
FILM AND VIDEO REVIEWS

A Memory in Three Acts. Director, **Inadelso Cossa**. 2016. 64 minutes. Colour. Produced by 16mmfilmes.

With this film director Inadelso Cossa delivers a significant work on history and memory related to Mozambique's anticolonial struggle in the 1960s and 70s. The film is compiled by interviews with militant clandestine participants in that struggle, juxtaposed to archival material from that era, and it is framed by two reflective and poetic sections, a prelude and an afterword, in which the director discusses his own position towards the political significance of memory. This is a film that is not only about Mozambique's struggle for independence from Portugal, but also about the diachronic political significance of memory in anti-colonial struggles, past and present. Thus, memories of struggle, oppression, torture and liberation are the source material for this work. The film opens with a criticism of how little mention is made in current official histories about the role of clandestine resistance in Mozambique's struggle against colonial rule. And the director, in a very sensible manner, starts the film by giving a face and a voice to a few of these anonymous people, who share their stories and confront their ghosts and traumas in the course of the film.

The personal stories and memories narrated by the interviewees provide a very comprehensive glance through first hand experiences of how colonial rule functioned, and how resistance was organized against it, significantly in, and in interaction with, the capital, Maputo city (then Lourenço Marques). For some of the

people interviewed, who were natives of rural Mozambique and arrived in Maputo at a young age, their urban encounters were life-changing comings of age, awakening them and engaging them in the anti-colonial movement. For instance, as one interviewee narrates, it was there that he first encountered the gloss and inequality that city life entailed. Working as a domestic servant and later in a hotel placed him in contact with colonial rulers, their collaborators and wealthy tourists who roamed the city in the 1960s. Significantly, marginal jobs in the city and unseen networks within the urban structure were the points through which some of them came in contact with the resistance movement. Through such networks they became involved in this movement, and used them to hide and find strength in their encounters with colonial violence, torture and terror.

The rich use of visual documents from Mozambique of that period, such as archival television footage, photographs from magazines of the time as well as propaganda material, framed by the interviews, establishes a politically significant collage of life in Maputo and in Mozambique of that era. Some scholars of urban studies may thus find the film useful, as well as scholars of memory studies and historians of colonialism who may be the primary scholarly audience for this film. Yet, by discussing details of how marginalized urban lives and underground networks played a role in establishing and maintaining the clandestine resistance movement against colonial rule, the film may be particularly useful to scholars and researchers studying urban social

movements - and in particular to urban studies scholars interested in the particular historical and geographical contexts or in the wider anti-colonial struggle in Africa.

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Delta Park. Directors/Screenwriters, **Karine de Villers** and **Mario Brenta**. 2016. 68 minutes.
Colour. Production: Polygone Etoilé, Film Flamme, Blue Film.

Delta Park is the fourth collaboration between Italian film director Mario Brenta and Belgian anthropologist turned cineaste, Karine de Villers. They partnered on this documentary to describe the experience of a group of African migrants stranded at the Hotel Delta Park that has been transformed into a government-funded migrant shelter. It is located somewhere in a nondescript Italian town at the delta of the Po. Depicting the Beckettian wait of African young men, the film juxtaposes their experience as migrants stuck in limbo with the decaying urban structures that embody the town's industrial past. The central theme is that of their wait. While this film may appeal to anthropologists interested in migration and more generally in migrants' experience of time and transience, it also provides insight into the ways in which they inhabit this architectural and post-industrial landscape.

The directors masterfully show how time comes to a stubborn standstill inside the walls of the Delta Park, which is shared by the owner's family and the hotel residents. The men's languishment, idleness, and feeling of social exclusion are

shown through a series of close-ups of their resigned faces interwoven with long shots of the abandoned ruins around the town. As one of the protagonists says: 'it's really not easy to stay in one place for a year and four months without doing anything'. Comically echoing the man's concern, the hotel's owner elderly mother relentlessly checks the unreliable longcase clock standing in the lounge. By making this visual parallel, the directors point the viewer's attention towards the protagonists' pervasive sense of boredom and doom. Both of these feelings permeate the inexorable passage of time at the Delta Park while beautifully contextualizing the exacting nature of the migrant's wait

The film's greatest strength is its use of visual language rather than words. It lets the images do the storytelling of the drama unfolding. The protagonists are barely introduced, which could leave the viewer wanting to know more about these men and their personal stories, and yet these stories manage to shadow the portrait of an Italian region impoverished by processes of de-industrialization. The nearby playground where the men kill time, the nearly deserted train station, the empty fields and the surrounding ruins all become an urban metaphor of their overbearing wait and sketch an endless vanishing line toward an absent horizon.

Distant from visions of spectacular exoduses at sea, a sea that is almost non-existent in the film, we are shown what becomes of the people who risk their lives for better prospects, only to find themselves trapped in the bureaucratic and geographical meanders of the European 'El Dorado'. We see the suffering of these

people helplessly looking for new horizons that are always imagined to be better yet seem forever out of reach. The hotel, and indeed the town, both become ‘non-places’ in the sense of ‘transit point’ proposed by Marc Augé (1992), except that, in the case of the hotel’s residents, transience has become an abiding circumstance.

As one of the protagonists says, ‘Suffer [sic] for long is different from long-suffering... long-suffering has to do with affliction.’ The affliction here is orchestrated by Karine de Villers and Mario Brenta to offer a seldom seen picture of the reality of migration, one that shows how this exodus can also defy movement, bringing so many lives to an enforced halt. Throughout this well-crafted film, we cannot help but share in the lassitude of these men, their seclusion, and contemplation of an uncertain future.

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Worlds on Edge. Directors, **Thiago B. Mendonça** and **Renata Jardim**. 2015. 25 minutes.

Colour. Produced by Memória Viva.

Worlds on Edge (*Entremundos*) documents a day in São Paulo’s most unequal neighbourhood. Built around shots that juxtapose the neighbourhood’s rich and poor quarters, the documentary records the extreme social differences that compose Brazilian reality. A simple and straightforward film structure portrays the social reality of one of the world’s largest and richest cities.

From wide-angle shots of residential buildings and luxury houses to ground level

shots of the litter that occupies the narrow streets of the slums, the viewer’s gaze is intercalated in the material universe of daily life in São Paulo. In that sense, the film renders an accurate portrait of the city. By contrasting the gated residencies and the slums, paved roads and narrow alleys, cars and skateboards, a personal trainer and a gym, the ballet class and the communal ball, the viewer is offered rich details of the material and symbolic elements found in the city, nearly creating in this way a typology of the megalopolis. A strong feature of the film is the sound editing, which allows the differences of the city to become clear not only through images, but through a clear editing of the many layers of noise of the poor periphery and the almost complete silence of the bourgeois residences.

In the most compelling sequence, the political component of the film becomes explicit. Residents from the rich quarters of the neighbourhood gather around a police station to discuss public security issues. In racist rants against the slum residents, these bourgeois residents demand harsh security measures, including the deployment of army troops, in a cacophony of nonsense and prejudice. Juxtaposed with this sequence, the camera presents a samba party in the slums, whose residents joyfully sing and dance. It is the sole moment in which the oppositional structure of the film falls short, however. Lacking mediation, the directors unwarily reproduce the same biased rhetoric that they denounce in the racist bourgeois residents. The overlapping of the soundscape and the appearance of joy with the upper-class resentment shows the film to have less of a dialog with the slums, which it sees with an air of naïveté, than

with the middle class itself. The core of inequality thus remains untouched, and although the denouncement of racist rhetoric is evident, in the end we are left with no account of the cause of the social inequality that the films denounces.

Overall, nonetheless, the film is a fair depiction of São Paulo's everyday reality. It may certainly provide insights for students of Urban Anthropology and Visual Culture, allowing them to reflect on ways to portray and work with images of the urban environment. It may also be of interest to Urban Studies and Architecture students in general, since it captures significant differences in material culture found in a global megalopolis, highlighting the topology of the city and the creative housing solutions developed with local ingenuity. Furthermore, it contributes to the portrayal of São Paulo (and Brazilian) reality, since it does not repeat the cliché of 'poverty as disgrace', common in many representations of Brazil, and provides a fair portrayal of the everyday life of marginalized communities.

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Portrait of China. Director, **Mathias Nordby**. 2018. 30 minutes.
Colour.

The opening shot of Mathias Nordby's 'Portrait of China' depicts a meandering ribbon of smoke trailing up from a lit cigarette perched on an ashtray. A chair pulled up to the small round table where the ashtray sits is conspicuously empty, and the

room is silent save for the muffled sounds that emanate from the grey, nondescript Chinese city outside the window. The image sets the scene for what can be read as a brisk thirty-minute reflection on presence and absence in China's rapidly shifting urban scapes. Self-described as an 'ethnographic film', Nordby presents a visual collage of nine different regions, juxtaposing moments of consumption, leisure, and everyday practices that are often mediated through technologies of communication, transportation, and recreation. As such, the short film invites a deeper consideration of how social relationships and relations to particular places, times, and lifestyles are being critically transformed in contemporary China. As new technologies thread together seemingly disparate episodes — a toy drone drawing a crowd at a cherry blossom festival, a group of friends discussing their post-graduation futures over a game of cards aboard a train, a barge drifting across the skyline at dusk, ubiquitous smart phones and selfie sticks — they point to new and enduring modes of connection even as they highlight proliferating forms of disconnection and disengagement.

In his analysis of the modern city, Georg Simmel distinguishes the density, diversity, and endless possibilities of the metropolis from the more rigid restrictions of rural life (1964). Simmel's urban dweller is a mobile subject, forging connections across social circles and using these new associations to construct an individualized identity and social world (1955). In the modern Maoist city, however, the enclosed form of the work unit frequently resulted in less freedom, heterogeneity and interaction at the urban level. As Lu Duanfang describes, in this context, the work unit was

often physically and socially separated from the rest of the city, restricting urban residents' access to resources outside of its confines (2006).

Nordby's film presents glimpses of a radically transformed Chinese urbanite, with cosmopolitan tastes, desires, and an identity derived from the expanding cityscapes once derided as parasitical under Mao (Visser 2010). While residents still congregate in public parks (see Farquhar 2009), stop to read the daily newspaper displayed on public walls, and gather to sing traditional patriotic songs, a 24-7, always-on media environment (Crary 2013) simultaneously allows them to reimagine themselves as part of a distributed national and transnational public (Anderson 2006). Nordby's almost surreptitious shots capturing the aesthetic parameters of Chinese tourists posing for, staging, and circulating selfies are especially provocative, illuminating the ways in which Chinese citizens are today repositioning themselves as protagonists in their own autobiographical stories (Shipley 2015). As we already know, mobile phone images can offer a counter perspective to mainstream media coverage and help reimagine a citizenry outside of official state channels (Bonilla and Rosa 2015). In this particular context, they offer insight into new modes of self-representation in a rapidly urbanizing China, questioning the boundaries of the urban and its communities, as well as the lines between public and private in the city. Although a sense of immense change is impressed upon the viewer, Nordby does not provide any narrative commentary or footage to contextualize this change. As such, Nordby's film would be most useful for scholars and wider audiences looking to

visually supplement more nuanced examinations of the monumental changes currently underway in China.

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Bricks. Director, **Quentin Ravelli**. 2017.
83 minutes.
Colour. Produced by Survivance.

The documentary *Bricks* explores the social and political consequences of the 2008 financial crisis in Spain. The collapse of the construction industry is used by the director to transform bricks into the main actors of the film. The production, use and destruction of bricks is intertwined with the dialogues and everyday life of people who responded to the crisis in different ways. The materiality of bricks is transgressed to stimulate a multiple audio-visual narrative in which viewers can relate the building blocks with evictions, processes of resistance, political agendas or business plans. 'We have pushed this wall, we've made cracks in it, and with everybody's help, we have to demolish it'.

The use of observational and participatory film techniques is taken to a high level in this audio-visual narrative. This creates a sense of intimacy with the actors and their environment. The camera seems not to interfere with the natural flow of the action, blurring the boundaries between scripted and spontaneous recording or between fiction and reality. Additionally, the adept treatment of lighting, photography and sound creates a cinematic aesthetic uncommon in most documentaries on social issues. The care for technical aspects, however, does not diminish the immersion of the film into the everyday life, emotions and thoughts of its protagonists. They are portrayed as part of a society shaken by the failure of its economic system and the film reveals how this affects people and their ways of life.

The housing crisis is a central point of discussion and involves voices from different economic and social backgrounds. The scenery of the film moves between landscapes shaped by abandoned construction sites and semi ghost towns such as Valdeluz. These places are metaphorically embedded in the process of social and urban transformation through images of the constant production of bricks at a factory. In between these takes we are presented people who introduce us to their life and activities. Dialogic methods are used to foster interactions between the participants in the documentary who address issues such as urban speculation, political corruption and the so-called burst of the construction bubble. This eruption produced high levels of unemployment in Spain, the bankruptcy of many real estate companies, and more than 400,000 evictions. The juxtaposition of some of these dramatic stories with other, less serious ones, offers a perspective for critically reflecting on people's basic rights within the capitalist system.

The frustration of people marginalized by the system and cast into vulnerable circumstances leads to the formation of the 'Mortgage Victims' Platform' collective, a common space for sharing and mutual help. The focus on this collective and its social and political activism is one of the main narratives of the film. We follow the eviction of Blanca's, who is a member of the platform. The different stages of her eviction show how the social and political strength of the platform is generated across generations and people with different social and national backgrounds. The heterogeneous

group, organized in self-defence around a common cause in the face of a reality in which issues of inequality and injustice are at play. The actions of the group members involve not only public demonstrations and interventions but also new forms of democratic expressions and ways of conducting politics. The film ends with the celebration of the local elections in Spain and how these new forms of politics begin to find political representation at the institutional level. The financial crisis evolved into a crisis of political representation, which forced people to find new forms of empowerment and ways to construct future possibilities.

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