

today's landscape. Rather than simply reading about segregation laws, systemic racism, and carceral abuse, following the lives of Elwood and Turner gives the audience an easier way to understand the Jim Crow era and how the lack of rights affected the individuals involved. By attaching historical events to characters, the film builds an emotional connection, which makes the film historically meaningful.

*Carlos Gil*

Kleber Mendonça Filho, director. *The Secret Agent*. MK Productions, 2025.

Kleber Mendonça Filho's *O Agente Secreto (The Secret Agent)* is an arresting political thriller period film set in Brazil during the military dictatorship that existed between 1964 and 1985. Shot on location in the director's native country, the film stars Wagner Moura as Armando Solimões, a widowed former professor who becomes involved with a group of anarcho-communist political dissidents opposed to the dictatorship amidst the vibrant and kaleidoscopic backdrop of the Brazilian Carnival.

The film is set during "a period of mischief:" Carnival in 1977, 13 years into the dictatorship that began with the Brazilian military's coup d'état against then-President João Goulart in 1964. Backed by the United States as part of its greater anti-communist endeavors during the Cold War, the dictatorship employed heavy censorship and numerous human rights violations against its citizens. The film opens with Armando traveling to the northeastern city of Recife when he stops at a gas station with a dead body lying out front; the police arrive, but instead of investigating the body they search Armando's car and shake him down for a bribe.

Arriving in Recife, Armando, using the alias Marcelo, meets with Elza, the head of the local resistance movement and takes an undercover job at the city identity card office to help Brazilians escape from their tyrannical government. Armando uses his office position to search the archives for information about his mother whom he has no memories of, whilst attempting to reconnect with his estranged son Fernando and father-in-law Arlindo. A subplot follows Euclides,

the corrupt chief of police, and his two sons' discovery of a human leg inside of a tiger shark. They dispose of the leg, and several days later a group of elderly women laugh over a newspaper article claiming a group of gay men were attacked in a park after sundown by a human leg.

Eventually it is revealed that Armando has a contract out on his head from Henrique Ghirotti, a powerful Eletrobras (a major Brazilian power electric company similar to PG&E) executive. Several years prior, he and his now-deceased wife Fátima had a disagreement with Ghirotti and his son; after several insults levied at Armando by Ghirotti regarding Armando's political sympathies and lower socioeconomic status, Fátima expresses her contempt for the executive and a fight breaks out. It is unclear if Fátima was killed as a result of this argument. Armando, with Eliza and Arlindo's help, makes plans to flee the country. However, Ghirotti's hitmen locate him in central Recife: they kill Arlindo and pursue Armando through the city. Decades later, history student Flavia meets with a now-grown Fernando, who tells her about his father's murder and admits he has no memory of him.

Although a fictional story, *The Secret Agent* depicts the experiences of many Brazilians during this period. Armando is a stand-in for the average Brazilian citizen whose life has been turned upside down by the dictatorship. The death of his wife and subsequent separation from his son highlight the families that were torn apart during this period, whether jailed, disappeared or murdered. The actions of Euclides and Henrique Ghirotti likewise depict the rampant corruption within the government and business worlds. Filho also shines a light on the socioeconomic problems that plague Brazil to this day: Armando is looked down upon by Ghirotti for being "lower" than him, while the gunman Vilmar takes the job of assassinating Armando because doing so will pay more than his day job. Memory is another important theme, with both Armando and later Fernando having no memories of their mother and father, respectively. That the film is set during the world-famous Carnival, complete with colorful, surreal and occasionally frightening costumes, highlights the absurdity of this time period and how the nation of Brazil had gone "topsy-turvy."

Cameron Harvey