Worlding Rio de Janeiro’s favelas
*Relations and representations of socio-spatial inequality in visual art*
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4. Favelas on Display: European Exhibitions

So me interessa o que não é meu. Lei do homem. Lei do antropófago.

Oswald de Andrade (1999, p. 25)

The over-riding fear is that cultural, ethnic, and racial difference will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate – that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten.

bell hooks (1992, p. 369)

In a book entitled Globalized Arts, political economist J.P. Singh (2011, p. xxi) opens his introduction by stating: “The anxieties of globalization are ubiquitous, from simmering favelas to favored salons.” Singh seems to choose these two examples for their incongruity: salons (elite spaces of living, entertainment and/or display) and favelas (poor and marginalized spaces in Brazil). As we have seen, however, there have long been links and interactions between these far-away sites. In this chapter, I will further explore these interconnections by studying recent examples of favela representations displayed in art and architecture exhibitions in Europe. My goal is to describe these European exhibitions as a particular stage on which Rio de Janeiro’s favelas are worlded, examining the images and texts through which they are represented. In other words, how do artists and curators transform favelas into objects to be looked at, experienced and thought about within this European art world space, and how does this relate to the broader narratives and discourses surrounding Brazilian favelas? By analyzing the aesthetic and representational qualities of a diverse selection of exhibitions, as well as their reception, I hope to provide insights in the global imaginaries and transnational social relations that facilitate and frame this worlding practice.

1 Translation: “The only things that interest me are those that are not mine. The laws of men. The laws of the anthropophagites” (de Andrade, 2017, p. 20).
As repeatedly emphasized in this thesis, any practice of putting poverty and inequality on display raises ethical questions around exoticism and the politics of representation. Accordingly, several authors have criticized representations of favelas and other ‘slum’ areas in film, tourism, literature, art and design, pointing out the discrepancies between these global discourses and local realities (e.g. Bentes, 2002; Peixoto, 2007; del Real, 2008; Williams, 2008; Linke, 2012; Kertzer, 2014). These concerns are the starting point for this chapter, but I explicitly aim to look beyond the moral outrage about the exoticist, exploitative and spectacular nature of artistic favela representations to open up a discussion about how and why the European art world engages with these neighbourhoods. Importantly, this is not to say that the fascination with the exotic and the drive for profit play no role in these representations, or that their contrasts with lived favela realities are not shocking and important to address. On the contrary, these are crucial issues that will return throughout the chapter. However, my argument is that ethical concerns around the representation of favelas should be inextricably connected to epistemological questions about informality, poverty and global inequality. To solely focus on the morality of individual artworks or projects would be to miss some crucial aspects of the international engagement with favelas today, such as the links between the commercial uses of favela images and the success of favela-based artists, or the similarities between characteristics ascribed to favelas in commercial discourses and key themes in critical scholarly debates.

The first section of the chapter takes a closer look at the phenomenon of ‘favela chic’ and, building on the work of Bianca Freire-Medeiros (2013, pp. p. 111-122), the notion of the “traveling favela.” Particularly important in this respect will be the idea of the favela as a category, which has been described by Valladares (2005) and strongly resonates with recent publications by Ananya Roy (2011a; 2011b; 2015) on “subaltern urbanism” and “worlding cities.” The following four sections will analyze a number of recent exhibitions that have shown favela images across Europe, starting from four central themes in the framing and reception of these works: (1) how favelas figure within narratives around Brazilian nationality, particularly considering issues of diversity and inclusion, (2) the focus on authenticity in the framing and reception of works by local and foreign artists, (3) the idea that the global North can ‘learn from favelas,’ and (4) the symbolic usage of favela images in actions and narratives that aim to counter global capitalism.²

² Parts of this chapter, especially the sections ‘Quintessentially Brazilian’ and ‘Learning from Favelas’ have previously been published in the article “Favelas at the Biennale: Exhibiting Brazilian
Framing ‘Favela Chic’

A variety of consumer products and spaces – from Puma sneakers to nightclubs, from video games to creative hubs – have in recent years been promoted using the image or name of Brazilian favelas, mostly for European markets. Several authors have criticized this phenomenon of ‘favela chic,’ focusing on a variety of representational contexts (e.g. Bentes, 2002; 2013; Peixoto, 2007; Williams, 2008; Perlman, 2010; Freire-Medeiros, 2013; Kertzer, 2014; Cummings, 2015; Robb Larkins, 2015). In these critiques, two arguments are particularly poignant. First, the majority of elite representational practices do not benefit favela residents, reproducing rather than challenging dominant relations of inequality and privilege. In the words of anthropologist Janice Perlman (2010, p. 330): “Revenues from the profits of favela chic bars, restaurants, dance, music, fashion, and design have not reached the favela communities, while they fill the pockets of the rich in Europe – and to a lesser extent in the United States.” Second, several authors note that sensationalist approaches lead to either simplifications or outright misrepresentations of favela reality. As Erika Robb Larkins (2015, p. 108), who builds on years of ethnographic work in the favela Rocinha, writes: “The aesthetics and discourses of the favela-as-brand do not reflect the complexities of local existence but rather homogenize and sensationalize favela landscapes, bodies, and violence.”

To summarize, what is questioned is firstly the ethical right to represent (and make money of) favelas and, secondly, the capacity and willingness to do so realistically.

These critiques are crucial, but two additional points must be highlighted here. First, as Frenzel (2016, p. 12) notes regarding favela tourism, there is a “danger of thinking of the ‘poor’ or the ‘subaltern’ as an ontological reality while tourism, and for that matter all ‘bourgeois’ or elite value practices, is considered inauthentic and artificial.” As we have seen in previous chapters, nuanced depictions and the self-representation of favela residents are crucial issues, but there exists no cohesive, stable favela reality to be represented. Accordingly, this chapter builds on Said (2003, p. 21, emphasis in original) when he argues that “[t]he things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, not the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original.” Second, as highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, scholars must reflect on their own complicity within these processes of valuing favela spaces, recognizing that the popularity of favela chic-products might be related to the ‘over-research’ of Rio de Janeiro’s Informality in Europe” (Kalkman, 2018b).
favelas (Kertzer, 2014, pp. 15-16). Not only do academics also “[earn] careers with poverty,“ but by reacting against negative stereotypes of favelas they actively contribute to the more positive validation that lies at the basis of most commercial representations (Frenzel, 2016, p. 9). For example, in her ethnography of Rocinha, Robb Larkins (2015, p. 25) mentions the “abundant instances of creativity and hope” she found there, and Perlman (2010, pp. 329-330) notes that “[w]ith their variegated colors, interesting angles, and creative use of materials, favela structures can be seen as exemplifying the mantra of the new urbanism: Low rise, high density – made visually interesting by an absence of standardization.” Importantly, my point here is not to criticize work of these authors – as I broadly concur with their analyses – but merely to highlight the relations between the different global contexts and discourses in which favelas are described and depicted.

With this in mind, it is crucial to return briefly to my own complicity and privilege in the broader context of internationally distributed favela representations. As noted earlier, my work as a European scholar writing in English is essentially part of a long tradition of favela representations by outsiders and for outsiders. As Robb Larkins (2015, p. 162) observes: “Books like this one and researchers like me play an important role in representing the favela to the world; we too ‘invent’ the favela as Licia Valladares [...] has so astutely suggested.” With the dangers of such a reproduction of inequality in mind, however, I hope to use my position as both a European scholar of art – and therefore part of the target audience of the exhibitions I’m discussing – and a scholar of Brazil and favelas to achieve the twofold goal of this chapter: (1) to analyze why certain aspects of favela reality are highlighted and celebrated in European art world spaces, and (2) to critically question the ways in which these projects are framed and received in this context. Again, I do not intend to make claims about life in actual favelas – although I build on a variety of local and foreign authors that have done so – but rather to study the formulation of what Steinbrink (2014, p. 130) calls the “sign ‘favela’” in global contexts and discourses.

To do so, I will build on the notion of the “traveling favela,” defined by Freire-Medeiros (2013, p. 96) as “a space of imagination and a mobile entity that is traveled to while traveling around the world.” At first sight, this term seems counter-intuitive, because, as Rivke Jaffe (2012, p. 676) writes regarding global imaginaries of the ‘ghetto,’ marginalized urban areas are often imagined as spaces of immobility:
While ‘the ghetto’ can refer to specific, concrete places, it has come to refer more broadly to a condition of urban immobility. Ghettos are the original no-go areas: outsiders and even the police are scared to go in, while insiders are unable to get out.

As repeatedly emphasized, similar imaginaries surround Rio de Janeiro’s favelas. However, as Jaffe (2012, p. 686) argues through the lens of popular music, it is precisely this state of immobility that “can connect unconnected and largely immobile populations across the globe and help them mobilize against immobility and marginalization.” Considering artists from Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, we see similar examples of transnational solidarity, inspiration and exchange between marginalized spaces, for example when the artists of the Morrinho Project worked with youngsters from a disadvantaged neighborhood in London, when Angelo Campos painted a mural in a peripheral area of Amsterdam, or when Favela Painting took participants from Rio to work on a painting project in a largely African-American neighborhood in North Philadelphia. These collaborations are noteworthy precisely because they do not receive a lot of attention in the context of ‘favela chic,’ while, as Jaffe (2012, p. 684) argues, “[t]o claim immobility and marginality in this way is an assertion that these lifeworlds are central, not peripheral,” which “subverts the normal urban hierarchy.”

As we will see, this is an important observation also for the focus of this chapter: collaborations among actors that occupy disparate positions in traditional urban hierarchies. Clearly, as the above-mentioned critiques of favela chic indicate, practices of representation across local and global inequalities raise questions of commercialization and exoticism. As bell hooks (1992, p. 370) writes:

Encounters with Otherness are clearly marked as more exciting, more intense, and more threatening. […] In the cultural marketplace the Other is coded as having the capacity to be more alive, as holding the secret that will allow those who venture and dare to break with the cultural anhedonia […] and experience sensual and spiritual renewal.

Addressing the topic at hand directly, Gareth Jones (2011, p. 698) similarly writes: “The slum serves as a counterpoint to the bland conformity of the non-slum city; slum-life is not allowed to be boring and mundane. It is exoticised anew and its image commodified in the process.”
At the same time, following scholarly work within the so-called mobilities turn, we might ask how “transnational exchanges can strengthen the position of poor communities within vertical partnerships with more powerful local and national actors” (Jaffe et al., 2012, p. 646). Artists and scholars alike have noted that art might function as “one means to encounter power relations as to how the slum is represented, and ultimately by whom” (Jones, 2011, p. 698, emphasis in original). Important to remember here is that the immobility of favelas and similar neighborhoods across the world is both real and imagined: the lack of socio-economic mobility in Brazilian society is a crucial issue, but the imaginary of favelas as isolated no-go areas only heightens their marginalization (see chapters one and three). Building on this, and considering that “[h]igher status is often associated with mobility,” it is worth examining how the display of favelas in contexts that are physically, socially and culturally removed from these neighborhoods helps transform the global imaginaries surrounding favelas, the lives and livelihoods of (some) favela residents, and the art world spaces in which these displays take place (Jaffe et al., 2012, p. 646).

Returning to Freire-Medeiros’ (2013, p. 72) account of the traveling favela, we see that on its journeys the sign favela becomes “a territory of the imagination to which various anxieties and desires converge.” Freire-Medeiros (2009, p. 587) argues that we should see favela tourism as a “continuous spiral of representations” in which tourists and favela inhabitants formulate multiple narratives about themselves and each other. To conceptualize this process, she builds on literary scholar Marie Louise Pratt’s concept of a “contact zone,” defined as “‘social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and intertwine with one another, often in extremely asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination,’ but where paradoxically other possibilities of mutual representation emerge” (Freire-Medeiros, 2007b, p. 69, my translation). As we will see in this chapter, similar forms of circulation and (unequal) exchange take place in the contexts of artistic favela representations, especially when these representations travel across the world. Considering the diverse locations of production and display, we might even say that this practice creates multiple (yet overlapping) contact zones, each with their own affordances and limitations.

Writing about ‘the ghetto,’ Jaffe (2012, p. 676) asks “why, precisely, ‘the ghetto’ has stretched and come to be applied to so many different contexts”: how has it come to be “a specific, spatial form of social imaginary that is linked to the urban” (Jaffe, 2012, p. 676)? This chapter asks a similar question for ideas about ‘the favela.’ In addition to historical and
present imaginations of favelas in Brazil, discussed in previous chapters, I argue that the phenomenon Ananya Roy (2011b) calls “subaltern urbanism” is important here. As noted, Roy (2011b, p. 224) describes subaltern urbanism as a particular tendency in urban theory:

Writing against apocalyptic and dystopian narratives of the slum, subaltern urbanism provides accounts of the slum as a terrain of habitation, livelihood and politics. […] [It] seeks to confer recognition on spaces of poverty and forms of popular agency that often remain invisible and neglected in the archives and annals of urban theory.

Other authors have described this discourse as “the human potential city” or “slums of hope” (Amin, 2013a, p. 479-484; Frenzel, 2016, p. 44-47). As Ash Amin (2013a, p. 482) writes, the informal city is increasingly recognized as a space of “improvisation, ingenuity, community, fortitude, hope, laughter, music, personal hygiene, clean-ironed shirts, homemaking, neighborliness, labour and entrepreneurship.” Roy (2011b) recognizes the importance of such a project of recognition, but also warns for idealization and a rigid conceptualization of informality. Similarly, this chapter will be “sympathetic to the cause of subaltern urbanism,” while hoping to contribute to a more critical questioning of “this project of recognition and its key analytical terms” (Roy, 2011b, p. 228-229).

To do so, it is useful to return to the dogmas Licia Valladares (2005, pp. 148-152) recognizes in academic publications on favelas, as discussed in chapter one. Taken together, these dogmas treat favelas as a category: highly different from other forms of urbanism but singular in and of itself. As such, this approach fails to recognize both the internal differences between favelas and the similarities to other parts of the city. Importantly, this categorical approach draws on particular “aesthetic registers,” which will be discussed in this chapter (Jones, 2011, p. 706). In addition, as we have seen in previous chapters, this is what allows ‘the favela’ to become a symbol both within and outside of Brazil: “a strategic resource – a symbolic capital, if you will – for producers as well as consumers” (Freire-Medeiros, 2013, p. 122). A similar argument can be made for slums in the global South in a more general sense. For Roy (2011b, p. 231), “subaltern urbanism” depends on the “ontological and topological readings of the subaltern.” As Jones and Sanyal (2015, p. 433) write about slums in India, this reading allows images to be detached from their local context, becoming part of “a fluid
representational stock of images and experiences that circulate, with the potential to be picked up and acted upon by diverse actors.” Crucially, this categorical isolation of favelas or slums leads to “ignoring the political, economic and social causes underpinning the production and continuity of urban slums” (Jones and Sanyal, 2015, p. 436).

As postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1986, p. 263-264) writes, “[w]hat is at stake here is a ‘worlding,’ the reinscription of a cartography that must (re)present itself as impeccable.” Spivak (1986) also shows, however, that the relations and representations that make up such a process of ‘Othering’ are far from monolithic. Similarly, this chapter shows that while the categorical approach allows for the symbolic and instrumental usage of ‘the favela’ as a sign, it does not in itself determine the values and narratives attached to this symbol. For example, favelas are seen as quintessentially Brazilian, but also as representative of global informality. They are approached as passive spaces waiting for outside intervention, but also as the birthplaces of extraordinary agency, authenticity and resistance. In the following sections, these different symbolic meanings of the favela will be closely examined. Sections two and three look at the ways in which favelas are tied to local identity and specificity, by discussing narratives of Brazilianiness and authenticity. Sections four and five, in contrast, look at the detachment of favela images from local realities, transforming them into generalized spaces of inspiration for the global North. Crucially, as we will see, these distinct visual and discursive repertoires are closely entangled, which causes the many contradictions in the framing of artistic favela representations.

Quintessentially Brazilian

At the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2016, one of the collateral exhibitions showed an installation of photographs by Germany-based photographer Patricia Parinejad, depicting the Rio de Janeiro favela of Cantagalo. The accompanying text by the artist states that the architecture of this neighborhood “is a reflection of Latin America, Brazil itself, and particularly so of Rio, a city full of surprising discoveries and delights” (Time Space Existence, 2016). As a small, hillside community in the Zona Sul, Cantagalo very much fits the typical imagery of the Rio favela – even though the vast majority of favelas in Rio are not blessed with such a scenic location (Varley, 2013). Building on chapters two and three, we see that Parinejad’s reading of Rio’s favelas as “scenic and sensual icons of tropicalized
Brazil” mirrors a long historical tradition (Jackson, 1994, p. 99). With this in mind, this section has a closer look at how favelas figure within current negotiations of Brazilian identity in European art world contexts. In contrast to the rest of the chapter, this section therefore treats not so much the imaginary of the favela as an isolated category, but rather how favelas are incorporated in imaginaries of Brazil and Brazilianness, which are often defined in opposition to Europe and North America.

In recent decades, modern and contemporary art from Brazil has become increasingly visible and popular within the globalized art world and market (Brandellero, 2015). However, the ways in which this inclusion has happened raised widespread critiques, as the European and North American taste for exotic ‘Others’ plays a role here (e.g. Mosquera, 1992; Camnitzer, 1995; Herkenhoff, 1995; Ramírez, 1995). Exhibitions based on national or regional identity are problematic because, as Mosquera (2001, p. 26) notes, “all too often only those works that explicitly manifest difference or satisfy expectations of exoticism are legitimated.” In the increasingly globalized art world, such questions regarding national identity and the politics of representation are becoming ever more complex, but these critiques remain relevant. Perhaps the most urgent question in the Brazilian case remains how to showcase the country’s social, cultural, racial and economic diversity/inequality – since this is precisely an element that has become stereotypical and idealized.

A good illustration of such dilemmas can be found at the Brazilian pavilion of the 2016 Venice Biennale of Architecture, curated by Rio-based urban planner Washington Fajardo. The exhibition presented fifteen architectural projects in different Brazilian cities through video clips and posters, which visitors could take home. The selection and framing of the projects reflected a focus on social relevance rather than architectural prestige. For example, the projects on display highlight the creation of beautiful and democratically used public spaces (Parque Madureira, Parque Sitiê), inclusionary architectural programs (Selo de Qualidade MCMV, Programa Vivenda) and educational facilities (Escola Mangue, Escola Vidigal, Circo Crescer e Viver). Significantly, nine of the projects on display are located in or conducted by residents of favelas/peripheries in different Brazilian cities, with a strong overall focus on Rio de Janeiro. We hear and see favela residents talk about the projects in several of the video presentations. Moreover, projects in favelas and the formal city are shown side-by-side, without clear distinctions, thereby arguably challenging the dominant
idea of Brazilian cities as divided. As such, at first sight the exhibition paints a different picture than the predominantly negative imagery of favelas.

Fig. 4.1. *Circuito da Herança Africana*, poster presented at the exhibition *Juntos*, Brazilian Pavilion, Venice Biennale of Architecture, 2016.
It is not my goal in this chapter to analyze the local relevance of the projects exhibited in this pavilion – important as that topic might be. Rather, I will describe how these projects are worlded in this exhibition, relating this to the ethical and epistemological questions around favela representations outlined above. In the opening wall text, Fajardo paints the European audience a familiar picture of his country. Brazil is described as “a nation that is black, mixed-race, hedonistic, avant-garde, joyful, light and intense,” a “catholic-candomblé-amorous-libidinous-anthropophagic melting pot” (Juntos, 2016). The problematic idea of Brazil as a ‘racial democracy’ is dangerously close here, and becomes even clearer later on:

Through the contribution of the African-Brazilian population we exercise the pursuit of happiness. Through the message of black culture we are impelled to be together, to love, to rejoice, to dance, to attain higher human intelligence, in a togetherness of rare beauty (Juntos, 2016).

Later on, the wall text also mentions that “black populations were exiled in informal areas and urban peripheries subjected to violence and segregation,” but it describes Brazil’s problems as a context in which ingenious solutions are being found in urban settings (Juntos, 2016).

To further examine this exhibition, I will focus on the framing of two of the projects on display, both located in Rio de Janeiro. The first is the Circuito da Herença Africana (Circuit of African Heritage), a tourist route around significant sites of Afro-Brazilian history in Rio de Janeiro’s port region, which encompasses both formal, working-class areas and favelas (fig. 4.1). The poster of this project celebrates Afro-Brazilian culture, which is linked to historical exclusion by mentioning how in Rio “the memory of its African roots were systematically repressed and erased,” but that the city is now “finally starting to reconcile with itself and rediscover that it’s black, very black, at heart” (Milton Guran qtd. in Juntos, 2016). What is not mentioned, however, is that the Circuito forms part of a broader redevelopment of Rio’s port region called Porto Maravilha, aimed at making the region more attractive for residents, visitors and companies. As briefly noted in the previous chapter, inhabitants, activists and scholars have criticized Porto Maravilha as “a textbook case of neoliberal governance” and a project of gentrification, which in Brazil is tellingly also referred to by the term branqueamento (whitening) (Freeman, 2012, p. 110; Gaffney, 2016).
Despite the focus on African heritage, scholars and residents note the difficulty of getting funds and recognition for Afro-Brazilian initiatives with a more direct, political discourse, the problems related to the increase of tourism in heritage sites such as Pedra do Sal, and the struggle between rich and poor (and white and black) people in redeveloped public spaces such as the Praça Mauá (Freeman, 2012; Pereira Ribeiro and Santos da Silva, 2014; Gonçalves, 2016). Therefore Kaleb Gonçalves (2016), an artist living in a favela in the port area, told me in a personal interview that the Circuito is “pretty nice,” but feared it would serve to legitimize the injustices also part of Porto Maravilha. Similarly, Pereira Ribeiro and Santos da Silva (2014) argue that the focus on Afro-Brazilian heritage serves to distract attention from the program’s underlying neoliberal logic.

Without a doubt, several organizations in the port region do perform crucial work in the area of remembering slavery and celebrating Afro-Brazilian culture, and a number of individuals from these groups were interviewed for the video presentation at the Biennale. However, their more politicized discourse – including critiques of Porto Maravilha – is not shown. As such, the Biennale presentation fails to acknowledge the current struggles in the port region, focusing solely on historical recognition. While seemingly inclusionary, this focus on the past serves to distract attention from the problems faced by this area in the present, in which the project on display occupies a central position. This resonates with broader critiques of validating cultural heritage, as outlined for example by García Canclini (2014, p. 54-56). Finally, the presentation does not make a distinction between the different groups and actors that are active in the area – presenting the Circuito as a collaborative, rather than a government project. Considering these different stakeholders, it is worth noting that curator Fajardo worked as an advisor for the Rio government on the Porto Maravilha program, which brings to the fore some of the personal stakes he had in presenting this project in a positive light.

The second project from Fajardo’s pavilion that I’d like to discuss is an art school created by internationally famous artist Vik Muniz in the favela Vidigal, in the south zone of Rio de Janeiro (fig. 4.2). The school is situated in a modern building that takes inspiration from the architecture of the surrounding favela. On the poster of the project, Muniz describes that Vidigal’s close proximity to richer neighbourhoods causes its residents “insatiable material desires,” which the school transforms “into empowerment that is liberating and creative” (Muniz qtd, in Juntos 2016, emphasis in original). We can see similarities here to
the charity-like approach found (and criticized) in many community art projects, where the artist acts as a ‘benefactor’ for the poor and marginalized, who are “defined a priori as in need of empowerment or access to creative/expressive skills” (Kester, 2004, p. 137). The image of a smiling Muniz surrounded by young children is telling here, related to his self-proclaimed status as a “Robin Hood of the arts” (Armendariz, 2015, my translation). This is not to say that art education is not necessary and beneficial within the context of Vidigal (as it is for children everywhere), but rather to recognize that, paraphrasing Kester (1995), people do not live in favelas “because of low self-esteem” or because they have material desires, “but because of a range of economic and political forces that conservatives […] are very anxious to obscure and naturalize” (see also Kwon, 2004). Especially important here is the low quality of Brazil’s public education, widely recognized as a factor that impedes socio-economic mobility.

Fig. 4.2. Escola Vidigal, poster presented at the exhibition Juntos, Brazilian Pavilion, Venice Biennale of Architecture, 2016.
According to Smith (2015, p. 5), precisely because the once-denied racism must now be acknowledged in Brazil, “the country symbolically performs rituals of racial tolerance […] by publically and dramatically including black people in the national fabric in order to forge a new identity,” while failing to address the persistent racism present in daily life and public policy. Similarly, in this exhibition, the age-old idea of inclusion as an essentially Brazilian feature and a nation where discrimination no longer plays a significant role is reiterated, glossing over the very real consequences of racism and classism on the daily lives of people living in favelas. We might therefore read these inclusions as “non-performatives,” in which “naming [is] a way of not bringing something into effect” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 117). Naturally, neoliberal city-planning and/or low-quality education are not problems that this exhibition, Muniz or Fajardo alone can solve. Also, it should be reiterated what this exhibition does achieve: showcasing architectural projects in favelas and asfalto side-by-side, recognizing the former as integral and constitutive territories of Brazilian cities. However, the tensions and struggles that define the context of (and need for) these projects are glossed over rather than made explicit, which is particularly poignant considering the claims in the opening wall text. In other words, by focusing solely on innovative ‘solutions,’ the structural problems faced by peripheral areas are effectively denied, and the limitations of architectural projects like these are not taken into account. Taken together, the projects discussed and Fajardo’s overall framing therefore illustrate the conflicts of interest that might arise in presenting favelas to a foreign audience, especially in an exhibition that seems ultimately aimed at presenting Brazil in a positive light.

(Im)mobility and Authenticity

Chapter two has shown that collaborations between cultural producers from different social strata have a long history in Brazil. In recent years, however, the role and agency of favela inhabitants in the broader process of representing their neighborhoods has increased, as several residents have traveled the world to present their artistic representations to foreign audiences. In this section, I aim to address some of the complexities inherent to this process, particularly considering narratives of (im)mobility and authenticity. To do so, I start at the exhibition *Soft Power. Arte Brasil*, held in 2016 at Kunsthall Kade, in the Dutch city of Amersfoort. As an exhibition based on nationality, we must keep in mind the critiques expressed in the previous section, particularly the tendency of valuing only stereotypically
‘Brazilian’ art. For example, the catalog of this show problematically mentions artists “[telling] us more about the essence of their country” (Roos and van Meeuwen, 2016, p. 3). Looking at the artworks on display, however, we see a rather nuanced and diverse selection, for example by looking explicitly beyond the so-called eixo (axis), the dominant art circuit as found in between the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (Brandellero, 2016, p. 18).

Favelas were depicted in several of the artworks displayed in Soft Power. Arte Brasil, but I will focus here on the participation of one particular artist: Angelo Campos. Campos is a street artist, who was born, raised and still living in the Rio de Janeiro favela of Vila Cruzeiro. The artist, who had never exhibited in Europe prior to this exhibition, makes mostly critical murals about violence and politics in Rio’s favelas (e.g. fig. 4.3). The curators became aware of Campos’ work through his ties with two Dutch artists who have worked in various Rio de Janeiro favelas as part of their project Favela Painting: Jeroen Koolhaas and Dre Urhahn. According to the exhibition catalog, Campos decided to pursue a solo career as an artist after his participation in this project. In reality, however, he started painting already in 1998 – years before the Dutch artists came to Rio – and his status as a local artist was what got him involved in their project in the first place (Campos, 2016). This is, in my view, more than just a misunderstanding. Rather, it is related to a broader critique that Campos (2016) expresses towards Koolhaas and Urhahn, namely that they came to Vila Cruzeiro with a fixed and pre-established idea, without considering what was already there (e.g. local artists, activists, social projects) or what residents wanted. Like Vik Muniz in his Vidigal project, favela residents are here approached as “a priori in need of empowerment” (Kester, 2004, pp. 137-138).

In contrast, Koolhaas and Urhahn are imagined as “creatively, intellectually, financially and institutionally empowered,” despite the fact that, much like JR’s project discussed in the previous chapter, Favela Painting depends on local mediation by actors such as Campos (Kester, 2004, pp. 137-138).3 Within this narrative, favelas remain destitute places yearning to be ‘transformed’ by foreign artists, “a kind of raw material in need of transformation” (Kester, 2004, pp. 137-138). We see this, for example, when Koolhaas tells a

3 The catalog text about Favela Painting mentions, for example, that they “[raised] money to make a dream come true,” and argues that the project “are part of the overall upgrading of the favelas, which are gradually becoming ordinary residential neighborhoods” (Roos and van Meeuwen, 2016, p. 43). While we do see, broadly speaking, a formalization of favela neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro, several favela residents (including Campos) told me that surface-level interventions like these contribute little to that process.
Dutch interviewer that after their intervention, the residents of Vila Cruzeiro “finally had something in their neighborhood to be proud of,” despite the fact that his colleague Urhahn previously mentioned that most favela residents already felt pride for the place in which they live (Wensink, 2009). In addition, keeping in mind Jaffe’s (2012) account of the ‘ghetto,’ the art project supposedly transforms the favela from a space of immobility to a hub of transnational relations. As Koolhaas notes in the same interview: “What was formerly a no-go area is now a place where interested people look at art” (Wensink, 2009).

Considering realities and imaginaries of immobility, Campos’ travel to Amersfoort gains significance, because it disrupts global patterns of mobility and inequality. The next chapter will consider the importance such mobilities in more detail. In contrast, my aim here is to highlight how the idea of favelas as territories of immobility creates a problematic distinction between favela residents and outside artists. Of course, these ideas are partly true – as most foreign artists have a higher degree of mobility than their favela-based interlocutors – but the narratives that accompany most socially-engaged art practices reinforce rather than
Fig. 4.4. The Morrinho Project (2017) *Morrinho* [Installation]. Pereira da Silva, Rio de Janeiro (photo: Simone Kalkman).

Fig. 4.5. The Morrinho Project (2010) *Morrinho* [Installation]. Southbank Centre, London (photo: Jeff van Campen, [Southbank Centre Favela](https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whatson/uncategorized/southbank-centre-favela), licensed under [CC BY-NY 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-ny/2.0/)).
counter this reality. An important reason for this, as addressed in chapter one, is that community-based art projects often build on problematic, essentialist notions of ‘community,’ whether bound by territory or other markers of difference, which leads to the idea of “a coherent collective subject” that is then “consumed as authenticity” (Kwon, 2004, p. 154).

The link to authenticity can be clarified by considering another example of favela residents traveling to European exhibitions, namely the Morrinho Project, known for its miniature ‘model’ of a Rio de Janeiro favela (fig. 4.4). Importantly, this project abolishes the distinction between ‘artists’ and ‘community members,’ but I argue that similar narratives are used to frame and interpret this project on its travels across the world. Generally, the exhibition framing in European contexts builds strongly on the artists’ inspiring life story, and emphasizes Morrinho’s goal of spreading a more positive imagery of Rio’s favelas (Kalkman, 2013). Importantly, the artists’ local origins tend to be used as a guarantee for the authenticity of their representation. We see this for example when 2007 Biennale curator Robert Storr (2007, no pagination, emphasis in original) writes: “[Morrinho’s creators] are not artists who have gone to make contact with street kids […] they are street kids.” Crucially, however, Morrinho’s participants never lived on the streets, and were in their mid-twenties when they participated in the Venice Biennale. Here we see, as Freire-Medeiros and Rocha (2011, p. 16, my translation) write, that Morrinho’s artists “will never be ‘just artists’ but always necessarily ‘artists-favelados.’” The negative associations of the term favelado are important here, showing that these narratives mainly serve to highlight the exceptionalism of particular circulations, as “exceptions that prove the rule” (Jones, 2011, p. 701).

Again, artists from favelas participating in European exhibitions do disrupt dominant patterns of global mobility, but the radical meaning and potential of these disruptions diminishes significantly if they are framed in terms of realism and authenticity, as ‘spokespersons’ for the favela as a category. This resonates with what Gary Alan Fine (2003, p. 162-163) writes about self-taught artists more generally:

> The biographies of self-taught artists justify their authenticity, serving as a primary criterion of evaluation. To be sure, the work itself matters, as many people have

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4 The story of how the Morrinho Project developed since starting in 2007 is described in a number of academic publications (e.g. Freire-Medeiros and Rocha, 2011; Linke, 2012; Kalkman, 2013; Angelini, 2015; 2016).
interesting biographies, but the biography invests the material with meaning. […] The identity of the artist is embedded in the definitions of the field and in the practices of selling.

Fine (2003, p. 163) links this focus to a broader desire for ‘the real thing,’ which, as chapter two has shown, is also strongly present in the production and consumption of favela representations (Jaguaribe, 2004; 2007; Jaguaribe and Hetherington, 2004; Jaguaribe and Salmon, 2012). As Jaguaribe (2004, p. 338) argues, “[t]he prevalence of the realist code” in both the production and the reception of favela representations in various media “attests to a veritable anxiety for uncovering these pluralistic portraits of Brazil,” despite often relying on formulaic and sensationalist encodings of ‘the real.’

This desire for the ‘real’ and the ‘authentic’ is particularly striking in the case of Morrinho, as a closer look at their model reveals that a realist or documentary representation of favela life is not the artists’ primary goal. The model is constructed in a free and playful manner and while the original model was divided up in different, existing favela neighborhoods, these are hard to distinguish for the casual viewer and left out of exhibition reproductions. Moreover, while drawing on a visual language closely associated to that of ‘favela chic,’ the model combines architectural and societal elements from different parts of Rio and the world, for example a Museum of Modern Art, a London Eye, and an Amsterdam-inspired red light district (e.g. fig. 4.5). In this sense, Morrinho plays with the viewer’s expectations of favelas by both confirming and disrupting them. As such, rather than a realistic depiction, we might see the model as an ongoing reflection on what a favela is, can be and should be. As Angelini (2015, p. 2) writes, rather than make a definite statement, Morrinho asks critical questions about “how [Rio] is lived and represented – and the gap between the two” (see also Jones, 2011; Angelini, 2016). These nuances are usually lost, however, in international exhibition contexts, where the main focus remains the artists’ biography. Again, the contrast between the mobile, cosmopolitan art world and the favela as a space of immobility is key in this respect – for this (supposedly) is what makes this story so unique.

Crucially, as we have seen in the case of Favela Painting, these imaginaries of authenticity, (im)mobility, and the physical or symbolic distanced traveled between favelas and exhibition contexts also inform the reception of artists that were not born and raised in
favelas. Another interesting example of this is Japanese artist Tadashi Kawamata, who presented his so-called Favela Café at Art Basel 2013 (fig. 4.6). This installation presented huts made of wood and corrugated iron in which visitors of could get food and drinks. It was heavily criticized in reviews as “poverty porn” and “a distasteful sleight to actual favelas” in which poverty “becomes a source of comfort and status to the rich” (Jordana, 2013; Artemel, 2013). Important here is Kawamata’s “exterior” position, as we see for example in a critical article by Berenstein Jacques (2008, p. 163). She writes that the Japanese artist “discovered favelas through his hotel window during a brief stay in Brazil,” which she contrasts to Oiticica’s “more internal vision” (Berenstein Jacques, 2008, p. 163). Kawamata himself acknowledges this distanced viewpoint when he says in an interview: “For me it’s not about the lifestyle of poor people, but about the material, the size, the arrangement” (Krebs, 2013, my translation). This lack of engagement with actual favelas clearly matters, as shown by the rather different reception of the work of outside artists such as Favela Painting and JR.

Considering Kawamata’s statement, it is noteworthy that the small, wooden structures presented at Art Basel do not look much like actual favelas in terms of material, size or arrangement. This lack of realism is another frequent point of critique. As one reviewer notes: “I’ve been to real favelas and Favela Café has nothing to do with real favelas” (Jordana, 2013). The shacks do resemble Kawamata’s other installations as well as a variety of bars, restaurants and products with a recycled aesthetics around the world. Here we start to see that the inclusion of favelas within exhibitions of contemporary art and architecture is closely linked to broader trends in architecture and urbanism, such as recycled materials, irregular forms and self-building (to be discussed in the following sections). It also shows that what bothered critical reviewers about this work were not the formal characteristics of Kawamata’s work, but rather the direct reference to favelas and the blunt acknowledgment of a superficial interest in these territories (Krebs, 2013). In the words of one reviewer: “Favela Café cannot escape its literalness. The seriousness of the subject matter undermines any attempts at playful irony” (Jordana, 2013).

While these responses are valid, comparing this reception to that of other artists who have employed favela images shows that they are selectively applied. Keeping in mind Berenstein Jacques’ (2008) opposition between Kawamata and Oiticica, for example, it is important to emphasize that “[n]o favelas in Rio have spaces and environments that we could figuratively associate with the environment of [Oiticica’s work] Tropicália” (Figueiredo, p.
As noted in chapter two, a few of Oiticica’s contemporaries and more recent critics noted that the artist “displayed something of a primitivist take on [Mangueira]” (Martins, 2013, p. 70). Here too, the idea of authenticity is important. In the words of art critic Paulo Venâncio Filho (2007, p. 29), Mangueira offered Oiticica “the vital, true authenticity that only total confrontation with the city […] could offer and validate.” While these images and experiences were incorporated in the artist’s extensive philosophy (see Martins, 2013; Asbury, 2008), chapter two showed that foreign audiences not familiar with this philosophical framework are likely to ‘consume’ this authenticity and vitality in a more direct, simplified manner. Similarly, most critics, curators and journalists praise his connections to Mangueira without asking the ethical questions posed about Kawamata’s work.

Fig. 4.6. Tadashi Kawamata (2013) Favela Café [Installation] (Photo: unknown).
Another interesting counterpoint to Kawamata’s installation is found in the work of Brazilian artist Caio Reisewitz. His 2015 exhibition *Florestas, Favelas and Falcatrucas* at Huis Marseille in Amsterdam showed highly aesthetic photographs and collages that
combined images of Brazil’s Atlantic rainforest, modernist architecture and favela neighbourhoods (e.g. fig. 4.7). While making – in the title and framing of the exhibition – a specific reference to favelas as Brazilian, the images are aestheticized, depoliticized and unspecific. Especially in the collages, taking them out of context seems to be the artist’s explicit goal. Importantly, however, most reviewers of the exhibition interpreted the inclusion of favela images as a sign of Reisewitz’ social and political engagement. As Kruijswijk (2015, my translation) writes in a review:

That [Reisewitz’] photographs are so much more than just an aesthetic treat becomes clear when you see in his collages the other side of the typical Brazilian architectural spectrum: fragments of the favelas, slums that spread endlessly and that are almost organically connected to big cities such as Rio and São Paulo. More than a visual seducer, Caio Reisewitz is very much a socially engaged artist, who wants to use his work to address the corruption and political scandals of his country.

For Reisewitz the use of favela images was interpreted as a sign of his socio-political concerns, whereas Kawamata was criticized for his lack of political engagement. Despite having lived in Europe for a long time, Reisewitz is presented as “a profoundly Brazilian artist, concerned about the underlying problems associated with [his] country’s economic and social development” (Monterosso, 2015, no pagination). For many reviewers, Reisewitz’ nationality seems to give him the right to employ favela images. In this sense, like the Brazilian Modernists in the early twentieth century, both Reisewitz and Oiticica are able to “export as their own the Other the Europeans [crave]” (Philippou, 2005, p. 249).

To further illustrate how ideas of authenticity impact the global circulation of artistic favela representations, a final look at Morrinho is in order, focusing particularly on some accounts of exhibitions outside of Pereira da Silva (the favela in which the project started). Some authors have argued that, in these exhibitions, Morrinho has lost its significance and “the dynamic signs of social life that once populated the original playground model” (Linke, 2012, p. 310). As Linke (2012, p. 311) writes:

The exhibit participates in [the manufacture of consumable images for European tourists] by displaying a Brazilian shanty community as an exotic object for European
consumption. An architectural artefact, like the Morrinho project, participates in the staging of authenticity by creating a freeze-frame picture, in which historical time stands still.

Similarly, writing about Morrinho at the Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR), da Costa Bezerra (2017, p. 130) notes that “[t]he original context, meanings, and relationship to the community in which it was created get lost,” leading her to conclude that “Morrinho has become another commodity to be consumed.” Morrinho’s meaning certainly changes during its journeys, and the artists themselves recognize that foreign tastes for the exotic favela have impacted their popularity (Kalkman, 2013). Nevertheless, I argue that the “staging of authenticity” happens predominantly in the framing of the project. The model itself does not aim for a realistic or ‘authentic’ representation, but rather questions the favela as a category. Moreover, by lamenting the transformed relation between Morrinho and its ‘original context,’ I contend that these authors fixate the position of Morrinho’s artists as “always necessarily ‘artists-favelados’” (Freire-Medeiros and Rocha, 2011, p. 16, my translation).

Considering the long history of outsiders depicting favelas, the participation of these favela residents within the European art world is highly significant. However, as Gerardo Mosquera (2001, p. 27) writes: “The question remains: to what extent are the artists contributing to transformation of the hegemonic and restrictive status quo in favour of true diversification, instead of being managed by it?” In the Brazilian context, this question is perhaps especially relevant and complex due to the country’s long history of “racist inclusionism” (Holston, 2008, p. 70). On the one hand, we see that this historical context forces contemporary exhibitions focusing on Brazil to reflect on the country’s inequalities and diversities, as they have long been a central theme in the country’s art production. Including artists from favelas often forms part of this focus. On the other hand, favela residents frequently retain their ‘subaltern’ status in these exhibitions, as spokespersons for territories in need of empowerment valued only for the authenticity they supposedly perform. Through the same narrative, foreign and favela-based artists are being judged on the basis of a perceived lack or loss of an authentic connection with favela territories.

In a recent article, Ash Amin (2013a, p. 476) distinguished two parallel imaginaries of what he calls “telescopic urbanism.” On the one hand, there is the city as “the powerhouse of future capitalist inventiveness, productivity growth and consumer demand,” whereas on the
other side we see “the world of slums, informal settlements, illegal occupation and other forms of existential improvisation” (Amin, 2013a, pp. 478-479). Despite the fact that these inequalities are very real, Amin (2013a, p. 484) argues that the “telescopic” focus “leaves out everything else, above all the myriad hidden connections and relational doings that hold together the contemporary city as an assemblage of many types of spatial formation.” A similar argument, as I argue, can be made regarding favelas and the art world. To be sure, the lived realities of favela residents and European art world insiders or audiences are fundamentally different, which raises important ethical questions. The same is true for the experiences and opportunities of artists from different backgrounds. Nevertheless, here too I would say that there is a risk of leaving out everything else, particularly the “the circuits of knowledge production” through which favela images reach their art world context (Roy, 2011a, p. 314). More specifically, I argue that to rank works on a scale of authenticity as linked to artists’ experiences in favelas misses the point that the curatorial choices, framings and critiques of these distinct projects are often based on the same theoretical discourses, in which favelas remain the locus of authentic immobility. This approach perpetuates the idea of the favela as an isolated category, paradoxically motivated by a desire for “the real thing” (Jaguaribe, 2004).

Learning from Favelas

Returning to the 2016 Venice Biennale of Architecture, two projects by European-based artists put Brazilian favelas on display in this prestigious context. The first was Patricia Parinejad’s Refavela: Structures of Spontaneous Architecture in the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro, briefly mentioned at the outset of the second section. As noted, her installation showed photographs of Cantagalo, accompanied in the exhibition by a text by the artist (fig. 4.8). This text notes “the [fascinating] creative energy exuding from the wildly interwoven structures” and “the abundance of unique solutions, shimmering colours, diverse shapes and unusual ways of using materials” found in favelas (Time Space Existence, 2016). The second installation by the Swiss architect Christian Kerez was entitled Learning from the favelas (without poeticizing them), presented in the main exhibition by curator Alejandro Aravena (fig. 4.9). As the wall text indicates, Kerez argues that favelas “could change the way we understand the city and housing more generally” because they revolve “to a much greater degree around density and variety than around generosity and openness” (Reporting from the
In both installations, the favela is presented as a different “typological and morphological system,” from which architects might learn.

In her influential account on the spectatorship of images of war, Susan Sontag (2003, p. 37-38) writes:
Perhaps the only people with the right to look at images of suffering of this extreme order are those who could do something to alleviate it [...] or those who could learn from it. The rest of us are voyeurs, whether or not we mean to be.

Importantly, my goal here is not to equate images of favelas with those of war and bloodshed, but rather to point to a common narrative in European exhibitions showing Brazilian favelas, in which the idea of learning from images of ‘Others’ is employed to counter critiques of voyeurism. Both Parinejad and Kerez read favelas as “paragons or models for future living,” arguing, in other words, that audiences in the global North might learn from these spaces (Jones and Sanyal, 2015, p. 437). At the Brazilian pavilion, Washington Fajardo similarly argues for seeing the potentiality of the “precarious” neighbourhoods in Brazil, where unsuccessful ideals of “white modernity” failed to completely erase the popular culture of Afro-Brazilian populations (Juntos, 2016). He argues that Brazil’s conflicted relation to modernist city planning – different as it is from that in Europe and North America – holds insights for cities around the world. To a certain extent, these goals resonate with Roy’s (2009, p. 819) call for “new geographies of urban theory,” as these architects challenge the idea that formal, modernist development is the only way for cities to flourish. This section, however, will show some problematic aspects of the narrative of learning from favelas, focusing on Kerez’ and Parinejad’s representations. I will highlight the dichotomies that often underlie the goal of learning from favelas, as well as the function that this narrative performs within the context of European exhibitions.

In his account of Orientalism, discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Said (2003, p. 2-3) argues that “the basic distinction between East and West” can be seen as “the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient.” Similarly, many favela representations in European exhibition contexts present their presentation in oppositional terms: formal vs. informal urbanism, Brazilian vs. Euro-American cities, and global North vs. global South. Parinejad and Kerez literally approach favelas as a category, a different “typological and morphological system” (Kerez qtd. in Reporting from the Front, 2016). As noted, this approach has been criticized by various scholars, who emphasize the need “to challenge binary thinking about (in)formality” rather than merely “reversing the valorisation” of such dualisms (Varley, 2013: 16; see also Roy, 2011b). Two things are particularly important here. First, as Varley (2013,
p. 7) notes, “the idea of a distinctive morphology” fails to recognize the diversity of informal/
low-income settlements around the world, as well as the material and social similarities with
formally built territories in the global North and South. Second, we must question the
tendency of equating informality with specific territories (i.e. ‘slums’ or, in Brazil, favelas).
This approach not only fails to recognize the consolidation and indeed formalization of many
such areas, it also – as Roy (2009) has argued – obscures how informality is less a spatial
characteristic than a method of space production, which can be found across rich and poor
areas throughout the world.

A comparison of Kerez’ and Parinejad’s projects allows us to see how these
frameworks of thought influence many exhibition practices showing favelas in Europe. In
both presentations, we see a focus on the research conducted in favelas. Kerez here depends
on Hugo Mesquita, “who depicted five of São Paulo’s favelas in an extremely detailed way”
in his PhD thesis (Kerez qtd. in Reporting from the Front, 2016; Mesquita, 2016). Noteworthy here is also that Kerez works at ETH Zürich, where a lot of research has been
conducted over the last years into Brazil’s popular architecture (Casa/Cidade/Mundo, 2015;
Angéil and Hehl, 2011; 2013; 2014). Parinejad’s text, in turn, emphasizes the “months living on site and documenting countless structures” in Cantagalo (qtd. in Time Space Existence 2016). Comparing the two projects, we certainly see that Mesquita’s (2016) documentation, which combines formal and historical analysis in a doctoral thesis, was in fact more thorough than Parinejad’s. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy (particularly considering the reception of Kawamata discussed above) that both framings use the focus on research and contact with locals to bridge the physical and symbolic distance between the spaces represented and the context of display – thereby reacting to the outsider-status of these artists. What is not recognized here, however, is that such research practices arguably approach favelas as collections of inspiring practices to be examined and exported by foreign researchers, which has of course been criticized by a range of scholars in the field of postcolonial studies as well as journalists and activists from favelas (Kapoor, 2004; Spivak, 2010; Roy, 2011b; 2015; Steiker-Ginzberg, 2013).

Turning to the differences between the two presentations, the first thing to note is the artistic medium and approach. Parinejad, as an artistic photographer, works intuitively, depicting a seemingly random selection of details and fragments of favela architecture. Architect Kerez, on the other hand, employs a more formal methodology: showing detailed maps of favela neighbourhoods, patterns of form and color and a concrete proposal for an architectural intervention. Another important difference is that – as the title indicates – Kerez’ project is framed more carefully, acknowledging the ethical problems of putting poverty on display in a context such as the Biennale. Reacting to the danger of romanticizing poverty, the exhibition text argues that “mainly because Kerez is a careful architect, we should give him (and the favelas) the benefit of the doubt and see if we can learn something from them” (Reporting from the Front 2016). In contrast, Parinejad does not hesitate to celebrate favela architecture and the “future solutions” it offers for “urban design and development.” For both, however, what ultimately legitimizes their presence at the Biennale are the lessons learned from favela architecture. As if reassuring Sontag (2003, p. 37-38), they contend: we are not looking at favela spaces because we enjoy it – as that would be voyeurism – but because we recognize the value of these building practices for urban contexts across the world.

Unfortunately, neither Kerez nor Parinejad is very specific about what it is we are supposed learn here. Parinejad’s text merely notes generalized positive characteristics of
favelas (e.g. “unique solutions, shimmering colours, diverse shapes and unusual ways of using materials”), without explaining how these would lead to a “role model” for “the current refugee crisis” (*Time Space Existence* 2016). Kerez hints at what he learned in Brazil by juxtaposing the “monumental open spaces” he was familiar with to the “density and variety” of favelas, but also fails to concretize the broader lessons this would teach us (*Reporting from the Front*, 2016). Because it is not specified in the display how these architectural forms of density, flexibility and variety impact daily life or how this differs (or not) from other contexts around the world, the European viewer is left to contemplate formal differences between favelas and the cities she is more familiar with. In contrast, the catalog of another European exhibition, at the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp (M HKA), proposes a ‘learning from favelas’ that is slightly more concrete. Curator Roelstraete (2011, p. 32-33) argues that the “street-less heterotopia” of the favela, devoid of formally conceptualized streets, might help us rethink how we conventionally understand the street “architecturally or even urbanistically, as a physical space,” showing it instead as “a mental space first and foremost – and primordially a social one.”

Through these examples, we start to see how ethical and epistemological questions are intertwined when considering the practice of exhibiting favelas in Europe, which illustrates and makes concrete the claims made in previous chapters about the entangled nature of artistic and academic favela representations. To ask how we can represent favela territories in a respectful manner that disrupts rather than reproduces the structural inequalities therefore inevitably means questioning both the frameworks of thought and the aesthetic registers through which we know, approach and display favela images, models and narratives. As we have seen, critical scholarship has called into question some of these verbal and visual repertoires, challenging dominant conceptualizations and depictions of poverty, informality, marginality and urban divisions. To effectively do so, I would argue that what is needed above all is to recognize the unequal relations between various urban territories, both on a local and a global scale. The next section will examine this topic further, by looking at one particular exemplary function ascribed to favelas and ‘slums,’ namely that of spaces of resistance.

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5 The exhibition *A RUA/DE STRAAT* was organized at the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp (M HKA) for the *Europalia Brasil* festival, from October 6th 2011 through January 22th 2012.
Spaces of Resistance

In the first section of this chapter, I built on Roy (2011b) and Freire-Medeiros (2013) to show how favela images are ascribed symbolic positions within globalized debates. A particularly poignant element of this global imagination, as Roy (2011b) argues, concerns ‘slums’ as spaces of political resistance. Using an account by Solomon Benjamin (2008) as an example, she notes how ‘subaltern urbanism’ presents informality “as the subversive politics of the poor, autonomous of developmentalism, state action and real estate capital” (Roy, 2011b, p. 230). Another example of this tendency is found in a short text by philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2005), tellingly entitled “Where to look for a revolutionary potential?”:

It is effectively surprising how many features of slum dwellers fit the good old Marxist determination of the proletarian revolutionary subject: they are “free” in the double meaning of the word even more than the classic proletariat (“freed” from all substantial ties, dwelling in a free space, outside the police regulations of the state); and they are a large collective, forcibly thrown together, “thrown” into a situation where they have to invent some mode of being-together, and simultaneously deprived of any support in traditional ways of life, in inherited religious or ethnic life-forms.

In this section, I will take a closer look at this imaginary, linking it to art theoretical debates and visual languages in a broader sense. Building on Roy (2011b), I argue that this narrative too depends on the idea of the slum, or favela, as a category. Finally, I will show that it is highly problematic to consider, as Žižek does, favelas as “a free space, outside the police regulations of the state,” closing with some examples that propagate a different view (Žižek, 2005).

As we have seen, in the 1960s and 1970s Hélio Oiticica, Lina Bo Bardi and others turned to favelas as ‘marginal’ spaces, with the goal of protesting Brazil’s right-wing, conservative dictatorship. As working-class and informally-built communities, favelas symbolized the spirit of revolt against the dominant power – also because the government feared real and imagined “communist activism” in these territories (Fischer, 2014, p. 30; see also Dunn, 2016). The work of these artists was inextricably linked to the Brazilian context, but also shows interesting similarities to past and present trends in the international art world (Dezeuze, 2017). Dezeuze (2017) writes extensively about the artistic concern with
‘precarity,’ manifested for example in the use of discarded materials, ephemeral works, and being inspired by the figure of the outcast. She finds this in the practices of Oiticica as well as in the work of US and European artists of the same period. We can see, for example, similarities to the Situationist International, in which elusive forms of “individual freedom and creativity” were placed in opposition to “a perceived ‘machinery’ of domination” in the capitalist city (Schrijver, 2011, p. 248; see also Pinder, 2000). Since the 2000s, as Dezeuze writes, these ideas have become increasingly influential. For example, several exhibitions link the improvisational urbanism of Latin America directly to a position of resistance against global capitalism and neoliberalism, as “the weapon of the weak” (Dezeuze, 2017, p. 256-260). Theoretically, authors often link this to a de Certeau-inspired tactics of ‘making do’ or, in the Brazilian context, the term of gambiarra (Lagnado, 2009).

To illustrate the linkages between, on the one hand, art resisting global capitalism and modernity and, on the other, certain values and characteristics ascribed to favelas and similar neighborhoods, we can return to the 2016 Biennale of Architecture. Main curator Alejandro Aravena, a Chilean architect who has received worldwide recognition for his socially-engaged architectural projects, positions himself as an activist-architect, hoping to use “architecture as a shortcut towards equality” (Franco, 2016; see also McGuirk, 2015). In line with this work, the 2016 edition of the Biennale, entitled Reporting from the front, focused on “the social, political, economical and environmental end of the spectrum,” discussing “issues like segregation, inequalities, peripheries, access to sanitation, natural disasters, housing shortage, migration, informality, crime, traffic, waste, pollution and participation of communities” (Reporting from the front, 2016). In the main exhibition, we see a focus on issues such as density, flexibility, recyclable materials, a small-scale approach, and resistance – for example in the slogans “transform scarcity into abundance,” “resisting globalization,” “architecture against all odds,” and “learning from the global South” (Reporting from the Front, 2016). As such, this exhibition is in line with a range of other initiatives that “[invite] artists, urban designers, social workers, activists, and academics to understand precariousness as a condition under which imagining other ways of living and fighting is both necessary and viable” (Camacho Vargas, 2017, p. 41).

Quotations are taken from the presentations by the following Biennale participants respectively: Gabinete de Arquitetura, Vo Trong Nghia Architects, Al Borde, Tyin Tegnestue.
Fig. 4.10. RUA Arquitetos & MAS Urban Design (2015) *Varanda Products* [Print].
To elaborate on this, it is useful to return briefly the the idea of the right to the city, discussed in chapter one as a “spontaneous coming together” of “disparate heterotopic groups” (Harvey, 2012, p. xvii). In his account of this topic, Peter Marcuse (2009, p. 190) distinguishes two specific groups that are likely to claim their right to the city: (1) the “excluded,” or “those deprived of basic material and existing legal right,” and (2) the “alienated,” or “those discontented with life as they see it around them, perceived as limiting their own potentials for growth and creativity.” This idea of seeing revolutionary potential in collaborations between, on the one hand, the “materially deprived” and, on the other hand, the “intellectually and socially alienated” is significant when considering artists working in marginalized communities, and has, as we have seen, a long history in Brazil (Marcuse, 2009, p. 190). Brazilian artist and art critic Waldemar Cordeiro (1987, qtd. in Martins, 2013, p. 26), for example, writes that “culture only comes into historical existence when it creates a unity of thinking between the ‘simple’ people and the artists and intellectuals.” It also specifies what the right to the city entails, namely a combination of a material right to for example housing and public services and a symbolic or ideological right to appropriate and change the physical and social structures of the city. In a way, both groups identified by Marcuse suffer under global capitalism. However, I argue that to combine “the demands of the oppressed with the aspirations of the alienated,” we must firstly acknowledge that deprivation and discontent are profoundly different experiences, and might lead to a rather different conceptualization of problems, solutions, priorities and means of action (Marcuse, 2009, p. 192).

To illustrate this, it is useful to briefly consider Robb Larkins’ (2015) description of so-called rolezinhos in Rio de Janeiro, organized strolls in which groups of favela residents visit elite spaces such as shopping malls, which are often met with distrust and even violence by security guards and upper-class visitors. Robb Larkins (2015, p. 169) writes that while “news pundits, cultural commentators, and academics have all been quick to assess the political and social significance of the rolezinho,” people in favelas paint a rather different picture, suggesting that “the rolezinho was about being able to enter and enjoy the luxury of the mall and the consumer experience it offered.” In other words, “the movement wasn’t so much politically radical as it was about the right to consume” (Robb Larkins, 2015, p. 169). Without a doubt, there are many activists groups in favelas with a strongly politicized, anti-capitalist discourse, and many favela residents are acutely aware of the injustices they suffer
as a result of the (neoliberal) state. However, this does not necessarily mean that favela residents do not want to shop in air-conditioned shopping malls, have comfortable homes, televisions, smartphones and Nike shoes. This point speaks to the diversity of favela neighborhoods, but also to the fact that in these spaces consumer products are – as in most places – objects of desire.

In addition to this rather practical argument, some reviewers of the 2016 Venice Biennale questioned the very idea of bottom-up inventiveness and agency as the way towards social or political transformation. As one reviewer notes:

The elevation of values like poverty, ephemerality, and impermanence all too easily dovetails with a new global precariar order in which we’re asked to take basics like accommodation, healthcare, and employment much less for granted. ‘Against scarcity: inventiveness,’ is the biennale’s rallying cry, yet it’s not too far from the demands of neoliberal politicians that the poor buckle down to austerity, meeting structural constraint with a personal resourcefulness of last resort (Currie, 2016).

Amin (2013b, p. 142) has also noted the similarities between “the neoliberal turn towards active subjects” and celebrations of the ingenuity and self-sufficiently of the urban poor, both centered on the idea of resilience. In the words of Deuze (2017, p. 259), the insistence on self-reliance and flexibility “runs the risk of echoing neoliberal justifications for the withdrawal of state support and welfare in order to let the free market run without any regulations.” Here we start to see that, while seemingly opposite, the narrative of ‘slums-as-resistant’ is not too far removed from “other potential misreadings” such as “slum life as a capitalist dream free from an oppressive state” or an untapped resource for capitalist markets (Jones and Sanyal, 2015, p. 438; see for a well-known example of the latter, de Soto, 2000). Both rely on the idea of favelas as spaces outside or ‘free’ of capitalist modernity.

Building on these critiques, I argue that we must be careful when linking specific places or practices to broader narratives of resistance against the neoliberal state, architectural modernism, or global capitalism. Crucially, this is not to say that resistant practices do not exist in favela neighbourhoods, or that these forms of local activism cannot be inspiring. We might even say that slums can become “an epistemological shorthand for tracking the cracks in [the] framework [of modernity]” (Rao, 2006, p. 232). However, as Dovey and King (2012,
p. 291) note, the tendency of reading slums spaces as resistant is closely related to the ideas of authenticity discussed above: “In this context the slum adds value as an authentic urbanism cutting through the spectacle of globalization, modernity and placelessness, an insurgent urbanism that resists global capitalism and authoritarian politics.” In other words, what we see here is a dualistic framework in which certain spaces (i.e. the ‘formal city’) embody modernity and global capitalism, whereas other spaces take on a symbolic position of resistance only because they do not occupy a position of privilege within those systems.

To challenge this framework, I build on Roy and Ong’s (2011) conceptualization of worlding, as outlined in the introduction, particularly their “anthropological focus on mid-range theorizing” (Ong, 2011, p. 9; see also Jones, 2011, p. 698). Such an approach brings to the fore two important points. First, we should never forget that the self-constructed environment of favelas is the long-term effect of a lack of social housing and, perhaps even more importantly, social mobility in Brazilian society. This is not just to say that the innovative solutions we see here are born out of hardship and scarcity, but rather aims to highlight the societal structures that lie at the basis of these conditions, in which the capitalist state plays a crucial role. Put more critically, rather than develop in absence of the state and/or capitalism, informality is “produced by the state itself” (Roy, 2005, p. 149; see also Rolnik, 2015). Moreover, as James Holston (2008, p. 23) notes, historically many protest movements from Brazil’s peripheries do not define their rights in outright opposition to the state or the market, but rather developed “a new sense of citizenship in terms of their contributions to the city’s construction through house and neighborhood building, to its government through paying taxes, and to its economy through consumption.” In other words, claiming the identity of “property owners, taxpayers and modern consumers” can be a source of pride for residents of informally-built neighborhoods (Holston, 2008, p. 23).

Second, when praising the spontaneity and variety of favela architecture, we should keep in mind that favelas are by no means spaces without rules. Rules are established by different groups in power (e.g. drug gangs, militia, and the police) and often enforced with violence, which calls the supposed spontaneity of favela life into question. More generally, in Roy’s (2005, p. 149, emphasis in original) words, we must keep in mind the “very different concretizations of legitimacy […] within informality.” In other words, the visual and physical outlook of favela architecture (i.e. their ‘flexibility’ and ‘spontaneity’) do not necessarily mean that the experience of living in these neighborhoods is similarly unstructured. These
points resonate with Roy’s (2011b, p. 231) critique of the “ontological and topological understandings of subalternity,” on which subaltern urbanism depends. Instead, building on Spivak’s work, she defines subalternity as “the silences of our archives and annals,” “the limits of archival and ethnographic recognition” (Roy, 2011b, p. 231). In this definition, “the subaltern is neither habitus nor territory, neither politically subversive nor culturally pragmatic,” and a true project of recognition would be aimed at disrupting the familiar categories through which favelas are worlded (Roy, 2011b, p. 231; see also del Real, 2014; Jones and Sanyal, 2015).

With this argument in mind, I will look at a final European exhibition, titled *Uneven Growth: Tactical Urbanisms for Expanding Megacities*, which was held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2014 and in the Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna in 2015. The exhibition reflected on socio-economic inequality within contemporary cities, building on research collaborations between scholars, designers and urban planners from all over the world. As the opening text reads:

> In 2030, the world’s population will be a staggering eight billion people. Of these, two-thirds will live in cities. Most will be poor. As resources become more limited, rising inequality in urban areas will be one of the greatest trials faced by societies across the planet (*Uneven Growth: Tactical Urbanisms for Expanding Megacities*, 2015).

As a response, the exhibition proposes “tactical urbanisms” – defined as “a highly pragmatic movement that abandons all holistic and comprehensive planning” (Gadanho, 2014, p. 12). Six cities from different continents were chosen as case studies, where a collaboration of local and foreign researchers developed a so-called design scenario to challenge that city’s socio-economic inequalities. The selected Latin American city was Rio de Janeiro, with a project by RUA Arquitetos and MAS Urban Design (based at ETH Zürich).

The design scenarios differed greatly in approach and scale, but most were – in the spirit of tactical urbanisms – localized, easily applicable solutions. Critics of the exhibitions

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7 My analysis is based on a research visit to the exhibition in Vienna, the exhibition catalog, and a research visit to the exhibition 35º Panorama da Arte Brasileira at Museu de Arte Moderna in São Paulo, from 27 September through 17 December 2017, where the Rio de Janeiro project of *Uneven Growth* (Varanda Products) was also exhibited.
therefore addressed the “profound disconnect between the problem meant to be tackled and
the scale of the tactics meant to do the tackling” (Tarleton, 2015). The Rio project, by RUA
Arquitetos and ETH Zürich, was the most small-scale of them all. It was based on the
puxadinho, a Portuguese term defined as “add-ons to existing structures, typical in Rio’s self-
built environments, that are created by people with minimal means from leftover and recycled
materials” (Gadanho, 2014, p. 148). The creators’ idea was to provide a collection of cheap
consumer products that people can use to enhance their homes, such as a folding table, a
plastic chair, and a silver sheet to provide shade (fig. 4.10). This led to mixed reactions. On
the one hand, it was one of the most realistic projects, cheap and easy to execute – compared
for example to building new islands off the coast of Hong Kong. On the other hand, some
reviewers judged the entry “painfully superficial” and fully incorporated within the capitalist
structures that caused the very inequality the exhibition is trying to counter, without any
“potential to disrupt the status quo” (Flint, 2014; see also Hong, 2015). As one reviewer
writes: “Go ahead, enjoy your crumbling concrete patio, the Rio de Janeiro team suggests,
laying out a catalogue of fictional home-improvement products, like a silver shade screen,
reflective tiles, and plastic chairs. It’s healing via Home Depot” (Davidson, 2014).

Without a doubt, it is hard to see the potential for revolutionary change within the
laid-back and playful Varanda Products – especially considering they’re not so different from
regular plastic chairs or sunshades. What we do see in this project, however, is a disruption of
the division between formal and informal urbanism (as these ‘solutions’ can be applied in
both), thereby challenging the idea of favelas as a category. For example, in the black-and-
white drawings that illustrate the project, the borders between favelas and asfalto are
indistinct and overlapping – challenging dominant visual registers through which Rio is
depicted (see chapter three). Moreover, through its development of consumer products, this
project counters the idea of favelas as spaces outside of capitalism. The catalog text, in
particular, talks not only about Rio’s stark inequalities, but also about the fact that these have
greatly diminished in recent years, as “60 percent of favela residents now belong to this
emerging middle class” (Gadanho, 2014, p. 147). This has resulted in a significant increase in
purchasing power: many favela residents now own flat screen TV’s, smartphones, and other
luxury consumption goods. In this way, this project counters the separated imaginaries of
“telescopic urbanism”: the “glitzy” capitalist city and the “gritty and survivalist” favela
(Amin, 2013a, p. 483). At the same time, the catalog notes that “the equal distribution of
public services and educational facilities remains an unfulfilled promise,” which means that
favela residents still lack basic rights such as proper education, healthcare and public safety
(Gadanho, 2014, p. 147).

In a broader project, a number of researchers based at ETH Zürich have in recent
years formulated and examined a concept of Arquitetura Popular Brasileira (Popular
Brazilian Architecture, APB). Importantly, while this concept was developed “[b]ased on
urban informality and favela studies,” it applies to both formal and informal areas of the city,
with a focus on small-scale, practical solutions and daily uses of architecture (Casa/Cidade/
Mundo, 2015). The Swiss architects find inspiration in these practices, arguing that they
might ultimately lead to “a more sustainable world, a more beautiful architecture and, last but
not least, a happier people” (Angélil and Hehl, 2014, p. 83). More specifically, as Angélil and
Hehl (2013, p. 71) note, the goal is to “come closer to an everyday design practice, to an
anonymous architecture beyond the self-fulfilling claim of the individual author.” Their
overview of APB, presented for example at the 2015 exhibition Casa/Cidade/Mundo at the
Centro Municipal de Arte Hélio Oiticica in Rio de Janeiro, includes architectural details,
geographical settings, and social practices. Importantly, here too we can find examples of
idealization, for example when they write that “at the beach, social equality prevails” (see
chapter three). Rainer Hehl, one of APB’s principle proponents, also problematically
discusses the favela as “potentiality, even solution” (Furlaneto, 2013). Finally, we might
question to what extent these elements are quintessentially Brazilian, as many can also be
found in other places. Nevertheless, this project is noteworthy because it denies the favela as
a category, the “ontological and topological” reading of favela spaces (Roy, 2011b, p. 231).
In this project, inspiration is taken from concrete examples in both favelas and asfalto, and
the provided solutions are applicable to both. This changes the unidirectional narrative of
‘learning from favelas,’ as well as making this idea more practical and specific.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that “the shack has become an object of fancy, a source of
metaphors for a mediated society abundant in objects” (del Real, 2014, p. 83). Art and
architecture exhibitions showing Brazilian favelas in elite European institutions are arguably
part of the phenomenon of ‘favela chic’: the commercial potential and aesthetic enjoyment of
favela images and narratives in contexts that have little to do with actual favela
neighbourhoods. Needless to say, these practices of display and consumption raise important ethical questions around the politics of representation and the reproduction of global inequalities. With this in mind, my goal has been to draw attention to the “institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding” on which these artworks and exhibitions rely “for their effects” (Said, 2003, p. 22). I have specifically tried to challenge the idea of the favela as a category, unique compared to other forms of urbanism but singular in itself. This categorical approach, as I have argued, allows for the symbolic usage of favela images in global contexts, while glossing over the diversity and the agency of actual favela spaces. At the same time, I have tried to highlight that the practice of putting favelas on display in Europe is diverse, because favela images are called upon in a number of distinct yet overlapping narratives around Brazilianness, poverty, and (global) inequality.

The chapter addressed four particular narratives that frequently accompany artistic favela representations in European exhibitions. First, I examined the paradoxical combination of validation and stigma attached to favelas in narratives around Brazilian identity, often juxtaposing Brazil to Europe and/or the United States. The context of “racist inclusionism” is important here, as images of favelas continue to be employed in the age-old narrative of Brazil as a country of inclusiveness and intercultural mixing (Holston, 2008, p. 70). Importantly, while not showing favelas within displays of Brazilian nationality might be equally problematic, too often such exhibitions “[ignore] the political, economic and social causes underpinning the production and continuity of urban slums” (Jones and Sanyal, 2015, p. 436).

Second, I have looked at how artists, curators and journalists make sense of the real and imaginary connections artists have to actual favelas. Favela residents are increasingly participating in the exhibition processes outlined, but their work is often framed in terms of authenticity, as spokespersons for the ‘authentic favela,’ or as replacable ‘participants’ of projects by foreign artists. These narratives perpetuate the idea of favelas as destitute and isolated areas waiting to be transformed by artistic practice, and fail to recognize the relations between local, regional and global people and processes of exchange.

Third, I’ve examined the often-cited question of what audiences in the global North might learn from favelas – a focus often used to legitimate the presence of favela representations in European exhibition contexts. As we have seen, this narrative often builds on questionable dichotomies, e.g. density vs. openness, flexibility vs. rigid rules, community
life vs. alienation, global North vs. global South. Moreover, the lessons we – Europe, the
global North – are supposed to learn are rarely specified. To be clear, I’m not necessarily
arguing for a more didactic approach to exhibition practices, but rather for using the insights
found in favelas to reflect on our own architecture and urban planning in a way that goes
beyond familiar juxtapositions. The common, dualistic approach, as I have argued,
reproduces the epistemological frameworks and aesthetic registers through which we know
cities around the world. Moreover, it presents the formal and social characteristics of favela
territories as a repertoire from which we can pick and choose aspects to appropriate, without
considering the historical and contemporary relations through which local and global
inequality are (re)produced, or our own position within these structures (Spivak, 2010;
Steiker-Ginzberg, 2013).

Finally, I’ve considered arguments around “subaltern urbanism” and “slums of hope”
(Roy, 2011b; Frenzel, 2016). Serving again as a source of inspiration, favelas here often
figure within broader narratives of resistance against global capitalism and its various
injustices. Many artists and curators see links between the deprivation of slum residents and
the alienation of, for example, artists and intellectuals within contexts of global capitalism
(Marcuse, 2009). As we have seen, however, the way in which these groups conceptualize
and prioritize problems and solutions can differ substantially – which complicates their
collaboration towards a more inclusive right to the city. In addition, while we might see
subaltern urbanism as a much-needed counter narrative against the negative stereotypes of
slums and informality, this practice hinges on “ontological and topological readings of the
subaltern” (Roy, 2011b, p. 231). In response, I’ve discussed several academic and artistic
examples that disrupt the dominant frameworks through which favelas are seen and shown,
focusing, for example, on similarities between favelas and the formal city in Brazil (Varanda
Products, Arquitetura Popular Brasileira) or reflecting in a broader sense on what a favela is,
can be and should be (Morrinho).

As Roy (2011a, p. 314) writes, “worlding as a practice of centering […] involves the
production of regimes of truth,” and I hope this chapter functions as a “critical intervention in
the truth-claims that are constructed and circulated” around Brazilian favelas. Crucially,
however, this thesis is also part of the unequal, global circuits that produce, distribute and
interpret favela images for foreign audiences. Returning, for example, to narratives of
(im)mobility, it should be highlighted that “[t]he vocabulary (and practices) of ‘research’ and
‘findings [...] carries with it its own implicit infrastructures of inclusion and exclusion, mobility and immobility” (Urry and Sheller, 2006, p. 218). In an attempt to recognize this complicity, my aim has been to highlight some of the similarities between different contexts in which Brazilian favelas have been employed symbolically. Building on this, I do not argue that exhibition practices showing favelas are somehow inherently ‘wrong,’ or that Europeans cannot learn from favelas. However, there is an imperative to be very careful with linking international visibility – either in exhibitions or texts like this one – to democratic inclusion or social change in actual favela neighbourhoods, precisely because the socio-spatial context of these worlding practices tends to reproduce rather than challenge global inequalities.