



It’s a city inside a city. Unlike the bigger city that surrounds it, this city does not dominate, debilitate or compete. Its residents are part of an isolated micro culture with its own distinctive ‘lifestyle’. Each resident owns his or her own house. Rarely do couples or families share the same roof. While all the houses are grey and made of stone, craftsmanship and styles vary. Some are large and quite beautiful, decorated like small castles; pillars accentuating a majestic entrance; a statue of an angel decorating the front garden. There are sculptures of flowers, a mother holding the body of her dead son, the torso of a scholarly-looking wrinkled old man next to the portrait of a woman smiling, the tight-muscled body of a young athlete. Other residents occupy more humble dwellings, devoid of any architectural flourishes — a block of streets with houses all in the same plain standard design. Here and there a plant or pot of flowers marks a particular residence, differentiating it from all the other identical ones around it. Some of the residents live in cellars and some in an area the size of a push cart; in a space just big enough to bury a body. Others have nothing but a hole in the ground. The streets that connect the dwellings in this city are of various widths and design. Some are paved and lined with trees, others are nothing but gravel roads and sand paths. The streets have no names and the dwellings no numbers. The only identifying markers are the names and dates of birth of the residents, and the dates they moved in. If you knock on their doors, they will not answer. For reasons unknown, they do not like visitors from the world they left behind. They pretend to be invisible and prefer to be left alone.

# CIDADE DOS MORTOS

WRECKS

This is *Caju*, the ‘City of Death’ and home to 35,000 inhabitants. It is a hierarchical copy of the ‘*Big City*’. The homes of the rich are closest to the entrance. Further along, the architecture begins to change. Castle tombs are gradually replaced by simple standard graves and blocks of row houses. Eventually the path ends at a large expanse of empty field with nothing but the odd crooked cross sticking up out of the ground. At first it appears to be unused territory waiting to be filled with new houses. In reality, this is the home of the poorest of the poor in *Caju*. As evening approaches, swarms of mosquitoes descend on the city. These are the guards of ‘Cidade dos Mortos’ announcing it is time to leave. ‘GO! GO!’ they seem to scream as they buzz and dive, attacking from all sides. Soon it will be dark and the ghosts of the city will awaken. **(Repórter sem Beiras)**

*Cidade dos Mortos*, *Jornal de Artigos Não Lidos* Archive: ‘Cidade dos Mortos’, *Jornal de Artigos Não Lidos*, November 25, 2010. This article is based a residence in Rio de Janeiro, July & August 2010. Written by Repórter sem Beiras.

Glossary **Big City** — refers to Rio de Janeiro. **Caju** — is the popular name for the São Francisco Xavier Cemetery, a necropolis in Rio de Janeiro. It is considered one of the largest cemeteries in Brazil. It is located in the neighborhood of Caju in northern Rio de Janeiro.

# REPÓRTER SEM BEIRAS OR THE OTHER IS YOU

Daniela Labra

“Observe the observed observer”  
(W. Burroughs)

Many readers have probably never set foot on Brazilian soil. Clearly the theme discussed in this show — everyday life in the Brazilian favelas — is a foreign urban experience. Apart from being geographically distant, this reality bends and recreates the European influence that was engrained in Brazil with the arrival of the Portuguese royal family in 1808.

It is also unlikely that you are familiar with the events of the second half of the nineteenth century and the role of the country’s intellectual elite in the years following independence. Inspired by the ideas of the Enlightenment, they supported the project of constructing a rising tropical Continent-Nation, a nation which excluded the poorest members of society, emancipated slaves and women. This, it seems, is what prevented the future development of a modern, socially-inclusive country. It also led to other problems, such as the phenomenon of today’s urban favelas.

The favelas are areas of paradox and poverty where official power is subverted. They are also places where new aesthetics and economic paradigms are being created and invented. In order to understand how things work here, one needs to experience these contrasting regions from an insider’s perspective, i.e. from the perspective of the favela dwellers themselves.

At a time of global economic crisis, Brazil, with its human and natural resources, has been rising politically in the intense panorama of international capitalism and degraded ecosystems. It has been trying to be seen as a territory of miscegenation, offering strategies for overcoming and resisting hegemonic nations in decline.

In this sense, “improvising” Brazilian style has become an inside trademark and cliché. It is used both as a first and last resource and offers real, positive possibilities for production in times of adversity. But it also generates the problem of believing in the “temporary-permanent” where unfinished public and private situations end up becoming ultimate solutions. In a way, the favela is the achievement of this peculiar Brazilian operational means.

“Repórter sem Beiras”, developed by designer Annelies Vaneycken, began as a “social design” project that deals with stigmatized populations and the negative perception attributed to them by society. Looking to transform through visual communications, and uncomfortable with the established, commercial side of graphic design, she decided to create a series of graphic pieces with poor communities in Brazil.

Vaneycken is interested in deconstructing social roles that have become cultural identity clichés. For this reason, she spent long periods of time inside communities in Rio de Janeiro and Recife where she conducted workshops in visual communications. The news articles she worked on addressed simple questions raised in the favelas by the people themselves. Issues like misery and violence, so often the focus of the media, were not among them. Annelies Vaneycken works as an information (and empowerment) communicator for those who have no access to any form of media. Despite the risk that these practices involve — in terms of confining the object that is being studied in an ethnographic vision — she deals with unknown logistics carefully in order to study them without moral judgement.

For Vaneycken, outsiders occupy a central position in the study, and she describes herself as one of the “Others”. By admitting her own inadequacy in the periphery of the world’s periphery, she avoids all posturing (which could diminish the poetic and political objective of her work) and the temptation to use clichés that are close-minded and ‘aestheticise’ the media. In this sense, there is no “Other” in her work — just you and us.