CineBrasil 2015 took the quality of Brazilian films at the festival to new heights. Largely thanks to the vision of curator Flora Thomson-Deveaux, a graduate student at the Portuguese and Brazilian Studies Department with strong ties to the world of Brazilian filmmaking, this year's selection included artistic innovation and social themes of great importance to Brazil.

The first night attracted more than 70 people to the documentary “Últimas Conversas” (Last Conversations) by deceased filmmaker Eduardo Coutinho. This crowd-pleaser consisted of interviews with Brazilian teenagers from a variety of backgrounds touching on bullying, racism, family, and the afterlife among other subjects. Moving and poignant, Coutinho’s final work was a powerful reflection on suffering, intergenerational communication and growing pains of adolescence. Following the film was a conversation about the making of it after Coutinho’s tragic death by one of the producers who completed the editing, João Moreira Salles.

The second night of shorts attracted more than 40 people to think about race and sexuality, dating and hookups, memories of childhood, raising children and the everyday, mundane nature of relationships. The films, in spite of their tight budgets, communicated simple and powerful messages about attachments and emotions that make up life anywhere. Brown University had the lovely privilege of hosting a discussion over Skype about the process of conceiving and producing the films with the promising young group of filmmakers behind the shorts.

The third night boasted two remarkable feature films, “Orestes” and “Futuro Beach.” A documentary that touched on current police brutality, public support of reducing the age of criminal responsibility and human rights abuses of the dictatorship, “Orestes” dug deep into the emotional darkness of victims of these social processes. “Futuro Beach,” an independent film about gay love, family attachments, alienation and the beauty of nature, moved spectators through a world of splendid cinematography and understated feelings.

The fourth and final night moved further into questions of estrangement, alienation and strangeness. “Everyman” followed a truck driver for decades through the intimacy and oddities of his life on the road and with family. “The Man of the Crowd,” inspired by Edgar Allen Poe, tells the story of two peculiar co-workers who work at the operation of trains in Belo Horizonte, the capital of the state of Minas Gerais. Both films, rather than opting for fast-paced dialogue and action, told their stories at a slower pace and showed a disconnect between life and meaning.

-Written by Ramon Stern, Administrative Manager of the Brazil Initiative and the Brazilian Studies Association.