several of the city’s half-finished construction sites and unfinished or half-finished buildings. These are the most frequent images we see of the cityscape, especially during the film’s latter parts. For instance, when the two ‘slumdog’ brothers sit on the edge of an apartment floor of a high-rise building under construction, overlooking a gigantic construction site, Salim emphasises what Boyle describes is a ‘city in fast-forward’, when he says: ‘That used to be our slum. Can you believe that? We used to live right there, man. Now it’s all business’.

On the other hand, *Satya* not only captures the unintended city. Mazumdar has claimed that, the ‘mise-en-scène of *Satya* recalls the “kinetic city”, which is a city in motion. The kinetic city cannot be detected or understood through its architectural design. The kinetic city is energetic and dense; space and the urban crowd converge here’ (2007: 176). What is present in *Satya*’s mise-en-scène can also be found in *Slumdog Millionaire*’s too, and particularly with regard to Boyle’s perception of a ‘city in fast-forward’, which he translates not only through mise-en-scène, but also via his editing and camera work decisions

into a 'cinematic city in fast-forward'; for instance in the film's numerous chase scenes which highlight the city's overcrowded spaces: when Jamal and Salim escape from a mob of nationalist Hindus during the 1992 riots; when Jamal chases Latika through the overcrowded Victoria Terminus train station; when Latika runs through a traffic jam to take a call on her mobile phone. These chase scenes are met with a cinematic style of high velocity: rapid editing of a variety of takes with different camera angles, handheld camera moves or hectic zooms. With it the filmmakers want us to 'sense' (rather than dispassionately 'look at') the city from a never static, often 'running' handheld camera. Bordwell has commented on *Slumdog Millionaire's* cinematographic style as a 'rapid-fire array' of images and shots. In fact, the film literally 'bombards' the viewer with 2,700 shots in less than two hours. Furthermore, Bordwell observes that the film bears much in common with some recent trends in Bombay Cinema: 'surprisingly we find strong congruences between this movie's style and trends in Indian cinema. Over the last twenty years Indian cinema has cultivated its own fairly flashy action style, usually in crime films' (2011: 221).

Slumdog Millionaire's cinematography and editing style have much in common with those of a gangster film like *Company*. Scenes of hyperkinetic energy – where speed is both an element of the narrative as well as of a cinematographic technique, of camera movement and of editing speed – can be observed in both films; they mostly appear when the chaotic, crowded density of urban space is highlighted. One could thus say that, as in recent Bombay Cinema's cop and gangster films, *Slumdog Millionaire* tries to explore the sensory and spatial dimensions of the city. Much like the camera work and editing styles of some of the 1920s city symphonies (see Chapter 3), Boyle tries to capture a city that is rapidly transforming – 'a city in fast-forward' – through a kinetic camera and editing style.²⁰ The film therefore attempts to evoke a sense of immediacy by immersing its audience in the 'Mumbai experience' (as perceived by the film's creators), so that the sensual experience (Greek: *aisthēsis*) of the city is translated into the notion of a city in motion (Greek: *kineō*) – hence a 'kinaesthetic Mumbai'.

Glocal melodrama

The chase scene through Juhu's slums during the film's opening sequence establishes the notion that what the viewer is about to experience is not a visual 'representation of', but a bodily, kinaesthetic immersion in the city. This kinaesthetic approach, an approach that highlights audio-visual perception through movement, could also be related to cinema's ability to translate kinetically moving images into emotionally 'moving' stories: cinema's ability to create e-motions. The emotional aspects of the film relate to its romantic love story, and more concretely to its deployment of the melodramatic

mode. This mode is essential to Bombay Cinema, since melodramatic pathos permeates through almost all of its major genres.²¹ In other words, melodrama can be regarded as Bombay Cinema's 'default logic', since excessive melodramatic pathos can not only be found in love and romance films such as *Devdas* (Bhansali 2002),²² but also in gangster/cop films like *Deemar*. *Slumdog Millionaire* self-consciously reworks the melodramatic logic in a typically post-classical manner, precisely through *exposing* some of the genre's classical motifs and narrative structures. In doing so, the film includes some very essential characteristics of the melodramatic logic through its romantic plot. I would argue that this happens, in the first instance, through the film's foregrounding of speed, and by extension, the running of time. The central importance of time is already emphasised during the first seconds of the film, when we hear the 'tick-tock' – the audible ticking of time – of the *Millionaire* show. This 'tick-tock' sound alludes to the thirty seconds in which participants have to use the lifeline phone in the *Millionaire* show.

In a metaphorical sense, however, the sound of the ticking clock also alludes to the *irreversibility of time*, the deep structural temporality of melodrama. The notion of the irreversibility of time refers to what Linda Williams described in her seminal essay on 'body genres' as melodrama's temporal mode of *being-too-late*. She argues that melodramas are in fact fantasies that are structured around 'quests for connection' to origins (1991: 11). Because melodrama's protagonists always come 'too late' to reconnect, an overwhelming feeling of helplessness emerges in the spectator, namely the feeling that a primordial loss or disconnection cannot be recovered or retrieved. These feelings of helplessness create, according to Williams, bodily viewing experiences. As already mentioned, Jamal's quest for 'reconnection' is one of the major structuring principles of *Slumdog Millionaire's* plot. Latika appears for the first time in the movie in the background as a lost girl amidst the chaos of the 1992 Bombay riots and it is at exactly that point of the plot when Jamal loses his mother. This analogy relates to melodrama's primal (Freudian) fantasy of longing to replace the traumatic loss of the mother with a lover. Yet, this is done in such an obvious way that one could say that the film overtly exposes the character's fantasies and desires to 'reconnect'. In addition, the melodramatic temporality of 'being-too-late' is indeed one of the film's major temporal principles. This notion is already established in the opening sequence when the 'slumdog' brothers arrive 'too late' to their class at school. Deferrals, delays and detours of Jamal's quest to reconnect with Latika are, furthermore, the film's major plot points: when the kids escape from the orphanage, Latika comes 'too late' to catch the train, which causes a yearslong separation of the lovers; when they try to meet at the train station, their appointment is set for 5:00 p.m., but Jamal arrives 'too late' to save her from the henchmen of a gangster for whom Salim works, which leads to

another separation and really triggers Jamal's wish to appear on the quiz show (so that Latika can find him again).

Rebecca Duncan has analysed *Slumdog Millionaire*'s use of the classical literary trope of the 'romantic quest' through the emphasis on Jamal's desire for reconnection. For Duncan, Jamal's longing for reconnection is associated with memories of innocence and Edenic pasts (the protagonist's childhood years in Juhu); it furthermore provides a backwards movement. Indeed, the notion of the 'irreversibility of time' is inverted at the very end of the movie and turned into its opposite, a reversing/rewinding of time: when Jamal kisses Latika, the film rewinds to the scene in which the two lovers miss each other at the train station – a 'fast-backwards' to the point of the narrative before Latika's cheek is cut by the knife of a henchman, which seems to epitomise Jamal's fantasy of reconnecting to Edenic pasts. As we see Jamal running backwards, the film underlines the notion that reconnecting might not be 'too late'. In her later essay 'Melodrama Revised', Williams points to exactly this feature of the melodramatic mode, its staging of a desire to return to a time of innocence, an Edenic past: 'The "main thrust" of melodramatic narrative . . . is to get back to the beginning. Melodrama offers the hope that it may not be too late' (1998: 74). When Latika hurries through a traffic jam to catch Jamal's lifeline phone call, so as not to be 'too late' to help him answer the Alexandre Dumas question, the notion of 'being-too-late' is turned into the notion that the right 'timing' is necessary to reconnect. The importance of time and timing is furthermore overtly exposed by the numerous inclusions of clocks in the film's mise-en-scène (Fig. 9.2), most obviously, perhaps, when the train station's clock hangs above the dancers during the 'Jai Ho' song-and-dance-sequence in the epilogue of the film. Clocks are also included in a sequence in which the three kids sleep in an abandoned hotel, as well as in the call centre sequence.



Figure 9.2 Glocal melodrama: world time and local time, being-too-late and being-on-time.

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In both sequences we see clocks displaying the time in Mumbai, New York, London and Los Angeles. These juxtapositions of 'local time' and 'world time' not only point towards the importance of 'right timing', but also to the film's attempt to appeal to a global audience. It does so not only through employing a globally recognisable television show broadcast in 106 countries, but also through the film's melodramatic mode, a mode that has found a truly global (post-classical) language in recent Hollywood and Bollywood productions.

The universal language of melodrama, the Bollywoodian as well as the Hollywoodian, is analysed by Bhaskar Sarkar, who contends that they not only share the (universal) logic of the melodramatic, but that they do so 'through their deployment of new technologies'; what moves us in today's melodramas is, according to Sarkar, not so much the 'stock moral dilemmas, but the accentuation of the emotions through excessive stylisation. What is new . . . is the tremendous self-consciousness with which these elements are deployed in recent films' (2008: 43). This 'tremendous self-consciousness' is a feature of post-classical cinema and in *Slumdog Millionaire* it is the melodramatic mode (its motifs and temporal structure), in particular, that is self-consciously deployed in order to provide a 'glocalised' type of melodrama, one which applies the global language of melodrama and localises it with features of Bombay Cinema. In addition, what Sarkar describes as 'bodily sensations' refers to what Williams described in her exploration of 'body genres' as melodrama's ability to strike strong emotions, even physical reactions (tears, for example), in audiences, which is closely connected to the genre's temporal structures. Precisely because melodramas seem to evoke feelings of overwhelming helplessness through detours, deferrals and delays to fulfilment, the genre creates, in Williams' view, a bodily viewing experience. Yet, as Sarkar concludes, recent melodramas have another common, globally applicable pattern, which is in turn related to the protagonist's bodily experiences of marginality: 'a melodramatic mode, which allows the underdog to have a moral upper hand, often comes into play, when a wounded or marginalised subjectivity is the object of representation, whether in developed societies or in the developing world' (2008: 48).

Homelessness and embodied cognition

The morally winning slum-/underdog and the melodramatic representation of 'wounded or marginalised subjectivity' are central features of the *Slumdog Millionaire* story. This is particularly highlighted by the film's repeated emphasis on the protagonist's experience of homelessness. By showcasing numerous public-sleeping places, the film not only juxtaposes its scenes of hyperkinetic energy (kinesis versus stasis), but also exposes the notion of homelessness in quite an obvious way. After losing their families in the 1992

Bombay riots, the three protagonists first sleep in an empty container and later in an improvised tent on a gigantic garbage dump; when they get seduced by the gangster Maman, who collects orphaned street children in order to blind and cripple them into becoming street beggars, they sleep in an 'orphanage', a dormitory of horror, where dozens of children are trained to be street beggars; when Salim and Jamal manage to escape, they find a sleeping place among migrant workers in train wagons; later a scene shows that Salim sleeps on the table of a restaurant's kitchen and, finally, when they manage to free Latika from Maman, they rest in an empty room of an abandoned, ghost-like former five star hotel. So, the film explores the experience of homelessness especially through sites of public or semi-public sleeping.

As I have already outlined in the previous subchapter, there is a rich tradition in Bombay Cinema that deals with issues like homelessness or with street kids as central characters, from *Boot Polish* and *Deewar* to *Salaam Bombay!* Mazumdar even claims that homelessness is a master-trope, because it 'has been a recurring theme in popular cinema since the 1950s. Over the last three decades, the pathos that influenced earlier narratives of homelessness has all but disappeared. In contemporary cinema, homelessness introduces scars that cannot be easily erased' (2007: 3). *Slumdog Millionaire's* 'excavation' of one of Bombay Cinema's (now forgotten) master-tropes is re-contextualised into the urban experience of contemporary Mumbai. No longer is it the mythologised or remembered 'footpath' of childhood memories – as in *Boot Polish* or *Deewar* – which lends credibility to the hero's performance (his or her struggle for survival), but the memories of dwelling in places like containers, abandoned buildings or garbage dumps which lends believability to the protagonist's performance on a television show. Public or semi-public sleeping places appear in *Slumdog Millionaire* so often that it seems that the film is trying to make us aware that the experience of being homeless is, in the first instance, a physical experience of *vulnerability*, of 'being at home in bodies' only.²³ For Jamal this bodily experience of homelessness is not only at times unsettling, but is also sometimes 'educational', as in the literary genre of the *Bildungsroman*: just like Jamal, the protagonists of these novels acquire the knowledge to manoeuvre through life's hazards through real-life experiences rather than through proper schooling and studying books. Accordingly, the flashbacks to his lived experiences not only move through the kinetic city but they also manoeuvre the audience through emotively unsettling events, violent and traumatic ones, while simultaneously revealing vital clues to the quiz show's questions. Keywords, such as 'Surdas' (the blind poet and the blinding of orphaned children), 'Rama' (the Hindu deity and the slaughter of Jamal's mother by Hindu fanatics) or 'Samuel Colt' (Salim's threatening of Jamal with a Colt and the final split between the brothers) activate Jamal's embodied memories of traumatic loss, rupture and separation which enable him to answer the questions

asked in the quiz show. As Jamal knows *how* rather than *that* the answer is A, B, C or D, and as the whole premise of this story is rather implausible (even though the police interrogators want us to believe that it, in fact, may be ‘bizarrely plausible’), one could also say that the film tries to present an idea rather than to represent a plausible, chronologically unfolding chain of events. That idea could perhaps be best described as the anti-Cartesian notion that cognition is embodied.

Embodied cognition is a concept that describes how cognitive processes are deeply shaped by the human body’s real-time interactions with its environment (participatory, inclusive and empathic) and not by being disconnected and disembodied from it (distanced, isolated and observing). This idea has at its core a rejection of the cognitivist approach to understanding processes of cognition, which is grounded on a rule-based model that characterises problem solving (or indeed, answering questions) in terms of inputs and outputs – hence a computational model. In film theory, this led to a rejection of cognitivist models focusing exclusively on narration – or ‘telling a story’ – as the medium’s default logic. Recent film theory’s exploration of the idea that cinematic viewing experiences are in fact embodied experiences, attempts to describe interactive and bodily relations between spectators and screens – a screen-spectator relationship that reaches out to the spectator’s bodily senses, as well as to his or her mind. As one of the leading film scholars of embodied spectatorship, Vivian Sobchack, writes: ‘Embodiment is a radically material condition of human being that necessarily entails both the body and consciousness, objectivity and subjectivity, in an *irreducible ensemble*’ (2004: 4). *Slumdog Millionaire* quite openly exposes the ‘irreducible ensemble’ of bodily experience (Jamal’s experiences of trauma, homelessness and separation) and cognitive thought (the question/answer game of the quiz show). Hence the idea that cognition is embodied is, quite literally, a feature of the film’s plot.

However, one can equally say that through its emphasis on temporality and kinesis the film also turns the spectator’s attention away from the cognitive aspects of narration and, as the film progresses, more and more towards cinema’s ability to ‘move’ (bodily, affectively, participatory) – a view of the medium that is also shared by Anne Rutherford, who contends that cinema ‘is not only about telling a story; it’s about creating an affect, an event, a moment which lodges itself under the skin of the spectator’ (2003). According to many re/viewers this seems to also have been one of the strengths of *Slumdog Millionaire*, its achievement to create both a visceral viewing experience and affective spectatorial responses. In an audience study, Hannah Wojciehowski (2010) has analysed those spectator responses; while she quotes Boyle’s claim that his film tries to ‘get under the skin of the city’, she analyses how the film manages to ‘get under the skin’ of its spectators. As outlined above, *Slumdog Millionaire* ‘gets under the skin’ of its spectators in the first instance through

its melodramatic plot structure and its kinetic cinematography and editing, but it also highlights the notion of the vulnerability, permeability and sensitivity of skins, as if to make its aesthetic ambition – its attempt to ‘get under the skin’ – visible. The film’s recurring scenes of homelessness and public sleeping display the protagonists’ bodies as a last refuge for being at home, hence their vulnerability. The nexus between home and body, or between homelessness and vulnerability, should thus be made visible through images that emphasise the body’s ‘home’, its external protective membrane, its skin. The vulnerability of the street children’s skins is of course inextricably linked to the experience of homelessness and the search for homes or sleeping places is inextricably linked to the search for protective ‘second skins’, which shield them from the outside world – from wounds or traumas.

Indeed, the film emphasises the protagonist’s skin from the very beginning and, more importantly, through its most iconic images, which designate this theme (the vulnerability of bodies and skins) as a major leitmotif: when Jamal is tortured by the police officers his skin is wired and penetrated by electric shocks. Later on, his skin is covered with excrement – the film’s most iconic image – in an inversion of the notion of ‘untouchability’, where this ‘second skin’ of stinking human waste helps him shield off the crowds surrounding the ‘untouchable’ Amithab Bachchan (Fig. 9.3). In the film’s second iconic image, Salim puts on a ‘second skin’ in a bathtub full with banknotes, as if to protect himself with money, albeit ‘dirty money’, from the traumatic childhood memories of the ‘footpath’, which is an apt image of Salim as an heir to Bombay Cinema’s ‘angry young man’ characters. Latika’s skin, finally, is covered with ornamental henna paintings, when she works for Maman in a brothel. Her painted ‘second skin’ designates her as a virgin, protecting her from being sexually exploited by the brothel’s customers. When she tries to escape and



Figure 9.3 Skins as leitmotif: untouchability, second skins and sensing through touching.

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reunite with Jamal at the train station, she is wounded by a gangster's knife which leaves a permanent scar on her cheek. In the movie's climax Jamal kisses Latika's scar – a violation of a classical Bollywood prohibition and thus a last 'slap in the face' to Hindu audiences. This is simultaneously the film's affective climax (and the last iconic image), as the scar signifies their vulnerability, past lives and traumas (Greek: wounds), hence, the embodied experiences of homelessness the characters have been through, or to repeat the words of Mazumdar, 'in contemporary cinema . . . homelessness introduces scars that cannot be easily erased' (2007: 3).

Maximum city of screens

Boyle's claim that the film tries to 'get under the skin of the city' could also be interpreted metaphorically. The 'skin of the city' would in this metaphorical sense be the city's thick layers of mediation, that is, the city's hypermediated surface. The increasing flow of images, sounds and signs of a rapidly expanding consumer culture – the fashion, music and television industries of neo-liberal Mumbai – contribute to a new form of panoramic 'surface culture', or to repeat Anustup Basu: 'The city – with its manifold electronic terminals, data flows, image flickers, borderless connections, and varied pulsations of information – has itself become the screen' (2010: 99). In Mumbai, this new electronic 'skin' of urban life was most significantly transformed and shaped into its current form by the emergence of cable and satellite television in the early 1990s. In other words, Mumbai is not only a 'cinematic city', but also a 'televisual city'. *Slumdog Millionaire* presents the city's 'skin' by including various TV sets, monitors and screens in its mise-en-scène to point to the city's ubiquitous screen environment – emphasising Manovich's notion of a 'society of the screen' (2001: 94) – particularly when Jamal answers the last question of the quiz show. Here the film cuts to dozens of screens, monitors and TV sets all over the city, placed on construction sites, in homes or in corner shops, where numerous spectators gather to watch Jamal answering his last question. In other words, the screen becomes, here, a metaphor for the city (Figs. 9.4 and 9.5).

This sequence points to another important motif, that of the film's emphasis on the nexus between 'looking at' and 'being looked at', and by extension, blindness and seeing or social invisibility and televisual hypervisibility. The film's motif of blindness – a motif that also refers to the motif of the skin and through it to the theme of sensing through touching – is one of the most central ones in *Slumdog Millionaire*, because Jamal applies for the quiz show only to be 'seen' by Latika: when the police officers ask him why he applied for the quiz show, he answers, 'because I wanted Latika to see me'. The motif of blindness is introduced in the orphanage sequence and the narrative module surrounding the quiz show question about Surdas – a fifteenth-century



Figures 9.4 and 9.5 Maximum City of screens: *doordarshan*, the city's electronic skin and its spectators or citizens.

poet, who is alleged to have been blind, like Homer. The song 'Darshan do Ganshyam', a devotional song to the Hindu god Krishna, which the orphans are forced to sing as street beggars, is thus not only a clue to answering one of the quiz show's questions, but it gives the interpreter of the film an additional clue too. This is because a very specific religious tradition is entailed in the word *darshan*. It is a Sanskrit term meaning 'sight' or 'seeing'; hence, the song's verses express the poet's desire to 'see' Krishna. The Indologist Diana Eck explains the religious practice of *darshan* as follows: 'In the Hindu ritual tradition it refers especially to religious seeing, or the visual perception of the sacred. When Hindus go to a temple, they do not commonly say, "I am going to worship", but rather "I am going for *darshan*"' (1998: 3). Yet, this kind of

devotional seeing is a reciprocal, or indeed, interactive kind of seeing. It establishes a profound engagement with the sacred and can only be understood when one accepts the proposition that images are themselves literally alive. In other words, *darshan* is an interactive, two-way look in which the divinity is actually present, even if only as an image. *Darshan* thus describes a mutuality of seeing and being seen, of 'looking at' and 'being looked at', in which the image looks back and the worshipper and the deity literally 'connect'.

Doordarshan is not only translated as 'television' (*door* for 'far' and *darshan* for 'seeing'), but also the name of India's biggest public service broadcaster. Some scholars of Hindi film and television culture highlighted the religious practice of *darshan* in order to not only explain India's obsession with (or devotion to) its movie stars, but also to outline the major difference between Western conceptions of visibility – of 'looking at' versus 'being looked at', the visual regime of scopophilic voyeurism – and the ones of Hindu popular culture.²⁴ Christopher Pinney has, for instance, emphasised how the practice of *darshan* describes a sensory, corporeal and 'haptic visibility', rather than a disembodied, ocularcentric one as follows: 'The eye in *darshan* is best thought of as an organ of tactility, an organ that connects with others . . . [D]issimilar to dominant class "western" practices, which privilege disembodied, unidirectional and disinterested vision', *darshan* is, as Pinney explains, not unlike other 'popular practices that stress mutuality and corporeality in spaces as varied as those of religious devotion and cinematic pleasure' (2004: 193). *Darshan* is thus a way of seeing that is a form of touching (Eck 1998: 9); the viewer imagines that the object being looked at is actually present and can be physically touched. This implies that *darshan* describes a way of seeing that is more haptic than visual, a 'way of seeing' that is more familiar to blind people than to those who possess the sense of sight.²⁵ With Pinney one could argue that this kind of 'haptic visibility' (or 'touching with the eyes') is not only a distinct feature of Indian spirituality, but also of its visual culture, particularly of Bollywood films.

Hence, the film's driving story element, Jamal's desire to find and reconnect with Latika, to be seen and touched by her, is translated into visual leitmotifs that hint at the notion of haptic visibility, particularly the motifs of *door-/darshan* (Indian TV and visual culture), blindness (sensing through touching) and skins (whether carnal or electronic). At the same time these motifs also give us vital clues as to the film's main aesthetic features and mode of address. Accordingly, the film is not so much concerned with issues of representation, but rather more with 'getting under the skin' of its audiences, that is, with creating a visceral or bodily viewing experience, particularly through its play with genre temporalities, hyperkinetic cinematography and an interactive mode of narration. In this way, however, it creates an 'immersive experience' of a mediated reality – a Bombay Cinema version of the Maximum City – rather than a

truthful representation of life in the slums in the 'global capital of slum dwellers'. It so truly succeeds as a 'feel-good movie', not only because it has a happy ending but also because it simply feels good to be immersed into such a virtual reality. Just like in a computer game, the viewers are first introduced to the 'rules of the game' before they are invited to play the game and enter a world of depthless digital (or digitalised) images of a Maximum City of screens.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Even though *Slumdog Millionaire* has been harshly criticised for being a form of 'poverty tourism', it is far more accurately described as a tremendously self-conscious imitation of Bombay Cinema. As this chapter has shown, its references to genre temporalities and/or modes of address (of gangster films, street kid films or romantic melodramas), specific scenes (for example, the opening scene in *Black Friday*), plot structures (such as the forking life paths of two rival brothers in *Deewar*), cinematographic and editing styles (particularly of recent gangster films like *Satya*), or character types (such as the orphaned children of *Boot Polish*) are indeed so manifold, that one can, to re-phrase Mazumdar, describe the film itself as an 'archive of Bombay cinema'. But how does *Slumdog Millionaire*'s proverbial *masala* style distinguish itself then from the postmodern bricolage aesthetics of films like *Dom za vešanje* with their likewise excessive intertextuality and their similar employment of the figure of the street kid as a narrative focaliser? As I have tried to outline above, the difference lies in 'an entirely new logic for justifying the realism of the story and transmitting the energy of the depicted events' (Thanouli 2009: 176) which, together with Thanouli, I have referred to as a hypermediated form of realism; that is, a form of realism that does not conceal its status as a mediation and which corresponds with our new digital 'realities', our ubiquitous screen environments and permanent immersion in (new) mediascapes. In many ways, *Slumdog Millionaire* adheres to this kind of (new media) logic, since it not only creates an interactive viewing experience in the form of a narratological game (show), but also attempts to refigure the properties of screen space according to the way we use our (mobile) screens today, that is, as haptic surfaces to play with, rather than merely as visual ones to 'look at'. However, this does not necessarily mean that the spectator truly gets 'under the skin of Mumbai', the Maximum City of crowded spaces and extreme social contrasts; rather, it means that we, as viewers, immerse ourselves into an alternate Maximum City, that is, a city of screens, surfaces and images.

NOTES

1. Or as Ranjani Mazumdar has put it, 'The city itself is marked, even scarred, by the fuzziness of lines between the "urban" and the "rural"' (2007: 4).
2. In Dharavi, dubbed as 'Asia's largest slum', approximately one million people occupy only two square kilometres. As for the naming of informal settlements like Dharavi, in India there are at least seven terms to describe slums, depending on region, city, language or shape. The Marathi word for hut is *zopda*, so that a cluster of huts is called a *zoppad-patti*. *Chawl*, on the other hand, is a Mumbai term for social housing facilities. In the 1920s almost seventy per cent of all workers lived in *chawls*, while today an estimated twenty per cent of Mumbai's total population. However, *chawls* are by now in such dilapidated conditions that they were included in UN-HABITAT's case study on Mumbai's slums (see Agnithori 1994: 43–6; Risbud 2003: 5).
3. Mehta's book was, as Danny Boyle claims, a major supplementary inspiration to *Slumdog Millionaire*: 'I read the script. It's a great narrative, but also a dazzling picture of the city. Then I read *Maximum City*. This . . . book became my Bible really. I took it everywhere. I felt part of the time we were adapting that' (Boyle 2008). Mehta explores the 'Maximum City's' enormous film and television industry, as well as its criminal underworld. It also recounts its recent history, politics and ethnic tensions, or in other words, the city's 'maximum extremes', which not only caused social turmoil and political instability, but also frequent outbursts of violence during recent decades.
4. Mazumdar has formulated this point as follows: 'Writers, architects, and poets have tried to represent Bombay's diversity and its brutal contrasts in imaginative ways. The most persistent image of Bombay is the cheek-by-jowl coexistence of skyscrapers and slums, each inhabiting a different experience and world . . . The narrative of contrasts and compressed spaces has been central to the way Bombay has been imagined in literature and cinema and has informed the city's cultural imagination throughout the twentieth century' (2007: 46–7).
5. The term 'Bollywood' appeared for the first time in the 1970s to designate the meteoric rise of Bombay's film industry as an Indian version of Hollywood. However, it was later also used to designate popular Hindi films. I use Ranjani Mazumdar's term 'Bombay Cinema' to designate both popular Hindi films as well as various other (or alternative) Bombay-set films from the 1950s onwards. As already mentioned, the term also hints at the notion of Bombay as a cinematic city, as Mazumdar makes quite explicit (2007: xxxi).
6. The two major Indian film studios were Bombay Talkies (founded in 1934 in Bombay) and New Theatres (founded in 1930 in Calcutta). Both companies closed down by the mid-1950s.
7. One of the most famous 'studio Socials' was *Do Bigha Zamin* (*Two Acres of Land*, 1954), a Hindi film, directed by the Bengali filmmaker Bimal Roy. Distributed abroad with the title *Calcutta: The Cruel City*, the film is inspired by the father/son theme of neorealist films like *Ladri di bicicletta* (*The Bicycle Thieves*, De Sica, 1948) and narrates the most recurring plot line of postwar Indian films: the journey from poor village to big city slum (see also Chapter 4).
8. 'Unintended city' is a phrase used by Mazumdar, who, in turn, refers to the architect Jai Sen, who introduced the term in 1976 to describe some of Bombay's urban spaces that have become undesired (or abject) byproducts of the 'intended city', the planned city of urban planners, politicians and architects.

9. I am referring here to Anustup Basu, who claims in his *Bollywood in the Age of New Media* that between 1991 and 2004 popular Hindi cinema abandoned the slum and its related topics: 'It was during the 1990s that the *bustee* (shanty-town) film gradually lapsed into obsolescence or was relegated to B- or C-grade industries. The screen was overwhelmingly taken over by a decorative milieu that assembled, often without obligation, varied aspects of a new urban consumerism, lifestyle choices, novelties, boundless imaginations of space and time' (2010: 43).
10. For Basu it is especially the notorious song-and-dance sequences which assemble such (literally) deterritorialised images of exotic tourist locations with decorative middle-class interiors, skipping, for instance, from Egypt's pyramids, an upper-class Mumbai living room to the Alps in Switzerland.
11. *Masala* is a term that is often used by journalists to describe the aesthetics of recent Bollywood films. Referring to the South Asian cuisine and its mixture of various ingredients and spices, *masala* films could be described as genuinely postmodern or intertextual in the sense that they are recognisable by their mix of generic codes (romance, family drama, melodrama), song-and-dance-sequences and their references to either popular culture or Hindu mythology.
12. The UK based production company *Celador Film* (since 2008 a subsidiary of Sony Pictures International) and *Film 4* were the original producers of the film, while *Pathé*, *20th Century Fox* and *Warner Brothers* came in at a later stage to co-produce the film (see Raphael 2011: 268–9). However, beyond specific marketing strategies and the Oscars, one could also claim that a major reason for the film's global success is its 'geo-televisual aesthetic', most evident, of course, in the centrality of the globally recognisable TV quiz show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* – a TV format that has been adapted across the world in 106 countries.
13. This is due to the film's cameraman (Anthony Dod Mantle), who worked with *Dogma 95* directors like Thomas Vinterberg, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen or Lars von Trier. For *Slumdog Millionaire* Dod Mantle used a novel handheld digital mini camera (SI-2K Digital Cinema Camera), which had never been used for a feature film before. According to Dod Mantle, the camera allowed him to be more flexible, mobile and freed from bodily constraints: 'I had to find a camera set up that would be ergonomic for me to throw myself around the slums chasing the children' (Silicon Imaging 2009).
14. Beaufoy's script borrows the narrative structure (e.g. first person narration, flashbacks and narrative mini-segments structured according to the quiz show's questions) of Swarup's novel, but it also departs a great deal from it. One such major departure is for example that in Swarup's novel the main protagonist and first person narrator, Ram Mohammed Thomas (the character Jamal Malik in the film), does not live in Juhu, the main setting of *Slumdog Millionaire*, but in 'Asia's largest slum', Dharavi.
15. For the central importance of *dharma* in the Bollywood family romance see Mishra 2002: 14–15.
16. See Bordwell 2011: 214–15.
17. See Bellow's essays 'To segment/to analyze' (2000: 193–216) and 'To alternate/to narrate' (2000: 262–78).
18. With the phrase 'dialogical passage to Bombay Cinema' I refer to Kristeva's (1980) notion of intertextuality and to what Bakhtin describes in his *The Dialogic Imagination* (1982) as a text's dialogue with other texts (see also Chapter 6).
19. See Mazumdar 2007: 158.
20. Boyle describes his/the cameraman's immersion into the Mumbai experience as a cinematic strategy as follows: 'I wanted to feel really involved in the city. I didn't want to

- be looking at it, examining it. I wanted to be thrown right into the chaos as much as possible' (Silicon Imaging 2009).
21. For a discussion of the epic melodrama as the foundational genre of popular Hindi cinema cf. Rajadhyaksha 1993.
 22. The immensely popular story of *Devdas* narrates the impossible love between a Brahmin boy and a lower caste girl. It is based on a 1917 novel by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay and was adapted for the screen at least fourteen times.
 23. I refer here to an expression used by Appadurai, who describes Mumbai's 'spectral housing' scene and contends that public sleeping has become a technique of necessity for the homeless pavement-dwellers of Mumbai, who can only feel secure while sleeping and only 'be at home in their bodies' (2000: 638).
 24. Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel have argued that the practice of *darshan* is deeply rooted in popular Indian visual culture, in which actors not only become stars, but almost semi-gods and goddesses (Dwyer and Patel 2002: 33).
 25. In this way, the practice of *darshan* relates to what Laura Marks has referred to in her seminal *The Skin of the Film* as 'haptic visuality', since here 'the eyes themselves function like organs of touch' (2000: 162); furthermore haptic visuality for Marks consists of a 'dynamic subjectivity between looker and image [and] tends less to isolate and focus upon objects, than simply to be co-present with them' (2000: 164).

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Conclusion

In a chapter which is tellingly entitled ‘Back to Dickens’, Mike Davis argues, in his book *Planet of Slums*, that the contemporary ‘dynamics of Third World urbanization both recapitulate and confound the precedents of nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe and North America’ (2007: 11). Similar analogies between the Victorian slums of the nineteenth and the shantytowns of the twenty-first century have not only been drawn by sociologists, but also by filmmakers and writers. Danny Boyle has, for instance, compared Mumbai to ‘Charles Dickens’ Victorian London’ (Boyle 2009b) and the journalist George Packer has argued in his essay ‘Dickens in Lagos’ that

Dickens’ real heirs are less likely to have grown up in London than Bombay. It’s no accident that one of the few great works of social realism of recent years was produced by an Indian-born writer, Rohinton Mistry, whose novel *A Fine Balance* begins with [an] epigraph from Balzac . . . In vast, impoverished cities like Bombay, Cairo, Jakarta, Rio, or Lagos, the plot lines of the nineteenth century proliferate. Not ignorant mass suffering, but the ordeal of sentient individuals who are daily exposed to a world of possibilities through a sheet of glass – satellite TV, the Internet – that keeps them out. The extreme conditions of megacity slums contain the extravagant material that animated Dickens. (Packer 2010)

Hence, apart from drawing analogies between Charles Dickens and Rohinton Mistry, Packer also points to the novel realities of globalised screen media that are shaping, for better or worse, the dreams, aspirations and hopes of many slum-dwellers today – a topic that has, however, already been explored in films like *Moi, un noir* or *Salaam Bombay!*, but still continues to be a prominent concern in more contemporary films like *Cidade de Deus* and *Slumdog Millionaire*.

With the latter example, this book concludes not merely with a return of

'Dickens in Mumbai'. Evidently there is a much broader historical loop or cycle that has been outlined in this book: another turn-of-the-century conflation between emerging new media technologies and an immense multiplication of slum images and stories. To rephrase Douglas Muzzio and Thomas Halper's observation about the previous *fin-de-siècle* (see Chapter 2), in the digital era the slum – tied to a panoply of issues, from drug abuse, crime and gang violence to homelessness and social inequality – has returned as a topic of high visibility. But unlike around 1900, our 'planet of slums' is now a multimediated topic of a 'planet of screens': from the festival films of a Pedro Costa, new wave cinemas as in the Philippines, DVDs like *Lagos Wide & Close*, news reports or documentaries on public television as Al Jazeera's *The Slum*, interactive websites and multimedia exhibitions such as *The Places We Live*, to globally distributed cult films like *Cidade de Deus* and blockbusters such as *Slumdog Millionaire*. Around the year 2000, and at the same time as the slum population reached the enormous figure of one billion, the global 'population explosion' coincided with a global 'image explosion', made possible by the digital revolution. The result of this most recent confluence between media and social history is a globally interconnected visual and film culture that is more than ever obsessed with life in the world's urban slums.

I have argued in the book's Introduction that a 'polycentric approach to world cinema' is an appropriate way of approaching this book's research question. In doing so, I have tried to illustrate how contemporary examples take part not only in a 'glocal dialogue', in a transnational exchange that is shaped by the 'push-pull' dynamic between global currents and local contexts, but that they also do so in a dialogue with the past, through which they continuously return to and modify previous ways of representing slums on screen. The contemporary examples that I have discussed in Chapters 2 to 9 return in all instances to certain documentary and realist modes of representation, but modify them in regard to local contexts as well as in response to changing viewing habits in the digital era, thereby refiguring what audiovisual media can do today with regard to topics like urban poverty in different ways. Let's summarise these modifications thus:

- Examples such as *The Places We Live* or *Lagos Wide & Close* show that 'the digital age represents not the onset but the recent flourishing of multimodality, a historical accumulation rather than a beginning' (Carter 2008: 118). Even though they share similar ethical problems of representation as their related predecessors (*How the Other Half Lives* or *Housing Problems*), these contemporary examples try to use digital technologies in order to resolve these moral problems in various ways, especially by enabling spectators to choose several different viewing modes or options, rather than to

align them with a single, authoritarian perspective (-of-God). The use of multiple modes and interactive menus emphasises the notion of the active 'user' who is encouraged to 'go into' (or inhabit) the images of our 'planet of slums', rather than remain a passive observer who merely 'looks at' the world's 'Other Half' from a safe distance. Yet, despite these benevolent (media-) reformist intentions to engage us more profoundly with life in our planet of slums, one can nevertheless say that the 'interactive' viewer, user or visitor remains protected by the screen that shield 'us' from 'them' – and so becomes a virtual, rather than an actual slum tourist.

- Just like in earlier new wave cinemas or in classical *cinéma vérité* examples like *Moi, un noir*, in the films of the Philippine New Wave 'crews and casts feel not only enabled, but morally obliged to express the truth, not any truth, but the truth about the land and the people [the films are] focusing on through a fictional plot' (Nagib 2011: 32). This way of filmmaking relies on 'found' actors, stories and real-world objects, rather than on pre-designed characters, stories and sets. However, this DV-enabled new wave attempts to convey the reality of the material world more obviously, that is through its people, places *as well as* its things. It does so through putting an emphasis on the performative, bodily commitment of both crews and casts, of filmmakers and slum-dwellers, as well as on the 'many real-world objects or events that are part of their 'field-of-convenience' (Jim Libirian). Hence, the filmmakers of the Philippine New Wave strongly believe in cinema's 'unlimited power' to convey the (visual, social and material) reality of life in the slums and thereby display less a new, but rather a 'renewed concern and respect for reference in the visual media' (Elsaesser).
- In contemporary world cinema's 'festival films' – such as in *No Quarto da Vanda* – the classical neorealist device of the long take becomes hyperbolically extended so that it radically challenges our perceptions of (cinematic) time and space. In Costa's *Fontainhas Trilogy*, static and unbearably long takes are gradually disassociated from a comprehensive story or plot, so that the trilogy's images of drug addiction, wretchedness and inertia in Fontainhas acquire, paradoxically, both documentary and painterly qualities. Thus a new modified form of political docufiction for the digital age becomes possible, which is most evidently expressed in the concluding part of the trilogy. *Juventude em Marcha* provides a political critique, not so much in the form of a cinema that is accusatory, explanatory, or even essayistic – as *De Certa Manera* –, but more in the form of what the French philosopher Jacques Rancière described as an 'aesthetic regime of art' (in the true sense of *aísthēsis* as feeling, perceiving, sensing); a cinema that acknowledges what art or cinema can be or do today in order to be political: to 'revolutionise' our ways of not only 'looking at', but also of feeling, per-

ceiving and sensing the world beyond merely its visible appearances – and particularly a world which many would prefer to ignore altogether.

- Even though they obviously experiment with (glocal) generic patterns and the classical narrative form (for example, three-act-structures and chronological cause-and-effect narration), post-classical films like *Cidade de Deus* or *Slumdog Millionaire* not only return to the cinema of attractions or to forgotten notions of cinema as a medium of gaming, but they also reuse the narrative device of the street kids' subjective points of view. Like *Dom za vešanje*, these post-classical films of the digital era reconnect thus to a tradition in world cinema, or, as some would have it, to a genre which reaches as far back as to *Los Olvidados*. This (world cinema) genre attempts to bring us (cognitively and emotionally) closer to these street kids' embodied experiences of living in the slums. However, unlike their predecessors, they also hypermediate their subjective points of view, thereby introducing 'an entirely new logic for justifying the realism of the story and transmitting the energy of the depicted events' (Thanouli 2009: 176). This new logic could be described with Bolter and Grusin as the paradoxical 'double logic of remediation': a logic that creates a self-consciously hypermediated 'filmic text' (or 'intertext'), but at the same time intensifies the (embodied) viewing experience of closeness, affinity and immediacy. The concept of 'remediation' explains how (new) media devices function today, but it also helps in defining how post-classical films of the digital era, such as *Cidade de Deus* and *Slumdog Millionaire*, incorporate the logic of new media into their plot structures and visual designs in order to address their primary target audience: young people who use digital media devices on an everyday basis.

What connects these contemporary examples is that, despite their obvious stylistic differences and 'modes of address', the (ideal) spectator – whether he or she is called a performative participator, an embodied spectator, an active user or an immersed experiencer – is not only imagined to be a spectator who sees or observes, but also one who senses, feels and is physically involved. Like the viewing habits of its audiences, cinema itself is being transformed today too: it is becoming a presentational rather than a representational medium, as many filmmakers do not primarily aim to reproduce reality in an encoded, illusionary or transparent way, but instead they acknowledge the presence of an embodied spectator in order to convey somatic reality-effects, no matter how different these effects are in each case. Hence, contemporary filmmakers are finding new ways to answer the question of what cinema is and what it can do – and what cinema can do with the slum as a topic – while simultaneously responding (either in the form of a resistance or in an affirmative way) to changing viewing habits in the digital age. Irregardless of whether such labels as mainstream or underground, commercial or alternative, this refiguration of

screen-spectator relations goes much deeper and it affects many contemporary films, and of course many of those that address the slum as a topic too. It shows that even socially engaged filmmakers gradually move away from an emphasis on merely reproducing pro-filmic social realities, towards (piercing, activating or engaging) the spectator's sensory apparatus in order to make him/her more attentive towards the images and stories, people and things, sounds and voices from today's 'planet of slums'. Yet, this implied 'from . . . to' trajectory is by no means teleological as this book has shown; such notions continuously (re)appear, disappear and reappear over and over again, because Riis's magic lantern shows had already produced somatic reality-effects for its spectators to lend sensory immediacy to the tenement problem, whereas Pedro Costa's films do still attempt to 'embalm' a fleeting pro-filmic reality of a place and its people.

Another general aspect that I would like to stress in this conclusion is related to the notion of 'authenticity' in the digital age. Thomas Elsaesser has claimed that today 'only sites that are "archaeological" will be perceived as authentic, remediated sites if you like, multiply inscribed, like video-overlay, or multiply occupied, like land claimed by several owners' (2005: 368). In other words, Elsaesser suggests that the digital age transforms our notions of what an 'authentic representation', and by extension, of what 'realism' in audiovisual media is, and this also connects all the contemporary examples discussed in this book. Whereas Pedro Costa's *Fontainhas Trilogy* seems from the outset to attempt an unfiltered, unmediated access to life in Fontainhas, it is, in fact, *also* an attempt to set up (a previously unmediated) Fontainhas as an 'archeological site': Costa re-visits and consequently remediates Fontainhas from film to film, so that his trilogy not only chronicles and stores the neighbourhood's steady decay and destruction, but also, metaphorically speaking, layers image upon image, 'like video-overlay', to create an 'archeological site'. Almost the same can be said about the films of the Philippine New Wave, *Cidade de Deus* or *Slumdog Millionaire*, all of which re-visit or remediate well-established local topics, sites and/or *topoi*: they do not pretend to 'explore' an unknown *terra incongita* 'at the doorstep', but re-visit or remediate the slums of Manila (from Lino Brocka to Brillante Mendoza), the *favela* as a symbolic landscape of crisis (from Nelson Pereira dos Santos to the New Brazilian Cinema) or the 'Maximum City' of extremes (from Raj Kapoor to Ram Gopal Varma). Following Elsaesser, one could say that such media layering possibly appears more 'real' and more 'authentic' to us today than first-time documentary 'explorations' like Jacob Riis's 'flashes from the slums'. This is because most sites or topics have already been re-visited numerous times before. One could conclude then that slums today are, as they were around 1900, multi- and remediated sites but that, unlike around 1900, they have now also become layered (media-) 'archeological sites'.

Since another major aim of this book was to think *with* representative

examples rather than to merely use them as illustrations, I would also like to conclude it with a final example, which, I believe, is another local expression of a global current – a current which includes films like the already mentioned 2010 remake of the *Cinema Novo* classic *Cinco Vezes Favela* that has the programmatic subtitle *Now By Ourselves*. I am referring here to the media initiative *Slum-TV*, which was launched in 2006 by two Austrian and one Kenyan artist, as well as by two local residents of a densely populated slum in Nairobi called Mathare. The organisation provides technologies (DV cameras, laptops etc.) and services (film schooling, workshops, and so on) to enable the slum-dwellers of Mathare to become filmmakers and citizen journalists. Mathare's residents, particularly its youth, have produced numerous news reportages, documentaries, dramas and comedies that, in each case, deal exclusively with local issues. Each month these films were screened outside in public places to a local audience who apparently found tremendous pleasure in watching these self-produced videos that were addressing their own community issues (see cover image on front). *Slum-TV* is explicitly aiming to set up an audiovisual archive of Mathare, similar to the idea of an oral history – to create what could be for future generations an 'archeological' rather than a forgotten site, as the organisation stores these videos on the internet. In addition, these aspiring filmmakers not only exhibit their work to a local audience on the squares of Mathare but also to an international one at the annual *Slum Film Festival*. This festival invites filmmakers from all over the African continent to share their experiences and present their slum-related films.

Slum-TV is another good example of what audiovisual media can today do in the slums. Contrary to Susan Sontag's belief that the camera is essentially a non-interventionist medium that finds the most 'enthraling of decors' in the slums, one should instead say that cameras – now ubiquitous, cheap and easy to get – enable the dispossessed to become creative agents of their own lives. Cameras can serve as a means for self-expression, -representation and -empowerment and so stimulate communal activities. In this sense *Slum-TV* is a highly idealistic, but nevertheless also distinctly political type of TV/cinema that is, just like the Philippine New Wave, enabled by the digital turn. This is, of course, yet another return to a world cinema tradition – if one thinks of Third Cinema – but it is also a significant modification of this tradition. Instead of explaining and criticising specific parties for their wrongdoings and apart from attempting to 'revolutionise' our ways of 'looking at' places that many would prefer to ignore altogether, another strategy that today can be regarded as political is to create audiovisual archives of such places. This is because the act of layering – recorded images, sounds, stories and ultimately memories – is a *symbolic* occupation of a land that is physically occupied but that is, in the majority of cases, legally insecure for its residents.

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