

**Citizenship in the Neo-liberal City:**

**São Paulo in two Films by Walter Salles and Daniella Thomas**

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James Holston tells us that cities “are full of stories in time, some sedimented and catalogued; others spoor-like, vestigial, and dispersed. Their narratives are epic and everyday; they tell of migration and production, law and laughter, revolution and art” (1999, 155). In *Terra estrangeira* (1995) and *Linha de passe* (2008), Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas have scrutinized the pulse of São Paulo, a city which, according to Teresa Caldeira, “is the largest metropolitan region of a society with one of the most inequitable distributions of wealth in the world” (1999, 114-115).<sup>1</sup> In this megalopolis (recent data places its population at almost 21 million in the metropolitan region), anonymity and stark class differences are prevalent despite the fact that the city of São Paulo is Brazil’s “economic center” (Ramos Schiffer 2002, 214). In addition, globalization made possible by neoliberalism intensified, according to Saskia Sassen, processes of dispersal and centralization, which greatly affected the city of São Paulo (2002, 3).<sup>2</sup> Addressing the filmic representation of this city, Reinaldo Cardenuto holds that

São Paulo evokes profoundly ambiguous feelings: a scary and overwhelming city of social and political contradictions that have become

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<sup>1</sup> Both films have garnered awards, but *Linha de passe* more than *Terra estrangeira*. *Linha de passe* won an award at Cannes (Best Actress) and awards at the Havana Film Festival (Best Actress, Best Editing, and Second Place Grand Coral).

<sup>2</sup> Sassen mentions the integration of São Paulo into global stock markets (2002, 7), particularly after Brazil deregulated its economy (2002, 22).

increasingly acute as the years have gone by, it is simultaneously a source of inspiration for its multicultural characters, for the poetry extracted from the concrete, and for a cosmopolitanism that projects the city towards the outside world. (Pinazza and Bayman 2013, 6)

Indeed, since the first decade of the twentieth century, São Paulo has been depicted in more than 80 films.<sup>3</sup> Two films, by Walter Salles and Daniella Thomas respectively, represent this impressive city during neoliberal times. *Terra estrangeira* is set in the early 1990s the period that led to the instauration of neoliberalism, while *Linha de passe* takes place during the first decade of the twentieth-first century. To understand these films, it is important to briefly look at the Brazilian socio-economic context of the early 1990s, during which neoliberalism was introduced.

The early 1990s were crucial years in recent Brazilian history. Fernando Collor de Mello was elected as the first democratic president after more than two decades of military governments. His youth portended the emergence of a new democratic society after a brutal dictatorship that had severely curtailed civic, human, and labor rights. Nonetheless, Collor de Mello soon put an end to the hope of extending the privileges of modern citizenship to numerous Brazilians. According to political theorist Kurt Weyland, in the early 1990s Brazilian society faced “skyrocketing inflation and worsening fiscal deficits” (1996, 192). To solve these problems, Collor de Mello adopted painful economic reforms that were initially supported by the majority of citizens (Weyland 1996, 192). These market-oriented or neoliberal measures, drawn from the Washington Consensus, included the shrinking of the state, structural adjustment, privatization and support of private enterprise and capital, reorientation of national economies toward foreign markets, weakening labor legislation, and scaling down or finishing the welfare state (Lins Ribeiro 2005, 3). The state’s diminished role impacted national film production, particularly when state funding was discontinued (Pinazza 2014, 12). However, with the passing of the Rouanet Law in 1991 and the Audiovisual Law in 1993, Brazilian film production entered a new productive period, the *retomada* (Rêgo and Rocha 2011, 2-3). Salles and Thomas were among the first beneficiaries of these laws: not only were they able to shoot films in the mid-1990s, but also and more importantly, in *Terra estrangeira* and *Linha de passe*, they captured the *zeitgeist* of neoliberalism, a period during which citizenship appeared as an elusive privilege, particularly for *paulistanos*. Here it is important to take into account that, writing in 2009, former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (terms of office 1995-1999 and 1999-2003) mentioned the ongoing technological innovations and the rise of global capital as

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<sup>3</sup> Pinazza and Bayman surveyed 81 films in *World Film Locations: São Paulo*.

factors that had influenced a new international order characterized by “a scarcity of jobs and inequalities” (2009, 300). Thus, the context of neoliberalism applies to both films.

Spanning more than a decade, *Terra estrangeira* and *Linha de passe* revolve around Brazilian identity and citizenship *vis-à-vis* globalization and its effect on young male *paulistanos*. For communication scholar Miriam Roussini de Souza, *Terra estrangeira* exhibits the filmmakers’ attention to narratives about globalization that also trigger an exploration of national identity (2005, 99). For her part, film scholar Darlene Sadlier has included *Terra estrangeira* as part of a trilogy of road movies, noting that, “for the most part, they treat cities as dystopian (*locus terribilis*) and rural landscapes as a mixture of the pastoral (*locus amoenus*) and the mythic” (2013, 146). Building on Sadlier’s assertions about São Paulo, I argue that the dystopian in *Terra estrangeira* and *Linha de passe* is inextricably linked with a critique of urban space as a site of the “renegotiations of citizenship” during neoliberalism (Appudurai and Holston 1999, 3).<sup>4</sup> This renegotiation of citizenship during the neoliberal years takes place amid a crisis of values described by David Harvey. He says:

The anarchy of the market, of competition, and of unbridled individualism (individual hopes, desires, anxieties, and fears; choices of lifestyle and sexual habits and orientations; modes of expressions and behavior towards others) generates a situation that becomes increasingly ungovernable. It may even lead to a breakdown of all bonds of solidarity and a condition verging on social anarchy and nihilism. (2008, 82)

Thus, the city, the iconic space for the modernist project of citizenship, is transformed by neoliberalism into a theater that discourages cooperation and devalues the exercise of political citizenship. Whereas São Paulo and other urban centers used to encourage people to become citizens, it became, through neoliberalism, a space where everyone fends for himself/herself, as Salles and Thomas’ two films reflect. Consequently, I contend that, in both films, this inhospitable environment weakens national belonging and effective citizenship, particularly through the lack of paternal involvement; however, in *Linha de passe*, the city also allows new forms of belonging, such as soccer and religion, through which male mentors help orient two of the young male characters. By acting as surrogate fathers, these mentors save them from criminality and invisibility and push them to rekindle communal ties.

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<sup>4</sup> Reinaldo Cadernuto holds that since the mid-1960s, São Paulo has been portrayed in films as an “agonizing space marked by acute conflicts” (Pinazza and Bayman 2013), 7.

*Terra estrangeira*

Shot in black and white, *Terra estrangeira* opens with a brief text explaining the economic policies of Collor de Mello. As the camera focuses on the exterior façade of a building, the voice-over of a young male recites the lines of Goethe's *Faust* (Overhoff Ferreira 2012, 207), a play that centers on an educated man who bets with the Devil. This opening sets the tone for the film in which Paco (Fernando Alves Pinto) will see his spiritual values challenged by characters who seek only profit and wealth. Another shot captures the empty Minhocão, or more formally, the Elevado Presidente Costa e Silva, a highway built in 1971 that traverses the city of São Paulo. Ciro Biderman, a Brazilian professor of Economics, explains that "Apart from its significant political associations, the [Minhocão] overpass cuts East-West through downtown São Paulo and is considered to be partially responsible for the deterioration of the city's historic core" (2008, n.p.). The political associations mentioned refer to the highway's construction during the most recent dictatorship (1964-1985), as part of the "Brazilian Miracle," a top-down nationalist plan to spur national development. Thus, for Brazilian viewers the image of this famous motorway recalls both the gradual encroachment of their rights by different governments as well as the broken promises of these governments, given the instability of the Brazilian economy in the early 1990s. Natália Pinazza has also noted that in *Terra estrangeira* the highway serves both as "a signifier of São Paulo" (2014, 100) and as a "no-place" that can refer to any global location (2014, 101). In the film, the static shot of the Minhocão contrasts with the next shot taken during the day of a woman, Manuela (Laura Cardoso), crossing a busy street, setting the tone for the film's emphasis on movement and journeys. Janaína Cordeiro Freire explains that "*Terra estrangeira* surge povoado de personagens desgarradas, em trânsito, reféns de um exílio inicial voluntário. Povoado também de territorialidades físicas, geográfica, que parecem sempre hostis, como se toda e qualquer terra fosse, *a priori*, estrangeira" [*Terra estrangeira* is populated with torn characters, in transit, hostages of an initial voluntary exile. It is also full of physical, geographical territorialities that always seem hostile, as if every land were, *a priori*, foreign] (2004, 21). These words allude to the antagonism between the city and its inhabitants, a tension that will be emphasized throughout the film.

The opposition between home and foreign land is deeply felt by Manuela and her son Paco, both residents of São Paulo. The first take shows Manuela concerned about her survival at a busy intersection and oblivious to a giant billboard

that sells Hope, a lingerie brand.<sup>5</sup> There is also an ad, featuring a young, dynamic male model, promoting the clothing brand Mash, a foreboding sign about the grinding pace of the metropolis. A Basque immigrant and her family's breadwinner, Manuela depends on the fruits of her labor, which have allowed her to attain middle class status as evidenced by her ample and well-furnished apartment. Nonetheless, she no longer feels at home in São Paulo and hopes to convince her son to visit her native San Sebastián with her. Her desire to return "home" reflects her feeling of alienation from the city/country in which she currently resides, but, young Paco, a first-generation Brazilian, has other ideas. Manuela's plans are suddenly dashed when the democratic government unexpectedly freezes the Brazilian population's savings. Shocked and upset by this news, Manuela passes away. Her death has crucial consequences for Paco, who now left orphaned, starts perceiving São Paulo as an unfamiliar landscape. When he has to make arrangements to bury his mother, he discovers that "his" city and its services are unknown to him, a development that highlights his feelings of foreignness. He starts seeing the city as overwhelming for its residents. A slow pan of the tombs in the cemetery, uniformly laid and silent, reinforces the notion of São Paulo as a grinding and harsh city, as do the apartment buildings seen at a distance that also resemble tombs.

In *Terra estrangeira*, São Paulo is shown as an impassive witness to the young protagonist's trials and tribulations. The first shot of Paco shows him sitting next to a window, a liminal space between home and city. In that space, he enjoys a privileged location as the sun shines in the background: he can look at the city without suffering the crushing effects of traffic and noise that his mother encounters on the ground level as she does her errands. Once Manuela dies, Paco makes his home his refuge, blocking out the city's neglectful presence. When he ventures out for an audition and fails to perform, the city offers no comfort to his emotional distress. Two different shots underscore this lack of sympathy. The first offers a bird's-eye view that captures the deserted Minhocão and the monumental billboard advertising consumer goods. This take emphasizes failed promises: the highway, built to alleviate traffic, is now closed to motorists and the billboard stands as a reminder of the capitalist goods that are out of reach for the thousands of citizens who, like Manuela, have seen their savings evaporate overnight. The second shot shows Paco as he contemplates his dire circumstances, sitting alone under an overpass. Having descended from his apartment and lost his self-confidence, he seems to be a disoriented youth. Both shots are incongruous images of a vibrant

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<sup>5</sup> Deborah Tudor explains that "a concomitant phenomenon [of the twenty-first century] is the emergence of more sexually explicit female images in advertising, notably underwear ads" (63).

city and financial center. On one hand, São Paulo extols market and human mobility. On the other, it is gravely impacted by the newly-passed neoliberal reforms that limit the population's access to its own funds. These aerial and ground views of the city's landscape convey both loneliness and stagnation.

São Paulo's disparate urban status disavows a public renegotiation of citizenship, making individual solutions possible instead. Igor (Luís Melo), a sympathetic stranger, meets Paco at a bar, and upon seeing his desolation, suggests that Paco leave the metropolis: "Estamos a viver no império da mediocridade, dos engarrafamentos, dos shoppings centers, dessa falsa modernidade dos janotas incultos. É o fim do mundo" [We are living in the empire of mediocrity, of traffic jams and shopping centers, of that false modernity of educated yuppies. It's the end of the world]. Igor's somewhat exaggerated assessment lists the features of late capitalism. More importantly, his seemingly embittered discourse appeals to the orphaned Paco, who sees him as a potential role model and authority figure. Film scholar Deborah Shaw has pointed out that absent fathers "can no longer provide economic support or protect their families (citizens)" (2004, 87). Without a father's presence, for Paco, the city feels like a foreign land in which the privileges of his middle-class existence are slowly disappearing from his reach. Thus, he accepts Igor's suggestion of taking a suitcase to Lisbon as a first stop on a journey to find his origins, opting for an individual solution. His final moments in São Paulo are spent dreaming about his mother's native land, San Sebastián, as the place where he hopes to rekindle ties of kinship and solidarity that will allow him to reclaim his middle-class status and his "citizenship" as a consumer. Lúcia Nagib judiciously explains that "Paco represents one of the 800,000 emigrants who left the country during the less than two years of the Collor government" (2013, 165) and also calls attention to Sebastianism: "a nostalgia for the lost homeland" (2013, 173). For her part, Andrea França Martins "stresses that the fatherland (*pátria*) loses its significance as territorial reference in the film and is redefined by the characters' journey in which other emotional communities are delineated" (quoted in Overhoff Ferreira 2012, 210). My reading complements those of Nagib and França Martins, as I propose that the city of São Paulo is the fatherland that loses its grip on the young male character, giving way to a desire to reconnect to an ideal land in opposition to his native city. Hence, San Sebastián is not just another saint, as Igor jokes; rather, it is São Paulo's counterpart, a coastal city and small sea-side resort known for its distinct cultural life that has accepted globalization without losing its distinctiveness.

*Terra estrangeira*'s ending is far from reassuring. Embroiled in a case of drug trafficking instigated by Igor, Paco is wounded. His uncertain prospects lie at the hands of Alex (Fernanda Torres), another Brazilian who has immigrated to Europe, but has failed—like Paco—to build a stable life and meaningful bonds with her Portuguese hosts. Displaced from home, Alex and Paco both constantly inhabit a foreign land, implicitly renouncing their Brazilian citizenship over and over again. Their separation from a state that used to protect its citizens highlights the risks of living in a world shaped by globalization. The portrayal of São Paulo as a city overly affected by globalization and the absence of the father are also the topics of Salles and Thomas' 2008 film.

### *Linha de passe*

*Linha de passe* takes place in contemporary São Paulo, where a lower-middle-class, single-parent family explores ways to assert its citizenship and belonging. Years after the introduction of neoliberalism, São Paulo is now a post-industrial society, illustrative of the country's new status as an emerging economy and one of the BRICS countries (Conde and Jazeel 2013, 446). While the label "emerging economy" refers to a country that is experiencing rapid growth—usually by industrialization—, such nation is attempting that growth in a climate of a modernity that dissolves, in Ulrich Beck's words, industrial society (2004, 10). Therefore, one of the unintended consequences of Brazil's participation in the world's economy has been high unemployment and underemployment, affecting mainly young people and contributing to a heightened awareness of social class divisions and inequality.

Discrimination and social divisions in São Paulo are central themes in *Linha de passe*. For Brazilian psychologist Renato Tardivo, the film presents social humiliation, a prevalent feature of the city of São Paulo: "É esta a São Paulo captada pela lente de Walter Salles e Daniela Thomas—a São Paulo da perspectiva do humilhado social; uma São Paulo em que o sol, à iminência de nascer, nunca nasce de fato e, reversivelmente, a iminência de se pôr, jamais se põe (a propósito, a luz do filme é sombria)" [This is the São Paulo captured by the lens of Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas—the São Paulo from the perspective of the humiliated public; a São Paulo in which the sun, on the brink of rising, never actually rises and, conversely, on the brink of setting, never sets (coincidentally, the film's lighting is somber)] (2014, n.p.). Indeed, the film abounds in a palette of greys and beiges to portray the daily challenges faced by mother Cleuza (Sandra Corveloni) and her four sons Dênis (João Baldasserini), Dinho (Geraldo Rodrigues), Dario (Vinícius

de Oliveira), and Reginaldo (Kaike Jesus Santos), all residents of Cidade Líder. This district, ironically named “City Leader,” began growing rapidly in the 1940s and expanded in a disorderly fashion in the following decades as those employed in manufacturing chose it in which to build their humble houses. As members of a post-industrial society, none of the characters in this family is involved in production: Cleuza, Dinho, and Dênis work in the service sector as maid, gas station attendant, and *motoboy*, respectively. These workers are representative of a flexible work force that is not represented by unions, and does not enjoy certain rights (such as maternity and sick leaves, paid vacations, etc.). For their parts, Dario is the family’s golden boy because of his talent as a soccer player and Reginaldo, a minor, is still in school.

The characters assert their belonging to the city as they freely circulate around it, even though certain spaces are closed to them. For instance, Dario, who longs to become a professional soccer player, has to explain to talent recruiters and soccer coaches that his neighborhood is part of metropolitan São Paulo. While most of the characters enjoy freedom of circulation, they are at the same time “confined” to the working-class suburbs, one of the marks of neoliberalism according to Harvey. For Cleuza and Dinho, who rely on public transportation to get to their jobs, the city is a distant place reached only after a long and numbing commute. Reginaldo also uses public transportation as a means to constantly traverse the city and often flee from his family. His journeys present him with new opportunities, such as learning how to drive a bus and befriending a motorist, but also expose him to urban violence and crime (he witnesses the vandalization of several buses). Dênis also knows the ugly side of São Paulo, as he has to survive the city’s chaotic traffic every day. He encounters firsthand the modernization risks that Beck characterizes as unpredictable and erratic (2004, 28). Scott Lash and Bryan Winne explain in their introduction to *Risk Society* that “the axial principle of industrial society is the distribution of goods, while that of the risk society is the distribution of ‘bads’ or dangers” (2008, 3). Like her son, Cleuza is also exposed to risks: in one scene, we see her body leaning outside a high-rise building as she cleans the window. Cleuza and Dênis experience the city’s segregation as they have limited access, due to their work, to areas that would otherwise be closed off to them. The downtown, with its high-rises and business district, “remains a key form of centrality” (Sassen, 2002, 13) that draws in and repels the main characters. Dario’s skill as a soccer player allows him to enter spaces that would normally be off limits to him (due to his social class). He is the only one of Cleuza’s boys who socializes with the son of her employer, playing by his side in the “building’s championship.”

Like *Terra estrangeira*, *Linha de passe* shows a cycle of fatherless families, which, Deborah Shaw has interpreted as the fall of patriarchal structures (2004, 85). The father's absence in Cleuza's home is more acutely felt by Afro-Brazilian Reginaldo, whose appearance is very different from that of his brothers. Despite his status as the cute *caçula* (youngest of the family), he needs a father who will curb his manipulative ways. Curiously, the eldest son Dênis also suffers from the lack of moral guidance from an adult male as he resorts to petty criminality to make ends meet. Dênis is himself an absent father for his young son. Not only does he not live with him, but he also falls behind in his child support payments, though not for lack of affection, as we see when he buys his son a teddy bear. He hopes the present will endear him to the boy, but it constitutes a stark and poor substitute for his presence. In *Linha de passé*, the father's absence creates a void that clearly alludes to the restricted role of the state in neoliberal times. In different ways, Cleuza's sons are all looking for a father figure: Dario is lucky to have a caring and supportive mentor who knows about the politics of soccer and opens doors for him in this competitive sport, while Dinho has a father-like figure in his church's pastor, though he is far from being a thoroughly moral character.

Depicted as a way to combat separation in such a harsh urban environment, brotherhood in São Paulo, both literally and figuratively, is a central organizing theme of the film. The bonds of literal and familiar brotherhood are shown when the brothers play soccer together, exhibit their mutual interests, and help each other out on different occasions. For example, when Dênis brings a friend and needs money, Dinho and Reginaldo reluctantly gives him some, and when Dario passes out, both Dênis and Dinho try to wake him up. Brotherhood is also experienced beyond the family. Dario feels a sense of camaraderie with the other soccer players, especially during the brief but intense moments at try-outs. A sense of brotherhood links the believers at his church where the attendees are referred to as "irmãos" [brothers]. Soccer also brings Cleuza into a new familial fold. A supporter of the Corinthians soccer club, she is seen in the opening scenes, clinging to the team's flag and singing "Corinthians é minha vida" [Corinthians is my life]. Her passion for this soccer team speaks to an identity indirectly related to the city that prioritizes her social class and level of education (Ridge 2014, 425). Loyalty to the nation and political citizenship is now privatized, replaced by an affiliation with the local soccer team. The camera also captures the reactions and gestures of the other soccer fans, which resemble the religious customs and rites that take place at the Evangelical church that Dinho attends. When the pastor notes that they are gradually deserting him, he asks Dinho, "Vamos orar pelos irmãos que vão nos abandonar?" [Are we

going to pray for the brothers who will leave us?]) The question remains unanswered, testing both the young man's faith as well as his ties to his fellow believers. Both soccer and religion appear as highly ritualized activities that demand active participation and are institutions, in a post-industrial society, to which lonely and disenfranchised citizens turn, hoping to recreate bonds of solidarity and belonging, apart from political affiliations.

If brotherhood allows the creation of new identities for some of these characters and provides safety nets for them, those without social support become invisible in the metropolis and fall into criminality. Dênis and Reginaldo, for example, are pushed to *malandragem*. Literary critic Antonio Cândido defines the *malandro* as an anti-hero, one whose actions are oriented towards self-gain or a specific problem (1970, 71). Unlike the other members of the family, these brothers are unable to build meaningful bonds and thus lead lives based on short-term goals. Dênis risks his life daily, navigating the busy streets of São Paulo, where traffic accidents and crime abound. He has a son, but fails to support him, spending what little money he can get on brief sexual encounters. Without special talents, he is an invisible, low-paid worker, one more of the hundreds who roam the streets of São Paulo. His initiation into crime occurs when he witnesses a robbery by another *motoboy*, retrieves the bag that is discarded and gives it to his mother. In another scene, he buys a stuffed animal for his son. These acts show that Dênis has limited access to consumer goods (mainly only through his criminal activities) and does not spend money wisely. By mugging others, he can temporarily pay his child support, but during one escapade, his accomplice falls from his motorcycle and, instead of rescuing him, Dênis flees to save himself. This scene is telling because it shows Dênis' lack of loyalty toward his partner in crime who can help him earn money. For his part, young Reginaldo is also an invisible *malandro* who wanders the city streets. His displaced status within his family is stressed by the fact that, unlike his brothers who share a room, he sleeps on the sofa. He tries to assuage his displacement at home by taking long bus rides looking for his father, a bus driver. Based on Marc Auge's definition of non-places, Rachel Randall has astutely pointed out that the boy's endless rides on public buses place him "nowhere" (2014, 9). In this nowhere, he becomes invisible; though bus drivers report "seeing" him, the child's strange behavior does not alarm them, nor do they attempt to understand his dilemma. Thus, he is yet another unaccompanied youth in an impersonal environment.

Although São Paulo is as indifferent to the plight of its residents in *Linha de passe* as in *Terra estrangeira*, in the former, there seems to be no way out of the city

for its self-centered characters. Their choices are all marked by individualism, a feature that Toby Miller identifies with the time in which they live: “neoliberalism understood people exclusively through the precepts of selfishness” (2011, 22). Thus, Cleuza’s pregnancy, resented by two of her sons, diminishes her capacity as a provider, but also brings her the hope of having someone who will love her. Dênis and Reginaldo act motivated by pleasure without commitments: one, enjoying sexual dalliances; the other, fleeing in search of an absent father. Dario belongs to an intermediate position: he is the one who rolls up his sleeves to unclog the sink, a gesture that validates his place as “the man” of the family, ready to solve its problems, albeit manually. Nonetheless, he repeatedly resorts to devious tricks: first, altering his *carteira de identidade* [identity card] and then lying to both his mentor and coach to be allowed to play. Different from all members of his family, Dinho is the only one guided by self-abnegation, but when his reformed life is questioned by his boss, who refuses to see him as the victim of a robbery, he reacts violently. Drunk, he seeks refuge at his church and later helps in a christening ceremony, an event that reminds him of the possibility of starting anew. These five endings are far from promising: most of the characters barely contribute to processes of production, which barely permits them to participate in consumption. Nevertheless, they mostly rely on themselves to get ahead in their lives. Only Dinho and, to some extent, Dario seem to have the backing of mentors and some ties of brotherhood that, albeit weak, allow them to be part of their local community.

In short, both *Terra estrangeira* and *Linha de passe* present the city of São Paulo as an impassive milieu during neoliberalism, yet, while in the first film the city is abandoned and does not offer any hope for possibility, in the second, each character is given the opportunity to negotiate his or her own relationship with the urban environment. Those with stronger communal ties, corresponding to a brotherhood, are better prepared to weather the uncertainties of socio-economic and cultural life in a post-industrial society. Coincidentally, they are also the ones who count on father figures to act as points of reference who have some knowledge. Far from romanticizing life in a metropolitan city, Salles and Thomas present the daily challenges of humble citizens in their dealings in and with the city and its different forms of communal associations. Contrary to Caldeira’s description of São Paulo as a city of walls, in *Terra estrangeira* and *Linha de passe*, the filmmakers emphasize the fluid exchanges between the city’s center and its periphery, as well as the divergent options for its most dispossessed citizens: either associations or anonymity to renegotiate their belonging to the city.

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