

## **Infotainment and encounter in the pacification of Rocinha favela**

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### **Abstract**

*This essay draws upon anthropological analysis of dark tourism, concepts of relational philosophy, and auto-ethnography to consider the epistemological and ethical implications of news coverage of the recent pacification of the favela of Rocinha, the largest squatter town in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In November of 2011, police and military occupied Rocinha in a massive joint operation called Peace Shock. This occurred as part of a push to wrest the favelas from the control of the city's criminal factions, a movement many link to Rio's preparation for mega-events like the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympics. After a major US cable television news network enlisted me (as co-founder of an NGO in Rocinha) to assemble a field crew to document the thoughts and feelings of local residents about the operation—in an effort to eschew the sensationalist stereotypes typical of much news coverage of favelas—I was surprised so little of these everyday perspectives made it to air. Reflection on this episode leads me to contrast “infotainment”-based approaches to learning, which can inadvertently inflict further violence by turning people and their suffering into objects, and “encounter”-based learning, in which people meet in dialogue, mutuality, reciprocity, and community.*

“When atrocity becomes a recreational attraction, visitors are themselves inflicting violence as they search out unique and authentic experiences.”

—Erika Robb, “Violence and Recreation: Vacationing in the Realm of Dark Tourism.”

“When a human being turns to another as another, as a particular and specific person to be addressed, and tries to communicate with him (or her) through language or silence, something takes place between them which is not found elsewhere in nature.”

—Audrey Hodes, *Encounter with Martin Buber*.<sup>1</sup>

As adults often do when talking to children, I once asked a young boy living in the squatter town of Rocinha, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, what he wanted to be

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<sup>1</sup> This event Hodes writes about is Martin Buber's “encounter,” to be explained in more detail below (1972:72). I have added the “or her” in parenthesis to preserve the meaning of the quote in today's language (and the sense Buber himself intended).

when he grew up. His name was Erick, and I had known him since my first visit to Brazil as an undergraduate researcher from the United States six years earlier, in 1990. His aunt Socorro and her family, already dear friends of mine, had been among the first people I had met after moving to Rocinha—a favela of some 120,000 residents located on a steep hillside between two of the most exclusive beachfront neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro—to study the rule of that community by a faction of drug traffickers. Given the difficulties of life in Rocinha and the favela’s proximity to the Intercontinental Hotel (and the now defunct National Hotel), perhaps the seven year-old boy’s answer should have come as no surprise: when he grew up, Erick wanted to be a tourist.

Several other adults were crowded around the small living room watching the Botafogo soccer club play against Fluminense. They chuckled heartily at Erick’s answer, as did I. Certainly the idea of being a career tourist—travelling, meeting new people, learning about history and culture, trying local foods and such, without worrying much about money or having too many responsibilities or rigid schedules—would likely have its appeal for a great many of us. “Ditto!” I told him, laughing. Beneath my amusement, however, it occurred to me that Erick would likely have to make it over some pretty significant hurdles if he were ever to have opportunities at being even a recreational tourist in the way of foreign visitors to his home city. In any case, I figured, he was much better off than another small boy from Rocinha to whom I had posed that same question not long before. This other little boy wanted to be a thief, just like his dad, he had answered. Despite my objections that “thief” was not an occupation, and my request that he think of another career, the five or six year-old told me he was sure that being a thief really was a job and that, since his dad was doing it, it was a good job at that.

These many years later, I have spent a total of some four years living in Rocinha as a researcher of everyday life and popular culture in the favela and as a teacher/co-founder of a non-profit educational and outreach center there. Remembering back on that conversation today, it strikes me that Erick’s interest in being a career tourist was not really so far removed from my own interest in being an academic or a community activist. Indeed, it occurs to me that the desire Erick felt to be a *turista* was at heart similar to the attraction felt by many people engaged in more “serious” pursuits to learn about and connect with other people and places through things like journalism, ethnographic research, activism, service learning, volunteering, mission trips, filmmaking, photography, study abroad, or any number of other scholarly and artistic practices. Almost inevitably, there are psychological and emotional factors involved in such pursuits that can make them entertaining as well as educational. Even though I never would have copped to it at the time, there was no small dose of “tourist” in me—just as there is a little “tourist” in most of us as we engage in such activities.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Erick Andrade Gonçalves, now 23 years old, is one of the friends who has most profoundly impacted my work as a community educator and researcher in Rocinha. Now a young father,

## **Dark tourism, infotainment, and encounter**

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with or exploitive about being a tourist; it's more a question of what kind of tourism we practice and the way we practice it. Erika Robb, a cultural anthropologist who spent a year as a "voluntourist" working with two non-profit organizations in Rocinha while she conducted fieldwork on favela tourism, makes this point in her studies of "dark tourism."<sup>3</sup> According to Robb, dark tourism is tourism in places of violence—whether past (as in the case of Nazi concentration camps like Auschwitz) or present (as in the case of poor neighborhoods facing problems of social exclusion and violence, like Rocinha). She argues that while dark tourism offers tremendous resources for potentially transformational educational experiences that can contribute to greater social and global justice, in blurring the lines between civic responsibility and entertainment it can just as easily turn ugly, trivializing human suffering and turning it into a commodity (2009:51).

Although Robb does not suggest names for labeling the poles of what she considers destructive and constructive dark tourism in the article, we can extrapolate such a division from the thrust of her arguments. The destructive side does little to eradicate violence and can even inadvertently work to the opposite effect and generate more violence, as Robb points out in the first epigraph of this essay (54). Because of the way such negative sorts of dark tourism join together "information" with "entertainment," they are readily comparable to the journalistic neologism "infotainment." This infotainment-style dark tourism is not primarily about transformational education or about stopping objectifying people as exotic "things" and as "others." Indeed, because of the somewhat superficial experiences it entails, it is likely in some ways to reinforce caricatures and stereotypes about other people that—at the societal level—may end up serving to justify further oppressive control, greater discrimination, or even bodily aggression against them, as Robb points out.

More constructive practices of dark tourism, on the other hand, promote a transformational type of educational experience in which the "tourist" turns towards "another as another," in the sense of the second epigraph of this essay, as a "particular and specific person to be addressed." Such a turning about and openness entails the mutuality and reciprocal dialogue of what Austrian-Israeli existential theologian Martin Buber called *Begegnung*, which means "meeting" or "encounter" (Buber 2010). Forms of this sort of encounter-style dark tourism allow for "learning" in a broader, more transformation sense than "information," as part of an immersion into a moment and place of community or communion.

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Erick has traveled somewhat extensively around the city and state of Rio de Janeiro and even throughout Brazil, mostly as a semi-professional street ball and soccer player and a member of the Sonho de Um a Noite de Verão ballroom dance troupe.

<sup>3</sup> Voluntourism—in which travellers blend social justice and environmental activism with more conventional, entertainment-driven forms of tourism—has become increasingly popular in Latin America over the past two decades or so (see Fogarty 2009).

Buber's relational philosophy revolves around what he describes as the twofold attitudes of human beings toward the world around them. We embrace one side of this, which he denotes as "I and it," when we engage other people and the world as "others," "objects," "phenomena," or "things." We embrace the other side, which he calls "I and Thou," when we turn towards the other people and the world around us as "another," in encounters of mutuality and exchange. The first entails an organizational posture concerning the connections between objects and the second a relational one concerning relations between persons. For Buber, every "I and Thou" relationship opens up a window giving a miniature glimpse of the ultimate *Thou* of God, even encounters with animals, trees, or a mere "heap of stones" (Hodes 1972:42).

One of the aspects of his thought that makes Buber's notion of encounter so readily applicable to questions of dark tourism is the emphasis he places on dialogue. He understands dialogue not so much in the sense of the dialectical reasoning process of the Socratic method but more in the sense of the immersion in community and communion it made possible among participants (Hodes 1972:72). He argues that "genuine dialogue"—as opposed to "technical dialogue" or "monologue" posing as dialogue—involves a "turning towards the other" that brings "encounter," or *Begegnung*, or into existence as a real, inter-subjective space of the "in between" (Buber 2010: 102-103).<sup>4</sup>

At the core of Buber's understanding of dialogue is a fundamental distinction very much in step with the tensions Robb observes between destructive forms of dark tourism and constructive ones. For Buber, dialogue is not so much a question of "content," in the sense of something that could be acquired as experience, information, argument, or consciousness-raising, as it is one of "presence," in the sense of people coming together in the present moment of the here and now—in openness to one another and the world around them. At the heart of his formulation is an emphatic rejection of the rationalistic epistemology so prevalent in Western thought (especially since the Enlightenment) in favor of a more mystical and holistic understanding of knowledge. As part and parcel of his assertion that, "All real living is meeting," Buber argues that the power, knowledge, and life we find in encounters is not the result of agency—or through seeking and acquiring things like information, experience, adventure, or entertainment—but rather through what he terms as "grace," as a thing freely given that we accept and receive (11). With this in mind, Buber writes,

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<sup>4</sup> In some ways, Buber's vision of dialogue is similar to that espoused by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, Freire's seminal manifesto of popular education, especially for the emphasis Freire places on the role of community, love, faith, and humility in dialogue (Freire:92-94). On the other hand, whereas Freire links dialogue to conceptual and analytical processes like the "reflection" and "convincing" necessary for revolutionary consciousness-raising (Freire:58-64), Buber's notion of dialogue is less goal-oriented and more existential, as explained below.

The relation to the Thou is direct. No system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between I and Thou... No aim, no lust, and no anticipation intervene between I and Thou. Desire itself is transformed as it plunges out of its dream into the appearance. Every means is an obstacle. Only when every means has collapsed does the meeting come about” (11-12).

His emphasis on receiving and presence over the seeking and mastery of content loosens up the apparent rigidity of Buber’s dualism. Encounter is never perfect but is a question of degree, just as it is not permanent but only a momentary reprieve from objectification and “false” encounter. This means that even when people engage in dark tourism—or any other potential encounter—in ways that are mostly superficial there exists the possibility that they will come around and meet those around them more as persons and less as objects.<sup>5</sup>

My aim in this essay is to make connections between these two modes of dark tourism and other pursuits that can be seen as having “dark” dimensions in similar ways. Just as dark tourism is fraught with ethical and epistemological tensions that can be characterized in terms of the differences between infotainment and encounter, so too can things like “dark journalism,” “dark ethnography,” “dark research,” “dark social activism,” “dark artistic expression,” and “dark education” more generally. In a sense, any of these endeavors can become a form of “dark infotainment” through which an individual objectifies people as “others” and “things,” inadvertently reinforcing the very violence they are intended to combat. By the same token, however, such endeavors can become “dark encounters,” in the sense of Buber’s *Begegnung*, through which a person turns towards another in community.

To consider such tensions here, I will frame my comments as something of an auto-ethnographic reflection on my own trajectory as a bit of an accidental “dark” tourist—in my involvement with journalism, ethnography, and community activism undertaken to address issues of violence and social exclusion—whether in directly living and working in Rocinha or through indirect participation in such activities through other educational and civic avenues. As an example of the tensions I have personally wrestled with between infotainment and encounter in the exploration of violence, I will discuss my involvement in a journalistic project to cover the recent pacification of the favela of Rocinha late last year in a massive joint police and military occupation of the favela called *Operação Choque de Paz*, or “Operation Peace Shock.”

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<sup>5</sup> In an online reflection, musicologist and founder of MusicUnitesUs Judith Eissenberg explores the difficulties experienced by non-initiates in entering in “encounters” (in Buber’s sense of “I and “Thou”) at a performance of Brazilian *candomblé* music held at Brandeis University. She arrives at a position that, like Buber’s, understands the encounter as a question of degrees rather than an absolute. She writes, “How do we go about this when our very ways of processing, transmitting, taking in knowledge seems to be so different, one ‘of the hand,’ the other of the mind? Clearly, for this dialogue to take place, the I and the Thou must each be willing to learn a little of the other’s way” (Eissenberg).

## **The pacification of Rocinha**

Near four thirty in the morning on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011, eighteen armored assault vehicles rolled up the streets of Rocinha—the largest and perhaps best known of Rio’s favelas; with them two armored helicopters patrolled the skies. Accompanied by the city’s highly controversial urban tactical unit, the Batalhão de Operações Policiais Especiais (BOPE), and a total of some 3,000 police and military personnel, these vehicles were part of the Operação Choque de Paz, initiated to claim governmental control of the Rocinha after decades of the rule of drug gangs in the community (Araújo 2011).

After government sources announced the tentative schedule for the operation earlier that month, Rocinha kingpin Nem (whose legal name is Antônio Francisco Bonfim Lopes) fled the favela and was arrested in the middle-class enclave of Lagoa in the trunk of his lawyer’s car. His lawyer’s attempts to pay off the arresting officers, who were members of the BOPE, were unsuccessful (Leite and Mendes 2011). Nem had been at the head of the Rocinha gang since 2005 and was considered one the principal leaders of one of Rio’s most powerful criminal factions, the Amigos dos Amigos (ADA), or “Friends of the Friends” (Aquino 2011b). Rocinha, widely considered the crown jewel in the Rio drug trade, due to its location amidst some of Rio’s richest beachfront neighborhoods, was the 19<sup>th</sup> of the city’s over 900 favelas to be “pacified” since the program was initiated in 2008—as the city prepares to host the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympics (Romo 2011). Unlike operations in many of the other pacified favelas, the local drug gang did not resist; not a shot was fired and no one was injured.

Operation Peace Shock was the opening phase of the implementation in Rocinha of an ambitious new mode of community policing initiated in 2008 in the favela of Dona Marta, located nearby in the middle-class neighborhood of Botafogo (“Operação” 2011). Until recently, the policing of favelas consisted mostly in an unending series of military-style invasions carried out to arrest or kill criminals and apprehend drugs, weapons, and other property—not infrequently resulting in casualties among innocent residents (Soares, Batista, and Pimentel 2006). When these short-term operations were over, the police would leave the favela, allowing the drug traffickers to regroup or for new ones to take over (Arias 2006; Penglasse 2008). Just as commonly, the policing of favelas was left to extralegal and even illegal means, either through the drug traffickers themselves or paramilitary groups who often assumed patronage of their local populations (Zaluar and Siqueira Coneição 2007).

While the initial phase of the new model of policing may look similar to the in-and-out approach of former days, the difference is in maintaining a permanent police presence in the favelas at local police stations known as *Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora* (UPPs), or “Pacifying Police Units.” These new installations are promoted as constituting a radical departure from the old system through a two-prong approach. First, law enforcement is carried out by scores of community beat cops, many of whom are women, selected largely from

the ranks of new recruits presumably not yet implicated in the tangles of police corruption and brutality considered endemic among Rio's police. Second, the UPPs are community centers offering a comprehensive range of government sponsored social services (Aquino 2011b).

From my current residence here in the United States, I followed these events as best I could before, during, and after Operation Peace Shock, through both news accounts and contact with friends in Rocinha and around Rio alike. Like many people living in the favela with whom I spoke, I was fearful that the operation would bring casualties, especially if the members of the favela's powerful gang were to resist, as had gangs in other pacified favelas, or if the police and military exhibited the brutality of former days. Even if there were no gun battles, I was afraid there might be abuses and humiliating acts practiced against my friends and neighbors from around the favela, young and old—people who had been my students and teachers and who had offered Rocinha to me as my home throughout the years I lived there. Would the name Operation Peace Shock prove to be just a euphemism for an oppressive action that would deal out more dehumanizing violence against the poor residents of Rocinha? Or did it represent some more genuine commitment on the part of mainstream Brazilian society to extend social inclusion to the poor? In the long term, I was concerned pacification would bring about gentrification. Moreover, even if a UPP were successfully installed and the outside formal society was to gain control of the favela, how would this effect the sense of community its residents have built up from within?

After Rocinha's initial pacification, the operation suffered some major setbacks and the inauguration of its UPP, the 28<sup>th</sup> in the city, was pushed back until September 2012—almost a year after Operação Choque de Paz. In the early months of the pacification police reported uncovering new stores of firearms and illegal drugs in the community and a resurgence of gang-related shootouts left at least thirteen people dead, including a police officer from the BOPE (“Policia! do Batalhão de Choque É Morto ap3s Troca de Tiros na Rocinha” 2012). Also, on March 26<sup>th</sup>, one of the Rocinha's political leaders was gunned down in the street in broad daylight. Vanderlan Barros de Oliveira, known as *Feijão*, or “Beans,” president of one of Rocinha's three neighbors associations (Associação de Moradores e Amigos do Bairro de Barcelos, or AMAB), had been suspected of money laundering ties with the favela's ousted gang leader, Nem (“Presidente de Associação de Moradores da Rocinha É Morto” 2012). International SOS Medical Alerts and Travel Security reported that favela tours were suspended and warned against visiting Rocinha (International 2012). Then just days before the UPP was officially inaugurated, another police officer who was working with the UPP was shot to death (Carvalho 2012).

Despite such difficulties, the majority of favela residents in both pacified and non-pacified areas continue to hold a generally favorable view of the UPPs, with some polls rating them at 92% and 77% approval respectively (Vasconcellos 2010). José Mariano Beltrame, the Secretary of Security for the State of Rio de Janeiro and principal architect of the program, has enjoyed popularity across

class lines (Aquino 2011b). Still, activists and advocacy groups from Rocinha and around Rio are critical of the UPPs on several fronts. Marcelo Freixo, a state representative from the Partido Socialismo e Liberdade (PSOL) and one of the best-known critics of the program, has claimed that the UPPs are a cosmetic cure designed more to protect the city's image during the upcoming FIFA World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016 (Freixo n.d.). Another well-known public figure opposed to the UPPs is MC Leonardo (Leonardo Pereira Mota), who points to the negative impact of pacification is having on the sense of community in the favelas and on popular cultural practices there, such as Rocinha's once vibrant *baile funk* music scene. Himself a pioneer Rio's electronic of *baile funk* music, a Rocinha native, and co-founder of the highly politicized Associação de Profissionais e Amigos do Funk (APAFUNK), MC Leonardo has denounced pacification, saying, "I haven't seen anything as shameful as the UPPs since the military government in Brazil. Peace is a feeling, you cannot impose it on people" (McCoughlin 2012).

Others, too, have voiced concerns over the specific methods of the UPPs' implementation. According to the website of the non-profit community health group Mundo Real, the success of the UPPs will be impossible until a culture of accountability can be installed in the Rio police forces (Mundo Real 2012). In an editorial in the New York Times published as part of a discussion of the challenges presented Rio's upcoming Olympic Games, Brazilian urban planner and activist Theresa Williamson (director of the Comunidades Catalisadoras non-profit organization) warned against the threat that pacification could lead to gentrification if it focuses too much on security and not enough on integration policies (Williamson 2012b), which she lists in a more complete version of her argument published by the online community news service *Rio On Watch*,

**Integration policies include** education, job training and access, health care, sanitation, public spaces, housing materials, formalization of businesses, payment for services, and definitive land title, all of which are required to integrate these communities into the formal city—and they should be implemented in that approximate order so as to allow time for improvements in income which will allow residents to pay for services and remain where they are (Williamson 2012a).

With twenty or so more favelas scheduled to receive UPPs in the near future, the pacification program will continue at the center of debates about citizenship and social violence in Rio de Janeiro and throughout Brazil for a long time to come.

## Backstory

Brazil and Rio specifically have gained much notoriety over the past thirty years or so as places of police and gang violence. More recently, this image has been reinforced by the international success of films like *City of God* (Meirelles and Lund, 2002), *Bus 174* (Padilha, 2002), *Carandiru* (Babenco, 2003), and *Elite Squad* (Padilha, 2007). Rocinha's position in the wealthy Zona Sul and its history of intense gang violence have become somewhat emblematic of the lamentably wide gap between the haves and have-nots in the country. So it was no surprise that Operação Choque de Paz generated a blitz of media coverage around the world.<sup>6</sup>

The day after the police occupied Rocinha, I received a call at my university in the United States from a friend named Jake at a major American cable television news network, TVN, or Television News.<sup>7</sup> We had met two or so years earlier when he produced a piece about projects to build community in Rocinha that had featured our small educational and outreach center, along with a judo school and a hang gliding program. Even though Jake didn't speak Portuguese and had spent little time in Brazil—and had never visited Rocinha—he had always impressed me greatly with his ability to eschew sensationalist tones and to instead represent everyday people like the residents of Rocinha in an intimate, down-to-earth style. Jake was troubled by what he saw as somewhat trivializing and exploitive character of the media coverage he had seen about the Rocinha and Operation Peace Shock from other new sources. In his view, coverage had almost invariably focused more on the armored helicopters, tanks, and black-ops police troopers—along with the firepower of Rocinha's notorious drug gang—than on what ordinary residents thought and felt.

When he sent me the link for *City of God, Guns and Gangs*, a documentary about the UPP program and previous favela pacifications, I understood what he meant. Despite being thoroughly documented and very successful in communicating the challenges of the UPP program from a sociological point of view, the coverage is presented in an adventurous tone that constantly pushes the dangerousness and underlying violence of the theme to the forefront. In the film, which was the fourth episode of season five of the *Vanguard* series on Current TV, Portuguese journalist Mariana van Zeller can be seen wearing a combat helmet as she accompanies the police on an operation; she also interviews drug addicts and gang members, dedicating relatively little space to “civilian” community leaders or everyday favela residents. Although the video is in English, van Zeller speaks to local people in her Continental Portuguese

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<sup>6</sup> A quick survey of the Internet on the days leading up to and following the Rocinha pacification operation turns up an abundance of news sources, such as the following in English, Spanish, and French (see “Con un Megaoperativo Recuperan la Favela Más Grande de Río de Janeiro” 2011, “La Police Prend Contrôle de la Plus Grande Favela du Brésil” 2011, Romo 2011, Scruggs 2011).

<sup>7</sup> I use many pseudonyms throughout this essay in order to protect the anonymity of the friends and contacts involved in the episode recounted here, especially anyone identifiable with the news story and the non-profit educational and outreach center.

throughout, never positioning herself for English speaking audiences as a foreigner in Brazil or as a person from a different social class from favela residents. Her lack of “coming clean” works to deemphasize her distance from the subject and to cast her as an insider and legitimate “guide.”

Even the description of the *Vanguard* series on their website bills the series in terms that smack of dark tourism,

*Vanguard* is a no-limits documentary series whose award-winning journalists put themselves in extraordinary situations to immerse viewers in global issues that have a large social significance. Unlike sound-bite driven reporting, the show’s correspondents, Adam Yamaguchi, Christof Putzel, and Mariana van Zeller, serve as trusted guides who take viewers on in-depth real life adventures in pursuit of some of the world’s most important stories (Current TV 2012).

In emphasizing that the reporters place themselves in harm’s way in “extraordinary situations,” while taking viewers on “real life adventures,” *Vanguard* runs the risk of getting away from the hard journalism it touts and falling into infotainment. In limiting itself to “guns” and “gangs,” and evoking the ultra-violent feature film *City of God*—itself often criticized for commercializing the violence of Rio’s favelas in sensationalist tones—the title of the episode itself moves things even further in this direction.<sup>8</sup>

In the wake of such entertaining media coverage of Operation Peace Shock, Jake wanted to put together a television news segment for the daily news show he worked on, *Details*. It would present the story of Rocinha’s pacification in an up close and personal tone more conducive to the viewer engaging the residents of Rio’s favelas in a spirit of “encounter” over “infotainment.” Jake’s idea was to focus less on police and gangs and more on what everyday people of in community were thinking and feeling.

He asked me if I would be interested in helping get someone to film interviews around the favela, reminding me that with TV news things would need to move very quickly. Excited at the proposition of helping make the voices of everyday people a bigger part of the story—and at the opportunity to work with such a prestigious television network and hopefully help get word out about our non-profit center—I gladly came on board. Over the next several hours, I used Skype, email, and the telephone to contact and coordinate a small group of volunteers in and around our non-profit educational and outreach center—including both Rocinha residents and outside researchers/community activists—and enlist their help in setting up a series of interviews throughout the favela.

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<sup>8</sup> Film critics Marta Peixoto (2007) and Ivana Bentes (2003) have argued that *City of God* and many other recent films about poor people and favelas in Brazil have been limited in their ability to raise awareness about social exclusion by their entertaining qualities.

## **Community interviews**

My main contact for filming the interviews was Chema Vidal, an old friend I met in Rio in 1998 when he first went to Brazil from Barcelona seeking employment as a cameraman. That year, Chema moved to Rocinha as my roommate in Rocinha. Over the next several months he spent hours upon hours in Rocinha helping me get our little educational and outreach center off the ground with Cleonice Gonçalves, Lucinda Santos, and Patrícia Cliliano, the organization's other co-founders. Now, 13 years later, on the heels of Rocinha's momentous pacification, Chema was a Ph.D. student in Luso-Hispanic Literary and Visual Studies at an Ivy League school. He happened to be back in Rio across town conducting research for this thesis and was more than happy to help with the TVN news segments. Another friend who agreed to help Chema was Patrick Perez, an American Ph.D. student in Sociology at the City University of New York (CUNY) who had been living in Rocinha for many years as he worked towards his degree. Patrick was co-founder and director of another small NGO in the favela that worked with healthcare. He offered to accompany Chema in getting around Rocinha to film the interviews and to introduce him to local social activists and community leaders to get their take on things.

Chema and Patrick's first stop in Rocinha was the small private day school where our non-profit currently conducts its programs, owned by co-founder Patrícia, whom I had contacted to schedule an interview. The school, called Escola Cebolinha, after "Little Onion," a cartoon character from the Mônica comics, is located just off the Largo do Boiadeiro, a small plaza at the foot of Rocinha that is one of the busiest areas of the favela. It occupies the first two floors of a house, with another two floors of residential space above it. Its four classrooms, kitchen, storage room, and single bathroom are kept very tidy; the classrooms are brightly painted and have various cartoon characters on the walls, along with large green blackboards and the sorts of children's artwork on clothespins and whatnot typical of many daycare/child development centers anywhere. At the time of pacification, the Escola Cebolinha was doing better than ever, with over 100 students, ranging from two to six years old, as well as several teachers and assistants.

Chema and Patrick recorded interviews with Patrícia, her niece, Thaís, and one of her teaching assistants, Rosie. Patrícia's brother-in-law, Jackson, who is a volunteer at our NGO, also came over to meet with Chema and Patrick. Like almost all the people the two interviewed, these folks were solidly optimistic about the Rocinha pacification. Unfortunately, after experiencing some difficulties with his camcorder equipment and the low lighting in the school, the only segment Chema could upload to the TVN site was a brief statement made by Patrícia.

Patrícia Cliliano, who is in her early forties, was born and raised in Rocinha after her parents moved there from the northeastern state of Ceará in the sixties. As a young woman, she graduated from high school with a certification in teaching. After involvement in a series of government run schools and NGOs,

she joined her childhood best friend, Cleonice Gonçalves, in the mid-90s as a partner in the Escola Cebolinha. In 1998, as a means of starting up our NGO, Patrícia and Cleonice suggested we hold our activities at their school in the evenings and on weekends when it was not in use. Eventually, Patrícia assumed sole control of the Escola Cebolinha, after Cleonice had kids and decided to sell her share and also to leave the NGO.

Three years ago, Patrícia graduated from the UNITINS (Fundação Universidade do Tocantins), after completing the requirements for an online/distance learning degree in Education, with hopes of continuing her studies at the Master's level. Besides being a former director of our NGO in Rocinha and its current Field Coordinator in the favela, Patrícia (who is single) is also very involved her Pentecostal church, the Igreja Missionária Evangélica Maranata, located in Copacabana. She is deeply committed to her teaching and community activism and is an effective boss at her school. Even so, she is somewhat shy publicly and not too keen on things like media appearances—as is somewhat evident in her (42 second) spot with Chema,

We're at the Escola Cebolinha. Today, as a matter of fact, there are few children because of the pacification, right? And the mothers are still afraid to send their kids to school. We are waiting for things to calm down so the children can return to school safely. (pause) What do I think of the pacification? I think the pacification is very important at this time here in our community because as far as I'm concerned it's going to help a lot. There will be improvements in water supply, electricity, sewage, sanitation. It's really going to help our community a lot. Anything else?<sup>9</sup>

Despite her enthusiasm for the pacification, sadly it has brought about some difficult circumstances for Patrícia—at least in the short-term. In the months since Operation Peace Shock, the Escola Cebolinha has lost most of its students to new government-run schools that have been started up as part of the program's social angle, currently having less than 30. Patrícia has been forced to let go of all but one of her teachers and is currently keeping the school running on a shoestring with no take home pay of her own. Even so, she remains optimistic that in the long run her situation will improve and that the new situation will prove beneficial to Rocinha residents (Patrícia Cliliano, pers. comm.)

Chema and Patrick's next stop after leaving the Escola Cebolinha was the PizzaHot restaurant, one of the busiest in Rocinha, where they spoke with local businessman Gabriel Soares de Almeida, known around the favela as Gabriel da PizzaHot. The restaurant is located on the corner of the busiest intersections in the whole favela, open along its entire front side in the way of sidewalk cafés. In

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<sup>9</sup> This and all other translations appearing in this article are my own.

the early days of our NGO, Gabriel had opened up his office to us for the use of our non-profit organization in a back room of the restaurant, where we were able to set up a desk with a computer and telephone. When Chema and Patrick stopped by that day, Gabriel—who is married with two kids and in his late forties—was only too glad to see them and to have a chance to share his thoughts and feelings about Operation Peace Shock.

In the segment, which is roughly four minutes long, Gabriel can be seen leaning against the front counter that separates the main dining area from the kitchen. But with no external mike, the camera can't pick up his voice very well over the din of the traffic and his initial exchange with Chema is too muddled to make out (in fact, such difficulties ultimately made it impossible to use in the TVN video). It clears up a bit as Gabriel straightens his posture and introduces himself as a business owner who was the first to bring residential food delivery to Rocinha. Born in the Northeast, he says, he's lived in Rocinha since he was a small child. Throughout these four odd decades, the government has been essentially absent from Rocinha, he says, especially in terms of things like healthcare and law enforcement. Pacification, he suggests, represents a fundamental act of social inclusion in which the government has annexed a territory that had been left to operate separately and under its own rules all these many years.<sup>10</sup> Gabriel sees this gesture of social inclusion as an extension of the new, wealthier Brazil of the Lula era, which has a stronger middle-class and a new societal standard no longer compatible with the rule of criminal factions. After so long living on a sort of "island," he says, the residents of Rocinha are extremely hopeful about the new UPP and the improvements in social relationships it represents. Gabriel closes out the segment with a smile and a warm thank you to the viewers for their attention.

Towards the end of the day, Chema filmed a spot with someone much less enthusiastic about the pacification than the other folks interviewed. He and Patrick decided to stop by the house of Jurandir da Silva, or "Pai" Jurandir, as he is often known ("Father" Jurandir), an Afro-Brazilian man in his mid-fifties who came to Rio from Salvador, Bahia when he was four. Jurandir is a priest of *candomblé* whose house doubles as a *terreiro*, or place where sessions of the Afro-Brazilian animist religion are practiced. He serves Xangô, the *orixá* spirit of thunder and justice who possesses him spiritually in the elaborate sessions of percussion, song, and dance put on by Jurandir and the other faithful.

Jurandir is a kindhearted, generous person, with a rich, deep voice for singing his favorite samba songs; a voice a bit like fellow Bahian and timeless *sambista* Dorival Caymmi. Besides singing, in his younger days Jurandir loved to dance and playfully wander the streets of the city during Carnival dressed in what he called his *bundão*, or "big butt." That was how he described his outfit: a black wig and a short, flower-covered cotton dress with a pillow tucked under the seat.

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<sup>10</sup> These were the "rules" of the drug traffickers, who since the 80s have extended the culture and code of conduct of the city's prison gangs into its favelas (see Penglase 2008).

Jurandir is also an excellent cook of Brazilian food, especially Bahian food and the food of the Cariocas, as Rio natives are called. In fact, he was so good in the kitchen that he worked for years as the cook for his close friend, the famous samba singer Elza Soares.

Back in the late 90s and early 2000s when Chema and I lived down the alley from his house, Jurandir lived with his best friend, the much younger Roberto. A shoe salesman born and raised in Rocinha, Roberto was brought up by his mother in *umbanda*, a syncretic faith blending African religions with Catholicism, and the Spiritism of Allan Kardec. In the days he lived with Jurandir, Roberto became an *ogan* of *candomblé* (a priest who does not fall into trance or receive spirits during the sessions) who played percussion in Jurandir's sessions.

Chema and I both knew them both well; we had spent a great deal of time with Jurandir in his home, which was small but bustling with social activity. The two liked making coffee for us and offering us plates of Jurandir's delicious cooking. Often, as either Chema or I came back home in the middle of the night, we would stop off at their window in the alley leading to our house, where Roberto or Jurandir would chat with us from their living room couch, frequently luring us in to watch TV for hours while they smoked and made coffee. They also used to hold cookouts in the cramped alleyway outside their front door. Every few months, Roberto helped Jurandir put on elaborate sessions of *candomblé*, to which we were always invited and made to feel welcome, despite the fact that we were not initiates.

The two friends had a dog named Fly—a skinny, female half sheepdog who was quick and communicative (although she rarely resorted to barking). During the *candomblé* sessions, I remember her peering out from her place under a plastic lawn chair by Roberto's feet as he played his percussion, excited by the crowd of drummers, dancers, *ekede* attendants, and people of all ages from around the community who were jammed into the small house. I can still see Fly raising her head from her front paws and wagging her tail as Jurandir passes by, twirling to the beat of the drums in the thick of a session, adorned in the white robes and headgear of Xangô, his aluminum two-headed ceremonial axe in hand, his eyes nearly closed. To me, Fly embodied the spirit of the magical, in-between space that comes to be in *candomblé* gatherings in which an everyday home is transformed into a temple and where the mundane and the domestic co-exist with spiritual ecstasy and release. For Fly, one moment or the other always seemed to be more about the gathering and the people she loved than anything else.

As for Jurandir, his affinity with Xangô is perhaps no coincidence, since even when he is not “possessed” by the orixá, associated with thunder and justice, the man himself embodies a stormy spirit of righteousness. He is a “tell it like it is”-type person who's not afraid to speak his mind. He's also very sensitive to the hidden motives of those around him and quite cynical of the police and government in particular. People who knew him back in the day say that in his youth Jurandir was brawler, or *brigão*; I've heard stories about him getting into

more than a few physical altercations back then, even with a PM, or officer of the Military Police. Nowadays, legally blind and older, he is more of a homebody. His somewhat poor health notwithstanding, a great many people from Rocinha and other parts of the city still visit him each week, seeking spiritual guidance and support.

On the evening of the interview, Jurandir heated up plates of food for his visitors and offered them bottled beer, coffee, or water. Sitting in a little white, plastic chair in his living room, glass plate and fork in hand, he spoke candidly for the camera about his reluctance regarding the pacification.

In the opening of the clip Chema sent, Patrick is talking to Jurandir about the ways room rentals had gone up in the previously pacified favelas of Santa Marta (in Botafogo) and Cantagalo (in Ipanema) from R\$200 a month to R\$800. People had been forced out and another social class had moved in, Patrick says, to which Jurandir responds,

But that's what I'm saying... Their desire, their ambition, is this land here, this piece of land. Do you think they're satisfied that, besides everything, besides the fact that this is a favela, that it gives poor people a place to live, it also takes away some of their revenue? Look, the property taxes around here are some of the city's highest, the property taxes down in São Conrado, but because of Rocinha they have to reduce them. Everyone knows that. They have to reduce them. So, what happens? Here we are applauding the service of the State, of the police, right? And our country. For law and order. But this law and order is going to cost us a great deal down the line. I'm 60, I'll be 60 soon. Maybe tomorrow I won't be around to tell the story or to see what happens, you know? But that's usually how things go.

I have nothing to say against the drug traffickers, against this or that... You know why? I've never been held up, they've never killed anyone from my family, I've never been involved in any way, never smoked drugs, never did lines or anything, so I don't have any reason to complain or to say if it was good or bad. I've always been a stand up person, always fought hard and worked to live, to survive, see? I never relied on any of that, not the police, not the drug dealers, or anybody else, you know? I've always followed my path with my head held high with no problem. I don't rely on them.

Right now, I see a lot of things. I see a lot of things. See, I pray to God the police come in here differently than the way they came into to other communities. At least the way people say they came in—I never saw anything personally so I can't really accuse them for sure. But I pray to God the police don't come in here doing what they've done in other favelas, stealing things from poor people, taking their personal belongings.

I've been shaken down by the police before. I have. But since people asked me afterwards... people asked me to let it alone, I dropped the matter, you know? I went to meet a guy in São Conrado. I bought an entertainment center stand, and the guy bringing it didn't know his way around Rocinha. So I went to São Conrado to wait for him, there in São Conrado's little plaza. He came over from Tijuca. As we were coming into Rocinha a Policeman stopped him, so he... we all

got out of the car, me, him, and the driver. So the PM stopped him, he came over and all, and he ended up asking for money. The guy didn't have any money and he came over to ask me if I had any. I said, "I refuse to give this cop money!" He said, "No, no, no! Give me some and later the boss will set things straight." And I ended up giving R\$20 to a... to a policeman. I mean, the policeman, who's supposed to uphold the law... my guy was totally clean: there was nothing wrong with the car, he had all his documents, he had everything, and the policeman shook the guy down. (Man passes in the alleyway outside Almir's window, "Hey, Almir!" Almir answers, "Hi!") You know what I mean?

So, that's what I'm talking about. Let's pray to God that all this works out and that it's good for poor people, because you know it's going to be good for the rich people either way, right?

Chema and Patrick lingered a while longer at Jurandir's house as they finished up their food and drink. When they finally thanked him for his hospitality and help with the piece and headed out, night had fallen.

### **Production and airing**

By the end of the next day, Chema had uploaded several videos to Jake's TVN site for editing. Jake put the interviews of Patrícia, Gabriel, and Jurandir on YouTube so I could transcribe and translate them for the read overs. He told us his team at TVN wanted to do two segments: the first, which was to be about the pacification, would include footage from the interviews with the residents; the second would be about the other side of Rocinha, in the wealth of culture and community to be found there, and would include footage from an interview with me. Any further material that could not be worked into these two segments could be posted on TVN.com as a podcast, he said. Jake's team wanted Bela Boyd—the anchor of *Details* who had been very supportive of the project from the start—to personally interview me. Since she needed to leave the studio on travel, however, it would push back our airdate. This was actually a good thing, Jake remarked, since it gave us a bit more time to work on this than was originally planned.

At that point, I was generally confident that our experiment in community collaboration was going to yield some results considerably more humanizing than the original stories that broke in the media at the time of Operation Peace Shock and the adventurous *City of God, Guns, and Gangs* documentary mentioned above. Even so, I had second thoughts about personally appearing in one of the segments. It seemed to me that it would be better just to focus on the folks we had interviewed, who were not only eyewitnesses but also permanent residents of Rocinha. Though Jake didn't disagree, he pointed out that it would be helpful, too, to have an English speaker involved and someone representative of the scene of social activists and researchers; such a person would serve as a sort of mediator connecting wider audiences to the life in the favela.

Jake's team at TVN was trying to contact another American academic and activist or two who lived in Rio but who were out of town. I thought that made better sense than interviewing me, but when he told me their names I changed my mind. I told him that I had the deepest amount of respect for all of them as activists, but that none had ever lived in any of Rio's favelas, much less Rocinha. Why didn't he use the bit Chema filmed with Patrick Perez, I suggested (although I had never had a chance to view it), or set up a one on one interview with Patrick over Skype, since his presence in the piece would fit in with TVN's desire to include an English-speaking activist without moving things too far away from the actual community. The team would consider such an option, Jake replied, but it was more likely I would be chosen if his other American contacts living in Rio fell through. Eventually, I agreed to the interview with Bela Boyd for *Details*, which she conducted with me via Skype. I was nervous, but she put me at ease. We talked for nearly 20 minutes about the rich culture and community of Rocinha and she asked smart questions about religious groups and burgeoning scene of non-profit organizations. The following evening Jake called me, excited for me to see the finished segments, which had aired on that day's show and which he had sent as links via email.

### **Interview Segment**

The first link he sent me was to the segment about community and culture in Rocinha, which was basically an interview with me with some additional live action images of children and other residents of Rocinha going about their lives. Considering how nervous I was at the time of taping, Jake had done a good job as an editor to keep me from sounding too tongue-tied. From my conversations with Jake, I had a notion of just how significant it was for TVN to pull off a piece that focused less on gangs and guns and more on community and culture, and that promoted education (one of the banners that flashes across the bottom of the screen suggests that viewers interested in supporting educational projects there visit the website for our NGO). His show's anchor, Bela Boyd, likewise deserved much credit for pushing for the piece, as well, as did the field reporter who worked on it, Fresca Durham, and indeed Jake's whole team.

Still, upon viewing the piece, I noticed that much of what I am shown saying for the three minutes and 38 seconds of the edited version of the interview is about the gang. The sound bites were focused less on relationships and people and more on "things" like the physical structure of the favela, its size and population density, the weapons members of the drug gang had carried around the streets, and the prison code rule of law they had kept in the community during the many years of their rule there. This didn't leave much room for mention of the other residents or their intelligence, creativity, spirituality, and wisdom—or the sense of community that pervaded the favela. It occurred to me that I must not have been emphatic enough about the love and humanity of the people of Rocinha. In fact, I felt a bit foolish for having mentioned the drug traffickers at all. Additionally, there were no credits included that would give people an idea of

the responsiveness of our field team and the receptivity of people in Rocinha to help put the piece together, attitudes that for me were testimony of the sort of community spirit we were trying to portray in the piece.

### **Pacification Segment**

The pacification segment, which aired first on TVN, is much shorter (one minute and 49 seconds). Considering the short length of the segment, Jake and his team actually packed in a large amount of information about Rio's pacification program and Operation Peace Shock in Rocinha. Despite the abundance of images of police and military personnel and their assault vehicles, the segment does a better job than the bulk of media coverage by including sound bites from local residents—first Jurandir, then Patrícia. The entertainment factor is toned down as well. Instead of wearing a combat helmet and joining police on an operation, Fresca Durham, the reporter to which the piece was credited, dons a motorcycle helmet and takes a motorcycle taxi ride around Rocinha to take in the mood of the favela.

Even so, the narrative and B reel focus on relatively stereotypical images of favelas like the heaps of trash strewn about the favela and the tangles of electrical wires running overhead. At one point, Fresca Durham describes Rocinha as a place of “poverty living in dark alleys.” In fact, since neither my friends in Rocinha nor I had been informed that TVN had an official reporter on location working on the same story, I was tremendously surprised to see Fresca in the piece at all. As it turned out, she was the network's new correspondent in Rio who had scooped the story and filmed it on her own. In any case, it seemed odd to me to have my friends spring into action in this way only to find their work inserted into the story of another person they'd never even heard of, especially since once again no credits were attached to the piece.<sup>11</sup>

The inclusion of sound bites from Jurandir and Patrícia, although quite short, certainly helped shift the emphasis to everyday people. Jurandir, who comes first, is merely quoted saying, “I pray to God the police don't come in here doing what they've done in other favelas, stealing things from poor people, taking their personal belongings.” The scene cuts to Patrícia, who says, “I think the pacification is very important at this time here in our community because as far as I'm concerned it's going to help a lot. There will be improvements in water supply, electricity, sewage, sanitation.” Besides their brevity, the effectiveness of these shots is further limited by their inclusion as anonymous excerpts with no contextual information. Jake later explained to me that Jurandir and Patrícia had been added to the piece as shots of what is called MIS, or “man in the street.”

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<sup>11</sup> Jake later wrote a detailed blurb for the *Details* website listing each person's role and thanking them for helping set up or participate in the interviews. At his and most other networks, it is not standard operating procedure to give credit to producers, cameramen, and the like as part of the actual story.

While I could see that including flash perspectives such as these could have its value, leaving the people closest to the story unnamed seemed to contradict the very goal that had inspired the story in the first place of giving greater voice to Rocinha residents. This omission was particularly unfortunate to me in light of the fact that my own name and title as a foreign university professor was so prominently displayed in the other piece and that I was given so much airtime. So when I finished viewing both segments, I wondered how effective we had been in offering a less infotainment-based perspective than productions like *City of God, Guns, and Gangs* and the others that had inspired our own journalistic project. In other words, I was not sure how much more “human” it had been or how much more of an “encounter” it had made possible.

In some ways, my dissatisfactions with the segments were the result of having had such a positive experience in my earlier collaboration with Jake in his video from the year before, the one about community building in Rocinha at the judo school, at the hang gliding program, and at our non-profit educational and outreach center. But that piece never aired on TV but was instead posted directly as a podcast on the network’s webpage, allowing it to be much longer and softer, more like a documentary-style piece than a TV news article. Whereas the new segments together totaled only roughly five minutes, the earlier video had been nearly a half hour. Also, the earlier piece had no explicit narrator but was done using only “natural sound,” allowing the people featured in it to speak much more for themselves. As we worked to make the pacification piece, I don’t think I realized just how different it would be to produce the sort of rapid-fire segments typical of commercial television new programs like *Details*.

## **Dark Encounters**

Looking back on the segments over one year after the pacification of Rocinha, it occurs to me that in attempting to blur the lines between commercial news and community-based reporting our journalistic experiment had embodied the tensions between destructive and constructive forms of dark tourism pointed to by Erika Robb. In her work, she describes spectacles of violence as a triangular performance between “victim,” “perpetrator,” and “witness,” arguing that in destructive forms of dark tourism this “witness” becomes something more akin to a “voyeur” (2009:53) and points out that, “... combining commercialization with witnessing often results in the creation of spectacular, fantastic displays—displays unlikely to do justice to the pain of others” (54). It is in this sense that she warns of the potential violence that can result from overly sensationalistic and entertaining inroads into dark tourism.<sup>12</sup>

Though he does not directly engage tourism or entertainment, Martin Buber’s notion of encounter offers a unique complement to Robb’s formulation. When

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<sup>12</sup> Robb borrows this triangle of spectacles of violence from David Riches’ formulations in *The Anthropology of Violence*, published in 1986.

we are able to meet the people around us in situations of violence in the relational spirit of Buber's encounters we blur the division separating perpetrators, victims, and witnesses. As we turn towards a victim as "another" we connect with the pain and suffering of that person in a personal way, rather than merely being titillated by it. In so doing, we gain greater awareness that violence against anyone is violence against us all (including the perpetrators of violence themselves). More than empathy towards others, pity, or mere tolerance, however, such connection entails an even deeper and fuller sense of unity and equality between persons, in community and love. In a similar way, in turning toward the perpetrators of violence as "another," we experience the violence in our own attitudes and actions—including the potential for destructive consequences of our "dark encounters"—and perceive more clearly the ways these can sustain violence socially.

My dissatisfaction with the final TVN segments that aired stemmed from the limitations we faced in helping viewers turn towards the Rocinha residents portrayed less as exotic "others" and more as fully fleshed out human beings—as "another" and as persons. After they aired, I resolved to edit together a new independent segment that would embody encounter over infotainment to a fuller extent. I went to the media productions studio of my university in the United States, where a colleague and one of my students helped me recycle some of the uncut material filmed along the way and splice it together with additional footage shot by other students, colleagues, and Rocinha residents.

When this new 12-minute segment was ready, I posted it on our NGO's website and sent out the link to two or three other community organizations in Brazil. No doubt, it was much less readily visible and accessible than the TVN pieces. Almost certainly, this longer, independent version was not entirely successful in eschewing the shortcomings of the official news pieces, either, though at least it gave me a chance to highlight Jurandir's testimony nearly in its entirety and to more properly credit him by giving his name, as well as those of many others involved. It also enabled me to show Jurandir in the context of his leadership role in worship at a *candomblé* session.<sup>13</sup>

Looking back now, it occurs to me that just as our news segments embodied the tensions underlying dark tourism, so too does writing the present essay. In a very real sense it too is an act of dark tourism that is reaching for the encounter—for communion with another as another and not as an exotic object—however imperfectly. Indeed, long before I ever worked with TVN to put together the video news stories on Rocinha's pacification, my own experience as a foreign researcher/social activist and neighbor there had encapsulated many of the tensions between the potential superficiality and sensationalism of

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<sup>13</sup> The film, available online, is titled *Pacificação da Favela: Encontro com Pai Almir* (*Favela Pacification: Encounter with Father Almir*, 2012). The highest quality version is at: <https://vimeo.com/50384580>. I see it as something of a spin-off from two longer videos I produced called *Rocinha: Em Casa no Morrão* (*Rocinha: At Home on the Big Hill*, 2007) and *Atalhos e Encontros* (*Pathways and Encounters*, 2012), which are also available online.

information and entertainment, on the one hand, and the possibility of a more profoundly communal connection in encounter.

From the beginning, many of the motivations that led me to move to Rocinha in the first place as an independent researcher and exchange student in Rio in the early 90's were the same as those that attract the radical tourists and adventure volunteers of today (and as those of many potential viewers of more sensationalistic news videos and other films about favelas). If I am honest, the attraction I felt to life in the favela in those early days stemmed in part from my desire to see myself as someone who cared about people and social justice, as some sort of hardcore person with firsthand experience of violence who knew which way the wind blew, as they say, and as someone connected to causes bigger than myself. I suspect, too, that in some ways it was born out of my own frustrations with daily life in the United States, which only all too often seemed to me somewhat fragmented and plastic; it was as my experiences in Brazil would give me a psychological boost capable of lifting me out the sense of lifelessness and alienation that threatened to get a grip on me.

In another sense, my initial relationship with Rocinha was like that of a person with a romantic crush; I didn't really know Brazil, Rio, or Rocinha all that well yet, in of themselves, but I was fascinated and giddy with excitement at the *idea* I had of them. Just as is often the case with crushes, however, my fascination with Rocinha and the people I met there was at least as much about me as it was about them. Just think of the difference between the feeling of being "in love" with someone (which even a stalker can feel) and actually "loving" someone we truly know and are with, through the good and the bad.

To be fair to my younger self, I was also motivated by a genuine connection I felt with the many extraordinary and caring people I was meeting in and around Rocinha. I was glad to spend time with these people, who were constant reminders that some of the most important types of knowledge and power are not found inside the classroom or in books. Despite these flashes of real connection, though, my being in Rocinha wasn't nearly as selfless or altruistic as I thought and my solidarity did not run nearly so deep. To this day my own craving for "real life adventures" in "extraordinary situations" and my desire immerse myself along the front lines of globally significant realities—like the focus of Current TV discussed above—sometimes rears its head, somewhat hindering my ability to fully move beyond seeing others as objects and to begin meeting them in genuine community.

But if someone who is "crushing" has a chance to actually be in a relationship with the person he or she desires, of course, it can be possible to move beyond feeling "in love" and *knowing about* the person to truly *knowing* that person in real emotional intimacy. Over time many of my friends and neighbors in Rocinha freely opened their hearts and lives to me, by turning toward me as a person and accepting me, and by allowing me to treat them likewise. The fact that my circumstances in the favela were not limited to either research or social activism helped place me in a position to receive this love and fellowship: during my years in Rocinha I also attended a local 12 Step recovery group, went to

church, played capoeira, and worked out at a local gym, among other things. Working at the NGO and teaching were good places to start, but it was really in sharing daily life with my friends in these other spaces of encounters—in which I was generally not a teacher but instead a learner, or at least someone on equal footing with those around me—that I found myself being led beyond the boundaries of “content” and “experiences” into the “presence” of deeper community.

Ultimately, there is little difference between encounters in places of violence and encounters anywhere else. We do not have to be on a favela tour or visiting a Holocaust museum to turn away from people as exotic “others” or experience them as objects; this can happen in our relationships with friends, co-workers, teachers, and students, between parents and their children, in our most intimate sex and love relationships, and even in our spiritual lives. When this happens and we treat the people around as “things” for whatever reason, some small degree of violence creeps in that turns our relationships similarly “violent.” If we allow ourselves, however, we can turn toward the world in community. This we can do as we walk alone in the woods, contemplate a work of art, read a scholarly essay, or watch a sports event on TV; we can also enter into encounter with others persons at a school or pizza place, or at a church or house of candomblé in a favela—in dialogue, reciprocity, mutuality, and community.

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