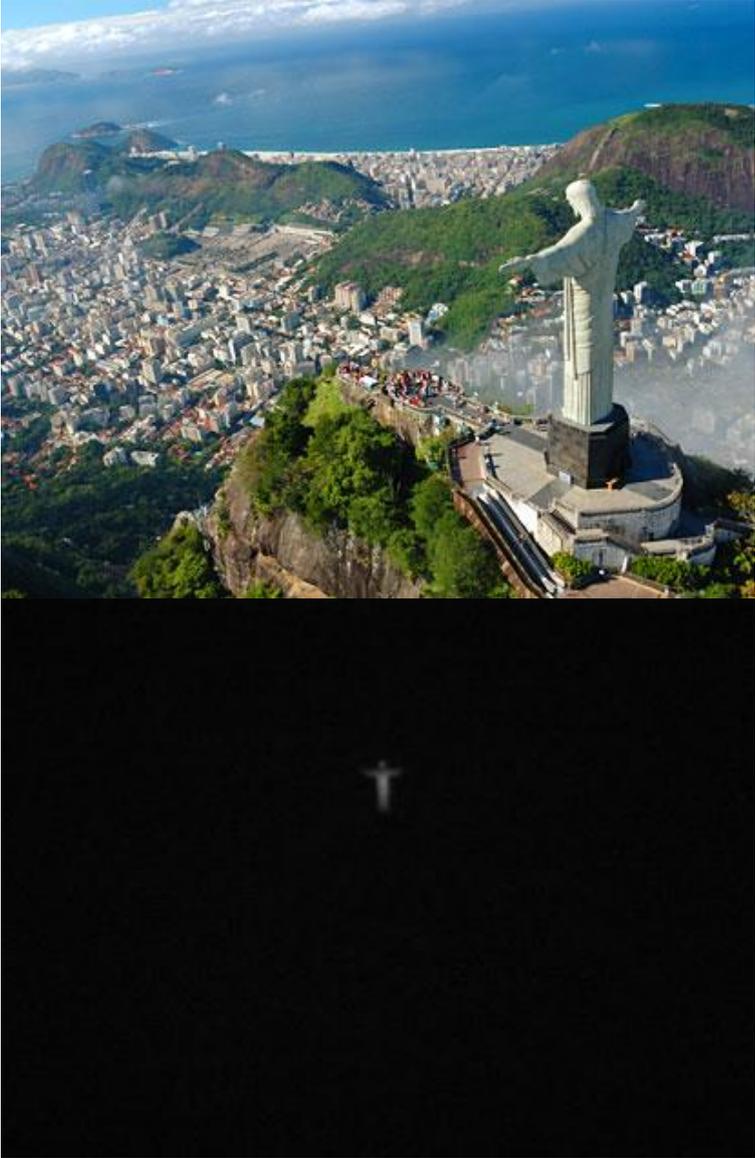


Rio Life and Conditions







Rio is one of the most beautiful cities in the world, and cariocas (people from Rio) are the most casually dressed people you will find. It is known for carnival, samba, soccer, cachaça, beaches and 710 m

above Christ is overlooking it all. The 30 m tall statue from 1931 is a monument to commemorate 100 years of Brazilian independence.

From 1964 to 1985 Brazil had a military dictatorship.

22% of the 6 millions inhabitants of Rio lives in favelas, shanty towns or communities as some inhabitants I meet prefer to call them. Favelas “grow” mostly on public ground as they gain residents rights after 5 years. Because Rio has mountains with public land inside the city there are approx. 750 favelas are everywhere you look.

The favelas are reputed for their drug trafficking but some estimates that only 5% of the inhabitants are involved. The 95% suffer from that image. The non-favela people I meet had never been to a favela except to buy drugs or visit a samba school! They expressed fear and referred to the daily shooting heard in Rio as coming from drug and thereby (!) favela related incidents!

To my great surprise it was in an art context I should find the information with the least amount of prejudice. In the 2003 Venice Biennale catalogue for “The Structure of Survival” platform I found a text called “Striving for Progress – Struggling to Survive. The formation of shanty towns” by Peter Lloyd.

Here I found expressions like “deploying alternative modes of community”, “slums of despair and slums of hope”, “deserving and undeserving poor”, “the shanty town is a problem – but it is also the solution to a problem”

Peter Lloyd refers to fieldwork by a number of scholars in the 70’s and 80’s in the shanty towns:

“In the shanty towns they met men and women who had made a conscious decision to move to the city to improve the quality of their lives. For these migrants’ a communal water tap which flowed sporadically, or the tanker which filled one’s 44 gallon drum every third day was an improvement on the long trek to a muddy stream. A couple of low wattage bulbs fed with electricity pirated from overhead cables were better than candles or oil lamps. City primary schools were probably better than those in the village; secondary school did not exist in rural areas. City hospitals, albeit crowded and expensive, at least offered hope of treatment; in the village rudimentary medical facilities might well be tens of miles away.

Contrary to many prevailing images the shanty town residents – as we shall see below – were law abiding citizens, family structures were strong, community ties well developed, psychological impairments rare. The residents were striving to get ahead – to build a better home, to get a better job, to give their children a better start in life.

In establishing themselves in the shanty town they had successfully gained a foothold in the city, managing to reach the lowest steps of the ladder of success. But these descriptions were of people who had arrived in the city but twenty, or perhaps only ten, years previously. Since then three decades have passed. Have their hopes been realised – or has their success been constrained by factors far beyond their control?”

The people I meet and talked to were all just as anybody else I meet. The only distinction I noticed was that almost no one living in a favela spoke English whereas all the non-favelas did!

However, for the first time “community” was a term that could rightfully be applied. To come from a flat property with 8 flats with an almost non-existing community and experience Mangueira de Botafogo with 3,000 inhabitants was amazing. To walk around with Janaina, Gabriela and a bunch of children and see how everybody knew each other and interacted were great.

(Please see my essay about Community, [Artist and Community – On Offer: a Dis-illusion of Transparency.](#))