UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS/INGLÊS E LITERATURA CORRESPONDENTE

VIOLENT IMAGES AND THE IMAGES OF VIOLENCE:

THE POLITICS OF VIOLENCE IN URBAN SPACE

IN CONTEMPORARY BRAZILIAN CINEMA

RAMAYANA LIRA DE SOUSA

Tese submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina em cumprimento
parcial dos requisitos para obtenção do grau de

DOUTOR EM LETRAS

FLORIANÓPOLIS
Maio 2009

I, having loved ever since I was a child a few things, never having wavered
In these affections; never through shyness in the houses of the rich or in the presence of clergymen having denied these loves;
Never when worked upon by cynics like chiropractors having grunted or clicked a vertebra to the discredit of those loves;
Never when anxious to land a job having diminished them by a conniving smile; or when befuddled by drink
Jeered at them through heartache or lazily fondled the fingers of their alert enemies; declare

That I shall love you always.
No matter what party is in power;
No matter what temporarily expedient combination of allied interests wins the war;
Shall love you always.

("Modern Declaration", Edna St. Vincent Millay)

For Alessandra

Acknowledgments

It is like running a very long distance. It is lonely sometimes, but not too often, if you are lucky. And I was. When I stopped to gasp they were there.

I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Anelise Corseuil – exemplary scholar and human being. Her academic and personal support, when doubts and difficulties seemed to block my view, worked as a lighthouse. Also, my tutors/teachers at Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês for their provocations, which were invaluable challenges.

My students at Unisul – thank you for demanding the most of me and responding with affection to my vacillations; they were the first, though unknowingly, to test many of the arguments in this dissertation. My colleagues at Unisul – special thanks for being interlocutors who cheered along the way, expecting the final result from the years of shared anxiety and joy for the discoveries.

My friend Luis Felipe Soares – my immense gratitude for helping me understand many things, and, mainly, for instructing me not to panic when I didn't. My friend Antônio João Teixeira - partner in crime, the delicious crime of sharing what we know, what we don't, and what we don't know that we do. My friend Jair Fonseca – a cool and generous sage. My friend Claudia Mesquita – for sharing the angst and the bliss of teaching and research and, mainly, for the warmth.

My partner Alessandra – interlocutor and provocateur. Thank you for making the road even, removing bumps and potholes with tenderness and patience. With you I have been walking through this smooth road of events and affections and intensities.

My family – I realized that all members of my immediate family have been, or still are, in a graduate program. They do know the pain and the bliss that come with academic life, so I share with them the pain and the bliss of this work.

The long-distance runner is not so lonely, after all. There is a little of everybody in what is good about this dissertation. However, its faults are my responsibility only.

Abstract

VIOLENT IMAGES AND THE IMAGES OF VIOLENCE:

THE POLITICS OF VIOLENCE IN URBAN SPACE

IN CONTEMPORARY BRAZILIAN CINEMA

RAMAYANA LIRA DE SOUSA

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
2009

Supervising Professor: Dr. Anelise Corseuil

This dissertation proposes study of contemporary Brazilian films focusing on the portrayal of violence in urban spaces in a number of films set in different cities, namely *Estorvo, Cidade de Deus, Carandiru, O Invasor, Amarelo Manga, Cidade Baixa* and *Tropa de Elite*. The problem to be discussed in these films concerns the possibility of understanding violence as a political force that destabilizes notions such as unified self, representation, agency, nationality and class. The films analyzed suggest a tension between images of violence, mimetic, coagulated, normalized violence, and violent images, violence as dissemination, irradiation, fragmentation, explosion. Following the recent theorizations about biopolitics and community (which include the thought of Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Rancière), this work explores how this tension suggests a (re)configuration of ways of living together.

Nº de páginas: 227
Nº de palavras: 47.818

Resumo

VIOLENT IMAGES AND THE IMAGES OF VIOLENCE:

THE POLITICS OF VIOLENCE IN URBAN SPACE

IN CONTEMPORARY BRAZILIAN CINEMA

RAMAYANA LIRA DE SOUSA

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
2008

Supervising Professor: Dr. Anelise Corseuil

Esta tese propõe um estudo de filmes brasileiros contemporâneos, com ênfase na apresentação da violência e sua relação com o espaço urbano representado, em uma série de obras que se passam em diferentes cidades, a saber, *Estorvo, Cidade de Deus, Carandiru, O Invasor, Amarelo Manga*, que se passam em diferentes cidades *Cidade Baixa* e *Tropa de Elite*. O problema a ser discutido diz respeito à possibilidade de entender a violência como uma força política capaz de desestabilizar noções como *self*, representação, agência, nacionalidade e classe. Os filmes analisados sugerem uma tensão entre imagens da violência, violência mimética, coagulada, normalizadas, e imagens violentas, violência como disseminação, irradiação, fragmentação, explosão. Tendo como base teorizações recentes sobre biopolítica e comunidade (incluindo o pensamento de Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, Jean-Luc Nancy e Jacques Rancière), este trabalho explora como essa tensão sugere uma (re)configuração do modos de viver junto.

Table of Contents

List of illustrations

Figure 1 – Cover of *Veja* Maganize (17th October 2007)

Figure 2 - Lucio Fontana, *Concetto Spaziale Attesa* (Spatial Concept Waiting, 1960)

Figure 3 – *Cidade de Deus*. The *lajes* as an example of the diverse uses of space

Figure 4 - American Gothic @ Project Row House, Houston

Figure 5 - GAP's original CASUAL, FRESH, AMERICAN STYLE campaign with Sarah Jessica Parker

Figure 6 - Shabnum Shahnaz (Pakistan, b. 1973)

Figure 7 - Arnulf Rainer *Self-Portrait*. 1971/76

Figure 8 - Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct* (Dir. Paul Verhoeven, 1992) and Rinko Kinkuchi in *Babel* (Dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006)

Figure 9 - Leona Cavalli in *Amarelo Manga* (Dir. Cláudio Assis, 2003)

Figure 10- Francisco de Goya, *The shooting of May 3rd* (1808/14).

Figure 11 - Edouard Manet, Fourth version of *Execution of the Emperor Maximilian*, Final Version, Edouard Manet, 1868-69.

Figure 12 - Chris Burden *Shoot* (1971)

Figure 13 - Tony Tasset *Squib* (1996)

Figure 14 – *Histoire(s) du Cinema*, by Jean-Luc Godard.

Figure 15 - *Un Chien Undalou*, directed by Luis Buñuel, 1929

Figure 16 – Music video for rock band Santigold's *L.E.S. Artistes*.

Figure 17 - Francis Bacon, *Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953)

Figure 18 - Hieronymous Bosch, *Christ Carrying the Cross*. 1515-16

Figure 19 - *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), directed by Mel Gibson

Figure 20 - Victor Meirelles *Estudo para o Panorama do Rio de Janeiro (Morro do Castelo)*. ca. 1885

Introduction
24 Shots a Second

> Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to violence – the word and the act. [...] Violence devours all it touches, its voracious appetite rarely fulfilled. Yet violence doesn't only destroy; it creates and molds as well.
>
> (Spoken prologue from Russ Mayer's *Faster Pussycat, Kill, Kill*, 1965)

I have always been fascinated by violence in art. Actually, anything that defies 'normality' (ugliness, monstrosity, abjection) attracts my attention. Much can be said about the dubious moral position I assume when I contemplate the 'abnormal', but I think it is only fair that I start acknowledging my position: I am enthralled by images of violence and I set out to try to understand what these images do to me. This is how this dissertation began, not as redemption for a guilty spectator, but as a reflection about the workings of violence in the filmic medium.

Recently, Brazilian spectators have been bombarded with violent experiences – Brazilian films are no exception for the ubiquity of violence. The controversy about *Tropa de Elite*[1] (2007), exemplifies the relevance of the discussion for an understanding of contemporary Brazilian cinema. José Padilha's film, which won the 2008 Golden Bear at Berlin Festival, will be discussed in the following chapters, but to exemplify the controversial nature of the films in question, we can refer

---

[1] I will be using the original titles of the films throughout this dissertation. The titles in English for international market are mentioned in the bibliography.

to publications such as *Veja*, which pictured *Tropa de Elite* on its cover on 17th October 2007. The article is entitled "Pegou Geral", a double entendre that could be translated as something that is successful – *pegou[2]* - and as an expression of total control over a situation. The film is praised, on the cover, for its purported 'realism' in the depiction of Brazilian police and for a supposed 'fair' treatment of 'reality', as the cover announces that it treats "bandits like bandits" and denounces drug users as "partners" with drug dealers. This kind of critical reception highlights the close-knit association between box-office success and the rendition of a 'true' – and moralistic – view of the social malaises in contemporary Brazil.

Figure 1 – Cover of *Veja* Maganize (17th October 2007). Interestingly, the periodic decided for the image of a 'real' officer from the Elite Squad instead of images from the film, stressing its interest in connecting the cinematic event with 'reality'.

---

[2] In Portuguese the verb *pegar*, informally, refers to something that becomes popular, for example a catchy tune ("Aquela música *pegou*", meaning 'that song became popular, everyone is singing it'). On the other hand, it also makes reference to a sudden assault, as in "a polícia *pegou geral*", that is, 'the police struck down".

The present circumstances have raised a series of critical debates about the nature of a purported 'rebirth of Brazilian cinema', as it is commonly put by specialised publications, in a demonstration that the cultural relevance of Brazilian cinema is, again, highlighted. Having this relevance in mind, my intention in this study of contemporary Brazilian films is to focus on the portrayal of violence and its relation with the represented urban space in a number of films set in different cities, films like *Estorvo, Cidade de Deus, Carandiru, O Invasor, Amarelo Manga,* C*idade Baixa,* and *Tropa de Elite.* These films are, in various degrees, committed to the exploration of the various facets of violence, often resorting to a pre-existing reality. This appeal is reinforced by strategies that are well accounted for by Ilana Feldman:

> Incorporating documental images and amateur records, making use of the 'wilder' aesthetic codes – once a mark of modern cinema – as a new convention, re-enacting given non-fictional events and often using high technological sophistication bestowed by digital technologies of recording and editing images and sounds in order to promote productions marked by a feel of improvisation, 'urgency', formal 'poverty' and 'amateurism', often simulating a spectacle that simulates its non-staging. ("O Apelo Realista" 237)[3]

Whereas Feldman's research is concerned with the approximations between cinema and the audiovisual (mainly televisual, via *reality* shows) 'real', my concerns with the present dissertation are directed to the possibility of understanding violence as a political force

---

[3] In the original: Incorporando imagens documentais e registros amadores, fazendo dos códigos estéticos mais 'selvagens', que um dia foram a marca de um cinema moderno, uma nova convenção, re-encenando acontecimentos não-ficcionais já dados previamente e se utilizando, muitas vezes, da alta sofisticação tecnológica, oferecidas pelas tecnologias digitais de captação e finalização de imagens e sons, para promover produções marcadas por uma impressão de improviso, de 'urgência', de 'precariedade' formal e de amadorismo, muitas vezes, simulando um espetáculo que simule sua não-encenação.

that destabilizes political notions such as unified self, representation, agency. It is worth investigating how the articulation of violence with urban spaces poses questions to the spectator which may counter the investment in cultural hegemonic processes of normal/t/ization of both self and society. Such processes, as I will try to argue later on, are biopolitical in their expression, working for the control and stabilization of violence on and off the screen.

The films I will be dealing with raise important questions about the role of cities, the place of subjectivities and the dismantling of oppositions such as margins and centers. More specifically, when reflecting about Brazilian cinema tradition, we can observe that under the influence of Italian Neo-Realism, films like *O Grande Momento* and *Rio 40 Graus* conveyed the city as a site of uneven development as it becomes, in a more visible fashion, also a site of violence. Criminality and urban space are linked in films such as *O Assalto ao Trem Pagador,* and the relationship between violence and unjust social formations is gradually highlighted, so that it becomes a landmark in the ways the city is constructed.

In my attempt to analyze violence in urban spaces in contemporary Brazilian films, I will assess theories which engage in the problematization of violence beyond moralistic overtones, with special emphasis on the re-presentation of violence in films and their potential to engage the spectator; this assessment will, hopefully, indicate parameters for my analysis that encompass images' capacity to create

affects, enabling a reading that goes beyond the 'judgment' of these images as good or bad representations.

The critical historical survey of the images of violence and urban spaces in Brazilian cinema, here presented, will pave the ground for the investigation of the political potential of images of violence in contemporary Brazilian films, as they destabilize/normalize notions based on a unified political subject and promote/avoid 'lines of flight' from pre-established parameters such as 'nation' and 'class' and from the overbearing proliferation of biopolitics. These films, I argue, examine the corrosion of a sense of community and the imagination of forms of 'being together' which are suggested by the films.

This study is deeply rooted in the perception that violence is not a stranger to society. It is (and has been) present in our lives in many forms, from the brutal forces of imperial arms to the everyday abuse of workers, from representations on TV and videogames to the symbolic violence of stereotypes. If images of violence are nothing new to human eyes, the massification of information and communications in contemporary times has made them more visible than ever. Furthermore, with the exacerbation of urbanization, such images are commonly connected with the urban environment. In contemporary Brazilian culture (from the overexposure on TV news to hip hop urban culture), the connection between violence and the city is too conspicuous to be ignored.

The discussion about 'politics' of violence in Brazilian cinema has been, for the most part, based on the terms laid out by a nostalgic

reading of *Cinema Novo*, as in the discussion about the 'cosmetics of hunger', to an understanding of violence in Brazilian culture as displacement, doubt and ambiguity. It is important to reassess the cultural importance of Brazilian film in terms which do not necessarily have identitarian issues as a starting point. Not that such issues do not hold any interpretive value, but the fact is that academic discourses about Brazilian filmography have, for quite some time, taken on this scheme. The search for alternative modes of understanding Brazilian cinema is at the core of this investigation and may be its main contribution to the academic debate.

The emphasis on 'violence' should not deter a questioning of the terminology employed here. The word is a catch-all term used with such frequent ease that its indeterminacy appears almost 'natural'. The commonplace notion of violence negatively reads it as disproportionate and unnecessary, something from which, at least officially, we wish to dissociate ourselves and, in all likelihood, connect with someone else. Violence is thus popularly understood as an act of aggression that is usually destructive, antisocial, and degrading in its consequences and that usually seems deliberate.

A false or naive notion about violence will simply increase the convenience with which we refer to 'representations of violence' in fiction without ever questioning the provisional nature of such assertion. To say that there are representations *of* violence in film implies that there is a preexistent something out there, called violence, which is then presented to us via language - or a camera. Hence, the

need for a position of precaution against fallacious perceptions of violence as something 'new' to Brazilian films. There is a history of violence in Brazilian films – and in the history of film in general. As Ivana Bentes argues, "violence has been thought by theoreticians and filmmakers as a fundamental experience in cinema, an experience intimately connected to the very structure of audiovisual flux"[4] ("Estéticas da Violência"). There are myriad instances of this articulation: from the historical vanguards to postmodern action films, violence has been portrayed and theorized as an important element in film history.

Thus, a preliminary inference that might guide the advance of this research indicates that although violence is a ubiquitous issue in contemporary Brazilian films, this does not imply that there exists a political or aesthetic program underlying this ubiquity, as in the Cinema Novo with Glauber Rocha's manifestos *The Aesthetics of Hunger* and *The Aesthetics of Violence*. Moreover, it could be argued that even when put in more programmatic terms, violence slips away, always defying absolute point-of-views. Therefore, in contemporary cinema, not only is the tone different, but diverse is the approach to the question of narrative, representation and national identity.

Finally, the theoretical approaches chosen for this study are 'in between'. Drawing from both European and U.S. theorists, I aim to create spaces of contact between such 'foreign' views and the already

---

[4] In the original: a violência já foi pensada por teóricos e cineastas como uma experiência fundamental do cinema, uma experiência intimamente ligada à própria estrutura do fluxo audiovisual.

established discussion on Brazilian cinema taken on by Brazilian intellectuals. And I place myself 'in between', a seamstress dealing with delicate text(ile)s, hoping that my needle is dexterous enough to create a congruous garment, as I embroider fine paillettes in this fabric(ation) to produce a new *constellation*. Neither here nor there, I wish this *constellation* would shed some light on the ongoing debates on Brazilian cinema, thus contributing to enriching the scope of the researches in film studies.

My approach here is limited to the reflection on violence in Brazilian films and my reading, though interdisciplinarily connected to sociological, philosophical and anthropological approaches, is strongly rooted in the themes, terminology and methodology derived from film studies. Actually, I subscribe to what Robert Stam defends in *Introdução à Teoria do Cinema* when he proposes a "theoretical cubism[5]" (15): because cinema is a kinesthetic medium, composed by a multiplicity of registers, thus producing an enormous variety of texts, it is essential to employ multiple theoretical frameworks. Therefore, the specificity of filmic discourse will be taken into consideration, mainly in relation to elements such as narrative and patterns of development, mise-en-scène, cinematographic properties, shots, scenes and sequences, editing, and sound. Another category to be cogitated is the contexts of production — the fact that films are always the products of specific social and historical conditions.

---

[5] In the Brazilian translation: "cubismo teórico"

There are, of course, many 'types' of violence in the movies, from gore to subtle torture, from squibs to amputations, with varying viewing experiences. It is necessary to pinpoint a working notion for 'violence'. James B. Twitchell gives a straightforward definition of violence as more than a force directed against an object (etymologically, violence is the combination of two Latin words: [*vis* = force] + [*latus* = participle of *fero*, the Latin verb for 'carry']). Twitchell characterizes violence as

> a force directed against a victim, usually a specific human being. The inclusion of some direct object is implied in the verb 'violate' as well as in the noun 'violation', which share a common etymology with 'violence'. The implication of 'violence' is that a force is inflicted on someone for which some violation is the result. (3-4)

Violence is, thus, characterized as a material alteration in a person's 'normality', the force of violence being a force that can be derived from a human subject or from specific objects.[6] As I intend to show in the body of this work, the working notion of violence transcends the idea of a

---

[6]

Figure 2 - Lucio Fontana, *Concetto Spaziale Attesa* (Spatial Concept Waiting, 1960).
(Source: http://www.tate.co.uk)
Beginning in the late 50's, Argentinean artist Lucio Fontana cut the canvas with dramatic effect. These *tagli* (cuts, in Italian) were planned and executed in a single moment. The *tagli* are calculated incisions in monochromatic canvases, tearing apart the integrity of the bidimensional surface. The violent gesture have the effect of drawing the viewer into space – we no longer dwell in the limits imposed by the frame, but are invited to delve into the unknown depths of the hole.

representation of violent acts on screen to encompass the violence of the medium over the spectator.

When we map out the contemporary cinematographic production in Brazil we are able to see a profusion of films, either fictional or documentary, where violence is set in the city. In a sense, this production creates a false idea of causality: it is the *city* that generates the violence represented on the screen. The city becomes an exemplary *camp*, concentrating vices, miseries and failures.

Responses for this construction of urban spaces as an archive of vices can be seen in films like *Cidade de Deus* and *O Invasor*, where characters have a very ambiguous relationship with the urban environment. Aware of the constraints imposed by material obstacles such as walls and symbolic barriers like *suburbs/favelas* and *jardins/asfalto*,[7] they still reveal possibilities of appropriation of spaces. The use of *lajes*,[8] for instance, as alternative to the lack of public spaces in *Cidade de Deus* is symptomatic.

Such forms of unconventional use of spaces are object of Michel de Certeau's analysis, which involves the ways through which the 'weak' create a sphere of action within the constraints that are imposed on them by making use of 'tactics' to manipulate events and turn them into opportunities. An example of such procedure is given by de Certeau in

---

[7] The symbolic character of these barriers does not exclude the real existence of separate spaces. By symbolic obstacles I mean the reinforcement, in cultural forms, of the gap existing between poor and rich, powerful and powerless, black and white.

[8] *Lajes* (slates) are frequently used in poorer urban districts as meeting points, where people get together for a *roda de samba* (a group of samba musicians) or *pagode* and/or barbecue. Because of the lacking of urban planning and precarious construction, the *lajes* have become one of the few meeting points for the *favela* dwellers.

the figure of the 'perruque' (wig), a French term used to designate the satisfaction of workers' needs during company time (e.g. writing love letter during working hours using company material), "a work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed towards profit" (24). To given cultural products, de Certeau opposes a corresponding practice that resists and thus redefines the object in question. In his discussion of spatial practices, for example, he invokes a 'rhetoric of walking', through which individuals appropriate their environment and create their own spaces by means of shortcuts, roundabout paths, meanderings etc.

Figure 3 – *Cidade de Deus*. The *lajes* as an example of the diverse uses of space[9].

These user's ruses are defined by the author as 'tactics', distinct from 'strategies' employed by dominant powers. A strategy "postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of target or threats […] can be managed" (36). It seeks a conquest of place over time through the construction of a position of predictability and surveillance that

---

[9] Unless otherwise indicated, the source for the stills are the original films.

transforms "the uncertainties of history into readable spaces" (36). Strategies exercise the power of knowledge based on a power that is a precondition to that knowledge: the power of establishing a 'proper place'. Contrasting with the strategy, a 'tactic' is a "calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus" (37). It takes place in the "space of the other" (37), on occasion, unpredictably, without a formalized knowledge. It is, thus, the "art of the weak" (37). A strategy is a stable ideological apparatus set in motion:

> I call a *strategy* the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects or research, etc.) can be managed. (37)

The tactic is a response to this particular ideological place, a refashioning – and a refusal – of the *strategic* 'proper' uses, taking advantage of opportunities and responding immediately, working with speed, mobility and setting smaller goals. The fluidity of tactics and the restraint of strategies are political forces that draw maps that enable us to read the space in films like *Cidade de Deus* and *Carandiru*. What is striking in these films is the spatial organization of their settings: editing and mise-en-scène produce a sense of disorientation and lack of points of escape, entrapping the viewer in the diagetic marginal spaces, as if facing a *cul-de-sac.* The *favela* and the presidium become what

Mike Davis calls an archetypal place, "a museum archiving vices and miseries of potential fascination to the middle class" (34).

As I said before, my position as a spectator has suffered a great deal of 'alterations' in the encounters with violence in/of films. I have felt disgusted, excited, furious, saddened, hopeful and (quite often) hopeless. My subjectivity has been displaced and put back 'in track'; I have felt like I could change the world; I have thought nothing good could come from it. Such a wide palette of emotions and affects that I could hardly define where to begin. The difficulties in approaching violence are especially apparent when we think of the illusion of a simple way out of it. An absolute path away from violence, an absolute means to master it, are shadows in humankind's (and humanist) utopian projects. What this simplistic approach fails to notice is that violence has been understood as a force of change per se, that it can also be considered productive, not only destructive. One needs only refer to Frantz Fanon's understanding of violence as a decolonizing force, which was taken on by part of Brazilian *Cinema Novo* as a possibility for social change. I will further this discussion later on, but suffices it to say now that intrinsic to the use of violence by *cinemanovistas* was an awareness of the violence of the medium itself, also considered as a potent weapon.

The humanist impulse to purge violence from the world on and off the screen is still, it seems, far from being accomplished. In a more pragmatic fashion, we can only assume that the question is, rather, how violence has been 'managed', in all its different forms, and which

forms have been chosen in spite of others and why. The 'management' of violence is on the very core of political life.

The importance of violence for politics is revealed in the plethora of authors who have tackled on the subject, mostly with a sense that there should be an overcoming of violence. Power, Law, Civilization, Society are some propositions for a way out of it, but it does not simplify the ambivalence of violence: more often than not it is difficult – if not impossible – to determine victims and oppressors, to decide the extent of its liberating or oppressing forces.

That is when we enter the realm of biopolitics. Biopolitics, a term coined by Michel Foucault, condensates the modes power is exerted against *life*. Foucault demonstrates how, from the 18th century onwards, new strategies of power focus on *life* as a basic unit, considering both individual bodies and populations. In texts like *Vigiar e Punir* (Discipline and Punish), *Em Defesa da Sociedade* (Society Must Be Defended) and *História da Sexualidade* (History of Sexuality), Foucault challenged the basis of the political theory of sovereignty by positing the notion of disciplines. Whereas sovereignty makes use of judicial power, disciplines involve the practice of power on the individual and his body.

Biopower and biopolitics, then, come into play to expose the shift from the judicial body defined by law and contract to biopower, as a practice of control of a *social* body that is the object of government. If disciplines act upon individual bodies, biopower acts on the population like a preventive form of control. It draws its legitimacy from the

promises of optimizing life, controlling random phenomena such as epidemics and hunger and keeping events in an acceptable number of occurrences. Biopower, thus, cannot be qualified as a 'simple' discipline because it regulates on a global scale, exerting control on what lives. Italian theoretician Maurizio Lazzarato summarizes Focault's discussion:

> Biopolitics is the strategic coordination of these power relations in order to extract a surplus of power from living beings. Biopolitics is a strategic relation; it is not the pure and simple capacity to legislate or legitimize sovereignty. According to Foucault the biopolitical functions of 'coordination and determination' concede that biopower, from the moment it begins to operate in this particular manner, is not the true source of power. Biopower coordinates and targets a power that does not properly belong to it, that comes from the 'outside'. Biopower is always born of something other than itself. ("From Biopower to Biopolitics")

Biopolitics, thus, emerges with the notion that it is necessary to preserve life. The figure of the sovereign is what guarantees the preservation of life: this figure condenses the desire for a law-abiding civil society and a cosmopolitan State, in an attempt to rationalize and pacify social life. Because peace is always precarious, the sovereign appears as a warranty against anything that may threaten life. As we can see, the idea of 'life' comes to the center stage, becoming more important in the political arena. Foucault, then, theorizes the mechanisms, techniques and technologies that are employed in the exercise of the power over life. Power over human life, human beings as a species.

These technologies affect not only the individual bodies of men and women, but they also affect global phenomena, like processes related to birth, death, diseases, reproduction, marriage. Thus, the definition of what marriage is, for example, includes the control over bodies so that bodies of the same sex are not warranted the same treatment as the legal union of bodies of different sexes. Other paradigms of biopolitical control can be perceived in the rigid timing and discipline of the bodies at schools, hospitals and prisons, in the distribution of spaces in *favelas*, in the devices of *reality shows* on TV (where the participant's bodies are subjected to ethically dubious rules).

Contrary to what may seem as a decrease of violence (after all, these technologies are legitimized in the name of peace), Foucault observes that from the moment life becomes the most important political element – and, as a consequence, something to be 'managed', calculated, rules and normal/t/ized –, there is an actual increase of violence, now exerted against those lives which have to be eliminated in order to assert the survival of a given population. The power over life is another face of the power over death: some have to die so that some may live. Foucault says: "the death of the other is not simply my life, insofar as it would be my personal safety; the death of the other, of the bad race, of the inferior race (the degenerate, the abnormal) is what makes life in general healthier; healthier and purer" ("Em Defesa da Sociedade" 305). [10]

---

[10] In the Brazilian translation: A morte do outro não é simplesmente a minha vida, na medida em que seria minha segurança pessoal; a morte do outro, a morte da raça ruim, da raça inferior

Surely, albeit his rich and well-thought discussion, Foucault does not linger on a very relevant definition, one that Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben urges us to question: what do we talk about when we talk about 'life'? Agamben's contribution to the debate is especially important when he discerns *zoe* from *bios*, based on the ancient Greek usage of the terms: the former "expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings" and the latter "signified the form or manner of living peculiar to a single individual" ("Form-of-Life" 3). This distinction gives rise to the existence of politically qualified and un-qualified life. Life that exists within the limits and warranties of the *polis* (the city) and life that exists either outside or on the threshold of this city. The notion of the *polis*, the city that shelter politically qualified life, is directly related with the objectives of this research. Violence in the urban spaces, the production of forms of life which are excluded from the protection of the *polis*, the biopolitical implications of this violence and the crisis that erupts from the dissolution of the bonds that would sew together a 'community' are intertwined issues at the very core of what I intend to analyze.

In *Homo Sacer*, Giorgio Agamben takes on Foucault's analysis and develops, from it, a reflection about sovereignty. Agamben points out that the sovereign power is not linked to rightholders, but to a "bare life", that is, life included in the political realm by a paradoxical exclusion, life that is exposed to the violence and the decision of

---

(ou do degenerado, ou do anormal), é o que vai deixar a vida em geral mais sadia; mais sadia e mais pura.

sovereign power. Contrary to viewpoints that identify political community with a common 'belonging" in a shared national, ethnic, religious or moral identity, Agamben posits that the original political relation is the 'ban' in which a form of life is actively and continuously excluded from the polis. This excluded life is reduced to its 'organic' function, it is a 'bare life'.

'Bare life', in the sense Agamben uses the term, is an ever-present figure in Brazilian cinema, as I intend to discuss in chapter 2. Produced by an extremely violent movement of 'banishment', this life is portrayed from the very first films, based on real crimes, to Brazilian neo-realism, as expressed in Nelson Pereira dos Santos' *Rio 40 Graus*, to the oppressed people in Cinema Novo works such as Ruy Guerra's *Os Fuzis* and Glauber Rocha's *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol*, to the criminals and *favela* dwellers of contemporary films.

Agamben's contribution to the current debate on biopower consists in revealing how this "bare life" progressively coincides with what we call "public sphere": it becomes the hegemonic figure in political spaces. The city, understood as *polis*, is, then, displaced as the political paradigm in the regime of biopower; the "concentration camp", as a model of production of "bare life", is the substitute for the city. The substitution of the city for the camp and the proliferation of "bare life" are obstacles for the reconfiguration of a new politics.[11] According to Agamben, when commenting on Foucault's strategic use of the body

---

[11] Agamben's apparent negativity can be balanced with other perspectives that still see life's productive power as a possibility in the political horizon. Here, thinkers like Maurizio Lazzarato and Antonio Negri offer a counterpoint based on the idea of "creation" of new forms of life,

> The conclusions of our research impose an ulterior caution. Even the concept of the 'body', as well as sex and sexuality, is already caught in a dispositive, it is from the start biopolitical body and bare life, and nothing in it, or in the economy of its pleasure, seems to offer us a firm ground against the sovereign's intentions[12]. (*Homo Sacer* 192)

Agamben's conclusions to *Homo Sacer* summarize his three important theses, which will be developed later in this dissertation: 1. the original political relation is the *ban* (state of exception as a zone of indistinctiveness between inside and outside, exclusion and inclusion); 2. the main outcome of sovereign power is the production of bare life, as the original political element and a threshold that articulates nature and culture, *zoe* and *bios*; 3. the biopolitical paradigm of the West is not the city (the *polis*), but the concentration camp. It is important to point out, here, that the first thesis questions the contractual nature of State power. The ban, and not the sentiment of belonging is what founds political relations. For Agamben, the overbearing biopolitical conditions of present times make it questionable to affirm that one 'belongs' to an identity, be it popular, national, religious or any other kind (187).

The formation of a sense of 'community' underlies this reflection. How to think about a 'common ground' when facing images of violence? What kind of community is being traced by contemporary Brazilian

---

urging us "to conceive the reversal of biopower into biopolitics, the 'art of governance' into the production and government of new forms of life" (Lazzarato, "From Biopower to Biopolitics"). This implies the perception that where there is biopower there is also the potential of biopolitics, understood as a creative force.

[12] In the Brazilian translation: "As conclusões de nossa pesquisa impõem uma ulterior cautela. Até mesmo o conceito de "corpo", bem como aquele de sexo e sexualidade, já está desde sempre preso a um dispositivo, ou melhor, é desde sempre corpo biopolítico e vida nua, e ainda, nele ou na economia de seu prazer, parece oferecer-nos um terreno firme contra as pretensões do soberano.

films? This discussion starts by disputing notions of community as a collectivity that relies on a sense of closure, continuity, unity and universalism. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, for example, postulates a notion of community as a unified, continuous and enclosed collectivity, a horizontal comradeship. This notion is problematic as it tends to efface the tensions and contradictions that may exist even in 'horizontal affiliations'.

A more complex notion of community, which takes into consideration forms of being and belonging that might question the 'universalism' of a horizontal community can be traced in the thought of Jean-Luc Nancy and Giorgio Agamben, who propose a "community without unity" (Nancy) and a "coming community" (Agamben). The complexity of the notion of community is evident when we are confronted with the idea of community that does not guarantee meaning, identity, belonging; a concept that does not have an essence. This inessential community is paramount in the understanding of the forms of life created in/by the images of the films, as they challenge the ways we imag(in)e to be (im)possible 'being in common'.

The discourse on 'community' has taken over exalted tones in Brazil. Marginalized groups, mainly inhabitants of urban *favelas*, have reclaimed and politicized the term as an alternative designation to the places where they live, in order to resist prejudiced references to the *favelas* as sites of crime and low moral standards. However, this appropriation of the term has generated a kind of expectation that, again, paralyzes these groups in a fixed identity. On the one hand,

these 'communities' have become spaces that incite the 'curiosity' of strangers, who happily go on 'safaris' to the *favelas*.[13] It is no wonder that a parallel can be traced here between the *favela* and the *zoo*, considering the etymological link of the latter with the Greek root *zoe*, as defined by Giorgio Agamben (see discussion above). The 'community' becomes a kind of wildlife reserve, an exotic space to visit – and then forget – life at the outskirts of the *polis*. On the other hand, the idea of 'community' has also been transformed into a fixed identity that dwellers of the *favelas* put forward in order to cater for the taste for the exotic. A blatant example of this can be seen in Eduardo Coutinho's documentary *Babilônia 2000*, when the crew approaches a resident who asks for some time to get dressed in order to be filmed. The assistant director tells her that she does not need to get changed, to which the old lady replies "Oh, you want the 'community' look", anticipating the stereotype currently associated with this kind of 'living in common'.

Therefore, a research focusing on the articulations between urban spaces and violence in contemporary Brazilian cinema involves the re-evaluation of notions like class, nationhood, community, forms of life. These elements are intertwined in art's capacity to imagine violence (whether rational or irrational) as both associative and disruptive. The latter case, since Zuenir Ventura popularized the notion of the *broken city* (cidade partida) to describe the scission in Rio de Janeiro between *favela* (poor and marginal) and *asfalto* (middle-class), is, so far, the

---

[13] *Jeep Tour*, a travel agency based in Rio de Janeiro, offers a tour, on Jeep, through the *favelas*, advertising in their website that the aim of the tour is to show the "joy, solidarity and hospitality" of the dwellers of the *carioca* 'community'. (http://www.jeeptour.com.br/roteiro/50/1/rio-de-janeiro/favela.html)

most wide-spread account of social tension in Brazilian cities. This conception, however, tends to homogenize the varied communities and individuals who live in those places, as well as disregard the constant flow of cultural products from *asfalto* to *favela*, and, meaningfully, from *favela* to *asfalto*. Furthermore, the idea of the *broken city*, if transported to other cities in Brazil, might erase important differences in terms of tensions and negotiations involving urban spaces and violence.

Thinking in terms of ways of 'being together' which do not resort to this kind of stereotyping is a challenge to be met in this work, mainly when this 'being together' usually comes tinted with violent overtones. It is striking about recent Brazilian films that the association of marginality with violence is so pervasive. The task that is put forward to the analyst is to avoid simplistic operations of identifying a direct cause-effect relationship, as if violence were a direct consequence of poverty and as if films were a mirror held up to reality, 'reflecting' these operations. What we must strive to find is a position beyond the logical operative 'either/or' which signalizes that characters are *either* helpless victims of social injustice *or* merciless killers without any regard for human life.

In the following chapters I intend to discuss whether the filmic discourse in contemporary Brazilian cinema favors this kind of entrapment, constituting spaces of exclusion that, by shutting out certain subjects, 'immunize' the rest of the city. I draw upon Roberto Esposito notion of 'immunization' in politics. According to him, we have,

on the one hand, the institutional apparatus, the State, the judicial forms. On the other hand, the territorial organization, ethnic communities identified by a common element: language, religion, culture. These groups tend to shut out the others, in order to become 'immune' from whatever comes from the outside.

Esposito explains, in a interview ("Recuperemos a comunidade"), that the 'I', in fact, implies a constant displacement, a fact that modernity tried to erase with a destructive dialects between 'I' and 'the other', which still determines much of the sociopolitical dynamics in the world today. The notion of the 'foreigner' takes on a connotation of danger, of social, medical and symbolic risk. Hence the immuno-logical perception of 'the other' as promiscuity, contamination, the contagious contact with the immigrant, the risk of attack against property. This chain of metaphors of 'the other' as infection coming from the outside is extremely (self-)destructive.

For Esposito, community, immunity and life come together in the definition of what is politically relevant in our times. There is a striking paradox in the term community: it is something that people *have* in *common*, that is, something that is *common* that people are *proprie*tors of. The familiar separation between what is *common* and what is *proper* is disputed.

This is the context of this research: the study of *violence in/of representation*, a dialectical relationship which explores the tensions generated by the portrayal of violence in the media in general, and in cinema in particular, and that could be summarized in the constant

negotiation between two poles: the violence in the image and the violence of the image – *the image of violence* and the *violent image.* This entices another debate about the *violence of representation,* that is, the operations through which a representational regime implies operations of power that essentialize and paralyze the flux of images.

A book like Olivier Mongin's *A Violência das Imagens, ou Como Eliminá-la?* demonstrates, paradigmatically, the difficulty in dealing with these tensions: its moralistic approach, materialized in its subtitle, sometimes implicitly, and other times more conspicuously, defends the idea that violence is something 'bad', which should be 'eliminated' from the screen. My proposal adopts a different attitude towards this object: my intention with this research is to trans-evaluate this affirmation and start questioning not whether violence is bad, but investigating its presentation in the circumstances of contemporary Brazilian cinema.

As stated before, the issue of violence in Brazilian cinema has been, to a certain extent, explored by critics in the academy, but sometimes with a moralist inflection that is essentially reductionist. The significance of this research lies in its attempt to understand violence in the force of the images, trying to avoid simplistic cause-effect explanations: the research proposed here is concerned with the aesthetic as a possibility of existence, as practice, as an intervention in the world.

The analysis of violence in urban spaces in Brazilian cinema is located at a crossroads where aesthetics and politics are seen as

intimate. Following Jacques Rancière's theorization in *A Partilha do Sensível*, one can realize that on the basis of politics there is aesthetics, but in a different sense from an 'aestheticization of politics', generated by mass culture and harshly criticized by Walter Benjamin in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". On the one hand, in Benjamin, we have the discussion of how Nazism employed mass culture to present the political as a self-referential space of authenticity and self-assertion, giving the masses an illusory expression instead of their rights, culminating in the glorification of war. For Ranciére, on the other hand, politics is aesthetical and art is necessarily political inasmuch as they distribute temporal and spatial relations, forms of visibility and modes of representation[14].

---

[14]   The Visible Collective, headed by Naeem Mohaiemen, can be taken as a contemporary example of the complex state of art. It is an art group that seeks to draw attention to the detentions, by the U.S. government, of Arabs and Muslims since September 11th 2001 (www.disappearedinamerica.org). The Collective makes use of different strategies, from slick light-box installations to comic films and banners depicting the faces of the disappeared. Their aesthetic choices are not centered in formal aspect of the works, but they aim at getting people involved in the political discussion. They have a very clear political purpose: increase the visibility of this crucial issue as part of a real struggle. Initiatives like this put in question the intellectual bias towards purely intellectual means of resistance. Their website declares: "The impulse to create an **insider-outsider dynamic with "loyalty" overtones** has a long pedigree: WWI incarceration of German-Americans; 1919 detention of immigrants in Anarchist bomb scare; WWII internment of Japanese-Americans; execution of the Rosenbergs; HUAC 'red scare'; infiltration of Deacons For Defense and Black Panthers; and the rise of the Minutemen." (www.disappearedinamerica.org – emphasis in the original) One of the Collective's projects parodies GAP's *Casual, Fresh, American Style* campaign. They produced banners with images of detainees, drawing attention to their invisibility. These images were plastered on walls, windows and other public places. Visually, they employ the same codes of fashion magazines, but now dislocated by the images of 'ordinary' people in opposition to the iconicity of figures like actress Sarah Jessica Parker, famous for her part in the TV series and motion picture *Sex and the City*, which ultimately celebrates consumerism and sexism. The way this project renders visible the detainees may exemplify the dynamics at work in contemporary aesthetics and politics.

The notion of a 'politics of art', according to Jacques Ranciére, derives not from the messages and feelings that art may convey, nor from the way it represents social structures, conflicts or identities. Art

Figure 4 - American Gothic @ Project Row House, Houston. (Source: http://www.disappearedinamerica.org/photos/index.php?current=1)

Figure 5 - GAP's original CASUAL, FRESH, AMERICAN STYLE campaign with Sarah Jessica Parker (Source:http://www.disappearedinamerica.org/photos/index.php?current=3)

Figure 6 - Shabnum Shahnaz (Pakistan, b. 1973)
Daughter of Rani Shahnaz (b. 1950). Rani indefinitely detained since September 22, 2003; currently fighting deportation proceedings.
(Source:http://www.disappearedinamerica.org/photos/index.php?current=7)

becomes political as its own practices shape forms of visibility that reframe the way in which practices, manners of being and modes of feeling and saying are interwoven in a commonsense, which means a 'sense of the common' embodied in a common *sensorium*. This idea redefines art as political not owing to its message – nor due to mimetically reproducing social structures (and thus 'revealing' it to the spectators) – but because it creates a specific space-time *sensorium* that can reframe the habits and categorical imperatives of common sense.

In this sense, Rancière's theorization helps problematize straightforward assumption about the political nature of art such as the notions that politics can be 'satisfactorily' represented in art; also, it makes it possible to assess how 'political' art, involving an aestheticization of the object, partitions[15] political events as fragmented. Rather, art produces forms of reconfiguration of the experience that are the sites where new forms of political subjectivation can be created which can reconfigure shared experience and give cause to new artistic dissent.[16]

Not so much a discipline, but a 'regime of identification of art' (*A Partilha do Sensível* 28), aesthetics refers to the ways art is identified as art in a given context. Rancière describes three mains regimes: ethical, mimetic and aesthetic. In the first, having Plato as paradigm, art is

---

[15] The expression 'partitions' can also be referred to the title of Rancière's book *A Partilha do Sensível* (La Partage du Sensible).

[16] In the Brazilian translation: Ela produz, assim, formas de reconfiguração da experiência que são o terreno sobre o qual podem se elaborar formas de subjetivação políticas que, por sua vez, reconfiguram a experiência comum e suscitam novos dissensos artísticos. ("Política da Arte", 10)

measured against notions of truthfulness and copy. In the second, it is framed within a system of genres and evaluated in terms of 'qualities' related to skills and satisfactory link between the object and its representation. In the mimetic regime arts take place in the 'distribution of the sensible', that is, in the division of the activities in society. This particular place that art is assigned to is challenged in the aesthetic regime (47): this identification regime works by means of the *sensorium* in which art will be perceived as such.

Because the aesthetic regime complexifies the distribution of the sensible, art is trapped in the tension between being art as such and merging into other forms of being. Art as art and art opening up to life: these are the main poles of tension that refer to a politics of art. Hence the strenuous task of discussing a politics of violence in film. This politics is inscribed in the tensions between the tendency to police images (as in the ethical regime), the intricacies of form and plot (as in the mimetic regime) and the articulation to produce the aesthetic conditions for a (re)distribution of the sensible (aesthetic regime).

Moreover, his *Film Fables* opens with a quote from Jean Epstein, where the filmmaker and theorist argues that "cinema 'by and large' doesn't do justice to the story. And 'dramatic action' here is a mistake. The drama we're watching is already half-resolved and unfolding on the curative slope to the crisis" (1). This entails the realization that cinema is not a medium that does justice to story-telling – Epstein, in Rancière's view, wanted cinema to discard the 'fable' in the Aristotelian sense, that is, the concoction of necessary and verisimilar actions that

guide the characters from fortune to misfortune. Nevertheless, while various filmmakers and theorists have questioned the relevance of the story and found ways to oppose it, Rancière does not give in to easy oppositions such as plot X visuality. Rancière disputes two widespread attitudes towards cinema: nostalgia and condescension. In the first case, cinema might have abdicated its potential as camera style, becoming merely storytelling by restoring the old representative hierarchy the other arts had strongly challenged; film would be responsible for reintroducing plots, typical characters, expressive codes and genres. On the other side is straightforward derision, that is, we are foolishly expecting something that cinema is not capable of handling; films are nothing but a dream factory designed to tell stories.

Rancière refuses these two simplistic viewpoints. For him, cinema debases the Aristotelian hierarchy that sees the coherence of the plot as something superior to the sensible effect. It settles the quarrel between thought and feeling, which become, in the moving image, indistinguishable.

> Cinematic automatism settles the quarrel between art and technique by changing the very status of the 'real'. It does not reproduce things as they offer themselves to the gaze. It records them as the human eye cannot see them, as they come into being, in a state of waves and vibrations, before they can be qualified as intelligible objects, people, or events due to their descriptive and narrative properties. (2)

We have, here, that a film is composed of conscious and unconscious elements, the former comprises the realization of the director's activity and the latter involving what the camera registers or

allows to be read independently of authorial control. The conscious eye of the filmmaker has a counterpart in the unconscious eye of the camera, as a result debasing the Aristotelian privilege of *muthos*, what makes narration possible, in contrast with, *opsis*, the visuality that runs against the grain of narrative.

This discussion traverses a number of issues referring to violence in urban spaces in contemporary Brazilian cinema: space, violence (figural and immanent), biopolitics, community. They intersect in the questioning of what these contemporary films do to us. Mainly, Rancière's thought may help understand, by problematizing cinema's rendering of the 'real', how some films 'redistribute' our perception and sensation, engaging the spectator with narratives that often seek legitimation in making reference to a 'reality' that has to denounced. In a tradition of producing images of violence a number of contemporary films make use of formal devices (cited on pages 3 and 4) that aim at giving a sense of immediacy, of close proximity, whereas narratives work ambiguously to 'protect' spectator from being too close to the sordid universe being portrayed, as I intend to show during the film analyses throughout this dissertation.

On the other hand, the films are also to be seen as sites of political confrontation, where distribution of cinematic forms, sensations and perception may lead to an awareness of (bio)political systems that impose consensus to legitimate violent actions (torture, elimination of 'undesired' subjects). What needs to be analyzed (as I will try to build my argumentation in the next chapters) is whether this very

awareness is hindered or heightened by violent images. *Images of violence* – the representation of violent acts – and *violent images* – the violent impact on our perception of images independently of what they 'represent' – are, thus, very important concepts (to be more thoroughly discussed latter) that condense the political potential of cinema.

These are some of the issues that impregnate this research. In order to set about discussing all the complex themes, theories and films proposed here, I tried to organize the contents as follows:

Firstly, I propose a debate about violence in (Brazilian) cinema. I will attempt to confront a number of authors, looking for an approach that takes into consideration the ambiguous role of violence, paralyzing and fluid, fascinating and repulsive, (a)political and (an)aesthetic. My objective, here, will be to offer possible ways to see violence in cinema, from emphases in representational impulses to considerations about the immanent flow of images.

Then I will sketch a 'little history of violence' in Brazilian cinema. I am interested in knowing how violence becomes a pervasive presence and how it relates with other cultural manifestations. By doing so I expect to have a starting point to understand the current productions as a continuum, trying to avoid a teleological account, but investing in the possibility of the past illuminating the present. This second chapter carries on many of the reflections from the first chapter, proposing an analysis of the theoretical debate about violence in (Brazilian) cinema.

The third chapter aims at examining the biopolitical implications in the films within the urban environment. I will endeavor to distinguish at least two types of subjectivity, one that is formed in order to be governed, and one that is concerned with itself as an aesthetics of existence. Such subjectivities oscillate between qualified and bare life and the main question to be discussed is whether these different uses are contradictory, exclusive, or are they supporting each other.

Finally, chapter four brings the examination of the 'community' in Brazilian cinema. What does violence do with the sense of 'beloging'? What happens to the city, as a 'common' space?

I assume, from the start, a personal investment in the focus of inquiry, for I believe that an intimate involvement with film is required instead of a clinical distance in order to perceive the molecular 'becomings'. Both regarding violence and urban space, the role of the viewer (and of the critic) is much more active and personal, as Giuliana Bruno describes in "Site-seeing: Architecture and the Moving Image":

> Acting like a voyager, the itinerant spectator of the architectural-filmic ensemble reads moving views-- practices of imaging. In the cine city, the framing of space and the succession of sites organized as shots from different viewpoints, adjoined and disjoined by way of editing, is a montage of spectatorial movements. A dweller inhabits the moving image.

Thus, dwelling the moving image, I set out to the cinematic blood-spattered maze.

1

Slicing up Eyeballs[17]

Figure 7 - Arnulf Rainer *Self-Portrait*. 1971/76

Let's take the color red, for example. It can be connected to food and fluids. It may remind one of primeval things and things alive. It can be considered a kinetic color. It might make one think of movement and flow. And red is the color of blood, although sometimes blood looks purplish or deep brown or even literally blue. But it is the red in the blood that is the most beautiful. It is towards red that the eye is attracted. The eye smears the image with red.

---

[17] This title was taken from a song by the band The Pixies, named *Debaser*. The lyrics are:

got me movie	don't know about you	slicing up eyeballs
i want you to know	but i am un chien andalusia	girlie so groovie
slicing up eyeballs	wanna grow up to be	ha ha ha ho
i want you to know	be a debaser	don't know about you
girlie so groovy	got me a movie	but i am un chien andalusia
i want you to know	ha ha ha ho	i am un chien Andalusia

The Pixies' piercing song violently leaves the sphere of mass culture to perform in the listener's body the debasement of 'artistic' values. It is a rock song, shouted, much more than sung, it reverberates in the organs. It disparages the sense-making abilities. Here, the illicit encounter of pop culture and historical avant-garde exemplifies the flow of codes and artistic energies between the falsely engendered poles of "high" and "low" culture.

Arnulf Rainer's *Self-Portrait* is, at the same time, shocking and enthralling. Over the static photograph the brushes of yellow, black and red dissipate the self in the fluidity of their mobility. The transient body is *smeared* with the blots of *red blood*. But then, again, stepping back, one has to acknowledge: "This is not the red of blood, it is the color red". Why should there be blood where there is only red? "I don't shoot blood, I shoot the color red" (Jean-Luc Godard).

Arnulf Rainer (1960) is also a film, directed by Peter Kubelka. Kubelka's style denied naturalism and highly rated the concrete material of film[18]. The film establishes a relationship with the spectator that is not grounded on 'psychology', but rather on the sharp awareness of the cinematic medium. *Arnulf Rainer* is arranged entirely of black and white frames which are put together in varying lengths, from 24 seconds to a single frame. With the alternation between the black and white frames, a flicker effect is created, which is close to the rapid flicker of film projection. The film effects a strange sense of anticipation, during the long sections of darkness, for the flicker to return; then comes the blinding white light. The spectator's perception is disturbed

---

[18] In an interview, when questioned if *Arnulf Rainer* was an "antifilm" Kubelka says:

> Just the opposite for me. It's the essence of cinema. I went back to the four most simple and essential elements, which is light and absence of light, and sound and the absence of sound. [...] Cinema is not as cold, as untasting as it seems. It is not so living as a violin is living, or as a drum is living. It is cold, it's iron, steel, celluloid. But there is sensual taste in cinema which you can see most in my films in the Rainer film. The "Arnulf Rainer" tastes different in every projection. No film varies so much, because there the taste of projection comes to be. It tastes different as to the room. (185-6)

by the changing light that comes from the screen. The film works as a machinegun, our eyes the target of its 'shots'.[19]

Between the fascination with mimetic violence (the 'blood' that is not there) and the lived experience of being 'attacked' by the moving image lies the core of this dissertation. Understanding the connections between violence and cinema is no small endeavor. In what follows I try to discuss different approaches to the dynamics between violence and film so as to point out paradigms that can be helpful in the investigation of the images of violence in the urban space in contemporary Brazilian films.

Since the 'Retomada',[20] a number of films have taken on the theme of violence as a result of social exclusion and, as a result, of a fractured society. Zuenir Ventura's book *Cidade Partida* (Broken City) gives a literary example of how the 'fracture' can be seen. The book's theme is the division of the city of Rio de Janeiro into two parts: the welcoming touristic attraction and the hidden city of poor inhabitants, violence and drug trafficking. Ventura proposes that although rich and poor share a same urban milieu, they live as if it were two distinct cities.

---

[19] The wordplay involving the polysemy of the word 'shot' (both as single sequence of a film captured by the camera without interruption and as a discharge of a firearm) is a strong evidence for the close-knit association between cinema and violence.

[20] The notion of a 'rebirth' of Brazilian cinema, after a crisis engendered by the extinction of Embrafilme (the most important funder for Brazilian cinema) in 1990, may convey the wrong idea of a uniform development of the film industry in Brazil since then. On the contrary – although film production has survived the near 'blackout' of the early 1990s, the new form of funding, via tax waiver, has engendered at least two competing views: one that highlights the lack of 'artistic' merit in the works produced (aimed at 'commercial' success only) and another that stresses the 'professionalization' of the entertainment industry. Furthermore, the competition for funds is still very fierce. It's also important to point out that the aesthetics (and the politics) of the films produced under the aegis of this model of funding is varied.

Ventura's perception replicates theses put forward by the Social Sciences for 30 years or so. What the notion of the divided city fails to perceive is the flux between the poles, with micro interaction that go from the dissemination of *funk* music – originally associated with the *favelas* - into middle and upper-classes and the parodic appropriation of the brand *Daslu* – a high society store – by an organization of prostitutes who launched the brand *Daspu*. Nevertheless, the notion of a broken city still pervades Brazilian films, mainly in their depiction of urban spaces like the *favela*.

In dialogue with audiovisual forms such as Hollywood genre film and exploitive TV news programs, these films have approached the slums through an allegedly 'realist' standpoint and were saluted as a 'rediscovery' of Brazilian society through which filmmakers exposed their 'critical social awareness'. The use of the expressions "reality" and "reveal" is pervasive[21] when referring to the approach described here, indicating a belief in the possibility of a true 'revelation', of an objective expression of the world. Interestingly, in these circulating discourses about Brazilian films, the constructed 'reality' of the film is taken as 'reality' itself.

Asbjorn Gronstad criticizes this kind of common-sense mimeticism, reminding us that "violent action in the cinema is not so much the simulation of actual violence as a re-representation of violent

---

[21] If we take the example of criticism about *Cidade de Deus* in major periodic publications, we will see that the idea of the film's revelation of Brazilian society is present in *Bravo!* (July 2008), *Revista de Cinema* (November 2003) and *Veja* (October 2002), to name a few.

images drawn from the intertextual history of the medium" (61). He defends the idea that if art 'reflects' anything, it is other works of art.

This problematic is addressed by a number of Brazilian scholars. Lúcia Nagib, for instance, in her recent *A Utopia no Cinema Brasileiro*, explores *O Invasor* saying that "*O invasor* is a work of fiction. However, fiction can reveal more than the document through critical analysis. [...] Marina's character [...] is, perhaps, the film's main revelation as a symptom of late capitalism" (177).[22] The trope of the revelation is textually present. And although Nagib's study of the fate of Utopia in Brazilian cinema questions the way contemporary films deal with a national project, it eventually falls into a rather non-analytical praise of filmmakers like Walter Salles and Fernando Meirelles, who have an 'international' career. She says: "If the Brazilian utopia is far from being realized, the Brazilian cinema utopia, at least in aesthetic terms, has taken place" (21).[23] The cinematic utopia: the recognition in a world market and the capacity to talk about violence and social convulsion in a 'realist' way that is palatable for domestic and foreign audiences.

Esther Hamburger in "Violência e pobreza no cinema brasileiro recente" analyzes contemporary films that stress the visibility of poor, black dwellers of slums and periphery. She argues that when television and cinema bring these subjects to public attention, they intensify and stimulate a struggle for the control of visibility, for the definition of

---

[22] *O invasor* é um filme de ficção. Porém, a ficção pode revelar até mais do que o documento através da análise crítica. [...] O personagem de Marina [...] é talvez a principal revelação do filme enquanto sintoma do capitalismo tardio.

[23] Se a utopia brasileira ainda está longe de se realizar, a do cinema brasileiro, ao menos no nível estético, já aconteceu.

which subjects and characters will have audiovisual expression. Her approach, however, deals in term of stereotypes - how to correct or diversify the production of the images of poor violent people. What such truth-oriented perspective neglects is the fact that what is said to be 'true' or not about a given community is not easily unveiled or wholly unproblematic.

A different account of the issues discussed here is given by Ismail Xavier. In "Da violência justiceira à violência ressentida", he argues that contemporary films resist the temptation to romanticize criminals like works in the past. The objective is to undermine the criminal's representativity (as a 'spokesperson') in contrast with the violent characters of the past – mainly from the 1960's and 1970's – whose violence, although unequivocally criticized, still resounded as a justifiable response to social injustice. In this text, however, Xavier reveals a nostalgic reference to filmmakers of the 'past', as if they, like the criminals they produced on the screen, also held the legitimacy for social criticism. He states that

> The 1960-70's metaphors [...] transformed the rifle into a camera, the left-winged filmmaker into a proto-guerilla confronting the media, and associated the aesthetics of violence to the wars of national liberation. The emphasis now changes and introduces a cinema whose unfoldings are more problematic because this modern instrument can corrode relationships and has unpredictable consequences. (66-7)[24]

---

[24] As metáforas dos anos 60-70 que transformavam a câmara num fuzil, o cineasta de esquerda num proto-guerrilheiro enfrentando a mídia, e associavam a estética da violência às guerras de libertação nacional. A ênfase agora muda e entra em cena um cinema cujos desdobramentos são mais problemáticos, pois este instrumento moderno pode corroer relações e tem conseqüências imprevistas.

What I find controversial about his argument is the qualification of recent works as "more problematic". This characteristic implies a 'less' problematic past, which would portray violence and poverty in a more 'adequate' way. To a certain extent, this is the same argument put forward by Ivana Bentes in her discussion of the 'cosmetics of violence' as opposed to the 'aesthetics of violence'. Bentes defends that recent Brazilian films are resuming Cinema Novo themes such as poverty and violence, but without the political inflection of social denounce. For Bentes, contemporary cinema, on the contrary, makes a spectacle out of misery and violence, increasingly "consumed as a 'typical' or 'natural', albeit helpless element" ("Estética e Cosmética da Fome", 243). [25]

In her account, violence emerges as a new urban folklore, with its stories of crimes, massacres and horrors. A new 'brutality' that does not create spaces for complicity or mercy. Such random, meaningless violence eventually becomes a spectacle, representing the ultimate scission between *favelas* and the rest of the city. Moreover, there is no political discourse like in the 1960s (249). What is different from the Cinema Novo context is the fact that presently the images of violence are also being appropriated by the marginalized subjects which conventional cinema demonizes. She concludes the article by stating that "there are many aesthetics of violence, with diverse ethics and consequences: affirmative, reactive, resistant, they can be symptoms

---

[25] Cada vez mais consumida como um elemento de "tipicidade" ou "natureza" diante da qual não há nada a fazer.

and expression of forms of living, valuing and thinking" (254).[26] Although Bentes makes an important point by making reference to the different appropriations of images of violence, in these texts she stills reverberates the prominence of the 'images of violence' as a 'good' or 'bad' representation.

One other approach to violence in art might qualify it as transgressive. For Georges Bataille, transgression is a path to 'expenditure', to 'excess'. But the very idea of transgression demands the existence of the 'interdict'. It both contains and gives birth to transgression; actually, transgression and interdict are complementary rather than antipodes. In this tension of forces, as defended by Bataille, the interdict has a kind of 'reserve', an 'economy' that gives off an excess, a Dionysian force unleashed by transgression.

Situating violence in the sphere of the taboos held in Western societies, Bataille, in his work on *Eroticism*, argued that the imposition of the taboo implied, simultaneously, the need to transgress it. Transgression is an essential component of the taboo. It does not stand outside it, nor is the impulse behind transgression to subvert the taboo, but, on the contrary, to ensure its effectiveness. Transgression, therefore, does not deny the taboo, but transcends and completes it. In *Eroticism* Bataille posits that it is not a question of a necessary transgression of specific taboos, for there is no direct correspondence in

---

[26] São muitas as estéticas da violência, com diferentes éticas e conseqüências: afirmativas, reativas, resistentes elas podem ser sintoma e expressão de formas de viver, valorar e pensar (254).

this sense between a taboo and the transgressive impulse, both spheres being incommensurate (76).

Homogeneous societies typically refuse to acknowledge the element of disorder brought forth by eroticism. This refusal usually works in two ways: limiting sexual activity to reproduction and perpetuating a model of chastity, and legitimizing excess in animal sexuality, by sanctioning libertinism and sexual promiscuity. But even when rejected, eroticism still defines our being human, it remains what separates us from beasts.

Since the first kiss recorded on film by the end of the nineteenth century, erotic moving images have stimulated viewers and outraged public bodies around the world giving an audiovisual rendering of eroticism. Two images come to mind: two flashes of flesh, two shots where women make different use of their bodies. It can be said that these images are difficult to approach with aesthetic disinterest: they are rather explicit (the second, as it will be seen, in a greater degree), at the same time arousing and alienating. They defy notions of an eroticism that is free from power and oppression, sanitized and idealized. In Paul Verhoeven's *Basic Instinct,* Sharon Stone's character Catherine Tramell, a bisexual writer suspect of murder, displays her genitals during a police inquiry as a way to divert the men's attention from the content of the questions which would incriminate her. She uses her vagina as a weapon, or, rather, as a tool, to dominate her male interlocutors. Tramell uses sex to attract men and women, her fluid sexuality a well-knit black widow's web.

Figure 8 - Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct* (Dir. Paul Verhoeven, 1992) and Rinko Kinkuchi in *Babel* (Dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006)

Figure 9 - Leona Cavalli in *Amarelo Manga* (Dir. Cláudio Assis, 2003)

Chieko, Rinko Kikuchi's character in *Babel*, also displays her sex, but in Iñárritu's film, this display comes with the force of assertion: the deaf girl dares the young men who were flirting with her (and who eventually

dismissed her for being hearing-impaired) to acknowledge her subjectivity. It is, a subtle exhibitionist act, like Tramell/Stone's. On the other hand, we have Lígia's (Leona Cavalli) dyed vagina, flared abruptly. When she flaunts her 'mango yellow' pubic hair, it is not an invitation for sexual intercourse. Quite the opposite: her ostentatious blondness corresponds to an affront. Responding to Isaac's (Jonas Bloch) insistent insinuations, she flashes her genitals not to seduce him, but to scare him, to assert her own power in a different way. Her gesture suggests: "Look at this, is this what you want? But you're not having it". The unexpected violence of her act takes viewers by surprise and paralyzes the other male characters' reaction by taking a very ambiguous position, for she is neither maintaining a chaste attitude (because she is revealing her intimacy), nor indulging in promiscuous intercourse.

In this particular instance, *Amarelo Manga* produces an ambiguous manifestation of the erotic. The woman's body becomes, at the same time, a *vagina dentata*,[27] a kind of scarecrow (stuffed with yellow straw), devised to scare off male advances, and the object to male gaze (Isaac's in particular, but also for the other costumers of the bar she owns), concomitantly sovereign and subject.

Violence, as eroticism, tends to be repressed. The atrociousness of violent moments such as concentration camps and genocide is seen by

---

[27] In 2005 South-African Sonette Ehlers invented 'Rapex', an anti-rape device for women in the shape of female condoms that is inserted in the vaginal canal like a diaphragm. Rapex is covered with microscopic barbs which hook onto the rapist's penis and can only be removed surgically. Ehlers said that she was inspired to invent 'Rapex' after a rape victim told her: "If only I had teeth down there". (http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/controversy-in-south-africa-over-device-to-snare-rapists/2005/09/01/1125302683893.html)

Bataille not as an anomaly but as the surface effect of the repression of this primordial violence. It takes a profound faith in the project of the Enlightenment to be 'surprised' before such atrocities. There is an underlying rejection of Theodor Adorno's famous notion that it is barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz. For Bataille, poetry (art) is the only possible response, given that it contains the starting point for a reconfiguration of the sacred. Art is a necessary undertaking for the re-integration of transgressive violence into social being.

Art is part of Bataille's harsh criticism of utilitarianism. In his book *The Accursed Share,* the emphasis is upon the destruction of ends in general. It is a transgressive practice: the "parte maudite" is released; this "accursed part" is a sort of reserve of life, detached from rationality, which can be liberated through excess, drunkenness, joy, madness. Art, in this context, can never be 'useful': "the fatality of fascism is to submit: among other things, to reduce literature to usefulness" (*La Felicidad* 17).[28] Literature (and art in general) cannot be useful because it is the ultimate expression of humans, of their essential part, which is not reduced to utility. A true artist is a sovereign, refusing to serve the commands of a utilitarian order.

It is possible to place Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben's discussion on profanation side by side with Bataille's theorization. For Agamben, children play with whatever falls into their hand, transforming into toys things which belong to 'serious' spheres of life:

---

[28] "La fatalidad del fascismo es someter: entre otras cosas, reducir la literatura a una utilidad"

law, economics, war. Their use of these things "does not coincide with utilitarian consumption" (*Profanations* 76). This playful 'profanation' has to be differentiated from 'secularization'; the latter is a form of repression, because it simply replaces the forces it deals with, for example, displacing theological monarchy with worldly monarchy (77). Profanation deals with a different principle. It neutralizes what is profaned, destroying its aura and returning it to its use. As Agamben puts it: "both are political operations: the first guarantees the exercise of power by carrying it back to a sacred model; the second deactivates the apparatuses of power and return to common use the spaces that power had seized"(77). Returning violence to the 'common use', that is, its desacralization, implies rescuing it from capitalism's tendency to create a sphere of unprofanable things. This sphere has a lot to do with establishing ends for things. If things have an end, then they cannot be profaned.

A good example is that of a cat's behavior while playing with a ball of yarn. The instincts that would otherwise be employed in hunting a mouse, for example, are spent in a 'meaningless' task: hunting a ball of yarn. The play, then, "becomes a pure means, that is, a praxis that, while firmly maintaining its nature as a means, is emancipated from its relationship with an end; it has joyously forgotten its goal and can now show itself as such, as a means without an end" (86). Like the cat has found a new use for the ball of yarn, we must also think of new uses for violence that could defy its entrapment in some end. In this sense,

'profane' violence would be characteristic of the *violent image*, the image that plays with violence without being caught in a functionalist logic.

Moving forward, we could question the fascination with dismembered bodies. What is there in the fragmented whole that attracts the attention and the libido equally? Why is it almost impossible to control the eye/I? It goes from right to left and into the bodies, like in the paintings below. Bullet-eye/iron-dove.

"In this picture Goya caught the blinding, instantaneous flash of death, a thunderbolt of sight-destroying intensity, brighter than any known light" (Bataille, qtd in Krauss 151). Here lies the impasse of vision, as described by Rosalind Krauss, the ambiguity present in Georges Bataille's definition of the founding moment of modernism, the ambivalence between the "values of opticality [Manet] and those of an intensity that is 'blinding', 'sight-destroying', and in which representation dares to be neither appropriative nor productive [Goya]" (152).

Figure 10- Francisco de Goya, *The shooting of May 3rd* (1808/14).
(Source:http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/
commons/thumb/6/6e/Francisco_de_Goya_
y_Lucientes_023.jpg)

Figure 11 - Edouard Manet, Fourth version of *Execution of the Emperor Maximilian*, Final Version, Edouard Manet, 1868-69.
(Source:
http://cgfa.sunsite.dk/manet/manet22.jpg)

For in Goya there is light attracting the moth of vision to the violence exerted. Krauss argues that, in Bataille's book on Manet, a tension is created between vision and blindness which recuperates the body of the perceiver against the idealist paradigm of the work of art as a function of senses without bodies. The modernist tradition represented by Manet aims

> To exclude the domain of knowledge, both moral and scientific, to rewrite the visual in the realm of a reflexive relation to the modality of vision rather than to its contents, to savor in and for itself qualities like *immediacy, vibrancy, simultaneity, effulgence* and to experience these as qualities without objects – the intransitive verbs of vision, as it were. (147)

Manet's project, in this account, is associated with a fetishization of vision that is counterpoint to Goya's art of excess, related to the violence of the sacred.

In Manet the shots are portrayed in the precise moment of their emission. There is the smoke of the rifles but the bullets have not reached their destiny yet, or have just reached. It is a suspension of violence, the holding of breath. The spectators are protecting their ears from the noise of the rifles. In Goya, the rifles have shot the victims, there is despair, and blood, and cadavers.[29] Here the eye/bullet followed the shot just to be shattered by the blinding light of the lantern.

---

[29] We can trace a parallel with film squibs, small explosives widely used in the special effects industry to simulate a bullet hit on a person. Squibs became popular with 1960's U.S. films like *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Wild Bunch*. They are particularly disturbing because they confront the viewer with the breaking of the interior/exterior border: blood (and sometimes viscera) spatters, gurgles, explodes. Squibs are technical artifacts in film production that have altered the way people see movies. Thanks to them, the visualization of the inner matter of the human body became possible; in a way it contributed to profanation of human bodies.

'Do you see the eye?' she asked me.

'Well?'

'It's an egg', she concluded with all simplicity.

'All right', I urged her, extremely disturbed, 'what are you getting at?'

'I want to play with this eye'.

'What do you mean?'

'Listen, Sir Edmund', she finally let it out, 'you must give me this at one, tear it out at once, I want it!'

Sir Edmund was always poker-faced except when he turned purple. Nor did he bat an eyelash now; but the blood did shoot to his face. He removed a pair of fine scissors from his wallet, knelt down, then nimbly inserted the fingers of his left hand into the socket and drew out the eye, while his right hand snipped the obstinate ligaments. Next, he presented the small whitish eyeball in a hand reddened with blood. (Bataille *Story of the Eye* 65-6)

Bataille tried to understand the possible relations between art and violence: violence *in* art and violence *of* art. The eye is torn out of its orbit – in Bataille, the privileged hierarchical space given to vision

---

In 1971 performance artist Chris Burden had his arm pierced by a bullet from a 22 rifle, in a provocative performance which defied fears and anxieties about violence and shot wounds (which, in their turn, fed on the escalation of the Vietnam War).

Tony Tasset offered a rereading of the piece in 1996, with *Squib*. Tasset parodies explicit violence in a video where he is supposedly shot in front of the camera: the gruesome image is a commentary on the contemporary fascination with violence as it employs the strategy of exaggeration and lack of verisimilitude.

Figure 12 - Chris Burden *Shoot* (1971)
(Source: http://www.ubu.com/film/burden. Html)

Figure 13 - Tony Tasset *Squib* (1996)
(Source: http://www.neuegalerie.at/03/mars /tasset01.jpg

(inherited from a Cartesian perspective) is challenged. The eye is destroyed - it takes a destroyed object to destroy the order within, the order that suffocates and belittles. The destruction of things without perishment: "But with this double impasse arises a sense of art, which, putting us on the track of complete extinction – leaving us suspended there for a time – proposes to man a ravishing without repose" (Bataille *La Felicidad* 124).[30]

Bataille discusses modernist art as a kind of creative destruction, a kind of sacrifice. It refuses to give off 'pretty images' and expands the obsession with the sacrificial image in which the destruction of objects corresponds, in a manner already half-conscious, to the enduring functions of religions. Art is the more important for Bataille as it implies a sense of destruction. This self-destruction, a sacrifice, heightens emotions, which cannot be subordinate to any useful object. Emotion should be connected to the opening of new horizons, and not coerced into a familiar object. Art is at its best; with its images of horror, art opens up the doors to possibilities.

In *Histoire(s) du Cinema* Jean-Luc Godard credits French artist Edouard Manet with the birth of modern painting, when his works create a junction of the interior world with the cosmos; and with that, Godard muses, Manet also created cinema. Manet created forms that think, and for Godard the fact that cinema is an art that was made to think is something that has been forgotten.

---

[30] "Pero con este doble atolladero se destaca justamente el sentido del arte, que al arrojarnos en la vía de una desaparición completa – y dejándonos suspendidos por un tiempo – e ofrece al hombre un incesante rapto".

What kinds of thoughts are possible, then, before the conspicuous excess of violence in film? The spectator is invited (subpoenaed?) to see, hear and feel at once. No other art provides this kind of experience of violence. Filmmaker Brian de Palma has declared that

> Motion pictures are a kinetic art form; you're dealing with motion and sometimes that can be violent motion. There are very few art forms that let you deal with things in motion and that is why Westerners and chases and shoot-outs crop up in film. They require one of the elements intrinsic to film: motion. (qtd. in Prince 2)

This attraction, however, is not based on deviancy or amorality, but rather it is an attraction to the aesthetics of film, to the range of emotional and physical responses to watching film.

Figure 14 – *Histoire(s) du Cinema*, by Jean-Luc Godard. In a sequence dedicated to the discussing of the relationship between cinema and painting, with emphasis on Manet's works. Godard argues that the women in Manet's paintings look at the spectator as if saying "I know what you're thinking". Also in this sequence, a title-card reads "It was silent cinema". Cinema culminates art's potential to liberate itself from representation and concentrate on form and color. At the end of this episode from *Histoire(s) du Cinema*, Godard comes up with a wordplay that synthesizes his argument: "The thought that forms a form that thinks".

In literature, for example, the aesthetic techniques of 'convulsion' and automatic writing marked surrealism. The surrealist writer wanted to recover the hidden, repressed lawbreaker (the 'other') through art. The surrealists envisaged crime as transgression of taboos, the discharge of desire that constituted the origin of art. Carolyn J. Dean details: "Surrealist writers thus eroticized art by merging it with violence, and they reconceived it as the product of a libidinal, primarily sadomasochistic drive that metamorphosed everyday objects, especially the human body" (214). Embedded in the oneiric experience, the surrealists dreamed of violent images.

Those drives were replicated in surrealist filmic practice. According to Ramona Fotiade, for surrealists, "the visual essence of cinema held the promise of a miraculous, non-verbal language that announced 'a new, audacious aesthetic, a sense of modern beauty' (395)". The oneiric appeal of the cinematographic image was soon appropriated by filmmakers such as Luis Buñuel, who did not hesitate

in transforming filmic dreams into reveries of mutilation and sexual violence.

Un Chien Andalou exemplifies Buñuel's iconoclastic endeavors. The opening sequence still testifies to this challenge: the initial titles read "Once upon a time", referring to children's story and the fantastic imaginary. A man (played by Buñuel himself) anxiously smokes a cigarette while he sharpens the blade of a razor. To test the blade, he cuts his own fingernail. He goes out and looks at the moon at its fullest. A cloud slides in direction of the moon, as if to sever it in two. In the following shot, the man pushes open wide the eye of a woman. As the cloud cuts across the surface of the moon, the razor slices the eye apart. A second title announces: "Eight years later". The arbitrariness of the relations between images and between images and titles destabilizes the spectators' sense-making capacities and splits their ego.

Figure 15 - *Un Chien Undalou*, directed by Luis Buñuel, 1929

The political/revolutionary character of the surrealist work itself, in isolation from the polemical positions taken up by André Breton and others on its defense, is not always evident. Walter Benjamin, for instance, was alert to how developments in the technological means of production affected the nature of art, whereas his contemporary Surrealists were indifferent to this issue, more preoccupied with the subliminal. The creative powers of the unconscious were celebrated by the Surrealists and, while Benjamin too approved of the element of chance in creativity and welcomed the Surrealist desire to disorder the senses, he was never insistent on automatism in art as both means and ends.

Benjamin was not primarily interested in objects created or discovered by the unconsciousness. His objective was to uncover the objects of external, socio-historical reality: "all serious investigation of the gifts and occult, surrealist and phantasmagoric phenomena must have a dialectical assumption that the romantic spirit cannot accept"

("Surrealismo", 32).[31] It is the 'profane illumination' of the artist which can reveal the real potential of the notions of dreams, telepathy and drunkenness. The perception of ordinary objects as uncanny, strange, is a common effect of the use of drugs; Benjamin, however, propounds the 'profane illuminations' of these objects through a sober dialectics that sees "the ordinary as impenetrable and the impenetrable as ordinary" (33).[32] Although his development took a divergent path from that of Surrealism, Benjamin never lost touch with his original sympathy for the shared impulses behind their ideas.

Sergei Eisenstein also helped develop the connection between image, thought and violence by proposing his notion of *montage* (and, more specifically, of *intellectual montage*), which deals in shock and confrontation of images. Eisenstein program involved a revolutionary ideal that cinema would provoke a new kind of thought through "a process of comparing each new image with the common denotation", where "power is accumulated behind a process that can be formally identified with that of logical deduction. The decision to release these ideas, as well as the method used, is already *intellectually* conceived" (154). The spectators' intellectual activity would be triggered by the violent shock of images and their constitutive elements, insofar as they are promoted to producers of meaning.

---

[31] In the Brazilian translation: Toda investigação séria dos dons e fenômenos ocultos, surrealistas e fantasmagóricos, precisa ter um pressuposto dialético que o espírito romântico não pode aceitar.

[32] O cotidiano como impenetrável e o impenetrável como cotidiano.

In *Eisenstein Rediscovered* we are reminded of Eisenstein's feud with Dziga Vertov: "It is not a 'Cine-Eye' that we need but a 'Cine-Fist'"(Kleiman 34). Here, the idea of a violent intrusion into one's mind by means of the cinematographic image goes hand in hand with Eisenstein's project to change the conditioned reflex that is aggravated by the social context and to deliver from the reflex reactions of servility and terror. Naum Kleiman argues that from *The Strike* to *Ivan the Terrible* both the subject and the structure of the films can be seen as a kind of immunization against this reflex reaction of panic and fear.

Gilles Deleuze describes this 'aesthetics of shock' in three moments: the first goes from the image to thought ("the shock has an effect on the spirit, it forces it to think" [*Time*-Image, 158]); the second moment may go from thought to affect or return from thought to image ("it is a matter of giving 'emotional fullness' or 'passion' back to the intellectual process" [158]); and the third, present in the previous two moment, amounts to an identity of concept and image, it "*indicates the relation between man and the world*" (161 – emphasis in the original). Deleuze, however, sees a waning of this dialectical image, which is politically relevant for a mass art like cinema, as films tend to psychological individualization. He states that "when the violence is no longer that of the image and its vibrations but that of the represented, we move into a blood-red arbitrariness" (164). What Deleuze fears is that, by weakening the capacities of cinema to think, its mass quality

degenerates into a kind of fascism that promotes the encounter of Hitler with Hollywood.[33]

Jean-Luc Godard's cinema appropriated the codes of violence from classical Hollywood cinema and, in self-reflexive operation, highlighted their artifices. Godard parodied the 'naturalistic' use of violence in Hollywood, where it is engendered by the *action* in the narrative, leaving little space for the spectator to reflect about it: the moral rigidity of Hollywood codes determines that the use of violence in the name of the law is justified whereas its use against the law should be punished, as can be best seen in the Western genre.

Following Gilles Deleuze, we can say of Godard that his films do not express a dialectical thought (Deleuze *Conversações* 59-61). The film director prefers the conjunction *and* to *or*. His films think violence not in the terms of 'good' or 'bad', but 'good' and 'bad' and 'beautiful' and 'ugly' and 'disgusting' and 'artful' and 'commercial' and so on. It is in the interstice between the terms that Godard's politics arises, questioning the macropolitics of big groupings. As he says in an interview: "you can't separate the mirror from the reality. You can't distinguish them so clearly. I think that the movie is not a thing which is taken by the camera; the movie is the reality of the movie moving from reality to the camera. It's between them" (29).

---

[33] A very recent example of this pernicious encounter is Zack Snyder's *300*, a terrifying tale that mixes jingoism, sexism, stylized violence, and the handling of human masses.

Godard charges violence with ironic and parodic overtones, questioning classical codes, mainly when he articulates violence with the universe of pop culture. Violence becomes laughable and unnatural.

Figure 16 – Shots from the music video for rock band Santigold's *L.E.S. Artistes*. The video, directed by Nima Nourizadeh, appropriates Godardian strategies in its presentation of violence. The conventional and melodramatic acting is in stark contrast with the use of non-conventional techniques to produce an effect of violence.

Steven Shaviro offers another insight into violence and argues for the importance of the often neglected body in film theory:

> Film is a vivid medium, and it is important to talk about how it arouses corporeal reactions of desire and fear, pleasure and disgust, fascination and shame. [...] Power works in the depths and on the surfaces of the body, and not just in the disembodied realm of

> 'representation' or of 'discourse'. It is in the flesh first of all, far more than on some level of supposed ideological reflection, that the political is personal, and the personal political. (viii)

His theoretical strategy is to exempt film from being both exalted as a medium of communal fantasy and rejected as a mechanism of ideological mystification. Film becomes something else: a technology that strengthens and renews experiences of passivity and abjection. He expands this idea in the following terms:

> What I am trying to say is that a lot of pleasure that humans have in general is tied to abjection. The trouble with analyzing it is that analyzing becomes a way to distance it. Too many people want to say that artistic or aesthetic experiences (including sexual) are supposed to be nice. ("Interview")

Shaviro's theorizations are relevant in the study of violence in film as they describe the pleasure in watching films as primarily violent. Taking sides with the abject, exploring the 'masochistic' pleasure of watching a film, he ends up proposing a Foucaultian kind of resistance in this process: "[The] body is a necessary condition and support of the cinematic process: it makes that process possible, but also continually interrupts it, unlacing its sutures and swallowing up its meanings" (257).

Accordingly, one can say that film does not simply 'dump' ideology into the minds of passive individual viewers but that it negotiates degrees of 'truth' with the spectators through their bodies. Cinema is the presentation of images loaded with emotions, feelings,

thoughts that have a direct impact on these bodies and that might reverberate in their own subjectivity.

Shaviro's discussion is one of the numerous approaches film scholars have developed to try to understand the cinema's affect on viewers. Miriam Hensen, for example, whose notion of 'vernacular modernism' is employed in the second chapter, draws on Siegfrid Kracauer for the idea of "alternative public sphere"[34] and Walter Benjamin's "optical unconscious" to explain film's appeal in the first decades of the twentieth century. Tom Gunning's theorization about the "cinema of attractions" also tried to connect cinema to the new experiences of time and space that came with modernity, so that films could be related to forces other than storytelling.

Walter Benjamin, in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", portrayed the shock sensation as the cause of a heightening of consciousness in modernity, a process which in turn causes the disintegration of the 'aura' and the suffocation of experience under the protective shield of consciousness. For Benjamin, the simultaneous and collective experience that characterizes the film as the new technical medium is very close to the reception of architecture, not as a representative but as an unconscious and interactive space. We relate to buildings by use and by perception, by touch and sight.

---

[34] Hansen explains the notion of this sphere: "Kracauer, in his more utopian moments, understood the cinema as an alternative public sphere - alternative to both bourgeois institutions of art, education, and culture, and the traditional arenas of politics - an imaginative horizon in which, however compromised by its capitalist foundations, something like an actual democratization of culture seemed to be taking shape". ("Mass Production" 70)

Architecture is exemplary for Benjamin because differently from painting or other art forms, it fulfills a basic social and economic human need (shelter). Thus, our perception of it happens habitually (unconsciously) rather than conscious contemplation. Being perceived by way of habit based on daily practice, architecture excludes attention: we notice architecture without paying attention to it. Our way of interacting with our architectural environments is very muck like film – in the dark cinema theater; the projection simulates the habitual perception that has accompanied architecture. This happens thanks to what Benjamin calls 'distraction', a form of perception that would be appropriate to the challenges of modernity. In cinema, distraction and habit merge dialectically, for even the distracted person can form a habit. If we can notice a building habitually without paying attention to it, the same is true for the cinema for we notice its 'shock-effects' but these do not invite (in fact, they exclude) all contemplation.

This is why Susan Buck-Morss interprets Walter Benjamin's elusive call for the politicization of art as a claim for art to combat the multifarious anaesthetizing effects of industrial capitalism and mass media by allowing the viewer or receiver of art to feel in the original sense of the term aesthetic.

In an essay called "Critique of Violence", Walter Benjamin offers a critical approach to violence that neither advocates, condones nor rejects it, but assesses the aporias in the dominant trends in the discussion of violence. It is common-sense that the contemporary State has taken over the monopoly of the exercise of violence, an exercise that

is historically justified as long as violence is serving 'legal' ends, that is, the ends which have been sanctioned under certain historical conditions. Because the State holds the monopoly of 'legal' violence, it is unacceptable (therefore, illegal – with very few exceptions, including self-defense) that individuals use violence to pursue their own goals. The greatest menace for the law is, thus, this 'excess' violence that has not been declared legal but that exists wherever individuals – or groups – threat to use violence to fulfill their ends. As Benjamin explains,

> The law's interest in the monopoly of violence vis-à-vis individuals is not explained by the intention of preserving legal ends but, rather, by that of preserving the law itself: that violence, when not in the hands of the law, threatens it not by the ends that it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law. (281)

Benjamin goes on to exemplify his point by mentioning the fascination that the figure of the "great criminal" (281) arises. We are fascinated by the criminal because s/he brings to light the existence of a violence that has not been co-opted, sanctioned, institutionalized by the law. It can be said, we are fascinated by the existence of violence 'in the wild' and its potential to disturb normality and peace.

The great political struggles, mainly revolutionary ones, center on this problem of the 'sanctioning' of violence: the constant fight to establish laws, where violence confronts the *status quo* with the possibility of becoming, itself, a 'new law'. Violence 'makes' laws. But this law will also fight back to maintain its existence, it will also use violence to preserve the ruling order. Violence also 'preserves' laws. Benjamin's text differentiates divine from human – and inauthentic –

manifestations of force and makes a strong point that it is not possible to separate violence from politics: that violence is either law-making or law-preserving (287).

There is, however, a possibility that the law-breaker is not caught by law-preserving violence, and this 'violation' might threaten to become a law-making violence, thus a challenging to the power established by law-making violence. Benjamin characterizes this as a mythical cycle, entrapped in an endless loop like the mythical punishments. It is the breaking of this cycle that might lay the foundations for a new historic epoch (300). In other words, the point, for Benjamin, was to establish the possibility of violence outside, or parallel to, the law, which could break the dialectics between the violence that creates and the one that conserves the law. Benjamin calls this other violence 'pure', 'divine' or 'revolutionary'.

The example of police violence can clarify Benjamin's critique. The police make use of State-sanctioned violence. That implies that this violence has 'legal' ends, but because there is such discretionary space (as in the right of decree), it is the very police which often establishes these very ends, even outside the 'legal' sphere. In Benjamin's words,

> the 'law' of the police really marks the point at which the state, whether from impotence or because of the immanent connections within any legal system, can no longer guarantee through the legal system the empirical ends that it desires at any price to attain. (287)

The great issue that arises from these considerations concerns the idea of 'mediality'. As Tom McCall posits, "the object of Benjamin's critique is

a 'pure and immediate' ('reine unmittelbare') violence, one that is absolutely nonrepeatable, nontransferable, and so nonrepresentational, one that cannot serve as the instrument toward some end" (188). Benjamin proposes 'pure means', that is, means without ends, neither law-making nor law-preserving.

Beatrice Hanssen draws a relevant connection between violence's mediality and the filmic *medium* as discussed by Benjamin in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction": "Benjamin hopes to separate the pure, unalloyed use of technological means, that is, film as a revolutionary medium, from its exploitation as fascist propaganda" (24). It can be argued that the violence of the medium is also to be regarded in its pure mediality, in terms of its potential to neither 'make' nor 'preserve' law and institutional normality.

Benjamin's essay on mechanical reproduction is an important reflection on the transformations that occurred, during the first decades of the 20th century, in the control and regulation of audiences. Cinema, which with the fordist[35] model of production realized its potential as a mass medium, changed radically the modes of collective perception by

---

[35] After World War II, western countries re-organized their economies and productive forces in such a way that they witnessed economic growth, a balance between production and mass consumption, while companies enjoyed a period of high productivity based of Taylorism, centralization and rationalization of the processes. This kind of fordist capitalism combined the rationalization of the companies with the vertical organization national workers' unions and the expansion of the State. Furthermore, it employed specialized and mechanized production and the bureaucratization of the companies, leading to a deep distinction between types of manual and intellectual labor. (Harvey 1998) More recently this model has suffered alterations, leading to a post-fordist capitalism, or immaterial capitalism, as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt define in their book *Império*. This new economic configuration is defined by a growing reliance of the 'material' economy on the 'immaterial' elements that qualify it, that is, the symbolic, linguistic, aesthetic and affective elements. Culture and aesthetics once thought to be 'hovering' over the 'hard', 'material' production, are now considered as a vital part, the very basis of contemporary capitalism.

debasing the separation between author and audience. Then – and even more so nowadays –

> there is hardly a gainfully employed European who could not, in principle, find an opportunity to publish somewhere or other comments on his work, grievances, documentary reports, or that sort of thing. Thus, the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character. The difference becomes merely functional; it may vary from case to case. At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer. (57-58)

Cinema partakes in these transformations inasmuch as it incites the participation of the audience as 'connoisseurs', as experts. The mass audiences, now able to consider themselves experts in art, want to participate not only in the perception, but also in the production of the work of art. Benjamin's great insight is to connect this productive endeavor with social and economic work: the formation of the audiences resembles the formation of the collective workforce, for the shock produced by *montage* bear semblance to the shocks workers are submitted to in the assembly lines. Machines are responsible for these alterations.

It is important to recall that work and perception exist not only under the aegis of regulation and control, in order to better serve the ends of capitalistic accumulation. They are also 'productive' in the sense of the creation of new forms of being and collective innovation. However, the normal/t/ization of these 'productive' forces is a strong tendency in post-fordist societies. What is at stake here is the attempt to circumscribe these forces to profitable maneuvers, engulfing the whole of people's lives into capitalistic production. It is a double bind: on the

one hand, the transformations that characterize the passage from fordist to post-fordist capitalism allow people to value and insert their subjectivities in the processes of production. Companies, for example, are increasingly more interested in such 'subjective' qualities as creativity, leadership and sympathy, than in 'objective' criteria as qualification and experience. That means that workers are asked to bring their lives into their jobs in a way that work ends up colonizing their whole lives. 'Working' hours become 'living' hours. This is where the biopolitical operations come into play, hijacking the potential mediality and valorization of life.

Film critic André Bazin considers that cinema should point towards the world, the reality that surrounds us. This task is especially suitable for the cinema because the apparatus expresses a psychologically convincing illusion of reality; this means that, if filmmakers use it appropriately, cinema can convey the world in its complexity, as long as they do not shape reality for their own interests. Bazin mentions aesthetic devices – long take and deep focus – that could be more suitable to transform the world without violating it.

Bazin's ontology of the photographic image is, therefore, ruled by the ethical principle that aims at limiting the power of manipulation of the real. In this sense, the French critic acknowledges the limits of the realist enactment of events like death and sex. He says that "before cinema we had only the profanation of corpses and the violation of graves. Nowadays, thanks to film, we can violate and exhibit at will our

single inalienable possession in time. Dead people without Requiem, eternal re-dead of the cinema!" (134).[36]

Bazin's ontology is guided by the ethical principle of the object's primacy over the subject, which must be reinforced in order to preserve the integrity of phenomenological space and time – hence, his defense of the long take and depth of field. The ethics that ensues aims at limiting the possibility of manipulation of the real by filmmakers, and it acknowledges the limits of realist mise-en-scène of singular moments such as death and sex. Bazin argues in "À Margem do Erotismo no Cinema" that cinema can talk about anything but it cannot show everything. There are no situations whose expression is forbidden, under the condition that the filmmaker resorts to the possibility of abstraction of film language in such a way that the images do not acquire a documentary value.

Another ethical claim concerning violent images is given by Serge Daney. He theorizes that when the spectator, or the film, produce a *stop*, then cinema enters adulthood and can be free from banalization:

> Either it is the spectator who is suddenly "missing from its place" and stops while the movie continues. Or it is the movie which, instead of "continuing", folds back onto itself and onto a temporary definitive "image" allowing the spectator to continue believing in cinema and the citizen to live his life. Stop of the spectator, stop on the image: cinema entered adulthood. The sphere of the visible had ceased to be entirely available: there were gaps and holes, necessary hollowness and superfluous fullness, forever missing images and always defective gazes.

---

[36] In the Brazilian translation: Antes do cinema, conheciam-se apenas a profanação de cadáveres e a violação de sepulturas. Hoje, graças ao filme, pode-se violar e exibir à vontade o único de nossos bens temporalmente inalienável. Mortos sem réquiem, eternos re-mortos o cinema!

> The show and the spectator stopped playing all the balls. And having chosen cinema – allegedly "the art of moving images" – I began my cinephile life under the paradox of a first *stop on the image*. (Serge Daney, "The tracking shot in *Kapo*")

The concept of the stops of the image comes to surface as a safeguard against the banality of historical events, such as the concentration camps. Serge Daney expresses his aversion to a scene in the film *Kapo*, directed by Gillo Pontecorvo, about a concentration camp. An inmate commits suicide on an electric fence, a scene that is depicted through a traveling shot to close in on the dead body – an approximation Daney considers shameful. Daney gives voice to those concerned with the possibility of representing 'true evil' or 'absolute violence', incarnated in the figure of the World War II concentration camps.

> Handed back to the historians and the curious, the question of the camps is now in line with their work, their divergences and their madness. The foreclosed desire that returns "as a hallucination into the real" is evidently the one that should never have returned. It is the desire that no gas chambers, no final solution and eventually no camps ever existed: various revisionisms. Along with the tracking shot in *Kapo* today's film students would also inherit an uncertain transmission, a taboo not clearly identified, in a word just another round in the history of tribalism of the same and the phobia of the other. The stop on the image has ceased to operate; the banality of evil can launch new, electronic images. (Serge Daney, "The tracking shot in *Kapo*")

The stop of the image encounters a counterpart in Leo Bersani and Ulysses Dutoit's theorization, which also sees a similar risk in 'objectifying' violence. According to them, Western humanist culture has promoted a narrativizing of violence that eventually upholds the glamour of historical violence, fashioning violence as something isolated

and identifiable. As they point out, "a liberal humanist tradition has trained us to locate violence historically – that is, as a certain type of eruptions against a background of generally nonviolence human experience" (21). For them, the process of turning violent moments into a narrative makes more possible to "master" violence, which, reduced to a plot, can be "isolated, understood, perhaps mastered and eliminated" (21). Mastering violence through a historical, narrative approach can bring consequences such as the re-organization of governments in order to minimize the appearance of violent occasions and the ethical claim that certain subjects in art should be banned because of their potential to raise violent impulses in the audiences.

The authors want to present a redefinition of our culture's implication in violence: we have a "tendency" to immobilize and centralize historical and represented violence. The problem with this tendency, they argue, is that it leads to a pleasant identification with the enactment of violence. Their train of thought goes in this direction:

> A coherent narrative depends on stabilized images; stabilized images stimulate the mimetic impulse. Centrality, the privileged foreground, and the suspenseful expectation of climaxes all contribute, in historical and artistic narratives, to a fascination with violent events on the part of readers and spectator. (22)

Following this conclusion, we have that both the artist and the historian are deeply implicated in the encouragement of the mimetic excitement that comes with the privileging of violence as a subject-matter. The centrality of the images of violence limits our attention toward other adjacent elements and because the critique of violence

privileges these images it may encourage the very fascination it wants to preclude.

Bersani and Dutoit are looking for a way to see violence that is more erratic and decentered, where the gaze is neither fixed nor fetishistic. Because there is no way out of violence, our choice is between the dislocations of desire and the destructive fixation on violence. Dealing with the processes of 'identification' in art, however, leaves space for a number of interrogations: how do we 'identify'? Are all "fixations" on violence inherently destructive?

In "How Films Mean, or, From Aesthetics to Semiotics and Half-Way Back Again" Geoffrey Nowell-Smith shows how the study of 'meaning' gained central stage in film analysis: through the study of 'what a film means' theorists tried to make visible a politics of representation. His argument goes on to challenge this political project, considering it redundant, contending that films studies should simply focus on the question of meaning. Nowell-Smith is looking for a basis for film studies that takes into consideration the fact that "films do not just mean," but they "also work in less describable ways", "partly through meaning and partly in other ways, partly in ways that have linguistic equivalents and partly in ways that do not" (16). The expression "less describable ways" implies, in his article, that we should include considerations about affect.

We can try to find tentative responses to these issues in Francis Bacon's art. In his interviews to David Sylvester, Bacon affirms that his paintings, expressions of disfiguration and violence, address images in

such a way that they can not be determined through discourse. Bacon's program is to create images that put spectators in a position where their *dogmatic* expectations (turning one's face from violence, for example) have to break up with their scheme of reception.

In *Francis Bacon: Lógica da Sensação*, Gilles Deleuze tries to explain how this scheme of reception is broken up according to a 'logics of sensation'. He proposes two strategies to escape the clichés of representation and to get to a 'sensation': abstraction and the Figure. On the one hand, abstract artists (Kandinsky, for example), by discarding classical figuration, diminish sensation to a purely optical code, which means they address principally to the eye, "they pass through the brain, they do no act directly on the nervous system, they do not have access to sensation" (44). [37] On the other hand, the "Figure" is the form that is connected to a sensation, and which transmits the violence of this sensation directly to the nervous system.

The notion of the Figure suggests that sensation is *in* the body, which, at the same time, produces and receives sensation. Deleuze claims that Bacon's violent and distorted paintings, when producing 'sensations', try to escape the 'sensational', that is "the primary figuration of what causes a violent sensation[38]" (45). Bacon said "I wanted to paint the scream more than the horror", Deleuze, explains, and so when he paints the screaming Pope there is nothing there that

---

[37] In the Brazilian translation: "elas passam pelo cérebro, não agem diretamente sobre o sistema nervoso, não têm acesso à sensação".

[38] In the Brazilian translation: "a figuração primária daquilo que provoca uma sensação violenta".

could have caused the horror. On the contrary, facing the invisible, the horror becomes a consequence of the scream.

Figure 17 - Francis Bacon, *Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953)
Source: http://francis-bacon.cx/popes/innocent_X.html

Deleuze opposes two kinds of violence when he discussed Bacon's works. One is the violence of the represented, the violence of clichés and sensationalism. In *Cinema Two: The Time-Image* Deleuze talks about a "civilization of the cliché where all the powers have an interest in hiding images from us, not necessarily in hiding the same thing from us, but in hiding something in the image"(21). This civilization of clichés prevents us from experiencing the sensation when in contact with an image: we usually project all kinds of 'meanings' that defer/deter experience. There is sensation in the image when we are able to do away with 'sentiments', standardized responses; there is sensation when cliché is no more.

Deleuze finds in Bacon's art an opportune instance of what he calls a *haptic* reception, when "there is no longer a rigorous subordination in one sense or another, neither mild subordination nor

virtual connection, that is, when vision finds in itself a function of tact that is its own and differs form the optical function[39]" (156). With the *haptic* Deleuze argues that space becomes tactile as if the eye were now a hand stroking surfaces without any sense of the whole configuration or mutual relation of those surfaces.

A *haptic* reception is also discussed in *Mil Platôs* (One Thousand Plateaus, as a virtual space whose fragmented components can be assembled in multiple combinations. It is proper of a 'smooth space' of close-vision, where all orientation, landmarks and the linkages between things are in continuous variation – i.e. a continuous transmutation which operates "step-by-step" to no pre-arranged or pre-governed schema. There is no stable unified set of referents since orientations are never constant, but constantly change. In this space, "reception is made of symptoms and evaluations, much more than measurements and properties[40]" (185). The *haptic* model, thus, demands that we rethink violence in art not so much as a 'distant' object caught by the eye, but also as a reshaping of perception that destabilizes the power of representation in the name of fluid, erratic reception.

We can then infer that in cinema there is this double movement of images: superimposed clichés that weaken their potential to create sensations, and an attempt to escape these clichés, to produce direct sensations. When the image is presented without clichés, it appears "in

---

[39] In the Brazlian translation: Quando não houver mais subordinação rigorosa em um sentido ou em outro, nem subordinação branda nem conexão virtual, isto é, quando a visão descobrir em si mesma uma função de tato que lhe é característica, e que pertence só a ela, distinta de sua função ótica.

[40] In the Brazilian translation: "a percepção é feita de sintomas e avaliações, mais do que de medidas e propriedades".

its excess of horror or beauty, in its radical or unjustifiable character, because it no longer has to be 'justified'" (20).

Marco Abel observes that Bacon's operations to create sensations are also possible in films, even when this particular medium tends to privilege the figurative/narrative nature of the images. Offering a reading of the Coen Brother's cinema akin to Bacon's paintings, Abel states that "sensation is what they film, and what they film is subsequently projected on screen is the body – not insofar as it is represented as an object, but insofar as it is experienced as sustaining *this* sensation" (9-10).

Whereas Bersani and Dutoit claim for the dislocation of desire that would un-privilege narrativized images of violence, Abel proposes, following Deleuze, that the affective forces of sensation produce effects *prior* to narrativization, before they are reterritorialized in representation. An ethical consequence derives from these effects: it is not so much the case of 'judging' the 'correctness' of representations, but of examining the kinds of effects that spring from an encounter with images of violence/violent images.

We have an innate ability to respond to these images (a 'response-ability', in Abel's formulation), but how we are 'affected' by them is not a matter of evaluating how we feel. 'Feeling' still expresses a causal logic (action-reaction circuits) that does not account for the potential of the image stripped off clichés. Affects, explain Abel, quoting Brian Massumi, is a "state of passional suspension in which [the body] exists more outside of itself, more in the abstracted action of the impinging thing

and the abstracted context of that action, than within itself" (11). The main problem consists in understanding the possibility of a response *before* it is trapped in the plane of representation.

Abel calls for an ethical approach to films which could debunk moralistic assumptions about violence. An ethics similar to Baruch Spinoza's, where 'power' is understood as the power to affect or to be affected by the other, generating a new model to philosophy based on the body (Deluze *Espinosa: Filosofia Prática*). Spinoza's provocative assumption that we have not yet understood all that a body can do relates to his thesis that the mind/body Cartesian split does not exist. Mind and body are not in a hierarchical order, an affirmation that destabilizes Morality as the control of the passion of the body by consciousness. What we experience are infinite affects of different encounters or relations between bodies, which may agree or disagree.

As a consequence, the notion of 'evil' ceases to exist, because there are only good or bad encounters of bodies: food, for example, increases the potential of our bodies, so this encounter can be considered 'good'; poison, on the other hand, decomposes our body, so this is a bad encounter. Good or Evil are not present in nature in general, but there is goodness and badness, according to what is useful or harmful to one's nature. But it does not mean that there are no more values, only that there are more contingent values and not an absolute (God-imposed) entity. Therefore, following a Spinozist line of thought, violence can not be judged, it is beyond judgment. Violence is born out of bad encounters, and can both have the effect of sadness or an

affirmative potential. An encounter with violence, can thus, destroy our potential to act, generating a bad encounter, or it can add to that potential (Deleuze *Espinosa* 33-34).

Considering that representation woks by means of immobilization, and spatialization, it conveniently becomes a process through which we 'interpret' the always implied referent. The analogies and correspondences it creates between elements are produced to the detriment of their differences, movements and changes. However, with Deleuze and Abel we can start thinking that the affective potential of film is not that it resembles the objects it represents (the 'iconic' nature of cinema). This potential would lie in the capacity of the film to defy the limitations of the intellect, drawing us not to a chain of action and reaction, but to a zone of indeterminacy between perception and action, one that leaves us with no straight forward 'response' to the images.

In this perspective, the body no longer reassures reality, identities or self – on the contrary, it is exposed to variations, fluxes and mutations. This much more complex understanding of what a body can do surpasses the widespread simplification that 'the body thinks'. What this platitude fails to perceive is that the variations and intensities that traverse the body force us to think about something that, from its origins, belongs to the sphere of the *un*thinkable. The body makes us think about that which is not thinkable.

As Ricardo Parodi explains, the body has always been implied in social and historical processes of production, register and consumption of desire. Actually, the body has been the primary and ultimate object of

politics (75). Controlling and organizing the body is a function of a great many institutions, from hospital to prisons, from workplace to work itself. Such institutions – either public of private – as well as the various disciplines and religious beliefs come to limit and regulate the body. The productive, regulated, docile body is very appealing. In its classical beauty of perfectly executed actions lies the illusion of the construction of the individual as autonomous and independent, sealed against the exterior, free from any other regulation or flux but his own interiority (Parodi, 78).[41] This is the body that is most present in mainstream and classical cinema. The ideal image of the body, where most of the representational organization of the industrial, classical cinema lies.

In a text called "O Ato de Criação", Deleuze asks what it means to 'create' in cinema. Arguing for art as a form of resistance, he defends the idea that the matter with cinema is not a question of representing or perceiving movement, but of *thinking* through movement, of creating new movements and new images of thought. The Deleuzian approach is fruitful for those looking for tools for conceiving film beyond the boundaries of representation. Nevertheless, there is still much to be discussed on how these images of thought can be produced in more popular works[42] that usually rely on the sensory-motor schema, but that are never fully contained by that logic.

---

[41] It is possible to return, here, to the discussion of the aesthetic effect of *squibs*, as instances of 'leakage' from this sealed body. By exposing and decomposing the order within, *squibs* have the potential to destabilize the 'organicity' of the body.

[42] It can not be ignored that Deleuze draws almost exclusively from 'canonical' films, mainly when discussing modern cinema: Antonioni, Bergman, Straub-Huillet, Godard are his paradigms.

This is a great challenge in this dissertation. How to account for the images of violence/violent images, how to understand their political vigor, their transgressive potential, their ethical claim, the images of thought they produce in contemporary Brazilian films that are located, almost exclusively, within the regime of representation and cliché. These films are apparently the complete opposite of Deleuze's own canon. One way to see this paradox is to consider that the methodology concerns not necessarily a group of authors or styles or modes of production, but cinema as a site of production of perception, memory and thought.

The endeavor is to construct an aesthetic experience that 'makes sense', that may help illuminate the processes through which these films produce violence. I want to know how response-able a spectator can be in an encounter with violence in Brazilian films. And that can be done because the different types of images/affects do not exclude each other. Narrative and Figure co-exist, so do the mobile desire that precludes fascination with violence and the static identification with it. If anything, it is exactly this tension between narrativity and visuality that makes cinema a relevant art form in our society.

In a sense, the analysis proposed here is based on Jacques Rancière's questioning of cinema's position in modern and contemporary art. As Michelle Garneau and James Cisneros explain,

> Jacques Ranciere does not favor a given poetics – unlike Deleuze and Guattari, who affirm the power of artistic presentation over representation's doxa, but gives equal critical attention to the old representative power that persists in each work [*auvre*]. In the

history of artistic thought and criticism, the two poetics have largely ignored each other. Choosing one has invariably meant excluding the other in a gesture of analytic and theoretic chauvinism whose first consequence has been to reduce the film – the play, the novel, the painting – to the single dimension pertaining to either the representational regime or the aesthetic regime of art. ("Film's Aesthetic Turn")

These films will not exactly stop 'telling their stories' to produce time-images, but their affectual power is still there, in constant tension with the narrative impulse. 'Popular', or 'commercial' films, need also to be studied in terms of their capacity to escape *doxa*, not only of their ability to build on it. In this sense, I am a "debaser", to return to the song by the Pixies, as I try to locate strategies for analyzing such films that do not necessarily conform with the patterns o 'art' film: although they are products of a marginal economy (I would not dare talk about a Brazilian film 'industry', considering our small-scale infrastructure and mode o production), these films are still 'conventional'.

The conceptual frames employed here are, for the most cases, primarily life-affirming and politically progressive. Consequently, there is an inherently political engagement of my part, when I try to see violence *in* films and violence *of* films as an interplay between figurative images stuffed with clichés and images that explode these same clichés. I try to discuss approaches suggesting 'lines of flight', following the fluxes of blood and flesh that defy the ego to quit mastering and regulating the anxiety that pervades the experience of watching a film.

In the next chapter I offer a little history of violence in Brazilian cinema as an attempt to show the construction of clichés and lines of

flights in the tradition of Brazilian cinematography. From the bourgeois moralism of the first *posados*, to the 'cordial' figure of the *malandro*, from the intolerable violence of *Cinema Novo* to the postmodern pastiches of the 1980s, violence was reconfigured in a number of ways, many of which sill resonate in the contemporary productions.

2

A Little History of Violence in Urban Spaces in Brazilian Cinema

Cinema Novo, Bossa Nova, tudo
é novo nesta terra! A velharia
nos vem só do estrangeiro. O que seria
do Chaplin sem o velho cine mudo?
(Glauco Mattoso, *Soneto 399*)

Figure 18 - Hieronymous Bosch, *Christ Carrying the Cross.* C. 1490 (Source: http://www.artchive.com/artchive/b/bosch/carrying.jpg)

Figure 19 - *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), directed by Mel Gibson

From Sumerian myths, Greek tragedies, Chinese folk tales, Elizabethan drama, to more recent literary and cinematic works, a long and cherished tradition of regaling in violent excess is revealed to the great entertainment of audiences. Artistic images try to surpass the written word with cruel displays of blood splashing, images that even (or, maybe, mostly) when connected with the religious tend to go for the shocking, sensational, and sublimely disturbing. It comes as no surprise, then, the striking semblance between Bosch's painting and Gibson's film - they are renditions of the ultimate violence: the slay of the lamb. In Bosch's rendition, however, Christ is portrayed as a pure, unmitigated figure, is stark contrast with the vicious people surrounding him. The tension between purity and vice give body to a spiritual warfare between Good and Evil. Gibson's Christ,

on the other hand, is sullied to an almost-inhuman degree after being tortured. Violence, in the film, becomes a cathartic/masochist exercise, where spectators can be understood as being so affected by violence that they are 'purged', 'purified' by the film.

Violence has been an essential part of art in all forms. It has been, and probably will always be, a part of human life, independently of our degree of 'civilization'. Actually, this is a recurring word when we read and think about violence: Civilization. Sometimes they appear as antipodes, sometimes as complementary ideas. Not only are 'civilized' societies created and molded by violence, but also sustained, perpetuated, and developed by its application or the threat of it. Violence's threat is always on the background, exerting its disciplinary powers, ensuring that individuals follow the conventions, the acceptable code of behavior. Or serving as a promising resistance to these very same norms.

But how far is it possible to go using a term like 'civilization' to reflect upon violence? Its ethnocentric tone suggests that there is something 'superior' in transcending it, the force of civilization being the force to silence violence. The effort to understand Janus-faced violence, engaging and abhorrent, can be seen in newsstands, in the myriad weekly publication expressing their concern with urban violence, violence on the media, domestic violence.[43] And such phenomena are presented with their geographical and historical contexts: it is happening here, now, Brazil, in the first decade of the twentieth-first century. However, this alarmist discourse, as it increasingly floods reader, viewers and listeners with stories of violence in urban places,

---

[43] See the covers of weekly publications such as Veja 19.07.2006 and 10.01.2007, Isto É 24.01.2007, 05.07.2006 and 24.05.2006, Época 06.01.2007, 03.03.2006 and 18.05.2005.

feeds the impression that violence is something new to our society. They erase a history of violence, real and represented, that founded the basis of our 'cordial' national character.[44]

Georges Balandier insists that the primitive violence has never left us, no matter how we try to domesticate it with our rites and myths and sacrifices. What characterizes our times is not so much the quantity of violence – for how can we measure and say that there is more violence now than before, what kind of yardstick can be used to evaluate the 'amount' of violence, given the different usages, manifestations and apprehensions of violence? -, it is, rather, a growing "consciousness of violence" (210).

For Balandier, violence can take the form of a contagious disorder, a social epidemic that entraps the individuals and the collective body in a state of insecurity that breeds fear. The eschatological scenario is tattooed to the body of the modern world, as the culture of alarm. There is a sense that insecurity in contemporary world is connected to the rising of violence which, on its turn, reinforces the imaginary of fear. Insecurity – violence – fear: a triangle that is formed disconnected from the other social forms. The geometry of economics, politics, ethics and aesthetics is seldom related to it.

Violence can be imagined collectively and such images ascribe, more often than not, very definable roles, as put by Susanna Rotker:

---

[44] The character of the Brazilian as a "cordial man", defended by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda in *Raízes do Brasil*, cannot be simply understood as subservient, kind and agreeable. On the contrary, in his book, Holanda paints the "cordial man" with passion and aversion to social convention and formalism, a trait that can be both positive and negative. He argues that, whereas 'civilization' is coercive, the virtues of the cordial man are extremely emotive (147).

"one is of a poor person, often represented within these social/textual imaginaries as a criminal" (8). The other, a victim, whose image "is reproduced in every social stratum, and not only because this reflects reality" (8). The "victim", in such discourse is "society", as a condensation of the various individuals who are subjected to violent actions.

There are, however, positions who do not subscribe to the victimizing and moralizing discourse criticized by Rotker. Such approaches take into consideration the possibility of the production of subjects who are, after all, more suitable than others for the role of the aggressor. Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil have perceived this nuanced production and developed it as a theme for their song "Haiti". It says:

> Inmates are mostly black
> Or almost black
> Or almost white, so poor they're almost black
> And poor people are rotten
> And everybody knows how blacks are treated[45]

The lyrics take on the idea that the production of aggressors merges racial and social issues. The song is responding to manichean viewpoints, expressed in the terror caused by a number of subjects whose identities are 'hijacked' by the discourses of fear. It is, however, difficult to see clearly amidst the disquieting images and sounds of violence.

Rotker seems to be right when she points out that "violence produces crises in all aspects of life, even in communicating" (8). It is

---

[45] Mas presos são quase todos pretos / Ou quase pretos / Ou quase brancos quase pretos de tão pobres / E pobres são como podres / E todos sabem como se tratam os pretos.
Robert Stam, in *Tropical Multiculturalism*, points out how this song depicts "the intersection of race and class" (55).

difficult to 'talk about' violence as a personal experience as it is difficult to 'describe' violence that is re-presented before our eyes in art. Language stutters. The discussion about violence in Brazilian cinema is permeated by these questions, concerning the ethics, aesthetics and politics embedded in images that usually bring forth conflicting subjectivities and produce contradictory views of Brazilian society.

On this matter, Fernão Pessoa Ramos posits that

> Brazilian cinema reflects directly the contemporary discomfort, Brazilian society's discomfort with itself. The issue of violence, for example, is conspicuous. Our cinema does not hide Brazil; on the contrary, it seems to have a hidden pleasure in laying bare our problems. ("O Cinema Reflete" 7)[46]

Ramos touches on a very sensitive point: the question of violence resonates in many spheres, revealing the difficulty in tackling on a subject that may bring to light extremely problematic positions, by filmmakers, audiences and critics alike. This difficulty can be addressed by a historical account of the connections between violence, urban spaces and cinema in Brazil.

It is not totally surprising that these connections are present from the very beginnings of Brazilian cinema. The use of the expression 'beginnings' is purposeful: Jean-Claude Bernadet has rightly addressed the problems in establishing a 'birth date' for Brazilian cinema. José Inácio de Melo e Souza, for example, suggests the 27th November 1897, the day José Roberto da Cunha Salles registered "living images" from

---

[46] O cinema brasileiro reflete diretamente o mal-estar contemporâneo, o mal-estar da sociedade brasileira consigo mesma. A questão da violência, por exemplo, está muito presente. O nosso cinema não esconde o Brasil; ao contrário, ele parece ter um prazer oculto em escancarar as nossas mazelas. (2005, 7)

Baía da Guanabara, anticipating in seven moths Paschoal Segretto's images from the same spot, for some time considered the first Brazilian film – regardless the 'inconvenience' of having been made by an Italian. To ascertain an exact date for the first public exhibition and/or the first production is a very problematic questions for film historians in Brazil: on the one hand, the fonts are scarce and imprecise; on the other, as suggested by Bernadet, the choice between the first exhibition or the first production as a historical mark is not free from ideological implications. According to him, the fact that 'classic' Brazilian cinema historiography (Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes and Alex Viany as paradigms) elected the first production as the initial date for our national cinematography has reinforced the ideology of filmmakers as a corporation fighting against 'foreign invaders' and defending 'our culture'.

Nevertheless, it is important to contextualize these beginnings in the transitions from the 19th to the 20th century within Brazilian modernization. Flora Süssekind, in *As Revistas de Ano e a Invenção do Rio de Janeiro*, explores the processes through which the capital of Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, at the beginning of the 20th century, was constructed as an invention by a modernizing impulse, materialized in the urbanization and the *bota-abaixo*[47]. The transition from Monarchy to Republic, with all its political unrest, took place almost at the same

---

[47] Rio de Janeiro underwent severe changes in its process of modernization, such as the demolition of *cortiços* (collective housing for poor people, very common in the capital of Brazil) and the eviction of its dwellers, aiming at building wide boulevards, modern avenues and five to six-story buildings.

time as the introduction of cinema in Brazil. Like the *Revistas de Ano*, cinema was also part of the (re)invention of urban space:

> At Ouvidor Street there is a *cosmorama*, at S. Francisco de Paula Street another, and, at the Largo, a house where one can see fat beasts, seashells, two-headed kids, five-legged pigs etc. (Martins Pena *O Juiz de Paz na Roça* qtd in Süssekind 23)[48]

There is, thus, a strong parallel that can traced between these events that marked Brazilian incipient modernization: political transformation, urbanization, cinema and the theater, all transformed into some kind of attraction. The *Revistas de Ano* mentioned by Süssekind, written by Arthur Azevedo, Joaquim Serra, Moreira Sampaio e Oscar Pederneiras, for example, were theatrical attractions, born into Parisian fairs, which performed a critical review of the year, both in prose and in verse. It consisted of relatively independent skits that alluded to political, economic, artistic and mundane facts, always with a dose of humor. To connect the skits and avoid excessive dispersal, authors would create a thin narrative line – a love story, for instance – and use the figure of the *compadre*, usually a character coming from a distant place who comments the situations. Allegories were frequently employed, such as the *Bilontra[49]*, *Work*, *Sloth* etc.

According to Süssekind, the *Revistas* were received by the audiences as a normalizing and settling view of the city of Rio de Janeiro, with its changing landscape and mores. The *Revistas*, in this

---

[48] Na Rua do Ouvidor há um cosmorama, na Rua de S. Francisco de Paula outro, e no Largo uma casa onde se vêem muitos bichos cheios, muitas conchas, cabritos com duas cabeças, porcos com cinco pernas etc.

[49] Crook

sense, would function as tranquilizers for the inhabitants of the city, insecure when facing these changes. This normalizing effect is supplemented, in Fernando Mencarelli's perspective, by a panoramic observation of society, as the *Revistas* would give voice to diverse viewpoints,[50] forming a kaleidoscopic perspective. The kaleidoscope metaphor also resonates in the idea of a 'broken city',[51] a city divided into conflicting classes which were portrayed in the *Revistas*.

Figure 20 - Victor Meirelles
Estudo para o Panorama do Rio de Janeiro (Morro do Castelo), ca. 1885

The first panorama was Robert Barker's view of London, from 1791. It was a smash hit among Londoners, who would pay to see a representation of the very city they could see for free. Soon after that the panorama fever spread trough Europe.

---

[50] In a sense, this debate resembles the current reassessment of the *chanchadas*. At first considered a poor imitation of Hollywood musical, the *chanchadas* also offered opportunities for anthropophagic critique. However, this critique is restricted to the rules of the genre and sometimes outright naïve.

[51] The idea of Rio de Janeiro as a 'broken city' is also present in contemporary film and criticism, as I intend to show later in this work.

Another cultural product that paved the way for the introduction of cinema as an urban entertainment were the panoramas, which served "to invent for their spectators a different way to see the urban space they inhabit" (Süssekind 59).[52] There was, however, an important distinction between cinema, the *Revistas* and the panoramas: the first two run fast, reproducing the shock-effect of modernization, whereas the latter comprised a slow contemplation of the city.

Figure 21 - Ferrez, Marc. *Av. Central*. Avenida Central (now Avenida Rio Branco). Rio de Janeiro. Ca. 1907 (Source: Instituto Moreira Salles - http://acervos.ims.uol.com.br/fotografia/marca/007-gilberto_ferrez%5C04_banco_de_imagens%5C000/A5P3F04-12.JPG)

This avenue originated in the idea of a street that would cross the whole city and it was constructed over the debris of many collective residences. It was inaugurated in 1905.

Revistas, panoramas and cinema comprised in Brazil part of what Miriam Bratu Hansen calls "vernacular modernism", cultural practices articulating and mediating the way people experience modernity,

---

[52] Inventar para seus espectadores uma maneira diferente de enxergar o espaço urbano que habitam.

including fashion, design, advertising, architecture and urban environment, photography, radio, and cinema, not coincidently mass-produced and mass-consumed phenomena. Hansen uses the term "vernacular", and not 'popular', to avoid the latter's political and ideological implications, but also because it "combines the dimension of the quotidian, of everyday usage, with connotations of discourse, idiom, and dialect, with circulation, promiscuity, and translatability" (59). In this context, cinema constructs a sort of public space where individual experience – both perception and sensation – can be shared.

This idea of modernism opposes the anachronistic split between high and low modernism and offers a clearer way to tackle film history in Brazil, mainly if we consider that alternative forms and avant-garde were almost absent in the first half decade of film production. It is this "vernacular modernism" that embeds the greater amount of films portraying violence in urban spaces. Brazilian composer and theorist José Miguel Wisnik, for example, in "O Minuto e o Milênio, ou Por Favor, Professor, uma Década de Cada Vez" shows how Brazilian culture, and its music in special, challenged the 'great divide' between high and low culture, between erudite and popular art. Brazilian culture, marked by a carnavalizing poetics, mixes elements of lyricism, criticism and humor, is in stark contrast with the European tradition, which saw the establishment of an erudite culture that imposed an aesthetic, contemplative reception. In Brazil, conversely, such erudite culture had never had a chance to establish a system of authors, works and audience. Among us, Wisnik argues, musical tradition is a popular

affair, coming from the ritual use of it, articulated with other social practices.

Thus, our 'modern tradition' presents specificities that have to be taken into consideration when assessed through Anglophonic/ European theories. Silviano Santiago reminds us in "Crítica literária e jornal da Pós-Modernidade" that, in Brazil, cinema substitutes the theater – and even the circus – as the most sophisticated spectacle that could be consumed by any given community, however unprepared to produce this kind of spectacle; cinema also steals from newspapers and magazines their writers, with promises of money and fame. The construction of pleasing serialized stories aims no longer at the printed page, but at the moving image, for cinema becomes increasingly interested in this kind of narrative.

However, as pointed out by Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes, the first decade of cinema in Brazil[53] was not especially busy. There are many explanations for this fact, from lack of electrical power (Salles Gomes),[54] to the impoverishment of the population during the Campos Sales administration, taxation, and the price of the ticket (Máximo Barro). José Inácio de Melo e Sousa refutes the work of a single cause, adding that the main reason for the weak beginning of Brazilian cinema was due to lack of films to be distributed. Once the problem with

---

[53] The 'classical' historiography of Brazilian cinema is, indeed, centered on the developments in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Not only because they were two of the biggest cities in Brazil, but maybe also because they ended up being historically connected with a cosmopolitism that would be welcome, by the first Brazilian film historians, in the consolidation of cinema as a culturally relevant phenomenon.

[54] An unlikely explanation for two reasons: first, because this view is restricted to the conditions in Rio de Janeiro, and second, because most of the equipment used in Brazil came from France, where it was designed for use independently of electricity.

distribution was solved, cinema began to flourish, mainly in the biggest cities.

Maria Rita Eliezer Galvão, in *Crônica do Cinema Paulistano*, for example, traces the associations between city and cinema and we can infer how violence triangulates with them in the first decades of the twentieth century. Violence becomes a component of modern life and cinema could not but try to help people imag(in)e the excitement and perils involved in this process. São Paulo, for instance, becomes, in the first 20 years of the 20th century, the "brave metropolis"[55] (15), immersed in the mythology of modernity and progress.

In Galvão's account, two cultures struggled for hegemony: the increasingly strong *bourgeoisie* and the popular, mainly urban and proletarian, with great influence of immigrants from Portugal, Italy, Spain and Germany. These immigrants played a relevant role in the development of Brazilian cinematography, as Spanish Fracisco Serrador,[56] who produced the first *posado*[57] feature made in São Paulo, *O Crime da Mala*, in 1908.

O Crime da Mala was the re-enactment of Elias Farhat's murder by Miguel Traad, who quartered the corpse, put it inside a truck and followed to the city of Santos, where he took a ship in order to throw the remains in the sea. The murderer's suspicious attitude attracted the

---

[55] Pujante metrópole

[56] Serrador, born in Valencia, was a dynamic businessman, one of the first entrepreneur in the cinema business in Brazil. He owned movies theaters and was also a producer / director.

[57] The first films in Brazil were divided into two major categories: *naturais* (documentaries) and *posados* (fiction), the latter denomination indicating the use of actors who 'posed' for the camera.

attention of authorities who eventually discovered the body. The film is said to have shown documented scenes of the trial and actual settings related to the crime. Here, we already have the first evidence of the fascination with urban violence which would accompany film productions in Brazil. The same case also inspired a film made in Rio de Janeiro, in the same year, by Marc Ferrez.[58] Also known as *A Mala Sinistra*, it was divided into five blocks: 1) The purchase of the trunk; 2) The crime; 3) On board the ship; 4) At the police station; 5) Remorse.

Figure 22 - *O Crime da Mala* (1928) directed by Francisco Madrigano. The images that are left of this film suggest the setting in a bourgeois society. (Source: Cinemateca Brasileira)

In 1928 two other films were produced in São Paulo with the same title, also based on a crime story, directed by Antonio Tibiriçá[59]

---

[58] Marc Ferrez was born in 1843 in Rio de Janeiro, a son of a sculptor and engraver. He inaugurated the Casa Marc Ferrez in 1865, specialized in vistas from Brazil, though he also made portraits and photographed public festivities and the transforming modern life in Rio de Janeiro.

[59] Born in São Paulo in 1898, Tibiriça was a writer, producer, actor and director.

and Francisco Madrigano.[60] They were based on Maria Fea's murder by her husband, Giuseppe Pistone. It was advertised as a "true scoop in our national cinematography. The sensational trunk murder that shook up the people from São Paulo", "This film, impeccably acted out by silent screen stars, is the most faithful, complete e suggestive documentation of the trunk murder", and "The sensational silent tragedy of Conceição Street".[61]

Figure 23 - *O Crime da Mala* (1928) directed by Francisco Madrigano
(Source: Cinemateca Brasileira)

---

[60] Madrigano was born in São Paulo in 1899 and directed *O Descrente* in 1927.

[61] "Um verdadeiro furo de cinematografia nacional. O sensacional crime da mala que abalou profundamente a população paulista, reconstruído em todos os seus detalhes" ... "Esse filme desempenhado impecavelmente por artistas de nome da cena muda brasileira é a mais fiel, completa e sugestiva documentação do Crime da Mala"... "A sensacional tragédia silenciosa da Rua da Conceição."

O Crime de Cravinhos, directed by Arturo Carrari and Gilberto Rossi[62] in 1920 reveals the moralism which could be accompanied by social implications and be followed by sensationalism. On its opening night the police confiscated the film following a court order: the story revolved around one of the most prestigious families in São Paulo, landowners and coffee plantations. The film was liberated a week after and the second opening night was a success. Carrari also directed *O Misterioso Roubo dos 500 Contos do Banco Italiano de Descontos* (1922). According to reports of the period, the film was also inspired by a real event and was even prohibited by censorship.

The reenactment of famous crimes was, in fact, a strong tendency in the first two decades of Brazilian cinema and displays a close-knit connection with the press, as analyzed by Jean-Claude Bernadet in *Historiografia Clássica do Cinema Brasileiro. Os Estranguladores* (1908) was probably the first *posado* from Rio de Janeiro to draw from the news. It was a big hit and belonged to an international genre that was established in the first decade of the 1900s.[63] The fact that the audiences went to the movie theaters with a greater knowledge of the narrative line was definitely an attraction. Moreover, the press coverage would familiarize the spectator with the images of the crime. Vicente de Paula Araújo reproduces a telling report from the magazine *Careta:*

---

[62] Carrari and Rossi were Italian immigrants who, once in Brazil, contributed to the development of cinema. Carrari founded the *Sculoa Azzurri*, a school for actors and technicians and a production company, responsible for the production of *Crime de Cravinhos*.

[63] This genre would include films like *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), *L'Assassinat de la Famille Royale de Serbie* (1903), *L'Assassinat du Ministre Plehve* (1904), among others.

> This film, reenacting an event that touched the *cariocas* so deeply, unveiling landscapes, streets and the seaside of this Capital city, is of great interest for our audiences, which go in huge numbers to the cinematograph. *The reenactment is so well-made that it moves and revolts* (our emphasis). (256)[64]

The familiarity with the theme (mainly through newspapers) and the genre (at an international level) reinforced the movie-going experience as vernacular modernism, which by the early 1920's cinema had been absorbed by most social classes, including middle and upper class, and from then on was no longer a 'popular' entertainment, but a common (in both senses, as 'shared', and 'ordinary') habit. What is strikingly similar in those films is the production of the human body as waste. Turned into a mass, the dead bodies are disposed of as garbage, the trunks the garbage-can that prevents the contamination with the corpses.

This cinema was still very close to the moralism of 19th century bourgeois foulletin. Characters were black-and-white, even more so because there was a close control by censors; there were no – or very few – ethical nuances. *Morphina* (1927-28) directed by Francisco Madrigano e Nino Ponti, *Vício e Beleza*[65] (1926), by Antonio Tibiriçá, *Exemplo Regenerador* (1919), by José Medina,[66] are examples of films as

---

[64] Essa fita, reproduzindo um acontecimento que tanto emocionou os cariocas, desenrolando paisagens, ruas e marinhas desta Capital, interessa profundamente a nosso público, que em grandes massas corre àquele cinematógrafo. A reprodução do crime emociona e revolta: tão bem feita que é (256).

[65] According to Maria Rita Galvão, *Vício e Beleza* was a success not only in Brazil but also in Urugay and Argentina (44).

[66] Medina was born in Sorocaba, São Paulo, in 1894 and directed *Perversidade* (1920) and *Do Rio para São Paulo para Casar* (1922).

moral tales, where corruption and vice, bolstered by modern life, were punished, and 'good' people rewarded for their good deeds.

Figure 24 - *Morphina* (1927-28) directed by Francisco Madrigano e Nino Ponti. The film's moralism can be seen in this still, where a devil-figure seems to be enticing the young women into addiction. (Source: Cinemateca Brasileira)

Moreover, these films portraying violence may have intensified the critical debate about the 'proper' images of Brazil. At first an imported commodity, films soon became acclimatized, gaining 'local' tint. Much like Brazilian literature, as explored by Silviano Santiago in *Cosmopolitismo do Pobre*, Brazilian cinema – filmmakers and critics – was embedded in an ambiguous relationship with 'foreign' cinema. Hollywood soon turned out to be the measuring stick against which Brazilian films would be judged. Brazilian cinema was trapped between a desire to give images of the country and the anxiety that such images might create a 'wrong' idea of what the country really is/should be, between the fascination with urban types and miseries and the concern that such types and miseries might become 'acceptable' once they are integrated into the moving image. One critic wrote that

> One has the impression, when watching most *posados* films in Brazil, that the pseudo-director searched for our city's most degraded street as settings, and the least charming, picturesque and

> grand places for the cinematographic reproduction of nature's works in Brazil. (*O Estado de São Paulo* n/d, qtd. In *Galvão* 58)[67]

Cinearte, the most important publication about cinema in that period, epitomized the racist and moralistic view of cinema, endorsing the notion that cinema should be a vehicle to publicize Brazilian incipient modernity and that Brazilian cinema should mimic Hollywood films (including its star system, which the *Cinearte* tried to reproduce), seen as the model of 'quality'. In the defense of national cinema industry, *Cinearte* policed film production in Brazil, severely debasing 'adventurers' known as *cavadores*,[68] the first film schools and documentaries, arguing that they created a 'distorted' image of Brazil and that they were hazards to serious business. Critic and producer Adhemar Gonzaga[69] wrote in 1930

> Cinema demands fine taste, aesthetic sensibility, spirit of beauty. (...) How can one like European films if the aspects shown on the screen are ugly, with old houses and badly paved streets? (...) People will say it is part of well-praised realism. (...) Brazil, its people and its elements are more photogenic than all European countries. And this is why we defend Brazilian films with modern subject, set in the cities with landscapes and all that we have of value. At least for now, so as to popularize our cinema. After that, we can explore other film styles. We saw a Brazilian film one of these days, where, among other sordid and unpleasant settings such as

---

[67] A impressão que se tem, ao assistir à maioria das fitas posadas nacionais, é que o pseudo-diretor procurou as ruas mais ignóbeis para cenário das cenas externas da nossa bela cidade, e os recantos mais sem graça, os menos pitorescos e grandiosos, para a reprodução cinematográfica da obra da natureza no Brasil.

[68] *Cavadores* was a derogatory term used to refer to those pioneers filmmakers who would produce films, on commission, for rich and powerful people.

[69] Born in Rio de Janeiro in 1901, Gonzaga was one of the most impostant producers in Brazil, responsible, amog other things, for the foundation of Cinédia studios.

> public houses, cemeteries, morgues, inns and stables, there was a police station with walls full of wholes and a broken desk. (...) These sordid settings impress a lot o people who say: This is art! (...) Should we and can we show a police station like that in Brazil? (...) We can make art in the salons, in the elegant gatherings. (qtd in Salles Gomes *Humberto Mauro* 334-5)[70]

What mattered was to sanitize the images of a country that was still in search for an identity. In this search violence had to be polarized against 'civilization'. A civilized, modernized country that can accept and praise European 'realism', but that is not prepared to deal with its own 'realist' images. Cinema should work to stress our cosmopolitism, our place in the 'civilized' world. In the critic's discourse, it was as if we were not ready yet to deal with either images of violence or the violence of the image.

A filmic experiment produced in 1929 also demonstrated the anxiety in dealing with the modern and urban: Adalberto Kemeny and Rudolf Rex Lustig's *São Paulo, Sinfonia da Metrópole.* In the same fashion as the *criminal films, Sinfonia da Metrópole* took part in a transnational tendency, of which films like *Rien que les Heures* (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1926), *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City* (Walter Ruttmann,1927), *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929) and

---

[70] O cinema requer gosto apurado, senso esthetico, espírito de belleza. (...) Como se póde gostar de films europeus, se os aspectos das cidades mostrados na téla são feios, com casas velhas e ruas mal calçadas? (...) Dirão que faz parte do tão apregoado realismo. (...) O Brasil, o seu povo e as suas coisas tem mais photogenia do que todos os paizes europeus. E é por isso que nos batemos pelos films brasileiros de assumpto moderno, desenrolados nas cidades com ambientes e mostrando tudo o que temos de bom. Pelo menos agora para dar popularidade ao nosso cinema. Depois, então, sigamos a outros mil estylos de cinema. Num dia desses vimos um film nosso em que entre vários ambiente sórdidos e desagradáveis, como albergues, cemitérios, necrotérios, estalagens e estribarias, apparecia uma delegacia de policia com paredes esburacadas, uma mesinha quebrada. (...) Estes ambientes sórdidos impressionam a muita gente que diz logo: Isto é arte! (...) Ora bolas, nós devemos e podemos mostrar uma delegacia no Brasil assim? (...) Nós podemos fazer muita arte dentro dos salões, nas reuniões elegantes.

Skyscraper Symphony (Robert Florey, 1929) are part, a tendency to give an avant-garde portrayal of the city space. The Brazilian film strives to give form and content to a desire to draw near European and U.S. societies and cultures. São Paulo's cosmopolitism is praised, with especial emphasis to its diversity; the filmmaker's approach is really *symphonic*, as opposed to monologic, as the filmic language constructs a mosaic of the city and its inhabitants.

Nevertheless, the insistence in praising the city incipient cosmopolitism and growing industrial development, the film does not seem to fully fulfill its potential to present a more complex image of the city. Contrary to Ruttman's *Berlin, São Paulo* is solidified in the images of an 'institutional' perspective, where editing highlights the construction of a 'brave' city that will lead the way into modernity. *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City* rejects this solid state in the name of a perception that is not in the individual, but in the things, in the objects. Images in *Berlin* are fluid, they are continuous movement that crosses under things.
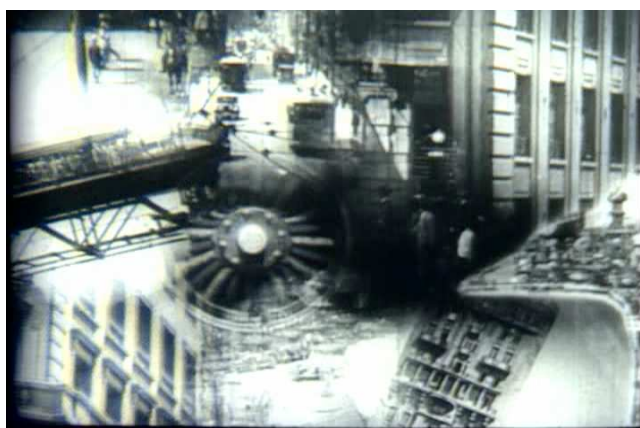

Figure 25 - *São Paulo, Sinfonia da Metrópole* (1929), directed by Adalberto Kemeny and Rudolf Rex Lustig. The filmic techniques emplyed by the filmmakers greatly resemble both Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera* and Ruttman's *Berlin.* The use of visual effects was an attempt to come near avant-garde experimentation in the beginning of the 20th century.

As cinema becomes a more popular entertainment and adventurous exhibitors took cinema to the further areas of the countries, film production also develops in other spaces besides Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. In Recife, for example, *Aitaré da Praia* (Gentil Roiz, 1926) introduces local themes and views anticipating the contemporary production, the same occurring in Rio Grande do Sul.[71]

Figure 26 - *Ganga Bruta* (1933), directed by Humberto Mauro

Here, the protagonist's friend plays with matches which, under the effect of a drop of water, suggest the movement of a woman opening her legs. The film takes on the theme of repressed sexuality and violence.

From Minas Gerais, filmmaker Humberto Mauro starts making films in Cataguases, then moves to Rio de Janeiro, where he shoots *Ganga Bruta* (1933). With this film, Mauro composed a delicate picture of human desire and instinct, through the story of an engineer, Marcos, who kills his wife on their wedding night, after discovering she had been

---

[71] These *ciclos regionais* (regional cycles) which took place in the first decades of the 20th century resound in today's regional production: we have witnessed an attempt to decentralize film production from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo to other regions like Recife, Salvador, Brasília, Belo Horizonte and Porto Alegre.

unfaithful to him. After being acquitted, he moves into the country, where he falls in love with an innocent girl and then marries her.

Sheila Schvarzman says about the film

> The matrixes forged along Mauro's career –
> nature, sensuality, the female role – pure and
> perverse, or perversely Brazilian –, the tension of a
> changing time and its permance, they persist and
> acquire complexity in *Ganga Bruta*. (81-2)[72]

Figura 27 - *Ganga Bruta* (1933), directed by Humberto Mauro
Moved by jealousy, the main character kills his wife. Guilt takes him from Rio de Janeiro to Minas Gerais, where he gets married to a provincial girl and is eventually redeemed.

Ganga Bruta sheds some new light on the topic of violence, by connecting it with the characters' psychological states instead of their moral status. In its retreat to nature, violence becomes not a form of o 'social disease', but an individual condition. The complexity in the film

---

[72] As matrizes forjadas ao longo da carreira de Mauro – a natureza, a sensualidade, o papel feminino – puro e perverso, ou brasileiramente perverso -, a tensão de um tempo cambiante e suas permanências persistem e adquirem complexidade em *Ganga Bruta*. (81 2)

comes from the narrative tensions that avoid simple solutions: going back to the countryside does not guarantee peace, women's roles are not passive, the 'hero' is not constructed in a black-and-white morality. The film's editing expresses some sophistication, and along with Afrodísio de Castro's cinematography, it sets up a dreaming atmosphere of sensuality and desire.

In the 1940's the film production in Brazil suffers the influence of World War II, economically and thematically. The period is characterized, on the one hand, by the documentary production, including a number of films about the Brazilian participation in the war. This decade is marked by a relative absence of violent images on the screen. In 1945 Luiz de Barros directed an adaptation of Aluizio de Azevedo's naturalistic novel *O Cortiço*, apparently faithful to the literary work, but the most relevant productions gravitate around comedies and musicals. On the other hand, the greater part of the production is established in Rio de Janeiro, where the Cinédia studios develop their most important product: the *chanchadas*. They were popular musical comedies (comic musicals?), cheap productions that depicted radio celebrities and artists in stories about the city's everyday life.

By this time the figure of the *malandro* is settled both in musical and in cinematographic terms. The *malandro* is a cultural figure that encapsulates a rejection of work and a strategy of survival in peripheral societies. Roberto da Matta in *Carnavais, Malandros e Heróis* points out the permanent tension, in Brazilian society, between authority-hierarchy-violence and harmony-democracy-peacefulness. This dilemma

is never solved but leads to the construction of a number of rites and myths which materialize the main alternatives. The *malandro* being one of them.

According to Gilberto Vasconcellos,

> While most of the population has to produce and live on a more or less regular work, submitting to the demands of the labour following the dominant ideological code, the *malandro* – our popular songs assert – seems to have a softer social fate, getting by here and there by means of his irresistible waggery and seductive expressions. (104)[73]

Cinema took much of this imaginary from popular music, which had been portraying *malandros* for decades. The dialogue between radio and cinema in Brazil contributed significantly to this exchange and reached its height with the *chanchadas*.

The musical comedies that were produced by Cinédia and Atlândita studios were successful in communicating with the public and in offering a paradigm for a pragmatic and nationalistic cinema. The tendency to 'copy' formulae from mainstream Hollywood cinema revealed what Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes named in "Cinema: Trajetória no Subdesenvolvimento, "our creative incompetence for copying"[74] (90) – the films, although technically questionable, often presented a parodic style, assuming their precarious condition and making fun of U.S. hegemonic culture. Furthermore, by reinforcing the cultural figure of

---

[73] Enquanto a maioria da população é obrigada a ingressar na produção e viver de um trabalho mais ou menos regular, submetendo-se às exigências da labuta em conformidade com o código ideológico dominante, o malandro – sublinha nosso cancioneiro popular – parece ter um destino social mais brando, dando aqui e ali um jeitinho no aperto, através de sua irresistível picardia e visagem sedutora.

[74] Nossa incompetência criativa em copiar.

the *malandro* and of the underdog, the *chanchadas* helped audiences imagine a cultural response to everyday problems that diverted from violent confrontation.

Bashed by the critics at their time (and later, as in the case of Glauber Rocha's writings), the *chanchadas* were considered second-rate entertainment. Alcides Freire Ramos gives examples of this assessment: Salvyano Cavalcanti Paiva, for instance, said that

> what is called film comedy in Brazil is nothing but 'chanchada', vulgar absurdity combined with a little sex and double entendre. Influenced by low theater, burlesque and worse radio. Our comics come from the theater and the radio.[75]

Critical reception, nevertheless, did not prevent the audiences from watching *chanchadas*, which provided a chance for self-reflexivity and parody. The *chanchadas* promoted the inversion of hierarchies and the circulation of a variety of voices. And most significant to the context of this research, it advanced the *malandro* as a type that avoids conflict and violence, living by his wits and *ginga*, and that eventually succeeds, even when wits and *ginga* fail him. The *malandro* is a complex cultural figure. He is a form of life from the borders, a Hermes-like creature that moves through social classes, spaces and races. Inhabiting the frontiers, he is always inside and outside, belonging and rejected. Oscarito's characters may be the best example of this strategy: the steward in *Aviso aos Navegantes*, barber Horácio in *Nem Sansão nem Dalila*, the conman Kid Bolha in *Matar ou Correr* are personifications of

---

[75] O que se chama no Brasil comédia cinematográfica é a pura 'chanchada', é o disparate vulgar combinado a um pouco de sexo e frases de duplo sentido. Influência do baixo teatro, da burleta e do pior radiologismo. É do rádio e do teatro que têm vindo nossos cômicos.

the sometimes shrewd, sometimes naïve underdog who seek to obtain advantage at all cost.

In the 1950's Atlândida studios were diversifying their products. It released *Maior que o Ódio* (directed by José Carlos Burle in 1951) and *Amei um Bicheiro* (directed by Jorge Ileli and Paulo Wanderley in 1952). The first film was highly influenced by Hollywood *noir*, while the second disputed the idea of the 1950's as romanticized, innocent and optimist decade in Brazil. Ileli and Wanderley tell the story of a young man from Rio de Janeiro who is involved with *jogo do bicho.*[76] He decides to change the course of his life and get married, but having failed to get a job, he returns to the life of crime. His wife falls ill, and, in a desperate attempt to collect the money necessary for her surgery, he decides to steal from the *bicheiro.*[77] The film ultimately confronts the spectator with pre-modern capitalist relations in a peripheral society that responds violently to those who depend on it. *Amei um Bicheiro* can be seen as a reaction to Brazil's emerging second wave of industrialization, a process that opposed social classes and left little to imagine but a violent reaction.

Also important in that period (1952, to be exact) was film critic Alex Viany's directorial debut, *Agulha no Palheiro*, revealing the

---

[76] *Jogo do bicho* ("the animals lottery") is an illegal and popular (mainly because it is possible to bet any amount of money) gambling game in Brazil. It is a lottery-type drawing operated by organized crime. Criminal organization is, actually, a problematic that will re-appear with full force in the 1990's and 2000's in Brazilian cinema.

[77] Head of the organized crime in *jogo do bicho*.

influences of Italian neo-realism in Brazil.[78] The film plot revolves around Mariana, a young woman from the countryside who arrives in Rio in search of José da Silva, the man she had fallen in love with and who had got her pregnant. In Rio, she meets Eduardo at her cousin's house, a participant of the workers union. She is attracted to Eduardo and when her family eventually finds José da Silva, she has to decide between the playboy and the worker. The film combines romantic comedy with melodramatic moments, and its portrayal of Rio de Janeiro as a mosaic of types displays a sociological approach towards its subject.

The second half of the 1950's is, thus, a moment of transition. Films like *Uma Agulha no Palheiro, O Grande Momento* (directed by Roberto Santos in 1958) and *Rio 40 Graus* (directed by Nelson Pereira dos Santos in 1955) paved the way for an engaged and independent filmography in Brazil. Brazilian society was changing fast,[79] mainly because of the emergence of a second wave of industrialization and modernization. Juscelino Kubitschek's administration epitomized this transition, putting into practice the project of developmentism, associated with the idea of national sovereignty and identity. It was a moment of intense intellectual activity and ideological partition, as well as of the belief in Brazil as the 'country of the future', revealing, once again, the return of the question backwardness X modernity and of

---

[78] Mariarosaria Fabris enumerates pre-1950's films which could be seen as proto-realist, for presenting some of the characteristics of Italian neo-realism, such as shooting in locations and the identification with underprivileged classes.

[79] One needs only remember president Juscelino Kubitschek's (1956-1960) moto "Fifty years in five"

underdevelopment. This social background paved the way for the problematization of cinema's role: filmmakers and critics questioned how 'adequate' our cinema was for our reality. Bráulio Pedroso summarized the debate, during a roundtable promoted by revista *Fundamentos* in 1951:

> The depersonalizing and corrupting presence of cosmopolitanism has been denounced as harmful for our cinema and our culture. We stress and importance and the necessity to fight for a cinema that reflects the reality and the character of our people, for a cinema that truly represents our culture, because that is the only way for us to have national scope and international reach.[80] (qtd in Fabris 71)

Themes like 'national-popular' culture, auteurism, independent mode of production, cinema as spectacle and cinema as art emerge from the effervescence of that time, prefiguring what was to be Brazil's Cinema Novo.

Rio 40 Graus offered an opportunity to test this debate. It promoted an inversion in Brazil's most famous postcard: Rio de Janeiro as tropical paradise. The city of Rio appears, from the film titles, as a character, but not as the panoramas from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Nelson Pereira dos Santos reverses the camera and points it at Rio's worst: the *favelas* and its inhabitants. Highly influenced by Italian neo-realism, in *Rio 40 Graus* the camera is an omniscient observer,[81] following a group of characters from the hills to the city's

---

[80] Foi denunciada a presença despersonalizante e corruptora do cosmopolitanismo prejudicial ao nosso cinema e à nossa cultura. Frisou-se a importância e a necessidade de se batalhar por um cinema que reflita a realidade e o caráter de nosso povo, por um cinema que represente de fato a nossa cultura, porque só assim teremos amplitude nacional e alcance internacional.

[81] Mariarosaria Fabris points out that there is only one moment where the camera assumes a character's point of view – when the little boy follows his pet gecko to the zoo.

most famous spots. There is a constant transit, a flow that sutures Rio de Janeiro as a space of inequalities. Social injustice gains a Manichean representation: rich people are idle, insensitive, sometimes downright stupid, whereas poor people are hardworking, ethical, sympathetic. There is a condescending tone, a victimizing tendency in the portrayal of underprivileged characters; dramatic situations force empathy (as in the case of the boy with a sick mother) and the use of music is often melodramatic. However, *Rio 40 Graus* contributed with a 'documentary' view of social spaces and violence. Although sometimes the staging of situation gives the impression of a 'reality' more real that the 'real', as suggested by Mariarosaria Fabris, the film nonetheless sustains a documentary inflection

> For there are moment in which the camera 'distractedly' captures fragments of non-staged reality: that is the case of the surroundings in exteriors, both in the hills and in the city; that is the case of everyday objects, belonging to both rich and poor characters.[82] (102)

Nelson Pereira dos Santos' film expresses a will[83] to see the 'people' in a critical way, and the city as more than a neutral background for individual dramas. Violence occurs in relation to social status and not only as consequence of 'evil' characters. It is not fortuitous that the film song title is Zé Keti's *A Voz do Morro*: *Rio 40*

---

[82] Pois há momentos em que a câmera capta "distraidamente" fragmentos da realidade não elaborada: é o caso do entorno nas tomadas externas, seja no morro, seja na cidade; é o caso dos objetos do cotidiano, tanto dos pobres como dos ricos.

[83] A similar will (and, perhaps, more successful) is expressed in Roberto Santos' *O Grande Momento* (1958). The neo-realist inflection is transferred to São Paulo, in order to tell the story of a young proletarian intending to get married but lacking the financial resources to do so, resulting in a good-humored reflection on the problems of increasingly industrialized and urban São Paulo.

Graus is a sort of delegation of the voices coming from marginalized spaces. In *A Voz do Morro*, samba is personified as a boastful king, hailed by millions of Brazilians, in an attempt to recuperate dignity.

A Voz do Morro (Zé Kéti)	A Voz do Morto (Caetano Veloso)
Eu sou o samba	Estamos aqui no tablado
A voz do morro	Feito de ouro e prata
sou eu mesmo sim senhor	E filó de nylon
Quero mostrar ao mundo	Eles querem salvar as glórias nacionais
que tenho valor	As glórias nacionais, coitados
Eu sou o rei do terreiro	Ninguém me salva
Eu sou o samba	Ninguém me engana
Sou natural daqui	Eu sou alegre
do Rio de Janeiro	Eu sou contente
Sou eu quem levo a alegria	Eu sou cigana
Para milhões de corações	Eu sou terrível
brasileiros	Eu sou o samba
Salve o samba, queremos samba	A voz do morto
Quem está pedindo	Os pés do torto
é a voz do povo de um país	O cais do porto
Salve o samba, queremos samba	A vez do louco
Essa melodia de um Brasil feliz	A paz do mundo
Eu sou o samba	Na Glória!
A voz do morro	Eu canto com o mundo que roda
sou eu mesmo sim senhor	Eu e o Paulinho da Viola
Quero mostrar ao mundo	Viva o Paulinho da Viola!
que tenho valor	Eu canto com o mundo que roda
Eu sou o rei do terreiro	Mesmo do lado de for a
Eu sou o samba	Mesmo que eu não cante agora
Sou natural daqui	Ninguém me atende
do Rio de Janeiro	Ninguém me chama
Sou eu quem levo a alegria	Mas ninguém me prende
Para milhões de corações	Ninguém me engana
brasileiros	Eu sou valente
	Eu sou o samba
	A voz do morto
	Atrás do muro
	A vez de tudo
	A paz do mundo
	Na Glória!

This purist position (which one could qualify as naïve and one-sided) is ironically decried by Caetano Veloso in *A Voz do Morto*. Sung by Aracy de Almeida in 1968, it expressed Veloso's discontent with fundamentalists who did not allow him to participate in the First Samba Biannual because his music was too 'contaminated' by foreign influences, such as rock'n'roll. As Pedro Alexandre Santos argues, *A Voz do Morto* makes reference to the death of samba as a 'pure' Brazilian manifestation, as the only 'voice' for marginal groups. Almeida's

rendition of the song adds to the ironic mode: at the age of 54, she represented old-school[84] *samba*, singing her own death. The song is extremely complex and allegorical. It is a bric-a-brac of references. The verse "Eu sou terrível", for example, is a reference to Roberto Carlos' hit song. Roberto Carlos, an extremely popular singer at the time, was revalued by artists like Caetano Veloso in the late 1960's. By then, the cultural debate had shifted tremendously.[85]

Glauber Rocha's *estética da violência* (aesthetics of violence), for example, wanted to present the public with a new kind of cinema: technically imperfect, dramatically dissonant, poetically rebellious, politically unsure, violent and sad – much sadder than violent, like our carnival which is much sadder than it is gay. Not surprisingly, a short film was made in 1993 by Vitor Angelo entitled *A Voz do Morto*, a homage to Glauber Rocha. This film, which exemplifies the (sometimes overbearing) relevance of Rocha's filmography to later generations,

---

[84] Velha-guarda

[85] The 1960's radicalized the embryonic politicization of the 1950's. Cinema would continue to depict violence in urban spaces in *thrillers* and other 'conventional' genres, but some filmmakers took on the task to produce images that would go against the grain of arbitrary violence.

Figure 28 - *Mulheres e Milhões*, directed by Jorge Ileli in 1961.
The film is a *thriller* about a bank robbery, with a suspenseful editing. It could be compared to Lewis Milestone's *Ocean's Eleven* (1960)

makes use of some of Rocha's own works, as his TV programs for the show *Abertura*. In a particular moment used by Angelo, Rocha is interviewing psychoanalyst Eduardo Mascarenhas; while Mascarenhas explains the works of the subconscious, Rocha moves around as a kind of ghost, setting up the lighting, directing the mise-en-scène, until he interrupts Mascarenhas's musing to declare that playwright Nelson Rodrigues is, along with Chacrinha, Sílvio Santos and others, a *vedete*[86] of Brazilian TV, the unconscious inspiration for Brazilian televisual dramaturgy. This can be understood as a metaphor of Rocha's position in contemporary Brazilian culture: a ghost whose voice, coming from the dead, still provokes and sets the terms of many discussions about cinema.

His *estética da fome* – or, rather, *eztetyka da fome* – states that the noblest cultural manifestation of hunger is violence. But this hunger, according to Rocha's project, should not come out of hate, but of a brutal, paradoxical love that would lead to action and transformation. For the 'aesthetics' of this hunger combines images of violence, of suffering and lack, and violent image, pulsating and affecting.

In *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* Rocha exposes the spectator to scenes of massacres, hysteria, humiliation and penitence, imposing on the 'people' a series of intolerable moments of physical violence which were intended to raise ethical questions and revolutionary impulses. On the one hand, violence, here, could be said to assume a pedagogic

---

[86] Rocha ironically refers to these celebrities as *vedetes*, show girls.

nature and it is justified only inasmuch as it allegorizes a quasi-teleological overcoming of social injustice. It is essential to point out that Rocha's *aesthetics of violence* takes place mainly in the backlands or allegorical places, chiefly in his films in the 1960's. This could imply that underlying his perception of violence in the cinema was the notion that the rural areas represented the most problematic sites, the first places to be liberated.

On the other hand, Rocha's film offers a meditation on ritual and myth. Ritualized violence is one of Rocha's strategies to deal with the myths of the people, prophetism and banditism. These myths, for Gilles Deleuze "are the archaic obverse of the capitalist violence, as if the people were turning and increasing against themselves the violence that they suffers from somewhere else out of a need of idolization" (*Time-Image* 218). In this sense, against the idea of a possible 'pedagogic' and teleological implication, as described above, Rocha's film produces not a political 'consciousness', but, on the contrary, it works by "*putting everything into a trance*, the people and its masters, and the camera itself, pushing everything into a state of aberration)" (219 – emphasis in the original). Myths are treated here not in semiological fashion – it not a matter of 'unveiling' or 'deciphering' myths to reveal their structure. Rather, it is matter of re-connecting these myths with contemporary hunger, misery, violence.

Figure 29 - *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol*, directed by Glauber Rocha, 1964. Scenes of violence against the main characters are plenty: they are humiliated and suffer torture, but eventually run away from the *sertão* in the direction of the sea. The male character, that is. Rosa, his wife, falls to the ground during the escape and is left there, alone.

In another film by Rocha, *Terra em Transe*, the issue of violence appears with slightly different tones. According to Robert Stam, the poles around which the film revolves are "the bloody cosmos and the pure soul, violence and tenderness, politics and poetry" ("Land in Anguish"), in a narrative world that is, to cite the film's title in English, "in anguish".

Violence, here, contradicts the tenderness of poetry, "just as the soundtrack superimposes the crackling fire of machine guns on the tender harmonies of the Brazilian composer Villa-Lobos". The presentation of violence is, grossly speaking, non-realistic, mainly due to lack of continuity and fragmentation in the editing. The sounds of violence are asynchronous with their images and the consequences of violent acts are not shown (as when Paulo, the leading character, is shot and we do not see the injury in his body). As Stam argues, "Violence is treated in a fragmented and anti-realistic way, in keeping with Rocha's expressed desire to reflect on violence rather than make a spectacle of it".

This is an important argument, as it illustrates the filmmaker's desire to think violence 'seriously', withdrawing it from the banalization of mass culture products, and enhancing its political connotations. Filmic expression is a form of thought that aims at destabilizing the spectator's passivity, the concern with one's own interiority and soul, in the name of a radical exteriority. Rocha's film aim at destroying the 'habit' of looking into violent images, looking for the intolerable. The destructive force is not alone. At the same time, the aesthetics of violence presupposes the creation of new subjects, the production of a people to come.

Another approach towards violence is present in the Brazilian Marginal Cinema, with films like Rogério Sganzerla's *O Bandido da Luz Vermelha*, and Andrea Tonacci's *Bang Bang,* and their underground, anarchic fragmentation of violence, embedded in a keen awareness of pop culture and a self-proclaimed approximation with marginal groups.

Jean-Claude Bernadet proposes to re-examine the relationship between Cinema Novo and Cinema Marginal, pointing out a number of approximations where most critics see only differences. The issue of violence in urban spaces traverses these two moments in Brazilian cinema: denaturalized violence in *Terra em Transe* resonates in *O Bandido da Luz Vermelha* and *Bang Bang,* for example. In both instances, violence destabilizes the 'natural' reception, forcing spectators to re-evaluate the impact produced by the audiovisual language. Not so much as a 'subject' on the screen, violence is explored by both Cinema Novo and Cinema Marginal as an aesthetic option.

On the other hand, Ismail Xavier and Robert Stam comment that with Marginal Cinema, Brazilian films

> become allegorical in another, more modernist sense, as 'fragmentary discourses', expressing a 'crisis in representation', where the very notion of historical and cinematic teleology becomes suspect. The early sixties metaphor of hunger, evoking the victim finding self-redemption through Fanonian violence, gives way to the late sixties metaphor of an 'aesthetic of garbage' as being appropriate to a Third World country picking through the leavings of an international cinema dominated by First World monopoly capitalism. (16)

Marginal Cinema elected the urban spaces as privileged sites for their criticism. The city becomes the realm of the 'marginal' groups which are in constant tension and negotiation with the elements of mass culture. Haroldo de Campos coined the term "filmargem", including the words *filmagem* (filming) and *margem* (margin) to describe how Rocha's "aesthetics of hunger" was turned into a "disaesthetics of the disform"[87] by Cinema Maginal filmmakers. These two moments in Brazilian cinema were especially rich in the theoretical and aesthetical discussions of violence.

José Mojica Marins (a.k.a. Zé do Caixão) is a unique filmmaker in Brazil: from Cinema Marginal, through Boca do Lixo to today's recognition as a master of horror film, he made films that, in Jairo Ferreira's viewpoint, were akin to Antonin Artaud's and Samuel Fuller's works. Developing Ferreira's argument, it can be said that Marins did subscribe to a notion of 'cruelty' in his films, as actors (and himself, as Zé do Caixão) were exposed to spiders and snakes and spectators to

---

[87] Diestética do disforme, with the word "disforme" echoing the word "fome".

macabre rituals and gruesome deaths. The highly ritualized violence of his films is uncanny and disturbing, inviting for a more serious assessment. Zé do Caixão, in his quest for the perfect woman to bear his child, evokes, with his ritualistic powers, a profane realm, where bodies are taken to their limit. Marins deals with the beauty of the forbidden: the desacralization of bodies, the inversion of social values, the unbidden powers of the unconscious. Violence, in his films, is a ritual that challenges spectators to acknowledge that we are not in control.

As mentioned above, Marins participated in a 'production cycle' at *Boca do Lixo* in São Paulo. *Boca do Lixo* was a depreciating name given by the police to a deteriorated area in downtown São Paulo where many film producers established their business. They surfed the wave of nationalization of Brazilian cinema, materialized in the incentive for the production via Embrafilme and in a law that imposed the exhibition of national films. While Embrafilme financed an 'elite' of filmmakers, *Boca* producers organized a simple, albeit effective, mode of production based on low budget and small investors.

Films from the *Boca* took on sexploitation and violence. They are partly responsible for a prejudice against national films – Brazilian spectators would think that 'Brazilian films are only about screwing'.[88] There was an overt exploitation of women (who, hypocritically, were considered the real 'stars' of *Boca*, but, much like porn actresses, were debased in the films in spite of their names coming first in the film

---

[88] "Filme Brasileiro só tem sacanagem" (so much is lost in translation…).

credits), and of violence in many of the films; in others, there was a combination of ironic, parodistic and comic nuances, integrating a genre of its own, named *pornochanchada*, erotic comedies with enormous popular appeal.

Cinema from *Boca* (*pornochanchadas* and more 'serious' films*)* provided entertainment for the masses for a decade and a half. It reinforced sexism and hypermasculinization, but also left space for appropriations that would go against *status quo. Histórias que Nossas Babás não Contavam* (directed by Osvaldo de Oliveria in 1979), for example, is a parody of fairy tales, where the authoritarian king and his court can be seen as a parody of the military regime. Moreover, Egg White, [89] the protagonist, is played by black actress Adélia Fátima, in a clear inversion of values. Egg White is exceptionally in charge of her own fate and ultimately decides to stay with the dwarfs, having relentless sex in the forest. And Prince Charming? Well, he has a happy end too: he elopes with one of the dwarfs.

Besides the *pornochanchadas*, another genre was popular in the 1970's: there was a 'revival' of interest in adapting real crimes for the screen. A very successful film from the early 1960's had anticipating this wave, *Assalto ao Trem Pagador* (directed by Roberto Faria in 1962), the reconstitution of a train robbery. In 1968 J. B. Tanko directed *Massacre no Supermercado*, but it was really in the 1970's that the genre flourished: *Rainha Diaba* (directed by Antonio Carlos Fontoura in 1974), *Esquadrão da Morte* (directed by Carlos Imperial in 1975), *Os*

---

[89] Clara de Neve, an obvious pun with Snow White

Amores da Pantera (directed by Jece Valadão in 1977), *O Caso Cláudia* (directed by Miguel Borges in 1979), *Eu Matei Lúcio Flávio* (directed by Antonio Calmon in 1979) are some of the titles. Here, cinema seems to accompany Brazilian literature in its interest for real police cases.

Many of these films were adaptations of novels that dealt, in a journalistic fashion, with real events. Flora Sussekind[90] sees in this literary production of the 1970 a third Naturalistic impulse in Brazilian literature (the other two being late 19th century and the 1930's). Writers such as José Louzeiro and Aguinaldo Silva, according to Sussekind, undertook the journalist's 'task' of revealing the nation under military dictatorship. In that sense, the books – and the films – were result of a privileged knowledge of the 'real' Brazil. In her words, "the journalist is the one with a voice. The country now has as imago a newsroom. Where we read 'newspaper' we should read Brazil. Where we read 'reporter', we should read 'Brazilian society'" (179-80).[91]

In the 1980's, a multileveled[92] crisis is installed and the numerically significant production of the previous decade is diminished. In São Paulo, a series of films, labeled *neon realism* because of their refined technique and oneiric cinematography, redesigned the city. Wilson Barros' *Anjos da Noite* (1987), Chico Botelho's *Cidade Oculta*

---

[90] In the following chapters I will discuss this association more thoroughly

[91] Quem tem voz é o jornalista e o modelo de romance é a reportagem. Até o país passa a ter por imago uma redação de jornal. Onde se lê jornal, leia-se Brasil. Onde se lê repórter, leia-se sociedade brasileira.

[92] Coinciding with the end of the Military regime, Brazilian economy came to a near collapse: the economic miracle of early dictatorship converted into monstrous foreign debt and inflation, forcing the government to slow down import and making film much more expensive. Besides, TV developed into the most popular (and for a majority, only) audiovisual entertainment. Also, the State withdrew from direct financing, leaving a huge space that was not immediately occupied.

(1986) and Guilherme de Almeida Prado's *A Dama do Cine Shangai* (1988) were metalinguistic works, less preoccupied with the 'scene of the crime', as the documentary fiction films of the 1970's, and more with creating an atmosphere that could be understood as both superficial (in the sense that Fredric Jameson defines postmodern works) and as an appropriation of pop and avant-garde (an appropriation close to Linda Hutcheon's definition of postmodernism). This ambiguity is reflected in the violence portrayed in the films: it is 'neon' violence, superficial at times, but also critical and ironically political.

In the early 1990's, violence has acquired an ironic tone that, though indebted to the spirit of the underground cinema from the 1970's, tends to an aesthetic labeled by Jean-Claude Bernadet as *ironic cruelty*, which uses graphic, 'explicit' violence to shock the spectator, a shock, however, that seems to fall flat.

Bernadet cites Brazilian TV programs and short films as examples of this aesthetic, whose appeal to Brazilian audiences is explained by the author in terms of our culture's tendency to conciliation and compromising - the radical violence is, thus, an 'other' ("A Crueldade Irônica", 43). Such cruelty may be understood as a kind of postmodern violence with strong appeal to irony, which elicits laughs from the audience and thus undermines possible revulsion and weakens the revolutionary tone of the 1960's. Violence becomes 'natural', unexceptional.

Throughout this chapter, I intended to construct 'a little' history of violence in Brazilian cinema. But this little I hope will be sufficient to argue that the presence of violence is nothing new to our cinema. In the sonnet I quote in the epigraph, poet Glauco Mattoso calls attention to the cultural charge that comes with the term 'new': 'new' bossa, 'new' cinema, the promises of something unprecedented that would be a 'real' contribution coming from a peripheral country. In order to be legitimate and important, it has to be 'new'. However, no matter how conspicuous violence is in the images of contemporary Brazilian cinema, we cannot ignore that it has a trajectory that indicates the existence of a tension between images of violence and violent images. When the images of violence brought anxiety for showing a country that was still underdeveloped, albeit its desire to be modern, cinema was blamed for creating a 'distorted' image of Brazil. Later it became evident that the 'distortion' was exactly the concealing of such images – it was then mandatory to reinsert such images in a broader social context and hope that they would speak for the oppressed minorities which were the most common victims of violence. It was probably Glauber Rocha who introduced a new inflexion in this debate, by insisting in the violent image as recourse for political awareness. Violence is not only to be 'represented' on screen, but it is also 'created' in the manipulation of the very medium.

With the *Retomada* in the 1990's, Brazilian cinema is restructured around new forms of production and reveals an increased desire to be less programmatic, expressed in the variety of themes and

aesthetic choices. It is also in the last two decades that criticism has reviewed violence in Brazilian films with more emphasis. In the following chapter I will analyze contemporary Brazilian films as manifestations of resistance and reproduction of biopower, a power that consists, among other things, I want to argue, of controlling the affects produced by the films. A biopower of narrative and sensation, enclosing language and experience in a single form of control. Furthermore, the fact that the urban spaces appear as the location of such control in diegetic terms cannot be disregarded. Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Recife, Salvador are cities transformed into mazes, into concentration camps.

3

Biopolitics and the City
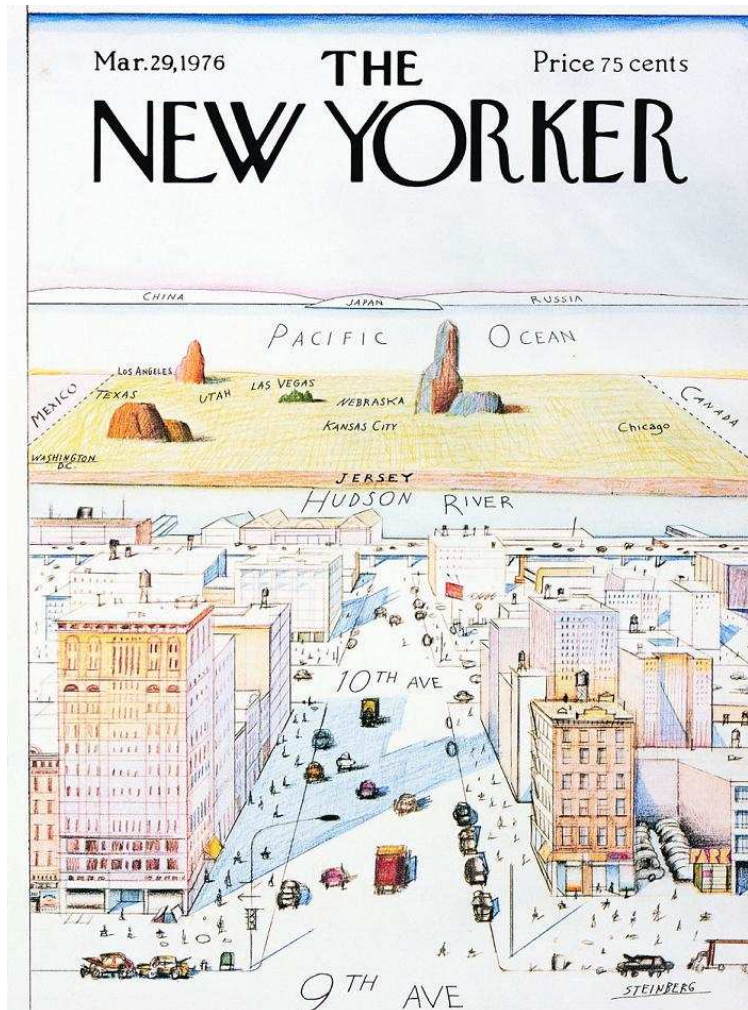
Figure 30 – *View of the World from 9th Avenue*. Saul Steinberg, 1976.

In March 1976 *The New Yorker* bore a Saul Steinberg illustration on its cover. The drawing, titled *View of the World from 9th Avenue*, depicts a parochial perspective that sets New York as the centre of the world. The city takes about half of the picture, and the rest of the U.S. territory, the Pacific Ocean, Canada, Mexico and Eastern countries (China, Japan and Russia), the other half. New York gets a relatively

detailed rendering, whereas 'the rest of the world' is reduced to geometrical forms. The map looks west, as if the viewer had their back to the European continent. Here is the city in its most blatantly provincial moment: a refusal of its colonial past (with the back turned to Europe), the celebration of its prominence in relation to the remainder of the country, its quasi-panoptical view of the world. This imag(in)ed urban space is an example of how power relations are deeply embedded in the way we see, construct and experience the city.[93]

In contemporary Brazil, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find films that imag(in)e urban spaces without considering the relationship with violence. Much like Steinberg's illustration, audiovisual works give

---

[93] On its 21st March 2009 edition, the magaine *The Economist* bore a parody of Steinberg's famous illustration. This time, we have China's point of view of the world, accentuating the changes in the geopolitical forces.

body to cities under attack, cities as war zones, maze-like cities, cities as concentration camps. TV news, music videos, films, soap operas: there is a thick fabric of audiovisual discourses weaving images and sounds of Brazilian cities as sites of conflict. Surely, as stated before, this is no news in Brazilian culture. Furthermore, the recent audiovisual productions, with emphasis on the cinema, seem to be preserving some of the Naturalistic impulse that marked Brazilian literature in the second half of the 19th century.

In *O Cortiço* (1890), for example, Aluísio de Azevedo creates 'a portrait' of Rio de Janeiro under strong urban changes:

> That, by the way, did not prevent the small houses from emerging, one after the other, and soon being filled, spreading everywhere, from the shop to the hill, and then turning to Miranda's corner and advancing over his yard, which seemed threatened by that snake made of stone and whitewash. [...] And in that muddy and steamy land, in that hot and slimy humidity, there started to crawl, to simmer, to grow, a world, a living thing, a generation that seemed to sprout spontaneously, right there, from that slough, and multiply like maggots in manure.[94]

Literary language is engaged, in this extract, in the construction of an urban environment that would refer immediately to the 'real' conditions of a 19th century *cortiço*. Actually, Azevedo uses the legal maxim as an epigraph: "The Truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth", stressing the author's program. Flora Sussekind argues, in *Tal*

---

[94] O que aliás não impediu que as casinhas continuassem a surgir, uma após outra, e fossem logo se enchendo, a estenderem-se unidas por ali a fora, desde a venda até quase ao morro, e depois dobrassem para o lado do Miranda e avançassem sobre o quintal deste, que parecia ameaçado por aquela serpente de pedra e cal. (...) E naquela terra encharcada e fumegante, naquela umidade quente e lodosa, começou a minhocar, a esfervilhar, a crescer, um mundo, uma coisa viva, uma geração, que parecia brotar espontânea, ali mesmo, daquele lameiro, e multiplicar-se como larvas no esterco.

Brasil, qual Romance?, that novels like *O Cortiço* seem to look for a meaning beyond itself, in the extra-literary context, reinforcing its being a document. She notes that it is not by chance that the novel makes reference to a Penal Law axiom, for "when a novel tries to hide its own *fictionality* in the name of a greater referentiality, perhaps its major models are science and journalistic information, as a rule considered paradigms of objectivity and truth[95]" (37). A reader facing such artistic strategies tends to overlook the language that constructs the works, tracing direct parallels with the extra-textual world. Such strategies, Süssekind goes on, present continuities in literature produced in the 1880's, 1930's and 1970's. Such continuity, I would like to argue, can also be extended to a part of the production in contemporary Brazilian cinema.

In the chapter entitled "Do Naturalismo ao Realismo Crítico" (From Naturalism to Critical Realism), from the book *O Discurso Cinematográfico,* Ismail Xavier uses the term Naturalism in a broad sense, intersecting with the notion of literary Naturalism, but going beyond it. Xavier sketches the concept as an effort to faithfully reproduce the physical world and human behavior, as if the audience were directly in touch with the world. Filmic discourse would then be 'natural', a transparent medium revealing reality. The renewed interest for this kind of 'immediate' discourse is materialized in what Leonardo Mecchi calls 'Brazilian Popular Cinema' of the 21st century: in this

---

[95] Quando um romance tenta ocultar sua própria *ficcionalidade* em prol de uma maior referencialidade, talvez os seus grandes modelos estejam efetivamente na ciência e na informação jornalística, via de regra consideradas paradigmas da objetividade e da veracidade.

article he surveys the top box office hits of the last eight years to reveal a tendency towards what he calls "film-verism" (filme-verismo), that is, the affirmation of cultural legitimacy by appealing to the representation of an aspect from our reality.

In filmic narratives since the 1990's, poverty and violence are consumed as 'typical' or 'natural' constituents: in such view there is nothing one can do about them. Ivana Bentes argues that these films "rarely present 'explanations' for any context, they do not intend to judge, perplex narratives, and pose as 'mirror' and 'cognizance' of a state of things"[96] ("Da Estética à Cosmética", 249). The impulse towards 'reality', through artistic discourse, described by Süssekind as *like Brazil, like novel[97]* (*Tal Brasil, Qual Romance),* contribute to the appeasement of contradictions and fractures. *Like* Naturalistic novels, it can be said that films such as *Cidade de Deus, Cidade Baixa, Amarelo Manga* tend to portray violence by appealing to a 'real' constructed as 'immediate', as if the characters where directly 'denouncing' reality. Such search for 'the real' – that can also be perceived in the increasing production of documentaries – is, however, more often then not, coated with an aesthetic or narrative varnish to prevent from a traumatic encounter. We can see a metaphor of this search in a shot from *Amarelo Manga*, where the use of wide-angle lens extends the limits of the frame,

---

[96] Filmes que quase nunca se pretendem "explicativos" de qualquer contexto, não se arriscam a julgar, narrativas perplexas, e se apresentam como "espelho" e "constatação" de um estado de coisas.

[97] The title of the book makes explicit reference to expressions of comparison such as *like father, like son*. According to Süssekind, the expression reveals pride in having a son, *just like* the father; indeed, it reveals the expectation that the son will *mirror* the father. Breaking with these bonds can be extremely traumatic.

including information on the screen. A desire to show all, to see everything, much like a peephole on a wall.

Figure 31 – *Amarelo Manga*. Wide-angle lens shot.

Filmmakers would, then, be legitimized by the 'delegation' of the subaltern's voice present in the films. Director Tata Amaral reveals the anxiety of reaching the 'truth' and the 'reality' of the characters in her film *Antônia*, in a text revealingly named "Em Busca do Naturalismo no Cinema" (In Search of Naturalism in the Cinema):

> What I was searching for was the truth in the situations and emotions and they would not always correspond to what we imagined. More than imposing a story, I wanted them [the actors] to tell theirs. [...] That it would be like 'peeping' into those characters' lives, who are there independently of the camera.[98]

The choice of words is telling: when Amaral says "*we* imagined" (my emphasis), one can read the pronoun as a reference to a) the film crew and the director; b) filmmakers as a group from which Amaral is part; and c) the film's audience. *We* 'imagine', but it is more important to see what the "situations and emotions" are 'really' like. The access to

---

[98] O que eu buscava era a verdade das situações e das emoções e estas nem sempre correspondiam ao que imaginávamos. Mais do que impor uma história, eu queria que eles contassem as deles [...] Que funcionasse como uma "espiada" na vida daquelas personagens que estão lá independentes da câmera.

this 'reality' is granted by the delegation of voice: because the stories are not mediated by the director/screenwriter, but are told by the actors themselves. The director seems to want to be the invisible medium through which these voices speak. Moreover, the will to 'peep' into ("dar uma espiada") the characters' lives indicates a desire to observe at a distance, because 'we' may not want to get too close, too familiar with these lives. Amaral, here, describes the impetus to film the nation as it is: like nation, like film.

The recourse to Naturalistic aesthetics[99] reinforces 'familiar' *topoi*. Familiar not only because it echoes previous literary works, but because it promotes the assuring notion that films 'reflect' reality. Common-sense logic is deeply rooted in the discursively familiar, and, as Catherine Belsey says, "the world evoked in the fiction, its patterns of cause and effect, of social relationships and moral values, largely confirms the patterns of the world we seem to know" (51). There is an underlying 'will to truth' in such position, one that masks a 'will to power', a will to pose as the ultimate source of legitimate knowledge about art and society.

In a way, the kind of faith that Amaral seems to have in 'ontological realism' of the cinematographic image[100] points at an attempt at demystification which can be associated with leftist intellectual goals, and a belief in giving space to anonymous voices and unknown faces. Not only does Flora Süssekind stress the fact that

---

[99] I do not want to argue that Naturalism is the 'specific' aesthetics for cinema, or that cinema is 'fundamentally' a 'realist' medium.

[100] As discussed previously in chapter 1.

Naturalist writers were driven by an irresistible drive to see, but she also constructs a metaphor with cinema:

> It is necessary to transform the writer into film, searching for real impressions, and literary language's opacity into transparency, so that the audience may see what happened without barriers or fiction's ambiguity. [...] A work is valued as long as it is analogous to the real. A writer, as long as he is like a camera. [101] (101)

The writer/camera becomes, in a number of recent Brazilian films, a metaphor to the camera/writer, a camera that (re)writes 'reality' to gratify the obsession with the real. The cinematic city is this complicated object for a Naturalistic approach, although it is not restricted to it. The production of urban spaces opens up to a series of debates, mainly when we consider its intricate relationship with violence. We cannot ignore the intricate network that joins the notion of a city (*polis*) as the site that qualifies political life, the life that is to be taken seriously as a part of public affair, as a participant of public decisions. The *polis*, the base of a *poli*tics, is what is put into question here. In contemporary society and cinema it also becomes the site of *bio*politics, of a chasm between qualified and unqualified life. Stage to chaos (frequently) and resistance (rarely), the city takes on many forms, from dazzling mazes to suffocating concentration camps, producing different forms of subjects. These forms propose a way to read the films that focus on their biopolitical imagination and how it reconfigures possibilities of existence.

---

[101] "É preciso que do escritor se faça película virgem em busca de impressões reais, assim como da opacidade da literatura simples transparência para que o público possa ver o acontecido sem nenhuma barreira e sem as ambigüidades próprias ao ficcional. [...] Uma obra fica valorizada desde que análoga ao real. Um escritor, desde que semelhante a uma câmera."

In an interview published on *Eurozine* website, Italian theorist Antonio Negri says that

> The biopolitical diagram is the space in which the reproduction of organised life (social, political) in all its dimensions is controlled, captured, and exploited – this has to do with the circulation of money, police presence, the normalisation of life forms, the exploitation of productivity, repression, the reining in of subjectivities. ("What Makes a Biopolitical Space?")

The notion of biopolitics developed by Negri has its roots in Michel Foucault's *História da Sexualidade* (History of Sexuality) and *Em Defesa da Sociedade* (Society Must Be Defended). In these books Foucault develops an archeology of the concept, which eventually is made to coincide with modernity, and identifies the processes through which biopower emerges by making life (*bios*) part of its calculations. Human beings, as a species, have become the fundamental issue for the political strategies in Western societies. The emergence of 'biopolitics' corresponds to one of the two great technologies of power in the modern age, second to 'discipline'. 'Biopolitics' differs from 'discipline' for being more recent and for operating at another level: discipline is a technology which is concerned with individuals, the control of individual bodies, whereas biopolitics deals with populations at the level of the multiplicity. The former employs technology to make individuals docile, efficient and productive, and the latter is used to manage population, for example, to ensure there are enough and healthy workers.

Biopower is the engine that drives public policies, social technologies and capitalism in the direction of vital, molecular processes of human existence. For Foucault, "one of the fundamental

phenomena in the 19th century was what could be called the taking over of life by power: if you prefer, a taking over of man as a living being, a kind of control by state of the biological[102]" (*Em Defesa*, 285-6) And he moves on to show how political power, as it colonizes the space of biological life, has developed a twofold nature: it is a power 'to take life and to let live', but also a power 'to make live and to let die'. The focus shifts, according to Foucault, from the power over death to the management of life, indispensable for the development of capitalism, which can only take place once bodies are inserted in mechanism of production: bodies have to be useful and docile, energies must be increased so as to be co-opted as 'labor force'. Capitalism found in the biopower an essential ally. Biopower as the eruption of many and diverse techniques subjugating bodies and controlling populations.

Giorgio Agamben responds with a contemporary perspective (and radicalization) of Foucault's discussion: while acknowledging the Foucaultian thesis of the biopower as a modern event, Agamben argues that sovereignty and biopower are much older phenomena, intertwined in the primary gesture of all politics. In this view, sovereignty equals the power to decide the state of exception through which 'bare life' (*zoé*, in the Greek correlate) underlies political life (*bios*). In other words, according to Agamben, the Greek understanding of politics holds two conceptions of life, *zoe*, bare life, and *bios*, politically or morally qualified life, the particular form of life of a community. The

---

[102] In the Brazilian translation: Um dos fenômenos fundamentais do século XIX foi, é o que se poderia denominar a assunção da vida pelo poder: se vocês preferirem, uma tomada de poder sobre o homem enquanto ser vivo, uma espécie de estatização do biológico.

fundamental political act is made possible through the exclusion of bare life from political life that simultaneously makes bare life a condition of politics. He says, in *Homo Sacer* that

> side by side with the process through which exception becomes the rule, the space of bare life, originally situated at the margins of the law, has increasingly coincided with political space, and exclusion and inclusion, external and internal, *bios* e *zoé*, law and fact enter in a zone of irreducible indistinctness.[103] (16)

The notion of the "Homo sacer" designated the individual that may be killed by anyone without implying that his/her killer should be condemned for homicide since s/he had already been banned from the juridical-political community. It refers to a juridical category in ancient Roman law that designates an individual accused of a crime that cannot be sacrificed (turned 'sacred', *sacer*) for having committed this crime. However, as Agamben argues, Roman writer Pompeius Festus posits that what is crucial about the homo sacer is that although he is not allowed to be sacrificed, whoever kills him would not be condemned for homicide. The homo sacer is a limit-concept that Agamben sees throughout the history of Western political thought and situates as the fundamental element of sovereign power. It is important to notice that whereas even the basest criminal could allege legal guarantees and the 'due process of law', this "sacred man" was completely vulnerable and reduced to sheer physical existence, to mere 'bare life', life that can be

---

[103] Lado a lado com o processo pelo qual a exceção se torna em todos os lugares a regra, o espaço da vida nua, situado originariamente à margem do ordenamento, vem progressivamente a coincidir com o espaço político, e exclusão e inclusão, externo e interno, *bios* e *zoé*, direito e fato entram em uma zona de irredutível indistinção.

killed without turning the killer into a criminal or the victim into a martyr.

Whereas Agamben's analysis of biopolitics is centered mainly in legal reasoning it seems to be possible to see that people can still go through processes of exclusion, even if they are formally in full fruition of their rights; they can still be seen as 'bare life', as 'useless', 'superfluous', "ex-cremental". These 'leftovers' once inhabiting only peripheral spaces, in contemporary global economy, become present in every industrialized center.

What interests us here is the dynamics of contemporary capitalism as it is aesthetically expressed in its biopolitical aspect. If we refer back to the etymology of the term 'aesthetic' we will see that it comes from the Greek *αισθητική* (*aisthetike*), meaning 'sensation', from *αίσθησιν* (*aisthesin*), 'sense', indicating a perception through the senses. The aesthetic experimentation, that is, the perception through the sense, in the contemporary world is the main element in everyday life – seen here beyond the limitation of a reductionist viewpoint that banalizes experience into 'mass culture' – encompassing a number of processes, including production, distribution and circulation, regulation and control. There is an unwavering tension between the biopolitical forces that limit, control or exclude from the possibility of experimentation and the potentiality of life. Narrative strategies and images express, in many contemporary cultural products, such biopolitical forces – Naturalistic images are perhaps a very good examples of these workings; nevertheless, one must also be aware of the

'lines of flight', which can offer a perspective that does not necessarily normalizes or reifies life. Biopolitics can wane the force of life as much as it can wane the force of the image.

Chico Science e a Nação Zumbi, a rock band from the 1990's, perceived the biopolitical forces at work in the city. Their song "A Cidade" (The City) says

> The sun rises and shines
> Over the evolved stones
> That grew from the force
> Of suicidal bricklayers
> Horsemen circulate
> Watching people
> No matter if they're bad
> Or if they're good[104]

The horsemen's constant vigil does not differentiate people according to moral standards: whether good or bad, they are all under surveillance. The city arises from the bodies of construction workers, resembling another famous Brazilian song, Chico Buarque's "Construção", where the worker "died in the wrong way of the street, hindering traffic".[105] This life is dispensable, it is bare life.

In the song "Rios, Pontes and Overdrives" (Rivers, Bridges and Overdrives) Chico Science also explores the theme:

> Because there are ducks eating mud in the river
> Rivers, bridges and overdrives, amazing sculptures of mud
> And the mud eats up the *mocambo*
> And there are rags in the *mocambo*
> And the rags have flown and fallen on the pavement
> Under midday sun

---

[104] O sol nasce e ilumina/as pedras evoluídas / que cresceram com a força / de pedreiros suicidas / Cavaleiros circulam / vigiando as pessoas / Não importa se são ruins / nem importa se são boas.

[105] "Morreu na contramão atrapalhando o tráfego".

> They were run over by a car
> And just stood there
> Me, a rag, you, a rag
> It's Macaxeira, Imbiribeira, Bom Pastor, it's Ibura,
> Ipseb, Torreão,Casa Amarela, Boa Viagem, Genipapo,
> Bonifácio, Santo Amaro, Madalena, Boa Vista, Dois
> Irmãos, It's Cais do Porto, It's Caxangá, It's Brasilit,
> Beberibe, CDU, Capibaribe, é o Centrão[106]

In this song, Recife 'swallows' its inhabitants in the mud of the mangroves. People are reduced to the most miserable condition, identified with *patos* (in Brazilian slang, also a designation for stupid or gullible people) and eating mud. Actually, mud is a central trope in the song, the substance that transforms people into things (the "amazing sculptures of mud") and that corrodes and causes chaos[107] in the *mocambos*. The association of *mocambos* with houses brings to mind both the poor living conditions in the city and the issue of racialization of poverty, as the term makes reference to African heritage. The dwellers of these *mocambos* are *molambos*, the rags, but also, in Portuguese, an individual of weak character. The *molambos* are ubiquitous, from the most renowned places (Boa Viagem) to the most deprived (Brasilit), and they are the appropriate passive elements in the production of misery.[108]

---

[106] Porque no rio tem pato comendo lama / Rios, pontes e overdrives - impressionantes esculturas de lama / E a lama come no mocambo e no mocambo tem molambo / E o molambo já voou, caiu lá no calçamento bem no sol do meio-dia / O carro passou por cima e o molambo ficou lá / Molambo eu, molambo tu, molambo eu, molambo tu / É Macaxeira, Imbiribeira, Bom Pastor, é o Ibura, Ipseb, Torreão, Casa Amarela, Boa Viagem, Genipapo, Bonifácio, Santo Amaro, Madalena, Boa Vista, Dois Irmãos, É Cais do Porto, é Caxangá, é Brasilit, Beberibe,CDU, Capibaribe, é o Centrão.

[107] In the Northeast, the verb *comer* is also associated with violent disruption, as in *o pau comeu*, that is, there was "a fight".

[108] It is interesting to compare Chico Science's song with Otto's "Bob", which says "She's from the time of bob / from the pina of Copacabana / In the afternoon, on the beach / she likes smoking and kissing her fiancée" (Ela é do tempo do bob lá do pina de Copacabana / De tarde na praia o que ela gosta é de fumar e beijar seu noivo). The song then samples the extract from

The city depersonalizes and reifies its inhabitants. The districts may have different names, but they are all transformed by the mud into *mocambos*. The sense of movement, the transit from one district to another is in tension with the immobility of the mud statues, suggesting a map whose landmarks could be pictured as these statues. Rags, run over by cars, left on the pavement, are social dejects. Decomposing under the sun, these rags may turn into the mud that will eventually "eat up" the city. This dispensable life is the bare life produced in and by the city of Recife.

Amarelo Manga, the film directed by Cláudio Assis in 2002, gives an audiovisual rendering of Recife in manner akin to Chico Science's song. Tellingly, Chico Dias' character, Wellington Canibal, says "among all the species living in world, man is the most deserving of death";[109] also, the film's title song, composed by Otto, Bnegão and Apollo 9, and sung by Dunga, the gay character played by Matheus Narchtegaele, declares:

> turned yellow, made fun of me,
> you'll have to pay,
> and inside this box, an indigent body,
> a body that doesn't speak
> a body that doesn't feel[110]

These elements of the soundtrack announce the film's predilection for a sordid universe of deceit, deception and vengeance,

---

"Rios, Pontes e Overdrives" which cites the various places from Recife. Otto's nostalgic song offers a counterpoint to the tragic tone in Chico Science's original work.

[109] "Entre todas as espécies que existem no mundo o homem é a que mais merece morrer".

[110] "Amarelou mangou de mim/ Não vai ficar de graça/ E dentro desta caixa/ Um corpo indigente/ Um corpo que não fala/ Um corpo que não sente".

inhabited by marginal subjects guided by passions and instincts, in constant search for the satisfaction of their appetite. This universe is, indeed, a "box", trapping the bodies in a decaying environment. A yellow "box", not the yellow of gold, but the yellow of decomposing cadavers, of fake blonde hair, of old car. The containment is also present in the diegetic time: the film takes place within a 24-hour period, structured as a *ritornello*.

Musically, the technique of the *ritornello* involves a recurring orchestral melody, a theme, that is played by the whole orchestra and that returns after solo instruments or voices play their own tune.[111] Although the theme can be repeated integrally, it is also possible that it may be 'affected' by the solos, so that the *tutti* may be modulated by the individual parts. *Amarelo Manga* puts forward a similar structure. Nevertheless, the closing of the circuit in the film is much more akin to a negative nihilism challenged by Friedrich Nietzsche in *A Gaia Ciência* (The Gay Science). In a famous excerpt Nietzsche says

> What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you in your loneliest loneliness and told you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and

---

[111] The passage below shows the ritornello in Bach's *Brandenburg Concert 2.*

everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence - even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again- and you with it, speck of dust!"- Would you not throw yourself down and clench your teeth and curse the demon who said it? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine!" If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you; the question in each and every thing, "Do you desire this once more, and innumerable times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight! Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal[112]? (341)

The notion of the eternal recurrence poses the question of the loss of individual 'self' with its faculty to reason and want. The circular movement, the movement of the eternal recurrence, implies loss of identity in the name of disperse intensities. This possibility, however, is not carried out by the narrative in *Amarelo Manga*. Its *ritornello*, its recurrence is trapped into the same, into mere repetition without difference, incarcerating the characters into the yellow 'boxes' of an unending despair.

---

[112] E se um dia ou uma noite um demônio se esgueirasse em tua mais solitária solidão e te dissesse: "Esta vida, assim como tu vives agora e como a viveste, terás de vivê-la ainda uma vez e ainda inúmeras vezes: e não haverá nela nada de novo, cada dor e cada prazer e cada pensamento e suspiro e tudo o que há de indivisivelmente pequeno e de grande em tua vida há de te retornar, e tudo na mesma ordem e seqüência - e do mesmo modo esta aranha e este luar entre as árvores, e do mesmo modo este instante e eu próprio. A eterna ampulheta da existência será sempre virada outra vez - e tu com ela, poeirinha da poeira!". Não te lançarias ao chão e rangerias os dentes e amaldiçoarias o demônio que te falasses assim? Ou viveste alguma vez um instante descomunal, em que lhe responderias: "Tu és um deus e nunca ouvi nada mais divino!" Se esse pensamento adquirisse poder sobre ti, assim como tu és, ele te transformaria e talvez te trituraria: a pergunta diante de tudo e de cada coisa: "Quero isto ainda uma vez e inúmeras vezes?" pesaria como o mais pesado dos pesos sobre o teu agir! Ou, então, como terias de ficar de bem contigo e mesmo com a vida, para não desejar nada mais do que essa última, eterna confirmação e chancela?"

The color yellow, photographed with impressive power by Walter Carvalho, is a metaphor for the illnesses – both social and psychological – that characterizes the diegetic world in *Amarelo Manga*. A character cites a chronicle written by Renato Carneiro Campos,[113] which reads

> Yellow is the color of the tables, the benches, the fishmonger's knife handle, garden hoes and junk. Of oxcart, yoke, aging hats, sun-dried beef. Yellow of the diseases, boy's eye secretion, purulent wounds, gob, worms, hepatitis, diarrhea, rotten teeth [...] Yellow inner time. Old, faded, sick.[114]

The film, set in the periphery and in the old quarters of Recife, invests in the construction of human beings as animals driven by instincts, confirming the pathologization suggested by Campos's quote, much like Naturalistic novels: the film poster announces that human beings are "stomach and sex", and if one looks closely, it can be seen that the picture on the background in a 'mango yellow' vagina. Like the late 19th century novels, the film has a 'clinical' approach, foregrounding sick(ening) behavior.

But it also has a 'cynical' attitude, revealed in the director's cameo appearance. Here, Claudio Assis approaches Kika (Dira Paes) and whispers in her ear, "Modesty is the most intelligent form of perversion[115]". Lecturing the character, the filmmaker assumes the

---

[113] Renato Carneiro Campos (Born 1930 in Pernambuco, died 1977) was an important writer in Penambuco. He published intensely in newspapers, mainly chronicles, and often making references to colors. Poet Marcus Accioly refers to him as the "chronicler of Recife's color".

[114] Amarelo é a cor das mesas, dos bancos, dos cabos das peixeiras, da enxada e da estrovenga. Do carro-de-boi, das cangas, dos chapéus envelhecidos, da charque. Amarelo das doenças, das remelas dos olhos dos meninos, das feridas purulentas, dos escarros, das verminoses, das hepatites, das diarréias, dos dentes apodrecidos [...] Tempo interior amarelo. Velho, desbotado, doente.

[115] "O pudor é a forma mais inteligente de perversão".

position of the moral judge, the ultimate stance of denouncement. Furthermore, the use of direct address to the camera at the same time engages the spectators' sympathies and alienates them, because of the accusative tone employed by the text itself and the actor's performances (one needs only to remember the first soliloquy, played by Leona Cavalli, where she tell everyone to "Fuck off"[116]). There is a dull pedagogic effect ensuing from this use, which, once more, voices an indignant, albeit naïve, view of humanity.
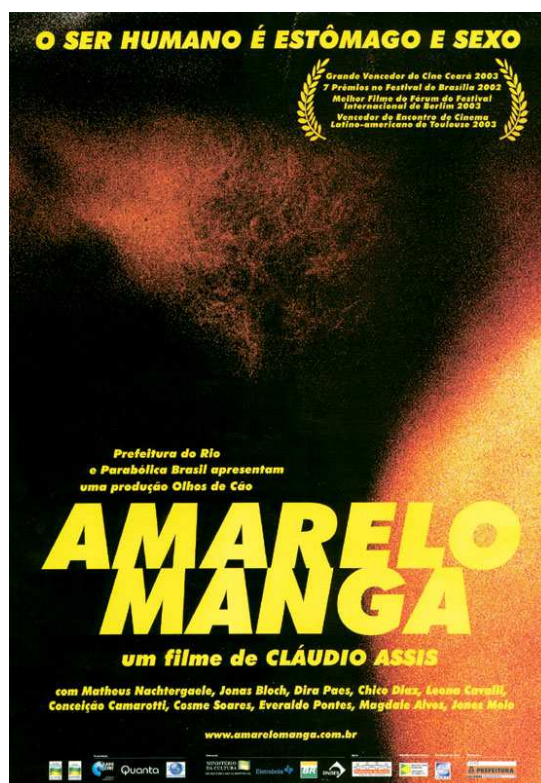

Figure 32 – *Amarelo Manga*. Film Poster. The reference to sex and instincts are present in the quote on top of the poster, taken from a line spoken by the priest in the film.

The open spaces in Assis' film stress the Naturalistic impulse and the will to denounce. The priest's walk through the slum, in what seems

---

[116] "Eu quero é que todo mundo vá tomar no cu"

to be a maze[117] of subhuman housings, leads to a church that is shut down, doors and windows cemented, resembling a face with closed eyes, a face of a corpse. During this perambulation, the voice over narration says: "We're doomed to be free".[118] In a maze, where you are free to choose the path you take, but you are doomed to be lost in. The dreary, shabby maze of endless streets which lead nowhere but to themselves, not only in *Amarelo Manga*, but in *Cidade de Deus*, as well.

Figure 33 – *Amarelo Manga.* Labyrinth streets in the slums.

Moreover, the paradoxical statement echoes the notion, also expressed by his voice over, that "the human being is stomach and sex", a fatalism that assigns the instincts the preponderant role in subjectivity. Nonetheless, instincts, here, are not taken as a possible response to a body/mind split, or deft Freudian critique. They are taken at face-value, a daft reduction of potential to its realization in sordid acts meant, it seems, to shock only.

---

[117] It is important to establish a distinction between *maze* and *labyrinth,* so that I might justify the preference for the former term. Both words designate a network of interconnected passages, meant to be a challenge to navigation. A labyrinth (from the Greek word *labrys*, a double-headed axe), however, is unicursal, whereas a maze is a non-unicursal intellectual puzzle. The word labyrinth, thus, suggests a single route, while maze implies a number of possibilities.

[118] "Estamos condenados a ser livres"

Figure 34 – *Amarelo Manga.* The priest's peruse in the narrow lanes leading to the church.

So it comes as no surprise when we perceive the spaces in *Amarelo Manga,* constructed so as to emphasize the degradation of urban Recife and the people who live there, "like maggots in manure", to cite Azevedo's novel. Façades, shops, parks, streets are framed and shot in their decadence.
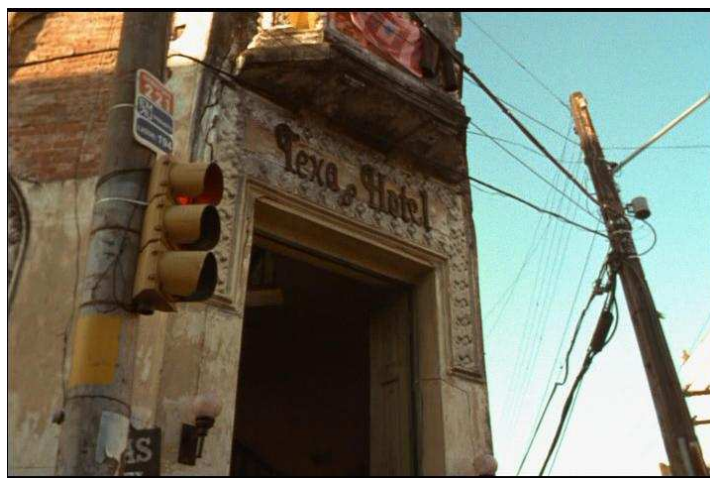

Figure 35 – *Amarelo Manga* – Texas Hotel façade.

The color yellow is also present in the hotel walls. The prevailing tone is the sickening yellow of pus, decomposing, infected matter. In the film, the Texas Hotel ironically recontextualizes the U.S. state into a third-world context. The degraded façade houses the various rooms, constituting an interior that resembles a small city. Such rooms are presented more or less in the same level of deterioration, so there is no hierarchy that would distinguish them. The camera travels following the

characters as they move around, the constant transit in the hallways entailing a sensation of flow similar to streets. The rooms substitute the houses in this small-scale urban configuration, even though a hotel, by definition, is a place of passage and not of definite stay. The sense of 'belonging', is, thus problematized in the ambiguous 'definite passage' that is the hotel.

Figure 36 – *Amarelo Manga*. The interior of the hotel.

The TV is always on in one of the rooms, where Native Brazilians are mesmerized in front of the screen. The loss of a sense of 'belonging' to a Native culture is revealed through the displacement of these people from their origins. In the Hotel, they become just part of the furniture, as they do not react to any of the events. They are absorbed by the room where they are sitting, as if they were chameleons replicating the environment.

Figure 37 – *Amarelo Manga*. Native Brazilians in the hotel.

Throughout the film there is a series of shots from the top which verticalizes the visual axis, producing a map of the interiors. The boundaries between public and private become less explicit as the transit of the gaze is not stopped by physical barriers. In a paradigmatic moment, a scene taking place in the hotel bathrooms reveal a man peeking over the wall at a woman who is having a shower in the contiguous room. This framing from above reduces the size of the human figure, maximizing space, producing maps traced by the (sometimes illicit) movement of the characters.

Figure 38 – *Amarelo Manga*. View from the top.

Figure 39 - *Amarelo Manga*. View from the top in the bathroom.

The bar, the film's first shot. A view from the top weakens the differentiation between public and private. The camera follows the bare

figure of a woman as she gets up from bed, gets dressed and goes from her bedroom to the bar. This preferred framing evokes Michel Foucault's discussion about panopticism:

> This enclosed, divided space, observed at every point, where individuals are inserted in a fixed place, where the slightest movements are supervised, where all events are recorded, where an uninterrupted work of writing links the centre and periphery, where power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, where each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead - all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary dispositive.[119] (*Vigiar e Punir* 174-5)

It can be said that Foucault's theorization emphasizes the controlling nature of the Panopticon and that, in a way, the space in *Amarelo Manga* is not organized accordingly. Moreover, it is a space of exclusion and the characters can be considered the 'leftovers' of capitalism. However, still the film creates a universe that gives life to images of a desire to control through prying: the framing by the camera turns the screen and the rooms into 'boxes' containing life that should be regarded as abnormal, shocking. A moral freak show.

Figure 40 - *Amarelo Manga.* View from the top in the bar.

[119] Esse espaço fechado, recortado, vigiado em todos os seus pontos, onde os indivíduos estão inseridos em um lugar fixo, onde os menores movimentos são controlados, onde todos os acontecimentos são registrados, onde um trabalho ininterrupto de escrita liga o centro e a periferia, onde o poder é exercido sem divisão, segundo uma figura hierárquica contínua, onde cada indivíduo é constantemente localizado, examinado e distribuído entre os vivos, os doentes e os mortos – isso tudo constitui um modelo compacto do dispositivo disciplinar.

Furthermore, in the slaughter house, this framing has the effect of mingling the bodies of the workers with the meat. The lack of differentiation serves to enhance the bestiality assigned to the characters. Men, meat, beast, baseness. Life becomes expendable, just life the killed ox. The images of the animal being slaughtered remind us of the production of political subjects in our times: this is neither a sacrifice – the ox is being killed for consumption, it is commodified – nor a crime.
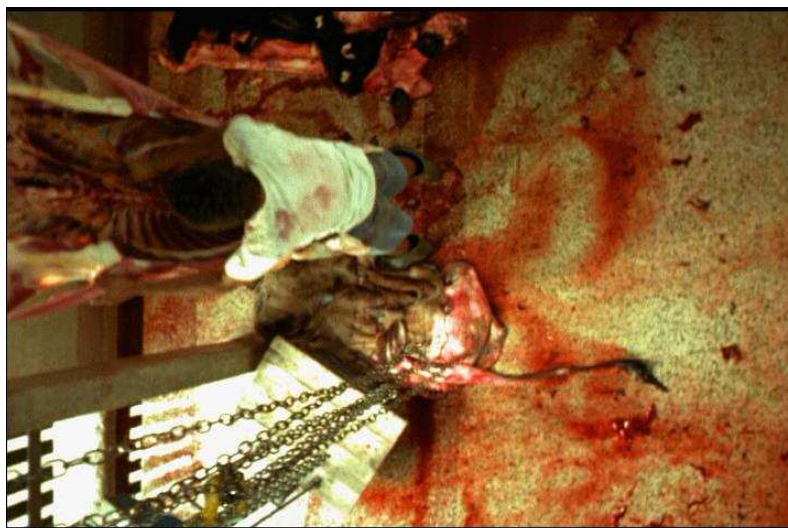

Figure 41 - *Amarelo Manga.* View from the top in the slaughterhouse.

It seems that *Amarelo Manga*, in its search for an image that reveals some 'truth' about humankind's animality, finds in the 'documentary' slaughter of the ox an emblematic association with the biopolitical forces at play. Furthermore, the film participates in contemporary discourses on economic, social, and cultural exclusion as deeply associated with recurrent commonplaces about the life of the 'wretched'. If one of the objectives of life in a city is to effect the transition from one level of human capability to another, from mere life to human life, and from human life to the good life, *Amarelo Manga*

denies this possibility, enclosing all forms of life in an endless loop of decadence and squalor.

Figure 42 – *Amarelo Manga*. The 'documentary' killing of the ox.

In Sérgio Machado's *Cidade Baixa* friends Deco and Naldinho, owners of a small boat in Bahia, meet strip-dancer Karinna. Both men fall for her and their friendship is deeply shattered. The film suggests that through the resilience of pain, the refusal of a flesh wound to heal and ritualized violence, male bodies become indistinct from roosters. The animal metaphor is also present, as is the issue of contextualizing violence in a poor, deteriorating urban environment.

Figure 43 - *Cidade Baixa*. Like the roosters, the two main male characters fight to an almost-death.

Throughout the film, the camera explores the surface of the male characters' bodies, as they sweat, bleed and mingle with one another. The ultimate merging is provided by Karinna, when she cleans the men's wounds, fusing their blood in the washbasin. Machado takes almost literally the notion of 'male bonding'; the film, instead of distancing spectators in a critical position from the potential danger of *machismo*, actualizes this hypermasculinization. The open-endedness of *Cidade Baixa* aggravates the lack of distinction between the two characters' bodies. Then, to a certain extent, we are drawn, as viewers, to a subtle destabilization of social norms, of a 'masculinist' order by the very excess that the film portrays and then undermines by denying a resolution to the conflict.

Figure 44 - *Cidade Baixa*. The merging of the blood.

In both *Amarelo Manga* and *Cidade Baixa* we have a reconfiguration of the private–public axis in terms of the *zoé/bios* distinction.[120] Commenting on Aristotle, Agamben indicates that politics can be found in the passage from voice to language (*Homo* sacer, 15), that is, the qualification of life in terms of logos. Hence, politics exists because human beings separate themselves from bare life through language. Bare life can thus be seen as a 'bestialization of man', the threshold between man and beast. This argument is expanded when Agamben refers to Hobbes, who does not consider the state of nature a pre-historic era, but an internal principle to the State revealed in the moment in which the State is considered as if it had been dissolved (112). In the state of nature, man is wolf to man, by which Agamben means a condition where everyone is bare life in relation to others. So this transformation of man into wolf and humanization of the wolf is at every moment possible in the *dissolutio civitatis*, in the 'dissolved political city' (113).

---

[120] In the beginning of Giorgio Agamben's book, *Homo Sacer*, he discusses this distinction. The Greek term *zoe* has no plural, and it defined simple natural life that is excluded from the *polis* in the strict sense, and remains confined as mere reproductive life to the sphere of the *oikos* (home). In contrast, Agamben argues, Aristotle uses the phrase *bios* politikos for political life.

Similarly to the ox and the *patos,* the ducks, from Chico Science's song, and the cocks in *Cidade Baixa,* Fernando Meirelles' *Cidade de Deus* also seems to produce its bare life from an animal metaphor. The title sequence shows a frenetic chase for a hen, which tries to escape its destiny running franticly through the streets of the slum. In the maze composed by the slum's arteries, the hen stood no chances. There was no way out for it, caught between the violence of the drug dealers and the police. Framing and camera movement favor the hen's perspective, but also resemble a videogame.

Figure 45 – *Cidade de Deus.* Initial sequence.

These first shots announce the dynamic camera movements and editing which, throughout the film, will destabilize the spectator's sense of direction and space. This loss, however, operates within the confines

of the slum. *Cidade de Deus*, the diegetic space where the film is set, is a maze of dirty alleys. As most of the action takes place there, we have few other spatial references (a beach, the newspaper building); it is the maze that interests us here. It is a self-contained world, its narrow lanes with dead ends.

In Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's *Couro de Gato*, we can see the exact border between *favela* and *asphalt*. A zone of contact, the place of everlasting conflict. *Cidade de Deus* does not give us this zone. We are faced with cuts that carry us from one place to another within the slum, or from the slum to another environment without ever problematizing this conflict. The problem in the *favela* has nothing to do with the 'outside' world. It is difficult to tell Theseus from the Minotaur.

Figure 46 – *Couro de Gato*. The border between *favela* and *asfalto*.

But it has not always been like this, this *Cidade de Deus*. Once, it was a romanticized place for the Robin-Hoodesque Trio Ternura from the 1960's. The nostalgic tone is set, in the musical soundtrack, when we hear "Alvorada no Morro" (Dawn in the Hill/Slum). The song,

composed by Carlos Cachaça, Cartola and Herminio Bello de Carvalho in 1968 says

> Dawn
> in the hill/slum, so pretty
> nobody cries, there is no sorrow
> nobody's disappointed
> the coloring sky
> is so beautiful
> and nature smiling
> tinting[121]

Nostalgia is accompanied by irony, because images deny the most obvious meaning of the lyrics. Still, this early version of *Cidade de Deus*, with its dust roads and inept criminals is far from the war zone it will become later in the narrative. The Trio Ternura are still much closer to the cultural matrix of the *malandro*, living by their wits, avoiding confrontation as much as possible – at least in comparison with the 'professional' criminality that is embodied by Dadinho/Zé Pequeno.

Figure 47 – *Cidade de Deus*. Trio Ternura and the nostalgic past. The partners rob a gas delivery truck.

---

[121] Alvorada/Lá no morro, que beleza/Ninguém chora, não há tristeza/Ninguém sente dissabor/O sol colorindo/É tão lindo, é tão lindo/E a natureza sorrindo/Tingindo, tingindo.

Figure 48 – *Cidade de Deus*. The second robbery of a truck. This time, violence is pervasive.

Actually, young Dadinho's transformation into Zé Pequeno is also the transformation of the image, from the ochre/yellow tones of the 'old' *Cidade de Deus* to the somber shades of blue and gray of the 1970's and 1980's. However, cinematography is only one of the changes operated by the temporal dislocation. The 'professionalization' of the criminal, the aggravation of violence is also present in the death of 'malandro' Cabeleira and 'marginal' Zé Pequeno. The former dies as a romantic hero, leaving his girlfriend behind, surrounded by the people from the *favela*. The soundtrack brings Candeia's song "Preciso me Encontrar" (I Need to Find Myself). The lyrics go

> Let me go
> I have to go
> I'll walk around searching
> Laughing so as not to cry
> I want to see the sun rise
> See the river waters running
> Listen to the birds singing
> I wan to be born
> I want to live
> Let me go
> I have to go
> I'll walk around searching
> Laughing so as not to cry
> If someone asks for me
> Tell them I will only come back

When I find myself[122]

The words follow a melancholic solo of the bassoon which plays the melodic line, stressing the sorrow and sadness for the loss of Cabeleira.

Zé Pequeno's death, on the other hand, takes place brutally and almost nonchalantly. There is, surely, a genre convention here: Zé Pequeno is the bad guy and he deserves his death. The reassuring punishment of the villain against the poignant death of the not so bad *malandro*. Zé Pequeno's death, nevertheless, indicates something else. It personifies the expendable life that occupies the slum.

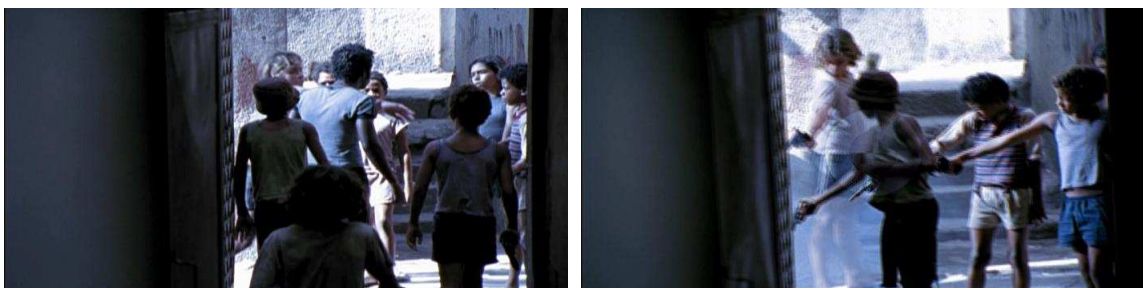Figure 49 – *Cidade de Deus*. Cabeleira's melancholy death.

Figure 50 – *Cidade de Deus*. Zé Pequeno's brutal death.

---

[122] Deixe-me ir/Preciso andar/Vou por aí a procurar/Rir prá não chorar/Quero assistir ao sol nascer/Ver as águas dos rios correr/Ouvir os pássaros cantar/Eu quero nascer, quero viver/Deixe-me ir/Preciso andar/Vou por aí a procurar/Rir prá não chorar/Se alguém por mim perguntar/Diga que eu só vou voltar/Quando eu me encontrar

The leaps from past to present in the film are not always paced. The ebb and flow of time may be quite erratic, as in the sequence that explains the rise and fall of the "gang do apê" (the apartment gang). Mise-en-scène plays an important part in revealing the transformations that are taking place but these transformations are more strongly orchestrated by the voice over narration, which controls the narrative deciding when events should take place. About the use of voice over in *Cidade de Deus*, Ismail Xavier says that

> The narrator's rhetoric force consists of being in tune with the spectators as a mediating pole in this tragedy of vengeance and power struggle. The voice's space is a kind of proscenium, half film, half audience, where he speaks who has gone through hardship, but recapitulating in an organized fashion (however squeezed in the flux of action), being able to express humor because he is now distant from the scene.[123] ("Corrosão Social, Pragmatismo e Ressentimento", 142)

The voice's decisive control over the narrative functions as a mediating device that, as Xavier argues, comes in between the audience and the film, organizing, restraining, pacifying the diegetic world. His role as a photographer stresses the mediation: the camera distances Buscapé from the sordid world that surrounds him. But this camera is not free from ambiguity.

---

[123] A força retórica do narrador é estar em sintonia com os espectadores como pólo mediador nessa tragédia de vingança e luta pelo poder.O espaço da voz é uma espécie de proscênio, meio filme meio platéia,em que fala quem passou por apertos,mas recapitula de forma organizada (embora espremida no fluxo das ações), podendo trazer humor porque já distante da cena.

Figure 51 – *Cidade de Deus*. The changes in the apartment. The mise-en-scène stresses the transformation of the environment as criminals take over the suburbs.

Firstly, one needs only remember that Zé Pequeno's death occurs under the camera's scrutiny. We can say it (re)frames the killing, transforming it into a spectacle for the newspaper's readers. But it is also through the camera that Zé Pequeno's gang becomes known, becomes a subject. If we decompose the shots from the sequence where Buscapé is producing the 'official' images of the gang, we have a very telling frame: in it, Buscapé's image is fusing with the gang's. For this very short time, they are one and the same. But only to be detached immediately after, fulfilling the promises of redemption that can only fall for the boy with the camera, who helps us not get too much into the image, who helps us not fuse with the gang.

Figure 52 – *Cidade de Deus*. Buscapé produces the images of the bandits. In the top right frame, the fusion of the images.

But there is no point acknowledging this ambiguity if we do not also recognize the camera as a 'shooting machine' – trapped between drug dealers and the police, Buscapé's camera wants to register all, wants to collect the images of the slum for the consumption of those who cannot see 'what it is really like'. He clicks and he shoots, a fatal photograph/bullet hitting a gang member.

Figure 53 – *Cidade de Deus*. A character is 'shot' by Buscpé's camera.

And it is not only Buscapé's camera that shoots. The film camera literally becomes a bullet. It takes us in its zigzagging across the streets, ricocheting until its final destination. Only this time it does not hit anyone. What does this camera do, then, when it becomes bullet? It chooses its victims carefully, it decides who deserves to dies, who is supposed to live.

Figure 54 – *Cidade de Deus*. The camera/bullet.

The images produce the exclusion, in visual terms of these lives which are excluded from the juridical order. Not only in the actual images of their being annihilated, but by means of the dynamic camera movements that blur their bodies. One of the most disturbing scenes in the film shows the shooting of children by another child from Zé

Pequeno's gang. Contrasting deep and shallow focus, the images of the children are effaced, leaving only traces of their existence.
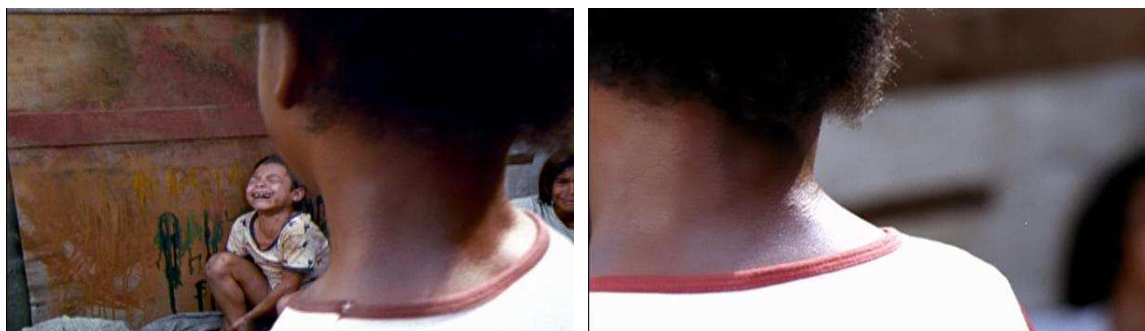

Figure 55 – *Cidade de Deus.* The effacement of characters in the manipulation of focus.

In the instances I tried to describe above, *Cidade de Deus* suggests ways through which we can recognize not only the 'representation' but an actual production of biopower. Camera movements, cinematography, mise-en-scène, voice over narration are filmic elements that naturalize the control over life and the control over filmic experience.

Figure 56 – *Cidade de Deus.* The final shots. The film's end suggest a loop of recidivist crime.

There is, still, one last element that works to emphasize the point I am trying to make. The film's ending hints at a nihilist resolution, where the younger generation of criminals seems to take over the drug dealing business. A loop traps violence in a diegetic world that resembles the maze of the slum. With no other reference but the elimination of bare life, violence in the film does not produce intensities

that could percolate within the clichés of representation. The clichés,[124] here, control the game; violence is hijacked by biopower and moralized as the exemplar punishment for the 'bad' guys.

There are, nevertheless, other possibilities, in Brazilian cinema, of articulating violence. Ruy Guerra's *Estorvo*, for exemple. *Estorvo* is based on a novel by Chico Buarque, first published in 1991. Both works are non-linear narratives about a man who thinks he is being chased by strangers; and in the process of running away from his persecutors, he bumps into a number of character for whom he becomes a *burden*. The book begins with a circular sequence of words: "*burden, to burden, extubare, disturb, perturbation, bewilderment, turbid, whirling, turbulence, turmoil, trouble, trap, hustle, crowd, slumber, stupor, cripple, uprising, insubordination, burden*".[125] Such sequence announces the dissolution of narrative line through the immersion in unique space and time. Much like the protagonist, lost in perambulations across the city, readers/spectators are thrown into discontinuous space and time. The main character's deambulatory walk is marked by the subversion of temporal structures – past, present and future are intertwined –, resulting in a 'burdened' film, which denies easy gratification.

Erratic time and space are reinforced by the fact that director Ruy Guerra opted to pulverize the imaginary city in *Estorvo* by filming in

---

[124] In *O que é Filosofia* (What is Philosophy), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari discuss the cliché as that which prevents the genesis of an image, just as opinion and convention prevent the genesis of thought. One of the fundamental questions in Deleuze's philosophy concerns the conditions for the production of the *new* (image, thought etc). Thus, the condition for the genesis of the image (or the sensation) is the condition for the destruction of the cliché (See also Deleuze's book on Francis Bacon).

[125] Estorvo, estorvar, exturbare, distúrbio, perturbação, torvação, turva, torvelinho, turbulência, turbilhão, trouble, trápola, atropelo, tropel, torpor, estupor, estropiar, estrupício, estrovenga, estorvo.

three different countries: Brazil (Rio de Janeiro), Cuba (Havana) and Portugal (Lisbon). The protagonist's wandering in these nameless spaces destroys the possibility of reconstructing both the geography and the history of the cities; here, the expression to err has a double meaning: the perambulation through unidentified streets also connotes being equivocated in relation to the spaces one circulates in; it means being lost, confounding spaces. It is only symptomatic that during the sequence in which the protagonist meets his sister for breakfast, she shows him pictures of unidentified places, which look interchangeable. His gaze gets lost in those places, so that there is no reason to look for meaning: his is a gesture of refusal to decide whether those are real places, actual representations.
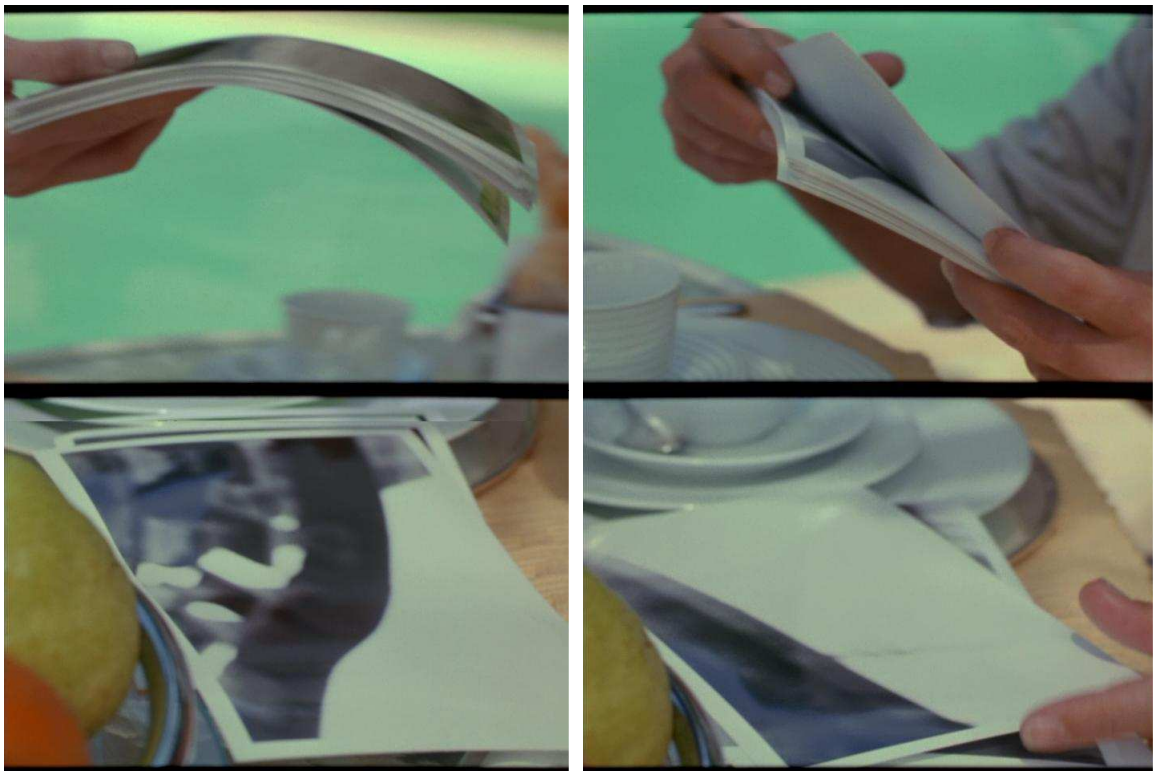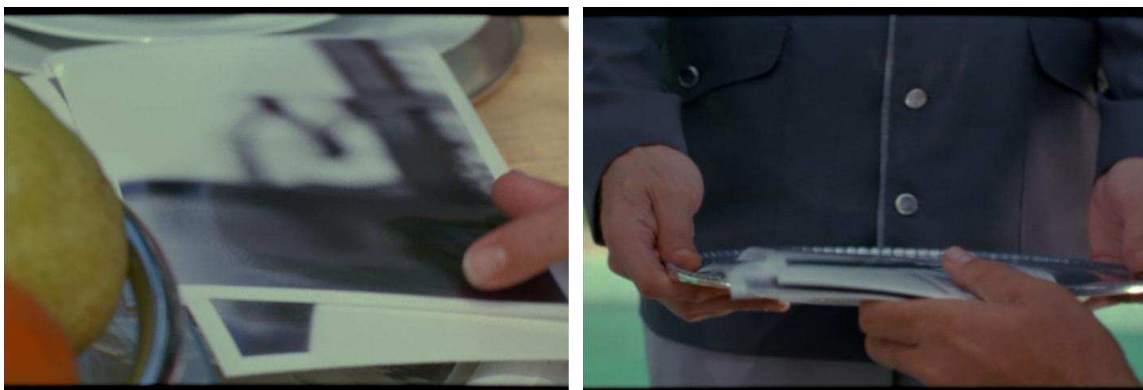
Figure 57 – *Estorvo*. The protagonist looks at the pictures of his sister's holiday

Furthermore, the character's deambulatory walk links very diverse spaces: decadent deteriorated building, modern shopping malls, mansions, abandoned farmsteads. This shifting of spaces resounds on other 'displacements', as, for example, in the film's linguistic politics. Jorge Perugorría, the lead Cuban actor, speaks Portuguese with a strong Spanish accent and talks to other characters in both Spanish and Portuguese. Moreover, Ruy Guerra's voice over narration is marked by an undisguiseable Mozambican accent. The 'natural' convention that identifies territory with language is, thus, contested, for the expression in the different linguistic forms happens independently of the places where they are presented.

Another instance of displacement can be seen in the challenge to common-sense attribution of the public sphere to men and private sphere to women. The main character does no 'perform' his socially ascribed functions: it is his wife who provides for them. Mise-en-scène reinforces the change of roles, having him wearing an apron and lying lazily on a couch. What is specially striking about this character is the sense of inadequacy that ensues from his transit – from pool parties

with the rich to dilapidated suburbs, from public to private places, he does not seem to belong anywhere.

As a schizophrenic stroller, the main character in *Estorvo* opposes the rationality and utilitarianism of contemporary life, where acts must be justified according to their pertinence to social order. His is not, however, a *flâneur*. According to Tom Gunning,

> the *flâneur* flaunted a characteristic detachment which depended on the leisurely pace of the stroll and the stroller's possession of a fund of knowledge about the city and its inhabitants. As an observer *par excellence*, the *flâneur* attempted to assert both independence from and insight into the urban scenes he witnessed. [Walter] Benjamin's famous example of *flâneurs* walking turtles on leashes stands as an emblem of the figure's unhurried pace. [...] Further, the *flâneur* classified the sights before him into more or less stable (even if ironic) categories. [...] However, as Benjamin stresses, this was a *petit bourgeois* genre offering limited insight, a literature of reassurance which sifted the shifting and potentially chaotic urban population into superficial stereotypes. [Edgar Allan] Poe's convalescent at his plate glass window exemplifies both the leisurely observation and the epistemological confidence of the classic *flâneur*. He displays, as Brand puts it, the *flâneur* "as domesticator of reality, aspiring to reduce it to a comfortable transparency". (28)

The *flâneur* described by Walter Benjamin and commented by Gunning, as a witness to modernity, tries, to a certain extent, to tame the frenzied rhythm of the historical moment he lived in. His slow strolls across the city, aiming at apprehending the city and its types, contrasted with the hubbub of metropolitan life. Contrary to the *flâneur*, however, in *Estorvo* we have a hiker whose walk is convulsive, because of his persecutory delirium. His total immersion in the fragmented

space differs from the *flâneur*'s detachment and epistemological confidence. Also, the use of closer framing and erratic camera movement (which follows the character's eye line) and the small number of longer framings prevent the spectator from apprehending the space more thoroughly. The image created, thus, puts us in an uncomfortable position: like the protagonist, we see, but we cannot fully map out what we are seeing.

What we can do is follow the main character's action within the imposed limitations. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau explores possible ways to subvert these limitations by means of everyday 'tactics'. He argues that such 'tactics' are in conflict with 'strategies' deployed by dominant powers. A 'strategy, for him, "postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of target or threats [...] can be managed" (36). It tries to conquer time through space, constructing a position of predictability and vigilance that turns "the uncertainties of history into readable spaces" (36). Strategies exercise a power/knowledge that is previous to them: a power to establish a *proper* place.

Contrastingly, 'tactics' refer to a "calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus" (37). It happens in "space of the other" (37), randomly, unpredictably, without formal knowledge; it is "the art of the weak" (37). Adrian Fielder shows these 'tactic' at work in

banlieu[126] films. He argues that these films show the use of 'tactics' as a way to space the 'machine of the law', a kind of social typewriter which write on people's bodies, both metaphorically – through the need to carry identity documents, for example – and literally – through repressive violence. If the city taken on the contours traced by the interdictions imposed to people (fences, walls), there are still places that can be used such as sidewalks, ceilings, stairways. Such possibilities are, according to Fielder, maximized by the young people in the *banlieu* films, as hideouts, wrestling ring, dwelling.

Like these young people, Jorge Perurroría's character utilizes 'tactics' to prevent from being inscribe into the law. He tries to escape from the typewriter, as does the film. Naming spaces so that they can be recognized in our fantasy has been a dominant strategy in spatial representation, which can be considered coherent with the efforts to delineate the 'national' as a counterpoint to the 'foreign'. But in Guerra's film what we have is a violent, debased universe that puts together the 'Third' (Cuba and Brazil) and the 'First' (Portugal) worlds. The film destabilizes the notions of 'belonging' to a nation. It actually suggests the absence of a 'being together', of a community.

This can explain the difficult reception that *Estorvo* has encountered. In the film's participation in Cannes Festival, Ruy Guerra commented about the negative reactions:

> There is a series of factors. It is a consequence not only of the French reception, but mainly from what is usually produced in Brazilian cinema. Our

---

[126] Fielder defines *banlieue* film as a kind of movie which explores the relations between periphery and centre of French metropolises.

> cinema is too institutionalized and their criticism is not open to Brazilian films that are not part of this institution. There, they expect an exotic expression from non-European countries. They want to see Brazilian films that show our things, folklore, carnival, such things... Nonsense! We are also entitled to universality, we can deal with thinking matter, which they think they are totally entitled to. The European feeling of possession resented my film a lot[127].
> (http://www.terra.com.br/cinema/gramado2000/2000/08/03/008.htm)

Surely, we must take Guerra's assertion with a grain of salt – in the context of the interview above he was actually defending his films against negative criticism. But his statement does raise a good question: what to make of films that seem to break with the Naturalistic, mimetic impulse we have been discussing throughout this chapter?

These are images of sensational violence – sensational images of violence. Distributed over the urban space, it reintroduces the sensational logic of representation, where mimetic operations safeguard us from the disturbance a violent image may generate. *Estorvo* seems to provide a tentative alternative, with its tactics of displacement. What prevails, however, are images that represent and reproduce biopower.

Doxa, common-sense, has it that representations of violence in urban spaces lead to moral indignation, to the valuing of the images as good or bad for its content, to the fate of the image as a 'correction' of

---

[127] Existem vários fatores. É uma conseqüência não só da receptividade francesa, mas principalmente daquilo que o Brasil está acostumado a produzir cinematograficamente. O cinema de cá está muito institucionalizado e a crítica de lá não está aberta a filmes brasileiros que não façam parte dessa instituição. Lá eles esperam sempre dos países não europeus uma expressão exótica. Querem sempre ver filmes brasileiros que mostrem coisas nossas, folclore carnaval, essas coisas... Não tem nada a ver! Nós temos o direito também à universalidades, podemos lidar com fatores pensantes, que eles se acham totalmente no direito. Esse sentimento de posse europeu se ressentiu bastante com meu filme.

the world; these are 'images of violence'. These images are biopolitical because they aim at conducting our bodies through pre-established, determined reactions. Reaction to the 'information' that is being shown. In "O Ato de Criação" Gilles Deleuze says that information is a set of words of order; when we are 'informed', someone is telling us what we should believe in. Informing means circulating words of order. The biopolitical order has to be acknowledged and criticized, so that our relationship with films does not fall into the trap of control and determination.

In the following chapter I go back to these biopolitical implications in order to suggest the (re)configurations of community. If the possibility of univocal, qualified political life in the *polis* is challenged by thinkers like Agamben, we must start thinking about what kind of operations are at work in the construction of ties that bind us together.

4

Violence, or the Impossible Living Together

Figure 58 – Poster of the 27th São Paulo Biannual[128]

Séparés, on est ensemble.[129]

("Le Nénuphar Blanc",
Stephane Mallarmé)

In *Cidade de* Deus, when Zé Galinha engages in the revenge for his brother's death and his girlfriend's rape, he starts robbing banks and supermarkets in order to gather money to buy weapons for what turns out to be a bloody war between gangs of drug dealers. Zé Galinha,

---

[128] In 2006, the theme chosen for the 27th São Paulo Biannual was 'How to Live Together', inspired by Roland Barthes's conferences on the subject. The exhibit did not provide answers to the question, suggesting that 'living together' can also mean the impossibility of a harmonious relationship between communities. Or even, the very impossibility of thinking in terms of 'community'.

[129] Separated, we're together.

who was initially reluctant to resort to violence, eventually resigns his scruples. During the third robbery the voice over narration states, matter-of-factly: "After the third holdup, the exception became the rule". How does an exception become a rule? How does it happen that something which was not included in the rule becomes the rule itself, excluding that which was primarily the law?

Contrary to arguments that see the 'community' as essentially a common 'belonging' to a national, ethnic, religious identity, Giorgio Agamben propounds that the original political relation is the ban, which is an active and continuous exclusion from the *polis*. Sovereign power is responsible for the decision of what constitutes the life that is to be taken outside of the *polis*. From that we can infer that this bare life is not a natural or given 'bareness', but consist of artificial, constructed relations; in Agamben, politics is always biopolitics, for the political exists thanks to the production of bare life, which sustains the state of exception, in which bare life is produced. What distinguishes our times from previous epochs is the fact that this bare life once placed at the margins of political life, now takes up more and more space inside it.

As the state of exception becomes the rule,[130] the figure of the concentration camp comes to the center of the political stage, in contrast with arguments that understand political community as essentially a common 'belonging' in a shared national, ethnic, religious,

---

[130] It is relevant to notice Agamben's debt to Walter Benjamin assertion in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" that the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of exception' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. For him, we must construct a conception of history that is keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of exception. ("Sobre o Conceito de História", 226)

or moral identity, Agamben argues, in *Homo Sacer*, that the original political relation is the ban in which a mode of life is actively and continuously excluded or shut out (*ex-claudere*) from the polis.

Not so much a 'real' space, the camp can also be understood as the borders that separate bare life from 'proper' political subjects. A camp can be seen as every space where bare life is produced. As Agamben puts it, "we can expect new camps but also new and more delirious normative definitions of the inscription of life in the city. The camp, which is now firmly settled inside it, is the new biopolitical *nomos* of the planet" ("What is a camp?" 45). Thus, the camp is a space outside the *nomos*, not an extension or an institution of the law, but a space where the law is suspended. While the encampment springs from the nature state and travels towards the city, the camp heralds the deterioration of political life into the state of exception.

Furthermore, the camp carries the indistinguishability between law and life: in it, it is impossible to tell fact from law, norm from its application, exception from rule. That is how the exception becomes the rule. By transforming the political space into a camp, by turning life into bare life, Zé Galinha, at the same time, executioner and victim. Inside and outside of the camp become indistinguishable.

Hector Babenco's *Carandiru* deals with images of a paradigmatic modern-day concentration camp: a presidium. In the film, a series of shots establish a point-of-view that privileges the perspective of those from the 'outside', peeping into the cells. The camera, thus, frames the characters as a *Panopticon*, the prison conceived by Jeremy Bentham in

1785, which was designed so as permit that an observer could see the inmates without them being able to discern whether they were being watched.

In his reading of Bentham's project, Michel Foucault argues that in the *Panopticon*, power is automatized and non-individual. Its principle is not centered on a single person, but the distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes (*Vigiar e Punir*, 178). And this is what the camera-work does in *Carandiru*: it distributes the bodies of the prisoner's bare lives under surveillance. Through the frame within the frame we peek into the hall of horrors, but safe. In these instances, the film seems to reassure the spectator that it is still possible to think of an 'outside' of the camp. We can look into it without being contaminated by it.
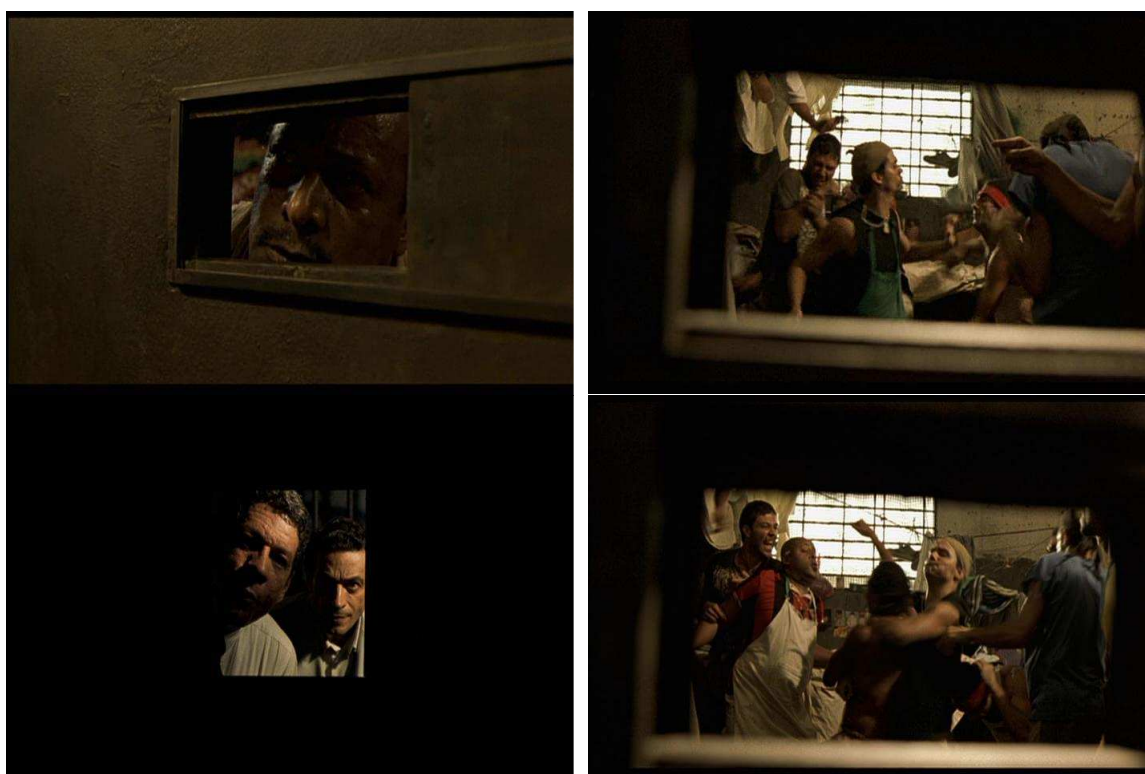

Figure 59 – *Carandiru*. The frame within the frame, an allusion to the *Panopticon*

Adapted from Drauzio Varela's book, which was based on real events, the film depicts the work of a doctor in the presidium, while telling the stories of some of the prisoners, leading up to the massacre where 111 men were killed. The doctor's character functions as a mediator, connecting the parallel stories and filtering the facts. This mediator, however, is dramatically construed as a passive, distant, albeit humanist, character. He is not exactly a 'hero' in terms of his role in the drama – on the contrary, we find him rather unaffected by the stories he hears. *Carandiru* is, to a certain extent, a film about hearing and looking at, a film about who is allowed to hear and look, and who can be subjected to the gaze and hearing. It transforms the prison into a thin glass plate under the microscope.

Figure 60 – *Carandiru*. The doctor observes the 'cells' as through a microscope.

Actually, the film insists in framing things and people, with a proliferation of small windows, grids, hatches, doors, gates. These little

openings suggest both isolation from the prisoners and a desire to look, a will to know what they are like, mingling voyeuristic and controlling impulses with the caution against contagion. The effective separation of the 'common'.

Figure 61 – *Carandiru*. The police shields also appear as frames, in this case giving passage to the gaze but separating from physical contact. The shields are protection against violence that, at the same time, allow for the soldiers' gaze. A comparison can be drawn here with the spectator's gaze in the film: we can see, but aesthetic and narrative choices act like shields, protecting us against violence.

The presidium as a place of banishment - the presidium as an instance of the camp. Is it not possible to foster the idea of a shared common (at least in political terms) when the fundament for political life is the ban? The idea of the common resonates not only in the political sphere but also in the issue of what ensues from art. A common that reaches the other, affects the other; the imagi(ni)ng of a common that would affect the other. Surely, it is difficult to envisage the possibility of a harmonic community. The immuno-logical nature of the prison is replicated in the film's preferred framing, as I argued above.

For Roberto Esposito, immunity has a double meaning: it imports the exemption of an obligation and a privilege. One is immune as long as s/he is exempt from an obligation other people have. The *munus*

(obligation, debt, work) is a comparative concept, because it involves the others. So much so that Esposito will defend the notion that the counterpart for *immunitas* is not the absence of *munus*, but the *community* of those who have it (*Immunitas* 15). The *munus* has important political connotations, as it signifies an obligation to the other.

The contiguous relationship between *communitas* and *immunitas* means that the latter is not a simple negation of the former, a protection from what is external, but it is inscribed in the horizon of the common *munus*. Immunity, then, is a dispensation of the reciprocal gift-giving, creating a sphere of what is 'proper', individual, against the communal. This exoneration is necessary for the very existence of community – in a sense, community has to protect itself from an excess of *munus*. What follows is that community puts itself in danger by introjecting immunity in its core, much similarly to the working of vaccines: the inoculation of a small dosage of a dangerous element in order to prevent the development of a disease.

According to Esposito, we have, on the one hand, an institutional apparatus of juridical forms, which springs from the State, and, on the other, territorial organizations, ethnic communities, identified by a common element, be it territory, language, religion or culture. These groups, defined in territorial or cultural terms, tend to shut off, immunizing against exterior elements. In spite of the fact that this destructive dialectics between 'I' and 'Other' still determines the sociopolitical dynamics around the world, subjectivity is all about flux,

a fact that modern society tried to erase. The idea of the 'foreign' takes on a connotation of social, symbolic, medical danger, risk, ensuing the immuno-logical perception of the 'other' as contagion, contamination. The other as infection, a (self)destructive perception. Esposito argues that the immunitarian system is both an offensive and a defensive dispositive against what cannot be recognized as 'one's own'. This dispositive, when taken to its limits, tends to revert against what it was defending, as an 'auto-immune' disease, determining the implosion of the whole organism (29).

Esposito's approach towards community puts forward a break with monolithic, closed, organic notions of the political body, favoring multiplicity and variety. In sum, he relates *immunitas*, the subjectivity that does not acknowledge the *munus*, the work, the debt in relation to the other, disconsidering the other, with *communitas*, the subjectivity that does acknowledge the debt, abandoning the fortress that isolates from contagion with the other. This implies a decentering of the subject, whose sovereign claims are destabilized, in the name of the other.

In *Carandiru*, the figure of the doctor could be taken as an instance of this immuno-logical production. His mediation, however weak, seems to be necessary to guide us through the universe that is being displayed. Nonetheless, the character's potential to subvert the mimetic impulse (expressed exactly in the 'weakness' of his action and passivity) is never taken seriously, because of his eventual role as the thread connecting the otherwise disperse stories. The prisoners' narratives are loosely put together in his medical practice, through a

series of 'testimonials', embedded in a naturalistic aesthetic very similar to TV programs commercials. Ironically, his work in the presidium has much to do with AIDS epidemics: the metaphor of the virus as element of a justifiable seclusion too strong not to be noticed.

Figure 62 – *Carandiru* – The inmates' 'testimonials' as TV commercials

The schematic presentation of the narratives (to the extreme of the unlikely episode when an inmate, after panicking for having drunk from a glass full of potentially contaminated blood, halts at the stairs and starts telling his tale as if nothing had happened) brings the films back and forth from the prison to the 'world out there'. It is important to contain the virus, to immunize the spectator from the *violent image* by emphasizing the *image of violence*, contained and reproduced in the narrative. The virus circulates amongst the inmates, but we are safe: the good doctor is there to make sure there is no contagion.

Figure 66 – *Carandiru*. After drinking possibly contaminated blood, the prisoner stops on the stair to tell his story.

Babenco's film thus problematizes the concept of belonging and being-together and the tendency towards immunization. In a very parodic moment, prisoners line up before a soccer match, similarly to professional soccer players before a World Cup match, to listen to the national anthem. The camera travels horizontally, showing their elated faces as they sing along – one of the team jersey blatantly showing a leaf of *cannabis* – very much like on TV transmissions.

Figure 64 – *Carandiru.* Before the soccer match, the line-up parodies the ritual in matches where the national teams sing the anthems

This is a moment of ironic inversion, where the idea of nation is destabilized by other belongings, highlighting the problematic nature of this idea as unity and homogeneity. A series of question arise from these images, issues concerning the possibility of thinking about nation and community in terms of homogeneity and the reassessment of the creation of the bonds that bind us together, when the work of imagination keeps trying to immunize us from the other.

A first step towards this understanding is acknowledging the inadequacy of approaches that engage with unproblematic notions of *people.* Thinking of these films in such terms is to neglect recent assessments of the notion that allude to its inherent ambiguity. Giorgio Agamben admonishes:

> Any interpretation of the political meaning of the term *people* ought to start from the peculiar fact that in modern European languages this term always indicates also the poor, the underprivileged, and the excluded. The same term names the constitutive political subject as well as the class that is excluded - de facto, if not de jure - from politics. ("What is a People?" 29)

Political life has to face a paradox: the idea of a *people* is, at the same time, inclusive and exclusive, 'the people' refers to both the political subjects and the surplus, those excluded from the juridical order, the *homini sacri*. Agamben goes on explaining this paradox

> It is as if, in other words, what we call people was actually not a unitary subject but rather a dialectical oscillation between two opposite poles: on the one hand, the *People* as a whole and as an integral body politic and, on the other hand, the *people* as a subset and as fragmentary multiplicity of needy and excluded bodies; on the one hand, an inclusive concept that pretends to be without remainder while, on the other hand, an exclusive concept known to afford no hope; at one pole, the total state of the sovereign and integrated citizens and, at the other pole, the banishment - either court of miracles or camp - of the wretched, the oppressed, and the vanquished. (31)

Contemporary history has witnessed a relentless attempt at exterminating the 'excess' contained in *people*, in order to keep the promises involved in the notion of *People*: unity, equality, democracy.

> This also means, however, that the constitution of the human species into a body politic comes into being through a fundamental split and that in the concept of *people* we can easily recognize the conceptual pair identified earlier as the defining category of the original political structure: bare life (*people*) and political existence (*People*), exclusion and inclusion, *zoé* and *bios*. The concept of people always already contains within itself the fundamental biopolitical fracture. It is what cannot be included in the whole of

> which it is a part as well as what cannot belong to the whole in which it is always already included. (31-2)

Hence, the impasse in using the term 'people' in discussing Brazilian films. Its analytical value has to be reassessed in terms of ambiguity creation of 'leftovers' from the *People*, what we could call *people* - who are *in* the system but not *of* it, who can easily be understood as a 'remainder', as waste, impure in relation to the purity of the *People*. In name of protecting the *People* from the *people*, there is always a right to use violence, but not because the *people* have abdicated their right to life – the ambiguous exclusive inclusion of bare life does not means it is surrendered, but that is included by being excluded.

A similar problem arises when we think of the idea of community. The main attribute of Agamben's conception of the 'coming community' is the fact that the community is a community that has never been: it is not a nostalgic return to an identitarian conception of community, but a notion of community based on the pure immanence of a 'whatever' beyond identity and all relation. In *The Coming Community* he expands:

> Nothing is more instructive in this regard than the way Spinoza conceives of the common. All bodies, he says, have it in common to express the divine attributes of extension [...] And yet what is common cannot in any case constitute the essence of the single case [...]. Decisive here is the idea of an *inessential* commonality, a solidarity that in no way concerns an essence. (18-9)

Agamben goes on to propound "an absolutely unrepresentable community" (25). He refuses to subsume community to identity,

confronting the foundational violence[131] that is its origin and suggesting
we see community as new constitutions and networks of relationships,
which would not be concerned with race, class, gender, sexuality or
culture. Community would, then, be a matter of relations, of being-with,
that are formed across these categories. This perspective entails the
denial of normative and passive (already construed) descriptions of
community.

Figure 65 – *Cidade de Deus*. The romanticizing of the past, signaling a nostalgic return to a time
when 'community' was possible.

In *Cidade de Deus*, for instance, a sense of organic community is
implied in a romanticized past, when the notion of belonging and
sharing was stronger. The voice over narration says that the rich people
did not care for the recently built district, but the images slightly
contradict the negative tone: they are shot with orange and yellow filters
like a postcard from a small town. This nostalgic city resembles the

---

[131] The notion of foundational violence reminds us that communities are routinely founded on
violence and that founding moments are per definition violent.

trope of the 'broken city' discussed by Zuenir Ventura in his *Cidade Partida*; the city is 'broken' not only in spatial terms, but also in time, as the book divides it into two parts: "The Age of Innocence" and "The Times of the Barbarians". There is clearly, here, a desire to return to a more peaceful and organic past, when the bonds were tighter and there was innocence before the Fall. A desire to return to the times of the *malandro*, swaying his way away from confrontation, unless, of course, when totally necessary for survival.

This longing for an original community reverberates in many spheres of life and films help shape it as a mythical thought, an imaginary space in the past. The mythical reasoning, however, has to be put under scrutiny, as Jean-Luc Nancy argues:

> Whether this consciousness conceives of itself as effectively retrospective or whether, disregarding the realities of the past, it constructs images of this past for the sake of an ideal or prospective vision. We should be suspicious of this consciousness first of all because it seems to have accompanied the Western world from its very beginnings: at every moment in history, the Occident has rendered itself to the nostalgia for a more archaic community that has disappeared, and to deploring a loss of familiarity, fraternity and conviviality. Our history begins with the departure of Ulysses and with the onset of rivalry, dissension, and conspiracy in his palace. Around Penelope, who reweaves the fabric of intimacy without ever managing to complete it, pretenders set up the warring and political scene of society – pure exteriority. (*The Inoperative Community* 10)

The nostalgic return to this mythical past obliterates the contemporary fact that we no longer find solid basis for a communal existence. In another text Nancy develops his argument:

> Community itself is something historical. Which means that it is not a substance, nor a subject; it is not a common being, which could be the goal or culmination of a progressive process. It is rather being-in-common that only *happens,* or that is happening, an event, more than a '*being*'. (*The Birth to Presence*, 41)

Some films have emphasized this disruption of the *common*, with mixed results. On the one had, they call attention to the impossibility of 'living together' under present circumstance; on the other hand, they eventually resort to a biopolitical imaginary and to images of violence that eventually lead back to a nostalgic past or to total destruction. Recently, José Padilha's *Tropa de Elite* seems to have produced an example of the latter case.
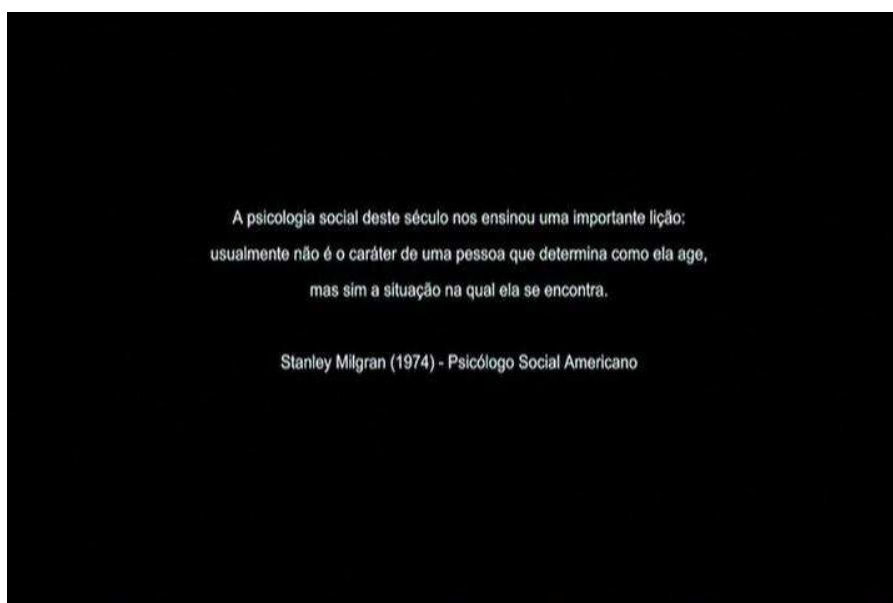

Figure 66 – *Tropa de Elite*. Initial titles bearing a quote by psychologist Stanley Milgram

The film seeks legitimacy by referring to the Social Sciences. The initial titles quote social psychologist Stanley Milgram (whose name is wrongly spelt in the film as 'Milgran'), who conducted experiments on obedience to authority at Yale University in 1961 and 1962. These experiments showed that 65% of his subjects – the 'professors' -,

otherwise common residents of New Haven, were willing to give apparently harmful electric shocks to protesting victims – the 'students'-, who failed in performing certain tasks supervised by the 'professors' -, simply because a scientific authority commanded them to. The 'students' were, in fact, actors who did not really receive shocks, a fact that was only revealed to the 'professors' at the end of the experiment. Until then, however, most of the participants did not fail to apply what they knew would be mortifying pain to their 'students'. A lesson in obedience that the film values.

Milgram's quote introduces an important trope in the film: the idea that individuals are 'good' and 'pure' in principle, and that somewhere in their lives they are 'corrupted' by circumstances. They are eventually contaminated by a world that also was, in principle, good, but was degenerated throughout history. It is necessary to react to this contamination, to restore the 'natural' order before corruption. It is mandatory to extirpate the tumor that caused the Fall of the world.

Furthermore, the sequences taking place at the university, during Sociology classes, function as 'academic' commentary for the events. The commentaries, however, are dismissed by the narrative, as the rather simplistic discussion about Foucault's theory of the disciplinary society degenerates into a false generalization that 'all cops are bad'. The film's voice over narration and images aim at contradicting this gross proposition, but to such an extent that it eventually shuts off any other possibility but its own generalization: middle-class drug-users are to blame for the increasing violence in drug-trafficking.

Figure 67 – *Tropa de Elite*. During sociology classes, Foucault's theories are heavy-handedly presented as a kind of 'academic' legitimation for the film's 'social theory'.

Tropa de Elite, thus, normalizes the images of police violence as a justifiable response to crime. The narrative closure reinforces the didacticism that the voice-over narration exposes. The beginning in *media res* is a crafty way to establish a connection among the protagonists (Captain Nascimento, Neto and Matias) based on gratitude. This beginning, to which the film returns later, is not exactly how the film ends, but marks the middle of the narrative, which then moves on to a second part, the training, where obedience and loyalty are put in question.

After being exposed to the boredom of ordinary police bureaucratic work, Neto and Matias find in the inhumane *Bope* training a means to pay back their debt to Nascimento. The dramatic structure closes the circuit and Captain Nascimento's narration, in concert with images, direct spectators to a single conclusion, to the truth of the image, to the horror of a society that is corrupted. The only promise of another society, the only possible *becoming* is necessarily through biopolitical violence.

Figure 68 – *Tropa de Elite*. The graphic scenes of torture produce the effacement of the subjects under police violence, in a similar fashion to the effacement in *Cidade de Deus*, discussed in the previous chapter.

The scenes of torture, legitimized by the narrative (it is only through torture that the police can get the information they need in order to find the 'bad guys'), produce the effacement of the subjects, tuned into smears of blood under the plastic bags. Drug dealers are also merciless, but their violence seems more gratuitous in contrast with the action of *Bope*, which is, after all, the only instance of morality and duty. Indeed, the first images we have are from a *baile funk*, a kind of party animated by funk music, *carioca*-style. The soundtrack plays *Rap das Armas* (Weapons Rap), whose lyrics describe the use of heavy weaponry by drug dealers.

The song takes on the point of view from an inhabitant from *Morro do Dendê*, praising his gang for their courage and ability to use arms[132].

---

[132] The lyrics say:
Parapapapapapapapapa
Paparapaparapapara clack bum
Parapapapapapapapapa
Morro do Dendê é ruim de invadir
Nois, com os Alemão, vamo se diverti
Porque no Dendê eu vo dizer como é que é
Aqui não tem mole nem pra DRE
Pra subir aqui no morro até a BOPE treme
Não tem mole pro exército civil nem pra PM
Eu dou o maior conceito para os amigos meus
Mas Morro Do Dendê Também é terra de Deus
Fé em Deus, DJ
Vamo lá

The melody emulates the sound of machine guns and although there are no images of actual violence in the *baile*, the song functions as the sound of attack. So, though the images suggest a 'pacific' gathering (even if some characters are seen carrying weapons, they are not actually using them), the soundtrack reinforces the legitimacy of the police attack. Likewise, the film's title song, performed by Tihuana, highlights the biopolitical control that is assigned to the squad. The catchy refrain reminds us that the Elite Squad has arrived and that they are tough and that they will catch the bad guys, that they will catch everybody. What was once the exception to the rule – killing the 'bad' guys – now becomes the rule of exception – they are going to catch us all.[133]

Vem um de AR15 e outro de 12 na mão
Vem mais um de pistola e outro com 2oitão
Um vai de URU na frente escoltando o camburão
Tem mais dois na retaguarda mas tão de Glock na mão
Amigos que eu não esqueço nem deixo pra depois
Lá vem dois irmãozinho de 762
Dando tiro pro alto só pra fazer teste
De ina-ingratek, pisto-uzi ou de winchester
É que eles são bandido ruim e ninguém trabalha
De AK47 e na outra mão a metralha
Esse rap é maneiro eu digo pra vocês,
Quem é aqueles cara de M16
A vizinhança dessa massa já diz que não agüenta
Nas entradas da favela já tem ponto 50
E se tu toma um pá, será que você grita
Seja de ponto 50 ou então de ponto 30
Mas se for Alemão eu não deixo pra amanhã
Acabo com o safado dou-lhe um tiro de paizan
Porque esses Alemão são tudo safado
Vem de garrucha velha dá dois tiro e sai voado
E se não for de revolver eu quebro na porrada
E finalizo o rap detonando de granada

[133] "E agora o bicho vai pegar!"
Tô chegando é de bicho
Tô chegando e é de bicho
Pode parar com essa história
De se fazer de difícil
Eu tô!
Que eu tô chegando
Tô chegando e é de bicho

Figure 69 – *Tropa de Elite*. The passage from the training to the 'real' city.

The city is turned into a citadel. Or else, the dream of a citadel, fortified against the intruder. The dream that is materialized in the smooth, almost imperceptible passage from the training of the recruits into the 'real' battlefield. As the characters move along the containers that mimic the narrow streets of the slums, they walk into a dark corridor – the dark screen, then, becomes the dilapidated ruins where the combat takes place. As if the soldiers in the film could really move

Pode parar com essa marra
Pode parando tudo isso...
Não dá bobeira não
Cê tá na minha mão
Segunda-feira
É só história prá contar
Não vem com idéia não
Não quero confusão
Mas vamo junto
Que hoje o bicho vai pegar
Chega prá lá!
Tô chegando e vou passar
Cheguei de repente
Vai ser diferente
Sai da minha frente
Sai da minha frente meu irmão
Não!
Não vem com isso não
Tô chegando é de ladrão
Porque quando eu pego
Eu levo pela mão
Não mando recado
Eu vou na contramão...
Nao dá bobeira não
Cê tá na minha mão
Tropa de Elite
Osso duro de roer
Pega um pega geral
Também vai pegar você...

out from the fictional world, out of the black screen, into the 'real' city, to protect it, to purge it.

Figure 70 – *Tropa de Elite*. In the beginning of the film, the image freezes at the moment of a shot.

In the first scenes of *Tropa de Elite*, during the shooting that brings together Captain Nascimento, Matias and Neto, the image freezes. In the exact moment that the rifles fires. This is, I want to argue, a key shot for understanding how the films operates with violence. The framing of the shot puts us side-by-side with the shooter – we are picking over his shoulder. This is an uncomfortably ambiguous position, for we are aligned with the executioner, and we may, actually, *want* to be *with* him. Perhaps this is what, eventually, the narrative wants us to do - to *want* to shoot.

The issue of representing execution has, to a certain extent, always been more how to show the executioner, not the victims. How to show the executioner without creating the kind of 'intimacy' suggesting by the shot – but then, if the executioner is portrayed laterally or frontally, we are obliged to give a face, to recognize him/her. Goya experimented with alternatives for this representation.

In "No se Puede Mirar" (from the series *Los Desastres de la Guerra*[134]), we can only see the tips of the bayonets. Horror ensues from the victims' reactions. We can see ("mirar") the faces of those who are suffering, but not the ones inflicting the pain. Where is, then, the real horror? What is it that we cannot stand looking at? The victims' suffering or the source of violence? Goya creates a space outside the frame where violence streams to. Between the images of the victims and the subtle presence of the killers our gazes travels from inside to outside the frame, our attention dislocated.

Figure 71 –Francisco de Goya, *No se puede mirar.* (Source: http://projects.vanartgallery.bc.ca/ publications/75years/exhibitions/4/1/artist/75/67.22.26/bibliography/660/fullscreen)

In another work from the same series, Goya depicts the struggle and death of two peasants, attacked by the French army. Here, Goya

---

[134] The series of etchings *Fatalas concecuencias de la sangriente guerra en España con Bounaparte y otros Caprichos enfaticos en 85 estampas. Inventadas, dibujadas y grabadas por el pintor original D.Francisco de Goya y Lucientes. En Madrid* was created by the artist in the period of 1808-1813. It was suggested by the Spanish resistance to Napoleon's army which invaded Spain between 1808 and 1813.

chose to present the scene in an oblique fashion, so that the soldiers are neither with their backs to the looker nor are their faces shown. The executioners are, thus, denied a full existence.

Figure 72 - Francisco de Goya, *Con razón ó sin ella.*
(Source : http://www.adn.es/cultura/20071017/IMA-3048-conrazonosinella-goya)

The dehumanization of the executioner works in tandem with the images and its subtitle. Goya's titles for the series, Susan Sontag reminds us, are provocations: while the images entice us to look at them, the titles insist on the difficulty of looking. She argues that the titles work as a voice constantly prompting us: 'can you stand looking at this?[135]' (*Diante da Dor dos Outros*, 41). Goya's etchings bring about an important questioning of the images by the titles – the titles implying not the impossibility of the images themselves, but the fact that they refer to something that should have been impossible. The *Disastres* pieces do not say 'this is how it was', but 'things such as this happen'.

---

[135] One could draw, here, a contrast between the Goya's titles and Captain Nascimento's narration a commentaries to the images. Whereas the first questions the images, the latter reinforces their status as a 'legitimate' representation of the real.

We are no longer in the realm of a realist or naturalistic impulse, but confronted with intellectual, aesthetic and moral dilemmas.

Figure 73 – *Tropa de Elite*. The end of the film, the final 'shot' against the audience.

The final images from *Tropa de Elite*, on the contrary, seem to reject the possibility of dilemmas. Rather, they indicate a totalizing and totalitarian ending. The police officer who wanted to be a lawyer, who had the mediation of academic knowledge eventually graduates in executions. Matias' character hardens and refuses conciliation. The impotence that ensues from the lack of alternative leads to the need to 'cleanse' society. The film locks up any exits. The final image, the glaring of the sun (a metaphorical 'cleansing', one could argue), the gun pointed at the audience, a weapon of resentment. Its mimetic, naturalist impulse normalizes and accepts the slum as waste, as the site of exception.

A comparison with French photographer JR's work may come in handy. The photographer is also a graffiti and performance artist. Because he plasters his work illegally on buildings at night, he usually has to hide from the police, which is why he keeps his identity

anonymous. For one project, JR created portraits of ghetto inhabitants of the suburbs of Paris – the scene of riots in recent years – and installed them on the walls in the city centre. By doing so, he questions the social and mediatic representations of such events.

Figure 74 – JR. *Wall of Tate Modern Museum.* London, 2008. (Source: http://www.jr-art.net)

In a work commissioned by the Tate Modern Museum in London, he plastered on the wall of the museum wall an enlarged version of a photograph of documentary filmmaker Dadj Ly. Here too, we have a black man with a menacing look on his face, point his gun at the spectator. JR's work, however, destabilizes our perception, because it takes a second look to perceive that what we supposed to be a gun is actually a camera. The larger-than-life image on the wall disturbs preconceived notions about racial identity, social status and violence. In

stark contrast with the final 'shot' of *Tropa de Elite,* this image works to de-naturalize violence.

Figure 75 - *Portrait of a generation*, Ladj Ly, by JR. 2004 (Source: http://www.jr-art.net)

Another project carried out by JR involved plastering posters on the walls of houses and building in Morro da Providência, a slum in Rio de Janeiro. They are part of the series "Women are heroes", which, according to the project website, "wants to underline their pivotal role and to highlight their dignity by shooting them in their daily lives and posting them on the walls of their country". The effect, here, is also disturbing: seen from afar, the immense eyes gaze at the passersby, retuning the detached, safe look that electronic media and cinema allow. One needs only recall that it was the Morro da Providência which was invaded in 2006 by the army under the pretense of locating stolen weapons, a fact that received full coverage from national press.

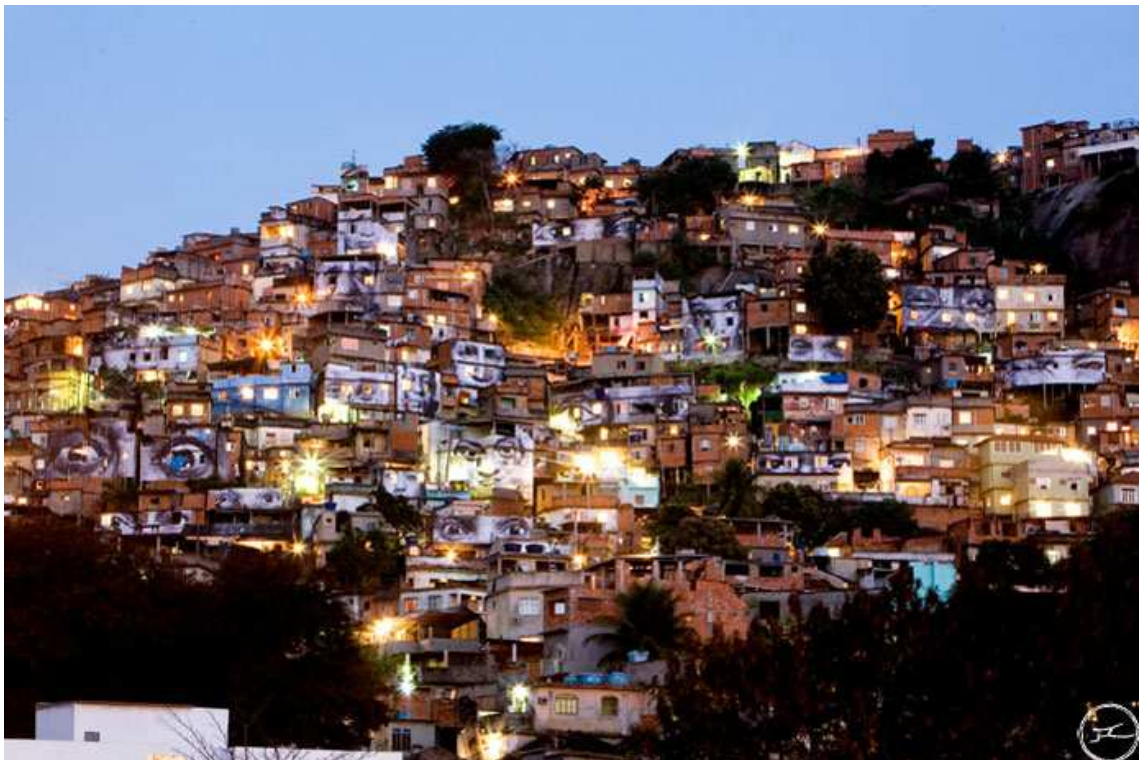Figure 76 –*Morro da Providência*, by JR. 2008 (Source: http://www.jr-art.net)

Figure 77 - *Morro da Providência*, by JR. 2008 (Source: http://www.jr-art.net)

These images bring a presence to our eyes, the anonymous faces

appear before us, reminds us of our inescapable condition:

> We compear: we come together in(to) the world.
> It is not that there is a simultaneous arrival of several

> distinct units (as when we go to see a film 'together')
> but that there is not a coming (in)to the world that is
> not radically *common*; it is even the 'common' itself.
> To come into the world is to be-in-common.
> Everything takes place in this constant diversion
> (*détournement)* of this truth (to say its repression
> would be too easy) were the permanent rule of
> Western thought (Jean-Luc Nancy, "La
> Comparution/The Compearance" 72)

Nancy's complex theorization about community pinpoints the resurgence, from the ashes of communism as a political reality, of a "desire to discover or rediscover a place of community at once beyond social divisions and beyond subordination to technopolitical dominion" (*The Inoperative Community*, 1). The reconfiguration of the notion of community takes on several forms, the most dangerous of which being religious fundamentalism, nationalism, or any other political movement leaning towards the production of a unified, harmonious, infrangible communal spirit. Here community may easily degenerate into totalitarianism.

These communitarian forms are 'worked', 'operated' to work thus. Nancy, on the other hand, apprizes the 'unworking' of community, based on the idea that community has not taken place yet. The 'inoperative community' is "that which, before or beyond the work, withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do either with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension" (31). Against the conception of a communal around which all people would gather in an essential spirit, Nancy propounds a community that exposes us to our singularity and mortality in the presence of the others.

We are, here, far from theorizations such as Benedict Anderson's concept of 'the imagined community', related to the nation-state, and that provides a collectivity with the sense of unity, continuity, and closure. In *Amarelo Manga,* for instance, the work of imagination solidifies an idea of community that is based on the sordid and inescapable destiny of poverty. The links created by the 'documental' images of the people from Recife encompass all subjects into the same universe, a homogenous, albeit decadent, city. The anonymity of the faces becomes the object of a merciless gaze, which uses them as a marker for the passage of time: the juxtaposition of different places and situations happening at the same time imply a being-together. Such a community of dispossessed and subaltern subjects is construed similarly to Camilo Cavalcante's short film *Ave Maria, ou a Mãe dos Oprimidos.* It explores the tradition in popular radios of playing Gounod's *Ave Maria* at six o'clock in the evening to celebrate the *Angelus*, utilizing parallel editing to reveal situations that occur in Recife at that time. Mingling staged with documentary shots, Cavalcante, as well as Cláudio Assis, provide a panorama of the life in the city, founded, however, in a generalization of perversion that eventually includes all the anonymous faces in the sordid fictional world.

The erasure of difference, contradictions and forms of being implied in this notion constitute what Jacques Derrida calls a 'foundational violence' in his text "Force of Law: The Mystical

Foundation of Authority". Nancy describes the inscription of this theme along history:

> The lost or broken community can be exemplified in all kinds of ways and by all kinds of paradigms: the natural family, the Athenian city, the Roman Republic, the first Christian community, corporations, communes, or brotherhoods - always it is a matter of a lost age in which community was tight and bound to harmonious bonds in which above all it played back to itself, through its institutions, its rituals, and its symbols, the representation, indeed the living offering, of its own immanent unity, intimacy and autonomy (9).

Nancy rejects the project of community as a means to come to terms with mortality and finitude. On the contrary, denying community as a common being, a common substance, he insists that it is, rather, a being–in–common, a sharing of nothing but the space between subjects. Community understood not as shared meaning, but as the sharing of meaninglessness – the sharing of the impossibility of community. As Nancy puts in a roundtable entitled "Love and Community":

> I would argue that the community is always a community of Being–With, that the With is characterised by the touch, and that the touch is characterised both by proximity and by distance, but by proximity *as* distance. In the touch you still need to have both. This is the impossibility of penetration. The conclusion then is that a community is a community of bodies and nothing else. This doesn't mean that it is a community like the glass and the pen — It means that to be "in common" we need the exteriority of the bodies, contrary to the very old model where the community should become a pure community of spirits becoming One Spirit.

Beto Brant's *O Invasor* is a much more nuanced film in its imag(in)ing of being together than the films mentioned above. In the film, businessmen Giba and Ivan decide to do away with their partner

by hiring hit man Anísio, who, once the job is done, proves impossible to get rid of. Showing unexpectedly at the construction firm's offices with disturbing constancy, Anísio interrupts meetings, and swaggers around as if he is on the administrative payroll. Coming from the slums of São Paulo, Anísio decides to make his way up the city's middle class, to the point of getting involved with Marina, the daughter of the man he killed.

By focusing on the disconcerting relationship between Anísio and Marina, the narrative directs the audience into peculiar criminal territory, where the only ambition of the characters seems to be to satisfy their desires in whorehouses, bars, clubs. It is, then, Anísio's menacing presence which triggers the course of the action, a course that goes from margins to centre and back again.

Fernão Pessoa Ramos explores the aggressiveness and violence of the film as a portrayal of a sordid and negative nation. Corrupted characters wander through an amoral society, reduced to the perverse and blackmailing logic of a bandit ("Má Consciência", 377). Ramos argues that the fracture between social classes is an ubiquitous theme in Brazilian cinema, characterized, since the 1960's, by a feeling of guilty consciousness for presenting the 'other's' voice, the 'people's' voice from an essentially (upper)middle-class perspective (usually associated with the director's) (372). Recently, Ramos goes on, a displacement of this guilty consciousness has taken place which idealizes the people as now opposed to the (always incompetent) State and its institutions, and not to the bourgeoisie. As a consequence, the

spectator finds egotistical satisfaction in the identification with the accusatory stance that the narratives take on. Spectators are invited to point a finger at the foul universe presented by the films, therefore positioning themselves detached from that universe (373).
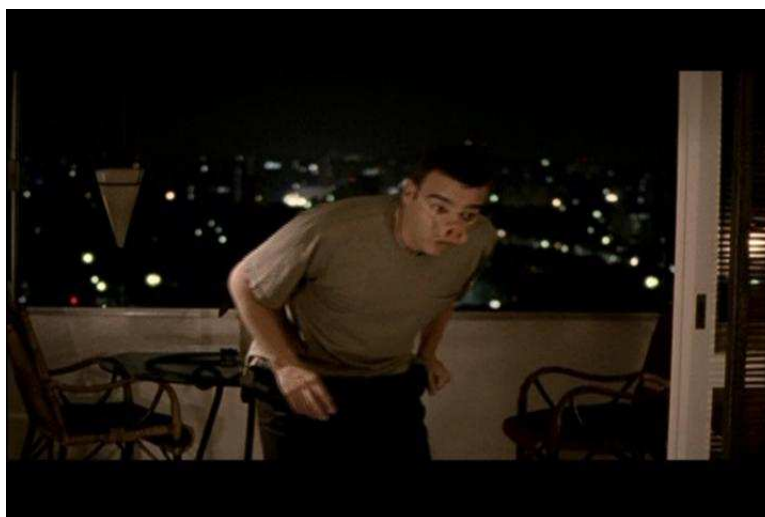

Figure 78 – *O Invasor*. Giba tells the story of the Three Little Pigs to his daughter, an allegorical reference to the characters' lack of ethical commitment.

We can further Ramos' argument by analyzing more thoroughly film language. In *O Invasor*, for example, we are immediately put in an uneasy position, as the first sequence shows a point-of-view shot from Anísio's perspective. The acousmatic strategy denies the shot/reverse shot paradigm for presenting a conversation. The disembodied voice that converses with Ivan and Giba is mobilizing off-screen space – we do not see the face of the hit man, but framing invites us to take his place in the conversation. Here, film language does not necessarily suggest a position from which we would be 'pointing our finger' at the immoral characters, but, on the contrary, it provokes us to think with them, from their standpoint.

Figure 79 – *O Invasor*. The film's acousmatic strategy.

The film does produce a universe that is morally condemnable. A fragmented, convulsed, chaotic, selfish society that leaves little space for imagining forms of being together. A song, entitled "Eu, Você, a Vadia, Ninguém Presta" (Me, You, the Cunt, Nobody's Worth Shit), may exemplify this state of things. The lyrics say

<div style="margin-left:2em;">

You smile like a tame cuckold
It's better this way
While you speed along the streets
Showing off to your stupid friends
I fuck your girlfriend's ass and say
"It's a nice ass
Round and big as a crater"
I fuck her non-stop and she screams
Her ass burning,
It's life
You burn your tire on the asphalt
I burn your cunt's ass
Welcome to the nightmare of reality
Me, you, the cunt, nobody's worth shit
You can't escape
Stupidity
Something screams in your mind
About that whore, the cunt
Fucked by everyone
You cuckold, shut your eyes
Don't try to hide from your mediocrity
It's all insane, everyone's sick
Me, you, the cunt, all sick

</div>

Nobody's worth shit[136]

Figure 80 – *O Invasor*. Anisio's viewpoint during his first visit to the office.

This song is the extra-diegetic accompaniment that brings together two important sequences: the funeral of the murdered partner and Anísio's first trespassing. The violence of the hard rock tune resonates in the violent atmosphere of the film and, more importantly, Anísio's invasion is shown, again, through a point-of-view shot, this time embedded in a long take that travels through the corridors of the

---

[136] Você sorri feito um corno manso
Mas é melhor assim
Enquanto você acelera pelas ruas
Se exibindo pros seus amigos idiotas
Eu faço o cu de sua mulher e digo:
É um belo cu!
Redondo e grande feito uma cratera
Eu enfio sem parar e a vaca grita
Com o rabo queimando
É a vida
Você queima borracha no asfalto
Eu queimo a rosca da sua vadia
Bem vindo ao pesadelo da realidade
Você não consegue fugir
Da estupidez
Algo grita em sua mente
Falando daquela puta, vadia
Grampeada por todos
Seu corno prega seu olho
Não tente se esconder do medíocre que é
É tudo insano, todos são doentes
Eu, você, a vadia, todos doentes
Ninguém presta

office. The first-person lyrical voice in the song also contributes to positioning us in Anísio's shoes.

The narrative in Brant's film highlights the tensions generated by the forces of capitalism in a peripheral country, with its stress on accumulation and individualism, well-represented by the popular ideology of *Lei de Gérson* (Gerson's Law, a dictum derived from a cigarette commercial where Gérson, then a football player, stated that he liked to take advantage from all situations). This would be a Brazilian version of the survival of the strongest that delineates the pervading notion that an underprivileged situation results from one's lack of initiative much more than from a wider social context. Anísio, like Ivan and Giba, is an entrepreneur, he has the same appetite as Giba and Ivan and is willing to take advantage from all situations to achieve his goals. He is not really their antagonist but their complement - by the end of the film he says to Giba that he does not do anything anymore, he has it done, demonstrating how much he has climbed the social ladder.

Figure 81 – *O Invasor*. Mise-en-scène highlights the distance between the partners and Cícero, their employee

When characters appear before each other, they create a space of shared egoism, a contradictory space where the communion happens at the expense of the other. This is translated in filmic terms by the mise-en-scène, as for example, in the sequence where Giba, who seems to be much more comfortable with crime than Ivan, tries to persuade him to go through with the plan. Giba delivers his 'philosophy': pointing at Cícero, the construction worker who is seen between them, he says that if Ivan allows any sign of weakness Cícero would unrepentantly take his car, his money, his wife. Cícero, a small figure on the background, becomes, in a twisted logic, an element of solidarity between the two men.

The mise-en-scène plays with the characters' affiliations, first blocking Ivan and Giba together, then placing Anísio between them. Anísio gradually invades the spaces, like a virus. The other character, however, are defenseless against this contagion. He has found a crack in the immuno-logical defenses: blackmail and fear.

Figure 82 – *O Invasor*. The mise-en-scène blocks Anísio between the partners as the film progresses.

Against the maneuvers to shut him off, Anísio uses his own cunning turpitude, his only talent. His genius lies in perceiving his indistinguishability from Ivan and Giba: his trespassing reveling how

artificial the frontiers between classes really are. The trespassing, actually, is not Anísio's exclusively: Giba in the whorehouse, Marina in the slums, Ivan in the suburbs. The promiscuity is evident everywhere.

A rather blatant example of the promiscuous relations between classes can be seen in Anísio and Marina's sexual intercourse. In spite of his warning that he does not have any condom, she willingly has unprotected sex with him, eliding, in the physicality of their intercourse, any separation between classes. The contagion is materialized.

Figure 83 – *O Invasor*. Ivan's perambulation through the streets of a slum.

Ivan's final run along the suburbs in Sao Paulo epitomizes the lack of perspective. As he runs desperately, we listen to a song that says: "Boom!! The bomb is going to explode / Nobody's going to help you / Society destroys your life / Capitalism is suicide around here"[137]. The musical soundtrack stresses the impossibility of life under capitalist society, where everyone seems to be, at the same time, victim and executioner.

One of the most powerful scenes in the film brings Anísio getting ready to go out with Marina. In front of the mirror, he looks at himself

---

[137] A bomba vai explodir
Ninguém vai te acudir
Sociedade destrói sua vida
Capitalismo por aqui suicida

with contentment. A defiant grin traces his mouth, he is pleased with himself. He vocalizes the sound of a gun, turns to the camera and says that one has got to earn respect.[138]
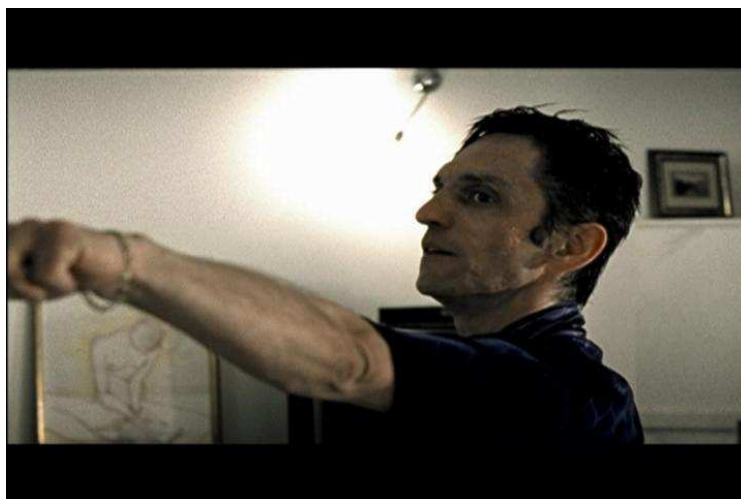

Figure 84 – *O Invasor*. Anísio watches himself in the mirror.

When discussing the film *Taxi Driver* Slavoj Zizek says that

> When Travis prepares for his attack, he practices in front of the mirror the drawing of the gun ; in what is the best-known scene of the film, he addresses his own image in the mirror with the aggressive-condescending 'You talkin' to me ?'. In a textbook illustration of Lacan's notion of the "mirror stage", aggressivity is here clearly aimed at oneself, at one's own mirror image. This suicidal dimension reemerges at the end of the slaughter scene when Travis, heavily wounded and leaning at the wall, mimics with the forefinger of his right hand a gun aimed at his blood-stained forehead and mockingly triggers it, as if saying 'The true aim of my outburst was myself.' The paradox of Travis is that he perceives HIMSELF as part of the degenerate dirt of the city life he wants to eradicate, so that, as Brecht put it apropos of revolutionary violence in his The Measure Taken, he wants to be the last piece of dirt with whose removal the room will be clean. Far from signaling an imperial arrogance, such 'irrational' outbursts of violence - one of the key topics of American culture and ideology - rather stand for an implicit admission of impotence: their very violence, display of destructive power, is to be conceived as the mode of appearance of its very opposite - if anything,

---

[138] "Respeito é para quem tem".

they are exemplary cases of the impotent passage à l'acte. ("Some Politically Incorrect Reflections on Violence")

Contrary to the protagonist in *Taxi Driver,* Anísio's logic is not self-destructive. Quite the opposite: he is not addressing his violence to himself, but to the camera – to the spectator. Anísio tries to find ways to escape the condition of bare life and he uses the very violence exerted against him in his favor. A virus that promotes the contamination between classes, the character epitomizes the difficulty in imagining a community that could bring people together under the aegis of a universal promise – justice, good, God. He can only appear before us with his thin, tattooed, scarred body and challenge us to (re)discover other meanings for notions such as community and people.

Figure 85 – *O Invasor*. Anísio addresses the camera.

References

Primary Sources

Amarelo Manga. (Mango Yellow) Dir. Cláudio Assis. Olhos de Cão, 2002.

Carandiru. (Carandiru) Dir. Hector Babenco. Columbia, Globo Filmes, 2003.

C*idade Baixa.* (Lower City) Dir. Sérgio Machado. VideoFilmes, 2005.

Cidade de Deus. (City of God) Dir. Fernando Meirelles. O2, 2002.

Estorvo. (Turbulence) Dir. Ruy Guerra. D&D, 2000.

O Invasor. (The Trespasser) Dir. Beto Brant. Drama, 2002.

Tropa de Elite. (Elite Squad) Dir. José Padilha. Zazen, 2007.

Secondary Sources

Abel, Marco. *Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema, and Critique After Representation.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2008.

Agamben, Giorgio. "Form-of-living". *Means Wihout Ends.* Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota, 2000. 3-14.

---. *Homo Sacer: o poder soberano e a vida nua.* Belo. Horizonte: UFMG, 2002

---. *Profanations.* New York: Zone Books, 2007.

---. *The Coming Community.* Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota, 1993.

---. "What is a Camp?". *Means Wihout Ends.* Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota, 2000. 37-48.

---. "What is a People?". *Means Wihout Ends.* Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota, 2000. 29-36.

Amaral, Tata. "Em Busca do Naturalismo no Cinema". Pressbook for the film *Antônia.* 08 July 2008. <http://antoniaofilme.globo.com/dowld/PRESSBOOK_PORTUGUES_2007.pdf>

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities – Reflection on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso, 2003.

Araújo, Vicente de Paula. *A bela época do cinema brasileiro.* São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1976.

Azevedo, Aluísio. *O Cortiço.* 22 Sep 2008. <http://www.dominiopublico. gov.br/download/texto/bv000015.pdf>

Balandier, Georges. *A Desordem - Elogio do Movimento.* Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 1997.

Barcinsky, André, and Ivan Finotti. *Maldito: a vida e o cinema de José Mojica Marins, o Zé do Caixão.* São Paulo: 34, 1998.

Barro, Maximo. *A Primeira Sessão de Cinema em São Paulo.* São Paulo: Tanz do Brasil, 1996.

---. "Francisco Serrador e a primeira década do cinema em São Paulo". *Mnemocine.* 20 March 2007 <www.mnemocine.com.br/cinema/ historiatextos/serrador.htm>

Barthes, Roland. *Como Viver Junto.* São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2003.

Bataille, Georges. *O Erotismo.* São Paulo: Arx, 2004.

---. *La Felicidad, El Erotismo y La Literatura.* Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo, 2001.

---. *Story of the Eye.* London: Penguin, 2001.

Bazin, André. *O Cinema – Ensaios.* São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1991.

Belsey, Catherine. *Critical Practice.* London and New York : Methuen, 1980.

Benjamin, Walter. "Critique of Violence". *Reflections.* New York: Schoken, 1986. 277-300.

---. "Sobre o Conceito de História". *Obras Escolhidas I: magia e técnica, arte política.* São Paulo. Brasiliense, 1996

---. "Surrealismo". *Obras Escolhidas I: magia e técnica, arte e política.* São Paulo. Brasiliense, 1996

---. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks.* Ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham, Douglas Kellner. Malden: Blackwell, 2001. 48-70.

Bentes, Ivana. "Estéticas da Violência no Cinema". 24 March 2008. www.eco.ufrj.br/semiosfera/anteriores/especial2003/conteudo_ibe ntes.htm

---. "Sertões e Favelas no Cinema Brasileiro Contemporâneo: Estética e Cosmética da Fome". *Alceu.* 8.15 (2007): 242-255.

Bernadet, Jean-Claude. "Cinema Marginal?". *Portal Heco.* 20 Jan 2008 http://www.heco.com.br/marginal/ensaios/03_01.php.

---. "A crueldade irônica. A nova fórmula da violência no cinema dos anos 90." *Imagens.* São Paulo, ago 1994.

---. *Historiografia clássica do cinema brasileiro.* São Paulo: Annablume, 1995.

Bersani, Leo, and Ulysses Dutoit. *The Forms of Violence.* New York: Schocken, 1985.

Bruno, Giuliana. "Site-seeing: Architecture and the Moving Image". 15 Feb 2006. < muse.jhu.edu/journals/wide_angle/v019/19.4bruno. html>

Buarque, Chico. *Estorvo.* São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 1991.

Buck-Morss, Susan. "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered". *October* 62 (1992): 3-41

Campos, Haroldo de. "Filmargem". *Portal Heco.* 22 Jan 2008 <http://www.heco.com.br/marginal/ontem%20hoje%20amanha/ 04_01_12.php>

Candido, Antonio. *O Discurso e a Cidade.* São Paulo: Duas Cidades, 1998.

Catani, Afrânio Mendes, and José Inácio de Melo Souza. *A chanchada no cinema brasileiro.* São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1983.

de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life.* Berkley: University of California Press, 2002.

Cooper, Mark Garrett. "Narrative Spaces". *Screen* 43:2 Summer (2002): 139-57.

Daney. Serge. "The Tracking Shot in *Kapo*". *Senses of Cinema.* 13 Sep 2008.<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/04/30/kapo_ daney.html>

Davis, Mike. "Bunker Hill: Hollywood's Dark Shadow". Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (eds.). *Cinema and the City.* Oxford, Malden: Blackwell, 2001. 33-45.

Dean, Carolyn J. *The Self and Its Pleasure: Bataille, Lacan, and the History of the Decentered Subject.* Ithaca: Coernell University, 1992.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 1: The Movement Image.* London and New York: Continuum Books, 1986.

---. *Cinema 2: The Time Image.* London and New York: Continuum Books, 1989.

---. *Conversações.* Rio de Janeiro: 34, 2000.

---. *Espinosa: Filosofia Prática.* São Paulo: Escuta, 2002.

---. *Francis Bacon – Lógica da Sensação.* Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2007.

---. "O Ato de Criação". *Blog Intermídias.* 12 Sep 2008. < http://intermidias.blogspot.com/2007/07/o-ato-de-criao-por-gilles-deleuze.html>

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *O que é a filosofia?.* Rio de Janeiro: 34, 1997.

---. *Mil Platôs: capitalismo e esquizofrenia.* Volume V. Rio de Janeiro: 34,1995.

Eisenstein, Sergei. "The Dramaturgy of Film Form [The Dialectical Approach to Film Form]. *Film Theory and Criticism.* Leo Baudry and Marshall (eds.). New York: Oxford University, 1992. 23-40.

Esposito, Roberto. *Immunitas.* Buenos Aires, Amorrortu, 2005.

---. "Immunization and Violence". 16 Oct 2008. http://www.biopolitica.cl/docs/Esposito_Immunization_Violence.pdf

---. "Recuperemos a Comunidade". 23 Aug. 2007. < www.pos.eco.ufrj.br/uploads/entrevista_resposito1.pdf> Broken link on 11 Oct 2008.

Fabris, Mariarosaria. *Nélson Pereira dos Santos: um olhar neo-realista?* São Paulo: Edusp / Fapesp, 1994.

Fanon, Franz. *The Wretched of the Earth.* London: Penguin, 2001.

Feldman, Ilana. "O Apelo Realista: Um Expressão Estética da Biopolítica". Esther Hamburger, Gustavo Souza, Leandro Mendonça, Tunico Amâncio eds. *Estudos de Cinema Socine.* São Paulo: FAPESP, Annablume, Socine, 2008. 235-246.

Fielder, Adrian. "Poaching on Public Space: Urban Autonomous Zones in French *Banlieue* Films". *Cinema and the City*. Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (eds.). Oxford: Blackwell, 2001. 1-18.

Fotiade, Ramona. "The Untamed Eye: Surrealism and Film Theory". *Screen*. 36 (1995): 394-408.

Foucault, Michel. *Em Defesa da Sociedade*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2000

---. *História da Sexualidade: a vontade de saber*. Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 2005.

---. *História da Sexualidade: o uso dos prazeres*. São Paulo: Graal, 2003.

---. *História da Sexualidade: o cuidado de si*. São Paulo: Edições Graal, 2005.

---. *Vigiar e Punir*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1996.

Fraia, Emilio. "Como não Ser Ator". *Piauí* Jan 2009: 54-58.

França, Andréia. "Paisagens Fronteiriças no Cinema Contemporâneo". *Alceu*. v. 2. n. 4 (2002): 61-75.

French, Karl ed. *Screen Violence*. London: Bloomsbury, 1996.

Galvão, Maria Rita Eliezer. *Crônica do Cinema Paulistano*. São Paulo: Ática, 1975.

Garneau, Michèle, and James Cisneros. "Film's Aesthetic Turn: A Contribution from Jacques Rancière". *SubStance* 33.1 (2004): 108-125.

Godard, JeanLuc. *Godard on Godard*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1972.

Gomes, Paulo Emílio Salles. *Cinema: trajetória no subdesenvolvimento*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1996.

---. *Humberto Mauro, Cataguases, Cinearte*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1972.

Gronstad, Abjorn. *Transfigurations: Violence, Death and Masculinity in American Cinema*. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University, 2008.

Gunning, Tom. "From the Kaleidoscope to the X-Ray: Urban Spectatorship, Poe, Benjamin, and *Traffic in Souls* (1913)". *Wide Angle* 19.4 (1997) 25-61.

Haag, Carlos. "No escurinho do cinematógrafo". *Revista FAPESP*. 18 Feb 2007. http://www.revistapesquisa.fapesp.br/index.php?art=2678&bd=1&pg=1&lg=

Hansen, Miriam Bratu. "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism". *Modernism/Modernity* 6.2 (1999) 59-77.

Hanssen, Beatrice. *Critique of Violence: Between Poststructuralism and Critical Theory.* New York: Routledge, 2000.

Hamburger, Esther. "Vilência e Pobreza no Cinema Brasileiro Recente". *Novos Estudos.* 79 (2007): 113-120.

Hardt, Michael. "A sociedade mundial de controle". Eric Alliez ed. *Gilles Deleuze: Uma vida filosófica.* São Paulo: editora 34, 2000

Harvey, David. *Condição pós-moderna: uma pesquisa sobre as origens da mudança cultural.* São Paulo: Loyola, 1998.

Holanda, Sérgio Buarque de. *Raízes do Brasil.* 26 ed. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 1995.

Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism.* London and New York: Routledge, 1989.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.* Durham: Duke University, 1991.

Johnson, Randal e Robert Stam (Eds). *Brazilian cinema.* Austin: University of Austin, 1982.

Kleiman, Naum. "Arguments and Ancestors. *Einsenstein Rediscovered.* Ian Christie and Richard Taylor. London and New York: Routledge, 1993. 33-40.

Krauss, Rosalind. "Antivision". *October.* 36 (Spring, 1986): 147-154.

Kubelka, Peter. "Peter Kubelka at the Cinemateque, October 3, 1974". *Canyon Cinema: The Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributor.* Scott MacDonald (ed.). Berkley: University of California, 2008. 185-186.

Lazzarato, Maurizio. "From Biopower to Biopolitcs". 15 Aug 2008. <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcbiopolitics.htm>

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space.* Malden: Blackwell, 1991.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Tristes trópicos.* São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 1998

Matta, Roberto da. *Carnavais, Malandros e Heróis*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1983.

McCall, Tom. "Momentary Violence". *Walter Benjamin – Theoretical Questions*. David S. Ferris ed. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Mecchi, Leonardo. "O Cinema Popular Brasileiro do Século 21". 03 Sep 2008.< http://www.revistacinetica.com.br/cinemapopular1.htm>

Mencarelli, Fernando. *A Arena Aberta. A absolvição de um Bilontra e o teatro de revista de Arthur Azevedo*. Campinas: Unicamp, 1999.

Mongin, Olivier. *A Violência das Imagens, ou Como Eliminá-la?*. Lisboa: Bizâncio, 1998.

Nagib, Lúcia. *A Utopia no Cinema Brasileiro*. São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2006.

---.*O Cinema da Retomada - Depoimentos de 90 cineastas dos anos 90*. São Paulo: 34, 2002.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. "La Comparution /The Compearance: From the Existence of 'Communism' to the Community of 'Existence'. *Political Theory*, 20.3 (1992): 371-398.

---. "Love and Community". 22 Sep 2008. <http://www.egs.edu/faculty /nancy/nancy-roundtable discussion2001.html>

---.*The Birth to Presence*. Stanford: Stanford University, 1993.

---. *The Inoperative Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1991.

Negri, Antonio. Interview. "What Makes a Biopolitical Space". *Eurozine*. 15 Mar 2008 <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-01-21-negri-en.html>

Negri, Antonio and Michael Hardt. *Império*. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2001.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *A Gaia Ciência*. São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 2001.

Nowell-Smith, Geofrrey. "How Films Mean, or, From Aesthetics to Semiotics and Half-Way Back Again". *Reinventing Film Studies*. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (eds.) London: Arnold, 2000. 5-17.

Parodi, Ricardo. "Cuerpo y Cine. Reporte Fragmentario sobre Extrañas Intensidades y Mutaciones Del Orden Corporal". Gerardo Yoel (Ed.). *Pensar el Cine 2*. Buenos Aires: Manancial, 2004. 73-100.

Prince, Stephen. *Screening Violence.* New Jersey: Rutgers University, 2000.

Ramos, Alcides Freire. "Historiografia do cinema brasileiro diante das fronteiras entre o trágico e o cômico: redescobrindo a 'Chanchada'". *Fênix – Revista de História e Estudos Culturais.* Oct.-Dec. (2005): 1-15.

Ramos, Fernão. *Cinema Marginal (1968/1973) - A representação em seu limite.* São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1987.

---. "Má-consciência, Crueldade e Narcisismo às Avessas no Cinema Brasileiro Contemporâneo". Mariarosaria Fabris and Antonio Catani (eds). *SOCINE de Cinema.* São Paulo: Panorama, 2004.

---. "O Cinema Brasileiro Reflete o Mal-Estar Contemporâneo". *Unicamp Hoje.* 06 July 2008. <www.unicamp.br/unicamp/unicamp_hoje/ jornalPDF/ju304pg0607.pdf>

Rancière, Jacques. "Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community". 12 Oct 2008. <www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/pdfs/ranciere.pdf>

---. *A Partilha do Sensível: estética e política.* São Paulo: Ed. 34

---. "A Política da Arte." 26 Nov 2007 <http://www.sescsp.org.br/sesc/ images/upload/conferencias/206.rtf>

---. *Film Fables.* Oxford: Berg, 2006.

---. "The Emancipated Spectator". 14 Oct 2008. <http://findarticles. com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_7_45/ai_n24354915>

---. *The Future of the Image.* New York: Verso, 2007.

Rocha, Glauber. "Estética da Fome". *Cartas ao mundo.* Ivana Bentes (ed.). Paulo: Cia das Letras, 1997.

---. *Revisão crítica do cinema brasileiro.* Rio de Janeiro: Cosac & Naify, 2003.

Rodowick, D.N., *Gilles Deleuze*'s *Time Machine.* Durham: Duke University, 1997.

Rotker, Susana (ed.). "Cities Written by Violence; An Introduction". *Citizens Fear - Urban* Violence *in Latin America.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002. 7-24.

Sanches, Pedro Alexandre. *Tropicalismo: Decadência Bonita do Samba.* São Paulo: Boitempo, 2000

Santiago, Silviano. *O Cosmopolitismo do Pobre*. Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2004.

---. "Crítica literária e Jornal da Pós-Modernidade". *Revista de Estudos Literários*. v. 1 n. 1 (1993): 11-17.

Sassen, Saskia. *As Cidades na Economia Mundial*. São Paulo: Studio Nobel, 1998

Schvarzman, Sheila. *Humberto Mauro e as Imagens do Brasil*. São Paulo, UNESP, 2004

Severiano, Jairo & Mello, Zuza Homem de. *A canção no tempo: 85 anos de músicas brasileiras*. Vol. 1: 1901-1957. São Paulo:Ed. 34, 1997.

Shiel, Mark, and Tony Fitzmaurice. *Cinema and the City*. Oxford, Malden: Blackwell, 2001.

Shaviro, Steven. "The Avan-Prof: An Interview with Steven Shaviro". 24 Aug 2007. <http://www.altx.com/interviews/steven.shaviro.html>

---. *The Cinematic Body*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993.

Shiel, Mark. "Cinema and the City in History and Theory". Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (eds.). *Cinema and the City*. Oxford, Malden: Blackwell, 2001. 1-18.

Sontag, Susan. *Diante da Dor dos Outros*. São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 2003.

Sousa. José Inácio de Melo. "Descoberto o primeiro filme brasileiro". *Revistada USP*, v. 19 (1993): 170 -173.

Spinoza, Benedict de. *Ethics*. London: Penguin, 1996.

Stam, Robert. *Introdução à Teoria do Cinema*. Campinas: Papirus, *2003.*

---. "Land in Anguish. 12 Sep 2008. <www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlin essays/JC1011folder/TerraTranseStam.html>

---. *Tropical Multiculturalism*. Durham: Duke University, 1997.

Stam, Robert, and Ismail Xavier. "Recent Brazilian Cinema: Allegory/Metacinema/Carnival"*Film Quaterly*. Vol 41, No. 3 (Spring 1988), 15-30.

Süssekind, Flora. *As Revistas de Ano e a Invenção do Rio de Janeiro*. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1986

---. *Tal Brasil, Qual Romance?* Rio de Janeiro, Achiamé: 1984.

Sylvester, David. *Entrevistas com Francis Bacon.* São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2007.

Tolentino, Célia Aparecida Ferreira. *O Rural no Cinema Brasileiro.* São Paulo: UNESP, 2001.

Twitchell, James B. *Preposterous Violence: Fables of Aggression in Modern Culture.* New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Vasconcellos, Gilberto. "Yes, nós temos malandro". *Música Popular: de Olho na Festa.* Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1977.

Ventura, Zuenir. *Cidade Partida.* São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 1994.

Wisnik, José Miguel. "O Minuto e o Milênio, ou Por Favor, Professor, uma Década de Cada Vez". Adauto Novaes (ed.). *Anos 70: Ainda sob a Tempestade.* Rio de Janeiro: Senac, 2005. 25-37.

Xavier, Ismail. "Corrosão Social, Pragmatismo e Ressentimento: Vozes Dissonantes no Cinema Brasileiro de Resultados". *Novos Estudos* 75 (2006): 139-156.

---. "Da Violência Justiceira à Violência Ressentida". *Ilha do Desterro.* 51 (2006): 55-68.

---. *O discurso cinematográfico: a opacidade e a transparência.* São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2005.

Zizek, Slavoj. "Some Politically Incorrect Reflection on Violence in France & Related Matters". 25 Oct 2008. <http://www.lacan.com/zizfrance.htm>

Conclusion

French critic Serge Daney cites Jean-Louis Schefer when he talks about the "films that have watched our childhood" ("The Tracking Shot in Kapo"). I remember being very young, maybe 5 or 6 years old, when my father had a Super-8 camera and a projector. There were evenings of white sheets hanging on the walls, with care so as not to wrinkle, and my older brother and I would sit on the floor and watch Woody Woodpecker cartoons, with our backs to that black box from which light would come out through a thin sheet of dust that reminded me of smoke. It has been a long time and I confess that I might not be entirely faithful to the facts because my memory is now so populated with the stuff that movies are made of that instead of remembering I may be writing a script.

Among the films that I saw when a child, one that has "watched me" all along: it is a short animated film about war. I remember the action figures, dressed as World War II soldiers fighting on a dry, yellowish field. One soldier shoots another and – bang! - there goes an arm. The toy bleeds. Another soldier catches on fire. It melts. My infant retina was bombarded by these images and they remain, for me, a key

for the questions almost thirty years later I sought to discuss in this dissertation.

My father does not remember the name of the film. I have spent too many hours 'googling' and 'youtubing' to never find it. Brother says he remembers vaguely. So how come the image of a melting action figure stuck on my mind as vividly as if it had been produced two minutes ago?

In *O que Resta de Auschwitz* (Remnants of Auschwitz), Giorgio Agamben reminds us that when we experience something we also experience ourselves. Drawing from Kant, he says that being affected by something also implies a self-affection: "given that everything happens inside the subject, activity and passivity must coincide, and the passive subject must be active in respect to their own passivity, must behave (*verhalten*) 'against' themselves (*gegen uns selbst*) as passive" (114).[139] We actively feel our passivity, we're *affected* by it. Agamben goes on to say that "passivity – as self-affection – is, thus, a receptivity to the second potency, in love with its own passivity" (114).[140] This goes to show how complex is our relationship with movies. To affect and to be affected, to act on an object, to interact with it, to be transformed by it, to act on ourselves. Like the wax of a stamp molded by the heat, in my passivity I have been affected by that film with the action figure dolls, been highly affected by my own receptivity.

---

[139] Dado que, no caso, tudo ocorre no interior do sujeito, atividade e passividade devem coincidir, e o sujeito passivo deve ser ativo com respeito à própria passividade, deve comportar-se (*verhalten*) 'contra' si mesmo (*gegen uns selbst*) como passivo.

[140] A passividade – enquanto auto-feição – é, pois, uma receptividade elevada à segunda potência, que se apaixona pela própria passividade.

* * * * * * *

Roberto Rossellini said that it is necessary to make the movie, look at it, study it, criticize it, and then shoot it a second time. Once it has been reshot, it is necessary to watch it again, study it again, criticize it again and shoot it a third time. It is impossible. A film is always a sketch – and you must make the most of it. Perhaps we could say that film analysis follows the same principle. It is always a sketch of the films we watch 3, 4 times. Like making a film, writing about film is virtually probably impossible – it is never a *work*, but we stubbornly *work* as if it were, we strive to make the most of it.

Moreover, the film is the absence of this other film, the one that I have to create. This was one of the most difficult tasks in my attempt at understanding the biopolitical operations of violence and the (re)configurations of community in contemporary Brazilian cinema. It is difficult to avoid falling into the temptation of foreclosing the films into concepts that would pre-exist them - 'critical', 'didactic' – and to create a common sense – a community of sense - that would remain open-ended rather than pre-written. Thinking in those terms requires an understanding of politics as *becoming,* and not as fixed identities, requiring an open and immanent relation with film images.

The challenge was to structure a critical approach for contemporary Brazilian films that could go *through* the mimetic impulses of images of violence, to find in the violent image the openness that could propose ways of distributing the sensible other than those based on resentment and negativity. The biopolitical implications,

however, never stopped referring back to a representational, closed universe.

Among the many images of violence that pervade contemporary Brazilian cinema, I tried to show during this dissertation, there is a strong tendency towards a 'bad encounter' between spectator and film. These images reinforce systems of thought based on dogmatic views of 'Brazilian reality and society'. They are entrapped in sadness and negativity. Such affections lead to the desire to destroy the source of this sadness, diminishing out potency to act (Deleuze *Espinosa* 106-7). The biopolitics at work in these instances refer not only to the moralizing, normative representation of violence, but also, and perhaps mainly, to the weakening of the potency to act that ensues from these images.

The aesthetic experience in these films takes place in the moment the sensations produced by the images take the form of a thought. This experience goes from the fluidity of perception to the unity of a monadic subjectivity. From the violent image to the images of violence. What I was interested in analyzing was exactly how we can go from one state to another. How, in many instances, the potential of the violent image is stopped by a belief in the image of violence as a final comment on 'reality', attempting to construe a consensus about what this reality *is*.

The notion of a consensus implies what is already established and expressed as part of a stable order. What such stable order fails to accept is the fact that the 'real', as such, does not exist. Indeed, all we can have are framings, slices of reality. Our attempt at positing a 'real

world' eventually leads to a framing of reality, a *consensual* framing. This consensus erases all controversy as to what framing of 'reality' we are talking about, suggesting that the world we live in is but one and single real whose existence we all agree about. Because there is so much exclusion in this process of framing the real that art is necessary to 'restore' identities and give us back a sense of community.

However, if we think with Jacques Ranciére, in *O Desentendimento* (The Disagreement), we will see that consensus cannot be a basis for politics. On the contrary, politics begins when we disagree on the 'reality' of the real, when we challenge this given reality. Rancière explicitly elevates 'disagreement' to the status of the primary political category. This implies a communitarianism that is not exactly 'communitarian', in so far as what we share is disagreement, not consensus: it is the *dissensus* between us that needs to be verified. Disconnection, dissensus: we are far from a regime of concordance, a regime where senses agree, suggesting a break with the regime of representation or the mimetic regime.

Aesthetics and politics are, thus, extremely close. Both deal with the construction/reinforcement of a consensus, which is extremely policed and controlled, and the opening up of this consensus, via disagreement. They partake in the formation of a *common sense* that is shared by everybody. The community of sense that is engendered is not a community of aesthetes; it is a *sensus communis*. This means a number of things for Rancière.

A community of sense first is a certain combination of sense data. This also means a combination of different senses of sense. The words of the poet are sensory realities which suggest another sensory reality, which in turn can be perceived as a metaphor of the poetic activity. The inhabitants put a white sentence on their black tee-shirt and they choose a certain stance to present it in front of the camera, etc. This is the first level of 'community'. Now in my three examples that community takes on a specific figure, that I will call a dissensual figure. The words of the poet are first used as neutral tools to frame a certain sensorium. They describe us a movement of the arms oriented towards a certain aim: reaching a place which could be visualised on a space. But they superimpose to that sensorium another sensorium organized around that which is specific to their own power, sound and absence. They stage a conflict between two regimes of sense, two sensory worlds. This is what dissensus means ("Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community", 4).

When violence is portrayed in *Cidade de Deus, Amarelo Manga, Carandiru, Cidade Baixa* and *Tropa de Elite* it is contained in the representation of the urban space as a symptom of a naturalist impulse, an impulse that looks for legitimation by bringing to fore the 'truth' about the 'reality' in Brazil. Other films, like *Estorvo* and *O Invasor* can posit more a complex challenge to the spectator, albeit recurring to the discourse of truth at times (mainly in the latter work). In this sense, those films are reinforcing a consensus on the 'appropriate' way to look at a given reality.

We can refer to Fatima Toledo's collaboration in the preparation of actor for *Cidade de Deus, Cidade Baixa, Tropa de Elite,* among other contemporary films. In an interview to *Piauí* magazine entitled "Como não Ser Ator", Toledo defends that actors should not prepare for their roles according to Stanislavski's "What if...", which is based on the

"possibility of not being" (54).[141] She does not deny it that actor can "not be", but she argues that "being immediately awakens the sensorial. It's real! It's like in life!" (54)[142] For Toledo, people are becoming desensitized and the expression "What if..." serves as a sort of security device that prevents people from acting. This search for the 'real' is also present in her directorial debut, to come out in 2010, and which, according to the *Piauí* article, is provisionally entitled *Sobre a Verdade* (On Truth).

The important question of the possibility of understanding violence as a political force that destabilizes notions such as self, representation, agency, nationality and class, which may counter the investment in cultural hegemonic processes of normalization and stabilization of both self and society suggests a not-so-optimistic answer. The films analyzed here suggest a coagulated, normalized violence. Violence as dissemination, irradiation, fragmentation, explosion, this is a kind of violent image that is still absent from the recent productions.

These images of violence are biopolitical in two levels: they offer 'representations' of biopolitical operations (torture, control of the bodies, decisions on life and death), and they also invest cinema with a consensus-making capacity. That means that the social and moral 'denouncement' that ensues from the films wants to 'correct' the world, set it back its 'proper' reality (always a 'slice' of the real, as argued

---

[141] Possibilidade de não ser.

[142] O 'eu sou', por outro lado, desperta o sensorial imediatamente. É real! É como na vida!

above). Images become a piece of information, a "word of order"[143], in Delueze's formula, a tool to construct reactions, to control de bodies, to police the spectator. There is no disagreement on what the image 'means', no opening up in the consensus of the denounced 'reality'. What is *common* is the policing of these borders, of what is left 'in' and 'out' of the image. A *common*, a *community* based on words of order is bound to fail.

But we can also shift our focus on biopolitics and try to find in it an affirmative stance through the lens of immunity, in the light of Roberto Esposito's elaboration of a positive immunity in the relationship between mother and fetus. This relationship is the proof that immunity does not inevitably deteriorate into a suicidal auto-immunity crises. In *Immunitas*, Esposito discusses the imperative of security that overwhelms contemporary social systems and the process by which risk and protection reinforce each other, describing the auto-immunity crises of biopolitics that gives rise to the very possibility of a dialectical reversal into community.

There is a limit-point beyond which the entire biopolitical horizon risks entering a destructive contradiction with itself. Esposito explains:

> The negative protection of life, strengthened so much that it is reversed into its own opposite, will wind up destroying not only the enemy outside it but also its own body. The violence of interiorization - the abrogation of the outside, of the negative could be reversed into an absolute exteriorization, in a complete negativity. (11)

---

[143] Palavra de ordem

This self-destructive revolt of immunity against itself or the opening to its reversal in community. This opening to community as the site in which an affirmative biopolitics can result from a dialectical reversal at the heart of the immunitarian paradigm: if we acknowledge that immunization is the way biopolitics has degenerated since the dawn of modernity, the point now is how to break with the amalgamation of biology and politics.

It takes a new vocabulary for (re)assessing the boundaries between life and its other, a new vocabulary that recognizes the one in the other such that any living being is thought in the unity of life, in a co-belonging with what is different. The immunity system of a pregnant mother serves as a model for Esposito, who says that

> women develop certain types of antibodies which, by hiding the symptoms of the presence of extraneous agent coming from the fetus, allow the mother to survive. [...] In short, immunizing against the other [the fetus], the mother immunizes against herself. She immunizes herself against an excess of immunization[144]. (242)

The mother's body does attack the fetus but the immunological reaction ends up protecting the fetus and not destroying it. Pregnancy gives an example of a productive immunitarian existence, where difference and confrontation are not necessarily destructive (243).

Most images of violence that I discussed throughout this study reinforce the biopolitical paradigm of immunization,

---

[144] In the Spanish translation: Las mujeres desarrollan determinados tipos de anticuerpos, lo cuales, al ocultar las siñales de pesencia de um agente extraño porvenientes del feto, permiten que sobreviva. [...] em síntesis, inmunizando de lo outro, también inmuniza de si. Se inmuniza de um excesso de inmunización.

> This in the sense that it forces it into a sort of cage or armoring in which not only our freedom is lost, but also the very meaning of our individual and collective existence, which is to say that circulation of meaning, that appearance of existence outside itself that I define with the term *communitas* (thereby alluding to the constitutively exposed character of existence). (Esposito, "Immunization and violence", 7)

While films insist on portraying violence under this regime, we re still facing the challenge to (re)write the political implications of violence. Violence seems to be at its strongest political potential when it explodes the clichés in the images and punctures the immunizing bubble around us. When it injects us against immunization.

<p style="text-align:center">* * * * * * *</p>

Cinema is the place where we can (re)imag(in)e violence in its destructive and constructive impulses. It's a safe place for these experiments. I never got hurt from watching the animated film where action figures where dismembered. Not 'physically' hurt, that is. In my childish imagination I was sad for the world where dolls had to die. Sad, I now risk a hypothesis, because those images where like aborted infants or rejected transplanted organs. Narrative closure and common sense logic produced their antibodies, so that they would not be attacked by the very violence that inhabited them.