

La construcció de l'actualitat en el cinema dels orígens

*The construction of news
in early cinema*

*La construcción de la actualidad
en el cine de los orígenes*

The True-Crime Films of Antônio Leal, 1908-1909: From Newspaper Reportage to Filmed Re-Enactments in Brazil's "Bela Época"

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On October 15, 1906, the initial reports of a sensational case of robbery and murder dubbed the "Crime of Carioca Street" appeared in Rio de Janeiro newspapers. Daily front-page reports chronicled a series of gruesome events that captivated the city's collective imagination: the discovery of the body of nineteen-year old Paulino Fuoco, who had been strangled, in a ransacked jewelry store belonging to his uncle; the location of the corpse of Paulino's brother Carlos, who had been lured into a boat by the robbers and then killed when he refused to surrender the keys to the jeweler's; and the pursuit and arrest of the criminals. This case would serve as the basis for the first fiction feature made in Brazil, Antônio Leal's 1908 *Os estranguladores* (*The Stranglers*), reportedly exhibited a staggering 830 times in its first three months of exhibition.¹

Os estranguladores inaugurated a genre of true-crime films that achieved unprecedented local success. These dramatic reconstructions of widely reported cases functioned as transitional texts during a brief surge in local production by film exhibitors, often referred to as the "Bela Época" of Brazilian cinema (1907-1911).² Despite the disappearance of the films and the scarcity of documentation from the period, one can trace a shift from simple actualities, to feature-length reconstructions, to fictional narratives without direct reference to actual events in the true-crime films exhibited to the public. In the progression from the 1906 actuality *Rocca - Carletto - Pigato na Casa da Detenção* (*Rocca - Carletto - Pigato in the House of Detention*) filmed by an uni-

1. *Correio da Manhã*, November 12, 1908, 5. The film was first exhibited on August 3, 1908. *Gazeta de Notícias*, August 3, 1908, 6.

2. This idea of a cinematic "belle époque" has been influentially critiqued by Jean-Claude Bernadet, who suggests that historians' notion of a harmonious integration of local production, distribution and exhibition is an idealization, functioning as a utopian myth of origin that stymies critical analysis of the period. *Historiografia clássica do cinema brasileiro: metodologia e pedagogia* (São Paulo: Annablume Editora, 1995).

identified cameraman employed by Paschoal Segreto, to the dramatic re-constitutions of *Os Estranguladores*, *A mala sinistra* (*The Sinister Trunk*, 1908) and *Noivado de sangue* (*Bloody Honeymoon*, 1909) to *Um drama na Tijuca* (*A Drama in Tijuca*, 1909) which was likely an entirely fictional film, I read not an evolution from "primitive" actualities to sophisticated narratives, but rather a complex negotiation between emerging fictional modes and visual documentation of the "scene of the crime." In their use of actuality conventions (most notably location shooting) with comparatively complex narratives (suggested by tableaux lists indicating multiple settings and plot events)³ and the anti-realistic convention of the climactic apotheosis, the true-crime films show close affinities with contemporary cultures of popular sensationalism in which fact, speculation, and pure invention mingled.

I seek to account for the varied representational strategies of Leal's true-crime films by exploring their relationship to crime journalism and theatrical spectacles of the period. Drawing on Vanessa Schwartz's analysis of the "spectacular realities" of fin-de-siècle Paris,⁴ I argue that in the Rio de Janeiro of the "Bela Época," current events were spectacularly framed for mass consumption in theatrical spectacles and crime reportage richly illustrated with photographs, drawings, and diagrams. Before turning my attention to Leal's true-crime films more specifically, I want to examine an excerpt from the coverage of the "Crime of Carioca Street" in the *Gazeta de Notícias*, written in a highly imaginative style:

The last stragglers emerging from the houses of diversion on the nearby promenade were passing by. In the new gas lamps, the yellowed light of the Auer bulbs softly lit the street....

It was a horrifying crime at the classic hour of horrifying crimes, accentuated by the audacious circumstance of having taken place in the heart of the city...

The flash of diamonds in a *vitrine*, the profusion of jewels lined up on the shelves, with fat figures attesting to their value, from that

brilliant, illuminated rectangle arose a hallucinatory fascination that tempted a group of bandits, whose number is not yet known, to crime.⁵

Here, novel practices of urban diversion and consumption (popular amusements, the shop window)⁶ are evoked in the context of criminality. In its reference to the new electric illumination used on Rio's streets,⁷ the article evokes a broader program of urban reforms, most notably the construction of the Avenida Central, whose inauguration was commemorated in an actuality shown the month the "Crime of Carioca Street" occurred.⁸ Aligning these physical transformations with demographic shifts caused by an influx of immigrants, the *Jornal do Brasil* situated the perpetrators of the "Crime of Carioca Street" among a group of suspicious figures visible in these new public spaces: "New types make an appearance daily, giving preference to houses of amusements, confectioneries and fashionable cafés, in order to promenade on the avenues, in automobiles and luxurious carriages, without anyone knowing their provenance or how they maintain the lifestyle of wealthy persons."⁹

Somewhat paradoxically, the commission of savage crimes was associated with ambitions for national progress implicitly measured against European and American models. Describing the perceived explosion of urban violence, a *Gazeta* writer declared two days after the report cited above: "One of the characteristics of the greatest and most refined civilizations are grand crimes. In this respect, and under this aspect, we have the right to consider ourselves among the most advanced of civilized peoples."¹⁰ This rather perverse sense of pride in urban violence, though presumably tinged with irony, was expressed with surprising frequency in the criminal reportage of the period.

The *Gazeta's* coverage of the "Crime of Carioca Street" hints at a local imaginary that linked increasing crime rates with rapid modernization, and by extension, with new visual technologies, an association

5. *Gazeta de Notícias*, October 15, 1906, 1. All translations from the Portuguese are mine.

6. Anne Friedberg has influentially linked these modern spaces of consumption and visibility to cinema in *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

7. The main downtown thoroughfares of the city all boasted electrical lighting by 1905. Teresa A. Meade, "Civilizing Rio: Reform and Resistance in a Brazilian City, 1889-1930" (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 87.

8. According to advertisements published in the *Gazeta de Notícias*, the film "Inauguration of the Avenida Central" was exhibited in the Theatro Maison Moderne from October 22 to October 30.

9. *Jornal do Brasil*, October 16, 1906, 3.

10. *Gazeta de Notícias*, "Civilização e policia," October 17, 1906, 1.

that would be literalized in the true-crime films that reconstructed widely reported cases. In evoking a "horrifying crime at the classic hour of horrifying crimes," the aforementioned article evokes narrative conventions surrounding representations of criminality in mass journalism and popular theater, which churned out commodified versions of current events ranging from the ostensibly factual to the openly fanciful. While the *Gazeta* article was published several months before the opening of the first permanent cinemas in Rio de Janeiro, in late 1907,¹¹ it prefigures an intimate relationship between self-consciously sensationalistic crime reporting and the "hallucinatory fascination" exerted on turn-of-the-century Rio de Janeiro audiences by the "brilliant, illuminated rectangle" of the cinema screen.

The close relationship between the coverage of so-called "grand crimes" and early true-crime films is evident in the latter's very titles, which often corresponded closely to the headlines used to direct readers' attention to the ongoing coverage of sensational cases.¹² Yet both journalistic and cinematic representations of criminality were also permeated with the terminology and codes of reception of the popular theater. The preexisting vocabulary of popular spectacles was adopted by early film advertisements; like publicity for plays, these provided numbered lists of the *quadros* (tableaux, or scenes consisting of a single shot) that made up the work and often touted concluding apotheoses as a selling point. Similarly, self-dramatizing crime reportage often used theatrically inflected metaphors: a deadly confrontation might be referred to as a "scena tragica" (tragic scene)¹³ and detailed information was provided regarding "o cenário do crime" (literally the "stage" or "backdrop" of the crime").¹⁴

11. José Inácio de Melo Souza cites the opening of the Chic on August 1, 1907; the Parisiense on August 10; the Pathé on September 18; the Paraíso no Rio on September 28; and the Pavilhão Internacional on October 17. *Imagens do passado: São Paulo e Rio de Janeiro nos primórdios do cinema* (São Paulo: Editora Senac, 2003), 119.

12. The *Jornal do Brasil* announced the "Crime of Carioca Street" using the headline *Estranguladores do Rio* (Stranglers of Rio), which later appeared in 1907 advertisements for the actuality filmed by Leal in 1906 as well as the 1908 reconstruction; *A Mala Sinistra* was the headline used by the *Gazeta de Notícias* and the *Correio da Manhã* to refer to the events on which Leal's film of the same title was based; *Noivado de Sangue* recalled both previous headlines such as *Noivado da Morte* (Deadly Honeymoon) (*Gazeta de Notícias*, September 14, 1908, 1) and the *Jornal do Brasil's* headline for the 1909 case *Carnaval de sangue* (A Bloody Carnival, referring to the fact that the crime took place during that festival).

13. *Gazeta de Notícias*, October 10, 1908, 1.

14. Coverage of "Crime of Carioca Street" in the *Jornal do Brasil*, October 16, 1906, 1.

A columnist in the *Jornal do Brasil* connected the way in which criminal reportage drew on theatrical rhetoric with the production of actual theatrical pieces in a dry commentary on the proliferation of spectacles based on the "Crime of Carioca Street." Referring to the addition of scenes representing key moments of the case to a pre-existing revue production, he writes, "The artists of the Palace Theatre had their own idea about the horrifying case of Carioca Street. If from the true theater of events things passed into the theater of exploitation and the ridiculous, they too resolved to take advantage of the situation, reproducing several scenes of the crime."¹⁵ These references to the "theater of events" suggest the extent to which crime journalism was inseparable from a broader tendency to sensationalize topical happenings.

If the 1908 film version of *Os estranguladores* was advertised as "a magnificent reconstitution of the exciting drama for which Rio de Janeiro served as theater,"¹⁶ the 1906 play *Os estranguladores* was described as a spectacle of both "sensation" and of "actuality," since it boasted "new and appropriate scenery, props and furniture," although it took liberties with actual events.¹⁷ Presented in the Theatro Lucinda by the Dias Braga Company, which was known for staging "gaudy magic plays and cape-and-sword melodramas...at sale prices with three shows a night,"¹⁸ the production featured the strangling of a countess during the robbery of a pearl necklace.¹⁹ In addition to this production, a play based on the "Crime of Carioca Street" was later mounted in the Theatro São José in January 1907;²⁰ and yet a fourth work based on the same events, ostensibly the direct basis for Leal's film, was written by Figueiredo Pimentel and Rafael Pinheiro.²¹ Several of these productions featured apotheoses or concluding tableaux

15. *Jornal do Brasil*, November 4, 1906, 10.

16. *Gazeta de Notícias*, July 9, 1908, 10.

17. *Correio da Manhã*, November 3, 1906, 6.

18. Almir Carvalho, "Mario Nunes, o 'decano' da Crítica Teatral." *Teatro Ilustrado* (July 1960), 36.

19. *Gazeta de Notícias*, November 3, 1906, 12.

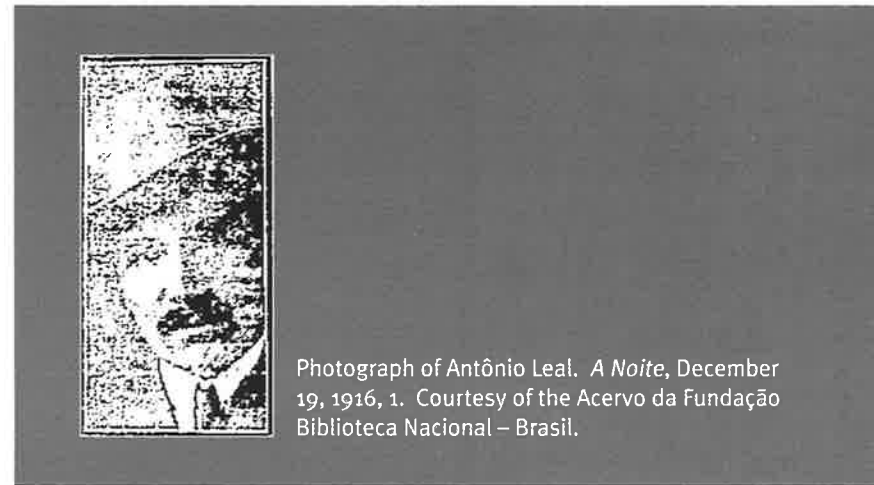
20. *Gazeta de Notícias*, January 11, 1907, 6. The "operetta, magic theater, and revue company of the former Carlos Gomes theater" staged *Fé em Deus, ou os Estranguladores do Rio* (Faith in God [the name of the boat used by the criminals] or the Stranglers of Rio), in three acts, eight tableaux and an apotheosis.

21. José Inácio de Melo Souza, *Imagens do passado*, 155. I have thus far been unable to uncover any references to its production in the Rio de Janeiro press. There were also additional theatrical adaptations of the case; a performance in the Theatro S. José of a play by José de Castro was announced, then postponed (*Gazeta de Notícias*, November 11, 1906, 14); it may never have been presented. A one-act comedy, "Um crime na Rua da Carioca," was also performed in the Theatro Lucinda, according to the *Gazeta de Notícias*, November 25, 1906, 12.

dedicated to "Justice;"²² as the description of the Dias Braga version of *Os estranguladores* as "actuality" suggests, such anti-realistic dramatic devices were not seen as in conflict with their topicality or veracity.

I would now like to concisely examine Leal's true-crime films in the context of this local understanding of actuality as dramatized. A Portuguese immigrant to Brazil, Leal worked simultaneously as film producer and exhibitor, as was the case with most of the city's production at the time. He acted as a camera operator for the Photo-cinematographia Brasileira and financial partner of the Cinema Palace, where his films were exhibited. In addition to the dramatic reconstructions of "grand crimes," the Photo-cinematographia Brasileira regularly released actualities and short comedies that were shown in programs composed exclusively of local films. Rather than attempting to capture unpredictable, singular events like natural disasters, rebellions, or assassinations, the Photo-cinematographia Brasileira tended to document events of a communitarian and commemorative nature. Their advertised programs listed views of regattas and carriage races, military ceremonies, and the solemnities of national holidays. These films were often exhibited within a few days of being shot,²³ but might remain in programs for several days "by popular demand."²⁴

The true-crime films produced by the Photo-cinematographia Brasileira were in some senses more topical than the actualities, as they capitalized on surges of public interest in sensational crimes that were periodically revived by trials or other developments. This was the case with *Rocca – Carletto – Pigato na Casa da Detenção*, which was re-exhibited as *Os estranguladores do Rio* in 1907 on the occasion of the trial of the accused.²⁵ After the presentation of the dramatized version of *Os estranguladores* on



Photograph of Antônio Leal. *A Noite*, December 19, 1916, 1. Courtesy of the Acervo da Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil.

August 3, 1908, nearly two years after the case unfolded, the gap between initial reports of the crimes and the release of the film adaptation steadily decreased: *Noivado de sangue* was released only nine days after the crime was first reported in Rio.²⁶ If in 1908, the local production of a film of a reported 700 meters was itself an event, the Photo-cinematographia Brasileira's true-crime films were able to become increasingly topical as their facilities improved. The success of *Noivado de sangue*, which left Leal's theater "full to the brim, struggling to contain the congress," was attributed to the fact that "new national films are now being made with all the trimmings in the new studios of the Cinema Palace."²⁷

Yet this decreasing lag between crime reportage and exhibition, which would constitute an approximation of dramatic reconstruction to journalistic reportage, was in fact in conflict with visual fidelity to the actual locales and figures involved in sensational cases. This tension was particularly evident in the delayed release of Leal's *A mala sinistra*, which was filmed on the heels of the massive success of *Os estranguladores* and released on October 13, 1908.²⁸ Leal's film was one of four versions of a notorious São Paulo case, in which a Syrian immigrant named Michel Traad murdered his employer Elias Farhat out of desire for his wife, then decapitated him

22. A gala held in the Theatro Apollo to celebrate the lead investigator in the "Crime of Carioca Street," Dr. Caetano Junior, included the addition of "a brilliant apotheosis representing Justice, for whose allegory the comedian Arthur Azevedo wrote a BRILLIANT POEM," to the second act of the revue "Guanabarina" (*Gazeta de Notícias*, November 1, 1908, 8.) The final tableaux of the Dias Braga production was entitled "Justice," (*Correio da Manhã*, November 3, 1906, 6) as was the final scene of the play announced for the Theatro S. José, which was described as an apotheosis.

23. For example, on February 21, 1908, the Cinema-Palace exhibited *The Carriage Race*, "film taken the day before yesterday on the Avenida Beira-Mar." *Gazeta de Notícias*, 6.

24. A previous actuality showing the carriage races, taken on February 12, was still being shown on February 20. *Gazeta de Notícias*, February 20, 1908, 6.

25. Paschoal Segreto's Pavilhão Internacional exhibited "Os estranguladores do Rio, a sensational film based on the horrible crime of Carioca Street, whose authors are to receive a verdict." *Gazeta de Notícias*, November 28, 1907, 6. A November 29 advertisement describes the film as "taken in the House of Detention at the beginning of the trial," suggesting that it is the same film. *Gazeta de Notícias*, 6. The film was advertised as showing at the Pavilhão until December 7, though it is not clear whether it was shown each day.

26. The crime was reported on February 24, 1909; the film premiered on March 4.

27. *Gazeta de Notícias*, March 5, 1909, 1.

28. The crime was reported on September 5; advertisements for the Cinema-Palace in the *Gazeta de Notícias* announced *A mala sinistra* as early as September 12, when *Os estranguladores* was still being exhibited.



Left: A news photograph of the "sinister trunk." *Gazeta de Notícias*, September 5, 1908, 1. Right: An image identified as a still from Leal's film. *Revista da Semana*, October 20, 1928, n/p. Both courtesy of the Acervo da Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil.

and stuffed his body into a steamer trunk which he tried to throw overboard from an ocean liner leaving the port of Santos.

An actuality and a fictionalized version of events were produced in São Paulo, both under the title *O crime da mala* (*The Crime of the Trunk*). In Rio, a rival adaptation by Júlio Ferrez, whose father Gilbert Ferrez owned the Cinema Pathé, was released eleven days before Leal's film,²⁹ leading to a series of advertisements aggressively touting the superior virtues of the Photo-cinematographia Brasileira's version.³⁰ Where Ferrez's version had only five tableaux, Leal's boasted "640 meters with twenty-odd tableaux, some colored and others natural, taken in São Paulo, on board, and in Rio de Janeiro, ending with a beautiful colored apotheosis: Virtue crushes calumny."³¹ The brief newspaper coverage of Leal's film emphasized its journalistic ambitions: the *Jornal do Brasil* "in the production of this film,

29. The version of the film made by Júlio Ferrez was first shown on October 2, 1908 and was shown for three days in the Cinema Pathé, four in the Cinema Rio Branco, according to advertisements in the *Gazeta de Notícias*.

30. On October 11, the ads for the Cinema Palace read "We now call attention to this national work which challenges other on the same subject which have been exhibited in various cinemas, to which we ask you to compare it." *Jornal do Brasil*, 20.

31. *Correio da Manhã*, October 11, 1908, 14. A similar advertisement was published in the *Gazeta de Notícias*, October 10, 1908, 6.

the cinematic press labored to accomplish the best reconstruction of this tragedy."³² More strongly, columnist Binóculo³³ wrote:

It is the exact reproduction of the crime. The cameraman Antônio Leal went to Santos and S. Paulo, he was on board, in all the places, in short, where the terrible scenes took place. It could be said that it is a true film, *d'apres-nature*.³⁴

Strangely, Binóculo does not mention the apotheosis that ended the film, suggesting the device was not perceived as conflicting with aspirations to cinematic truth. Further suggesting the compatibility of the apotheosis with the actuality in local film reception, on at least one occasion, the Photo-Cinematographia Brasileira actually added such an ending to an imported non-fiction view of events following the assassination of the King of Portugal and his heir. An advertisement in the *Gazeta de Notícias* promises images of "the funerals of D[om] Carlos and D[om] Luiz in Lisbon - a gorgeous confection of the House of Gaumont... ending with a lavish apotheosis by the Photo-cinematographia Brasileira: THE PORTUGUESE FATHERLAND - THE BRAZILIAN FATHERLAND."³⁵ Perhaps the apotheosis provided a form of ideological closure, mitigating the disruptive effect of the violent events depicted in both the Gaumont actuality and the true-crime films.³⁶

Even less information is available regarding the Photo-cinematographia Brasileira's next dramatic reconstruction, *Noivado de sangue*, which depicted Albertina Barbosa's murder of her former lover with the complicity of Elizario Bonilha, her new husband, to whom she had recently confessed her previous transgression. Advertisements for the "recent tragedy of love and blood that unfolded in São Paulo last week" note the film's length (450 meters) and number of tableaux (fifteen), but do not list the scenes, declaring "we dispense with a lengthy description since the plot of this film is too well known to the public,"³⁷ implying a close relationship to a journalistic intertext.

32. *Jornal do Brasil*, October 13, 1908, 11.

33. This was a pseudonym of journalist and intellectual Figueiredo Pimentel.

34. *Gazeta de Notícias*, October 13, 1908, 3.

35. *Gazeta de Notícias*, March 10, 1908, 6.

36. Commenting on the use of the apotheosis borrowed from the French variety theater in chase films and *féeries*, Noël Burch describes it as an "open endin[g]." *Life to Those Shadows*, translated and edited by Ben Brewster. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, p. 193. However, I would like to suggest that the abstract moral concept presented by the apotheosis provided another type of closure to these potentially socially disruptive texts.

37. *Gazeta de Notícias*, March 5, 1909, 6.



"The Teacher's Vengeance:" a graphic representation of the events on which *Noivado de Sangue* was based. *Gazeta de Notícias*, March 7, 1909, 1. Courtesy of the Acervo da Fundação Biblioteca Nacional.

Advertised starting shortly after the showing of *Noivado de sangue*, the Photo-cinematographia Brasileira released *Um drama na Tijuca* on April 1.³⁸ The film seems to have been entirely fictional - advertisements credit actor João Barbosa, "the national interpreter of Sherlock Holmes,"³⁹ as the author of its plot, an attribution not present in publicity for any of the other crime films. Yet it was likely influenced by news reports of female suicides and a set of romantic and mysterious associations with the Tijuca neighborhood.⁴⁰ In this "real and characteristic scene of the intimate

38. While it was briefly advertised as *Um crime na Tijuca*, the title I have used appears far more frequently.

39. *Jornal do Brasil*, April 2, 1909, 12.

40. According to news items from throughout the period under study suggest, the corpses of suicides and others who died under mysterious circumstances were being found with increasing frequency in Tijuca's hilly, wooded areas. One such news item reads: "Tijuca, picturesque Tijuca, has been decidedly mysterious. Just a few days ago now, already pecked by vultures, appeared the corpse of a man whose identity has not yet been established; before this task was completed by the police behind the scenes, another one appeared as laborious as the first, to give our investigators difficulty." *Correio da Manhã*, November 13, 1908, 2. More romantically and less morbidly, Binóculo wrote, "Tijuca...Oh, Tijuca has for us infinite enchantments. We don't consider it a suburb. It is a country, a veritable Country of Dreams, of Legends, of Loves. Enchanting land, with its forest full of secret corners, where Mystery reigns, where the Secret reigns." *Gazeta de Notícias*, March 23, 1909, 3.

life of Rio's finest society, with tableaux of astonishing artistic effect, some taken on the natural sites of that fantastic mountain, full of beauty and a witness to innumerable amorous adventures,"⁴¹ a young society woman betrays her lover with another man; publicly revealed as "immoral," she poisons herself. Tension between visual documentation and fictional narrative apparently remains: in contrast to previous advertisements, the titles of tableaux are principally lines of dialogue.⁴² Yet an unusually lengthy review in the *Jornal do Brasil* emphasized the depiction of Tijuca's natural beauties, suggesting that the film lingered on the elements of local setting as much as the advancement of the plot.

After *Um drama na Tijuca*, the Photo-cinematographia Brasileira produced no comparable dramatic features. Filmmaking in Rio and São Paulo declined sharply as the 20th century entered its second decade and the Companhia Cinematographica Brasileira exhibition trust established by Francisco Serrador was consolidated beginning in 1911, superseding the model of the joint producer/exhibitor exemplified by Leal.⁴³ Significantly, the only locally made fiction features exhibited in São Paulo in the years 1912 and 1913 were true-crime films: *1.400 Contos ou o Caso dos Caixotes* (*1,400 Contos*⁴⁴ or *the Case of the Strongboxes*) and *Um crime sensacional* (*A Sensational Crime*), made by brothers Alberto and Paulino Botelho, who concurrently produced a series of newsreels. Their work suggests that the productive tension between fiction and actuality manifested by the true-crime films of Antônio Leal, and the culture of popular sensationalism that informed it continued to define the experience of rapid modernization in early 20th-century Rio de Janeiro.

Abstracts

Las películas de Antônio Leal sobre crímenes verídicos, 1908-1909: Del reportaje de diario a las re-representaciones durante la *Bela Época* brasileña

Esta comunicación sitúa las películas sobre crímenes verídicos de Antônio Leal, producidas en Río de Janeiro al inicio del siglo XX, en el contexto del reportaje sobre el crimen contemporáneo y la estética discontinua

41. *Correio da Manhã*, March 29, 1909, 8.

42. This tension is evident in tableau titles like that of the second scene, "My love is great and strong like our blessed nature," or the fourth "The lovers' walk, how happy they are! Views taken in the Caverns and other points in Tijuca." *Jornal do Brasil*, April 2, 1909, 12.

43. See Chapter 8, José Inácio de Melo Souza, *Imagens do passado*.

44. The term *conto* refers to 100,000 réis; to give a notion of this quantity, a cinema ticket often cost 1,000 réis during this period.

del teatro popular. Mientras que el tratamiento de casos sensacionalistas evolucionó desde la realidad de 1906 convertida en 1908 en dramáticas reconstrucciones de casos sensacionalistas hasta una película de ficción de 1909 inspirada en hechos reales, este grupo de películas no manifiesta ni una evolución de la realidad hacia una compleja ficción narrativa, ni una representación de hechos actuales que crece rápidamente a medida que las facilidades de producción mejoran, sino más bien una tensión entre la ficción narrativa, el documento visual y la convención antirrealista de la apoteosis culminante. Esta tensión se puede explicar a partir de la relación entre los filmes sobre crímenes verídicos y las culturas de sensacionalismo popular que dramatizaban la vida cotidiana para el consumo de las masas.

Les pel·lícules d'Antônio Leal sobre crims verídics, 1908-1909: Del reportatge de diari a les re-representacions durant la Bela Época brasilera

Aquesta comunicació situa les pel·lícules sobre crims verídics d'Antônio Leal, produïdes a Rio de Janeiro a l'inici del segle xx, en el context del reportatge sobre el crim contemporani i l'estètica discontínua del teatre popular. Mentre que el tractament de casos sensacionalistes va evolucionar des de la realitat de 1906 convertida l'any 1908 en dramàtiques reconstruccions de casos sensacionalistes fins a una pel·lícula de ficció del 1909 inspirada en fets reals, aquest grup de pel·lícules no manifesta ni una evolució de la realitat cap a una complexa ficció narrativa, ni una representació de fets actuals que creix ràpidament a mesura que les facilitats de producció milloren, sinó més aviat una tensió entre la ficció narrativa, el document visual i la convenció antirealista de l'apoteosi culminant. Aquesta tensió es pot explicar a partir de la relació entre els films sobre crims verídics i les cultures de sensacionalisme popular que dramatitzaven la vida quotidiana per al consum de les masses.

How important was actuality in actualité's? Time as agency in presenting moving images of news in variety theatres and by travelling showmen

Ansje van Veusekom

Because there has been done and published so much research on the first years of the cinema in the last three decades, what I did was mere adding a special focus on the specific agency of time in presenting actuality films instead of starting a new research project. In other words: in re-reading a lot of literature and press records with the special focus on the time span in mind, I was able to get a picture of the importance of time in the exhibition of actualities. The ground breaking work in film historiography of the first years of cinema contains films and their exhibition in programs in particular towns and fair grounds, biographies of specific film producers, exhibitors and showmen and how they interacted. My observations are based on this research complemented with contemporary press records from the Netherlands, obtained from a wonderful new tool: the database of all Dutch newspapers from the 1618 on, made available by the Royal Library (Koninklijke Bibliotheek) in The Hague and information in Karel Dibbets Cinema Context database retaining records on screenings of films in The Netherlands.¹

News in contexts

As many researchers on early cinema have stated: it is inappropriate to study early films isolated from the contexts wherein they are produced, distributed and exhibited. Early cinema existed at the time of its emergence as extension of existing media and practises: adding 'life' or movement to still photography and bringing outdoor sets and exotic places on the indoor theatre stage. As such cinema after its novelty period was also presented as a film number, part of a larger whole and embedded in longer presentations together with other attractions. Charles Musser was among the first who emphasized that cinema emerged, developed and was perceived in its first

1. <http://www.cinemacontext.nl>