Worlding Rio de Janeiro’s favelas

Relations and representations of socio-spatial inequality in visual art

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In 1924, Brazilian poet and intellectual Oswald de Andrade (1986, p. 184) famously wrote in his Pau-Brasil manifesto: “The shacks of saffron and ochre in the green of the favela, under cabralín blue, are aesthetic facts.” That same year, Tarsila do Amaral painted *Morro da Favela*, depicting small houses and tropical vegetation in a colorful, peaceful-looking setting (fig. 2.1). These two examples show that from the very moment favelas entered Rio’s urban imaginary in the 1920s, they have been aesthetically valued, even if they were also despised and feared in society at large (see chapter one). In addition, they highlight that favelas have long occupied a place in the international imaginary of Brazil and Rio de Janeiro, as *Morro da Favela* was a central piece of Tarsila’s 1926 exhibition in Paris and de Andrade’s manifesto called for “the exportation” of Brazilian culture.\(^1\) In this chapter, I consider how favelas have been imagined and interpreted in twentieth century visual art practices, focusing especially on the international exportation and reception of such expressions and theories. Put differently, how have favelas – as real and symbolic territories – been worlded in narratives and imaginaries of Brazil’s identity and global position across different temporal and spatial contexts?

This history is often mentioned in more recent accounts of ‘favela chic,’ but the links between the two are rarely explored in-depth. More generally, as Brodwyn Fisher (2014, p. 50) notes, there exists a tendency “to bind the realities of informal cities to the present tense, to allow favelas […] to be defined only by their most dramatic links to contemporary crises,” which often serves “important political purposes.” In reaction to such ‘presentisms,’ this

\(^1\) Translation: “The re-favela reveals the paradoxical samba school/ quite Brazilian because of its accent, but of an international language.”

\(^2\) In contrast to most other artists discussed in this thesis, I will mostly refer to Tarsila do Amaral by her first name, seeing as this is common practice in Brazil.
chapter outlines an art historical context that – as I argue – has had a fundamental impact on how twenty-first favela representations are conceptualized, framed, and interpreted, both within and outside of Brazil. By highlighting a number of temporal continuities, the (art) historical narrative presented here will therefore serve as an important background to my analysis of more recent practices in later chapters.

The title of the chapter refers to a phrase I frequently heard during my fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro, namely that the city’s favelas are *a periferia da periferia* (the periphery of the periphery), denoting both Brazil’s position as a country of the global South and the widespread inequality within Brazil. Building on the concept of worlding as outlined in the introduction to this thesis, local and global relations of inequality will be a key focal point of this chapter. Importantly, this is inextricably related to the topic of exoticism. The following
Chapter Two

1938 statement by Tarsila do Amaral (2008, p. 354, my translation) illustrates the continuity of exoticist depictions, as it resonates with numerous conversations I had during my fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro:

> Europeans are fed up with standardized processes. When they visit our country, they are interested in the picturesque that she possesses: the sugarloaf and the favela hill are valued as the whole of Rio de Janeiro with its skyscrapers, but still they do not fail to register our progress.

This quotation highlights the linkages between exoticism, primitivism and modernity in Brazil, which will be central to this chapter. I will examine how the meaning and function of the exoticist gaze at favelas has been negotiated by a variety of actors in different temporal and spatial contexts: middle- and upper-class Brazilian artists or curators, foreign spectators, and scholars. In this sense, the chapter is also an attempt to contextualize and historicize my own European gaze and voice. By highlighting both continuities and changes in the exoticist depiction of favelas, my goal is to give a nuanced and detailed account of how and why favela images have for so long spoken to the imagination of both Brazilian and foreign ‘outsiders,’ as well as how these images were mobilized in broader debates around identity, nationality, global inequality and resistance.

As explained in the previous chapter, the context of display and reception will be as important as the artistic depictions themselves. As Leon Wainwright (2011, p. 11) notes about art production in the Caribbean:

> The record of art display and remembrance highlights the intersections of time and belonging, time and generation, memory, alterity and space. Observing this at work more directly is the key to knowing what new relations have come into being between global movement and visual experience, and to what extent ideas of the Caribbean seem forever unfolded by time.

Accordingly, my goal is to provide both a history and a historiography of the worlding of favelas in visual art. In many accounts of favela representations, the history of this phenomenon is framed by distinguishing between four broad periods: (1) the native-
primitivist experimentation of Brazilian modernism in the 1920s, (2) the consolidation and exportation of cultural *Brasilidade* (Brazilianess) during the populist-nationalism of the 1930s and 1940s, (3) the romantic-revolutionary approach under the military dictatorship in the 1960s and 1970s, and (4) the commercialized, globalized depictions from the 2000s onwards. While recognizing the distinctions between these time periods, however, the specific aim in this chapter, which moves through the first three periods as well as the transition to the fourth (which will be the focus of upcoming chapters), is to highlight continuities and gradual changes rather than neat time periods delineated by points of rupture.

In the first section, I consider the often-mentioned ‘rediscovery of Brazil’ by Brazilian modernism, focusing on the role of European interlocutors and spectators. Second, I examine how favelas have figured in the art production, display and reception of three famous modernist painters: Tarsila do Amaral, Cândido Portinari and Lasar Segall. The third section discusses the so-called revolutionary romanticism of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly the internationally acclaimed work of Hélio Oiticica. Fourth, I look at the 1980s and 1990s as a crucial transitional period towards the contemporary context, characterized by growing commercialism and an increased emphasis on documentary realism. Finally, the concluding section draws out some of the continuities between these different time periods and highlights their importance for current artistic engagements with favelas.

**Re-discovering Brazil**

The obvious starting point for a historical analysis of artistic favela representations is Brazilian modernism, which gained national fame the 1920s, the same decade in which favelas started to become ingrained in Rio’s urban imaginary (Valladares 2005). A number of Brazilian modernists, such as Emilio di Cavalcanti, Lasar Segall, Cândido Portinari, Rossini Perez and Oswaldo Goeldi, depicted favelas from the 1920s onwards in a rather diverse artistic production. Tarsila do Amaral’s *Morro da Favela*, as noted, shows a colorful, rural-looking community of Afro-Brazilians that lives peacefully within its tropical surroundings. The prints of Rossini Perez from the 1950s, on the other hand, give a more abstract and geometrical depiction of lines and forms resembling favela houses (fig. 2.2). Oswaldo Goeldi, another printmaker, has yet another interpretation. Here the favela is a dark, grim-looking place with clear references to poverty. For Cândido Portinari, the favela was one of the contexts in which he depicted the daily life and struggles of Brazil’s working classes,
whereas Emilio di Cavalcanti mainly focused on the sensualized *mulatas* (supposedly) inhabiting favela neighborhoods. We thus see that favelas are appreciated and depicted for rather varied reasons, including their happy, colorful community life, their formal/aesthetic characteristics, their status as a gritty, dangerous-yet-exciting ‘slum,’ and their symbolic status within Brazil’s political economy.
The dominant narrative of Brazil’s modernist movement is often repeated: kicked off by the *Semana de Arte Moderna* art event in 1922, Brazilian artists and writers started oppose the French academic styles that had dominated art production in the country, looking instead at modernist forms of expression. Since 1924, the search for a quintessentially Brazilian art production became increasingly important in this respect, famously theorized by Oswald de Andrade’s (1986; 2017) *Pau-Brasil* and *Antropofagia* manifestos (see chapter one). Brazilian modernism and the Semana are generally read as a “watershed moment between the traditional past of a clear aristocracy and the revolutionary present of young intellectuals and artists that utopically hoped for a promising future through the arts” (Coelho, 2012, p. 24, my translation; see also de Andrade, 2008). As Williams (2001, p. 42) and others note, however, this narrative fails to acknowledge the internal diversity of the modernist movement, in which varied opinions about the role of the ‘national’ and ‘traditional’ co-existed in dialogue with one another (Coelho, 2012; Amaral, 1998). Moreover, considering depictions of non-elite Brazil, it should be reiterated that the artistic fascination with Afro-Brazilian and indigenous individuals and customs was far from new. There had been a long tradition of depicting these peoples during the colonial period and throughout the nineteenth century, both in quasi-anthropological works and in more traditional artistic genres, by foreign as well as Brazilian artists (Bandeira and Burton, 2012; Burton and Bandeira, 2012; Morais, 2001; Diniz and Cardoso, 2015).

Many of the Brazilian modernists received their artistic education in Europe, and a number of scholars have highlighted the links with European primitivism. However, as Philippou (2005, p. 248-249, emphasis in original) writes:

> To the Brazilians, the ‘primitive’ was also autochthonous; the native was their legitimate heritage *and* contemporaneous reality. In contrast to Europeans who had to import the African Other, the Brazilians were able to export as their own the Other the Europeans craved.

In other words, the idea of proximity was used by the Brazilians to distinguish themselves from the European primitivists: they argued that they were living *with* rather than merely imagining the ‘Other’ (de Andrade, 1923, qtd. in Amaral, 2003, p. 108; Schwartz, 2004;
Importantly, the exportation mentioned by Philippou was explicitly propagated in de Andrade’s (1986, p. 185) Manifesto Pau-Brasil: “Let’s make the division: imported Poetry. And Pau-Brasil Poetry, for exportation.” Of course, primitivist depictions of Latin America were often precisely what the European audiences desired: some artists even “shifted their approach” because “the Parisian audience […] did not want reality, but rather stereotypes of the exotic and native” (Greet, 2014, p. 227). In 1923, Tarsila do Amaral (qtd. in Amaral, 2003, p. 101-102, my translation) writes about this Parisian interest to her family: “What is wanted here is that everyone brings a contribution from their own country. This explains the success of the Russian ballets, Japanese prints and black music. Paris is done with Parisian art.”

Exoticism and primitivism thus found a contradictory following among the Brazilian modernists, which was further complicated by the class and race inequalities within Brazil. In a way, the Brazilian modernists occupied a position in-between the European artists they admired and befriended, and the marginalized Brazilian subjects they depicted (Herkenhoff, 1995). Mindful of this peripheral status in Europe, they related their artistic work to broader imaginaries of Brazil’s global position and relevance. As Carlos Zilio (1997, p. 113, my translation) notes:

> Negotiating the rhetoric nationalism, [the modernists] had in mind a globalization of the Brazilian imaginary through a unity created by the constituting cultural sources[:]
> the contribution of the popular and the absorption of the contemporaneity of the art of developed industrial societies.

In this way, Roberto Schwartz (2004, p. 239) asserts: “Local primitivism would give back a modern sense to tired European culture. Brazil’s experience would be a differentiated cornerstone, with utopian powers, on the map of contemporary history.” Within this broader goal, images of favelas and their inhabitants served as a particular embodiment of the traditional and the popular the modernists searched for, thereby taking on symbolic importance in these narratives around global uniqueness and relevance.

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3 It is noteworthy here that several European metropolises also housed substantial populations from the respective colonies during this period, but my aim here is to highlight how Brazilian modernists differentiated themselves from European artists.
The relation between Brazil and Europe thus lay at the heart of the modernist movement, which is reflected in frequent travels across the Atlantic. A central figure in this respect is the Swiss poet Blaise Cendrars, who is widely recognized as “an interesting foreign intervention in the elite ‘discovery’ of Carioca popular culture” (Vianna, 1999, p. 7; see also Amaral, 1997). Tarsila do Amaral and Oswald de Andrade first met Cendrars in Paris in 1923 where “the affinity was established,” and where Cendrars introduced them to several European artists (Amaral, 2003, p. 104, my translation). In 1924, he stayed in Brazil for six months, a visit described by Coelho (2012, p. 31) as a crucial moment in the development of Brazilian modernism. Cendrars and several Brazilian artists celebrated carnival in Rio, followed by a visit to colonial mining towns in Minas Gerais, in a trip that is said to have inspired Tarsila’s Pau-Brasil phase and Oswald de Andrade’s corresponding manifesto.4 Accordingly, both Mario and Oswald de Andrade note the influence of Cendrars on what they called their ‘re-discovery’ of Brazil (Amaral, 1997). In a 1926 article, Gilberto Freyre even observed a movement in Rio “to assert the value of things black” under the “influence of Blaise Cendrars” (Vianna, 1999, p. 9). In other words, Cendrars is seen to have played a crucial role in the direction and focus chosen by the Brazilian modernists, in which non-elite people and cultural expressions became a key source of inspiration.

However, while these claims around Cendrars’ importance are telling, we should also keep in mind earlier appreciations of traditionally ‘Brazilian’ cultural forms and calls for cultural independence. Already in 1922, Menotti del Picchia and Ronaldo de Carvalho had presented such arguments (Philippou, 2005). Also, Oswald de Andrade argued in a lecture at the Sorbonne in Paris in May 1923, just days before meeting Cendrars, how classical, European styles had “long impeded the free enclosure of a true national art,” emphasizing the role of Afro-Brazilian and indigenous characteristics, which he described as “realist elements” in Brazil (Amaral, 2003, p. 108, my translation). Finally, Mario de Andrade urged Tarsila in a 1923 letter to “abandon Paris” and return to the “virgin forest” (mata virgem) of Brazil (Amaral, 1999, p. 78-79, my translation). Vianna (1999, p. 71) therefore suggests that the Brazilian artists in Paris might have sparked Cendrars’ interest in the country – rather

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4 Tarsila notes the participants of the group: “We went with a group to discover Brazil. Dona Olivia Guedes Penteado in front, with her sensibility, her charm, her social prestige, her help to the modern artists. Blaise Cendrars, Oswald de Andrade, Mario de Andrade, Gofredo da Silva Telles, René Thiollier, Oswald de Andrade Filho, then a boy, and me” (do Amaral, 1939, qtd. in Amaral, 2003, p. 152).
than the other way around. In any case, it is more appropriate to speak of a mutual influence and interest, which occurred through frequent travels across the Atlantic.

As Brazilian art historian Aracy Amaral (1997) notes in her book on Cendrars and the Brazilian modernists, Cendrars approached Brazil as a mysterious and exotic land: he was fascinated by Afro-Brazilian culture, the country’s tropical nature and its colonial history. Accordingly, in his writings about Brazil fantasy and reality are often mixed. Interestingly, the Brazilian modernists saw and criticized Cendrars’ European gaze, but the poet’s position was ambiguous. In a 1938 article, Tarsila explicitly describes this liberty towards the facts, but also notes:

In the middle of a lot of blague [jokes, nonsense], Cendrars said profound and serious things, and his description of our capital, with its more than two million inhabitants, its immense skyscrapers, its illumination that looks like a dream, says very well that it treats a big city, where its people live with modern comforts, of the level of the great civilizations, with the advantage of a regional picturesque and the unexpected (do Amaral, 2008, p. 355, my translation).

Here we see that the primitivist-nationalism of Tarsila was paralleled by imaginaries of modernity, which is reflected in the passage from the same text quoted in the introduction to this chapter. In addition, it illustrates what Amaral (1997, p. 103) describes as a Brazilian sensitivity to foreign depictions of their country as an exotic hell and/or paradise.

Writing in the 1950s, influential cultural critic Sergio Milliet (1959, qtd. in Amaral, 1997, p. 52, my translation) also reflected on the realism of Cendrars depiction: “Cendrars was one of those who imagined [Brazil], but he did that so well and with such a sense of reality that the reader ended up not knowing what he invented and what he experienced,” which made his depiction “admirably Brazilian, without a single true fact.” It is noteworthy here that Cendrars was highly familiar with Brazilian literature – both fiction and non-fiction, historical and contemporary. Moreover, he had close personal and professional relationships with the modernists, for example helping Tarsila with her first exhibition in Paris and translating Ferreira de Castro’s novel A Selva (1930). As such, for Aracy Amaral (1997, p. 90, my translation), Cendrars’ interest in Brazil “went beyond the few travels he made to [the] country,” showing instead careful research and reciprocal relations (see also Amaral, 2008, p. 355, my translation).
2003, p. 152-153). This focus on a more sustained engagement will return throughout the thesis, particularly in relation to foreign interventions in favela neighborhoods.

Favelas occupied a central position in Cendrars’ imaginary of Brazil. As Vianna (1999, p. 72) notes, Cendrars described Morro da Favella (currently known as Morro da Providência) as “a ‘completely savage’ place whose inhabitants rarely went down to the other parts of the city at all, except during carnival.” As literary critic Brito Broca (1960, qtd. in Amaral 1997, p. 53, my translation) recalls:

There [in Favela] lived the blacks in shacks, living in the law of nature. [Cendrars] understood that he had to go there, to see up close this wonderful exoticism. But the mayor of Rio, a friend, advised him: “Don’t go, Cendrars, you will be killed,” and offered to have him accompanied by an investigator, which he refused. He preferred to go in the company of another friend, who was in an ambulance one time when it was called to Favela. [In Favela], he behaved admirably with the blacks, a meek and accessible people […]. This allowed him to go back there many times by himself.

While the terminology used here is dated and highly problematic, the narrative of how Cendrars traveled to Favela is strikingly similar to that of contemporary foreign artists working in favela communities throughout Rio, including imaginaries of danger, bravery by the artist in spite of upper-class warnings, and finally acceptance by the locals (see chapter three). Accordingly, regardless of what actually happened during this encounter, this example illustrates how both foreign and Brazilian artists have historically been imagined in mediating roles between Brazil’s upper-classes and the urban poor.

This is especially significant considering the widespread discrimination and stigma attached to favelas in dominant elite discourses at the time. Importantly, Cendrars was not the only prominent, foreign visitor to favelas in the early twentieth century: others included Le Corbusier, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Alfred Agache, Marcel Camus, Albert Camus, Orson Welles, and Waldo Frank (Machado Calil, 2000; Philippou, 2005; Jaguaribe and Hetherington, 2004; Valladares 2005; Carvalho, 2013). These visits often led to representations of an “exuberant, feminised and eroticised Brazil, where ‘everything is festival’” (Le Corbusier, 1991: 233)” (Philippou, 2005, p. 289). Given the widespread stigmatization of favelas, Brazilian contemporaries did not always welcome these appraisals.
For example, real-estate developer Mattos Pimenta (1926, qtd. in Costa Mattos, 2015, p. 193-194) is recorded to have said in a 1926 speech: “A frankly ridiculous and revolting trend is developing amongst us, buoyed by the hot air of certain bohemian spirits, of accepting the favela as a happy, interesting institution worthy of being left to posterity as a national tradition.” Similarly, US film director Orson Welles was heavily criticized in the 1940s for entering the favelas to film “no good half-breeds” and “dances of negroes,” which shows that the validation of favelas never replaced the widespread discrimination and disapproval (Angorá, 1942, qtd. in Carvalho, 2013). Importantly, these combined sentiments led to a contradictory imaginary of Rio’s favelas. As Austrian writer Stefan Zweig (2016, p. 202) writes about Rio’s favelas in 1936:

Amid the metropolis here hundreds of thousands live in utter primitiveness, exactly as in the jungle or the bush. The astonishing thing is that these poor quarters seem neither tragic nor oppressive. For they lie in the open, among the green, with the most beautiful view in the world at exactly the same height and on the same streets as the luxurious villas.

Similar viewpoints inform Cendrars’ description of Favella as a ‘completely savage’ place (Vianna, 1999, p. 72), which nevertheless fascinated him.

This section has shown how images and imaginaries of non-elites in Brazil have been employed since the 1920s by an internationally-oriented avant-garde composed of actors with different national backgrounds – but excluding the population depicted. Their overall goal was to negotiate Brazil’s position in and potential contributions to a global context in which it was labeled ‘unoriginal’ or ‘repetitive’ (Schwartz, 2004). Crucially, however, different visitors to Rio’s favelas had distinct intentions and motivations, and their engagements took on varied forms. Futurist painter Marinetti, for example, visited one time in the company of a variety of prominent cultural and political figures: a favela tour avant-la-lettre (Costa Mattos, 2015). Orson Welles, in contrast, had a more long-term engagement for his documentary project It’s all true, for which he continuously changed his plans based on the realities he encountered, making it “far more than an ‘adventure’ in the tropics” (Carvalho, 2013, p. 178; see also Stam, 1997). Throughout the dissertation, I will argue for the need to be attentive to such particularities without losing sight of the voyeurism and exoticism shared by these
engagements. With this in mind, the next section will take a closer look at how the modernist favela representations of three specific artists were ‘exported’ to the global North across different time periods.

Exporting Favelas: Tarsila, Portinari, Segall

Tarsila do Amaral and Candido Portinari are among Brazil’s most successful modern painters, both within the country and internationally. Their work has been shown in a number of museums and galleries in Brazil, Europe and the United States, received international recognition through prizes and media attention, and can now be found in public and private collections across the world. Lasar Segall, a Lithuanian-born artist who immigrated to Brazil in the 1920s, has been equally successful but occupies a somewhat different position, as his identity shifts between ‘Brazilian’ and ‘European,’ often depending on where and by whom he is discussed. By analyzing the work and especially the reception of these three artists from the 1920s until the early 1960s, this section aims to further define how favelas have been mobilized to world Brazil’s identity and positionality in art world centers.

Tarsila is one of the most well-known proponents of the Brazilian modernist movement, both within and outside of Brazil, partly because her work developed in close connection to the highly influential writings of her then-husband Oswald de Andrade. My goal here is specifically to consider how the paintings Morro da Favela (1924) and, to a lesser extent, Carnaval em Madureira (1924), contributed to and were incorporated into international imaginaries of Brazil during the first half of the twentieth century. As noted, the direct inspiration for these paintings – which are central works of Tarsila’s Pau-Brasil phase – was the 1924 trip to Rio’s carnival with Cendrars and de Andrade, described by Luiz Perez-Oramas as “a moment of almost conversion” (Tarsila do Amaral: Inventing Modern Art in Brazil | MoMA LIVE, 2018). Interestingly, the colorful paintings of Rio’s periphery show similarities to sketches made during their trip to the Minas Gerais countryside, right after the Rio visit. In contrast, Tarsila’s Pau-Brasil paintings of São Paulo emphasize a modern and fast-paced urban imaginary, for example in the works São Paulo [Gazo] (1924), A Gare (1925), and E.F.C.B (1924). This resonates with Mario de Andrade’s (2008, p. 99) characterization of Rio in 1942:
Rio is one of those cities which keeps intact not only its national ‘exoticism’ (which is in any case a sign of its vitality of character) but also the interpenetration of the rural and the urban. Something you would never see in São Paulo.\(^5\)

Of course, such juxtapositions between modern, business-minded São Paulo and exuberant, exotic Rio continue to be influential, even if Tarsila would later (as we have seen in the previous section) also defend Rio’s modernity. Particularly important in relation to favela representations, however, are the imagined links between Rio’s favelas and the Brazilian countryside (especially the sertão, the arid backlands in the northeast of the country).

During the early twentieth century, favelas looked rather different than today. As filmmaker Nelson Pereira dos Santos (1999, qtd. in Couto and Leite Neto, 1999, my translation) notes:

> During this time, the favela was a semi-rural environment. You can see in the film [Rio Zona Norte, from 1957] that every house had its own space; they are not stacked onto each other. The majority of the houses had a yard, with some crops, some vegetables. People were reproducing the conditions of existence that they had in the countryside, outside of the city.

Valladares (2005, p. 31-36) and Bentes (2003) also describe the symbolic connections between favelas and the sertão – the two quintessential ‘Others’ to Brazil’s modern cities – which originate in the links between Rio’s favelas and the Canudos war. Based on these real and imaginary relations, as Valladares writes, favelas were seen as a continuation of the more ‘authentic’ or ‘traditional’ countryside, which was strengthened by their high number of North Eastern inhabitants. In other words, they were read as a mythical but somehow more ‘real’ Brazil within the metropolitan capital. Crucially, this also caused the need for representations that bridged this urban divide – which positioned the producers of these representations (e.g. journalists, scholars and artists) in a mediating role. In Valladares’ (2005, p. 36, my translation) words:

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\(^5\) Mario de Andrade was another famous member of the Brazilian modernist movement, who had no familial relation to Oswald de Andrade.
[The favela became] ‘a different world,’ much closer than the wilderness, the sertão, [but still] ‘far from the city,’ where one could only arrive through the ‘bridge’ constructed by the reporter or chronicler, who would take the reader to the top of the hill where he himself, as a member of the middle-class or elite, did not dare to ascend.

In other words, favelas came to be imagined as both proximate and distanced, both picturesque and threatening – and (artistic) depictions became a way to bridge this divide.

In Tarsila’s favela representation, the focus on the picturesque clearly dominates – and this proved a successful export product. Allegedly, Blaise Cendrars was so impressed by Morro da Favela that he encouraged her to base twelve paintings on this work before even thinking about exhibiting in Paris (Amaral, 2003, p. 185). And indeed, in 1926 Tarsila held her first ever solo exhibition, in Paris, with Morro da Favela as a central piece. As Tarsila (2008, p. 735, my translation) remembers in a text originally published in 1939, this painting made an impact from the outset:

Mr. Level, director of the gallery, even with Cendrars’ introduction, could not commit to showing the work of a new, unknown painter. He pretended not to have space. He would, however, come to my studio to see my works. When I showed him Morro da Favela, with blacks, little blacks, animals, clothes drying in the sunshine, between tropical colors, [...] he asked: When would you like to exhibit? I was approved: imagine my happiness.

Again, it is noteworthy here, as Greet (2014) has argued, that primitivist frameworks tended to dominate the reception of Latin American artists in Paris, and Tarsila’s exhibition was indeed celebrated by a number of French critics for its wonderful exoticness. As Aracy Amaral (2003, p. 239, my translation) writes: “Evidently the exoticism of the color and the motives was one of the keys to her success,” with reviewers referring, among other things, to “the tropical landscape, the village of the blacks, [...] the portrait of the good black” (Apollonius, 1926, qtd. in Amaral, 2003, p. 239, my translation). According to Greet (2013, p. 6), Tarsila herself was “acutely aware that this vision of Brazil was exactly what her

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6 The exhibition included a combination of ‘exotic’ works such as A Negra (1923), O Mamoeiro, A Cuca (1924), and Marchand de Fruits/Vendedor de Frutas (1925), as well as more ‘modern’ works like São Paulo (1924) and La Gare (1925).
audience desired,” and strategically used her ‘exoticness’ to position herself as a Brazilian artist within the center of the art world. As a well-traveled and well-connected artist, she continuously shifted between the Brazilian and the European context, reflecting in her work (as did many other Brazilian modernists) on the implications of this position for herself and the global reputation of her country. Importantly, her depictions of Brazil’s various peripheries traveled with her, gaining symbolic meaning within these intercultural reflections and exchanges.

Like Tarsila, painter Cândido Portinari was inspired by non-elite Brazil: Afro-Brazilian and indigenous cultures, the sertão and its poor inhabitants (retirantes), and favelas. Unlike Tarsila, however, his focus was on hardship, suffering and class inequality. Near the end of his life, in 1957-1958, Portinari produced an extensive series of paintings and sketches showing Rio’s hillside favelas. His most famous portrayal, however, is Morro (1933), purchased by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1938 (fig. 2.3). This painting...
depicts an unidentified favela in Rio’s south zone, with skyscrapers, green hills and the ocean in the background. In one of the houses we see the quintessential figure of a *malandro*, a clever and often charming petty criminal from a poor neighborhood (Dantas, 2003). In 1947, a Brazilian newspaper described this painting in the following terms:

> Portinari did not paint the [...] Guanabara that you see from one specific location, but ‘constructed’ another Guanabara, of a more complete reality: that which we know is there, including the misery of the hill bordering the luxury of the skyscrapers, the modern airplanes and the permanent mountains and – although invisible – the exit to the sea (O.M.C., 1947, my translation).

It is noteworthy here that a similar panorama of south zone favelas – contrasted with the formal city and overlooking the ocean – would later become one of Rio’s most iconic images (see chapter three). Like Tarsila’s depiction, however, the favela that we see here is much more rural-looking than current images and realities. It shows a limited number of houses occupying a bare, brown hillside, showing again the imaginary and material linkages between favelas and the countryside, strengthened by the contrast with the modern, formal city below.

It bears repeating here that within Brazil this aestheticized imaginary of Afro-Brazilians was far from universally accepted at the time, and often contradictory. Eventually, as Jackson (1994, no pagination) notes, “[t]hose cultural images that had been selected to constitute the modernist style [were] transformed into enduring scenic and sensual icons of tropicalized Brazil: *carnaval*, *sertão*, and *favela*.” However, this inclusion was selective and contested, as illustrated by Williams’ (2001) account of Brazil’s “culture wars” under the reign of Getúlio Vargas between 1930 and 1945, and 1951 and 1954 (see also Miceli, 1979). The international exportation of, for example, samba was widely debated in Brazil, often in primitivist terms. As a 1946 newspaper article writes about samba in Paris: “The samba of our hillsides [favelas], *malandro*, delicious, with its primitive cadence, its semi-barbarous rhythm, at the moment delights thousands of Parisians and tourists every night” (de Jorge Maia, 1946, my translation). The article continues by referencing Portinari:

> The opinions differ, are shocked, explode, but, certainly in a positive manner, our grand master [Portinari] left an definite impression, bringing to Paris a message from
Brazil, this country that seemed something distant, half-civilized, without a complete social and artistic formation (de Jorge Maia, 1946, my translation).

Negotiations about Brazilian identity abroad had a profound impact on the framing and reception of Portinari’s work within Brazil, which led to a rather contradictory reception of his work.

On the one hand, Portinari is described as a social or humanist painter, based on his own claims that “every art that is consciously produced should be a powerful weapon of battle, for the good of the people” (Aulicus, 1946, my translation; see also Fabris 1990). He has been celebrated as a painter who “vibrated with Brazilianness and nurtured the desire to realize a [form of] painting that would conciliate modern art with genuinely Brazilian, human aspects” (Salgado, 1974, my translation). On the other hand, Portinari’s work has been widely criticized because of the artist’s participation in several government-supported exhibitions within and outside of Brazil during the Vargas regime (Williams, 2001, p. 223-224; Fabris, 1990). These critiques already arose during the 1930s and 1940s, from artists and intellectuals opposing Vargas’ government, but became even stronger in later decades, when Portinari became known as a ‘painter of the regime’ (Fabris, 1990, p. 29-36). As Fabris (1990, p. 30, my translation) notes, in the 1970s, prominent Brazilian art critics such as Federico Morais and Carlos Zilio judged Portinari’s work as “having served a stereotypical image of Brazilian reality, in congruence with the developmentalist and tranquilizing model provided by the government.” Morais (1970, qtd. in Fabris, 1990, p. 26, my translation), for example, writes: “As official painter, Portinari could only mask the social reality of the country. The misery of the northeast appears in the work of Portinari as distanced from the true Brazilian reality, something surreal, metaphysic, like a vision.” In other words, these accounts link stylistic/representational concerns to Portinari’s position in relation to the Vargas regime, which is seen to have prevented an autonomous position and artistic production. As such, Fabris (1990, p. 25 my translation) notes, Portinari tends to be seen “in absolute terms (whether positive or negative).”

My aim is not to take sides in this debate, but rather to examine how Portinari’s depictions of favelas figured within his broader imaginary of ‘the Brazilian people,’ and how this was received and interpreted by foreign audiences. Portinari’s international success began in 1935, when his painting Café (1935) received an honorary mention in the exhibition
of the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh. In the United States, Portinari quickly found admirers in some of the most powerful art world actors – among them Alfred Barr, director of MoMA, and the philanthropist Nelson Rockefeller. Interestingly, Florence Horn (1939, qtd. in Misura Nastari, 2016, p. 92), art critic of the magazine *Fortune* and a personal friend of Portinari, tells a story of Barr’s appreciation of *Morro* that is remarkably similar to Tarsila’s encounter with Level:

We had three pictures [by Portinari] in our Art department and quite by accident someone from the *Museum of Modern Art* was there, and said, “Who painted these pictures. Mr. Barr must see them.” So, a few hours later, Mr. Barr came up, looked at the three pictures, and the photos I had. And said, “I want that one, the Rio one, for the show.

The show referred to here is *Art in our Time* (1939) commemorating ten years of MoMA, in which Portinari was the only South American participant. In addition, in 1938 the museum later acquired *Morro* as the first South American work in its collection, which led to Portinari’s first solo exhibition in the United States in 1940. As in Tarsila’s anecdote about Paris, the narrative of ‘discovery’ by an important art world figure is important here, showing both the peripheral status of Brazilian art on the world stage and the contingency and social construction of artistic success.

In the catalog of Portinari’s solo exhibition at MoMA, racial relations are a strong focus (Williams, 2001, p. 214-226). Robert C. Smith (1940, p. 12) even presents Portinari as “the foremost interpreter of that great force which is daily growing more articulate – the negro of the Americas” (see also Nicodemo, 2016; Misura Nastari, 2016). In addition, Florence Horn (1940, p. 8-9) writes: “Brazil, of course, has a large negro and a still larger mulatto population. It is true that within the country the negro and mulatto are treated with far greater justice and understanding than they are in New York City.” It is noteworthy here that both catalog texts explicitly link the racial composition of Brazil to the “Morro slums,” envisioned as the ultimate locus for poor Afro-Brazilians (Horn, 1940, p. 6). The juxtaposition of racial relations in the United States and Brazil, with the latter imagined as a ‘racial democracy,’ has long been influential (Skidmore, 1993b). Because of these perceived

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7 Before that time, Portinari had already traveled to Europe on a government grant, but he famously used this period to study rather than to paint and/or exhibit (Fabris, 1990).
differences, as cultural historian Daryle Williams (2001, p. 221) notes, Portinari’s depictions fascinated and shocked North American audiences: “Portinari let Americans see that black faces had an inner force that went beyond the mere picturesque. Favelas, at least for some, could be beautiful. Favelados could be modern.” Naturally, Brazil was (and remains) a country in which racial relations are far from egalitarian, but I seek here to emphasize the frameworks within which favelas were interpreted and valued, which juxtaposed Brazil and the United States based on how these countries (supposedly) approached racial difference.

Interestingly, Portinari’s poor background – affectionately summarized in his nickname ‘the boy from Brodosqui’ – was frequently employed in these accounts, both in Brazil and in the United States (Reinheimer, 2013, p. 56; Williams, 2001, p. 219). Relating this to the polemics around Portinari’s ‘authenticity’ described above, we see that validations and judgments of his work were negotiated through a debate on the definition of Brasilidade, the painter’s personal background, (lack of) political autonomy, and international exposure. Crucially, as Williams (2001) describes in detail, this was part of a broader process under the Vargas regime of establishing and propagating past, present and future expressions of Brasilidade by varied actors within and outside of the Vargas state. Once again, Portinari’s images of Rio’s morros gained symbolic meaning within these debates.

The final artist I will discuss in this section is Lasar Segall, who was born in Lithuania but immigrated to Brazil in 1923. His adopted homeland fascinated him, leading to a series of paintings that later became known as his ‘Brazilian phase,’ depicting tropical nature, Afro-Brazilian people as well as favelas, which he described as “the most beautiful architecture” (d’Horta, 1997, p. 194) (fig. 2.4). Particularly well-known is Segall’s series of engravings of Rio’s mangue, a poor district known for prostitution, which he produced while temporarily back in Paris in 1928 (e.g. fig. 2.5). Segall is widely known as one of the first artists to employ and promote modernist painting in Brazil, but my focus here will be the reception of his work in the second half of the twentieth century, when his Brasilidade was scrutinized by Brazilian and international critics.

8 Before this time, Segall had already visited Brazil in 1912 to visit family members, which also led to two exhibitions in São Paulo.
Fig. 2.4. Lasar Segall (1954-1955) *Favela I* [Oil on canvas]. Museu Lasar Segall - IPHAN MinC, São Paulo.
Segall’s position in relation to conceptualizations of Brasilidade differs from Tarsila and Portinari, since Brazilian and European critics variously describe him as Brazilian, Lithuanian, Russian, Jewish and German. We see this for example in the press reception of a series of European exhibitions between 1957 and 1961, partly funded by the Brazilian ministry of Foreign Affairs and broadly covered in both Europe and Brazil. In these accounts, Segall’s background is often directly related to his artistic development and the quality of his work. A Dutch review, for example, reads:

To call Segall a Brazilian painter is actually misleading. […] Already in 1906 his life as a migrant started; he moved then to Germany and it was in the specific atmosphere of this country, that he developed in the years before, during and after the first world war, into the rounded artistic personality to which his later years in Brazil could add little (Kouwenaar, 1960, my translation).

In contrast, a 1962 Brazilian review of Segall reads: “Arriving in Brazil, in 1923, Lasar Segall quickly found the true path of his artistic personality, identifying himself perfectly with the country, the habits and the people” (A Tribuna, 1962, my translation). Additionally, in Brazilian reviews his exhibitions in Europe are often framed as ‘promoting’ Brazilian art and culture, with titles such as “The works of Segall elevate Brazil’s name in European countries” (O Jornal RJ, 1959, my translation). Segall’s widow Jenny Klabin, who helped produce these shows, confirms that her goals were “to make the memory of this artist indelible and to propagate Brazilian art in all foreign countries, because all of his work is saturated by the Brazilian spirit and body” (O Jornal RJ, 1959, my translation).

This ‘elevation’ of Brazilian art was, however, not always successful, as several European reviews of Segall’s work describe the country in rather derogatory terms. A Dutch reviewer, for example, argues that Segall “can probably play a leading role in a just-starting country like Brazil, but to me doesn’t seem like the person that could bring Western culture somewhere” (Prange, 1960, p. 17, my translation). He continues: “I can imagine that the content of this work interested his fellow countrymen, not bothered by any painterly tradition or culture” (Prange, 1960, p. 17, my translation). These sentiments, which highlight Brazil’s continued peripheral status within the so-called global art world, are reflected not only in reviews of Segall’s exhibition. A review of a collective show of modern Brazilian art in the
Periphery of the Periphery

Centraal Museum in Utrecht in 1960 (which included work of both Portinari and Segall), for example, writes: “Brazil has shown a typically provincial development, a history of coming up late and not fully understanding what one does” (Tegenbosch, 1960, p. 9, my translation). This illustrates well-known arguments by Wainwright (2011) and others that art from outside Europe and the US has long been interpreted through narratives of belatedness and anachronism, emphasizing their peripheral status.

That being said, Segall’s images of non-elite Brazil were shown in a variety of European contexts. His work was and is admired by many, as we see in the following description by Brazilian art critic Carlos Pinto Alves (Folha da Noite, 1958, p. 17, my translation): “It will be difficult to find, even in Brazil, someone who has found a poetic language, like Segall did, to capture the oppressed and humble dignity of our people” (see also Amaral, 1984, p. 111-
As we can read in a Dutch review of his 1960 exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam:

The most important themes that [Segall] explores throughout his life and in various media are the so-called ‘Mangue,’ the notorious prostitution neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro, and the housing of the negro-proletariat soaring up to the sky in the [favela] neighborhood of Babylonia (Engelman, 1960, my translation).

In more recent exhibitions, however, these depictions have been assessed as exoticist and primitivist, raising crucial ethical questions about Segall’s gaze at Brazilian ‘Otherness.’ D’Alessandro (1997, p. 115), for example, closely links Segall’s work to European primitivism:

What intrigued [Segall] was everything un-European […]. Setting up this contrast between European and Brazilian expression, Segall elaborated on an established tenet of modernist thought in Europe, and especially in German expressionism: the dichotomy between the ‘primitive’ and the ‘civilized.’

In his depictions of the mangue, d’Alessandro (1997, p. 147) continues, this focus on the primitive gets a sexual component, as he “fashioned himself its artistic explorer, venturing out into the eroticized space of the primitive.” Again, this mixed reception frequently takes the form of a discussion about the connection between the artist’s personal background and the ‘authenticity’ of his depiction, in which Segall is variously discussed as a representative of Europe and/or Brazil.

In this section, we have seen that images of favelas have long been shown and interpreted against the backdrop of both local and global inequalities and prejudice. In true modernist fashion, artists and critics (both European and Brazilian) have approached favelas and their inhabitants through a series of interrelated dichotomies operating on different scales: favela and modern city, city and countryside, and Brazil and Europe/the United States. Importantly, however, these frameworks of thought were creatively appropriated and mobilized with the goal of worlding Brazilian identities in art world centers, sometimes with direct government support. As we have seen, Portinari has been described as “he who best
reproduced the misfortunes of the third world,” and as a propaganda vessel, which led to a divided reception back home (Cambara, 1980). Tarsila, in contrast, validated Brazilian culture in a more experimental, anthropophagic fashion, but also consciously showcased the country’s picturesque exoticness to a Parisian audience fascinated by this aspect of Brazilian identity. Segall’s Brasilidade is more contested, and sometimes read as outright primitivism, but his work too has been employed within government and media narratives of international prestige, in which exhibitions are seen not only as a homage to the artist, but also to Brazil itself (e.g. de Amaral, 1959; Bittencourt, 1959; Correio da Manhã RJ, 1959; O Jornal RJ, 1959).

Within these debates, as we have seen, favelas paradoxically signify both the ‘misfortunes’ of Brazil as a so-called Third World country and its picturesque exoticness. Moreover, they have become a symbol for the prejudice Brazil suffers on the world stage and, as such, their depictions have been employed in attempts to radically inverse these value judgments. Once again, it should be emphasized that this symbolic usage has little to do with favelas as real spaces of poverty, and favela residents remain decisively voiceless in these representations and discussions. They are approached as racial archetypes or occupational groups (e.g. prostitutes, coffee workers), rather than as individuals to be interacted with. In addition, we should keep in mind that intersecting forms of inequality further complicate the position and reception of the artists discussed. Tarsila’s reception, for example, is clearly marked by her gender, seen in the widespread use of her first name and frequent references to her Latina beauty and grace. Also, while these three artists were white and had access to Brazil’s elite cultural scene, their economic situation was quite different, with Tarsila living (at least in the 1920s) from her family’s coffee fortune, whereas Segall and Portinari were first and second-generation migrants that to a much larger extent depended on paid work and/ or government support. Accordingly, such differences between these artists reveal a number of the tensions, contradictions and complexities within these modernist dichotomies.

Importantly, debates around nationality, the representation of peripheries, and Brazil’s international position continue to dominate the exhibition framing of these three artists. For example, the wall text of a 2016 exhibition in the Museum of Art São Paulo entitled Portinari Popular (2016) addressed the continued urgency of representing non-elite Brazilians:
We still suffer from a precarious and prejudiced representation of African, indigenous and popular subjects in the media, in politics, in society and also in art. It is necessary to deepen the reflection on these strategies of representation, something that the artist’s work anticipates, hence its urgency and relevance.

Among other works, this exhibition showed a number of Portinari’s later favela representations (painted from 1957 until 1959). In addition, the Brazilian press coverage of MoMA’s 2018 exhibition *Tarsila do Amaral: Inventing Modern Art in Brazil* emphasizes Tarsila’s acceptance into a museum widely acknowledged as the main influence on the construction of an art historical canon (*Tarsila do Amaral Ganha Primeira Exposição Exclusiva no MoMA de Nova York*, 2018). However, primitivism also remains a recurring theme, as for example in this New York Times review:

> For contemporary audiences in New York, now hyper-attuned to white artists’ use and misuse of black bodies, ‘A Negra’ will pose the toughest challenge in this exhibition. But context is critical here. In 1923, for a trained artist to imagine a black woman as the embodiment of a new national spirit would have constituted a direct attack on the old, wannabe-European establishment of Rio and São Paulo (Farago, 2018).

As we will see in the next section, this symbolic, rebellious usage of images of non-elite Brazil would remain important in the 1960s and 1970s, even if the socio-political relations that motivated, facilitated and disseminated these artistic depictions changed significantly.

**Myths of Mangueira: Oiticica**

Since 2016, London’s Tate Modern permanently exhibits Helio Oiticica’s 1966 work *Tropicália, Penetráveis PN2 ‘Puraça é um mito’ e PN3 ‘Imagético’* (Tropicália, Penetrables PN2 ‘Purity is a myth’ and PN3 ‘Imagetic’) (fig. 2.6). These two shack-like structures – as the exhibition text reads – “mimic the improvised colourful dwellings in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, or shanty towns.” In addition, the work of Oiticica and his contemporaries is increasingly recognized in Europe and the United States for its early development of theories and practices of participation in artistic production (Dezeuze, 2004; Brett, 2010). In this
section, my goal is to examine how and why Oiticica and others transformed the artistic and intellectual engagement with favelas in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as how these practices have reached international audiences. This period is recognized for its fundamentally changed attitude towards artistic favela representations, as we see in the catalog text of the 2014 exhibition *Do Valongo à Favela: Imaginario e Periferia*, held at the Museu de Arte do Rio (From Valongo to Favela: Imaginary and Periphery):

If distance and idealization run through a significant portion of [the early twentieth century] output – grounded in the geometrisation and aestheticisation of the favela, often at the complete neglect of its residents -, the challenge in the latter half of the twentieth century and the first decades of our own has been [to] move closer to the favela from another perspective, a project at once political and aesthetic in which Helio Oiticica played a founding role (Diniz, 2015, p. 218).

The 1960s and 1970s have become known for their politically-inspired, revolutionary approach, which, as we will see, is related both to international art world trends and to the local political situation of the military regime.

More than any artist before him, Oiticica did not aim to figuratively depict favelas, but rather engaged with them on a profound aesthetic/theoretical level while building on his social experiences in Mangueira (Berenstein Jacques, 2001; Pequeno, 2013; Aguilar, 2015; Salomão, 2015). In a number of texts, Oiticica (e.g. 1973; 2004) links his experiences in and depictions of Mangueira to an extensive artistic philosophy (see Martins, 2013; Pequeno, 2013; Aguilar, 2015). For Asbury (2008, p. 59), Oiticica’s social encounters with this favela “facilitated the application” of his theoretical reflections; they were “the unexpected social dimension to the artist’s analytical development” (see also Dezeuze, 2004; Brett, 2005). As in the modernist practices, however, his engagement with favelas was not an isolated phenomenon, but instead reflective of broader concerns of the Brazilian avant-garde from the mid-1950s onwards. Marcelo Ridenti (2000, p. 38-39, my translation) describes these diverse cultural practices as *revolutionary romanticism*, a term that points to the desire – materialized in different ways – to critique and rebel against capitalism and its inequalities by both depicting and reaching ‘the Brazilian people,’ thereby “decisively advancing in the direction of overcoming capitalism through the construction of a new man, rooted in popular
traditions.” In his book on this topic, Ridenti describes how this tendency started in the early 1960s – an optimistic period for many artists that was brutally disrupted by the military coup in 1964 – and continued throughout the 1970s (see also Dunn, 2001). Of course, the emphasis on popular traditions reminds us of Brazilian modernism, but the revolutionary romanticists combined a representational focus with the desire to interact directly with marginalized subjects as part of their artistic practice, confronting common critiques of elitism and exoticism faced by the modernists. Moreover, while modernists were directly concerned with modernity and national identity, the connotations and feelings associated with these terms had changed drastically in the 1960s, which led to rather different forms of social, political and economic critique.

Fig. 2.6. Hélio Oiticica (1966) Tropicália, Penetráveis PN2 ‘Pureza é um mito’ and PN3 ‘Imagético’ [Installation]. Tate Collection, London.
Favelas thus remained a both a powerful symbolic trope and an object of representation in various fields of cultural production. In the visual arts, Oiticica’s work in this respect was related to that of artists such as Lygia Pape and Antonio Manuel, with whom he had close personal relations. We also see a focus on favelas in the architectural practice of Lina Bo Bardi, who had a keen interest in *arquitetura da pobre* (architecture of the poor), in which she found a “simplicity, rationality, and logic of construction” absent in elite building practices (Bo Bardi, 1951 qtd. in Machado, 2012, no pagination). Inspired by Antonio Gramsci, Bo Bardi saw popular spaces as sites of practical protest against capitalist, consumer-driven modernity. Similar concerns were expressed in *Cinema Novo*, an influential cinema movement in which filmmakers reflected on how best to represent the hardships of Brazil as a so-called third world country (Rocha, 1965). Another well-known example are the *Centros Popular de Cultura* (CPCs), cultural centers started by left-wing intellectuals and artists (such as Augusto Boal, Vianinha and Ferreira Gullar) who aimed to spread revolutionary art and culture among the masses (Amaral, 1984).

As frequently addressed, the military dictatorship had a profound impact on the work these artists did and could do – especially after the AI-5 censorship laws were introduced in 1968. During this time, the idea of marginality rose as an important conceptual trope within artistic and intellectual debates. As Calirman (2012, p. 94; see also Oliveira, 2013) writes:

The term ‘marginal’ was loosely used at the time to convey the status of any figure or concept at the periphery. It might be used variously to describe a criminal victim of police brutality, a persecuted political figure who had to hide or live clandestinely, the poor and disenfranchised, the insane, or even emerging artists with no ties to the art market.

The idea of ‘marginal aesthetics’ linked the figure of the ‘marginal’ to a progressive, non-conformist political ideology of revolt. Building on this, artists saw “strategic power in [the] auto-affirmation as marginal” (Calirman, 2012, p. 94; Oliveira, 2013, p. 33). Oiticica powerfully captures this sentiment in two famous slogans: *Seja Marginal, Seja Heroi* (Be Marginal, Be a Hero), and *da adversidade vivemos* (of adversity we live) (Calirman, 2012, p. 94). Bo Bardi’s *arquitetura da pobre* references not only vernacular architecture in Brazil, but also the Italian art movement of Arte Povera (Bo Bardi was Italian by birth) (Kamimura, 2013; Bergdoll, 2015). Another noteworthy architect concerned with architecture by and for the poor was Lelé.
Chapter Two

As the artist himself puts it, his goal was to be “viscerally against everything that would in short stand for any cultural, political, ethical, social conformism” (Oiticica, 1967 qtd. in Dezeuze, 2013, p. 237).

While this philosophy inextricably tied to the political context in Brazil, two observations are noteworthy here. First, these ideas around the marginality of the artist built on earlier romantic discourses. For example, a 1942 text by Sergio Milliet (2005, p. 203, my translation), entitled *Marginalidade da Pintura Moderna* (Marginality of Modern Painting), describes the artist as a “free individual” with a “very sharp sensibility” and an “unusual intelligence,” which paradoxically placed them “at the margins of their culture.” Second, we also see important similarities to international art and philosophy of the same period, which, as Anna Dezeuze describes, moved towards precarity, dematerialization and instability. Especially the distinction between ‘beat/hip/outcast’ and ‘square/mainstream’ identities, analyzed by Dezeuze (2017, p. 27), propagates a similar view of “a dominant culture on the one hand, and a rebellious counterculture on the other.” Crucially, both correlated poverty with the freedom of rejecting capitalist values, allowing for a greater appreciation of what ‘truly matters.’

In a similar vein, Oiticica notes how in Mangueira he discovered the “existential meaning” of life and “the locus of his richest, most significant lived experiences,” which “gave him a totally new social awareness and vision of society which it would be impossible to acquire in the art galleries, institutions, middle-class or upper-class circles of Rio” (Figueiredo, 2007, p. 23-24). As Dezeuze (2004, p. 60; p. 65) describes, this ‘discovery’ of Mangueira was quickly picked up by Brazilian art critics such as Mario Pedrosa and Harry Laus as essential to his art and philosophy. Naturally, the idea that the poor lived somehow more connected, ‘authentic’ lives – symbolized by bare, samba-dancing feet on un-asphalted streets – is romanticized, denying realities of hardship and scarcity (e.g. the removal policies of the military regime). Moreover, despite the real friendships Oiticica might have formed in Mangueira, descriptions of his engagement with this favela – by himself and others – usually focus on how the artist learned and benefited from his experiences, rather than the other way around. Even when he famously brought samba dancers from Mangueira to Rio’s Museu de Arte Moderna, this was conceptualized and interpreted as a symbolic act of resistance against the status quo, which was perhaps only strengthened when the museum denied them access, reducing these dancers once again to their societal position as ‘marginals.’
Importantly, Oiticica’s engagement with and ‘exportation’ of Mangueira were topics of debate and critique in Brazil and Europe. We see this for example in the reception of Oiticica’s 1969 exhibition in the White Chapel gallery in London, where Oiticica lived in exile at the time, in which Mangueira occupied a central role (Oiticica, 1969). As this show’s curator Guy Brett (2007, p. 14) recalls:

Much later, in fact only quite recently, I learned that some people very close to Oiticica, including Lygia Clark and Mário Pedrosa, were critical of the [Whitechapel] catalogue. They found it too ‘folkloric’; too overloaded with Mangueira, samba, carnival, etc., rather, perhaps, than with the innovatory genius of Oiticica’s art.

Additionally, a British review of this exhibition reads:

We are invited to shed such metropolitan gloss and return to a state of rustic innocence – rusticity here comprising Brazilian fringe-housing. We are back once more in Rousseau’s primitive purity, in Gauguin’s lotus-land, in the scene which shimmers at the end of the hippie’s rainbow, the blessed isles of the cultural drop-out (Gosling, 1969).

Naturally, this review fails to notice both the ambiguities of Oiticica’s position as a Brazilian artist on the international stage, which is rather different than that of Rousseau and Gauguin, as well as his social interactions with favelas. It does raise important questions, however, about how European audiences would have viewed this exhibition.

According to Guy Brett (2005, qtd. in Osório, 2016, p. 320), the Whitechapel show received little press coverage at the time, although Oiticica (2007, p. 42) mentions in letters to friends and family that “the BBC filmed for hours” at the opening, and ended up broadcasting a film of “half an hour long.” Brett (2005, qtd. in Osório, 2016, p. 320) writes that the show had a large impact on young artists in the UK due to its radicalism in terms of audience participation. The memories of Jill Drower (2007, p. 80), a young British artist and friend of Oiticica, hint at the interpretation of Oiticica’s images of Mangueira:
[Hélio] told me all about Rio, its prostitutes and its lowlife. [...] he described the favelas and the samba schools and the drug-taking; he described, above all, the violence. My jaw dropped in amazement at such sensational stuff [...] Some of his stories were tall stories and some weren’t: it didn’t much matter to me. [...] I was a cushioned teenager at the time, with a newly emerging awareness of the world of sex and drugs, but completely protected from sleaze and financial or political reality, and here was Hélio, filling my head with tales of South American gangland assassinations, and with polemics.

Naturally, Drower’s account describes her personal relation with Oiticica rather than her reaction to his artworks, but it does suggest how images of favelas, criminals, and the sensual dance of samba reach “cushioned” European audiences, both in 1969 and more recently. Again, the symbolic linking of favelas and ideas of radicality, both in terms of protest against the Brazilian dictatorship and within and international tendency to validate precarity and marginality, is key to this reception.

Michael Asbury (2008) has argued that Oiticica’s reception has focused too heavily on Mangueira, which fails to take into account the broader philosophical frameworks through which the artist made sense of his experiences there (focused, for example, on philosophies of color and phenomenology) (see also Martins, 2013). Crucially, as Asbury continues, this emphasis on the favela performs two specific functions: (1) it idealizes the artist’s engagement with Mangueira, which in reality might not have been as effortless as it is now made out to be, and (2) it ‘Othered’ Oiticica in an international context, depending on familiar images of dangerous-yet-exotic Brazil. This second point is contested. A Dutch review from the 1990s, for example, states: “[Oiticica’s work] unnerves our eurocentric ideas around Latin American culture, rather than strengthening our ideas about the other” (de Volkskrant, 1992, my translation; see also Martins, 2013, p. 1-2). However, Paul Overy’s (2007, p. 72) recollection of the Whitechapel exhibition supports Asbury’s claim: “There was this very strong sense of it coming from another culture,” “[t]he hot colours, macaws, sand and jungle seemed very exciting and ‘other.’” With these contradictions in mind, a closer look at how Oiticica’s reception developed after his premature death in 1980 is useful.

During his lifetime, Oiticica was a successful artist and a prominent figure within the Brazilian avant-garde, who also had several influential foreign admirers. It was after his
death, however, that his work became more widely celebrated. From the late 1970s onwards, with the *abertura* (opening up) of the military dictatorship, Oiticica started to receive increased press attention in Brazil. Major Brazilian news outlets focused on his work in the 1980s, often emphasizing his experiences in Mangueira. A good example is a four-page spread in *Veja* in 1986, entitled “The illuminated marginal,” which describes Oiticica’s engagement with Mangueira at length, quoting both art critics and members of the Mangueira samba school, concluding:

> Capable of dancing like a black man and integrating himself in the life of the Mangueira hill as if he were born there, Helio Oiticica left a inextinguishable impression in the hearts of the inhabitants that he met. ‘He was a white man with a black soul,’ evaluates Mosquito [a samba dancer from Mangueira] (Coutinho, 1986, my translation).

Here we start to see the mainstream acceptance and even idealization of Oiticica’s engagement with favelas described by Asbury (2008). Interestingly, in a 1978 interview, the artist himself explicitly contributed to his identification with Mangueira:

> In New York they asked me: ‘Don’t you miss Mangueira? And Rio?’ I would answer that I could not miss Mangueira, because I am Mangueira. I don’t feel *saudades* [nostalgia, melancholy], because I ate the entire fruit. *Saudades* are felt by those who only took a bite (Maria, 1978, my translation).

This metaphor of consumption resonates with de Andrade’s *antropofagia* because of its focus on eating and ‘Otherness.’ At the same time, Oiticica’s statement arguably reduces Mangueira to an exotic fruit that can be ‘eaten’ by outsiders for their own pleasure and personal development, which is reflected in the fact that I found no reviews examining what Oiticica’s engagement and depiction might have meant for the inhabitants of Mangueira. As we have seen, similar critiques have been leveled at the Brazilian Modernists and their elite, distanced position, which resonates with broader concerns in in both art theory and ethnography around ideas of ‘going native’ (e.g. Foster, 1994; Clifford and Marcus, 1986).
In the 1990s, after a series of exhibitions in Europe and the United States, Oiticica’s work also became internationally famous. The first of these exhibitions was held at the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam, which was followed by participation in the Documenta X in 1997. Interestingly, in contrast to Brazilian reviews discussed, Dutch critics in the 1990s rarely mention Oiticica’s work in favelas – focusing instead on a broader art historical context (e.g. Piet Mondriaan, Kurt Schwitters, Joseph Beuys, Arte Povera) and a more general description of his engagement with anarchy, criminals and 1960s ‘hippie culture.’ A notable exception is Ineke Schwartz’ (1992, my translation) review in Trouw:

In addition Oiticica frequently worked with the inhabitants of shanty towns in Rio, which means that his art must have had a very different impact [in Brazil] than in museums here. How exactly and why are interesting questions. The exhibition unfortunately does not address them.

The general absence of Mangueira in these reviews is particularly interesting because favelas would later become the “most common and repeated” focus of critical and scholarly accounts of Oiticica’s work, which suggests this might have been related to the more widespread, international fame favelas enjoyed in the 2000s, as will be addressed in next section (Brett, 2007, p. 14).

In this section, I have tried to highlight once again that when thinking of the favela as a source of inspiration, we must look beyond the level of the individual artist and his or her ‘discovery’ of this inspiration. In Oiticica’s case, the engagement with Mangueira was closely related to what Ridenti describes as Brazil’s revolutionary romanticism, but also to European and US conceptualizations of the relation between marginality and countercultures. As such, during this period a newfound, symbolic meaning of rebelliousness and anti-establishment attitudes were ascribed to favela spaces. Interestingly, as in antropofagia, this association is based on an inversion of dominant readings of non-elite Brazil, as government fears about communist rebellion in the working-class favelas grew during the dictatorship (Fischer, 2014). With this in mind, I argue that it is essential to not only acknowledge how the engagement of Oiticica and his contemporaries differs from earlier practices, but to also consider what similarities we can find, particularly given the display of these artworks.

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10 The exhibition held in Rotterdam was later reproduced in Paris, Barcelona, Lisbon and Minneapolis.
outside of Brazil. We should especially take heed of romanticized ideas about poverty, the favela territory becoming a symbol of Brazil’s peripheral status on the world stage, and – despite changes in the social interactions artists had with favela residents – the continued detachment from local actors and contexts when exhibiting these artworks abroad.

Towards a “Cosmetics of Hunger”

From the early 2000s onwards, favela representations in different media have become increasingly commercialized, as summarized in Ivana Bentes’ (2002, my translation) influential notion of a “cosmetics of hunger” – a direct reaction to Glauber Rocha’s “aesthetics of hunger.” In 2002, Bentes juxtaposed the Cinema Novo of Rocha and his contemporaries to more recent Brazilian films. As she writes:

> The modernist prohibition of the Cinema Novo, something like ‘you will not enjoy the misery of others,’ created an aesthetic and an ethic of the intolerable to treat the dramas of poverty, in a context in which the excluded were seen positively as ‘primitive rebels,’ carriers of a revolutionary anger and the cinema proposed to deconstruct European paternalism, exoticism and the sentimentality creating an ‘aesthetics of hunger’ and an aesthetics of violence” (Bentes, 2002, p. 86, my translation).

Later depictions, however, reflected “an ‘internationally popular’ or ‘globalized’ cinema whose formula would be a local, historical or traditional theme, and an ‘international aesthetic’” (Bentes, 2002, p. 88, my translation). Often-criticized characteristics of this latter cinema are a ‘post-MTV aesthetics,’ a depoliticized approach, and a strong emphasis on deadly violence in Rio’s beautiful landscape – the standard example of which is the blockbuster movie *Cidade de Deus* (2002). Naturally, as Bentes notes, this builds on older narratives in which favelas are celebrated based on “primitivist-exoticist” discourses, but for her a new phase was introduced by international commercialization and a global aesthetics in which “violence surges […] as a new urban folklore,” leading to a “cosmetics of hunger” (Bentes, 2002, p. 90; p. 88, my translation).

In this section, we will see that Bentes’ argument about cinema is reflected in the production and reception of visual art in or about Rio’s favelas. However, I also argue that
too strong a juxtaposition between favela representations in the 1960s and 1970s and the 2000s fails to take into account both the continuities between these periods and the inevitable impact of broader societal and cultural transformations. To do so, I focus on the decades in between the periods she discussed, namely the 1980s and 1990s. A closer look at these decades allows us to see how the ‘cosmetics of hunger’ came into being, as this period signified a number of influential changes for both the field of cultural production and Rio de Janeiro’s favelas. Particularly important here, as I argue, are (1) the commercialization of the Brazilian media landscape, and (2) different realities and perceptions of urban violence in Rio. Finally, institutional developments within the art world, most notably commercialization and attempts at globalization, are important to take into account. A focus on these factors, as I argue, nuances Bentes’ juxtaposition by emphasizing both the differences and similarities between current artistic engagement with favelas and the historical tendencies described in this chapter.

The first factor to analyze is a broader transformation of the media landscape in Brazil (as in the rest of the world). While television was already a highly influential medium during the military dictatorship, since the late 1980s representations of Brazil’s marginalized and non-elite inhabitants started to reach larger audiences through commercialized media outlets (Ridenti, 2000). The growing political influence of media companies such as Rede Globo has been widely acknowledged in this respect, but my interest here is mainly how individual cultural producers navigated this new cultural landscape in their depictions of non-elite Brazil. Ridenti (2000, p. 323-334) describes how some cultural producers that had in the 1970s been at the heart of revolutionary romanticism start to participate with this new medium, albeit with mixed feelings. They were acutely aware of the complicity of their new employer within the capitalist structures they criticized, which limited possibilities of radical critique. However, several artists reasoned that even if the networks did not accept everything they proposed, television provided funding to conduct projects that had previously been impossible, and access to working-class audiences they had been trying to reach in the previous decades. This resonates with the more pragmatic takes on complicity outlined in the

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11 Bentes paper does mention several examples of cultural products in these decades (e.g. the documentary Noticias de uma Guerra Particular, and the films Um Ceu de Estrelas and Como Nascem os Anjos), but her main focus is Cinema Novo on the one hand, and more recent cinematic productions on the other.
introduction to this thesis. As summarized by Dias Gomes (qtd. in Ridenti, 2000, p. 329, my translation):

When Globo called me, I thought: Globo is giving me a popular stage, of which I dreamed in theater all the time. A stage that goes from A to Z, from the intellectual to the cook, the cleaning lady etc. Do I have the right to refuse? Politically, would it be correct to refuse?

In other words, these developments brought opportunities of broader outreach, which is a political question precisely because of the elitism of so-called high art practices (see also Peixoto, 2007). Nevertheless, it also complicated questions these artists already grappled with, particularly considering the increased complicity with the structures they criticized, and the function of art as both critique and entertainment.

The second development to keep in mind considering changes of favela representations since the 1980s is the violent rise of the organized drug traffic in Rio de Janeiro. Added to the deep-seated territorial stigma and state distrust of favela areas that already existed, the increasing value of cocaine and the international weapons trade in the 1980s and 1990s contributed to a vicious circle of violence, in which state and police play an active role (see Zaluar and Alvito, 1998; Arias, 2006; Perlman, 2010; McCann, 2014). Unsurprisingly, this rise in violence has had a significant impact on favela imaginaries and representations, becoming – as Bentes notes – one of its central components. Considering the historical development of favela representations, two points are of crucial importance here. First, outright celebrations of favelas as happy, colorful communities became increasingly hard to maintain. The increase in lethal violence complicated the idealization of the figure of the marginal malandro, which was so central to Oiticica’s rallying cry da adversidade vivemos. Instead, depictions of criminal figures became more brutal, even if we also see remnants of the malandro-figure in recent representations (as for example in the Cidade de Deus-character Bené).

Second, whereas in previous decades “the fear outsiders had of entering favelas was not warranted by the facts” (Perlman, 2010, p. 173), safe access became a more complex issue. Perceptions, fears and realities of violence grew mutually influential and increasingly hard to distinguish, which created a complex environment for local and outside artists,
Chapter Two

Journalists, writers and researchers. This is also related to the intensified urbanization of many favela territories, resulting in a dense, labyrinthine environment (as opposed to the rural-looking settlements of earlier decades). Accordingly, mediators with knowledge of and access to the area became ever more important, as we also see in the first guided favela tours during the 1992 VN Summit in Rio (Freire-Medeiros, 2009). For artistic projects, as I will explain in later chapters, questions of danger and safety started to dominate framings and interpretations, usually through narratives of rebellious courage and cross-cultural communication skills. As we have seen in the description of Cendrars’ visit to Favela, these narratives did have parallels in earlier engagements, but became more pressing and sensational against the backdrop of media stories of gun violence, torture and drug lords.

Crucially, this combination of a new, commercialized media landscape and transformed realities and perceptions of urban violence in Brazil caused the birth of what Beatriz Jaguaribe (2004; 2007; Jaguaribe and Hetherington, 2004) calls the “aesthetics of realism.” As she writes:

[T]he overall spectacularization of daily life and the very nature of representation make it practically impossible to experience facts without media mediation. The sense of the real is increasingly packaged and yet the shock of the real is insistently sought (Jaguaribe, 2004, p. 329).

The ever more confusing relation between representations/mediation and reality caused an increased production of so-called realist representations of favelas, as we see for example in TV-programs focusing on urban violence such as Linha Direta, CidadeAlerta, and Ratinho, which Bentes (2002) mentions as examples of a ‘cosmetics of hunger.’ As with blockbuster films focusing on favelas (e.g. Cidade de Deus, Tropa de Elite), these depictions show a codified, sensational “shock of the real,” usually through a focus on explicit, decontextualized violence (Jaguaribe, 2004; 2007). In reaction to such sensationalist depictions, however, the 1990s also saw the production of more nuanced, reflective documentaries such as Noticias de uma Guerra Particular (1999) and Babilônia 2000 (1999), which redefine the realist focus by searching for “anti-aesthetics of the real, an anti-spectacularization of daily life” (Jaguaribe, 2004, p. 336). This more critical focus on representational realism can also be found in the reception and interpretation of favela
depictions, as seen in the widespread critical debate sparked by *Cidade de Deus*, primarily focused on how the film corresponds to local realities (e.g. Ribeiro Pires Vieira, 2005).

Importantly, this ‘realist’ focus stands in stark contrast to some of the accounts we have seen in this chapter, for example Milliet’s (qtd. in Amaral, 1997, p. 52) description of Cendrars’ representation as “admiringly Brazilian, without a single true fact,” or accounts of Portinari’s *Morro* as “a more complete reality: that which we know is there” but cannot see from one vantage point (O.M.C., 1947). Naturally, as noted by Jaguaribe and Hetherington (2004, p. 157), ideas of authenticity have always been central to cultural celebrations of favela territories:

The modernist excursion to the favela relied on the appraising eye of tourism right from the beginning. It prized the unpackaged experience that has more recently come be sold also as the ‘authentic’ or the ‘real thing’ by tourist agencies.

However, this concern with an ‘authentic’ Brazil did not necessarily lead to naturalistic representations of favela neighborhoods or inhabitants, which were usually produced and valued for their symbolic rather than their documentary value. For example, Waly Salomão (2015, p. 45) defends Oittica’s work against accusations of romanticism (i.e. not acknowledging the hardships of favela life) by writing: “It was not decorative romanticism to say *Seja Marginal, Seja Heroi*; it had a tremendous offensive potential in Brazil under the military dictatorship” (see also Brett, 2005, p. 57). Similarly, as Bentes’ quotation at the outset of this section describes, Cinema Novo-films depicted hunger and violence primarily as a weapon against cultural colonialism and the exoticist European gaze. Within the new, commercialized media landscape, however, these revolutionary functions became more difficult to sustain considering realities and imaginaries of violence, which had a significant impact on the practice of representing favelas.

To elaborate on this, it is useful to (re)turn to the world of contemporary art. In the 1980s and 1990s, we see that artists and theorists around the world start to criticize art’s commercialized, institutional context, which caused the need to redefine both artistic autonomy and the revolutionary function of avant-garde practices. According to Johanna

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12 A noteworthy predecessor of this discourse is Carolina de Jesus’ *Quarto do Despejo*, the framing and reception of which was closely related to her identity as a favela resident (Boltendal, 1961; Jaguaribe, 2004).
Drucker (2005, p. 24), this was inextricably related to the fact that “the locus of power [that] was once identifiable in centralized, nationalistic, generally urban concentrations,” now became diffused and “always elsewhere,” in “flows of capital and tensions between multinational interests and residual structures of nation-states.” In my view, this is relevant for the conceptualization and reception of favela representations. The Brazilian modernists and the revolutionary romanticists had a clear power against which they operated, namely Europe’s cultural domination and the military dictatorship. Favela depictions were mobilized and justified based on their symbolic power within these struggles. However, when the seats of hegemonic power became less centralized in the mid-1980s, the symbolic-political efficacy of favela representations became less evident, which required new responses to the ethical questions around the politics of representation that had long accompanied these practices.

Combined with global trends in so-called participatory art practice, this led to a number of socially inspired projects. A good example is Devotionalia (1994-1996), by the Brazilian-Swiss artist duo Mauricio Dias and Walter Riedweg. In this project, the artists worked with street children in several parts of Rio to make wax models of their hands and feet. After this, the children were asked on video to talk about their opinions on art, museums and about their dreams in life. The project was first exhibited at the Museu de Arte Moderna (MAM) in Rio in 1996. Over 3000 people visited the opening event, many of whom living in favelas or on the streets. In contrast to Oiticica’s failed visit to MAM in 1975, street children were now explicitly invited into the museum.

In the official promotions of the exhibition, the project is explicitly framed as new genre public art, with the artists talking about the need to combat elitism in art production and display. After the show in MAM, the work was presented and extended in several European countries and the artists did various follow-up projects in Rio over the next ten years. The exhibition and its opening event got ample media attention in Rio de Janeiro, usually through a strong focus on violence in the city, mentioning robberies, assaults and an overall ‘climate of chaos.’ Against this background, several articles play with the readers’ expectations about street kids. Rio’s newspaper O Dia, for example, published an article entitled: “Street kids invade, in a good way, the Museum of Modern Art and make sculptures” (Pereira, 1996). Of course, Devotionalia’s goal was precisely to invert those expectations, showing that, in the words of Dias, “whoever thinks that abandoned youth do not have finesse, is profoundly
mistaken” (O Fluminense, 1995). However, when Dias says about his wax casts that “these are the hands that rob, the feet that walk barefoot over there” or when he calls the participants “bandidinhos” (little bandits), he seems to be reproducing the very stereotypes he is trying to challenge (Faria, 1997; Cesar Carvalho, 1995).

Interestingly, Dias and Riedweg’s framing of their socially-engaged, participatory projects has changed significantly over the years. In the catalog of a 2012 exhibition of the artists’ work in Centro Cultural Hélio Oiticica, for example, the term New Genre Public Art is absent. The question of ‘Otherness’ and representation remain important, but are continuously problematized:

There is also a big problem in the fact that if we want to say something in public, we have to be sure to make ourselves understood, which means that we use languages of power that are already firmly in place […]. As soon as I talk, as you understand what I say, we are inside a system of understanding that might also be a system of oppression (Dias and Riedweg, 2012, p. 197)

Another important shift in the project’s contextualization has occurred in the framing of the city of Rio de Janeiro. As noted, in the 1990s framing, the chaos of the city was addressed as being threatening and dangerous. In the later exhibition and media reception this chaotic and fragmented nature of the city is addressed in much more positive terms. Rather than the threats and risks, the focus lies on the fact that “each corner of the city has a charm of its own” (Dias and Riedweg, 2012, p. 59). The exhibition is framed as an “ode to Rio” and its streets – “from the outskirts to the center, from the so-called asphalt to the favelas” (Dias and Riedweg, 2012, p. 63). Importantly, this corresponds to changing imaginaries of violence in the city. In 2012, the UPP policy seemed to be reducing violence in the city’s favelas, and an overall optimistic socio-economic climate was caused by increasing economic prosperity and the upcoming mega-events in the city. Accordingly, we see once again that changing imaginaries of Rio and Brazil, which manifest in different spatial and temporal contexts of display, profoundly influence the reception of artistic favela engagements.

A final development that is crucial to consider in this section is the increasing amount of favela residents reclaiming the “copyright” of their own representations (Bentes, 2002). We can think for example of groups and projects such as Nós do Morro (1986); Coopa-Roca
Rocinha (1987); Afro-Reggae (1992); Projeto Morrinho (1997); Rede Memória da Mare (1998); Central Único de Favelas or CUFA (1999); Observatório das Favelas (2001); and Agência de Notícias das Favelas (2001). Once again, some parallels with earlier periods can be found in this respect, as in the newspaper A Voz do Morro; Carolina de Jesus’ Quarto de Despejo (1960); visual artists such as Heitor dos Prazeres, Júlio Martins da Silva, and Sinésio Brandão; and a variety of samba musicians (e.g. Pixinguinha, Donga, Cartola, Paulinho da Viola, Zé Keti). However, the 1990s and early 2000s saw increased numbers and variation in this respect. Bentes (2002, p. 94-95) rightly discusses these practices as a counter discourse to the cosmetics of hunger, using the example of rapper MV Bill (see also Bentes, 2011). This is an important point, but it should be acknowledged that the increased, commercial attention for favelas she criticizes – combined with the newfound focus on ‘realism’ – might have had an impact on the opportunities of funding and outreach for these artists and initiatives. Crucially, as will be further discussed in chapter five, this is not to disregard their remarkable achievements in a highly unequal media landscape, but rather to emphasize how such initiatives strategically navigate and mobilize the widespread fascination that exists around their place of residence.

In this section, I have focused on the 1980s and 1990s as a ‘transitional period’ between the revolutionary romanticism of the sixties and seventies and the commercialized representations of the 2000s. My goal has been to historicize this newfound commercial attention, of which Cidade de Deus (2002) is often seen as a starting point. Following Jaguaribe (2004), I have argued that this engagement was shaped through the combination of a local journalistic and documentary interest in rising violence and a broader commercialization of the media landscape. The most crucial shift is the increased concern for realism and the ‘real’ in both the production and the reception of favela representations, which might be read as a reaction to critiques of distanced, earlier representations. Moreover, in the visual arts commercialization and globalization centralized and further complicated debates on artistic autonomy, political efficacy and center-periphery relations – which framed artistic favela representations until the 1980s. Paradoxically, in comparison to earlier decades, we thus see both a distancing from favela neighborhoods (through large-scale international consumption), but also a rapprochement by inextricably linking these new forms of consumption to a discourse of realism and an increase in local voices. In other words, while

this desire for the real might be most frequently expressed through spectacular media encodings of “reality,” it also foregrounds and centralizes the fundamental question of how the symbolic usage of favela images connects to actual, marginalized areas in Rio.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that artists have long been inspired by favela landscapes, appreciating for example their architectural structure, various expressions of popular culture, and their inhabitants. The inspiration found in popular cultural expressions as well as the relations between elite and popular cultural actors has received widespread attention in scholarship in and on Brazil, a history in which favelas often take center stage. Building on this, my goal in this chapter has been to examine how the symbolic meaning attached to favela spaces in the visual arts has been negotiated and put on display within and especially outside of Brazil. In this concluding section, I summarize my argument by drawing out five important continuities that come to the fore in a century of artistic favela representations. These practices, tendencies and discourses, as I argue, have set the stage for current engagements. Because of this, acknowledging the five continuities outlined below will help the following chapters to deconstruct some of the common interpretations of contemporary artistic favela representations, which all too often build on historical narratives around discovery, uniqueness, ‘Otherness,’ physical/symbolic distance, and exoticism.

First of all, we have seen, in Carvalho’s (2013, p. 29) words, that “the paradigm of the artist who circulates from centre to periphery [reappears] throughout the history of Rio’s culture” (Carvalho, 2013, p. 29). In a book on the Brazilian intelligentsia’s embrace of the country’s popular culture, Hermano Vianna (1999) describes the category of “transcultural mediators,” namely “those serving as conduits between, for example, the Afro-Brazilian samba musicians of Rio’s poor neighborhoods and the white intellectuals of its salons” (McCann, 2000, p. 389). In other words, artists and cultural producers have long occupied a central role in negotiating the relations between Rio’s favelas and asfalto, its center and periphery. On the one hand, such practices highlight that the city is “only one,” performing cultural and social connections and processes of mutual influence (de Souza e Silva and Barbosa, 2005, p. 90). At the same time, these relations are usually framed as exceptions, depending on brave and socially skilled ‘mediators,’ which obscures more day-to-day forms of encounter and confirms the supposed ‘Otherness’ of the favela. Also, it should be
emphasized that foreign and/or elite Brazilian mediators often depended on additional mediating figures living in favelas and the periphery (e.g. samba musicians, community leaders).

Second, the interpretation of artistic favela images frequently draws on a series of interrelated dichotomies: favela vs. city, countryside vs. city, modern vs. traditional, dominant vs. subversive, mainstream vs. marginal, and Brazil vs. Europe or the United States. Crucially, these oppositions allow favelas to embody a symbolic position within broader discourses, often aimed at inverting the value judgments attached to these juxtapositions, but they also serve to discursively detach these representations from the real spaces that inspired them – which is usually mirrored in a physical move away from favela territories in exhibition practices. This detachment has long been seen as ethically problematic, firstly because of the position of power taken up by the people involved in the production and distribution of these representations, and, secondly, because the people depicted did not usually benefit from (or even know about) these representations. A typical periodization of these engagements, both in aesthetic and ethical terms, distinguishes (1) the native-primitivism of the modernists, (2) the consolidation and exportation of Brasilidade under Vargas, (3) the revolutionary romanticism of the 1960s and 1970s and (3) the commercialized presentations from the early 2000s onward. While the first three periods have guided the first sections of this chapter, it has been my explicit aim to nuance this periodization by emphasizing gradual changes and similarities, for example by focusing on transitional periods and the historiography of exhibition practices and interpretations.

A third, interrelated continuity concerns the meanings and functions favelas have been ascribed in artistic, social and political imaginaries of Brasilidade. Among other things, this meant that their marginalized status in Brazilian cities has come to exemplify Brazil’s peripheral status within the (art) world. This symbolic function is closely related to two parallel questions that have been central to Brazilian art and theory since the early twentieth century. The first considers the ethical-social implications of elite cultural expressions. In Oiticica’s (qtd. in Calirman, 2012, p. 83) words, “how [can] an underdeveloped country […] explain and justify the creation of an avant-garde art, without it being considered a symbol of alienation, but instead as a decisive factor for the collective process” (see also Oiticica, 1973; Ferreira Gullar, 1978; Amaral, 1984; Schwartz, 2004). The second relates to critiques around how art from Brazil has been considered in the centralized art world, namely as ‘wonderfully
exotic’ and/or as belated and provincial. The mobilization of favela images might then be seen as a response to both these conundrums: by using favela images symbolically, Brazilian artists inverted cultural and political power structures and engaged with the non-elites of their country. Paradoxically, however, when taken out of context this often resulted in the very ‘exotic’ images that foreign audiences were hoping to encounter.

The fourth continuity relates to the positions of artists. It must first of all be reiterated here that artists from Rio’s favelas and periphery have been grossly underrepresented in the (art) history outlined in this chapter, although they were never completely absent. Middle- and upper-class artists dominate this production, paradoxically occupying both an elite and a peripheral status within these global debates. International Relations scholar Laura Lima elaborates on this complex position in her account on the role of non-Western academics. While emphasizing the disadvantaged position of “non-core academics,” she highlights how these intellectuals “also actively engage in power plays and also act as local gatekeepers of orthodoxy” (Lima, 2015, p. 26). As such, she continues:

Understanding these multiple and overlapping layers of power that are constitutive of intellectual writing in the periphery means breaking away from one-dimensional analysis that perceived non-core theorizing as either the extension of what is done in the West or succumbs to complacent, often romanticized, view that intellectuals in the periphery give voice to the silent majorities of their region (Lima, 2015, p. 26).

The same can be said – as I argue – for the artists discussed in this chapter, which resonates with recent calls from art history to “rethink the interconnections of colonial and postcolonial experience, and the common geography and global imaginings directed to the historical study of art” (Wainwright, 2011, p. 11). For the topic at hand, in which exoticism and primitivism remain of crucial importance, it is especially important to study how artworks that depict peripheries travel across different temporal and spatial contexts, a process facilitated by actors from highly different backgrounds.

The fifth and final continuity concerns the economic conditions and consequences of the production and circulation of favela representations. Again, this has long been an issue of debate. In 1949, a US newspaper wrote about Portinari’s paintings: “Many were staring close-ups of the poor – which he sells for fat sums to the rich” (Time, 1949). Following
Renzo Martens’ (2008) artistic critique of the so-called ‘development industry,’ we must therefore ask whether these artists (and those in the following chapters) employ poverty as a ‘resource’ to be ‘enjoyed’ by privileged audiences. While these questions are most frequently posed when referring to a more recent, commercialized art- and media landscape, they are in my view equally poignant considering how favela representations influenced the international successes of the artists discussed in this chapter, e.g. Tarsila in Paris, Portinari in New York and Oiticica in London. In other words, while the media landscape changed considerably over the time period discussed in this chapter – which has fundamentally transformed conditions of art production, circulation and audiences – underlying structures and dilemmas have remained remarkably similar.