

7-1-2010

# Marginality, Mayhem and Middle Class Anxieties: Imaginaries of Masculinity and Urban Violence in Contemporary Mexican and Brazilian Film

Jeremy Lehnen

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Jeremy Lee Lehen

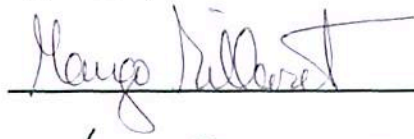
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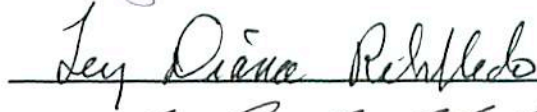
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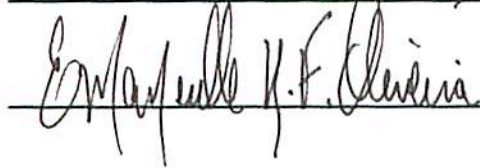
*Approved by the Dissertation Committee:*



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**MARGINALITY, MAYHEM AND MIDDLE CLASS ANXIETIES:  
IMAGINARIES OF VIOLENCE AND MASCULINITY IN  
CONTEMPORARY MEXICAN AND BRAZILIAN FILM**

**BY**

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Latin American Studies**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**JULY, 2010**

## **DEDICATION**

A mi G.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my dissertation director Margo Milleret for her insights and guidance as well as the intellectual space and support that she offered me throughout the research and writing of this project.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the other members of my committee: Diana Rebolledo, Rich Wood and Emanuelle Oliveira. Your criticism and encouragement was truly the backbone of this dissertation.

Leila Lehnen, I would like to recognize your stimulating ideas, critical gaze, professional mentorship and unending support. They have inspired and guided this dissertation, my research and my life. Neither this work nor I would be the same without you.

I would like to thank Arno Carlos Lehnen for the endless number of films and texts that he scoured the streets of Porto Alegre to find and send to me. Your dedication to research and teaching are inspirational.

I would to show my appreciation to the Latin American and Iberian Institute as well as Amanda Wolfe

and Kathy McKnight for their support and for keeping all the paperwork together when I didn't.

I would like to thank my Mother and family, I may be the first to do this, but without you all it never would have been possible (even if my brothers still don't remember what I am researching).

Lastly, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Maricarmen Zorrilla Medianero. The time I spent with you and your beautiful family marked the beginning of this life-long trajectory.

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**PH. D., LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO,  
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**ABSTRACT**

*Marginality, Mayhem and Middle Class Anxieties:  
Imaginaries of Masculinity and Urban Violence in  
Contemporary Mexican and Brazilian Film* is a comparative  
study that explores the confluence of cinematic discourse,  
violence, masculinity and constructions (or denial) of  
citizenship in present-day Latin America. My argument is  
that the thematization of violence and masculinity in  
contemporary Latin American film intercedes at a symbolic  
level into social relations that are increasingly mediated  
through images that depict what is socially permitted. This  
dissertation considers how film (re)structures perceptions  
of masculinity and its inter-linkages with cityscapes marked



by social and material violence. Violence is at the same time the producer and the product of prevailing mediatic representations of social strife. As such, material and symbolic violence generate a spectacle of otherness (socioeconomic, ethnic, gendered) that purports to demarcate the symbolic limits of so-called legitimate society, often employing the peripheral male subject as the axis around which difference is articulated. On the one hand, films such as *Amores perros* (Mexico Iñárritu 2001) and *Cidade de Deus* (Brazil, Meirelles, Lund 2002) utilize paradigms of socioeconomic and gender difference to naturalize the perception of the divided city by formulating the body of the peripheral male subject (and the metropolitan zones he inhabits) as a dangerous terrain. On the other hand, other productions, such as *La Zona* (Mexico, Spain, Plá 2007) and *O homem do ano* (Brazil, Fonseca 2004), using similar archetypes, call this vision into question by focusing on how middle class and elite anxieties create practices of violence as modes of social definition.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

In the final decades of the twentieth century and the initial decade of the twenty-first century, narratives of violence have proliferated within Latin American cinematic production. Films such as the Mexican *Amores perros* (Iñárritu 2000) and the Brazilian *Cidade de Deus* (Meirelles 2002) have become both national and international box office blockbusters by projecting the spectacle of violence upon the silver screen. These films are part of what Christian León has denominated a "Cine de la Marginalidad." This body of works thematizes urban violence and what many directors claim to be the gritty reality of marginal subjects within the continent's cityscapes. These cinematic works appear to dialogue with newspaper and television headlines that broadcast daily what at times seems an ad nauseam recitation of accounts of metropolitan violence.

Have these mediatic images become the governing medium of social citizenship, replacing in part inter-social relations? Within the visual spectacle of contemporary media and film, what are the narratives that crime films are constructing and how do they dialogue with social

perceptions of violence and dominant society's Other? This dissertation interrogates the confluence between cinema, violence and masculinity within Latin American society, more specifically Brazil and Mexico, attempting to better comprehend the role film plays in a social sphere that is mired in decreased sociability, fragmented cityscapes and an ever widening socio-economic gap between social sectors.

At the contemporary moment, the growth of social (ethnic, cultural, sexual) and economic disparities between citizens has become exacerbated to the point that at times it appears that individuals are no longer able to subscribe to the idea of a shared civic arena or cultural discourse / identity. As the possibility of unity within the national sphere is increasingly questioned, James Holston and Arjun Appadurai have called for the development of "a framework of investigation that considers cities challenging, diverging from, and even replacing nations as the important space of citizenship..." (3). According to these critics, it is within the urban space that citizenship is being renegotiated and rearticulated. Paradoxically, what we find in the films that I contemplate in this dissertation is that these metropolitan centers also function as privileged arenas for the negation of citizenship through social and economic exclusion.

Within this frame of reference, José Luis Machinea contends that the population of the metropolises of Latin America has grown by 240% over the last three decades.<sup>1</sup> Mass migrations to metropolitan hubs within Latin America have resulted in a human geography in which three quarters of the continent's population resides in urban spaces (Pedrazzini 40). With the massive influx of people to the cities, modern planning ideals to eliminate disorder and congestion that once served as guideposts of urban development are breaking down. Since the later half of the twentieth century, the rapid pace of urbanization coupled with the implementation of neoliberal policies that promote the privatization of water, energy, telecommunications, road and other infrastructural networks are creating parallel cities, what Steve Graham has referred to as "splintering urbanisms" (Graham 2001). This has resulted in cityscapes that increasingly embody a hubristic conurbation, one populated by those that are connected and have access to material goods and services, and the other by those cast aside and denied access to said benefits.

Accordingly, division now governs the geo-social organization of many Latin American cities. Within

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<sup>1</sup> José Luis Machinea is the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

metropolitan areas such as Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, Caracas and Bogotá, social tensions amplify under the strain of cohabitation, as the margins, the limits where what Bauman denominates the "redundant" of society reside, become more visible and impinge upon the privileged spaces of the social elites.<sup>2</sup> In cities such as Caracas and Rio de Janeiro, the slums are perched upon the unstable hillsides encircling the elite sectors of the city. From between the bars of their compounds, social elites gaze out from their high-rise condominiums, terrified of the shanty towns that engulf them (one only needs to consider the much photographed image of Morumbi, São Paulo, Brazil –reproduced on the cover of the Brazilian author Ferréz's novel *Ninguém é inocente em São Paulo* [2006]– in which residents of a high-rise condominium with individual swimming pools on their terraces overlook the *favela* below). In other urban centers such as Bogotá, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, or Mexico City they are located at the peripheral zones of the city above toxic waste dumps, within flood plains or upon otherwise symbolically and

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<sup>2</sup> Modernization necessarily produces waste, both the refuse or byproducts of the manufacturing process (in the form of carcinogenic materials, contaminants and residues, cities of plastics and discarded items that overflow the world's landfills, not to mention the biological excrement that pollutes the waterways and lands of the world) as well as the human beings (Bauman 2004,).

materially precarious terrain. At the same time that the poor are relegated to these marginal spaces, Teresa Caldeira has documented how the middle and upper classes of Brazilian society are increasingly constructing fortified "communities" that generate and exacerbate already existing social distances between the elites and the poor segments of society.<sup>3</sup> In her introduction to *City of Walls* (2000), Caldeira contends that:

Violence and fear are entangled with processes of social change in contemporary cities, generating new forms of spatial segregation and social discrimination. In the last two decades, in cities as distinct as São Paulo, Los Angeles, Johannesburg, Buenos Aires, Budapest, Mexico City, and Miami, different social groups, especially from the upper classes, have used fear of violence and crime to justify new techniques of exclusion and their withdrawal from traditional quarters of the cities. Groups that feel threatened by the social order taking shape in these cities commonly build exclusive,

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<sup>3</sup> The Luis Felipe Cabrales Barajas' anthology *Latinoamérica: países abiertos, ciudades cerradas* (2002) presents a series of studies that document parallel processes to those described by Caldeira. This volume discusses the walling of the urban space in Buenos Aires, Mexico City Santiago de Chile and a variety of other Latin American urban centers.

fortified enclaves for their residence, work, leisure, and consumption. The discourses of fear that simultaneously help to legitimize this withdrawal and to reproduce fear find different references. Frequently they are about crime, and especially violent crime. (1)

As Caldeira points out, the physical and metaphorical chasm that divides the urban terrain is growing deeper as the everyday practices of individuals adapt to the walled city. For example, youth are experiencing two very different cities. The children of the upper social echelons avoid the public domain of the street due to fear and prejudice: attending private schools, frequenting closed malls in the affluent areas of the city, spending their leisure time at private clubs, chauffeured from place to place in the comfort of their automobiles. At the same time, poorer adolescents navigate a much less hospitable city space, contending with a public transportation system that at times requires two hours or more to access the city center from the outer lying shanty towns.<sup>4</sup>

As the elites withdraw into the protected enclaves of private condominiums and "countries," within the public

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<sup>4</sup> While in Brazil in 2006, it took me three hours to go from Capão Redondo to the city center of São Paulo by bus.



realm exclusive shopping malls are now displacing the traditional commercial districts of many cities.<sup>5</sup> These commercial centers are privileged arenas of controlled circulation in which affluent individuals impose not only a social distance, but literally construct walled barriers between themselves and those of little or no economic means. These malls are generally located in the more upscale areas of town and cater to a public with purchasing power. John King has pointed out:

Malls are islands of safety, atomized units, space capsules, centres geared to consumption—buying the trainers [athletic shoes] before the movie and having a drink afterwards—where the perils and complexities of the street are at a distance. (260)

Within the malls, recreational activities such as multiplex cinemas have proliferated as the movie going public, those members of society who have the necessary disposable income to allow them such luxuries, have abandoned locally owned single screen cinemas.

The boom of multinational multiplexes such as Cinemex, Cinemark, General Cinema, ShowCase, Hoyts and Village

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<sup>5</sup> *Los countries* are enclosed private neighborhoods on the outskirts of Buenos Aires where many of the local elites own homes. In Brazil these neighborhoods are known as *Chácaras*.

Cinemas has proliferated in Latin American metropolitan centers since the end of the twentieth century. In the areas of Santa Fe, Polanco, Insurgentes and Periférico Sur of Mexico City a surge in upscale condominiums, shopping centers and a range of transnational investments have been accompanied by a dramatic growth in multiplex cinemas (García Canclini 2006). A similar concentration of multiplex cinemas has occurred in the privileged districts of Buenos Aires and São Paulo (Falicov 2007). The expansion of screens has surged within regions of these cities that multiplex builders consider "prime property," leading to an over-saturation of venues while within the poor and marginal areas of the city such cinemas are virtually nonexistent. Within the secured space of shopping complexes, these multiplex cinemas are projecting films that dialogue, at times very directly, with what members of the middle and upper classes imagine to be the life of those that inhabit the other city. Discourses of fear resonate upon the silver screen between reinforced walls of poured concrete and steel.

The *favela* forms part of this other city, the megalopolis of chaos where the "dangerous classes" reside. According to Mike Davis, urban slums are growing exponentially and those that reside within these spaces

have been cast out of the formal world economy. The critic Jan Breman warns of these outcasts:

A point of no return is reached when a reserve army waiting to be incorporated into the labor process becomes stigmatized as a permanently redundant mass, an excessive burden that cannot be included now or in the future, in economy or society. (*The Labouring Poor* 13)

At this "point of no return," individuals develop alternative strategies of subsistence by participating in the informal economic sectors and/or resorting to other practices that at times include aggression. Urban sociologist Yves Pedrazzini contends that:

as estratégias de sobrevivência criadas pelos habitantes do lado obscuro da cidade são cada vez mais radicais e violentas, pois o sentido profundo da segregação subsiste mesmo nas cidades mais caóticas. (24)

Denied the possibility of material acquisition within a consumer society that equates citizenship with consumption (García Canclini 1995), the dark, chaotic side of the city is experiencing a growing violence.<sup>6</sup> Zygmunt Bauman links

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<sup>6</sup> It is generally agreed upon within literature produced by academic and non-governmental bodies that violence and

this violence directly to questions of consumption.

Whatever has been registered in recent years as *rising criminality*...is not a product of malfunctioning or neglect— let alone of factors external to society itself...It is, instead, the consumer society's own product, logically (if not legally) legitimate..."

(Bauman 1997, 40)

In other words, criminality is not solely linked to questions of subsistence, but rather it is also a product of insatiable consumer desires. This need of those without to acquire material goods takes on new extremes in films such as Elia Schneider's *Huelepega* (Venezuela, 1999). In this narrative, an adolescent is gunned down for a pair of Nikes, a scene that has attained the status of myth in contemporary culture.<sup>7</sup>

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criminality are increasing within Latin America. However, official statistics from local and national governments can prove very precarious terrain when analyzing the question of violence and citizen security. Studies are normally based upon statistics garnered from police records, judicial records and health records. However, these official records many times underreport these statistics of segments of the society that are rendered virtually invisible by the "Law." Beyond this, no country in Latin America assesses citizen security through ongoing public opinion surveys (Arriagada and Godoy 1999).

<sup>7</sup> A similar scene is also referenced by one of the youths in José Roberto Duque and Boris Muñoz's *La ley de la calle: Testimonios de jóvenes protagonistas de la violencia en Caracas* (1995) as well as in Kátia Lund's *Notícias de uma guerra particular* (Brazil, 1999).

Nonetheless, it is not only the problematic presence of the social Others who "invade" and "threaten" the metropolitan centers, leisure and domestic spheres of the bourgeoisie. The police and state security forces, as representatives of the nation and its "legitimate" monopoly on the use of physical force, in their attempt to enforce the ideals of "order and progress" resort to demonstrations of illegal violence.<sup>8</sup> The violence of Candelária,<sup>9</sup> Vigário Geral,<sup>10</sup> the BOPE [Batalhão de Operações Policiais Especiais],<sup>11</sup> the National Military Troops in anti-narco

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<sup>8</sup> "Order and progress" is the motto found on the Brazilian flag.

<sup>9</sup> The Candelária Church is a famous Roman Catholic Church in the center of Rio de Janeiro. On the night of July 23, 1993 approximately seventy street kids who had taken refuge on the steps of the church were assaulted by a group of individuals, many of whom were later found to be military police officers. The men fired on the adolescents, killing eight of the kids. Ultimately, of the fifty officers who are said to have taken part in the massacre only two were convicted, Macos Emmanuel and Nelson Cunha. For more information see Zuenir Ventura's *Cidade Partida* (1994).

<sup>10</sup> On the night of August 29, 1993 fifty-two police officers invaded the *favela* of Vigário Geral in Rio de Janeiro, a death squad organized as retaliation for the killing of four officers by the drug cartel that controlled the *favela*. In the ensuing attack, twenty-one individuals were killed, including a family of seven. According to Zuenir Ventura, none of the dead had any ties to drug trafficking. Of the fifty-two officers accused of the crime, only seven were convicted of any crimes. For more information see Zuenir Ventura's *Cidade Partida* (1994).

<sup>11</sup> The BOPE is an elite military police squad in the state of Rio de Janeiro that has been accused of using excessive force in their campaigns. For example, in 2005 Amnesty International published a report entitled *Brazil: 'They*

operations patrolling the streets of towns and cities in part due to the rampant corruption of local police forces.<sup>12</sup> According to official discourses, these actions are taken to supposedly uphold and enforce the "Law," however, in many cases what they result in is the imposition of a *de facto State of Exception* (Agamben 2005), these actions

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*Come in Shooting': Policing socially excluded communities.* The report accuses the BOPE of killing three youths from Rocinha (Liniker Ferreira Medeiros, Leandro Santos da Silva and Jean Alexandre de Campos) during carnival and then covering up the killings by contending that the youth were drug dealers. One only needs to consider the words of the military cadence chant that the BOPE sings during their training exercises: "The interrogation is very easy to do / get the slum dweller and beat him till it hurts / Interrogations are very easy to finish / get the criminal and beat him till he dies." [*O interrogatório é muito fácil de fazer / pega o favelado e dá porrada até doer/ O interrogatório é muito fácil de acabar / pega o bandido e dá porrada até matar.*] This chant was first published in *O Globo* on 24 September 2003 in an editorial entitled "Gritos de Guerra do BOPE assustam Parque Guinle", and is also cited in the Amnesty International Report (Index Number: AMR 19/025/2005) *Brazil: "They come in Shooting": Policing Socially Excluded Communities.*

<sup>12</sup> On March 9, 2010 the United Nations' Human Rights Committee concluded their 98<sup>th</sup> session. In this meeting they were presented with reports from human rights groups such as the Centros de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez (Prodh), the Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de Derechos Humanos (CMDPDH) and the Red Todos los Derechos para Todos (RTDT) reported to the commission that the use of National Military Forces to patrol the streets of Mexican cities under Felipe Calderón's Plan Merida have resulted in a significant upsurge in Human Rights violations within the country. According to these reports the war against organized crime and narcotics has been marked by arbitrary detentions of individuals, torture and executions at the hands of the military and local police forces.

rooted within an ethos of violating the same legal regulations they profess to advocate.<sup>13</sup> Brutality committed by representatives of law enforcement is therefore symptomatic of the socio-economic split that runs down the body of the nation: a divide that perpetuates more discourses of aggression and fear and translates into the material realm in practices of hostility.

As apprehension of the urban space and socio-economic difference increases, the middle and upper classes develop evermore-extensive strategies (private security guards, bullet-proof automobiles, closed shopping malls) that aim to limit their exposure to the perceived violence of the public arena. Frequently, this results in a decrease in inter-social relations, as individuals withdraw into the safety of private guarded spaces. Consequently, the mediatic spectacle, more specifically cinema in the context of this study, becomes a governing medium of sociability: "a place of coming together, of vicarious encounters with the world, with people, and even with the city in which we live"

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<sup>13</sup> I want to make it clear that I do not mean to collapse the different types of violence that I am signaling here into one homogenous grouping, but rather to signal the multiple positions that official forces occupy in the propagation of violence whether officially or unofficially.

(Barbero 1996, 28).<sup>14</sup> This is to say that within society there is a progressive substitution of experiential real world encounters with mediated simulations. French critic Guy Debord discusses what transpires when the spectacle is endowed with this role in society:

When the real world changes into simple images, simple images become real beings and effective motivations of a hypnotic behavior. The spectacle has a tendency to make one see the world by means of various specialized mediations (it can no longer be grasped directly).

(Debord 17)

My argument is that the thematization of violence and masculinity in contemporary film intercedes at the symbolic level into social relations that are increasingly mediated through images that depict not only what is socially permitted, but also distinguish this from what is possible (Debord 1967). This study considers how film both transforms and structures perceptions of social relations, the urban space where they occur and the individuals that interact within this milieu. This dissertation analyzes how crime films are dialoguing with and (trans)forming social

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<sup>14</sup> Guy Debord in theses twenty-five and twenty-six of *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) signals a similar move of the individual from the public arena to the inert consumption of the spectacle.



perceptions of the prevalence, risks and actors associated in the hegemonic imaginary with urban violence.

Within these spectacles of fear, a bond has been forged that links violence with the marginal spaces of the city: the *favelas*, *cortiços*, *villas miserias*, *colonias*.<sup>15</sup> The Brazilian sociologist José Vicente Tavares do Santos argues that:

[E]stamos vivendo em um horizonte de representações sociais da violência para cuja disseminação em muito contribuem os meios de comunicação de massa, produzindo a dramatização da violência e difundindo sua espetacularização, enquanto um efeito da violência exercida pelo "campo jornalístico." (22)

These discourses can then be used to establish a power hierarchy and in turn negate material resources to the impoverished communities of the shantytowns. Stephen Littlejohn (1989) argues that this occurs in a three-step process. Firstly, media outlets establish the importance of an issue by integrating it into their programming. Secondly, the media's agenda then influences the public's perception of the given subject, including the gravity or importance that is assigned to it. Lastly, once the matter

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<sup>15</sup> Favela and cortiço are two names given to slums in Brazil. In Argentina, the slums are referred to as villas miserias and in Mexico as colonias.

has been incorporated into the public's agenda, it then becomes a matter of concern for policymakers, and in turn shapes public policy decisions. However, what many of the mediatic narratives thematizing societal violence obviate are the social, economic and political shifts that are in part responsible for the socio-economic conditions of individuals at the margins of society. These narratives at times dislodge themselves from and ultimately substitute the reality they supposedly represent,<sup>16</sup> often venturing into a world of hyperbole that plays on hegemonic society's fears.<sup>17</sup>

Crime films both tap into and inform the media's depiction of violence and criminality. Together the cinema and the mass media construct a "mediascape" / "infoscape" (Appadurai 1996) that influences both individually and

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<sup>16</sup> Stuart Hall's essay "Encoding/Decoding" in *Culture, Media, Language* (1980) offers a very informative discussion of the process of media representations and the process of encoding and decoding actual events into media spectacles.

<sup>17</sup> Sílvia Ramos and Anabela Paiva's recently published study *Mídia e violência: Novas tendências na cobertura de criminalidade e segurança no Brasil* (2007) as well as Tiarajú D'andrea article "Visões de Paraisópolis: violência, mídia e representações" in *Periferia sexta feira n.8* study the media-society dynamic. Both works reveal how the mass media outlets exaggerate and at times even invent stories of violence within the urban space. For her part, D'andrea concentrates on media representations of the Primeiro Comando do Capital (PCC) and how mediatic exaggeration specifically affected the *favela* of Paraisópolis. Ramos and Paiva reveal how criminality is sensationalized within the press core.

socially constructed ideas concerning the prevalence of crime within metropolitan areas, the individuals and / or groups who are responsible for criminal acts, and the threat violent actions pose to the viewer. Nicole Rafter in her discussion of crime films in the United States, *Shots in the Mirror* (2000), argues that crime films maintain a dialectical relationship to society "as a two-way street: Crime films draw from and in turn shape social thought about crime and its players" (7). Of the series of crime films from Latin America that I consider in this work, some parallel journalistic discourse by sensationalizing violence for mass consumption (*Amores perros, Cidade de Deus*), while others command a more critical engagement with urban violence and its mediatic representations (*La Zona, O homem do ano*). For several of these films, the authority that they claim as a means of product promotion lies in their utilization of the spectacle. This is to say that they replace lived social life with its representation, supplanting "relations between people" with "relations between commodities." Via the spectacle, these cinematic narratives assert their authenticity as a direct reflection, testimonial or chronicle of the violence that plagues contemporary society in many Latin American urban centers.

At the same time, a second group of films rely on the spectacle as an ultra-stylized aesthetic product, transforming the urban terrain into an artifice of images through sophisticated cinematic techniques steeped in jump cuts, steady pans, and various other "hip" filming and production tricks. Many of these filming and editing techniques have been adapted from the world of advertising and music videos. These techniques were originally developed and employed to create desire and promote consumption via the placement of seductive and appealing imagery. The adaptation of these techniques within the realm of crime films implies the employment of these same devices to "sell" images and discourses about crime, potentially transforming the viewers into crime voyeurs consuming these spectacles of violence. However, the spectacle in these films veers away from representing the "real," although authenticity may form part of their claims to connecting these products with the material world. Rather they are constructed around an "affective shock of images" (Gormley 2005) that in some instances reaffirms dominant ideologies, while at other times they disrupt socially sanctified beliefs. All of these cinematic narratives of violence and fear

'go in a procession' ahead of social practices in order to open a field for them. Decisions and juridical combinations themselves come only afterwards, like statements... arbitrating the areas of action granted... (de Certeau 125)

In other words, the image serves to "pave the way" or, as Stephen Littlejohn maintains within the mass media, set the socio-political and economic agenda for future policy. Consequently, mass-mediated spectacles of violence intercede at the symbolic level into social relations. In turn, these films to varying degrees set socio-political agendas. The Mexican sociologist Rosanna Reguillo asserts that cinematographic production is "one of contemporary society's most effective mechanisms of reflexivity" (199) for understanding the proliferation of the accounts of violence and the association of the male subject with these actions. However, the question remains of whether these films promote dialogue with a "reflective" public and socio-political milieu or rather if the discourses around the marginal male subject and criminality are being limited, controlled and distorted.

Though the cinematic creations I am considering are fictional works, they do have real world effects. Robert

Stam<sup>18</sup> has argued that the fictional narratives of film, although they may not claim to document the real (this is to say they are not documentary films), they inevitably dialogue with real-life assumptions and are grounded to varying degrees upon factual claims.<sup>19</sup> Marta Peixoto has forwarded a similar argument in her discussion of the representations of Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* in contemporary narrative. According to this critic:

Many recent works of fiction and film forcefully represent, divulge, and denounce -with greater or lesser sensationalism- a social dynamic of segregation and violence that is indeed a commonplace. Who could deny it? Yet the discourses that rely on the commonplace, including print and televised journalism, which often provide narratives and images that reappear in fiction and film, showcase violence and can have the undesirable effect of strengthening social segregation. When such discourses are directed as entertainment at middle and upper class readers and film viewers, they harm *favela* residents: by

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Stam is primarily interested in representations of race and ethnicity.

<sup>19</sup> According to Robert Stam, the fact "that films are only representations does not prevent them from having real effects in the world; racist films can mobilize the Klu Klux Klan, or prepare the ground for retrograde social policy" (Shohat and Stam 178).

reinforcing the commonplaces that equate *favela* residence with criminality and violence, they increase the urban paranoia that segregates the classes and further erode the citizenship rights of those who already suffer race and class discrimination. (174)

In other words, cinema can foster the proliferation of society's fears of social, economic, and / or ethnic Others, resulting in a deepening of social divisions.

But, what are the specters of fear and crime that fill the reels of celluloid and, by extension, the minds of Latin American citizens? According to Jean Franco:

The life and death of delinquents has become a common theme of urban chronicles, newspaper articles, and the fiction [she describes] as *costumbrismo* of globalization...[these] contemporary texts are postapocalyptic, reflecting the horror of the middle classes as their whole cultural World implodes. (2002, 222)

Many contemporary Latin American cinematic productions construct narratives that exploit this sense of terror by formulating the body of the male "criminal" and the geographic space he occupies, the periphery, as dangerous terrains. As a result, the male delinquent is transformed into "the lightning rod of all social ills" (Franco 2002,

220). Hence, it could be argued that the marginal male subject and the territories he inhabits are converted into hegemonic contemporary society's scapegoat, (following René Girard's [1986] postulation of the term) for an increasingly splintered and uncertain socio-economic landscape. However, this formulation obfuscates possible underlying social and economic causes of contemporary social ills such as: the implementation of neoliberal policies (the weakening of the social state), the dissolution of traditional social control mechanisms due to rapid urbanization and / or the abandonment of an enlightenment ethos constructed upon the ideas of human rights, liberty and equality for all members of society (Caldeira 2000, Graham 2001, Davis 2006). At the same time, within these films, there is often a tension between a scapegoating and a victimization discourse. On the one hand, some films, such as the Brazilian feature *O homem do ano* (Fonseca 2000) and the Mexican *La Zona* (Plá 2007), attempt to question the "scapegoat" model of the young male delinquent, thus beginning to unearth the diverse nature of societal violence and its root causes. On the other hand, this does not preclude these same cinematic narratives, perhaps unwittingly, from re-inscribing the body of the male "criminal" as the primary agent of violence within contemporary society.



If we take a panoramic look at violent films over the last fifteen years from Latin America, violence (here I am referring specifically to acts of criminal or predatory violence within the urban space) is bound up with masculinity, the figure of the male delinquent as the agent of said aggressive behavior.<sup>20</sup> Within this set of films, much of said violence is attributed to the marginal male subject who comes from the lower classes and occupies the peripheral spaces of the city, i.e. the *favela*, *colonia* or *villa miseria*.<sup>21</sup> Many of the representations of peripheral male figures in contemporary film are being created, disseminated, and consumed by society's elites (Prado 2006). Nonetheless, these same narratives also circulate within the lower classes. As a consequence, the spectacle of violence present in these cinematic works forms part of hegemonic discourse that "constructs" reality through the

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<sup>20</sup> One of the few exceptions is the recent Colombian production *Rosario Tijeras* (Maillé 2006). Also, I am not including within this body of works historical accounts of political violence that have also seen a fairly substantial output over the last fifteen to twenty years, although there are films that straddle these areas such as *Quasi dois irmãos* (Murat 2004).

<sup>21</sup> I would like to point out that, particularly in the case of Mexico, there is also a selection of films that shifts the gaze from the male subject from the lower classes to the corrupt male government official such as *Conejo en la luna* (Suárez 2004) and *Todo el poder* (Sariñana 1999) or interrogates both cases as in the case of *De la calle* (Tort 2001)

lens of the privileged sectors. According to cultural critic Dick Hebdige, dominant ideologies are structured

so that subordinate groups are, if not controlled; then at least contained within an ideological space which does not seem at all 'ideological': which appears instead to be permanent and 'natural', to lie outside history, to be beyond particular interests.

(17)

In other words, prevailing mediatic representations, through the spectacle of Otherness (socioeconomic, ethnic, gendered), demarcate the symbolic limits of so-called legitimate society. Consequently, these images naturalize the perception of the divided city marked by fear and violence; and, concomitantly, peripheral subjects (and the zones of the city they inhabit) as the perpetrators of violent actions.

The analysis of this dissertation concentrates on Brazil and Mexico, although the cinematic and social trends discussed are not exclusive to these two countries. Rather, I propose that the paradigms that are guiding the cinematic production of violent narratives in these two nations are also present within the rest of the contemporary Latin American film industry. However, the countries under consideration have the strongest film

industries of the Americas beyond Hollywood. Since the early twentieth century, the national film production from these cinematic hubs has been relatively strong. In the 1930's sound was a new and costly addition to film and Hollywood was suffering the stress of financial problems due to the Great Depression in the United States. During this epoch, Brazil and Mexico (and Argentina) invested heavily in the development of a national cinema, particularly films with sound, in hopes of strengthening their respective positions in the industry and competing with Hollywood. Having remained dominant centers of movie production in Latin America since the 1930's, albeit with financial and political crises, the films of these countries have garnered wider distribution than the other national cinema industries of the continent.

In the contemporary period, the *Cinema da Retomada* in Brazil and the *Nuevo Cine* in Mexico refer primarily to disjointed groups of directors and artists whose productions lack any central unifying theme, agenda or ideology (Johnson 2005, Monsivais 2006). However, many contemporary directors, both in these two nations as well as in the rest of Latin America, privilege cinematographic tales dealing with multifarious modes of violence, particularly within the urban public arena. Within this

oeuvre, I will examine how selected films narrate fear and oscillate between the voyeuristic desires and fears of the middle and upper classes.<sup>22</sup> The questions dealt with in this analysis are guiding the production of violent film narratives throughout Latin America. This dissertation

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<sup>22</sup> My research will therefore discuss the paradigms of violence that permeate the fabric of films such as: *Pizza, birra y faso* (Argentina, 1997) by Adrián Caetano and Bruno Stagnaro; *Mundo Grúa* (Argentina, 1999) by Pablo Trapero; *Amores perros* (México, 2000) by Alejandro González Iñárritu; *Todo el poder* (México, 2000) by Fernando Sariñana; *De la calle* (México, 2001) by Gerardo Tort; *Perfume de violetas* (México, 2000) by Maryse Sistach; *Ciudades oscuras* (México, 2001) by Fernando Sariñana; *Cidade de Deus* (Brazil, 2002) by Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund; *Sin destino* (México, 2002) by Leopoldo Laborde; *Un oso rojo* (Argentina-Spain-France, 2002) by Adrián Caetano, *Contra todos* (Brazil, 2004) by Roberto Moreira, *El polaquito* (Argentina, 2003) by Juan Carlos Desanzo; *O homem do ano* (Brazil, 2003) by José Henrique Fonseca, *Carandiru* (Brazil, 2003) by Héctor Babenco; *O invasor* (Brazil, 2001) by Beto Brant, *Quase dois irmãos* (Brazil, 2004) by Lúcia Murat; *Cidade Baixa* (Brazil, 2005) by Sérgio Machado; and *Tropa de elite* (Brazil, 2007) by José Padilha. There is also a substantial body of films within Latin America, beyond the countries that I am considering, that privilege narratives of crime and violence within the metropolis: *Johnny 100 Pesos* (Chile, 1993) by Greff-Marino; *Sicario* (Venezuela, 1994) by José Novoa; *Rodrigo D: No futuro* (Colombia, 1994) by Víctor Gaviria; *La vendedora de las rosas* (Colombia, 1998) by Víctor Gaviria; *Huelepega, a ley de la calle* (Venezuela, 1999) by Elías Scheifer; *Ratas, rateros, ratones* (Ecuador, 2000) by Sebastián Cordero, *Ciudad de M* (Perú, 2000) by Felipe Degregori; *Taxi para tres* (Chile, 2001) by Orlando Lübbert; *25 watts* (Uruguay, 2001) by Juan Pablo Rebella and Pablo Stoll; *B-happy* (Chile, Spain, Venezuela, 2003) by Gonzalo Justiniarno, *Crónicas* (Ecuador, Mexico, 2004) by Sebastián Cordero, *María llena eres de gracias* (Colombia, United States, 2004) by Joshua Marston; and *Secuestro express* (Venezuela, 2005) by Jonathan Jakubowicz.

attempts to better comprehend the role cinema plays in the symbolic construction and interrogation of collective spheres that are mired in decreased sociability and an ever-widening gap between socio-economic groups. Within this frame of reference, my research considers both questions of the formation of socio-cultural identity (particularly gender and class constructions and accompanying formulations of Otherness within dominant society) as well as their entailing expression and commodification through film.

The dissertation is organized into four chapters with an introduction and conclusion. The chapters are grouped within the framework of the cinematic works' countries of origin, Mexico and Brazil respectively. This structure will be utilized because many of these films are engaging specific socio-economic and historical markers tied to the national / regional / metropolitan context. Additionally, the individual chapters consider, for example, broader social and economic shifts that have shaped the national movie industries.

The analytical framing of this work centers around Guy Debord's theory that contemporary society is experiencing a shift to a society premised upon the spectacle. Debord's theory of the *Society of the Spectacle* in dialogue with Giovanni Satori's theory of *Homo Videns* and Edgar Morin's

*Homo cinematograficus* in conjunction with agenda-setting theories (McCombs and Shaw 1972; Littlejohn 1989; Infante, Rancer and Womack 1990) that have been developed within the communications field will inform my analysis of how crime films are constructing and (trans)forming social perceptions of the prevalence, risks and actors associated with urban violence. Within this framework, I consider how the representation of urban violence and the male subject as well as the ideological structures that are present in the films discussed both alter and structure perceptions of social relations, the urban space where they occur and the individuals that are responsible for and interact within this milieu. At the same time, the socio-historical framing of my dissertation is constructed around anthropological work on discourses of violence and the growing shift towards a contemporary urban space premised upon socio-economic division by Teresa Caldeira, James Holston and Luis Felipe Cabrales Barajas. Beyond this, concepts forwarded by cultural critics such as Jesús Martín-Barbero, George Yúdice, Stuart Hall and Nestor García Canclini will also serve as guiding paradigms for my reading of cultural production and its positioning within contemporary society.

The first half of the dissertation considers contemporary feature length films produced in Mexico.

Specifically, the first chapter of this section analyzes *Amores perros* and the second chapter discusses *La Zona*. The thematization of urban violence within contemporary cinema has taken on newfound importance since Felipe Calderón took office in 2006 and declared a “war on drugs” in Mexico. Since the year of his inauguration, drug related killings have risen from 2,126 to 6,587 in 2009.<sup>23</sup> In this time period, drug violence and more generally urban violence, seem to have attained an evermore-ubiquitous presence in Mexican society. At the same time drug violence is increasing, the official forces of the Mexican national military are patrolling the streets of many cities under the pretext of said drug war and the support of the Plan Mérida. Caught within the crossfire of these two groups, violence has literally invaded the daily lives of the Mexican public. Concomitantly, cultural products that thematize violence are also growing. This is true both within the national film industry as is demonstrated with the production of films such as the examples that I discuss here as well as the boom of narco-cinema. Also known as narco-drama, this filmic genre is currently a thriving niche within the

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<sup>23</sup> For more statistical information on drug violence in Mexico in the twenty-first century, please consult the work of the University of San Diego’s Trans-Border Institute.

Mexican home video market / industry.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, contemporary authors such as Jorge Moch, Antonio Ortuño, Jaime Mesa, Guillermo Fadanelli and J.M. Servín are contemplating the nature of violence that afflicts contemporary society within literature. Together these narratives of violence mark the contemporary moment and, I believe, attest to the growing presence and preoccupation with violence within society and to varying degrees respond to it.

The second half of the dissertation moves away from Mexico to Brazil. In the past decade, both writers and critics alike have stated that representations of violence have been transformed into Brazil's new export product, the same has been said of Mexico. Narratives of violence not only fill the pages of the daily journals, but also are a prevalent theme within the literary arena as well as the

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<sup>24</sup> These straight to video films are low-budget films that take their cues from the 1960's and 1970's B-movies. They initially emerged in the 1980's, but in recent years have seen substantial growth. A few examples are *Asaltos en Tijuana* (Alfredo Gurrola 1984), *Escape sangriento* (Alfredo Gurrola 1985), *Escuadrón de la Muerte* (Alfredo Gurrola 1985), *Cartel Mortal* (Fernando Durán Rojas 1993), *Regalo caro I* (Carlos Durán 2003), *Regalo caro II* (José Luis Vera 2004), *Regalo caro III* (Javier Montaña 2006), & *Regalo caro IV* (Javier Montaña 2007), *Como perros con rabia* (Jorge Reynoso 2003), *Los más buscados I, II, & III* (Jorge Reynoso 2004, 2004, 2005), *Guerra de pandillas* (Jorge Reynoso 2004), and *La estampa del escorpion* (Jorge Reynoso 2007).



film industry.<sup>25</sup> The first chapter of this section analyzes: Lund and Meirelles' *Cidade de Deus* while the second chapter contemplates Foseca's *O homem do ano*. Violence, particularly violence within the urban sphere that intersects with the *favela* seems to be ever-present in contemporary Brazilian cultural production. While Fernando Meirelles claimed to want to bring a "little known subject" to the attention to middle and upper class Brazilians, this supposedly obscure arena presently seems to fill not only the daily headlines of the newspapers, but also is the theme of what seems an unending body of cultural works from the numerous cinematic works that I have previously mentioned and are studied in this dissertation to the many literary works that broach this topic. One need only think of writers such as Ferréz, Sacolinha, Patricia Melo, Rubem Fonseca, Anna Paula Maia, Luis Ruffato, Fernando Bonassi, Marcelino Freire, or Marçal Aquino.

*Marginality, Mayhem and Middle Class Anxieties:*

*Imaginaries of Masculinity and Urban Violence in*

*Contemporary Mexican and Brazilian Film* is a comparative

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<sup>25</sup> Novels such as Patrícia Melo's *O matador* (1995) and *Inferno* (2000), Paulo Lin's *Cidade de Deus* (1997), Marcelino Freire's *Angu de sangue* (2000), Luiz Ruffato's *Eles eram muitos cavalos* (2001), Marçal Aquino's *O invasor* (2002), Fernando Bonassi's *Suburbio* (2006), and André Sant'Anna's *O paraíso é bem bacana* (2006) to name only a few.

study that explores the confluence of cinematic discourse, violence, masculinity and constructions of citizenship (or the denial of) in present-day Latin America. In this dissertation I argue that the thematization of violence and masculinity in contemporary Latin American film intercedes at a symbolic level into social relations that are increasingly mediated through images that depict what is socially permitted. Within this framework, I consider how film (re)structures perceptions of masculinity and its inter-linkages with cityscapes marked by social and material violence. Violence is at the same time the producer and the product of prevailing mediatic representations of social strife. As such, material and symbolic violence generate a spectacle of Otherness (socioeconomic, ethnic, gendered) that purports to demarcate the symbolic limits of so-called legitimate society, often employing the peripheral male subject as the axis around which difference is articulated. On the one hand, films such as *Amores perros* and *Cidade de Deus* utilize paradigms of socio-economic and gender difference to naturalize the perception of the divided city by formulating the body of the peripheral male subject (and the metropolitan zones he inhabits) as a dangerous terrain. On the other hand, other productions, such as *La Zona* and *O homem do ano*, using similar archetypes, call this vision

into question by focusing on how middle class and elite anxieties create practices of violence as a mode of social definition.

Mexico

## Chapter II

### The Men and the Boys: Social Anomie in *Amores Perros*

[Society] is a complex of ideas and sentiments, of ways of seeing and of feeling, a certain intellectual and moral framework distinctive of the entire group. Society is above all a consciousness of the whole.

(Emile Durkheim, *Moral Education*, 277).

The camera trails the silhouette of a stout medium-sized, shorthaired dog, his owner maintaining a tight grip on the taught leash as he leads the mascot through the corridor.<sup>26</sup> We move through the shadowy hallway into the light of a central patio, men are moving about. The chatter of indiscernible conversations and a cacophony of barking canines intermingle. The space comes into focus, light reflects off a pool of blood-laden water that covers the floor. A man, hunched over, drags the carcass of a dog past the camera leaving bare the cracked cement beneath the crimson surface of the liquid. Along the sides of the

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<sup>26</sup> In typical point-of-view "doggie cam" style.

hallway, among stacks of empty beer and soda bottles, men wash blood spatter from the fur of their mascots. The camera whirls from side to side, the dizzying movement of the lens only stabilizing once we reach the arena of the barbarous spectacle. Alvaro (Dagoberto Gama), better known as el Gordo the ringmaster of the events, stands at the center: "¿Listo padrino? ¿En cuánto le vas a ir?" Jarocho (Gustavo Sánchez Parra) responds assertively as he glares at the dog of his opponent "Diez mil." The bet is confirmed. El Gordo gives his okay with a nod of his head and a tussle of his testicles, calling for the final bets as the dogs and their respective owners move to opposite sides of the ring. The weight of the smoky air grows heavy as the camera slides between hands, bodies, cash and clear plastic cups of beer. The two men stand on opposing sides of the enclosed square, holding their beasts by the necks, moving them closer, then returning to the corners only to let them go.. the two canine bodies clash as saliva is hurled into the air.

*Amores perros* is constructed around three intersecting storylines that merge at the site of a car crash in Mexico City. The story of *Octavio y Susana* chronicles the sibling rivalry between Octavio and his elder brother Ramiro for Susana. Octavio, attempting to financially define himself,

enters into the underground world of dogfighting. After a dog fight gone wrong, Octavio flees the scene and is involved in a car accident. It is at this point that he crosses paths with Valeria, protagonist of the second vignette *Daniel y Valeria*. Valeria's car is blindsided by Octavio at an intersection. As a result of the accident, Valeria develops a severe case of gangrene in her leg that was crushed in the accident and the limb must be amputated. Valeria is involved in an affair with Daniel, who has abandoned his family for her. The final story of *El Chivo y Maru* introduces the spectator to el Chivo, a homeless man who witnesses Octavio's and Valeria's car accident. After the collision, el Chivo rescues the bloodied body of Cofi, Octavio's prized fighting dog, who had been abandoned by the side of the road. El Chivo is an ex-revolutionary who, following his release from prison, becomes an assassin for hire. At the same time, el Chivo yearns to be reunited with his estranged daughter Maru following the death of his ex-wife.

*Amores perros* introduces the spectator into the underground world of dog fighting. The dogfight, just as the cockfight and many other competitions fought with animals, traditionally served as an arena through which predominantly male elites of society established social

hierarchies. Consider the now canonical work of Clifford Geertz on the Balinese cockfight and social order.

According to the anthropologist in *Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight*:

What makes Balinese cockfighting deep is thus not money in itself, but what, the more of it that is involved the more so, money causes to happen: the migration of the Balinese status hierarchy into the body of the cockfight... And as prestige, the necessity to affirm it, defend it, celebrate it, justify it, and just plain bask in it (but not given the strongly ascriptive character of Balinese stratification, to seek it), is perhaps the central driving force in the society, so also - ambulant penises, blood sacrifices, and monetary exchanges aside - is it of the cockfight. This apparent amusement and seeming sport is, to take another phrase from Erving Goffman, "a status bloodbath." (Geertz 89)

Similar to the atmosphere of the cockfight that Geertz describes, the world of dogfights into which the film *Amores perros* inserts the viewer is a ritualized space where the fight between canines embodies more than a simple monetary wager. The fight is transformed into a surrogate



for a struggle between men for status, predominance and demonstration(s) of masculinity. This is the space that the viewer initially encounters. In the previously described scene, Jarocho is, for all intents and purposes, the dominant male both within the dog fighting underworld as well as one of the men who controls the *colonia* that serves as the setting for the story of *Octavio y Susana*. Jarocho has won the last ten dogfights with his prizewinning Pancho. El Gordo, ringmaster of the events, presides over the functions. He organizes the fights, calls the winner, at times stops the fights, manages the wagers and is the owner of the physical location in which the dog fights occur. According to Geertz, in the context of the Balinese cockfight, the umpire (*saja konong; djuru kembar*) maintains absolute authority over the event. However, the underground world of dogfights within the story, contrary to Geertz's cockfights in which the rules are written on palm leaves and handed down from generation to generation, is the result of neither longstanding oral traditions that govern the parameters of the fight nor do they have a set of formalized rules that structure and control their enactment. In other words, the dogfights are simulacra of previous rites of passage that have been devoid of their "deep" meaning. The dogfight is

transformed into a hyper real event, a simulation of what was a ritualized symbolic structure of a masculine social contract.

The simulated nature of these events begins to reveal itself from the initial scenes of the dogfights when the umpire's position of power is undermined, or at the very least the spectators are privy to the cracks that line its façade. Let us return to the initial dogfight. As the day's events end and the dog owners and spectators exit, el Gordo tells the loosing party of the dogfight to take his dog corpse with him. The man retorts: "Échalo a la barbacoa." The competitor's flippant response to el Gordo calls into question the patriarchal structuring of the event. Although el Gordo serves as the umpire of the events, he is allotted neither respect nor authority from the participants. Rather, the only deference that he is afforded is garnered in relation to the material wealth he has accrued through his operations.

Subsequently, we return to the setting of the dog-fighting ring when Octavio (Gael García Bernal) makes his debut with Cofi into this insidious underworld.. A man bends down, clearing the blood from the metal barriers that demarcate the limits of the concrete arena, another, washes the blood from the head of his mascot: a young, stout,

shorthaired canine. The stream of red runs down the animal's body and stains the worn cement floor underfoot. Young, old and middle-aged men: three generations of the Mexican males encircle the ring. The camera moves between the anonymous figures in the crowd, the details of the bodies and their garments sliding in and out of focus. Thin plastic cups of cheap beer and tattered pesos flow between the hands that animate the dense space filled by the bodies of the multitude. The dull murmur of the crowd permeates the air as new bets are placed and the previous round of wagers settled. Octavio kneels down beside his dog Cofi, a sizable Rottweiler that calmly awaits his initiation fight. From the corridor Jarocho appears, by his side a chow-mix with a leather muzzle stares into the crowd. Jarocho turns to El Gordo: "¿Desde cuándo entras con niños?" nodding his head flippantly in the direction of Octavio. Octavio with a dazed glaze in his eyes swills a beer in his mouth and spits, interrupting the exchange between the two: "Mi perro es más chingón que cualquier de los tuyos." Jarocho cuts him off: "Estoy hablando con el dueño del circo, reinito." El Gordo calls for the final bets as the dogs and their owners move to opposite sides of the ring. The air, laden with the respiration of close, tense bodies, grows heavy. Octavio and Jarocho stand on

opposite sides of the dog fighting ring, holding their respective beasts by the necks, moving them closer, then releasing the enraged animals...

Just as within the aforementioned arena of the cockfights, these two initial scenes of the dog-fighting event are translations of traditional spaces of rites of passage and the recognition of masculinity. Octavio is initiated into the world of dog fighting by el Gordo, the headmaster of the events. However, these events quickly shift from initiation to confrontation. As Clifford Geertz argues: "For it is only apparently cocks [or in the context of *Amores perros* dogs] that are fighting there. Actually, it is men" (2). The tension rises in the context of the contemporary urban space. These surrogate fights between men revolve around a logic of consumption and individualism rather than forming part of a social structure defined by the altercations. The conflict between these rivals has its base in the fact that previously Cofi killed Pancho, Jarocho's prize fighting dog, therefore destroying his source of revenue.

What initially is fought as a battle between animals quickly spills over from the ring and is inscribed upon the bodies of the men involved. The dog fighting ring, one of the few spaces that at the beginning of *Amores perros* is

governed by a degree of social organization and structure soon falls into the space of chaos and social anomie.

In my reflections, I discuss the role of social anomie, violence and masculinity in Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Amores perros*. I contemplate how *Amores perros* meditates on social disintegration and the definition of the contemporary male subject within the territory of the megalopolis. According to Susana Rotker, "It [the civil war that many urban spaces in Latin America are embroiled in] deals... with a violence that resists the whole system... at the heart of its social relations... it makes victims of all of us... making all of us experience injustice, insecurity, and inequality" (18). I begin by exploring the ideas of social anomie and the effects of neoliberal policies in precipitating the actual state of affairs of many urban spaces as described by Rotker. As part of this, I discuss *Amores perros* to surmise how the text comments on relations between men and constructions of masculinity within Mexico City. I begin my analysis considering technical and structural components of the film. From this point, I contemplate each of the three individual narratives. Within this analysis, I demonstrate how discourses of violence replace traditional sites of social cohesion and violent understandings of masculinity are

employed to cultivate conflict. In this way, violence occupies a dual function in the articulation of social organization. On the one hand, discourses of violence pretend to formulate masculine identities through difference; while on the other hand they also serve to dismantle said identities (Herschmann 2000). Ultimately, I consider how the dogfights serve as an allegory for the state of contemporary society and homosocial relations between men. In this manner, I deliberate on both how the film offers a critique of said relations while at the same time reinforcing class based social hierarchies and stereotypes that cast the male "criminal" from the *colonias* of the city as the cause of present-day social ills. Finally, I will place my discussion of the film in dialogue with the sociological study of Patricia Torres San Martín "Los perros amores de los tapatíos" to better understand how this film dialogues with and inserts itself into visions of various socio-economic sectors and their perception of males, principally of the lower social strata.

According to Frederic Jameson, the dislocation provoked by socio-cultural globalization marks the contemporary subject since the individual finds himself within a constant flow, movements that negate the

possibility of locating / localizing oneself, neither in the past nor the present (Jameson 1991). In other words, the subject exists in an ahistorical space since his (her) reality is limited to a series of fragments of the present. In this manner, history and the connection of the individual with the society that encompasses him (her) disappears. The sociologist Emile Durkheim argues that: "it is only in the course of history that he [man] is formed" (Durkheim 1973, 150). The social constitution of the individual is a process that inserts him within a community whose symbols and rituals are based within the collective history of said society. The individual who does not form part of a community suffers an identity crisis due to his *anomic* state.<sup>27</sup> According to Durkheim, the individual finds himself within a position that lacks social norms. In turn, moral direction is absent as a force that guides ones objectives.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The French sociologist offers us an example of the destructive actions that are the result of *anomie* in *Suicide* (1897). This study examines the structural determinants of society that drive an individual to suicide. Within the sketch of this phenomenon, one of the reasons that an individual would take ones own life is due to the failure of social structure, in other words, suicidal anomie.

<sup>28</sup> In this study, one should understand the "moral" in a Durkheimian sense of the "social."

The changes occurring within social structures and organizations can, at least in part, be attributed to neoliberal policies and their effects on society. These social changes are the result of globalizing forces<sup>29</sup> (migration, the disruption of traditional forms of living, the imposition of neoliberal policies, privatization etc.) that invalidate traditional paradigms (nation, family, religion, ethnic identity, etc) that previously offered the individual a more secure identity referent. According to Mike Featherstone,

The cultural flux associated with the postnational communication of globalization processes means that the search for steady points of reference becomes difficult, making the search for stable tradition, ethnicity, kinship and other identity markers problematic. (132)

In this manner, with the disappearance of solid references that serve to cement the subject's social identity, a

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<sup>29</sup> Globalization is a "dynamic that has economic, political, social and cultural ramifications, implies the intensification of transnational flows of information, commodities, and capital around the globe (eroding technical, political, or legal barriers), the development of new trading blocs, and the strengthening of supranational governing bodies and military powers" (Schugurenski 259).



process of query in search of social definition is embarked upon.

According to Durkheim, social cohesion through social morals fails when the ties between individual and community are truncated. This occurs, on the one hand, when the individual no longer shares the cultural symbols and social rituals of said community. On the other hand, a moral matrix no longer governs the individual's actions when an authority vacuum exists. In accord with the sociologist, social dissolution occurs because traditional social axes (government, religion, labor groups, family) no longer configure the individual's ambitions and desires. In this manner, socio-moral rules no longer restrict the exploits of the subject through their integration / control by the community. Thus, social norms no longer function nor guide the individual's acts. With the disappearance of a social fabric an anomic state arises in which the lack of a moral ethos brings about destructive actions.

In this manner, a unifying social fabric disappears due to the imposition of neoliberal policies that depend upon the market to create economic opportunities for the people of the nation (Franco 2002). The result in many Latin American countries and beyond is that the disparities between social sectors widens. According to the United

Nations Development Programme *Human Development Report* (2005), the gaps that mark the contrasts between social sectors have augmented over the last thirty years. This study highlights that more than eighty percent of the global population finds itself in conditions in which the unequal distribution of goods grows annually. In 1985, Mexico was the second country in Latin America after Chile to implement a neoliberal model of economic reform premised around liberalization, deregulation and privatization. The "reforms" were set into place on the assurance of sustainable growth and improved equity, however the ensuing reality has not fulfilled these promises. Rather what has resulted is a situation in which wealth distribution and income have deteriorated and the labor markets contracted (Pastor, Wise 1997). In the introduction to *Citizens of Fear* (2002) Jorge Balán describes the actual state of many urban enclaves in Latin America:

Latin American cities that provide limited and inefficient public services with an obvious bias favoring the middle class - not necessarily the upper-income groups who have always resorted to the private sector for health, education, and security - are also attempting to balance the budget in the face of a fiscal crisis. Public employment, up to one-third of

the formally employed work force, is under fire. Subsidized public services, even if essential, are reduced or privatized... (3)

In this manner, society feels the pressure of these neoliberal processes. The urban space becomes progressively more fragmented, divided and constructed around zones to which access is limited. Stephen Graham and Marvin Simon in *Splintering Urbanisms* (2001) demonstrate that in the majority of metropolises there exist two urban sectors that are segregated from one another. Between the fortified walls of condominiums and other exclusive communities, individuals have access to water, sewage, electric and communications infrastructure as well as private security and at times medical facilities. At the same time, beyond these secured spaces, the residents face the reality of crumbling or even non-existent infrastructural projects.

*Amores Perros* brings into the purview of the viewer what we might argue is a crisis in the space of the megalopolis, more specifically the Ciudad de México. In the most general sense, cities are "specific forms of social organizations and cultural expression, materially rooted in spatially concentrated human settlements" (Susser 367). On the eve of the twenty-first century approximately seventy-

eight percent of the population of Latin America lived in urban settings. In *Los rituales de caos* (1995) critic Carlos Mosiváis refers to Mexico City as a "posciudad" or a "postapocalyptic" city.

As indicated by Nestor García Canclini, in the introduction to *Reabrir espacios públicos* (2004), the disappearance of a sense of city implies the dissolution of the moral aspect of the city. According to the Argentine critic: "Si no hay ciudad, todo está permitido: contaminar, asaltar..." (15). In this way, what remains of the public space is a zone where "Dios está ausente, donde lo que queda de familia y del Estado-nación no son suficientes para establecer reglas de convivencia" (15). The critic attempts to respond to questions concerning how to construct the public space, cultural politics and citizenship within the megalopolis of the twenty-first century in order to (re)occupy this social vacuum. For Canclini it is necessary to propose "intercultural solutions for everyone" (17). *Amores perros* bridges this same thematic, probing the disappearance of these moral focal points and the resulting socio-cultural consequences. However, unlike the esteemed critic, the film does not promote a reoccupation of the social vacuum that has led to the splintering of the social sphere. Rather, as we

delve into the film, it becomes clear that at the same time that the film maintains a critical relation to contemporary social problems, it also reinforces many of the stereotypes upon which these social woes are in part constructed.

One such point of interrogation and reification is around Mexican masculinities. Understandings of masculinity in Mexico have experienced substantial shifts since the nineteenth century during which period, according to Robert McKee Irwin, homosocial bonding was the foundational trope within literary narratives. Moving into the twentieth century, this epoch was marked by the growing importance of sociological and criminological discourses through which sexing and racializing practices were constructed around prevalent medicalizing discourses. These "scientific" studies were utilized to scrutinize, delineate and exert control over the sites where dominant society located its Other. For example, in 1870, Carl Westphal in his now infamous article *Archiv für Neurologie* (*Archive of Neurology*) set out to define Other sexual sensations, coining the term homosexuality and, with it, medicalizing and bringing into existence the homosexual as a "species." Michel Foucault, in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1976), discusses this categorization arguing that:

The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. (43)

Sex and sexuality were shifted from mere acts to discursive elements and, with this displacement, a multitude of institutional and social control mechanisms were born to create, validate and expand, through discourse, power over the subject.<sup>30</sup> As a result, the homosexual became a definable location of perversion, a "specification of individual" in need of examination, observation and social control. Hegemonic discourse formed its subject, the homosexual and a plethora of other newly categorized sexual "deviants," and in the same gesture delineate the boundaries of normal sexuality / masculinity and exert

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<sup>30</sup> "[P]ower must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formation of the law, in the various social hegemonies" (Foucault 92-3).

discursive power over them.<sup>31</sup> From 1870 onward, the “deviant homosexual” began to inhabit official documents and discourse in the form of medical case histories and clinical analyses that compiled studies of supposed “normal” versus “pathological” behaviors, police reports of illicit social behavior, and a variety of other testaments to the detrimental consequences of homosexuality. Normative society constructed its constitutive Other through which it attempted to demarcate its own sexual boundaries and limitations and consolidate power within a heterosexual matrix.

These binary understandings of masculinity and sexuality infuse the work of authors throughout the twentieth century in Mexico and beyond. Take for example the study of Samuel Ramos *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (1934) or Octavio Paz's canonical *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950). These foundational texts on Mexican masculinities posit particularly the masculine identity of the lower classes within stereotypical ideals that associate masculinity with virility and violence. Although

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<sup>31</sup> The homosexual was categorized with the “Krafft-Ebing's zoophiles and zoerasts, Rohleder's auto-monosexualists; and later mixoscopophiles, gynecomasts, prebyophiles, sexoesthetic inverts, and dyspareunist women” (Foucault 43), as well as the “hysterization” of the feminine body and the “pedagogization” of the child's sex to name only a few others (Foucault 104).

these texts ultimately intend to critique the hypermasculinity that they interrogate for inhibiting the progress of the nation, they also dictate the form of future discussions and understandings of Mexican masculinity.<sup>32</sup> According to Samuel Ramos, the *pelado*, the Mexican male of the lower economic sectors:

Es como un náufrago que se agita en la nada y descubre de improviso una tabla de salvación: la virilidad. La terminología del "pelado" abunda en alusiones sexuales que revelan una obsesión fálica, nacida para considerar el órgano sexual como símbolo de la fuerza masculina. En sus combates verbales atribuye al adversario una femineidad imaginaria, reservando para sí el papel masculino. Con esta actitud pretende afirmar su superioridad sobre el contrincante. (Ramos 52-53)

What these authors delineate is an antiquated concept of masculinity that is founded upon ideals of violence and virility. Relations between men are constructed as adversarial endeavors, competitions of superiority. *Amores*

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<sup>32</sup> For a more in depth discussion of the development of understandings of Mexican masculinities see Robert McKee Irwin's *Mexican Masculinities*, particularly Chapter 3 "Homosexual panic."



*perros* inserts the viewer within the urban space scarred by these rituals of masculine confrontation.

Not only for the protagonists of *Amores perros*, but more generally within contemporary Mexican cinema, the Ciudad de México is an inhospitable territory. Within its streets, physical and psychological violence predominate. According to Álvaro Vergara-Mery:

La producción cinematográfica mexicana en el último tiempo se ha venido centrando y desarrollando la capacidad alienante y desgarradora de la ya monstruosa Ciudad de México como la metrópolis que restringe la condición humana a una existencia atribulada, sorpresiva y llena de complicaciones, violencia e incertidumbre. (169)

The Ciudad de México as an alienating terrain is born out in a wide range of films from the more art-house work of Carlos Reygada's *Batalla en el cielo* (2005) to Fernando Sariñana's blockbuster *Todo el poder* (1999). Within these cinematographic works the city is personified, attributed the role of protagonist in a manner analogous to *Amores perros*. More specifically to Iñárritu's film, the conurbation into which the spectator is introduced refuses the possibility of spatially locating oneself to the individual. Rapid camera movements, shifting locations,

and the absence of distinctive spatial markers combine to immerse the viewer in an over-saturated barrage of disorienting imagery. The film negates traditional reference points associated with the Mexican urban center such as the Zócalo, the Metropolitan Cathedral, Paseo de la Reforma, monuments, national spaces, or historical sites, rather limiting the setting to anonymous metropolitan *colonias*. The urban terrains of the city are constructed as fragmentary spaces that are neither linked to nor form part of a larger national / cultural sphere. According to Rebecca Biron:

[T]he lack of any shared perspective after the fact reinforces both the sense of urban disunity established by the film's frenetic cinematography and the sense that no mastery over urban representation is possible. (81)

*Amores perros* inserts the spectator within the splintering megalopolis of Ciudad de México. The film is organized around three intertwined narratives: *Octavio y Susana*, *Daniel y Valeria* and *El Chivo y Maru*. The stories are linked at the level of plot by a car accident and at the thematic level by social and individual violence, the fragmentation of the social subject, and the dissolution of social norms and cohesion. Although the three primary

narratives of the film intersect, they do not find unity, but rather encounter within a crossroads of conflict. The vignettes of *Octavio y Susana* and *El Chivo y Maru* pulse through the streets of this urban jungle, at once inviting the spectator to and expulsing him (her) from the frenetic pace and disorienting magnitude of the cityscape.

Concomitantly, *Daniel y Valeria*, while somewhat removed or protected from the city's tempo, are unable to escape its wrath. In this manner, the spectator is also, just as the protagonists, unable to locate oneself, continually confronting the fracturing of the space as well as the narrative

In general, *Amores perros* employs a pseudo-documentary style, exploiting filming techniques such as hand held-cameras and following shots. Beyond this, the editing techniques, for example the repetition of the same scene from different angles, elliptical editing, hard cuts, also add to the raw nature and general feel of the filming.

Cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto shot the film on location in Ciudad de México. The cinematographer opted to use Kodak Vision 800T 5289 35mm film stock for *Octavio y Susana* and *El Chivo y Maru* because of the grainier consistency of the results in postproduction (Oppenheimer 2001). This in turn also serves to emphasize the gritty image of the cityscape

that underlies these two narrative-scapes (Appaduri 1996). In postproduction the negative was treated with silver tint, also know as bleach by-pass. This process gives the images high-contrast with deeper blacks and whiter whites, in turn resulting in a harder appearance. According to Prieto "When you do it on the negative, it desaturates certain hues and colors, such as skin tones, but the reds and blues still keep their saturation - in fact, it even enhances those colors" (Oppenheimer, *Dog's* 22). At the same time, the change in film stock is also employed to subtly influence the visual appearance and in turn reading of the film. Unlike the other two stories, *Daniel y Valeria*, was shot on Kodak Vision 250D 5246 and Vision 500T 5279 35mm film stock (Oppenheimer, *Dog's* 24). The cleaner and crisper look of this segment of the film can be attributed in part to the decision to utilize a different film stock. Beyond the use of various film stocks, Prieto also employed a wide variety of lenses, exposures, lighting and cameras to achieve the desired texture; color saturation and general appearance that is both defines and differentiates the three narrative sequences.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the use of lenses, exposures and film stock please consult Jean Oppenheimer's "A Dog's Life" and Paul Julian Smith's "Amores perros."

These filming and editing techniques are employed to insert the viewer into what one could argue are presented as "costumbrista" representations of various socio-economic sectors of Mexican society. According to the director Alejandro González Iñárritu and his cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto, each vignette is constructed around its own visual expression that guides and influences the narrative storyline. The first story, *Octavio y Susana*, utilizes hand-held cameras, exploiting a variety of cinematographic techniques such as hard cuts, tracking and following shots, and elliptical editing to represent the agitated rhythm of the lives of lower class individuals (Shaw 95). The second, *Daniel y Valeria*, attempts to reflect the claustrophobia experienced by the protagonists, and with them much of the upper class, by framing the shots within enclosed spaces: interior rooms, cars, etc. What the spectator notices in the last story, *El Chivo y Maru*, is that the camera distances itself from the protagonists through long shots, in turn visually distancing el Chivo (Emilio Echevarría) from the society that envelops him.

#### *Octavio y Susana*

Ramiro (Marco Pérez) standing behind the cash register grabs the package of diapers, running the barcode across

the checkout scanner. "Buenas tardes. ¿Encontró todo lo que buscaba?" Octavio, feeling emboldened by his newfound prosperity from the dogfights responds: "Sólo me faltó unos condones. Es que no encontré de mi talla." Raising his hands into the air implying that he has a large phallus. The camera in a series of quick shot-counter-shots moves between the two brothers as they exchange words, staring intently at one another...

Ramiro: "¿Qué chingados haces aquí?"

Octavio: "Pues, comprando güey."

Ramiro: "¿De dónde sacaste dinero cabrón?"

Octavio: "Si tú no tienes dinero, yo sí."

Ramiro: "Cávate por el culo güey. Las cosas de mi familia las pago yo." [Pushing Octavio back with the diaper package.]

Octavio: "O me cobras o le hablo al gerente."

[Stepping forward.]

Ramiro: "Pendejo, te doy tres para que te largues de aquí si no quieres que te rompa los huevos."

[Grabs Octavio by the back of the head pulling him close.]

Octavio: "Yo no soy como Susana carbón. Tú a mí me la melas."

As the -s falls off the tip of his tongue he head butts Ramiro sending blood streaming from his nose and spattering across his face. Later that evening, upon returning home from his job, Ramiro finds Octavio in the shower singing. After checking out his nose in the vanity mirror, Ramiro pulls the towel rod from the wall. He proceeds to beat Octavio as he screams from behind the shower curtain.

The story of *Octavio y Susana* recounts the familial tensions between the brothers Octavio and Ramiro. Ramiro, the elder brother, lives in the family's home with his wife Susana (Vanessa Bauche) and their infant son Rodrigo (Edgar González). Although at one time he was respected as one of the tough guys in the neighborhood, he has subsequently succumbed to the demands of daily survival and now works in a supermarket. Although employed, his wages are not sufficient to cover his family's living expenses. Not having enough money to even purchase food, formula and diapers, Ramiro supplements his income by robbing pharmacies. His grand illusion to change his economic position is to pull off a big heist, robbing a bank, with his partner in the near future.

Traditional ideals of masculinity are linked to narratives of human evolution that represent the male as the hunter-provider while the female remains responsible

for the care of the children.<sup>34</sup> While recent studies have placed these historical narratives into question, these ideas are reconstructed within traditional familial structures in which the male figure functions as the head-of-household / breadwinner for the family.<sup>35</sup> These views of masculinity and the role of male within the familial structure form the base of the conflict between Octavio and Ramiro. Their animosity towards one another is expressed as a threat to the other's self-definition as a man based on these terms. The tension inherent in their dispute grows as they challenge one another in terms of virility, economic capability and violence.

Throughout the film, Ramiro attempts to establish and maintain his position of power through violence. This is established at the outset of the film when he chastises Susana for getting bleach spots on his work uniform and for letting Cofi, their large Rottweiler, escape from the house. Octavio diffuses the immediate exchange, taking the blame for Cofi's flight. However, later in the afternoon,

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<sup>34</sup> One obvious example where this scene is played out again and again is in the many dioramas at the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City, Mexico; the Museu Histórico Nacional in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; or the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC, United States.

<sup>35</sup> Please consult Marina Castañeda's *El machismo invisible regresa* (2007) and her discussion of "Hombres cazadores, mujeres amas de casa" for a more in depth discussion of these historical



once Ramiro has left to work, we learn that it was not so much diffused as deferred. Susana appears in Octavio's bedroom wanting to thank him for taking the blame. The lobe of her right ear is bleeding because Ramiro has ripped out her earring. In this sense, it could be argued that Ramiro conforms to an essentialist definition of machismo. He adheres to an interpretation of the male sex role that defines itself through the domination of women. According to Marina Castañeda:

Una definición de la hombría que los jóvenes de nuestra era, en muchas sociedades, comparten con sus padres, sus abuelos y sus bisabuelos, es su necesidad de dominar a las mujeres para demostrar su masculinidad. El sometimiento de la mujer sigue siendo prueba de virilidad. (43)

Within this construction, masculinity is premised upon power relations that are defined vis-à-vis sex. The male constructs his identity through his domination of the female sex. The relationship between Ramiro and Susana is mired in physical violence, and the performance of stereotypical gender roles that are reinforced through age differences. Within each nodule of power, Ramiro exerts control over Susana. In this manner, Ramiro replaces what is implied as his previous dominant position within the

neighborhood with a parallel standing within the family. This leads to the abuse of the people over whom he exerts control, in other words Susana, his mother, and to varying degrees Octavio. In an attempt to bolster his male ego, he responds to any and all conflict with violence.

Octavio has grown up in the shadow of his elder brother. Within the neighborhood he maintains a caché of power because of his brother's reputation. At the same time this also elicits the ire of Jarocho who has subsequently assumed Ramiro's former position but is still intimidated by him.

Octavio is infatuated with his brother's wife, Susana and has now become obsessed with the idea of stealing her from Ramiro and leaving with her. Octavio has constructed a utopian fantasy around the possibility of escaping from the urban center to Juarez, a liminal zone that promises the opportunity of constructing a "new beginning" (Hind 2004). Octavio discovers in the dogfights a source of income, what he considers to be the barrier between himself and this fictitious promise land. He believes that with the acquisition of material wealth, he will be able to also acquire Susana.

The cinematographic sequence of *Octavio y Susana* is characterized by the use of a fragmented and agitated

filming style. The editing and filming are constructed through the use of intercalated montages that interchange through hard cuts underlined with constant tension, at times to the point of disorienting the viewer and refusing them the possibility of visual reprieve. The constant movement of the camera, along with other filming and editing techniques, reflects the precarious position of the lower classes and the lack of social and economic security that they find themselves in. One could argue that neo-liberal policies, imposed by the expansion of a global economy, could be one of multiple causes of this insecurity. The neo-liberal model has dismantled social systems that traditionally guaranteed citizenship, such as social security, education and public healthcare. These changes have disproportionately affected the lower classes, further destabilizing their precarious socio-economic position.

The story of "Octavio y Susana" reveals a familial situation in which the relationships between core family members (mother-son, mother-father, father-son, brother-brother) are either altogether absent, as is the case of the father, or premised upon violence. Traditionally, it could be argued, the home and family offer a degree of reprieve from the chaotic space of the street, the urban

center. In this sense, the family is thought of as offering a controlled, structured, defined arena. Canclini characterizes the role of the family as "contenedor cuya capacidad [es] de producir sujetos y asignarles roles precisos como padres, madres, e hijos" (Canclini 2004, 14). This being said, the individuals the viewer encounters in *Amores perros* are mere sarcophaguses, the remnants of a rotted familial organizational structure. The tensions that guide the encounters between family members are perversions of antiquated social roles. Within this abandoned space violence becomes the language of exchange within the (dis)order. What proliferates is uninhibited individualism. In this manner, the familiar space is constructed as an extension of the street. The lack of affective ties truncates communication between family members.

One such example is the representation of parental figures within the familial structure. While the father is absent in both the case of Ramiro and Octavio as well as Susana, the mother is constructed as a problematic figure that assumes an ambiguous rendition of the mother's traditional familial role. On the one hand, the mother rejects essentialist ideals of motherly spirit: caring, nurturing, and promoting familial cohesion and social

bonds. At the same time, she also assumes certain traditional roles assigned to the mother. As the mother, she cooks, cleans and "cares" for her two sons. This being said, she also undermines this function by continually fighting with her children over questions of money, relationships, etc. In many ways, the mother figure exemplifies the fracturing of the familial unit and its reconstruction within an anomic structuring. Throughout the entirety of the film both mothers remain unnamed except for one exception. Octavio and Ramiro's mother, in the last scene in which she appears mourning the death of her son at the funeral, is referred to as Doña Concha (Adrianna Barraza) by an elderly gentleman offering his condolences for the loss. It is important because the mothers are denied subjectivity throughout movie. Rather, they guarantee that women remain in an inferior position to men by repeating and enforcing the machist discourse of the male protagonists. Susana's mother (Dunia Saldívar), similar to Doña Concha, remains unnamed throughout the film. In the few scenes in which she does appear, she is either in an inebriated state (when she babysits Rodrigo) or silent (at the funeral of Ramiro). Both mothers assure that this cycle of female subjugation continues.

Susana, the next generation of mother / wife / female,

is both forced into and recreates the discourse of submission. Her relations to the other mother figures are antagonistic. Susana is still finishing her high school studies, however, the demands of juggling both school and the upbringing of Rodrigo prove quite taxing. Economically, Ramiro and Susana are unable to provide for their child. Due to this, childcare would be a luxury that is beyond the scope of Susana's economic possibilities. For this reason, she is forced to rely on the assistance of the child's grandmothers. However, her own mother proves unfit to take care of Rodrigo due to her alcoholism. Doña Concha, on the other hand, is not willing to take care of the child. When Susana asks if she could care for the toddler for another week so that she can figure out what to do with the child while she is at school, Doña Concha retorts "Yo ya cuidé a mis hijos, ahora tú cuida el tuyo." Doña Concha essentially serves as a continual disturbance to the other characters. Susana promises to repeat the viscous cycle. Through the story she remains with Ramiro who both physically and mentally abuses her. However, not only does she continue within this abusive relationship, but also, upon his death, she decides to name her unborn child Ramiro. Metaphorically the perpetuation of a legacy of abuse is established and the female character is locked

within this vicious cycle at the same time suffering from and upholding said attitudes.

The brother's relations are developed around competition. The love triangle that forms between Ramiro, Octavio and Susana does not follow the ideas developed by Eve Sedgwick, where the female serves as a surrogate of erotic desire and as such cements a bond between men. Rather, what is enacted is a reworking of brotherly competition more in the lines of Borges' "La intrusa." In the short story, the female character ruptures a brotherly bond that previous to her "intrusion" was very close in which the brothers looked to one another for support. In *Amores perros*, the bond between brothers proves completely absent from the narrative. Rather, individualism consumes each brother as they attempt to attain the goods of the other. In the case of Ramiro and Octavio, Octavio lusts after Ramiro's wife, while Ramiro wants to force Octavio to split the winnings of the dog fights.

The only other example of brothers interacting is the relation between Gustavo and Luis that forms part of the story "El Chivo y Maru." The two are half-brothers. Gustavo hires El Chivo to assassinate Luis due to supposed incorrect business practices. Gustavo supposedly feels that his brother is taking advantage of him financially and

so decides that he will have him killed so that he does not jeopardize his personal earnings. Their relationship parallels that of Ramiro and Octavio, although it is within the upper class. What we encounter are relations between men, ruptured by and guided exclusively through individual interests and desires. Returning to the ideas of Durkheim, social cohesion through social morals fails when the ties between individual and community are truncated. The brothers no longer share cultural symbols or social rituals, but rather have supplanted them with unbridled consumptive desire. In this manner, traditional social axes cease to configure their individual ambitions and desires. In turn, an anomic state arises in which each is concerned with individual consumptive abilities rather than community good or cooperation.

In the few scenes that develop around what purport to be affective bonds between individuals, these relationships are in turn ruptured, negated or truncated by the filming techniques. Let us consider, for example, the love scene between Octavio and Susana. Firstly, as Paul Julian Smith signals, individuals who enter and exit the scene, the soundtrack and the filming techniques fragment all the amorous scenes in the film (44). In the first sequences in which the spectator discovers Octavio's sentiments for



Susana, the two are seated on Octavio's bed watching television. However, the mother bursts into the room and orders the young woman to care for her child. Upon her leaving, the mother admonishes Octavio "Ya sabes que a Ramiro no le gusta que Susana esté en tu cuarto ni a mi tampoco." The mother attempts to establish her power as head of the family, but her son barely acknowledges her. On their next encounter, Octavio and Susana begin to touch one another, however, this time the baby begins to cry, truncating the encounter. These interruptions temporally fragment the narrative and impede a cohesive development of their relationship.

The most significant of the Octavio and Susana scenes is when they consummate their "relationship" for one another in the family bathroom. This is the point of culmination of a series of images that are interwoven: the dogfights, Susana and Octavio counting and hiding the loot they have won from the dogfights, Octavio's newfound power of acquisition when he purchases a car, Ramiro in the storage room of the supermarket with his lover. This puzzle of images is accompanied by the aggressive music of the rap group Control Machete's "Si señor." The chorus of the song repeats over a strong driving beat "Sí señor, sí señor / viento, caricias, levedad y sabor / Sí señor, sí

señor / fuego, sonrisas, realidad y dolor." The words are interwoven with the temporality of the caresses, the moments of dreamy possibility, and the pain caused by reimposition of hard reality. This visual orgy that assaults the spectator, finally ends with the focus centering in on two simultaneously occurring events that are crosscut: Octavio and Susana in the bathroom and Ramiro as he leaves his job at the supermarket for the day. While the camera shifts between these interchanging lines of action, the soundtrack plays the acoustic rhythms of Nacha Pop's "Lucha de gigantes." A melodic voice accompanies the guitar "Me da miedo la inmensidad donde nadie oye mi voz... monstruo de papel / no sé contra quien voy." As the rhythm and melodies maintain a subtle tranquility, the camera begins to stabilize and the crosscuts become less agitated. A degree of linearity returns to the two scenes as the frequency of the cuts decreases as compared to the previous scenes. This structure emphasizes the simultaneous nature of the two temporal events.

In the bathroom, during the sexual encounter of Octavio and Susana, the camera focuses repeatedly on Octavio's face as he stares at the mirror while searching for ecstasy as he and Susana have sex on the sink. This is crosscut with the moment when Ramiro is beaten by Gordo's

henchmen. The camera work creates a triangle or web of desire that links Octavio, Susana and Ramiro. The juxtaposition of scenes as previously mentioned reaches its climax at the moment that Octavio achieves ecstasy. The camera cuts between Octavio's face reflected in the mirror, Susana's and finally Ramiro as he lies on the ground and blood streams from his face. This series of crosscut scenes melds violence and ecstasy, pleasure and pain, as the two become interdependent. Within this scene, the cracked mirror that reflects Octavio's face as he and Susana have sex on the clothes washer, visually fragments the person and calls attention to the divisive results of violence and betrayal.

### *Daniel y Valeria*

The second history of the trilogy, *Daniel y Valeria*, inserts the viewer into the life of the upper classes. Daniel (Alvaro Guerrero) works as an editor / publicist of the magazine *Live Show*. We are introduced to the character at the moment he has decided to leave his wife Julieta (Laura Almela) and children to be with his lover Valeria (Goya Toledo). For her part, Valeria is a successful model for the perfume company Enchant, but her career is truncated due to a car accident with Octavio. The scenes

from this segment occur primarily in closed spaces such as cars, apartments, and the hospital. Beyond this, the few scenes that transpire outdoors maintain the controlled nature of the indoor arenas where much of the action occurs in the *Octavio y Susana* vignette, for example the secured parking area of the TV station where Valeria and Andrés Salgado (Ricardo Damacci) encounter one another. Within these walled spaces, the camera sheds the frenetic pace and movements of the earlier story, opting rather for a more stable filmic style with relatively medium shots and longer sequences. Additionally, the hard lighting and color contrasts achieved through the negative's treatment with silver tint in the other two stories are not employed in the story of Daniel and Valeria. Therefore, the images are lighter in color and tone, the lighting is softer, and the overall hard contrasts are shed.

The critic Juan Poblete contends that this change in visual style emphasizes the superficiality of the petite bourgeoisie that has grown due to neo-liberal policies. According to the Chilean critic:

[T]he suave and calculated images of Valeria and Daniel reveal their deeply disturbing ugliness beneath the superficial, commodified beauty. This central episode is lighter than the other two in terms of

illumination and melodrama. In dealing with the bourgeoisie, this contrast in color and tone creates a dialectical relation to the darker realities of the other social actors. Fetishistic beauty (fetishized by both the camera and the publicity discourse) is shown to be weak and internally corrupted and corrupting (218).

For the critic, the second history is the key to understanding how the film criticizes the petite bourgeoisie, neo-liberal policies, their effects at the national level and the government more generally.

While I believe that Poblete signals a very significant point in relation to the film and its political commentaries of the government, I would argue that the vignette of Daniel and Valeria also serves to question middle and upper class masculine identity. Let us consider how the film constructs middle class masculinity and the cultural discourses that it is interrogating. Returning to Angel Ramos' description of the *pelado* that I discussed in the previous section, one can juxtapose it to what Ramos terms the "civilized" elements that are associated with the European male.

Cuando [el pelado] se compara con el hombre civilizado extranjero y resalta su nulidad, se consuela del

siguiente modo: "Un europeo—dice—tiene la ciencia, el arte, la técnica, etc., etc.,; aquí no tenemos nada de esto, pero somos muy hombres." Hombres en la acepción zoológica de la palabra, es decir, un macho disfruta de toda la potencia animal. (55-56)

Ramos in his comparison between the *pelado* and the *extranjero* reconstructs a binary understanding of Mexican masculine identity. This identity is constructed around Maniquean understandings of Mexican masculinity: violence vs. culture / Mexican vs. European. On the one hand, the Mexican *pelado*, typically from the lower classes, represents a symbolic hyper masculinity that is linked to aggression and an inherent machist attitude. On the other hand the European, symbolizing high culture and refinement, is feminized. We find parallels to this symbolic ordering of masculinity in *Amores perros*, although the representation of this dichotomy is ambivalent, reconstructing it while at the same time posing the possibility that violence is part of a masculine identity more generally. While Daniel is not European, we do find congruencies between the "civilized" representation of the European and the protagonist. Daniel forms part of the world of high fashion since he works in the fashion / celebrity magazine *Live Show*. This affords him an

economical means that is higher than that of the other characters of the film and at the same time endows him with a caché of sophistication. Daniel is able to brush elbows with the stars, date a model, maintain a modern loft style apartment and at the same time provide financially for his family. Additionally, his wife Valeria is Spanish. Although this does not transform him into a European subject, it does further distance him from a "Mexican" identity. At the same time, it endows him with a degree of "European" flair, if only through the association of violent mannerisms that are continually juxtaposed to Valeria's evoking of a similar aggression. He is the most passive of the male characters physically that appear in the movie. This is also emphasized through the focus of the camera in this segment. One could argue that in stereotypical terms the cinematography in this section is "feminized," both through the slower more contemplative camera work, as well as the fact that Valeria is the subject of the majority of the narrative time-space. Additionally, if we are operating in stereotypical understandings of gender norms, this section revolves around the emotional tensions of the relationship between Daniel and Valeria. The action that infused the story of Octavio and Susana is shed in this second triptych, marking

the shift from a "man of action" to a "man of words," or in the case of Daniel, images. This being said, violence infuses the construction of Daniel's masculine identity and serves as a reactionary tool to the women who are part of his life.

The private space of the home is also invaded by violence and fragmentation in the history of *Daniel and Valeria*. In the first scenes of *Amores perros*, Daniel still lives with Julieta. The audience's first encounter with Daniel is within the confined space of the family automobile. The scene is framed by the edge of the windshield housing. His two daughters are in the back of the car fighting. The couple stares out their respective sides of the car windows without exchanging a word. As the camera traces the sight line of Daniel, we encounter his stare fixated on a seductive ad of the perfume Enchant in which Valeria is the model. Within this scene Valeria is constructed as a consumable product, the new perfume, the new women that Daniel so desires. The city and its goods translate into something that is available for monetary acquisition. While the spectator's initial encounter with Daniel is not fraught with physical violence, monetary and emotional domestic power predominate.



Once Daniel has left his family, he begins his new life with Valeria. In general, the spaces through which we accompany Daniel and Valeria are closed spaces that are divided from the street. Their apartment, the hospital, or even the TV station and its walled parking area are represented as secured but claustrophobic divided spaces to which only specific individuals have access. At the same time, these supposedly protected venues rapidly shift from secure spaces to hostile terrains. For example, the aseptic condominium where Daniel and Valeria live is initially a refuge from the outside world, their opportunity to construct the dreamed relationship. However, this dreamscape soon degenerates into a nightmare in which the actual space is transformed into threat. On the day of the big surprise of the new apartment when Valeria arrived, as she walked down the corridor towards the living area to give Daniel a hug, her foot pierced through the floorboards, almost throwing her to the ground. According to Daniel, he had the money to purchase the unit, but not to fix it. Soon after returning from the hospital, after her accident, Valeria is playing fetch with Richie, their small Maltese / Shih Tzu breed. She tosses the ball and it goes down between the floorboards. Richie follows, however he does not reemerge. Over the subsequent days /

weeks, the dog is trapped beneath the floorboards of the loft, scampering between the floor joists seeking refuge from the rats that inhabit this in between space. The home, just as the street, is transformed into an inhospitable, threatening terrain, refusing to the inhabitants the possibility of completely protected isolation. Rather, from within, the decay begins to infuse these sheltered arenas, posing a subtle threat to the stability of these supposedly secure spaces and compelling recognition that these arenas are not necessarily as safe as they are meant to appear.

In part, the identity of the middle-upper classes is constructed around their access to consumable products that serve to differentiate them from the lower classes. These groups have access to the privileged spaces of the city. In other words, the metropolis is organized at the level of planning and architecture to guarantee and limit movement and access to determinate regions. According to Mike Davis in *City of Quartz* (1990), "In cities like Los Angeles... one observes an unprecedented tendency to merge urban design, architecture and the police apparatus into a single, comprehensive security effort" (224). However, the security that is guaranteed is the security of the groups that can pay to maintain their access to these benefits.

In this way, what one encounters is a series of spaces that are divided without virtually any points of commonality or contact, urban islands separated by walls. The Brazilian anthropologist Teresa Caldeira has signaled a similar phenomenon in São Paulo, Brazil. According to her:

[R]ecent transformations are generating spaces in which different social groups are again closer to one another but are separated by walls and technologies of security, and they tend not to circulate or interact in common areas. (213)

In this manner, the city is transformed into a labyrinth through which the inhabitants must move. Within the urban enclave, democratic spaces such as parks and plazas have virtually disappeared. In the film, with the disappearance of shared venues, what the film represents is the violence that marks encounters between different socio-economic sectors. What is denied are points of exchange / of commonality / communal spaces.

Visually, in the film, one of the few times that we see Daniel or Valeria leave the protected confines of their home or work environment is when Valeria is driving just moments before the accident. The camera uses the passenger car window to frame the scene, at the same time visually dividing Valeria from the street, and in turn

reproducing her auto-isolation from the world that envelops her. She also does not relate to or form part of the city. The film establishes a division not only visually, but also through the soundtrack. The chorus of Titán's feel good debut track *Corazón* repeats incessantly in the background to a naïve dance pop rhythm "Corazón / mi corazón."

Valeria appears to be lost in a schoolgirl daydream as she drives down the road unconscious of the social, political or economic ambit that envelops her and composes the cityscape. The film cuts to a crane shot that locates Valeria spatially as part of the street, and it is at this exact moment that the stories collide as her automobile and that of Octavio crash into one another revealing the impossibility of isolation and the encounter of social classes as violent.

Now let us return for a moment to discuss the epigraph of this work.

[Society] It is a complex of ideas and sentiments, of ways of seeing and of feeling, a certain intellectual and moral framework distinctive of the entire group. Society is above all a consciousness of the whole.

(Durkheim, *Moral* 277)

*Amores perros* reveals the loss of a shared social conscience. In the film, society atomizes to the point

that the individual is no longer able to integrate socially. According to Durkheim, the increase in population density in a metropolis brings with it a division of labor in which each individual becomes more and more specialized. In turn, an "organic" interdependence develops that also promotes a growth in the solidarity between individuals. Contrary to the idea of Durkheim, the film reveals the fragmentation that occurs due to overpopulation of the megalopolis, a lack of a sense of citizenship and in turn the dissolution of a unifying social fabric.

### *El Chivo y Maru*

The third and final narrative, titled *El Chivo y Maru*, tells the story of el Chivo who left his wife and newborn daughter, Maru (Lourdes Echevaría), to join the revolutionary movement in the 1970's in Mexico. He was subsequently captured and jailed for twenty years. Since the time of his arrest, his daughter has been led to believe that he is dead. In other words, el Chivo formed part of the resistance movement in the sixties and seventies in Mexico. Through his disappearance he was figuratively disappeared as part of the war of the state against resistant factions. During this time period, as

part of the "dirty war" in Mexico, the state captured and disappeared under duress many individuals who were opposed to the government. While el Chivo is eventually released from prison, he abandons legitimate society, rather, taking to the streets and surviving as a vagabond on the waste of contemporary society. His interactions with society are limited almost exclusively to tenuous exchanges with the detective Leonardo (José Sefami), which occur within the liminal geo-social sectors of the urbe. El Chivo is to a degree animalized in his representation since initially he lacks any semblance of personal hygiene and his relationships are limited almost exclusively to the dogs that he rescues from the streets, in a sense forming part of the pack, the alpha dog of the group.

El Chivo has assimilated a "dog eat dog" worldview, juxtaposed to his revolutionary ideals of attacking consumerism and neoliberal policies by placing a bomb in an upscale shopping mall as a form of resistance to government policy. Rather, he has integrated himself into a neoliberal logic in which the individual is converted into yet another consumable product, a reflection of his / her monetary value. El Chivo is a contract killer, hired by the police and the petite bourgeoisie of the city. In this sense he is at once on the edges of society and at the same

time the end product of the consumer logic that dominates the metropolitan ambit in *Amores perros*. His social distance is emphasized in the visual construction of the scenes.

The visual representations of the scenes of the "El Chivo y Maru" segment of the film are marked by camera distance. The shots move between crane and medium / long shots. These techniques help to emphasize the isolation of el Chivo from society. According to Deborah Shaw in her article "The figure of the absent father in recent Latin American films:"

The film is primarily interested in indicating to the audience that El Chivo has made the wrong choices, a message that is conveyed principally through characterization and plot: he is seen to be living in squalor, he is an amoral killer, and cannot begin to be redeemed until he attempts to become the father he was before he joined the revolutionary group. (97)

For Shaw, the absent father is the central focal that unites the histories of the film. According to her, present day Mexican cinema reveals the absence of a central patriarchal figure that organizes society and in turn, society, the state and the family find themselves in crisis.

Contrary to Shaw's reading of the film, according to film critic B. Ruby Rich: "[T]he theme of family, imprisoning in the first and abandoned in the second, returns for a third time to signify refuge and rebirth" (34). Can one read this film as an allegory of salvation? Are the final scenes of the film a rebirth of el Chivo, a story of redemption in which el Chivo is in some sense saved? I do not believe so. Rather, I would argue that it is the assimilation of this individual into a neoliberal logic in which any semblance of a social or community ethos disappears. In this sense el Chivo is the most tragic of the characters because we are witness to his one hundred and eighty degree shift from the utopian revolutionary dedicated to the possibility of an egalitarian social ideal to his current state in which he is an anomic figure that represents the contemporary social order.

My reading of the film parallels much more closely that of Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado who argues that far from salvation, the history of "el Chivo y Maru" serves to reconstruct the figure of the revolutionary and with him/her any individual who opposes neoliberal policies. According to the critic:

La historia del chivo no sólo transmite el fracaso del discurso utópico y revolucionario de la generación de



los 60, sino que en más de un sentido alegoriza las interpretaciones que la 'ciudadanía del miedo' de la burguesía capitalina incorpora a su imaginario.

(online)

The film, according to Sánchez Prado ultimately promotes a conservative agenda that reaffirms the status quo in terms of the politics of the Mexican state. Beyond the failure of the 1960's revolutionary ideals, I would contend that the film implies the bankruptcy of and impossibility of invoking said ideals within contemporary society in which the assimilation to a neoliberal model has become all encompassing.

This is apparent on various levels in relation to the story of "el Chivo y Maru." Firstly, the state is virtually absent from the entirety of the film with one exception. The only official representative of the Mexican state, detective Leonardo, is a public servant of the Secretaria de Seguridad Publica del Distrito Federal whose mission according to the official web page of the department is:

Mantener el orden público; proteger la integridad física de las personas y de sus bienes; prevenir la comisión de delitos e infracciones a los reglamentos del gobierno y de la policía y auxiliar a la población

en caso de siniestros o desastres. (Secretaría de Seguridad Pública, Policía DF)

However, detective Leonardo undermines the very ethos of the law enforcement agency because he does not assume the professed professional responsibilities associated with state security and his position. Rather, Leonardo adopts a market-oriented posture in relation to his position. This is to say that he transforms his post into one governed not by ideas of "mantener, proteger, prevenir y auxiliar," but rather inserts his actions into the flow of capital in the form of the commodification and exchange of human bodies. In this way, the film renders public institutions and a communitarian ethos of the collective good void and invisible. What is left is the skeleton of a system in decadence that has been replaced by market-oriented forces at all levels. Let us consider the example of Gustavo Garfias (Rodrigo Murria) and Luis Miranda Solares (Jorge Salinas) the brothers that I had previously mentioned.

Beyond Daniel and Valeria, the half-brothers Gustavo and Luis are the only other characters of significance who belong to the moneyed classes. Gustavo hires el Chivo to assassinate his half-brother and business partner Luis. According to Gustavo, he must take this extreme measure because his brother Luis has been stealing from him.

Gustavo accompanies detective Leonardo to el Chivo's home. It is interesting that the only semblance of community is the one that exists between el Chivo and his pack of K-9s. Gustavo brings tortas for the pack, within which there exists a communitarian bond. However, the objective of the visit is the fracturing of bonds, principally the one that exists between the two brothers. Gustavo only describes Luis as a *socio* and claims "me está transando." The veil of interest in the reasons for the killing are abandoned quickly as the essence of the interchange is reached: "Y cómo va a ser el negocio?" The monetary negotiations are the focal for all involved parties, Luis' body / life are translated into a monetary quantity and reduced to its exchange value.

The shift of socio-economic and political organization to a neoliberal model that underscores the supremacy of the market, the supposed elimination of the state intervention (although this could be called into question if we look at how state intervention is reconfigured rather than eliminated, particularly when we consider state policies towards films), and a move away from a more socialist agenda finds its parallel within social relations in a shift from a community oriented ethos to one that emphasizes the individual. This analogy and shift in

Mexican society is underscored when el Chivo tells Luis: "Acuerda que todo dueño se parece a su perro." While at first this appears to only be a standard saying, if we consider the circumstances of el Chivo's shift in socio-political orientation as well as the fact that Cofi killed the rest of the dog pack with which el Chivo had resided, being the only remaining dog, the analogy is clearly underscoring that it is the individual that matters at the cost of the social.

From these scenes, we are able to comprehend the impossibility of upper classes isolating themselves from the rest of the populous in a pharisaical world constructed within walled fortresses and premised on the division of the urban space. However, the violence that marks encounters between classes and the construction of masculinity within the film leaves the viewer with a question: if the film allegorizes the "citizenship of fear" of the middle and upper classes, then to what degree have these narratives become self-fulfilling prophecies, readymade social organizers that are ultimately the fulfillment of a self-inflicted prophecy of the ruling elites?

To begin to respond to this, we must recognize that the film refuses the possibility of locating violence as

solely the hubris of the lower classes afflicting the upper echelons of society, although the film does focus much more upon violence within the proletariat class. Rather, through the figures of Gustavo and Luis what is revealed is how the male subject of the moneyed classes is responsible, to varying degrees, for the violence that is perpetrated, although these occurrences are cast as actions of the lower classes. This is revealed when Gustavo hires el Chivo, he requests that: "Que parezca que fue un robo. Sin gente, sin líos." His objective is to distance himself from the murder of Luis, using poverty to cover up the heinous actions.

The film ends with Cofi and the Chivo abandoning the urban space, crossing a burnt and blackened territory with what could possibly be a town in the background. *Amores perros* reveals the fragmentation of society within the megalopolis. Beyond simply repeating the tragedies and fears that are broadcast daily within the news outlets, the film contemplates the effects of a society whose social fabric is in crisis, one in which masculinity and the male subject are the primary actors. *Amores perros* reflects upon the resulting social disintegration within the territory of the megalopolis provoked by the imposition of neoliberal policies and a shift to an individualist society

that is governed by the ideals of consumption. Within the resulting anomic state, everyone is guilty and no one can isolate themselves from its repercussions.

Patricia Torres San Martín, in her sociological study "Los perros amores de los tapatíos" interviewed individuals from Guadalajara to begin to create a composite of the responses of a variety of Mexicans from varying social classes and age groups. According to the researcher:

A la gran mayoría del público le gustó la película. Los pocos a los que nos les gustó (cuyo disgusto se fue haciendo evidente por la manera en que se refirieron a los personajes de Octavio y El Chivo), fueron a las personas que se entrevistó en las plazas públicas del Centro y las colonias populares. Sus respuestas estaban muy vinculadas con sentimientos de enojo e incomodidad, indicadores de rechazo por lo cercano del tema y la construcción simbólica de los dos héroes de la cinta, Octavio y El Chivo: "Me gustó por su contraste social y la triste impresión que te deja el final de los chavos" (Iván, 18 años, con escolaridad hasta primaria, clase baja), "no me gustó la película porque es un drama muy sádico". "La película no habla de amor, es la historia de un psicópata [El Chivo], aunque Octavio entra en sangre

liviana por el amor, pero al final pierde todo, es muy triste" (Jaime Ernesto, 29 años, estudia primer año de Artes Plásticas, clase baja), "la película me dio asco" (Jorge, 20 años, con escolaridad hasta secundaria, clase baja), "no me gustó porque siempre ponen a México muy abajo" (sin nombre, 22 años, estudia licenciatura, clase baja), "la verdad, no le entendí muy bien, pero me gustó. Aunque ahí tú ves que no debes amar a una mujer casada" (Juan Pablo, 19 años, estudios hasta preparatoria, clase media-baja).

En cambio, las personas de clase media tomaron su distancia con la historia: "Me gustó mucho porque es la cruda realidad de México, pero sobre todo la de los barrios bajos, los chavos que engañan a sus mujeres, que se drogan, que roban" (Adriana, 20 años, estudia licenciatura en Comunicación en el ITESO), "me gustó mucho porque refleja la cultura de la pobreza" (Claudia Edith, 20 años, estudiante de licenciatura, clase media). Estas respuestas nos refieren a un mito muy arraigado sobre los "pobres salvajes marginados", "las parias de la sociedad", pero más representativo es aún referirse a esta cruda realidad como "la cultura de la pobreza".

As we can glean from this brief summary of her findings, the middle classes found *Amores perros* to be a direct reflection of the "reality" that they believe to exist within and between individuals who comprise the lower economic echelons of society. At the same time, the lower socio-economic sectors felt that this film simply repeated a reoccurring representation that is so prevalent within mediatic discourses. It is curious that the violence of the upper classes remains virtually absent from these discussions. Ultimately, Añárritu's box office blockbuster allegorizes the state of contemporary society and homosocial relations between men within the symbolic ring of the dog fight. The film offers both a critique of said relations while at the same time falling into stereotypes that reinforce class based social hierarchies and cast the male "criminal" from the *colonias* of the city as the cause of present-day social ills. In this sense the spectator encounters an ambivalent movement within the film that meditates on social disintegration and the (in)definition of the contemporary male subject within the territory of the modern megalopolis.



### Chapter III

#### Disjunctive Urbanisms:

##### Exclusion, Fear and Rites of Passage in *La Zona*

In April of 2008 André Gardenberg's photographic exposition *Arquitetura do medo* opened at the *Centro Cultural de Correios* in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. According to the artist's statement, the inspiration for the pictures came from the inexorable transformation he witnessed in Brazil's contemporary cityscape. Gardenberg observes that:

A mudança na arquitetura das cidades brasileiras, devido ao crescimento da violência nos grandes centros urbanos é visível em cada rua, cada esquina.

Prédios e residências protegidos por seguranças fortemente armados, cercados com grades cada vez mais intransponíveis, elétricas e eletrônicas, com redes de circuito interno também cada vez mais sofisticados, nos coloca diante de um dilema... Quem é o verdadeiro algoz? Quem é a verdadeira vítima? (Gardenberg Web)

*Arquitetura do medo* inserts the viewer into an urban landscape scarred by fear and transformed both visibly and socio-symbolically by this sentiment. Gardenberg's metropolitan snapshots reveal how the city's planning and architecture increasingly respond to a fractured public

space. While there is a propagation of structures that signal partition, these images also reverberate with the questions of who must remain outside? And who is kept inside the "protective" walls? Ultimately, as Gardenberg suggests, the divisions we witness in the shots insinuate the ambivalence of violence in contemporary Latin American conurbations. We must ask ourselves (paraphrasing Gardenberg): who are the victimizers and who are the victims in these scenarios of fear? Or, in other words, who are the *homo sacer* of contemporary society?

Beyond illustrating urban rupture, the photographs also highlight how the volatile public ambit has been abandoned in favor of privatized - or private spaces. Accordingly, many images from the series focus on objects that signify both fear and a longing for security (bars, fences, razor wire, walls and security cameras), visually portioning the foreground, and, as a consequence, metaphorically denying the viewer entrance to the "protected" spaces that lie beyond the safeguards depicted in the images (homes, people, products, or simply landscapes).



(Image published in André Gardenberg's Arquitetura Do Medo = Architecture of Fear.)

Of the many images from this exposition, I would like to pause for a moment to consider the photo displayed here. Two eyes at once fearful and vigilant peer out from behind a wooden structure. The makeshift assemblage evokes the shape and feel of a guillotine, as if the blade had just fallen and severed the rock in the foreground from the body. A leery canine gaze, apprehensive of the photographer, the viewer, or whatever lies beyond the gate, tracks each motion beyond the enclosure. This photograph encapsulates several phenomenon that are transforming Latin

America's urban terrains: it represents the fear that contaminates said spaces, the protective mechanisms put in place to ward off the causes of this anxiety (fences, security apparatuses, and criminality respectively), and the - at times hostile - separation between public and private domains. As indicated by critics such as Susan Rotker, Carlos Monsivais, Néstor García Canclini and Jesús Martín Barbero, the culture of fear that permeates many of Latin America's *urbes* has eroded the notion of the polis. As a result, increasingly, the individual has retracted from what were once the more democratic public spaces of the street, plaza, metro, and public markets into the exclusive arenas of gated communities, private cars, and de facto restricted shopping malls, spaces which are many times hidden behind bulletproof windows, fortified walls and surveillance systems (Caldeira 2000). Paradigmatic of this trend from public into private *Lebenswelt* are the gated neighborhoods that proliferate in Brazil, Argentina and Mexico, as well as other Latin American countries. These enclaves "sell" the promise of safety in a sanitized - and relatively homogenous environment. Hence for example, in the article *Seguridad, un factor decisivo* that was recently published in the supplemental section "Countries" in *La Nación* (Buenos Aires, Argentina January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2010),

the readers are offered a checklist to ensure the "security" of their "country." A few of the more salient points are:

- Se debe disponer de un pasillo entre el lote y el perímetro para que la guardia pueda hacer sus rondas.
- Revisar periódicamente las alarmas.
- Llevar una base de datos de empleados y personal de servicio.
- Es fundamental asesorarse sobre la empresa de vigilancia que se haya contratado y sus empleados.

(Francese web)

As stated above, *countries, cotos, chácaras, condomínios* and *fraccionamientos cerrados* are becoming a ubiquitous presence within the urban landscape of many Latin American nations. These segregated spaces assume varying formats: from the formal construction of planned communities, to more improvised street closures and the erection of walls around individual properties. In tandem with the growing number of these fortified private spaces and the concomitant changing composition of the metropolitan geo-social topography, these enclaves have also begun to garner a pronounced interest within both artistic and academic circles. Recent cinematic artifacts such as Beto Brant's *O*

*invasor* (2002), Ariel Winograd's *Cara de queso* (2006), Rodrigo Plá's *La Zona* (2007), Marcelo Piñeyero's *Las viudas de los jueves* (2009) as well as literary works, such as Claudia Piñeiro's *Las viudas de los jueves* that inspired the homonymous film adaptation, Laura Santullo's *El otro lado* (2005), and Luiz Ruffato's *Eles Eram Muitos Cavalos* (2001) to name a few examples that revolve around the subject-matter of the divided city and the material and socio-cultural upshots this "City of Walls" has for urban denizens. Within the academic milieu, studies emanating from the social sciences, community and regional planning, architecture, media studies as well as literature and the visual arts are scrutinizing the rise of said communities vis-à-vis contemporary social relations.

Rodrigo Plá's 2007 feature film *La Zona* is an adaptation of Laura Santullo's short story of the same name. The film chronicles the excision of the urban public space and the accompanying crises of citizenship, using as its backdrop the upper class fortified community of *La Zona*, in the heart of Mexico City. One stormy night, three teenagers from the neighboring *colonia* breach the walls of *La Zona* and endeavor to rob a home. The attempt is foiled and tragedy ensues: two of the young boys and the homeowner are killed. A third juvenile, Miguel (Alan Chávez),

escapes, but is trapped inside the compound. Fleeing the scene, Miguel hides in the basement of one of the homes that also happens to be the residence of Alejandro. Alejandro is one of the young boys who is tangentially involved with the communities search for the intruder. Within La Zona, the community members impose a virtual military state as their search becomes more and more entrenched in extra-legal vigilante justice. Eventually, Alejandro discovers Miguel in the basement and provides food and shelter for him as he attempts to find a way to escape from the compound. While this initially seems possible, it becomes evermore remote as the community council of La Zona decides that the intruder must be eradicated to guarantee the retention of the special privileges that are afforded to the affluent community. Ultimately Alejandro's father Daniel discovers Miguel in the basement of the family's home and drags the young boy out into the street. When Miguel's presence is revealed to the other members of the La Zona, rather than discussing how to proceed, they bludgeon him to death.

Within this narrative, Miguel is paradigmatic of the socio-economically disenfranchised subjects that have become the focal points of what Christian Leon has termed *Cine de la marginalidad* [*De la calle* (Gerardo Tort 2001)],

*Sin destino* (Leopoldo Laborde 2002), *Cidade dos homens* (Paulo Morelli 2007), *Huelepega: la ley de la calle* (Elia Schneider 1998), *Azotes de barrio en Petare* (Jackson Gutiérrez 2006), *Pizza, birra e faso* (Adrian Caetano and Bruno Stagnaro 1997)]. In the aforementioned films the male peripheral Other is cast as what Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has termed "*homo sacer*." Within these cinematic productions, the poor male subject is reduced to his "bare life," stripped of his political component. His body becomes a force field crisscrossed by the intersecting vectors of exclusion, abjection, violence and fear.

Several of the above cited films epitomize a trend within Latin American cinema to center on the depiction of urban poverty and its "violent subjects." This reality is both a source of fascination and grounds for (upper) middle class angst.

In this chapter I discuss how Rodrigo Plá's *La Zona* inverts the cinematic gaze and takes as its primary subject the upper-class residents of an elite urban denizen. What we witness in the film is Miguel, cast as *homo sacer* (Agamben) and reduced to what Giorgio Agamben has defined as *bare life*. At the same time, masculine rites of passage within the upper classes serve to guarantee the continuation of violence within this social framework. In



this manner, acts of aggression are not the exclusive domain of the lower class male, but rather infuse the upper classes. *La Zona*, while engaging films that spectacularize violence and the marginal male subject, assumes a slightly different stance, zooming in on the horror caused - not suffered - by the bourgeoisie (as a response to a perceived threat). Shifting its cinematic gaze, *La Zona* avoids Manichean distinctions between victim and victimizer. Rather, Plá's film interrogates the role both the lower and the upper-middle classes play in the escalation of violence and in the buttressing of social divisions within contemporary society.

*La Zona's* opening scene establishes and dialogues with the socio-economic split that runs down the national body: a divide that perpetuates discourses of fear and translates into practices of hostility which are often inscribed upon the body of the young male peripheral subject. In these establishing shots, the camera tracks a butterfly as it flutters above the lawns, between the affluent housing and luxury SUV's of the residents of *La Zona*. The community could be located virtually anywhere with a temperate climate in Latin America or the United States: the manicured green grass, the matching terra cotta roof tiles, the subtle pastel colors of the adobe walls, the Jeep

Liberty and Mercedes M-Class parked in the driveway. As the camera tracks the insect as it climbs above the bushes, the vibrant green of the foliage that predominate throughout the community is lost to the muted grey hues of cement and metal that overtake the screen. Security walls, electric and razor wire divide the spectator from the housing projects beyond these apparatuses of control, much in the same way that we previously saw in Gardenberg's photographs. What is revealed beyond the security wall is the chaotic conurbation of dense low-income housing across a hillside, the vitality of the previous scene shed. The image recalls the ubiquitous photographic images pervasive within newspapers and visual media of the precarious housing emblematic of lower-income social segments that predominate across the hillsides of urban centers such as Caracas and Rio de Janeiro. In the foreground a surveillance camera monitors what occurs within this enclave, at the same time a camera in the background monitors the surrounding *colonia*. What is telling in the positioning of the two cameras is the shift to a surveillance society. This establishing shot foreshadows the insidious encroachment of fear (not only a fear of the Other, but also of oneself) into the everyday lives of individuals and signals its profound effects.

The introduction to the disjunctive cityscape very clearly ascertains the material difference between the two communities. Disparity is emphasized optically through the use of color, as well as the visual composition and design of the shots. Order and chaos are juxtaposed. Whereas the shots of La Zona resemble a real estate advertisement in that symmetry, balance and appealing (yet neutral) colors prevail, the *colonia* provides us with the reverse of this imagery. Haphazard and nonlinear lines control the visual composition, with color limited almost exclusively to the muted grey hues that approximate those of cement and metal. *La Zona* is cordoned off from the adjacent *colonia* through security mechanisms (material barriers and a panopticum style surveillance system) that reinforce existence in the former as a constant *state of exception*, a condition that becomes exacerbated when Miguel and his companions penetrate the gated territory.

Agamben characterizes *state of exception* as that which defines the limits of the law "insofar as it is a suspension of juridical order itself, it defines the law's threshold or limit concept" (*State 4*). The *state of exception* implies the suspension of the law in order to safeguard precisely the application of said law. Agamben also points out that the *state of exception* is based on the

concept of necessity, while also signaling that the notion of necessity is a subjective one. For the inhabitants of *La Zona*, not only the adjoining shanty, but also the invisible city beyond the impoverished neighborhood represent amorphous and yet perpetual perils, which take shape in the bodies of the three invaders, and, especially in Miguel's body which is, at once visible and invisible, a foreign element wedged inside *La Zona's* upper-middle class socio-geographic corpus. Their/his menacing presence creates the necessity of "defense," and, as a result, the official declaration of a *state of exception* within the fortress-like walls of the gated compound. Indeed, *La Zona* has an "arrangement" with the city, establishing the area as a semi-sovereign terrain - a state within the state, whose autarchy is based on the enclave's financial clout and autonomy. This means that, per the community's founding charter, the residents will provide for both their own governance and infrastructural needs, including security. At the same time, the state, epitomized by the police, can supposedly only intervene in the affairs of *La Zona* in the extreme case that "blood is shed." However, the *state of exception* that reigns in the enclave nullifies the accord between it and the official power that operates beyond its walls. The suspension of law allows for the annihilation of

the *homo sacer* that has disrupted the artificial bourgeoisie idyll of La Zona's residents.

Giorgio Agamben, in *Homo sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995) describes *homo sacer* as an individual who is at once subject to the law and, at the same time, excluded from it. Paradoxically it is the same law that at the same time constitutes and bars *homo sacer*. Agamben maintains that this paradox develops from the fact that the ancient Greeks had no single word equivalent to what is currently understood as "life," but rather employed two concepts of life: the biological life common to all living things (*Zoë*) and political life or the life of the polis (*bios*). Within this binary structuring, Agamben claims that originally political life was and is based upon a ban or exclusion, in other words the sovereign defined the necessary negative referent that in turn allowed for the demarcation of what was considered as political life, or the lives that matter. Consequently, power relations were constructed upon the negative exclusion that permitted the constitution of the polis. *Homo sacer* exists within bare life, this is to say suspended between *Zoë* and *bios* within a "being in force without significance." In other words, *homo sacer* is marked by a negative ambiguity, at once being the subject of the law and therefore bound to the violence

of said law, while simultaneously being deprived of the protections it affords. According to Agamben:

What defines the status of *homo sacer* is...the particular character of the double exclusion into which he is taken and the violence to which he finds himself exposed. This violence - the unsanctionable killing that, in his case, anyone may commit -- is classifiable neither as sacrifice nor as homicide, neither as the execution of a condemnation to death nor as sacrilege. (*Homo* 82)

The law, which formulates *homo sacer's* body as an abject cipher, expurgates it from legitimate society and ultimately mandates the ambivalence with which it is constructed, consumed and expelled.

Miguel, illegitimately inserted in the space of *La Zona*, experiences the unmediated brutality dictated by the community's *state of exception*. His body is both expunged from the legal horizon, and immolated by the unofficial violence enabled by this erasure.

This effacement of the young boy is revealed most succinctly just following the moment when the members of *La Zona* have arrived at a monetary accord with the police chief De la Garza (Fernando Becerril) that, in essence, purges Miguel of his political life. Miguel is hiding

behind a construction barrier, between the building materials that it conceals. As the police drive by the site, along the main avenue of La Zona, Miguel dashes out from behind the zinc corrugated metal gates. As he chases the car, Oficial Iván (Enrique Arreola) notices Miguel in the rear view mirror. He slowly stops the car, glancing again at Miguel's reflection and then turning around to speak with De la Garza who is in the back seat:

Oficial Iván: Es él, ¿qué hacemos? Esta muy chavo.

Si le damos una putiza, no vuelve a robar.

Miguel stands outside the car window, pounding on the glass. De la Garza, looks away, refusing to make eye contact with the boy.

De la Garza: Lo salvas ahora, tienes un asesino en la calle después. Pues sígale... Es una orden Iván.

As the police car pulls away, Miguel continues to pound on the glass of the rear driver's-side door yelling "Ábreme... Ábreme!" as he runs along side the vehicle. The car begins to disappear down the street, Miguel frustrated, scared and defeated stands in the middle of the avenue. At this moment, the security camera locates the intruder, the screen cutting to the black and white tagged images of the electronic surveillance instruments. We cut back to the color image of a close up shot of the security guard's

mouth speaking into a hand held microphone. The security guard is notifying the residents, a grouping of men and boys from the community armed with hand guns, rifles and other weapons: "Tengo el sospechoso en pantalla." Only seconds later, the mob, guns in hand, round the corner of the street in pursuit of Miguel. Miguel takes off running between the homes and over the walled yards, disappearing from the purview of the ever-vigilant security cameras.

What is first apparent in this scene is the shift between the color images of the primary narrative and the black and white footage of the surveillance cameras that are continually monitoring the physical terrain of La Zona. Beyond the obvious shift from color to black and white, the two filmic representations also demonstrate a shift in perspective. The color images are principally medium and full shots from a street / eye level viewpoint. These scenes immerse the viewer into the virtual reality that transpires on the scene. On the contrary, the surveillance video has grainy texture and always represents a bird's eye view, a crane shot of the scene that registers the actions. Additionally, the surveillance video prompts the spectator to recall that what they are viewing is a recording, a specific perspective that is imparted by the camera. At the same time, the viewer is prompted to remember that the



surveillance video serves as a log, an official documenting of the events that transpire within La Zona. The time stamp that accompanies the footage in the bottom margin of the image reinforces this fact. Moreover, the time coded video chronicles both the *state of exception* that reigns within which La Zona as well as the events that posit Miguel as a trespasser and ultimately render him *homo sacer* at once invisible and yet subject to the law. His actions are codified. At the same time that the surveillance video corroborates Miguel's presence, it also transforms him into an almost ghostlike figure that emerges and disappears from the surveillance monitor. He is both present and absent within the video as well as the physical terrain of La Zona, he is an ambiguous figure that the law recognizes in terms of punishment but denies protection. The image incarnates *homo sacer*. In this manner, the filmic representation imitates the precarious soci-political position that Miguel occupies.

Returning to the scene in which the state officials abandon Miguel on the street of La Zona, we find a parallel between the action that transpires and the ideas that underlie the filming techniques. Within this scene, the police see Miguel, but they refuse to acknowledge him - he becomes legally obliterated by the pecuniary logic that

establishes citizenship as an economic transaction - of which he is unable to partake. Stripped of his civil and political, not to mention social rights, Miguel falls, so to speak, through the cracks of what James Holston (2008) has denominated "disjunctive citizenship." He is, in other words, the personification of *homo sacer*. Not only is he excluded from the body politic or, if we think in geo-juridical terms, the polis, but he also is denied access to both civil and social rights.

T.H. Marshall postulates that citizenship should be understood as comprised of three parts: political, civic and social elements. These three components are synonymous with membership in the polity, access to juridical process (assertion and defense of one's rights), and the right to economic security and social welfare, which purportedly secures a civilized and humane existence.

Since the later half of the twentieth century the implementation of neoliberal policies has promoted the privatization of security along with water, energy, telecommunications, road and other infrastructural and social services within many Latin American nations. With this shift parallel cities are emerging, a phenomenon that Steve Graham calls "splintering urbanisms" (Graham 2001). Many contemporary cityscapes reflect the lopsided

citizenship that prevails in civilly disjunctive democracies (Holston 2008). Therefore, vicinities inhabited by the socially affluent, such as La Zona, are privy to empirical and symbolical modes of citizenship (services, civic, political and social rights). In contrast, terrains populated by the economically disenfranchised often lack this access and, as a result, become de facto urban wastelands - abject landscapes peopled by abject subjects, whose status as citizens is either precarious or effectively annulled.

Miguel resides in the abject spaces of the crumbling city. We first encounter the young boy in a junkyard. He and his girlfriend Carolina (Asur Zagada) are making out in an abandoned municipal / school bus. The vehicle lies just beyond the walls of *La Zona*, tagged with graffiti, missing parts, with a jumble of objects stacked on its roof. In the background the erratic construction of an unplanned housing development rises up the hillside, dim lights highlight their irregular design. Strong rain showers pelt the windows of the bus and inundate the grounds where the bus lies.

Beyond the setting, abjection is emphasized by the muted dark hues of the color palette and the limited lighting of the scene, which blur the material contours of

the setting, endowing it with a nightmarish quality further highlighted by the unremitting rain. The dilapidated bus is a metaphor for the breakdown of the social system. It represents the collapse of social institutions such as public schools, public transportation and, by extension, the erosion of the social contract promulgated within the modern nation-building project and which, purportedly, entailed universal access to education. Nonetheless, this same endeavor was also premised around a structure of exclusion, a distinction between citizenship and non-citizenship. Zygmunt Bauman observes that

The production of 'human waste', or more correctly wasted humans... is an inevitable outcome of modernization... an inescapable side-effect of order-building (each order casts some parts of the extant population as 'out of place', 'unfit' or 'undesirable') and of economic progress. (*Wasted* 5)

This dichotomy between hegemonic and non-hegemonic subjects has been exacerbated in recent times, with the spread of neoliberal globalization. The encroachment of a neoliberal logic, and the concomitant metamorphosis of the state into a "for profit" enterprise, transforms the nation's underprivileged subjects such as Miguel into the debris of the society of consumers. They are the "human waste" that

are opposed to and often make possible the "economic progress" experienced by the consumer-citizens that inhabit La Zona.

Miguel's status as "human detritus" - especially once he trespassed into the arena of expediency, in other words, La Zona - is highlighted by the physical ambits to which he is confined: a home's dank basement, the community's sewage system, and lastly, the trash mound, where his body becomes coterminous with refuse. Two scenes are emblematic of the continuum that is established between waste and the body of the male peripheral subject, i.e. Miguel. These scenes are when Miguel integrates into and eventually emerges from the sewage system of the community, and the disposal of the bodies of the three intruders in the trash mound. I would like to pause for a moment to consider these two moments.

Miguel, hidden behind one of the many walls that divide the individual properties within the compound watches as several of the men from La Zona drag the dead bodies of his two accomplices wrapped in black plastic from the back of an automobile. Suddenly a high-pitched squeal cuts through the silence of the dark night. A young boy stares out of his second floor bedroom window blowing a whistle furiously, his eyes locked on Miguel. The sound catches the attention of the men moving the bodies.

Pistols drawn, they set out to find the invader. The image cuts to the surveillance video that logs Miguel's descent from the street to the sewage system, and then cuts back. Once within the bowels of La Zona, the camera whirls and twists as it tracks Miguel, the young boy attempting to evade the men and dogs that hunt him. Finally he emerges from one of the drainage pipes. We are inserted into a virtual wasteland. The camera slowly moves upward, the tilt up shot revealing a burnt, desolate landscape. Shimmers of lightning rip through the black sky, a chain-link fence divides Miguel from the open space that lies beyond. The camera, in a counter shot, turns to reveal the broken face of Miguel as he returns to the tunnels from which he emerged, his only refuge within the expelled waste of La Zona.

Miguel forms part of the surplus population of consumer society, its waste product. According to Zygmunt Bauman this group:

In a society of consumers, they are 'flawed consumers' - people lacking the money that would allow them to stretch the capacity of the consumer market, while they create another kind of demand to which the profit-oriented consumer industry cannot respond and which it cannot profitably 'colonize'. Consumers are

the prime assets of consumer society; flawed consumers are its most irksome and costly liabilities.

Surplus population' is one more variety of human waste" (*Wasted* 39).

Miguel does not form part of consumer society. He is absent from consumer circles because he does not have the economic means to participate in the exchange of goods. Ironically, the same space that marks his exclusion also provides an ambit of reprieve from the physical and metaphorical violence that marks the body of *homo sacer*. The superfluous body of Miguel is silent, rendered invisible and incorporated into the detritus of affluent society.

Whereas the community's sewage system and the dank basement are, paradoxically (for normally these are considered inhospitable spaces) the only refuges the young boy finds within the *state of exception* that reigns in La Zona, the latter represents the pure violence that prevails as a result of this condition. As indicated by Agamben, what is at stake within the *state of exception* is precisely the employment of pure violence - in this case the obliteration of Miguel's *zoë* after he has been reduced to his *bare life*, suspended in the legal and political limbo allocated to *homo sacer*. Moreover, violence, the act of

murder and the hubris of improper burial, are not subject to the law since, as signaled by Agamben, legislative, executive, and transgressive acts committed during these conditions are outside the legal sphere. Miguel's body, similar to that of his companions, is ultimately relegated to the garbage heap. They are exempted from the nation, from consumer society and thus transformed into the waste of "order building" (Bauman 33). The scene serves to emphasize and differentiate between citizen and *homo sacer*. According to Bauman:

Throughout the era of modernity, the nation-state has claimed the right to preside over the distinction between order and chaos, law and lawlessness, citizen and *homo sacer*, belonging and exclusion, useful (=legitimate) product and waste... Present-day nation-states may no longer preside over the drawing of blueprints and exercise the ownership right of *utere et abutere* (use and misuse) over the sites of order-building, but they still claim the foundational, constitutive prerogative of sovereignty: their right of exemption. (*Wasted* 33)

The violence exacted upon the body of the male subject is the physical demonstration of the violence this "right of exemption."



Violence in *La Zona*, counter to the innocuous image reproduced incessantly within contemporary mediatic discourse of the marginal male criminal, emanates from the male subject regardless of his social or economic standing. The film interrogates the rituals of violence that form part of social structuring. As I discussed previously in my analysis of *Amores perros*, foundational texts within Mexican letters such as Samuel Ramos *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (1934) or Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950) associate masculine identity with virility and violence. Although these texts ultimately pretend to critique hypermasculinity due to the fact that it hinders the progress of the nation, the paradigms they set forth influence future discussions and understandings of Mexican masculinity. What we encounter in their texts is an antiquated concept of masculinity that is premised upon violence and virility. Relations between men are constructed as adversarial rites of passage of masculine confrontation.

Counter to the paradigms set forth in these texts *La Zona* interrogates any identity or community premised around violence, particularly masculine identity. Masculinity, within the context of *La Zona*, serves as the medium through which the residents of the enclave attempt to cement the

continuation of an established – outsider (Elias, Scotson 1994) binary in which the established, the residents of La Zona, retain a superior power ratio to those that live beyond the fortified walls. According to Norbert Elias and John Scotson's 1965 study:

[D]ominant groups with a high power superiority attribute to themselves, as collectivities, and to those who belong to them, as families and individuals, a distinguishing group charisma. All those who "belong" participate in it. But they have to pay a price. Participation in a group's superiority and its unique group charisma is, as it were, the reward for submitting to group-specific norms. It has to be paid for by each of its members individually through the subjection of his own conduct to specific patterns of affect control. (xxiii)

The case of belonging is established and maintained in La Zona vis-à-vis the consecration of the extraordinary measures that are enacted to guarantee the prevailing *state of exception* under which the enclave exists. This point is established from the outset, when the *asamblea*, the resident's association, meets in the school gymnasium to decide how to proceed after the break-in because "nos vamos a perder todos nuestros derechos por un accidente

estúpido...” The stupid “accident,” the killing of the night guard (not the killing of the two intruders), threatens the privileged position of the residents. The general consensus of how to move forward after this event is summed up by Gerardo (Carlos Bardem), “Somos nosotros los que tenemos que solucionar esto. Hay que buscar el asesino. Tenemos armas, usémoslas, es en legítima defensa.” The resident’s group, to guarantee their position, consecrates the use of violent action against the intruder. Differing opinions, i.e. the response of Diego (Andrés Montiel) that violence only causes more violence, are silenced and compulsory agreement is imposed. Diego, who is one of the few members who does not submit to group-specific norms, is ultimately driven from the community.

Within this context, violence is employed both as a means to guarantee submission to the group, as well as a form of initiation into manhood. The experience of the hunt and ultimately the kill of Miguel by the male members of the society is enacted as an initiation or ritualized admission of the young boys into the clan or dominant group vis-à-vis their entrance into manhood. Arnold van Gennep in the foundational *Rites of Passage* (1960) delineates the general format that underlies the transition of a child from his sexless position within the community to the

assumption of his role as a male adult. Van Gennep outlines the general socialization process of male initiation rites based upon the rituals of a variety of native cultures. These rituals include: separation from the family / women of the society with whom they cohabited during their childhood, a stripping of the garments that were used during this stage of their lives, a period of instruction and finally their graduation into the community as fully endowed male members. Within many human cultures violence forms an integral part of this transformation into manhood. I would argue that we find the general mechanisms of this process both delineated and questioned as elements of contemporary society in *La Zona*.

Paradigmatic of the delineation of this process is Eddie (Germán Valdéz). In the beginning of the narrative, Eddie and the other young boys are not part of the search group that aspire to "protect and defend" La Zona. In these opening scenes, the boys are confined to their homes, while the men patrol the streets. In these initial scenes Mariana (Maribel Verdú) commands / constrains the boys to the private sphere, requiring them to not congregate on the street, return to their homes, and more generally maintain the decorum that is deemed acceptable of actions of children. However, as the search for the intruder

continues the boys are ultimately incorporated into the group of men. Their participation in and propensity for violent action parallels their assimilation into the group.

While within the protected sphere of the home, the boys remain under the care and guidance of the women. Within these scenes, they are under the supervision of the mother figure, Mariana, however it is also at this point that they initiate their forays into the realm of traditional manhood. For example when the group of friends gather in Alejandro's (Daniel Tovar) room after school, the father figure is not present. Rather it is Mariana and the housekeeper who enter the room with a birthday cake to celebrate Alejandro's birthday. The scene marks a moment of change, because it is also at this time that the initial discussion of the boys concerning their participation in the search for the trespasser is broached. Eddie contends: "Y si buscamos al asesino... no oyeron lo que dijeron hoy: 'Hay que defender La Zona...' Imagínate que somos nosotros quienes lo encontramos." The transition from passive boys who remain in the custody of the women and are protected by the male adults of the community to active participants as young men who defend the group commences at this moment.

The following day Eddie and the other boys acquire their tools of violence (bats, gun, harpoon, hockey stick)

and embark on their search for Miguel. The camera registers this preliminary foray into the world of male aggression, as well as the initial levity / ignorance with which they approach it. The boys, meet at the golf course of the compound and begin to play a virtual game of show and tell. Eddie has brought a gun that he stole from his family. Upon revealing his tool to the others, he begins to point the loaded weapon at them. These youth do not understand the seriousness of their actions nor the violence that is embodied in the weapons they carry, for example the gun, which also serves as an obvious phallic reference to the coming of age of the youth.

The film cuts from this scene of the boys snickering at Eddie and his antics with the firearm to the five boys each in the blue slacks and tie, white shirt, and red blazer of the school uniform running across the golf course jumping and thrashing with their weapons in hand. As they lunge through trees and lash at their branches, the bright vibrant colors of a rolling green landscape in the foreground contrast directly with the gray shanty-like structures that fill the background and populate the hills beyond La Zona. The color contrasts serve to highlight the ignorance of the boys as to the serious nature of the journey they have embarked upon. Their "search" resembles

a game of "cops and robbers," however with a perturbing twist that transforms it into what we might denominate as "mob and marginal Other." The fact that they are searching for a young boy to kill him appears to escape the realm of their comprehension, their consciousness. The scene mimics the search of the elders, however the innocence that initially envelops it will soon be lost.

Upon reaching the edge of the manicured greens of the golf course, the boys decide to venture into the canyon. The "games" of the morning take a serious turn when the search party that is monitoring the liminal zones of the community begins to discharge their firearms at the boys, believing them to be intruders. Once the group of men realizes that they are firing at the young boys, the scene cuts to Daniel (Daniel Giménez Cacho) and Gerardo as they castigate the youths for their actions and decide to integrate them as active participants in the hunt:

Gerardo: ¿Pero qué tienen en la cabeza?

Daniel: ¿Se dan cuenta de lo que hicieron? Aquí no estamos jugando?

Gerardo: Esto es serio. Si quieren participar, háganlo bien, organizadamente.

Daniel: No Gerardo... Son niños.

Gerardo: Ven. (Gerardo y Daniel move away from the

boys) Son adolescentes, no te están pidiendo permiso. Van a hacer igual. A menos si están con nosotros, podemos controlar.

The boys are incorporated into the larger search. From this moment forward they will no longer appear in the scenes in their school uniforms, but rather exclusively in street clothes. In this way, they are stripped of the garments that marked their childhood. They begin a period of instruction in the violent practices of their fathers, the elder men of the community. At this moment, there is a shift from the world of "make believe" and the innocence / ignorance that marked their initial actions as boys to their coming of age / initiation into manhood vis-à-vis their participation in the violence that is being perpetrated upon Miguel.

The escalation of their actions from mere games to violent dealings, while they are not ceremonial "rites of passage" they do reflect the social force of the community that guides the young boys through their initiation into these realms of violence. This violence manifests in two primary areas, firstly in the *state of exception* that is imposed within La Zona and secondly in the erasure of *homo sacer*, i.e. Miguel, through the multiple levels of violence perpetrated upon him.



Again I look to Eddie as paradigmatic of this state. In subsequent scenes the young adult now explicitly participates with the elder men in the realization of said violence. His process of instruction has begun. Firstly, in regard to the law, Eddie now locates himself beyond it, just as the adults do. He mimics the actions of the men of the community. While Gerardo and Daniel are negotiating the "terms of settlement" with de la Garza that will guarantee the continuation of their status within a *state of exception*, Eddie jumps up on the hood of the police car, stomps across it and lunges to the ground. He, just as the men, is "above the law" in that he is not subject to its disciplinary actions. Although he vandalizes the vehicle of the official state representative, he is not held accountable.

Additionally, Eddie, upon jumping from the vehicle, demonstrates to the other young men that he is once again in possession of the handgun. The firearm confers upon him a sense of power and strength. During this initiation period he shadows the actions of the other gun toting men of the community. The firearm represents an almost heroic violence founded within the idea of "protection," although the lives of the La Zona community members are not under threat, only their special status. Violence, symbolized in

the gun, is his entrance into manhood. In the subsequent scene, when de la Garza, Comandante Rigoberto (Mario Zaragoza) and Oficial Ivan leave the compound and abandon Miguel within La Zona, the security guards alert the search party as to the whereabouts of Miguel. Once alerted, the men of the community set off in pursuit of Miguel. The attack, however, is now lead by Gerardo, Daniel, Eddie and a security guard. Eddie forms part of the official group, following the men and reflecting their actions. As such when he and the other men round the corner and begin to chase Miguel down the avenue, Eddie has his firearm drawn.

Finally, at the closing of the film, Eddie (and the other young men except for Alejandro) has graduated and is now a "full member," recognized as a man. This is established visually in the final scenes of the film when the mob of community members attack and kill Miguel in the street. The boys are no longer thematized as a separate group at the margins of the larger community. Rather, within the scene they are integrated into the mass that beats and cause the subsequent death of Miguel. On screen, the image shifts between the surveillance camera and the color footage. As the mob descends upon the boy, Eddie and the other newly initiated young men are only faces within the mass. The surveillance camera captures their descent

upon and erasure of *homo sacer*, signaling that they are now one of the group.

The ideas developed in *La Zona* parallel those that we find in Robert W. Connell's foundational study *Masculinities* (1995). In this text Connell argues that masculinity is a collective project composed of varying complex and at times contradictory cultural paradigms. These practices exist within a hierarchical gender regime constructed around a hegemonic ideal of masculinity that generally emphasizes success, toughness, dominance, authority and heterosexuality. Eddie at once strives to embody these ideals, while at the same time the film questions and ultimately debunks hegemonic masculinity and the socialization processes that propagate it. However, the film does not simply posit a marginal or subordinate masculinity as a replacement, but rather questions the violence that underlies its construction.

Contrasting these dominant constructions and understandings of masculinity, the figure of Alejandro interrogates the perseverance of rites of passage that guarantee the persistence of male violence, by offering a negative cipher of these traditional constructs. The young man ruptures the cycle of violence, disavowing its continuation. One might argue that Alejandro represents

what Berthold Schoene-Harwood has labeled post-patriarchal "gynandricity" (*Writing Men* 2000) or a space in which the male and the female, the masculine and the feminine are not conceived of as binaries but rather where they flow together and infuse one another. Alejandro ruptures these binaries in the sense that he demonstrates qualities that would traditionally be associated with femininity: he cares for, shelters and feeds Miguel, he expresses his emotions and listens. At the same time his actions display a high degree of skill, toughness and authority, attributes traditionally considered masculine.

Let us consider the final scene of the film. Alejandro in the early hours of the morning before daybreak gathers his things in a small backpack, going out to the garage to take the car. Just before descending the stairs, he stops for a moment, approximating his forehead to his parent's (Daniel and Mariana) bedroom door. The scene cuts to the other side of the door where his father sits on the edge of the bed, viewing a digital video of Miguel that Daniel had recorded in which Miguel apologizes and explains the sequence of events, confirming that he understands that he will have to go to jail for his actions. Daniel cries as the reality of Miguel's situation is revealed and the fiction of his transgressive and dangerous person

demystified. Alejandro hangs his head against his parents' bedroom door and then leaves without making a noise. He takes the family's SUV to the community garbage bins and rummages through the bags of waste until he encounters Miguel's discarded body. The camera registers the pain that engulfs Alejandro's face. He puts the corpse in the back of the vehicle and leaves the compound, flashing the security card marked "resident." We have come full circle and returned to the opening scenes of the film in which we were introduced to Alejandro in a BMW X3 traversing La Zona. The spectator witnesses the normalcy with which the functioning of the community has returned, erasing the previous events from view. However subtle signs remain, Diego, one of the few community residents that opposed the actions of the group, is packing up his family and belongings to leave La Zona; Miguel's mother remains at the outer entrance gates to the compound, vigilantly watching the cars and searching for her missing son. After leaving the fortified community, the camera tracks the automobile as it passes through a multiplicity of *colonias* that resemble those that encircle La Zona. Finally, in dark hours of night, Alejandro arrives at a cemetery. As dawn breaks the cemetery caretaker begins clearing brush from around a tomb. Alejandro takes Miguel's body from the car,

laying him on the ground by the caretaker. Again the gestures and facial expressions of Alejandro reflect the emotional pain that these tragic events have caused. He hands the caretaker a roll of money, telling him "Se llama Miguel." After leaving the cemetery, he stops at a local business and places a call to the number that was written down Miguel's arm. It is Carolina, her face bruised and battered. She negates knowing anyone by the name of Miguel and hangs up abruptly. Alejandro calls again and states "Miguel está muerto," again the line is broken. We cut to the final scene of the film. We encounter Alejandro, standing below a naked light bulb beside the zinc metal corrugated panels that form the structure of one of the many taco stands that populate the streets of Mexico City. He is consuming the street food as a white Volkswagen bus passes in the background.

In the closing scenes of the film, the spectator is privy to the failure of violence as a founding trope of masculinity as well as the implication of the possible reformulation of masculinity. In Alejandro's actions as well as his face the viewer witnesses the pain of the events and the compassion with which he approaches them. Additionally, Alejandro's actions are an initial attempt to undermine the *state of exception* within which the upper

class denizens such as those of La Zona exist. In the final scene, Alejandro abandons this sphere and reintegrates into the wider community, implying the effacement of the violence and privilege upon which a *state of exception* is constructed. Additionally, Alejandro removes Miguel from his status as human detritus, when he names him and buries his body rather than discarding him with the waste of La Zona.

As stated previously, the lives of individuals who inhabit the liminal city is a recurrent theme in contemporary Latin American cinema. While several of these films cast the male peripheral Other in the parallel roles of agent of chaos and *homo sacer*, many lack the critical stance of *La Zona*. Rather, numerous films that form part of the *Cinema de la marginalidad* construct narratives that exploit a sense of social terror by formulating the body of the male "criminal" and the geographic space he occupies, the periphery, as dangerous terrains. Both are seen as threats that imperil the "health" of the bourgeoisie city. The male peripheral subject engenders the "necessity" of defense that leads to the declaration of the *state of exception* within the metropolis - and, by extension - within the nation. Nonetheless, by pinpointing the impoverished male subject as the motive for the *state of exception*, the

socio-cultural discourse articulated by the *Cinema de la marginalidad* obfuscates underlying social, economic and epistemic causes of contemporary civic crises such as, for example, the implementation and/or continuation of neoliberal policies (and the resultant weakening of a Keynesian notion of statehood), and the abandonment of an enlightenment ethos constructed upon the ideas of human rights, liberty and equality for all members of a given society (Caldeira 2000, Graham 2001, Davis 2006).

Rodrigo Plá's film brings under the purview of the camera a fractured urban landscape, torn apart by a culture of fear that is eroding the notion of polis. Upper and middle class individuals are retracting from the public space into the private ambit. Violence and anxiety regarding different types of aggression, the pretext for their flight, are generally affixed to the peripheral male subject and validate his casting as *homo sacer*. The production of *homo sacer* is attached to the overt, but most often insidious *state of exception*, in that it invokes and endorses the negation of political, civic and social rights to individuals that lie beyond the concrete and the metaphorical walls of the city proper - and of its spaces of citizenship. At this historical moment when police forces are incurring onto the campus of the Universidade de São



Paulo to quell student protests, or the Mexican national military forces are patrolling the streets of many cities under the pretext of the drug war and the support of the Plan Mérida, *La Zona* and comparable cultural discourses are firmly anchored within the material realm as they lead us to consider how the *state of exception* is employed to validate these incursions upon citizens' rights and its manifold repercussions.

Brazil

## Chapter IV

### Narratives of Fear, Constructions of Otherness:

#### *O homem do ano*

On July 23, 1993 eight street children were murdered on the front steps of the Igreja da Candelária (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil). Two months later, twenty-one individuals were massacred in the carioca *favela* of Vigário Geral, also in Rio de Janeiro. All twenty-nine deaths were attributed to (vigilante) police forces and were considered, in part, a retaliation for the *arrastões* of 1992 and 1993 in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>36</sup> These disturbances of the middle and upper class beach enclaves of the carioca *Zona Sul* exacerbated already prevalent feelings of insecurity within the city's hegemonic social sectors. The occurrences also led to increased police brutality. As a consequence, the hope that the recent democratization of the country would usher in an era of respect for citizen's rights was effectively undermined by the clash between dominant and marginal social segments, epitomized by the *arrastões* and the police-led massacres.

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<sup>36</sup> An *arrastão* typically refers to the use of fishing nets, but in this case it is when a group of youth run across the beach causing havoc

The *arrastões*, the massacre in Vigário Geral, and the killing of the street children on the steps of Candelária Church were all taken up by the Brazilian media, and reinforced a "Culture of Fear" (Soares 1993; Ventura 1994; Herschmann 1997) that infected the carioca imaginary of the early 1990's. According to the sociologist Luiz Eduardo Soares, the public conferred a heightened importance to these three incidences due to the fact that these actions desecrated what previously were held to be mythically safe territories within the Brazilian imaginary: the sacred ground of the church, the domestic space of the home, and the democratic terrain of the beach (Soares 1993). The media's relentless attention to the invasion of these mythical and purportedly safe spaces cemented a "culture of fear" into the dominant public's imaginary. Hilda Maria Gaspar Pereira, discussing violence from this period, states:

Rio de Janeiro has apparently become one of the most violent cities in the world. Yet a closer examination may reveal a gap between the reality and the perception given by the national and international media... To some extent the Brazilian media has been sensationalist when dealing with the subject of crime. It seems that the aspect of time is neglected in

accounts. Consequently the daily addition of horror stories has provoked a snowball effect, inflating society's fears. (4)

As indicated by Gaspar Pereira, violence, especially violence associated with lower socio-economic sectors, has become a dominant headline story within the media. The growing focus on crime at times exaggerates reality by collapsing the variety of accounts within a single narrative continuum that, through its silencing of questions of when these events occurred, locates them "as if" they were part of a single time space. The corresponding responses serve to both construct and reinforce overarching and pervasive narratives that are founded upon prevalent stereotypes that associate poverty with violence. As Silvia Ramos and Anabela Paiva demonstrate:

A maioria dos profissionais ouvidos [in the interviews for their book *Mídia e violence*] reconhece que os seus veículos têm grande responsabilidade na caracterização dos territórios populares como espaços exclusivos da violência. (77)

In this manner, these narratives exacerbate already existent ideas that circulate within the Brazilian hegemonic imaginary that posit the marginal male subject as

the primary perpetrator of urban violence directed against the upper and middle classes.

The lives of individuals who inhabit the limits of "legitimate" society is a prevalent subject matter not only within the pages and newsreels of local, national, and international news outlets, but also a central theme in Brazil's *Cinema da Retomada*. Though the *Cinema da Retomada* is marked by a multiplicity of aesthetic proposals, some of the films are in virtual dialogue with the news headlines and augment the "snowball effect" that Pereira signals. At the same time, other films from this same movement draw attention to the need to address the relevance and stereotyping of class, racial and gender identities in the debates over social change in Latin America.

As I have argued in this dissertation thus far, cinema occupies an ever more privileged position within social relations. Cinema functions in society as an epistemological two-way street in which the projection on the screen (re)creates the symbolic social order of society, both real and imagined, and subsequently this mediatic social order in turn influences material society through the incorporation of the spectacle into individuals' understanding of said social order (Morin 1956, Debord 1967, Sartori 1998, Diken and Bagge Laustsen

2008). In this manner, cinema can be a medium through which citizens are introduced to social issues, gain understandings of their supposed actors and are made aware of the purported consequences (Deleuze 1989). Cinema can be associated particularly with the identification process of both self and Other within contemporary society as the screen and / or image (cinematic, televised, web or otherwise) progressively intercede at a symbolic level into social relations. According to José Álvaro Moisés:

The country [Brazil] understands, more every day, how important it is for us to look at ourselves in a cinematic 'mirror.' We realize that we need that fundamental function of self-identification which is made possible by the projection of our common experiences on a screen, to understand each other better and to define with more clarity what we want for ourselves in the new millennium (Moisés 5).

However, is this cinematic mirror projecting the common experiences of all Brazilians, regardless of socio-economic, racial or gender differences onto the screen? Or, rather, are these cinematic products the specters of hegemonic perceptions of the middle and upper classes caste

upon the silver screen and expounded "as if" they were the common experiences of the nation?<sup>37</sup>

Specifically, within the *Cinema da Retomada*, what stands out is the number of films that thematize multiple aspects of violence and crime, particularly in relation to the male subject, that have been produced over the first decade of the twenty-first century.<sup>38</sup> Crime films both tap into and inform the media's depiction of violence and criminality, and, together these mass mediatic forums influence both individual and socially constructed ideas concerning the prevalence of law-breaking, the individuals or groups who are responsible for unlawful acts, and the threat that violence implies in both physical and psychological terms. Crime films dialogue with and help formulate "the myths that a society lives by, as if these myths referred to some natural, unproblematic 'reality'"

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<sup>37</sup> Slavoj Zizek argues that "the big Other" (the institutions, laws, and customs that govern society) are premised around a symbolic order that society follows that essentially disavows the Real. In this manner, society acts "as if" this symbolic order were the Real and as such disavows the real in this "as if." For a more in depth discussion of "the big Other" in the work of Zizek, please consult Tony Myer's *Slavoj Zizek* (2003).

<sup>38</sup> A few of the more salient examples are *Cidade de Deus* (Lund, Meirelles 2002), *Contra todos* (Moreira 2003), *Carandiru* (Babenco 2003), *O invasor* (Brant 2003), *O homem que copiava* (Furtado 2003), *Tropa de elite* (Padilha 2007), *Meu nome não é Johnny* (Lima 2008), and *Última parada 174* (Barreto 2008).



(Kaplan 12-13). These cinematic works continue a narrative tradition that looks to crime as a central organizing principle of narration. As Josefina Ludmir argues:

El "delito" es, entonces, uno de los útiles o *instrumentos críticos*... porque funciona, como en Freud, como *una frontera cultural* que separa la cultura de la no cultura, que funda culturas, y que también separa líneas en el interior de una cultura. Sirve para trazar límites, diferenciar y excluir. Con el delito se construyen conciencias culpables y fábulas de fundación e identidad cultural. (14)

These narratives according to the Argentine critic are situated somewhere between fiction and reality, within a space that connects the two, on a two-way street of "cultural conversations." The fictitious crime narrative, therefore, is not simply a cultural product of *l'art pour l'art*, but rather dialogues with and influences perceptions of social realities. Crime narratives inform and construct social consciousness about crime, its actors, and the consequences.

Is the *Cinema da Retomada* representing, within these crime narratives, "common experiences" or is it projecting from the celluloid cultural paradigms that reinforce socio-economic, racial, gender and sexual divisions? How do

these narratives mark the national community? Do they further promote the construction of a society of walls?<sup>39</sup> José Henrique Fonseca's 2003 feature length film, *O homem do ano* brings under the purview of the camera questions of material and discursive violence, masculinity, socio-economic divisions, and their problematic relationship to mediatic representations. The film questions: what groups are responsible for increased societal violence, what are the motivating factors, and how is masculinity linked to these acts of violence?<sup>40</sup> What is revealed is how the middle class' response to these issues approximates the imposition of a *state of exception* within a society that sanctions the erasure of the "non-desirable" marginal male subject, the *homo sacer* of said community, paralleling what we had seen in the previous discussion of *La Zona*.

In this chapter I analyze how José Henrique Fonseca's

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<sup>39</sup> As I discussed in the Introduction of this dissertation, Teresa Caldeira in *City of Walls (2000)* studies the transformation of São Paulo into an urban space divided and dominated by enclosures, walls, boundaries and distances. According to the Brazilian anthropologist, this Brazilian city is more divided now than it was in the 1970's. Her text, after establishing how the residents of the city talk about crime, then goes on to plot the rise in violence in the megalopolis and finally discusses how the city itself has been divided as a result.

<sup>40</sup> José Henrique Fonseca is the son of Rubem Fonseca, an author well known for his crime novels. Beyond this, Rubem Fonseca and fellow writer Patrícia Melo wrote the screenplay of the movie. Patrícia Melo wrote the novel *O matador* (1999) upon which the screenplay is based.

*O homem do ano* questions cinematic works that posit the marginal male as the primary perpetrator of urban violence in the contemporary period. This is achieved by revealing a link between the employment of said narrative and the veiled power networks that promulgate it. The film exposes how, within contemporary society, a *de facto state of exception* has been imposed that guarantees the immolation of the marginal male Other and the buttressing of predominant narratives that consecrate this erasure. *O homem do ano* interrogates mediatic representations of the urban poor and racial minorities. At the same time, the film exposes the neurosis that infuses contemporary masculine identity, when said identity is constructed around violence.

*O homem do ano* takes place in the Baixada Fluminense, in the periphery of Rio de Janeiro, and narrates the story of Máiquel (Murilo Benício) who, at the start of the movie, is unemployed and believes that "Antes da gente nascer, alguém, talvez Deus, define direitinho como vai foder a tua vida. Isso era minha teoria. Deus só pensa no homem na largada. Quando decide se sua vida vai ser boa ou ruim." After losing a soccer bet with his friends, Máiquel must make good on his wager and dye his hair blond. This transformation gives him newfound confidence and produces a

shift in the protagonist's self-definition, both in ontological and social terms. Returning to Gonzaga's, the neighborhood bar, Máiquel gets into an argument with Suel (Wagner Moura), the local drug dealer who runs the lower-class neighborhood in which the two characters reside. Suel insults Máiquel publically saying that "Para mim, homem que pinta o cabelinho loirinho assim como você é muito viado!" The comment questions Máiquel's self-definition as a heterosexual male. Subsequently, Máiquel looks to violence to reaffirm his masculinity, challenging Suel to a duel. The following evening Máiquel shoots Suel. To Máiquel's surprise, the community, instead of punishing him as a murderer, begins to shower him with gifts. He receives praise and respect for ridding the streets of the human *lixo*. Máiquel becomes famous in his neighborhood as a *justiceiro*, a vigilante whose actions are condoned by the community. His fame spreads throughout the Baixada Fluminense, reaching the middle-class elites of the area, including Dr. Carvalho (Jorge Dória), a local dentist. The doctor hires Máiquel to kill Ezequiel (Nill Marcondes), a supposed honor shooting to avenge his familial pride.

The assassinations of Suel and Ezequiel set in motion a series of "revenge" killings that serve to establish Máiquel as an extra-legal law-enforcer within the

community. The supposed necessity to impede the impunity and power of the local drug lord, condones the violent actions of Máiquel. The community invokes a *state of exception* that condones the killing of *homo sacer*. Once Máiquel's fame is consolidated, he enters into a deal with Carvalho and several of his associates including Zílmár (Agildo Ribeiro), Sílvio (José Wilker), and the local police inspector, Delegado Santana (Carlo Mossy). They become the silent backers of the security firm SESEPA that Máiquel operates under the auspices of the necessity to "protect" local businesses.<sup>41</sup> After opening the firm, Máiquel is elected *homem do ano* by the local business community. As his role as a vigilante grows, the ensuing power spirals beyond his control. His personal life begins to shatter apart as the professional sphere infuses the private realm, immersing it in violence. This leads to the killing of his wife Cedir. Impunity overtakes all aspects of his existence, however this façade shatters when state investigators discover the corpse of Cledir. Soon both public and private worlds implode, driving Maiquel to abandon his life as *o homem do ano*.

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<sup>41</sup> Both Santana and Carvalho are from the upper-middle class, demonstrated by their ability to install home security systems, own businesses, take vacations as well as the general décor of their homes

The setting of the film within the Baixada Fluminense serves as a microcosm through which to better understand the national context and the socio-economic divisions that mark its terrain. The geo-social space of the Baixada Fluminense links this fictional story to the larger metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro and the history of violence that has been particularly pronounced in this metropolis. Within hegemonic understandings of Rio de Janeiro, the Baixada Fluminense has traditionally been considered a region that is plagued by a higher degree of violence than many other areas of the city.<sup>42</sup> The roots of this narrative were born out of the 1970's and the annexation of the Baixada Fluminense to the metropolitan core of Rio de Janeiro. At this moment, a marked shift occurred in how the area was classified and represented. This change also coincided with a newfound interest in urban studies within Brazil. Many of the academic works

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<sup>42</sup> Consider for a moment the historical developments of the Baixada Fluminense during the later half of the twentieth century in relation to the metropolitan center of Rio de Janeiro. Previous to 1975 the Baixada Fluminense was part of the state of Rio de Janeiro, separate from the Federal District (1889-1960) and the State of Guanabara (1960-1975). It was only in the 1970's, when the States of Guanabara and Rio de Janeiro merged that the Baixada Fluminense officially became a peripheral community of the Região Metropolitana do Rio de Janeiro. This being said, the urbanization process that culminated in the 1970's actually began in the 1930's.

that focused on urban planning and regional studies from the time period inserted the Baixada Fluminense into a center-periphery binary. By the late 1970's both academic and popular narratives of violence prevailed about the region and its relationship to the urban center of Rio de Janeiro (Souza Alves 1998, Enne 2004).<sup>43</sup> In relation to said violence, what is significant is not the individual acts, but rather to whom or what groups the violence has been attributed: execution squads, individual attacks, drug cartel violence, etc. According to Souza Alves, what is evident in the violent acts that have plagued the region is that: "Encontra-se a constituição do poder e do Estado calcada em empresas bem sucedidas de violência privada e ilegal" (Souza Alves 24). In other words, while acts of violence may be attributed to rogue groups or marginal individuals, the underlying motivational force for said violence is a political and economic system that is constructed and premised around privatized violence. This system is constituted by and through aggressive actions that ultimately serve to sustain existing power structures. "Estado, sistema de justiça, setores econômicos e processos eleitorais associam-se na construção desta forma de poder

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<sup>43</sup> This fact was made clear in articles such as "Câncer Vizinho," an editorial from 1977 in "O Jornal do Brasil" (Souza Alves 1998).

extremamente permeável ao uso da violência e àqueles que a empregam" (Souza Alves 25). The appearance of death squads, and other forms of vigilante justice, are not the expression of a barbarous element that underlies the socio-culture roots of Brazil's economically destitute. Rather, said violence emanates from a political system premised upon social and economic power relations that both permit and propagate these actions.<sup>44</sup>

While many of these issues are specific to the Baixada, it is also significant that this region is at times constructed as paradigmatic of the multitude of problems that the city / country confront.<sup>45</sup> *O homem do ano* places

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<sup>44</sup> The Baixada Fluminense has, throughout much of its history been considered a marginal territory rife with violence, political corruption and extermination squads. Understandings of the violence that have plagued this region throughout the twentieth century and into the present period are in large part guided by the belief that is held by many Brazilians that associates violence with poverty rather than with

a construção de trajetórias políticas calcadas tanto no medo como no clientelismo. Mandatos populares de matadores surgirão assim, não como expressão da barbárie de uma sociedade à margem da civilização e impregnada por uma cultura da violência, mas como possibilidades historicamente construídas pelas relações de poder (Souza Alves 6).

<sup>45</sup> In a discussion of the previously mentioned massacre at Vigário Geral on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 1993, a representative of the federal government, during a live interview on the radio, incorrectly located the occurrence in the favela of Baixada Fluminense (Souza Alves 14). The geographic relocation of this event from the favela Vigário Geral to



itself in direct dialogue with the turbulent history of this region, engaging both popular and official narratives that circulate about the Baixada and the violence that predominates within it.

*O homem do ano* begins to unearth the links between violence and political power, questioning dominant mediatic representations and hegemonic societal narratives that posit the marginal male individual as the primary perpetrator of urban violence, while exposing the *de facto state of exception* that contemporary society has imposed to immolate this individual. Fonseca's film, by bringing these relations of power between men of different social strata in view of the camera, uncovers the socio-economic and physical violence that marks the body of the marginal male

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the Baixada Fluminense signals a geo-epistemological issue: Este equívoco, por sua vez, revela o problema dos limites dessa região. O aspecto geográfico acaba se relacionando com o político e com o social na construção de fronteiras não muito precisas. (Souza Alves 14)

This rewriting of the geographical boundaries of Rio de Janeiro by the media and state representative signals an understanding of the urban space that collapses the different regions of the city into one homogeneous mass understood vis-à-vis socio-economic divisionary lines. The re-mapping of Rio de Janeiro by the aforementioned state representative transforms the Baixada Fluminense into a microcosm that epitomizes urban violence. Additionally, this rewriting of the urban space negates a differentiation of individual *favelas* and *bairros* and illustrates how the Baixada Fluminense occupies a privileged position among the imaginary of Rio de Janeiro's elites as an epicenter of violence.

subject. Although *O homem do ano* hones in on the metropolitan center of Rio de Janeiro and its peripheral regions, violence and the construction of the poor marginal male as the scapegoat for violent events is not exclusive to this region, but rather prevalent in the news and media headlines throughout Brazil.

Reflecting Gaspar Pereira's argument that hegemonic groups maintain a scopophilic drive that fetishizes violence associated with lower socio-economic sectors, *O homem do ano* confers to the media a privileged position in relation to the production and consumption of images of violence. Throughout the narrative, Máiquel and his associates in SESPA collect the newspaper clippings of the killings that they are responsible for, pasting the articles into a binder, a trophy that Carvalho and his cronies marvel over. Headlines such as "Violência fez outras vítimas...", "Tiroteio e morte em Ramos," "Ladrão assalta a Caminho Aéreo Pão de Açúcar" declaim acts of violence in the Baixada Fluminense, Ramos and by extension in the rest of the metropolis. These articles attribute the violence to *marginais, quadrilhas, bandidos, ladrões* and the turf wars, drug trade and *balas perdidas* that are associated with these groups in dominant media outlets. These stories form the backbone of the construction of the marginal male

subject as *homo sacer*. He is limited to a series of images or stories that reduce him to his *bare life*. He is posited as the Other to hegemonic society, the embodiment of social strife. Within the media, the stories of the peripheral male figure are not anchored within empirical data, but rather are rooted in the fears and anxieties that preoccupy dominant society. Claudio Beato contends that:

Ao contrário de temas como política, economia, educação, cultura ou ciência, esta [a violência e segurança pública] é uma área em que as redações não contam com muitos jornalistas especializados. Mesmo quando existem, raramente são qualificados para compreender o fenômeno da segurança e da violência em todas as suas nuances. Lugares comuns e chavões passam a servir como base de interpretação de fenômenos complexos e heterogêneos, reforçando ainda mais os inúmeros estereótipos existentes. (Beato 33)

In this manner, the media outlets narrate a vision of the urban space in decay that reinforces existent "common sense" understandings of violence. What *O homem do ano* reveals is how, within this "society of the spectacle" the circulation and consumption of stereotypical understandings of the causes of violence supersedes the necessity to anchor such claims. The film reveals how the

aforementioned headlines represent violence as acts of a select group of marginal male figures. However, these narratives betray the reality that SESEPA is responsible for these actions. In other words, what is sold is the product desired by a consuming public whose fears stem in part from these same acts of violence. The power of the media and their stories to dialogue with, formulate, and manipulate understandings of events is a central theme of the film. *O homem do ano* attempts to question the construction and representation of crime and its actors within the multiplicity of media outlets that (re)produce ad nauseum these narratives and their sanctioning of one another's stories.

Beyond the apparition of the news headlines within the film, consider the scene when Zílmair, Sílvio and Carvalho first meet Máiquel in Carvalho's home. As the four men discuss the current state of affairs within Brazil, i.e. their construction as "citizens of fear" (Rotker 2002), they make reference to the incompetence of the police force to persecute the supposedly criminal subjects that threaten the health and wealth of the dominant classes whom these men represent.<sup>46</sup> The men's dialogue invokes the real-life

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<sup>46</sup> Susana Rotker coined the term "citizens of fear." Rotker contends that social practices are constructed around a

events broadcast by the media of the kidnapping of Bus 174 by Sandro do Nascimento on June 12, 2000 that was televised live over a four and a half hour period to the Brazilian nation.<sup>47</sup> Referencing this tragic event, Carvalho characterizes Sandro do Nascimento as a "crioulo enfurecido," evoking this term to posit him as a threatening racialized social Other. In an attempt to validate this stereotyping of the Nascimento, Carvalho asserts that during the broadcast of the events Sandro screamed "Eu sou filho do demônio." This statement is meant to emphasize Carvalho's argument that criminals are not human beings, but rather the "redundant" that contaminates

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generalized fear that shapes the "truths" of individual's daily lives. The bodies that inhabit the cityscape understand fear as an instinctive survival mechanism they use to guide the urban space. A daily portrait of life in these urban centers as beyond control dominates how these individuals understand the urban arena. The city becomes a text, a work of fear, in which the mass public consumes daily images, stories, and other representations of violence. Within these images there are few discernable narratives, but one that appears continually is that of the poor person as criminal. In this manner, violence rewrites the text of the city. According to Rotker, this violence "makes victims of us all, this undeclared civil war obliterates spaces of difference and differentiation, making all of us experience injustice, insecurity, and inequality" (Rotker, p. 18). This fear is then only heightened by media outlets that repeatedly feed into sensationalistic constructions of the poor, immigrants, etc as the source of crime.

<sup>47</sup> The events of this day are thematized in José Padilha's documentary *Ônibus 174* (2002) as well as Bruno Barreto's feature film *Última parada 174* (2008).

the urban landscape and therefore threatens the life / law / order of the upper and middle class citizens and the denizens they occupy (Bauman 1997 / 2004). As such, the criminal, understood as the marginal male subject, is *homo sacer*.

Carvalho desires to segregate the lower classes from dominant society since, from his point-of-view, the former threatens the progress of the nation formed by the latter. To this end, Carvalho utilizes the mediatic image to position his argument and incarnate his vision of all individuals from the lower classes. As such, the spectacle of Sandro do Nascimento strips the events of their socio-economic and historical context, foregoes the individual circumstances of the event, and transforms the incidence into a paradigm of the peripheral male. This discourse is then employed to validate the denial of civil and material "goods," in effect negating citizenship. In this manner, individuals from lower socio-economic groups are constructed as deviants and perpetrators of the crimes that afflict society and as such are not afforded the rights of "legitimate" citizens. They are formulated as the *homo sacer*.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, these narratives are employed

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<sup>48</sup> "What defines the status of *homo sacer* is therefore not the originary ambivalence of the sacredness that is assumed

to evoke a *state of exception* that permits the immolation of said personage.

As we had discussed in the chapter on *La Zona*, Giorgio Agamben in *The State of Exception*, characterizes *state of exception* as that which defines the limits of the law:

In truth, the *state of exception* is neither external nor internal to the juridical order, and the problem of defining it concerns precisely a threshold, or a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other.

The suspension of the norm does not mean its abolition, and the zone of anomie that it establishes is not (at least claims not to be) unrelated to juridical order.

(23)

The *state of exception* implies the suspension of the law in order to safeguard precisely the application of said law.

This is to say, the state of exception is an extrajudicial order that is imposed in order to guarantee juridical

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to belong to him, but rather both the particular character of the double exclusion into which he is taken and the violence to which he finds himself exposed. This violence—the unsanctionable killing that, in his case, anyone may commit—is classifiable neither as sacrifice nor as homicide, neither as the execution of a condemnation to death nor as sacrilege. Subtracting itself from the sanctioned forms of both human and divine law, this violence opens a sphere of human action that is neither the sphere of *sacrum facere* nor that of profane action” (Agamben, *Homo* 82-3).

order. The sphere of action established under the *state of exception* is based on the concept of necessity, an eternally subjective notion, a power structure that permits the suspension of juridical laws and citizenship in the face of necessity.

Within the film, a *de facto state of exception* is imposed within the Baixada Fluminense premised upon a perceived "crisis." Carvalho's discourse reflects the growing talk around the lack of security that predominates not only within the streets of the community, but also the mass media outlets that serve to heighten the sense of urgency with which this discussion is occurring. According to Cecília Coimbra in her study of *Operação Rio*:<sup>49</sup>

como sob novas maquiagens [...] os discursos sobre segurança pública [...] são profundamente influenciados pela Doutrina de Segurança Nacional - introduzida e enraizada em nosso cotidiano naqueles anos [de ditadura] - e como, ao longo das décadas de 80 e 90, veio a ser criada uma outra Doutrina, voltada agora para as parcelas miseráveis de nossa população.

(19)

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<sup>49</sup> *Operação Rio* took place in 1994 and 1995. The local and military police occupied areas of Baixada Fluminense that were considered dangerous with the pretense of ending violence and drug trafficking in Rio.



Coimbra indicates that there has been a shift from the repression of the political dissident to a positing of the lower classes as the faction in need of control. After the country's redemocratization, the poor have been constructed as the subversive element that endangers the nation's "order and progress," motto on the Brazilian flag. The motto, founded within Auguste Comte's positivist ideals, attempts to insert the nation of Brazil found within an ideological paradigm founded upon science and the industrial process. However, within such an understanding, there are those who are necessarily excluded from this project. According to Bauman:

The production of 'human waste', or more correctly wasted humans... is an inevitable outcome of modernization... an inescapable side-effect of order-building (each order casts some parts of the extant population as 'out of place', 'unfit' or 'undesirable') and of economic progress. (5)

In other words, the modernization process is necessarily an exclusionary practice that omits individuals who do not have the economic means to participate in its benefits. Within a neoliberal logic, the poor are redundant to the economic process. During the period of the military dictatorship in Brazil, the political dissidents, student

demonstrators, and all other individuals deemed subversive were posited as groups that needed monitored and restrained for the supposed "good of society." In the contemporary period, the urban poor have now substituted the political dissident as the faction that poses a threat to the progress of the nation.

Teresa Caldeira, in her book *City of Walls*, discusses the rise in crime that has struck the urban center of São Paulo and how this has resulted in a generalized fear that signals the loss of a unified social fabric. It is from this sense of chaos in front of a crumbling social structure that crime is utilized to symbolically reorder / restructure the social episteme. This symbolic order is constructed around stereotypical categories that are formed and then employed as tools to order the world within a matrix of discriminatory practices.

In the framework of *O homem do ano*, the dentist Carvalho after establishing his argument that the city must be divided goes yet a step further. The doctor contends that delinquents are born with criminal impulses and, for this reason they are ultimately not human beings. Carvalho states:

O bandido... corre solto. Eu sou a favor da pena de morte. Porque essa história de direitos humanos é uma

piada. Porque eles não são humanos, os seqüestradores, os estupradores. Para mim, o sujeito já nasce com esses impulsos criminosos.

These statements recall notions that were popular at the end of the nineteenth century, such as Francis Galton's theories on eugenics.<sup>50</sup> These same theories were later exploited by the Brazilian military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985.<sup>51</sup> The socially undesirable were posited within a medicalized discourse in which social sickness must be

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<sup>50</sup> Medicalizing discourses that we see in the treatises and studies of nineteenth century Europe traversed the Atlantic and had a profound effect in Brazil. The "criminal," the "homosexual" as well as other social "deviants" became the location of perversion, bodies in need of study that were placed within the purview of science, quantifying and categorizing the "other's" material and symbolic body. At this same historical moment, Brazil was undergoing significant social transformations. In 1888, the *Lei Áurea* (Golden Law) abolished slavery. The same medical discourses that studied those who were considered social deviants were also employed to "understand" race. Darwinian ideas and Francis Galton's theories on eugenics were exploited by intellectuals of the epoch to promote the "whitening" of Brazil and attest to the detrimental influences and consequences of Afro-Brazilian elements within the society (Stam 1997).

<sup>51</sup> For example Sérgio Paranhos Fleury, a torturer during the military dictatorship, stated in an interview "O marginal é aquele cachorrinho que é mau caráter, indisciplinado, que não adianta educar" (Coimbra 84). What one may find disturbing is that these same arguments continue to reappear well into the eighties and beyond. According to Maurício Knobel, head of the UNICAMP department of psychiatry, in an interview with the newspaper *Estado de São Paulo* in 1981: "... a criminalidade tem origens patológicas e as condições que a sociedade oferece facilitam os portadores de problemas patológicos a externarem sua violência" (Coimbra p. 84).

purged to allow for the advancement of the health of the national body. The words of Carvalho invoke these earlier treatises contending that "ordem e progresso" are to be achieved through the cleansing of society of those that are considered "infectious." For this reason, the dentist and his cronies consider Máiquel's vigilante work as "higiênico e patriótico."

One must also remember that when Carvalho and Máiquel originally meet, the dentist very clearly expresses his views about race, proudly stating that he is a racist, that all blacks and mulattos are criminals, and anyone who denies this is just scared to be honest due to international NGO's and their human rights campaigns. The linking of crime with race also connects transgression to questions of class, especially if we consider that in urban Brazil, fifty percent of households of color were poor in 1989, as compared to only twenty-two percent of white households (Telles 112). *O homem do ano* connects these discourses with the current discussions within the media that revolve around public security.

*O homem do ano*, however, indicates a gap between what Carvalho and his cronies propose as the root cause of the social maladies that afflict Brazil and the material reality that drives their beliefs. Security and violence

appear to be a predominant topic of discussion within the general population, and particularly between men. However, the film reveals the double standard that hegemonic society employs in reference to practices of violence. The violence that the lower classes utilize to attain a degree of social and material agency is construed as threatening democratic ideals, as injustices ravaged upon the middle and upper classes. At the same time, the hegemonic groups impose a *state of exception* that suspends said democratic ideals in relation to *homo sacer* and employ violence to supposedly guarantee these same ideals. Or, one might argue pre-modern measures are employed when the hegemonic classes confront those they consider responsible for crime.<sup>52</sup>

Consider for a moment that Zilmar, Sílvio, Carvalho, and Delegado Santana are the silent backers of the security firm SESEPA that Máiquel runs. The firm "protects" local businesses although they are responsible for much of the random crime that has surged in the neighborhood. This is transmitted in two ways through the film. Firstly, after having their security services turned down by several companies, Máiquel and several of his accomplices blackmail the same businesses they are hoping to protect,

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<sup>52</sup> See Foucault and his discussion of modern and premodern forms of punishment in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977).

consequently creating the havoc and instilling the fear necessary for their economic aspirations to be realized. Secondly, Máiquel and the security firm take the law into their own hands as vigilantes, assassinating those they consider to be "non-desirable" individuals, negating to them the possibility of participating in the appropriate legal process (i.e. a trial) and imposing a *state of exception*. The community and the local representatives of the state, the police, condone these actions. In turn, the poor, the victims of said official violence, are cast as *homo sacer* and are at once subject to and excluded from the law.

In terms of cinematography, *O homem do ano* is narrated from within, presenting the perspective of Máiquel who, through a combination of first hand narration and voiceover, explains his initiation into the world of vigilante justice. The first person narration inserts the viewers into the action, allowing them a "direct" experience vis-à-vis the trials and tribulations of the protagonist. *O homem do ano* follows in the tradition of many recent films such as *Amores perros*, *Cidade de Deus* and *O invasor* and their use of filming and editing techniques such as jump cuts, steady pans, and various other stylistic practices adapted from the visual design of music videos

and television commercials that fragment the visual narrative. The use of these filming and editing techniques creates a fast-paced narrative that emulates the frenetic pace of life in modern metropolitan centers of Latin America, where many of these fictional chronicles are situated. Furthermore, the video-clip visual style of *O homem do ano* augments the internal tension within the narrative and creates dramatic friction between the film and the spectator. This occurs vis-à-vis the continual rupturing of the visual narrative, which in turn undermines the narrative's stability, prompting the spectator to "experience," to a degree, the emotional instability of Máiquel. In other words, the rapid camera movements in tandem with a high degree of editing are employed to create a parallel between the viewing experience and the mental state of the protagonist. As Máiquel slides into a state of neurosis, the movements of the camera quicken and destabilize, the pace of editing accelerates, and the visual space collapses.

Additionally, in terms of filming, the selection of a color palette marked by the use of saturated hues creates visual involvement by engaging the viewer at an aesthetic level. Rich colors garner the attention of the spectator, intensifying the scenes through the visceral responses they

elicit while at the same time espousing or contradicting the emotional states of the protagonist. Fonseca manipulates the background of many scenes through the use of colored light. Saturated hues of blue, green, yellow and red flood the background creating unnatural lighting situations that meld into the visual narrative. On a purely aesthetic level, these colors serve to control the scenes both stylistically and psychologically, while generating a visually engaging setting.

On a psychological level, Fonseca manipulates the scenes through the engagement of normal psychological responses that the viewer has to warm and cool colors. On the one hand he infuses a limited number of scenes with warm hues (red, orange, yellow), such as those that occur in Carvalho's home, Erica's (Natália Lage) visits to Marlênio's (André Barros) church where sermons of fire and brimstone taint the air, as well as scenes shot in the home of Cledir's mother (Marilu Bueno). A warm color palette is normally associated with excitement and energy. The scenes in which we encounter these colors are spaces inhabited by individuals who hold sway over Máiquel. Predominantly, they are spaces within which the protagonist finds himself in conflict, not physical struggle, but rather in enveloped in masculine neurosis as the authority his gender role



supposedly endows upon him collapses. He is unable to exert the same degree of control that he initially commands within public sphere through violence. Rather his emotional state reveals the changing dynamics of gender relations and his desire to impose a patriarchal structuring of his personal life.

Contrary to the warm colors, a cool color palette (blue, green, violet) predominates in the background of the majority of the movie. While cool colors typically suggest a feeling of ease and relaxation, many of the scenes seem to break with the psychological response naturally associated with this color palette. Take for example the evening when Neno (Marcelo Biju), a rival mercenary / drug kingpin in the area kills Robinson (Perfeito Fortuna), one of Máiquel's close friends. After news arrives of Robinson's death and all the men go back to the chop-shop, the background of the space is flooded in blue and green. The coolness of the hues create an unnatural ease that contrasts directly with the tension of the action: Máiquel amped up on cocaine, the ambience charged with the desire to avenge Robinson's death and the subsequent killing of Neno and Pereba (Guilherme Estevam). At the same time, if violence is the mediating factor that promotes a sense of security within the protagonist, then these cooler hues

reflect the false sense of security that said response elicits. The fact that Fonseca inundates the backgrounds of scenes with vibrant colors that appear, at times, juxtaposed to the natural psychological response associated with hues, serves to emphasize the state of neurosis into which Máiquel succumbs and the ambivalent positioning of violence within patriarchal understandings of masculinity and social relations. Color is further emphasized by the utilization of hard lighting that adds crispness to the textures and sharpens edges.

The use of hard lighting, colored light and saturated hues work in tandem with the framing of the shots throughout the film in which the camera rarely pulls back to wide high-angles. Rather, the film is composed primarily of straight-on medium, close-up and extreme close-up shots. This pulls the viewer into the personal space of the protagonist. Additionally, the strategic employment of optically subjective shots shifts the focal point between Máiquel as both subject and object of the camera. In turn, the cinematography establishes Máiquel as the central figure throughout the film. According to "Hitchcock's rule," the size of any object in a frame

should be relative to its importance to the story.<sup>53</sup> The framing pulls the viewer beyond the physical actions of Máiquel and into the mental state of the character and his fears as a masculine subject.<sup>54</sup>

Consider for a moment how framing serves to insert the viewer into the scene and introduce the viewer to Máiquel's emotional state when he arrives at the warehouse from which Caju (José Henrique Fonseca) deals arms. The *mise-en-scène* of Máiquel and Caju in the parts warehouse creates a virtually indefinable clutter against which Caju expounds upon a multiplicity of firearms, their popularity and optimal use. Wires, belts, gears, blocks, electric motors and a variety of other mismatched parts encumber the locale. This bric-a-brac of mechanical pieces permeates every available space. The background of automotive

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<sup>53</sup> Truffaut, François. *Hitchcock*, by François Truffaut with the collaboration of Helen G. Scott. Simon and Schuster, New York. 1967.

<sup>54</sup> Due to the length and focus of this chapter, I will not compare the film to the Patricia Melo's novel *O matador* (1995) upon which it is based. This being said, I would like to signal that the visual narrative that Fonseca creates engages the development of the internal monologues of the protagonist in the novel. For an interesting analysis of the book please consult Rosana Cacciatore Silveira's article "Máiquel, o herói da morte: uma análise mitológica do romance *O matador* de Patrícia Melo" or Thomas Johnen's "A violência no romance *O matador* de Patrícia Melo."

fragments is cast in blue and green hues, an ocean of confusion that drowns the protagonist. Máiquel, bleached platinum blond hair glowing, stares nervously at the weapons, his eyes shifting from side to side attempting to track each firearm as Caju displays, cocks and whirls around his deadly merchandise. Máiquel squints as Caju pulls out an AR-15 and then later unfolds the shoulder rest of an Uzi. He winces when he cocks a 12-pump pistol (manufactured version of the sawed off shotgun). The camera registers the nervousness of Máiquel by shifting between the two characters in close-up answering shots. The filming techniques bring to the fore the protagonist's anxiety as he delves into this sea of the unknown merchandise that connotes hitherto unfamiliar violence. The limited depth of field of the camera reflects and augments the spatial confusion and claustrophobia, as well as the protagonist's mental disorientation. Máiquel appears drunk with the prospect of authority that these weapons elicit. Between the two individuals, a stream of lethal weapons ruptures the space. In each instance, the camera shifts from the firearm to Caju and Máiquel until finally at the end of the sequence Máiquel holds a 45mm semi-automatic pistol in his hand. Caju inquires anxiously: "Está sentindo a força? É como colocar uma coroa na cabeça."

Máiquel cracks a slight smirk as he gazes down the barrel of the gun towards the camera. The fear and distress that build throughout the scene seem to vanish. As the camera gazes down 45mm, the depth of field elongates and Máiquel's face fills the background. His countenance reflects his inebriation with the power of the weapon and the supposed authority this instrument of violence endows upon him. The handgun serves as a metaphor for the status that Máiquel longs to attain within the community, reinforces a masculine ideal founded upon violence and proposes aggression as the inherent to these possibilities. His dominance is premised upon illegitimate power founded upon coercion and acceded to by the subjective "necessity" of the community. At the same time, said paramountcy comes with a price attached. Within the scene there is a subtle foreshadowing of the destructive nature of social relations and individual identities premised upon violence. Through a slight shift of the camera, there is an opening in the depth of field that invites the viewer to peer into a dark nothingness. This black vortex prefigures the neurosis that will accompany Máiquel and his forays into violence and power. Both visually and discursively, the spectator accompanies Máiquel from the initial sense of power that the gun endows him with through his downward spiral into

the seedy world of murder and violence and the resultant chaos and mental turbulence.

In *O homem do ano*, framing progressively creates a sense of visual claustrophobia. On the one hand the spatial confinement alludes to Máiquel's state of mind as social confinement augments his sense of neurosis. At the same time, the partitioning of space within the film serves to mark the exclusion of the marginal male subject from the social space of the community. The film occurs almost exclusively within enclosed, controlled and limited areas, from the small apartment of Máiquel to the automobile chopshop that Marcão (Lázaro Ramos), Robinson (Perfeito Fortuna), Enoque (Paulo Moska) and Galego (André Gonçalves) operate. Beyond this, the spaces seem to contract as the film progresses, constricting into the interior of automobiles, SESEPA's minimal office, Maiquel's kitchen or the vestibule of the Igreja da Nossa Senhora das Penas. The visual feeling of enclosure also extends to spaces that would normally be viewed as open arenas, such as streets, squares, and urban wastelands (terrenos baldios). For example, when Máiquel eliminates Pedrão (Romeu Evaristo), a large brooding man who is characterized exclusively through his stereotyping as a thug by his physical appearance and the apparel he wears, they drive him to one of these

wastelands. An oil refinery rises above them in the background as they pull Pedrão from the car and force him to his knees. When Máiquel fires the gunshot that kills Pedrão, a clean single extreme close-up from the throat up focuses in on the protagonist as the backdrop blurs and the sound of the gun blast reverberates. In this manner, the visual space shrinks around the protagonist and envelops him. Through his incorporation into the industrial / wasteland of the urban space, the body of Pedrão is transformed into social waste, constructed as a byproduct of society's modernization process and the consumptive logic that underlies it.

Modernization necessarily produces waste, both the refuse and byproducts of the manufacturing process (in the form of carcinogenic materials, contaminants and residues, cities of plastics and discarded items that overflow the world's landfills, not to mention the biological excrement that pollutes the waterways and lands of the world) as well as human beings. According to Zygmunt Bauman:

The production of 'human waste,' or more correctly wasted humans (the 'excessive' and 'redundant,' that is the population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay), is an inevitable outcome of modernization, and an

inseparable accompaniment of modernity. (Bauman 2004, 5)

At the same time that his body is immolated, Pedrão's story is incorporated into the excess mass that blights the urban terrain. The narratives of urban violence associated with the body of this "thug" are in turn used to validate the elimination of the "redundant" element within society and condone the negation of their political, civil and social rights.

According to the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística and the Ministério de Saúde in Brazil, men ages fifteen to twenty-nine are the principal victims and agents of violence within Brazil. In 1980 homicides were the cause of 22.4% of male deaths, while in 2000 this number had risen to 41.8%. In 2006, 83% of the victims of violence were men. Specifically, in the state of Rio de Janeiro, of the 10,426 violent deaths registered that year, 9,126 were men. These figures demonstrate the centrality of men and underlying questions of masculinity in the proliferation of violence within Brazil. *O homem do ano* unearths some of the links between constructions of masculinity, crime and the male subject.

Traditionally, the masculinity of the bourgeois, white, heterosexual male has served as an invisible norm



against which "other" masculinities and femininities were posited both socially and politically. With the emergence of second wave feminism, particularly in the latter part of the 1970's, theoretical studies positioned masculinity within a sex role socialization paradigm (Farrell 1974, Tolson 1977) and argued that masculinity was constructed through a process of socialization. In tandem with ideas from third wave feminism and its criticism of the essentialist definitions of sex roles that underlie the concepts of second wave feminism, sociologist R.W. Connell applied the concept of hegemony to masculinity, revealing white, middle-class, heterosexual masculinity as a dominant and oppressive paradigm within society. From this, Connell along with other researchers such as Lynn Segal have questioned how hegemonic masculinity has served as an oppressive force in relation to other masculinities. In the current period we have entered into a "potential third wave" of masculinities studies which, according to Tim Edwards:

is less easy to define, often slipping across interdisciplinary lines and invoking literary, cultural and media studies alongside the work of social scientists.. A common theme, however, is the importance of representation and its connection with

wider questions of change and continuity in  
contemporary... masculinities and identities. (3)

The conceptualization of masculinity since the 1970's has evolved from a homogenous site of identity and power embodied in archetypal understandings of patriarchal society to a plural masculinities, that calls into question stereotypes and begins to exhume the multifarious nature and underpinnings of patriarchal power. As this process has taken root, critics such as Leanne Payne (1985), Roger Horrocks (1994), Harry Brod (1994) and D. Sabo (1995) have argued that masculinity has been thrown into a crisis of definition that forces the questioning of any singular understanding of masculinity and reveals the constructed, performative nature of male gender identity and sexuality, although one could argue that masculinity has inhabited a space of permanent crisis throughout history. In any case, these studies have attempted to refuse masculinity the status of invisible norm against which all other gendered positionings are measured. With this, masculinity as an unconscious element of socio-political power and identity has been forced into social and political consciousness and subsequently questioned. *O homem do ano* dialogues with this interrogation by driving a wedge between traditional ideals of masculine virility and the masculine masquerade

that is encompassed in these social roles (Perchuk 1995).

Let us return to the beginning of the film when Máiquel first goes into Cledir's beauty salon. Cledir whirls Máiquel around so that Máiquel can feast upon the outcome of his newly dyed platinum blond hair. The bright lights of the salon fall upon the radiant locks as the hum of the red neon light "Chez Cledir" buzzes in the background. Máiquel stares into the mirror of the beauty parlor as a voiceover inserts us into his thoughts:

Eu sempre me achei um homem feio. Nunca gostei de olhar no espelho. Naquele dia foi diferente. Olhei para aquela cara que não era eu mais era eu, um loiro, um estranho. Eu passei a melhor parte de minha vida querendo ser outra pessoa. E aí eu vi que tinha chegada a minha hora.

His eyes penetrate the camera as he stares at us, at his reflection, in a shot-counter-shot, his lips trembling with desire, a faint smirk begins to invade his face. He feels empowered by his new look and asks Cledir: "Que é o que vai fazer hoje noite?" The camera cuts to the two in the front seat of his car, as Máiquel drives through the darkness of night constantly scrutinizing his new look in the mirror. Cledir tosses her hair and smiles flirtatiously. They drive off to Gonzaga's bar, Máiquel wanting to prove that

he has paid his debt to Robinson, as well as make public his new image and female companionship. As he walks into the bar and pulls his hand across his wisps of golden hair, a cackle breaks out from the other end of the local hangout. Suel, seated at a table playing cards with his buddies, begins to howl as Máiquel glances around nervously. The camera cuts between them, Máiquel trapped between the piercing glances of Cledir, his buddies and Suel as they all stare and an air of anxiety invades the ambiance.

In these initial scenes of the film, just after Cledir reveals the new platinum blond hair color to Maiquel, he stares into the salon's mirror, shedding the timidity that dominated his face just moments before when he peered through the salon window from the street. When Máiquel gazes into the mirror / camera, what the viewer encounters is a gesture that embodies the power of the male gaze.

Laura Mulvey argues that:

As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. A male movie star's

glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of his gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror. (838)

Máiquel assumes the role of spectator: "Eu passei a melhor parte de minha vida querendo ser outra pessoa. E aí eu vi que tinha chegada a minha hora ." The protagonist has positioned himself vis-a-vis the "ideal ego" and shed the timidity that dominated his previous constitution. He has transformed himself into another by assuming the "active power of the erotic look." In this move, the viewer is also induced to accept this invitation to assume the male gaze. What the spectator accompanies is a male figure who desires to assume the "glamorous characteristics" of the heroic male lead of classic Hollywood films that Mulvey references and the implicit omnipotence that this bequeaths upon him. However, what initially begins as the assumption of an ideal of masculinity founded upon male dominance, very quickly reveals the cracks within this façade, and what is traced is the gradual disintegration of male power through its own narcissistic unraveling.

The confrontation that occurs between Suel and Máiquel in the opening scenes of the film creates a situation that

places traditional ideals of masculinity on display. At the same time, Máiquel's masculinity also becomes a public spectacle for other men, i.e. his friends and other individuals from his neighborhood, to scrutinize.

According to Michael Kimmel in his article *Masculinity as Homophobia*:

What we call masculinity is often a hedge against being revealed as a fraud, an exaggerated set of activities that keep others from seeing through us, and a frenzied effort to keep at bay those fears within ourselves... We are afraid to let other men see that fear. Fear makes us ashamed, because the recognition of fear in ourselves is proof to ourselves that we are not as manly as we pretend... Violence is often the single most evident marker of manhood... it is the willingness to fight, the desire to fight (103-4).

While Kimmel's discussion of masculinity focuses on the United States, we can glean from his argument several paradigms that pulsate in the construction of traditional masculinity within the North American framework and which we can also detect in questions of gender formation and masculinity within Brazil. Máiquel decides to go to Gonzaga's bar not because of necessity, but rather because he wants to "mostrar para todo mundo o novo Máiquel." The

new Máiquel is defined as much by his new hairdo and his female companion as he is by a newfound sense of masculine strength and bravado that underlies this identity.

Máiquel's decision to dye his hair blond also "whitens" him, inserting him into a new paradigm of social definition. Traditionally, within Brazilian society, whiteness confers to individuals both social standing and, to varying degrees, power. According to Richard Graham:

Brazilian opinion makers are still living with the intellectual legacy of the compromise their parents and grandparents struck with racist theory. They are still implicit believers in a whiter Brazil, even though it may no longer be respectable to say so.

(28).

In other words, racism persists within the social structuring of Brazilian society, only that rather than explicit racism, contemporary social relations and racial understandings are built around a "color-blind" racist paradigm (Bonilla Silva 2006). Within the context of *O homem do ano*, Máiquel, at the moment that he dyes his hair blond, assumes a newfound position of power within this racialized system. Dyeing his hair incorporates him as part of a whiter community and reveals the simulated nature of the status and power that racism confers upon

individuals of lighter skin tone in Brazilian society. In the film, this translates into Máiquel assuming an aggressive stance and looking to violence to affirm his insertion into this racialized gender paradigm.

Returning to the bar scene, upon entering the local hangout, however, the new Máiquel's masculine masquerade is ultimately questioned by the local drug kingpin Suel. Suel retains a caché of power in terms of his definition as a "man" because he is the strong arm of the neighborhood, forcing businesses such as Gonzaga's to pay him bribes and supposedly known for his violent nature. Suel, by publicly "insulting" Máiquel threatens to reveal the fear that is hidden below Máiquel's macho guise. As Kimmel points out: "Homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men" (103). Máiquel directly links the idea of emasculation with homophobia when he responds to Suel's cackles from the back of the bar. "Qual é, está achando que eu sou viado?... O problema é que eu não sou viado nem palhaço. Eu não gostei de ver você rindo de mim quando entrei no bar, viu." Homophobia and the fear that his masculinity will be revealed as a mere ruse, a jester who dons a manly guise, impel Máiquel to violence as a means to reassert his newfound masculine



identity. "Pensa que sou viado, Suel. Vamos fora resolver essa merda como homens." As Kimmel points out, violence is transformed into a marker of manhood, a socialized response intended to quell any possible questioning by both the individual self as well as others that are present. In part due to the intervention of Gonzaga, Máiquel defers the moment of violence, rather challenging Suel to a fight the following day in the plaza.

From the bar scene we cut to Máiquel seated on his bed, staring out the window:

Virei a noite sem conseguir dormir assim pensando no Suel... Eu não devia ter feito aquilo. Estava arrependido tem inventado aquele do erro. Suel deve andar armado caralho. Eu nunca tinha segurado uma arma, porra. Eu vou ficar em casa, quieto, esquecer aquele assunto. Fodáse ele. Não vou botar pé na rua.

Once isolated from his friends and Cledir, the fear that Máiquel so relentlessly attempted to conceal is exposed. His male bravado of the previous evening is gone and he is consumed with the apprehension that Suel is an armed and dangerous individual against which he is virtually defenseless. A voiceover of Máiquel's stream of conscience divulges the rational thoughts of the protagonist and the fact that he is cognizant that he should not escalate the

situation. Panic begins to overwhelm him as he questions his individual strength and whether he should even set foot in the street until the entire debacle passes.

Following this interior monologue, the film cuts from Máiquel on his balcony to a shot of him walking down the subway platform with a long cardboard box of what appears to be fluorescent lighting tubes, the carton labeled Phillips TLT. He proceeds, with the package cradled in his arms to the plaza where he was to meet Suel at noon to "resolver essa merda como homem."

The location, the street in front of the bar where everyone gathers, and the hour, midday, evoke the image of the Hollywood Western in which two lone cowboys, good and bad, duel at high noon in the center of the town.

According to Brian Baker many contemporary Hollywood Westerns and police thrillers:

inhabit and replicate the tension between the necessity for law to organize a democratic, civic society, and the extra-legal violence which the law both excludes and relies upon to discipline the community. These texts commemorate... heroic masculinity... revisit the masculine individualism of the classic western; and... imagine a space for heroic male action (xi-xii).

*O homem do ano* reconstructs the scene of "heroic male action," while at the same time stripping it of "heroic" possibility and by structuring said actions as antiquated attempts to salvage a decadent masculinity that is premised upon violence and a male "frontiersman" ethos.

Once Máiquel reaches the plaza at noon, we accompany him for the remainder of the day at the plaza. This central space, in front of the church and local businesses, would many of times be an area of commerce and pedestrian movement, however, in the film the area is deserted, except eventually for a lone dog that wanders through the scene. The spectacle of the showdown, embodying the display of male virility and power is ignored, menialized. Máiquel's masculine identity, symbolized in his challenge to Suel and the necessity to prove himself, to be recognized as a "man," is ignored both by Suel as well as the local community. In the plaza he is alone, unacknowledged within the public eye. Within this scene, the change in daylight marks the passing of time, while Máiquel nervously paces the plaza or sits semi-confounded by this lack of recognition. The sequence lasts a minute without any dialogue or action, shifting from a close-up head-on shot of Máiquel to a long shot of him alone as darkness engulfs him. The spectacle of the duel, the showdown between men

is shattered. He is relegated to non-existence, negated the possibility of action and belittled.

Finally, just after dusk, Suel appears, not to acknowledge Máiquel's challenge, but rather passing through the area with Erica in route to Gonzaga's bar or some other location. As he passes, smoking a cigarette with his arm around Erica, Suel smiles ironically at Máiquel and continues. Máiquel retrieves from the box a small caliber rifle and runs to the center of the street, cocking the hammer and exclaiming "Pega tua arma, Suel." Suel spins around slowly, stating "Pode atirar loirinha," an evoking of the verbal sparring of the previous evening that revolved around homophobic insults. Suel then turns back to Erica, placing his arm over her as they walk away. Máiquel fires the rifle shooting Suel in the back and killing him.

The scene deconstructs the western shoot-out, reducing the entire event to an antiquated display of meaningless bravado that attempts to reaffirm a macho identity that is no longer possible (if it ever existed at all), a Hollywood ideal constructed through the westerns of the fifties such as *High Noon* (1952), the sixties with *The Man Who Shot Liberty Vance* (1962) or Clint Eastwood's *A Fist Full of Dollars* (1964) and his seventies and eighties with the *Dirty Harry* series as well as Charles Bronson's *Death Wish*

cycle, for example.

Following the killing, it is not strength that overcomes Máiquel, but rather fear: "Eu queria fugir, sair da cidade, mais fiquei aí, parado. Medo da vingança, medo da polícia, medo de ser preso. A vontade que eu tinha era acabar com aquela agonia." He is frozen by his fear, trapped by his previous actions and desperate to escape. These feelings, however, wane at the moment that the community begins to shower him with gifts and demonstrate their approval of his use of extra-legal violence against those they consider to be marginal or socially undesirable. Máiquel begins to gain confidence in himself as well as develop an understanding of the permissibility of violence directed at the lower classes, upon which his confidence is constructed. The community, particularly Carvalho and his cronies, exploit Máiquel's desire to be recognized as a strong man to enforce a vision of justice that applies unevenly to the members of the community. Máiquel is transformed into a perverse rendition of the heroic male figure. His recently discovered status changes his life view:

Depois que eu matei o Suel, muita coisa mudou na minha vida. Só se falava disso no bairro. As pessoas estavam orgulhosas de mim. Eu sempre achei a vida uma

merda, sempre fiz tudo errado, mas agora era diferente. Comecei a gostar das coisas. Me senti importante, feliz. Ia arrumar emprego, trabalhar e namorar.

The status benefits of Máiquel's newfound role as a figure of central importance, a man to be looked up to within the community, also translate into economic gains. The community members begin to lavish Máiquel with gifts, refusing payment on the goods and services that they provide. All of this Máiquel interprets as signs of acceptance of a redefinition of Máiquel premised on violence and power. What he fails to recognize is the underlying currents of racism and bigotry that motivate the community's judgment and their willingness to accept these extra-legal actions. In the beginning the community embraces his actions, looking for reprieve from what they consider the suffocating violence of Suel as well as others they have deemed undesirable to the community. However, Máiquel quickly fills the power vacuum and begins to run the neighborhood. This power soon spirals beyond his control consuming all aspects of his existence and revealing the neurosis of masculinity in crisis.

Violence is transformed into the defining characteristic upon which Máiquel constructs his masculine

identity. As this occurs, what becomes obvious is that the very essence of this identity is also the root of its own destruction. Initially, violence is limited to episodes between men in which they wrangle for power. This struggle begins with Máiquel's killing of Suel and then augments as he kills Ezequiel, Neno, etc. Although at the start, the violence is contained within a male dominated public sphere, it quickly invades the private space of the home. Violence is transformed into an automated response of Máiquel to any situation where he does not assume control. This becomes particularly evident when Erica drops by Máiquel and Cledir's home to return the keys to Máiquel's old apartment where she had been living ever since Máiquel moved in with Cledir. After Erica tosses the keys on the dining room table where Máiquel is seated reading the paper and turns to walk away, Máiquel inquires with his wife: "Porque ela não pode ficar aqui? Que é que ela fez de errado?" Cledir becomes quite upset, already feeling semi-abandoned by Máiquel and throws Erica out. As she walks out the door, Erica exchanges an accusatory glance with Máiquel just before exiting. Cledir catches the shooting look and begins to question Máiquel: "Esta tendo uma coisa com ela?" The confrontation between the two escalates as Máiquel, at first silent, meekly responds "No" and gets up

to leave the room. Cledir follows him yelling "Estão trepando, pirado?" Máiquel locks himself in the bedroom, Cledir screaming on the other side of the door "Cafejeste! Abra essa porta!" The handheld camera whirls around in close-up on Máiquel, the sunlight at times drowning out the background and blurring the image, pulling back as he rocks to and fro on the bed. His front of macho strength begins to crack. Máiquel, feeling vulnerable and under attack, reacts with violence.

Just as in his encounter with Suel, Máiquel reacts violently when the fear of being exposed as unmanly begins to threaten his façade of a traditional macho ethos. However, unlike previously, it is not the question of being exposed as a farce in the eyes of others, but rather it is the fear within himself that causes this break. As we had previously seen in Kimmel's discussion of masculinity, what we encounter is a demonstration of male bravado meant to quell any challenge that could lead to a rupturing of the veneer of manhood. Máiquel is overcome with anxiety. To hold at bay his frenzy of doubts and fears, he throws open the door and slams Cledir against the wall, gripping her by the throat and choking her to death, in effect silencing these ghosts of doubt.

In *O homem do ano*, violence is constructed as the



"tragic flaw" of masculinity and ultimately serves to undermine any attempt to construct a definition of masculinity that is premised upon it. The final scene of the film reveals the impossibility of this equation. Máiquel murders Delegado Santana, Carvalho, Silvio and Zilmer. In effect, he eliminates the backers of not only his business, but also his power base. In other words, he eliminates the source of his manhood, emasculating himself if one defines masculinity vis-à-vis violence. Later, Máiquel in the dingy bathroom of a roadside gas station, re-dyes his hair back to its natural dark chestnut color. The film cuts from the bathroom to a long stream of car headlights engulfed by the darkness of the night. A voiceover of Máiquel informs the viewer: "A vida é uma coisa engraçada. Se você deixar, ela vai sozinha, como um rio. Mas se você quiser pode colocar um cabresto, fazer da vida seu cavalo. A gente faz que a gente quiser. Cada um escolhe sua cena, cavalo ou rio." The words ring of irony, as we just accompanied Máiquel along his journey, attempting to tame life through violence and the imposition of an antiquated masculine identity that is premised upon brute force. The film reveals the impossibility of said project. As the film ends, Máiquel once again reintegrates into the mass, into the sea of headlights that stream down

the highway. He is no longer able to be named, able to be singled out, or hidden from view, he is protected by anonymity.

*O homem do ano* brings into the purview of the cinematic gaze questions of violence as they relate to masculinity, marginality and the media. Fonseca's cinematic work questions mediatic representations that seem to focus in on the urban poor and racial minorities, by offering a daily barrage of headline stories that dialogue with and often confirm the social myths that guide individual understandings of the problem of violence in Brazilian society. The film takes a critical stance toward the scapegoating of lower-class individuals as the root cause of violence within contemporary Brazilian society. At the same time, the work deconstructs masculine identity as it relates to violence, calling into question any definition of manhood that is premised upon aggression. Ultimately, what is revealed is that violence is the expression of fear: fear of the Other, fear of the unknown, fear of revealing ones vulnerabilities or fear of not conforming to anachronistic stereotypes of what it means to be a "man."

## Chapter V

### *Cidade de Deus:*

#### Spectacularizing Men, Aestheticizing Violence, Effacing Reality

In an interview on the tenth of August 2005 with the BBC, Marco Müller, the director of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Venice International Film Festival, criticized Brazilian submissions to the film festival for being "too Brazilian." He went on to state that:

I enjoyed the three films, but the committee did not understand anything. They need to understand more about Brazilian cinema. But the directors need to think about the possibility of exporting their films.<sup>55</sup>

(Rey)

With the elimination of the film submissions of the Brazilian directors Andrucha Waddington, Sérgio Bianchi and Beto Brant, Brazilian cinematography was not represented in the festival. The only exception was Fernando Meirelles' *The Constant Gardener* (2005). The film, a co-production of Germany, Great Britain and Kenya, is an English language feature that competed for the Golden Lion. According to

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<sup>55</sup> The film titles are never mentioned, only the directors Andrucha Waddington, Sérgio Bianchi and Beto Brant.

Müller, this was the only submission that was not "a constant fight" (Rey). Previous to the 2002 release of the polemic *Cidade de Deus*, Meirelles was not a celebrated director on the national or international film circuit.<sup>56</sup> Rather, he was recognized for the advertising firm O2 that he founded as well as his work on television series and the direction and production of publicity spots. Following the international success of *Cidade de Deus*, Meirelles attained international fame that served to catapult the Brazilian director to Hollywood and the global film scene. Subsequently, he directed *The Constant Gardener* (2005) and *Blindness* (2008). Both are English language blockbuster films created primarily for an international / North American / European viewing public.

*Cidade de Deus*, co-directed by Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund, was the director's first venture into the international market. The film incorporates a national and international aesthetic and employs a narrative that appeals to a global audience. The work is based on the nationally best-selling Brazilian homonymous novel

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<sup>56</sup> I will refer to the film in italics *Cidade de Deus*, I will reference Paulo Lin's novel Cidade de Deus by underlining the title and lastly, I will not add additional formatting when I refer to the geo-political space of the *favela* Cidade de Deus. I hope that this will facilitate the differentiation between the three in my study.

published in 1997 by Paulo Lins.<sup>57</sup> The protagonist of the movie, Buscapé (Wilson Rodrigues) narrates the development of the urban enclave Cidade de Deus, a *favela* of Rio de Janeiro established in the 1960's as a low-income housing project. The movie is organized in three acts sequentially portraying the shantytown through the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's, tracing Cidade de Deus from its inception to a lethal territory controlled by drug lords and plagued by turf wars. In the 1960's the film follows the story of the Trio Ternura, composed of Cabeleira (Jonathan Haagensen), Alicate (Jefechander Suplino) and Marreco (Renato de Souza). The youthful gang is involved in an array of petty thefts as they both try to avoid the authorities and gain growing recognition in Cidade de Deus. At the same time, during this period, we witness the beginnings of Zé Pequeno (Leandro Firmino da Hora) who at this point is still a child and known as Dadinho (Douglas Silva). The audience is introduced to him through his initial forays into the world of crime and criminality in the *favela* with his childhood friend Bené. With the shift to the 1970's the narrative continues, however Zé Pequeno is now one of the

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<sup>57</sup> Though co-directed by Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund, in many of the reviews Katia Lund is either not mentioned or following an initial mention is cast in a secondary role at best to Meirelles.

major players within the narcotics business of the *favela*. He and Bené continue to build their business and eliminate the other dealers that are their competitors until only Sandro Cenoura (Matheus Nachtergaele) remains. However as their power base grows, Bené falls in love with Angélica (Alice Braga) and decides that he is going to leave the narcotics trade and escape with her to the countryside. With the end of the 1970's an epoch marked by the initial stages of violence and the drug trade, the unbridled violence of the 1980's begins. Bené is shot by Neguinho (Rubens Sabino), one of the drug traffickers that Zé Pequeno had overtaken. Bené's death initiates what appears to be a futile exercise in extermination. The wars between Zé Pequeno and Sandro Cenoura, who has been joined by Mané Galinha (Seu Jorge), engulf Cidade de Deus as the two become entwined in an all out battle for control of drug turf. The film is narrated from within, presenting the perspective of Buscapé. Buscapé, while a childhood friend of the various actors in this bloody drama, explains from the outset that "Eu nunca tive coragem de seguir o meu irmão." His brother was Marreco, one of the original members of the Trio Ternura. However, Buscapé takes another path and becomes a photographer, looking to art as an alternative to violence, although he is only able to

become a photographer through his documentation of the violence in *Cidade de Deus*. In the film, the narrative voice employs a combination of first hand narration and voiceovers, as Buscapé explains his growing up in *Cidade de Deus*, introduces characters and describes the growth of the drug trade and its functioning within the *favela*. The first hand narration inserts the viewer into the action, allowing him / her to experience the trials and tribulations of this youth. His bildungsroman parallels the coming of age story of *Cidade de Deus*.

In this chapter, I will discuss Fernando Meirreles' *Cidade de Deus*. I propose that, through the film *Cidade de Deus*, the community of *Cidade de Deus* is transformed from a concrete reality into an imagined locality in which masculinity and violence are spectacularized. This occurs through an aestheticization of violence and the spectacle of masculinity, which are transformed and packaged as cultural commodities. In so doing, violence is dislocated from its social, economic and political context, constructed as fetishistic commodity to be consumed by the mass public.

In this analysis, I will briefly discuss the various viewpoints that have marked discussions of the film *Cidade de Deus*. Following this, I will illustrate how the film

articulates *Cidade de Deus* as a liminal space divided from the larger context of Brazil geographically, socio-economically and historically. In so doing, I will consider how this liminal space is transformed into aesthetic product through sophisticated cinematic filming and editing techniques that serve to suture the spectator into the film. I will then pause for a moment to contemplate how masculinity dialogues with the construction of violence. Ultimately, I will demonstrate how Meirelles propagates the *favela* and its male inhabitants as consumable products, reducing *Cidade de Deus* and its residents to a spectacle for a voyeuristic consuming public.

When discussing *Cidade de Deus*, one is initially struck by the comments of the cultural critics that have reviewed the film both nationally and internationally. Many of these scholars and writers inserted the film into the North American cinematic traditions of the Wachowski brother's *The Matrix* (1999) (Rodríguez), any number of Quentin Tarantino's films (Lally) as well as within the canon of unforgettable gangster /crime films such as Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas* (1990) (Heard) and John Singleton's *Boyz'n the Hood* (1991) (Siwi). Miranda Shaw takes issue with the North American and British film critics that have



located *Cidade de Deus* within the tradition of gangster /crime films stating that:

[T]he gangster film is linked both to the moral doctrine and entertainment within the context of depression and prohibition America whilst *City of God* concerns itself with the development of political awareness in pursuit of social reform in Brazil. (59)

Shaw maintains that *Cidade de Deus* does not fit within the gangster / crime genre because this filmic genre is rooted in the social reality of the United States.<sup>58</sup> While *Cidade*

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<sup>58</sup> Alternatively, Shaw argues that the film is a revitalization of *Cinema Novo*. I agree that *Cidade de Deus* utilizes some of the technical and thematic aspects that are associated with the historical legacy of *Cinema Novo*, for example, the use of hand-held cameras, the employment of non-professional actors, the thematization and localization of the film in society's dispossessed terrains. This being said, we must also remember that these cinematic devices are the influence of French Realism and *Cinéma Vérité* upon the directors of *Cinema Novo*. In other words, they are styles that mark a wide range of films. Additionally, these filming styles have seen a marked revival in Latin American Cinema since the mid 1990's with the growing accessibility to digital cameras and editing (One obvious example is Bruno Stagnaro and Israel Adrián Caetano's *Pizza, Birra y faso* (1998)). As such, I believe that it is problematic to claim that these devices employed in *Cidade de Deus* mark a revitalization of *Cinema Novo*. This argument seems to mask the quick paced style, high degree of editing and manipulation of the image that is fundamental to the visual and narrative style of *Cidade de Deus*.

Additionally, I would question the argument that the prevailing social agenda of the film places it in direct dialogue with *Cinema Novo* (Shaw). I would contend that this argument seems to be constructed primarily upon the

*de Deus* emerges from the Brazilian context, I would argue that the pervasiveness and popularity of Hollywood both in Latin America and beyond, underscores the influence of the gangster genre internationally and more generally the growing importance and centrality of the action film globally.

The cultural critic Néstor García Canclini discusses the ubiquitous presence of and signals the shift to the spectacle of action in film and narration as an example of the prevalence of an "Americanized" style that has come to mark international film production. According to the Argentine critic in *Consumidores y ciudadanos: conflictos multiculturales de la globalización* (1995) (*Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and multicultural conflicts* [2001]):

They [U.S. capital and corporations] are, without a doubt, a key factor in the confusion of an expanding

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director's professed intentions. However, I find a gap between these stated intentions and the spectacularization of violence and masculinity within the film. Additionally, Meirelles claims that his objective was to offer the spectator an "unfiltered" experience, in this sense engaging the desire of both Cinéma Novo and Cinéma Vérité to remove the veneer that existed between the spectator and the subject. However, the video-clip styling of the cinematography seems to negate this very premise. Rather than an *Estética de Fome* (Glauber Rocha 1965) what we are privy to is the spectacularization of violence and poverty, what Ivana Bentes has termed a *Cosmética de Fome* (2001).

globalization of the worldwide export of one country's film, television, and food styles to the entire planet. Our analysis of the changes in the supply of cultural commodities and in the tastes of audiences indicates that the economic control wielded by the United States is linked to the rise of certain aesthetic and cultural features that are not exclusive to that country. They find in it, however, an exemplary representative: the predominance of spectacular action over more reflexive and intimate forms of narration...(*Consumers* 32)

As Canclini signals, the spectacle almost universally has come to predominate in contemporary cinematic production. With this, he intimates the growing importance of "spectacular action" in the success of contemporary films. Canclini asserts the idea that, in the context of globalization, culture becomes increasingly hybrid exposed as it is to augmented processes of intercultural mixing. In this manner, the action film of Hollywood is adapted and incorporated into other cinematic traditions and through this a new hybrid cultural product emerges.

Returning specifically to our discussion of the gangster / crime genre in relation to *Cidade de Deus*, if we consider comments by directors such as Albert and Allen

Hughes, who in the 1990's directed *Menace II Society* (1993), we find a striking parallel between their comments and the claims of Meirelles that he was motivated to direct *Cidade de Deus* in an effort to inform Brazil's middle and upper classes of the deplorable conditions that exist within the social setting of the *favela*.<sup>59</sup> In an interview with the *New York Times* the Hughes brothers stated:

[W]e wanted to show the realities of violence, we wanted to make a movie with a strong anti-violent theme and not like one of those Hollywood movies where hundreds of people die and everybody laughs and cheers. (Weintraub C13)

According to these directors, their film, while part of the gangster / crime film genre assumes a social agenda that was meant to confront present-day social problems associated with violence in the urban ghetto.<sup>60</sup> The contemporary gangster / crime genre cannot simply be limited to the traditional thematization of the Italian

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<sup>59</sup> Meirelles contends that by making *Cidade de Deus*: "I would be killing two birds with one stone: I would expose a view of my country that had shocked me when I read the book, and I would give my own life a boost" (13). I will discuss this quote and the problems that I find with his claims later in this chapter.

<sup>60</sup> Ed Guerrero has used the term hood-homeboy action formula to refer to films that thematize the urban ghetto and primarily poor, black marginal subject who is involved with drugs, gangs and urban violence.

mafia and the prohibition period in the US. This would negate both the changing composition and role of the mafia in the United States during the 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's as well as ignore the shifting dynamics of crime throughout the twentieth century. In recent years this genre has come to embrace a varied cultural landscape as well as broader understanding of gang cultures and crime both within the United States and internationally. While we may consider works such as *Boyz'n the Hood* (Singleton 1991), *Menace II Society* (Hughes 1993), *La Haine* (Kassovitz 1995), *Bones* (Dickerson 2001), *Get Rich or Dye Tryin'* (Sheridan 2005) or *Sin Nombre* (Fukunaga 2009) a subgenre within the traditional gangster / crime genre, I would argue that since they deal with the world of contemporary crime and society, they form part of this overarching genus. As I discussed in the introduction to the dissertation, working from the ideas put forth by Nicole Rafter in *Shots in the Mirror*, these films in part shape ideas of crime, its prevalence and its actors. Genre films tap into and dialogue with cultural beliefs, traditionally utilizing established story models that many times serve to reinforce hegemonic viewpoints. In turn, the films are both influenced by predominant social codes and formulate and perpetuate these same beliefs in the viewing public. In

this manner, cinema and crime narratives maintain a dialectical relationship to society, oscillating between "virtualization" (how the mediatic image [re]produces the social) and "actualization" (how the image is then [re]incorporated into society) (Diken and Bagge Laustsen 2008).

The dialectical relationship of these films to society however, does not explain why cinematic works such as *Cidade de Deus* and *Amores perros* have become both national and international blockbusters. To understand, at least in part, their success we must also consider briefly how capitalism functions. The intention of these films is not necessarily the eradication of crime, but rather the commodification of it. Capitalism functions not so much through erasure as through exploitation. Difference, embodied in the exotic Other, is a necessary product that participates in the creation of desire and the propagation of consumption, the backbone of capitalism. Once the Other, the "exotic" is consumed (cannibalized) the desire of consumption must continually be relocated within a new exotic product (Root 1996, Jain 2004). Desire must be created and maintained. Anil K. Jain explains this process as:

[W]herever they are destroyed and seem to evaporate, differences have to be ('virtually') created. And wherever certain 'valuable' forms of difference (like poverty or a harmless but appealing cultural 'flavor') still can be found and exploited, they are (often violently) sustained. (15)

In this manner, difference must not only be constantly consumed but also sustained and produced for capitalism to function. This capitalist logic guides both the creation and dissemination of *Cidade de Deus*. Through the film, the geo-political space is transformed into a consumable spectacle that taps into overarching stereotypes about the marginal male subject and the spaces he inhabits. Rapper and resident of Cidade de Deus MV Bill signaled the *favela's* insertion into this very process when he criticized Meirelles and the film on January 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2003.<sup>61</sup> The communiqués were published on the Viva Favela

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<sup>61</sup> A brief excerpt from the January 22<sup>nd</sup> communiqué: "Everyone knows we [the residents of Cidade de Deus] do not want any money. We only want respect. They, the owners of *City of God*; the film, have the media's support. But in our case, unfortunately, the support of hatred is the only thing left to us... the humiliation that we are enduring may serve as an example for other communities of misery. If someday, somebody should transform their lives into a circus, tell them to demand a reward to match, even if it is simply the role of a clown. This way, at least some cheer is guaranteed" (123).

website.<sup>62</sup> The film transforms the geographical location into a space of difference, an exotic location cloaked in masculine violence and abject poverty, which in turn is constructed as Other to middle and upper class urban denizens of Brazil as well as much of the international audience.

The "Othering project" of the film resides in part within its claims to "authenticity" and the representation of "reality." In order to fully understand the assertion of authenticity that the film professes, we must first consider the novel upon which the film is based in conjunction with the screen adaptation as well as the rehearsal process. Paulo Lins, the author of Cidade de Deus (1997), was born in 1958 and moved to Cidade de Deus in the 1960's. Following this, in the 1980's and 90's he trained as an anthropologist under the direction of Alba Zaluar, renowned for her in-depth studies of marginal groups.<sup>63</sup> Through his life experiences as well as formal

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<sup>62</sup> [www.vivafavela.com.br](http://www.vivafavela.com.br)

<sup>63</sup> Alba Zaluar is an urban anthropologist and well known for her studies of violence and the favelas. She is the author of a series of anthropological studies that concentrate on the urban space, violence, the favela and its inhabitants: *Cidadãos Não Vão ao Paraíso* (1994), *Condomínio do Diabo* (1996), *Da Revolta ao Crime S.A.* (1996), *Um Século de Favela* (1998), *A Máquina e a Revolta* (1999), *Violência, Cultura, Poder* (2000), and *Integração Perversa: Pobreza e Tráfico de Drogas* (2004)



training, Paulo Lins gained an insider's perspective into the *favela* of Cidade de Deus and its inhabitants. Working from his personal and professional experiences, the carioca novelist wrote Cidade de Deus. Within the pages of the novel, one very quickly notes the local vernacular of the language and a firm rooting in the "reality" of contemporary urban Brazil. The novel is composed of an unremitting compendium of vignettes that broach the lives of some 247 different characters.

Screenwriter Bráulio Mantovani transformed this seven hundred page epic novel into the intersecting narratives of the Trio Ternura, Bené and Dadinho / Zé Pequeno. The central narrative voice of Buscapé recounts, through a series of flashbacks his homodiegetic narration of the development of Cidade de Deus from a state-run housing project to a community rife with drug trafficking to a gang infested war zone funded by the drug trade.

The film *Cidade de Deus* utilizes the authenticity that is afforded Paulo Lins' novel as a form of product promotion to corroborate the legitimacy and realism of the cinematographic work. The validity that it garners from Paulo Lins' insider status is then translated into the foundational argument upon which Meirelles constructed the social agenda that purportedly underscores the film.

Within this viewpoint, the camera is transformed into a means to document the socio-economic reality of the *favela* and at the same time a medium to achieve social change through the revelation of said reality. Critic Else Vieira contends that:

[T]he audience is looked at and is unavoidably implicated in the images of the perverse encounter of dire poverty, drugs and arms; the audience becomes complicit with what is documented and presented. The camera becomes a weapon against the violence of non-recognition or mis-recognition. It is a demand for social visibility in the structure of the film.

(xviii)

Vieira, just as the majority of the critics who have analyzed *Cidade de Deus*, signals the ability of the film to pull the audience into the visual narrative that ravages the screen. Vieira along with cultural critics such as Lúcia Nagib, Miranda Shaw and André Gatti signal a supposed demand for social visibility and the prominence of the social project that emanate from the realist aspects of the film. However, does the film create a realistic portrayal of *Cidade de Deus* and life in the *favela*? To what degree does the film / the camera, on the one hand implicate the spectator and on the Other construct a voyeuristic gaze

that objectifies the *favela* and uses this scopophilic gaze to merely confirm dominant society's stereotypes of the lower classes?

According to Fernando Meirelles, he originally decided to transform this novel into a film because he wanted to present this "other" experience of life in Brazil to the middle and upper classes who were primarily ignorant of what occurred in the *favelas*. Meirelles contends that by making the film: "I would be killing two birds with one stone: I would expose a view of my country that had shocked me when I read the book, and I would give my own life a boost" (13). With this the founder of O2 films, Brazil's largest advertisement firm, started down the path that would eventually lead to his winning Best Director from the Academia Brasileira do Cinema in 2003 as well as his nomination for Best Director at the 2004 Oscars. Meirelles attained the "boost" he set out for when he began this project. Through the recognition he garnered as director of *Cidade de Deus*, Meirelles was able to move beyond the world of directing commercial television series and advertisement spots and reposition himself internationally as a feature film director. While the Brazilian director achieved his goal in terms of the "life-boost" he was searching for, we must inquire into the first of his two

professed objectives and ask: what is the vision of the *favela* that he has constructed and exposed to the Brazilian nation as well as international audiences?

Building from the "authenticity" that his work garnered from that fact that it was based on Paulo Lins' novel and takes as its subject an actual *favela* of Rio de Janeiro, the director decided to employ a combination of professional and non-professional actors. Meirelles has placed emphasis on this aspect of the preparation process in countless interviews as well as his article "Writing the Script, Finding and Preparing the Actors." According to Meirelles:

The idea was to have these unknown actors in order to eliminate the filter, to let the spectator have a direct relationship with the character. All this, I thought would bring out the truth I wanted to have in the film. Middle class actors would not know how to interpret those characters. Besides, there were no young black or mulatto actors in Brazil. I would have to find the cast in the favelas of Rio. (15)

Meirelles, three years after the release of the *Cidade de Deus*, corrects the media hype around the film that endorsed that all the actors were amateurs from the *favelas*. For many of the film and cultural critics, the use of non-

professional actors was a central point that bound the film to reality. For example, Nagib finds this aspect a fundamental element of the success of the film and one of the foundational building blocks in its veridical representation of the social and economic reality it portrays.<sup>64</sup>

Another element of the claim to authenticity lies in the writing and re-writings of the script of *Cidade de Deus* by Mantovani. The dialogues were constructed in part around improvised scenes that allowed the non-professional actors the lateral freedom to supposedly recreate the reality they knew so well. Additionally, improvisation was a fundamental part of the training of the actors that participated in the *Nós do Cinema* project in preparation for the film.<sup>65</sup> This being said, consistent with Meirelles,

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<sup>64</sup> "The appearance on screen of real-life *favela* inhabitants, with their varying shades of dark skin, their frequently semi-naked, raw beauty, seems to emphasize the characters' veracity and restore the reality that gave rise to this fictitious story. Without a shadow of a doubt, the film has the revelatory quality of a 'hidden reality' that previously characterized neo-realist films, which depicted the ravages of war, or the films of the Brazilian Cinema Novo movement, which depicted the misery of the Brazilian backlands" (244)

<sup>65</sup> *Nós do Morro* was a theatrical trope from the favela Morro do Vidigal in Rio Zona Sul. The group was directed by Guti Fraga, a known actor in Rio. Upon accepting to participate in Fernando Meirelles' project, Fraga along with three groups or teams from the *Nós do Morro* trope went out into the community and began recruiting participants. They

the script itself remained a work in progress with thirteen drafts because director and script writer were continually testing the scenes on the students at *Nós do Cinema*. Working from the students' reactions to the scenes and the subsequent improvisation of them, Mantovani would re-adapt the script accordingly. Ultimately, a final script was developed and both the novel as well as the actors served to cement the notion that the film was a faithful representation of *Cidade de Deus* and by extension the many *favelas* that populate Brazil's urban landscape. However, I would argue that the final script reduces the community of *Cidade de Deus* to a mere backdrop, if the actual geo-political space exists at all, against which drug dealers and violence between men takes center stage.

Returning to the ideas of Lúcia Nagib, the renowned critic argues that *Cidade de Deus* has avoided Americanized representations that are limited to mere "surfing the surface" or "repeating attractions" (246). She maintains that the film "avoids such schemes via the importance it gives to the narrative" (246). This is achieved in part due

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renamed the project *Nós do Cinema* in homage to the original acting trope and from their efforts ended up recruiting over two thousand kids who showed up for the screen test. From this group they selected four hundred kids to participate in acting workshops. They have subsequently renamed the group *Cinema Nosso*.

to the fact that the cinematic techniques serve to approximate the spectator to the narrative, pulling her/him into a critical dialogue with the violence that dominates the screen. Elsie Vieira, in the introduction to her anthology *City of God in Several Voices* (2005), also signals the importance of the cinematic techniques that the film employs contending that: "Special effects of sight further expose this social wound in the body of Brazilian history" (ix). According to Vieira, these filmic devices defamiliarize the spectator from the reality that they are viewing on screen and as such rupture the automatism that marks traditional relations to film. In turn, through this defamiliarization the audience is introduced to (an)other view of the country and the traditional belief that social relations in Brazil are harmonious and cordial.

Juxtaposed to these evaluations of the film, João Marcelo Melo argues that *Cidade de Deus* is an Americanized film because it approximates itself to "Hollywood narratives [that] are remarkable for inviting our emotional participation. They do not seek to educate, to make us understand things, to clarify ideas" (478). According to Melo, the work invites the spectator to experience the film emotionally and get lost in the visual pleasure of the screen. Ivana Bentes forwards an argument that parallels

that of Melo when she contends that *Cidade de Deus* is premised around a "cosmetics of hunger" arguing that it employs a "post-MTV language" that relies on "high discharges of adrenaline" that surf reality and valorize the aesthetic product.<sup>66</sup> She asserts that the film employs "cliché images of advertisements" in the treatment of the social themes of poverty, violence, and the *favela*. In turn this creates a "'package' that neutralizes any potential to disturb the ethical issues that involve the themes of misery, poverty, annihilation of the other, leaving only sensorial impact" (85). Bentes along with Melo and other critics such as Bülent Diken argue that the film is limited to "surfing the surface" a claim that Vieira and Nagib negate.

I would argue that a quick assessment of the film reviews demonstrates that, no matter how the critics understand the film, the viewing public almost unanimously finds themselves engulfed in the emotion, the thrill of the film, referring to it as a "dazzling tale," (Lally 2003) or "mesmerized by the beauty, style and technique" (Heard 2004) and positing it within the gangster films of the

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<sup>66</sup> Ivana Bente is a specialist in the works of Glauber Rocha and Cinema Novo. In her article "Da Estética à Cosmética da Fome" that was published in the *Jornal do Brasil*, julho de 2001, she discusses *Rio 40 graus* from the era of Cinema Novo and *Cidade de Deus*.



Hollywood cinematic tradition. I contend that the cinematic techniques that evoke the viewer's emotional engagement with the film are employed by Meirelles incrementally to centralize violence and suture the spectator into the film. Violence becomes masked through the aesthetic. It is transformed into a dazzling parade of images that engulf the spectator in the excitement and adventure of the scene, leading the public to experience the thrill driven surface without engaging the film beyond a superficial connection to the video-clip sequences.

In the film, the spectacle of violence is contained within the space of *Cidade de Deus*. This encapsulated vision of the *favela* occurs vis-à-vis the dislocation of *Cidade de Deus* from any relation to the larger metropolis of Rio de Janeiro or a contextualization of the epochs that it broaches in relation to the socio-political changes within the nation.<sup>67</sup> Rather, difference is centralized, limited and contained. The homosocial relations between men and the violence that marks them are constructed as spectacle for middle and upper class consumption.

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<sup>67</sup> Articles such as Douglas Rogers "Lessons of Streets and Screens" published in *Américas* (2003) concentrate on the authenticity of the film. For the critic participation in the creation of the movie provided an alternative for the young actors to escape the violent reality they lived and portrayed in the film.

In introducing the carioca *favela*, at the beginning of *Cidade de Deus*, Buscapé states "this is where the politicians dump their garbage." *Cidade de Deus* is transformed by the film into a dumping ground, a landfill of the undesirable, the Other of dominant society. These social Others were driven from the city proper and whether it be in the name of "progress" or "social justice" they were relocated within segregated communities. The citizen-consumer of these spaces is unable to participate in the exchange of goods that is exacted by a capitalist ethos. The original housing project of *Cidade de Deus* began as a means to liberate the valuable land / real estate of the urban center of Rio de Janeiro and "clean" the streets of the city. As such *Cidade de Deus* served to amputate those that were unable to participate in the formal economy from the city proper. These motivational forces that marked the creation of the actual housing project, are repeated through the film, where the residents of the *favela* are once again constructed as the detritus of society.

What initially strikes the spectator is that within the context of the film there is almost no contact between the *morro* and the *asfalto* (the *favela* and the city proper). One of the few localizations of encounter is the image, the photographs that Buscapé publishes in the *Jornal do*

*Brasil*.<sup>68</sup> In this sense the position of the film spectator parallels that of the middle and upper class newspaper readership that is referenced in the film. The media headlines "Traficantes da Cidade de Deus usam armas do Exército" that accompany Buscapé's photographic portrayals of the drug lord Zé Pequeno reproduce the images and headlines of "real" society and the mass media's coverage of the *favela*. Buscapé is the native informant both for the spectator of the film as well as the fictional readership of the newspaper within the narrative. As the editor of the newspaper (Gustavo Engrácia) states: "Nenhum fotógrafo de nenhum jornal, conseguiu entrar lá." In this manner, Buscapé's photographs authenticate the stories that abound in relation to the *favela* and at the same time he nourishes the spectator's voyeuristic gaze. As such, the *favela* is transformed into an economic product. As Marina Cintra (Graziella Moretto), journalist for the *Jornal do Brasil* in the film states: "Buscapé, relaxa. Eu tô com um dinheiro pra te dar aqui... que é justamente por essas fotos que você tirou. É assim que funciona." The *favela* is transformed into an object of monetary exchange, inserted into the logic of consumption.

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<sup>68</sup> The *Jornal do Brasil* is the third oldest newspaper in Brazil and one of the principle daily newspapers in circulation in Rio de Janeiro.

Within the space of the film *Cidade de Deus* exists only as a fetishized spectacle. The voyeuristic representation in the newspaper image parallels the experience of the spectators who are viewing the film, engulfed in the action that unveils before their eyes. *Cidade de Deus* is present only as a bound image-spectacle for the carioca residents of the metropolitan center that live within the city proper. They, just as the viewing public of *Cidade de Deus*, peer in from the outside consuming selectively the images of violence in Buscapé's photographs / memories. According to Laura Mulvey in her article *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*:

[T]he mass of mainstream film, and the conventions within which it has consciously evolved, portray a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic fantasy. Moreover, the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation. Although the film is really being shown, is there to be seen, conditions of

screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world. (835-36)

The spectator is enclosed in the actual space of the cinema, pulled into the screen from the darkness of room. The hermetically sealed world that unravels on the screen, sutures the viewer into a voyeuristic fantasy, while at the same time guaranteeing them the security of distance, the possibility of experiencing the events "as if" they were physically present, all from the safety of the theater. In this manner, both the readership of the newspaper and the spectatorship of the film are invited to consume the spectacle, to peer in on unknown worlds and witness the violence that unfolds within them. The space is delimited, concealing anything beyond this scopophilic jaunt into forbidden terrains, just as the darkness of the theater blacks out the world beyond the glow of the screen.

Returning to the narrative, beyond the voyeuristic connection of the newspaper that permits the city proper to peer in from the outside, contact between the *morro* and *asfalto* is virtually absent. One of the few exceptions to this is the excursion of the young kids from the *favela* to the beach. However, even these sparse instances when characters leave Cidade de Deus, they do so almost exclusively in isolated groups. The beach in *Cidade de*

*Deus* does not represent the "espaço do convívio democrático" (Ventura 88) that Zuenir Ventura references in *Cidade partida* (1994) as one of the pillars of Brazilian society. Rather, it forms an extension of the *favela* through the continued isolation and containment of the residents. This is evident in the opening scenes of the *Os anos 70* segment. A group of friends from Cidade de Deus, Bené, Buscapé, Angélica, Thiago (Daniel Zettel) and several others venture to the beach. Although the sun is shining and they are able to swim in the ocean, what is absent from the white sands and blue waters is any insinuation or murmur of inhabitants of the city proper, or for that matter, anyone beyond the small group of friends. The beach is deserted. The excision of Cidade de Deus and its inhabitants from Rio de Janeiro is continued.

Another example of this partitioning is the plight of Bené when he wants to buy a new, fashionable wardrobe. He is forced to ask the drug-addicted Thiago to purchase clothes for him in the "official" space of the city, but neither he nor the camera move beyond the limits of *favela*. The only permitted points of contact are characters (i.e. drug addicts) who, because of their acquisition power and / or social status, are able to shuttle between the territory of Cidade de Deus and the city proper. Within the city,

Cidade de Deus becomes a post-modern version of Hades. The specificity of the *favela* is dislocated from the images, as a simulacrum of this space is re-constructed.<sup>69</sup> In so doing, the *favela* is transformed into a consumable aestheticized commodity, for national and transnational markets. According to critic Anil K. Jain:

In the 'space of flows' of the network society, place loses its specifics and importance... Indeterminate, freely re-shapable places are demanded. In order to integrate them into the global network, the 'resistance' of the concrete places, which results from the anchorage in history and culture and the linkage to the 'lifeworld' of their inhabitants, must be dissolved by the absorbing and - at the same time - disembedding power of globalization. (Hyper)real 'non-places do come into being. (17)

In the film *Cidade de Deus*, the physical dislocation that occurs in tandem with the disappearance of socio-historic markers manifests Cidade de Deus as a non-place.

Historically there is neither mention of nor inference to the military dictatorship that assumed power in 1964, the

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<sup>69</sup> For Plato simulacrum is a perfect copy for which there exists no original. Jean Baudrillard in *Simulations* (1983) inserts the concept of simulacrum within the realm of communications media and consumerist culture.

military governments of Humberto Castelo Branco (1964-1967) Artur Costa e Silva (1967-1969) and Emílio Garrastazu Médici (1969-1974), the loosening of repression by Ernesto Geisel (1974-1978), the transition to democracy under João Baptista Figueiredo (1978-1985), the election of Brazil's first president Tancredo Neves (1985), nor the "Brasil Grande" that was ushered in with the Worldcup championship in 1970, the resulting ideals of the Brazilian miracle, not to mention the economic crisis from 1980 to 1991. In the film, *Cidade de Deus* is emptied of historical context. It becomes a version of what Fredrick Jameson illustrates in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991).

[T]he retrospective dimension... has meanwhile itself become a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum... a society bereft of all historicity, one whose putative past is little more than a set of dusty spectacles. (13)

History is nullified, transformed into an empty shell of images. *Cidade de Deus*, while purporting to chronicle the development of *Cidade de Deus*, empties the geo-political space of historical markers, limiting the narrative to the growth of drugs and violence within a male homosocial context. The film transforms the history of *Cidade de Deus*



into a seamless one-dimensional narrative that traces a direct line from housing project to *boca de fumo*. The audience is invited to assume this limited perspective of the *favela* and its history and respond: "that is what I see." In this way, there is never a question of perspective, of whose history has been narrated and to what end. Rather what is promoted is acceptance without acknowledging that which has been silenced.

Beatriz Jaguaribe argues that in *Cidade de Deus*, "disruptive violence... produces a vision of otherness, of encapsulated worlds" (335). The film produces a vision of contained Otherness. This is achieved through the introduction of violence as a trope of differentiation and a voyeuristic gaze leveled against the masculine subject. Violence is the dominant trope of *Cidade de Deus*. As we move through the different epochs portrayed in the film the cinematic techniques of camera movement, focus, as well as editing and color all reflect the augmentation of violence and its evermore-predominant position within both the film as well as the *favela*. In the sixties, the film begins with a warm color palette. The scene is tinted with hues of yellow and orange that create a melancholic feel that bathes the images. The shots employ open lenses that capture the geographical space of the recently inaugurated

housing project. The camera is steady and the shots longer, a style that juxtaposes with the subsequent sections and the incremental presence of handheld cameras and shorter shots with more agitated editing.

Additionally, the shots are taken from low angles. This endows the characters with a certain grander or almost heroic air. According to the cinematographer César Charlone:

We [Fernando and I] wanted the assault on the gas truck to be like a stagecoach hold-up, with the boys and the camera running alongside the vehicle like gunmen on horseback. The boys even wore kerchiefs across their faces the way stage robbers did.

(Oppenheimer, *Shooting* 26)

These filming and editing techniques endow the images with a nostalgic quality as the youthful gang of Trio Ternura takes on a Robin Hoodesque presence in the *favela*. The evoking of the Western film genre in these initial scenes in which the Trio Ternura robs propane bottles from the delivery truck to distribute to the residents, inserts the film into a binary logic of good versus bad. Within this paradigm, what initially appears as resistance to dominant society is soon reversed as the film slides into the 1970's. The outlaws who in these opening scenes retained a

social cause that motivated their lawlessness are transformed into originating myths and replaced with evil or corrupting elements. These preliminary scenes endow the actions of the Trio Ternura with an innocence that is evident in the gang's name. The narrative story line remains linear during the recounting of the 1960's. Charlone employs standard filming techniques with longer shots, smoother editing and transitions between cuts and scenes that reflect the more idyllic and tranquil environment of Cidade de Deus during this time period.

This being said, violence is centralized as a defining characteristic of the youth culture of Cidade de Deus, particularly in relation to Zé Pequeno and Bené. Consider for example when, in these early scenes, the young kids from the neighborhood are playing soccer on the community sports field. Zé Pequeno, Bené, Buscapé and several other boys are arguing, when suddenly Cabeleira jumps into the group and grabs the ball. He begins to kick the soccer ball in the air as the kids count the number of times he dribbles it on his foot without letting it hit the ground. Alicate and Marreco emerge telling him to hurry up. Cabeleira punts the ball high into the air as the camera, in an opposite movement, descends to a low angle. Cabeleira reaches into the waistline of his shorts and

pulls out a handgun. The frame centers him with a heroic air in his posture, arm extended and gun drawn as he fires. A bullet cuts through the soccer ball. The image freezes as the sound of the bullet punctures the leather sphere, in white lettering "A história do Trio Ternura" appears written just to the left of the ball. The freeze frame captures the deformed orb and the rush of white powder that traces the path of the bullet. The background noise goes silent and then the cheers of the neighborhood kids fill the air as a guitar melody begins to fade in. The punctured ball falls to the ground. The camera cuts from Cabeleira twirling the gun on his index finger in slow motion to the kids jumping up and down and cheering. Violence embodied in the gun and the prowess of Cabeleira in both sports and marksmanship are centralized as something to be looked up to. An association between strength, violence and masculinity is established as an integral part of the identity of the male subject.

The second period, that of the seventies, begins in the Motel MiAmi where the Trio Ternura is robbing the clientele. The evening's events quickly spiral out of control when Dadinho sets out on a killing spree, taking the lives of all of the motel's patrons and personnel. The massacre ends the sway of influence of the Trio Ternura in

Cidade de Deus and ushers in Dadinho / Zé Pequeno's reign. With the change of regime comes a change of name, Dadinho quickly becomes Zé Pequeno. A novel color palette accompanies the new epoch. The hues shift from the warm shades of yellow and orange to the cooler and yet more vibrant colors of blue and green that infuse the lighting, stage art and images of the 1970's. The colors take on a more "psychedelic" twist, reflecting the growing presence and influence of drugs and drug culture on the community (Oppenheimer 2005). Additionally the filming techniques and editing energize the scenes. Hand-held cameras are now used with much more frequency, although, as Jean Oppenheimer points out, "camera movements are freer but still respect cinematographic grammar" (*Shooting* 27). With the change from tripod to hand-held cameras, the stability of the initial scenes is shed. Moreover, the editing techniques also begin to invigorate, the scenes become further fragmented and the dialogue more abrupt. As violence begins to infest the favela, Zé Pequeno is installed as the *dono* of the Cidade de Deus. He arms the youth of the favela, instating his despotic law under the guise of protection against other gangs that threaten the territory.

In the final period of the 1980's, the scenes acquire a dark monochromatic hue as this urban space is immersed in cocaine and gang warfare. The band of youth that are members of Zé Pequeno's gang shoot it out with the rival gang of Mané Galinha and Sandro Cenoura. These two factional criminal elements are embroiled in an incessant self-destructive territorial battle that engulfs the entire favela. The cinematic techniques of freeze frames, jump cuts, steady pans, tracking shots and ellipsis ravage the screen as the spectator dizzies from the sporadic movements of the hand held camera and the shifts of the lens as it moves in and out of focus. According to the Meirelles:

For this part of the story, we did not respect anything... The camera was shaking and frequently out of focus... because César would be in a room with seven or eight people, panning and zooming from speaker to speaker or capturing reaction shots. The mood at this point is cold, tense and monochromatic – like an opium trip. (Oppenheimer, *Shooting* 28)

The spectator is pulled into the "opium trip" that is created visually upon the silver screen. The rhythm of the cinematography has quickened to dizzying proportions as the audience feels the devastating effects of warfare.

These cinematic techniques serve to pull the spectator into the action of the film, little by little immersing them in this amputated space in which unadulterated violence is transformed into the primary narrative. Within classic cinematography, suturing is a process that is used to "stitch" or "sew" the spectator into the fabric of the film as "subjects-within-the-film." Following the work of Stephen Heath (1981) and Kaja Silverman (1983), suture occurs when the viewing experience is transformed into one in which the cinematic world being represented is constructed as an encapsulated world onto itself. This does not mean that the spectator identifies as a specific character or necessarily assumes a "participatory role" in the film. Rather, suture can simply be understood as assuming the position of observer, in which the eye of the camera is adopted as the perspective of the spectator.

Kaja Silverman explains suture as:

The classic cinematic organization depends upon the subject's willingness to become absent to itself by permitting the fictional character to "stand in" for, or by allowing a particular point of view to define what it sees. The operation of suture is successful at the moment that the viewing subject says, "Yes, that's me," or "That's what I see." (Silverman 205)

In *Cidade de Deus* the spectator is invited to assume the point of view of Buscapé and accept that his narrative is reliable and accurate, although he did not "witness" the events that he narrates. This is accomplished on multiple levels, one of which is through the presentation of the narrative voice as an insider authorial voice that is sanctioned to "represent" the favela. Another element that sutures the spectator into the film is the seamless narration. Accordingly, suturing in this case serves a hegemonic function as it silences the possibility of critical dialogue through the suppression of other narratives and constructs the history of *Cidade de Deus* as a linear, contained history. The hyper-employment of cuts in the editing of the film, especially in the sequences that thematize the 1970's and 1980's, strings together the events that are narrated "as if" there were only one seamless, comprehensive storyline. The absences, silences imposed upon the narrative create cinematic cohesion.

Again I look to Kaja Silverman:

Equally important to the cinematic organization are the operations of cutting and excluding... The cut guarantees that both the preceding and the subsequent shots will function as structuring absences to the present shot. These absences make possible a



signifying ensemble... [C]inematic coherence and plentitude emerge through multiple cuts and negations. Each image is defined through its differences... as well as through its denial of any discourse but its own.

(Silverman 208)

In this manner, *Cidade de Deus* becomes a mis-en-scène of violence. This occurs vis-à-vis the construction of the spectator as voyeuristic subject and then establishes and invites the scopophilic desire to watch the parade of masculine aggression upon the screen. The film creates a world unto itself in which violence is the central defining theme and the male subject its actor.

Masculinity within the film is constructed and defined almost exclusively through violence. To understand the construction of masculinity, its linkages to violence and the representation of the marginal male subject in *Cidade de Deus*, I will consider three central figures: Bené, Mané Galinho and Zé Pequeno and how they "do" gender. As we had previously seen in the context of the dogfight in *Amores perros*, homosocial bonding occurs within spaces that promote and are premised around the relations between men. In the context of *Cidade de Deus*, the gangs function as homosocial units or groupings that are the exclusive terrain of men. What we find in the social construction of

the gang identity within the film is that it is formed around a masculine / feminine, heterosexual / homosexual binary. The social identity of the gang promotes a latent fear of the feminine / feminization, in which masculine domination is defined around ideals of aggression, toughness, unemotional logic and a heterosexual matrix. In many ways the gang operates in a manner analogous to the traditional military unit in war. In the introduction to Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies* (1987) a discussion of war and the male soldier contends that: "in this world of war the repudiation of one's own body, of femininity, becomes a psychic compulsion which associates masculinity with hardness, destruction and self-denial" (xiii). The "repudiation" of the feminine underscores the entirety of *Cidade de Deus*.

Within the context of the film, the feminine / the female characters are constructed as Other to the established masculine ethos and as such are forbidden to partake in what are designated as male ambits. As such, female characters are essentially non-existent. In the limited female roles that are part of the narrative, women are reduced almost exclusively to their corporality, constructed as sexual objects: as the embodiment of male desire and sexual conquest as is the case of Cabeleiro and

Bernice (Roberta Rodrigues), as the confirmation of a heterosexual matrix as occurs between Buscapé and Marina, or as the site of male confrontation when Zé Pequeno rapes Mané Galinha's unnamed girlfriend (Sabrina Rosa). I would argue that the sole female character that maintains at least a secondary role in the narrative is Angélica.

Angélica due to her influence on Bené and the rupturing of male bonds that she embodies represents a threat to the homosocial relations that form the gang identity. More specifically Angélica imperils the bond between Zé Pequeno and Bené. Homosociality can be interpreted in various ways. Eve Sedgwick understands homosociality as the routing of male-male desire through a female figure that serves to join or bond the two males. However, in traditionally homosocial ambits such as the military, prisons or in this case gang culture, the feminine represents a danger to the homosocial order. In this case, the homosocial follows the ideas outlined by Theweleit of a repudiation of anything feminine in which the phallus becomes the "indissoluble signifier" (373). This is underscored in the use of epithets that associate femininity with anything that is considered Other to an idealized masculinity (Barrett 2001, Enloe 1990, Strange 1983).

*Cidade de Deus* accomplishes the association of the female / femininity as Other visually through the figure of Bené. Zé Pequeno and Bené grew up in *Cidade de Deus* from the time they were young boys. The two are thematized as a unit, a team in the film throughout the 1960's and the first half of the 1970's. They run *Cidade de Deus*, Bené functioning as a counter balance to Zé Pequeno's pernicious manifestations of aggression. According to our omniscient narrator, power is the motivational force behind Zé Pequeno. Supposedly, for this reason, he occupies his time only with furthering his control of the drug trade and eliminating any and all competition. Within this context, women are reduced to mere terrains upon which relations between men are enacted. Or, in the case that a man "succumbs" to a women, the female figure serves as a corrupting force that weakens men and rupture their bonds. The narrative reinforces this idea in the transformation and subsequent sacrifice of Bené. There is a corresponding movement between the development of the relationship between Bené and Angélica, the transformation of Bené into a *playboy*, and the rupturing of homosocial bonds between Bené and Zé Pequeno. These three movements collide at Bené's farewell party. Let us consider the scene of Bené and Angélica sitting on the gymnasium bleachers, kissing

one another. Zé Pequeno, who has just been turned down by Mané Galinha's girlfriend when he asks her to dance, spots the two on the bleachers and approaches them, agitated from his rejection.

Zé Pequeno: Aí meu cumpáde. Chega aí, que eu quero falar com você. [Zé Pequeno and Bené move away from the bleachers, out of earshot of Angélica.] Aí, tu não pode ir embora com essa mulher, não, rapaz.

Bené: Por quê? Vou morar num sítio, fumar maconha o dia inteiro, tá ligado? Escutar Raul Seixas.

Zé Pequeno: Vai jogar fora tudo que nós conquistamos por causa dessa piranha, meu irmão?...

The dialogue clearly establishes Angélica as a foreign element that obstructs relations between men. The camera visual constructs Angélica as a wedge. Initially, when the two men begin to argue on the gymnasium floor, the camera employs answering shots to register the emotional fervor that faces convey. As the tension grows and the words "essa mulher" slide off Zé Pequeno's tongue, the screen cuts to a medium body shot that frames the two men from the waist up. Angélica, the origin of their confrontation, is visually lodged between them. Her body in the background fills the visual space that divides them. The female subject, the feminine body is posited as an obstructive

force in relation to the homosocial. Angélica is the catalyst that will sever the bonds between Zé Pequeno and Bené. Following this argument, Bené walks away with Angélica. Soon thereafter Bené will be shot dead by Neginho (Rubens Sabino) at the party. In essence Bené is sacrificed, testifying to the detrimental effects of the feminine.

The feminization of the male subject within the context of *Cidade de Deus* is represented as non-permissible. Bené's sacrificial death at the hands of Neginho attests not only to the treacherous feminine figure and her detrimental effects upon homosocial relations, but also to the effects of feminization on the male subject. To grasp how this is constructed, we must return to the moment when Bené's death is foreshadowed.

This occurs when Neginho, in an attempt to avenge his honor, kills his girlfriend in the favela. We are not privy to the details of the events that lead up to her murder. Rather, the camera cuts momentarily to the bloodied, half-naked corpse of the young girl in the grass, just before cutting to Bené and Zé Pequeno's residence. The implication is that the unnamed woman had cheated on Neginho with another man. As such it is the woman who must pay the price of infidelity with her life so that male

honor can be re-established.<sup>70</sup> Following the brief shot of the body, the screen cuts to Zé Pequeno where he is kicking and hitting Neginho. He is upset with Neginho, not because he killed his girlfriend, but rather because he did it in the *favela* without permission. Due to the fact that he violated Zé Pequeno's laws, he must now forfeit his life. Bené saves Neginho, grabbing him and throwing him out of the house, banishing him from Cidade de Deus. Zé Pequeno retorts: "Sabe qual é, Bené? Tu é muito bonzinho, meu cumádi. Quem cria cobra, amanhece picado, morou?" Bené's weakness, the clemency he shows towards Neginho, is constructed as a liability and a sign of the feminine. Zé Pequeno calls Bené cumádi, an abbreviation of comadre, returning us to the use of the feminine as a means of denigrating the male subject and questioning his masculine identity. It is interesting to note that Bené is constructed as compassionate and as such unmanly only after he has bleached his hair blond, purchased new *playboyzada* clothing, began dating Angélica and become known as the "cool dude" in the *favela*.

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<sup>70</sup> Paraíba's wife (Karina Falcão) suffered a similar fate in the 1960's sequence when Paraíba found her cheating on him with Marreco. He killed her with a shovel and then buried her in the dirt floor of his home.

In the figure of Mané Galinha, we have a reverse movement from what we encounter in the construction of Bené. Mané Galinha is portrayed as "bom de paz. Paz e amor." While he is initially represented as a pacific individual, he still embodies traditional masculine ideals of aggression, agility and prowess. At the moment that we are introduced to Mané Galinha the narrative asserts, through a brief dialogue between Mané Galinha and Buscapé, that: "fiz o colegial, servi o quartel, fui o melhor atirador-combatente da minha unidade... eu sei lutar caratê." The latent violence that he retains is unleashed only after Zé Pequeno rapes Mané's girlfriend and kills another family member. At this point, Mané Galinha is transformed into one of the most ruthless killers in the *favela*. In this tragic twist, masculine pride overtakes Mané Galinha and an ethic of revenge commands his every decision. What revenge offers is the fantasy of control and the desire to impede the possibility of constructing the injured individual as incapable of response, in turn emasculating him. The film engages this heroic masculine ideal through Mané Galinha, reflecting a standard practice in Hollywood action films. The spectator is meant to sympathize with the character, the avenger, while at the same time endowing his actions with a degree of nobility. Mané preserves a semblance of



dignity at the same time that he embarks on a ruthless battle with Zé Pequeno that ravages the *favela* and causes countless deaths. This is accomplished through the construction of Mané Galinha as righteous in his staging as the genre character of avenging hero. Within this narrative, Mané Galinha maintains a semblance of humanity because although his mission is to exact vengeance, he retains an effective bond to the men that encircle him, that are part of his gang, his new family. In this manner, the camera continually registers the pain that he experiences as a form of recalling the moment when Zé Pequeno destroyed his family. However, in the film, catharsis seems only possible through the exacting of vengeance upon the body of Zé Pequeno. In an ironic turn of events, it is ultimately Otto, one of the child soldiers of Mané Galinha's gang that takes revenge on Mané for having killed his father in a bank robbery. The effective bonds that Mané maintains with the other gang members causes him to attempt to care for the young boy Otto when he is struck by a bullet, ultimately his emotional ties cause his downfall, his death.

As we have discussed in previous chapters, masculinity is formed around processes of socialization that can assume multiple forms, one of which is constructed around the

dominant paradigms of a social group. Pierre Bourdieu in *Masculine Domination* (2001) argues that masculine domination in contemporary society is an insidious and all encompassing socialization process. According to the sociologist:

The biological appearances and the very real effects that have been produced in bodies and minds by a long collective labour of socialization of the biological and biologicalization of the social combine to reverse the relationship between causes and effects and to make a naturalized social construction [in relation to masculine domination] (3)

Bourdieu maintains that while the argument may be made that the male subject is innately prone to assert dominance, arguments that posit this as a biological trait of the male subject are obviate the fact that the socialization process may lie at the root of and serve as the catalyst to these biological effects. In *Cidade de Deus* Zé Pequeno embodies both a socialization as well as a biological argument. He is constructed as inherently aggressive. The narrative (both visual and dialogue) structures his masculine identity as an intrinsic drive towards violence and power. This is fundamentally established when the Trio Ternura along with Dadinho (he still has not changed his name to Zé

Pequeno) rob the Motel MiAmi. The film naturalizes Dadinho's violent urge. At the same time, it also establishes an intrinsic association between masculinity and violence within the context of the *favela* by positing this correlation within a biological framework, of which Zé Pequeno is representative. Let us consider how.

The *História de Zé Pequeno* segment of the film begins with a cut to Dadinho in front of the Motel MiAmi. The narrative voice of Buscapé states: "Zé Pequeno sempre quis ser dono de Cidade de Deus desde os tempos de moleque quando ele ainda se chamava 'Dadinho.'" With this statement, Dadinho shoots out a small windowpane. The shattering glass was the alarm to the Trio Ternura when they are robbing the motel that something has gone awry. The screen cuts to a series of short clips that visually recompile the story of the Trio Ternura robbery at the motel that had been recounted earlier. When the video clip compilation ends, the camera cuts to a door slowly swinging open inside the hotel. A man and a woman are on a large disheveled bed. The woman is sobbing as the man tries to comfort her. Dadinho crosses over the threshold of the room, his body inserted into the scene. The out of focus camera cuts to a reverse shot and from the blackness of the doorway Dadinho emerges. The woman screams and the screen

cuts back to an over the shoulder shot from behind Dadinho. The man begins to chastise the young boy, claiming that the others had taken all his money. As the words fall off his tongue, Dadinho lifts a pistol, a shot-reverse-shot series registers the blasts of the gun as he kills the two patrons. The camera cuts back to a headshot of Dadinho as a broad smile engulfs his face. He begins to laugh, then turns and disappears into the darkness. The narrative voice informs the audience: "Naquele noite, Dadinho matou sua vontade de matar..." At the same time, the spectator sees Dadinho as he unloads his gun, laughing as voices in the background implore him to stop.

The narrative voice of Buscapé continues recounting the beginnings of Dadinho from the hotel robbery to the subsequent encounter with Marreco when he reprimands the young boy, attempting to walk off with a bag of money that Dadinho and Bené had accumulated. Dadinho shoots Marreco. As Dadinho stands over Marreco to finish him off, the camera from a low angle view stares up the barrel of the gun and registers Dadinho's ecstasy. This same camera shot is then recreated nine times, Dadinho's exuberant face echoing the image of execution of Marreco and the killings at the Motel MiAmi. With each reverberation of the weapon Dadinho gets a little older until finally reaching his

eighteenth birthday. The narrator breaks in: "Entre um tiro e outro, Dadinho cresceu quando tinha dezoito anos, Dadinho já era o bandido mais respeitado na Cidade de Deus e um dos bandidos mais procurados no Rio de Janeiro."

Both the narrator and the camera conspire to offer a history of Zé Pequeno that is grounded within the naturalization of the male subject as violent. The narrator initiates this process when he states "Dadinho matou sua vontade de matar," creating an organic link between the two. Following this, the camera traces this naturalized desire "as if" it were instinctive to Dadinho, marking the passage of time as a *bildungsroman* of violence. In so doing, violence is centralized as both the defining agent of change in the *favela* as well as in Zé Pequeno, the two conjoined in an analogous movement towards ever-heightened displays of aggression and destruction. Ultimately, what we encounter in *Cidade de Deus* are a series of masculine paradigms in which masculinity is constructed around violence and traditional ideals of virility, toughness, unemotional logic and a heterosexual matrix. Within the space of the *favela* there is no space for the male subject that does not imply his death, whether it be due to a hyper-masculine construction of the subject or to his feminization. The only possibility allotted to

him that does not automatically imply his impending demise is to leave the *favela*, however, this is only possible when sanctioned by the city proper.

Buscapé is the only male character that is able to escape this vicious cycle. Buscapé is "saved" from what is presented as an almost imminent demise by the middle class workers at the *Journal do Brasil*. He finds salvation in art, art that hegemonic society will consume. In this sense we could argue that art serves as an alternative to violence and is premised as the only means of escaping the cycle of violence that predominates in the film. However, this is only possible due to the fact that within the contained space of the *favela* any possibility of salvation is negated.

Let us return to the original questions with which we began this study: does the film implicate the spectator and create a socially conscientious work that informs middle-class Brazilians of the deplorable conditions in the *favelas* and the terror that reigns within them? Or rather does the audience experience a voyeuristic gaze that merely confirms dominant society's stereotypes of the lower classes?

As I have thus argued, the first premise is questionable when any semblance of daily life dissolves

into the background after the innocence of the sixties fades with the warm yellow tints that bathe the first segment, slowly giving way to unadulterated violence. The residents of the *favela* are reduced to background noise, stage props, eliminated from any central or even secondary role.

With the purging of secondary plots, violence is centralized as the only narrative possible. The critical role of violence, however, does not serve to enlighten the middle class, but rather only reaffirms the narratives that emblazon the pages of the daily newspapers.<sup>71</sup> Brazilian sociologist José Vicente Tavares do Santos contends that:

We are living on the horizon of social representations of violence to whose dissemination the mass media outlets contribute greatly, producing the dramatization of violence and propagating the spectacular, as an effect of violence exercised by the "journalistic field." (22)

In other words, the film parallels the discourse of the daily journals sensationalizing violence for mass consumption. The authority that the film claims as a means

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<sup>71</sup> "Rio de Janeiro vive mais um dia de violência" (AFP September 8, 2005) "Violência comanda o mundo de moradores de favela" (Terra September 20, 2005) "Polícia ocupa 16 favelas no Rio de Janeiro para conter a violência" (May 9, 2003)

of product promotion lies in its assertion of authenticity. The "reality" it portrays, however, is not that of *Cidade de Deus* the community, but rather the middle and upper class' perceived reality of the *favela*. In this manner the film is limited to surface sensationalism.

According to Bülent Diken in his informative study of *Cidade de Deus*:

In a sense *City of God* is not so much about producing an 'effect of the real' through which fiction is perceived as real but about producing an 'effect of irreality' through which the real itself (the camp, the *favela*) is perceived as a violent specter, as a fantasy space. In *City of God*, through images the *favela* turns into a virtual entity, into a simulacrum.

(Diken 70)

Through the continual repetition of violent images the *favela* becomes so dissipated that it loses any reference to the "real." Rather than presenting the "real," what is created is a simulacra or copy that is dislodged from its original. If we agree with Jean Baudrillard (1983) that communications media shape our consciousness, then it is the film, the simulacrum, *Cidade de Deus*, not *Cidade de Deus*, the community, that will mold the perceptions of the viewing public. In turn, the reading of the *favela* from



the view of dominant culture is a perception steeped in violence and perceptions mold policies. Thus, when María Elisa Cevalco discusses globalization within the "logic of late capitalism," she interrogates: "[W]hich of those two nations [the propertied class and those who work for them] is to be 'integrated' in a globalized world?" The reply of neo-liberal transnational global policies she contends is:

Surely not those who have been increasingly re-marginalized by the economic effects of globalization if they do get integrated it will be, as Robert Kurtz (1991) put it, as "monetary subjects without money."  
(106)

The illegitimate, moneyless citizen is not integrated but rather contained and controlled.

The film *Cidade de Deus* inserts itself into the struggles for hegemony at multiple levels that are being played out within both national and transnational arenas. Within this conflict dominant individuals and power structures seek to maintain their privileged positions. Visual narratives such as *Cidade de Deus* reconstruct society within traditional dichotomies, the poor of the metropolitan centers as the "barbarous Other" that threatens the "civilizing" processes being ushered in by globalization. Sarmiento's dichotomy is reconstructed,

reaffirming the struggle between the legitimate and illegitimate within society. According to Herschmann and Messeder Pereira:

[W]hat will generally be sought by the great majority of contemporary Western societies...is a 'drama management' of this tragic dimension ["the direction of void, rupture...and loss of control"(294)] or of its more threatening spectacular manifestations, emphasizing the possible control of these potentially tragic spectacles. (294)

The spectacle is utilized to set social agendas and implement policies that demarcate the margins of legitimate society and exclude those that are considered the "waste" of society, those who are unable to participate in consumer society.

## Chapter VI

### Conclusion

"THE SPECTACLE IS NOT a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (Debord #4, 12).

In this dissertation I have discussed a cross-section of contemporary cinematic production from Mexico and Brazil. Through these filmic works I hope to have shed some light on the confluence between cinema, material and symbolic violence, and articulations of masculinity within Latin American society, as well as the relationship that cinema entertains with a social sphere that is increasingly mired in decreased sociability, fragmented cityscapes and an profound socio-economic gaps between different classes.

Guy Debord maintains that social relationships are increasingly mediated via the image, an opinion that both Giovanni Sartori and Jesús Martín-Barbero corroborate. In light of this, the films I have discussed reflect social relations within their countries of origin while also influencing social interactions.

Let us return to the question that I posed at the beginning of this thesis: Within the cinematic corpus that composes the "cinema de la marginalidad," what are the narratives that these films convey, how do they dialogue with / (re)formulate social perceptions of violence, masculinity and dominant society's Other?

In my reflections on Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Amores perros* I discussed the role of social anomie, violence and how the definition of the contemporary male subject interacts with the aforementioned issues and how these, in turn, influence the symbolic geography of the megalopolis. Specifically the themes of violence and social disjuncture are posited within a neoliberal framework that became increasingly dominant after the implementation of NAFTA in 1992. This framework is accompanied by a logic of consumption that infiltrates virtually every dominion of society and social relations.

Additionally, I considered how *Amores perros* comments on relations between men and constructions of masculinity within Mexico City. Violence mars these relations, and expresses the disenfranchisement of the peripheral male subject who is excluded from rituals of consumption that increasingly delineate citizenship. The film amalgamates traditional heteronormative hyper-masculine constructions

of the male subject and the crisis of masculinity that results from the centralization of a logic of consumption as a means of social definition. This dissertation delineates how contemporary cinematic discourses of violence create communities based on exclusion and disjuncture that are gradually substituting traditional discourses, which, at least in principle, promoted inclusion and social cohesion.

The figure of the hostile poor male is pivotal in the formulation of social segmentation. His body and the boundaries of the city proper coincide in that he inhabits these liminal spaces and threatens to invade and contaminate the official urbe, just as the frontiers of the city proper threaten to dissolve in light of augmented socio-economic exigency.

While *Amores perros* maintains, at least to a degree, a critical relation to contemporary societal exclusion and the ensuing violence, it nevertheless harks back to the discursive premises around which socio-economic differentiation is constructed. The film performs an ambivalent movement between critiquing societal violence and traditional notions of the male subject and reinforcing class based social hierarchies through the negative casting of the peripheral male Other.

Rodrigo Plá's *La Zona* relocates us from the geo-social space of the *colonia* and the street, the primary stages of *Amores perros*, and inserts us into an upscale gated community located somewhere in Mexico City. The film inverts the gaze from the periphery and takes as its primary subject the upper-class residents of this elite urban location. We witness how the male peripheral Other, embodied in the character of Miguel, is cast as *homo sacer*. Consequently, he is reduced to his *bare life*, stripped of the political dimension of his ontology. Sanctioned violence, exclusion and abjection are the intersecting vectors that define *homo sacer* and as such inscribe Miguel's body.

Similarly to *Amores perros*, the peripheral male body becomes the vessel of upper-class fears and the threshold of the legal. Conversely, masculine rites of passage serve to guarantee the delimitation of class boundaries and the use of violence to maintain these. This is to say the male subject is the access around which class definition revolves.

*La Zona* does not exempt any group from guilt in the crisis of sociability and accordingly avoids Manichean distinctions. The filmic work interrogates the roles that multiple groups play in the escalation of violence and in

the buttressing of social divisions within contemporary society. Unlike *Amores perros*, in *La Zona* acts of aggression are not the exclusive domain of the lower class male. Rather, they also form part of the upper classes' repertoire and serve as a means to ensure their privileged position through the promulgation of a de facto *state of exception*. In this manner, the cinematic work assumes a stance closer to that of the Brazilian film *O homem do ano*, focusing on the complicity and dependence of the middle and upper classes on mechanisms of exclusion within society. Therefore, both *La Zona* and *O homem do ano* establish a counterpunctual narrative to cinematic works that allocate violence exclusively to the marginal classes.

Shifting our interpretive lens from Mexico to Brazil, in the fourth chapter, I discuss how *O homem do ano* unearths the links between violence and power. The film questions representations promulgated within dominant media that posit the marginal male subject as the primary perpetrator of urban violence. The film brings into the purview of the camera questions of violence as they relate to masculinity and marginality. *O homem do ano* deconstructs masculine identity as it relates to violence and aggression by exposing the neurosis that underlies contemporary masculine identity configurations. Analogous

to *La Zona*, violence in *O homem do ano* is multifaceted, it serves a variety purposes and has different perpetrators. Within these two films, violence is not limited to any solitary geo-social ambit, nor does it maintain a single target. As such, similar to *La Zona*, *O homem do ano* exposes the de facto *state of exception* that contemporary society has imposed to typecast this individual as a menace to privileged society and constrict him to this role.

Lastly, I consider how Fernando Meirelles' and Katia Lund's film *Cidade de Deus* transforms the community of Cidade de Deus from a concrete reality into an imagined locality in which masculinity and violence are spectacularized. This occurs through the aestheticization of violence. The space of Cidade de Deus becomes a staging ground for a visual spectacle that bedazzles the viewer casting both the geographic local of Cidade de Deus and its male residents as the principal actors. In this imagetic framework, violence is dislocated from its social, economic and political context into a readymade package for easy consumption. Sophisticated filming and editing techniques suture the spectator into an aestheticized arena of contravention. The spectator inserted into the forbidden territory of the *favela*, led on a guided tour of exotic violence.



Furthermore, *City of God's* filming techniques reiterate hegemonic ideals of masculinity premised around aggression, virility, toughness, and a heterosexual matrix that intersects with homosocial bonding. Within the film, symbolic and material violence is constructed as a defining trait of the marginal male subject and as such he poses a threat to dominant society.

The films discussed in this dissertation broach questions and influence perceptions of the general public as to the prevalence of social violence, the risks it poses to individuals and the groups who are responsible for these acts. Of the works I have analyzed in this dissertation, the films *La Zona* and *O homem do ano*, problematize any facile model that faults the marginal male subject for the rise in societal violence, signaling the role of the police, government and the middle and upper classes in this deadly trade. On the other hand, both *Amores perros* and *Cidade de Deus* construct the marginal male subject as the primary offender from whom violence emanates.

We are able to understand a plural conceptualization of violence within contemporary society through the ambivalence that we encounter in the multiple narratives and viewpoints present in the films that I have discussed. However what one is able to perceive is a heightened focus

on the male subject, particularly the subaltern male figure, within this plurality.

The aggression that we encounter in these films marks virtually all aspects of the principally peripheral male subject both as part of the individual male's self-definition as well as a crucial aspect of the relations between men. Violence tinges almost every facet of the contemporary male subject and his social milieu. Through the images projected in the films I analyzed in this dissertation, a masculine ethos premised on the affirmation of male dominance underlies the majority of these texts. While *O homem do ano* reveals the neurosis that infuses this desire for power and the other films offer "alternative" constructions of masculinity, the bulwark of the filmic narratives, both within this analysis and more generally within contemporary Mexican and Brazilian cinema, thematize and spectacularize violence as integral to the preservation and definition of the male subject. As such, violence and aggression are mechanisms that guarantee a class based social order premised around the male subject. In this manner, the male subject serves as both the foundation and an anti-foundation of sorts for the establishment and imposition of an exclusionary order within society. The

peripheral male subject is the homo sacer that the state of exception demands.

It is significant that *Amores perros* and *Cidade de Deus* achieved much higher ticket sales than the either *La Zona* or *O homem do ano*.<sup>72</sup> Both films have won acclaim at international festivals and are generally considered emblematic of contemporary Latin American cinema for both international and national audiences. Do they reproduce popular socio-cultural stereotypes?

At the same time, other films such as *La Zona* and *O homem do ano* that level a more critical gaze at societal divisions, violence and masculinity have not achieved the success of these other works. Some of these films have been accused of being "too Brazilian" or Mexican or Argentine or Columbian or Venezuelan... Is it that these Latin American directors do not conform to the conventions of Hollywood genre film sufficiently and as such are not accepted by an international and increasingly national audience? Is it that the critical engagement of social and political problems within contemporary society is a

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<sup>72</sup> According to Box Office Mojo, *Cidade de Deus* has grossed over 30 million dollars and *Amores perros* has grossed over 20 million dollars while *La Zona* grossed just over 2.7 million dollars while data on *O homem do ano* is not available.

discourse that is not readily consumed by both national and international spectators?

Within our discussions of cinema we must begin to better understand the social and political ideologies of cinematic works as well as the changing positions that both cinema and the image / screen occupy in a society where social relations are evermore mediated by the spectacle.

Beyond the reels of film that we discussed in this dissertation, in a macabre twist, we are able to find instances where real life has begun to emulate the narratives of crime films. Consider the recent case of Wallace Souza in the Brazilian city of Manaus. Mr. Souza, a state legislator from the state of Amazonas, was the host of the television crime show *Canal livre* (*Canal livre* was started by Mr. Souza in 1989 and continued through 2008). *Canal livre* methodically railed against the growing violence in the city of Manaus as well as Brazil. Recently, the former television host has been charged with drug trafficking, gang formation and weapons possession, and stands to face charges on five counts of homicide. According to reports, Mr. Souza ordered the assassination of at least five individuals in an effort to substantiate his claims that the city was being overrun by violence, to eliminate his competition and to boost ratings of his

program through the televising of first hand footage of violent acts that were recorded within moments of the arrival of the police.

Just as this television program, cinema, whether it takes a more critical stance towards social relations or merely reinforces the predominant ethos of contemporary society, is ultimately created for consumption. The films that we have discussed here are paradigmatic of this because they are ultimately aesthetic products created for and distributed as consumer goods although they may also attempt to criticize the social, political and economic disjunctures of present-day society. Therefore, within the present day cinematographic industry, filmic narratives partake in the inescapable circuit of commodities.

As a commodity and as a means of commodification, cinema also has an impact on and is impacted by social relations that are increasingly mediated through mediascapes. Therefore, ultimately we as spectators and critics must question the epistemological role(s) cinema and media more generally play in contemporary society. Moreover, we must also inquire into how social critique is formulated (or not) within mass mediated discourse (film, television, blogs, social media networks, etc).

Electronically mediated communication is having a profound effect on social relations. At the end of twentieth and the beginning decade of the twenty-first centuries, the electronic archive has become the predominant matrix of signification. Electronic media occupy an increasingly prominent role in the individual and collective subject's understanding of and engagement with their social, political, and historical milieus. In this manner, one might argue that private and public identities are evermore premised around *homo electronigraphicus*, insofar as the electronic archive maintains a dialectical relationship to society. As such we must consider the multifarious and ever-changing forms of electronic media, their interface with society and their relationship to postulations and contestations of both individual and collective identities.

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