

# WALTER SALLÉS SYMPOSIUM

Thursday June 30 – Friday July 1, 2022

Minghella Studios  
Whiteknights Campus  
University of Reading



## On the occasion of the University of Reading's conferment of an Honorary Degree to Brazil's iconic filmmaker, **WALTER SALLES**, a symposium in his honour will take place, addressing his oeuvre and artistic vision, including a keynote by the director himself.

Walter Salles's filmic work centres on issues of national identity and displacement. *Foreign Land (Terra estrangeira)*, which focused on the Brazilian political turmoil of the early 1990s, received the prize for Best Brazilian Film in 1995. *Central Station (Central do Brasil)* won the Golden Bear and the Silver Bear for best actress at the 1998 Berlin Film Festival. During its development, *Central Station's* screenplay received the Sundance/ NHK award. His other films received prizes at the Cannes (*Linha de Passe*), Venice (*Behind the Sun*), and San Sebastian Film Festivals. Salles also won the Golden Globe and the British BAFTA twice (*The Motorcycle Diaries* and *Central Station*). Films that Salles has directed or produced have received a total of 8 Oscar nominations, including one win for *The Motorcycle Diaries*. In 2014, Salles directed *Jia Zhangke, a guy from Fenyang*, a documentary on the Chinese independent film director. *The World of Jia Zhangke*, a book with interviews conducted by Salles and Jean-Michel Frodon, was launched at the 2014 São Paulo International Film Festival. Salles is also a producer of first features made by young directors from Brazil, such as Karim Ainouz, Sérgio Machado, Eryk Rocha and Flávia Castro. In 2020, Salles received the FIAF Award, in recognition of his work in film preservation. He was also the recipient of the Robert Bresson Award from the Venice Film Festival, and the Marc'Antonio d'Oro Award from the Rome Film Festival.

### PROGRAMME

#### 30 June

16:00-16:15 - Opening address – **Lúcia Nagib**

16:15-18:25 – Screening: *The Passenger* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1975): 'The film that made me a filmmaker'

18:25-18:30 – Comfort break

18:30-19:30 – **Walter Salles** in conversation with **Laura Mulvey**

19:30-20:00 – Reception

#### 01 July

10:00-11:30 - Panel 1

**Tiago de Luca:** '*Central Station, Revisited*'

**Stephanie Dennison:** '*When the Earth Trembles: Walter Salles and BRICS filmmaking*'

**Natália Pinazza:** '*On Board: Vehicles in Walter Salles' Films*'

11:30-11:45 – Coffee break

11:45-13:15 – Panel 2

**Claire Williams:** '*Looking for Latin America: Identity in The Motorcycle Diaries*'

**Cecília Mello:** '*Walter Salles and China: breaching an antipodal distance, affectively*'

**Lúcia Nagib:** '*Deconstructing Foundational Myths: Foreign Land's Geography of Exclusion*'

13:15-14:15 – Lunch

14:15-15:15 – Keynote Speech

**Walter Salles:** '*What can cinema do for us today?*'

15:15-15:30 – Tea break

15:30-17:25 – Screening: *Central Station* (Walter Salles, 1998)

17:25-17:30 – Comfort break

17:30-18:30 – **Walter Salles** in conversation with **Geoff Andrew**

### ABSTRACTS

#### '*Central Station, Revisited*' – Tiago de Luca

*Central Station (Central do Brasil)*, Walter Salles, 1998) was the most emblematic film to emerge from the Retomada (Brazilian Film Revival). It accordingly received voluminous critical and scholarly attention upon and after its release, often in relation to questions of national identity and its perceived aestheticisation of the *sertão*. In this paper I want to revisit this film from today's perspective and thus away from the debates that overdetermined much of its critical reception. With the benefit of hindsight, some features of the film fall into the background while others become newly salient in return. In particular, I would like to explore the role played by physical objects in the film and how they accrue semiotic value through the narrative as it unfolds over a specified time period. In a similar gesture, I want to look at these objects and the film itself in time, that is, from a contemporary standpoint that compels us to see *Central Station* in a new light and as a historical object in its own right.

#### '*When the Earth Trembles: Walter Salles and BRICS filmmaking*' – Stephanie Dennison

This paper will discuss Walter Salles' 2017 contribution to a portmanteau film, *Where Has Time Gone?*, the first in a series of films co-produced by Jia Zhangke, made to showcase cultural cooperation among the BRICS countries. The contribution, entitled *When the Earth Trembles*, is a fictional account of the aftermath of the real-life mudslides caused by a dam bursting in Mariana, Minas Gerais, with loss of life and the displacement of hundreds of inhabitants. I will begin with a brief contextualising of the film in Salles' other contributions to international portmanteau films, before turning my attention to the Mariana environmental disaster, and the broader context of BRICS filmmaking.

#### '*On Board: Vehicles in Walter Salles' Films*' – Natália Pinazza

There has been a marked increase in road movies in Latin America since the 1990s with filmmakers from the region breaking into the global market. In this context, the work of Walter Salles emerges as a unique and pertinent

contribution to the road movie genre, interweaving journeys of self-discovery and national and even regional concerns as with the case of *The Motorcycle Diaries*. This paper will analyse a selected body of Salles' films and the ways in which vehicles, a quintessential motif of the road movie genre, inform the dramatic structure of the journey. In focusing on vehicles and their impact on the narrative structure in Salles' work, this paper will examine the extent to which they create a distinctive cinematic language.

### **'Looking for Latin America: Identity in *The Motorcycle Diaries*' – Claire Williams**

Walter Salles's *The Motorcycle Diaries* (*Los diarios de motocicleta*, 2014) is a truly pan-American film. It can be read on many levels: as a road movie, a historical travel documentary, a travelogue and guide to sites of symbolic or tourist significance across Latin America, and a representation of two young men's rites of passage. This paper will consider the construction of a Latin American identity that recognises differences and celebrates common struggles.

### **'Walter Salles and China: breaching an antipodal distance, affectively' – Cecilia Mello**

My paper will focus on Walter Salles's relationship with the People's Republic of China – its geography, people, culture and cinema. Salles has made some significant visits to China, the first as a teenager in 1979, travelling as far as Guilin near the border with Vietnam, at a time when the two countries fought a brief war. The second visit happened in the 1980s, when he supervised and later edited the documentary *China: The Empire of the Centre*, directed by his brother João Moreira Salles, a profound gaze upon the country as it was being reshaped by Deng Xiaoping's reforms. The documentary opened a window into China after decades of isolation, and was broadcast in two parts by TV Manchete. Notwithstanding the major differences in style, the documentary invites comparisons with Antonioni's *Cina*, made in the early 1970s for television channel RAI. Antonioni is also behind some of the affinities between Walter Salles and his Chinese colleague Jia Zhangke, who prompted another visit to China and who is affectionately portrayed in Salles's 2014 documentary, *Jia Zhangke: A Guy from Fenyang*. In this documentary, intertextuality works as a means to reflect upon China's unprecedented transformations and upon the place and the role of cinema within them.

### **'Deconstructing Foundational Myths: Foreign Land's Geography of Exclusion' – Lúcia Nagib**

*Foreign Land* (*Terra estrangeira*), directed by Walter Salles and Daniella Thomas in 1995, has gained new relevance in the face of Brazil's disastrous government currently in power. It allows us to view today's political crisis not as a historical blip, but as the result of foundational myths dating back to the country's colonial past. The film focuses on the election and brief ruling of a previous nefarious government in the early 1990s, which caused a massive exodus of unemployed Brazilians to the old colonial centre, Portugal. Shot mainly on location in São Paulo, Lisbon and Cape Verde, it promotes the encounter of Lusophone peoples who find common ground in their marginal situation. Viewed from afar, their native countries are reduced to invisible proportions, despite their great territorial

extensions. Even Portugal is defined by its location at the edge of Europe and by beliefs such as Sebastianism, whose origins go back to the time when it was dominated by Spain. As a result, notions of 'core' or 'centre' are devolved to the realm of myth. This paper attempts to demonstrate how a perspectival shift between great and small, centre and periphery permeates the film at all levels and accounts for its enduring qualities.

### **Keynote Speech: 'What can cinema do for us today?' – Walter Salles**

At a time of radical changes to the way we interact with our surroundings, can cinema still serve as a powerful medium to unveil the world? In this talk, I will endeavour to look back at the invention of the cinematograph, the Lumière brothers and Thomas Edison as an attempt to shed light on this debate.

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

**Geoff Andrew** is Programmer-at-large for BFI Southbank. Formerly Head of Film Programme for BFI Southbank, he was also film editor of *Time Out* magazine for many years, and is a regular contributor to *Sight & Sound*; he is also a programme advisor to the BFI London Film Festival. His numerous books on the cinema including studies of Nicholas Ray and the American 'indie' filmmakers of the 1980s and '90s, and BFI Classics monographs on Kieslowski's Three Colours Trilogy and Kiarostami's *10*. He is the editor of *Sight & Sound's* 'Auteurs Series' anthologies devoted to Jean-Luc Godard and Martin Scorsese. He has contributed to many anthologies and DVD extras, lectured widely on the cinema, and served on film festival juries in Cannes, Venice, Istanbul, Turin, Krakow, Morelia, Sarajevo and elsewhere. In 2009 the French government made him a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. He writes on film, music and the other arts at [geoffandrew.com](http://geoffandrew.com)

**Dr Tiago de Luca** is Reader in Film Studies at the University of Warwick. He is the author of *Planetary Cinema: Film, Media and the Earth* (2022) and *Realism of the Senses in World Cinema: The Experience of Physical Reality* (2014), and the co-editor of *Slow Cinema* (2016) and *Towards an Intermedial History of Brazilian Cinema* (2022). He is the editor, with Lúcia Nagib, of the Film Thinks series (Bloomsbury).

**Prof Stephanie Dennison** holds a Chair in Brazilian Studies at the University of Leeds, where she directs the Centre for World Cinemas and Digital Cultures. She led an AHRC-funded project on soft power, filmmaking and the BRICS countries. Her two most recent books are the monograph *Remapping Brazilian Film Culture in the Twenty-first Century* (Routledge, 2020) and the co-edited volume *Cinema and Soft Power: Configuring the National and Transnational in Geo-politics* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021).

**Prof Cecilia Mello** is Professor of Film in the Department of Film, Radio and Television, University of São Paulo, Brazil, and currently Visiting Scholar at King's College London. She is the author of *The Cinema of Jia Zhangke: Realism and Memory in Chinese Film* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

**Prof Laura Mulvey** is Professor of Film at Birkbeck College, University of London. She is the author of: *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Macmillan 1989/2009), *Fetishism and Curiosity* (British Film Institute 1996/2013), *Citizen Kane* (BFI Classics series 1992/2012), *Death Twenty-four Times a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (Reaktion Books 2006) and *Afterimages: On Cinema, Women and Changing Times* (Reaktion Books 2019). She made six films in collaboration with Peter Wollen including *Riddles of the Sphinx* (British Film Institute 1977; dvd 2013) and *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti* (Arts Council 1980). With artist/filmmaker Mark Lewis, she has made *Disgraced Monuments* (Channel 4 1994) and *23 August 2008* (2013).

---

**Prof Lúcia Nagib** is Professor of Film at the University of Reading. Her research has focused, among other subjects, on polycentric approaches to world cinema, new waves and new cinemas, cinematic realism and intermediality. She is the author of many books, including *Realist Cinema as World Cinema: Non-cinema, Intermedial Passages, Total Cinema* (Amsterdam University Press, 2020), *World Cinema and the Ethics of Realism* (Bloomsbury, 2011) and *Brazil on Screen: Cinema Novo, New Cinema, Utopia* (I.B. Tauris, 2007). Her edited books include *Impure Cinema: Intermedial and Intercultural Approaches to Film* (with Anne Jerslev, I.B. Tauris, 2013), *Theorizing World Cinema* (with Chris Perriam and Rajinder Dudrah, I.B. Tauris, 2011), *Realism and the Audiovisual Media* (with Cecília Mello, Palgrave, 2009) and *The New Brazilian Cinema* (I.B. Tauris, 2003). She is the writer and director, with Samuel Paiva, of the award-winning feature-length documentary, *Passages* (UK 2019).

---

**Dr Natália Pinazza** is a lecturer in Portuguese Studies at the University of Exeter. She holds a PhD and MA from the University of Bath and a BA from the University of São Paulo. Her research interests centre on journey narratives, film industry and issues of transnational cinema with a particular focus on Latin America and the Portuguese-speaking world. Her book *Journeys in Argentine and Brazilian Cinema: Road Movies in a Global Era* was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2014. Her other books as an editor include *World Film Location São Paulo* (2013), *World Cinema Directory: Brazil* (2013), *New Approaches to Lusophone Culture* (2016) and *Journeys on Screen: Theory, Ethics, Aesthetics* (2018).

---

**Walter Salles** (for Walter Salles's biography, please see the beginning of this document) Walter Salles's Filmography (from 1995 onwards)

2022 – *I'm Still Here* (in development)

2017 – *When the Earth Trembles*, a short for *Where Has Time Gone*

2015 – *Jia Zhang-ke, a guy from Fenyang*

2013 – *The Square* – a short for *Venice 70: Future Reloaded* – La Biennale di Venezia.

2012 – *On the Road*

2008 – *Linha de Passe* (co-directed by Daniela Thomas)

2007 – *A 8.944km de Cannes* and *Letter to V* – shorts for *Chacun son cinema*, for the 60th Cannes Film Festival

2006 – *Loin du 16ème*, a short for *Paris je t'aime*

2005 – *Dark Water*

2004 – *The Motorcycle Diaries*

2002 – *Un petit message du Brésil*, a short for the Quinzaine des Réalisateurs for the Cannes Film Festival

2001 – *Behind the Sun*

2000 – *Midnight* (co-directed by Daniela Thomas)

1998 – *Central Station*

1995 – *Foreign Land* (co-directed by Daniela Thomas)

---

**Dr Claire Williams** is Associate Professor in Brazilian Literature and Culture at the University of Oxford. Her research focuses on twentieth and twenty-first century women's writing, minority writing and life-writing from the Lusophone world, and her research interests include cinema and translation.

---

## SPONSORED BY:

Department of Film, Theatre & Television (FTT) • School of Arts and Communication Design (ACD)

• Centre for Film Aesthetics and Culture (CFAC) •