

The image, the sound and the fury: the representation of violence in the Brazilian documentary

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Foreword

DURING the 1980's, the Brazilians witnessed a series of events that had a great influence in the country's history. In the political sphere, it can be mentioned, among other things, the campaign for *Diretas já* (Direct Elections Now) and the election of the first civilian president as the fact that represented the end of just over two decades of military regime. In the economic sphere, inflation and recession marked in an indelible manner that period as the "lost decade". Such situation didn't become more mild with the economic plans to fight the economic crisis executed by José Sarney's transition government, vice-president elected in the ballot led by Tancredo Neves and who was invested in office due to the latter's death.

As usual in our history, the moments of economic collapse are felt in a cruel manner by the poorer layers of the population. In a study that he published in the early 1990's, Celso Furtado (1992), stated that:

Everybody notices that the considerable productivity increase that took place in Brazil in the last forty years consistently operated to concentrate the assets in the hands of a few, while great masses of the population remained without the personal equipment with which they value themselves in the markets.

How would that income concentration in the hands of a few be changed in an economic system the goal of which is to preserve that unjust richness division? Once again let's see what Furtado has to say (1992, p.54):

The great question is how to change the mechanism that leads to that perverse asset distribution, in terms of the things and of the personal qualifications. There's no doubt that the decisive factor to determine the primary income distribution can be found there. And it can only be expected that the market forces ensure the reproduction of that situation and even feed the tendency to its aggravation.

In that period of political transition and of profound economic instability, Brazil also witnessed the emergence in its cities of the increase of crime and criminality¹, which brought to the daily national life a sad topic: violence.

When we state that violence became a part of the daily life of the Brazilians in those last three decades that doesn't mean that it was unprecedented among us. We simply pointed out that it was from the 1980's on that it became present in a significant manner. As Alba Zaluar pointed out (1998, p.246-7):

The theme of violence, even though it already worried the population back then, remained almost forgotten until the last years of this decade [the 1980's], when it became one of the themes that occupies the most the public debate in the great press, as well as the academic debate in seminars and congresses. It became a part of the daily chats at home, in the street, at school, in the shops, in the newspapers, in the radios, in all television channels, in the inquiries and law-suits, wherever people commented what was going on and what could go on. It was equally incorporated in the informal practices, belonging to the sphere of the daily life tacit agreements, which are not explained in any code but people agree to them in their social interactions, acquiring the invisibility of what is "natural" or common, even in the sphere of the institutions created to defend the law.

A natural consequence of that state of things is that violence started to stand out and to be discussed in the press, in the soap operas, in literature, in music, in the comics and in the movies.

The purpose of this article is to discuss some issues brought forth by the contemporary Brazilian documentary on violence. For that reason, we chose as analysis objects the following undertakings: *News from a personal war* (João Moreira Salles and Kátia Lund – 1998/1999), *Bus 174* (José Padilha – 2002), *Justice* (Maria Augusta Ramos – 2004) and *Falcon: boys of the drug trade* (MV Bill and Celso Athayde – 2006).

Those undertakings seek to expose the impact of violence on the Brazilian society from several angles: drugs traffic and its effects on the lives of the people involved directly or indirectly with it (*News* and *Falcon*), the Brazilian criminal justice and its characters: lawyers, judges, accused people and their relatives (*Justice*) and violence as uprootedness (*Bus 174*).

Violence is not an unprecedented fact in our cinematography. In the silent phase of our cinema, famous crimes and criminals were depicted in the Brazilian screens in such undertakings as: *The stranglers of Rio* (1906), *Rocca*, *Carleto and Pegatto in prison* (1906), *The sinister suitcase* (1908), *The suitcase crime* (1908), *The Paula Matos crime* (1913), *The Banhados crime* (1913), *Dioguinho* (1916), *The Cravinhos crime* (1920).

Those silent films were contemporary of the economic and social transformations that the country underwent in the beginning of the last

century. In his study about crime in the city of São Paulo between 1880 and 1924, Boris Fausto (2001, p.19) stated that:

The choice of the period and the setting of the limit dates are not casual. As it is known, during those years, together with nationwide social processes and as an integral part of them, São Paulo experienced an intense economic and demographic growth, in which immigration played a crucial role. For several reasons – some general, others related to peculiar conditions –, the city became a prolific sphere for the study of delinquency, bringing up to date in a defiant manner classical issues such as those of the correlations between criminality and urban growth, criminality and color, criminality and immigrant population, to stick to only a few examples.

The historical situation of the country, both in the beginning of the 20th century and in the transition from that to the 21st century, seems to always offer reasons for the debate of the relations between criminality and disordered urban growth, criminality and social discrimination. The cinema participated in that debate in both occasions. If, in the first case, many of them weren't preserved, in the second one they are moving among us through the movie theaters, the television networks and the versions released in the video stores.

News from a personal war or the crisis without solution

Originally made to be shown on a Brazilian cable TV network, *News from a personal war*, a documentary by João Moreira Salles and Kátia Lund, presents a panel of the violent conflicts waged between the drug dealers and the police, which transformed the city of Rio de Janeiro into a war zone that names the film.

In the opening sequence, the dark screen quickly vanishes and shows us civil policemen transporting drugs apprehended during the previous month to be incinerated. While we see that process, a voice in *off* provides data about the repression to crime, drugs trade, and the purpose of the documentary:

On the first Tuesday of each month a police car escorted by three cars of the civil police leaves Suburban Avenue in Rio de Janeiro, where it's located the headquarters of the police station in charge of the repression to narcotics, and comes to this junkyard in Caju neighborhood. The convoy transports all the drug seized in the previous month, an amount that may vary between 200 kg and three or four tons. In less than two hours it will all be incinerated in the high temperature oven.

The expansion of the drugs traffic from the mid-1980's on is directly responsible for the vertiginous growth of the number of homicides.² One person dies every half hour in Rio, 90% of them hit by thick caliber bullets.

The Federal Police estimates that today the drugs trade employs one hundred thousand people in Rio, that is, the same number of employees of

the city hall. Not all those people live in slums. However, the repression is concentrated exclusively in the carioca hills.

That program, shot during 1997 and 1998, heard the people more directly involved in that conflict: the policeman, the drug dealer and, in the middle of the crossfire, the dweller.

At the moment when the narrator informs that the traffic “undertaking” has the same number of employees as the carioca municipal power in its ranks, the camera leaves the Caju junkyard to fly over a carioca slum. Right after we hear the word “dweller”, a black card, with the title of the film, is inserted in the screen from tight to left.

In this brief introduction we have the object of the contravention – the drug – and the space where the repression to the trade of that same object is concentrated – the slum. During its almost two minutes, the overture of *News from a personal war* places us before an articulation between sound and image which is proper to it. The element that articulates the audiovisual time and space in the movies is editing. According to moviemaker Serguei Eisenstein (1990, p.13), its purpose is to expose the theme, the material, the plot and the action of the film in a coherent and organic manner. Let’s stick to certain procedures present in the overture of the documentary by Salles & Lund so that we can understand better the use of editing used by both moviemakers.

During the junkyard sequence, after informing us that 90% of the people murdered in Rio de Janeiro are victims of thick caliber bullets, a camera stays for a few instants in the drug being consumed by the high temperature oven’s flames. From that image of the flames and of the narcotics – a symbolic picture that ties violence to drugs –, we’re taken to an aerial shot of the slums, the place where the common opinion traditionally associates as the main source of violence of the city. And, even if not everybody involved in the illegal business of drugs live in the carioca hills, that’s where the police repression to its trade is concentrated. The overture brings within it all the groups that will be interviewed during the documentary: the police, the drug dealers³ and the slum population.

That alternation among the police, the drug dealer and the slum dweller is present throughout the entire documentary and is its organizing principle. The moviemakers make up a panel of the violence in Rio de Janeiro by means of an esthetic cinematographic resource which is the parallel editing⁴ among those characters. Each testimony by a policeman is followed by the one of a drug dealer. They, in turn, are interposed with the interviews made with slum dwellers.

The first policeman to give his testimony is captain Rodrigo Pimentel, of the Special Police Operations Battalion (Bope). In his first intervention, while answering a question, he stated that he was participating of a war – that

of the combat to traffic. The difference in that kind of war is that he goes home everyday.

The first drug dealer is a minor that presents himself to us by means of a rap that talks about the arms and the fight against the policemen. After that, another peculiar person from traffic emerges who, wearing a hood, tells us that if he did rob it wasn't to sniff cocaine, but to eat, to help his family and to tidy himself up.

The first dweller to give her testimony is Hilda, who describes her difficult daily life: waking up at two o'clock in the morning to deliver newspapers, come back at seven to take the children to school, go back to her house on the hill once again to do her domestic chores. Her day ends at ten o'clock at night, after making dinner for her husband and, right after that, "fainting" so she can recover for another day of hard work.

The next representative of the dwellers is a couple made up of Adão, Janete and their daughter Luanda. The first one sings a samba together with his daughter while his wife spreads clothes on the clothesline. That's what they say:

Janete – Traffic improved things in one side but not in another. Because before there was the traffic, when the police got into the slum it entered kicking your front door, already breaking everything. So when those arms entered the community through drugs, they [the police] had to become more cautious, got it?

Adão – They're afraid.

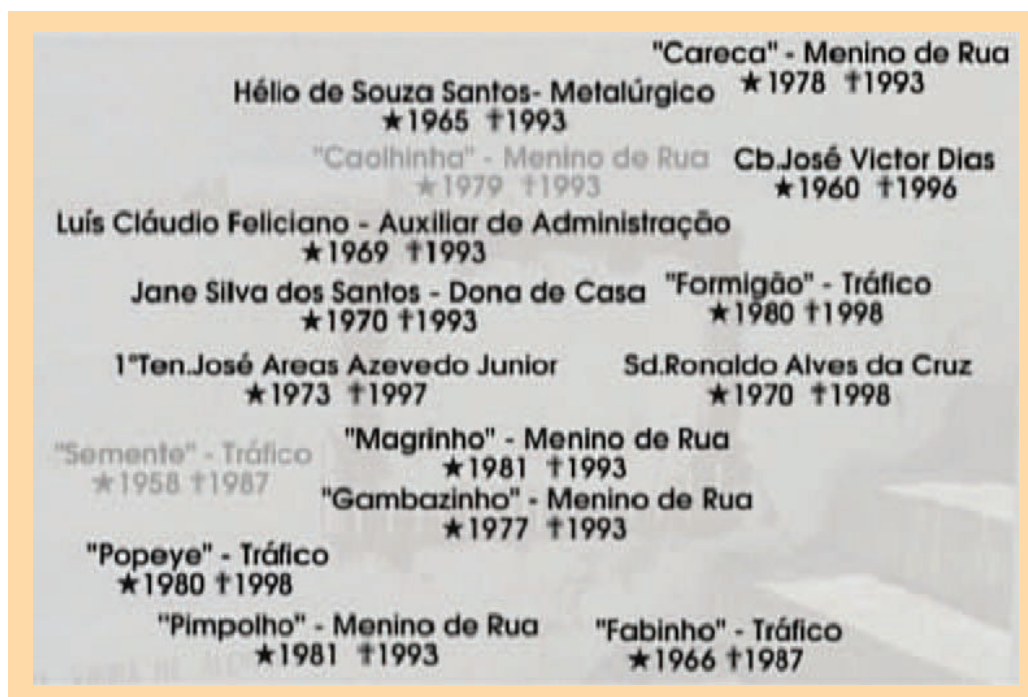
Janete – They're afraid because they're aware that this new generation, those young people have a suicidal spirit. They don't care if they die or kill. They want to defend the community from that violent entrance by the police. That's the good side of the arms.

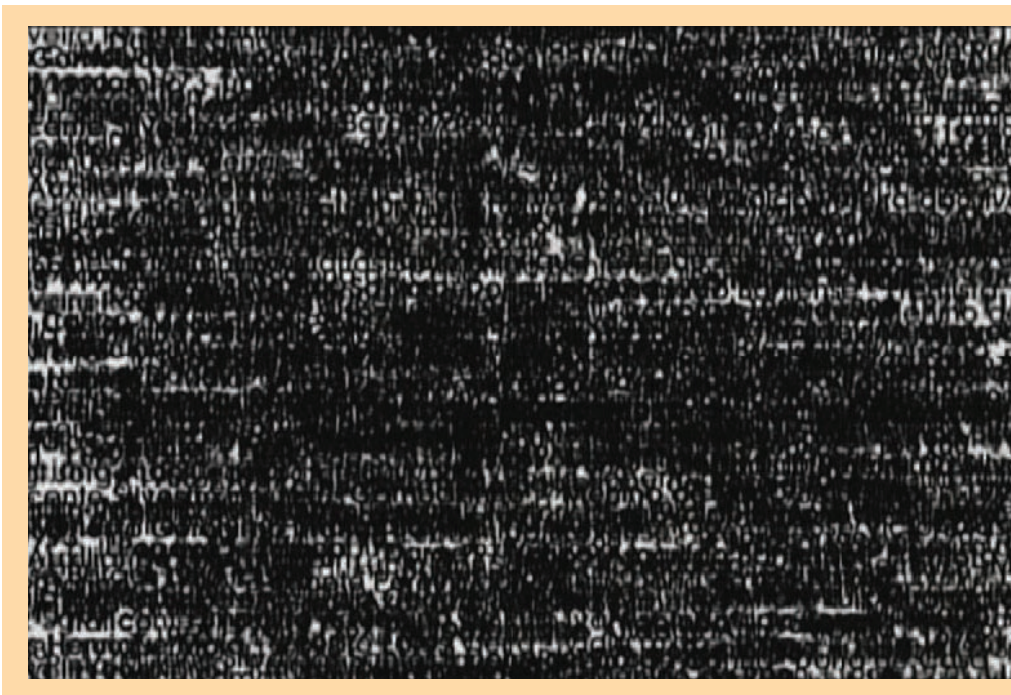
Now, the negative side, the cruel side of the arms is that when they have to change from people down there or from our community they won't measure, they don't care if it's a minor or not, got it? If they can kill, quarter, cut and leave it there for everyone to see as an example, so that nobody will hesitate or he will go to the ditch, they're capable of doing that.

The way the moviemakers treated Adão, Janete and Luanda, leads us to make a brief comment on how that family is presented. The only characters to have their testimonies taken at their home – the others were shot in workplaces or on open air –, they're shown in a light, relaxed manner, with the camera placed as a person sitting on a couch or on a chair for a visit. The samba, Luanda's delicate face, the captivating characters of Janete and Adão take us away from the stereotypes that often accompany the dwellers of the carioca slums. The generous welcome with which they "host" us, the spectators, in their home, the sincere and direct way they address the camera

makes us support those people who are in the middle of the crossfire of that drugs war.

Figure 1 – The corpses of the drug trafficking war.





Resuming our analysis of the documentary's narrative structure until its end, it will maintain that alternation between policemen testimonies and those of drug dealers, sometimes interspersed by testimonies by the slum dwellers. As we know, in the traditional films the parallel actions always move

towards a solution. Let's once again think about the elaborate sequences of last-minute rescues that often end with the saving of the threatened innocence.

If we stated before that Salles & Lund use editing as their central strategy to present the characters in *News*, what might be its conclusion, its proposal to solve the conflict? In its final sequence, the film shows the funeral of a drug dealer and of a policeman. Over those images we hear pessimistic testimonies:

A drug dealer: I will stay in this life until I die. That's my sin. I've made my sin...

Hélio Luz (chief of the Civil Police of Rio de Janeiro): If the drugs traffic issue is serious, the good forces have already lost the war. Because they have been there for a long time and it hasn't solve the problem.

Rodrigo Pimentel (captain of Bope): The only segment of the State power that goes up the hill is the police. But the police alone can't do it...

José Carlos Gregório (one of the founders of Comando Vermelho): I have taken over penitentiaries armed: machine-gun, money, pistol, gun. I have robbed police stations and police cars. What for? What history have I made? Is crime history? It's not history...

Rodrigo Pimentel: I arrive at home, sometimes even coming from a tough operation in which one of our policemen was shot and one drug dealer was killed. Our relatives don't even ask how was our day anymore, how was the operation, if it was dangerous. They don't ask it anymore... I'm tired, really tired of this job...

The documentary proposes to us an ending in which there's no apparent solution, or better still, it concludes that the only path seems to be that of the never-ending private war. The final image summarizes in a very proper manner that state of mind: in the white screen, composed over a grave, gradually emerge names of victims of the violence caused by the drugs traffic. They are homeless kids, drug dealers, policemen, and workers. For each name that emerges the screen gets progressively darker. In the last moment, the most profound darkness prevails.

News is also relevant for the influence it exercised on other later films, such as *City of God* and *Almost two brothers*. Directed by Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, *City of God* is based on the novel with the same name by Paulo Lins. The writer is one of the people interviewed in *News*, in a testimony made before his book was published. He's the one who tells us about the history of drugs traffic in Rio, about the influence that the inmates in Ilha Grande exercise on the common prisoners, providing those organizational elements that would later be used to constitute the crime organization by means of such groups as Comando Vermelho. Lins was also the screenwriter

of *Almost two brothers*, a film in which that proximity between political and common prisoners that took place in the military regime prisons is explored.

***Bus 174* and violence as uprootedness**

Botanical Garden, city of São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro, June 12th, 2000. Electromagnetic waves cross the ether of the marvelous city to take to the households of millions of Brazilians just over five hours of live images of urban violence, which is common in many metropolis. The images revealed that a young man, when trying to rob a bus, had his action interrupted by the police and by the press, who surrounded the vehicle. The frustrated robbery suddenly became a kidnap.

Two years later, director José Padilha made the documentary *Bus 174*, in which he resumed the event mentioned above to try to understand it. In that process, the moviemaker presented its main protagonist: Sandro do Nascimento – the kidnaper.

Artist Yvonne Bezerra de Mello, who knew Sandro since the period when she developed a social work with the homeless kids of Candelária, in her testimony, informs that Sandro saw the violent murder of his mother at Rato Molhado slum, when he was six years old. With nobody to support him – he didn't know his father –, the boy ended up living in the street, first in Méier and later in the Southern Zone, in Copacabana. Yvonne claims that there it's easier to get money with tourists. With the family ties violently cut, child eventually joined a gang of homeless boys. Sandro was one of the boys who survived the Candelária massacre.

Each person must receive from his or her community the totality of his or her intellectual, spiritual and moral lives. When that happens, the human being is actively participating in the collectivity and, at the same time that he or she takes from it the values of its tradition, he or she adds others, which will be present in the future of that same community. Simone Weil (1996) calls this state of things rooting, and which, according to her, is one of the most important and unknown needs of the human soul. When the ties of the subjects with their collectivity are broken, occurs what Weil defined as uprootedness. According to the thinker-worker there's uprootedness, among other things, in the military conquests and also in the social relations within a same country.

Violence turned Sandro into an uprooted person. His mother's murder destroyed his home and all the feeling of belonging to a group. That sent him into the street, where he had to face the harsh survival conditions existent in that environment. We can confirm that when we hear the testimony of a young girl who had met Sandro, in the first time he arrived in Copacabana. According to her, everyone that goes to the street arrives there as an innocent person. It's the difficulty to survive that makes them become adults quickly.⁵

Once again, Yvonne returns to the screen to tell us that the homeless kids are those who have cut any family, home or community tie. They forgot the past, they only live the present.

Sandro is an uprooted young man who, in his attempt to rob the bus, noticed that he was surrounded by the police forces and by the television network cameras. Suddenly, he realized that he was the protagonist of a violent and bitter drama: the boy who brutally witnessed his mother's murder saw the circle close around him.

According to David Bordwell (1976), the camera has an ubiquitous power:

Cinema is an improvement of the vision because the camera's eye, unlike the spectator's eye, can't be hindered by fences, walls or signs. If something interferes with its safe progress within a scene, we know that it's an artificial and temporary obstacle.

That power is also present in Padilha's documentary. Inside the bus, Sandro notices and acknowledges the importance of the television cameras that surround him, since he knows that they may take him to places where he would hardly have access. It's for them that he elaborates his performance.⁶

When other characters mention the influence of the television cameras on Sandro's behavior, we find out that it's not only him who addresses them. He chooses one of the hostages to write in the bus windows messages for the spectators who surround the vehicle. Let's allow her to tell us how it all happened:

He was disarranging one of the purses and got the lipstick. He gave it to me himself. And then he called me: "Come here, girl, come write in front of the bus".

I don't know what crossed my mind at the moment to say: "Oh, I will write for everyone outside to see it". I don't know if was the presence of mind or what was it, but something told me: "Write it backwards". Because when you're playing you write it backwards, but when you have a gun on your head it's not so simple...

That testimony is followed by the opinion of a policeman: "His level of violence is directly related to the presence of the cameras. He was the one who wanted to show himself, who wanted to perform his play".

Next, the girl who was writing messages with the lipstick speaks once again. That's when we find out that she was also "performing" to the camera: "I had the feeling that the whole world would be seeing that, that it would be broadcasted". At this point the camera resumes its aerial journey to show us, that time around, the TV transmission towers installed on top of a mountain.

The towers, shot in the foreground, submit the landscape to their power, subjugate even Rio de Janeiro's most important references: the Sugar Loaf and the Christ, the Redeemer statue, which are reduced to a background that gains symbolic dimensions.

The described scene emphasizes the testimonies simultaneous to it:

I believe that the television allowed him to feel powerful, since he knew that he was being filmed and that he wanted to be filmed. [*Another hostage of Sandro*]

He played it very well. But he knew what would happen if he was caught. So that was also the means for him to protect himself. [*Yvonne Bezerra de Mello*]

The media is something that provides confidence to the kidnaper. Of course! It's the certainty that I won't be executed, killed! [*Rodrigo Pimentel*]

The extension of that situation also worked as a space to mean something to someone, as a space to show that he was powerful, to show that he existed, after all. And that was something as crucial as solving the situation of getting out of there alive. Therefore, the television cameras were important to him. [*Another hostage*]

To Sandro, the cameras had a crucial importance. While he was before them, his life would be guaranteed. That's the reason for his interest to extend his performance as much as he could. For a brief moment, *Bus 174* makes us think that Sandro was participating, even if it was an illusion, of a community thanks to the television cameras. However, such participation

Figure 2 – Sandro among the kids in Candelária



Figura 3 – Sandro and a hostage of Bus 174



derives from the intolerance, the violence, and the desperate loneliness. Its conclusion could only be fatal. We dare to say that the “rooting” that the television cameras offered to him is, in fact, the other cruel side of its opposite, uprootedness.

Justice – the separation between State and citizen

We rely on a passage of *Democracy in America*, by Aléxis de Tocqueville (1977, p.209-10), to begin our dialogue with the film by Maria Augusta Ramos:

I understand a jury as being a certain number of citizens, randomly chosen and temporarily invested of the right to judge. Applying the jury to the repression of the crimes seems to me to introduce in the government an eminently republican institution. I will my point of view: the institution of the jury can be either aristocratic or democratic, according to the class where the jurors come from; but it always maintains a republican character, since it places the real direction of the society in the hands of the governed people, or of a portion among them, instead of in the hands of the rulers. Power is never anything beyond a temporary success element: the idea of right comes directly after it. A government reduced to being unable to reach its enemies except in the battlefield would be quickly destroyed. Thus, the true confirmation of the political laws is found in the penal laws, and if there's a lack of confirmation, sooner or later the law loses its power. Therefore, he who judges the criminal is really the lord of the society. Well, the institution of the jury places the people themselves, or at least a class of citizens, in the judge's chair. For that very reason, the instruction of the jury places the direction of the society in the hands of the people or of that class.

We find in Tocqueville's view about the American justice the concept of jury as a mechanism of popular participation not only in the legislative scope, but in the broader field of democracy. The jury represents the people in the judicial instance of the tribunal, in the law space where the accused people are absolved or convicted. Therefore, the people have an important function in the penal process that, for Tocqueville, is nothing more than a political process. To exercise the law, in the participative form of the popular jury, is to exercise politics in a high level. That, of course, doesn't exempt the North American justice or any other from mistakes. However, the legislative system shown in *Democracy in America* seems to us to be democratic in its essence.

Hollywood often resorts to tribunals in many of its films. It's the case of *Lincoln's youth* (John Ford), *Judgement in Nuremberg*, *Accusation witness* (Billy Wilder), *Anatomy of a crime* (Otto Preminger), *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme) and many others. The TV series "Law and order", on the air since 1990, has the following phrase in its overture: "In the criminal justice system, the people are represented by two separate and equally important groups: the police that investigates the crimes and the public prosecutor's office, which sues the accused people".

We, who are used to the Hollywood court movies, get shocked when we see the Brazilian criminal justice presented on the screen in the documentary by Maria Augusta Ramos.

In the beginning of the film, a person on a wheelchair is led by a policeman through a hallway of the Rio de Janeiro State Tribunal. At the exact moment when the young man crosses a door, we find out that he's arriving in the first session of his trial. It's the judge who manages the inquiry, all the action in court takes place around him. The case is dreadful: the young man is being accused of participating in the robbery to a house. However, the wall that surrounded the place of the robbery, being high, wouldn't be overcome by someone who was lost the movement of his legs. It can be observed that even the judge is surprised with the arrest and with the trial to which the defendant is being submitted.

The impact of that first case presented by Augusta Ramos is undeniable. Her camera transforms us, in that and in the other trials shown in the film, in privileged but helpless observers. We're members of a virtual jury that can't express its opinion in the trials.

The defendants shown in *Justice* come from poor classes and who, with their limited education are incapable of understanding the meanders of the complex judiciary system they're facing. If they were educated, they could be better prepared for their defense. If they were educated and had more favorable financial conditions, they could hire good lawyers. But they don't have any of those elements.

However, we who are spectators of that film, are in better conditions than the defendants. After all, the public who watches documentaries in

Figure 4 – The defendant in his wheelchair



Figure 5 – The court session



the cinemas, buys or rents non-fiction undertakings, is mostly made up of educated people and with relatively stable social and economic conditions. For that reason, we – the audience – could be those characters who sit in the jurors' chairs of the North American court⁸.

Tocqueville considers the jury institution a mechanism to promote the equity among the citizens. Theoretically, the man who's in the juror's bench knows that someday he might be in the defendant's chair, and that

helps him to judge with greater thrift. According to the French thinker, the jury is an education instrument:

The jury serves in an unbelievable way to form the judgement and increase the people's natural enlightenment. As I understand it, that's its greatest advantage. We should consider it as a free and always open school, where each juror will educate him or herself in his or her rights, where he or she has a daily communication with the most educated and enlightened of the high classes, where the laws are taught in a practical manner and are placed at a reachable distance of his or her intelligence through the efforts of the lawyers, the judges' councils and the passions themselves of the parties involved. (Tocqueville, 1977, p.211).

The court sessions of *Justice* lead us to think the radical separation existent in Brazil between the State and the least favored classes is represented in them, particularly in the conditions in which the latter depends the most on the former. Without the economic power to help them, the excluded people are left on their own, depending only on the sentence determined by the judge, which transforms itself in an all-powerful person before the eyes of the defendants.

Falcon: boys of the drug trade – the game as a death symbol

Falcon: boys of the drug trade is the view on the illegal drugs trade by means of the individuals who perform in it and of the slums and periphery dwellers. They are people who see the problem from within. Its undertakers, directors and producers are also of the same origin. Its production was made by the Single Central of Slums (Cufa) and the direction was made by Celso Athayde and of singer and composer MV Bill.

The documentary was shown by Globo Television Network in *Fantástico*, a program aired on Sundays by the TV station, which ensured to it national repercussion.

Falcon is the name given to the boys who watch the slums during the night. Supplied with their radios, their function is to warn the drug dealers of the arrival of anyone who comes near. Those young boys can't sleep and they work hard. There are days when their working hours begin at noon and end at six o'clock in the next morning.

The purpose of the documentary is not the technical precision or the esthetic innovation. In the leaflet of the DVD version it can be read: "The language follows a typical documentary pattern. There's nothing new in the composition of the images. The editing is traditional, without any tricks, direct and linear". According to that same text, what's new about the film is its content, which "leaves the middle class, the elites and the government aware" of the great slum which Brazil became due to the ostensive presence of the drugs traffic and of the violence that it generated not only in the city of Rio de

Figure 6 – Children's game: selling the drug



Figure 7 – Another game: execution of a denouncer



Janeiro, but also in other urban centers spread throughout the country – the documentary is shot in several Brazilian regions.

The power of *Falcon* is exactly in the direct and linear editing that their undertakers used to register the theme which they decided to address.

Two moments in the film are noteworthy. The first one has to do with the mother of an adolescent drug dealer who was killed as a result of the drugs traffic. In the woman's testimony, not even the occultation mask – a distortion

of the faces created in the editing and used in almost all the interviewed people – impedes us from noticing the emotion with which she recalls her son lost to the drugs world. Her feelings of tenderness and loss strikes us when we hear her talk about the boy's preferred shorts, caps and muffler.

Another striking moment is when the camera shows us how the traffic violence penetrates in the individuals' daily life. It's the sequence of the children who turn the traffic into a game. The scenes are disturbing. Not because there's real violence, but because in that game that the boys play the cruel and violent world that surround them is represented.

The boys gather to "sell" dust and marijuana using the slangs used by the vapor – the young man who really deals: "Dust for five" (a five dollar package), marijuana! What do you want?". One of the children comments that this is how they play, "just for fun". The "children's games" continue: the bribe of policemen by the drug dealers who own the joint, the "cruel" murder of an X-9 (a denouncer).⁹

Here it's impossible not to think about the observation made by Walter Benjamin that the toys and the children's games are, in a certain way, reflections of the society where they emerge. In it the German thinker states that the child's view is imbued by the adult world, since it's in that universe that he or she develops him pr herself. And the toys that will be offered for the children to have fun are built in that universe ruled by the older people. According to the Benjamin's happy expression (2002, p.95-102), the toys are things imposed in a certain way as worship objects by the adults to the children and the latter, with their creativity, later turn into toys. In *Falcon*, that relation between the toy and the social environment acquire gloomy tones.

Conclusion

Of course this article didn't intend to exhaust the theme of violence in the Brazilian cinema. Other undertakings permit approximations with the films discussed here and other approaches as well. As an example, we can mention the documentaries *The iron rail prisoner* (Paulo Sacramento – 2002), *Jail and the street* (Liliana Sulzbach – 2006) and the fiction films, such as *Who killed Pixote* (José Joffily – 1996), *How angels are born* (Murilo Salles – 1996), *The invader* (Beto Brandt – 2001), *City of God* (Fernando Meirelles e Kátia Lund – 2002), *Carandiru* (Hector Babenco – 2002) and *Almost two brothers* (Lúcia Murat – 2005).

We mentioned before that in one of the sequences of *News from a personal war* captain of Bope Rodrigo Pimentel states that the only State agent that goes up the carioca hills is the police, and that this is not enough. The films briefly analyzed here present in their set a gloomy vision about violence in Brazil. Each undertaking is marked, in its own way, by the bitter taste of hopelessness. What can be done to change that situation? Instead of offering

answers, those films raise other issues. What we should consider is not the ability of the undertaking to solve problems, but its approximation with life, with the human things. All four documentaries commented here were efficient to execute that task.

Notes

- 1 I use those terms in the same sense as given by Boris Fausto (2001, p.19) to them: “Criminality refers to the social phenomenon in its broadest dimension, permitting the establishment of patterns by means of the verification of regularities and differences; crime has to do with the phenomenon in its uniqueness, the richness of which, in certain cases, is not within itself, as an individual case, but make way for many perceptions”.
- 2 The increase of violence from the 1980`s on was not an exclusive phenomenon of Rio de Janeiro. It happened in other Brazilian cities, as can be observed in this comment by Alba Zaluar (1998, p.249): “There`s no doubt that they [the violent crimes] increased during the 1980`s in the Brazilian metropolitan regions, during the 1990`s in cities in the heartland, particularly those located in the countless traffic routes, the more affected by the recent growing curve of the violent crimes, especially homicide among young men”. The great majority of the victims of the films analyzed here is made up of young men.
- 3 Let`s recall that this indirect mention to the drug dealers by means of the result of their activity is an anticipation of how they are presented to us during the documentary: they`re never directly identified, their faces are covered or out of focus and their names are fictional.
- 4 The parallel editing is an organizational element typical of the classical narrative cinema. It`s the literary equivalent of “at the same time”. The first moviemaker to use it with more boldness was the North American moviemaker David Wark Griffith, in his films shot during the 1910`s, with their famous sequences of last-minute rescues, in which the hero fights against obstacles that delay the saving of the female protagonist, threatened by a cruel villain.
- 5 In a chat with Ecléa Bosi, she told me the wise statement: “Childhood is about social class. It exists for some and not for others”.
- 6 Esther Hamburguer (2005) makes the following pertinent comment: “The inside of the bus, where not everything can be seen or heard, becomes almost as a backstage for what proves to be a real dramatic performance. Sandro was an actor at that time. Throughout the event he eventually played a bad guy, for which his profile was adequate”.
- 7 Rodrigo Pimentel worked in the Special Operations Battalion (Bope) at the time of the bus 174 case. Pimentel was one of the main deponents of *News from a personal war*.
- 8 The popular jury is not an inexistent element in the Brazilian courts. However, from what can be deduced from the film by Maria Augusta Ramos, it`s not present in all kinds of trial.
- 9 At the same moment when children played the game of killing the denouncer, a real X-9 was murdered a few meters away from where the boys were.

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ABSTRACT – In the last 30 years, urban violence in Brazil has reached levels that had never been seen before. The theme, which has been approached by several sectors of society, has not been ignored by the Brazilian cinema either. This article aims to discuss some issues brought up by contemporary Brazilian documentaries on this complex datum of our reality. The following films have been chosen as objects of analysis: *News from a personal war* (*Notícias de uma guerra particular*, João Moreira Salles and Kátia Lund – 1998/1999), *Bus 174* (*Ônibus 174*, José Padilha – 2002), *Justice* (*Justiça*, Maria Augusta Ramos – 2004) and *Falcon: boys of the drug trade* (*Falcão: meninos do tráfico*, MV Bill and Celso Athayde – 2006). These films expose the impact of violence on Brazilian society from different angles: the illegal drug trade and its effects on the people directly or indirectly involved with it (*News from a personal war* and *Falcon: boys of the drug trade*); the Brazilian criminal justice and its characters: lawyers, judges, the defendants and their relatives (*Justice*); and violence as an example of uprootedness (*Bus 174*).

KEYWORDS – Brazilian Cinema, Documentaries, Violence, Illegal Drug Trade, Justice, Uprootedness.

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