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CENTRAL STATION AND ISSUES OF IDENTITY IN FILM FORM AND CRITICAL DEBATES

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To Dayson, with Love.

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ABSTRACT

CENTRAL STATION AND ISSUES OF IDENTITY IN FILM FORM AND CRITICAL DEBATES

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2009

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This research addresses questions related to the construction of a Brazilian cultural identity in the film *Central Station*, directed by Walter Salles, from the perspective of film form, and concerning the critical debates prompted by the film in Brazilian and American reviews. The film is argued to be, by the director himself, a metaphor for the search for identity, both personal, in the case on the main characters, Dora and Josué, and national, since the film encourages the association of the characters' journey to a search for a Brazilian identity. What this research sought to find were the elements in film form that relate to this hypothesis of the film as a metaphor for the search of identity, and how and if the critical debates prompted by the film identified the issue of identity. For the issue of identity, critics such as Stuart Hall, Robert Stam, and Zygmunt Bauman were invoked. For Film Studies, theorists such as Bordwell and Marcel Martin were used. For

readings in Brazilian Cinema, the works of Luiz Zanin Oricchio, Robert Stam and Sidney Ferreira Leite were used. The analysis showed that the film, indeed, brings elements that can be related to a metaphor for the search for identity.

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RESUMO

CENTRAL STATION AND ISSUES OF IDENTITY IN FILM FORM AND CRITICAL DEBATES

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2009

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O presente trabalho trata de questões relacionadas à construção de uma identidade cultural brasileira no filme *Central do Brasil*, dirigido por Walter Salles, a partir da perspectiva fílmica e também relacionada aos debates críticos que o filme gerou em resenhas americanas e brasileiras. Argumenta-se que o filme é uma metáfora da busca por identidade, argumento usado pelo próprio diretor. Esta busca se dá no nível pessoal, no caso das personagens principais, Dora e Josué, e nacional, já que o filme encoraja a associação da jornada das personagens a uma busca pela identidade nacional brasileira. A pesquisa buscou encontrar os elementos fílmicos que remetem a essa hipótese de que o filme é uma metáfora da busca por identidade, bem como de que forma (e se) os debates críticos gerados a partir do filme identificaram essa questão da busca. Para teorias de identidade, autores como Stuart Hall, Zygmunt Bauman e Robert Stam foram usados. Para teoria fílmica

foram usados trabalhos de David Bordwell e Marcel Martin. Para estudos em cinema brasileiro, leituras de trabalhos de Luiz Zanin Oricchio, Robert Stam e Sidney Ferreira Leite foram realizadas. A análise mostrou que o filme, de fato, traz elementos que podem ser relacionados à metáfora da busca por identidade.

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CHAPTER I

1.1 Introduction - Central Station and the Retomada in Brazilian Cinema

Brazilian cinema has often struggled to survive in both the national and international market. When a film from Latin America, such as *Central Station*, directed by Walter Salles, manages to crawl its way up to North America, United States specifically, and be somehow successful in a market that is traditionally blockbuster-oriented, due attention must be paid, since – among other things, – it is likely to generate debates regarding the culture that produced it. It also generates debates about identities, both national and cultural, as argued by Robert Stam and Ella Shohat (2005). The authors claim that in a globalized world that has as one of its most vivid characteristics the candid circulation of sounds and images from the most various populations, film production not only has a great impact on national identity, but also helps to shape it (393-394). When a Brazilian film manages to be successful in its own market, even more attention must be paid, since Brazilian cinema has been striving to conquer its own public: the Brazilian public. This is this thesis' central concern, namely the debates

on identity prompted by the film *Central Station* both in the United States and in Brazil. One thing must be kept in mind: *Central Station* was first shown in international markets, first in the United States, at the Sundance Festival[1], and then in Germany, at the Berlin Festival. It was well praised at both festivals, as it received awards and was loudly celebrated by the audiences. To briefly illustrate the importance that film festivals have in projecting foreign cultures, the report *A Indústria do Cinema Hoje*, produced by the American Government, puts forward that:

> Assim como o festival de Veneza original [que teve início em 1932] almejava promover sua cultura e as culturas de outras nações por meio dos filmes, os festivais contemporâneos servem de veículos para que se possa ter uma visão das culturas fora do cinema nacional e de Hollywood, tornam-se barômetro da atenção crítica do mundo todo e ao mesmo tempo atraem freqüentemente financiamento e distribuição para filmes menores e mais criativos[2]. (13-14)

[1] The Report "A Indústria do Cinema Hoje", (http://www.america.gov/media/pdf/ejs/ijsp0607.pdf) shows that when *Central Station* was awarded at the Sundance Film Festival, the film became much more promising in the American Box Office, which reveals the type of effect awards have on future audiences (13-14).

[2] Just as the original Venice festival [which began in 1932] aimed at promoting its own culture and the culture of other nations by means of films, contemporary festivals serve as vehicles through which one can envision other cultures other than the national and Hollywood cinema, thus functioning as a barometer of critics' attention of the whole world and, at the same time, they often attract financing and distribution for smaller and more creative productions.

In brief, the fact that *Central Station* had indeed a successful projection in a number of festivals probably affected not only its screenings abroad, but also in Brazil. The film won awards in categories such as *Best Film* in the Berlin Festival, *Best Script* at the Sundance Festival, *Best Film not in the English Language* at the BAFTA awards, aside from many other wins and nominations[3].

Júlio Bressane, a Brazilian filmmaker famous for being one of the protagonists of *Cinema Marginal* – one of the movements that stemmed from *Cinema Novo*, – once said that "It was easy to chase the public away from cinema; it's difficult to bring it back" (as qtd. in Johnson, 1997). However, even though Cinema Novo could not be said to have been highly successful, it did indeed help to give status to Brazilian cinema among intellectuals in Brazil and abroad, as can be seen in the number of academic studies carried out both here and in international academic circles. Having Bressane's argument in mind, *Central Station* is part of a modest group of films from the *Retomada* period that managed to bring Brazilian audiences back to the cinemas

Central Station (1998), directed by Walter Salles, tells the story of a woman, Dora, who helps a child, Josué, to find his father after his

[3] For full list of wins and nominations, see http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0140888/awards.

mother dies in an accident near where Dora works as a writer of letters for the illiterate, at Rio de Janeiro's central train station. *Central Station* was one of the few groundbreaking films in Brazil and abroad in terms of audiences in the 1990s, selling more than 1.5 million theatre tickets only in Brazil. Aside from that, according to Luiz Zanin Oricchio (2003), a renowned Brazilian film critic, *Central Station* achieved something that most filmmakers aim for: winning over not only the masses but also critics, although there are some exceptions to the latter. Salles's film was nominated for several awards in different film festivals and won many of them, as mentioned before. The film was produced immediately after (and also during) a difficult time for Brazil and Brazilian cinema, but it accomplished a very respectable status in the national and international markets. This was evidenced not only in the number of spectators who went to the movie theaters in foreign countries like the United States, France and England, but also in the number of positive and hopeful reviews it generated. The mood was of surprise, since Brazilian cinema had, as Oricchio puts it, left the imaginary of the Brazilian and foreign population (Oricchio 221).

Film production in Brazil, in the first half of the 1990s, was *practically* non-existent, and Oricchio insists on using the word

practically to call attention to the fact that there were filmmakers who resisted fiercely, despite the turbulence of the time, and managed to keep on producing films, especially short films. Oricchio explains that Brazilian filmmakers usually call the beginning of this decade "the horrible years," such was the difficulty to carry out a project in the area. As Sidney Ferreira Leite (2005) remarks, when Fernando Collor de Mello took over the command of the country, in 1990, he extinguished the already few and dying agencies that helped regulate and sponsor film productions, such as *Embrafilme*, *Concine*, and *Fundação do Cinema Brasileiro*. Brazil, at the time, was trying to find itself politically and culturally, and was struggling in both realms to survive. Zanin makes an important remark when he points out that the cultural environment inherited by decades of military governments and a devaluation of the cultural production, that came to its zenith in the Collor period, left Brazil and Brazilians' minds crowded with doubts and confusion about the state of affairs in the country. The cultural production would, and in fact the author proves that it does, come with these marks of doubts and confusion. *Central Station* is no different. It brings marks and evidences that the cultural production was looking into its own country for answers about where Brazilians stand in this long

experienced confusion of morals, politics, and – most importantly for this study, – identities. Confusion, however, is not the prerogative of the *Retomada* period, as films usually reflect the context in which they are made. Sidney Ferreira Leite, a Brazilian historian, calls attention to the fact that the American cinema managed to convey to the world, through the powerful medium of cinema, the *American Way of Life*. Oricchio, in keeping with this notion that cinema has the power to convey values related to culture, called cinema a "meaning-making machine." It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that films from Brazil too, or from the Third World, would serve as "tokens," as makers of meaning, just as American films, based on which people can make assumptions about the culture that produces them. They convey truths, idealizations, allegories, and criticisms that, under careful analysis, may lead to important and meaningful interpretations.

Central Station is part of a particular moment in Brazilian cinema usually referred to as *Retomada*, that is, the act of retaking, recapturing, and recovering. Most Brazilian critics and theorists, including Luiz Zanin Oricchio and Sidney Ferreira Leite, identify the beginning of *Retomada* in the mid-1990s, and Oricchio believes that it ended with *City of God* (2003), directed by Fernando Meirelles and

Kátia Lund. Oricchio establishes the "end" of the *Retomada* at that precise moment because, he argues, no activity can keep on "recovering" itself indeterminately; after a certain point, it becomes something else, something other than an act of recovery, and hence the need to establish a point where the movement "ends" and becomes "something else" (Oricchio 24). Some people do not agree with the term "Retomada," such as filmmaker José Joffily. He claims that Brazilian film production has seen this phenomenon of "recovery" so many times that it seems no different this time (238). However, in the present thesis the term *Retomada* will be used in order to facilitate explanations concerning the particular moment in which *Central Station* was produced.

The films produced during the *Retomada* period, and still most films that are being currently produced, were characterized as being mostly funded by tax deduction laws. The first tax deduction law was passed in 1991, and it was known as Rouanet Law, named after its creator, Sérgio Paulo Rouanet, who took over the government's Office of Culture and attempted to bring culture back to Brazil's agenda (Leite 121-123). But the law that became most famous in film production in Brazil was passed on July 24, 1993, called *LEI DO AUDIOVISUAL*

[AUDIOVISUAL LAW], number 8.685. Leite calls attention to the fact that the State was no longer "publicly" the investor in national film productions, but it was still, indirectly, the main sponsor, since it allowed (and still allows) tax deduction. Lúcia Nagib remarks that it is the government indeed that sponsors film production in Brazil, but private companies are the ones who *take the credit*, for it is their name that appears on the screen, so that they lend– to use Nagib's words – their "griffe." According to Leite, the Audiovisual law implemented two important sectors, namely distribution and production (123). For the former sector, the law made it possible for foreign distribution companies in Brazil to invest in national productions and to deduct the investment from the taxes paid over their revenue. Therefore, international companies started to become co-producers, which is the case with *Central Station*, as it was a co-production between Brazil and France, and it was also sponsored by both the Rouanet and the Audiovisual laws. But even though measures have been taken to guarantee a better distribution of films produced in Brazil, the scenery is still not ideal. Production is still more privileged than distribution, and, in fact, as Leite and Zanin point out, this is a problem that has been

occurring in Brazilian cinema since its infancy[4]. Distribution is still a field that needs much work, for films are indeed being produced, but there is no guarantee that they will be shown to large audiences, being then restricted to festivals around the country and, luckily, the world. Unfortunately, that is not the whole problem. When it comes to exhibition, Brazilian films face yet another obstacle. There are laws that require movie theaters to screen national productions (as the *Cota de Tela*[5]), but there is not enough control, so as long as blockbusters (mostly North American) can be shown instead of Brazilian films -- that will most likely not bring the same number of people to the movie theaters--, Brazilian cinema will remain one based on production.

For Lúcia Nagib, *Central Station* has become the film which symbolizes the *Retomada* period, for as its own title suggests, it looks into Brazil in search of meaning. It represents the "rediscovery" of the homeland (16). Aside from that, Nagib shows that the film also conveys a trend that persists to the present, namely that of filmmakers from

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[4] As a member of the Popular Jury in the 35th Cinema Festival of Gramado, in 2007, I recall constantly hearing, in debates, complaints such as Hermano Penna's, the director of *Olho de Boi*, who said that "we have made the movie, and now we don't know how, when and if it will be distributed. That is our main struggle. Making the movie is easy, finding ways to distribute it is the real problem" (my personal notes).

[5] Cota de Tela, or "Screen Quota", a law passed in 1996 by the Ministry of Culture which makes it Obligatory to screen national films (Giannasi, 2008). More information at http://www.cultura.gov.br/.

dominant classes casting an anthropological gaze on popular culture and the poor (16). However, for Nagib, what distinguishes this trend from former ones is that filmmakers are treating the subject not in a politically engaged manner, but with solidarity (16). According to Zanin, a great number of films produced during this period seek a Brazilian identity (33). The films from the *Retomada* – which Zanin defines as being born from the ashes, – seek not only in the country's roots (colonial roots, in the author's argument), but also in its near past and present, answers to questions such as "Quem somos? Qual a nossa posição diante do mundo? Somos autores de uma cultura própria ou não passamos de epígonos, que reciclam o saber alheio sem nada produzir de original?" (33)[6]. These questions are part of a larger movement not only in cinema, but in Brazilian arts in general, in the academia, and in politics. In most of these spaces and places there are people thinking about Brazil, trying to answer the listed questions above. The practice of cinema seems not to be able to exempt itself (perhaps thankfully) from social accusation, so the films produced in the 1990s and 2000s bring some of the contradictions present in the country.

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[6] "Who are we? What is our position before the world? Are we the authors of our own culture, or are we nothing but epigones that recycle foreign knowledge without producing anything that is truly original?" (p. 33)

In terms of beginnings and endings, the film that is considered the first of the *Retomada* is *Carlota Joaquina*, directed by Carla Camurati (1994), and it somehow establishes the tone of "self-discovery" of the period. It is, in Oricchio's opinion, a satiric account of the Portuguese court to explain its own result in a Brazil that is still far from well. In a more psychoanalytical approach, Oricchio points out that in most *Retomada* films, such as *Abril Despedaçado*, *Bicho de Sete Cabeças*, and *Central do Brasil*, the figure of the father is absent or extremely aggressive, characterized as either an imposing or lacking figure (97). In *Central Station*, the search for a father is symbolic, for he never appears, but he is, nonetheless, as Oricchio notes, the driving force that makes the story move forward. As Walter Salles points out in the making-off of the film's DVD, this is "a film in search of a country." The father, in this sense, is the reference that Brazilians are searching for, a search for a tangible identity.

Pedro Lapera (2006), in his study on the Brazilian film production after the end of Embrafilme, reminds us that the films produced in the *Retomada* period bring back a continuous motif in Brazilian cinema, especially in the 1960s: that of using Brazil, as mentioned before, as its main source of inspiration. As Oricchio points

out, all cinematic traditions in Brazil will be analyzed against what is considered the greatest tradition in Brazilian cinema, namely *Cinema Novo*, which met its zenith in the 1960s. Lapera does this when he compares the *Cinema Novo* tradition with the films of the *Retomada*, concluding that the latter praises cinematic techniques and wishes to conquer the masses, while the former had no necessary commitment to the audience and aimed to convey, through cinema, the disturbing and alarming Brazilian realities. As Carlos Diegues puts forward, with *Cinema Novo* "Brazil and its people became the central preoccupation of the new group of Brazilian filmmakers" (273), a trend that still takes place in the *Retomada*, only in a less political way. The filmmaker defines *Cinema Novo* as *freedom* (273), for it was free from the responsibility of gathering great masses in movie theaters and, most importantly, it was free from the formal system of production imposed by the Hollywood tradition. He explains the goals of the movement as the desire to examine the social relations present in regions and cities in an attempt to unmask, in a condemning way, the cultural and social structures of the country.

Following Carlos Diegues's reasoning, Walter Salles himself claims that *Central Station* tries to recapture some of the concerns

brought forward by *Cinema Novo*. He argues that the film is not only a reverence towards European and American classical cinema, but especially towards the *Cinema Novo* tradition in the sense that it takes the characters back to an area of Brazil much explored by *cinemanovistas*: northeastern Brazil, the backlands, the *Sertão*. As Leite points out, however, films from the *Retomada* are more melodramatic. With *Central Station*, this is particularly true. As the author points out, the disturbances and contradictions are not fully discussed, but serve as a framing device. Calamities are approached, but not necessarily discussed or problematized as the main theme. They are mostly in the background. Leite calls attention to a current debate when he says that approaching social themes now works as an official seal of artistic and academic quality, turning these issues into entertainment rather than fundamental, society-shaping discussions (130).

Jean-Claude Bernardet is even more radical. He says:

> [E]sta ponte que se faz entre o cinema de 1994 pra cá com o Cinema Novo é absolutamente equivocada. Vincular o cinema atual com o cinema dos anos 60 usando a temática nordestina é extremamente generalizador. Um filme como *Central do Brasil*, por exemplo, possui vínculos estéticos fortíssimos com o tipo de representação e impostação estilística da Vera Cruz. Posso até concordar com aqueles que dizem que o diretor possui ligações estéticas e admira o trabalho de Glauber Rocha ou Nelson Pereira dos Santos. Mas o que vejo de próximo entre o cinema dos anos 90 e o Cinema Novo – característica estética, fruto de

> impossibilidade econômica, muito mais que opção estilística – seria a produção pobre dos filmes (p. 112)[7]

Bernardet's comparison between the *Retomada* cinema and *Vera Cruz* seems to be pertinent in certain respects. According to Maria Rita Galvão (1995), *Vera Cruz* was a Brazilian version of Hollywood, as it was one of Brazil's attempts to establish a cinematic industry following Hollywood in São Paulo (*Atlântida* would be the other example). Its films had an "international cinematic language" (270), which seems to be the type of language incorporated by a large number of films from the *Retomada*. As Galvão remarks, Vera Cruz aimed at making international films, that is, "a cinema 'just like the foreign' cinema, which could be shown with pride to audiences throughout the world" (274), and this seems to be somehow what a large number of films from the *Retomada* period attempt to achieve, such as *Bossa Nova* (2000), directed by Bruno Barreto; and *Orfeu* (1999), directed by Cacá Diegues. But *Vera Cruz* took for granted that Brazilian audiences would populate the national theaters, which did not come true, with some exceptions,

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[7] My Translation: "This connection between the kind of cinemas produced from 1994 to the present with Cinema Novo is absolutely nonsensical. Identifying current cinema with the one made in the 60s by using the Northeastern motif is a great generalization. A film like Central Station, for example, has strong aesthetic associations with the kind of representation and stylistic traits of Vera Cruz. I can even agree with those who say that the director has some aesthetic resemblances and admires the work of Glauber Rocha or Nelson Pereira dos Santos. But what I see that is closer between the cinema made in the 90s and that of Cinema Novo – aesthetically, resulting from economic impracticality, much more than stylistic option – would the poor production of films"

such as with the films *O Cangaceiro* (1953), directed by Lima Barreto, and *Sinhá Moça* (1952-1953), directed by Tom Payne and Oswaldo Sampaio. Robert Stam (1997) points out that the films from Vera Cruz "reveal an immense effort to demonstrate technical proficiency and to avoid what the filmmakers regarded as the sloppiness of the *chanchada*" (156). This is an interesting remark because it could be argued that *Retomada* films also seem to aim at having a more "plastic" aesthetic – as can be seen in the aforementioned *Bossa Nova* and *Pequeno Dicionário Amoroso*, directed by Sandra Werneck –, more based on Hollywood's style (when compared to *Cinema Novo*), so that this attempt is similar to that of *Vera Cruz*, and Bernardet's remark proves appropriate. Salles claims to try to praise *cinemanovistas* in *Central Station*, but the circumstances in which the movie was made, when compared to those of *Cinema Novo*, are quite different, both in financing and in ideological alignment. Although there is clearly an attempt to portray social realities, the aim is not necessarily to shock, as a number of films from the *Cinema Novo* movement strived to. For Bernardet, nostalgia and fetishism towards *Cinema Novo* is as far as it goes when one attempts to relate, in any way, the films produced in the *Retomada* period to those made in the 1960s. His argument is in keeping with

Leite's in the sense that Leite claims that associating *Retomada* films to *Cinema Novo* works as a frame of reference for quality, as if the more a film "looks" like a product of *Cinema Novo*, the better it is. Bernardet's argument can also be related to Fábio Barreto's (2002) observation that Nelson Pereira dos Santos had an idea to implement in Brazil a school for producers, where people would be trained in this important profession instead of what has been happening in Brazilian cinema, which entails having filmmakers carry out the task that should be done by a producer, but approaching this issue any further goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

Cinema Novo, according to Ismail Xavier, was a dense period in Brazilian cinema in intellectual and aesthetic terms, which is not the way most people would define the *Retomada* period. As mentioned before, the latter, in the view of most theorists and critics, is spectacle-oriented. The films are, in this particular sense, more ideologically aligned with Hollywood (or Roliúde, as Glauber Rocha called it, in an anthropophagic style) than with traditions such as *Cinema Novo* or even *Third Cinema*. A *Third Cinema*, as Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gentino (as qtd. in Stam, 2003) explain it, is a revolutionary cinema, a tradition that is composed especially of documentaries and militant

guerrillas. As Robert Stam and Ella Shohat explain, the 1960s and 1970s were decades hungry for change, for a new parameter other than the Eurocentric one (116). New aesthetics arose in response to this desire, such as Glauber Rocha's "Esthetic of Hunger", which aimed at revolutionizing film form as we knew it (ugly, sad, and *hungry* films); Solanas's and Gentino's fighting for a guerrilla movement in documentary productions; and Julio García Espinosa's work, where he attempted to fight for an *imperfect* cinema, which meant a cinema that did not have as its parameter the Eurocentric model, but one that was politically active (Stam 248). A film like *Central Station*, therefore, shares little in common with a tradition based on political manifests, but it has, nonetheless, as its central topic an attempt to portray social realities and inequalities within the context of a fictional narrative.

Central Station is a Latin American film. It is a film that was produced in Brazil and is about Brazil. It could be said, therefore, that it is part of a "national cinema", which, as Philip Rosen (2006) argues, is composed of a large number of films, a "body of textuality" (17). He explains that

> "The discussion of a national cinema assumes not only that there is a principle or principles of coherence among a large number of films; it also involves an assumption that those principles have something to do with the production and/or reception of those

> films within legal borders of (or benefiting capital controlled from within) a given nation-state. That is, the intertextual coherence is connected to a socio-political and or socio-cultural coherence implicitly or explicitly assigned to the nation" (18).

Having Rosen's argument in mind, it is possible to argue that even though Brazilian cinema suffers from a "chronic lack of continuity [in time]", as Randal Johnson (1997) points out, the films produced in Brazil are in constant dialogue with the socio-political and socio-cultural realities, not seeming to matter whether the films are political or apolitical, romantic or violent. The "body of textuality" of Brazilian cinema, that is, the films that serve as tokens, that represent national cinema, seem to implicitly establish a dialectic relation with the political and cultural values belonging to and usually assigned to the Brazilian context. Philip Rosen (2006) calls attention to the need to conceptualize how a large number of films can be compared by using a common denominator, one that would make it reasonable to identify as belonging to most films, and therefore would be a trace of a given country's "national cinema." In Brazil, it could be argued that this common denominator is the constant presence of the backlands and the *favelas*, i.e. poverty and social inequality, as Oricchio argues. To better illustrate this point, several films could be mentioned, such as *Cidade de Deus* (2002) directed by Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund; *Baile*

Perfumado (1997), directed by Paulo Caldas[8] and Lírio Ferreira; and Carlos Digues's *Orfeu* (1999), to name a few. Although not all Brazilian films show these sceneries, they are (more often than not) either in the background or clearly present, as a constant textuality. They may even be sometimes (maybe most times) considered as a character, such is their force. Oricchio describes the *favela* and the backlands as the laboratories where one can analyze, "*in vitro* and *in vivo,*" the organizing principles of the country, the conditions under which it works (121), and perhaps that is one of the reasons why they are, so much so, a constant in Brazilian cinema.

1.2 Objectives

In this thesis, I wish to address questions related to the construction of a Brazilian cultural identity in the film *Central Station* from the perspective of narrative and film form, and concerning the critical debates prompted by the film in Brazilian and American reviews. As Walter Salles explains in a number of interviews (including

[8] Paulo Caldas returned to the *sertão* with the shocking and also touching film *Deserto Feliz* (2007). For more information, see http://www.desertofeliz.com.br/.

in the DVD's extras), he wanted to metaphorically portray the return of a Brazilian who had lost faith in his country. His argument comes from the position of a person who experienced the Collor period (and the period prior to Collor), a very turbulent time for the country's population, not only economically, but also culturally. Culture had been eradicated from the country's agenda, inflation was at its highest point, and the population was, therefore, seeking for opportunities abroad (this issue is well illustrated in Salles's previous film, co-directed by Daniela Thomas, namely *Foreign Land*, 1996). While the director seeks to find his way back into the country in order to find hope, so does Josué seek to find his father, also with hope, and Dora seems not to realize she is seeking something until she finds it: herself.

The main question I wish to address is related to how the film leads to a construction of a Brazilian cultural identity, since the trajectories of the characters, Josué and Dora, can be seen as representative of the Brazilian people at that specific historical moment: Dora and Josue had somehow lost their hopes in life and managed to recover, through the process of an internal (emotional) and external (geographical) journey, their identities, both as individuals and as national citizens. Josué lacks models on which to mirror himself and

thus build his own identity, for he does not know his father, and his mother dies at the beginning of the plot. Dora's identity is clearly in question, since her moral values and attitudes demonstrate that she is not at peace with herself and with the world surrounding her. One could say that the journey brings her back to herself, to an identity she is comfortable with, in individual and in metaphorical terms, that is, related to the country in the larger picture of the film. However, the film's theme seems to supersede the individual narratives of Josué and Dora, functioning as a metaphor for Brazilians who had experienced long years of confusion and turn their attention once again to a glimpse of hope in the "heart" of the country. Finally, I am looking for elements that will show, both in film form and in critical debates, how the film leads to the construction of an identity that is supposed to be hopeful, for such is the message Salles claims to be trying to convey.

1.3 Methodology

In order to carry out the research as described above, the theoretical parameters that will guide this study are related to theories on cultural/national identity, cinema, film theory, and Brazilian cinema.

The main authors used in this study are Stuart Hall, Zygmunt Bauman, Robert Stam, David Bordwell, Marcel Martin, Luiz Zanin Oricchio, and Sidney Ferreira Leite. Film reviews, academic articles/books of criticism produced in Brazil and United States are invoked to illustrate how and if the film prompted debates on identity. The pieces of criticism are of three kinds. The first kind entails reviews gathered on the Internet, on news websites such as *The New York Times*, *Variety*, *Washington Post*, *Folha de São Paulo*, and the sort. The second kind entails articles and essays published in books, such as in Oricchio's *Cinema de Novo*, where the author dedicates a considerable amount of lines to discuss *Central Station*[9], and, lastly, one journal publication. By associating an in depth analysis of the film with reviews produced about it, I expect to be able to contemplate – to a limited extent, given the length of this thesis – what Fernando Mascarello calls attention to in his article *Reinventando o Cinema Nacional*, namely that the excessive attention paid to the cinematic text[10], that is, the actual film, is usually

[9] After considerable research it was possible to conclude that while American newspapers have available in their Internet archives older publications (considering *Central Station* was released in 1998), the Brazilian equivalents offer more recent archives, therefore I found it necessary to resort to other means of research, including books and resources on the internet that cited newspaper reviews from 1998.

[10] Mascarello claims this to be a tendency of the academia in the 1980s, but he argues that in Brazil this still takes place, which causes *extrafilmic* aspects to be marginalized.

done at the expense of the *extrafilmic*[11] aspects, which are equally important and compose the whole of the film experience (28). Having this in mind, I expect to be able to encompass both extrafilmic (related to a number of reviews produced about the film) and filmic aspects of *Central Station* in this analysis.

I expect to find in film form (such as theme, narrative, and techniques) elements that corroborate the initial hypothesis that *Central Station* entails a search for a Brazilian identity, based on the supposition that not only the protagonists are in search for a referential, but also the Brazilian population, after turbulent political, economic and cultural times. According to José Jobson de A. Arruda and Nelson Pilleti (2000), the Brazilian population of the last decades – especially the generation represented by Dora, – experienced a traumatic and turbulent scenario: 21 years of dictatorship (during which people migrated from the Northeast to the big centers like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro because of the draught, hunger, and because landowners held power over the productive lands, leaving the gross of the Northeastern population with unproductive and dry lands); political parties and students from the opposition were silenced, tortured and some murdered; and workers

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[11] In the original it reads *aspectos extrafílmicos*.

remained with their pays frozen. Dora's generation also saw the end of the dictatorship, and the institution of different currencies, such as the *Cruzeiro*, *Cruzeiro Novo*, *Cruzado*, *Cruzado Novo,* and others, until the *Real*, all created in an attempt to tame one of Brazilians' worst fears, namely the inflation. With José Sarney, from 1985 to 1990, inflation reached its zenith, at almost 85% a month, adding up to 4.853.90/ a year. With Fernando Collor de Mello, Dora's generation also had their current accounts and savings accounts frozen for eighteen months, and saw the renunciation of a nearly impeached president, the first to be elected by the population after the dictatorship years, and the inflation was still a problem. When Fernando Henrique Cardoso took over in 1995, after the Itamar Franco administration, when Cardoso, as Minister of Finance, implemented the *Plano Real*, inflation had already been tamed, but unemployment and recession were growing to concerning levels. This is the scenario in which *Central Station* takes place. Dora brings with her the weight of all this experience, while Josué, being nine years old, hardly recognizes the situation around him, which, as will be argued ahead, allows him a more innocent and hopeful perspective.

Before moving on to the review of the literature, one could argue that films are, too, a country's "visiting card", since it calls

attention to what the people belonging to the country in question are producing in the cultural realm. It could be based on this medium that those from other nationalities construct their knowledge on other countries. As Matheus Nachtergaele (2004) argues:

> Apesar de 'O [sic] que isso, companheiro?' também ter estado no Oscar, acho que o 'Central do Brasil', além de ser o filme que efetivamente abriu as portas do mundo para o nosso cinema na retomada, é um pouco o filme que nos representa. Antes o Cinema Novo é que era a cara que nosso cinema tinha lá fora e depois de 'Central' foi meio: 'Ah, é isso que eles fazem agora?'[12]

The actor plays Josué's older brother in *Central Station* and poses an issue that is pertinent to this work, for it goes along the same lines as the present hypothesis, namely that cinema conveys and helps construct cultural identities.

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[12] My translation: "Even though 'Four Days in September' also went to the Oscars, I think 'Central Station', aside from being a film that effectively revealed to the world our *retomada* cinema, it is also somehow the film that represents us. Before this, Cinema Novo was the face of our cinema abroad, and after 'Central' it was more like: "Oh, so this is what they [Brazilians] do now" (p 140).

CHAPTER II

2.1 Review of the Literature - Debates on Identity

Cinema is part of the products that are socially produced, and is thus a "cultural product," for it reflects on issues such as habits of given groups of society, morals, customs, laws and art, among other things. It usually contemplates issues under the light of their particular time; so that they will bring "scars" from the moment and place they are produced. Bordwell (2005) believes that films offer a means to measure the social dynamics of the time in which they are produced (25). Stuart Hall (2000), along the same lines, claims that cinema helps us to ponder on the representations of a given population, and thus "discover" who the people belonging to this population are. He argues that in analyzing these representations one can identify the positionalities of those who speak and thus delineate a "cultural identity" (714).

Before further exploring the issue of identity, it is necessary to put forward some working definitions on representation. As Raul Antelo (1994) points out, there is no human practice that is not mediated, at

least on some level, by representation (10). Representation, he claims, is what allows people to give themselves meaning and to assign meaning to the things surrounding them, and this usually occurs with a greater or smaller sense of contradiction and confrontation, since representation is too mediated by individual interpretation. What helps us work with representation, Antelo explains, is the materiality of the text, or in this case cinema, which allows us to reconstruct the symbolic immateriality in representations of different social groups and cultures (11).

Robert Stam (2003) calls attention to the specificity of cinema in the realm of representation, noting that one should make use of the analytical possibilities presented by the medium when analyzing a film production in search for given representations. He explains that cinema offers dimensions other than words, and that if one chooses to analyze only words, then it would be more appropriate to analyze a novel instead of a film. He says this precisely to stimulate the use of the possibilities of representation in cinema, and suggests a series of issues specific to this medium that one must keep in mind when analyzing it, such as lighting, focus, *mise-en-scène*, framing, empty and full spaces, silences, music (original scores or soundtracks and their commentary on the

scene), that is, a series of elements that, together with words, compose the specificity of cinema (304).

Representation, for Stam, is a space where perspectives and positionalities are paramount. A love film, for example, where a given woman is subservient to a given man may be seen by men as a sign of respect, but for certain women, and feminists in particular, it will reveal the workings of patriarchal society. Different theoretical approaches, like Marxist, Culturalist, Feminist, will reveal different readings. In this sense, the analysis of representation usually depends on the perspective from which one is analyzing, and the questions asked are always important[13]. In keeping with this argument, Stam suggests that cinema is not only representation, but also a contextualized enunciation produced by and to contextualized people. The author argues that it is not enough to say that art is "constructed," as one must ask "[c]onstructed for whom and aligned to what ideologies and discourses?" (306). In this sense, art has a political dimension in its attempt to give voice to determined groups. The focus, he explains, should be more on the "truths" conveyed by certain representations rather than the "distortions" present in them.

[13] Stam suggests a series of important questions that may aid in the analysis of how minorities are represented when opposed to their oppressors, such as "how much space do representatives from different social groups occupy in the screen?," "How does body language, posture and facial expression signal social hierarchies, arrogance, servility, resentment or pride?." To see all suggested questions, see pages 304-305 of *Introdução à Teoria do Cinema*.

In other words, the "truths" might be more revealing about the group that produced the representations than the eventual stereotypes that may accompany the work. To illustrate this point, Brazilians dancing tango under Mexican *sombreros* in Hollywood films seem to tell more about the ignorance of those that produced the piece than about Brazilians. This is one of the methodological approaches suggested by Stam, one that focuses on what the images and discourses within films have to say about the groups that produced them.

Turning again to the issue of identity, now associated to representation, Stuart Hall (2000) claims that representation always implicates the "place of enunciation" from which the person or group speaks or writes. What theories suggests, he explains, is that "though we speak, so to say 'in our own name,' of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never exactly in the same place. Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think." (704). Cinematic discourses, he suggests, are unable to fully represent identities, for the latter are a process and are constituted within the act of representation, and not outside it.

Bearing in mind the previous points, Hall puts forward two approaches to *cultural identity*. Firstly, he claims that there is an identity

based on an act of "imaginative rediscovery," which is rooted on the "discovery"[14] of an essentialist characteristic of a country's shared culture, one that belongs and has "always" collectively belonged to the people in that culture. This imaginative act should not, as Hall remarks, be undermined nor neglected, but it should be explored. This essentialist approach, he points out, provides the people of a country with "stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual histories" (705). He claims that this is the essential cultural identity that films sometimes seek to portray, which could be said to be the case in *Central Station*, since it is a film, as Walter Salles points out, in search of a country. It could be argued that it is seeking to find the "essential values" of the country that shape its identity, considering it develops from the ever-changing big city to the "unchanging" backlands, where old values have supposedly endured. It is a film in search of a hopeful past that secretly holds an essential identity that the country "needs" to be able to shape itself in the present. The second view of cultural identity, Hall explains, is one that both acknowledges and displaces the first view. Although it

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[14] "Discovery" is here faced as a kind of invention in the sense that there is not, according to Hall, a true essential identity, but a forged essential identity that has the purpose of providing one country's population with a community "frame of reference".

recognizes the similarities that hold together the notion of cultural identity, it also calls attention to the important and meaningful differences that shape a nation's cultural identity. The author claims that cultural identity, in this case, is both *being* and *becoming*. A cultural identity can *be* something, as in the first case – where essentialism suggests that there are qualities of a national identity that are and have always been inherent to the national subjects –, but it is also a concept in constant reconfiguration, so that it is also constantly *becoming* something else in the present and will remain on undergoing changes in the future. It is a transformation that suffers the influence of time, culture, history and place. So, in this sense, the former case is that of continuity and shared similarities. The latter, however, is characterized by ruptures and differences, but, even so, by points of similarities. Essentialism, nonetheless, can be evoked as a strategy, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (apud Cláudia Lima Costa, 2002) reasons. In this sense, groups of people can strategically claim an essential identity in order to have a political voice. This requires the important differences mentioned by Hall to be temporarily set aside. An essentialist positioning is not, one could say, a lie. It reflects something that is present in a culture, but which is not necessarily shared by all people at

the same time and is constantly changing. Cinema, then, as Hall explains, is a place where points of identification may occur, and these points of similarities help shape what is called "cultural identity."

The concept of "points of similarities" is similar to what June Jordan refers to as "points of connection." In her article entitled *Report from the Bahamas* she exposes the insights she had during a solo trip to the Bahamas regarding gender, class, and race. In examining issues of race, she, as a black woman, wonders if having a color and an oppressor in common are enough for two people to bond. She wonders how she, who is a black woman and a university professor in the United States, will ever find it in her experience to understand a black woman in the Bahamas who manufactures products and bargains prices with customers to survive. The issue of gender, skin color, and having a common oppressor is not enough for the two of them to have a real point of connection. While the only thing at stake for Jordan in not buying the piece that the woman from the Bahamas is selling is that she does not want to spend too much money in the beginning of her trip, the woman in the Bahamas, on the other hand, risks going into starvation for extreme need. Jordan then remarks that in that case "[they] are not particularly women anymore; [they] are parties to a transaction designed

to set [them] against each other" (41). They are part of a bigger system, so that the common denominators, the larger categories, are not necessarily responsible for a bond between these two people: there is a suspension of the common denominators in favor of a larger system of values. As she puts it, "[t]he usual race and class concepts of connection, or gender assumptions of unity, do not apply very well. [She] doubt[s] that they ever did" (46). She claims that as real as these categories may be, they cannot function as a prediction that, if they exist, then there will be a point of connection. These categories may very well function as a basis to identify problems felt by people who fall into these "categories," but as far as points of connections are concerned, they are unreliable.

Jordan searches for the words to outline the contrast between a shared and an individual identity. Jordan explains that the concept of shared identity entails that which is imposed on us and is shared by those people who fall into a certain "category," such as gender, skin color, or religion. Our individual identity involves that which we can choose – at least in most cases –, such as our profession, marriage, and so on. It is based on this individual identity that we connect with others, she claims. In Jordan's words, "[t]he ultimate connection must be the

need that we find between us. It is not who you are, in other words, but what we can do for each other that will determine the connection." (47) Jordan's argument appropriately illustrates another usually "taken for granted" relationship, namely that among people of the same nationality. Being Brazilian alone does not necessarily make one person bond with another. Strategically and politically it seems to be indispensible to speak in the name of a people, but on daily relationships, sharing a nationality does not mean that values, beliefs or needs will be shared. In *Central Station*, it is the point of connection that seems to make the relationship between Dora and Josué work, and the shared national identity is in the background, in the locations, in the landscapes, and in the people that surround them. Josué is hopeful, in search for his father, and Dora's development reveals her lost hope in life. The film itself seems to be searching for a hopeful essential identity in the backlands of Brazil. The two main characters are the ones who lead the spectators into this search for an identity, and it seems to be this individual need that is responsible for the ultimate bond between them, instead of their shared national background.

Along these lines, Anthony K. Appiah (1992) puts forward that every person is composed of two dimensions of identities, a collective

and a personal one. The former relates to the notions of identities proposed by Hall and Jordan, which entail large categories, such as nation, culture, gender and race, and the latter to less general concepts, such as intelligence, wit, that is, it relates to characteristics that are not necessarily categories, as there is no "category for the witty" (152). These large categories, the author explains, are highly scripted, that is, they represent models or general norms that people belonging to given categories are expected to follow. They function as a narrative unity, for they offer a forecast regarding how people from a given category are likely to behave. Appiah claims that this unity is tightly scripted, therefore both imprisoning and "safe," in the sense that people wish for some kind of unity in order to give meaning to their personal narratives. Most importantly for the author is the need to realize that some scripts have been assigned negative meanings and must, therefore, be restructured and changed. *Central Station*, in this sense, not only reaffirms, at given points, the scripts commonly assigned to Brazilian people, but also aims to find values within these scripts worth holding on to. As Appiah puts forward, "If we create a culture that our descendents will want to hold on to, our culture will survive in them" (158). Although this will be further explored in the third chapter, it

could be briefly said that perhaps *Central Station* is, among other things, an attempt to address some of the scripts present in Brazilian culture in order to both praise and question a portion of them. As, for instance, in the script of goodness in the *sertão*, or the cynicism of the city, represented in Dora's character, and the script of religion, represented throughout the film as the population's source of hope.

In *Identidade*[15], Zygmunt Bauman (2005) explores the issue of identity in the contemporary world. He believes, similarly to Hall, that the task of constructing an identity is not only intimidating but maybe impossible, for it is an ongoing process that never ends. Bauman claims that identities are always "invented" rather than "discovered," and that the frailty of its ephemeral condition is no longer a secret, as theorists have "unveiled" its provisory condition, as opposed to its stable status in what Hall calls the Enlightenment subject, further explained below. Identities, now, are "poorly connected" fragments, for the once apparently solid social structures of the State, related to education, social welfare and social obligations, which dictated rules to which citizens had to abide by, that furnished the references for a stable identity, are no longer as stable as they were, for in the process of

[15] Original title: *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi.*

Globalization, the claims of these structures were questioned and destabilized. In other words, he claims that identity is now in the spotlight precisely because it is "in trouble." Its center can no longer be taken for granted as it once was.

The author explains that the notion of identity, especially national identity, was instilled among populations: it entered our repertoires as fiction. "Identity," according to him, arose from a "belonging crisis," so that the "need to belong" gave way to the fiction of "actually belonging." The fiction of "birth" played an essential role for modern States, for it legitimated the unconditional subordination of the national population, and no matter how artificial this fiction may be, strong efforts were made to make it seem natural. In return, the population was granted with a sense of national identity, of belonging, and the State was able to legitimate the control of frontiers between "us" and "others," or in the perspective of developing cultures, "them" *from* "us." However, with the advent of globalization, the States have less need for feverous patriotism than before, as national borders, both cultural and economic, are eroding in several respects. The population is no longer assisted by the State as it used to be, and it no longer has to be faithful to the ideal patriotic identity projected by the State, and now has

the option of identifying with a wide range of possibilities, from all parts of the world, so that every man and woman "constructs" him/herself. The State no longer wishes to have a social welfare approach since it is in its interest to have each citizen solving their own issues, however harmful this may be for the well being of the population, especially the poor (34). *Central Station* illustrates this well, as will be shown in the third chapter. To sum up, the State no longer offers most of the benefits it once did in return for the patriotic loyalty, but the desire for an identity is still latent in the population. Bauman reasons that

> "[o] anseio por identidade vem do desejo de segurança, ele próprio um desejo ambíguo [...] flutuar sem apoio num espaço pouco definido, num lugar teimosamente, perturbadoramente, 'nem-um-nem-outro', torna-se a longo prazo uma condição enervante e produtora de ansiedade. Por outro lado, uma posição fixa dentro de uma infinidade de possibilidades também não é uma perspectiva atraente"[16] (35).

As the State no longer offers a safe frame of reference for identity, people are more and more seeking this security in the realm of "cultural identity," and the ultimate objective is to forge a state of satisfaction. This is obtained with the "consumption" of identities at disposal not only in material objects, such as clothes, but also in cultural products,

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[16] "[t]he longing for an idenity comes from the desire for safety, in itself an ambiguous wish […] floating freely over a little defined space, in a stubborn location, disturbingly, nor-one-nor the-other becomes, in the long run, a nerve-wrecking condition, which causes anxiety. On the other hand, a fixed position within an infinity of possibilities is not an attractive perspective" (35).

such as films and art. The author notes that in this waning of stable references coming from the State, people also started holding on to categories such as gender, race, shared colonial heritage, among others, for they seemed safer and more stable. However, as June Jordan points out, not even these categories are as stable as they promise to be, but some categories do not even "have a voice." As Bauman argues, there is one pole composed of privileged people and groups that articulate their identities at their own will, and there is another pole which entails those who have had their right to an identity denied, as is the case of several characters in *Central Station*. They have no right to manifest their preferences. They are, instead, humiliated, stereotyped, stigmatized, and dehumanized. They hold a "subclass identity," which, by definition, allows for no identity at all (Bauman 44 - 46). In keeping with this argument, Bauman puts forward that more problematic than the imperialist efforts to expand their territory and find new labor force in the past, are the exclusion mechanisms at work today. They intensify poverty and humiliation, and the most crying effect of this is that individuals are not only excluded, but they are requested to solve their socially produced problems by themselves, an issue that is well illustrated in *Central Station*, and will also be analyzed in the next

chapter. Some examples may be mentioned in terms of the abandonment of the State. First, public health systems are more and more giving way to private health plans. The part of the population that can afford to pay for private health plans usually resorts to this option rather than relying on the State. Secondly, those who can afford to pay for private retirement plans usually do so in fear of depending on the State in the future, no matter if they contributed with their labor force and with taxes. A last example could be that of violence in urban centers. With poverty, which also increases when the State stops assisting its population, there is an increase in violence, for those who have had their access to social mobility denied will try, by their own means, to survive. The picture painted by Bauman about the State is a sad one:

> "O governo do Estado é uma entidade à qual é improvável que os membros de uma sociedade cada vez mais privatizada e desregulamentada dirijam as suas queixas e exigências. Eles têm sido repetidamente orientados a confiarem em suas próprias sagacidade, habilidades e em seu esforço sem esperar que a salvação venha do céu: culpar a si mesmos, a sua apatia ou preguiça, se tropeçarem ou quebrarem as pernas no caminho rumo à felicidade"[17] (52).

[17] My translation: "The State government is an entity to which members of a society which is privatized by the minute is less likely to resort to for complaints and demands. [These members] have been repeatedly oriented to trust their own common sense, skills and efforts without waiting for salvation to fall from heaven: they should blame themselves, their apathy or laziness if they happen to trip or break their legs on their way to happiness." (52)

This is, according to Bauman, the message that the State has been sending to those belonging to the second pole, those of the "subclass identity" (since the ones belonging to the first pole do not necessarily seek nor need this assistance). It is no surprise, Bauman remarks, that people are more and more resorting to religion and to fundamentalism, which, differently from this "subclass identity," forges a sense of certainty, of stability of values and behaviors. The abandonment by the State wounded people who had no means to solve their socially created problems without assistance. Our times, the author professes, is haunted by the "specters of exclusion" (53), an image reflected in *Central Station* from beginning to end.

Bauman compares the construction of identities to a puzzle, but the main difference, he remarks, is that in a puzzle one starts putting the pieces together knowing what the image should look like in the end, but in our current state of affairs, we can pick as many pieces as we please and construct the image we would like to see, and as many images as we wish to construct. The task is that of a *bricoleur*, the author observes, one who builds all sorts of things with the tools one has been given. Within one's biography, identities are construed. According to Bauman, this is one of the results of the passage from the "solid" phase of

modernity – where the State provided a stable reference – to its "fluid" phase. He uses the term fluid because substances with this characteristic cannot keep their shape for too long unless they are poured into a tight vessel. Otherwise, fluid substances keep on changing their shape, and by that he means that we should not expect any structures, especially those related to the State, when forged, to last too long. However, the State still represents a space where one feels "safe." As Bauman puts forward, in our imaginaries, if there are hurricanes, traps and turmoil "outside" national borders, "inside" there is a feeling of coziness, security and protection. Culture, Bauman argues, plays an important role in these current efforts of "belonging." He reminds his readers that although the word *culture* now seems naturally embedded in our national identities through what he calls "primary designation,"[18] it entered our repertoires as something which represented the exact opposite of "natural." It denoted human traits that were "chosen by human beings." In other words, culture changed its status from "un-natural," that is, "chosen" and manipulated, to "natural." Culture, the author demonstrates, is now seen as a shelter for more stable frames of

[18] My translation. In the Portuguese version it reads "adscrição primordial". The author means by this that we, as members of a nation, "belong" according to two models, namely by "primary designation" and by "choice". The former entails all those characteristics that one "naturally" comes with once born within a given nation, and the latter entails all those characteristics one *chooses* in the course of one's life.

reference than those provided by the State amid the changing winds of globalization. There are two sides to this. First, culture furnishes those eager for stable frames of references where there are way too many of them – both known and unknown – at disposal. Second, it can convey the feeling of a prison to those trying to catch the waves of changes, those who want to select freely their identities from a myriad of choices (66-68).

Finally, identity, for Bauman, is also a term that comes to the fore when there is a "battle" in progress. This battle usually entails that of a group (usually weaker than the forces it is fighting) against fragmentation and dissolution of its identities. It is, simultaneously, the desire to change – in this process of globalization, and in the presence of uncountable alternative identity symbols, within religions, ethnicities, sexualities and many more – and remain the same, with a familiar identity.

Another author who ponders on the issue of identity is Stuart Hall. In *A Identidade Cultural na Pós-Modernidade*, Hall (2006) argues that the identities that once stabilized the social world are now in decline, and thus new identities are arising and are fragmenting the subject. He calls this destabilization an "identity crisis," where the

elements in our society that functioned as frames of references for the shaping of identities are suffering changes themselves. Hall claims that the destabilization of categories, such as national, ethnic, sexual and so on, that once provided people with solid references as social individuals, is causing the shaking of ideas people have of themselves, thus resulting in a mass identity crisis.

Hall (2006) considers three identity subjects. Firstly, the *Enlightenment* subject, who was based on a conception of a centered and unified individual, who entailed a "centre" and an essential character that remained the same throughout one's life. Secondly, there is the *Sociological* subject, who started to manifest the complexities of the modern world in the awareness that this so-thought centre was not self-sufficient and autonomous, but was actually shaped by the things, concepts and people one came in contact with throughout life. It consisted on the notion that one's identity was shaped in one's interaction with society, so that the belief in a "stable" centre starts giving place to an idea that acknowledges culture and society as having the force to change this subject's centre. Thirdly and lastly, there is the postmodern subject, who is becoming fragmented and is composed of

many identities, which are most of the time contradictory and in constant change (10 – 13).

Perhaps it is interesting to briefly refer to the concepts of modernism and postmodernism, since Hall situates the current identity crisis within the concept of postmodernism, and Frederic Jameson (2007) defines the latter as being a reaction to modernism. Although simplifying notions so pregnant with meanings may seem impossible, fully exploring them goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

For Marshall Berman (1986), modernity was the cultural shift responsible for the displacement of our identities. It started within an atmosphere of turbulence which caused psychic perplexity and inebriety, which, as he notes, is well represented in Walter Benjamin's *Flaneur*. This atmosphere was that of automated factories, railways, steam, crowded cities, newspapers, telephone, the telegrapher, that is, elements which provided for a shift in former notions of space and time. Humans started experiencing the world in an extremely different way, where social mobility was an option and geographical distance meant something different than before, since vapor had shortened these distances and changed the meaning of time and space. Brenan identifies the first phase of modern experience as starting to be felt in the 1500s

through the 1700s, when people felt some structures to be changing, but these changes had not yet fully penetrated experience. With the revolutionary wave of the late 1700s, such as the French revolution, there came the second phase, when people still remembered what it felt like to live in a world that was not yet fully modern. It was only in the 1900s that modernization reached a point where constant agitation and turbulence was experienced, and it resulted in modernism. The modernist movement, as Brenan puts forward, is responsible for "spectacular triumphs" in the arts and in thought. Art, in modernism, Brenan explains, had the intent to free artists from the "impurities" and "vulgarities" of the modern world, so that it had a high status, a role of "redemption." The myriad of experiences and constant movement made available by modernism marks the beginning of a fragmented crowd. There are no solid or stable references, since everything changes rapidly in both space and time.

Frederic Jameson (2007), in his essay entitled *Postmodernism and Consumer Society*, explains that, first and foremost, postmodernism is a reaction to these established forms of high modernism, which had dominated most realms of culture, such as the universities and the arts. In this sense, as Jameson argues, "there will be as many different forms

of postmodernism as there were high modernisms in place, since the former are at least initially specific and local reactions against those models" (1956). Also, in postmodernism one can identify the effacement of what the author calls "key-boundaries," most importantly the boundaries that distinguish high art from popular or mass culture, which is to say, among other things, that art in its commercial form becomes ever more frequent. Jameson sketches some features of the social order of postmodernism, namely pastiche, the death of the subject, and "the nostalgia mode," and these will be briefly described for they are pertinent to the notion of displaced and fragmented identities. Pastiche involves the imitation of a style, just like parody, but without the latter's drive for mockery and laughter. Pastiche is, in Jameson's words, "the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in dead language. [It is] parody that has lost its sense of humor" (1958), and this feature is a constant in contemporary culture. Postmodernism, in Jameson's argument, brings us to the end of individualism as it was conceived in modernism. Modernism, Jameson explains, postulated a personal style, a unique fingerprint of the author and artist. However, as Jameson points out, now this notion of a unique individuality and of a coherent identity is described by a great deal of

theorists, from the most distinct areas, such as psychoanalysts, social theorists and linguists, as an ideology, and in the age of massification of culture, of demographic explosion, among other things, the individual subject no longer exists and has never, in fact, existed. This is the death of the author. As Jameson argues, “this construct [of a coherent identity] is merely a philosophical and cultural mystification which sought to persuade people that they ‘had’ individual subjects and possessed some unique personal identity” (1958-1959). So, in this sense, what seems to have changed is the experience of the ideology, which instructed modernists, and that now no longer serves as a reliable frame of reference. Jameson argues that the result is that artists and writers inserted in the postmodern context are not quite sure of their direction, their source of information, for there is not a unique frame of reference such as that of the coherent individual producing his/her “fingerprint” work. The artist is free, and perhaps “too” free.

Finally, Jameson uses cinema to explain what he calls the “nostalgia mode”. The author suggests that in using elements from the past in contemporary or even futuristic scenarios, and contemporary elements in past scenarios in film production, is a form of pastiche and that, in doing this, one is conveying a “nostalgia mode.” It is an

"allusive plagiarism of older plots" (1959), both in terms of film and way of life. The following citation is included because it is relevant to this work in the sense that the backlands in Central Station seems to invoke the same types of interpretations put forward by Jameson. In briefly analyzing the film *Body Heat* (1981), directed by Lawrence Kasdan, Jameson says:

> "One begins to realize after a while that the small town setting has a crucial strategic function: it allows the film to do without most of the signals and references which we might associate with the contemporary world, with consumer society – the appliances and artifacts, the high rises, the object world of late capitalism. Technically, then, its objects (its cars, for instance) are 1980s products, but everything in the film conspires to blur that immediate contemporary reference and to make it possible to receive this too as nostalgia work – as a narrative set in some indefinable nostalgic past, an eternal 1930s, say, beyond history." (1960)

This will be further explored in the next chapter, but it can be noted that this is a recurrent phenomenon in contemporary movies, and, according to Jameson, it is symptomatic of our incapacity to represent our current, present experiences, through aesthetic representations. To do so, we are constantly evoking past experiences. We are, as Jameson predicts, unable to deal with our current time and history, and we end up with stereotypes, for the past will always remain, in the author's words, "out of reach" (1960). The relation can be made to Central Station in the

sense that the film also brings forward, especially when the duo enters the backlands, this lack of temporality. In presenting a scenario where the characters could be said to be experiencing either the 1950s or the 1990s, Salles, perhaps unintentionally, evokes a feeling of nostalgia.

Closing the brief parenthesis on modernism and postmodernism, identity, in Hall's view, is a "celebration in motion," considering that it is shaped depending on the ways people and things are represented by the cultural systems available. Identity, then, is no longer based on an essentialist and unified centre. Modernism, Hall argues, played an important role in the development of this "identity crisis." He puts forward that Baudelaire's *flaneur*, a figure that represented the isolated and alienated individual against the backdrop of the great city, with his unattached feelings and among the crowds of people, is one of the main portraits of what we now relate to the figure of the tourist, also alone in the crowd. This tourist has the capacity to constantly change and "reconstruct" him/herself, since this figure is unknown to the crowd, and the crowd is unknown to him. The main characters in *Central Station* are, in a way, these tourists, for they hold the anonymity of the figure described by Hall. They are in the process of

construing an identity, and they enjoy this “freedom” of not having static identities, just as tourists do.

Hall lists the five main ruptures in modern discourse that forged the aforementioned dislocation and fragmentation of modern identities. The first rupture was caused by the Marxist tradition, which first disturbed the notion that there was a universal essence to individuals, and that this essence was the “real subject” of each individual. The second rupture was caused by Freud, who unveiled the unconscious, which he claimed to be part of the way we develop our identities based on symbolic psychic processes which shared little in common with the then absolute notion of Reason, which postulated a fixed and unified identity. Further interpretations of Freud’s work, such as the researches carried out by Jacques Lacan, postulated that the concept of a unified identity begins in the *mirror phase*, where the child first recognizes its reflection on the mirror, and believes it to be whole, unified, and more complete than the way it experiences its own body and its own conception of itself. So, in this sense, the fantasy of unity starts at a very early age and is the origin of the contradiction between fragmented and unified identity. The third rupture was caused by the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, which postulated that we are not the “authors” of the

concepts we utter, since we produce these concepts and meanings within the rules that regulate the systems of meanings of our own culture. For Saussure, meanings are not fixed. They carry the echoes of former and current meanings and of the culture in which they are being produced, despite our efforts to fixate meanings. The fourth was revealed by the work of historian Michel Foucault, who unveiled the workings and the role of *discipline* in our society from the nineteenth century on, that is, the role of institutions that put into practice the notion of discipline, such as schools, prisons, and hospitals, and so on (to put it in a very summarized way). The final rupture identified by Hall was that caused by the social movements that arose in the 1960s, especially feminism, for which the notion of identity has been of the utmost importance ever since (35-45). To identify all these ruptures is to say that these are the changes that had the most impact and motivated the present decentering of the subject that was once stable and had a supposed centre, a supposed essence.

Hall then moves on to explain how this fragmented subject, who suffered the aforementioned ruptures, develops in terms of cultural identities, and he focuses primarily on national identity. He claims that the national culture into which we are born makes up one of the main

sources for our cultural identity, and that its imprint on our identities is so strong that popular belief sometimes considers it to be in our genes (48), as if it were our essence, our nature. However, as Hall argues, national identities are shaped and modified through representation. The author considers the nation as a meaning-making machine, a system through which culture is represented, and it usually forges a feeling of loyalty and identification among members of a given society (49). Hall (2006) defines national cultures as made of symbols, representations and cultural institutions, and he postulates that "national culture" is a discourse, that is,

> "um modo de construir sentidos que influencia e organiza tanto nossas ações quanto a concepção que temos de nós mesmos [...] As culturas nacionais, ao produzir sentidos sobre 'a nação', sentidos com os quais podemos nos *identificar*, constroem identidades. Esses sentidos estão contidos nas histórias que são contadas sobre a nação, memórias que conectam seu presente com seu passado e imagens que dela são construídas"[19] (50).

And Hall's argument is important for this thesis because it corroborates the hypothesis that cinema, which is part of the national culture, conveys and helps construct identities and meanings, for it is a vehicle by means

[19] "a way of construing meanings that influences and organizes not only our actions but also the conceptions we have of ourselves [...] National cultures, in producing meanings on 'the nation,' meanings with which we *identify*, construe identities. These meanings are in the stories that are told about the nation, in memories that connect its present to its future and in images that are construed from it." (50)

of which stories are told about the culture, with which people may or do identify.

Hall (2006) gives five examples of ways through which national cultures are conveyed to people. In the first place, he mentions that nations are "narrated." In this case, stories of the nation are told in literature – as in Machado de Assis's portrayal of Rio de Janeiro in his novels that show Brazil in the nineteenth century –; in popular culture, as in the arts, traditional religious ceremonies, music, and the like; and in the media, such as magazines, newspapers, the famous and influential Brazilian soap operas, films and so on. These narratives convey the country's shared experiences, victories, historical events and rituals that, when added up, give meaning to the nation as a whole. In the second place, Hall gives the example of *origin*, in which one true national identity is considered natural, as a set of values and characteristics that have always belonged to the nation and that can be invoked to stimulate nationalism. In the third place, based on Eric Hobsbawm's concept of "invented tradition," he shows that national culture is conveyed in traditions and practices that seem to have supposedly existed forever in a given culture but were actually created to instill determined norms and beliefs among the population, and to explain present phenomenon by

using the past as reference, even if this past is an invention. In the fourth place, national culture is based on a foundational myth, which defines the location and the origin of the nation, its mythical past that gives meaning to determined aspects of the nation in the present, and sometimes justifies certain aspects as being “part of” the nation’s cultural character. Finally, one aspect that Hall does not greatly emphasize but also lists is that national identity is also structured around the notion of a “pure,” “original,” “folk” people, who are/were generally subjugated to the colonizers, which is the case with Brazilian Native Indians.

Hall (2006) proceeds to analyze whether national cultures and the national identities construed by it are in fact “unified,” claiming that no matter how different members of a given country may be, one of the main objectives of national cultures is to unify these members by means of a cultural identity, trying to represent members as being part of “a large national family” (60). But the final result of this attempt is not so simple, since it neither guarantees that cultural differences will be mitigated in name of a unifying culture, nor does it guarantee loyalty on the part of the nation’s members. Ethnicity, which Hall defines as entailing shared cultural manifestations such as costumes, traditions,

religions, language, and feelings associated to a “place,” has been the most common way of trying to “unify” the members of a national community.

Moving to globalization, which blurs national frontiers and forges a sense of interrelated experiences among nations, this phenomenon is seen by Hall (2006) as one of the main reasons why national cultural identities are being “dislocated.” Hall predicts three possible consequences of Globalization on cultural identities, namely [1] the disintegration of national identities due to the homogenization of cultures into a more global culture, [2] the reinforcement of local and national identities as a resistance response to the homogenization caused by globalization, and/or [3] the rise of new, hybrid identities that will take the place of declining national identities.

An aspect which Hall (2006) claims to be part of globalization and has an effect on national identities is that of space-time, similar to what is argued by Brenan on modernism. With the acceleration of global processes caused by Globalization, events that occur in specific places have an almost immediate effect on people located at great distances, which indicates that the notion of time and space has changed quickly from the near past (Hall situates this shift as starting to manifest in the

1970s) to our present. He tackles the issue to argue that time and space are the basic coordinates for the systems of representations. This is so because all forms of representation (painting, writing, photography and film, to name a few) occur within the dimensions of a specific time and space, and thus translate the ways in which that particular context articulates these coordinates. Representations of identities bring the "colors" and the traditions of their given time and space, which, in their turn, are informed both by their past (myths of origin, narratives of the nation) and present. With globalization, however, the notions of time and space are again changing, since space is no longer a reliable measure, as one can cover great distances, both in terms of travel and communication, – that once could have taken months – in a matter of hours, and what happens in one side of the world instantly affects the opposite side.

Having the previous argument in mind, namely that of Globalization and its effect on space and time, Hall argues that the result of this is *global identifications*, which seem to blur and sometimes eradicate national identities, fragmenting cultural codes that once served as a frame of reference for more stable identities:

> "Quanto mais a vida social se torna mediada pelo mercado global de estilos, lugares e imagens, pelas viagens internacionais, pelas

> imagens da mídia e pelos sistemas de comunicação globalmente interligados, mais as *identidades* se tornam desvinculadas – desalojadas – de tempos, lugares, histórias e tradições específicos e parecem 'flutuar livremente'" (75)[20].

That is, the "cultural flux," as Hall calls it, made possible by globalization, not only offers the possibility of shared identities, but also proves it difficult to keep cultural identities "intact." Sometimes, as will be argued ahead, it may lead to what has been mentioned before as one of the author's predictions of the consequences of globalization on national identities, namely that of reinforcing these identities in response to the impending "threat" of homogenization caused by this phenomenon. However, Hall observes that there are three arguments that *could* (if one attempted to) counterpose the prediction of homogenization. First, alongside this tendency, there is the excitement and curiosity in what is different, in the local colors of places, and also there is an economic interest imbued is this curiosity, which entails the creation of new consumption markets. Hall argues that it is more likely, in this case, for new forms of global identifications to take place rather than the complete homogenization of national cultures. Second,

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[20] "The more the social life becomes mediated by the global market of styles, places, images, by international travels, by the image of the media and by the globally linked communications systems, the more identities become unattached – dislocated – from specific times, places, histories and traditions, and seem to 'flow' freely"

globalization is not a uniform process in the world, nor does it penetrate completely all layers of society and all social classes. Third, Hall argues that there is no consensus on how globalization affects, in fact, all countries, so that researchers have still much work ahead before affirming what is its actual result in the world. In Hall's tentative conclusion he argues that globalization, instead of homogenization, produces new possibilities of identifications:

> "[A globalização] tem um efeito pluralizante sobre as identidades, produzindo uma variedade de possibilidades e novas posições de identificação, e tornando as identidades mais posicionais, mais políticas, mais plurais e diversas; menos fixas, unificadas ou trans-históricas"[21] (Hall 87).

The hybridity resulting from this effect of globalization on identities is, in Hall's view, a powerful creative force, since new forms of culture can rise from this, perhaps positive ones.

Having presented the theories pertinent to the analysis of *Central Station* in this second chapter, and the context in which the film was produced in the first chapter, the following chapter brings an analysis of the film associated to both the theories presented in the

[21] "Globalization has a pluralizing effect over identities, producing a variety of possibilities and new points of identifications, and making identities more positional, more political, more plural and diversified; less fixed, unified or trans-historical" (Hall 87).

second chapter and selected reviews and essays of American and Brazilian critics.

CHAPTER III
FILM FORM AND CRITICAL DEBATES

A film critic, as David Bordwell (2008) puts forward, carries out four tasks. He/she describes, analyzes, interprets and evaluates a given film. The task of describing usually serves the purpose of illustrating a point argued by the critic. Analysis usually entails thinking and writing about the functions of given cinematic elements in a determined film. Interpretation involves "making claims about the abstract or general meanings of a film," and evaluation is sometimes considered the cornerstone of criticism, which is where the critic reveals his/her personal impression on the film, and includes both judgment and taste. Judgment, Bordwell claims, has more to do with recognizing elements of quality in a given production based on specific criteria than taste, which is more related to the critic's own personal experience with the film.

Thomas Schartz (1994) explains that movie genres are based on dramatic conventions that allow spectators to expect "familiar patterns of conflict and resolution within familiar settings" (177). Road movies,

being one of the genres into which Central Station fits, the other being drama, is a genre that usually involves the transformation of the characters in the course of the narrative through journeys, often both geographical and emotional. One of the possible *themes*[22] of the film revolves around the journey, both internal and geographical, of the two main characters, namely Dora and Josué, in search for identities, personal and national, and it encompasses transformations and discoveries. But *Central Station* is also a film about Brazil and its people. In this sense, considering Hall's (2006) claim that representations bring the "colors" and traditions of their time and space, the following questions can be asked: what is *Central Station* actually saying about Brazil, its people and their identities, and how do American and Brazilian critics describe, analyze, interpret and evaluate the film?

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[22] David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (1993) argue that there are four kinds of *meanings* in film. First, there is the *referential meaning*, which entails the things and places that are already vested with significance, that is, things in the world that hold a general significance which most people are aware of. Second, there is the *explicit meaning*, which entails meanings defined by the context of the film, and all meanings that arise from the film work in collaboration with one another. Thirdly, there is the *implicit meaning*, which entails the suggested meanings of the film, that is, the interpretations that arise from it. These broad interpretations are usually called *themes*, and films usually convey more than one theme, as interpretations vary according to each spectator. Lastly, there is the *symptomatic meaning*, which the authors explain as being the result of the composition of the social values present in the implicit and explicit meanings, which ultimately reveal a social ideology. (49-51)

3.1 Central Station

Central Station tells the story of Dora (Fernanda Montenegro) and Josué (Vinícius de Oliveira) – described by Anthony Kaufman (1998) as an "unlikely duo" –, who cross the country in search of Josué's father. This journey, as José Geraldo Couto (1998) argues, is threefold, namely geographic, social, and in search for affection. Dora is a bitter older woman who writes letters for the illiterate in Rio de Janeiro's central train station, and her clients come mostly from the northeast, victims of the faith in the economic miracle of the south. She randomly selects the letters from these clients that "deserve" to be sent, and places the ones which she is not yet sure about in a drawer her neighbor, Irene, calls "the purgatory." Josué is the son of Ana, one of Dora's clients, who dies soon after having requested Dora's services, leaving Josué unattended in the cruelly depicted scenario of the train station. Dora is the only one in the position to help him, as she is in possession of the letter charged by Josué's mother, which holds the key to their destiny, namely Josué's father's address.

It could be argued that the film's narrative is divided in three parts. From the beginning, especially from the moment Josué's mother

dies, which is the conflict that sets the story in its course, to the moment Dora kidnaps Josué from the supposed adoption agency, entails the first part, which represents the conflict. The second part takes off from the moment they enter the bus, towards their destination to the northeast, to the scene of the pilgrimage in Bom Jesus do Norte, Pernambuco, which represents the journey. The third and last part begins with Josué's "entrepreneurial burst" in Bom Jesus (McCarthy 1998), which ends up being the moment when Josué and Dora finally bond, to the end of the film, with Dora's departure as a changed person, which represents the resolution.

It has been suggested by director Walter Salles, as well as by critics such as Luiz Zanin Oricchio (2003), Laura Winters[23] (1998), and Rita Kempley[24] (1999) – to mention a few, – that the film is a metaphor for a search for identity. In crossing the country, the characters are metaphorically trying to find themselves and a Brazilian identity.

In pursuing this discussion further, it could be said that the film metaphorically conveys the latent desire for the mentioned identity search/definition. The first part conveys the lack of definition of

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[23] The critic claims that Salles's work is "informed by the search for identity, both on a personal and national level."

[24] The critic puts forward that "no road trip or without mishap and misery. There are lessons to be learned, hearts to be won and discoveries to be made. After all has been said and done, the boy has discovered his identity and Dora has shed her grumpy old womanhood."

identities and the need for answers. The second part conveys the process of the search, that is, the journey, and the third brings forward possible answers and solutions to this search.

Allen G. Johnson (1998) puts forward that

> If, as noted film theorist Siegfried Kracauer postulated, the function of cinema is to reveal other cultures and provide viewers with a "tactile" experience, then the Brazilian import "Central Station" is surely one of the year's best films [...] Shot in a compelling cinema verite [sic], what also amazes about this most special movie is how much depressed, urban cultures all over the world have in common. It's a foreign film in setting, not story; the slums of Rio de Janeiro are as familiar as the ghettos of East L.A., or the Tenderloin here.[25]

The "tacticle" experience Allen mentions can be related to the issue of representation put forward by Stam and Hall. The film offers material for spectators both to infer meanings related to the culture that produced it and to relate its themes to other geographies, such as the critic's own country, the United States. In other words, films in general entail representations not only of their place of origin, but they also allow people to relate the situations present in them to other places. In this sense, interpretations, as Stam puts forward, depend on perspectives and positionalities. Having the previous argument in mind, the analysis that

[25] Allen here associates the film to cinéma verité, a style of documentary developed in France in the 1960s, having Jean Rouch as one of its most representative founders. Allen is the only critic to relate *Central Station* to Cinema Verité. Most critics, when associating the film to a given style, either brought up Italian Neorealism or Cinema Novo.

follows entails both my own perspective and positionalities, and those of critics, American and Brazilian.

3.2 Part One: the conflicts that set the story in motion

Michael O'Sullivan (1999) puts forward that the Rio de Janeiro of Dora and Josué "is not the Rio of the samba, the bossa nova or the thong bathing suit, but a gritty city whose sadness – and potential for redemption – is universal." It is in these early scenes that a specific element calls one's attention, namely the camera's focus. In the first sequence, most shots present elements that are out of focus, which could lead to the suggestion that the state of things is of confusion, metaphorically speaking. Dora is clearly a disturbed and hard person who needs to get rid of the extra emotional baggage she carries, mostly related to her father (as we are informed throughout the story), and Josué is metaphorically not whole, as he is seeking for his father, and, as Orichhio suggests, there is no need to resort to psychoanalytical approaches to observe that the search for a father can be read as a search for referential, for an identity (135).

Having in mind this search for identity, in the early scenes of the film, as people leave the trains in the station, the camera uses short-focal-length lens, conveying the effect of blurriness in all elements that are not in focus, suggesting undefined shapes, and perhaps undefined identities.

Several readings can be made from frames *a* and *b* (see appendix). First of all, there is more than one shot in *Central Station* that is framed (either in the foreground or on the sides) by bars or lines, suggesting a prison for those depicted along and behind them. In the frames above, people are shown leaving the trains, and they are not only out of focus, but they are also shown behind and within bars. Associated to this, the camera focus, as mentioned before, seems to reflect a lack of definition in the characters' identity, and it could also suggest the mass of people who have had their rights to an identity denied, in keeping with Bauman's arguments on "subclass identities." It could be argued that the bars and the focus represent the prison in which the working class finds itself in, where the State offers neither support nor consolation within ever growing and violent cities like Rio de Janeiro, and the subjects must rely on their own efforts to make it through the day. They are prisoners of their own lack of identity, prisoners of the

system, which forces them to work in what are frequently underpaid jobs that do not allow them to envision social mobility: their current class is their reality. The reality they are currently living is probably the only one they will ever know. They are truly behind bars.

Interestingly, Dora's apartment window also puts her behind bars, as one can see in a long shot when she calls Irene over to her apartment to sort the letters. Dora and Josué, in this sense, seem to be examples of the mentioned 'prison." Dora, a retired school teacher, cannot lead an economically comfortable life, even after having dedicated her life to the education of others. She, as a teacher, supposedly made it possible, through education, for many people to lead better lives (not necessarily, of course), but she herself does not receive the necessary support from the State, and leads her life as a "crook," as Edward Guthmann (1999) puts it, writing (and many times not posting) letters for the illiterate. In other words, the State does not offer enough, so she has to survive by her own means. When one of her clients complains that his letters never reach their destination, Dora blames the State. The client trusts her answer, for it is plausible, since he, as an illiterate man, is also a victim of the State. Josué enters this prison once his mother dies and we see him wondering around the station alone,

possibly running the risk of having the same fate as the boy who is shot in that same place after stealing a mere walkman from one of the *camelô* stands in the station. These characters are, according to Darién J. Davis (1999), "products of Brazilian urban malaise, which has cultivated individuals who are lost, exiled, alienated, and often unscrupulous. Josué has lost his innocence, and Dora is pathetically corrupt" (692).

To pursue this issue further, Marcelo Coelho (1998) compares the situation in which the characters in *Central Station* find themselves to the slogan "*virem-se*,"[26] which he explains as being the motto of Fernando Henrique Cardoso's administration towards the population. He puts forward that his conversation with an anthropologist who was carrying out research in the outskirts of São Paulo reminded him of what is, for him, the basic meaning of *Central Station*. She explained that neighborhood organizations were no longer relying on the State for their claims. They were taking actions for themselves, solving their own State-generated problems without seeking its assistance. Coelho claims that

> Esse "virem-se" ganha condições de epopéia no filme de Walter Salles Jr. É como se fosse aceita a irresponsabilidade absoluta do

[26] Louis Philippe's “"enrichissez-vous," translated to English as "enrich yourselves".

> governo na salvação do país. Choramos pelo desvalimento dos pobres, pela capacidade desses mesmos pobres de se virarem por si mesmos, criando suas pequenas marcenarias, suas modestas redes de auxílio mútuo, suas religiões comunitárias. O choro nos irmana, então, graças a recursos ficcionais meio capengas. O filme nos faz esquecer do Estado.[27]

In other words, for Coelho *Central Station* not only corroborates Bauman's perspective on the subject, but he claims that the film also praises the lack of assistance provided by the State, as it portrays this situation as beautiful, causing people to forget what really underlies the story, that is, the reckless posture of the State towards the population. Although the problem put forward by Coelho is not necessarily (or exclusively) a product of the FHC administration, his observation was invoked to illustrate Bauman's argument on the fact that people are seeking the State less and less.

Other critics present a different reading of the film. Todd McCarthy (1999), for example, believes that *Central Station* symbolically suggests a hopeful future for Brazil. For him, the film proposes "that the deep scars left by the social ills of the recent past

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[27] My translation: "This "enrich yourselves" develops into epic proportions in Walter Salles Jr's film. It is like the government's absolute lack of responsibility for the country's salvation is accepted. We cry for the depreciation of the poor, for their capacity to take care of themselves, opening their tiny carpentry work places, their modest network of mutual support, and their community religions. Crying bonds us, then, by means of crippled fictional resources. The film makes us forget the State."

might somehow be survived and surmounted by a creative union of the old and the new Brazils," represented in the two distant generations, namely that of Dora, who experienced these social ills throughout her life, and that Josué, whose young age allows him an innocent and hopeful take on things.

Frames *c* and *d* (see appendix) once again show the previously mentioned lack of focus. In *c*, when Ana and Josué appear for the first time, they are in focus and the background is completely blurred. In frame *d*, it is the same case. *d* is part of a very intense sequence of the film. Ana has just died and Josué is entering a different zone. His mother is no longer able to provide him protection; his father, who Oricchio defines as the occult driving force of the narrative (97), is not present; and the State, which should be responsible for those who find themselves unattended and without the means of self-support, is lacking at most moments in the film. When the State does show its face, it is corrupt, in the character of Pedrão, a policeman who receives a fee from Dora so that she can keep a stand at the station, shoots a teenager for stealing a walkman, and takes part in an organization that supposedly sells the organs of orphaned children. The State, in other words, is guarantee of practically nothing in this scenario.

From the moment Ana dies – including the moment portrayed in frame *d*, – to the scene when the teenager is shot in plain daylight, the film takes on an especially sinister tone, and this is the part in which things are mostly out of focus in the frames. Aside from this, the original score, by Antônio Pinto and Jaques Morelembaum, is full of high notes, conveying the idea of a thriller, that is, the idea of an imminent threat. Josué is, indeed, surrounded by threats. Frame *d* shows him immediately after his mother is hit by a bus. The scene is extremely dark, despite the fact that it takes place during the day; he is the only thing in focus in the frame, and between shots of him are inserted shots of people looking at him in a threatening way, as can be seen in frame *e* (see appendix), suggesting the dangerous situation he finds himself in. After this scene, Josué seeks the help of Dora, who rejects him, saying "scram." As Roger Ebert puts forward, "[t]he key to the power of 'Central Station' is in the way that word echoes down through most of the film." There is truly a tension between them. In his first night as an orphan, after being rejected by Dora, Josué sleeps in the floor of the train station, experiencing the fate of a number of children who have had their accesses to support denied. In the following day, when Dora tries

to approach him, it is his turn to say “scram,” offering viewers a glimpse of the dynamics of their future relationship throughout the film.

Frame *f* (see appendix) shows the shooting of a boy, who is not much older than Josué, after he steals a walkman, and Josué is sitting right by the stand from which the boy takes the walkman. Dora then realizes that she must help Josué escape that boy’s fate. She, as James Berardinelli points out, “has seen the fate of shoplifters, who are shot, and she reasons that, without her intervention, a similar fate awaits Josué.” However, her attempt to help by selling Josué to an “adoption agency” will most probably lead to his death. Josué is in the “ideal” position for this type of business. His mother dies, leaving him afloat in the world. The State keeps no track of him, since it does not offer assistance when he becomes an orphan. He almost does not exist. He literally has no identity.

Although only two critics, namely Caleb Faria Alves and Roger Ebert mention the train in *Central Station*, it is an important element in the first part of the film. It can be argued to be a motif, as it is recurrent in the first part and it both appears at important moments and makes possible various interpretations. For Caleb Faria Alves (2001), the train is the maximum symbol of modernity, and it is no coincidence that

Central Station has this element in the backdrop (88). For him, the train works in exact opposition to the other end of the narrative, namely the *sertão*, where, having Jameson's notion of nostalgia in mind, time stands still, that is, there are no clear markers of date. The *sertão*, as it is shown, could very well represent the 1960s or the 1990s. But the train represents a contradiction. It works, as Alves points out, as the opposite of what Dora and Josué find in the *sertão.* However, the type of modernity the train conveys is out of focus (literally, in terms of camera focus) and does not suffice to encompass all members of society. From images *a* and *b* one can notice that the people who go in and come out of these trains are undefined. They are part of the massification of modernity, part of the faceless crowds, part of the turbulence and inebriety aforementioned when reviewing the work of Brenan. Frames *g* and *h* (see appendix) show that the modernity suggested by the train does not encompass all people who live within this modern society. Frame *g* (see appendix) is part of the scene that prompts Roger Ebert to describe this scenario as a "dog-eat-dog world." The scene shows the hard work it takes to find a place to sit and stand in the train. Actually, in frame *h* (see appendix) it is possible to see people hanging from the door and a couple of people climbing to the roof of the train. There is a

feeling of desperation, a sense of seeing the portrait described by Ebert as a "dog-eat-dog world." In this train scene, Dora seems slightly jittery, as if she is preparing for a "mini-battle" to find herself a place in the trains. Many people are out of focus. The movement is intense. The score that accompanies this scene is also jittery, mysterious and somehow tense, establishing, along with the images, the tone of the beginning of the film. Dora, in the end of her efforts to enter the train, has to settle for holding on to a handrail hanger.

One gets the impression that this is, in a sense, the ultimate struggle for survival. People are at their limits. At the end of a day which is probably already full of other battles for survival, one must still fight this last battle with what the film conveys as a feeling of despair. Dora looks worn out in the train, but the battle continues for some, as one can see, in the background, a man selling sweet popcorn in the train. There is hardly any place to walk around, but he is there, fighting his battle at the end of the day.

Perhaps if the role of the train was restricted to the scenario of the train station, one could not argue it as a motif. However, the presence of the train is constant throughout the first part of the film (according to the division of the plot as explained above). When Dora

leaves the train and arrives home, immediately after the train scene described above, she opens the window of her apartment and we learn that it overlooks the train tracks. This is unlikely to be by chance. It is necessary to ask what role the train is playing in the narrative, what motivates its presence, as it evokes different interpretations, or what Bordwell calls implicit meanings.

The trains are also, it could be argued, a reminder of Dora’s financial situation, as this means of transportation is the cheapest one available. That is, although the symbolic possibilities of the motif can be inferred, there is also the economic aspect that associates the train to Dora’s financial status.

Dora has had a very intimate relationship with trains. Her father was a train conductor, so perhaps it could be said that trains, for her, represent the contradicting feelings she has for her father. On the one hand, he was the man who cheated and left her mother, who died soon after. He was also the man who, after they were years apart, did not recognize Dora when they met on the street. On the other hand, he was the loving father who took his daughter to some of his shifts as a train conductor and allowed her to pull the train’s whistle, as we learn at the last scene, when Dora writes a letter to Josué. In other words, the train

could be argued to be the invisible presence of the father, which is a theme in the film both for Dora and Josué, as Oricchio indicates.

Returning to the point when spectators learn that Dora's apartment overlooks the train tracks, it could also be said that the presence of the train represents the wretched side of Dora's identity. Is possible to observe that the train, the ultimate symbol of modernity, appears at moments when Dora is showing the cynical sides of her. She opens the window to invite her neighbor Irene for what seems to be their daily ritual, namely the selection of the letters that will be sent, those that will be torn to pieces, and those that will be "imprisoned" in the aforementioned purgatory drawer.

There is yet another meaningful scene that involves the train, and this scene follows the aforementioned scene when Dora replies to Josué's cry for help with a cold "scram," that is, when she once again shows her cynical side. Dora enters the train, which is already full, so she stands in the door, facing the outside. The score accompanies her trajectory to the train, but in a calm melody. It does not warn the spectator that Josué is about to "haunt" her. She suddenly sees him standing in front of the train, staring at her with an upsetting look. It suggests reprobation, accusation, and it is, in a sense, an attack. It could

be said that this is Josué's first attack on her conscience. The moment Dora sees Josué looking at her in that way, in a shot that shows Josué's point of view (image *i*), the score uses high pitched notes, and these notes are very abrupt, as in suspense scores, and the viewer understands that his look, for her, is a threatening one. It affects her, for in the following day she approaches him in an attempt to help him (however dubious her intentions may be in her first attempt to assist him). We can also see Josué's upsetting look through a point of view shot, on image *j* (see appendix).

Immediately after this tense encounter between the two, the train starts moving and Josué runs after it, and Dora keeps seeing his reproaching and desolate look through the window, as the shot shows her point of view. Interestingly, subsequently to running after the train and provoking what seems to be an intense feeling of awkwardness in Dora, Josué sits at the edge of the platform, where the train lights are red, suggesting that the paths we see in the train tracks before him are closed. This could be interpreted as Josué's own condition at that moment, namely that of belonging to the edge of society, to the margins, where there are no available paths to follow. This is the place where the right to an identity is denied, as Bauman explains.

There are still two other moments in which the presence of the train is remarkable. First of all, immediately before Josué finds the letter to his father in the purgatory drawer, he observes that Dora's apartment faces the train tracks. Their confrontation is followed by a promise made by Dora to mail the letter in the following day, and Josué asks, in a desolate tone, for her not to lie again. The next scenes not only show her being woken up by the train, which seems to try to rouse her to the errand she must run with him (take him to the "adoption agency"), but also shows her lying again to Josué *inside* the train, thus breaking her promise inside the place that seems to accompany her cynical character.

The last and perhaps most interesting scene involving the train is when Dora seems to decide to correct her wrongs. After having taken Josué to the "adoption agency," a decision that made her profit U$ 2.000 (which she shared with Pedrão, the corrupt policeman) and made it possible for her to buy a remote control operated television set, Irene intervenes claiming that Dora has gone too far. It is possible to feel the tension in their relationship at that point, and although Irene partakes, even with some reservation, in Dora's cynical practices, the humanity in Irene (which Dora seems to lack) pushes Dora to analyze the situation. Irene leaves and in the medium shot that follows it is possible to see the

loneliness of her situation. This medium shot is followed by a close up that shows Dora staring at the remote control and then the television set, clearly suggesting her awareness that the television would always symbolize and remind her of her wrongful action.

In the following scene, Dora wakes in the middle of the night to the sound of the train. She is clearly disturbed, and when she sees the lights projected on the ceiling (image *k*), caused by the passing train, she seems startled. Aside from that, the passing train sounds like blades of knifes, which could suggest the blades that would mostly likely cut Josué; they could suggest his imminent death. This is, as Gary Dauphin (1998) points out, a "predictable but credibly rendered attack of conscience."

Dauphin's review is entitled "Redeeming features," and it is precisely from this moment on that something seems to start to change in Dora in the direction of redemption. The purgatory drawer is, ironically, what allows Dora to save Josué from the suggested imminent death. She gathers all the photos of children from the unsent letters and takes them to Iolanda, the woman from the "adoption agency." The moment Dora enters her apartment and kidnaps Josué is when their journey truly begins. A journey, as Walter Salles remarks in the DVD's

making off, towards the recovery and discovery of an identity, both for the main characters and for Brazil.

To round off this subsection, the first part of the film,–elements of which were analyzed above, – entails the events that lead to the journey Dora and Josué embark on. This is what theoreticians call *exposition*. We learn that Dora is, as Laura Winters describes her, a bitter woman. Dora's quest here, although she does not acknowledge it until it finally hits her, in the end, is for affection. Dora, for Winters, represents "the epitome of modern Brazil, with its 'culture of cynicism'." This cynicism seems to be caused by many elements, including her lack of faith and hope in the country, metaphorically speaking. Dora is the product of a situation such as the one described by Coelho (1998), the "*virem-se*," where people must learn to go through life by their own means. We learn also that Josué is looking for his father, which suggests the yearning for reference, for an identity. Interpreting this further, it could be argued that Dora represents the generation that lost its identity in time, for she, at her age, witnessed a dictatorship, then the end of it, the Fernando Collor de Mello period, and Fernado Henrique Cardoso's "virem-se" approach. Josué, however, represents the young generation that has not yet been scarred by the

experience of Dora, and seeks to construe an identity; he is still hopeful. The death of Josué's mother forces an encounter between these two generations. Dora kidnapping Josué from the adoption agency forces her to leave with him in search for his father, for she is in danger as long as she stays in Rio de Janeiro. Their troubled relationship so far shows us that it will be a bumpy ride.

3.3 Part Two: the emotional and geographical journey – a bumpy ride

Considering that the subsection above began with the issue of camera focus and its implication on the issue of identity, this subsection will begin with the analysis of how camera focus changes in what has been previously defined as the second part of the film, in what narrative theory calls the *rising action* and *climax*. However, before tackling the subject of focus, brief considerations must be made. This second part is when the journey of Dora and Josué begins. Some critics, such as Janet Maslin (1998) and Edward Guthmann (1999), even call it an odyssey, suggesting not only a trip, but an adventure, a quest for something bigger. This seems to be indeed the case. It could be argued, in fact, that from the moment Dora kidnaps Josué to the scene of the pilgrimage, she

is herself in a purgatory, in an allusion to the "souls" of the letters she keeps in her own purgatory drawer. This voyage, or odyssey, seems to cleanse her, removing the layer of sheer cynicism from her skin, and allowing for a more affectionate Dora to bloom.

Returning to the issue of camera focus, Bordwell and Thompson (Film Art) argue that the length of lenses, the focus, affects the experience spectators have with a film, as they can make a character stand out in a given frame or can make it blend with the environment (193). This filmic element starts to change in *Central Station* as the film develops. It becomes clearer, and instead of short-focal-length lenses, which is the case in the first part, shots show deep focus, that is, the director starts using long-focal-length lenses. While Dora and Josué are still at the bus station, in Rio de Janeiro, after her rescuing him, the focus is still shallow, and people and things in the background are still out of focus. However, as Dora and Josué take the bus to Bom Jesus do Norte, Pernambuco, extreme long shots and long shots show deep focus, suggesting a change in the characters and in what their environment has to offer, in how it will change them, allowing them to discover and define their identities throughout their journey. As they enter the bus in Rio de Janeiro, there is a scene which evokes again the bars mentioned

before, but they are now moving towards the outside of the prison suggested in the first part of the film. The bus crossing the bridge, framed by the bars, can be seen on frame *l* (see appendix). From this scene on, the film presents more extreme long shots and long shots than in the first part, where American shots, medium long shots and close-ups predominate.

It is also in this second part that we start to understand the origin to Dora's cynic personality, as she tells Josué stories about her father and criticizes Josué's father, repeating throughout the film that his father is certainly a drunk. As Catherine von Ruhland (1999) puts forward:

> Dora uses squabbles with Josué about what his father is really like to project her pain and disillusion with her own father. But this is also a metaphor for the betrayed hopes of millions of ordinary Brazilians in a land beset by greed and corruption in high places, and a vast, unending divide between rich and poor. Josué's staunch and hopeful defense of a father he has never seen, however, suggests the vital need for optimism.

von Ruhland's argument seems to express well the relation of Dora's words to her own disillusion. The metaphor that she mentions regarding the betrayed hopes of Brazilians, where social mobility is never an option for the poor and where corruption reigns, is in keeping with the situation of Brazil at the time, since even though inflation had been

controlled, rates of unemployment and recession were rising to concerning levels. Dora and her generation have lost their hopes, but Josué is still hopeful. Ironically, after Dora starts calling Josué's father a drunk, just as her own father was, she buys a bottle of alcohol and drinks half of it in the bus. While she is asleep, Josué steals the bottle and makes a scene in the bus. This is another moment of great tension between them, and Dora seems to realize that she has become her own worst nightmare. The inference that can be made here is that although her experience has turned her into a person of shattered hopes, she cannot allow other people to follow the same path. Josué must keep his hope in order for her to be able to find something worth holding on to in life or, metaphorically speaking, in her country.

Coelho makes an important observation, which relates to von Ruland's remarks on the film in the sense that he spots something that she does not, namely that there is not a social "vertical" axis orienting the film. That is, there is no rich versus poor relationship. In this sense, the dramatic tension of the film does not convey the Brazilian social tension as we know it. The film, according to Coelho, relies on the possibility of people from lower classes to connect. Coelho's argument recalls that of June Jordan, who claims that people's nationality alone is

not a good enough category for two people to bond, and that there must be a shared "point of similarity" for such a bonding to take place. In this sense, Dora, as a member of Brazilian society and a victim of its recklessness towards its lower class members, understands and shares the tensions of Josué's situation. Their connection seems to be based on shared burdens.

In the first part of the film, O'Sullivan identifies in Dora a surrogate mother for Josué, and claims that her attempt to sell him to the supposed adoption agency is a metaphorical abortion. The latter entails her first attempt to break up their relationship in the film. The second attempt could be considered to be already in the second part of *Central Station*, at the bus station, when Josué asks Dora not to go with him on his search for his father, but she does anyway. The scene subsequent to Josué's drinking in the bus, mentioned above, entails already the third time they attempt to "break up" their relationship. This is a sequence in which, in this author's opinion, Dora hits rock bottom in terms of desolation and in which the mise-en-scène shows its power to convey meanings through images. The bus stops at a bus station where there is a diner. Dora leaves Josué asleep in the bus so that he can follow his trip without her, but not before putting money in his wallet, inside his

backpack. She buys a ticket back to Rio de Janeiro, watches Josué's bus leaving, and the camera shows her taking some last ripped reais notes from her wallet to drink a bottle of beer, seemingly telling us that she is running out of money. As she turns around, she finds Josué at a table across the diner. She is in shock. Spectators then realize that this troublesome relationship is bound to last, even if through tension, for they always find a way back to each other. When they both realize that Josué has left his backpack in the bus, there is a scene that shows Dora's ultimate desolation, and one notices the strength of what Marcel Martin (1985) calls "the latent content" (93), that is, the metaphor and the symbol.

Martin puts forward that images imply more then they make explicit. He explains that the use of symbols in cinema entails resorting to an image that has the power to imply more than what it apparently does, and mise-en-scène is one of the crucial elements to make this happen (93). The weight of Dora's situation seems to dawn on her once she realizes that her last reais are now in a bus that is heading to Bom Jesus do Norte, in Josué's backpack. She is now officially "stuck" with Josué, and she does not fully understand how she came to be involved in his search, a search that she only realizes that is her own at the end of

the film. The scenes that follow the backpack situation, accompanied by the score, seem to represent her ultimate desolation.

Dora is shown looking into the horizon when the score begins, and its melody suggests sadness and intense desolation. The images, too, and very strongly, suggest desolation. Frame *m* (see appendix) is followed by frame *n*, which, given Dora's current emotional state, seems to symbolize desperation. Frame *m* shows an abandoned tire and a retired teacher, two elements that are related in the sense that both have lost their use value, but in Dora's case this is true in the particular context she finds herself in her life. Dora is shown as desperate, clearly sweating, and penniless. Frame *n*, which follows frame *m*, shows a crippled goat and a large pig in a desolate and arid scenario. According to Martin's theory, this is a dramatic symbol, for it comments on the action with the strength of the image. The image of the crippled goat is especially strong here because it seems to reflect Dora's situation, as she finds herself crippled in several senses. She is emotionally crippled because she has not yet dealt with her demons, she is crippled in the national sense because she, as a retired school teacher, is not valued for her achievement as such, and she is crippled in her relationship with

Josué because until she changes, she does not understand why she must help him (to then help herself).

Another situation in which the mise-en-scène is particularly subtle and pregnant of meaning is when Dora and Josué arrive at the property that is supposed to belong to Jesus, Josué's father. At their arrival, in a careful analysis one learns that two images related to this one (image *o*, see appendix) were already presented previously in the film, suggesting, once again, a careful manipulation of the mise-en-scène. The scene from which the frame shown on image *o* was taken is one of the most beautiful in the film, since it is the culmination of an expectation that starts in the beginning of *Central Station*, an expectation that entails the missing elements of Josué's search for identity. However, this sequence, too, ends in desolation. But an interesting element about it is that in Josué's first night in the company of Dora, at her house, stares at a porcelain painting *p* (see appendix) on Dora's wall and then smiles, because it seems to represent the dream of what he projects his father's house to be like.

In the scene and sequence related to frame *q* (see appendix), the situation is even more interesting and deserves more attention. After this point Dora has already had her first affectionate connection, and it was

with César, a religious truck driver who seems to be able to penetrate the crust of cynicism that involves Dora. He knows that Dora is on this journey to “pay a promise” to Josué, and that seems to be important to him, for he is a man of faith. Frame shown on image *q* (see appendix) is interesting because when Dora opens her heart to César, his first reaction is to look at Josué, who has, in the background, a picture similar to the one he saw at Dora’s house and, we later learn, to his father’s supposed property. No one knows the exact reason why César leaves. It could be argued that he, as a religious man, does not accept being involved with a woman who steals, as she did not long before this scene, and drinks. When Dora offers him her beer, he says his religion does not allow him to drink. She replies by saying “I’m sure that He, up there, is not looking.” It could also be argued that he is not interested in her and leaves to avoid an awkward situation after she declares her interest in him. However, a more symbolic reading of the scene can be made. A shot of César, looking at Josué, seemingly seeking his approval, is followed by the shot from which frame *q* was taken. The way Josué looks back at César and the mise-en-scène seem to suggest that if César decides to invest in a relationship with Dora, her promise to Josué will likely be broken. César, as the religious and seemingly good

man that he is, cannot allow that to happen. The painting behind Josué could be interpreted as the journey Dora and Josué must follow, and it does not include César. But they soon after catch a ride with what Todd McCarthy calls "white-garbed worshipers" and head to the *sertão*, thus continuing their journey.

The opposition between the city and the *sertão* is perhaps one of the aspects on which critics focused the most. A number of critics associate the *sertão* to the metaphor of a solution to Brazil. Davis (1999), for example, puts forward that "[t]he film argues that the answers to Brazil's problems lie within, and this is symbolized by the interior dry lands, the *sertão*" (692). Davis continues, claiming that "[a]lthough the *sertão* is every bit as poor as the city, Salles celebrates the humanity of the old-fashioned life of the interior (as seen in the way that Josué's brothers eventually accept him)" (693). Davis associates this comparison between the city and the *sertão* to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's notion of the "uncorrupted," where the innocence of "the unexplored," in this case one of the people from the *sertão*, is, in Davis's view, utopian and romantic, and perhaps also naïve.

As mentioned elsewhere, the *sertão*, for Oricchio, is a "sociological lab," where one can observe "*in vitro* and *in vivo*" the

organizing principles of the country (121), for Brazilian filmmakers tend to use these elements to ponder on the values of Brazil, on the opposition between the poor and the rich, and other aspects. For Oricchio, for example, the *sertão* in *Central Station* also works in opposition to the city, since in the city one can be murdered before the indifferent gaze of passer-bys and children's organs are sold, representing, for this critic, the most repulsive kind of human act. The *sertão*, however, represents a kind of "moral reserve" for the Brazilian nation, an "archeological site of national ethics" (135). It is there that Josué encounters his brothers and where Dora is relieved and becomes a more affectionate person. Oricchio calls attention to the anachronism of the *sertão*, for, in this globalized and post-industrial world, toys are still handmade. This argument, once more, reminds that of Jameson's, when he explains the notion of nostalgia. The *sertão*, in Oricchio's opinion, appears as a possible medicine for a diseased country (134). For him, the *sertão* in *Central Station* is a space of reconciliation in the sense that it is where *Cinema Novo* sought to represent conflict, and where the *Retomada* films seek to represent harmony. While the former sought to unveil the fissures in Brazilian society, the latter seeks to reform and

find solutions. The only thing in common these two moments in cinema have, for Oricchio, is the setting.

Caleb Faria Alves's interpretation is similar to that of Oricchio. In his point of view, the film represents the city as the place where there is no appreciation for human life, and it all happens against the backdrop of the train, the ultimate symbol of modernity. In the *sertão*, however, the film focuses on showing excessive faith and unselfish goodness. This representation in the film may be considered naïve in the sense that it presumes that there is no badness in the *sertão* and no goodness in the city, but perhaps it is the way chosen by the director to represent that what was suggested by Darién, namely that the solution to Brazil lies within, so the movement from the city to the interior is one way of doing that through symbolic means. It could also be argued that it metaphorically suggests that Dora needs to look inward, so that the geographical journey to the interior represents her emotional journey to the inside. A third reading could also be argued to entail the search for cultural elements related to the Brazilian cultural identity worth holding on to, as Appiah suggests as one of the functions of cultural products. For critic Margaret A. McGurk (1999), finally, the *sertão* is almost a human character; such is its participation in the change of the characters.

For her, the actual geography helps change the human geography of Dora.

Finally, the second part of the film culminates in the pilgrimage, which could be argued to be the film's climax, and the ultimate representation of faith in the *sertão*. For Janet Maslin (1998), by the time the film reaches the pilgrimage sequence, "it has taken on a Felliniesque sense of spiritual discovery." The adjective "Felliniesque" could be understood here in its relation to the dreamlike mise-en-scène, feeling, and camera control in the tent of miracles, where Dora seems to experience the mentioned spiritual discovery. This sequence also presents the duo's fourth attempt to "break up," but the situation is, in the end, responsible for their long expected bonding. They find themselves in the middle of a pilgrimage, which works in direct opposition to Dora's mood. While pilgrims keep on repeating "Thank you, Lord, for the graces achieved," Dora and Josué walk in the opposite direction to the pilgrimage. She curses her fate of being "stuck" with Josué, repeating over and over that he is a disgrace, and especially a disgrace in her life. The choice of her words, as her mood, works in opposition to what the pilgrims say. The tension starts building up in Josué's expression until he runs towards the pilgrimage, away from her.

The camera cranes and tilts up and we see the pilgrimage and a church in the back. When Josué enters the crowd, everyone kneels, so that we see him running. Dora enters the crowd and everyone stands up again, so that Dora can no longer see Josué. Ironically, Dora, a person who seems to have completely lost her faith, starts crying "My God, My God." A handheld camera follows her at some points, always jittery, conveying the mood of the character and the scene.

There are some formal elements that deserve to be mentioned in the part of the sequence that takes place in the tent of miracles. The mise-en-scène, Fernanda Montenegro's acting, the sounds, and the score all work together to convey a sensation of confusion, of excessive faith, of desperation and also trance. People's wishes seem to range from finding love to wishing one's soccer team wins the championship (as one can see a photo of a soccer team on the wall). The candles burn away and photos crowd the little space. Voices of hundreds of people are mixed together, strengthening the feeling of confusion and trance, and perhaps suggesting the lament and gratitude of the Brazilian people, who seem to have in religion a strong identity reference. Religion, as Bauman points out, is one of the points of reference for those who cannot request the assistance of the State. For Bauman, those holding a

"subclass identity," which is the case of those in question in this sequence, resort to fundamentalism, for it forges a sense of certainty, of stability of values and behaviors. As mentioned elsewhere, the abandonment by the State wounded people who had no means to solve their socially created problems without assistance, so that religion works as a stable and more "reliable" pillar for the shaping of cultural and national identities.

The score works together with the mise-en-scène, and also with the cameras and the sounds to contribute to the feeling of confusion and trance Dora is experiencing. Violins are being tuned, in a suggestion that something is about to begin, that the action is rising and will culminate on something meaningful. Images of a Dora in trance are alternated with images of the pilgrims, and one in special, who says "Queima, Senhor! Queima, Senhor, o nosso Senhor das trevas, Senhor."[28] The alternation of these images seems to suggest that Dora is the one in need of cleansing. She, indeed, enters a trance that changes her from this point of the film on. The camera shows her point of view, and it is out of focus, suggesting that she cannot see straight. She is collapsing.

[28] Translation: Burn, Lord, Burn, Queima, Senhor! Queima, Senhor, o nosso Senhor das trevas, Senhor

A swirling camera (its effect can be seen on image *s*, see appendix) showing Dora's perspective in the tent of miracles is alternated with images of swirling fireworks right outside the tent (image *t*), creating a coordinated effect that shows Dora's fainting, as a result of the rising action, and the celebration of the graces achieved for the pilgrims. It could be argued that it represents Dora's rite of passage, when she gains conscience of all the harm she has caused for those who never had their letters sent and those who never received them, and also the harm she has been doing to herself in holding a grudge against her father, or even, metaphorically speaking, against her nation. However, Dora and Josué are now at peace, for Dora seems to expurgate her demons and Josué becomes more affectionate towards her.

3.4 Part Three: falling action and denouement

Retrospectively thinking, how does the third part of the film, which entails the falling action and the denouement, address the issue of identity? In the first part, the film presented spectators with undefined and unfocused images and characters in an environment that supposedly stimulated confrontation; the second part presented a change in the

environment and the characters, with less confrontation. What kind of answers does the third part of the film bring?

Firstly, it could be said that if there is an essentialist approach, as explored in chapter 2 of this thesis, the second and especially the third part of the film seem to embody it. As Stuart Hall points out, an essentialist approach is not a lie. He argues that it should be explored, even though it may seem naïve and utopian, for it provides "stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history" (705). This attempt to "rediscover" an essential identity, Hall suggests, is not really a rediscovery but a production of identities. He asks himself if an essentialist identity is not really "an identity grounded in the archeology, but in the re-telling of the past?" (705). *Central Station* seems to be somehow attempting to carry out what Hall calls "the act of imaginative rediscovery," which, as explained above, is rooted on the "discovery" of an essentialist characteristic of a country's shared culture, one that belongs and has "always" collectively belonged to the people in that culture. It is a myth, but one that aims at creating a feeling of unity among the members of given nations. In presenting the characters' journey, we see not only a change in them, but a change in setting and in

the way each of these settings behave and accommodate the people in them.

When the third part of the film begins, there are no more confrontations as the ones that took place before. The setting, too, no longer confronts Dora, who seems to be affected the most by the environments she is in throughout the film, as in the train station, her apartment, the first scenes in the *sertão*, and the pilgrimage. After Dora's trance in the pilgrimage, she and Josué begin a different stage of their relationship. They are affectionate towards each other and become "partners" in what Todd McCarthy calls Josué's an "entrepreneurial burst," when they join the informal workers who are, like them, fighting for survival by selling homemade *cachaça*, singing, and selling photos taken with statues of saints. Once again we see Dora writing letters for the illiterate, and here is where her change is noticeable. Like in the train station, the lenses are of short-focal-length, so that the people in the foreground are in focus and those in the background are undefined. However, the tone is different. There is not a feeling of confusion, as there was before, and no feeling of confrontation with her clients. She, unlike in the train station, becomes involved with the stories of her clients. She laughs, asks for more details, understands where they are

coming from, and, most importantly, she bonds with Josué. Their relation is now of trust. They blink at each other, take photos with the statue of the saint as a souvenir, and Josué symbolically buys Dora a dress, promising her that she will look much more beautiful in it. With this, he seems to accept her as his "surrogate mother."

After working all day writing letters for the illiterate, they check into a hotel and the first thing Josué does is to take all the letters from a plastic bag and throw them in the trash bin. Dora, clearly shocked, shouts "No!" It is a motherly attitude that tries to protect Josué from the cynicism he has already learned from her. She can no longer accept this attitude that was once part of her own repertoire of actions. In the next morning, as they are waiting for a bus to go to *Vila do João*, where Josué's father has supposedly moved to, Dora finds redemption in the symbolic gesture of posting the letters. The interesting thing here is that the camera, in this scene, does not show Dora, but Josué, whose expression suggests surprise and incredulity.

Having this in mind, it could be said that, in a sense, as Dora approximates her moral quality to that of Josué, their bond becomes stronger. Josué is not the character that suffers the noticeable change in the narrative, but Dora. He begins the film as a hopeful young boy, and

it has been suggested by McCarthy that this hope represents the innocent perspective of his generation, which did not experience the traumatic events of the past in Brazil, and reaches the final part of the film still as a hopeful boy. Dora, however, suffers great transformations. She begins the film as a wretched retiree who does not measure the consequences of her reckless approach towards her clients' letter, exchanges a young boy for a brand new TV set with a remote control, and reaches the last part of the film bonding in a way she could have not imagined with both her clients and Josué, whom she invites to go back home with her once they believe it will be impossible to find his father. As June Jordan puts forward, "[t]he ultimate connection must be the need that we find between us. It is not who you are, in other words, but what we can do for each other that will determine the connection." Josué managed to change Dora in the way she needed to be changed in order to find any happiness and hope in her life, and even to resolve her long problematic issues with her father, and Dora was the essential piece for Josué to continue his search. It seems to be, in a sense, a rite of passage for Dora, Josué, and, metaphorically speaking, for the country. It is so for Dora in the sense that she "needs" the intervention of Josué to embark on the emotional journey that the geography and the situations experienced by

them leads her. It is so for Josué in the sense that he needs to seek his father in order to define himself. It is for the country in the sense that it is also trying to find its way after turbulent times of dictatorship, uncontrolled inflation, Collor, new economic plans with Fernando Henrique Cardoso and the growing rates of unemployment and recession at the time the film was produced.

When Dora and Josué finally reach Vila do João one realizes that this place is not the traditional portrait shown of the *sertão*. It is a gigantic housing development where all the houses are alike, showing that even the heartlands of the *sertão* have been touched by the hands of "progress." McCarthy sees this as a sign of the "new economic frontier," a sign of the progress in Brazil, but what he does not recognize is that most houses have been invaded, as Isaías, Josué's older brother, explains to Dora. For McCarthy, the answer *Central Station* suggests is that "the deep scars left by the social ills of the recent past might somehow be survived and surmounted by a creative union of the old and the new Brazils," and, apparently, Vila do João is just that. There is still the goodness of the essential Brazilian identity (essential in the sense suggested by Hall, that of a creative rediscovery/invention of a shared national identity), but there is also sign of progress, however

problematic it might be in this context. The population in Vila do João still holds a "subclass identity," as they do not even have the means to construct their own houses and must settle for living in State housing developments, where all houses are alike and the chance of social mobility is still almost zero. It is not clear whether the house where Josué's brothers live has been invaded and occupied by them, or if the area in which the housing development was built is an invaded and occupied area. Whichever option applies, both reflect the problems felt by *Nordestinos* when it comes to lands: too much land in the hands of few land owners.

Josué and Dora do not find exactly what they embarked on their journey to find, that is, Josué's father. However, each one finds what they need. Dora finds tenderness, affection, and even sexual yearnings (towards César). In one of the last scenes, when she is about to leave Josué with his brothers, she, partly lighted and with dramatic shadows around her, puts on her new dress, which Josué gave her. She lights two candles in front of the mirror, one big and one small. To insisting viewers, these candles could even be related to her and Josué, who have, metaphorically speaking, had their ways enlightened in the process. She puts on lipstick and uses it as rouge as well, and then she laughs with

satisfaction, as if proud of her journey and their accomplishments together. Josué, she knows, will not forget her. Dora finally sets Ana's letter close to Jesus's letter and her mission with Josué and with herself is complete. Josué does not find his father, but finds that his brothers, who, together, embody the father figure he seeks. His middle brother, Moisés, embodies the qualities for which he admires the father he has never met: he is a maker. From wood, he can make chairs, tables, and spinning tops, the same kind that was so crucial when Josué's mother dies. The oldest, Isaías, is the father figure who tenderly brings Josué into the family, teaching him sayings and playing soccer.

Josué's brothers also embody, in some senses, the essential Brazilian identity that is supposedly lacking in the urban setting, although Irene is the representation of that in Rio de Janeiro. It is, perhaps, in this sense too that McCarthy argues that the solution to Brazil is in the marriage of the two contrasting Brazils, namely that of the big centers like Rio de Janeiro and that of the nameless villages of the *sertão*, where a sort of goodness has been preserved or, as Oricchio calls it, where there is a moral reserve. These contrasting national identities are perhaps complementary, as in the Brazilian scenario it is necessary to have the wit to survive in what Roger Ebert calls the "dog-

eat-dog" world of the central station, and also the idealistic goodness and tenderness of the *sertão* in order not to drown in its dramatic scenario, taking others along with, as Dora used to do.

It is perhaps not possible to say that the order has been restored in the end of the film, when Dora leaves, since there was never truly order in the story, but chaos. However, something is disturbed at the beginning, and it is the chaos in which Dora finds herself, drowned in the regime of the "dog-eat-dog" world she lives in, and something is restored by the time Dora leaves. She, as Kevin Thomas puts forward, "is moved to confront the painful losses that have left her so emotionally calcified," and leaves as a person who is born again: she has made her peace with her father, with those that sought her for help, in the figure of Josué, and with herself. The characters of Dora and Josué, once undefined and out of focus, finally find their focus in long shots, middle shots and even close ups, which show emotional ranges that differ from those settings and facial expressions which accompanied them in the beginning.

CHAPTER IV – CONCLUDING REMARS

One single film is pregnant with so many meanings that it would be impossible to explore all of them in a single thesis. What this thesis attempted to do was to explore some of the elements in *Central Station* that evoke the issue of identity in film form within the narrative. Alongside the theoretical background and the analysis, this thesis also used the debates of Brazilian and American critics in order to encompass different perspectives on the film. The initial hypothesis presented in the first chapter is that *Central Station* is a film that brings as one of its themes the search for an identity. This search is both personal, as in the case of Dora and Josué, and national, in the sense that Brazilian people and Brazilian cinema were in a process of recovery when the film was produced. Brazilian people were so because they had been deeply shaken by their past, with 21 years of dictatorship, inflation, and the Collor administration, so that it "needed" to recover from these traumas in order to envision a more hopeful future. Brazilian cinema was in this process because it was recovering from a drastic reduction in the number of productions, as explained in chapter I, which culminated with the closing of Embrafilme in the Collor administration.

The path followed to carry out the present study was threefold. The first chapter presented the context in which *Central Station* was produced, as well as a brief consideration on the Brazilian scenario at the time. The first chapter attempted to show some of the difficulties experienced by Brazilian cinema at the time, and it also considered some of the recurring themes, such as that of identity, in the *Retomada* cinema. The main authors used in this part of the thesis were Luiz Zanin Oricchio, Lúcia Nagib, and Sidney Ferreira Leite. The second chapter entailed the Review of the Literature, where considerations on representation and identity were tackled in order to guide the analysis. For the definition of identity, the main authors used were Stuart Hall, Zygmunt Bauman, Robert Stam, and Ella Shohat. The third chapter encompassed brief considerations on film theory and the analysis itself, which intertwined with the voices of a number of American and Brazilian film critics.

In the context of the *Retomada*, *Central Station* plays an important role. As Oricchio (2003) points out, films bring the marks of the time in which they are produced. The film in question does just so, as it looks inwards for answers about where Brazil and Brazilians stand in the long experienced confusions of the 20 to 40 years that preceded

the film. These years were precisely the years in which Dora's generation lived their adulthood, so that it affected them the most. The result of this can be felt in Dora's cynicism and skepticism. Josué, on the other hand, seems to represent the hope of his generation, which had not been affected by the traumas of Dora's generation. For Nagib, as mentioned in chapter I, many films of the Retomada bring forward a "rediscovery of the homeland," and in *Central Station* this is particularly true when compared to Salles's prior film, namely *Foreign Land* (co-directed by Daniela Thomás), where the Brazilian characters were looking for answers abroad. *Central Station* tries to rescue some of the optimism that was lost along the way, and does this by literally moving towards the interior of the country.

As Lúcia nagib (2004) puts forward, many films from the *Retomada* also cast an anthropological gaze on lower classes, as did the *cinema novo* films, but the former did it with solidarity, and the latter did it with a political drive, or with a tone of accusation towards the State. As Leite remarks, showing the "social reality" becomes, in the *Retomada* films, a seal of quality, for it sends the audiences back to references of *cinema novo*. In this sense, the reference to the *cinema novo* in *Central Station* brings to the fore what Jameson defines as

pastiche. *Central Station* wears a stylistic mask, which, for authors like Bernardet, aims at assigning a guarantee of quality by using the prestige of the *cinema novo*. And, for Bernadet (2002), nostalgia and fetishism is what truly takes place in *Retomada* films as far as any relation between the two movements is made. There is a sense in which the film also relates to the issue of nostalgia, as defined by Jameson, for, in using the *sertão*, the film gains a timeless aspect. It could either be placed in the 1940s or the 1990s. The lack of time markers in the mise-en-scène, and even in the theme itself, makes this eternal past/present possible, which brings us back to Jameson's argument that we seem to be somehow incapable of dealing with the present with elements from the present.

In taking a closer look at the film, the reviews, and the hypothesis, some considerations can be made. Firstly, the film seems to bring about the issue of identity in a number of elements; however, the word "identity" is never used, it can only be inferred. Some of these elements were explored in the third chapter, such as the journey and the change it caused in the characters (who were clearly in a process of search, which this author believes to entail that of a personal and national identity). Secondly, the opposition between the urban center and the *sertão* is, as a number of authors suggest, one of the most

remarkable elements in the film. This opposition is also criticized as naïve, for it puts forward a notion that there is no goodness in the city and no badness in the *sertão*. However, according to Hall's perspective on essentialist identities, this naïve positioning towards the *sertão* could also be seen as an attempt to "(re)discover" identities in order to forge a sense of national cultural identity, giving people stable frames of references, which are important for manufacturing identities. Thirdly, the camera focus, too, is an element that calls the attention of the attentive viewer. It changes, along with the framing of the characters and setting, throughout the film. The film begins with short focus lenses and, by the end of the film, the use of long focus lenses predominate. What this seems to indicate is that there is a kind of blurriness in the beginning that coincides with the condition of the characters, who were themselves "blurred" and undefined. As the film develops, however, not only the characters change, but the camera focus accompanies this change, giving the impression that it comments on the movement from "blurriness" to a more "defined" identity.

In general, it could be said that the reviews contemplated focused less on the issue of identity, in an explicit way, than was initially expected. They explicitly focused mostly on the characters and

on the quality of the film than on the country and the metaphorical implications of the journey in terms of identity. Few critics actually used the word "identity," and these were Luiz Zanin Oricchio, Lúcia Nagib, Kita Kempley, Thomas Kevin, and Darién J. Davis. However, many critics tackled issues related to identity in what concerns the shaping of cultural and national identities, such as Marcello Coelho, who mentioned the implications of the "*virem-se*" approach for the population, thus resulting in a change in frames of references for the people. Ruy Gardier, too, nails the subject by arguing that what *Central Station* attempted to do is what Brazilian cinema has been trying to do since its infancy, which is a "tentativa de elaboração de uma imagem própria."[29] And this attempt to elaborate a self image seems to be closely connected to what Hall calls the "imaginative rediscovery," that is, the "discovery" of an identity that encompasses traits that the national population can and may invoke in order to forge the feeling of national unity, even though Gardnier does not speak of this attempt in a positive tone in his article.

Finally, this thesis attempted to carry out, to a certain extent, what Fernando Mascarello (2008), suggests in his article *Reinventando*

[29] The attempt to elaborate a self image.

o Cinema Nacional, namely that analyses should consider not only the filmic text, but also the elements that are extraneous to it, such as reviews, reception, and so on. The present study considered the Brazilian cinema context in which *Central Station* was produced, as well as a number of reviews of Brazilian and American critics. I believe it would be interesting, in a future research, to gather more reviews and perhaps information on public reception in order to have a more global grasp of the public response prompted by the film, but, for the present study, given the length of the work, it was not possible to do that.

In a personal level, this research meant carrying out a study in an area that became very dear to me for three reasons. First, after attending classes on Brazilian cinema lectured by Professor Robert Stam, I became increasingly aware of the need to study more deeply the history of my country's cinema. It became clear to me that in understanding one's own national cinema it becomes easier to connect its history to a more global cinema history. Second, after my experience as a member of the Jury in the Cinema Festival of Gramado, in 2007, I understood the importance of assigning more importance to our national cinema in the sense that it not only reveals traits of our cultural identities, from North to South, thus making possible a deeper

understanding of our own country, but it also results in a sector that has the power to employ millions of creative, engaged and professional minds. These professionals seem eager for a working Brazilian cinema, one that guarantees not only production, but also a functioning distribution and exhibition system. By studying Brazilian cinema it is possible to identify the areas which lack investment and thus try and solve these issues with a more informed perspective. Third, I have always had the curiosity to study the issue of "identity." Our contemporary world is crowded with so many references that it seems paramount to step back and analyze some of the sources of references, cinema being one of them, in order to understand the workings of what makes us what we are. The present work on *Central Station*, I find, is the marriage of these three mentioned drives. Future works, I believe, could involve a more inclusive review of the literature in terms of Brazilian cinema, considering other moments other than the *Retomada*, and identity theories. This could be done in order to analyze the issue of identity with a more global perspective, based on the assumption that this is, as Ruy Gardnier suggests, one of the battles Brazilian cinema has been fighting since its infancy.

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APPENDIX I - IMAGES

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APPENDIX II – *CENTRAL STATION'S* CREDITS

Film: *Central do Brasil*

Director: Walter Salles

Producers: Arthur Cohn and Martine de Clermont-Tonnerre

Screenplay: João Emanuel Carneiro and Marcos Bernstein

Director of Photography: Walter Carvalho

Editor: Isabelle Rathery and Felipe Lacerda

Art Director: Cássio Amarante and Carla Caffé

Music: Antônio Pinto and Jaques Morelembaum

Reel time: 1:46

Release date: 3 April 1998

American theatrical title: Central Station

German theatrical title: Central Station

French theatrical title: Central do Brasil