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THE DEBATE AROUND *CIDADE DE DEUS*: POLITICAL EMPTINESS OF

"PASTICHE" OR PARADOX OF "COMPLICITOUS CRITIQUE"?

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"there is no neutral place to stand free and clear in which my words do not prescriptively affect or mediate the experience of others, nor is there a way to demarcate decisively a boundary between my location and all others"

Linda Martín Alcoff

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ABSTRACT

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2007

Supervising Professor: Anelise R. Corseuil
Co-advisor: Robert J. Burgoyne

This study analyses the aesthetics of the film *Cidade de Deus*, which is based in a thematic of poverty – more specifically in the representation of the *favela*, and exemplifies the postmodern moment in its use of different forms. Making a parallel between the criticism around this film and the theoretical debate promoted by postmodernism, this study analyses how hybridization of genres works: as "pastiche," emptying the political content, or as "complicitous critique," reinforcing the social criticism. Combining the critical debate around *Cidade de Deus* and the postmodern theoretical debate with an in-depth analysis of the film *Cidade de Deus*, the results of this study show that the hybrid representation of poverty, and the agile editing style of *Cidade de Deus*, albeit introducing elements of "pastiche," remain critical, thus characterizing the postmodern paradox through "complicitous critique."

RESUMO

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Professora Supervisora: Anelise R. Corseuil
Co-orientador: Robert J. Burgoyne

Este estudo analisa a estética do filme *Cidade de Deus*, filme este que se baseia na temática da pobreza – mais especificamente na representação da favela, e exemplifica o momento pós-moderno em seu uso de diferentes formas. Traçando um paralelo entre a crítica em torno deste filme e o debate teórico promovido pelo pós-modernismo, este estudo analisa como trabalha aqui a hibridização de gêneros: como "pastiche," esvaziando o conteúdo político, ou como uma "crítica cúmplice," reforçando a crítica social. Combinando os debates crítico em torno de *Cidade de Deus* e teórico pós-moderno com uma análise aprofundada do filme *Cidade de Deus*, os resultados do estudo mostram que a representação híbrida proposta pelo filme, e o rápido estilo de edição de *Cidade de Deus,* apesar de introduzir elementos do "pastiche," mantêm-se críticos, caracterizando assim o paradoxo pós-moderno através da "crítica cúmplice."

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CHAPTER I

CIDADE DE DEUS AND THE POSTMODERN MOMENT[*]

Contemporary Brazilian cinema, labeled by film critics "Cinema da Retomada,"[1] has been characterized as a diverse filmic production which presents different aesthetic tendencies from the mid 1990s to the present date. For instance, Brazilian critic Fernão Pessoa Ramos in an interview to *Jornal da Unicamp* claims: "o chamado Cinema da Retomada não tem nenhum tipo de manifesto ou proposta estética. Trata-se de um trabalho individualizado. São criações pessoais, com várias tendências" (Abreu, Passos, and Ramos).[2] When analyzing the interviews with Brazilian filmmakers of the 1990s presented in Lucia Nagib's *O cinema da Retomada*, Ismail Xavier points out that in contemporary Brazilian cinema "a tônica não é a defesa de uma forma bem definida de cinema contra outras consideradas ilegítimas [...]"(Xavier Preface 10).[3] In spite of the coexistence of different aesthetic forms noticed in films produced in the last decade, they have one common element which is the attempt to consider the country's situation, contemporary to the films' production moment. According to Luiz Zanin

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[*] "*City of God*" (English title). The original title shall be used throughout this thesis.

[1] The term "Cinema da Retomada" (freely translated as "the New Brazilian Cinema") was coined in 1995 when the Brazilian filmic production re-started, after a period of severe crisis. In 1990 president Fernando Collor de Mello authorized the extinction of cultural incentive laws and cultural organs of the Union, leading to the quasi-stagnation of the Brazilian filmic production, which would only return in 1995 with the new cultural incentive laws by Fernando Henrique Cardoso's administration. The term "Cinema da Retomada" generated a series of discussions in Brazil due to its attachment to politics and the implication of Cardoso's government being "responsible" for the cultural re-start in the country – a statement many critics disagree with. For this reason I will refer to the filmic production of the period from 1995 to the current days as "contemporary Brazilian cinema", in detriment of "Cinema da Retomada" (except in quotations from other authors, when the term will be maintained). For further reading on the subject see Lucia Nagib's *O cinema da Retomada. Depoimentos de 90 cineastas dos anos 90.* S. Paulo: Editora 34, 2002.

[2] "the so called New Brazilian Cinema does not have any kind of manifesto or aesthetic proposal. It is individualized work. Personal creations, with varied tendencies" (Abreu, Passos, and Ramos). This and further translations are my responsibility.

[3] "the tone is not the defense of a well defined form of cinema against others considered illegitimate [...]" (Xavier Preface 10).

Oricchio, in *Cinema de novo: um balanço crítico da retomada ("Cinema Again: a Critical Account of the New Brazilian Cinema")*, in this process of reflecting on Brazil's condition, a number of films "o fez de maneira explícita, debruçando-se diretamente sobre os 'grandes problemas' apontados até aqui: a relação do país com sua história; a problemática estrutura de classes, e sua relação com a violência; a relação com o Outro, com o estrangeiro" (Oricchio 32).[4] Within the search for understanding the country, emerges a tendency to address poverty, as a thematic issue, within a Brazilian context.

In the 1990s re-start of Brazilian filmic production, representation of poverty has kept a dialogue with previous models, in spite of the differences in the way such themes were approached. During the Cinema Novo of the 1950s and 1960s, to illustrate one of these models, poverty was aesthetically presented as a form of aggression directed towards the spectator, as a means of making audiences feel shocked by the horror of hunger. Hunger was understood by the Cinema Novo filmmakers as a metaphor for poverty. For instance, Nelson Pereira do Santos' *Vidas Secas* ("*Barren Lives*" 1963) is one of the films that better exemplify this aesthetics of aggression. As a low-budgeted film, *Vidas Secas'* cinematography is like the *sertão* ("midland"): dry and harsh. The aggression towards the spectator is already unveiled in the opening shot, when the peasants are shown walking, and the pace is in accordance with the pace of their lives, slow and harsh, in a shot that lasts 4 minutes. The spectator, used to the fast pace and density of events of action films, is warned from the very beginning that this is not a spectacular aesthetics.   In the words of Stam and Johnson, "[r]arely has a subject – in this case hunger, drought, and the exploitation of a peasant family – been so finely rendered by a style. Rarely have a thematic and an esthetic been quite so fully adequate

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[4] "has made it in an explicit manner, inclining directly over the 'great problems' pointed out so far: the relation of the country with its history; the problematic class structure, and its relation with violence; the relation with the Other, with the foreigner" (Oricchio 32).

to one another" (Johnson and Stam Hunger 120). For now it suffices to say that the aesthetics promoted by Cinema Novo is one of poverty not only in the thematic, but also in the production of low-budgeted films that shocked the audience. The aesthetics proposed by Cinema Novo is one of revolution, of opposition to commercialism and to technology, translated into a critique towards the dominant mainstream filmmaking models.

In contemporary Brazilian cinema, critics claim this aggressive characteristic of hunger has been replaced by narratives more associated with a Hollywood model (the very "dominant mainstream" filmmaking model) where, according to David Bordwell, five principles are crucial. The listing of these principles shall work here as a parameter for the criticism addressed to contemporary Brazilian cinema:

> 1 – Goal orientation: "The primary characters, protagonist and antagonist, both want something, or several somethings. The story progression is driven by characters' efforts to attain goals and the way circumstances alter those goals;" 2 – The double plotline: "Typically the goals govern least two lines of action, and at least one of these involves heterosexual romantic love;" 3 – Discrete part-structure: The process of defining, modifying, and achieving or not achieving goals is mapped into parts (usually 3-4 parts of around 25-35 minutes); 4 – Planting causes for future effects: "An unresolved action is presented near the end of one section that is picked up and pushed further in a later section;" 5 – Deadlines: deadlines are set for the resolution of the plot, especially at the climax. (Bordwell Anatomy)

The employment of the Hollywood model in contemporary Brazilian productions constitutes mainly an effort to please national and international audiences; however, they have been at the center of a polemic debate among critics and intellectuals. One of the most successful productions of this period, which caused polemics regarding its aesthetics, has been the film *Cidade de Deus* (2002).

Directed by Fernando Meirelles and co-directed by Kátia Lund, the film shows the growth of the drug traffic in the famous *favela* ("slum") called Cidade de Deus in Rio de Janeiro. Involved in the production of short-films since the early 1980s,

Meirelles has produced successful television shows, and has also become one of the most prominent names in Brazilian publicity and commercials. His first feature, *Menino Maluquinho 2: A Aventura* ("*The Nutty Boy 2* ") was released in 1998, but it was only in 2001 with the release of his second feature, *Domésticas* ("*Maids*"), which portrays the lives of Brazilian maids in São Paulo, that he was able to show his true interest in representing the subaltern and exposing their "invisible worlds." In 1999 Meirelles starts the pre-production phase of *Cidade de Deus.* The option for working with non-professional actors, and choosing residents of the poor communities of Rio de Janeiro to star this film, led to the integration of Lund as co-director. The casting and "training" of these actors, which shall be further discussed in chapter III of this thesis, counted on Lund's knowledge of the poor communities due to her previous work, especially in *Notícias de uma Guerra Particular* ("*News from a Personal War*"), a 1999 documentary film she co-directed with João Moreira Salles, in which urban poverty and violence were represented through the point-of-view of policemen, drug dealers and the poor communities dwellers. During the production phase of *Cidade de Deus* Meirelles and Lund co-directed the short film *Palace II* ("*Golden Gate*") as a final test in the preparation of *Cidade de Deus*. Released in 2000, *Palace II* was nominated for eleven national and international awards, winning ten of these.

With a more than successful "test" as was *Palace II*, *Cidade de Deus* was released in 2002 and in the following years was nominated for 78 awards, including four Oscar nominations (Best Cinematography, Best Director, Best Editing, and Best Writing/Adapted Screenplay).[5] Although not winning the Academy Awards, Meirelles and Lund's film won 49 important awards and has ever since been the source of debate in many different circles. Despite the success of *Cidade de Deus*, the film was received

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[5] For a list of these awards see <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0317248/awards>

with certain skepticism by many film theorists and critics in Brazil, at the same time that a large number of critics saw it with enthusiasm. What followed was a heated debate around the aesthetics and politics of *Cidade de Deus*.

The main point addressed in this critical debate was the hybridization of genres presented in the film, as a form of embellished images, either in terms of photography or for its enhancing of violence. *Cidade de Deus* cannot be labeled as part of a specific filmic genre (such as comedy, melodrama, action, western, etc.), instead it makes reference to a number of different genres that create this aesthetic of hybridism, which can be seen not only as an aesthetics, but as politics as well. In Linda Hutcheon's words "[p]ostmodern representational practices that refuse to stay neatly within accepted conventions and traditions and that deploy hybrid forms and seemingly mutually contradictory strategies frustrate critical attempts (including this one) to systematize them, to order them with an eye to control and mastery – that is, to totalize" (Hutcheon *Politics* 37). This frustration in systematizing might be the main fuel to this critical/theoretical debate which is about to be analyzed in this thesis.

The problem to be investigated in this study concerns the hybridization of genres in the film *Cidade de Deus*, and the impact of this hybridization on representations of poverty. The film *Cidade de Deus* shall be investigated in light of postmodernist theory, according to which hybridization can be seen as "pastiche" – as per Fredric Jameson in the article "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" – or as "complicitous critique" – as per Linda Hutcheon in *The Politics of Postmodernism*.

This study should embody a potential contribution to a better understanding of postmodern aesthetics within Brazilian contemporary cultural production, and the perception of these postmodern aesthetics as an intrinsic element to social representations of Brazilian contemporary society.

1.1. Contextualization of *Cidade de Deus* in the Postmodern Moment

When asked in interview to "briefly explain [his] notion of the postmodern" (Jameson South Korea 350), Jameson argued that in the current moment

> [t]here seem to have been all kinds of economic symptoms as well as cultural ones that indicate and foretell the emergence of a whole new moment no longer characterized by colonization of the old imperialist type but by decolonization and neocolonialism, by the emergence of great multinational corporations, the spread of business to parts of what had hitherto been thought to be the Third World […] and also the transformation of a whole range of cultural forms, which are therefore no longer modern. (Jameson South Korea 351)

The economic implications of this new moment are observable in the "frantic economic urgency" for consumer goods, in a process that demands a new aesthetic so as to conform to the cravings of what has been designated the new "consumer society" (Jameson Postmodernism 33). When even art follows this new aesthetic and enters the world of commodity, the world suffers a new kind of economic domination, spread through "business" and "multinational corporations." According to Jameson, this "no longer modern" moment called postmodernism, starts with the exhaustion of the modernist movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s. By that time, with the incorporation of "B art" into the cultural circle we see what Jameson calls an "aesthetic of populism" – or, as he puts it, "one fundamental feature of [postmodernism] [. . .]: namely, the effacement [. . .] of the older (essentially high modernist) frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture" (Postmodernism 31).

This effacement of frontiers, noticed by Jameson, gives way to an artistic and literary production that incorporates features of both high and mass culture, leading to the coexistence of different styles and genres. Postmodernism is seen here "not as a style, but rather as a cultural dominant: a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate features" (Postmodernism 33). This cultural dominant privileges different kinds of cultural impulses, although still

uniting these impulses under a "new systemic cultural norm," namely, late capitalism, which is characterized by its focus on commodification, and by the recycling of old images and commodities (Jameson Postmodernism 34). As a product of this cultural dominant, the before mentioned "coexistence of different features" is the main aspect to be analyzed in the film *Cidade de Deus,* while placing it as a postmodern production, after all "[t]he postmodern is […] the force field in which very different kinds of cultural impulses […] must make their way" (Jameson Postmodernism 34).

Cidade de Deus is one of the films that, based on the theme of poverty, exemplifies the postmodern moment in its use of different forms, in what Hutcheon calls the postmodern "crossing of boundaries of genre" (*Politics* 17). According to Hutcheon, the boundaries of genre and discourse have once been considered discrete, but in the postmodern moment they suffer a mix, for instance in the definition of what would be fact or fiction (as in the use of documentary film style in a fiction film as *Cidade de Deus,* which will be analyzed in chapter III). Moreover, the crossing of boundaries – not only between genres, but also between high art and mass or popular culture, art and non-art, theory and practice, etc – "leav[es] the viewer no comfortable viewing position" (Hutcheon *Politics* 119). The tension within the work of art demands that both viewers and critics face the theoretical and political implications caused by the postmodern crossing of boundaries, approaching the tension posed by construction and deconstruction, inscription and subversion. These theoretical and political implications shall be the main issue analyzed in the Brazilian cultural debate around the film *Cidade de Deus*.

According to Antonio Candido, Brazilian literature has been making use of this "hybridizing mix" since the 1970s. Candido discusses the appearance of what he calls

"*a nova narrativa*" ("the new narrative") in Brazilian literature, which presents the same

"crossing of boundaries of genres" discussed by Hutcheon:

> com relação aos [escritores] que avultam no decênio de 70 pode-se falar em verdadeira legitimação da pluralidade. Não se trata mais de coexistência pacífica das diversas modalidades de romance e conto, mas do desdobramento destes gêneros, que na verdade deixam de ser gêneros, incorporando técnicas e linguagens nunca dantes imaginadas dentro de suas fronteiras. Resultam textos indefiníveis: romances que mais parecem reportagens; contos que não se distinguem de poemas ou crônicas, semeados de sinais e fotomontagens; autobiografias com tonalidade e técnica de romance; narrativas que são cenas de teatro; textos feitos com a justaposição de recortes, documentos, lembranças, reflexões de toda sorte. (Candido 209)[6]

"The new narrative" in Brazilian cultural production can be exemplified by writers such

as Clarice Lispector, Maria Alice Barroso, Nélida Piñon, song-writer Vinícius de

Morais, and short-story writer Rubem Fonseca.[7] This opening of literary genres was

also manifest in the cinematic media – closely related to literature – and the

contemporary Brazilian cinema that is also characterized by a hybridization of genres.

Cidade de Deus mixes references from the gangster films of the 1930s, to Italian neo-

realism, institutional videos, documentaries, Hollywood action and violence movies,

and a post-MTV language, which is mostly evident in its fast editing style.

Given this mix of styles, postmodernist theory can be seen from a productive

perspective, since the debate among postmodernism theoreticians relates closely to the

debate generated in Brazil around the contemporary Brazilian cinema. In chapter II the

Anglo-American debate around postmodern aesthetics will be analyzed, bringing an

overview of the characterization of the postmodern moment and the main concepts

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[6] "in relation to the [writers] that arise in the decade of 1970, it is possible to speak of a real legitimization of plurality. It is not about the pacific coexistence of the diverse modalities of romance and short-stories any longer, but about the opening of these genres, which in fact are not genres anymore, incorporating techniques and languages never before imagined inside their boundaries. The result is indefinable texts: novels that look more like newspaper articles; short-stories that cannot be distinguished from poems or chronicles, filled with signs and photomontage; autobiographies with novel's tone and technique; narratives that are theatre scenes; texts made with the juxtaposition of cuts, documents, memories, reflections of all sort" (Candido 209).

[7] To read more about these writers and "the new narrative" see Antonio Candido's "A nova narrativa." *A educação pela noite e outros ensaios*. São Paulo: Ed Ática, 1989. 199-215.

addressed by postmodernism theoreticians. This overall view of the postmodern moment will lead to an in-depth analysis of Jameson's and Hutcheon's arguments as these give a theoretical background to the debate raised by Brazilian critics in relation to *Cidade de Deus* as empty parody or political film. The critical debate generated around *Cidade de Deus* shall also be analyzed in chapter II in relation to postmodern theory. After that, I move on to the filmic analysis of *Cidade de Deus* that shall be carried out in chapter III, focusing on how the most prominent features of this film (such as the narrative mode, cinematic techniques, and theme) work in order to create meanings: whether they create political meanings by criticizing dominant ideologies or if they can be seen as politically empty. In chapter IV, the concluding remarks, I readdress some of the important points discussed in previous chapters and try to situate the film analyzed within the postmodern aesthetics as either empty "pastiche" or "complicitous critique."

1.2. Review of Literature

As mentioned in the previous section, the postmodern aesthetics of *Cidade de Deus* gave way to an intense debate between film critics and theoreticians who received this film with reactions that go from passionate love to rabid rage. The tension produced by the criticism directed to *Cidade de Deus* helps to understand its importance in the Brazilian contemporary scenario. Not only in Brazil, but all around the world, critics expressed their views towards every aspect of this film, when the main issues debated were the film's fast editing pace and the supposed stylization of its cinematography, along with the thematic of poverty.

The first aspect to be noticed here is the comparison made between *Cidade de Deus* and typically American filmmakers' style. Mostly in the foreign reception of this film, the critics saw it as closely related to the "style" of directors such as Quentin

Tarantino, Spike Lee, and Martin Scorsese. For instance, in his review of *Cidade de Deus* for The *New York Times*, Stephen Holden claims *Cidade de Deus* is "one of the most powerful in a recent spate of movies that remind us that the civilized society we take for granted is actually a luxury. Although the police pop up now and again in Cidade de Deus, law and order are as scarce on these mean streets […] as they are in the slums of 1860's Manhattan depicted in Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York*." (Holden). As little flattering as this assumption might be, when comparing the Rio de Janeiro of the 1960s and 70s to the New York of a century before that, the critic's purpose seems to be one of inspiring audiences to identify in *Cidade de Deus* a familiar experience, such as Scorsese's films. Defined by the *Washington Times* as "[s]omething of a Brazilian *Boyz N the Hood*" (Peter Cushing), *Cidade de Deus* is offered to international audiences, not as a socially implicated work, but as an action film in the modes of Hollywood action and violence genres. In his review of *Cidade de Deus*, critic Jurgen Fauth gives us a brief summary on the "familiar Hollywoodian themes" depicted in *Cidade de Deus:*

> This is "Snatch" with a heart, Tarantino with a social agenda, and any number of dreary quasi-neo-realist films with a hyped-up sense of drama and excitement. There are more great movie moments here than in a whole multiplex full of vapid Hollywood fare: a crying girl watching her fleeing lover being shot from the back window of a moving car, a little gangster hopeful letting his bloodlust run unchecked for the first time, brothers shot, unfaithful wives murdered, fathers avenged, friends betrayed, children corrupted, in a torrent of surprising reversals and throwaway plotlines that could provide the climaxes for a dozen or so lesser films or a few Shakespeare dramas, all wonderfully cinematic and no less real for it. (Fauth)

Fauth's claim for the film being "real" (in spite of the "drama and excitement") is also one of the important points of this critical debate.

According to Ismail Xavier, the success of *Cidade de Deus* is due to its representation of "real life" within the basis for an action film. In his words, "[i]t's a film that deals with social concerns, but expresses them in the language of MTV, rap

and disco cultures familiar to young people of the same age as its protagonists" (Angels 28). Critic Lisa Schwarzbaum also corroborates this view when claiming that at the same time that it depicts "authenticity," *Cidade de Deus* brings an "unnerving whiff of sexy grooviness and gangsta-wise equanimity coming off the imagery and filmmaking, with its kinetic moonwalks between eras, its palette of deep crimsons, and its seductive soundtrack" (Schwarzbaum). However, the view of this film's "MTV style" as a positive feature which engages audiences is not shared by critics such as Gary Arnold. In his review of *Cidade de Deus* for the *Washington Times*, Arnold claims Meirelles "becomes too dependent on recurrent shootouts and bloodbaths to modulate toward coherence" (Arnold B05). Moreover, he claims the film relies on "stylized frenzy and brutality" and "on vicious spectacle at the expense of social perspective and character insight" (Arnold B05). Another American critic that, in spite of praising Meirelles and Lund's film, also focuses on its violence is A. O. Scott from the *New York Times*. Scott claims the film is violent in a merciless and dramatic way, shocking the audience many times. He also sees the film's visual style as cheerful and explosive, bringing humor to its narrative together with an excellent musical taste, which according to him turns *Cidade de Deus* into a contagious and irresistible entertainment (Scott) – in a reasoning that certainly would shock most of the Brazilian critics of this film.

The criticism of *Cidade de Deus* as an intrinsically violent film is due not only to the guns and violence depicted in the characters' action, but also to its editing and cinematography. Working with the director of photography Cesar Charlone and editor Daniel Rezende, the directors were able to achieve a fast paced film, using a hand-held camera and quick-cutting, which according to the *Chicago Sun-Times* critic Roger Ebert could create "a film that is merely busy" (Ebert), but that is not what happens in *Cidade de Deus*. This film's cinematography and editing, which shall be analyzed in chapter III,

work together in order to impress the pace and mood that characterizes each of the three phases portrayed in the film – from the 1960s, to the early 1970s, and the late 1970s, early 1980s. In the words of Ebert, "[t]he technique of that shot [when the story shifts from the 'present' date to a flashback of the 1960s] – the whirling camera, the flashback, the change in colors from the dark brightness of the slum to the dusty sunny browns of the soccer field – alert us to a movie that is visually alive and inventive as few films are" (Ebert). These visual characteristics have been connected to contemporary Hollywood productions, such as the ones mentioned earlier, and led many critics to characterize *Cidade de Deus* as an action film.

This categorization as an action movie has bothered many Brazilian critics. In the words of Miranda Shaw, "[w]hilst the categorisation of *City of God* as a gangster film may have enabled it to be recognised by a non-Brazilian audience […] it has made the film into an international commodity, and this has led to the neglect of some of its […] national relevance, its social agenda, and its link to the historically politicised Brazilian cinematic tradition." (Shaw 66). The criticism here is against the view of *Cidade de Deus* as a commercial piece, which serves exclusively an entertainment purpose. In concurrence with critics who were able to discern this link to the Brazilian cinematic tradition, Marcio Siwi, in the article "City of god city of Man," places the film within what he calls the "long and admirable lineage of outstanding Brazilian films grounded on social realism" (Siwi 235). In his article about *Cidade de Deus*, Peruvian critic Roberto Forns-Broggi sees the film as an image of the social "other" (Forns-Broggi 151). In Forns-Broggi's words "la eficacia massmediática y contracultural de la cinta de Meirelles justamente radica en ver esa realidad social no como un problema abstracto sino como una experiencia emocional en la que el espectador se ve enfrentado

a una visión del otro lado (la experiencia de vida en la favela de Río)" (Forns-Broggi 152).[8]

However, many of the influent members of the community of Cidade de Deus did not see the film as such a positive social experience. Kátia Santos, as a former dweller of Cidade de Deus, questions what was the social benefit to be received after the "exposicão ultra-negativa que seus moradores – os que não tem envolvimento com o trafico, ou seja, a esmagadora maioria – estavam tendo" (Santos 180).[9] Santos criticizes another aspect of *Cidade de Deus* that has also been discussed by many critics: "a desumanização de tudo e de todos, disfarçada de 'ficção verossimilhante'" (Santos 180).[10] She claims the bad guys also have relatives who love them; they do not grow from the ground with a gun in their hands. They do have a social background that was ignored by the film. And the representation of these bad guys, in a sense, creates not only a personal identity, but also a collective identity for the community of Cidade de Deus. This collective identity is what bothers community leaders such as the rapper MV Bill, who gave some of the most passionate arguments against *Cidade de Deus*. In his words:

> O mundo inteiro vai saber que esse filme não trouxe nada de bom para a favela, nem benefício social, nem moral, nenhum benefício humano. O mundo vai saber que eles exploraram a imagem das crianças daqui da CDD. O que vemos é que o tamanho do estigma que elas vão ter que carregar pela vida só aumentou, só cresceu com esse filme. Estereotiparam nossa gente e não deram nada em troca para essas pessoas. Pior, estereotiparam como ficção e venderam como verdade. (MV Bill 123)[11]

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[8] "[t]he mass-media and counter-culture efficacy of Meirelles' film is exactly in seeing this social reality not as an abstract problem, but as an emotional experience where the spectators see themselves facing a vision of the other side (the experience of life in a Rio's *favela* " (Roberto Forns-Broggi 152).

[9] "ultra-negative exposure of its dwellers – the ones not involved in the drug traffic, that is to say, the majority – were having." (Kátia Santos 180).

[10] "the de-humanization of everything and everyone, covered as a 'verisimilar fiction'." (Santos 180).

[11] "The entire world will know that this film brought nothing positive for the *favela*, not social benefit, nor moral, not a single human benefit. The world will know they have explored the image of the children from CDD [Cidade de Deus]. What we see is the size of the stigmata they will have to carry throughout their lives only increased; it has only augmented with this film. They stereotyped our people and gave nothing in exchange to these people. Even worst, they stereotyped them as fiction, and sold them as true" (MV Bill 123).

The argument deals with the lack of characters that are not involved in the organized crime – who are in "real life" the majority of the dwellers of communities such as Cidade de Deus. With the amount of crimes and criminals portrayed in the film, not only these dwellers will have to live with the long imposed stigma of being "*favelados*" (in a label that serves mainly a pejorative purpose of designating the poor communities dwellers), but also they might be identified with the criminals shown in the film and face the prejudice imposed by one more pejorative "label."

But while MV Bill criticizes the lack of social action brought forth by the success of *Cidade de Deus*, other accounts see the social response achieving levels that surpass that of the ideological discussion. For instance, Brazilian critic and filmmaker Arnaldo Jabor claims "[m]ore than three million Brazilians all over the country saw this film in mesmerised terror. It has already prompted changes in political conduct, because it set off a crucial process of awareness – within and beyond the misery belt – that no one can stop now" (Jabor iii). Moreover, José Geraldo Couto, in his review of *Cidade de Deus* for *Folha de S. Paulo*, sees the positive social change rise from the making of the film itself. In a very sensible article about *Cidade de Deus*, Couto agrees with many of the criticism received by Meirelles and Lund's film. For instance, the political criticism towards the *favela* being represented with no connections with other sectors of society – as if the drug traffic had nothing to do with society outside the limits of the *favela*; the sociological criticism addressed by anthropologist Alba Zaluar about the false proportion of blacks and whites in the film's *favela*; the moral criticism towards exposing children to situations of extreme brutality; the adoption of American action film narrative techniques that induces an identification of the audiences with the "nice bad guys" instead of the "bad bad guys" (Couto). However, in Couto's words,

> O que não se pode, porém, é dizer que se trata de um filme ruim, e muito menos rejeitá-lo em bloco sob o argumento de que estetiza a miséria [...]. A atuação do elenco como um todo eleva a interpretação cinematográfica no Brasil a um novo patamar [...] Nesse aspecto ocorre algo curioso. Ao constituir seu elenco com semi-amadores oriundos das favelas, Meirelles incorporou ao próprio modo de produção de "Cidade de Deus" algo que é cobrado do filme: a apresentação de alternativas positivas para os jovens das comunidades faveladas. (Couto)[12]

The selection of young people from the poor communities in Rio de Janeiro to act in *Cidade de Deus* is one of the few points – if not the only one – that reaches a consensus between film critics and theoreticians as being the most positive outcome of this film. In Couto's view, the social thematic of the film goes further than only starting a very necessary discussion; it is an indication of the social concern of the filmmakers and a point to be praised in this production.

The comparison to Brazilian filmmaking tradition as one of strong social concern is one of the tensest spots in this discussion. One of the most discussed opinions on *Cidade de Deus* is that of film critic Ivana Bentes. Bentes criticizes the appearance of violence without showing its relations to economy and social injustice, but shown as a sensational happening to be consumed with extreme pleasure due to its super agile language. Bentes contrasts not only *Cidade de Deus*, but a number of productions of the contemporary Brazilian cinema, to the Cinema Novo of the 1960s and its social concerns expressed through an aesthetics that defies the dominant filmmaking model mostly depicted by the Hollywood Classical style. The difference between representations of poverty of previous models (as mentioned earlier in this study) is seen by Bentes as a loss in the political strength of Brazilian cinema. Her argument is mostly explained through her concept of the "cosmetics of hunger," which

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[12]"what cannot be said is that this is a bad film, or reject it under the argument of the aesthetization of poverty […]. The acting of the entire casting elevates the Brazilian cinematographic interpretation to a new standard […]. In this aspect something curious happens. By building its cast with semi-amateurs coming from the *favelas*, Meirelles incorporated to *Cidade de Deus*' production something that is asked from the film: the presentation of positive alternatives to the youngsters of the *favelas*" (Couto).

demonstrates her views on the contemporary Brazilian cinema and the form it represents poverty. This "cosmetics of hunger" shall be analyzed in depth in the next chapter.

As mentioned before, in chapter II the focus is on postmodernist theory, reviewing Jameson's term "pastiche," and Hutcheon's concept of "complicitous critique," theories which will form the major conceptual paradigms in the analysis of *Cidade de Deus* (to be carried on in chapter III). Furthermore, I review Bentes' concept of the "cosmetics of hunger," an issue that I consider significant, due to its role in the debate generated around *Cidade de Deus*, and Fernando Mascarello's counterpoint to Bentes' argument, relating these two critics' arguments to the previously mentioned Anglo-American postmodern debate.

CHAPTER II

POSTMODERN AESTHETICS: THE ANGLO-AMERICAN DEBATE AND THE BRAZILIAN CRITICISM

2.1. The Postmodern Debate

Before moving on to the filmic analysis, the matter of the emptiness or not of political meanings in contemporary cultural manifestations needs to be addressed in light of the theoretical debate on postmodernism. In his article "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," Fredric Jameson sees postmodern art as an art without the political and critical density of previous periods, as an art that integrates aesthetic production into commodity production (Postmodernism 33). According to Jameson postmodernism needs to be associated with the various stages of capitalism, which are defined by him as following:

> after the political triumph of the middle classes we have first a stage of national capitalism of a classical type in which exchange and production take place within the borders of individual advanced countries, and then, toward the end of the nineteenth century, the second stage (which has been classically called by Lenin and others the monopoly stage or the stage of imperialism, since those two things seem to come at once) – the amalgamation of business into large national monopolies and then the carving up of a world into a set of spheres of influence controlled by classical colonial powers. To each of those corresponded a certain set of cultural forms and forms of consciousness. (Jameson South Korea 351)

The cultural forms of these two first stages of capitalism were suggested by Jameson to be realism in the first stage, and modernism for the moment of monopoly or imperialism. As Jameson sees it, the second stage comes to an end with the reconstructing after World War II, and sets forth a need for new forms of aesthetics, politics, and psychology, between other things, which are no longer valid in the third

stage of capitalism, namely the postmodern moment, or Late Capitalism (Jameson South Korea 352).

As the aesthetic representation shifts with each stage, the characterization of the postmodern moment can only be achieved through a reading of its transformation from modernism to postmodernism. As Jameson asserts, by the end of the 1950s modernist art becomes canonic – in the sense that the celebration of high art by intellectuals and critics effaces the criticism that should be transmitted through that art – and another form is needed in order to challenge that canon. The new form of art comes as a result of the economic and social context, now united under the label of "postmodernism." However, in Jameson's view, the expected impact of a new oppositional postmodern art is not fully achieved due to the before mentioned commodification of the aesthetic production of postmodernism. Basing his argument on architecture, David Harvey shares Jameson's perspective when saying that postmodernism is a reaction to modernism's view of the world. Harvey argues that while modernism can be identified with universal truths, rationalism, and linear progress, postmodernism, in contrast, identifies with difference and heterogeneity (9). In his words "[f]ragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal or 'totalizing' discourses (to use the favoured phrase) are the hallmark of postmodernist thought" (Harvey 9).

This "distrust of all universal or 'totalizing' discourses" is seen as the crisis of master narratives promoted by postmodernism. According to Lyotard,

> [a]s "metanarrativas" de que se trata em *A Condição Pós-moderna* são aquelas que marcaram a modernidade: emancipação progressiva da razão e da liberdade, emancipação progressiva ou catastrófica do trabalho (fonte do valor alienado no capitalismo), enriquecimento da humanidade inteira através dos progressos da tecnociência capitalista, e até, se considerando o próprio cristianismo da modernidade (opondo-se, neste caso, ao classicismo

antigo), salvação das criaturas através da conversão das almas à narrativa crística do amor mártir. (*O Pós-moderno Explicado às Crianças* 31)[13]

In modernism, these master narratives worked as universal referents, "unthinkingly experience[d] as 'natural'" (Hutcheon *Politics* 2). The acceptance of master narratives as natural allows for the exclusion of other narratives that do not apply to this universalizing view, the "minor" narratives of the subaltern are removed from the broader cultural scene. However, the concept of a universalizing truth is no longer at play in the postmodern moment. As claimed by Brenda K. Marshall, "[t]he postmodern moment resists totalizations, absolute Identity, absolute Truths" (6). The new understanding proposed by the postmodern era allows no objectivity, since all is filtered through our historical, cultural, social being, as well as through language. As endorsed by Eagleton, in a more positive view of the transition:

> Post-modernism signals the death of such 'metanarratives' whose secretly terroristic function was to ground and legitimate the illusion of a 'universal' human history. We are now in the process of wakening from the nightmare of modernity, with its manipulative reason and fetish of the totality, into the laid-back pluralism of the post-modern, that heterogeneous range of life-styles and language games which has renounced the nostalgic urge to totalize and legitimate itself….Science and philosophy must jettison their grandiose metaphysical claims and view themselves more modestly as just another set of narratives. (qtd. in Harvey 9).

Postmodernism is concerned with de-naturalizing the master narratives of modernism, and accepting heterogeneity, thus giving way to the acceptance of differences. In Jameson's words, postmodernism is "empirical, chaotic, and heterogeneous" (Postmodernism 31).

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[13] "The 'metanarratives' dealt with in *The Postmodern Condition* are those which have marked modernity: progressive emancipation of reason and liberty, progressive or catastrophic emancipation of work (source of alienated value in capitalism), enrichment of the entire humanity through the progresses of capitalist technoscience, and even, considering the Christianity of modernity (in opposition, in this case, to the old classicism), the salvation of creatures through the conversion of souls to the Christian narrative of martyr love" (Lyotard *O Pós-moderno explicado às crianças* 31).

Within the challenge to master narratives, one of the main features of modernism that has been questioned in the new postmodern moment is the dichotomy between high art and mass culture. In his book *After the Great Divide*, Andreas Huyssen focuses on the idea that modernism was characterized by the insistence on a very well defined frontier between high art and mass culture. As a consequence this period was haunted by a constant "anxiety of contamination." Huyssen argues that "[m]odernism constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture" (vii). According to Huyssen there were attempts to challenge "the great divide" even during modernism, but somehow these attempts only seemed to work to strengthen the dichotomy. In addition to Jameson and Harvey, Huyssen corroborates the thought that postmodernism develops as a means of challenging modernism's dichotomies: "from the beginning until today, the most significant trends within postmodernism have challenged modernism's relentless hostility to mass culture" (Huyssen 188).

Equally important has been the claim for the integration of aesthetic production into commodity production. In the words of Jameson:

> the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation. Such economic necessities then find recognition in the institutional support of all kinds available for the newer art, from foundations to grants to museums and other forms of patronage. (Jameson Postmodernism 33)

Art enters the world of commodities since the aesthetic production meets the needs of this "frantic economic urgency." More than entering the economic milieu, postmodern art seems to accept this commodity status, and according to Jameson the consequence is a recklessness about art's connotations, which gives room to the emptying of political meanings in postmodern art in general. In Eagleton's words "[i]f the work of art really

is a commodity then it might as well admit it […]. Rather than languish in some intolerable conflict between its material reality and its aesthetic structure, it can always collapse that conflict on one side, becoming aesthetically what it is economically" (68). This assumption makes clear Jameson's claim that the shifts in cultural production (from modernism to postmodernism) has its base on the matter of commodification, since cultural production crosses the boundary between art and economy and assumes its commodification.

The commodification of art brings forth an aesthetics that is no longer a reflection of life as much as a "material intervention" (Eagleton 62). In Eagleton's words "if art no longer reflects it is not because it seeks to change the world rather than mimic it, but because there is in truth nothing there to be reflected, no reality which is not itself already image, spectacle, simulacrum, gratuitous fiction" (62). When reality is commodified it is already turned into a text, it is already aestheticized. When art copies a "reality" that is not real, but just an image, it becomes what Jameson defines as a simulacrum. In Jameson's words, "'simulacrum' [is] the identical copy for which no original has ever existed. Appropriately enough, the culture of the simulacrum comes to *life* in a society where exchange-value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use-value is effaced […]" (Postmodernism 43). While in modernism art was seen in terms of "spectacle," as authentic culture, in postmodernism art becomes simulacrum, "a bastard product of cultural commercialization" (Silviano Santiago 195).

Within the challenges posed by postmodernism, one more prominent feature of this contemporary moment is its new relation with representation. According to Azade Seyhan, "[i]t is probably correct to state that the fine line of distinction or continuation between modern and postmodern discourse can be understood in terms of a fascination with representation [when representation becomes identical with reality] to a

problematic confrontation with it" (18). The crisis of representation brought forth by postmodernism is based on the assumption that all representation is ideologically grounded by particular interests and values, being thus involved with politics (Hutcheon *Politics* 3). Postmodern culture is seen as the result of representations; it is understood as a "power of systems of representation which do not *reflect* society so much as *grant* meaning and value within a particular society" (Hutcheon *Politics* 8). The new relation of postmodernism with representation portrays a process of creation of meanings for a reality that is not possible to be reached anymore. Representation becomes problematic because it is now seen *as representation*, as interpreting and creating a referent that no longer exists in "reality." As claimed by Hutcheon representation is acknowledged as "interpreting (indeed as creating) its referent, not as offering direct and immediate access to it" (*Politics* 34).

The importance of representation in postmodern cultural production is associated with its ability to bring forth the political constructs imbued in representation itself. Hutcheon is one of the critics who call attention to this aspect of postmodernism. Nonetheless, critics of postmodernist art have claimed that with postmodernism not only life and art become commodified, but also the subject. According to Jameson, the human subject is commodified and turned into its own image, generating what he characterizes as a "waning of affect," typical of the postmodern era: the depth of subjectivity, emotion, feelings, affect, all replaced by surface (or multiple surfaces), expressing the frivolous postmodern aesthetic (Jameson Postmodernism 38). Postmodern aesthetics deconstruct the aesthetic of subjective expression, typical of the modern era, and bring forth an aesthetic of the market. Together with the commodification of the human being, postmodernism promotes what many theorists see as the death of the subject (or, one may argue, the challenging of the notion of the

subject as known in modernism). Since reality is commodified and turned into image, the individual subjectivity loses its capacity of expressing deep feelings and emotions, and becomes superficial and unable to create a unique style. This change in the subjects' position brings a liberation of the before mentioned "anxiety of contamination," since with the end of the unique style, there is a loss in the importance of old modernist dichotomies. In Jameson's words,

> [a]s for the expression and feelings or emotions, the liberation, in contemporary society, from the older *anomie* of the centered subject may also mean, not merely a liberation from anxiety, but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling. This is not to say that the cultural products of the postmodern era are utterly devoid of feeling, but rather that such feelings […] are now free-floating and impersonal […]. (Postmodernism 41)

In brief, the "death" of the individual subject as previously known brings a waning of affect, and consequently, the end of personal style.

Following Jameson's reasoning, the end of style brings a new form of cultural production that can only rely in past art forms, in what Jameson determines as "Historicism", or the random cannibalization of all styles of the past (Postmodernism 42). However, this cannibalization brings the disappearing of history as seen in the previous periods: "the past as 'referent' finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts" (Jameson Postmodernism 43). Because of this difficulty in finding the past as referent, the postmodern "subject" cannot trust in experience anymore, thus bringing into being a cultural form that becomes "randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and […]aleatory" (Jameson Postmodernism 48). The result of all this is fragmentation as the postmodern aesthetics per excellence. What we have is disjunction, instead of unity, bringing tension to the notion of difference.

This disjunction can be exemplified through the mix of styles (the cannibalization) promoted by postmodern cultural forms. According to Jameson, the mix of different styles and referents are not only quoted in postmodernism, but incorporated into postmodern art's very substance. As an example of this "cannibalization," Jameson mentions the aesthetics of architecture: "the complacent eclecticism of postmodern architecture, which randomly and without principle but with gusto cannibalizes all the architectural styles of the past and combines them in overstimulatig ensembles" (Jameson Postmodernism 43). This eclecticism of postmodernism can be explained in the terms of the concepts discussed before in this chapter: the disappearance of the subject has as its formal cause the end of style "in the sense of the unique and the personal, the end of the distinctive individual brushstroke" (Jameson Postmodernism 41), and without personal style, the consequence is simulacrum, which leads to the main point of Jameson's theory I intend to explore: the concept of the "pastiche."

In Jameson's words pastiche is:

> like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language: but it is neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody. (Postmodernism 65)

The lack of a specific dominant class language in the postmodern moment, the heterogeneous language of postmodernism, prevents the artist from making a political statement through the use of irony. According to Jameson, the language of pastiche is more easily understandable to the consumerist mass, but it is not critical enough to raise a political debate. Jameson sees the hybrid quality, the fragmentary postmodern aesthetics (such as the one depicted in *Cidade de Deus*, which was briefly mentioned in the introduction of this thesis and shall be analyzed in the next chapter) as a

characteristic that contributes to the emptiness of political meanings, and thus sacrifices an important social content. The postmodern aesthetics encompass new forms of representation in its fragmentation, seen by Jameson as "attempts to distract and to divert us from that reality," thus preventing us from a deeper reflection about art (Postmodernism 65).

Differently from Jameson, Linda Hutcheon's starting point is the assumption that "postmodernism is a phenomenon whose mode is resolutely contradictory as well as unavoidably political" (*Politics* 1). In her view, the hybridization present in postmodern art forms "speak to a society from within the values and history of that society, while still questioning it" (*Politics* 12). What opposes Hutcheon's perspective to Jameson's, is his view of most of the postmodern cultural forms as failing in this questioning of the dominant values and ideals of society. While Jameson defines the supposed "questioning" as "neutral practice," in the concept of pastiche, Hutcheon argues that postmodern hybridization should necessarily be seen as "complicitous critique" (*Politics* 2). The hybridization of already known forms or styles speaks from within the values already installed in a certain society, thus portraying *complicity* with domination and power. However, at the same time that these values are used as a means to reach the consumers of postmodern art, they are being challenged by the exposure of power systems and of the limitations embedded in it.

To better explain this concept Hutcheon exposes the contradictions faced by postmodern art as being known and taken advantage of by this very art:

> [b]asic contradictions mark [postmodern art's] contact with artistic conventions of both production and reception: it seeks accessibility, without surrendering its right to criticize the consequences of that access. Postmodernism's relation to late capitalism, patriarchy, and other forms of those (now suspect) master narratives is paradoxical: the postmodern does not deny its inevitable implication in them, but it also wants to use that 'insider' position to 'de-doxify' the 'givens' that 'go without saying' in those grand systems. Thus, it is neither neoconservatively nostalgic nor radically

revolutionary; it is unavoidably compromised – and it knows it. (*Politics* 119)

Postmodern art does use the master narrative codes, but this use does not entail a renunciation of the right to criticize it.

Hutcheon claims that in order to criticize these master codes, postmodern art needs to install them first. In her words, "[c]omplicity is perhaps necessary (or at least unavoidable) in deconstructive critique (you have to signal – and thereby install – that which you want to subvert), though it also inevitably conditions both the radicality of the kind of critique it can offer and the possibility of suggestive change" (*Politics* 152). What we see in this ambiguous art is "postmodernism's renegotiation of the different possible relations (of complicity and critique) between high and popular forms of culture", when the contradictions found in the hybrid forms of art subvert the well defined frontier between high art and mass culture (Hutcheon *Politics* 28). The use of well known genres or master narratives are installed in order to seduce the audiences at the same time that it invites a questioning of these genres and their already established values. Yet, it must be clear that this questioning is not a pure and simple critique, since complicity is present from the start, and is used as a (paradoxical) means of achieving the intended critique.

In Hutcheon's words: "Postmodernism's relationship with contemporary mass culture is not, then, just one of implication; it is also one of critique" (*Poetics* 41). Hutcheon's model of postmodernism brings the paradox of complicity and critique in postmodern art. Accordingly, for Hutcheon at the same time that postmodernism reinforces ideology, it also subverts this same ideology and the dominant cultural and social conventions. According to Hutcheon, in postmodernism there is a "paradox of art forms that want to (or feel they have to) speak to a culture from inside it, that believe this to be the only way to reach that culture and make it question its values and its self-

constructing representations" (*Politics* 13). Hutcheon endorses that complicitous critique is the feature that makes postmodern art filled with political outcomes, thus leading to a reflexivity that challenges Jameson's critique.

Furthermore, Hutcheon counterargues Jameson's claim against Hollywood (as those films that are accepted and loved by the masses) by claiming that Jameson's real aversion is against these films' involvement with capitalism (Hutcheon *Politics* 114). Contrary to Jameson, Hutcheon does not believe the capitalist modes of production of these films empty their political meanings. She argues that instead of denying its capitalist mode, what postmodern film does is to "[exploit] its 'insider' position in order to begin a subversion from within, to talk to consumers in a capitalist society in a way that will get us where we live, so to speak" (*Politics* 114). For instance, Hutcheon suggests a reading of films such as *Star Wars*, with its "irony and play with cultural conventions of narrative and visual representation," or *Tampopo* and its "cultural inversion of both the traditional western (e.g. *Shane* with its lone hero helping needy widow) and the Italian 'spaghetti western' into what might literally be called a 'noodle western'" (*Politics* 114). Hutcheon argues that both *Star Wars* and *Tampopo*, as postmodern films, explore the recognizable conventions (of representation, of style, or of genre) in order to destabilize and dismantle these conventions.

2.2. Aesthetics and *Cidade de Deus*

Brazilian critics' arguments about Cidade de Deus can be closely related to the Anglo-American postmodern debate and its concern with the fragmentation of postmodern aesthetics.

Ivana Bentes' concept of the "cosmetics of hunger" has had a significant role in the debate generated around *Cidade de Deus*, seeing that she characterized this film as a

strong example of what she calls the "cosmetics of hunger". In 2001 she started a discussion around the aesthetization of poverty in many contemporary Brazilian films. Bentes sees the aesthetization of postmodern representations through a perspective that can be related to previous Anglo-American perspectives towards postmodernism, especially to Jameson's view of the pastiche and depthlessness of postmodern art. In her article "'Cosmética da fome' marca cinema no país" ("'Cosmetics of Hunger' Marks Cinema in the Country"), Bentes discusses the diversity of styles and proposals in Brazilian cinema nowadays, deriving the phrase from Glauber Rocha's "estética da fome" ("esthetics of hunger"), applied to the 1960s Cinema Novo.

Bentes' argument is partially based on Rocha's "An Esthetics of Hunger," an article first published in 1965. By that time Rocha argued for a new cinema, a cinema capable of expressing the brutality of poverty. In his words: "We know – since we made these sad, ugly films, these screaming, desperate films where reason does not always prevail – that the cloak of Technicolor cannot hide, but only aggravates, its tumors, surpass itself qualitatively; the most noble cultural manifestation of hunger is violence" (Rocha Esthetic, 70). Rocha believed that the authentic cultural expression of poverty, of "hunger," was violence, and when proposing an "esthetics of hunger" Rocha meant, as argued by Ismail Xavier, "the production of extremely low-budget politicized films taking an aggressive stance toward the dominant cinematic codes" (Xavier, *Allegories* 1). This aggressive stance was supposed to be directed not only to the spectator, but mainly to the "civilized culture" that used to represent our misery. Rocha's main claim was that "[t]he Latin American neither communicates his real misery to the 'civilized' European, nor does the European truly comprehend the misery of the Latin American" (Esthetic 69). The "industrial objectives" of previous films were to be abandoned in

benefit of a cinema of hunger, which would show the starvation in the Brazilian northeast, *favelas* and rural areas as a tragic symptom.

Bearing in sight this aesthetic proposal, Bentes sees in Rocha's work "um dos mais belos esforços de pensamento e de intervenção política do cinema moderno brasileiro" (Bentes Cosmética).[14] Using Rocha's argument, as well as his films, produced mostly in the 1960s, as a paradigm for a true revolutionary cinema, Bentes criticizes the 1990s films which use themes dear to the Cinema Novo. The option for these themes – such as poverty in Northeastern Brazil or in the *favelas* – was, in the 1960s, a direct reflex of the political engagement of the Cinema Novo filmmakers, who, influenced by the cultural debate raised in Brazil in the 1920s, "gave political meaning to the demands for authenticity typical of the European art cinema, combining those demands with careful observation of reality, especially in relation to the poorer sectors of the Brazilian society: the emblems of underdevelopment" (Xavier, *Allegories* 4). However, according to Bentes, contemporary Brazilian films which use these same themes are not as politically engaged as those of Cinema Novo. In her words, the 1990s films representing poverty "[marcam], de cara, a tênue perspectiva política dos filmes contemporâneos e as cada vez mais raras experimentações estéticas" (Bentes Cosmética).[15]

The debate that followed hinged on Bentes' assumption that nowadays the subaltern are shown in films in a very romanticized manner, even glamorizing poverty, instead of "expressing the brutality of poverty" as claimed by Rocha in the 1960s, making the poor a political and aesthetic project. Bentes' claim is close to Jameson's criticism when he asks: "How urban squalor can be a delight to the eyes, when

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[14] "one of the most beautiful efforts of thought and of political intervention in Brazilian modern cinema" (Bentes Cosmética).
[15] "mark, straightaway, the limited political perspective of contemporary films, and an ever rarer aesthetic experimentation" (Bentes Cosmética).

expressed in commodification, and how an unparalleled quantum leap in the alienation of daily life in the city can now be experienced in the form of a strange new hallucinatory exhilaration […]" (Postmodernism 53). Bentes seems to share not only Jameson's concerns, but also Harvey's perspective when he refers to postmodern form as shifting from an ethic view to a pure aesthetic concern which leaves no room for social commentary. In Harvey's words,

> 'Once the poor become aestheticized, poverty itself moves out of our field of social vision', except as a passive depiction of otherness, alienation and contingency within the human condition. When 'poverty and homelessness are served up for aesthetic pleasure', then ethics is indeed submerged by aesthetics, inviting, thereby, the bitter harvest of charismatic politics and ideological extremism. (337)

But according to Fernando Mascarello it was with the release of *Cidade de Deus* that the Brazilian critical debate took on larger proportions: "O sucesso do filme de Fernando Meirelles e Katia Lund e a pujança do ano cinematográfico [de 2002] foram decisivos para a enorme repercussão cultural da polêmica" (Mascarello).[16] Following the opening of *Cidade de Deus*, and drawing from her aforementioned concept of "cosmetics of hunger", in the article "*Cidade de Deus* promove turismo no inferno" ("*City of God* Promotes Tourism in Hell") Bentes writes that the film is only a spectacle for entertainment with its mixed references. According to her, the film does not touch on the very important point of the *favela*'s relation to society, thus being apolitical.

Fernando Mascarello defies Bentes' point in "O dragão da cosmética da fome contra o grande público" ("The Dragon of Cosmetics of Hunger against the Wide Audience"), in a clear reference to Glauber Rocha's film *O dragão da maldade contra o santo guerreiro* (1969), in English *The Dragon of Evil against the Saint Warrior*, also known as *Antonio das Mortes.* In this article, he claims that Bentes' argument is elitist and evinces a prejudice against an artistic mode capable of showing politics in a manner

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[16] "The success of Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund's film, and the greatness of the cinematographic year [of 2002] were decisive for the great cultural repercussion of the polemics" (Mascarello).

that can also entertain the masses. Hutcheon's defiance to Jameson's vision towards

postmodern film is illuminating to this debate since she claims that the capitalist mode

of postmodern films does not empty their political meaning. What Hutcheon claims

instead is that the capitalist insertion of these films helps to reach the capitalist mass,

and then install subversion from within (*Politics* 114). Such an argument supports

Mascarello's claim, that what bothers many critics in *Cidade de Deus* is its appeal to the

masses, the capitalist consumers. In Mascarello's words, the main motivation for the

criticism against *Cidade de Deus* arises because

> [e]m seu apelo e reconhecimento quase unânimes por um enorme contingente de público das mais diferentes inserções sociais, Cidade de Deus promove como que um "vazamento cultural", verdadeira invasão [...] do território simbólico do que, talvez, se poderia chamar "o grande cinema brasileiro" e seu tema preferencial, o nacional-popular. Os quais, de acordo com as autoridades do gosto, estariam reservados aos pretensos herdeiros de Glauber, cineastas e espectadores, a crème de la crème da alta cultura cinematográfica nacional. (Mascarello)[17]

This "symbolic territory of what might be called 'the great Brazilian Cinema'" refers to

the Cinema Novo films, which cannot be said to have been successful in reaching a

wide audience in Brazilian theaters at the time (Xavier *Allegories* 5). Cinema Novo

could only be appreciated by university students and intellectuals, for according to

Xavier, in the 1960s "[t]he representation of Brazilian society acquired a pedagogical

dimension, but the modernist concerns of the *cinéma d'auteur* defined the style and the

scope of the representation. Thus the pedagogical mission ended up concretely

embodied in original and complex films" (*Allegories* 5). The complexity of these films

raised the concern of the Cinema Novo filmmakers since their aim was to instigate a

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[17] "[i]n its appeal, and in its almost unanimous recognition by a wide public of the most varied social positions, *Cidade de Deus* creates a kind of "cultural leakage", a real invasion [. . .] of the symbolic territory of what might be called "the great Brazilian Cinema" and its favorite theme, the popular-national. Which [sic], according to the arbiters of taste, would be reserved for the "heirs" of Glauber, filmmakers and spectators, the *crème de la crème* of the national cinematographic high culture" (Mascarello).

revolution within the very heart of the "hungry" Brazilian population. The erroneous impression that those films were actually meant only for the "*créme de la créme*" to understand them is seen as a mistake made by the Cinema Novo filmmakers, who ended up missing their target audience. This critique is raised by Randal Johnson and Robert Stam, who argue that by producing such complex films, Cinema Novo "has alienated the traditional public of Brazilian Cinema" which by the late 1950s was a wide popular audience captivated by the *chanchada* (Johnson and Stam 72).[18] In Johnson and Stam's words "Cinema Novo in its regard is not unlike the Brazilian Modernist Movement of the twenties, which called in theory for a democratization of art but in practice remained an elitist form of expression" (72).

In 1966, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade and Alex Viany, in the article "Cristicism and Self-Criticism," had already started a discussion that held many elements in common with Mascarello's concerns toward the reach of audiences by Brazilian films. According to Andrade and Viany, the problem of alienation is seen in the films' exhibition: "We see it clearly in the box-office failures of some films, and even better in the distribution of profits, when films made from a supposedly revolutionary position fail precisely in the theaters located in areas inhabited by the potentially revolutionary classes. Political efficacy is obviously not being achieved" (Andrade and Viany 73). Following this cultural debate, Mascarello defends the success *Cidade de Deus* has achieved in theaters, and refutes Bentes' critique of the "cosmetics of hunger," mainly due to the prioritization of a political aesthetics in detriment of a form that communicates with popular sections of society. In Mascarello's words, "a crítica da cosmética da fome surge como manifestação radical do campo que prioriza o estético-político em detrimento da comunicabilidade, em reação, tudo indica, ao alto grau de

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[18] See Part I of Johnson and Stam's *Brazilian Cinema* for a brief history of the *chanchada* and Brazilian audiences.

referendo popular obtido por este deslocamento (rumo ao clássico) por ocasião de *Central do Brasil* e, acima de tudo, *Cidade de Deus*" (Mascarello).[19] Mascarello reads in Bentes' critique a claim that the popularity of films such as *Cidade de Deus* (which has reached a mass of over three million spectators only in Brazilian territory) might be caused by a "glamorization of poverty," thus placing the film in a position of not being "revolutionary" enough – a claim Mascarello does not endorse.

Bentes argues that the use of what she calls a "transnational aesthetics" might result in a total "immersion in the image," when, as claimed by Jameson, the result of a commodified art is only an "image" that appears out of a significant political context, hence sabotaging the possibility of any political impact:

> O interdito modernista do Cinema Novo, algo como "não gozarás com a miséria do outro", que criou uma estética e uma ética do intolerável para tratar dos dramas da pobreza, vem sendo deslocado pela incorporação dos temas locais (tráfico, favelas, sertão) a uma estética transnacional: a linguagem pós-MTV, um novo-realismo e brutalismo latino-americano, que tem como base altas descargas de adrenalina, reações por segundo criadas pela montagem, imersão total nas imagens. Ou seja, as bases do prazer e da eficácia do filme norte-americano de ação onde a violência e seus estímulos sensoriais são quase da ordem do alucinatório, um gozo imperativo e soberano em ver, infligir e sofrer a violência. (Bentes Cidade)[20]

From this use of Hollywoodian techniques (which can be seen as an outcome of the commodification of cinema) the result is the glamorization of poverty, leading to a filmmaking practice which no longer commits to the revolutionary position aimed by the 1960s Cinema Novo.

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[19] "the critique of the cosmetics of hunger advances as a radical manifestation in the field that prioritizes the political-aesthetic in detriment of communicability, in a reaction, it seems, to the high rate of popular acceptance obtained by this dislocation (towards the classic) by occasion of *Central Station* and, above all, *Cidade de Deus*" (Mascarello).

[20] "The modernist claim of *Cinema Novo*, something like "thee shall not make fun of another's misery," which created an ethics and an aesthetics of the intolerable to treat of poverty's dramas, has been dislocated by the incorporation of local themes (traffic, *favelas*, Northeastern Brazil) to a transnational aesthetics: post-MTV language, a Latin-American neo-realism and brutalism that has as its base the adrenaline rush, reactions per second created through montage, total immersion in the image. That is, the bases of pleasure and efficacy of North-American action film, where violence and its sensory stimuli are almost in the order of hallucination, an imperative and sovereign delight in seeing, inflicting and suffering violence" (Bentes Cidade).

Having exposed the cultural and critical context in which *Cidade de Deus* is situated, the next chapter presents an in-depth analysis of this film. Bearing in mind the theoretical debate around postmodern art, and the critical debate around the aesthetics of contemporary Brazilian cinema – and more specifically the film *Cidade de Deus* –, in chapter III this theoretical framework will be combined with the specifics of filmic analysis in order to explore more closely the following question: Does *Cidade de Deus* enforce a political argument, or only a "cosmetic" one?

CHAPTER III

UNRAVELING THE FOUNDATION OF THE CRITICAL DEBATE: THE

FILMIC ANALYSIS OF *CIDADE DE DEUS*

Set in the community originated from the housing project called Cidade de Deus, in Rio de Janeiro, the film *Cidade de Deus* presents the story of the inhabitants of that community as they face the growth of the drug traffic, and, consequently, of violence in the neighborhood.[21] According to the *Making Of* documentary of this film, in no more than twenty years the growth of organized crime and drug traffic has turned Cidade de Deus into one of the most violent *favelas* in Brazil (BigBonsai *Making Of*). With a screenplay by Braulio Mantovani, the film was adapted from Paulo Lins' novel with the same title. However, in this analysis the film *Cidade de Deus* will not be investigated *as adaptation*, but as an independent work. Robert Stam, in "The Dialogics of Adaptation" claims that

> [t]he shift from a single-track, uniquely verbal medium such as the novel, which 'has only words to play with,' to a multitrack medium such as film, which can play not only with words (written and spoken), but also with theatrical performance, music, sound effects, and moving photographic images, explains the unlikelihood – and I would suggest the undesirability – of literary fidelity. (56)

Based on this claim that the fidelity criticism would not play a major role in filmic adaptations from novels, and also in the belief that most of the audience of this film did not see it *as an adaptation* (since for this kind of reading to be made the audience would

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[21] Built by the Carlos Lacerda administration between 1962 and 1965, in Jacarepaguá neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro, the housing project named Cidade de Deus received its first residents in 1966, when one of the worst floods Rio had faced made hundreds of people homeless. Some time later, residents of sixty other *favelas* were brought to Cidade de Deus. The unordered growth soon turned the project into a big labyrinth, favoring the establishment of drug traffic in that place. The first gang wars were seen in 1979. Nowadays Cidade de Deus has more than 120 thousand inhabitants (Virtualbooks). <http://virtualbooks.terra.com.br/artigos/Cidade_de_Deus.htm>

have to have read the book *before* watching the film) [22], this analysis will be carried out without taking into consideration the similarities and differences the film may present with the novel *Cidade de Deus*. For these reasons, although Paulo Lins claims most of the events in the novel are based in real facts, the film is seen in this investigation as a fiction piece, and thus will not be investigated on the basis of its "realism," but on how it "represents" the social reality of not only Cidade de Deus, but "poor" Brazilian communities in general. As mentioned in chapter II, in the postmodern moment, representation is seen not as a reflection of society, but as an interpretation that creates meanings to society – instead of offering "immediate access to it" (Hutcheon *Politics* 34). In this study *Cidade de Deus* will be investigated according to the meanings it creates when representing Brazilian *favelas*.

3.1. Narrative Mode

Drawing from her concept of "cosmetics of hunger," in one of the most commented articles on this matter, briefly addressed in the previous chapter, Ivana Bentes in "*Cidade de Deus* promove turismo no inferno" ("*City of God* Promotes Tourism in Hell") writes about *Cidade de Deus* and its "beautiful style," which, according to her, turns poverty into a spectacle where violence has no political meaning whatsoever. Although agreeing that this is "um filme marco e realmente importante, por relatar a história modelar do tráfico no Brasil,"[23] Bentes argues for two points she sees as shortcomings that might empty the film of political value: the complicity of the first-person narrator with the dominant ideology (the classical narrative mode, where the audience is led to identifying with the "good guy"), and the isolation of the *favela* from

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[22] By the time the film was released, less than 15 thousand copies of the book had been sold, while the film reached an audience of over 3 million people only in Brazil.

[23] "a landmark film and really important, for telling the model history of the drug traffic in Brazil" (Bentes Cidade).

society. In her words, "[a] favela é mostrada de forma totalmente isolada do resto da cidade, como um território autônomo. Em momento algum se pode supor que o tráfico de drogas se sustenta e desenvolve (arma, dinheiro, proteção policial) porque tem uma base fora da favela. Esse fora não existe no filme" (Bentes Cidade).[24] This option for not showing the *favela*'s relation to society is one of the points that, in Bentes' view, turn *Cidade de Deus* into an apolitical film (this point will be further discussed on section 3.3. of this study).

Discussing the narrative mode of the film, Bentes mentions (and she is not alone in this claim) that the classic narrative in *Cidade de Deus* leads the spectator to what would be "mere spectacular amusement by violence" (Bentes Cidade).[25] The intradiegetic narration of the film is made by Busca-Pé (Alexandre Rodrigues)[26], who is not only the narrator of the story, but also the one around who the narrative discourse focalizes.[27] Although this analysis does not work with *Cidade de Deus* as adaptation, a brief reference to the narrative mode of the novel *Cidade de Deus* might help in understanding why Busca-Pé's narration in the film is seen by the critics as a point of ideological complicity. In the novel, the narrator is not a character. Nevertheless, this narrator is not omniscient, presenting characteristics of a restricted narration, confined to a character's range of knowledge, depending on who focalizes the event. Since the novel's narrative presents over a hundred characters, each event is narrated through the focalization of the main character present in that particular event. This variable internal

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[24] "[t]he *favela* is shown totally isolated from the city, as an autonomous territory. At no point can one suppose the drug traffic supports and develops itself (guns, money, police protection) because it has a basis outside the *favela*. This outside does not exist in the film" (Bentes Cidade).

[25] "mero gozo espetacular da violência" (Bentes Cidade).

[26] Busca-Pé, in the American subtitling of the film named "Rocket." This and subsequent translations of characters' names and dialogues from the film are quoted from the English subtitles of the DVD.

[27] According to Genette, intradiegetic narration occurs when the narrator is one of the characters of the story. The concept of focalization refers to whose point of view orients the narrative perspective (that may or may not be the narrator's). For further reading on the subject see Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980.

focalization[28], combined with the subjectivity, does not restrict the narrative discourse to siding with the "good" or the "bad" characters of the story.

Differently from the novel, where the use of variable internal focalization does not restrict the narrative discourse to one specific perspective, when choosing Busca-Pé as the narrator, the film seems to ally with the "hero," the well-known character of "the survivor." He is the kid who manages to escape a criminal life and pursue his dream of being a photographer. This option for an intradiegetic narrator implies an ideological outcome that meets the most common model seen in the mainstream cinema: the narrator is the "good guy", and he is the one the audience identifies with. José Geraldo Couto is one of the critics who, even when praising the film, recognizes this complicity with the dominant ideology: "Não há, que eu me lembre, uma única cena frouxa ou malfeita em 'Cidade de Deus', nem tampouco um diálogo que soe pobre ou artificial. Se existe alguma redundância e autocomplacência, ela está na narração em 'off'" (Couto Cidade).[29] Moreover, the story is not only *told* by Busca-Pé, but also *shown* through his cameras' lenses. From the moment he introduces himself to the audience his camera "clicks". Busca-Pé is the kid who is afraid of both the drug traffic "Lord" Zé Pequeno (Leandro Firmino da Hora)[30] and the police, and he is the one telling us this story.

Nevertheless a criticism of the dominant ideology is also present when Busca-Pé tells us this story. He is guided by fear, and when he chooses to print the picture of Zé Pequeno's corpse, instead of that of the corrupt police officers receiving money from Zé before he is murdered, Busca-Pé is telling the audience of/about the limitations of representation. As he has to choose one side of the story to print in the newspaper, the

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[28] According to Genette, variable internal focalization happens when different characters' points of view orient the narrative perspective.

[29] "There is not, that I can remember, even one scene that is untied or weakly executed in 'Cidade de Deus,' or a dialogue that sounds poor or artificial. If there is any redundancy and self-complacence, it is in the voice-over narration" (Couto Cidade).

[30] Zé Pequeno, "Li'l Zé."

same happens with the making of the film: *Cidade de Deus* has to choose one aspect, one specific perspective through which to tell this story. This subtle criticism, which is mostly present in postmodern aesthetic representations, as a form of metanarrative, shows how one single aspect can bring the paradox of complicity and critique at the same time.

However criticized by film critics and theoreticians, this postmodern perspective might be seen as the complicity necessary in order to engage the audiences with this film. According to Ismail Xavier, "Busca-Pé, em sua conversa com a platéia, faz um nítido contraponto com a avalanche de choques presente nas cenas; a sua voz *over* é uma ocasião de respiro, balanço e organização dos dados; às vezes, ele age como o informante do antropólogo para quem traduz os códigos do mundo em que se formou" (Xavier Corrosão).[31] The titles which are inserted in the film to help the audience follow the story are complemented by Busca-Pé's narration: he not only guides the spectator, but also assures identification with him as a character. As Hutcheon claims for a need to speak from inside the dominant ideology in order to reach the audience, this seems to be the role of Busca-Pé as a narrator, in a narrative mode that is easily recognizable by audiences, since it can be related to the well-known classical Hollywood style. Once the spectator identifies with Busca-Pé and is dragged into the story, the film's style does the "critique" part. The camera narrator in many instances is an extension of Busca-Pé's narration, since we see the events through his camera – as when he photographs his friends on the beach or Zé Pequeno's death. Nevertheless, the cinematic techniques used

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[31] "Busca-Pé, in his conversation with the audience, makes a clear counterpoint with the avalanche of shocks present in the scenes; his voice over is an occasion for breathing, for balance and data organization; sometimes he acts as the anthropologist's informant to whom he translates the codes of the world he has graduated in" (Xavier Corrosão).

in the film – mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing and sound[32] – although being consistent with Busca-Pé's narration, are representing Zé Pequeno's growth and the agility with which he takes over the drug traffic. Different sets of color and increasing speed are used to portray the three different phases of the film, based on the stages of the drug traffic's power. These cinematic techniques, that have been rated as the responsible for the political emptiness, and the glamorization of poverty supposedly conveyed by this film are going to be analyzed in the next section.

3.2. Cinematic Techniques

To initiate the analysis of the cinematic techniques adopted in *Cidade de Deus*, the description of the opening credits sequence is constructive. In the first sequence of the film, we see the killing of some chickens for a barbecue in the *favela*. In this sequence a lot of different camera angles are used, and in no way does it remind the audience of a common opening sequence. It diverges drastically from the usual analytical editing style (the sequence mostly used in classical Hollywood films: establishing long-shot, medium-shot, close-up, medium-shot, long-shot), due to the directors' option for a more dynamic and stylized montage sequence. The use of a moving hand-held camera combined with extreme close-ups (starting with the knife being sharpened intercut with black shots, moving to the hands playing the instruments or cooking the meal, intercut with the chicken's desperate look) adds suspense, and gives a sense of agitation while making the viewer feel the agony portrayed in that sequence. The medium-shot only appears when the chicken (after seeing the hands

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[32] According to Bordwell and Thompson, mise-en-scene includes setting, lighting, costume, and the behavior of the figures; cinematography involves the photographic aspects, the framing, and the duration of the shot; and editing is the coordination of one shot with the next. For further reading on the subject see David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's *Film Art: An Introduction*. New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, 1997.

taking the guts of another dead chicken) runs away. The chicken is shown in a medium-shot when Zé Pequeno realizes it has run away. In more than two minutes into the film, the first face we are shown is Zé Pequeno's. Until this moment the spectator has not been shown any faces on focus or entirely framed. Zé Pequeno's power in the favela is already portrayed here. He appears dictating orders – his face extrapolates the limits of the frame as if he were too big to be confined. That is when the chasing starts and the camera angles are even more stylized. We see another close-up of Zé Pequeno, with the camera in a canted angle, and then we have the camera on the ground, when the men run above it. Following up, we see a very high angle shot, a panning, another high angle shot, and finally the hand-held camera, that runs after the chicken.

This sequence definitely cannot be called a common opening sequence as it does not even present an establishing shot in the mode audiences are used to. Instead, it raises the spectators' emotions in feeling the chicken's suffering, presents the place where the film is set as a confined, labyrinth like place, and due to the agility of the editing in this sequence, the spectators are already dragged into the film in its first sequence. However, this means of "dragging the spectator into the film" does not paralyze the audiences, as might be said of many action films. What this sequence does is a kind of foreshadowing of the violence that is going to take place in the film. As the sequence goes on we see Busca-Pé trapped between Zé Pequeno's gang (who is after the runaway chicken), and the police (that seems to be after the criminals). The chicken manages to escape the violence, represented by both the gang and the police, as does Busca-Pé.

Another noticeable technique in this sequence (and throughout the film) is the use of sound, which adds to the fast pace of the story when the directors use both diegetic and non-diegetic sound in order to stress the emotions raised in the viewer. In the opening credits sequence we see a clear example of this successful mix that is used

throughout the film. The sound montage works in the same rhythm as the image montage. The sound of the knife being sharpened in the first shot is emphasized as well as the other sounds that accompany each shot: the instruments being played by the *favela* residents, the camera sound when Busca-Pé appears in the seventh shot of the sequence, the noise from the carrot being peeled, and many others, but specially the chicken's noise that gets more and more evident as the chicken's "anguish" increases. This constant use of diegetic sound makes every detail of each shot more noticeable for the audience.

Nevertheless, the use of non-diegetic sound is also very important in the film. The voice-over narration is the first example, but many more can be pointed out, as in the opening credits sequence, when the chicken runs away, a samba music which is being played by the favela residents turns into a non-diegetic music playing in the background. The cheerful samba music sets the mood for the passage between what would be the "present" time (somewhere around the late 1970s, early 1980s) and the flashback about to be narrated by Busca-Pé, who takes us to the 1960s when the pace is much slower, and everything seems to be more relaxed in a sense. Furthermore, still referring to sound, in the last sequence of the film the song being played non-diegetically (*O caminho do bem* "The good path") gives a message of optimism, while Busca-Pé announces that now people call him by his real name – Wilson Rodrigues, thus, signaling that everything turned out fine for him. However, the song is only related to Busca-Pé, and not to Cidade de Deus, as it ironically stops when the image shows the children taking over the drug traffic control in that community – not really an image of the good path. Although the spectator might not be aware of this, a number of other songs played both as diegetic and as non-diegetic sound functions in the same way, such as the soundtrack used when Busca-Pé is introducing the story of Dadinho (Douglas

Silva, as the young Zé Pequeno)[33], Bené (Phellipe Haagensen)[34] and the Trio Ternura[35],

giving the audience the feeling of them being typical *malandros*.[36] As Busca-Pé is our

narrator we know what he knows: "Back then I thought the guys in the Tender Trio

were the most dangerous hoods in Rio… But they were just amateurs," thus the

connection of the music to Busca-Pé's point of view. Moreover, the sound is what helps

not only to set the mood for the actions that are being narrated by Busca-Pé, but also to

compose the atmosphere that separates the three phases portrayed in *Cidade de Deu*s:

the 1960s with the history of the Trio Ternura, the 1970s with the balls and the insertion

of cocaine in the *favela*, and the late 1970s and early 1980s with the drug traffic bosses

engaged in a gangs' war.

In the opening sequence, as mentioned before, the rhythm created by the editing

and sound is agile, creating tension and portraying the control of Zé Pequeno. However,

soon after the opening sequence we have a flashback that starts what I will denominate

here the first phase of *Cidade de Deus*: the 1960's. When Busca-Pé sees himself trapped

in a compromising situation, a 360 degree revolving shot, which reminds us of *Matrix*,

takes us back in time some 15 or 20 years. The visual and sound styles then change

drastically. The colors are guided by yellow, conveying the old times, an "innocent"

period when "the most dangerous hoods in Rio" would rob gas trucks and distribute the

product of the robbery to the population of the *favela*. Besides the change in color,

achieved through the use of yellow filters in the camera lens, the long-shots deliver a

sensation of amplitude. In the first sequence of this phase half the screen is taken by the

sky – the horizon line can still be seen, together with the sand soccer field, trees on the

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[33] Dadinho, "Li'l Dice."
[34] Bené, "Beny."
[35] Trio Ternura, "The Tender Trio."
[36] *Malandro*, in the words of Castro Rocha, is a "man of many faces and discourses, whose *gingado* (swing) competes with his ability for taking advantage in the most diverse, and adverse, situations" (Castro Rocha 13).

background, the sun shining and children playing soccer. The pace is also much slower when compared to the previous sequence (the chasing of the chicken). For instance, the shot in which the kids playing soccer score a goal lasts at least eight seconds (in opposition to the opening sequence when in one or two seconds we see even four shots of the same action). The dweller's lives are pictured as bucolic scenery. Children hunt birds, fly kites, play in the river; people laugh and ride bicycles; the costumes are usually in bright colors; the houses are freshly painted; and dogs play in the middle of the street. Everything looks like a small town in the country. The lighting, inspired by Italian neo-realism, is always natural – as in most of the film – however, in this first phase, even the shots in the interior of houses are still very bright conveying the good atmosphere that reigned besides the poverty those people lived in and the violence they already faced.

Even the violent sequences in the 1960s, as the gas truck robbery, the sequence when Paraíba (Gero Camilo)[37] murders his wife, and the death of Cabeleira (Jonathan Haagensen),[38] are "softened" in the first phase. For instance, the gas truck robbery occurs in day light, and even though the costume the Trio is wearing is red (in a reference to blood and violence) the dwellers are not hurt and do not seem scared – in fact they come running to receive the gas as a "gift" from the criminals. After running from the police, the Trio even gives some of the money they robbed to the kids playing soccer. The framing of the Trio as they approach the gas truck is inspired in old American westerns, portraying a mood of nostalgia for the old days when even crime was "innocent" (Fig. 1). Another violent act mentioned, when Paraíba kills his wife, is followed by a humorous sequence: Marreco (Renato de Souza)[39] begs his brother Busca-Pé to lend him his shorts, since Marreco has run away completely nude. In

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[37] Paraíba, "Shorty."
[38] Cabeleira, "Shaggy."
[39] Marreco, "Goose."

addition, Cabeleira's death, as he tries to run from the police, carries a poetic tone: he is alone, running between the houses, accompanied by an old samba song playing on the background, while his wife cries his death. Moreover, the criminals' escapes are always through open fields, framed in long shots as if there still was somewhere to run, somewhere to escape to.

Fig.1. Trio Ternura robs the gas truck in a frame composition that refers back to American Westerns.

After Cabeleira's death, a match on movement takes the spectator to the second phase of the film: the 1970s. However, this is not a common match: the characters on screen are the same, walking the same direction, in the same place, but the times have changed. A much more colorful image is revealed, the yellow filter is discarded, the music is not the traditional old samba anymore, but a more quickly paced samba mixed with Brazilian pop music. The setting has changed as well: the houses' painting is faint, there are new walls and fences, the space nearby the houses is not so open anymore and the streets between the houses have narrowed, as a labyrinth that disseminates. However, this is the only phase when the natural beauty of Rio de Janeiro is present. In

the entire film, none of Rio de Janeiro's postcard images are shown, but in the 1970s we have some sequences that portray a group of teenagers at the beach – including the first sequence of the second phase when they are cutting classes and headed to the beach. In the words of Nagib, "[a]s an image, the beautiful Rio is merely a hazy silhouette on the horizon in the film. The sea is only attainable for Rocket, the social climber who has to get close to the 'groovies', that is, the white inhabitants of City of God" (Nagib Talking 40). This group of teenagers, the white inhabitants of Cidade de Deus, is constituted by the "Cocotas,"[40] and their style is what guides the second phase of the film.

Some of the most striking sequences of the second phase are the big balls that were very popular in the 1970's, when a number of different colors are portrayed, and the music follows the joyfulness of the Cocotas, going from Brazilian singers Tim Maia and Raul Seixas to James Brown and rock and roll. The use of old fashioned wipes and split screens during this phase refers back to the filmmaking practices more common in the 1970s. It is in this phase that the romantic plotline develops, as we have Busca-Pé and Angélica (Alice Braga) dating on the beach, and later on Angélica and Bené making plans to leave the community and move to the country side – maybe trying a return to a place that Cidade de Deus was in the 1960s. However, at the same time the film portrays this joyful mood, mostly represented by Bené (the good criminal that is part of the Cocotas group), Zé Pequeno is present as the dark counterpoint. The tension that prepares the war which is about to start can be felt in many sequences. The acceleration of the music and the editing pace seem to have a connection with the instauration of cocaine in the *favela*, leaving the marijuana "mood" and moving to a more agitated space, when the drug traffic grows at a more dynamic speed and starts to take control of the community – what is narrated by Busca-Pé as in an institutional video. The

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[40] Cocotas, "the groovies," "the groovy crowd."

cinematography is very unusual, or what critics called stylized: bird eye camera angles, frozen frames, canted angles, upside down camera, fast-forward speed, not to mention the computer graphics used to geographically locate the spectator in Cidade de Deus as Busca-Pé narrates the story.

In the 1970s the multi-color and the blue filter walk side by side, as we see in the first ball sequence. The tension is increasing when Zé Pequeno threatens his rival, Cenoura (Matheus Nachtergaele).[41] Nevertheless, Bené intervenes reassuring the "peace" in the place. However, in the second ball sequence, during Bené's farewell party, the outcome is different and leads to the third phase of the film in a beautifully orchestrated sequence when up to five different plotlines are intercut in parallel editing. The first shot shows a mirror globe, followed by a dance floor packed with people dancing and enjoying themselves, lights of different colors, music and smiles. The tension increases as Zé Pequeno feels rejected by a girl (Mané Galinha's girlfriend) and takes out on whomever comes to his sight: Angélica (as Zé is jealous of her relationship with his best friend Bené), Mané Galinha (Seu Jorge),[42] and even Busca-Pé (partly because Bené is giving him a camera as a gift). At this point the tension is unmanageable, and the colorful lights that assured the festive atmosphere are replaced by an intermittent black light that makes the moment even more confusing. The climax of this sequence is when Bené ends up being shot by accident while he fights Zé for the camera. The final shot is drastically different from the first one. It is almost completely black and white, with shadows of blue, for the blue filter is already being used towards the end of this sequence, and Zé Pequeno is alone in the middle of the dance floor, with Bené's dead body on his arms, shooting his gun up to the air. From the final cut of this

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[41] Cenoura, "Carrot."
[42] Mane Galinha, "Knockout Ned."

sequence on, blue is the color chosen to portray the coldness of the "gang war" that is about to start.

With the murder of Bené in his farewell party the third phase is inaugurated. In the third phase, some time between the late 1970s and early 1980s, the sound brings almost no music at all as silence works to create the war mood. The shootings are constant and the editing brings a dance of dead bodies in more than one sequence. The rival gangs enter a war that lasts over a year, but is portrayed in a very agile sequence of shootouts and inside shots of the gangs buying guns and recruiting "soldiers." The camera movement and editing become faster and faster, almost seeming to have escaped any control. As claimed by director Meirelles, in an interview to Ryan Mottersheard: "[w]e shot in three different ways: the first part of the film is more classical – we were using a 40mm lens, tripods, dollies. I'd give the actors some marks. But by the end of the film, it was like losing control of the production. In the last part, we never told the actors where to go, even in subsequent takes of a scene" (Mottesheard). Not only was the acting "out of control," as was the hand-held camera in unusual angles often working with distorted focus.

So far it is possible to say that the image portrayed combined with the narrator's voice is what makes the style of the film so effective. Responding to the claim against the supposed glamorization of poverty caused by the use of technology and the beautiful images employed in *Cidade de Deus*, some well-known Brazilian critics noticed the "glamorization critique" as empty, since the style does not harm the creation of meanings. For instance, Nuno Cesar de Abreu sees it as a confusion made by the critics, for "[n]o cinema brasileiro glamour pode se confundir com acabamento, refinamento da técnica, busca de uma misancene de gosto globalizado, elementos que compõem uma tentativa de se produzir um produto esteticamente sedutor" (Abreu, Passos and

Ramos).[43] Ismail Xavier gives credit to the audiences' knowledge of films, claiming that "[s]pecial effects, manipulation of speed and computer graphics haven't hindered audiences' recognition of the authenticity of the events shown. Obviously we no longer identify such effects purely with superficial drama and voyeuristic pleasure" (Angels 30). Couto, in the same article in which he points out the complicity of the narration, praises the films' style:

> [t]odas essas conquistas - sem falar da hábil assimilação de técnicas da publicidade e do videoclipe com propósitos narrativos essencialmente cinematográficos - correm o risco de ser obscurecidas por uma reação defensiva e ressentida, armada com o slogan "cosmética da fome." "Cidade de Deus," a despeito de sua composição, digamos, "estilosa," tem pouco a ver com essa estética (ou cosmética). Visto sem antolhos, é um filme de vigor espantoso e de extrema competência narrativa. Seus grandes trunfos são o roteiro engenhosamente construído (sim, à maneira americana, sem gorduras nem pontos sem nó) e a consistência da "mise-en-scène." (Couto Cidade).[44]

These critics realize the hybridization of genres in *Cidade de Deus* not only as a pastiche, but mostly as a part of the socio-political critique. Pairing with these critics' arguments it is possible to read Hutcheon's argument as favorable to the "capitalist modes of production" of *Cidade de Deus* as a postmodern film, which can work to bring audiences closer to the critique being made through its complicity with the dominant filmmaking mode of our times, as mentioned in the previous chapter (*Politics* 114).

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[43] "[i]n Brazilian cinema glamour can be confused with finish, refinement of technique, the search for a mise-en-scene of globalized taste, elements that compose an attempt to produce an aesthetically seductive product" (Abreu, Passos, and Ramos).

[44] [a]ll these conquests – not to mention the skillful assimilation of publicity and video clip techniques with essentially cinematographic narrative purposes – take the risk of being obscured by a defensive and resented reaction, armed with the slogan "cosmetics of hunger." *Cidade de Deus*, in spite of its, let's say "stylish" composition, has little to do with this aesthetics (or cosmetics). Seen without blinkers, it is a film of surprising vigor and extreme narrative competence. Its great glories are the ingeniously built screenplay (yes, following the American mode, without left-overs or untied knots) and the consistency of the mise-en-scene. (Couto Cidade)

3.3. The Theme

Cidade de Deus and its relationship to the *favela* can be read as a form of social theme. The representation of poverty depicted in the film presents the *favela* separated from other segments of society, and within this option it foregrounds the absence of the State. The State, that is supposedly responsible for the community's well being, is left out of the film's action, becoming a point to be criticized. However, *Cidade de Deus* makes an option of not focusing on how the traffic was installed in that place: the spectators are not shown how the drug dealing started, they are only shown the traffic "offices" from the moment Dadinho becomes Zé Pequeno and decides to kill the drug dealers in order to take their place. This is the moment when the colors change and the camera works to make the film more agile, the editing becoming faster, and the audience, as well as the people who live in the *favela* end up being caught by that rapid movement. What can be seen then is how a brutal criminal (Zé Pequeno) just kills anyone he wants and take over the control of the *favela*. It seems there are no attempts from the State's part to control his disturbed character. The only one who exerts some control over Zé Pequeno is the "good-hearted criminal" (and Zé's best friend) Bené.

The power Zé Pequeno has in the community can be noticed from the opening credits sequence, seeing that his face is the first we recognize. The opening credits sequence is, in fact, already part of the third phase, and it will be repeated later on in the film. However, the prominence of Zé Pequeno, Dadinho by that time, can be seen since the first phase when he is still a child. In his first appearance, Dadinho enters "invading" Busca-Pé's space both in the soccer field and the camera that for a moment abandons our narrator (and protagonist of this sequence) and focuses on Dadinho. Later on, we see Busca-Pé playing in the river with a friend when the peace of the moment is disturbed by a cut that shows the close-up of a gun held by Dadinho. Another moment

that shows the evil shadow that Dadinho projects over the community is during the robbery of the motel. Although one more time we see no long-shots (differently from those in which Cidade de Deus was presented to the spectators), the dialogues are "light," the criminals carry guns, but never shoot them and the samba music playing on the background confers a kind of softness to the event. Nonetheless, the sequence that follows the Trio's escape is stronger. The silence is absolute and we see the dead bodies of the people who were in the motel. At this point the spectator is not aware of this yet, but those dead bodies are one more demonstration of the power and villainy of Dadinho/Zé Pequeno.[45]

According to João Cezar de Castro Rocha, the figure of Zé Pequeno embodies a principle of "overcoming of social inequalities through confrontation instead of reconciliation, and through the exposure of violence instead of its concealment" (Castro Rocha 15). Castro Rocha's argument is that Zé Pequeno brings a rupture with early representation of criminals in Brazilian cinema. Following the same reasoning, Xavier claims that in contemporary Brazilian cinema, and especially in *Cidade de Deus*, through Zé Pequeno, there is an attempt to avoid "romantizar a figura do bandido [...], em contraste com os marginais do passado cuja violência, embora de equívoco reconhecido, carregava ainda um resto de legitimidade como resposta da vítima à injustiça social" (Xavier Violência 63).[46] Zé Pequeno's violence is not justified by an unfortunate past which would victimize him. He is not trying to reconcile with an unfair society, instead he is embodying capitalist ambition within a consumerist postmodern society in its worst representation. In the words of Xavier, "[n]ow [...] the bad guy is designed inside the paradigm of selfish calculating, as a businessman that takes the rules

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[45] Curiously, in the sequence we see Dadinho shooting these people, he fires 8 times a six shots gun.

[46] "a romanticizing of the figure of the bandit […], in contrast to the criminals of the past, whose violence, although being a recognizable mistake, still carried remains of legitimacy as an answer to social injustice" (Xavier Violência 63).

of the capitalist game to extremes" (Violência 60). Zé Pequeno is not fighting social injustice, instead he uses violence to gain the power that will assure him access to the consumerism goods he desires (as we can see in the sequence Zé decides to kill the drug dealers and take their business, motivated by the jewelry and cars they own and Zé covets).

Seeing Zé Pequeno's presence from this perspective it is possible to associate his power to the absence (or lack of power) of the State. The people from the community are suffering in the hands of criminals and being dragged into a gang war with nowhere to run: "in the City of God, if you run away, they get you… and if you stay, they get you too" (Busca-Pé).[47] Even the President of Brazil, Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, after watching *Cidade de Deus* has made a statement on the absence of the State in the film: "The absence of the State – in terms of schools, leisure, and employment – can transform housing estates like Cidade de Deus into a site of banishment, places where poor people are concentrated in order that they do not to disturb the peace of the other section of the country that is socially included" (Silva 115). The police officer Cabeção (Maurício Marques)[48], who represents the "absence" of the State in the *favela,* asserts: "come on, let them kill each other,"[49] clearly not worried in controlling the gangs. Apparently the poor people who live in Cidade de Deus are not worth the trouble. Moreover, the character who partakes with the corrupt police officer in selling guns is named Tio Sam (Charles Paraventi)[50] – in an indirect critique against capitalism (represented by the all American figure of Uncle Sam), and its relation to the drug traffic. The character, Tio Sam, is not brought to the foreground of the film's action (for this is not the main focus of the film), but his presence can be seen as a clear indication

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[47] "Se correr o bicho pega e se ficar o bicho come," in Busca-Pé's words.
[48] Cabeção, "Melonhead."
[49] "Vamo nessa. Deixa que esses filho-da-puta mesmo se matem," in Cabeção's words.
[50] Tio Sam, "Uncle Sam."

of the drug traffic's relation to other sections of society. More than the history of the growth of drug traffic in that community, this film seems to emphasize the lack of attention from the State, which allows for Zé Pequeno to take control the moment he chooses to. In this case the very absence of the State apparatus can be read as critique of its malfunctioning.

The rapid editing of the shots in the second and third phases of the film, the constant sense of movement, the mise-en-scene, and the aesthetics of the film in general are paired with the agility of Zé Pequeno in taking over the *favela*. The audience is engaged in the war as are engaged the people who live in that community. And if the audience is shocked, but is, at the same time, fascinated with the guns, the violence, and the power shown by those gangs, so are the *favela* kids who are instigated to enter the war for the most varied reasons. Even two of the main characters, Mané Galinha and Busca-Pé, are examples of honest people who want away from crime. However, one of them, Mané Galinha, seeing his girl being raped, his uncle and brother murdered and his house shot, sees no escape and asks for the rival gang's help. Within the reasoning the film allows, who would he ask to catch that criminal? The police? The police will not go there unless the press is around, or in Busca-Pé's words: "quando vem a imprensa, favela enche de polícia."[51] But the crimes that victimize Mané Galinha happen in the middle of the night, in a hidden alley in a *favela*, and are not spectacular enough to get the press's attention. Even Busca-Pé, after being discriminated for coming from Cidade de Deus, and loosing his job because of this, gives up hope and decides to start his criminal life. What stops him is only luck. Towards the end, when he finally has the pictures he needs to get a job, he is afraid of the police and does not show everything he

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[51] "along with the reporters, the place was swarming with cops," in Busca-Pé's words.

knows. Coercion is not only from the real criminals' part, but from the State too, keeping the community dwellers under control in the basis of fear.

The people in the movie are not "good boys," neither does the exhibition of their traditional culture (samba, soccer and carnival) occupy a privileged spot in the film. On the contrary, it even shows the torture and murder of two children by the residents of the *favela*. The film pictures the *favela* in a less idealized way than it was in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. It does not focus on the traditional culture and does not sell an idealized picture of happy people who have an easy time dealing with poverty; instead it demonstrates a harsh reality – and this harshness is represented through a rich combination of cinematic techniques.

3.4. The Hybridization of Genres

Postmodern hybridization of genres can be seen either as pastiche, according to Jameson's concept, or as complicitous critique, according to Hutcheon's perspective. Before moving on to the final chapter of this thesis, where the film *Cidade de Deus* shall be situated within these two concepts, a brief analysis of the genres that inform the aesthetics of this film is paramount.

According to Thomas Schartz in *Hollywood Genres*, "we might think of a *film genre* as a specific grammar or system of rules of expression and construction and the individual genre film as a manifestation of these rules" (Schatz 19). There are various ways of classifying genres: by a subject matter or theme (e.g.: western); formal elements (e.g.: musical); emotional tone (e.g.: melodrama); plot structure (e.g.: detective film); and style and period made (e.g.: film noir). In contemporary filmmaking the definition of genre becomes more complicated due to the different definitions of a same genre and by genre mixing, but the conventions of some genres (such as plot elements,

themes and techniques) are so engraved in the audience's memory that these genres are easily recognizable. As discussed before, the film *Cidade de Deus* cannot be located within a single genre. Instead, it is inspired by, or makes reference to, a number of different genres and styles as follows.

The first genre to be recognized is Italian neo-realism, which even before the production phase of *Cidade de Deus* has worked as a referent in the option of working with non-professional actors. According to Antonio Traverso,

> [t]he renewal of neorealist aesthetics in Brazilian films [is] in the films' observational and sometimes raw documentary style; the filmmakers' commitment to the exploration of political, sociological, and historical themes; and their production approaches, which often include the use of scripts based on true life stories, authentic locations, and non-actors playing themselves. (Traverso 208)

In order to convey authenticity to the story being told, director Meirelles decided to select *Cidade de Deus'* cast directly in the poor communities of Rio de Janeiro and gather a cast of non-professional actors. The actors' preparation started in 1999, when 2000 people were interviewed. 400 of them were selected to the next phase when video tests were recorded. From these video tests 200 people were chosen to participate on the acting classes where the points emphasized were improvisation and freedom to create. The actors were never given the screenplay of the film, only directors' guidance on the event to be acted, and even the few experienced actors participating in the film joined the new actors and refused to read the screenplay. The result is a remarkable acting. The debate around *Cidade de Deus* is the main point of investigation of this thesis, but as mentioned in chapter I, one point most of the critics and theorists (and I would even dare to say all of them) who were addressed in the examination of this debate agree is the actors' work. Together with the actors' improvisation, the lighting also had to follow the Italian neo-realist style. Without a strict figure behavior control, the natural lighting provides the freedom the actors need to express the meanings intended. Most of the

lighting in the film is natural, even indoors. For instance, in the sequence that tells "a história da boca dos apês"[52] the light we see on screen as the place's illumination source was the only lighting used to shoot all the takes that were cut for that sequence: the sunlight coming from the windows in day time shots, and the light bulb in the middle of the living room, the lamp on the table, and bathroom light in night shots. Moreover, the majority of the locations are set in real poor communities of Rio de Janeiro, most of the time not in Cidade de Deus due to the danger posed by the drug traffic, but other *favelas* that offered less risk for the crew and cast. In Siwi's words "City of God, still under the command of teenage drug gangs, proved to be far too unpredictable and dangerous for shooting the film" (Siwi 235).

Although Cinema Novo cannot be seen as a film genre, the aesthetics applied to Cinema Novo films resulted in a filmmaking style that is one of the styles referenced to in *Cidade de Deus*. For instance, this reference to Italian neo-realism could be said to be an influence of Brazilian Cinema Novo of the 1960s, since Cinema Novo openly referred to this same neo-realist techniques (Traverso 208). Moreover there are other instances of reference to Cinema Novo. The theme itself, representation of poverty and violence, which has been discussed in this thesis before, is one of the reasons that caused the polemics around this film. On top of that, the narrator of the story makes an open reference to one of the most famous quotes from Glauber Rocha. Rocha used to quote the sentence "uma câmera na mão e uma idéia na cabeça"[53] (attributed by some film theorists to Jean-Luc Godard, but with no registered connections to him), to try to free Brazilian cinema from the guidelines and technologies that came from abroad, especially from the United States. He wanted Brazilian Cinema to have a Brazilian "face," which would be given by our own ideas. In *Cidade de Deus* Busca-Pé parodies

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[52] A história da boca dos apês, "the story of the apartment."
[53] "a camera in the hand and an idea in the head."

Rocha's sentence by saying: "Pra ser bandido mesmo não basta ter uma arma na mão, precisa ter alguma idéia na cabeça. E isso o Dadinho tinha."[54] Director Meirelles claim the insertion of this "parody" was to pay homage to Rocha and Cinema Novo, but having a comparison of the Cinema Novo filmmakers with a criminal such as Zé Pequeno is a very problematic "homage."

The classical Hollywood narrative, which can be seen more as style than a proper genre, is another strong influence in *Cidade de Deus*. Some of these influences have been mentioned in previous sections – such as the narrator's commitment to dominant ideology as a means of making the spectator identify with the "hero" – but the film being analyzed here owes much more to Hollywood filmmaking than can be noticed at first sight. For instance, Busca-Pé's romantic virginity plot: he falls for Angélica, dates her, and loses her to Bené. The most "apolitical" instances of the film can certainly be described as the sequences that develop this plotline. However, this might be a "necessary" instrument, for audiences are used to having the double plotline, as quoted in chapter I: "Typically the goals govern least two lines of action, and at least one of these involves heterosexual romantic love" (Bordwell Anatomy). Nevertheless, trying to get the audience's attention to the well known Hollywoodian love plot, one of the posters for the advertising of *Cidade de Deus* in the United States portrays Busca-Pé and Angélica dating on the beach, in a still photo that by no means reflects the film's theme (Fig. 2). It seems here that more than being used to make the audience identify with the characters, the love plotline was used to "trick" audiences into going to the theaters to watch *Cidade de Deus*.

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[54] "To be a real hood it is not enough to have a gun in the hand, you need to have an idea in your head. And this Dadinho had" (my translation). The DVD's English subtitle reads: "To be a real hood you need more than just a gun. You need ideas. And Li'l Dice had them." Unfortunately the connection to Rocha's quote is lost in this translation.
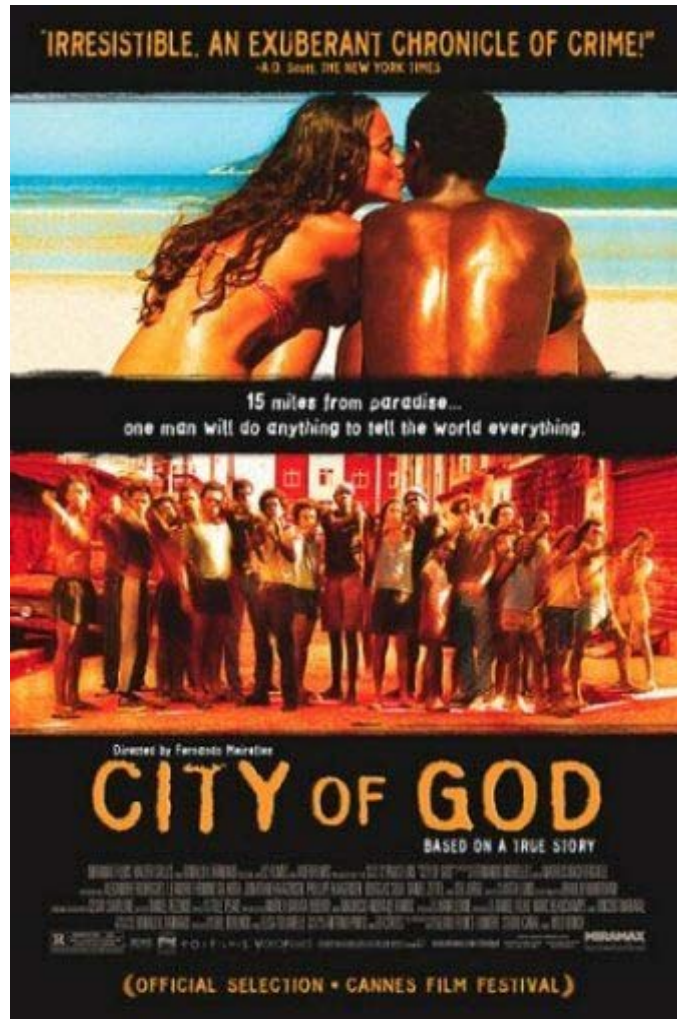
Fig. 2. The poster for the advertising of *Cidade de Deus* in the United States gives the same weight to Busca-Pé's love plotline as to the gang war.

Another plot element that can be connected to Hollywood productions is the portrayal of the "good bad guy" (Bené), and the "bad bad guy" (Zé Pequeno). The presence of Bené as the nice criminal, who pays beer and gathers all the crowds in his farewell party, who in Busca-Pé's words is "gente fina demais pra continuar naquela vida de bandido,"[55] makes a counterpoint to the real villain of the story, avoiding any identification or sympathy from the audience towards Zé Pequeno who becomes a kind of "number one public enemy" as we see in super-heroes stories. Moreover, when Mané Galinha decides to join the gang war he is welcomed by the community as a kind of

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[55] "just too cool to go on being a hoodlum" (Busca-Pé's words).

"gangster hero," a "Punisher," seeking for revenge not only for himself, but for the entire community who suffers in the hands of the "bad bad guy." In Busca-Pé's words "parecia que de repente a Cidade de Deus tinha encontrado um herói."[56] And this "hero" would make a perfect counterpoint to the "bad guy" Zé Pequeno, as Busca-Pé puts it: "a parada aí era entre o bonitão do bem e o feioso do mal."[57]

However, besides adhering to some features of the Hollywood filmmaking style, the film also criticizes it. One interesting parallel can be made between the chasing sequences in action Hollywood movies and the "chicken chasing sequence" in *Cidade de Deus*. Meirelles and Lund's film mirrors a chasing sequence, but undermines the Hollywood luxury attached to chasing in action movies. In *Cidade de Deus* there are no car scenes, no destruction, or the guns associated with it. The scenery is a *favela* in which cars are replaced by chicken, and action songs that help to enhance the suspense are replaced by a samba whose rhythm accompanies the montage, frenetically, undoing any sense of climax. As a joke on Hollywood itself, even the identification point of view, with a chicken, sort of undoes the Hollywood formula of the good boy vs. bad boy referred to in the previous paragraph, confirming the postmodern paradox of complicity and critique. Thus the film sets the scene: one that is half parody and half tragedy, moving between a commentary on genres, formulas, representations and a tragic drama that is about to happen.

Some of the other references that are identifiable in *Cidade de Deus* have been briefly mentioned in this thesis, but are recollected here. First the Tender Trio portrayed as Western "heroes" distributing gas and money to the community dwellers; the *Matrix* inspired 360 degrees revolving shot, referring to an American action film; the gangs' war, with shots of the gangs walking through dark alleys in order to surprise the enemy,

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[56] "it was as if the City of God had suddenly found a hero" (Busca-Pé's words).
[57] "it was a duel between the handsome good guy and the ugly bad guy" (Busca-pé's words).

with its typical gang leaders and urban setting referring to Gangster film of the 1930s; hand-held camera and the addition of real TV footage when Mané Galinha is interviewed, referring to documentary filmmaking; Busca-Pé's narration of how the drug traffic works as in an institutional video; all this tied up with the agile editing style and exotic camera angles typical of the post-MTV language.

This analysis of *Cidade de Deus* makes clear how the mix of styles can lead to different interpretations of the film's political awareness when focusing on different features. At the same time that the typically Brazilian (and South American) adoption of social themes (in this case the representation of poverty) raises a criticism towards a significant social problem, the use of different styles can portray a complicity that at times certainly hinders the reflection expected from the audience in a characteristically postmodern paradox that will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The present study has analyzed the film *Cidade de Deus* and its relation to the postmodern critical and theoretical debates, and has argued that the presence of hybridization of genres places this film within postmodern aesthetics as complicitous critique. The "coexistence of different features" in postmodern art, as claimed by Jameson (Postmodernism 33), can be detected in *Cidade de Deus* not only as a cannibalization of styles from the past in order to seduce the viewer, but mainly as a means of finding access to the spectator, and then criticizing the consequences of using those features. The Anglo-American debate around postmodern aesthetics demonstrates the different positions assumed by theoreticians concerning the political tones (or lack of them) of postmodern art forms, and drawing especially from Hutcheon's and Jameson's position, a parallel is traced with the criticism addressed to *Cidade de Deus*. The critical claim for the hybridization of genres in this film, and its consequent conveying of embellished images, can be related to Jameson's concept of pastiche. However, the identification of features that characterize the pastiche is seen in isolated aspects of the film, not working as a definition for the film as a whole. Instead, what can be identified is the use of dominant narrative modes in order to foreground a critique of totalizing concepts, such as capitalism, and of the fixed boundaries celebrated in the past (criticized through the very crossing of boundaries of genres, for instance).

In order to verify the degree of political implications proposed by *Cidade de Deus*, some of the most salient techniques present in the film were analyzed. The focus of the analysis was on the film's narrative mode, cinematic techniques, theme and

hybridization of genres. Busca-Pé's narration is a point of complicity with the dominant narrative mode of the classical Hollywood style: he is the intradiegetic narrator that manages to escape criminal life, his narration being the means of seducing the audience into the film. This narrative mode could be said to empty the political content of the narration, for it refers to a past style, popular in Hollywood films, a formula very well-known to audiences which, if related to Jameson's understanding of postmodern aesthetics, can be said to work as a means of seduction, and not of reflection. However, as a postmodern characteristic, the narrative mode of the film, besides being complicitous with the dominant Hollywood style, also poses a critique when it is understood as metanarrative: Busca-Pé has to choose what to represent when he has the opportunity of printing a photograph in the newspaper. He can approach representation as denunciation of the corruption of the police, or as denunciation of how criminals end up when involved in drug traffic. His option for showing the criminal's death portrays his fear of the police, and compromises his representation of "reality" through photography. Representation is indicated as an ideological and value-laden process and herein lays the criticism. Thus by making use of the dominant narrative mode, *Cidade de Deus* secures the identification of the spectator and later on destabilizes representation by unveiling the tensions embedded in it.

The cinematic techniques, such as mise-en-scene, sound, cinematography, and editing, were investigated through the analysis of the three different phases of the film that showed the use of technology in order to exacerbate the growth of violence towards the end of *Cidade de Deus*. Besides posing complicity with styles such as documentary, institutional video and the MTV video-clip language in the rapid editing and unusual camera angles, the use of cinematic techniques is committed to the plot of Zé Pequeno's power expanding over time. The different use of technique in the three phases analyzed

helps the spectator to understand the main plotline; at the same time it works to reinforce the criticism against the lack of control of the State over the criminals in poor communities in Brazil. The combination of the sequences' analysis with the critics' arguments – through the criticism examined in this thesis, such as Abreu, Xavier and Couto, quoted in chapter III – helped to clarify the use of technology in creating meanings that can also be political.

Moreover, the discussion around the social theme of poverty and violence, and the alleged lack of the presence of the State in the film, besides being presented by a rich combination of cinematic techniques, presents two main points of criticism against dominant discourses: the State as protector and capitalism. The analysis of Zé Pequeno's presence in the film (discussed in chapter III) also makes use of dominant cinematic techniques imbued in the film's editing style and cinematography in order to challenge the alleged belief in the State's power to protect the whole of the Brazilian population. Also the portrayal of Zé Pequeno as a businessman, as claimed by Xavier (quoted in chapter III), is a criticism to the ferocity of capitalism, as the drug traffic is explained in a sequence that refers back to institutional videos. Drug dealing is narrated by Busca-Pé in a comparison to assembly lines, and other legal business, with possibility for the kids to even make a career in the traffic. In an ironic portrayal of the capitalist mode of Zé Pequeno's business, Busca-Pé's voice-over narration ironically claims "se o tráfico fosse legal, o Pequeno ia ser o homem do ano."[58]

Throughout the filmic analysis, the mix of styles and crossing of genre boundaries in *Cidade de Deus* were highlighted, and the hybridization of genres was demonstrated in references to film genres and "styles" from the past such as Italian Neo-realism, Cinema Novo, Hollywood classical narrative, Western, American action films,

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[58] "if dealing were legal, Li'l Z' would have been man of the year" (Busca-Pé's words).

Gangster film of the 1930s, documentary, institutional videos, and the post-MTV language. Two points can be addressed as the main conveyors of complicity within this analysis of the film's use of different genres: the Hollywoodian double plotline (mentioned in chapters I and III), and the good boy vs. bad boy formula. The romantic plotline of Busca-Pé's virginity seems to be an insertion to give more exposure to the narrator, who not only is an observer of the growth of Zé Pequeno as a scary criminal, but is also the bridging element between the audience and the history of the growth of the drug traffic in Cidade de Deus. Once more, the complicity with a dominant Hollywoodian strategy helps to assure the narrator's access to the spectator in order to accomplish the postmodern complicitous critique observed by Hutcheon. The other point of complicity noticed here is the good boy vs. bad boy formula, as when the character Zé Pequeno conforms to the stereotype of the ugly evil guy with whom the audience is prevented from identification through the presence of his opponent, the handsome good guy. However, the complicity with this formula is challenged in the third phase of the film, when Mané Galinha (the "good boy") becomes a criminal, and the "exception becomes the rule": at first he was firm in his decision of not killing innocents; however, as the gang war goes on there is a turn of events that culminates with Mané's murder in an act of revenge executed by a kid, whose father, Mané had murdered in a bank robbery, the third robbery he participated in.[59] The irony of the death of the good boy here is a challenge to a formula that cannot be applied to such a harsh social context.

The previous examination of Jameson's concept of pastiche and Hutcheon's concept of complicitous critique, as developed in chapter II, allows for a connection of the filmic analysis to postmodern theory. The hybridization of genres is the feature that

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[59] In the words of Busca-Pé: "No terceiro assalto, a exeção virou regra" ("The third time, the exception becomes the rule").

can be related to Jameson's concept of the pastiche, since the reference to familiar features of these past genres and styles can be connected to a seduction of the spectator. However, at the same time that reflection might be prevented, the hybridization of genres works as the recognition necessary for the audience to interact with a structure they are already familiar with. The preoccupations with making the spectator understand the social problem portrayed by the film (and reflect about it) can only be legitimized through a film that can be understood by the film spectator. And here stands the paradox of postmodern aesthetics. As mentioned before, according to Hutcheon, postmodern film speak from within their capitalist location, portraying a *complicity* with domination and power that is not only aimed at making the film easier to be consumed, but is also an opportunity to challenge the power systems it uses to come through in a critique of domination.

In *Cidade de Deus*, especially after analyzing the critical debate around the film, it is possible to claim that the hybrid representation of poverty and the fast pace of the editing, though introducing elements of pastiche (such as the absence of a unique style and the fragmentation portrayed by the mix of genres), remain critical, characterizing a postmodern complicitous critique. The two main points of criticism said to empty the film's political content can be seen as the main conveyors of complicitous critique: the complicity of the narrator in order to engage an inserted audience, and the criticism against the lack of presence of the State, as a sort of implied critique, since the State, after all, has not done much to engage the periphery, the marginal communities here represented by the *favela*. As asked by Mascarello:

> por que tamanho mal-estar com relação a uma obra que (1) se propõe ao diálogo com o grande público, (2) para isso adota o modo narrativo (pós-)clássico, (3) é extremamente bem-sucedida em termos estilísticos (sobretudo na convergência com o tema) ao empregá-lo, e, acima de tudo,

(4) para a maior parte dos críticos, se mantém dentro de limites éticos e políticos mínimos no tratamento de sua temática? (Mascarello)[60]

Probably the criticism against the film is interested in seeing more than a film that "keeps itself within the minimal ethic and political limits." The urgency of the thematic of poverty and violence claims for a political discussion and responsibility that trespasses the boundaries of the movie theatre. Seen as a postmodern representation that presents the postmodern paradox, leading to political and theoretical implications (as claimed by Hutcheon), *Cidade de Deus*, although presenting the hybridization that at times can be seen as pastiche, does provide a social, cultural and political critique. When discussing the contemporary Brazilian cinema, after offering an analysis of the critical debate around *Cidade de Deus*, Oricchio asserts:

> [t]ematicamente, ele se incorpora ao trabalho de meditação sobre o país e suas contradições. Estilisticamente, dialoga com as tendências do seu tempo, ou seja, com linguagens cinematográficas importadas – Tarantino, Scorsese, Coppola, Iñarritu, entre outros, mas também com as linguagens da televisão, do clipe e da publicidade. Essa hibridização cruzada (porque também o cinema faz o caminho de volta e fertiliza as outras linguagens) é inevitável e acontecerá com freqüência cada vez maior num mundo de trocas culturais mais fáceis e rápidas. (Oricchio 233)[61]

The agility of cultural exchange in the postmodern moment is what enables the cultural debate to be so rich, at the same time, it impedes the possibility of reaching a consensus about any postmodern art work. Hutcheon's concept allows to reasonably giving credit to different perspectives that see the positive and negative sides of a work of art acting together. According to Docherty "only in the refusal of consensus and in the search for

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[60] "why such discomfort towards a work that (1) proposes to dialogue with the great audience, (2) for that end adopts a (post-)classical narrative mode, (3) is extremely successful in stylistic terms (above all in the convergence of the theme) in employing it, and, above all (4) for most of the critics, keeps itself within minimal ethic and political limits in the treatment of its thematic?" (Mascarello).

[61] "Thematically, it incorporates to the work of meditation about the country and its contradictions. Stylistically it dialogues with the tendencies of its time, that is, with imported cinematographic languages – Tarantino, Scorsese, Coppola, Iñarritu, and others, but also with languages of television, video-clip and publicity. This cross-hybridization (because cinema also makes the way back and fertilizes other languages) is inevitable and will happen more and more frequently in a world of faster and easier cultural exchanges" (Oricchio 233).

'dissensus' that we will be able to extend thinking, to allow it to be shocked into the new, the (chronological) postmodern" (Docherty 26).

As a final comment, and to reinforce the perspective – critical of "consensus"-adopted in this study, I would like to highlight the fact that *Cidade de Deus* does not offer a solution. In spite of Busca-Pé getting a job (an internship) at the newspaper, and in spite of Zé Pequeno's death, the gangs continue with the boys of the Caixa Baixa.[62] But this time it seems to be worse than with Zé Pequeno's gang: now little kids take power. And they are not soccer players anymore; they are playing gangster, with real guns. The conclusion of the film does not alienate the audience in an illusion of resolution. *Cidade de Deus* uses an intradiegetic narrator to reach the audience – it presents a pastiche of previous genres, but it also criticizes its own ideological location when applying Hollywoodian formulas as a basis for criticizing dominant ideologies such as capitalism and the State. The analysis of the film *Cidade de Deus* corroborates Hutcheon's aforementioned claim for the postmodern complicitous critique, for it is possible to say this is a film "that [wants] to (or [feels it has] to) speak to a culture from inside it, that [believes] this to be the only way to reach that culture and make it question its values and its self-constructing representations" (*Politics* 13). The paradox of complicity and critique is what leads critics and theorists to see the political aspect of the film from different perspectives that go from open defense to rabid attack. When commenting on the film *The Mozart Brothers* Hutcheon uses a sentence that might well be applied to every aspect of the debate around *Cidade de Deus*: "[t]he opposite of love is not hate, but indifference" (*Politics* 110). The critical outcome of this film proves indifference to be the only thing it has not attained, and its characterization as a paradoxical postmodern work keeps the way clear for the debate to go on and

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[62] Caixa Baixa, "The Runts."

investigate the ways postmodern aesthetics represents society and hopefully contributes

to promote political awareness.

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APPENDIX

Film: *Cidade de Deus*

Director: Fernando Meirelles

Co-director: Kátia Lund

Producers: Andréa Barata Ribeiro

         Mauricio Andrade Ramos

Screenplay: Bráulio Mantovani, based on the novel by Paulo Lins

Director of Photography: Cesar Charlone

Editor: Daniel Rezende

Art Director: Tulé Peake

Music: Antônio Pinto

     Ed Côrtes

Reel time: 129 minutes 40 seconds

Release date: 30 August 2002 (Brazil)

American theatrical title: *City of God*

German theatrical title: *Stadt Gottes*

French theatrical title: *La Cité de Dieu*