Transformations of a Hungry Cinema:
Images and Visibility of Hunger in Brazilian Cinema 1960s-2000s

BY

JUAN CARLOS ARIAS HERRERA
B.A., Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá, Colombia, 2003
B.A., Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombia, 2005
M.A., Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá, Colombia, 2008

THESIS

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Art History
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Chicago, 2015

Chicago, Illinois

Defense Committee:

       Hannah Higgins, Chair and Advisor
       Lisa Lee
       Virginia Miller
       Maria de los Angeles Torres, Latin American Studies
       Salome Aguilera Skvirsky, Latin American Studies

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SUMMARY

This dissertation analyzes the visibility of hunger in film—from the Cinema Novo movement of the 1960s to contemporary productions. It follows the discursive transformations of hunger as a key trope in the development of Brazilian cinema, highlighting hunger's role as a central motif—not only as the subject of specific films, but also as a place of reflection on the processes of the representation of marginality. I call hunger a *trope* to stress that it has not simply been the topic of films, nor an ethereal metaphor to rhetorically describe a socially committed cinema. Instead, the term *hunger* delineates a complex semantic field that includes several discursive strategies and artistic/political practices: it is a concept as well as a metaphor, a material reality, and an aesthetic principle.

Although it seems extremely easy to define something that we all, in different ways, have experienced, I argue that hunger is not a transparent reality, but a flexible notion shaped through a series of discourses and representations that respond to specific needs and interests. In contrast to our ingrained belief in the univocal nature of the term *hunger*, this word actually designates a complex network of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, and even aesthetic realities. I propose that a series of films throughout the history of Brazilian cinema have preserved that ambiguous and irreducible character of hunger instead of having transformed it into a digestible topic. Through the trope of hunger, Brazilian cinema has created a way to think of *that* that cannot be digested: the reality of hunger, misery and underdevelopment in Brazil.

Introduction

"When the people shall have nothing more to eat, they will eat the rich."
—Jean-Jacques Rousseau

After having lived in the city for several years, Firmino returns to his native town, a small village of *xaréu* (kingfish) fishermen, descendants of African slaves who were brought to the northeast Brazilian coast during colonial times. Not much has changed since he left. Life in the town still revolves around long hours of fishing and multiple *Candomblé*[1] rituals, two activities with a single purpose: alleviating hunger.

When the townspeople decided to stop venturing offshore in small individual rafts, fishing became a communal activity involving most of the men in town. The use of a large net from the beach proved to be safer than long night journeys out in the open sea. The worn-out net that the fishermen use, however, belongs to a white merchant, who allows them to use it for what he considers a "reasonable" price: 97% of the profits for him, 2% for the workers, and 1% for the intermediary.

In the years since he left the town, Firmino has changed, and he wants the entire town to see it. Wearing brand-new, elegant clothes, he proclaims the need for radical change: "*Candomblé* won't solve anything! We have to fight, resist. Our time is coming, brother." Facing the passive, resigned responses of his village fellows, Firmino decides to secretly cut the fishing net that the men have just sewn up. Later he explains to his lover: "That's why I cut the net. When their stomach is aching with hunger, they will scream."

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[1] *Candomblé* is a syncretic religion of African influences practiced primarily in Brazil since the 16th century.

Firmino's actions directly oppose a commonsense reaction to hunger: Instead of helping the hungry, he attempts to increase their suffering. Instead of alleviating their hunger, he wants to make it even more intense. This subversive attitude condenses the spirit of the young Glauber Rocha, who gave Firmino life on screen. In *Barravento* (1962)—and later in *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (1964) [Black god, white devil]—Rocha began to explore an idea that transformed film production in Brazil in the 1960s: a radical affirmation of hunger as a means of liberation. In 1965 Rocha used an invitation to a seminar on Third World cinema in Genoa, Italy, as an opportunity to explain and expand upon this idea. In his oral intervention in the seminar, which would later become his renowned manifesto *Aesthetics of Hunger*, Rocha affirmed that hunger was the core not only of his films, but also of an entire movement of new Brazilian filmmakers that had emerged since the late 1950s. According to Rocha, Cinema Novo opposed the traditional humanitarian approach to hunger by avoiding plaintive and paternalist representations of "the other." The movement proposed using hunger not simply as the main subject of its films, but also as a creation principle for a political cinema committed to the transformation of Latin American social reality.

Although the subject of hunger had been addressed in previous films, it was Rocha who transformed it into a central concept in the history of Brazilian cinema. During the 1960s and part of the 1970s the term *hunger* became a permanent reference, defining a new mode of cultural production. It combined both the issues of poverty and underdevelopment in Brazil, and the desire to create new aesthetic strategies to solve those issues. Its influence was such that, since the 1980s, historical accounts of Brazilian cinema have routinely referred to the early 1960s as the years of a "cinema of hunger" (Johnson and Stam 1995; López 1997). As Lúcia Nagib (2007) affirmed, "In the 1960s, Brazilian cinema seemed to define itself by the stomach" (66).

Despite its undeniable significance, the notion of hunger seems to have lost its prominence by the end of the 1960s. Rocha himself wrote a second manifesto in 1971 called *Aesthetics of Dream*, in which he seems to have abandoned the trope of hunger in favor of a defense of irrationality. The traditional historical accounts of Brazilian cinema reaffirm this perspective by identifying the trope of hunger with a specific period of national production that came to an end in the mid- or late 1960s, giving way to new concepts and neologisms to define film creation: cannibalism, garbage, and Tropicalismo, among others. Besides tracking how and why the concept of hunger became so crucial to the articulation of a political cinema in Brazil during the 1960s, I critically engage with these historical accounts in order to show that this trope, far from having disappeared, has had a crucial role in the development of a national cinema up to the present.

This dissertation analyzes the visibility of hunger in film—from the Cinema Novo movement of the 1960s to contemporary productions. It follows the discursive transformations of hunger as a key trope in the development of Brazilian cinema, highlighting hunger's role as a central motif—not only as the subject of specific films, but also as a place of reflection on the processes of the representation of marginality. I call hunger a *trope* to stress that it has not simply been the topic of films, nor an ethereal metaphor to rhetorically describe a socially committed cinema. Instead, the term *hunger* delineates a complex semantic field that includes several discursive strategies and artistic/political practices: it is a concept as well as a metaphor, a material reality, and an aesthetic principle. Hunger condenses a series of problems that, as Ivana Bentes (2003) affirmed, remain unresolved: not only the persistence of the material reality of hunger, but, more specifically, the representation of such a reality. The latter is the main issue that motivates my research: How does the filmmaker present those realities that seem to exceed any image or discourse? How does he or she name the specific,

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local reality of hunger without reducing it to already known structures or falling into victimization, paternalism, or tearful humanism? In a period that witnesses the creation of hundreds of representations of hunger, misery, and waste, what is the appropriate language (oral, written, or visual) to present the irreducible character and historical singularity of that reality? How are we to understand the other when we name him or her as "hungry" or "poor"? What image of that other is produced and perpetuated when humanitarian intervention is demanded?

Most of the literature on hunger produced in the last century uses statistics and numbers as facts. Many of these texts offer numerical records as incontrovertible evidence of the gravity of the situation, a call to help those multitudes suffering from starvation and malnutrition. Numbers are assumed to be indisputable facts, unquestionable truths; little is said about how these numbers are calculated or how they conveniently respond to concrete historical-political discourses. In fact, the rhetorical effectiveness of numbers relies on our familiarity with the object they measure. The numbers that tell us about the world's hunger crisis rest on a basic assumption: we all know what hunger is—or, at least, it is possible to define and, consequently, to measure hunger. It seems extremely easy to define something that we all, in different ways, have experienced: We all know that there is chronic hunger around the world, that millions of people suffer from it, and that some of them even die. We have all seen stories and images of distant others with skeletal bodies and swollen bellies. We experience our own hunger—temporary, almost banal—*with* that knowledge. As Sharman Apt Russell (2005) explained, "Hunger cannot be ignored. . . . You cannot live without hunger. You cannot live with hunger. Hunger begins your exchange with the world" (230).

That knowledge of hunger played an important role in shaping my eating habits during childhood. I grew up with the abstract image of starving children on the other side of the

world, ones who did not have the opportunity to eat what I wanted to reject from my plate. What child has not heard the refrain "There are starving children in Africa"? As an emotional appeal (manipulation), this statement reveals a concrete representation of hunger that permeates our social habits and perceptions. Although I was too young to know where Africa was, it became directly associated with a lacking other. In my mind, Africa was a land of hunger, a place where innocent victims did not have what I had. But the continent's name was no more than an empty signifier; the place was interchangeable as long as it was distant. (Strangely, the argument never identified the children in my own Colombian Pacific region who were actually suffering from starvation a few miles away from me: clearly, there is always a Third World other, even for the Third World self.) My image of the other was completely blurred; it was there only to produce a guilty feeling and, therefore, an immediate action (eating).

Eventually, the argument lost its efficacy—not because I discovered the logical fallacy behind it, but because the images of starving children lost their power to impress. The empty repetition of the statement produced in me an apparent familiarization with hunger. Now it was an everyday anecdote, innocent and innocuous. There were starving children *there*, and I was *here* with my food; the division seemed natural. Media images reinforced the familiar other: representations of Africa always included scenes of emaciated children in dry, barren landscapes. Africa became a synonym of "a dying malnourished child in a corner with outstretched arms" (Alam 2007, 60). This prototypical image of the starving other has marked our representations of hunger for decades and has even led some people to think that hunger can be exclusively defined in this way.

In January 2003, the Brazilian journalist and politician João Mellão Neto published an opinion column in *Estadão* criticizing the state policies against hunger that former president

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Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva had proposed implementing during his first term in office. According to Mellão Neto (n.d.), one of the main failures of Lula's programs was an incorrect diagnosis of the severity of hunger in Brazil. From his perspective, hunger was only a secondary issue, less important than misery. To support his argument, Neto appealed to the media coverage of the *caravana da fome* (caravan against hunger), a trip that the president and complete Cabinet took with the goal of witnessing the real conditions of hunger in some states in the northeast of Brazil:

> Just look at the pictures of the "fometur" (hunger tour) published in the press to see that Lula failed to pose next to a real hungry person. None of the people in the pictures even remotely resembled those skeletal figures we have come to see in reports on the sub-Saharan Africa or some regions of Asia. What we saw was actually misery. And that complicates everything. Hunger is solved by providing food. Misery is a more complex issue (8).

For Neto the image of hungry people in Brazil did not correspond to the images of the starving other that the media has shaped for decades. Therefore, these people were not actually hungry, only poor. It is clear that for this improvised critic "hunger" only constituted the absolute absence of food and its visible effect on the human body. As Jenny Edkins (2000) pointed out, modern accounts of hunger share this same approach to the issue. Famines, for instance, are perceived as episodes of mass starvation during which thousands lose their lives as a result of lack of food. Humanitarian aid provides food and the basic means for bare survival. It aims at "preserving the life of the biological organism rather than restoring the means of livelihood to the community" (39). Hunger is thus reduced to a threat to biological life.

It is extremely simplistic, however, to reduce all the social manifestations of hunger to the biological reality of lacking food. Hunger has multiple connotations. As Russell (2005) keenly showed, some of these even contradict the biological assumption that defines hunger

as a lack or deficiency. Both hunger strikes and the spectacles of hunger artists, for example, show such a biological definition to be insufficient.

In contrast to our ingrained belief in the univocal nature of the term *hunger*, this word actually designates a complex network of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, and even aesthetic realities. Even the scientific definition of hunger has proved to be flexible and subject to multiple debates. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has repeatedly changed its methods of measuring hunger in order to demonstrate reductions in the number of chronically undernourished people around the world. Martín Caparrós (2014) affirmed that the rate of hunger in 1990 has been adjusted several times in order to make current numbers look more favorable by comparison. A discussion about the number of hungry people in Brazil during the first decade of the twenty-first century illustrates how ambiguous statistics can be. In 2006 two researchers at the Universidade de São Paulo questioned the perception of hunger as a "socially relevant" issue in Brazil. According to them, the government ignored evidence in the field of nutritional epidemiology in order to stress the urgent need to take action against hunger in the country (Coutinho and Lucatelli 2006). President Lula's policies were supported by the statistic that more than forty million Brazilians were suffering from hunger in 2003. This number, however, was calculated based on the relationship between family income and food security, instead of the number of low-weight individuals within a specific region. Thus, if hunger is defined as the condition of food insecurity produced by an income below the poverty line, there were forty-six million hungry persons in Brazil in 2003. If, instead, hunger is defined, as Marília Coutinho and Márcio Lucatelli proposed, as the presence of adults with a body mass index of less than 18.5 kg/m^2, hunger was under control in Brazil, and thus irrelevant as a focus of state policies.

The ambiguity of the term reveals that hunger is not a transparent reality, but rather a flexible notion shaped through a series of discourses and representations that respond to specific needs and interests. In spite of all the numbers and images around it, our daily experiences, and our sympathy for the other, hunger remains strange and unfamiliar—even for those who experience it in extreme conditions. Thus, in this work I argue that a series of films made throughout the history of Brazilian cinema have preserved that irreducible character of hunger instead of transforming it into a digestible topic. Through the trope of hunger, Brazilian cinema has created a way to think about that which cannot be digested: the reality of hunger, misery, and underdevelopment in Brazil.

In the last decade, the topic of hunger had a central place in the public arena in Brazil, since President Lula established the fight against hunger as the main goal of his administration. He created multiple state policies and institutions, along with a massive media campaign that placed hunger at the center of the common imagination. In September 2014, Brazilian media announced news that seemed to bring to a close a long cycle of collective efforts: the FAO had permanently removed Brazil from the world hunger map. The journal *Folha de São Paulo* enthusiastically reported, "Brazil *overcame* the problem of hunger, according to FAO's report" (Foreque 2014 [italics are mine]). Today, when a discourse on the end of hunger has emerged, when a series of representations aims to stress our triumph over this issue, it is necessary to question the dynamics of the visibility of hunger, and the role that cinema has played in the perceptions of that reality.

As I discuss in chapters 1 and 2 of this dissertation, hunger is not external to its forms of visibility. My intention is not, however, to write a history of the representations of hunger in Brazilian cinema. This type of study—which is very popular today—assumes that any subject can be represented by any cultural artifact, and therefore focuses only on the

mechanisms of such processes of representation. These studies take for granted the concept of representation and only analyze its products. My interest, in contrast, is to examine how hunger has been thought of as an aesthetic principle that brings into question the very concept of representation. It is important to understand hunger not simply as a group of material conditions connected to food scarcity and malnutrition, but also as a political trope centered on the permanent critique of the processes of representation, of the terms we use to refer to a particular reality.

In order to alleviate social issues like hunger, it is necessary to think of the rationality that has shaped them as social issues, to understand the power dynamics within discourses and representations that we have learned to consider natural. We must develop a new language that allows us to think of Latin American reality as in permanent conflict with the discourses of development created by the First World. Thus, by focusing on hunger, my aim is not simply to stress again the gravity and absurdity of allowing thousands of people to die of starvation every day, or the shocking contrast between misery and consumption in Latin America. Rather, my goal is to demonstrate the necessity of reflecting on the terms we use to represent and think about those realities: What are the images we associate with the notion of hunger? Why do we choose those images instead of others? What discourses of power are shaping the imagery of hunger?

Focusing on the dynamics of the visibility of hunger—instead of on the material reality that affects millions of people—entails two main problems. First, there is an ethical concern: does this analytical interest in the images of hunger betray the urgent need to do something about hunger itself? As Slavoj Zizek (2008) affirmed, a critical analysis of a problem that offers no clear solution or practical advice on what to do usually meets with reproach: it seems unethical (almost immoral) to coldly analyze images of hunger in a country

where thousands are starving. This sense of urgency, however, only responds to the moral outrage of the upper classes, who attempt to legitimate their social position through an alleged knowledge and deep concern for the others' suffering. The pseudo-urgency that characterizes the liberal-humanitarian discourse has become a successful marketing tool that allows the privileged to "help" others while enjoying their position, to demonstrate goodwill and moral disposition. No one would dare to stop and think about an issue like hunger instead of immediately acting to solve it. That urgency does not call into question the causes of the phenomenon or, more importantly, the role that such a moral imperative plays in the perpetuation of the problem. This dissertation rests on the assumption that it is necessary to create distance from the media blitz of images and discourses about hunger—from the urgent need to alleviate it now—in order to analyze other forms of visibility that have attempted to critically reflect on the complex reality of hunger.

The second problem with focusing on the visibility of hunger is a methodological issue: given the complexity and flexibility of the issue, how is it possible to recognize images of hunger? Is there a clear limit that allows us to classify a character (real or fictional) as hungry? Hunger does not exist in a pure form; it is usually intertwined with other social phenomena like poverty and violence. Mass starvation is actually exceptional when compared to the more subtle and silent cases of malnutrition and food insecurity that affect millions around the world. Hunger does not have a single face, but multiple refined appearances that go unnoticed by external observers. What does a hungry person look like? What does he or she do during a regular day? Can a hungry person eat and remain hungry? Instead of solving this series of questions by devising a (temporary) definition of hunger, I propose to *surround* the problem through an examination of a group of Brazilian films, reflecting on the central concepts that have defined the visibility of hunger. I privilege films that explicitly mention

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hunger as a central narrative/formal element or that reinterpret spaces, events, or characters commonly associated with hunger in Brazil. Those films do not provide a complete explanation of hunger, but rather produce a series of views of a conceptually elusive object that does not exist as an autonomous, univocal entity. Outside of a conceptual construction, there is only an empirical multiplicity. Only within a theoretical reflection is it possible to identify hunger as a conceptual object that conserves its multiple identities.

 In most previous studies of Brazilian cinema, explanations of hunger highlight two main assumptions. First, the trope of hunger is not directly addressed, but always subsumed as part of broader, more general categories. Hunger is identified as a synonym of poverty and misery. In their prominent analyses of Cinema Novo, for instance, Randal Johnson (1984) and Ismail Xavier (2001) showed the strong influence of the political ideas of the 1950s in the formulation of an aesthetic discourse focused on the problem of national development. From their perspective, the notion of hunger was a way to summarize a broader project of decolonization that countered Brazil's dependence on external economic powers. They used hunger as a metaphor to name a series of films committed to showing the real conditions of poverty in Brazil, which they felt were ignored by both national and international mainstream productions. Poverty and hunger become interchangeable terms in this type of analysis, to the extent that they both are expressions of the broader reality of underdevelopment in Latin America.

This interpretation of the notion of hunger found recent applications in studies like Bentes's (2003) comparison between the aesthetic project of modern Brazilian cinema in the 1960s and 1970s, and some contemporary productions from the last two decades. Bentes coined the expression "cosmetics of hunger" (a direct reference to Rocha's "aesthetics of hunger") to criticize the new films that feature misery as their main subject. She used the term

hunger in a general sense to include all the films that address issues of poverty, violence, and marginality.

In contrast, I argue that an emphasis on hunger itself, as opposed to as a synonym of poverty has the power to expose the problem of the representation and incorporation of "the other" as a central issue for Brazilian filmmakers. The trope of hunger reveals a concern about the body and the affective processes of assimilation of reality that have been traditionally ignored by critical readings of Brazilian cinema. As a synonym of poverty or marginality, the notion of hunger loses its singular character; it is subsumed into broader categories that we seem to know better.

A second assumption that is key to critical explanations of hunger is that the notion of hunger is part of a linear historical narrative that features successive periods of climax, disappearance, and reemergence. Cinema Novo has been widely accepted as the most productive period in Brazilian cinematic history—not simply in terms of the number of films made from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s, but also as one of the first movements that attempted to radically create a national cinema opposed to external models of representation. Based on what seems to be the accepted narrative of the movement, only the first phase of Cinema Novo's production in the early 1960s would have followed the main principles that Rocha presented in *Aesthetics of Hunger* in 1965. Randall Johnson and Robert Stam (1995), in one of the most influential periodizations of modern Brazilian cinema, divided the movement's development into three main phases (probably following a division proposed by Rocha in his 1981 text, *Revolução do Cinema Novo*). They defined the first phase, between 1960 and 1964, as consisting of a group of "sad, ugly, desperate films" committed to the transformation of society (34). This first phase gave way to a second period of popular and

disenchanted films (1964–68), and to a third "cannibal-tropicalist" phase (1968–72).[2]

Although hunger clearly influenced Cinema Novo's production in the following years, it was

replaced by new concepts like garbage, anthropophagy, and cannibalism in the late 1960s

(Stam and Xavier 1988; Nagib 2007).

The trope of hunger seems to have disappeared entirely in the 1980s, a period that has

been defined as a "lost decade," during which cinema was kept "under the threat of imminent

death through narrative dissolution, nostalgic metalanguage and the rise of video" (Nagib

2007, xviii). That threat was almost consummated by President Collor de Mello's decision to

do away with all the sources of state support for cinema and close down the state-founded

company Embrafilme in 1990 (Oricchio 2003). After four "obscure" years, however, the

retomada movement emerged in 1994 with a renewed interest in the main social problems

that affected Brazil.

The films created during this renaissance have been criticized for not exhibiting the

same strong political commitment as the films from the 1960s. Laura Podalsky (2001)

characterized this critical approach as a major trend among contemporary interpretations of

cinema in Brazil and Latin America that evinces a "nostalgia for the type of self-reflexive and

overtly politicized cinematic praxis that emerged in the 1960s" (7). Opposing these nostalgic

comparative studies, Podalsky proposed focusing on "multilayered genealogies" (57) rather

than on a linear, standard historical division. I follow Podalsky's perspective by showing

possible lines of continuity around the multiple transformations of the trope of hunger. My

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[2] This division of Brazilian cinema echoes the traditional historical accounts of the New Latin American Cinema (this broader continental movement emerged in the 1950s, a time that scholars have traditionally defined as the birth of Brazilian Cinema Novo as well). The most recent of these periodizations, proposed by Paul A. Schroeder (2012), recognizes two successive periods: the militant phase of the 1960s and the neo-baroque period of the 1970s and 1980s.

interest is not simply to produce a historiographical account in order to compare contemporary representations of hunger with those produced in the 1960s and 1970s in order to determine what has been lost or gained, but also to analyze the formation and development of hunger as an aesthetic and political trope in Brazilian cinema.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters that combine analyses of films (and their critical reception), an examination of primary sources, and the appropriation of theoretical approaches as a way of exploring the conceptual dimensions of hunger in the last five decades of Brazilian cinema. The first chapter examines the historical construction of hunger as a social issue in Brazil from the final decades of the nineteenth century to the 1950s. My intention is to analyze how hunger was shaped as a regime of visibility and to ask what kind of discursive constructions have molded hunger as a representable phenomenon. This is not a history of how the social issue of hunger has been represented, but rather a history of the discursive decisions that simultaneously created hunger and its own representability.

In Brazil the physician Josué de Castro played a central role in defining a social phenomenon that would eventually become a national crusade. His works represent a pivotal moment that condensed the two central discursive approaches to the historical construction of hunger that I analyze: the realistic narratives on hunger that emerged in the late nineteenth century, and the scientific discourse on nutrition that has been consolidated since the 1930s. These are not really two different approaches, but rather two manifestations of the same logic of production of reality. My interest in this chapter—besides reconstructing the context from which the aesthetics of hunger emerged in the 1960s—is to reflect on the historical formation of hunger from a political perspective, unveiling the dynamics of power behind the shaping of a social phenomenon.

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By the 1960s, the issue of hunger seemed to have become an object of common knowledge in Brazil. When Rocha proposed a radicalization of hunger in his 1965 manifesto, a global war against hunger had already been declared. By the mid-1950s, the developmentalist policies of former Brazilian president Juscelino Kubitschek had transformed the alleviation of hunger into a national priority. Hunger was defined as a synonym for underdevelopment; therefore, all the aid programs formulated during the 1950s were presented as tools to promote Brazil's development. Rocha radically opposed the recent familiarity with hunger that was at the basis of those humanitarian aid programs.

The second chapter of my dissertation focuses on this opposition, and on Rocha's appropriation of the notion of hunger as an aesthetic principle. Rocha's major claim was that a hunger felt is not necessarily understood. He argued that the modern formulation of hunger as a social issue had been shaped through terms that were alien to the people who actually suffered from hunger. The image of an underdeveloped other waiting for external aid was formulated in developed countries as a tool of economic control and political intervention; hungry people never had a voice in shaping their own representations. Rocha saw cinema as a tool to overcome such alienation, a way to present Brazilian people with a true image of their own condition. The films produced during the 1960s have been the subject of many reflections and analyses since the 1970s. This chapter does not aim to repeat or summarize those studies, but rather to understand the conceptual construction of hunger as an aesthetic principle that condensed a political perspective on social transformation. For this reason, it focuses on the historical and theoretical construction of the aesthetics of hunger instead of on a detailed analysis of films. I use the film *O profeta da fome* [The prophet of hunger], directed by Maurice Capovilla in 1970, as a main motif with which to understand Rocha's aesthetics

of hunger. Rocha proposed the creation of a culture of hunger as the only possible means of decolonization in Latin America.

In the 1970s, a new generation of filmmakers known as Cinema Marginal deeply questioned what they considered the weakening of Cinema Novo's original principles; they proposed a radicalization of the aesthetics of hunger. In the third chapter of this dissertation, I analyze the consequences of that radicalization for the visibility of the hungry body. I focus on the film *Sem essa, Aranha*, directed by Rogerio Sganzerla in 1970, to show that Cinema Marginal used the trope of hunger as a way to oppose the discourse of economic welfare promoted by the military regime that took control of Brazil in 1964. Thanks to a series of economic policies focused on the stabilization of the markets and the promotion of industrial sectors, Brazil experienced a remarkable boom from 1968 to 1973. The "Brazilian miracle," as it came to be known, increased the annual real growth rate by more than eight percent, giving way to an official discourse of optimism and nationalism. Cinema Marginal opposed the rhetorical construction of a developing country becoming a world power. Unlike Cinema Novo, however, this new generation of filmmakers did not attempt to reveal the true conditions of misery behind the official rhetoric of development; instead, they opposed the very basis of that collective optimism through a radical affirmation of the cruel nature of hunger. The Cinema Marginal filmmakers believed that a cinema of denunciation was no longer possible—not only because of the permanent repression of cultural production that occurred during the military dictatorship, but especially because any realist representation of hunger was likely to be appropriated as an object of spectacle and consumption.[3]

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[3] The period of economic expansion was made possible by the implementation of a series of repressive measures in other social fields. The most radical of these policies was the 1968 Ato Institucional Número Cinco (AI-5),

I propose a reading of Cinema Marginal films as the composition of a grotesque body deprived of any individual feature or narrative structure. If Cinema Novo created characters as a background for hunger, the Cinema Marginal films featured emptied hungry bodies in which the realist claim of hunger lost any meaning. The main action of these films was the distortion of the hungry body in order to empty it of any previous meaning. By transforming the hungry body into a grotesque presence, the Cinema Marginal films radically opposed any reduction and familiarization of the reality of hunger. *Sem essa, Aranha*, for example, does not offer any explanation of the causes of hunger, nor does it present an active proposal to overcome it; I interpret this film as a verification of the horror of the present.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation focuses on two films made after Brazil's transition toward democracy in the mid-1980s: André Klotzel's *A marvada carne* (1985) and Jorge Furtado's *Ilha das flores* (1989) [Island of flowers]. Through these films, I reflect on the visibility of hunger in connection to the dynamics of modern capitalism in Brazil during the 1980s. I explore the contrast between hunger and consumption through the symbol of the supermarket—central in both films—showing that instead of a simple opposition, the filmmakers proposed a certain continuity between the peripheral spaces of hunger and the central urban spaces of consumption. Hunger becomes visible not as an unfortunate and unforeseen consequence of the dynamics of production, but as an active (expected) and necessary part of it. I condense this perspective in the concept of rational irrationality: the process of rationalization that defines modern capitalism (predictability, calculability, and control) inevitably produces irrational events, like the dehumanization of labor, unemployment, or poverty. The subordination of men to the rationality of production that they

which suspended several civil and political rights and directly affected cultural production through the legalization of censorship.

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once created to fulfill their own needs and desires is irrational. Hunger, misery, and other social tragedies are consequences of that inversion.

That constitutive irrationality, however, is not perceived as such by the social actors within the system of production. Not only have the upper classes learned to live with the uncomfortable fact of the existence of others experiencing hunger, but in many cases the hungry themselves have accepted their own condition and social role. The irrationality of a rational system has been naturalized and is perceived as a familiar, if unfortunate, fact. This common perception of hunger suggests the need to question the possibility of opposing and resisting the distribution of the common that separates and marginalizes certain sectors of the population. Can the hungry body oppose that irrationality that assigns it a marginal role within the dynamics of production and consumption? The films analyzed in this chapter propose two opposite perspectives on this issue: while *Ilha das flores* depicts a disciplined and passive hungry body, *A marvada carne* seems to suggest the possibility of resistance through the radical act of a supermarket looting that determines the outcome of the film. My interest is to explore those two poles that define the political dimension of hunger within modern capitalism.

In the last chapter of my dissertation, I analyze the contemporary discourse on overcoming hunger in Brazil. In the last two decades, the fight against hunger has been transformed into a massive national crusade, and it has come to occupy a central place in the social imagination. Important improvements in the welfare of Brazil's hungry have been possible thanks to a series of public policies whose effects have been so well publicized that a general perception that hunger has been overcome has begun to permeate political discourses and media representations of that social issue.

Cinema production seems to reflect this common perception. Only a few films in the last decade explicitly addressed hunger as their main subject, and although several productions mentioned the topic, it appears as a secondary consequence of other social issues like misery and violence. Authors like Bentes (2003) have proposed that even when films address hunger in its different manifestations, they tend to reduce the topic to familiar representations through a spectacular style intended to please the viewer. Bentes condensed that critique in the concept of the "cosmetics of hunger": contemporary Brazilian cinema promotes a spectacular and exotic representation of hunger by depicting the marginal spaces of the *sertão* (backlands) and the favelas through the lens of an international style that embellishes those social issues to make them easily consumable.

I use the concept of the cosmetics of hunger to analyze how the visibility of hunger has been transformed in a group of contemporary films. Through a reinterpretation of the notion of cosmetics, I show that an important trend in Brazilian cinema does not attempt to expose the intolerable character of the reality of hunger (as Cinema Novo did in the 1960s), but rather seeks to reflect on the conditions of visibility of hunger within the contemporary dynamics of the circulation of images. I propose that the intolerable character of hunger today is not only the physical persistence of misery and famine, but also the existence of a series of images and discourses that shape our comprehension of what we call hunger. Today the intolerable character of hunger is not simply the material lack of food, but also the different ways in which that lack has been shaped through certain forms of representation.

The image of Firmino cutting the fishing net in Rocha's *Barravento* has not lost its relevance. His radical attempt to force the hungry people of his native town to face the intolerable conditions of hunger and exploitation, however, has acquired a new dimension. In the 1960s, Rocha's main purpose was to create a cinema that reproduced Firmino's attitude:

to symbolically cut the net through the production of images that induced the marginalized to confront their hunger. Rocha defined cinema as a violent generator of consciousness that would induce a transformation of social reality. Contemporary cinema introduces a reflection on the discourses and representations that have shaped the social reality of hunger and the different attempts to overcome it. In the last two decades, an important trend in Brazilian cinema has reflected both on the issue of hunger and on the dynamics of its visibility. Today it is not enough to cut the net; we must also question the tool used in this radical action: cinema has become a medium to make visible the reality of hunger.

1. Hunger and Representation: The Emergence of a Social Phenomenon

On August 20, 1958, the neorealist filmmaker Roberto Rossellini, who had filmed the influential *Rome, Open City* (1945) thirteen years before, traveled to Recife, in the northeast region of Brazil, to scout possible locations for his new film project—an adaptation of Brazilian author Josué de Castro's 1951 *Geopolítica da fome* [Geopolitics of hunger]. The simple premise of the project, Castro explained in one of his letters to Rossellini, was to create "a work capable of influencing the main course of international policies due to the impact that it could generate on the consciousness of all peoples" (quoted in Martins 2001, 35). The Italian theorist and screenwriter Cesare Zavattini had initially conceived the project some months earlier, when, inspired by Castro's books, he began writing a film script about global hunger. Facing Rossellini's abrupt interest in Brazil, however, Zavattini agreed to cede the project to his compatriot. Almost three weeks after arriving in Brazil, Rossellini returned to Italy on September 7. The film was never made.

By the late 1950s, Castro, a physician born in Recife in 1908, had become one of the most influential intellectuals in Brazil, thanks to his multiple investigations of nutrition and human geography. Although his interest in cinema had emerged during his youth, when he wrote several film reviews for local newspapers, it was not until the early 1950s that, as chairman of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), he was able to develop film projects focusing on the dissemination of his theories concerning hunger. Recognizing that cinema was an ideal means for creating a massive awareness of global social issues, Castro agreed to produce a film with his friend Zavattini about the causes and possible solutions of famines and starvation. Zavattini proposed a movie that would be developed by filmmakers in several different countries. The project would follow the spirit of Italian neorealism that he had described in his theoretical texts (considered the foundation of the

movement). Coincidentally, Zavattini (2004) also defined the relationship between cinema and reality in terms of hunger: "The cinema's overwhelming desire to see, to analyze, its hunger for reality, is an act of concrete homage towards other people, towards what is happening and existing in the world. And, incidentally, it is what distinguishes 'neorealism' from the American cinema" (41).

This "hunger for reality" drove Rossellini to explore several regions of the Third World as possible locations for new films. Indeed, when he traveled to Brazil in 1958, Rossellini had just returned from India, where he had finished filming *India Motherland* (1958), along with a television documentary about the living conditions of different impoverished areas. Sarah Sarzynski (2012) explained that Rossellini's foray in Brazil was part of his interest in underdeveloped regions, which led to trips to and projects in Africa, India, and Jamaica. These regions were perfectly suited to Rossellini's mission to show what he considered the "great problems of humanity: hunger, water, energy, and science" (quoted in Sarzynski 2012, 210).

The reasons why the *Geopolítica da fome* project was never filmed are not clear. According to some accounts, Brazilian government officials banned the project because they thought it would portray their country in a negative light to international viewers.[4] Others believed that Rossellini was not able to obtain funding for the project, or that he simply lost interest and abandoned it after receiving harsh criticism for his works in India.

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[4] Sarzynski (2012) rejected this explanation by showing that Rossellini was originally invited by the Brazilian government to learn about the country and develop his project. However, Rossellini did receive several critiques from journalists and newspapers that considered the project to be "communist work" and disagreed with the choice of *Geografia da fome* as the subject for a film—instead of a book that showed the "beauty of our landscapes" and the uniqueness of Brazilians, "like *O guaraní*, for example" (Martins Jr. 2011, 36).

Despite this failed attempt, Castro insisted on creating a film adaptation of the main ideas that he had published over his career. With funds from the FAO and the World Association for the Struggle Against Hunger (founded by Castro in 1957), he supervised and collaborated with filmmakers on the production of several documentary films that attempted to complete the project Zavattini had initiated and Rossellini had abandoned. Castro never renounced the neorealist spirit of the project, and in the final months of 1958, with the participation of the Brazilian filmmaker Rodolfo Nanni, he was able to finish the Brazilian fragment of Zavattini's script. The product was the film *O drama das secas* [Drama of the drought].

The film, introduced by Castro himself, was based on a series of documentary images filmed in the states of Pernambuco, Ceará, and Paraiba—a journey of more than two thousand miles—exploring the consequences of drought. In Nanni's words, what he found on that trip were "hundreds and hundreds of men, women and children in a mixture of despair and hopelessness, looking for an unknown destination" (Sales 2008, 57). An explanatory voice-over narrating the history of the droughts and providing data about the conditions of the region complemented the scenes that Nanni and his cinematographer, Ruy Santos, captured in the desert (the film also used some images from Candido Portinari's paintings on poverty and famine).

The main goal of the film was to disseminate one of the major ideas that Castro defended until the end of his life: the explanation of hunger as a social phenomenon. Although this premise sounds familiar and almost obvious to a contemporary reader, in the 1950s it was a relatively recent and unknown formulation. Through his film projects, Castro attempted to highlight the results of a broad historical process that had transformed the perception of hunger from a necessary and inescapable consequence of the cycles of nature

into a biological symptom of deeper social and economic failures. I will attempt to reconstruct the process that led to the formulation of a new comprehension of hunger in the first decades of the twentieth century in Brazil, and that was, eventually, the basis for the emergence of the Cinema Novo's aesthetics of hunger in the 1960s.

I am interested not simply in elucidating how hunger has been represented, but also in determining what kind of discursive constructions have shaped hunger as a *representable* social phenomenon. I propose that the modern comprehension of hunger as a social issue has been shaped by a series of dynamics that have produced what Jacques Rancière (1999) called a regime of visibility: a logic that "distributes bodies within the space of their visibility or their invisibility and aligns ways of being, ways of doing, and ways of saying appropriate to each" (28). That means that this is not a history of how the social issue of hunger has been represented (as if hunger as a social phenomenon were something that preexisted its own representations), but rather a history of the discursive decisions that simultaneously created hunger and its own representability: how in the very decision of what to show or not to show the social phenomenon emerged as such; how a certain order of discourse produced acceptable modes of being and thinking, while excluding others and even making them impossible; how certain representations became dominant and shaped the ways in which reality was imagined and acted upon. In this sense, I am not exclusively interested in explicit representations of hunger, but also in some discourses that have made hunger invisible or that have privileged certain aspects of the phenomenon while obscuring others.

My main focus will be the first half of the twentieth century—not only because those decades preceded the appearance of Brazilian Cinema Novo, but also because they constituted a decisive time in the emergence of a comprehension of hunger that defined it as a social issue connected with underdevelopment. In this sense, my interest in the present chapter is not

simply to reconstruct the context from which the aesthetics of hunger would emerge in the 1960s, but also to reflect on the historical constructions of hunger from a political perspective. To think of hunger in terms of discourse and visibility makes it possible to unveil the dynamics of power behind the shaping of this social phenomenon. As Michel Foucault (1990) affirmed, by focusing on discourse, it is possible to expose "the manifold relations, the open strategies, and the rational techniques that articulate the exercise of powers" (6).

The figure of Josué de Castro and his interest in cinema, which serve as the starting point for this chapter, encapsulate the two central discursive approaches to the historical construction of hunger that I intend to analyze: scientific discourse and realistic narratives of hunger. As I will demonstrate at the end of this chapter, they are not two different approaches that were condensed in the historical representations of a social phenomenon, but rather two manifestations of the same logic of production of reality. Following Martin Heidegger's concept of the age of the world picture, I propose that scientific discourse and narrative realism are two manifestations of the modern tendency to transform the world into representations and, therefore, two key discursive approaches for understanding the shaping of hunger as a representable, social phenomenon.

1.1   Literary Realism and the Emergence of Humanitarianism

The social explanation of hunger emerged in Brazil in the literary works of the late nineteenth century and became a common trope in the first decades of the twentieth century. In the dedication of his first major work, *Geografía da fome*, published in 1946, Castro recognized his main precedents not in the field of science but in literature—in the works of writers like José Américo de Almeida, Euclides da Cunha, Rachel de Queiroz, and Rodolfo

Teófilo.[5] These authors, among others, developed a realistic approach to the conditions of misery in Brazil that had caught Castro's attention—and that probably were the indirect basis for his alignment of hunger with neorealism. One novel from 1890 was especially relevant in the development of this realist line regarding the topic of hunger: Teófilo's *A fome* [Hunger]. This work is considered the first literary romance about the droughts (*romance da seca*) in northeast Brazil, a region historically affected by extreme dry seasons that have caused famines and death (Montenegro 1953; Brito 2013).

The earliest recorded droughts in Brazil date back to the sixteenth century, but the worst of them took place between 1877 and 1879 as a result of a massive warming of western ocean waters that also affected countries like India and China. The Great Drought, as it is known in Brazilian history, killed more than 140,000 people after three years of failed rains. Massive displacements of the population to the coastal areas of Brazil were common after cattle ranching and agriculture became untenable. States like Ceará lost as much as a third of their total populations. Besides hunger, epidemics of yellow fever and smallpox further devastated the region.

The drought was an unexpected event for a country that had experienced fifty years of continuous economic expansion after the declaration of independence in 1822 and the coronation of Emperor Pedro I.[6] This expansion, however, had not benefited the entire population. Imperial Brazil was a visibly divided society, and famines and diseases only increased the gap between the small elite who dominated the country and the working classes.

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[5] The book published in English as *Geography of Hunger* in 1952 does not correspond to *Geografía da fome* from 1946. It is instead a misleading translation of the book *Geopolitica da fome* [Geopolitics of hunger] from 1951.
[6] Brazilian independence, declared in 1822, was a shift within the monarchy that transferred power from Portugal to a Brazilian king. The Republic was established in November 1889 through a military government. Only in 1894 did a civil republic take power.

Far from receiving structural solutions from the government, the affected populations were

marginalized in cities, and poverty remained the basic condition of the northeast.[7] The

American naturalist Herbert Smith, quoted by Davis (2001), described the severity of the

situation in 1879:

> Small supplies of provision came in from other provinces and were
> sent to the interior towns on the backs of horses; but often the
> animals died on the way, or the caravans were robbed. In some
> places, where they had no horses, provisions were brought in on
> men's shoulders. The few baskets of mandioca-meal, obtained in
> this way, were retailed by the merchants at fabulous prices—
> frequently eight or ten times above the normal—so that only the
> rich could buy (82).

The state of Ceará, the epicenter of the drought and famine, had almost totally collapsed by

the spring of 1878: an empty treasury, no commerce, outland bands threatening the

fragmented civil authority, and more than 100,000 refugees trying to escape to the coast.

Although the rains returned in 1880, the social structure of the region had undergone

profound changes.

Teófilo depicted this climate of social and economic crisis in his romance *A fome*. The

novel, traditionally held up as an important example of naturalism in the history of Brazilian

literature, focuses on the struggle of Manuel Freitas and his family to escape the arid lands of

the desert after the Great Drought (Brito 2013, 114).[8] The connection between drought and

hunger, besides the obvious cause-and-effect relationship, is an important element in the

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[7] Although as early as the nineteenth century, several academic studies and some publicly funded projects were enacted to mitigate the effects of the droughts, only in 1906 were they recognized as an official issue by the national government, with the creation of the Superintendence of Studies and Works Against the Effects of Drought.

[8] Some authors have questioned the identification of *A fome* as an example of naturalism. Almeida (2007) proposed that the structure of the work follows the tradition of Brazilian Romanticism, with a Manichean conflict between good and evil. The only trace of naturalism is the type of language Teófilo used in the realistic descriptions of the landscapes, characters, and actions.

novel. By focusing on the drought, Teófilo introduced an emphasis on the geographical component of hunger that would influence representations of this social phenomenon in subsequent decades. Important works like Cunha's *Os sertões*, [Rebellion on the Backlands] published in 1902, reinforced this new identification among a natural phenomenon (drought), a geographical region (*sertão*), and a social reality (hunger). Teófilo affirmed this positivistic perspective through his profusely detailed description of the journey and the experience of hunger of Manuel's family, as well as the experiences of several other characters they encountered on the road. In order to reinforce the realism of the story, the author, a former apothecary, incorporated a series of scientific terms to describe the landscapes and, especially, the effects of famine on the human body.[9]

Besides its contribution to the naturalistic style that had emerged in Brazil in the previous decades, *A fome* is recognized as one of the first literary works to denounce the misery of the people as a consequence of government neglect. According to Abelardo Montenegro (1953), "For the first time a literary romance is transmuted into an instrument for the liberation of the people" (22). Teófilo's interest was not simply to offer an objective description of the consequences of the drought, traditionally explained as a climatic phenomenon, but also to connect the event with concrete human actions. If it were possible to find the causes of hunger, not in the unavoidable cycles of nature but in human decisions (and omissions), it would be feasible to find prospective solutions for the people. Thus, by introducing a naturalistic perspective, close to the positivism and determinism booming in this

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[9] The following description is one of multiple examples of the use of scientific language in the novel: "Disorder was complete in those organisms. The heart, that became irregular and turbulent because of the low density of blood, afflicted them with atrocious sufferings. Systole and diastole were incomplete. The valves functioned poorly with accelerated movements of the motor of circulation. They allowed the blood, already low, to reflow causing anemia in the brain. . . . The functions of the epidermis, deeply affected, changed the physical qualities of the shell skin, making the highest cleanliness totally fruitless against that physiological condition" (Teófilo 2002, 102).

period, and by focusing on the social causes of the phenomenon of hunger, Teófilo made

visible a major transformation in the discourses on hunger that took place at the end of the

nineteenth century.

As James Vernon (2007) showed, before the late nineteenth century, when it was

established as a humanitarian cause, hunger was not perceived as a collective social problem.

Vernon recognized three different stages in the comprehension and representation of hunger:

the divine, the moral, and the social. Peter Garnsey (1990) offered a good example of the first

stage in his analysis of the responses to food crises in the ancient Mediterranean world. There

religious rites were not understood as symbolic actions that accompanied the real institutional

practices of improvement and prevention. For ancient Greek and Roman societies, there was

not a division between secular and religious responses to a concrete disaster such as a food

crisis.[10] Some of the historical accounts of Latin American indigenous cultures before the

encounter with European colonizers show a similar perception of hunger. In 1615 the

Quechua Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (best known as Guaman Poma) finished his

chronicle *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno* [The first new chronicle and good

government), in which he offered a historical account of the Andes—from the first native

tribes, to the Incas and the Spanish conquest. In this illustrated manuscript, sent to King Philip

II of Spain as a means to denounce the cruel treatment of the indigenous peoples in New

Spain, Guaman Poma described the representations of hunger of the original tribes that had

populated the region centuries before. In all his descriptions, hunger is directly associated

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[10] Garnsey described some common rituals, like the Thargelia or the Boulimos ceremonies, used to prevent or
alleviate periods of famine. In the former, an ugly man and an ugly woman were selected and "ritually expelled
from the city, perhaps with violence, carrying with them the guilt of the community" and, therefore, preventing
the divine punishment of hunger (141). The assumptions behind such rituals were also common among pagan,
Jewish, and Christian practices during the same period: the prosperity and continuity of the community
depended on the good will of the gods. The causal chain was clear: human acts, divine displeasure, famine.

with divine punishment: the natives "knew that there was a heaven, rest given by god *Runa*

Camac (creator of man), and that there was hell and pain, and hunger and punishment"

(Guaman Poma 2006, 55).

In Europe the representation of hunger as a divine punishment prevailed until the

seventeenth century.[11] Piero Camporesi's (1996) description of European famines between

the Renaissance and the Enlightenment shows that hunger was still considered an inevitable

part of the human condition, to the extent that it was sent as a divine retribution for man's

sins. The late eighteenth century introduced the first important transformation in such

thinking, with the formulation of the new principles of political economy represented by

figures like Thomas Malthus.

For Malthus (1998) famine, although not divine, was a natural and necessary part of

the world. It was the last and "most dreadful resource of nature" to control the unchecked

growth of human populations. His assumption was simple: man's capacity to increase his

numbers is greater than his capacity to produce new means of support. Therefore, "premature

death must in some shape or other visit the human race" (44). His solution was brutally

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[11] It is still an open question whether the same process took place in Latin America. Guaman Poma's account suggests that the process of colonization entailed a transformation of the representations of hunger. When Poma (2006) narrated the conquest, his explanation of famines and starvation not only included divine causes but also social ones: "The Indians felt abandoned by their gods (*wacas*), by their kings, and by their great lords and captains during this time of the conquest. Nor did they have the God of Christians, nor the king of Spain; nor did they have justice. . . . As a result, there was a very great deal of hunger and tumult, many people died, and there was commotion through the kingdom: 'Give me gold, hand over that gold'" (118). Hunger was not perceived as a divine punishment, but rather as a consequence of the plunders and abuses of the colonizers. This fact brings into question the linear development of the three stages proposed by Vernon in the case of Latin America. The connection between hunger and colonialism would have emerged in the first native accounts of the conquest, mixing divine and social causes in the same representations. It is also important to question how European representations of hunger affected the colonies in the New World. Arturo Escobar (1995) affirmed that, in colonial times, any approach to the issue of poverty and hunger was conditioned by the assumption that the natives were naturally incapable of development due to their inability to use science and technology. The presence of the colonizers was necessary to promote progress and alleviate misery. It was only at the end of the nineteenth century (after the wars of independence across the continent) that some countries in Latin America began producing reflections on the topic. Does this mean that from the end of the fifteenth century until the mid-1800s Latin America followed the representations of hunger produced in Europe? These questions exceed the scope of the present research.

straightforward: population control. Instead of economic intervention, Malthus defended two types of checks to population growth: the "preventive checks" of fertility limitation (the deferment of marriage until the prospective spouse could support wife and children), and the "positive checks" of mortality (including famine, pestilence, warfare, etc.). Like Adam Smith, Malthus supported the idea of refraining from any attempts to alleviate hunger through human intervention. Famine should be left to the logic of the market, which, without misguided interference, would find its natural rhythm and produce a plentiful society without hunger.

The only possible preventive practice against hunger was moral restraint. But if the moral virtues of the individuals faltered and the population increased, hunger would assume its regulatory role. Thus, as hunger had the same consequences as the practice of moral restraint, it was understood as a moral agent for the perfectibility of society. Vernon (2007) highlighted the pedagogic effect of hunger in this moral stage: "It taught the lazy and indigent the moral discipline of labor; it taught them how to enter modernity as industrious individuals capable of competing in a market economy and providing for their families" (2).

Although the Malthusian representation of hunger would prevail in some specific fields until the first decades of the twentieth century, both in Europe and in Latin America, the second half of the nineteenth century produced a strong challenge to Malthus's model of causation from an unexpected source: modern news. The reports and chronicles of famine began to create an image of the hungry that was far from the object of opprobrium implicit in the Malthusian approach. Instead of identifying hunger as a result of moral weakness, the newspapers attempted to produce a connection between the reader and those distant and anonymous suffering strangers. The representation of the hungry in news reports and chronicles aimed to create a sense of sympathy and compassion, stressing the fact that the causes of the victims' agony were external to them. This narrative relied on details about the

pain and suffering of ordinary people to create a realistic effect. The chronicles of the Great

Irish Famine between 1845 and 1852 reflected this narrative mechanism, as a December 19,

1846, article in the *Manchester Times and Gazette*, entitled "The Famine in Ireland," makes

clear:

> This is no ordinary case of poverty; it is a case of famine, practical
> famine, amongst a class who has no possible means of obtaining
> subsistence. None but the able-bodied are employed on the public
> works; their pay is 8d. or 10d. a day, and only one in a family is
> employed; and these works are not established in all districts. . . .
> There is a cry of want—famine felt within and the keen frost
> without—and there is no possible relief for this class but by the
> hand of charity. Surely it is not a time to be very rigorous about the
> science of political economy to the exclusion of charity. Unless we
> save them alive, our lessons will be useless to them. They are
> dying of want, and they cannot possibly rescue themselves.

The anonymous author of this chronicle described the hungry as victims of a series of social

and economic conditions that escaped from their own control. Some articles even identified

those external causes and, in several cases, blamed state institutions and officers, who now

bore the moral irresponsibility that had been previously attributed to the victims. In these

accounts, the hungry were made visible as permanently in-need victims, incapable of solving

their own condition of lack. The hungry were visible as a lament, as a "cry of want" instead of

as an articulated voice. Even when the hungry broke with their passive waiting, they were

depicted as wild, almost irrational victims. An *Illustrated London News* article, entitled "The

Accounts of the State of Ireland Grow Darker and Darker," from October 3, 1846, describes

the effects of famine on the people of Ireland:

> Famine seems to be doing its worst, and the extreme of want is
> producing revolt and riot; at Dungarvan it appears that the military
> have been obliged to fire on the people—with fatal effect. This is
> one of the horrors attending on scarcity; the rebellion it incites is of
> the worst kind . . . the mass makes a wild and desperate attempt to
> snatch a remedy at all risks with this sad and heart-rending result.

Similar descriptions were published in Brazilian journals during the Great Drought, between 1877 and 1879. Charity was a central element in all these chronicles. The depiction of the hungry as victims created a connection with the reader, who was automatically placed in the role of benefactor. That is why, besides the description of the victim, the chronicles clearly stated the need to suspend, at least temporarily, the Malthusian prohibition on market intervention through charity. In this way, hunger was presented not only as a human tragedy, but also as a social issue that required immediate action.

The journal *Gazeta de noticias* in Rio de Janeiro published a letter from one of its readers called "The Horrors of Hunger" on April 28, 1878. In the short text, the author identified hunger as a "national catastrophe" and blamed the government for not preventing the massive famines that affected states like Ceará: "What has been done, and what is being done, to free millions of Brazilians from the atrocious torture of starving to death? It is sad to say it: nothing!!!" (2). The solution that the anonymous author proposed was to continue providing public charity from any source, national or foreign: "For the first and crucial aid, the public charity emerged in brilliant and bountiful waterfalls that enhanced brotherhood and elevated the feelings of humanity" (2). Charity was the definitive channel through which to not only solve, but also prevent hunger. It was perceived as a moral duty that would answer the inefficacy of the government. A note published in *Gazeta do sertão* on September 28, 1888, stressed shared responsibility: "Facing hunger, that kills and annihilates everything, any political rancor disappears, and all the parties come together around the same purpose: charity, understood as the most sublime civic duty" (1).

These chronicles of hunger followed a narrative model in use since century to describe the pains and deaths of human beings in different contexts. The realistic novel, the autopsy, the clinical report, and the social inquiry composed what Thomas Laqueur (1989) called a

"humanitarian narrative" that applied the main principles of the empiricist revolution of the seventeenth century. Laqueur proposed a suggestive comparison between this narrative—in which someone or something produced pain, suffering, or death that could have been avoided—and tragedy, in which the suffering of the protagonist is universal and beyond any help (178). Before the nineteenth century, hunger had been narrated within the model of tragedy, and only with these chronicles written for the news did it come to be shaped as a humanitarian cause.

In the last two decades of the century, those chronicles would receive vital support in their goal of creating an empathetic connection between the victim and the reader: photography. Images were the definitive way to humanize hunger. With the arrival of handheld cameras in the late 1880s, journalists became improvised documentary photographers, reporting on famines and crises, especially in the colonial regions close to Europe. The first images produced a well-known stereotype of the hungry that David Campbell (2012) argued "has remained largely static" for several decades: a group of half-naked, starving men, women, and children (children were typically completely naked) posing for the camera in a desolate landscape. The composition was absolutely simple and, regardless of specific context, always the same. Starving people looked directly into the camera while standing or sitting together. The traces of hunger and illness were evident in their bodies: extremely thin limbs, large abdomens in the children, sunken eyes, and visible skeletal structure under taut skin. Some held empty pans, stressing the sense of scarcity. The hungry were not depicted performing a daily action, but instead posed exclusively for the camera, almost passively regarding their own condition. That passivity, through direct visual contact with the camera, appealed to viewers' emotions, calling them to assume an active role in the victims' plights.

Thanks to its technical singularity, photography stressed the physical presence that the media's written chronicles were only able to suggest. In photographs victims of hunger were visible as pure materiality, as bare bodies. The composition of a photograph reinforced the effect of the image as evidence of a material (and, therefore, true) reality. Even when photographs were used to demonstrate the improving condition of starving populations— thanks to the donations of the humanitarian public—the hungry were depicted in the same expositive pose. The proof of improvement was their altered bodies, their physiological transformations. Those bodies, however, were even *more* physical than others. Their marked bones and over- or undersized organs challenged viewers' perception of normalcy. These abnormal figures were simultaneously docile and passive bodies accepting their new symbolic space, and bodies waiting for a real solution. Thus, images and words created a distribution of bodies through which specific roles were assigned to the hungry and to the reader or viewer. They produced a particular way of being within the social reality that was now enclosed in the notion of hunger.

Besides the reduction of the hungry to an extreme body, these photographic images had an additional effect: the erasure of individuality. Most of the photographs used to report famines in different regions of the world portrayed groups. But even in depictions of single victims, the pictures repeated the same formula of composition and returned to the same subject in order to represent hunger. As Zahid R. Chaudhary (2012) argued regarding the photographs of the Madras famine of 1876–79, such images ignored the fact that "each person depicted represents a distinctive life history and a tale of suffering that is not interchangeable with the histories and tales of others" (155).

According to Vernon (2007), the nineteenth century created an unprecedented circle of humanitarian virtue that transformed the representation of hunger: "The journalist proved his

integrity by reporting the urgent misery of hunger and starvation; those reports elicited and

created immediate humanitarian response among readers, whose philanthropy in turn

demonstrated their own virtue and redeemed the lives of the recipients" (29). This "modern

understanding of hunger" defines the moment when it came to be understood as a social issue

caused by human actions and decisions, and, therefore, an objective situation susceptible to

intervention. The humanitarian sympathy created through the new narratives of the hungry

transformed hunger into an object of political protest and mobilization, an object of massive

indignation. As Michael Barnett (2011) affirmed, the humanitarian approach to hunger in the

nineteenth century introduced important nuances compared with previous forms of charity

and philanthropy. While earlier acts of compassion were a largely private affair reserved for

the privileged, the social issue of hunger was perceived as a global public concern. Sympathy

and compassion became moral sentiments across boundaries and not simply individual

virtues.[12] Humanitarianism presumed that local actions were an obligation (both for citizens

and the state), while international help was beyond the call of duty (21). Thus, the

humanitarian comprehension of hunger implied that the hungry person was always a distant

other permanently susceptible to becoming a subject of assistance. The modern organization's

principles of rationality shaped the will to help into different institutions responsible for

diagnosing the scope of the problem and determining the right methods of intervention.

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[12] Renowned intellectuals like David Hume and Adam Smith produced important reflections on sympathy as part of their theories on moral sentiments at the end of the eighteenth century. For Smith sympathy was a central affect in the maintenance of the social body, to the extent that it was a mechanism that regulated our reaction to the other. Sympathy was central for the moral formation of society because it implied an imagined impartial spectator who, according to Smith, identified a trace of the other within us. Recently, several postcolonial critics have pointed to sympathy as a suspect sentiment (Boltanski 1999; Rai 2002). Amit Rai, for instance, showed how sympathy has been used as a tool to expand and perpetuate colonial power, and how contemporary liberalism needs to conceal the relations of power behind humanitarian sympathy.

It is precisely at this turning point, with the emergence of a social comprehension of hunger, that the naturalistic novels about the droughts in Brazil emerged. Teófilo's *A fome* is one of the first examples of a literary line that would develop through the first half of the twentieth century, following the process of consolidation of the humanitarian perspective on hunger.[13] This process cannot be separated from the project of national development that republican Brazil had implemented in the last decades of the nineteenth century. With his novel, Teófilo attempted to offer a detailed portrait of those main transformations in the country: an industrial economic model was replacing a model of agrarian economy. The republican elites created a plan of social, political, and economic progress based on the idea of "novelty" represented by the image of an urban and industrialized world, as opposed to a rural and retrograde one. Along with the expansion of urban centers, the republic devoted considerable efforts to identifying the factors that inhibited the country's progress. Teófilo—along with other important writers like Manuel Bomfim, Euclydes da Cunha, José Monteiro Lobato, and Sílvio Romero—attempted to elucidate the reasons for rural underdevelopment, distancing themselves from the explanations that had became popular in imperial Brazil: poor geography and an inferior race of melancholic character.

Using different approaches, all these writers explained the backwardness of the country by portraying the rural population as victims of external causes instead of as the cause themselves. They were still the best representation of the social problems of the country, but they were not the source of those issues. Lobato, for instance, created the popular character

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[13] This line reached its highest point in the 1930s, with the publication of several works later grouped under the name *Romance de 30* or *Neorrealismo*. José de Americo de Almeida's *A bagaceira* (1928), Rachel de Queiroz's *O quinze* (1930), José Lins do Rego's *Bangüê* (1934), Jorge Amado's *Mar morto* (1936), and Graciliano Ramos's *Vidas secas* (1938) are examples of this naturalistic style. They attempted to denounce the wretched living conditions of northeastern Brazil through detailed description of individual experiences that condensed the situation of an entire social class.

Jeca Tatu, a *caboclo* (mestizo) who exemplified all the lamentable qualities of the interior peasants. The author created Jeca Tatu in 1914 as part of a short story called "Urupês," and the character soon became a symbol of the entire rural population of Brazil. Lobato portrayed him as a poor and slovenly laborer who lived in a hut of beaten ground with domestic animals (a hen, a rooster, and a mangy dog), his ugly wife, and a bunch of children. He was ignorant and, especially, lazy. Always barefooted, he worked only a small plantation for subsistence. As Alexandra Montague (2007) stated, Jeca Tatu is portrayed not simply as a passive being who exerts minimal effort to survive, "but as one so lacking in initiative and independent thought that he is more akin to a parasitic vegetable than a man" (210). Some years later, Lobato explained the causes of Jeca Tatu's wretched reality. When the story was published in 1918, as part of a compilation book with the same name, *Urupês*, the author apologized to his character, recognizing that he was not to blame for his own miserable conditions, which came from an external cause: "Here I take the bid to beg forgiveness from the poor Jeca. I did not know that you were so, my Tatu, due to illness." In the novel *Problema vital* (1964), also published in 1918, Lobato reaffirmed this perspective: "o caipira não é assim. Está assim" [The hick *is not* (*ser*) like that. He *is* (*estar*) like that] (285).[14] In this novel, Lobato discovered that his character had been infected by a series of parasites that had invaded through the mouth (intake of infected food), the skin, and especially the feet (he was always barefooted). The toxins that these microorganisms liberated in the duodenum were the cause of Jeca Tatu's ignorance and laziness, and, extrapolated to a great scale, of the miserable

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[14] The sentence plays with the difference between the verbs *ser* (*não é*) and *estar* (*está*) in Portuguese, in order to differentiate a permanent condition (*ser*) from a temporary state (*estar*). In English both of these words translate as "being": "The hick *is not* (*ser*) like that. He *is* (*estar*) like that."

conditions of the region and the country in general. The solution was simple: it was necessary to treat this illness in order to promote the social progress of Brazil.

1.2 The Scientific Perspective: Intervention and Social Progress

With his diagnosis, Lobato clearly followed the principles of the *movimento sanitarista* (sanitation movement) that had emerged in the first years of the twentieth century in Brazil as part of the efforts to "civilize" the capital city of Rio de Janeiro during President Rodrigues Alves's administration. During the first decade of the century, the government privileged public health as one of the priorities in this project of development, and enhanced research and public programs in the field of microbiological sciences. Important physicians like Carlos Chagas, Artur Neiva, and Belisário Penna discovered and exposed several sanitation-related maladies (the most renowned, probably, the Chagas disease), convincing the ruling elite of the importance of fighting the causes of Brazilians' poor health. Beyond highlighting the problem of illness in Brazil, these researchers also demonstrated the potential role of science to promote a revitalization of the population and, therefore, foster the civilizing process that the Republic had been stimulating (Stepan 1976). Just like Jeca Tatu, Brazilians were not doomed to misery by their race or geographical position; they were simply ill. Hunger, of course, was framed as a consequence of this disguised disease.

This new medical perspective on Brazil's problems extensively contributed to the implementation of the nationalist project of the republican elites by identifying the elements preventing the country from joining the industrialized powers of the world, and formulating concrete (scientifically based) solutions. The very diagnosis of an ill nation created a sense of what Benedict Anderson (1983) called an imagined community: the image of a shared disease created a sense of communion; being ill came to be a mark of national identity. As Penna

pointed out, even immigrants could become "Brazilianized" if they contracted the disease. The physician Miguel Pereira condensed this new perspective when he declared in 1916: "Brazil is an immense hospital" (quoted in Montague 2007, 14). That negative identity needed only to be transformed into a positive one through a series of campaigns of intervention and prevention.

This was the main goal of a series of expeditions to the interior of Brazil conducted by the Oswaldo Cruz Institute between 1911 and 1913. These field trips attempted to create a reliable census of the living conditions in the region and to document the benefits of medical intervention. Several images were produced in order to promote the expeditions: illustrations of the stages of development of different parasites, images of the insects that transmitted some diseases, posters stressing the benefits of sanitation, and photographs of the physicians and their patients. The documentary images of the population followed the same principles as the images of hungry people from the second half of the nineteenth century: a group of poor peasants posed for the camera to exhibit the marks of hunger in their bodies. The photographs that emerged from these scientific expeditions, however, were framed as images of ill people and classified in the same category as images of patients exhibiting symptoms.

Thus, during the first decades of the twentieth century, a scientific discourse about public health appeared as a main element in the construction of a national narrative in Brazil. My interest is in stressing that hunger began to be perceived as a social phenomenon within this conjunction of nationalist and scientific rhetoric. With the sanitarian approach—spread through medical campaigns but also through literary narratives—the hungry body was transformed into an ill body that required intervention, not only for individual benefit, but especially to promote national development. Medical intervention cured the national disease; therefore, it promoted the social and economic progress of the country and, hence, eradicated

hunger. An illustration in Penna's book *Saneamento do Brasil* (1923) condensed this new perspective by stressing the benefits of the sanitation program in Jeca Tatu's life.

The sanitarian movement contributed to the emergence of a specialized line of research that exclusively focused on issues of food hygiene, which would eventually evolve into the independent field of nutritional sciences. Although in Brazil there had been medical investigations of diet and alimentation practices since the second half of the nineteenth century, only the twentieth century saw the development of a unified field of nutrition through two main currents: a biological perspective dedicated to the clinical and physiological aspects of food consumption, and a social perspective focused on the production, distribution, and consumption of food among the Brazilian population (Vasconcelos 2002, 128).

Some authors have pointed out that this new nutrition science only confirmed what was an already common perception: the people in several regions of Brazil lived in miserable conditions and were starving (Barros and Tartaglia 2003). Its main contribution, however, was to reconceptualize those problems in a new language that made it possible to propose specific solutions in both the short and the long term. My interest is to show that this scientific language was not a simple translation of a previous comprehension of hunger into objective and positivist terms, but rather a new way of making hunger visible—that is, of defining its reality.

The scientific approach to the (newly reshaped) social issue of hunger would eventually be incorporated into state policies in the 1940s with the creation of the Serviço de Alimentação da Previdência Social [Social Security Service of Alimentation]. Hunger went from a field of knowledge to an object of public policy. Several figures were central in this process, but it was Josué de Castro who left the deepest imprint on the definition of the social

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causes of hunger and, especially, the transformation of hunger into a subject of public discussion.[15]

Since his first essays, published in the 1930s, Castro had opposed the Malthusian explanation of hunger and malnutrition as contingent phenomena limited to certain periods of history when the climatic conditions of specific regions had reduced the production and distribution of food. In two studies from 1935, *As condições de vida das classes operárias no Recife* [Living conditions of the working classes in Recife] and *Alimentação e raça* [Alimentation and race], Castro described the historical permanency of hunger in Brazil, analyzing three main factors: miserable wages for workers, semi-feudal single-crop farming, and irrational state policies (Castro 1935a, 23).

Castro not only repeated the denunciation of the negligence of the state staged in the novels of writers like José Américo de Almeida, Euclides da Cunha, and Rodolfo Teófilo, but also proposed a scientific approach to the issue of hunger that would allow it to be transformed into a subject of public discussion and, as a consequence, the main object of a series of state policies. Castro rephrased the issue of hunger in terms of modern dietary practices and defined the concept of rational food intake as the basis for his diagnosis of the conditions of the country. Consequently, the notion of hunger did not exclusively refer to cases of extreme lack of food, but rather to any circumstance of nutritional deficiency detected through scientific means.

Thus, hunger became measurable in biological, geographical, and economic terms. Numbers and statistics acquired a main role in the rhetorical construction of this social

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[15] Barros and Tartaglia (2003) mentioned Moura Campos, Sálvio de Mendonça, Dutra de Oliveira, Hélio Lourenço de Oliveira, Annes Dias, Salgado Filho, Peregrino Júnior, Silva Mello, Alexandre Moscoso, Olavo Rocha, Paula Souza, Silva Telles, and Seabra Velloso (118). Vasconcelos (2002) added Nelson Chaves, Ruy Coutinho, Gilberto Freyre, Jamesson Ferreira Lima, Orlando Parahym, and Naíde Regueira Teodósio (129).

phenomenon. This was an important step in the creation of a regime of visibility for hunger

(and in the construction of hunger *as* a regime of visibility). Singular cases that had been

traditionally ignored (like early stages of malnutrition) were now visible from the perspective

of science, thanks to different techniques of quantification.

Castro (1952) expanded the notion of hunger from the most obvious cases of

starvation to the silent problems of alimentary deficiency, stressing the notion of "hidden

hunger": "Hunger is an extremely variable phenomenon. It can exist as acute starvation,

turning its victims into veritable living skeletons, or it can work insidiously to produce subtle

chronic deficiencies almost without outward sign. Between these extremes it can attack

mankind in many strange and spectacular disguises" (28). Castro's scientific approach

allowed him to recognize those disguised cases of hunger that were invisible to the

nonspecialized gaze.

This was the major contribution of Castro's early study *As condições de vida da classe*

operária no Recife, written in 1932, in which he identified the problems of the dietary

practices of the people in the northeastern *sertão* (the vast desert backlands): lack of variety of

food, extremely low intake of fruits and milk (eighty percent of the population did not

consume sufficient amounts), low daily caloric intake (an average of only 1,645 calories,

compared to the 2,640 calories a healthy adult requires), excessive intake of carbohydrates,

and low intake of lipids and minerals. The conclusion of the study suggests that the role of

science was to make visible a face of hunger that remained imperceptible, hidden even at a

cellular level:

> Facing this diagnosis it is evident the terrible quality of the workers'
> alimentation, and their improper diet in all respects. There is only one
> way to feed themselves worse than this: not eating at all. This is why
> these people do not talk about eating, but about fooling hunger.
> Unfortunately, hunger cannot be fooled. You can only deceive the

conscious feeling, but deep inside of each cell its effects linger
indefinitely (87–88).

This scientific approach inaugurated a new practice of governing the appearance (forms of
appearing) of bodies. An abstract body is produced through an implicit process of
normalization of the non-hungry body, which serves as a reference to diagnose the anomalies
produced by hunger. For instance, Castro diagnosed the main problems in the feeding habits
of the working class in Recife and accordingly proposed a new food system that determined
dietary practices by using the logic of "rational food intake." It was thus possible to determine
the daily food intake that an adult needed to be healthy and productive by measuring the
efforts expended by the body in particular conditions (2,800 calories, according to Castro).
Those efforts could be calculated "on the basis of basal metabolism and work metabolism,
also taking into account the digestion metabolism and variations in age, sex, body weight,
food intake and climate" (quoted in da Silva Lima 2009, 4). Something similar happened on a
collective scale. According to Castro, for a geographic region to be considered an area
affected by hunger, the food intake deficiencies needed to affect the majority of the
population. Thus, the measures of the individual body were expanded to determine the
condition of a whole region.

From this perspective, the body was forced to conform to certain epistemic rules in
which numbers became the new language of representation. Using Alain Badiou's (2008)
expression, these new positivistic approaches are sciences of "men made into numbers." What
matters here is not the external correspondence between numbers and reality, but the internal
correspondence within numbers—between *these* numbers measuring one aspect of reality and
those numbers representing others. As Badiou bemoaned, "We live in the era of number's
despotism" (1).

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This transformation of hunger into both a scientific and a social subject had several consequences for representations of the hungry. Now they were perceived paradoxically: fully humanized as victims of a social tragedy in fictional narratives about suffering, and completely depersonalized by a positivistic scientific approach that transformed each individual body into a group of measurable symptoms shared by a larger population. It was this double perception—a product of the combination of the recently implemented scientific perspective and the humanitarian perception of hunger—that became the basis for the formulation of state policies on hunger. If the narrative language of the newspaper chronicles and literary fictions had created a feeling of empathy toward the hungry and, therefore, an impulse for individual action, the scientific approach institutionalized this tendency toward humanitarian assistance.

Thus, in the 1930s, Brazil had already joined an international movement that understood hunger as an object requiring intervention. The several famines produced by World War I had led to the creation of international initiatives that set an important precedent for the "conception and organization of subsequent large scale humanitarian operations" (Macalister-Smith 1985, 12). In 1914, for instance, future United States president Herbert Hoover created the Commission for the Relief of Belgium to assist the food needs of Belgian and French civilians in territories occupied by Germany and blocked by the Allied forces. As Paul Weindling (1994) suggested, the widespread food security crises throughout Europe presented a gigantic experiment for nutritional scientists that led to a twofold shift in food assistance: the transformation of food distribution programs into more scientifically based initiatives, and a shift in nutritional science from being "merely calculated to sustain life to… promoting optimum health, and . . . a new standard for well-being" (205).

This new approach would be consolidated in Brazil in the 1940s with the creation of multiple organizations and initiatives tasked with facing the problem of nutrition and food distribution at both the national and international level: the Sociedade Brasileira de Alimentação in 1940 (Brazilian society of food); the Serviço Técnico de Alimentação Nacional in 1943 (National food technical service); the Instituto Técnico de Alimentação (Feeding technical institute) in 1944; the Comissão Nacional de Alimentação in 1945 (Feeding national commission); and the Instituto Nacional de Nutrição in 1946 (Nutrition national institute) (Vasconcelos 2002). For Castro, the institutionalization of the scientific approach and the transformation of the fight against hunger into a national priority were meant to achieve one of his major goals: overcoming the taboo of hunger.

In *Geografía da fome* (1984), Castro introduced hunger as a "sensitive and risky" topic that had been rarely explored: "It is really strange, shocking, the fact that, in a world like ours, defined by its excessive ability to write and publish about itself, there is so little written about the phenomenon of hunger in its different manifestations" (28). This almost systematic disregard was not an accident but a "premeditated silence" caused by moral and economic interests. As an attentive reader of Sigmund Freud, Castro affirmed that hunger, as a primary instinct, had been deemed a subject unworthy of scientific or social research. Instinct and desire had been labeled animal impulses, while reason had been accepted as the exclusive faculty that defined humans. Therefore, Castro affirmed, only the products of rational activity deserved to be the subject of public discussion, while primary instincts were condemned to the silence of the private sphere. Hunger was thus perceived as an object of embarrassment,

especially for those who suffered from it to the extent that they were seen as morally incompetent.[16]

The economic interests of some minorities who sought to keep this topic far from public discussion complemented this moral taboo. During the first decades of the twentieth century, Brazil witnessed the process of consolidation of the recently established Republic. With the end of the military dictatorship—which had replaced the Empire of Brazil—in 1894, Brazil entered a period known as *política do café com leite* [coffee with milk politics]. The name refers to the domination of national politics by the oligarchies of the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais, which controlled the production of coffee and milk, two of the pillars of the Brazilian economy since the nineteenth century. Through the Partido Republicano Paulista and the Partido Republicano Mineiro, these privileged groups controlled the highest positions in the new democratic state until 1930, when a coup brought the end of the Old Republic.

One of the major consequences of this period and its concentration of property in a few hands was the unequal development of the different regions of the country.[17] While states like São Paulo made large investments to improve the infrastructure of their internal markets, the northeastern regions became even more impoverished due to their insufficient adaptation to the new capitalist system. According to Castro, the amplification of this social gap was favorable for the agrarian elites, who attempted to silence the discussion of poverty and hunger.

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[16] As mentioned previously, Castro and Rossellini's project of portraying the true conditions of hunger and malnutrition in Brazil found several critics in the media because this aspect of Brazilian reality was thought unseemly and unsuitable for discussion in the global community.

[17] Regarding the unequal distribution of land in Brazil, Castro (1952) stated that, in the 1940s, "with the same population as France and an area fifteen times as large, [Brazil] has only half as many individual properties (1,900,000 in Brazil as against 4,000,000 in France). . . . Only 2 per cent of the territory of Brazil is under cultivation, and only 1 per cent of it devoted to the production of food" (98).

Castro's analysis did not aim to blame a specific class for the nutritional problems of

the country, but rather to find the causes of the inequality in the economic structure that Brazil

had utilized since the establishment of the Portuguese Empire in South America in the first

decades of the sixteenth century. In his terms, the main problem—not only in Brazil but also

in the entire region—was the persistence of a colonial model of production based both on the

concentration of land and on the existence of cycles of exploitation of a single product:

> The prevailing starvation in South America is a direct consequence
> of the continent's historical past. This history is one of colonial
> exploitation along mercantile lines. It developed through
> successive economic cycles the effect of which was to destroy, or
> at least upset, the economic integrity of the continent. There were
> the cycle of gold, the cycle of sugar, the cycle of precious stones,
> the cycle of coffee, the cycle of rubber, the cycle of oil. And during
> the course of each of these cycles, one finds a whole region giving
> itself up entirely to the monoculture, or monoexploitation, of a
> single product—at the same time forgetting everything else, and
> thus wasting natural wealth and neglecting the potentialities of
> regional food supply (Castro 1952, 97).

Latifundia[18] and single-crop agriculture were, in Castro's words, the "two greatest evils of the

continent" inherited from colonialism (Castro 1952). By proposing an interpretation of hunger

as a colonial burden, Castro rephrased the representations of this social issue in terms of

progress and development. Hunger was now understood as the biological expression of

specific sociological disparities caused by economic backwardness: "Hunger and

underdevelopment—Castro affirmed—are the same thing" (Castro 1984, 46). This new

identification implied that improving the nutritional conditions of the country through the

transformation and defeat of colonial economic schemes would mean the promotion of

national development.

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[18] Extensive parcels of private land.

The idea of development had emerged in Brazil with the end of the Old Republic in

the 1930s and the implementation of state interventionism, the defense of a nationalist

ideology, and the growth of industrialization (Magalhães 1997). The Revolution of 1930

created a massive enthusiasm for the national project of President Getúlio Vargas, who took

control of the government through a military coup. The majority of the population welcomed

the new government as an unprecedented opportunity to open the political system to new

groups, principally to members of the nascent middle class. During his first years in office,

Vargas's main objective was to restore economic stability to the country in the face of the

global economic crisis (Levine 1999, 99). From 1937 to 1945, in the period known as *Estado*

novo [New state], Vargas oriented the state to intervene in the economy and promote

economic nationalism. Through populist rhetoric, Vargas attempted to imprint patriotic values

in the minds of the citizens, now addressed as *o povo* [the people].[19]

International relations were central in this development project, especially with the

implementation of the Good Neighbor policy in the United States.[20] Brazil received large

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[19] Vargas represented himself as a father for the country, a leader who would guide Brazil to a new era of progress and development. Several propaganda images that promoted the idea of the *Estado novo* showed Vargas addressing children and defending the ideologies behind his new government. For example, the textbook *A juventude no Estado Novo* includes full-page illustrations that accompany short texts explaining the main values promoted by the government. Rabelo and dos Santos (2006) highlighted such values as the defense of the family as the core of Brazilian society, the absolute confidence in scientific knowledge, the importance of hard work, and the radical rejection of any communist ideology, which was labeled as "enemies of god, enemies of Brazil and enemies of the Brazilian family" (11). The text also compared Vargas with figures like the young Napoleon, who "in his school breaks used to command fictional combats" in order to shape his character as a great leader (9). Levine (1999) quoted a primary school textbook that explained the idea of the new government through a fictional dialogue: " —What is government, papa? —[Government] is an organization that directs and orients the destiny of the country, attending to its needs and its progress. Everybody needs a guide, a governor, a director who makes things run smoothly" (106).

[20] In his inaugural address on Mar. 4, 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt defined the United States' international policy in terms of a good neighbor: "The neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others. The neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbors" (Roosevelt 1933). Although Roosevelt did not explicitly refer to Latin America, he was using an expression that President Herbert Hoover had coined in 1928 in a speech that he gave in Honduras announcing his intention of maintaining not only cordial relations between the governments of Honduras and the United States, but also the relations of "good neighbors." As Gellman (1979) affirmed, the

loans to promote its industrialization and to finally overcome phenomena like misery and

hunger. Vargas's intention to place Brazil on the same level as the world's major economic

powers directly influenced the country's international image. In addition to economic

programs, the United States government directly defined guidelines and procedures of

representation in order to help manage the images of its good neighbors.[21]

Figures like Brazilian actress Carmen Miranda condensed and personified the new

image of Latin America that the Good Neighbor policy attempted to project. Miranda became

a success in the 1940s, when she made nine films with Twentieth Century Fox and

popularized the image of the tutti-frutti woman. By 1946 she was the highest paid female star

in Hollywood and had become the paradigm of Latin American identity for US audiences.[22]

Good Neighbor policy did not have a precise definition but came to be associated with a complex of efforts developed between 1933 and 1945 to improve relations between the United States and the countries of Latin America, as well as to maintain continental unity against the Nazi threat. Although the most obvious consequence of this new diplomatic approach was a commitment to nonintervention into the affairs of Latin American countries (United States Marines were removed from Haiti in 1934, and Congress nullified the 1903 Platt Amendment that authorized the occupation of Cuba), the policy rapidly generated important transformations in other fields (sometimes indirectly), from international commerce to education and culture.

[21] This new policy had several consequences for the American film industry, especially after the creation of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA) in 1940. The CIAA established a special office in Hollywood, with John Hay Whitney as its director, and intervened in the conception, production, and distribution of films. During World War II, Latin America was the only foreign market available for exploitation, so the United States government sought to maintain the Pan-American spirit that President Roosevelt had promoted in the 1930s. Along with the Hays Office (which was in charge of the application of the Motion Picture Production Code that regulated the acceptable content of American films), the CIAA pressed the studios to produce more films with Latin American themes. Keeping in mind the protests by several Latin American governments against the offensive misrepresentations of their cultures seen in American cinema in the past, the CIAA suggested that any material projected on the screen be designed to promote a favorable reaction among Latin American audiences. As a result, the studios established international departments that worked closely with CIAA specialists on Latin America in order to avoid any kind of harmful or offensive representations of Latino cultures. In addition, the CIAA sponsored several documentary short films dubbed into Spanish and Portuguese for Latin American distribution presenting a favorable image of the United States. By 1943 thirty films with Latin American themes had been released and twenty-five more were in production. Two years later, the number had rise to eighty-four (López 1991). Hollywood had discovered the advantages of using locations in Latin America to shoot films portraying Latin Americans (an apparently obvious premise but one that had only been discovered after several misrepresentations in the previous decades), but the producers never forgot the most successful strategy that had assured them permanence in the international markets since the 1920s: the creation of film types through the use of well-known Latin American actors (always alongside recognizable American stars).

[22] Her image was the subject of heated controversies during those years (as it is still today). While many Brazilians seemed to perceive her as an object of cult worship and national pride, others stigmatized her as a

In the opening shots of *The Gang's All Here* (1943), the Brazilian bombshell is introduced in a musical performance in a nightclub. As an actor sings the famous theme *Aquarela do Brasil* in Portuguese, a group of sailors unload the SS *Brazil*, which has just arrived in New York. While showing the passengers leaving the ship, the camera unveils the major exports of Latin America: sugar, coffee, and fruits. The latter are not packaged in boxes or even bags, but hang directly from cargo nets. The camera follows the goods descending from the holds, revealing bunches of colorful fruits and vegetables almost magically suspended in the air. A few seconds later, the camera's descent connects the hanging fruits with the fruits in the hat of a woman who stands exactly behind the net. She smiles and starts singing in Portuguese. The visual connection between the cargo and this extravagantly dressed, exotic character serves to introduce Miranda as the most important export of Brazil. As the nightclub host remarks at the end of the sequence, Miranda, together with the other female dancers, has been "specially imported" to teach the "Uncle Sam-ba" to the American audience. "Well," the host comments, "there's your Good Neighbor policy!"

Miranda does not arrive in New York as a humble girl in search of the American dream, but as part of an abundant cargo of food ready to be consumed. As López (1991) argued, her validity as a Latin American was based on the rhetoric of the excess "of costume, performance, sexuality, and musicality" (416). Food was central in the construction of this image of plenty. Later in the film, in her second performance in the same nightclub, Miranda is presented not in the modern city of New York, but in a land full of banana palms, monkeys,

passive instrument of Hollywood's imperialism and even accused her of having been Americanized and abandoning her Brazilian roots. Several authors have analyzed Miranda's image as a regressive reduction that reinforced Latin American stereotypes, pointing out the undeniable process of exoticization she embodied (López 1991; Augusto 1995; Griffin 2002; Foster 2013). Others have tried to show how her image of both feminine and ethnic excess ultimately brought into question stereotyping in both areas (Roberts 1993; Castro 2005).

and numerous overtly sexualized women. Miranda arrives in the scene on a cart full of bananas pulled by two oxen and a half-naked man. Her black dress is decorated with fake strawberries and her hat (the famous tutti-frutti hat) is made with a bunch of bananas. The song and the choreography highlight the abundance of the land that, the viewer deduces, Miranda comes from. Sensual dancers with oversized bananas produce striking forms and shapes that seduce the viewer until Miranda sings goodbye: "Brazilian *señoritas*, they are sweet and shy, they dance and play together when the sun is high, but when the tropical morning is in the sky, they have a different kind of time, and even I forget the time. The lady in the tutti-frutti hat."

Hunger had no place in this land of plenty. Hollywood did not want to present its good neighbors as living in impoverished towns and suffering from famines and malnutrition. Instead, it showed them living in modern, glamorous cities (as Rio de Janeiro was presented in films like *Rio the Magnificent*, *Touring Brazil*, and *Flying Down to Rio*) or bucolic landscapes where ancient towns kept alive the most vital regional traditions.[23] During the years of the Good Neighbor policy, Hollywood did not simply ignore Latin American hunger, but actually created a completely opposing image based on the abundance of Carnival and the exotic diversity of nature in South America. Brazil was depicted as a developing nation with a growing, modern economy able to compete in and with the industrialized world. Although

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[23] This was precisely the image projected in *Saludos amigos* (1942), the product of Walt Disney's South American goodwill tour, which the US Department of State had commissioned the previous year. The film narrates the travel of a group of artists and writers who go to South America looking for new inspiration for cartoon films. In the first sequence, the animated plane carrying these American tourists flies over the two most important cities of the continent (Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aries), representing them with big, shiny buildings and highlighting their size and population. The sequence continues through smaller towns, represented with a white church and some smaller houses, before arriving in Lake Titicaca, where Donald Duck, half tourist and half ethnographer, learns the traditional customs of the Incas and appreciates the beauty of the natural landscapes. The final destination of this trip is Rio de Janeiro, "a city of amazing beauty," where the cartoonists create Joe Carioca, an anthropomorphized parrot who introduces the tourists to the colorful Brazilian culture and the region's natural diversity.

within the country the literary romances of the northeast focused on denouncing hunger and starvation, the international image of Brazil was one of abundance. The dry *sertão* of the literary romances contrasted with the colorful and musical tropics depicted in the movies.

The conjunction of the United States' Good Neighbor policy with Vargas's national project of developmentalism created an atmosphere of enthusiasm in Brazil. In a certain sense, Castro shared that optimistic perspective and translated it into the field of nutrition as a necessary link between public health and economic progress. Only through the increase of the national rent (that is, the reduction of the social gap) and the modernization of the economy was it possible to overcome hunger and illness (to the extent that those were social symptoms of underdevelopment). This emphasis on deep transformations in the economic politics of the country aimed to avoid any kind of assistentialist solution. Castro never defended a representation of the hungry as passive victims waiting for aid, but rather as active agents in the transformation of reality. Any public policy or institutional action needed to emerge together with the people's consciousness of their own condition. In this sense, within the populist-developmentalist rhetoric, the hungry were shaped as a vulnerable *population* (through the new scientific-economic approach) but also as a transforming *people* (able to understand and transform their own condition of misery). The two needed to be connected: state intervention without popular consciousness would imply only temporary solutions doomed to fail in the long term; the people's will to transform reality without the support of the state would degenerate into violence.[24]

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[24] Castro foreshadowed one of the main topics in Glauber Rocha's *Aesthetics of Hunger* from the mid-1960s: the connection between hunger and violence. Castro was fully aware that the poor conditions of food production and distribution in several regions of the country could prompt massive revolts against the government. However, far from defending violence (as Rocha would do), all Castro's reflections aimed to avoid this extreme, which he felt would imply the impossibility of any long-term solution.

With this new historical approach, Castro not only radically rejected previous

explanations that had associated hunger with overpopulation or with the absence of suitable

soils for agricultural production, but also introduced an association that would be vital in the

following decades, both in the formulation of official state policies and in the aesthetic

appropriation of the trope of hunger in the 1960s: the connection between colonialism,

hunger, and underdevelopment.

1.3   The Postwar Period and Representations of National Development

The end of World War II produced an unprecedented coincidence between the

development policies in Brazil and the international effort to make visible the phenomenon of

hunger in the Third World. At a national level, the 1950s saw the consolidation of the

connection between hunger and underdevelopment through the creation of new national

policies during Vargas's second term, many of which continued following the election of

Juscelino Kubitschek in 1956. One of Kubitschek's first acts was to establish the *Plano

Nacional de Desenvolvimento* [Plan of National Development], promoted with the slogan

"Fifty years of progress in five." Nutrition was one of the major goals of this ambitious plan,

which was divided into five areas: energy, transportation, food, base industries, and

education.[25] The basis of the plan was the expansion of industrialization, which Brazil had

initiated in the previous decades of the twentieth century in order to transform the country

from a producer of raw materials into a manufacturer of industrial goods. Although the plan

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[25] One of the main goals of the plan was the construction of the city of Brasilia, a symbol of the discourse of
development and modernization promoted by the government. Besides political reforms and projects of
modernization in the cities, Kubitschek fostered the expansion of research activity and the dissemination of
knowledge by the Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros (ISEB), created in 1955. The main objective of the
institute was to discuss and define the notion of development, which would be the basis of the state policies
during the next decade. The ISEB's ideas on underdevelopment and colonialism would influence the Cinema
Novo filmmakers in the 1960s.

explicitly included the modernization of agricultural production as one of its primary goals, the discourse of development deepened the division between rural and urban areas that had emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. In the postwar period, the urban population of the country rose from thirty to seventy percent. The image of the backward *sertão* was extended into the collective imagination in several ways, including the popular films called *chanchadas*.[26]

This gulf between the urban and rural populations in Brazil resonated at an international level with the division between the First and Third World, a consequence of the expansion and transformation of the rhetoric of development at a global scale. With the end of World War II, the relationship between the United States and Latin America changed. The United States turned its attention to the European devastation and the recognition of the Soviet Union as an international power. The inter-American affairs promoted by the Good Neighbor policy were relegated to secondary status. As Gellman (1979) affirmed, "Events like the Great Depression, the Roosevelt presidency, and the worldwide confrontation, which had united the Western Hemisphere, had disappeared" (226). With the arrival of the Cold War, the rhetoric of good neighbors was replaced by a relationship that clearly distinguished between developed and underdeveloped countries; hunger played an important role in this new discourse.

This division between developed and underdeveloped countries was the main idea that President Harry S. Truman expressed in his inaugural address on January 20, 1949:

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[26] Film critics used this pejorative name to refer to the comic musicals that adapted the model of Hollywood films using popular carnival music and dance. According to João Luiz Vieira (2003), the very name entailed a critique of the imitative character of these films: the Portuguese term *chanchada* came from the Italian word *cianciata*, which refers to a senseless discourse or a vulgar imitation (91). Augusto (1989) also pointed out the etymological connection with the word *chancho* (pork) in some Hispanic countries and, therefore, with dirt or garbage. In Argentina the word *chanchada* was originally used as synonym of garbage and later to refer to worthless theatrical pieces.

More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas [. . .] I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life. And, in cooperation with other nations, we should foster capital investment in areas needing development (Truman 1949).

The main goal of the Truman doctrine was to create the conditions necessary to replicate the characteristic features of advanced societies all over the world by focusing on capital, science, and technology. In the early 1950s, all the global powers shared this new political will toward intervention and the transformation of two-thirds of the global population. During that decade, it seemed impossible to define social reality in different terms: "Reality, in sum, had been colonized by the development discourse" (Escobar 1995, 5).

The coincidence of developmental divisions at both a national and an international level is vital to understanding representations of hunger as a social phenomenon. The visibility of hunger was shaped within these simultaneous divisions: The gulf between rural and urban populations in Brazil prompted leaders to ignore hunger in order to promote a narrative of national development, while the one between developed and underdeveloped nations drove leaders to expose hunger in order to promote the division between the First World and the Third World (and the power relationships that divide implied).

The separation between Brazil's poor rural interior and wealthy urban elite was exploited as the subject of several Brazilian films called *chanchadas*. Such films typically told the story of a marginal character on an insatiable quest for success. The universe of these films was based on a clear division between the exclusive and glamorous world of the show business elite, and the humble rural world of the working classes, from which the main

characters emerged. They were always cheaters and tricksters looking for a way to improve their fortunes and to overcome their marginal role in the social hierarchy (more often via a stroke of luck than by any real effort). Lisa Shaw (2003b) argued that the *chanchada* was rooted in the two main tenets of popular Brazilian identity: the countercultural lifestyle of *malandragem* and the subversion of the law and any hierarchical authority via the practice of *jeitinho*.[27] These comedy films were extremely popular amongst the thousands of migrants who moved to the city to escape from poverty in northeast Brazil.

It is remarkable that even when they featured marginal characters like beggars or rural workers the *chanchadas* did not introduce hunger as a central topic. The main characters in films like *É com este que eu vou* [With this one I go] are not hungry vagabonds looking desperately for food, but rather lazy *malandros* trying to take advantage of any situation to get fast and easy money.[28] The *chanchadas* were not intended to offer a portrait of the conditions of poverty and hunger facing the working classes in Brazil, but rather to show the paths the characters followed in a desperate attempt to transform their social roles. In most cases, those roles do not change at the end of the films, but the characters do seem to accept their

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[27] Shaw (2003b) cited popular definitions of these terms. *Malandragem* refers to the lifestyle of "idleness, petty crime, drinking, gambling, and womanizing." *Jeitinho* is the "fast, efficient, and last-minute way of accomplishing a goal by breaking a universalistic rule and using instead one's informal social or personal resources" (243, n. 5).

[28] *É com este que eu vou* (1948) tells the story of twin brothers separated in childhood, Oscar and Osmar. Oscar is a lazy beggar who sleeps on the streets of São Paulo and does anything to avoid work, while Osmar is the wealthy president of a bank in Rio de Janeiro who must find his lost brother in order to receive the family's inheritance. While Osmar is looking for Oscar in the streets of São Paulo, a police officer confuses Osmar with his brother and arrests him. With Osmar in jail, his secretary decides to pay Oscar to take his brother's place in Rio until Osmar's sudden disappearance is solved. Thus, their roles are inverted and the beggar Oscar enjoys for a while the luxury and comfort of the Brazilian elites. Other films like *O Homem do Sputnik* (1959) [The Sputnik man] use similar character types. In this film, Anastácio and his wife, Cleci, try to sell a strange object that fell onto their farm. Believing that the circular artifact is a Russian satellite covered with gold, they try to use it as a unique means to escape the discomforts of rural life. Their main motivation, however, is not to meet their basic needs, but to fulfill their desire for social ascension. When they discover that the object could be the Sputnik satellite, Cleci proclaims: "We are rich, Anastácio. Our day is here." Anastácio joyfully shares his plans: buying a new chicken coop and a new brooder. However, Cleci promptly replies: "No, no chickens! We are getting out of this hole. I want to live in Copacabana. I want a car with a driver. Go to beauty salons during the day and to elegant clubs at night. Traveling . . . London, Paris, New York."

conditions. The *chanchadas* follow an established convention of happy endings in which all the contradictions that compose the plot find a definitive solution. Music and dance bring together villains and heroes: "All is forgiven and the music wipes away the problems of everyday life" (Shaw 2003b, 234).[29]

Thus, although the *chanchadas* depicted marginal and poor characters, their condition was not represented as a tragedy, but as a picturesque circumstance. While some of the films criticized the state development project and parodied the capitalist fervor and work ethic, they did not offer a realistic denunciation of the precarious living conditions of millions of Brazilians, instead applauding conspicuous and vulgar consumption (Shaw 2001, 21). In films like *Esse milhão é meu* [That million is mine], when characters came into money by a stroke of good fortune, they immediately displayed a list of items to buy in order to achieve the standard of living officially promoted in the 1950s.

The *chanchadas* seem to make fun of poverty. Hunger and misery do not seem to be extremely serious or unsolvable problems; they appear as contingencies that eventually give way to the joy of music and Carnival. The humor of the *chanchadas* is explicitly self-deprecating and encourages the audience "to laugh at themselves and the difficulties they encounter in their daily lives" (Shaw 2001, 25).[30]

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[29] Some of their titles suggested this convention: *Tristezas não pagam dívidas* [Sorrows do not pay debts] from 1944, and *Não adianta chorar* [No use crying] from 1945.

[30] For some critics, especially in the 1960s, this was the central problem of the *chanchadas* and the main reason to despise them as simple Hollywood imitations that offered a distorted image of Brazilian reality. Glauber Rocha (2004) considered them a conformist critique of Brazilian misery and radically argued, "The people, receiving a superficial comedy of underdevelopment, find [their] own disgrace amusing and die laughing" (132). Other critics have attempted to recognize the importance of the *chanchadas* in the creation of a massive audience for Brazilian cinema (Viany 1970), even showing that the imitative character that defined these films in the 1930s and 1940s was transformed in the 1950s into an ironic relationship defined by a permanent parody of the generic Hollywood template and, therefore, into a struggle of the periphery against the hegemonic powers (Salles Gomes 1980; King 2000; Shaw 2003; Augusto 1995).

Although, in the early 1950s, the northeastern *sertão* became a central subject in

several Brazilian films, it was not used to portray or denounce the conditions of hunger in the

region, but rather as the scene of a series of adventures that evoked the model of Hollywood

Westerns. According to Jean-Claude Bernardet (1977), Lima Barreto's *O cangaceiro* (1953)

inaugurated a genre of Brazilian cinema known as *Nordestern*: this genre featured commercial

films, based on the character of the American cowboy, that depicted the adventures of the

cangaceiros, the bandits of the northeastern badlands.[31] These fictional figures were directly

connected with the phenomenon of hunger.[32] In the films produced during the 1950s,

however, that connection was overshadowed by the adoption of the classic plot of American

Westerns. Instead of portraying the concrete social conditions behind the *cangaço* (the

lifestyle of the *cangaceiros*), the films focused on the adventures of these fictional bandits,

placed in an abstract (almost mythical) time totally separated from historical context.

Barreto introduced *O cangaceiro* (1953) with the explanatory subtitle: "Imprecise

time. When there were still cangaceiros." As Ismail Xavier (2003) argued in one of the most

compelling analyses of the film, the *cangaceiro* is presented as an archaic character,

inevitably separated from the present. Following the model of the American Western, the film

proposed an ethnocentric perspective that honored "the other" (the badlands dwellers) based

on a radical distance. The *cangaceiros* and the reality that surrounded them were part of the

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[31] The critic Salvyano Cavalcanti de Paiva created this neologism in the 1960s by combining the words *nordeste* (northeast) and *Western* (referring to the American film genre).
[32] The *cangaceiro* was not a fictional creation. The term emerged in the early nineteenth century to name the poor peasants who inhabited the northeastern deserts. At the end of that century, it was associated with the groups of armed outlaws stealing goods and living in the desert. The *cangaceiros* were perceived as both bandits and heroes among the population of the Brazilian northeast. Together with *retirantes* and *beatos*, they were used in the literary romances of the 1930s to represent the different reactions of the population to the drought and famine (Paes and Massaud 1999). Some people emigrated to other regions in search of food (*retirantes*), devoted themselves to their religious beliefs in hope and expectation of divine intervention (*beatos*), or became bandits and obtained their food and goods by assaulting landlords and travelers (*cangaceiros*).

past. They were completely eradicated in the process of modernization of the country and could only be evoked from the civilized present as mythical figures of a primitive national identity. Xavier compared them to the indigenous natives and their appropriation in the twentieth century as figures of the modern *brasilidade* (Brazilian-ness), which honored them as a part of the nation's past (124).

This tribute to "the other" followed all the formal and narrative requirements of the commercial films of the period. The main axis of the plot of *O cangaceiro* is a classical love story, in which the woman is used as a motive for the awakening of the good feelings of the hero, and an inspiration for his struggle against the evil villains. Filmed in studios and rural zones of the state of São Paulo (far from the Brazilian northeast), the film follows the typical conventions of the Hollywood Western, even when these conventions contradict traditional representations of the *cangaço*. One of the most remarkable examples of this phenomenon is the use of horses in the film. While the *cangaceiros* are depicted as skillful riders permanently accompanied by their horses in *O cangaceiro*, other representations, especially in literary romances, used horses as a symbol of social division: The horse is property of the landlords (as industrial machinery is the property of the industrialist). The worker can use it, but it does not belong to him or her.[33]

Thus, the *cangaceiro* became a spectacle, and any possible connection between him and the reality of hunger was minimized. Although famine and starvation are mentioned in some of these films, hunger is only part of the picturesque landscape where the *cangaceiros'*

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[33] The visual documents of the original *cangaceiros* always depicted them on foot. Equestrian portraits were not common in the traditional representation of these figures (as they were, for instance, in representations of the leaders of the Mexican Revolution). When horses appear in these documents, they are being used for a specific action (especially hunting), but they are not included as a symbolic element to convey a message about the characters.

adventures take place. The northeast of Brazil became associated with the mythical past, while the present was clearly located in the urban centers where the characters of the *chanchadas* pursued success.[34]

The division between the rural *sertão* and the refined urban center found a correspondence at an international level. The new interest of world economic powers in promoting development in specific areas clearly divided the globe between poor, primitive areas and prosperous, technically advanced countries. This division was the basis for the expansion and institutionalization of international food aid policies from the mid-1940s to the late 1960s.[35]

The Allies' wartime food programs were consolidated into a permanent institution with the establishment of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in October 1945. Its main purpose was to raise the "levels of nutrition and standards of living of all the people under their [the Allies] respective jurisdictions" and to secure "improvements in the efficiency of the production and distribution of all food and agricultural products."[36] Almost a decade later, in 1954, the US government formalized its global programs with the

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[34] The absence of hunger as a subject in Brazilian cinema of this era is even more evident when considering that hunger had already become a major concern in other cultural productions, especially literature. Beyond the literary tradition of the *Romance de 30*, painters like Candido Portinari depicted the severe consequences of the droughts in the Brazilian northeast. His series *Retirantes*, produced between 1944 and 1945, illustrates a family forced to abandon its lands to look for food and basic goods. The images evoke the photographs of the hungry that had been published in journals and chronicles since the end of the nineteenth century: a group of starving people posing for the camera, looking directly at the viewer. With Expressionist strokes, Portinari deformed the bodies of the hungry, stressing the cruelty of their condition and producing an overwhelming effect. The gravity of these visual representations and the realism of the literary descriptions of the northeastern droughts contrasted with the comic, light depictions of these same conditions in films.

[35] In the case of Brazil, the United States had developed different programs in order to provide food and promote food production in the poorest regions of the country since the early 1940s. One of the first treaties focusing on food was signed in 1942 and was described as an "agreement between the governments of the United States of America and of the United States of Brazil, for the development of food stuffs production in Brazil, especially in the states situated in the Amazon region, the North and Northeast, including the state of Baía [*sic*]" (Bevans 1970, 932).

[36] A description of the objectives of the FAO is included in *Basic Texts of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations* (2013), available at http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/022/K8024E.pdf.

enactment of the Agricultural Trade and Development Assistance Act (PL-480). This new law

authorized both sales of surplus agricultural commodities and government donations of food

for famine and other urgent relief programs for "friendly nations" (Ruttan 1990, 10).

Although the PL-480 was originally designed as a security strategy to obtain the goodwill of

emerging states during the Cold War, it soon was rephrased as a policy of developmental

assistance based on the premise that a more prosperous and democratic world would also be a

more secure one.[37]

Similar to the way in which nutrition sciences had created a normalization of the body,

the discourse of development normalized certain economic and social conditions (represented

by developed and democratic countries) as a benchmark to diagnose underdevelopment and,

therefore, to propose solutions to famines and starvation. Thus, in making hunger visible, a

relationship of power was naturalized: the hungry, as an underdeveloped population, would

naturally need aid from the non-hungry, developed nations.

Cinema was an important tool in the promotion of these new policies. Richard

Patterson (1951) described the establishment of the Film Division of the Department of Public

Information of the United Nations (UN) after the General Assembly unanimously passed a

resolution in 1946 stating the importance of divulgating the aims and activities of the

organization (327). In the late 1940s, the Film Division attempted to establish consistent

contact with the motion picture industry in order to get the UN mentioned as often as possible

in Hollywood films.[38] Additionally, the Film Division produced several reels and

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[37] According to Sophia Murphy and Kathleen McAfee (2005), besides promoting development in underdeveloped areas and securing the goodwill of emerging states, the law was also aimed at finding new outlets for surplus production and building future export markets.

[38] Patterson (1951) offered an illustrative example of this new relationship between the UN and Hollywood: "For example, if Skot-Hansen discovered that someone was thinking of making a film about the destruction of the world, he immediately contacted the producer and pointed out that if the world faced destruction, it would be

documentaries covering all the UN activities around the world. Its perspective on hunger was similar to the one defended by the Truman doctrine: the hungry were victims who needed to be fed.[39]

Paul Rotha's documentary works illustrate this approach to global hunger. In fact, one of the British filmmaker's most famous films produced before the end of World War II, *World of Plenty* (1943), directly addressed the issue of hunger. The film focuses on the problem of world hunger, presenting a comparison between the situation before and during the war, and defending the need for a postwar world food plan. Its main argument is made explicit in the opening words: "This is a film about Food—the World Strategy of Food. . . . In peace or war, Food is Man's Security Number One" (Rotha 1956, 274). After the war, Rotha produced two other films about hunger that he described as part of his "The World" series: *The World Is Rich* (1947) and *World without End* (1953), both made for UNESCO.

In 1955 Herbert G. Luft published a comment on Rotha's work in the journal *Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television*, describing the conception of *World without End*, produced two years earlier. Made simultaneously in locations in Mexico and Thailand, the film aimed to show the actions that the UN had undertaken to tackle the problems of poverty, malnutrition, and disease around the world. Luft (1955) explained that Thailand and Mexico were chosen because, even though they were on opposite sides of the globe, "in these countries, as in many other underdeveloped countries, the main human problems are exactly the same, regardless of differences in customs, habits, and traditions of the people" (96). The

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imperative that there should be a meeting of the UN. He then offered either to act as technical consultant or to get whatever material was needed. And, what is more astounding, he would do it free of charge" (332).
[39] Patterson (1951) cited a pamphlet published by the Department of Public Information that described a seventeen-minute documentary film from 1950 called *Battle for Bread*. Subtly, its description shows a clear division between the needy hungry and the active programs of the UN: "A film concerned with food. The greater need for its better production is movingly shown as the only way to feed all the peoples of the world. This is not a story of what might have been done; it tells what is being done by the United Nations today" (328).

exposure of hunger was based on a disdain for differences, the generalization of the hungry as "underdeveloped," and a clear division of bodies: the hungry body, without a voice, always collective; and the body of the one who helps, the one who narrates and films, the body of the spectator.

The institutionalization of food programs was the first step in a series of strategies to combat hunger and promote economic development: "From food fortification and supplementation, nutrition education, and food aid in the 1950s and 1960s to land reform, the green revolution, integrated rural development, and comprehensive national food and nutritional planning since the late 1960s" (Escobar 1995, 103). Never before had hunger served such an important role—the subject of a series of discourses of control centered on the production and optimization of life. The discursive connection between hunger and underdevelopment was the final and definitive step in the transformation of the hungry into a mass object of knowledge and administration. Castro had long promoted this connection as a way to explain famines and nutritional deficiencies in Brazil. Latin America accepted its role in the new rhetoric of development and incorporated the representations of its own hunger in terms of backwardness and lack. The hungry became the paradigmatic symbol of the relations of power between the First World and the Third World.

The years of the international expansion of the discourses on hunger coincided with nationalist and developmentalist projects in Brazil and other countries in Latin America. Hunger was shaped simultaneously as a national issue, a product of a local history of colonialism, and a global phenomenon that demanded international intervention. This relationship between the local and the global was central in the emergence of modern representations of hunger. The humanitarian approach, consolidated from the late nineteenth century to the 1950s, implied an inherent process of abstraction: the local contexts of famines

and malnutrition were transformed into objective data. The hungry, always singular and concrete, were transformed into a part of a social body, into *population*. As Foucault (2007) pointed out, population is a statistical artifact that depends on a common abstract essence. Any individual variation always disappears in favor of regularity. In this sense, the starving African children and the undernourished Latin American peasants were perceived in the same way, as "at-risk" populations in need of intervention. The local was used as a rhetorical tool to stimulate sympathies and a sense of urgency for the hungry.

By the end of the 1950s, the discourses on hunger were almost naturally associated with the discourses on economic development and nationalism. From being considered a necessary condition (first a divine punishment and later a natural phenomenon) that taught a lesson to the morally incompetent, hunger came to be represented as a biological and social symptom of economic underdevelopment. The hungry, therefore, were no longer perceived as indirectly responsible for their own condition, but rather as victims of external circumstances. Those external forces were crystalized in the concept of colonialism: the persistence of an economic model based on the social gap between the oligarch landlords and the impoverished workers.

Castro condensed three of the main ideas that influenced the representations of hunger in the 1960s: the explanation of hunger as a universal phenomenon (not a local one) caused by human actions (rather than by natural or divine forces); the connection between hunger and underdevelopment in Brazil; and the need to generate a public discussion on an issue that, from his perspective, had long been a taboo. The third idea was one of his major concerns during his public life and the main reason for his interest in cinema beginning in the mid-1950s. He strongly believed that media must be used as a means of dissemination of the reality of hunger. According to Soares (2001), Castro even developed a film project

promoting this vision. Besides *O drama das secas* (1958), Castro collaborated on two

additional movies in the following years: *O drama da fome*, [Drama of hunger] directed by

Pio de Berti Gambini (about the poverty in the mangroves of Recife); and an untitled work

directed by Noel Ballif in which he criticized the lack of representations of hunger in the mass

media (33).

1.4   Conclusion

The process of the emergence of hunger as a social issue was only possible by an

implicit symbolic violence that reduced the hungry to an abstract object of intervention. The

hungry were irremediably defined in terms of lack and deficiency (the underdeveloped lacked

that which the developed already possessed), thus naturalizing the connection between hunger

and aid. The humanitarian sense of urgency came to be considered the obvious and usual

answer to hunger, ignoring inevitable and inescapable political considerations. Two elements

were central in this process: the sympathy toward the hungry produced through mass media

representations, and the scientific approach that "objectively" measured and diagnosed

hunger. These were the basis for the emergence of the social phenomenon of hunger.

I must stress two important nuances in this confluence of realistic narratives and

scientific discourse: first, the political consequences of placing sympathy as the basis of

representations of hunger; and second, the fact that media narratives and scientific

descriptions were not two different logics applied to the same reality, but rather two

expressions of the same process of transformation of the world into images.

Although, obviously, the moral sentiment of sympathy did not emerge with the

humanitarian perspective on hunger, humanitarianism did introduce an important change: the

transformation of sympathy or pity into a political principle. Luc Boltanski (1999) called it a

"politics of pity," as opposed to a politics of justice. The main difference between the two is that the former avoids the question of whether the misery of the unfortunate is justified: "For a politics of pity, the urgency of the action needing to be taken to bring an end to the suffering invoked always prevails over considerations of justice" (5).

The link between hunger, suffering, pity, and action was naturalized. Slavoj Zizek (2008) used the example of one of the well-known slogans of humanitarian causes: "In the time it takes you to read this paragraph, ten children will die of hunger" (6). Such evocative statements encapsulate the transformation of the representation of hunger that I have described in this chapter. The direct appeal to the reader or viewer, combined with objective scientific data (measuring the rate of deaths by starvation by the second at a global scale), communicates a clear sense of urgency. Thus, what had emerged as a result of power dynamics between the industrialized countries and the Third World was presented as a natural connection, free of any ideological content.

Distanced observation—the observation of the unfortunate other by those who do not share his suffering—was a central notion in the construction of this political approach (Boltanski 1999). The basis for a politics of pity is the spectacle of human suffering. In other words, such a politics depends on the creation of a specific regime of visibility. Timothy Mitchell (1989) showed the close link between the discourse of development and the modern comprehension of the world as image, using the model of the World's Fairs of the nineteenth century to examine the methods of order and truth that characterize the modern West. The practice of setting up the world as a picture was not only a singular ritual used to display exotic and unknown cultures for Western spectators at specific public events, but also the very logic of the construction of "the other" through which the West has represented the

world. Here, Mitchell followed Heidegger's (2002a) concept of "world picture": not a "picture of the world," but rather "the world grasped as picture" (67).

By pointing out the becoming-image of the world, Mitchell was not trying to denounce the possible alienation of the spectators from the "real world," but rather to identify how certain dynamics of visibility create the effect that we call the "real world." The problem is not the connection between the representation and the represented reality; the problem is how representations create the effect of an external reality as a mechanism of power. Thus, our task is not to determine whether the representations of hunger are accurate, or whether they are fair to the hungry, but rather to show the ideological mechanisms that have shaped hunger as a social, *representable* issue. As Jacques Rancière (2011) argued, representation "is a complex set of relations between the visible and the invisible, the visible and speech, the said and the unsaid. It is not a mere reproduction of what is out there in front of the photographer or the filmmaker. It is always an alteration that occurs in a chain of images which alter it in turn" (94).

The reality of hunger was shaped through the establishment of a regime of visibility that follows the modern logic of transforming the world into a picture. According to Heidegger (2002a), this world picture was not exclusively produced through explicit technologies of representation (such as photography or cinema), but rather, and predominantly, through modern science. Representation is not one procedure among others, but the very essence of science in the age of the world picture. That means that the fundamental procedure of modern science is the definition of the being as object of representation. Science "calls beings to account with regard to the way in which, and the extent to which, they can be placed at the disposal of representation" (65). Heidegger's perspective on science is remarkably suggestive for my interest in hunger. There should be a

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common logic in the production of images and narratives about hunger, and the scientific discourse that studied the phenomenon as a socio-biological fact: both were based on the transformation of hunger into a representable object.

This transformation produced a new perception of the hungry body as an object of knowledge and intervention, which thereby acquired a specific social role. The body was normalized in the role of the victim, the ill patient, the underdeveloped population. This codification of the hungry body was also a codification of the ways it was perceived, a normalization of the experience of any virtual observer. The very reactions to the image of a hungry body have been socially codified and morally regulated. The emotions such images evoke are strong but expected, anticipated, and open to manipulation and control. The experience of the hungry body thus came to be familiar as it became representable.

Beyond identifying the multiple transformations of the notion of hunger, my goal has been to point out a central belief in the basis of this historical process: hunger has always been defined as a representable phenomenon. The main assumption behind the humanist representations of hunger was precisely that it was possible to represent hunger. While the humanitarian approach assumed that the hungry body preceded its representations, I have attempted to show that the hungry body was produced *as* a regime of visibility. The hungry body is socially produced as long as it becomes representable. Representation, in this sense, is not a posterior procedure. This apparently obvious conclusion reveals the paradoxical effect of representation: the represented object is naturalized, while being depicted as autonomous from its own representations. Thus, although the social issue of hunger was the result of the conjunction of sympathetic narratives and scientific discourses, hunger is now depicted as their cause: it is assumed that hunger exists as a social issue and that narratives and scientific discourses are secondary representations of that original phenomenon. Hunger is assumed to

be a social object represented through different means. It is not only possible but also desirable to represent hunger to the extent that those representations allow a better understanding of the phenomenon and, therefore, the execution of effective solutions. In this sense, the problem is not the production of a regime of visibility but its naturalization.

The twentieth century was deeply defined by the desire for representations. By the late 1960s, an overpopulation of images of hungry and starving people was part of the social imagination. Numbers and data were daily disseminated in an attempt to stress the urgency of the phenomenon. My aim in the next chapter is to show that Brazilian Cinema Novo not only questioned a specific type of representation of hunger (the humanitarian approach), but also questioned the very notion of representation, the very fact of defining hunger as a representable social issue. I propose a reading of the aesthetics of hunger as a defense of the failures of representation.

2. Aesthetics of Hunger

On August 13, 1969, the journal *Folha de São Paulo* published a short note called "Ele passa fome para poder viver" ["He starves for a living"], describing the most recent performance on the streets of São Paulo by Adelino João da Silva, best known as the fakir Silki:

> In a dirty little parlor and exuding a strong smell of ether at the São João avenue, almost in the corner of Ipiranga, a 43-year-old man, thin and pale, with long hair and beard, almost like a beggar, desperately awaits for the next Tuesday. . . . If Silki is able to stand these seven days, he will break again the world record of "Physical Endurance" for Brazil, now held by the French fakir-doctor Burmah (10).

According to the note, over the course of his 105 days of fasting, hundreds of people had visited São Paulo's downtown to witness Silki's "heroic" achievement, leaving more than 3,000 notes and dedications supporting his effort. "I hope you break, not only this record, but all of them using your strength and hope, because you are the greatest pride of our Brazil," wrote Ana Maria de Arruda in one of the books arranged on the improvised stage. The journalist for *Folha de São Paulo* asked Silki whether he was starving; he replied, "I feel weak, not hungry."

One month later, on September 16, 1969, the illustrated supplement of the same journal published a note announcing an upcoming film inspired by Silki's life: *O profeta da fome* [The prophet of hunger]. The film, directed by Maurice Capovilla, featured two famous Brazilian actors: José Mojica Marins, known for his horror-film character Zé do Caixão; and Mauricio do Valle, who had performed important roles in *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* [Black god, white devil] and *O dragão da maldade contra o santo guerreiro* [The dragon of evil against the saint warrior], two of the most emblematic films of Brazilian Cinema Novo.

Mojica Marins interpreted the main character, the fakir Ali Khan, as a man who, after a series

of failed attempts to get food, decides to transform hunger into a way of life and become a

hunger artist. The film premiered on June 13, 1970—during the middle of the military

dictatorship that had taken control of Brazil six years earlier—in São Paulo.

According to Capovilla, his original intention was to create a film that followed the

"ideological horizon" established in Glauber Rocha's *Aesthetics of Hunger*, published five

years earlier. The figure of the fakir—a man who affirmed hunger as a way of life—

condensed the main ideas that had defined the first years of Cinema Novo and its approach to

the reality of hunger. This was precisely the core of Rocha's manifesto, in which he called for

the creation of a "culture of hunger" as the only effective way to face the conditions of

starvation in Latin America (Rocha 2004, 66). My goal in this chapter is to use Capovilla's

film as a place of reflection to condense the main conceptual implications of the affirmation

and transformation of hunger into an aesthetic principle, as proposed by Rocha in the 1960s.

Other films have been used to describe the aesthetics of hunger, traditionally following

a short list of examples that Rocha provided in his own manifesto.[40] Ismail Xavier (1983)

wrote one of the most rigorous and extensive analyses of the concept, focusing on two of the

earliest feature films directed by Glauber Rocha in the 1960s: *Barravento* (1962) and *Deus e

o diabo na terra do sol* (1964). These films represent, according to Xavier, "the most

characteristic moment of the *aesthetics of hunger*" (8). Randal Johnson (1984b) suggested

that the best expression of the aesthetics of hunger is the "critical realism" of a series of films

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[40] Rocha mentioned nine films: *Aruanda* (1960), *Porto das caixas* (1962), *Vidas secas* [Barren lives] (1963), *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* [Black god, white devil] (1964), *Ganga zumba* (1963), *Cinco vezes favela* [Five times favela] (1962), *Sol sobre a lama* [Su non the mud] (1963), *Garrincha: Alegría do povo* [Garrincha: the joy of people] (1962), and *Os mendigos* [The beggars] (1962).

made between 1960 and 1964, in what has been called the first phase of Cinema Novo.[41]

Besides *Deus e o diabo*, Johnson included Nelson Pereira dos Santos's *Vidas secas* [Barren lives] (1963) and Rui Guerra's *Os fuzis* [The guns] (1964) in this group. Johnson reaffirmed this perception in his influential compilation on Brazilian cinema, cowritten with Robert Stam (1995). Although these authors did not reduce the aesthetics of hunger to the films produced between 1960 and 1964, they stressed the commitment of these films to Rocha's manifesto. Films like *Cinco vezes favela* [Five times favela] (1962), *Porto das caixas* (1962), *Os cafajestes* [The scoundrels] (1962), and *Ganga zumba* (1963) would complete the list of the most representative films of the aesthetics of hunger.

This common association between the Cinema Novo films of the early 1960s and Rocha's manifesto is based on an interpretation of the aesthetics of hunger as a realistic style that attempted to reveal the true conditions of poverty and underdevelopment in Brazil through a series of narrative and formal experiments, as well as through innovative methods of low-budget production. My intention in this chapter is not to summarize these readings (an overwhelming task due to the vast production on the topic) or to add yet another detailed analysis of some of the most representative films of the first years of Cinema Novo, but rather

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[41] Randal Johnson and Robert Stam (1995), in one of the most influential periodizations of modern Brazilian cinema, divided its development into three main phases (probably following a division proposed by Rocha in his 1981 text, *Revolução do Cinema Novo*). The authors defined the first phase, between 1960 and 1964, as a group of "sad, ugly, desperate films" committed to the transformation of society (34). Rocha's concept of hunger condensed the spirit of this first phase, which gave way to a second period of popular and disenchanted films (1964 to 1968), and to a third "cannibal-tropicalist" phase (1968 to 1972). This division of Brazilian cinema echoes the traditional historical accounts of the New Latin American Cinema (this broader continental movement—in which Brazilian Cinema Novo has traditionally been included—emerged in the 1950s), the most recent proposed by Paul A. Schroeder (2012), who recognized two successive periods: the militant phase of the 1960s and the neo-baroque period of the 1970s and 1980s. Other authors, like Burnes Hollyman (1983), have proposed a division of the Cinema Novo into four phases: from 1955 to 1960, the "favela cycle"; from 1960 to 1964, the *sertão* films; from 1964 to 1968, a series of films centered around political power; and from 1968 to 1972, the "Tropicalist" period. Although Hollyman seemed to follow a division based on the subject of the films, he, in fact, reproduced the traditional division and simply added an extra stage for what others consider the predecessors of the movement.

to delve into one aspect of the aesthetics of hunger that has been obscured by classical interpretations.[42]

Traditionally, the concept of hunger has been linked to the broader notion of poverty and associated with the ongoing conditions of colonialism that Rocha denounced in his manifesto. Thus, the connection between the aesthetics of hunger and the problems of misery, underdevelopment, and colonialism in Latin America has been widely explored. Far from suggesting that these sources have misinterpreted the original concept that Rocha introduced in the mid-1960s, I intend to explore what it means to focus on hunger, not simply in terms of a rhetorical strategy used to stress the gravity of poverty and misery, but also as a conceptual decision that rephrases the discussion of other issues like underdevelopment and colonialism in terms of representation and visibility. Existing scholarship explains what the *aesthetics* of hunger means, with an emphasis on describing the concrete style proposed by the movement. My purpose, on the other hand, is to explore what the aesthetics *of hunger* implies, stressing the singularity of hunger as an aesthetic and political principle.

Those are precisely some of the main problems raised by *O profeta da fome* (1970). Besides reflecting—in Capovilla's words— on "the absurdity of hunger and underdevelopment in Brazil," the film focuses on two central elements that I would like to use as the axes for this chapter: hunger as an active decision rather than as imposed suffering, and the problem of spectacle—that is, of the public visibility of hunger (quoted in Mattos 2008, 119).

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[42] In 1984, three years after Rocha passed away, the University of São Paulo published a list of Rocha's bibliography. The compilation, made by Rita Cassia Rodrigues, mentioned 321 texts, including books, journal articles, screenplays, and dissertations. This list is indicative of the vast production on the topic.

This emphasis on hunger entails a reflection on the body and its singular presence in Rocha's cinema. Although the traditional readings of the aesthetics of hunger recognize the importance of the body, they tend to define it as a means to a more complex end: the depiction of violent, irrational hungry bodies guides the spectator to a new awareness of the conditions of exploitation that have produced the phenomenon of hunger. From this perspective, the body and its representations are subordinated to the rational process of consciousness awakening—the final goal of Rocha's aesthetics. My interest, on the contrary, is to think of the body in Rocha's cinema as a means without an end. Instead of a cinema *of* hunger (using hunger as a means), Rocha proposed a hungry cinema that reflected on the creation and visibility of a new and multiple body, opposing the normalized body of humanitarianism.

2.1   Utopia and Representation

Rocha's *Aesthetics of Hunger*, published in 1965, has been described as the climax of the utopian and revolutionary spirit that defined the first years of Cinema Novo in Brazil. According to Johnson and Stam (1995), during its first stage, the movement featured a series of optimistic films that promoted a social transformation of the conditions of underdevelopment and colonialism in Brazil. Sharing the enthusiasm of several left-wing intellectuals (most of them part of the Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros, founded in 1955) who had promoted an anti-imperialist discourse of emancipation based on the affirmation of a populist national identity and the need to foster economic development, the founders of Cinema Novo understood cinema as a revolutionary political praxis and defended its power as an agent of change. This revolutionary optimism contrasted with the disenchanted films produced during the second half of the 1960s, when Brazilian directors,

deeply affected by the military coup of 1964, reflected on their own failures and abandoned the political utopias of the first years of the movement.

Schroeder (2012) reaffirmed this historical narrative by defining *Aesthetics of Hunger* as the paradigmatic text of what he called the "militant phase" of Cinema Novo (92). He applied his historical division of film periods to the broader movement of the New Latin American Cinema (NLAC), not exclusively to Cinema Novo. However, he explicitly used the comparison between Rocha's *Aesthetics of Hunger* and Rocha's *Aesthetics of Dream* (1971) to demonstrate the transition from the militant phase of the NLAC to what he called the "neo-baroque phase" in the 1970s and 1980s. Although he clearly stated that the filmmakers' unwavering commitment to a revolutionary political project did not disappear in the late 1960s and early 1970s, his definition of distinct historical periods suggests that the aesthetics of hunger belongs to a first, realist stage (almost naive when compared to the second phase) based on an "empiricist epistemology" that would eventually be overcome by the more complex, "decentered, systemic counter-epistemology" of the neo-baroque cinema (100).

Behind these interpretations of the aesthetics of hunger lies a common assumption: before the drastic transformation of the political scene in Brazil in 1964 (and the resulting radicalization of repressive measures with the approval of the Institutional Act Number Five in 1968), Cinema Novo filmmakers defended a traditional revolutionary politics based on the idea of the *possible*. They shared a common faith in the possibility of an evolution, a historical passage from one social stage to another. As Jean-Christophe Goddard (2010) affirmed, the classical idea of revolution defends the idea that everything is possible. It is the idea of "yes, we can" (153). From that perspective, only the coup would have introduced a sense of failure to the filmmakers, showing them the impossibility of their early utopias.

These readings of the aesthetics of hunger as an optimistic and militant project

reproduce some of the most common interpretations of the 1960s. As Frederic Jameson

(1984) suggested, a "mythical simplification" of the period assumed that all those who used

the term *revolution*, either to support it or to oppose it, implicitly understood and shared a

common definition: a future-oriented project based on the possibility of the actual

transformation of social and political reality. It is precisely this definition of the 1960s that

has allowed authors like Todd Gitlin (1987) to describe the period as a failed revolution.

More recently, Noah Simblist (2005) affirmed that there is no place in our "post-utopic

world" for the modern idea of revolutionary artists, "leftists, progressives and rabble-rousers,

ever ready to push against the grain of society." The aesthetics of hunger are part of that

utopian period, which, due to the political agitation in Brazil, suddenly came to an end in the

late 1960s, during the same years that other countries celebrated the enthusiasm of 1968.[43]

Lisa Shaw and Stephanie Dennison (2007) radically affirmed the failure of Cinema Novo's

revolutionary project, a consequence not only of the political context in Brazil, but especially

of the messianic perspective of those young directors who tried to speak for the colonized

without having direct experience of the life in the *sertão* (87).

Lúcia Nagib (2007) subtly opposed this set of assumptions by stressing that an

essential aspect of any utopia is its own impossibility (9). Thus, the utopian character of both

Cinema Novo's first stage and the ideas of *Aesthetics of Hunger* does not necessarily

represent a defense of a classical-militant idea of revolution based on a blind faith in historical

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[43] Luís Camnitzer (2009) wisely criticized the universal classification of the 1960s that assumes that 1968 was
the climax of a revolutionary period all over the world. Describing his personal experience in his native Uruguay
in the 1950s, Camnitzer argued that, from his perspective, Uruguay's "1968" took place in 1957 with the
students' struggles against the "organic law" in the university. He explained, "I believe that there were many
1968s in the world, that they were quite different, and that they did not always happen in the same year. It is
even possible that there are different 1968s for every individual" (17).

progress. I would like to follow Nagib's nuanced perspective in order to show that the aesthetics of hunger was, from the beginning, a politics of the impossible, and more importantly, to point out that it was precisely because filmmakers were interested in creating a politics of impossibility that they assumed hunger (instead of poverty or misery) as an aesthetic political principle.[44] This affirmation of impossibility did not entail a rejection of every revolutionary project. Filmmakers like Rocha permanently defended the idea of revolution, despite its multiple transformations throughout their work. However, the affirmation of a politics of the impossible was only imaginable through the radical avowal of what Gilles Deleuze (1989), following Franz Kafka, called "the intolerable," an issue I will dwell further upon in this chapter (219).

Before defining what a politics of the impossible means, it is necessary to understand how Rocha defined Cinema Novo's revolutionary project. I propose an understanding of this project at three different interpretative levels, all of them connected to the problem of representation: first, as a realist project that aimed to represent a reality traditionally ignored by Brazilian cinema; second, as the attempt to correct a series of misrepresentations of the reality of hunger through the creation of new representations; and third, as an opposition to the very notion of representation.

The revolutionary character of Rocha's *Aesthetics of Hunger* was based on a specific diagnosis of the current conditions of Brazil and Latin America. His diagnosis was simple and cutting, even cruel: hunger was the most distinctive reality of Latin American society. It was

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[44] It is not my intention to affirm that the Cinema Novo filmmakers never shared the populist enthusiasm for the developmentalist policies in Brazil during the 1950s, nor to reject the presence of explicit militant-revolutionary ideas in some of their films and texts. My interest is to discuss how the very concept of hunger, transformed into an aesthetic and political trope, always entailed the affirmation of a politics of impossibility, even contradicting the explicit intentions of some of the filmmakers and films.

not an issue or symptom among others, but its very essence. The problem, however, was not

only the actual hunger of the people, but also the fact that those same people did not

understand their own hunger. "Our originality," Rocha contended, "is our hunger, and our

greatest misery is that this hunger, being felt, is not understood" (Rocha 2004, 288). The main

question that arises from this radical verdict is why the hungry did not understand their own

hunger, and what exactly they did not understand.[45]

Rocha (2004) argued, "For the Brazilian, [hunger] is a national shame. He does not

eat, but is ashamed to say so; and yet, he does not know where this hunger comes from" (66).

This analysis follows one of the main arguments that Josué de Castro introduced in the

scientific and political explanations of Brazil's hungry during the preceding decade: the taboo

of hunger in Brazil. This taboo not only suppressed public discussion about hunger, but also

served to sustain colonial relationships between workers and landowners, and in a broader

sense, between Brazil as part of the Third World and the centers of world economy. The

perception of hunger as a national shame and the population's complete ignorance about its

causes were the result of a series of relationships of power defined by a discourse of

development. As Rocha (2004) affirmed, "Latin America remains a colony. What

distinguishes yesterday's colonialism from today's is merely the more refined forms

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[45] Jean-Claude Bernardet (2007b) suggested that when Rocha affirmed the lack of comprehension of the phenomenon of hunger, he was addressing his European audience during the visit to Geneva where he read his manifesto *Aesthetics of Hunger* for the first time. According to Bernardet, it was the European colonizer who did not understand the Brazilian hunger, and with him the Brazilian bourgeoisie that had incorporated a series of European terms to understand the reality of their country. However, I would like to expand this reading, assuming that the ongoing process of colonization that Rocha denounced in his text (and that Bernardet recognized as the core of Rocha's aesthetic proposal) affected the impoverished populations of Brazil in a more complex way—not only in the terms of traditional colonialism, in which the European colonizer, lacking a deep understanding of the local reality, imposed a series of social and economic systems on a native population that was already fully aware of the main issues that affected them. I agree with Bernardet that the main context in which the manifesto appeared is important, but I do not believe that it implies that Rocha was defending a simple, even naive, concept of colonialism in which the process of alienation only affected the colonizer, not the colonized.

employed by the contemporary colonizer" (66). The taboo of hunger prevented the hungry from perceiving the colonial ties that caused their own conditions of misery and scarcity.

For both Castro and Rocha, the mission of cinema was to radically oppose that taboo by showing and explaining the phenomenon of hunger in an attempt to overcome the distance between people's perceptions and their reality. That was precisely what Cinema Novo had done during its first years. Rocha (2004) defined the movement as a broad "gallery of the hungry": "From *Amanda* to *Vidas Secas*, *Cinema Novo* narrated, described, poeticized, discoursed, analyzed. It aroused the themes of hunger: characters eating dirt, characters eating roots, characters stealing to eat, characters killing to eat, characters fleeing to eat, dirty ugly and starving characters living in dirty ugly dark houses" (65). The core of the new cinema was thus what it was able to show—the power of film images to depict the material reality of hunger. From this perspective, the major contribution of the first stage of Cinema Novo in Brazil was the creation of a particular style of social and political cinema that followed the path established by postwar Italian Neorealism, documenting (even through fiction) poverty and other social issues in a naturalistic way (Schroeder 2012). Cinema was defined as a witness to a specific reality that allowed the spectator to understand and, subsequently, transform it.

At this first interpretative level, hunger was the main subject of the Cinema Novo films, an external reality that needed to be represented through cinema. The aesthetics of hunger were also part of a broader continental movement that attempted to create a series of visual narrative procedures to depict the particular conditions of hunger in Latin America, which had been so far ignored by conventional spectacle films. The realism of Cinema Novo opposed what Rocha (2004) called a "digestive cinema": a series of films "about rich people, in nice houses, in luxury cars, happy funny fast films" (65).

Although part of the novelty of Cinema Novo was its direct portrayal of a reality that commercial Brazilian cinema had ignored, one of the main questions that the movement's filmmakers had to answer was *how* to represent that reality in order to create the conditions for an effective transformation of reality. Several authors pointed out that, far from being a simple attempt to make hunger a privileged topic, the aesthetics of hunger implied the creation of a style, a form of enunciation that was visible in the "texture of the works" (Xavier 1983, 9). At this second interpretative level, hunger was not simply a new subject to be shown, but rather the ethos of an entire movement that defined new narrative structures, formal compositions, and production strategies.

The aesthetics of hunger countered the lack of representations of hunger in Brazil, as well as specific kinds of representation that had created a new, imaginary version of this social phenomenon in the previous decades. Cinema Novo filmmakers not only opposed the silence and veiling of the subject, but also a particular way of making it visible. They recognized that hunger was not simply a material lack (lack of food or lack of representations of famine); it was also a regime of visibility created by a series of emphases and omissions. Specifically, Cinema Novo rejected the humanitarian regime of visibility consolidated in the previous decades that had produced a comprehension of hunger as a social issue requiring intervention.

Since the early 1960s, when he was involved in the production of his first feature film, *Barravento*, Rocha had recognized that showing the hungry their own hunger was not enough to make them aware of the conditions of colonial exploitation in which they were immersed. He stressed the importance of opposing the humanitarian representation of hunger, which reduced the hungry to passive victims waiting for help:

> Social assistance is a trick of the bourgeois consciousness to be
> able to calmly swallow the whisky. It is an individualistic and
> mean affirmation that only increases misery. What is the purpose
> of giving a Christmas toy to the son of a poor fisherman, if the next
> day he will have to fight with the starving dogs from the coast for a
> plate of beans? (Rocha 1960, 6).

Ivana Bentes (2003) accurately showed that the core of Rocha's *Aesthetics of Hunger* is the ethical question of how to represent hunger: "How to show suffering and represent territories of poverty and the excluded, without falling into folklore, paternalism, and conformist and lachrymose humanism" (122). The problem was not only that those representations of the hungry were completely useless in terms of an effective transformation of the reality of their hunger, but also that such representations were one of the main issues preventing the hungry from understanding their own condition.

Using a Marxist vocabulary, Rocha explained the problem in terms of "true" and "false" representations. The humanitarian perspective projected a false image of hunger. The word *false*, in this sense, does not mean that the representation was a lie or that the image did not correspond to an external reality, but rather that it produced a false consciousness of the reality of hunger. The humanitarian discourses on the social relationships that shaped the reality of hunger systematically obscured the dynamics of power and domination those relationships embodied. Thus, being accustomed to the humanitarian representations of their own reality, the hungry perceived as natural the realities of exploitation and subordination in which they were immersed. In his text "A revolução é uma eztetyka" from 1967, Rocha condensed this problem, arguing that "the colonial culture *informs* the colonized about his own condition" (Rocha 2004, 99). The Portuguese term *informar* refers not only to a process of communication but also to the action of giving form to or shaping the concrete reality of the colonized. The humanitarian perspective was incorporated into the process of self-

representation of the hungry, thus creating a distorted perception of hunger. According to this perspective, the conditions of hunger in Latin America—both the material reality of food shortage, and the distance between the hungry and this very reality—were products of a lack of "true" representations of hunger. Cinema Novo's main task was, precisely, to "film the truth" in order to oppose the systematic misrepresentation of the dominant social relationships condensed in the reality of hunger (Rocha 2004, 66). In Zuzana Pick's words, that is exactly what a film like *Os fuzis* did in 1964: it deconstructed "the sociological, ethnographic, and aesthetic codes that have served to portray the *sertão*—its drought, hunger, mysticism, and violence" (1993, 111).

The true representations of hunger in Cinema Novo would replace the false representations of the humanitarian discourses. New means of expression, comprehension, and representation countered traditional representations of hunger that had served as a tool to perpetuate colonial relationships, which, in turn, were the cause of hunger itself. Thus, the aesthetics of hunger was an attempt to create images of an ignored reality, particularly a specific type of image—a new series of representations capable of disputing the codes and discourses on hunger that had left its causes unquestioned. As Johnson (1984a) affirmed, "The idea is not, therefore, to transmit revolutionary ideas through bourgeois forms, but rather to create new forms adequate for new messages" (121).

I argue that this movement to correct traditional misrepresentations of hunger did not operate as a simple process of substitution. Originally, Cinema Novo's goal was not simply to replace the regime of visibility of humanitarianism with a new set of representations, or "new messages" in Johnson's words, but to question the assumptions of the humanitarian approach that had been incorporated and transformed into specific modes and habits of perception. Later in this chapter, I will discuss the eventual historical transformation of Cinema Novo into

a new formula to represent hunger, but for now my interest is to emphasize that a true image of hunger was only created through the process of questioning its false counterpart. Rocha summarized this position, stating that "cinema cannot be an agent of decolonization if it uses the language of the colonizer" (quoted in Sarno 1998, 124).

This direct struggle against colonialism has been one of the most commented upon elements of Rocha's manifesto. Geraldo Sarno (1998), Gilberto Felisberto Vasconcellos (2001), Paula Siega (2009), and Salome Aguilera Skvirsky (2011), for instance, highlighted the anticolonialist character of the aesthetics of hunger and the vindication of underdevelopment as a way of questioning the validity of the humanitarian-colonial perspective on Brazilian reality. Johnson (1984a) and Stam (1976) accurately showed how this anticolonial struggle was transformed into a decolonized cinematic language in some of Cinema Novo's main films. Bentes (2003) followed this line to highlight the "destructive" face of the movement by focusing on Rocha's affirmation of violence as the main principle of the aesthetics of hunger. Only through violence, the "normal behavior of the starving" in Rocha's words, would cinema be able to overcome colonial representations of hunger.[46] The aesthetics of hunger was an aesthetics of violence: the violence of a starving character on the screen, but also the violence of the film's formal composition, which was meant to shock and dislocate the viewer's perception, and to bring into question the way he or she understood the reality of hunger.

All these readings stress the core of Rocha's proposal: only a cinema of hunger—that is, a cinema that accepted and affirmed its own underdeveloped character as its major

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[46] Authors like Hollyman (1983) pointed to the influence of Franz Fanon's ideas about violence and revolution on Rocha's manifesto. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Fanon defended armed revolt as the only legitimate answer to the repressive effects of colonialism and underdevelopment in the Third World.

strength—would radically overcome the false representations of hunger and create a new awareness of the social reality. In 1960 Rocha presented the affirmation of hunger as the only way of giving the black fishermen of Buraquinho (the small village close to Salvador where he was filming *Barravento*) a new awareness of their own condition: "What we need to try first is to give the black an awareness of this misery and, maybe, to stress it as much as it is possible, just like a cat is corralled in a corner" (Rocha 1960, 6). This messianic language—reminiscent of the rhetoric imbedded in some branches of Marxism, which proposed reaffirming misery as a means of achieving class consciousness—appeared in a more nuanced form five years later in *Aesthetics of Hunger* through the affirmation of a culture of hunger: "Only a culture of hunger can qualitatively surpass its own structures by undermining and destroying them" (Rocha 2004, 66).

Without dismissing the importance of this perspective, I would like to propose a shift in focus. My aim is to explore the affirmation of hunger not as an affirmation of misery, underdevelopment, or violence, but rather as an aesthetic practice of voluntary self-starvation. What does such an affirmation of hunger mean? What exactly is affirmed? Only through an emphasis on hunger was it possible to show that in order to oppose the colonial logic behind the humanitarian discourse it was necessary not simply to create new and different representations, or to question the terms of traditional discourses on hunger—the first two interpretative levels previously exposed. It was also necessary to oppose the main assumption of the humanitarian construction of this social reality—hunger's very representability. This is the third interpretative level I want to propose: the aesthetics of hunger was not an attempt to represent the reality of the hungry, but rather a way to question the very notion of representation through the affirmation of the intolerable character of hunger.

2.2   A Culture of Hunger

Although Capovilla's *O profeta da fome* is not the kind of film traditionally associated with the aesthetics of hunger—in part because it did not follow the realistic style that had defined the first years of Cinema Novo—the filmmaker's original intention was to condense the ideas that Rocha had expressed in his manifesto. According to Capovilla, films like Pereira dos Santos's *Vidas secas* (1963) had taken the realistic treatment of the subject to an unsurpassable point, so it was necessary to find an appropriate metaphor that expressed "the absurdity of hunger and underdevelopment" in Brazil (quoted in Mattos 2008, 119). Rocha's "aesthetics of hunger" meant the transformation of cinema into a hunger art. I propose to use this transformation in the artistic treatment of hunger to understand the affirmation of hunger at the core of Rocha's manifesto.

The metaphor in Capovilla's film was the conversion of the fakir Ali Khan into a hunger artist. Ali Khan's transformation begins in a humble circus, where the fakir once performed impressive acts to attract spectators. The miserable conditions of the circus are clearly established in the first scene of the film, when the viewer witnesses a fight for a piece of meat. The first shot shows the silhouette of a lion locked in his cage. A man comes close to the bars and feeds him a piece of meat. When the man walks away, the lion opens the cage with his "hands" and walks out with the food. The viewer soon discovers that the lion is actually a disguised man, who now walks calmly looking for a place to eat his booty. A few seconds later, however, the viewer realizes that another man, the fakir Ali Kahn, has also been spying on the lion and started to follow him. When the first man sits to eat, the fakir attacks him. The two men wildly struggle for the food, to the point that it falls down and is stolen by a dog who has been observing the starving humans. The final shot shows the fakir and the

lion-man sitting next to each other inside one of the tents. The fakir, disappointed by his failure, bites a bone that the dog has abandoned.

The following sequences reaffirm this desperate struggle for food. Ali Khan performs increasingly risky acts—eating glass and razors, being buried alive, and presenting the (unfulfilled) promise of a live act of cannibalism—in a desperate attempt to sell more tickets and avoid the destiny of a fellow performer: death by starvation. Nothing works, and the circus is eventually destroyed. Exiled in the desert, the fakir—together with his assistant, the lion tamer, and a blind musician they find along the way—walks for weeks looking for food, recalling the long marches of the *retirantes* expelled from their homes and into the arid *sertão* by hunger (especially the march of Manuel and Rosa in Rocha's *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol*). During the climax of the trip, dying of starvation, Ali Khan accepts a cruel and absurd offer from the lion tamer: one of his eyes in exchange for a piece of bread. A second piece will cost him his other eye, but Maria, his assistant, knocks the tamer down and puts an end to the excessive trade.

The irrationality of this sequence illustrates the nature of Ali Khan's transformation. Hunger is depicted as an extreme, exaggerated condition, beyond the limits of rational discourse and behavior. The absurdity of the acts committed by the characters becomes a mirror for the absurdity of hunger itself. There is no rational solution for hunger in this universe. Only extreme attempts, during which the body is taken beyond its own limits, are possible. This absurd suffering is the catalyst for Ali Khan's epiphany and transformation into a hunger artist.

Ali Khan's conversion takes place in a small prison, where the fakir and his assistant have been locked after being accused of cheating and manipulating the beliefs of an entire town. Some days earlier, the fakir had decided to crucify himself on the outskirts of the

village in one of his most radical attempts to obtain money and food for survival. The townspeople interpreted this exhibition of physical endurance as a religious sacrifice, and the fakir had been declared a martyr, receiving offerings and oblations. This popular devotion, however, had become a problem for the priest and the mayor of the town. The first was losing his believers, and the second was facing a shortage of food due to the increasing number of sick and disabled people who were coming from other towns to pray to the fakir.

Thus, three days before the end of his act, the fakir and his assistant, Maria, are imprisoned. While she seems to feel the normal desperation at their confinement, he looks extremely calm, reflexive, almost in a trance. Every day the guard gives them a cup of water and a piece of bread, repeating the same phrase: "Bread and water for you, Mr. Malandro [rascal]." A montage stresses the monotonous ritual and the passage of time; one day Ali Khan, lying on his bed with a lifeless gaze, tells Maria: "I have discovered the gold mine, woman." His epiphany is revealed when the police chief decides to release them. The man confesses to the prisoners that he sent them bread and water every day just to demonstrate that Ali Khan was a false fakir. "Learn that, young man," the police officer says. "Who rules the world is who has the best weapon. I'm in charge here. I'm the police. And the police is the law." The fakir replies with a "small present": a necklace made with the pieces of bread that he received during his more than fifteen days in captivity. "Thank you," the fakir says. "I have learned a new profession." From this point on, Ali Khan will be a hunger artist.

Now the fakir is, in Capovilla's words, a professional "of that condition that a large part of Brazilian population practiced as amateurs: hunger. He transformed lack into a means

of livelihood" (quoted in Mattos 2008, 119).[47] Hunger ceases to be a synonym of lack and becomes a productive, vital principle. Starvation is transformed into fasting; an imposed suffering is transformed into an affirmative decision. Ali Khan affirms what he had once radically, but unsuccessfully, tried to deny and overcome. This drastic affirmation of hunger is not the acceptance of the private practice of fasting as an ascetic way of life, however. What Ali Khan affirms is not simply the decision to starve himself, but also the idea of turning starvation into a spectacle. The fakir chooses to fast, but he also embodies a spectacle of fasting, offering up his body to public consumption. This is a central point in understanding the aesthetics of hunger: the affirmation of hunger is the act of making visible that very affirmation. Hunger is affirmed as a visible phenomenon, but what exactly became visible through this affirmation of hunger? An examination of the historical spectacles of the hunger artists will shed light on this matter.

The hunger artist phenomenon emerged in Europe during the nineteenth century, when showmen publicly performed long acts of fasting, exhibiting their ability to overcome the experience of hunger. They were part of a broad tradition that used self-inflicted starvation as a spectacle. These practices can actually be traced back to the "fasting women" (or "miraculous maidens") who appeared in Europe during the sixteenth century. These women, who practiced prolonged periods of abstinence from food, became a sensation. Their fame spread beyond their own villages, especially after the invention of printing, when several physicians published extensive treatises on the subject. The hunger artists only emerged after the decline of the fasting women in the nineteenth century, due to a long process of medicalization (Vandereycken and Van Deth 1994).

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[47] Capovilla used the Portuguese expression "*meio de vida*." This can also be translated as "way of life," encompassing something far broader than "livelihood."

Besides the obvious and striking difference of gender (hunger artists were almost exclusively male), the hunger artist phenomenon introduced subtle but important alterations to the tradition of the fasting women. While motives of the fasting women were surrounded by secrecy, the hunger artists explicitly promoted their motive: spectacle. The fasting practices of the sixteenth-century women belonged to a private space, to the intimacy of their living rooms. They made public a personal decision about their own bodies, but never exposed themselves to the gaze of others. The performance of the hunger artist, on the contrary, was essentially public. The spectators' gaze was central to the act: during the period of fasting, the body of the artist was transformed into a public object. All his acts were subject to collective surveillance in order to demonstrate that he consumed no food. The hunger artists not only exhibited the results of their fast (as the fasting women had done), but also highlighted the very act of struggling with hunger. Thus, the hunger artists embodied the spectacle of hunger.[48]

How were these spectacles performed? A detailed narration of the hunger artists' performance is found in Franz Kafka's short story *A Hunger Artist*, published in 1922—a story that served as inspiration for Capovilla's *O profeta da fome* (Mattos 2008). According to Kafka, in the late nineteenth century, hunger artists were a common medium of entertainment in both Europe and the United States. Impresarios and circus managers used to hire hunger artists as a central part of their shows. Most of them advertised that they could break records

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[48] Several authors agree that, by the first decades of the twentieth century, the hunger artists had almost completely disappeared from the public scene in Europe. Walter Vandereycken and Ron van Deth (1994) affirmed that the 1920s represents the last period of glory for the hunger artists. In Brazil, however, the phenomenon was still present in the 1960s, as attested by the 1969 performances of the fakir Silki (who inspired the main character in *O profeta da fome*) in São Paulo. The case of Silki was repeatedly discussed in several journals in the late 1950s (in 1957, for instance, *Folha de São Paulo*, published several notes reporting Silki's different attempts to break the fasting world record: May 25, p. 5; June 5, p. 16; June 6, p. 6; Aug. 14, p. 4). An open question is why this phenomenon was still present in Brazil several decades after its decline in Europe.

of fasting and survival without food. Locked in cages or glass cases, they were permanently

observed. As Sigal Gooldin (2003) noted, the performance of the hunger artists was a

spectacle of both hunger and its mastering. It evolved around achievement: the spectators

perceived some of these artists as heroes, leaving supportive messages at the site of the

performance. The hunger artists were believed to be manifesting extraordinary achievements

of bodily endurance.

Kafka (1922) highlighted an important part of this remarkable achievement: its end.

The feat was not complete if the hunger artist did not eat, in public, marking the end of the

performance and exhibiting the convened limits of his body. The meal was the climax of the

spectacle. By eating, the hunger artist finally left the state of exception that had defined his

very condition as an artist and joined the audience. Kafka's description of this humanizing

meal is shocking, not because of the desirable end of the suffering for the artist, but because

of the silent tragedy that it reveals:

> The impresario put a little food into the mouth of the hunger artist,
> now half unconscious, as if fainting, and kept up a cheerful patter
> designed to divert attention away from the hunger artist's
> condition. Then a toast was proposed to the public, which was
> supposedly whispered to the impresario by the hunger artist, the
> orchestra confirmed everything with a great fanfare, people
> dispersed, and no one had the right to be dissatisfied with the
> event, no one except the hunger artist—he was always the only one
> (6).

The patter, the orchestra, and the discourse were intended to hide the real condition of the

artist: not simply the shocking evidence of an emaciated body that had endured a cruel

struggle ("many people, to their own regret, had to stay away from his performance, because

they could not bear to look at him" [4]), but also the surprising fact that the artist did not want

to end his fast, that that body had not reached its limit and was capable of continued fasting.

The body of the artist had been transformed, and now it was pure desire with no limits: "He could have kept going for even longer, *for an unlimited time*" (5 [emphasis added]). Against the will of the artist, the spectacle came to an end. It had to have an end. Why? "Why did this crowd, which pretended to admire him so much, have so little patience with him? If he kept going and kept fasting longer, why would they not tolerate it?" Kafka asked (5). Why did the audience not accept an even more radical affirmation of hunger?

Without the final meal, the achievement would have been worthless. The spectator would have not witnessed a body struggling against hunger, but a body that had become used to inhabiting it. The spectators desired the final meal in the same way that the dénouement of a story is expected and needed. The organism's need for food is naturalized in the narrative structure of the spectacle. If the spectators tolerated the prolongation of the fast, pleasing the artist, they would have to face a blatant contradiction: the presence of a hungry body that does not desire food. Historically, this contradiction has been shrewdly avoided. The hungry bodies created through self-inflicted practices, from the medieval fasting saints to the contemporary cases of anorexia nervosa, have always been subject of religious, medical, or social discourses that have attempted to explain (and, therefore, to reduce) the intolerable contradiction they incarnate.

The sixteenth-century fasting women were the subject of several discursive constructions that tried to categorize the phenomenon in familiar terms. Two explanations gained broad popularity among the public: On the one hand, the fasts were explained in supernatural terms, as miraculous spectacles of the spirit. Girls and women were described in religious language as manifestations of God's power, or in secular terms as wonders of nature. On the other hand, the fasts were scientifically defined as either cases of disease or frauds. Groups of physicians devoted themselves to challenging the popular and religious

explanations of those hungry bodies by studying the real possibility of existing without food for extended periods of time. Many fasting women, including some who had enjoyed years of fame, were denounced as impostors by men of science (Gooldin 2003). The perception of these bodies was divided between a suspecting and an admiring gaze. They represented an interpretative challenge, an obvious contradiction that needed to be solved. Both the supernatural and the scientific explanations were methods of making tolerable the contradiction: the former defended the existence of those bodies, but always as wonders beyond nature; the latter affirmed that they were impossible bodies that did not exist as such, or that existed only out of a normal order, as sick bodies.

2.3   An Intolerable Body

When exactly does the hungry body become intolerable? In which context is the spectacle of emaciation unbearable? Not all spectacles and images of hungry bodies imply this intolerable character. The photographic registers of starving populations that became popular in late-nineteenth-century journals, for instance, were not rejected or precluded by viewers. Far from being excluded from the public gaze, their popularity increased during the twentieth century, and they seem to be consumed more and more eagerly even today. As shown in the previous chapter, the exposition of these bodies as extreme and unusual implied their codification and normalization. The hungry body seems to be tolerable only when it is socially produced (through a series of medical, political, and aesthetic discourses) as a docile body capable of being corrected or, in this case, saved. The intolerable is not the hungry body as such, but the hungry body that escapes from the codification of the modern notion of hunger. By self-starving the hunger artists opposed the main conventions of the normal hungry body: from the very assumption of a "natural" tendency to satisfy the living condition

of being in need, to the passive role of the hungry victim as one who suffers his or her irremediable condition.

The intolerable is the very decision of a person who resolves to be hungry. That is why that decision is not recognized as such, but is reduced to a wonder or a disease. Stephanie Grant (1995) strikingly described the fear of the intolerable in her fictional reflections of a twenty-three-year-old anorexic woman about her own condition: "People think that anorexics imagine ourselves fat and diet away invisible flab. But *people are afraid of the truth*: we prefer ourselves this way, boiled-down bone, essence. . . . I know exactly what I look like, without hyperbole. Every inch of skin, each muscle, each bone. I see where and how they connect" (2 [emphasis added]). The intolerable is not that hunger threatens the body or even that it abolishes life, but that it deconstructs a concrete comprehension of body and life (Garrido 2012). The anorexic exposes herself as an indocile body, as a radical opposition to any practice of reduction and normalization. It is this opposition that has transformed the anorexic body into the subject of innumerable historical attempts at medicalization (Bray and Colebrook 1998).

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2005) used Antonin Artaud's notion of the "body without organs" (BwO) to describe the practice and experience of opposing the naturalization of a particular biomedical, psychoanalytic, or political organization of the body (both its internal organization and its social functions). A hungry body that does not desire any food is a body that has dissolved all its normalized organic functions, its very organization as an organism, like the masochist who violently redefines the functions of his or her own organs: "The eyes, anus, urethra, breasts, and nose are sewn shut. It has itself strung up to stop the organs from working; flayed, as if the organs clung to the skin" (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 150).

The organism is the real enemy of the BwO. It represents an over-codification of desire that determines which bodies are normal and, therefore, socially viable. Paraphrasing Judith Butler (2000), the submission of desire to the organism produces the desire of an organism, makes a normalized body desirable. A radical affirmation of hunger precisely implies the production of a decoded and de-stratified body that dislocates this "natural" desire of an organism and questions its very "natural" character. This is not, however, an exclusive problem of the individual body. Even if the affirmation of hunger implies the transformation of one's own body, it also involves restructuring the relationships among many bodies and signs. A radical hungry body symbolizes both "the process of experimenting with the form of the body and the politics of disturbing the socially imposed order of everyday life" (Arsic 2008, 35). The hungry BwO opposes the medical codification that produces a normalized body and serves as a model for diagnosing the hungry body, as well as the codification of hunger as lack, the codification of the social role of the hungry as victims in need, and even the visual codification that has created a recognizable stereotype of the hungry body.

Based on both this interpretation of the hungry body and the characterization of the hunger artist in *O profeta da fome*, I propose to reinterpret Rocha's aesthetics of hunger as the production of a hungry BwO. Opposing the rational codification of hunger, Rocha populated his films with hysterical and excessive hungry bodies—Carlos Heitor Cony called him an "envoy of delirium" (quoted in Teixeira Gomes 1997, xxi). In his exhaustive analysis of *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol*, Xavier (1983) highlighted the permanent disruption of the temporality of the action produced by the persistent presence of characters in trances. It is worth remembering that the entire film revolves around the reality of hunger. The drought is the background of the characters' actions and motivations, transforming hunger into a permanent and silent presence. Manuel and Rosa escape from hunger. Sebastião (the self-

proclaimed saint) and Corisco (the *cangaceiro*) present two different ways of confronting

hunger, two different promises of prosperity without suffering. The trance only emerges

within this reality of hunger—not simply as its consequence, but also as its purest

manifestation.

In what has become one of the most popular scenes in the film, Corisco performs a

long one-body dialogue (as distinct from a monologue) that Rocha presents as a subtle trance.

When Manuel and Rosa meet him for the first time, Corisco announces that Lampião, a

cangaceiro leader, had been killed three days earlier, along with María Bonita and all his

followers. However, Corisco proclaims that Lampião still lives inside him:

> María is dead but Lampião is alive. His flesh is no more, but his
> spirit is still living. His spirit is inside me, joined together with
> mine. I am a two-headed *cangaceiro*. One on the outside, the other
> on the inside. One is the killer, the other is the thinker. We will see
> whether a two-headed *cangaceiro* can change these backlands.

Those two heads of the *cangaceiro* perform a dialogue in the open space of the *sertão*,

foreshadowing their own death. The camera, slightly inclined from below, shows Corisco's

face. With a tense and almost solemn gesture, staring at a distant point, he asks: "Are there

any soldiers nearby?" Just after the last word, Corisco's face suddenly changes. He breaks the

composition of the shot with an abrupt movement, lowering his head almost to the level of the

camera. His wide-open eyes stare down, diluting the gravity of the first gesture. In a rough

and nervous voice, he replies: "I am waiting for the signal. I had a dream. Today we shall

die!" The tension slowly vanishes. His body recovers the firm and almost still posture of the

first question. He takes a few steps back, as if to leave, and remains a few seconds with his

back to the camera. Suddenly, he turns and comes closer, always firm and calm. The position

of the camera, which shows the body from below, emphasizes the sense of solemnity. While

looking directly at the camera, almost without opening his mouth, in a kind of whisper, Corisco asks: "Die? How? You are crazy!"

At this point, the spectator begins to understand that this is a dialogue, that Corisco's body is divided and his two heads are present in the *sertão*: Lampião asking, Corisco replying. His body is in a trance; it is a bicephalous body revealed in the variations of its own gestures. Although there are no cuts in the sequence, an implicit montage emerges in the movements of the body and the modulations of gestures and voice. Corisco intervenes again with a violent movement that breaks the stillness of Lampião's last question. He runs away, shouting and waving his rifle, in the opposite direction to the camera, which remains in its original position. After a few steps, when all his body is visible to the viewer, he stops, turns, and waves his rifle again while shouting: "When all was lost! I saw the Devil's rifle fired twice, once in each eye. In your eye, Lampião!" The last sentence is fiercely stressed with a rapid zoom onto his face, which has suddenly turned to the camera. For a second, Corisco points at the camera with his rifle in a gesture full of anxiety. He is talking directly to the spectator, who now assumes the place of Lampião. The spectator becomes part of the scene; his or her body is multiple: part Corisco, part Lampião, part external witness.

When the zoom is complete, Corisco's face has already lost all its tension and Lampião reappears. Corisco's violent movements contrast with the serene rigidity of Lampião, who calmly looks up and approaches the camera again (almost undoing what Corisco has done). Now he is closer than ever—too close. His face, always staring at the camera, does not seem to fit in the frame. With a delicate, almost imperceptible movement, the camera recomposes the shot, leaving half of his head out of the frame. Only the left half of his face is visible now in a close-up with the white background of the sky: "Stand aside, who would dare shoot me in the eye? My body is protected by the saints."

For the first time, the camera assumes an active role in the scene. It has remained in the same position so far, almost like a silent witness to Corisco's trance, but now it seems to participate in that trance. Before Lampião finishes his intervention, the camera begins to move, touring his body in the same close-up while his voice comes from offscreen. The camera moves to Corsico's belt, with a gun and a dagger, and from that to the rifle suspended in the air. Corisco replies: "But I saw the sign. Death is coming today at sunrise." There are no cuts. The camera shows all the details that compose the (dual) character's body in a slow movement. After it returns to the gun and dagger, Lampião speaks for the last time: "Here in our hideout? Only if you did it, if you betrayed me I would kill you." Corisco radically refuses this accusation, while running away again to the open space: "Not me. The others, there, the ones who live with the Devil." The camera zooms out, recovering its original position, like reviving from a subtle delirium. Pointing to the distance, with all his body visible again, Corisco states: "I'm going away. My time hasn't come yet. It is your turn."

Corisco's trance implies the complete suspension of the traditional equation that matches one body with one character. A body in a trance produces the dissolution of individual identities. The character multiplies his voices, his faces. *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* does not simply depict a body in a trance, but also the body as a trance. Far from being an exception in the temporality of the action, the trance becomes a permanent presence in the film: the violent trance during which Manuel kills his patron, Colonel Morais (or Rosa's trance when she kills Sebastião); the religious trance of Sebastião's followers; the sexual trance during the encounter between Rosa and Dadá (or Rosa and Corisco); and the trance of the *cangaceiros* (Manuel and Rosa included), during which they violently attack the Calazans' ranch. These same type of trances also repeatedly emerge in other films: the religious trance of the *candomblé* in *Barravento*; the revolutionary trance of Paolo Martins in

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Terra em transe; the nostalgic trance of Porfirio Diaz in *Cabezas cortadas*; and the messianic trance of the characters in *A idade da terra*. All those hungry bodies are composed as decentered and permanently displaced. Trance emerges as the expression of hunger.

Rocha condensed the importance of the trance for cinema in his text *Aesthetics of Dream* (1971), in which he further developed some of the ideas established in *Aesthetics of Hunger* six years earlier. The main change in his ideas was not, as some critiques have suggested, the abandonment of the notion of hunger, but rather the abandonment of the definition of aesthetics as a philosophical concept that rationally explains artistic creation. The notion of hunger, I would argue, was expanded through Rocha's reflection on dreams, which he understood as the paradigmatic space of irrationality. He saw the dream as a radical affirmation of a liberating irrationalism, of an anti-reason that "conveys the tensions and rebellions of the most irrational of all phenomena, which is poverty" (Rocha 2004, 250). The link between hunger and dreams is clear here: irrationality—that is, the absurd character of hunger (the same that Capovilla intended to present in *O profeta da fome*)—becomes visible in film through the production of an irrational body. Rocha's radical affirmation of hunger in his first manifesto necessarily entailed the defense of irrationality in his second.

This is not, however, the irrationality of an abstract imagination or of an alternative logic, but rather the irrationality of the BwO, the opposition to the rational organization of the body, to its reduction to an organic codification. Although the rhetorical transition from hunger to dream could suggest a displacement from the corporeal reality of the BwO to the abstract faculty of imagination, the notion of the irrationality of dreams for Rocha is not different from the body itself. In this sense, Rocha was close to authors like Friedrich Nietzsche (1997) and Antonin Artaud (2010), who described dreams in physical terms, as products of the variations of the body. Dream is delirium in Artaud's terms—not a mental

state, but a corporeal trance that he compared to the plague. At an individual scale, the plague threatens an organism and breaks the organization of its functions. At the same time, once established in a city, the plague produces the collapse of the social order: "The remaining survivors go berserk; the virtuous and obedient son kills his father, the continent sodomize their kin. The lewd become chaste. The miser chucks handfuls of his gold out of the windows, the soldier hero sets fire to the town he had formerly risked his life to save" (Artaud 2010, 16).

Thus, the aesthetics of hunger is the attempt to make visible a de-codified, irrational body. This body, as in the performance of the hunger artist, does not precede the cinema, but instead emerges in it. Like the hungry body of humanitarianism, which was produced as such in the creation of a regime of visibility, the de-codified hungry body also emerges when it becomes visible. This new visibility, however, operates in opposition to the representational regime. The hungry body emerges only in the practice of questioning the distribution of the visible that the modern humanitarian comprehension of hunger created. This is the core of the interpretation of the aesthetics of hunger that I am proposing in this chapter: the transformation of cinema into a de-codified hungry body amounts to a disputation of the central assumption of the humanitarian comprehension of hunger—that is, its "natural" representability. This does not mean questioning the ways in which an already docile body is shown, but rather opposing the mechanisms that create a docile body through its visibility. The hungry BwO is always elusive to a representational regime of visibility to the extent that

it is irreducible to any discursive logic of organization. The hungry BwO is, by definition, unrepresentable.[49]

Although it seems paradoxical, the affirmation of hunger and the making visible of that very affirmation implies a recognition of its unrepresentability. The problem is not how to represent hunger with a different logic, but how to make visible its essentially unrepresentable character. Rocha, deeply influenced by authors like Sergei Eisenstein, proposed a radical solution: only a hungry cinema is able to present a hungry body. In order to present the irrationality of a body in a trance, cinema itself needed to become an irrational body able to break the organization of audiovisual language (code). That is how Rocha described his last film *A idade da terra*: "A new body" (quoted in Bentes 1998, 148).

Multiple authors have shown that Rocha's films were not registers of irrational bodies; in his work, cinema itself became a dream or trance (Stam 1976; Xavier 1983; Costa 2000). *Terra em transe*, for instance, presents a world of spatial and temporal discontinuity: "There are no establishing shots to situate us. We are further disoriented by dizzying camera movements and an unorthodox variety of camera angles. Even in sequences characterized by spatial homogeneity, there is discontinuity in the cinematographic treatment of the unified space. We are given fragments that defy organization into a narrative whole" (Stam 1976, 50). The formal composition follows the same irrational movement as the bodies in space.

Rocha's films broke with the principles of organization that defined form as subordinate to the temporality of the action. Sometimes, like in Corisco's trance in *Deus e o*

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[49] This is not the ontologically unrepresentable body, such as some argued was confronted in the aftermath of the Holocaust, when the "dogmatists of the unrepresentable . . . assimilated it to the religious controversy over idolatry" (Rancière 2011, 95). It is, rather, an opposition to a regime of representation that denies those elements that cannot be represented. Affirming these elements, however, does not entail opposing any regime of the visible, but rather founding a new one in which the very unrepresentability of hunger becomes visible.

diabo na terra do sol, the delirium of the characters seems to infect the camera, which

acquires a certain independence of action. But sometimes it is the camera, with its

desynchronized sound and irregular montages, that seems to spread the trance to the bodies.

The bodies in the image and the image itself become inseparable; they compose a unified

body in trance. The spectator, meanwhile, is not a passive witness to these variations. The

film's discontinuous form dislocates his or her perception, distancing it from the temporality

of the narrative and immersing it in the modulations of the body in trance. According to

Bentes (2002): "The images do not represent. They go into a 'trance' or 'phase,' like the

characters, scenarios, objects. With the spectator they form a single flux" (7).

2.4   A Politics of Impossibility

The development of a relationship between the spectator and a film's composition was

one of Sergei Eisenstein's major contributions to film practice. Adopting Karl Marx's concept

of dialectics, the Russian filmmaker showed that if a film is expected to create a new

awareness in spectators by elucidating the contradictions of the economic system in which

they are immersed, it must assume the form of those contradictions. The contradictions of the

system of production only become visible through a dialectical form that, in turn, produces a

dialectical effect on the spectator. Rocha appropriated this circular identification among

image, reality, and thought: the irrational character of hunger is only visible through the

composition of an irrational hungry body (a modulation of characters and formal

composition) on the screen—a hungry body that dislocates viewers' organic perception by

exposing them to the irrationality of hunger.

The aesthetics of hunger, however, introduced an important variation with regard to

Eisenstein's thought. The composition of a dialectical form was, for Eisenstein, a means to

promote workers' rational comprehension of the conditions of their exploitation. Any dialectical contradiction had to be solved in order to reach a synthesis in a process of knowledge that, eventually, would lead to a transformation of reality. The irrationality of the hungry body (trance), to the contrary, was not a means for a subsequent rational comprehension of the phenomenon of hunger. For Rocha, the trance was, using Giorgio Agamben's (2000) concept, a "means without end"—not a means subordinated to an end based on rational knowledge, or an end in itself (in the Aristotelian sense of good moral action).

Agamben explained this concept using the example of dance—a practice whose origins have been associated with ritual trance. Dance is not a simple production (*poiesis*)— a series of movements aimed at an external goal—nor an action (*praxis*), an aesthetic end in itself. Dance, according to Agamben, "is nothing more than the endurance and the exhibition of the media character of corporal movements" (58). In a similar way, the irrational body in Rocha's films is neither a medium nor an aesthetic goal to be contemplated in itself. This idea is perfectly consistent with the understanding of Rocha's films and the aesthetics of hunger as a BwO. As Deleuze and Guattari (2005) explained, the BwO is always becoming: "You never reach the BwO, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit" (150). The BwO is not an end, a goal that the body reaches. It is a pure means without end that exhibits its to-come character, the possibilities of a body. This interpretation of the aesthetics of hunger differs from two traditional approaches: the reading of Rocha's films as a means for a revolutionary end and the implicit definition of the trance as an end in itself, defended by authors like Robert Stam and Ismail Xavier (1997) when they argued that the early 1960s metaphor of hunger evoked the figure of the victim finding self-redemption through trance and violence (306). I propose neither revolution nor redemption.

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Unlike Eisenstein, who defended the necessity of a synthesis (of dialectical opposites) in order to keep the possibility of revolution open (the use of cinema as a means of social transformation), Rocha's irrational body did not imply a consequent revolutionary awareness. My reading of the aesthetic of hunger differs from some traditional interpretations in that it does not affirm the recodification of the hungry body as a revolutionary one. Rocha's opposition to the humanitarian codification of the hungry body is not a simple displacement of the idea of the body as a sign of unfair inequality to one of a sign of revolt. The hungry body, once it has ceased to be understood as a normalized organism, does not immediately become a revolutionary agent. Authors like René Gardies (1974) and Gilberto Felisberto Vasconcellos (2001) suggested that the implicit presence of a "people-king" in some of Rocha's films, or the well-known metaphor of the *sertão* becoming sea, show his comprehension of politics as the seizure of power.

However, Rocha (2004) insisted that, although the seizure of power by the colonized was fundamental, it was not enough (237). He refused to transform the aesthetics of hunger into a motive for revolutionary reasoning: "The avant-gardes of thought can no longer spend their time uselessly responding to oppressive reason with revolutionary reason. Revolution is the anti-reason" (250). This anti-reason does not aspire to take the place of the dominant reason, but to become inapprehensible to it: the colonized does not take the place of the colonizer. In this sense, the aesthetics of hunger has no other goal than putting everything into a trance, initiating a crisis—not a crisis that will create the possibility of a new state, but a space of resistance to the codification of any oppressive reason (Deleuze 1989, 219). Instead of replacing the "negative" image of the hungry (the victim in need) with a "positive" one (the active revolutionary), the aesthetics of hunger multiplies its types and characters, de-codifies the hungry body, and makes its images irreducible to any discourse.

This irreducible character is precisely the core of the political dimension of the aesthetics of hunger. The hungry body resists *in* its de-codification, not in being recodified in terms of a concrete idea of social or political struggle. The very existence of a hungry body that escapes to the discursive reductions of humanitarianism is intolerable, to the extent that it threatens the organization of the social system in which it exists. The American anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes perceived this intolerable character of hunger after a long-term study of the conditions of undernourishment in the cane workers of northern Brazil, initiated in 1964. One of her most striking observations was the recent process of medicalization of the population of Alto do Cruzeiro, where she had been conducting her research. In 1985, during her second trip to the country, she found that almost twenty years later, the conditions of poverty and undernourishment in the region had not been mitigated. Instead, they had been obscured by a process of medical diagnosis that had transformed the symptoms of hunger into a psychological illness. Now hungry people (affected by weakness, fainting, insomnia, and anxiety) were suffering from *nervos* (nerves), and they were treated with tranquilizers, tonics, and antidepressants. For Brazil, an industrialized country that exports food and has the world's eighth largest economy, the persistent existence of hunger represents a threat. "A hungry body," Scheper-Hughes argued, "is a potent critique of the society in which it exists. . . . To acknowledge hunger, which is not a disease but a social illness, would be tantamount to political suicide for leaders whose power has come from the same plantation economy that has produced the hunger in the first place" (quoted in Russell 2005, 156). The aesthetics of hunger means the affirmation of that threat through the creation of hungry bodies that permanently escape classification.

In his influential study on cinema, Deleuze (1989) suggested that Rocha's emphasis on the notion of the trance placed him, along with other filmmakers and artists, in the line of a

modern political cinema that opposed the main assumptions of the classical perspective on the politics of images that filmmakers like Eisenstein had defended. Eisenstein's main assumption, according to Deleuze, was the preexistence of a revolutionary people: "The people are there, even though they are oppressed, tricked, subject, even though blind or unconscious" (216).[50] Indeed, Eisenstein believed that the revolution is possible precisely because there is an oppressed people capable of being transformed into a revolutionary consciousness. Cinema's political character thus depends on its capacity to operate that transformation, on its role as the catalyst of a possibility that is already present in the people. Rocha, on the contrary, believed that the people, not the possibility, are missing. Instead of films that revealed the true conditions of a preexisting people, Rocha made films that set the basis for the creation of a people.

In *Aesthetics of Dream*, Rocha explained this position through a critique of what he described as a revolutionary art useful for political activism, employing the example of the cinema of the Argentinian Fernando Solanas. Although in other texts Rocha had recognized the importance of Solana's political films, here he defined *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1968) as a "typical pamphlet of information, agitation and controversy that is currently used by political activists around the world" (Rocha 2004, 249).[51] Rocha's critique of *The Hour of the Furnaces* was not a personal dismissal of its director, but a deeper reflection on the differences between a cinema of liberation that followed the principles of a social and ideological realism and the approach of the Cinema Novo.

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[50] In French, Deleuze uses the concept of "le peuple," while Rocha uses "o povo" in Portuguese. Both terms refer to an abstract idea of unity (the people), and not simply to a group of individuals (people).

[51] In a text from the same year titled "Solanas" (1971), Rocha described the Argentinian filmmaker as one of the few artists in Latin America committed to the political struggle of liberation. He included Solanas in a group of avant-garde filmmakers like Walter Achugar, Santiago Álvarez, Mario Handler, Miguel Littín, Jorge Sanjinés, and Helvio Soto (Rocha 2004, 245–48).

Solanas always defended his intention of using cinema as a way of exposing the true conditions of oppression of Latin American peoples. In his famous manifesto, "Towards a Third Cinema," written with Octavio Getino, Solanas argued that cinema must be a "living document, and naked reality" that reflects the conditions of the people and gives them a new awareness of their own reality (quoted in Martin 1997, 44). Solanas and Getino proposed a cinema for the people, produced in conjunction with the oppressed masses. Film must be an extension of the people's daily revolutionary struggles: "The filmmaker's tie with reality makes him more a part of his people. . . . *The Hour of the Furnaces* shows how a film can be made in hostile circumstances when it has the support and collaboration of militants and cadres from the people" (quoted in Martin 1997, 49).

Rocha's resistance to Solanas's approach to film realism was based precisely on his perspective on the relationship between the filmmaker and the people depicted in film. His objection can be condensed into two main points: for Rocha, Solanas assumed a realist narrative structure taken from European cinema, and in consequence, his films presented the people as a mere abstraction. According to Rocha, the documentary registration of popular struggles made by Solanas reproduced the traditional forms of political representation, heirs of the revolutionary reason of the European bourgeoisie. *The Hour of the Furnaces* attempted to decolonize Latin America following the cinema of Chris Marker and Joris Ivens (Rocha 2004, 246). Thus, instead of revealing the true conditions of Latin American reality, Solanas reproduced a generic image of the people, turning it into an empty category.

It is important to stress that Rocha's objection was not formulated in terms of truth. What he criticized in Solanas's realism was not the lack of correspondence between the image of the people and the people themselves, but the assumption of an already given, already shaped "people" to be reflected in the cinematic image through the use of revolutionary

aesthetic formulas. Rocha (2004) condensed his critique by arguing, "The People is the myth of the bourgeoisie" (250).[52] In this sense, he rejected a cinema of liberation, close to a classical Marxist tradition of emancipation, which assumed the preexistence of the people (identified through categories like class antagonism). A cinema of emancipation shares with humanitarianism a common promise of change, the hope for a possible transformation. And both ground this possibility in the reduction of hunger—and its intolerable character—to a familiar language, pre-established categories, and a recodification of the hungry body.

If revolutionary cinema was a cinema for the people, that did not mean that that people had to exist before the cinema itself. In Rocha's cinema, there was no one people, but rather several peoples that needed to be united. Hungry bodies do not constitute a unified people. They do not belong to a single category such as "the oppressed" or the "working class." On the contrary, hunger disperses bodies in the space and makes their union problematic. The people are dissolved by the radical confirmation of the impossibility of living in this society. Like Manuel and Rosa in *Deus e o diabo*, Rocha's characters cannot find a place. They are permanently displaced in terms of territory, affects, and social roles; they wander, "looking for a new land, a new body"; any belief is impossible (Bentes 2002, 109). The character of the dictator Diaz in *Cabezas cortadas* (1970) encapsulates this condition: "I lost my faith. What a terrible disease." The people always appear as a promise that permanently fails in being fulfilled. Thus, instead of a cinema of the possible—in which the oppressed gain a new awareness of their own condition and, therefore, transform reality—Rocha created a cinema of the impossible, with hunger at the core of this impossibility.

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[52] The original text reads, "O Povo é o mito da burguesia." This section of the manifesto has been ignored in all the English translations of the text I have found so far.

This affirmation of the impossible does not imply pessimism or resignation, but rather a political position that transforms the intolerable into its only real possibility. What becomes possible, however, is not the overcoming of the intolerable—an effective transformation of the reality of hunger—but the promise of new peoples to come, of a multitude of de-codified hungry bodies that permanently affirm their irreducible character. Similar to the way Walter Benjamin (2007) argued that the most important political gesture was the creation of concepts "completely useless for the purposes of Fascism," the political dimension of the aesthetics of hunger lies in the introduction of totally unusable bodies that resist any codification (218). In a letter to Alfredo Guevara in 1971, Rocha wrote, "For me, revolution means life, and the peak of existence is mental liberation: for the most sensitive men, this liberation is expressed through fantasy" (1997, 410). It is necessary to add that this mental liberation is, before anything else, a liberation of the *body*: Rocha permanently defended a materialist comprehension of thought, denoting that he was not referring to an abstract mental reality, but to a transformation of the conditions of the body.

As I showed in the first section of this chapter, the affirmation of the intolerable and the impossibility of emancipation have been interpreted as the result of a historical turn in Cinema Novo's approach to the reality of hunger. After the political enthusiasm and revolutionary faith of the mid-twentieth century, the military coup of 1964 showed the real face of national politics to these young filmmakers, creating a deep sense of disappointment, which is manifest in films like *Terra em transe* (1967). From this perspective, the affirmation of the impossible was the historical result of the failure of the traditional revolutionary politics of liberation and emancipation. I want to propose, on the contrary, that the very

notion of an aesthetics of hunger implies resistance to a comprehension of politics based on the idea of the possible.[53]

How do we understand, from this perspective, the persistent utopian statements in Rocha's cinema, or his use of prophetic language in some of his texts? In almost all his films, Rocha included the figure of a prophet who announced a future revolution: Aruan and Firmino in *Barravento*; Sebastião and Corisco in *Deus e o diabo*; Antônio das Moretes and Antão in *O dragão da maldade contra o santo guerreiro*; the guerrilla priest in *O leão de sete cabeças*; the minister and Dulcinéia in *Cabezas cortadas*; and the four Christs in *A idade da terra*. In addition, in several texts, Rocha defended the idea of a revolution described as "bloody, messianic, mystical, apocalyptic and decisive for the political crisis of the twentieth century" (1997, 412).

Bentes (1998) defined Rocha's projective rhetoric as a utopian and "revolutionary romanticism" that would restore the possibility of believing (142). She used the example of *O dragão da maldade contra o Santo Guerreiro*, in which the main characters undergo a radical transformation: Antônio das Mortes, the *cangaceiro* hunter, turns into the protector; Antão gives up his conformism; the professor turns into a warrior; and the priest turns into a revolutionary. In short, Bentes affirmed, the people take up arms. Facing the intolerable, "Glauber built a way out through myth and mysticism, through pure revolt, a strategy, a possible composition" (Bentes 2002, 109). I propose an understanding of that "possibility of believing" that Bentes pointed to not as a messianic annunciation of the future but as a series of rhetorical inventions that reaffirmed the active powers of the present, such as the ones

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[53] I am not referring here to the personal intentions of the filmmakers, stated or otherwise, but to the conceptual implications of the creative decisions they made in the creation of their works. My interest has been the conceptual implications of their comprehension of cinema (manifest in their films).

described by Alain Badiou (2007) in his interpretation of the avant-garde manifestos of the first decades of the twentieth century.

Badiou opposed a series of readings that dismissed the importance of those texts by labeling them as unfulfilled promises of a future transformation of reality. "To criticize an aesthetic programme for failing to keep any of its promises is to miss the point," Badiou affirmed. "A programme is neither a contract nor a promise. It is a rhetorical device whose relation to what really takes place is only ever one of envelopment and protection" (139). The manifesto is, from this perspective, a rhetorical invention of a future aim that protects the powers of a present act. Badiou used the example of a love promise to explain the necessity of such a rhetorical device: "I love you forever" is not a contractual obligation to be kept in the future, but a "linguistic shelter" for the affirmation of a present event. Similarly, when Corisco from *Deus e o diabo* promises that the *sertão* will turn into the sea, and the sea into the *sertão,* he creates the image of a rhetorical future in order to affirm the present powers of a hungry body, its actual capacity for the disruption of the present. There is no other language to name that affirmation of the present. As Badiou pointed out, there is no metalanguage to capture the present of artistic production. For that reason, the artistic avant-gardes "activated formal ruptures in the present and at the same time produced the rhetorical envelope for that activation. They produced the envelopment of a real present in a fictive future" (139).

That is, in my view, exactly the role of Rocha's projections and messianic statements, of what he called an "uprooted material paradyze [*sic*]" (quoted in Bentes 1997, 147).[54] Bentes was right when she stated that this promise of a paradise emerged facing the

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[54] In Portuguese the expression is "*parayzo material dezenraizado.*" Rocha altered the spelling of the words *paraíso* (paradise) and *desenraizado* (uprooted). The formal distortion of writing (maybe following the same principle of formal experimentation he defended in his films) was a common practice in some of his texts.

disappointment of the failed revolution desired by an entire generation. However, that frustration was not overcome through the naive formulation of a utopian hope; instead, it was reaffirmed through the ironic construction of an improbable future. An anecdote about his short film *Di Cavalcanti* (1971) illustrates Rocha's perspective on redemption. The film is based on images that Rocha shot during the wake and funeral of his friend the painter Emiliano Di Cavalcanti in 1976. After assisting with the first projection of the film in the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro, Elizabeth Di Cavalcanti, the painter's daughter, vetoed the film, deciding that the direct images of her deceased father were disrespectful. Rocha explained his decision to film the body by arguing that the film was a celebration intended to liberate the dead man from his tragic condition:

> Fenix/Di never died. . . . Maybe if they had taken the body to an *Umbanda* land, with music, *batucada*, dance, energy, the living cells that remained in his body would have bounced back over the dead, and the man could have woken up. They had already declared that he was dead. But I believe in the bouncing back (quoted in Bentes 1997, 146).

This liberation and reemergence of the dead implied an affirmation of the power of images. Such a redemption was only possible in film and in the images of Di Cavalcanti's paintings. Rocha was not announcing his faith in a future event, but rather reaffirming the possibilities of the present. His film *Idade da terra* condenses this attitude toward redemption in a phrase repeated throughout it: "The bird of eternity does not exist. Only the real is eternal."

2.5   Representation and Spectacle

Up to this point, I have proposed using the figure of the hunger artist as a place of reflection from which to understand the political character of the aesthetics of hunger. However, I have deferred an important discussion of one of the main aspects of the affirmation of hunger enacted by the hunger artist. As Vandereycken and Van Deth (1994)

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pointed out, one of the main differences between hunger artists and any other practice of self-starvation is the centrality of spectacle. So far I have attempted to think of the significance of spectacle as a matter of visibility, but it is also necessary to reflect on it in the terms established by Guy Debord's (2002) influential philosophical work: as a commodification of reality.

When Ali Khan, the fakir of *O profeta da fome*, leaves prison after having decided to become a hunger artist, he finds a group of villagers waiting for him with offerings and gifts (they had begun to perceive him as a saint). The priest, who is with them, approaches Ali Khan and ironically declares his intention of "granting" him the spiritual direction of this wayward flock. Before the priest is able to finish his sobering discourse, another man with a rifle on his back approaches Ali Khan and offers him the control of an entire army to fight in his name. In this scene, Capovilla seems to have staged the two traditional responses to hunger that authors like Rocha had criticized a decade earlier: religious mystification and revolutionary struggle. Ali Khan's reply illustrates the distance of his conversion from these two interpretations: "You all are wrong. . . . You are looking for something you cannot find. I am an artist, a circus artist. And now, a hunger artist . . . that is going to work!" His affirmation of hunger is not a religious sacrifice or the beginning of a social revolution, but rather a public performance, a spectacle. He had indirectly explained the nature of this spectacle in the previous scene, when he revealed his decision to become a hunger artist, announcing, "Hunger is the business."

The sequence that follows marks a radical shift in the narrative and formal style of the film. Parodying the form of newsreels, Capovilla presented Ali Khan's performance in the streets of São Paulo as an important current affair. He used a montage to alternate documentary images of recent events—like the landing on the moon, soldiers in the middle of

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a war, and the Brazilian national soccer team—with images of the fakir inside a glass cabinet

ready to complete one hundred days of fasting (and thus earn Brazil a new world record).

Except for the scenes that document Ali Khan's performance, the narrator (imitating the tone

of a news anchor) does not assume a descriptive role, instead proposing a reflection on the

persistence of hunger in modern times. Capovilla affirmed that his intention in introducing

this reflexive sequence was to stress the absurdity of hunger by comparing images of starving

people with massive spectacles that distanced people from their own reality (while Pelé scores

a goal for the Brazilian national team, the voice-over exclaims "Pelé, superhero of hungry

people") and with impressive technical developments like the moon landing (Mattos 2008).

However, besides criticizing the contemporary reality of hunger, Capovilla's emphasis on the

spectacular character of Ali Khan's performance (the repetitive shots of camera lenses

recording the event, for instance) could be interpreted as a condemnation of the

commodification of hunger in Brazil. Marina Meliande (2000) proposed reading *O profeta da

fome* as a criticism of the eventual industrialization of the spectacle of hunger operated by

Cinema Novo:

> Hunger becomes an icon of that cinema, a flag whose meaning
> deflates and loses its initial strength. Hunger as the marketing of a
> cinema that wants to be hungry, precisely because that is its only
> possibility of existence. Hunger as a spectacle that is repeated
> insistently and, therefore, becomes a representation of a
> representation. Hunger as something exotic that draws the attention
> of the European spectator, and even of the Brazilian that has no
> contact with it. The loss of a real reference of hunger in cinema
> (Meliande 2000).

In fact, from the early 1960s, the impoverished conditions of the northeastern regions of

Brazil became a common subject for filmmakers interested in depicting the conditions of

underdevelopment in the country (Sarzynski 2012). Cinema Novo's emphasis on hunger

expanded this interest but, at the same time, may also have caused an exoticization and aestheticization of hunger. Although, according to Capovilla, that was not the original intention of the film, he retrospectively agreed with this critical interpretation (Mattos 2008, 121). At the end of the 1960s, this critique was common, especially among a group of new filmmakers who felt that Cinema Novo had become bourgeois, respectable, and paternalistic: it had become a "Cinema Novo Rico (nouveau rich cinema)" (Johnson and Stam 1995, 312). This group of filmmakers, commonly known as Cinema Marginal, will be the subject of the following chapter. Here, however, I would like to propose a final reflection on the becoming-spectacle of hunger.

The accusation of a commodification of hunger is not a simple allegation against a group of filmmakers who had betrayed their original intentions; it is a criticism of a revolutionary movement that, according to some detractors, eventually reinforced the colonized ideas on hunger that it was originally trying to abolish. If we follow Theodor Adorno's (1981) reflection on the commodification of the work of art, the main consequence of this process is the production of a phantasmagoric experience that alienates the human sensorium. The artwork as commodity overwhelms the rational reception of the spectators by organizing their experience "in terms of forgetting, fragmentation and atomization, and disciplines their sense perception, thereby establishing the basis upon which to transform their desire into a cultic community" (Kang 2005, 276). In this sense, the commodification of images of hunger implied a disciplining and normalization of the perception of the hungry body, and a reaffirmation of the humanitarian perspective that Cinema Novo tried to oppose.

What is interesting about the figure of the hunger artist in *O profeta da fome,* however, is not that it denounces the alienation and commodification of the original principles of the aesthetics of hunger in its spectacle, but that it shows that the spectacle is a constituent part of

the aesthetics of hunger. Again, the affirmation of hunger is the affirmation of it becoming visible. This affirmation does not precede the spectacle; it emerges within it. In this sense, instead of Adorno's criticism of the culture industry, I would like to use Benjamin's reflection on the notion of phantasmagoria to develop the consequences of the becoming-spectacle of hunger.

Although both Adorno and Benjamin used the notion of phantasmagoria to develop Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, Adorno interpreted it through the exclusive dominance of exchange value over use value, while Benjamin rephrased it in terms of the prevalence of exhibition value over cult value. This subtle displacement is central to Benjamin's approach to the commodification of artwork: the development of technological reproducibility in media like photography and cinema increases the artwork's potential for exhibition (while decreasing its aura). This predominance of exhibition value in modern societies may produce a standardization of individual experience that is now represented as a functionally reproducible entity. But it may also produce—and this is one of Benjamin's major contributions—a new field of experience through the democratization of the reception of visual images. The reified relationship among people mediated by commodities (phantasmagoria) may produce an alienated mass, and it may also open "an immense and unexpected field of action" for spectators (Benjamin 2007, 236).

Benjamin showed that the mechanical reproduction of artworks opened the possibility of both an introduction of aesthetics into political life (that he identified as Fascism) and a politicization of aesthetics. The difference between these two possibilities was not the spectacular nature of the former, as opposed to the artistic character of the latter, but rather the type of spectacle each of them created. The introduction of aesthetics into political life meant the production of humanity as a spectacle for itself, as an empty technical image that gave the

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masses a chance to express themselves without questioning property relations. Humanity's self-alienation has reached such a degree, Benjamin argued, "that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order" (242). The politicization of aesthetics, on the contrary, entailed the production of a new critical experience through spectacle. The technical nature of film "extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives. . . . Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder the dynamite of the tenth of a second" (236).

Benjamin's perspective is useful for thinking of the place of spectacle in the construction of a culture of hunger. The problem is not the spectacle of hunger in itself, but whether or not that spectacle empties hunger of its critical nature—that is, whether or not it shows the hungry but avoids the question of the distribution of the sensible (in terms of property, but also of visibility and normalization of the body) that produces hunger as such. Did Cinema Novo become an elite movement that, instead of producing liberated hungry bodies within its images, contributed to the recodification of hunger? My interest here is not to solve this question, making a case for Cinema Novo, but to show that it is necessary to think of the notion of spectacle as an essential part of the affirmation of hunger defended by Rocha since the 1960s (rather than as "the other" of this affirmation). Whether we see the Cinema Novo filmmakers as having become a bourgeois negation of what they proposed in the early 1960s depends on the historical narrative used to frame the development of the movement. In the following chapter, I will attempt to analyze the appropriation of the aesthetics of hunger by a new generation of filmmakers in the 1970s, who created a historical narrative in which Cinema Novo fell short in its radical affirmation of hunger due to its comfortable exoticization.

3. Cinema Marginal: The Grotesque Hungry Body

> "Grotesque creatures. They have beautiful faces too."
> —*Hitler do terceiro mundo*

In February 1970, the Rio de Janeiro periodical *O pasquim* published an interview with two young figures who had impressed the world of cinema in Brazil with their first feature films: Rogério Sganzerla and Helena Ignez. Sganzerla had released two films in the previous two years featuring Ignez as his main actress: *O bandido da luz vermelha* [The red light bandit] in 1968, and *A mulher de todos* [The woman of everyone] in 1969. Although several topics were addressed, one main subject stood out as the focus of the conversation published in *O pasquim*: the filmmaker and actress's relationship with Cinema Novo. The very first question posed by interviewer Sérgio Cabral defined the tone of the interview: "Why the war against Cinema Novo?" (quoted in Canuto 2007, 54).

Sganzerla's first two films revealed his break with the main ideas defended by Cinema Novo during the 1960s. Some scenes and formal elements in his films explicitly parodied various celebrated images from Glauber Rocha's most renowned films. In *O bandido*, for instance, the narrator ironically mentions a girl who liked to go to proms and talk about Cinema Novo. The film's initial images also show its remove from that movement. In the first scene after the credits, a group of black slum children dance in a dumpster holding their arms in the air; for the soundtrack, Sganzerla used the *candomblé*, music that Rocha had also included in *Terra em transe* (1967). The music and the children's movements resemble the famous revolutionary gesture of Paulo Martins in the final sequence of *Terra em transe*. These quotes from the earlier film established a parodic relationship that constituted both a tribute to and a critique of a movement that Sganzerla perceived as part of a previous generation (Stam 1995, 318). Ignez, meanwhile, had been married to Rocha in the early

1960s, and had participated in several films traditionally associated with Cinema Novo (she played the main character in Rocha's first short film, *O Pátio*, in 1959). In the late 1960s, however, she distanced herself from the movement, after having been, in her own words, intoxicated by it.

Sganzerla presented his and Ignez's disagreement with Cinema Novo in simple but radical terms: after a true revolutionary period from 1962 to 1965, the Cinema Novo filmmakers had become part of an "elite, paternalist, and conservative movement. A right-wing movement" (quoted in Canuto 2007, 54). His goal was to create a new experimental cinema in Brazil. The generation of Cinema Novo filmmakers represented the paradigm of what her needed to overcome: "I am a twenty-three-year-old filmmaker, I want to create the deepest and most authentic expressions of a new avant-garde, and I think that Cinema Novo is precisely an anti avant-garde" (quoted in Canuto 2007, 54).

Despite Cabral's persistent attempts to define this new avant-garde as a personal conflict with some of the figures of Cinema Novo, especially Rocha, both Sganzerla and Ignez stressed their goal of reforming the film scene in Brazil by recovering the revolutionary spirit of the first years of Cinema Novo.[55] Their problem was not the movement as such, but its current state of decadence and the fact that it was betraying what it had originally stated as the basis of a new cinema.

Rocha addressed these critiques of Cinema Novo in interviews and critical texts. In a conversation with Federico de Cárdenas and René Capriles in 1969, for example, he

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[55] The interpretation of the professional conflict between Sganzerla and Rocha as a personal conflict has been widely publicized since the late 1960s. A good (and maybe extreme) illustration is a short note published in May 18, 2012, in the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* in which the critic Inácio Araujo affirmed that Rocha sabotaged Sganzerla's career by using his international renown to spread the rumor that Sganzerla was a secret agent working for the CIA.

emphatically denied any perception of Cinema Novo as a decadent movement and criticized

Sganzerla's position as opportunistic: "Whoever talks against Cinema Novo is an incompetent

. . . that is the case of a filmmaker from São Paulo, who is a good filmmaker—Rogério

Sganzerla, director of *O bandido da luz vermelha*—but who is against Cinema Novo, because

he is opportunistic, and is trying to obtain funding from the Instituto Nacional do Cinema"

(Rocha 2004, 188–89). In 1975 Rocha published one of his most radical critiques of the

emergent movement in a text called "Udigrudi: Uma velha novidade" [*Udigrudi*: An old

novelty]. Rocha directly attacked the directors who were part of the new movement,

classifying them as a group of "young filmmakers of a minor talent" who announced as a

radical novelty what Cinema Novo had been doing for years: "Cheap cinema with a camera in

hand and an idea in the head" (Rocha 1981). The term *udigrudi* condensed his scornful

perspective: the group received several names in the late 1960s, among them the appellation

"underground," due to its radical rejection of the commercial circuits that the Cinema Novo

had begun to explore. This name (the Brazilian pronunciation of the word *underground*) was

a pejorative reference to that subversive and alternative character that some critics had

highlighted. Even in 1980, one year before succumbing to cancer, Rocha identified the

udigrudi as one of the main enemies of Cinema Novo (Rocha 2004, 467).

Rocha's fervent responses show that, by the early 1970s, Sganzerla's proposal of a

new cinema (a *novo* Cinema Novo) was not an isolated opinion, but rather the expression of

the beliefs of the emergent generation of filmmakers, who had begun to distance themselves

from some of Cinema Novo's ideas about cinema.[56] From the pejorative *udigrudi* to the

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[56] In his 1970 *O pasquim* interview, Sganzerla presented himself as a lone pioneer in the task of creating a new avant-garde in Brazil. This alleged loneliness would not last much longer: a few months later, in Jan. 1970, he created an independent production company named Belair, together with Ingez and the filmmaker Julio

common Cinema Marginal, several names have been given to this new generation of filmmakers: it has been called invention cinema, cinema of poetry, Brazilian underground, experimental, independent, and alternative cinema (Xavier 2004). As Andrea Tonacci (2004) affirmed, all these labels identified a group of filmmakers with a libertarian attitude who opposed both the creation model popularized by the Cinema Novo and the increasing political repression in Brazil, a product of the 1964 military coup and the country's oppressive radicalization in 1968 with the promulgation of the Ato Institucional Número Cinco (AI-5), which suspended several civil and political rights.[57]

Bressane. Belair only lasted for four months, after which the filmmakers had to abandon the country because of the pressures of the military dictatorship. In that short period of time, however, they made seven films that strongly influenced the new experimental cinema in the country: *A familia do barulho* [The family of noise]; *Carnaval na lama* [Carnival in the mud]; *Copacabana mon amour* [Copacabana my love]; *Barão olavo, o horrível* [Baron Olavo, the horrible]; *Cuidado, madame* [Be careful, madame]; *Sem essa, Aranha* [No way, Aranha]; and *A miss e o dinossauro* [The lady and the dinosaur].

In addition, since the mid-1960s, a series of filmmakers had begun to question some principles of Cinema Novo in different regions of Brazil. In his memoirs of the origins of Cinema Marginal, the filmmaker Geraldo Veloso (2008) affirmed that a group of filmmakers who had worked on some Cinema Novo films were in close contact with that generation of directors but were following a different path. That path represented a "deviation" from the principles of what had become known as the golden age of Brazilian cinema. In the region of Minas Gerais, for instance, the Centro Mineiro de Cinema Experimental had supported film projects by directors like Carlos Alberto Prates Correia, Neville Duarte de Almeida, and Schubert Magalhães. In São Paulo, besides Sganzerla, filmmakers like the Italian Andrea Tonacci had filmed some experiments, like the short film *Olho por olho* [Tit for tat] (1965), and a series of filmmakers established one of the most prolific centers of production in the country, in what has come to be known as the Boca do lixo [Mouth of garbage] cinema.

Some authors have even included important, and very dissimilar, figures like José Mojica Marins and his popular evil character Zé do Caixão (Coffin Joe), and the cinema experiments of the neo-concrete artist Lygia Pape, as part of the origins of the Cinema Marginal in the early 1960s (Puppo and Haddad 2004). Luís Alberto Rocha Melo (2007) proposed that the origins of the movement were a series of films from the late 1950s and early 1960s that have been traditionally ignored in the historiography of Brazilian cinema. Remier Lion recovered these films in the exhibition *Cinema brasileiro: A vergonha de uma nação* [Brazilian cinema: The shame of a nation], held in 2004 in São Paulo. According to Rocha Melo, Sganzerla recognized some of these films—including Maurício Barros's *Madrugada de sangue* (1957), Francisco José Ferreira's *Cais do vício* (1953), and Alberto Pieralisi's *O quinto poder* (1962)—as important influences for *O bandido*.

In the mid-1960s, the film festival Cinema Amador do Jornal do Brasil (also known as the Festival JB-Mesbla) at the Cinema Paissandu in Rio de Janeiro brought several of these filmmakers together, consolidating the core of the new film movement in Brazil.

[57] Some consequences of the AI-5 were the closure of the National Congress and the centralization of legislative and judicial power in the figure of the president of the Republic, the federal government's ability to intervene in states and municipalities, the suspension of habeas corpus, the suspension of any political meeting not authorized by the police, and the censorship of cultural production and means of mass communication.

In 1962–67, the Brazilian economy stagnated, with an annual real growth rate of only 3.7%. After the 1964 military coup, the new regime established a series of reforms focused on the stabilization of the markets and the promotion of industrial sectors.[58] Thanks to those new policies, the country experienced a remarkable boom from 1968 to 1973, with annual growth of 11.3%.[59] The government presented this boom (which coincided with the most repressive period of the dictatorship) as an economic wonder, the so-called Brazilian miracle, that would transform the country into a global power. Although other Brazilian governments had used this rhetoric of development and progress, the new regime stressed the connection between national identity, power, and greatness (instead of the idea of integration that was common in the developmentalist policies of the 1950s). Thus, the official government discourse defended an implicit idea of sacrifice: before distributing the fruits of the long process of modernization and progress, it was necessary to strengthen the economy as a whole (Fico 1997, 40). An initial period of collective sacrifice was necessary in order to build a "climate of order, stability, devotion to work, and trust in the future" (Geisel 1975, 35). A popular slogan that rephrased the problem in terms of nourishment condensed that approach: "First we need to grow the cake, then distribute it."[60]

This discourse of national greatness was projected through a propaganda campaign with slogans like "This is a country that moves ahead," "Nobody holds this country," and "Brazil is done by us," as well as the more radical phrase "Brazil, love it or leave it." Both

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[58] The military government emphasized a rapid industrial growth, the increase of exports, the creation of an income-concentrating wage policy, a more elastic tax system, a reformed capital market indexed for inflation and a semi-floating exchange rate, increased savings and investment, and a rise in the foreign debt (Mendonça and Graham 1978, 5).

[59] Industry was the leading sector in this expansion, with growth rates of 12.6% (higher than the average national rate). Food production, on the contrary, experienced much slower rates of growth (together with traditional sectors like textiles and clothing). Thus, while industry represented 35.84% of the GDP of the country in 1970, agriculture represented only 11.55% (in 1950, in contrast, both were close to 24%) (Baer 2008, 75).

[60] The original Portuguese phrase was "É preciso primeiro aumentar o 'bolo,' para depois reparti-lo."

slogans and images were present in every cinema screening, on the streets, on bus windows, on television, repeated every moment, every day (Avellar 2013, 58).[61] The government made a remarkable effort to create a climate of optimism in the country, thus legitimating the coup and all the repressive policies that came to support it.

Cinema Marginal opposed this rhetorical construction of a great country becoming a world power. In Sganzerla's *Sem essa, Aranha* (1970) [No way, Aranha], for example, the characters repeat simple formulas that imitate and invert state propaganda: "Worthless little planet," "The solar system is trash," "This is not Brazil anymore." This radical pessimism anticipated the dark side of the process of development, which would become evident in the following years: the fruits of the "Brazilian miracle" were unevenly distributed (the cake was never actually shared out), worsening the conditions of misery in the country. Baer (2008) showed that in 1970, the top 5% of the population received 36.3% of the income distribution (compared to 27.4% in 1960), while the lowest 40% received 9% (compared to 11.2% in 1960). The most evident contrast in the distribution of wealth emerges when comparing the northeast and southeast of Brazil, the most populated regions in 1970, with 30.3% and 42.7% of the total population, respectively (the south was in the third place, with 17.7%, almost half of the population of the northeast). The distribution of GDP in the same year was 12.1% for the northeast and 65% for the southeast (the south received 17.4%).[62] While the national income increased, the distribution of land remained the same, as did the levels of rural

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[61] Between 1972 and 1973, for instance, the government commissioned twelve documentary films about the country in order to consolidate a national and international image of development (all the films were made in several languages: French, English, German, Spanish, Italian, and, sometimes, Japanese). One of the films mixed images of the Brazilian beaches and the exuberant nature of the country with symbols of technology and economic development. A narrator intervened only at the end of the film: "You will always find the sun at the end of the road. You will always find a beach at the end of the road. At the end of the road you will always find an unforgettable place. This film was made in Brazil" (Fico 1997, 51).
[62] The difference was even larger when comparing the distribution of industrial production, the main engine of economic growth: 7% for the northeast and 76.9% for the southeast.

poverty. In 1970 the average per capita income of a rural household was 26% of the average

per capita income of an urban household.

Thus, the economic and social gap that had characterized Brazil throughout the

twentieth century only deepened during this period of economic development. The problems

of nutrition and alimentation were now more evident and urgent. In 1974 the Estudo Nacional

de Despesas Familiares [National Study of Family Expenses] showed that 67% of the

population had a lower level of caloric intake than recommended by the World Health

Organization (Vasconcelos 2005, 444). More than half of Brazil's population experienced

hunger.[63]

I argue that Cinema Marginal did not oppose the official discourse of economic

growth popular in that decade through denunciation films. Unlike some of the most iconic

Cinema Novo films of the previous decade, the Cinema Marginal films did not attempt to

reveal the true conditions of misery behind the rhetoric of development, but rather to oppose

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[63] In spite of the growing rates of economic development, the government did not change the approach to the problem of hunger that had defined state policies since the 1930s: in order to promote the development of the country, more assistentialist programs were created, always oriented toward the free distribution of food in at-risk communities (Medeiros Peliano 2010, 29). One popular slogan promoted by the milk producers condensed this approach: "A developed people is a well-nourished people" (Fico 1997, 135). In 1972 the Ministry of Health created the Feeding and Nutrition National Institute (INAN), together with the National Feeding and Nutrition Program (PRONAN), with the objective of using basic foods in the regional programs of assistance and supporting small rural producers in order to increase the income of the agriculture sector and the productivity of family farms. PRONAN was the main reference for the creation of other programs focusing on specific sectors of the population, among them the National School Feeding Program, Food Program for Workers, and Nutrition and Health Program for pregnant women and newborn babies (Januzzi 2014, 58). Indeed, several researchers have characterized the period from 1970 to 1984 as one of unprecedented multiplication of food aid policies in Brazil (Takagi 2006).

   Although INAN presented those programs as a solution to the reality of hunger, an evaluation showed that the implementation of these policies failed because of their scarce budget and the unequal distribution of the aid. During the 1970s, only 0.03% of the GDP was used to implement programs of food aid. In addition, several political interests affected the distribution of those few resources. Anna Peliano (1983) affirmed that in those programs, food was distributed according to income, and income was distributed according to political power. Instead of becoming a matter of administration, the solution to the problems of food distribution and nutrition was transformed into a political issue (and this in a period when politics was not a space for debate and participation, and therefore, the interests of the population were not a central concern). Thus, assistentialism, paternalism, and electoral patronage determined the implementation of the programs. In the end, the "Brazilian miracle" aggravated the conditions of misery and hunger in the country (Vasconcelos 2005).

the very basis of collective optimism through a radical affirmation of the cruel nature of

hunger. For the Cinema Marginal filmmakers, a cinema of denunciation was no longer

possible—not only because of the permanent repression against cultural production after

1968, but especially because any realist representation of hunger made it an object of political

appropriation, spectacle, and consumption. That was precisely their criticism of Cinema

Novo: its practices of making hunger visible had become a formula of denunciation that

contributed to an industrialization of images of the hungry body. Cinema Novo's

revolutionary intentions had been reduced to a digestible cinema for the elite.[64]

The opposition between Cinema Novo and Cinema Marginal became one of the

traditional lenses used to narrate the history of modern cinema in Brazil. The former

represented a utopian cinema committed to the political and social transformation of the

country, while the latter was defined as a cinema of disillusionment and pessimism, a cynical

cinema that abandoned any kind of political ideal to depict the conditions of

underdevelopment and political oppression in Brazil. In the last two decades, however,

several authors have pointed out the difficulty of defending a radical separation between the

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[64] These were Sganzerla's main reasons for condemning the recently established relationship between some Cinema Novo filmmakers and Embrafilme, the state film company created by the military government in 1969. The first film produced by Embrafilm was *São Bernardo* (1970), directed by Leon Hirszman, a recognized member of the Cinema Novo movement. Accepting resources from the state to produce films represented both an aesthetic regression (production of high-budget films with a more refined style) that contradicted the movement's original goal of opposing the colonial representations of hunger, and political treason (Sganzerla 2010). The relationship between the Cinema Novo filmmakers and Embrafilme was a subject of long discussions during the 1970s. Filmmakers like Carlos Diegues and Rui Guerra defended the relationship and explicitly endorsed the existence of Embrafilme as a fundamental tool in the development of Brazilian cinema. Diegues affirmed: "The Cinema Novo group is not identified with Embrafilme. Supporting Embrafilme does not exclude recognizing its weakness. . . . The country needs such an enterprise. It may be poorly administered or perhaps commit absurd errors. I defend Embrafilme as fundamental at this moment in the economy and development of Brazilian cinema. It is the only enterprise with sufficient economic and political power to confront the devastating voracity of the multinational corporations in Brazil" (Diegues 1995, 100).

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two movements.[65] It was probably the influential critic Jean-Claude Bernardet who most

thoroughly questioned this division by showing that, beyond the ideology that defined each

movement, there were several similarities in terms of the "style, materiality, spaces,

movements, and rhythms" in their films (Bernardet 2004, 16).

I choose to follow Bernardet's suggestion and read Cinema Marginal as an

appropriation of the principles of the aesthetics of hunger that defined some trends of Cinema

Novo in the 1960s and 1970s. In his famous 1970 interview published in *O pasquim*,

Sganzerla recognized his affinity with the spirit of the first years of Cinema Novo, before the

filmmakers of the movement attempted to produce a more commercial cinema. Authors like

Robert Stam (1995) and Ismael Xavier (2001) have read Cinema Marginal's ideas as a

radicalization of the aesthetics of hunger, attempting to oppose the relatively high-budget

films that the Cinema Novo filmmakers began to produce once they were funded by the state.

This radicalization has been widely commented on in terms of the formal and narrative

transformations introduced in Cinema Marginal, which have been condensed into the notion

of "estética do lixo" [garbage aesthetics]: "A garbage style, they argued, was the style most

appropriate to a Third World country picking through the leavings of an international system

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[65] In the late 1980s, some filmmakers, like Sganzerla and Bressane, publicly expressed some reluctance at being labeled "marginal" and highlighted several points of contact with Cinema Novo. In an interview with Marcos Valério in 1987, Sganzerla stated that the name Cinema Marginal should not be used: "I think that Brazil is the one marginalized. It is not correct to say cinema marginal, *udigrudi*, because that was a campaign of Cinema Novo, a compromising barbarism. We think that the correct name for that movement is 'experimental'" (quoted in Canuto 2007, 98). Tonacci also attempted to nuance the term *marginal* by replacing it with *marginalized* in order to stress the fact that the marginalization of the filmmakers in this movement was not simply a decision but also an imposition.

Ismail Xavier (2004) affirmed that films like Guerra's *Os deuses e os mortos* (1970), Arnaldo Jabor's *Pindorama* (1970), and Rocha's *Câncer* (filmed in 1968 but edited in 1972), traditionally labeled as part of Cinema Novo, were closer to the principles of Cinema Marginal than to the traditional image of the new cinema of the 1960s. Something similar happened with films like Olney São Paulo's *Manhã cinzenta* (1969), associated with the Cinema Marginal, but rendered closer to Cinema Novo by critics like José Carlos Avellar. Ângela José (2007) connected the film with Rocha's *Terra em transe* (1967) and Tonacci's *Blá, blá, blá* (1968) in a "triangle on the political circumstances of Brazil" in the late 1960s that influenced the emergence of the Cinema Marginal movement.

dominated by First World monopoly capitalism" (Stam 1995, 312). In Sganzerla's words, rather than films, Cinema Marginal produced *filmecos*, low-quality or inferior films that affirmed the conditions of underdevelopment in which they were produced. Underdevelopment was not only a condition, but also a decision: "Here the films are underdeveloped by nature and by calling" (Sganzerla 2010, 59).

My intention here is not to exhaustively describe the stylistic consequences of a radicalization of the aesthetics of hunger, but rather to think about how the trope of hunger appeared in Cinema Marginal. What are the consequences of radicalization for the visibility of a hungry body and the transformation of hunger into an aesthetic principle? I propose a reading of the Cinema Marginal films as the composition of a grotesque body deprived of any individual feature or narrative structure. If Cinema Novo created characters as a background for hunger, the Cinema Marginal composed emptied, hungry bodies in which the realist claim of hunger lost any meaning.

3.1 **Cannibal Violence**

In 1970 Sganzerla (working together with Ignez and Julio Bressane) produced three films in Rio de Janeiro The last product of this series was *Sem essa, Aranha,* an experimental feature film composed in seventeen sequence shots with no narrative continuity (something that was common among the films of the Cinema Marginal filmmakers).[66] Only a few elements connect the different fragments of the film: the presence of the four main characters

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[66] The film was censored and never released in commercial theaters. It was only exhibited in some festivals, especially outside of Brazil. It was not until the late 2000s that the film was exhibited in Brazil and published as part of a DVD collection on Cinema Marginal.

(only one, Aranha, identified by name), and a series of recurrent fillers and reflexive

monologues that are closer to a disjointed verbal torrent than to an organized discourse.

Aranha is introduced in the first of these sequences. Actor Jorge Laredo interpreted the

character in the same way as he did Zé Bonitinho, a television character that he popularized in

the 1960s in the comedy show *Noites cariocas*. Zé Bonitinho is a Casanova with a deep voice

and extravagant gestures. Flaunting an enormous quiff, vast sunglasses, and a fine mustache,

he describes himself through comic and sexist fillers.[67] In the first scene of the film, Aranha

talks directly to the camera, with a solemn voice and amplified gestures, while wandering in a

car sale lot, wearing a big black hat and a long fuchsia scarf. He exclaims, "Boys, for you,

why don't you do what everyone else does? Sell the same car three or four times. It's the only

way out of the crisis." Later in the film, a voice-over introduces Aranha as a "self-made

financer, banker, political adviser, and international figurehead" while he descends the stairs

of his mansion in the middle of a favela in Rio de Janeiro.

In the second sequence, Aranha interrupts a musical act in a brothel with one of his

extravagant discourses. The music suddenly stops and the dancers join the public to listen to

Aranha, who moves from the popular phrases of Zé Bonitinho ("Being handsome is a drag.

When he made me, God was suffering from a superiority complex") to a more serious and

indecipherable discourse.[68] When he finishes his speech and the dancers resume their

disrupted striptease, the camera shows Ignez's character, who has witnessed the action from

one of the tables around the dance floor. As soon as the camera reaches Ignez, she begins

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[67] Some of them are: "Zé Bonitinho, one that is not coffee, but will leave you awake all night long," and "Zé Bonitinho, one that is not a parking space, but the chicks are always competing for him."

[68] Aranha declares: "It's been six thousand years. If the earth's 200 billion inhabitants knew what I was thinking now, what I'm planning. If they understood the activities of the 200 billion, of the 200 bosses. That's when you need to drop the bombs. Attention, I have done everything a white man can do. Jerks! A new age is coming. Six thousand years weigh heavily upon me."

retching, each time with more violence. Facing the camera, she stands and begins to walk

while shoving her finger into her throat to force vomiting. Upon reaching the window, she

reads a fragment from *Literature and Revolution*, in which Leon Trotsky discussed the works

of the poet Nicolat Kliuev; she immediately begins retching again.[69] The music of the brothel

plays while the camera shows Ignez vomiting out the window, with Rio de Janeiro's

landscape in the background. A second woman (played by Maria Maria Gladys) joins Ignez in

her abject performance, walking out through the window and back again into the brothel to

resume dancing with the naked performers. Luiz Gonzaga's "A triste partida" plays in the

background: "September has passed, October and November. We're already in December, my

God what is to become of us! That's how the poor speak in the Northeastern drought afraid of

pestilence and famine."

The intensity of Ignez's vomiting condenses the attitude of Cinema Marginal and

serves as a useful tool for understanding the spirit of the movement. Sganzerla compared that

drastic corporeal act with the process of creation of the Cinema Marginal films (Ramos 1987,

74). Two elements are central to this abject metaphor: the radical violence of Ignez's

voluntary and public act (against her own body, and against the spectator), and the centrality

of bad taste in the movement's aesthetics.[70]

João Carlos Rodrigues (2002) proposed that one of the main differences between

Cinema Marginal and Cinema Novo is their dissimilar origins. While the latter emerged from

a political commitment (with clear Marxist influences) to transformation of the social

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[69] She reads: "It is unclear whether he himself believes or does not believe. His God suddenly spits blood and the Virgin Mother gives herself to some Hungarian for a few yellow pieces."

[70] Other authors, like Stam (1997), privileged the motif of garbage to describe and analyze Cinema Marginal's aesthetics. The expression "aesthetics of garbage" has been repeatedly used to describe this movement, and especially its differences with Cinema Novo. Here I have decided to use the motif of vomit instead of garbage in order to stress the importance of the body in the Cinema Marginal films that reflect on the topic of hunger.

conditions of the country, the main concern of the Cinema Marginal filmmakers was to subvert film language. If Cinema Novo filmmakers created an aesthetic reflection that allowed them to explore the political power of images, for the Cinema Marginal, "love for cinema exceeded the direct political activism" (29). In an interview with Alcino Lette published in *Folha de São Paulo* in 1995, Sganzerla and Bressane clearly stated their distance from the political motivations of filmmakers like Rocha when they affirmed that the main reason for "making cinema was enjoyment" (quoted in Canuto 2007, 136). They did not define cinema in terms of its capacity to transform reality, but rather, from a formalist perspective, as the "music of light" (using Abel Gance's popular formulation), and even as an expression of "a process of thought" (139). This definition did not imply, however, a rejection of politics; instead, it was an affirmation that the films needed to be political "in a different way, not only as in Rocha and Saraceni" (27).

This emphasis on form and film language was the main element that had defined the transgressive spirit of the Cinema Marginal movement since the late 1960s. The radicalization of the aesthetics of hunger was not a toughening of Cinema Novo's political ideas, but rather a reaffirmation of the formal principles derived from them, especially the aesthetic principle of violence that Rocha had placed at the core of his ideas on hunger and cinema. That formal violence—intended to dislocate the viewer's perception—has been recognized as Cinema Novo's signature during a time when several filmmakers were trying to get closer to a popular audience. However, it differed from Rocha's didactic approach, which was closer to that of authors like Brecht and Eisenstein, in which the dislocation of film form still had the spectator's thought processes as its goal. The Cinema Marginal filmmakers radically broke any link with the audience as an element of aesthetic consideration in the composition of their films. This was one of the main elements that the critics of that time highlighted in their

attempt to define the new movement.[71] In a text published in 1971 in *Jornal do Brasil*, José Carlos Avellar, for instance, described the attitude of the filmmakers as a radical defense of "the impossibility of overcoming the barrier between them (the filmmakers) and what would be the natural goal of their cultural action (the people)" (quoted in Ramos 1987, 48).

The contempt of the Cinema Marginal filmmakers for the spectator had been explicit since their first films. The act of vomiting while looking directly at the camera in *Sem essa, Aranha* was one of the clearest illustrations of this attitude, but it was not the only one. Jairo Ferreira (1986) explained that images of characters vomiting, bleeding, urinating, and expelling or even eating feces were common in the Cinema Marginal films. The filmmaker Luiz Rosemberg Filho condensed the Cinema Marginal filmmakers' passionate perspective on their audience: "If the reader-spectator does not agree with what we are saying and doing, we recommend a strong dose of Tatu insecticide" (quoted by Stam 1995, 311). Fernão Ramos (1987) suggested that one of the main causes of this distance between the filmmakers and their audience was the political conditions of the country after 1968.

While the first Cinema Novo films have been recognized as optimistic expressions of a nationalist discourse that had emerged in the mid-1940s, the Cinema Marginal films emerged from a feeling of total disillusionment and pessimism about the social and political conditions of Brazil after the strengthening of the military regime. The musician Luiz Gonzaga expresses this perception in one of the final sequences of *Sem essa, Aranha*, when he looks directly to the camera and addresses the spectators: "I'm not sure whether you know,

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[71] This radical rupture with the spectator contrasted with the new interest in the connection with the public that most of the Cinema Novo filmmakers began to express in the late 1960s. Gustavo Dahl, for instance, published two important articles in 1966 ("Cinema Novo e estruturas econômicas tradicionais" [Cinema Novo and the traditional economic structures] and "O Cinema Novo e seu público" [Cinema Novo and its public]) addressing the necessity of producing popular films.

but we are living in an anti-Brazil. We don't know what will happen and where we are going to get." This generation of filmmakers did not believe in any possible social transformation, so they refused to use cinema as a didactic tool, employing it instead to confirm that very impossibility. That is precisely the attitude that defined them as marginal: they were outside the social order and avoided any attempt at being reinserted into it. Their disenchantment was reflected in their films through a radical violence toward the spectator and a rejection of a polished form or narrative.

Thus, the formal violence and the consequent disdain for the spectator that defined Cinema Marginal films were not an end in themselves. In 1969 Sganzerla refused to define his approach as an empty act of aggression, rephrasing the discussion on avant-garde cinema in terms of bad taste: "I am not looking for a boor style. I attempt to use bad taste in order to achieve an intuitive comprehension of Brazilian reality and the problems that affect us today" (quoted in Canuto 2007, 33). "Bad taste" in this context meant both a film form that broke with the classical conventions of film language, and the incorporation of a series of references and styles in the composition of the film that had been rejected as part of a low, alienated culture incapable of creating a new political awareness of the conditions of the country.

Cinema Novo had radically rejected any connection to the commercial, popular cinema in Brazil, considering it an uncritical reproduction of the Hollywood model, which it saw as a colonial expression. The Cinema Marginal filmmakers intentionally opposed this implicit division between the good taste of the intellectual elites and the bad taste of the people by appropriating diverse materials despised by the political filmmakers of the early 1960s. The sequence from *Sem essa, Aranha* described above (where Ignez vomits and walks out through the window of the brothel) reveals the spirit of this practice of appropriation:

fragments from Leon Trotsky's discourse mix with the popular "A triste partida" and with the frivolous discourses of Zé Bonitinho, an icon of popular entertainment.

Sganzerla had used this method since his first film, *O bandido da luz vermelha*, which he described as a "far-west on the Third World": "That means, a mixture of different genres. I made a film-sum; a *far-west* but also a musical, documentary, thriller, comedy (or *chanchada*?), and science fiction" (Sganzerla [1968] 2001). In addition to the sources, the blend itself was not a refined and polished synthesis of critically appropriated elements, but rather a collage of different materials found randomly, sometimes in completely dissimilar contexts. The product was, in Sganzerla's words, pure garbage, "a primitive film, a schoolboy-film, a film that attacks the spectator but because of its stupidity" (quoted in Canuto 2007, 63).

As several critics pointed out, the appropriation of elements of bad taste had a direct connection to the renewed interest in the notion of cultural anthropophagy. The Tropicalismo musical movement had used this concept as one of the main strategies of artistic production during the years of Brazil's most intense political repression.[72] The image of the artist as a

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[72] Tropicalismo was not a musical style, like samba or bossa nova, but a strategy of cultural production centered on the appropriation of local and foreign styles and technologies. Caetano Veloso, one of the founders of the movement, stressed the intentional adoption of bad taste as a basis for the musicians' creations (Veloso and Dunn 1996). Their original purpose was to oppose an implicit code of "good musical behavior" that had emerged in the late 1960s as a result of the influence of bossa nova in Brazilian popular music. Christopher Dunn (2001) used the figure of Carmen Miranda to illustrate that code. Although her success in Hollywood during the 1930s made her one of the most popular and beloved figures in Brazil, Miranda was also strongly criticized, especially after her return to Brazil in 1940. While the upper class described her performances as too "Americanized," the press accused her of projecting a stereotypical and negative image of Brazil because her act was "too black." The São Paulo paper *A folha da noite* affirmed, "So, that's how Brazil shines in the United States: [Carmen Miranda] singing bad-tasting black sambas" (O'Neil 2005, 200).

During the 1950s, the discriminatory association between samba, Carmen Miranda, and bad taste was part of the common imagery of the Brazilian middle class. The rise of bossa nova contributed to the deepening of this image. While samba has always been connected to former slaves and the population of the favelas, bossa nova was created by the urban middle class of Rio de Janeiro by appropriating several elements of American jazz and mixing them with the rhythmic layers of samba. By the 1960s, when the Tropicalists began to produce their first experiments, a clear division between the "sophisticated" bossa nova and the low-culture samba was explicit in the country. The former was associated with a cosmopolitan culture that emerged in a time of

cannibal who devoured the other, originally proposed by the poet Oswald de Andrade in the

1920s, reemerged as the paradigmatic logic of production of a group of artists who were

increasingly aware of the conditions of underdevelopment that defined their context of

creation. Cannibalism was the mode of consumption par excellence in a Third World country

that received the leftovers of the industrialized world. Even Cinema Novo assumed the

strategy of cultural anthropophagy with paradigmatic films like Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's

Macunaíma (1969). That same year, Rocha (2004) affirmed that the cinema of the Third

World had to be a cannibal cinema that, instead of imitating the dominant culture, ingested

and transformed its complexity. "Tropicalismo," he affirmed, "that is anthropophagy and its

democracy, prosperity, and national pride, while the latter was depicted in the middle-class imagination as an expression of vulgar exoticism.

Retrospectively, Veloso described Miranda as a "culturally repulsive object" for audiences in the late 1960s. She had become the paradigm of bad taste, a "kind of grotesque representation of Brazil, something to be ashamed of" (Veloso and Dunn 1996, 132). That symbol of bad taste became a main reference in Veloso's song-manifesto *Tropicália* from 1968. The allegoric song celebrates Miranda ("Long live the band, long live Carmen Miranda") as part of Brazilian culture, together with the refined bossa nova ("Long live the bossa, long live the straw hut"). However, Miranda was not simply a symbol of the "low culture," but also an allegory of Brazilian culture as a whole. In Veloso's words, she was "a bit of a monster," a mixture of several heterogeneous elements instead of a pure symbol of *brasilidade* or a kitsch stereotype. In a similar way, Brazilian culture was not the expression of an isolated national identity, but the product of different influences both local and foreign. Bossa nova itself, perceived in the late 1960s as a symbol of nationalism, had emerged as a mixture of Brazilian popular music with elements of different international styles.

The incorporation of Miranda as an active element in Brazilian cultural identity was part of a strategy for recovering not only national elements that had been rejected by the arbiters of good taste, but also international influences that were excluded as symbols of capitalist imperialism. In their first performances and compositions, the Tropicalists appropriated several elements from Latin American popular music that most Brazilians considered of lesser quality (like Argentine tango, or Cuban and Mexican boleros) and mixed them with British and American rock and roll, the hippie movement, and pop music. The cannibalistic strategy was clear: "You take in anything and everything, coming from anywhere and everywhere, and then you do whatever you like with it, you digest it as you wish: you eat everything there is and then produce something new" (Veloso and Dunn 1996, 123). The audience's reactions to that logic of appropriation were radical and even violent. As had happened with Miranda almost four decades before, the Tropicalists were accused of being "Americanized," and some performances were sabotaged because the public believed they were insulting the tradition of popular music in Brazil by incorporating symbols of the expansion of capitalism. Thus, for all audiences—both the social elites and the young spectators who followed the festivals and new musical trends—their music was an expression of bad taste, defined in a broad sense. Bad taste was a racial and class category that designated the popularized products of a low culture, but it was also a nationalist category that identified any foreign influence that infringed upon the essence of Brazilian culture.

Through the strategy of cannibal appropriation, the Tropicalists opposed two of the predominant narratives of cultural nationalism in their time: the conservative patriotism of the regime, and the radical anti-imperialism of the left-wing opposition. Both of these narratives shared a common element: the affirmation of a defensive nationalism that rejected anything that was not considered purely Brazilian.

development, are the most important expressions of Brazilian culture today . . . there is a cinema before and after Tropicalismo" (150).

The figure of the cannibal also became central for Cinema Marginal. The filmmaker João Callego condensed the importance of the strategy of cannibalism in his text *Manifesto do cinema cafajeste* [Manifesto of boor cinema], written in 1968: "Boor cinema is a cinema of direct communication. It is a cinema that uses the tradition of fifty years of exhibition of 'bad' American cinema, properly absorbed by the spectator. . . . It is the aesthetic of the theatre of journals, of the conversations in the barbershop, of the pornographic magazines. . . . It is Oswald de Andrade and Líbero Rípoli Filho."[73] There was, however, a main difference between the anthropophagic practices of the Cinema Marginal filmmakers and the elaborated cannibalism of the Tropicalismo musicians.

As Veloso affirmed, the goal of cannibalistic appropriation for the Tropicalismo composers was to reject the role of Brazil as a Third World country: "By using electric guitar in melodic compositions with elements of Argentine tango and African things from Bahia, we assumed an immediate posture of 'being-in-the-world'" (Veloso and Dunn 1996, 121). Thus, although their first performances were rejected by some members of their Brazilian audience, the Tropicalists consciously produced international music (following the idea of "poetry for export" that Oswald de Andrade had defended in the 1920s) and rapidly became part of the international scene. In this sense, their perspective was highly optimistic: their appropriation produced a new synthesis; the cannibal was able to digest what he or she had devoured and to create a new product. The violence of the cannibal's act was blurred in that final product.

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[73] This text was never published in its totality. The original version is in the archive of the Cinemateca of the MAM at Rio de Janeiro with the materials that accompanied the premiere of *As libertinas* in 1968. It is available online on http://obarcobebado.blogspot.com/2010/10/manifesto-do-cinema-cafajeste.html.

Rather than an act of absorption, the cannibalistic appropriation of the Cinema Marginal filmmakers was an affirmation of the indigestible. In 1969 the critic Jairo Ferreira made explicit the violence of Cinema marginal cannibalism (in a comment in response to Mauricio Gomes Leite's film *A vida provisória* [The provisional life]) by using the symbol of vomiting: "It is a matter of swallowing and vomiting the invaders. Anthropophagic talent" (Ferreira 2006, 98). This anthropophagic vomit radically rejected any possibility of incorporating any external influence in order to produce a new synthesis. Terms like *combination* or *collage*, traditionally used to describe the Cinema Marginal films, are inadequate. The Cinema Marginal cannibals did not devour the external products from developed countries in order to create films for export to an international market. Their product was not a multicultural hybrid that expressed the pluralism of Brazilian culture. Instead, like vomit, the films are monstrous, dismembered objects composed of several others. They are not a finished synthesis, but the very process of a violent composition. The other is not devoured to be appropriated, but rather to be rejected, expelled.

The Cinema Marginal films' rejection of the other was, however, different from the nationalist trends that, since the 1940s, had implicitly defined the other as a series of external cultural manifestations that must be disallowed in order to preserve Brazilian identity. Cinema Marginal filmmakers recognized that the other was part of Brazilian culture—not through imposition, but through a long process of assimilation and adaptation. The other had been pleasantly appropriated as part of a national identity in several popular expressions and practices. Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes (1980) stressed this inherent otherness of Brazilian identity: "We are neither Europeans nor North Americans. Lacking an original culture, nothing is foreign to us because everything is. The painful construction of ourselves develops within the rarified dialectic of not being and being someone else" (90). So why devour those

"invaders" (who were already part of Brazilian culture) in order to reject them? Why eat, only to end up vomiting?

The core of this "anthropophagic talent" was the reality of underdevelopment. Sganzerla affirmed: "By devouring the developed cinema I produced its immediate negation: the total pastiche, the self-redemptory copy, our only option for leaving once again the truth of underdevelopment—to achieve an inverted notion of 'good' or 'bad,' by perverting the initial object in a final provocation of hunger: the Third World vomiting terrible and free films" (quoted in Ramos 1987, 74). The symbol of the anthropophagic vomit redeemed the act of imitation as a productive practice opposing a long tradition that had identified it as one of the main causes of the subordinated role that Brazil played internationally. As Roberto Schwarz (1995) showed, although this perspective reached its climax with the populist nationalism of President João Goulart's government, it had played an essential role in Brazil's critical thought since the country's independence (264). A defense of imitation entailed an affirmation of the artificial and inauthentic character of Brazilian culture that others had radically tried to overcome by rejecting any influence that served as a model for national production.[74] The copy, thus, was not understood as a regenerating duplicate that would allow Brazil to follow the cultural standards of First World countries in order to produce for an international market. Instead, Cinema Marginal filmmakers defended a poor and imperfect

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[74] Several authors stressed this defense as one of the main features of modern Latin American avant-gardes. In 1947 the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz coined the term *transculturation* to describe the capacity of the "New World" to appropriate in original ways external traditions in order to produce its own identity. Angel Rama (1982) described this term as a creative energy that allowed Latin America to produce a culture distinct from a simple aggregate of imported cultural objects and practices. Other authors like Daniel Castillo-Duarte (1994), Nelly Richard (1995), Michael Dash (1998), and Román de la Campa (1999) even agreed that the affirmation of imitation prefigured the postmodernist defense of the simulacrum by operating an inversion of the First World hierarchy of model and copy. Maybe this connection between a defense of imitation and the principles of postmodernist philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century explains Robert Stam's (1997) almost cryptic affirmation that the Cinema Marginal was "more decentered, postmodern, postcolonial" than Cinema Novo (287).

copy that affirmed Brazil's marginal and underdeveloped character. The copy only resembled its model in the sense that vomit resembles the devoured object. Cinema Marginal seemed to follow what Salles Gomes (1980) defined in 1973 as the "creative incapacity for copying," which had defined the whole history of Brazilian cinema (90).

Thus, like De Andrade's cannibal or Rocha's hungry cinema, the anthropophagic vomit of the Cinema Marginal movement was an affirmation of an identity that had previously been defined in pejorative terms. It is important to remember that, in this context, vomiting was not a natural reflex, but a self-inflicted practice. Several authors considered the act of vomiting as part of their aesthetic reflections. Most of them, however, focused on the involuntary reflex produced when experiencing disgust. Immanuel Kant, for instance, included a reflection on vomiting as part of his reflections on disgust in *Critique of Judgment*. According to Kant, disgust is a constitutive part of the notion of beauty: the beautiful tends in itself to become disgusting. It is always threatened with the danger of revealing itself as something vomitive (Menninghaus 2003). Although Kant considered disgust an important part of the aesthetics of beauty, he only saw vomit as an instinctive reaction to satiation and excess. In his influential text *Aesthetics of Ugliness*, the German philosopher Karl Rosenkranz defined voluntary vomit as extremely disgusting by citing Friedrich Hebbel's play *The Diamond*, in which a character not only vomits on the stage, but "even sticks his finger in his mouth to do so. That is too repellent!" (quoted in Menninghaus 2003, 145).[75]

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[75] The rejection of the act of vomiting at will is better exemplified by the modern myth of the Roman *vomitorium*: a room adjacent to the dining chamber where the participants in a feast could empty their stomachs in order to keep eating. Although the word existed in ancient Rome, it originally designated a passage in an amphitheater that allowed big crowds to circulate rapidly at the beginning or end of the performance. Only in the twentieth century was the term associated with the practice of vomiting and feasting, in an attempt to stress the decadence and excess of the Roman Empire.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin (1965) connected the ability to vomit at will to monkeys and primitive men. According to his theory, our ancestors retained this animal skill in order to distinguish the types of food they needed to avoid. The development of language eventually made this ability unnecessary, as men were able to communicate more effectively the distinctions between rotten and healthy food. Language transformed a primitive physical ability into an involuntary reflex that only emerged in extreme conditions (when a stimulus surpassed the barrier of language). Just as the figure of the cannibal has always been connected to the savage, the voluntary act of vomiting is associated with "inferior" species. Cinema Marginal affirmed this primitive skill as the act par excellence of the Third World. In a hungry and underdeveloped country, vomiting was a valid option, not as a form of disposal, but as a way to produce authentic products that reflected the country's social and cultural reality.

Stam (1997) pointed out the recurring use of a certain type of "neologistic aesthetics" in Latin America as an anticolonial strategy that revalorized, by inversion, what had formerly been seen as negative. Those neologisms always implied the dissolution of the division between center and periphery that supported (and still supports today) the relationship between the colonizers and colonized. Accordingly, the vomit of the Cinema Marginal filmmakers was an affirmation of the power of the margins instead of an attempt at becoming the center. It is in this sense that the practice of devouring and vomiting is defined as a liberating act of perversion for an underdeveloped and hungry culture.

This is an important element for understanding the radicalization of the aesthetics of hunger that Sganzerla proposed. He transformed Rocha's culture of hunger into an intextextual production, an exercise of permanent devouring. Through his aesthetics of hunger, Rocha did not consider questioning the universe that he was criticizing through the

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appropriation of the leftovers that universe produced, but only through what it had

systematically ignored. Although Rocha questioned the main assumptions behind colonial

representations of hunger, in "Aesthetics of hunger" he never considered using those

representations as a direct source to produce his critique. Cinema Marginal filmmakers were

open to appropriating images that Cinema Novo practitioners had rejected as alienated

representations that did not depict the reality of poverty and underdevelopment in Brazil and

Latin America. The question is how exactly the anthropophagic vomit of the Cinema

Marginal filmmakers opposed colonial representations of hunger. What kind of visibility did

the hungry body have in this marginal aesthetics? What was the connection between vomit

and hunger?

3.2   Humor and the Grotesque Body

In some Cinema Marginal films, the topic of hunger appeared as part of the

background for the central story, sometimes as an indirect cause of the characters' main

actions. In *O bandido da luz vermelha,* for instance, the bandit introduces himself in the first

sequence by suggesting a connection between hunger and his involvement in criminal

activities:[76]

> I know I failed. My mother tried an abortion so that I wouldn't starve. I
> was born like this and who wears shoes won't survive. I was used by the
> Black Hand criminals cause I didn't know. . . . I left 15 years ago. From
> the slums I ran the world with a nail in my foot.

The connection between hunger and crime is reaffirmed later in the film when a voice-over

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[76] This association was common in several Cinema Marginal films, including Rocha's *Câncer*, in which Antonio Pitanga, one of the main characters, becomes a criminal in an attempt to escape from starvation. In other films, like the short *Zézero*, filmed by Oswaldo Candeias in 1974, although hunger is not associated with crime, it is still one of the factors that motivates the actions of the characters—in this case, the migration of the rural worker to the city.

introduces the district of Boca do Lixo, where the main actions take place. Hunger is part of the wretched conditions of the neighborhood, and it is associated with delinquency, moral decadence, and marginal life: "It's the empire of drugs, riots and gangsters. Of mass prostitution. Of traffic of the underage. Of industrialized crime and the automotive trade. A city within the city. A criminal district full of hunger, and guilt. The Boca do Lixo, the most complete of all the criminal districts." From this perspective, hunger appears as an invisible condition that determines the actions, and even moral dispositions, of the characters. The characters' marginality directly depended on living (or having lived) in a context of hunger.

Two years after making *O bandido*, however, Sganzerla transformed the hungry body into the main character of one of his films by composing what he considered "a comedy about hunger": *Sem essa, Aranha* (1970).[77] Although it does not present an open, realistic image of famine, "Aranha is a discourse about Brazil's hungry-being," as the Cinema Marginal filmmaker Geraldo Veloso (2008) commented. The topic is repeatedly mentioned in the discourses of the different characters. In the third sequence, for instance, Aranha seems to denounce hunger as an inherent and permanent condition for humankind. With a giant toothbrush in his hand, he delivers a solemn speech, repeating his exaggerated gestures: "It's a vision. It's all wrong. I see everything upside-down. It's all wrong. For six thousand years everything has been wrong, upside-down. Only now do I see six thousand years of hunger. It's all backwards."

This strange association between hunger and history also appeared in Sganzerla's *Copacabana mon amour* (1970), filmed a few weeks before *Sem essa, Aranha*. A voice-over introduces the main character (played by Helena Ignez), narrating a fictional genealogical tree

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[77] A description of the film attributed to Sganzerla is included in the observations on the film held in the database of the Cinemateca Brasileira in São Paulo.

marked by hunger and thirst while she walks through the streets of a favela:

> Hunger, thirst, dance. From Gomorra came their barbaric ancestors. In spring of 1080, Nicolau de Cusa raped a Western princess descendent from Genghis Khan, thus conceiving David. And David brought forth Don Fernandes, and Don Fernandes brought Diacuí. And Diacuí brought forth the old black Zezinho of the hard leg. And Zezinho of the hard leg brought forth Noel. And Noel brought forth Edmílson. And Edmílson brought forth Aristídes. And Aristídes bred her: Sônia Silk, the oxygenated beast.

These kinds of fictional, nearly nonsense discourses seem to suggest a historical, almost original presence of hunger. It is not a contingency, but an ineluctable fact that defines the life of the character (in the cases of Sônia and the *bandido*), or even a completely different time and space. Aranha recalls six thousand years of hunger, while a voice-over in *O bandido* ties hunger to the Third World of the twentieth century: "It's the bomb and hunger in the twentieth century. The bomb and hunger. They separate the Third World from the rest of the Earth."

However, it is the character played by the actress Maria Maria Gladys who introduces the crudest and most direct claim on hunger. In the fifth sequence of *Sem essa, Aranha*, she appears in the middle of a humble theatrical performance wearing a graceful red dress and singing a joyful song (with no music). Aranha, wearing a giant pair of glasses, interrupts her act with one of his comic discourses: "Attention extras. One moment please. Would our friend kindly score a symphony for my act? I am Zé Bonitinho, women's little peril. And I only come on with a drum roll." The actress leaves the stage, and the camera focuses on Aranha: "Where are the women? Zé Bonitinho without women is like Tarzan without Jane. Women: good night. Men: goodbye. Being handsome is a drag. Being hot is a drag. Women, notice the detail of my 'womanistic' ennui." Suddenly, offstage, Maria Maria Gladys interrupts his speech with loud cries and moans. He does not stop, seeming to ignore her. Her shouts become stronger, until she finally articulates: "Ay, what cowardice. Ay, what hunger."

Aranha continues, "Now, pay attention to my hips," and begins dancing and singing in English. While another woman sings (dressed in the colors of Brazil's flag), Maria Maria Gladys invades the stage and shouts: "Ay, I'm really hungry. I can't sing when I'm hungry; my throat goes hoarse." Someone throws her a piece of food, and she begins to eat desperately. After a few seconds, she seems to recover the energy and joy of the first minutes of the sequence, and begins to sing again as she leaves the scene. Behind the stage, however, Aranha challenges her: "Why did you stop to eat that turkey breast?" She responds, "I was really hungry; my belly was hurting so much." He slaps her and leaves the scene.

From this point on, Maria Maria Gladys repeats that same complaint in each of her appearances in the film: "Ay, what a stomachache. I'm hungry!" She never expands her complaint; it never becomes a complete speech, but remains a simple and direct lament, almost an unarticulated moan. Ramos (1987) characterized this type of lament as a permanent presence in the Cinema Marginal films: an invasive cry that "comes from the bowels of the characters, and communicates an unmistakable feeling of discomfort" (124). This lamentation always seems out of context; it never appears in an explicit space of misery, one that would normally be associated with the presence of hunger. The film *Copacabana mon amour*, for instance, begins and ends with two characters crying with hunger. In one of the first sequences of the film, when the favela is introduced to the spectator, Sônia's mother desperately recriminates her, yelling: "We are broke and climbing up the walls with hunger, and you do nothing! Get that idea of singing on national radio off your head. There is nothing to eat." Sônia's brother repeats this refrain at the end of the film: while she dances samba on a bulldozer that frenetically spins with no direction or purpose, his voice interrupts the music, yelling, "I'm hungry. I wanna' eat! I'm hungry, everybody!"

Although those laments break into the daily spaces that other characters inhabit, other actions permanently eclipse their sudden invasions. The hungry are not the center of the scene and are always alone in their laments. Nobody echoes or replies to them; nobody seems to embrace or feel sympathy for them. Maria Maria Gladys's lament, for instance, is permanently silenced—sometimes with direct violence (Aranha hits her several times for complaining), and sometimes by other characters, whose actions and discourses compete for the viewer's attention (characters singing or walking in front of the camera, for example). Her somber lament especially contrasts with the comic tone of Aranha's discourses and gestures. Only in one sequence does Maria Maria Gladys appear in a context traditionally related to hunger: the Vidigal favela in Rio de Janeiro. However, the action in this sequence, instead of stressing the gravity of her lament, reaffirms its emptiness and isolation.

That sequence, rather than a film scene, resembles a happening registered by the camera. A group of four actors walks down through the favela, interacting with its inhabitants, who leave their houses to witness this unexpected action. During the first minutes of this sequence, Aranha (who presumably just left his mansion in the favela) walks alone, answering improvised questions from the people who have begun to surround and follow him, but soon he meets the other characters. First, Maria Maria Gladys asks him to sleep with her that night. Aranha rejects her and keeps walking, so she begins to shout and moan again: "Ay, what a stomachache. Saint Lazarus. Hail holy queen." Her desperate cries and gestures attract more viewers, who begin to follow her. The camera never tries to hide these unexpected extras, but rather incorporates them into the scene. Crying and wandering, Maria Maria Gladys finds Ignez's character, who says, "You, starving ghosts!" A fourth character, played by the actress Aparecida, joins them to complete the group. Each character performs an individual action and delivers a speech as if in the middle of a trance. The camera moves

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freely in the space, focusing alternatively on each of the bodies: some static, some compulsively speaking, and some performing strange and unexpected movements. Maria Maria Gladys does not stop crying and screaming, and she directly challenges the other characters, who try to avoid her. More and more people follow the group through the streets of the favela. There is not any distance between the space of the performance and the space of the viewers. The actors have to walk among the viewers, who follow each of their movements and seem to enjoy their performance, yelling and talking loudly to the characters to celebrate their actions. The camera moves chaotically, losing for some moments its object of attention. Maria Maria Gladys runs with Aranha and cries: "Ay, what a stomachache. I'm hungry!" The people celebrate her claim, laughing and shouting while she desperately repeats, "I'm hungry!"

The presence of laughter in the film is not a contingency, but an important element in understanding the visibility of hunger in Cinema Marginal. Several authors stressed the importance of humor as one of the main elements that distinguishes this group of filmmakers. The seriousness and gravity of Cinema Novo's reflections on hunger contrast with the burlesque and ironic tone of the Cinema Marginal films. As Vieira (2000) pointed out, those films "restored humor and irony to Brazilian cinema, precisely at the end of a decade that had repressed comedy and carnival" (173). But how is the comic mechanism activated in the Cinema Marginal films? And, more importantly, how does hunger become visible within that mechanism?

In the case of *Sem essa, Aranha*, those questions can be condensed into one: why do the inhabitants of the favela (the symbol of urban hunger) laugh at the performance, especially at Maria Maria Gladys's laments? One could argue that the presence of the actor Jorge Loredo and the reference to the popular Zé Bonitinho are the main causes for the joyful

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reaction of the people. However, beyond the connection to the comedian, the humorous response is the product of a distortion in the collective performance.

According to Henri Bergson (1914), the basic condition for laughter is the existence of two elements: a disinterested spectator and mechanical inelasticity. The comic effect emerges when an action is perceived as a moment of rigidity or lack of flexibility from a certain emotional distance (10). That distance, which Bergson described as a "momentary anesthesia of the heart," is the main effect of the characters' performance in the favela. Although the space between the spectators and the actors disappears, there is no real contact between them. The closer they are to one another, the larger the emotional gap becomes, avoiding any kind of identification between them.

The reason is simple: the actors' performance stresses the eccentricity and rigidity of their characters. Maria Maria Gladys's character illustrates this corporal distortion. In spite of her permanent lament, she does not look like a hungry person. There is something fake in her clamor. Her words and movements do not change regardless of the context or the people who surround her. She looks artificial, as if she were permanently in the middle of a performance, and the film does not hide this artificiality. Instead of serving as a realistic cry in opposition to Aranha's theatrical gestures, she is incorporated as part of a collective, farcical spectacle. Like all the other characters, she is empty: she has no name, no personality, no biography (Aranha is the only character with anything close to a sense of individuality, in part because of his references to the comic character Zé Bonitinho). There are no narrative elements that create a sense of closeness to her character. She is only defined by a series of repetitive and rigid acts.

Thus, rather than the dramatic development of a group of characters, the spectator witnesses nothing more than a series of people who laugh, scream, run, vomit, complain, masturbate, dance, and touch. Like Aranha's distorted objects (the oversize glasses or giant

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toothbrush), all these gestures are amplified. The film features a group of exaggerated bodies that circulate within a space, collide, and engage. They are not the stylized, idealized bodies of film stars, but profane ones—symbols of violence and bad taste. The film rejects any sublimation of the body, religious or aesthetic. Aranha, for instance, permanently repeats that he has met the Devil and they have made a pact. He has no sense of morality; "I'm a brute," he affirms.

One scene staged in a circus's backstage condenses the principle of a profane, excessive body: The camera, after exploring the space, corners a man wearing only a red cape and a woman's wig. With sharp cries and violent movements against the wall, he seems to try to escape. The camera is too close, almost touching him; it explores his naked body while he screams, panting and sweating. He looks directly at the spectator with contradictory gestures of fear and pleasure, while the camera moves slightly in and out. For some moments, it seems that he is moving (almost dancing) for the camera. At certain points, the camera's movements look like a violation that only ends when it gives up and steps back.[78]

This ambivalent and contradictory excess is one of the central elements of the Cinema Marginal films—not only in terms of the characters' visible actions, but also in the definition of the spectators' ambiguous experience. Instead of producing a total rejection, the excessive body creates a contradictory effect: a sense of distance and estrangement on the one hand, and pleasure and attraction on the other. Thus, the humorous effect of the Cinema Marginal films was not the outcome of simple joy; instead, it was a corrosive humor produced by the

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[78] This excessive closeness of the camera is common in other Cinema Marginal films, like Elyseu Visconti's *Os monstros de Babaloo* (1971). In one sequence, Madame Babaloo crosses a street with a former employee. The camera focuses on her big legs, almost distorted by cellulite, filling the shot with a shapeless mass. Instead of focusing on the action, the camera composes an excessive body through its closeness to the characters.

contradictory pleasure of the contemplation of an incongruent body (Veloso 2008; Xavier 2004).

Several authors condensed this effect in the concept of the grotesque. Ramos (1987) highlighted the permanent presence of diverse grotesque elements in Cinema Marginal: images of compulsive swallowing, characters with animal features, bodily secretions, horror, masturbation, castration, and garbage. If Rocha (2004) had defined Cinema Novo as a "gallery of hungry" characters in "Aesthetics of Hunger," the Cinema Marginal films could be characterized as a gallery of grotesque bodies. I argue that in these films hunger becomes visible as a grotesque structure of excessive and distorted bodies.

The classical definitions of the grotesque stressed those ambiguous presences common in the Cinema Marginal films. According to Lee Byron Jennings (1963), who collected various modern uses of the term, the grotesque has been defined as something in between the horrible and the ridiculous. In consequence, the grotesque object always displays a combination of fearsome and ludicrous qualities (10). This interaction of opposing forces was also central to Mikhail Bakhtin's influential study on François Rabelais. According to Bakhtin (1968), a grotesque image is always incomplete; it is the depiction of an unfinished metamorphosis of death and birth, of growth and becoming. For that reason, it is humorous and frightening at the same time.[79] In this sense, the grotesque body is not simply an exaggerated or excessive body, but one that incarnates a contradiction. Bakhtin used the example of the scene in Rabelais's *Pantagruel* in which Panurge proposes building walls from women's genital organs:

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[79] Peter Fingesten (1984) condensed this classical perspective in his "technical" definition of the grotesque: "Technically speaking, a grotesque consists of the presence and clash, incongruity, or juxtaposition of two or more different or even contradictory elements within the same work that may result in a visual and/or psychological surprise or shock" (420).

> I have observed that the pleasure-twats of women in this part of the world
> are much cheaper than stones. Therefore, the walls should be built of
> twats, symmetrically and according to the rules of architecture, the largest
> to go in front. . . . What devil could possibly overthrow these walls; what
> metal on earth could stand up as well against punishment? (313).

In the scene, the grotesque element in the scene is not simply the excessive image of multiple women's genitals transformed into an architectural structure, or the image of walls turned into flesh, but the ambiguous transformation of the human body into a building material. The core of this grotesque image lies in the weakening of the limits between the body and the world.

In a similar way, the grotesque in Cinema Marginal films is a consequence not only of the excessive presence of a distorted body, but also of the juxtaposition of two main elements: a normal context and the actions of that individual body. The conflict between the actions of the characters and their context is obvious in several films. In *Sem Essa, Aranha*, Aranha's extravagant gesticulations, Ignez's vomit and erotic gestures, and Maria Maria Gladys's violent movements and cries contrast with the normality of the daily spaces in which the film takes place. José Agrippino de Paula's *Hitler terceiro mundo* (1968) follows a nonnarrative structure, showing a series of public happenings in the streets of São Paulo performed by strange figures: dwarfs and extremely tall people; a monster that resembles the comic-book character The Thing (popular in the 1960s); the actor Jô Soares disguised as a mixture of a samurai, geisha, and sumo fighter. All these characters wander around public spaces, interacting with the people there through senseless and disconnected actions. These ordinary spaces contrast with the exaggerated features of the figures, which disrupt the normality of the space's visitors. But the contradiction is also visible within the actions of the characters. The same actor performs comic and violent actions in the same space, shifting from one mood to another without evident cause. Ignez mixes the abject action of vomiting with erotic gestures,

just as Aranha mingles comic discourses with grave reflections in the same speech, and Maria Maria Gladys blends joyful singing and painful shouting.

The grotesque refers not only to the individual body of each character, but also to the interactions of those bodies with one another (and the camera) in the space of the scene. In fact, the film composes a collective body by erasing any trace of individuality; the characters constantly touch and mingle, while the camera jumps from one body to the next. In that sense, the body that vomits is not different than the body that cries of hunger. This is probably the most blatant contradiction in the film: a hungry body that voluntarily retches and vomits.[80] In this sense, the grotesque refers not only to concrete characters or forms in the film, but also to a structure: "the structure of estrangement" (Harpham 1976, 462). As Wolfgang Kayser described: "It is our world which ceases to be reliable, and we feel that we would be unable to live in this changed world. The grotesque instills fear of life rather than fear of death" (quoted in Harpham 1976, 462). That sense of estrangement, that subversion of the familiar that threatens the social order, is the main effect of the Cinema Marginal films.

By transforming the hungry body into a grotesque presence, the Cinema Marginal films radically opposed any reduction and familiarization of the reality of hunger. As Geoffrey Harpham (1976) affirmed, "Domesticating our grotesqueries, we pay, applaud, or admire them, and finally pay them the ultimate tribute of ignoring their deformity" (463). The distortion and transformation of the hungry body into a grotesque reality worked against that domestication, serving as a reminder of the essential deformity of hunger and of the impossibility of ignoring its atrocious character.

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[80] In her first appearance in the film, Maria Gladys joins Ignez in her abject performance at the brothel, during which they violently (and voluntarily) retch and vomit. Later Maria Gladys's character incessantly repeats her hungry lament.

Cinema Novo became the symbol of the process of domestication: once a revolutionary project, it had become a digestible cinema through the use of a predictable formula. In order to avoid a similar reduction, Cinema Marginal films like *Sem essa, Aranha* emptied the hungry body by depriving it of any individual feature or narrative structure. While Cinema Novo used its characters as a background to make hunger visible, Cinema Marginal films created grotesque bodies in which the realist claim of hunger disappeared. In *Sem essa, Aranha* and *Copacabana mon amor*, the hungry moan is trivialized, almost silenced, in spite of its invasive presence.

3.3   A Caricature of Hunger

The claim that Cinema Marginal films trivialized the hungry has been traditionally interpreted in allegorical terms.[81] Ismail Xavier (1997) proposed that these films may be read as allegorical representations of Brazil's social and economic conditions: although the social awareness of hunger seemed to have increased (producing a considerable rise in food assistance programs), the real conditions of the hungry worsened. Brazilian society seemed to have learned to live with the increasingly wretched conditions of part of its population, accepting the presence of hunger, but only to make it invisible.

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[81] The interpretation of Brazilian cinema as an allegory of national history and contemporary society became popular with the publication of Ismail Xavier's *Alegorias do subdesenvolvimento* in 1993. Xavier (1997) developed Frederic Jameson's idea about the intrinsic allegorical character of Third World literature. In his article "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," published in 1986, Jameson affirmed that all Third World texts "necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (69). This idea perfectly suited the social and political conditions of Brazil since the mid-1960s, when filmmakers were compelled to find different strategies in order to reflect on the complex reality of the country within a context of increasing control and censorship. Xavier's influential interpretation created an accepted approach to Cinema Marginal films; they were read as pessimistic allegories of Brazilian society under the dictatorship.

The character of Aranha, introduced in Sganzerla's 1970 film as a symbol of the national bourgeoisie, coexists with Maria Maria Gladys's hungry laments, even inside his own mansion, where she interrupts one of his grandiloquent speeches and the cheerful performance of a popular singer (Moreira da Silva). She desperately attempts to stay in front of the camera, which is otherwise focused on the singer, but Aranha violently tries to silence her. While she shouts, "I'm hungry," he tries to cover her mouth and even to suffocate her until she falls out of the frame. The singer never stops performing, despite this violent struggle, and eventually Aranha resumes his routine, while Maria Gladys's laments continue from outside the frame.

Although Xavier's allegorical interpretation has been widely accepted to describe how some films opposed the most repressive period of the dictatorship, I believe that there is a certain literality in the depiction of the hungry body in films like *Sem essa, Aranha* that is relevant to understanding the dynamics of the visibility of hunger in Cinema Marginal films. Beyond the possible allegorical associations (or, maybe, at their basis), the radical emptying of the hungry body—its reduction to a grotesque lament, to a contradictory presence that vomits and begs—stresses the grotesque nature of hunger. In this sense, I propose an understanding of the narrative techniques in *Sem essa, Aranha* as a transformation of reality into a caricature.

Caricature has traditionally been associated with excessive distortion. As Steven Heller and Gail Anderson (1992) affirmed, the origin of the word is the Italian *cancare*, which means "to overload." The ludicrous exaggeration of characteristic or peculiar features seems to be the central procedure in caricature. Henri Bergson (1914), however, pointed out that exaggeration is not a sufficient condition to obtain a real caricature. In fact, he affirmed, "There exist caricatures that are more lifelike than portraits, caricatures in which the

exaggeration is scarcely noticeable." For an exaggeration to become caricature, it must not appear as an end in itself, but rather as a means for the artist "to make manifest to our eyes the distortions which he sees in embryo" (21). In this sense, the art of the caricaturist does not consist of distorting the otherwise pure nature of an object, but rather of detecting the distortions toward which nature seems inclined. The caricaturist perceives, captures that imperceptible tendency, and renders it visible to the eyes. His or her practice is a magnifying art. Thus, caricature, an art with a touch of the diabolical, dissects the apparent harmony of form to expose the "deep-seated recalcitrance of matter" (20). The distortion and exaggeration of reality reveals its distorted character, its monstrous nature.[82]

Thus, although caricature is capable of casting allegorical meanings (and that is one of its most common uses), it also has the power to stress the materiality of its own subject. Metaphor and material literality converge in the excessive distortion of caricature. It is precisely in this sense that I propose reading *Sem essa, Aranha* as a caricature of hunger. Beyond the possible allegorical references to the exclusion of the poor populations under the military regime, the film presents the recalcitrant materiality of hunger not in the singular body of individual victims, but in the exaggerated collective body: a body that sings, yells, vomits, touches, masturbates; that is strangulated, beaten, raped; a sexualized body, objectified. This excess of materiality magnifies that "imperceptible tendency" of nature—to use Bergson's words—its constitutive distortion. The excess of a grotesque hungry body makes visible the excessive, monstrous character of hunger.

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[82] In his reflection on the nature of laughter and in texts on caricature, Charles Baudelaire (1981) defended a similar idea about the power of caricature to destabilize the rationality of bourgeois sensibility. The exaggerated gestures of caricature opposed any categorization of reality, any stability of language and identity. Like Bergson, Baudelaire also linked caricature to the evil and satanic, due to its revolutionary character.

That grotesque nature of hunger becomes visible not only through the actions of the grotesque body, but also through the formal composition of the film's images. Although the use of long sequence shots, a style of montage commonly associated with realism, seems to contradict the mechanism of distortion that defines the film, it actually stresses the materiality that the caricature is able to reveal. In the late 1940s, the French critic André Bazin used the notion of "cinema of cruelty" to describe Erich von Stroheim's films. According to Bazin (2005), Stroheim's was a cinema of cruelty not because of the content of his images, but because of his narrative technique. Stroheim created a continuous cinematic narrative in which editing was not understood as a discontinuous analysis of reality, but rather as the integration of heterogeneous realities into the same space. Despite being forced to use discontinuous shots because of the technical state of filmmaking at the time, he attempted "continuous cutting"—that is, the disposition and interdependence of simultaneous events in space. Stroheim's ideal, according to Bazin, was an invisible editing that allowed reality to reveal itself through images. "He has one simple rule for direction," Bazin affirmed. "Take a close look at the world, keep on doing so, and in the end it will lay bare for you all its cruelty and its ugliness" (27). Bazin's concept of cruelty did not refer to the specific content of Stroheim's images, but to the formal procedure through which those images approached reality. If *Sem essa, Aranha* can be understood as a cinema of cruelty, it is precisely because it stresses the cruelty and ugliness of the world through a continuous narrative. As in Bazin's theory, that cruelty emerges through the presence of simultaneous and interdependent bodies within each sequence shot.

Sem essa, Aranha does not offer an explanation of the causes of hunger or an active proposal of how to overcome it. It is simply a pure verification of the horror of the present. In an essay on Cinema Marginal, Ismail Xavier (1990) affirmed that Julio Bressane's characters

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seem to confirm violence as a structural fact of the social universe they inhabit (116). It is possible to use these words to understand the caricature of hunger in *Sem essa, Aranha*: the confirmation of hunger is a structural fact of Brazil's social universe.

3.4   The Feminine Body

In *Sem essa, Aranha*, hunger becomes visible in the body of a woman who is continuously abused by different men. Although the identification of hunger with the female body may not be an explicit intention (in *Copacabana mon amour*, for instance, the lament comes from a man, although it has less intensity than Maria Gladys's), it opens an interesting reflection on the feminization of hunger.

From an allegorical perspective, the identification between hunger and the female body can be read as a denunciation of what some authors have called the "feminization of poverty." Diane Pearce coined the term in 1978 in order to describe the increased concentration of poverty among women in the United States between the 1950s and 1970s (especially in African American female-headed households). According to Pearce (1978), the economic status of women radically declined during those decades—to the point that in 1976, "nearly two out of three of the 15 million poor persons over 16 were women" (28). Sylvia Chant (2006) explained that the term "feminization of poverty" began to circulate in other parts of the world in the following decade, but it was not until the 1990s that it became part of the lexicon of international development. In 1995, at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, scholars asserted that seventy percent of the world's poor were female. More modestly, in 1995 UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) stated that women constituted at least sixty percent of world's poor (Marcoux 1998, 131). During the same decade, official data collected by the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografía e

Estatística (IGBE) showed the income differences between men and women, supporting the idea that Brazil's poverty had been feminized (Nascimento and Larkin Nascimento 2001, 113).[83]

Although several authors criticized the concept of the feminization of poverty, it has remained active in a number of fields.[84] In the last decades, several organizations have pointed out the problems of gender inequality in food and nutrition security. Although the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) does not provide specific statistics to defend the idea of a feminization of hunger, it affirmed that "more often than not, the face of malnutrition is female," that vulnerable women are at greater risk of malnutrition than men, and that more girls die of malnutrition than boys.[85] Other humanitarian agencies, like the World Food Program, have also developed special initiatives focused on women and gender inequality, noting that "women may be the victims of hunger but they are also the most effective solution to combating and preventing hunger."[86]

An allegorical reading of *Sem essa, Aranha* presumes a reduction of the female body to a victim of the male-dominated bourgeoisie (incarnated by Aranha). Margaret Kelleher

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[83] In addition to the gender differences in income distribution, the study highlighted racial inequality in Brazil. The poorest segment of Brazil's population was Afro-Brazilian women, who earned almost four times less than white men. According to IGBE, in 1994 white men received 6.3 times the monthly minimum wage, white women 3.6, black men 2.9, and black women 1.7.

[84] In 1986, for instance, Victor Fuchs published a paper called "The Feminization of Poverty?," in which he questioned the large increase in the percentage of poor adult women. Alain Marcoux (1998) also criticized the excessive gap between men and women that was implied in the concept of the feminization of poverty. His study concluded that the gender bias in poverty did not reach the very high levels that were frequently attributed to it. The bias, however, was real and growing. Chant (2006) showed that the feminization of poverty theses might be empirically incorrect, as well as detrimental to women (the stereotype of poor female-headed households implies that women's poverty is caused by personal or household attributes rather than wider socioeconomic forces). Her field research provided little evidence to support the major claims of the feminization of poverty. However, she defended the idea of a feminization of responsibility, describing how women contribute more labor to poor households, but gain little power to negotiate better deals for themselves in terms of labor and consumption.

[85] Food and Agriculture Organization, *Gender and Nutrition Fact Sheet*, 2010, http://www.fao.org/docrep/012/al184e/al184e00.pdf (accessed Nov. 6, 2014).

[86] "Focus on Women," World Food Program, http://www.wfp.org/focus-on-women (accessed Nov. 6, 2014).

(1997) showed that the use of the female body as a victim in representations of hunger has been a common narrative strategy since the late nineteenth century. Focusing on the Irish Great Famine of 1845–49 and the Bengali Famine of 1943, Kelleher analyzed the gendered nature of famine representations, discovering that a frequent motif in the twentieth century was the death of the woman to ensure the survival of the family or community. Through the woman's sacrifice, she becomes an allegory for an entire country. Kelleher argued that by privileging images of female suffering, those representations have reinforced the attitude that women are unable to help themselves in such crises.

In spite of the multiple abuses against Maria Gladys depicted in *Semm essa, Aranha*, I would argue that the women in this film, and in several other Cinema Marginal works, are never represented as passive victims. On the contrary, by transforming the female hungry body into a grotesque body, the film opposes any reduction of the feminine into traditional categories. In this sense, *Sem essa, Aranha* can be read as an ironic critique of the feminization of representations of hunger that Kelleher revealed.

Dianna Niebylski (2004) explained the presence of excessive female bodies in contemporary Latin American literature as a narrative strategy to resist the roles traditionally assigned to women's bodies. The fictional distortion of the female body opposed what Sandra Bartky (1990) called the "practiced and subjected body" produced by a series of social discourses that portrayed women's bodies as permanently incomplete and deficient. I find a useful model for understanding the depictions of women in Cinema Marginal in two of the categories that Niebylski proposed to define those resisting bodies: the sexually excessive body and the ill-grotesque body.

The sexually provocative (excessive) body was constantly present in Sganzerla's films. His second feature film, *A mulher de todos* [The woman of everyone] (1969), focuses

on Ângela Carne e Osso (Angela Meat and Bone), interpreted by Ignez as a young nymphomaniac who dominates men with her erotic power. All the descriptions of the character stress her active role as a "megalomaniac," "a hysterical vampire," "the number one enemy of men," and, in her own words, "a woman of the 21st century, an anti-Western demon." The female character who takes control of her own body and opposes any moral restrictions appeared again in *Copacabana mon amour*, with Sônia Silk, where she is described as an "oxygenated beast," and in *Sem essa Aranha*, where the female characters repeat, "We need to sin twice as much, so the world won't turn upside-down." In all of these films, the camera permanently celebrates the provocative female bodies—close shots of Ignez's legs are common—stressing their sensuality. The sexual liberation of women reaches a climax in the final scenes of *Sem essa, Aranha*, after Ignez's character kills Aranha, the symbol of the women's oppression: Ignez leaves the body in an open field, and Aparecida masturbates with a bottle while contemplating the corpse. In the last scene, Ignez lasciviously touches a figure of Christ with her feet.

Those images of transgression directly opposed the discourse of moral restoration that the military regime had popularized after 1964. The coup was presented as a solution to Brazil's moral crisis, one that would embrace the restitution of the ethical and moral values of Western Christianity (Fico 1997, 43). The Marcha da Família com Deus pela Liberdade [March of families with God for freedom], a series of public demonstrations against the threat of communism, was a paradigmatic expression of the climate of fear of moral danger.[87] Thus,

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[87] The marches began on Mar. 19, 1964, two weeks before the coup on Apr. 1. After the overthrow of President João Goulart, the demonstrations were extended until June and given the name Marches of Victory. The first demonstration took place in São Paulo, with between three hundred and five hundred thousand people gathering.

by taking control of her sexual desires, the women in Sganzerla's films are liberated and assume an active role in defending their right to pleasure.[88]

Besides the sexually excessive body, *Sem essa, Aranha* also presents a grotesque feminine body. Following the philosopher Julia Kristeva, Mary Russo (1994) underlined the transgressive nature of the grotesque, which is only recognizable in relation to a norm, as a place of overloading. Several feminist authors have shown how women's bodies have inspired both fascination and fear in the collective imagination of Western culture (Bordo 1991; Braidotti 1997; Driscoll 1997). This ambiguous fascination has produced multiple discourses that have traditionally depicted the female body as a body out of control, one that permanently exceeds the limits prescribed by scientific, moral, and social imperatives. The grotesque body appropriates those misogynous categorizations in order to explore the different disruptions and excesses attributed to women. Through the grotesque, the female body transforms those pejorative reductions into a possibility of resistance (Niebylski 2004).

In this sense, the hungry female body in *Sem essa, Aranha* is not a passive victim who bears masculine abuses, but rather a grotesque symbol of excess who resists and opposes any reduction or categorization. Maria Gladys's frenetic lament takes the popular figure of the female hysteric—promoted in some medical discourses as a body "ungrounded and out of bounds, enacting her pantomime of anguish and rebellion"—to the extreme (Russo 1994, 9).

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[88] This depiction of an excessive sexualized body coincided with what some authors have labeled the most recent development in the feminist movement in Brazil: the "sexual revolution" of the 1970s. Eva Alterman Blay (2001) and Constância de Lima Duarte (2003) recognized that decade as a time of transformation of the feminist discourse into a militant practice engaged on two main fronts: the involvement of women in the question about national identity, and the visibility of the main problems confronting women in Brazil. Fanny Tabak (1983) affirmed that, with the military dictatorship, many women in Brazil were transformed into political activists when they acquired a new awareness of the relationship between their private lives and the political systems in power. Although Sganzerla's films seemed to share the feminist approach toward the creation of new social roles for women, he never depicted the explicit political struggles that the feminist movement undertook against the regime. In his films, women's struggles focused on the liberation of sexual desire beyond the private sphere.

That grotesque pantomime ignores all the violent attempts to silence her and disrupts the space of the male characters. Maria Gladys incarnates a moving presence that bursts into different spaces like some kind of omnipresent phantom (in *Copacabana mon Amour*, Sganzerla included an actual phantom that followed Sônia Silk through the streets of Rio de Janeiro).

In the fourth sequence of *Sem essa, Aranha*, Maria Gladys arrives in a humble house in the middle of what seems to be a rural area. The scene does not establish where she comes from; she suddenly appears in the bushes outside of the house, disoriented, while eating a piece of bread. In front of the house, she encounters a man standing in front of a clothesline; he stares at her and tries to touch her breasts. Facing her refusal, he moves to a different space next to the house while she slowly goes in. The interior of the house is invisible to the spectator, and the camera remains outside. Once inside, Maria Gladys begins to scream: "I'll kill myself yet. One day I'll kill myself." While the camera travels along the outside of the house, the man describes her as insane: "What a lunatic, she's crazy. She's really gone." After a few seconds, he goes in and pushes her out of the house. With a knife in her hand, she wanders to the back of the house, next to a small wooden room (apparently a latrine), where a second man waits. At the door of this improvised toilet, she repeats one of the mottos of the film: "In order to blow up the planet we need to sin twice as hard." The two men begin to wantonly touch her body, trying to undress her. With an agile movement, she prevents them from closing the door and leaves the space with a pleasant expression on her face. After wandering around and going into the house a second time (this time the camera follows her, but the dark interior remains invisible), she leaves the space just as she arrived.

This invasion of the house—a paradigm of the familiar and domestic—is also an invasion of the space of masculine desire that tries to appropriate its object (both sexually and

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discursively). The male characters attempt to control Maria Gladys's annoying, uncomfortable presence, but she eventually persists. Rather than witnessing the repression of her lament, the spectator faces its perseverance and permanence. The feminization of hunger in *Sem essa, Aranha*, instead of assigning a passive role to women, produces a liberation of the female body through grotesque excess. Hunger, in this sense, functions as a liberating distortion rather than a victimizing condition. The excessive hungry body may demonstrate a way in which the gendered body can perform its way through the cultural and sociopolitical frames intended to control and contain it.

4. Hunger, Consumption, and the Desiring Body: The Lost Decade in Brazil

When he took office in 1985, Brazilian president José Sarney implemented a program

of accelerated economic growth in order to service the $100 million foreign debt his

government had inherited from previous administrations. Although this growth program

provided new jobs, it also pushed the yearly inflation rate from 100 percent in 1981 and 1982

to 300 percent in February 1986. In January 1986, the inflation rate was 16.2% for the month,

and in February it was 14.4%. Projections estimated a rate of 25% for March. In February

1986, the government implemented a heterodox economic shock to stop inflation: the

Economic Stabilization Plan (known as the Cruzado Plan because it introduced a new

currency that would strike three zeroes off of all prices).[89] The most radical measure of this

plan was to freeze all prices in order to stimulate consumption and control inflation.[90]

When Sarney presented the new pricing policy in a television address on February 28,

1986, he invited all Brazilians to act as prosecutors in order to control the price freeze

throughout the country. In his own words, "Every Brazilian man and woman has to be an

inspector of prices, an inspector working for the president for the successful implementation

of this program in every corner of this country."[91] Following the president's informal

appointment, several citizens began to wear yellow-green buttons with the slogan "I am one

of Sarney's inspectors" and denounce sellers who raised the prices of their products. Most of

the time, the police arrested those responsible for raising prices and closed down their stores.

However, in some cases, the wrath of the inspectors exceeded their respect for law, leading

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[89] The plan was very similar to the Austral Plan that Argentina had executed one year before with the same goal of reducing high inflation. In August 1985, Peru had also implemented a similar plan in order to reduce inflation.
[90] In addition to freezing all prices, the plan also fixed the exchange rate of the *cruzado* at 13.88 *cruzados* to the U.S. dollar for at least one year, removed indexing for contracts and arrangements, fixed the values of the Brazilian federal treasury notes, froze rents and mortgage payments, and created a wage-escalation system.
[91] Cited in "Plano Cruzado—Fiscais do Sarney," in *Memoria Globo*, available in:
http://memoriaglobo.globo.com/programas/jornalismo/coberturas/plano-cruzado/fiscais-do-sarney.htm.

them to apply a different kind of punishment. Several stores were looted when citizens found that sellers were remarking their products with higher prices. In April 1986, the Argentinean leftist journal *Correo internacional*, edited by the International Workers League (Fourth International), published a short comment on the Cruzado Plan in which the author included a striking anecdote. In Rio de Janeiro, hundreds of people looted a Bob's store while singing a samba song that had been released during the last carnival: "Give me, give me, what is mine, because twenty years ago someone ate it" (Almeida 1986, 33).

Anamaria Teles and Márcio José Cubiak (2009) affirmed that supermarket looting was a common practice during the 1980s in Brazil. In September 1983, for instance, the journal *O globo* reported a wave of supermarket looting in Rio de Janeiro that affected more than two hundred commercial establishments. The journal related that the governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro, Leonel Brizola, attributed the lootings to organized actions with a clear political goal: to destabilize the federal government. As sociologist Maria da Glória Gohn (1995) pointed out, the governor was right about the fact that the lootings were not spontaneous actions but rather organized, planned activities, yet the motivation behind the lootings, although never made completely explicit, was much simpler than ideological interest: the lootings were motivated by hunger. Beyond serving as an ideal source for food and groceries, supermarkets were also a symbol of the abundance that defined the border between the middle and high classes in Rio de Janeiro, as well as the margins of poverty.

In the case of the 1986 looting of the Bob's store, the samba lyrics that looters sang added a new layer to an act that might otherwise have been read as no more than a radical attempt to exact justice from the speculators. Instead, the reference to an event that occurred "twenty years ago" reveals a collective act of reprisal against the dictatorial regime that took

power in 1964 and had just been overthrown in 1985, when President Sarney took office.[92]

When Brazil's military regime came to power in 1964, one of its main goals was to eliminate

inflation and its distortions. According to Werner Baer (2008), the measures taken were

relatively successful for a time: inflation decreased from 92 percent in 1964 to 15.5 percent in

1973, and a remarkable growth boom accompanied this declining inflation from 1968 on.

After 1973, however, a series of shocks negatively impacted the Brazilian economy and

stimulated a resurgence of inflation.[93] In spite of the increasing inflation, the aggressive

policies of economic growth that the regime had promoted since the mid-1960s continued to

be the main emblem of President Ernesto Geisel's government from 1974 to 1979. In 1975 he

implemented the Second National Development Plan, a huge investment program with the

sole aim of keeping alive the "economic miracle" that Brazil had experienced during the

previous decade. The privileging of economic growth over other important aspects of the

national economy (like the distribution of income) implied a dramatic increase in the

country's foreign debt. John Markoff and Silvio Duncan Baretta (1990) affirmed that the high

rate of inflation and astronomical international debt of the 1980s were the economic

inheritances of two decades of dictatorship (423). Thus, Brazil was left with very similar

problems to the ones the military regime had vowed to solve when it took power in the 1960s,

but the country now also faced the added burden of a systematic increase in the rates of

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[92] Sarney was not directly elected as president of Brazil. He was Tancredo Neves's running mate in the elections in January 1985. Neves won the election, but due to a severe illness, he was unable to take office in March. Sarney assumed the office as acting president until Neves died in April. Then Sarney formally became the first civilian president of Brazil in twenty-one years.

[93] The inflation rate more than doubled from 1973 to 1974, and was in the 30–48% range for the next four years. In 1978–79 it almost doubled again, and it surpassed the 100% mark in 1980. In 1983 it reached 211%, and in 1984 it was at 224% (Baer 2008, 99).

inequality, even during the economic boom of the 1970s. Inflation, debt, and inequality eventually led to what became known as the *década perdida* (the lost decade) of the 1980s.[94]

These same economic hardships—the consequence of the past twenty years of economic growth policies—were the targets of the angry mass that looted the Bob's supermarket while singing a cheerful samba. But their radical and symbolic act also targeted the oppressive discourses and practices that had defined the public spaces of expression and communication during the previous decades. Looting was an act of freedom—by some definitions even a legal one, since the president himself had appointed the people as his inspectors—capable of revealing a series of social issues that had been concealed behind the official discourse of prosperity and development promoted by the regime.

According to Paulo de Martino Januzzi (2014), it was during the economic stagnation of the 1980s that the social issue of poverty and its multiple consequences regained a central place in the academic literature and political agenda, replacing the discussions on income distribution and the urban job market that had dominated the country during the decade of the "economic miracle" (57). Brazilian filmmakers, as expected, also found a new space to reflect on the real conditions in their country. Robert Stam, João Luiz Vieira, and Ismail Xavier (1995) described a process of liberalization in film narratives (what they called "*abertura naturalism*") that was a consequence of the process of political liberalization of the military regime initiated in 1974.[95] With the democratization of Brazil, filmmakers were able to focus

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[94] The term "lost decade" has been broadly used to designate the financial period of crisis in Latin America during the 1980s. Besides Brazil, other countries like Mexico, Chile, and Venezuela also experienced deep crisis caused by unaffordable foreign debts, large fiscal deficits, and inflation volatility.

[95] Although democratic elections were not held until 1982, when General Ernesto Geisel took office in 1974, a group within his regime proposed initiating institutional political liberalization (*abertura política*) to address the symptoms of economic crisis that began to appear in the mid-1970s. The process—described by Geisel as slow, gradual, and safe—eventually led to the ratification of a new constitution in 1988.

on the repressed political experience of the two decades of dictatorship, reflecting on topics, such as misery and hunger, that had been rendered invisible in mass media.

In this chapter, I use the symbolic space of the supermarket as a motif to reflect on the visibility of hunger in connection to the dynamics of modern capitalism in Brazil. Supermarkets are the opposite of hunger—not only in the obvious sense of abundance against scarcity, but also in the fact that they make visible different dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, and social practices around consumption. Multiple Brazilian films in the 1980s used the supermarket as an important narrative and symbolic space to address different approaches to the social issues in the country. I trace the conceptual distance between two of those films, both of which, in different ways, addressed the topic of hunger: Jorge Furtado's 1989 *Ilha das flores* [Island of flowers] and André Klotzel's 1985 *A marvada carne*.[96]

4.1   Spaces of Exclusion: Center and Peripheries

Furtado's *Ilha das flores* is one of the most acclaimed documentary short films in the history of Brazilian cinema. It won eleven national and seven international awards, including a Silver Bear for Best Short Feature at the 1990 Berlin Film Festival. In the original screenplay, Furtado described the "facts" at the core of the film: the Island of Flowers is one of the sixteen islands that compose the Arquipiélago neighborhood in the northern margin of the city of Porto Alegre. Part of the island is used as a dump, including some private portions of land where the owners deposit the waste they buy from local supermarkets to feed their

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[96] The title *A marvada carne* has different connotations in Portuguese. The word *marvada* is used as a synonym of evil (although the correct spelling is *malvada*), but it is also a name for the popular liquor *cachaça*. The word *carne* means meat, but also flesh. In that sense, an English translation of the film's name is ambiguous. Considering the importance of beef in the plot, a possible translation would be *Evil Meat*, but the ambiguity of the word *carne* as a reference to both meat and flesh (sexual desire) is lost in such a translation.

pigs. As not all the garbage is suitable for the animals, some of the owners' employees separate the organic waste they consider appropriate for the hogs. After collecting this waste, they open the fences around the property and allow the people who live in the area to come in and pick through the leftovers for their own consumption. Due to the large number of people trying to gain access to this waste, the employees have designed a "fair" system of distribution: they organize a line around the fence, and allow groups of ten people to scrounge for food for five minutes. After that time, the group is retired, and a new group is allowed to cross the fence. Furtado's main intention was, in his own words, to show the absurdity of this situation: "Human beings that, in a scale of priorities, are placed behind pigs" (Furtado 1992, 63). The narrative composition of the film, however, avoids showing that absurd and cruel reality from the beginning. Instead, Furtado created a narrative detour with the purpose of seducing the viewers and convincing them to participate in a trip that will eventually lead them to the heart of the dump.

Several authors have described the narrative composition of the film based on what Furtado (2001) called "textbook" language (9). Furtado parodied the form of traditional scientific and educational documentaries that describe their subjects using an "objective" and emotionless voiceover and a series of support images to illustrate the main definitions and explanations. According to Furtado, the main narrative strategy in *Ilha das flores* was the exaggeration of that didactic model:

> I said: "I'm going to write a text for someone who knows nothing, for
> someone who does not know the difference between a tomato and a
> chicken, who does not know the difference between a human being and a
> pork, who does not know what a tomato is, what garbage is. I'm going to
> explain everything. I'm going to create an entirely didactic text, as if it
> was a spelling book" (9).

Furtado's film follows the life of a tomato—from its production on a farm to its final destination in a dump at the Island of Flowers. There, after being discarded for human consumption by a middle-class family, and for animal consumption by the pig keepers, it is made available to feed a hungry family. Furtado explained each part of the production and consumption process, following a hyper-textual structure that allowed him to connect and define heterogeneous elements, and to insert subtle critical comments. Thus, in the first section of the film, the narration moves from a description of Mr. Susuki, a tomato producer, to the definition of human beings, the definition of a tomato, a description of the commercialization of Mr. Susuki's crops, and, finally, to a detailed definition and history of money. This section of the film ends when the farmer sells his harvest to a supermarket.

Although an explicit definition of the term *supermarket* is not provided, the narrator affirms that humans created supermarkets to "facilitate the exchange of tomatoes for money." Furtado's perspective on that exchange is condensed in the conclusion of his short history of money: "Nowadays and since the third century BC, any object produced by human beings, thanks to the combined efforts of their highly developed brains and the opposable thumb, as well as everything alive or not alive, above or below ground, tomatoes, chickens, or whales, can be exchanged for money." The supermarket represents that absolute commodification, in which all of reality becomes an exchangeable product.

The supermarket is also presented as an urban space reserved for the consumption of the upper classes, represented by Mrs. Anete, the matriarch of a middle-class family, who works selling perfumes. Mrs. Anete is introduced at the supermarket, elegantly dressed, buying one kilo of tomatoes and two kilos of pork. Her social spaces are established almost as the reverse of those of the inhabitants of the Island of Flowers. She can afford to consume meat and fresh vegetables, and to discard the food she considers inappropriate for her family

because of its appearance or smell. Even more, her perfumes, extracted from flowers, contrast

with the fetid smell of the dump in the Island of Flowers (where, the narrator affirms, there

are few flowers). It is through Mrs. Anete's decision to discard one of the tomatoes that she

purchased at the supermarket (it "was not fit to be made into sauce") that the narrator

introduces an ironic definition of garbage and allows for a transition into the description of

the dump at the Island of Flowers.[97] Up to this point, the urban supermarket and the

peripheral dump are established as opposing symbolic spaces: the former as a synonym for

abundance and consumption, and the latter as a symbol of the system's leftovers, of what has

no place within its very dynamics. The film seems to replicate the dual division broadly used

to explain the logic of the supermarket: the marginal and wretched rural world, opposed to the

abundant availability of the urban space.

This analytical model, commonly known as the center-periphery division, influenced

Brazilian social thought during the 1960s and 1970s, especially through the development of

dependency theory at the University of Brasília. Authors like André Gunder, Ruy Mauro

Marini, and Theotonio dos Santos proposed a nondogmatic Marxist interpretation of the

process of reproducing underdevelopment in the margins of world capitalism. Their approach,

based on the theories of authors like Raúl Prebisch, who coined the typology "center-

periphery" in the 1940s, opposed the explanations of the economic dynamics in Latin

America that came from both traditional Marxism and the United Nations Economic

Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). In 1969 the Chilean sociologist

Enzo Faletto and the Brazilian Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who became president of Brazil

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[97] The film defines garbage as "Everything that human beings produced as a result of the combined efforts of their highly developed brains and the opposable thumb, and which, in the judgment of one human being, does not fit to be made into sauce."

in 1995, published the influential *Dependency and Development in Latin America*. This is the book by Latin American authors that, according to José Maurício Domingues (2011), has had the greatest impact on social sciences across the world (749). Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto (1979) defended the idea that the historical specificity of the situation of underdevelopment derived from the relationship between peripheral and central societies: "The situation of underdevelopment came about when commercial capitalism and then industrial capitalism expanded and linked to the world market nonindustrial economies that went on to occupy different positions in the overall structure of the capitalist system" (17). Thus, the authors defined center and periphery not as physical spaces, but rather as differentiated functions within the international economic structure of production and distribution (the center produces industrial goods; the periphery produces raw materials).

Although dependency theory used the center-periphery division to explain economic underdevelopment at a national scale, it also applied this same model to the internal dynamics of cities in order to study phenomena like social segregation. Since the 1970s, Brazilian sociologists have defined the territories of misery as part of the urban periphery—that is, as socially homogeneous spaces, forgotten by state policies and typically located at the margins of a metropolitan area (Chinneli 1980; Bonduki and Rolnik 1982; Santos 1982). That explanatory model seemed to respond to actual dynamics of urban expansion. According to Luis Mauricio Cuervo (2003), in the 1980s, cities like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo expanded following a center-periphery model of spatial division.[98] Suzana Taschner and Lucía Bógus

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[98] In São Paulo, for instance, the dissection is evident when urban growth patterns are analyzed: the suburban areas of the so-called Grande São Paulo (the expanded metropolitan area that includes thirty-eight municipalities besides the city of São Paulo) have been the region with the highest growth rate in the state of São Paulo in the last four decades. The peripheral ring was responsible for 43% of the population growth in the 1960s, 55% in the 1970s, 94% in the 1980s, and 262% in the 1990s.

(2001) provided empirical evidence of the application of that model in the case of São Paulo: the concentration of wealth and higher rates of education in the center; the lower number of whites in the periphery; the dissymmetry in the delivery of public services; and the high growth of the population of the favelas between 1980 and 1993, leading to massive waves of migration from rural areas.

The narrative opposition between the supermarket, a center of consumption and abundance, and the peripheral world of waste and hunger of the Island of Flowers could be interpreted as an illustration of the dependency model, suggesting a causal connection between the two opposite spaces. The very composition of the film has been described in terms of a dialectical montage that uses direct oppositions to reveal a central contradiction: although much more developed than pigs, human beings may be below those animals on the food chain due to a lack of money (Jesus 2005; Leão and Paulista 2011).[99] The opposition between pigs and humans is one of the film's main narrative and rhetorical tools. Using the basic definitions of each term, the narrator stresses the fact that Mrs. Anete "has a highly developed telencephalon while the pig doesn't even have a thumb." That evolutionary advantage places humans, represented by Mrs. Anete, at the highest level in the production and consumption chain—and it is precisely the inversion of this relationship what opens the conclusion of the film.

A similar division between the urban center and the rural periphery is the basis of André Klotzel's comedy *A marvada carne*. This film tells the story of Nhô Quim, who decides to leave his lonely and quiet life to pursue an obsessive desire: to eat beef. According to Sandra Terciotti (2010), the film was one of the first representations of a taboo subject in

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[99] In the annotations about the film included at the end of Furtado's book *Um astronauta no Chipre* (1992), the author described the film as a "dialectical-cinematographic essay about the planet Earth and its inhabitants" (97).

Brazilian cinema: the *caipira* universe.[100] Unlike other regional cultures like the *nordestino* (from northeastern Brazil), the *mineiro* (from the state of Minas Gerais), or the *gaucho* (from the south of Brazil), the *caipira* was considered a vulgar and derogatory topic. In his detailed study of life in the region of São Paulo (originally published in 1964), Antonio Candido (2010) described the *caipiras* as isolated and self-sufficient groups, with a strong Portuguese heritage (evident in their language), whose subsistence economy was centered on the production of corn, beans, and cassava. Products like milk, wheat, and beef were (and are) extremely unusual in the *caipira* diet (65).

Klotzel's film uses that nutritional singularity as the leitmotif of the story. In the first sequence, Quim describes his monotonous diet, while the viewer contemplates his tedious routine in the middle of the forest: "Flour, beans and rice. Rice, flour, beans. It was only that every single day." That routine leads him to leave his humble house, carrying his few belongings, in pursuit of two goals: finding a wife to look after him and eating beef. Both objectives become entwined when Quim meets Sá Carula, a young and beautiful woman devoted to Saint Anthony who desperately wants a husband. Knowing about Quim's desire to eat beef, she stages a fake conversation at the riverbank (which he "secretly" overhears) affirming that her father has promised to slaughter a cow on her wedding day. Quim falls into the trap, and he begins to court Sá Carula and to convince her father that he is an appropriate suitor. After the wedding, he discovers that he has been tricked, as the bride's family does not have a cow. However, he accepts his destiny and establishes a family: "I was there, and I was feeling like the silliest person in this open world. No, it was not that time when I was going to

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[100] The term *caipira* is derived from the Tupi language and designates the inhabitants of rural and remote areas. Since colonial times, it has been applied to the inhabitants of the Captaincy of São Vicente, which currently corresponds to the states of São Paulo, Paraná, Mato Grosso do Sul, Goiás, and Minas Gerais. In some contexts, the term has been used with a pejorative, denoting backwardness.

eat beef. But, you know what? I was there, and I was very happy." After several months, however, with a new routine established, Quim once again begins to experience the same tedium that led him away from home in the first place. His desire for beef reemerges with such strength and conviction that he even faces the devil to get money to go to the city and purchase a piece of meat. There, despite having been swindled and lost all of his money, Quim finally catches a break: while wandering through the city, he finds himself in the middle of a supermarket looting. Abandoned on one of the supermarkets' weighing scales, he finds a piece of beef. Without hesitation, Quim takes the meat and flees. In one of the most famous sequences in the history of Brazilian cinema, he rapidly crosses the city with the bare piece of beef in his hands. The film's final scene shows Quim sharing the meat with his family and neighbors at a barbecue party held at a humble house on the periphery of the city.

The division between the rural peripheries and the urban center is clearly established in *A marvada carne*: the country is presented as a traditional and quiet place, as opposed to the chaos of the city. The division between country and city is not only spatial but also temporal. While the city is a symbol of modernization, the country is directly connected to the past. The first image of the city after Quim's train trip is the dazzling window of an electronics store full of television screens (all showing images of cattle). The city is directly connected to technology and consumption. As in *Ilha das flores*, the supermarket appears as a symbol of the urban center. Although the actual space of the supermarket is only shown for a few minutes in the looting scene, the rest of the city is presented as a big store. Before stealing the meat, Quim appears in three different spaces in the city, all of them connected to the dynamics of consumption: the electronics shop; a butcher shop, where he contemplates the abundance of meat; and a street full of stores, where only the shop windows are visible.

The screens in the electronics shop present him with a multitude of images of his object of desire, a promise of abundance that is both available and inaccessible.

That sense of profusion is precisely what defines modern supermarkets. Theodor Adorno (2009) described the experience of walking through one of these spaces as reminiscent of the land of milk and honey: "You will have the—however deceptive and superficial—feeling: the time of privation is over, it is the boundless and complete satisfaction of material needs as such" (145). That superficial feeling defines Quim's experience of the city, which is cast as a space of consumption. The urban space is not introduced through a wide shot of the skyline or images of the busy and chaotic movement of the city, but rather through images of images: cattle that appear on television screens displayed, in turn, in a shop window. The city is a space of display, of the circulation of images.

The connection between consumption and the production of images has been one of the most discussed topics among the critics of contemporary capitalism. The European Marxism of the first decades of the twentieth century developed an influential critique of the commodification of life in capitalist societies based on central concepts like exchange value and alienation. Authors like Georg Lukàcs, Herbert Marcuse, and Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer analyzed how the logic of commodities permeates social life and dominates individual discourses and practices. Thus, the process of commodification of technologies and things is, at the same time, a process of reification of human life: the perception of human social relationships as relationships between traded objects.

In the 1970s, the French theorist Jean Baudrillard (2004) introduced an important nuance in the reification theory in order to analyze the development of contemporary dynamics of consumption: the concept of sign-value. Commodities are bought and displayed

as symbols of social status—that is, as expressions and marks of prestige, style, and power. With the concept of sign-value, Baudrillard expanded the notion of "conspicuous consumption" (coined by the economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen in 1899 to describe the behavior of the nouveau riche) to the entire consumer society. The central process in the creation of sign-value is the production of the commodity as spectacle. In contemporary societies, the play of signs has replaced labor as the constitutive dynamic of human production. Signs and codes proliferate, always producing new signs in a permanent and expansive cycle. In this hyperreality, as Baudrillard (1993) called it, individuals consume images and signs instead of using value.

Through its depiction of the city as a center of the capitalist market, *A marvada carne* exposes the consequences of this realm of spectacle for food consumption. Before finding beef for consumption, Quim finds the source of this good: cattle. However, instead of real animals, he finds only images on television screens. The actual meat appears in the following sequence of the film, hanging in a butcher shop, available and ready for consumption. But the real source of this meat is never visible, nor is the process of production of the consumable good: the transformation of cattle into beef. Stephen Eisenman (2013) described how one of the main purposes of the industrialization of slaughterhouses in the twentieth century was precisely to "consolidate and segregate killing and remove it from public view" (187). This calculated omission contrasts with the dynamics of consumption in the countryside, where Quim and Nhô Totó (Sá Carula's father) sacrifice a pig for the family, and Quim repeatedly goes fishing. In the city, the dying fish and squealing pigs are replaced by silent, clean images: not only do animals appear on television screens, but meat is also transformed into a consumable sign.

That is the essence of the commodification process operated by the supermarket—and of our modern relationship with food: the process of production (who makes our food and under what conditions) is concealed, so that the object appears as an autonomous reality. This mysterious character of commodities—which Karl Marx ([1867] 1976) condensed in the concept of fetishism—defines the modern practices of food consumption as impersonal and detached dynamics. That was precisely the main novelty introduced by the first self-service grocery stores created in the United States in the 1910s. The transition from shopping over the counter to shopping off the shelf transformed the type of social contact necessary in former practices of consumption (Humphery 1998).

That impersonal relationship with food seems to define the totality of the urban space in *A marvada carne*. The city is impersonal, a place of isolation. In his short visit to the city, Quim only interacts with one person, who eventually cheats and robs him. After taking the meat from the supermarket, Quim flees through the streets of São Paulo, avoiding any human contact. He does not use the sidewalks (only one shot shows him on a sidewalk), but rather runs through the middle of a highway, crossing bridges and elevated roads that allow the spectator to see the urban landscape full of cars and buildings. Quim runs as if he were in the middle of the countryside, in an open field with no traffic laws. He avoids people while desperately attempting to escape from the gray scenery of the city and return to the reliable periphery.

Unlike the city, the country is depicted as a mystical place. It is a green space where manual labor, traditional collective costumes, and magical beings live together. Quim's prosaic life in the country is combined with a series of fantastic short stories (known as *causos*) inspired by traditional *caipira* legends: Quim's encounter with a female-shaped devil, whom he sells a chicken, the apparition of the *curupira* in the middle of the forest, the man

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who received a transplanted nose upside down, and so on.[101] While the city is a demystified and profane space, spiritual and fantastic experiences compose the daily life of the countryside—a space where Sá Carula's religious devotion coexists with Inhá Tomaza's skill in dealing with the supernatural.

A pejorative connection between the *caipira* rural life and the backward past has been part of the Brazilian consciousness since the first decades of the twentieth century, when fictional characters like the mestizo Jeca Tatu became popular. The representation of Jeca as an ignorant and lazy peasant in Montero Lobato's novels became a symbol of the country's entire rural population, contradicting the national project of modernization being promoted in the urban centers.[102] The actor and filmmaker Amácio Mazzaropi popularized the character in a series of films made during the 1960s and 1970s. The first film of this series, simply called *Jeca Tatu*, was produced in 1959, starring Mazzaropi as Jeca and directed by Milton Amaral. In the film, Jeca is the victim of a string of incriminating plots that force him to travel to the city to seek the help of a rich congressman in order to avoid being imprisoned. In one of the central scenes of the film (the one that served as the inspiration for its promotional poster), Jeca arrives in the congressman's house in São Paulo during the middle of a pool party. His clothes and peasant ways attract the attention of the refined guests, who surround him as though he is an exotic specimen and even try to throw him in the pool. The contrast between the modern and sophisticated urban space, a center of political power, and Jeca's *caipira* life is the basis of the plot. At the end of the film, Jeca overcomes the misery and backwardness

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[101] The *curupira* is a mythological creature of Brazilian folklore. It has bright red hair and looks like a dwarf, but its feet are turned backwards. In the film, it looks like a man and appears in the middle of the night to ask Quim for fire.
[102] See Chapter 1, pp. 41-42.

of rural life when the congressman appoints him as his campaign director, and Jeca is able to stay in the city.

Other fictional characters also perpetuated the stereotype of the *caipira* as ignorant and lazy, although in subtler ways than Jeca. In 1961, for instance, Maurício de Sousa created the cartoon character Chico Bento, a seven-year-old boy who walks barefoot, always with a straw hat. Although Chico attends school, he is not a good student: he is always late for class and gets bad grades. In several comic strips, his teacher scolds him for his poor grades and suggests that he only wants to sleep at the lakeshore. Cintia Weber Biazi and Joao Batista Martins (2010) showed how this representation of the *caipira* is directly associated with a clear dichotomy between city and countryside. In the universe of the comic strip *Turma de Chico Bento* [Chico Bento and folks], the countryside is depicted as an idealized space where the characters live in perfect harmony with nature. In one strip, a talking banana plant comforts Chico, whose parents want to sell their land. In another cartoon, Chico conspires with a jaguar to stage a fake fight and impress a girl (Weber Biazi and Batista Martins 2010, 187). In this case, although the countryside is not depicted as a backward space, it is associated with a mythical time when humans and nature lived in perfect communion.

A similar connection between man and nature is suggested in *A marvada carne*. Men get everything from nature and peacefully coexist with it. Quim, for instance, builds his new house with natural materials (gathered with his own hands) and the assistance of the entire community. That collective dimension of social life defines the rural space and radically contrasts with the individual isolation of the city. The film's final sequence—in which Quim shares the beef with his neighbors in a new house that the community is helping him build— clearly contrasts the impersonal character of the urban center with the restoration of a collective space in the periphery.

4.2 Hunger and Commodification

Despite the clear contrast between the urban center and the rural peripheries in *Ilha das flores* and *A marvada carne*, both films also suggest continuity between those spaces. In Klotzel's film, hunger functions as an articulating point between the modern city and the traditional countryside. From the first sequence, it is clear that Quim does not lack food, despite his humble living conditions. He is introduced through his daily routine: he wakes up and lights the fire to heat his breakfast; then he goes to work tilling the field and quietly eats his lunch under the shade of a tree. Quim is not starving, but as he describes, he is tired of eating the same thing every day. His fixation on meat could be interpreted as a simple craving resulting from the repetitive routine of rice, flour, and beans.

In contemporary societies, however, meat desire is more complex than a random and fleeting whim. Several studies have demonstrated the centrality of meat consumption in different human societies. Marion Kerr and Nicola Charles (1986), for instance, conducted a study on food distribution in British families in the 1980s and found:

> Meat was mentioned by the women more frequently than any other food. In fact, only five women (out of 200) thought meat was not an important item of the family diet. Meat, or fish as its substitute, was usually viewed as an essential ingredient of the main meal of the day and a proper meal was most commonly defined as meat and two veg (140).

Anthropologists like Daniel Gross (1975), Marjorie Shostak (1983), and Janet Siskind (1973) demonstrated the preeminence of meat among distant indigenous groups in different regions of the world. Gross, for instance, reported that the Canela of Amazonia use a special term to express hunger for meat: while *ii mo plam* means "I am hungry," *iiyate* means "I am hungry for meat" (532).

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The American anthropologist Marvin Harris (1998) coined the concept of "meat hunger" to explain the centrality of meat in human dietary and nutritional practices. From his perspective, "many different kinds of cultures, from hunter-gathered bands to industrial states, exhibit similar preferences for animal food" (25). That preference is not simply a whimsical craving, but rather a response to a basic instinct.[103] Harris affirmed that humans are genetically programmed to prefer animal foods. Thus, hunger for meat is not a symbolic form of hunger, but probably the quintessence of hunger itself.

Nick Fiddes (1993) demonstrated how meat is preeminent in our food system, not only through an examination of contemporary consumption habits or anthropological studies, but also through an analysis of our discourses about food intake. Several of his interviewees spontaneously placed meat at the top of their nutritional priorities, and even unconsciously identified food with meat: "A middle aged meat-eating woman, when asked how she might feel if she found herself in a situation where she had to kill animals for their meat herself, responds: 'I don't think I could. I think I'd probably starve. No, I'm not that adventurous'" (27–28).[104] Thus, Fiddes affirmed, "Meat is, to many, almost synonymous with 'real' food" (29). Meat is preeminent not only in our diets, but also in our thoughts and discourses about nutritional practices.

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[103] To illustrate his point, Harris (1998) described a series of hunger marches to protest against the meat shortage in the main cities of Poland during the early 1980s. "Give us meat," the crowds demanded, tired of queuing for hours, waiting for deliveries that never came. Harris inquired about the reasons behind those protests: "The Poles, in no danger of malnutrition, could eat less meat and easily remain well nourished, yet they are willing to spend a good part of their lives in an exasperating pursuit of more meat and other animal products. Why?" (20).

[104] Even in academic writings, several authors assumed that meat is synonymous with food. Fiddes referenced Claude Lévi-Strauss's influential series of publications about food, *The Raw and the Cooked* (1969), in which the French anthropologist attempted to demonstrate how the emergence of humanity was closely connected to the creation of fire and the transformation of food from a natural state to a cultural state. However, Lévi-Strauss was, in most cases, not discussing the cooking of food, but rather the cooking of animals. His description of the processes of smoking and roasting as central cooking operations in his prominent "culinary triangle" reveal his assumption of an identification between food and meat.

Fiddes, however, rejected Harris's explanation of the centrality of meat as being the result of human instinct. He affirms instead that a food habit is "a feature of society and is integrated into a structure of social values that may have nothing to do with the principles of nutrition" (27). The psychologist Paul Rozin (2002) supported this perspective by affirming that, although there are some universal biological predispositions (like the preference for sweet and fat texture), human beings are "food generalists," and most food choices are determined by cultural experience. Meat hunger, thus, is not necessarily a consequence of a primal instinct; it is culturally shaped. The sociologist Julia Twigg (1983), for instance, linked meat consumption to representations of power and masculinity, suggesting that we live in a meat-consuming society that organizes foods on a hierarchy: "Meat is the most highly prized of food. It is the center around which a meal is arranged. . . . At the top of the hierarchy, then, we find meat, and in particular red meat. . . . Lower in status are the 'bloodless' meats—chicken and fish—and below these are the animal products—eggs and cheese" (22). Meat symbolizes power and strength, and is associated with masculinity—whereas vegetables, as inferior foods, are associated with femininity (Rozin 2012). Red meat is the most valued food because it contains blood, which represents the life power of animals.

A marvada carne seems to suggest a similar connection. Quim's main goals are to eat beef and to find a wife. Both objectives become intertwined, suggesting an analogy between hunger for meat and sexual desire. Both goals become one when Quim decides to marry Sá Carula because he learns that her father will offer beef at the wedding feast. For Quim women and meat are equivalent objects of desire, and the possession of both reaffirms his active, masculine role in the film's narrative.

In addition to the connections between beef consumption and masculinity, authors like Cilene da Silva Gomes Ribeiro and Mariana Corção (2013) showed the relationship between

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meat and gendered social divisions in Brazil. According to Gomes Ribeiro and Corção, beef

consumption has played an important role in the consolidation of the Brazilian nation. During

the first decades of the twentieth century, the nutritional habits of the Brazilian population,

especially in the northeast, focused on beans, flour, and beef jerky. That trio made up the

staple foods of colonial Brazil (Pinto e Silva 2005). The centrality of beef consumption was

boosted by the spread of *churrasco gaúcho* (barbecue beef) throughout the country in the

1960s, and by the 1980s, meat was commonly labeled as "food par excellence," thus

demonstrating its position as an indispensable part of Brazilians' daily diet. Gomes Ribeiro

and Corção (2013) cited a demonstrative fragment from a cookbook published in 1983 by the

historian Maria Thereza Lacerda:

> Today, I will focus on meat, undoubtedly the most important item in our
> petty bourgeois tables . . . be it a filet mignon steak or the humble
> mincemeat for Tuesdays. We, who are not vegetarians or macrobiotics,
> much less naturalistic, need to eat meat at least once a day to avoid that
> unpleasant emptiness in the stomach—a problem that does not affect the
> Northeastern people, because they, lucky, discovered the secret to fill
> their stomach with water and cassava flour (432).

Beyond illustrating the importance of meat consumption for the Brazilian people, this

fragment reveals a key assumption about the contemporary status of meat: its importance as a

marker of social status. Lacerda clearly separated herself from the poor in the northeast who

had learned to live without meat.[105] This separation reveals that the biological necessity that

Lacerda described as an unpleasant emptiness in the stomach is actually the result of

economic and social conditions.

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[105] Besides pointing out the snobbish character of that statement, Gomes Ribeiro and Corção (2013) also showed
that Lacerda was wrong in her assumption about the extent that the consumption of meat had been a central
feature in the culture of the northeastern *sertão*. Since the first decades of the twentieth century, influential
authors like Mário de Andrade, Câmara Cascudo, Josué de Castro, and Gilberto Freyre stressed the importance
of beef consumption in the dietary habits of the northeast. This region was, in fact, the first place where the
Portuguese colonizers introduced livestock breeding in Brazil.

Meat consumption in Brazil, like in many other regions of the world, has been linked to economic power and social status. In his compelling study on the main problems of agriculture in the twenty-first century, Bruno Parmentier (2007) suggested that eating animals has usually been a treat directly connected to a high standard of living: with few exceptions, the human diet has been based on cereal consumption. Because cereals do not provide sufficient protein to meet every human need, legumes and tubers are added where meat is not available. As the standard of living increases, oils become part of the diet, and only when human communities reach a high standard of living are meat and other animal products consumed. Organizations like the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) have demonstrated a direct connection between the increase in meat consumption, and the process of urbanization and the growth of income in different regions. Some studies have even suggested that meat consumption can be interpreted as an indicator of national economic development. Gunter Heinz and Peter Hautzinger (2007), for instance, showed how meat consumption in developing countries has been continuously increasing over the past four decades: from an average annual per capita consumption of ten kilograms in the 1960s to twenty-six kilograms in 2000 (projections show that it will reach thirty-seven kilograms around the year 2030). That forecast suggests, the authors concluded, "that in a few decades, developing countries' consumption of meat will move towards that of developed countries where meat consumption remains stagnant at a high level" (v). As illustrated in *A marvada carne*, meat consumption is directly linked to a developed urban space. Quim's trip to the city represents the social mobility necessary to access what would be considered a luxury good in the countryside.

As the Argentinian writer Martín Caparrós (2014) suggested, the connection between meat consumption and social divisions is deeper than the simple issue of who is able to pay

for meat. In the last few decades, world meat consumption increased at twice the rate of population growth. This was only possible because livestock farming uses eighty percent of the agricultural area in the world, consumes forty percent of world cereal production, and uses ten percent of the water on the planet.[106] Since livestock farming consumes products that could be used for human nutrition, the greatest injustice for the poor northeasterners that Lacerda described, or for any inhabitants of the poorest regions of the world, is not that they are forced to follow an inadequate diet because they lack the resources to purchase a piece of meat. Instead, the real injustice of their position lies in the fact that their poor diet and wretched living conditions are directly connected to the availability of meat for that small portion of the world—represented by Lacerda and her cookbook, and by the fictional Mrs. Anete from *Ilha das flores*—that daily places meat at the center of the table. The connection between world hunger and the meat industry has been widely addressed. The environmental analyst Lester Brown (2009) succinctly explained the relationship:

> One of the questions I am often asked is: "How many people can the earth support?" I answer with another question: "At what level of food consumption?" Using round numbers, at the US level of 800 kilograms of grain per person annually for food and feed the 2-billion-ton annual world harvest of grain would support 2.5 billion people. At the Italian level of consumption of close to 400 kilograms, the current harvest would support 5 billion people. At the 200 kilograms of grain consumed by the average Indian, it would support 10 billion (233).

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[106] This problem is even more serious when taking into account that, since the 1950s, animals bred for consumption actually consume food that is suitable for human consumption (especially soy and corn). Thus, four vegetable calories are necessary to produce one calorie of chicken, six calories are necessary to produce one of pork, and ten calories are necessary to produce one of beef. Additionally, while the production of one kilogram of corn uses 1,500 liters of water, one kilogram of beef consumes 15,000. According to a report from United Nations Environment Program's (2010) international panel on sustainable resource management, animal products cause more environmental damage than producing construction minerals. Growing crops for animals is as damaging as burning fossil fuels.

Of the 800 kilograms of grain consumed per person in the United States every year, only about 100 kilograms are eaten directly (as bread, pasta, or cereals), while the rest of that grain is consumed indirectly in the form of livestock products. Thus, the eating habits of developed countries have directly influenced the conditions of scarcity and malnutrition in poorer regions. As Caparrós (2014) laconically affirmed, "Meat is the perfect metaphor for inequality" (104).

That metaphor is at the center of *A marvada carne*. Quim desires an object that is not part of his rural world, but that is directly associated with the city, where he eventually travels to get it. Beef is a luxury good among the *caipiras*, but it is common in the city, where Quim sees whole trucks loaded with meat. Beef becomes a social marker that divides the humble countryside from the plentiful city. Quim's hunger connects those two spaces, and his trip to the city condenses that connection. The prologue to Quim's trip is his encounter with the devil. This fantastic anecdote represents the transition from the mythical countryside to the merchandised urban space: instead of a religious or spiritual experience, this meeting is depicted as a negotiation. Quim needs to sell the devil a black chicken before dawn. That money will pay for his train ticket to the city and, eventually, for a piece of beef in an urban grocery store. The negotiation is the only sequence of the film in which money plays a central role. Economic relationships in the countryside are represented through more basic forms of exchange, such as manual labor for food. Until his encounter with the devil, Quim obtains everything he needs through work and direct interactions with nature, but in the sequence of the film that precedes his journey, Quim establishes a connection to money and the logic of the market that must necessarily lead him to the city.

The motif of a trip from the countryside to the city to find items that the poor peripheries lack is common in Brazilian cinema, in which the traditional figure of the

retirante has long played a central role.[107] Other films from the 1980s, including Aloysio

Raulino's *Noites Paraguayas* (1982), explored the contrast between the poor countryside and

the modern city, along with characters' need to pursue a new life in an urban center.[108] In the

1960s, paradigmatic films like Nelson Pereira dos Santos's *Vidas secas* (1963), Rocha's *Deus*

e o diabo na terra do sol (1964), and Geraldo Sarno's *Viramundo* (1965) were organized

around this type of travel, in which hunger and scarcity force the characters to migrate in an

attempt to leave the arid *sertão* behind. *A marvada carne*, however, introduces an important

transformation: instead of being motivated by radical material scarcity, Quim's hunger is

described as a desire for surplus, a necessity that goes beyond the need for basic food.[109] It is

a product of a fetishized commodity directly connected to the urban space. The film's first

sequence, in which Quim's voiceover explicitly states his desire to eat beef while he eats rice

and beans, radically contrasts with the first sequence of *Vidas secas*, in which Vitória has to

kill the family's pet parrot in order to feed her husband and sons in the middle of the arid

sertão.[110] Hunger, defined as a radical lack, has been replaced by a "hunger for" kind of

appetite in *A marvada carne*.

Thus, as Tales Ab'Sáber (2003) proposed, Quim's hunger is not a consequence of

natural instinct; rather it is directly connected to market dynamics. In *Grundrisse*, Marx

([1939] 1993) explained the connection between meat hunger and capitalism:

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[107] See Chapter 1, p. 59, n. 32.

[108] In *O cego às avessas*, José Carlos Avellar (2013) used the motif of travel as a metaphor for Brazilian cinema in the 1980s—not only in terms of explicit location displacements, but especially in the form of journeys inward, attempts to "say good-bye to the country" (26).

[109] The transgression of the traditional motif of the trip was common in the 1970s and 1980s. One of the most notorious examples was Carlos Diegues's *Bye Bye Brasil* (1979), in which a traveling show of circus artists—the Caravana Rolidei—crosses the country from the coast to the interior, reversing the traditional Brazilian migration path (from the north/northeast to the south/southeast, always close to the coast). Instead of finding a backward land, the caravan finds multiple traces of a process of modernization that affects the whole country.

[110] However, even in Pereira dos Santos's film, in which hunger defines the whole reality of the northeastern family, Vitória explicitly expresses her dream of sleeping in a leather bed. Basic hunger and material scarcity are, at a certain point, indistinguishable from the desire for commodities associated with a higher living standard.

> Hunger is hunger, but the hunger gratified by cooked meat eaten with a
> knife and fork is a different hunger from that which bolts down raw meat
> with the aid of hand, nail and tooth. Production thus produces not only the
> object but also the manner of consumption, not only objectively but also
> subjectively. Production thus creates the consumer (92).

Quim's hunger is not a hunger of hand, nail, and tooth; it is a desire for a commodity, a
surplus in the production chain. Although isolated in his remote and humble house in the
countryside, Quim's desire has been shaped by market logic, molded in the form of
consumption.

4.3   **Rational Irrationality**

Furtado's *Ilha das flores* also presents an interesting connection and continuity
between center and periphery. The dump is not a space outside of the market, but rather part
of that very system. It is the logical continuation of the supermarket, not its radical opposite.
In the dump, garbage becomes an economic activity: the pig farmer purchases the waste from
the supermarkets to feed his animals, and the scavengers separate and resell the reusable
waste that is not fed to the pigs following an elaborate system of labor.[111] The narrator even
ironically compares Mrs. Anete's family with the herd of pigs: "The tomato that Mrs. Anete
judged unsuitable for the pork to feed her family, can become an excellent food for the pig
and its family. In the pig's judgment of course." The film reveals that the dump mirrors, in a
certain way, the dynamics of the supermarket, with some obvious (and cruel) variations: the
line to pay is replaced by the line to cross the fence to collect organic waste, and the pigs are
not the consumed but the consumers.

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[111] Furtado (2001) explained that, during the filming process, some of the scavengers told him that they had
decided to work in the dump because they earned three times more than they had working as doormen or janitors
in the city (18).

Thus, the dump is portrayed as a space of consumption governed by economic relationships: landownership, money circulation, paid work. What Furtado revealed is not an opposition between the center and the periphery, but a continuous dynamic from the production of the tomato to its consumption as waste (twice over). The hungry inhabitants of the Island of Flowers are not outside the rational logic of modern capitalism. As some influential Latin American authors like José Joaquín Brunner (1992), Néstor García Canclini (1995), and Jesús Martín-Barbero (1991) affirmed, poor and marginalized people are not technically, economically, or morally outside the system. On the contrary, cultural industries have re-signified the life of the subaltern classes in Latin America, transforming them into an active part of the market dynamics. In this sense, *Ilha das flores* exposes an organized system and reveals the rationality that governs the whole process. The supermarket appears as the emblem of that process of rationalization.

The rationalization of the experience of consumption and the chain of production was, in fact, the original purpose behind the creation of supermarkets. The first self-service retail stores introduced a novel space design: the internal layout required the consumers—each provided with a hand basket—to follow a set path that moved them past shelves displaying multiple goods until they finally reached a checkout counter. This new open-shelf experience was made possible by the development of food manufacturing and packaging. Self-service stores affected the system of production in two primary ways: they required cheaper overall labor costs and a high mechanization of distribution that reduced production and supply expenses (Humphery 1998, 67). These new stores also influenced consumption practices: shoppers' choices at the supermarket changed their food consumption habits, which, in turn, transformed some farming practices and priorities.

Furtado's *Ilha das flores* depicts this interconnected chain, in which the producer and the (multiple) consumers of food products share the same market logic. The film explicitly states that Mr. Susuki, the tomato farmer, produces food *for* the supermarket, and it ironically establishes his insignificant place within the world production of tomatoes—about sixty-one million tons per year—despite the fact that he works twelve hours a day. Although the main function of his tomatoes is to feed humans, the film's narrator states that Mr. Susuki "does not grow tomatoes with the intention of eating them. All the tomatoes produced by Mr. Susuki are sent to the supermarket in exchange of money." In this description, the supermarket becomes a symbol of the process of rationalization of the entire system of food production. In short, the logic of the supermarket reproduces at a small scale the logic of the system as a totality.

Hunger becomes visible as part of that system, not as its unfortunate or unforeseen consequence. What led Furtado to make the film was not simply the immediate indignation of seeing people rating below pigs in supply chain priorities, but also the intrinsic rationality that determined such a situation. In a conversation with the filmmaker Geraldo Sarno, Furtado (2001) described his perception of the conditions of the inhabitants of the Island of Flowers in Marxist terms: "It was an absurd situation. I mean, absurd because it was logic . . . the whole situation was completely logic" (8). In *Manifesto of the Communist Party,* Marx and Frederick Engels ([1848] 1969) described capitalism in terms of "absurdity," referring to the existence of an epidemic of overproduction while the majority of the population lacked the necessary minimum:

> Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism;
> it appears as if famine, a universal war of devastation, had cut off the
> supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be
> destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilization, too much
> means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce (17).

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Yet that global irrationality that transformed society (or at least certain sectors of it) into a starvation camp did not contradict a partial rationality at the level of production management.

In the 1930s, Karl Löwith (1982) explained this peculiar irrationality formed through the process of rationalization by describing the affinities between Marx's theories on capitalism and Max Weber's concept of rationality. Both authors explained the irrationality of capitalism in terms of a paradoxical inversion of means and ends. When means are transformed into ends, they become independent and lose their original purpose, which is oriented toward men and their needs: "This reversal marks the whole of modern civilization, whose arrangements, institutions, and activities are so 'rationalized,' that whereas humanity once established itself within them, now it is they which enclose and determine humanity" (48). What is irrational is the subordination of men to the rationality of production, which they once created to fulfill their own needs and desires. The rational organization of the system of production is not a means toward a collective end anymore, but an end in itself—one that determines the role of each individual and group according to the system's own goals. Hunger, misery, and other social tragedies are the consequences of that inversion, symptoms of the constitutive irrationality of the system.

Furtado's main purpose in *Ilha das flores* was to reveal the peculiar irrationality formed through the process of rationalization of the market. The irrationality of the system of production becomes visible not as a side effect of the rationalization of the market, but as an essential part of that system. From this perspective, hunger is not an undesirable result or an unexpected accident within the chain of production, but rather an active and necessary part of it. Indeed, Furtado opposed some conceptual developments on rationalization that define irrationality as the unfortunate and uncontrolled product of over-rationalized systems. In the 1990s, the American sociologist George Ritzer coined the term *McDonaldization* to describe

the extreme process of rationalization in contemporary societies. According to Ritzer (2013), the rationalization process involves the creation of a series of procedures that ensure the predictability of operations, the calculability of the cost of each action, the control of the labor process through the substitution of machines for workers, and the standardization of employees' routines.[112] One outcome of this process, however, is irrationality—events or products that are neither anticipated nor desired, such as dehumanized working conditions (15).

Rather than following that perspective that defines irrationality as an unexpected outcome, Furtado's perspective on the irrationality of the system of production is closer to traditional Marxist ideas that define irrationality as a necessary part of the rationalization of capitalism. Marx ([1867] 1976) illustrated this point through the concept of a "reserve army of labor"—the surplus population necessary to the capitalist organization of labor. From this perspective, phenomena like poverty, hunger, and unemployment are not unexpected negative effects of a rational, efficient system; instead, they are calculated products that guarantee the system efficiency during periods of overproduction. Marx explained: "The laboring population therefore produces, along with the accumulation of capital produced by it, the means by which it itself is made relatively superfluous, is turned into a relative surplus population; and it does this to an always increasing extent. This is a law of population peculiar to the capitalist mode of production" (782).

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[112] Ritzer (2013) recognized that the McDonaldization of contemporary societies was preceded by a series of social and economic developments, especially the development of scientific management (invented by Frederick Winslow Taylor in the last decades of the nineteenth century), the creation of the assembly line by Henry Ford, the mass-produced suburban houses of Levittown (built by William Levitt and his company after World War II in four suburban areas of the United States), and the emergence of the shopping mall (24).

That necessary irrationality is made visible in *Ilha das flores* through the didactic excess that defines the film's narrative and formal composition. The narrator pretends to follow a linear-causal argument, describing the simple, direct logic of the system of production and consumption. Viewers listen to a series of humorous (and unnecessary) explanations of common, familiar terms in order to "understand" how the market works. Each of the definitions presented by the narrator seems to have a predetermined place within a logically organized totality, which is condensed in the symbolic space of the supermarket, where the main elements and dynamics of the system converge. However, the film's didactic excess also makes visible the absurd conditions that result from this supposed rationality: people eating garbage (rejected by pigs) to alleviate hunger. At that point, definitions are no longer possible. Although the voiceover proposes an explanation for the conditions of misery experienced by the inhabitants of the Island of Flowers, the narrator suddenly faces an unsolvable contradiction: "What places human beings after pigs in the priority of choosing food is the fact that they do not have money or an owner." Not having an owner means that humans are free: "Human beings distinguish themselves from animals by the highly developed telencephalon, the opposable thumb, and by being free. Being free is the state of one who has freedom."

This last series of definitions is contrasted with images of scavengers digging in the garbage and eating in the middle of the dump, depicted in slow motion in the film. Even didactic excess reaches its limit when faced with the paradox between freedom and misery: the pigs, despite not being free, live in better conditions than some humans. Actually, they live in better conditions *because* they are not free. At this point, the narrator is forced to change the tone of his voiceover. In order to close the signifying chain that began with a simple tomato, the film features a fragment from Cecilia Meireles's collection of poems

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Romanceiro da inconfidência (1953). Thus, the didactic discourse gives way to poetry: "Freedom is a word that the human dream feeds on, that none can explain, or fail to understand." These words accompany the camera's slow-motion pan of a woman who carries a heavy bag full of reusable waste on her shoulder and slowly crosses the wretched landscape while others continue collecting materials. There is no more background in this last shot than the huge mountains of garbage that cover the whole visible space: no sky, no empty land, no exit.

The film's use of poetry exposes the limits of a positivist approach in understanding the reality of hunger: an instrumental approximation of language fails to communicate what poetic language makes visible. The absurdity of the reality of the garbage dwellers on the Island of Flowers cannot be explained or even enunciated, but the film makes it visible by appealing to the possibility of understanding it in spite of the impossibility of a definition. Poetry reveals a particular truth that escapes the totalizing impulse of modern positivistic and instrumental scientific knowledge.

In his 1950 essay "The Origin of the Work of Art," Martin Heidegger (2002b) used the well-known example of a pair of shoes painted by Vincent van Gogh to illustrate the connection between art and truth. According to Heidegger, what is at stake in the image of Van Gogh's shoes—where the "loneliness of the field-path" slides—is the disclosure of the true being of the object: "The artwork lets us know what the shoes, in truth, are. . . . What comes to explicit appearance first and only through the work is the equipmental being of the equipment. . . . Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, in truth *is*" (14). This power to make visible the truth of an object or being was what defined the essential nature of art for Heidegger. He continued, "When there is a disclosure of the being as what and how it is, there is a happening of truth at work" (16). This

is one of Heidegger's major contributions: to position poetry against positivistic

objectification through the affirmation of truth—in the form of the Greek *aletheia*—in a work

of art. For the German philosopher, art was a means to oppose what he perceived as the

"darkness of our times": a radical loss of meaningfulness in an age determined by

technological positivism (Gosetti-Ferencei 2004, 102).

In this sense, poetic language provides a new orientation for thinking by opposing the

assumption that language is a vehicle for transmitting meaning to an audience. Poetic

language does not communicate through direct definitions or judgments that define what is

true or false. As Heidegger (2002b) affirmed, art is "just a word to which nothing real any

longer corresponds" (2). This statement does not mean that art is not connected to reality, but

rather that that connection cannot be defined in terms of correspondence. Thus, the truth that

poetry reveals is not the traditional notion of an agreement between matter and knowledge;

instead, it is the disclosure of the nature of an entity.

The final sequence in *Ilha das flores* does not attempt to reveal an unknown fact to the

audience, which, as Furtado (2001) affirmed, did not need to watch the film to learn about the

existence of the scavengers: "People eating garbage is something that we daily see on the

streets, in front of our houses. What is the novelty in that? The novelty is that it is absurd"

(11). That absurdity becomes visible through poetry. That is the truth about hunger, and it

emerges precisely where the limits of the positivistic discourse are exposed.[113]

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[113] The irrationality of the modern logic of production is suggested throughout the film in a series of ironic connections among the didactic definitions that compose the narrative. The subtle references to the atomic bomb or the Nazi genocide suggest the absurd consequences of the rationalization of modern life. The reference to the genocide as a product of modern rationality, for instance, has been widely commented upon since Adorno and Horkheimer proposed such connection in the late 1940s. According to the authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* the genocide was not an accidental deflection from the modern project of enlightenment, but its most perverse consequence.

4.4   Submissive or Rebellious Bodies?

The constitutive irrationality is not perceived as such by the actors within the system of production. The film's audience has learned to live with the uncomfortable fact of others' hunger. Even the hungry have accepted their condition and social position. The absurdity of the situation, in this sense, does not lie exclusively in the irrationality of a rational system, but also in the fact that such irrationality has been so naturalized that it is perceived as a familiar, if unfortunate, fact. Furtado (2001) related that he had several conversations during the production of the film with the inhabitants of the dump, in which they defended the landowner who kept the fence closed while making them wait in a line for the pigs to finish eating: "Well, the others buy the waste and give it to the pigs, and to no one else. He, at least, opens the fence for the people. And he has to organize a line because if not it becomes a mess" (9). The hungry perceive all the elements in this supposedly rational organization of social life as natural: private property (with the fence as the main symbol), social divisions, and food priorities. As Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2007) affirmed, that is precisely what makes capitalism an absurd system: "In it, wage-earners have lost ownership of the fruits of their labor and the possibility of pursuing a working life free of subordination" (7).

In *Ilha das flores*, this unexpected conformism is revealed by the absence of any action against the unequal organization of the system of production. The dump dwellers are depicted as submissive, disciplined people who accept their place in the market chain: whether patiently waiting in the line next to the fence, or walking in silence through the garbage under the burning sun, they seem to have incorporated their role, and to perceive the whole situation as part of the established, almost natural, order of things. This is one of the main consequences of the process of rationalization, according to Max Weber (2001), who

described modern man as living in an "iron cage" that determines the style of life of all individuals, even those not directly engaged in the production system (123).

Ilha das flores, with its representation of hungry, submissive bodies, contrasts with other Brazilian films that have addressed the living conditions of scavengers in different regions of the country. For example, in 1983 Maria Luísa Leal and Rita Moreira produced *The Lady of Pacaémbu: A Portrait of Brazil*. The film, composed almost exclusively of a series of conversations and interviews, focuses on the figure of Geralda, a beggar who lives on Pacaémbu Avenue in São Paulo, surrounded by fancy mansions. Instead of depicting her as a victim of exclusion and marginalization, the filmmakers portrayed Geralda as a lucid and eloquent character capable of reflecting on multiple subjects, from her own life on the streets to Brazilian foreign debt. Geralda's lucidity seems to be the main subject of the film. She mocks those who perceive her as a victim in need, and she rejects any kind of compassionate aid. Geralda constantly reaffirms her autonomy: she gets her food from the waste of supermarkets, so she does not need to beg. It is for that reason, she affirms, that only the poor are happy, because they know how to make the most of anything.

A similar narrative strategy was the core of Marcos Prado's *Estamira* (2005), in which the filmmaker presented the testimonies of Estamira Gomes de Sousa, a woman who worked in the Jardim Gramacho landfill in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Prado depicted Estamira as both lucid and mad through a series of existential digressions on grave subjects like the existence of God, the purpose of life, or the conditions of human societies. Like Geralda, Estamira seems to have chosen to live surrounded by garbage, subtracting herself from modern living standards. She interprets her life style as an indirect critique of our current production system, and affirms her active role as a critic, despite living in the margins of society.

In *Boca de lixo* (1993) [Garbage mouth], Eduardo Coutinho used interviews as his main tool to give a new voice to the marginalized scavengers of the neighborhood of Itaoca in the town of São Gonçalo (state of Rio de Janeiro). Instead of showing the dump dwellers as passive victims of social exclusion, Coutinho attempted to demonstrate their active role in the creation of their own images, thus opposing the negative stereotypes that circulated in traditional media. I will discuss the composition of this film in Chapter 5, but for now I wish to highlight how *Boca de lixo* breaks with the traditional passive representation of the filmed subjects, transforming images in a field of active engagement and identity production.

In 2010 the workers and inhabitants of Jardim Gramacho again became the subjects of a film: Lucy Walker and João Jardim's *Waste Land*. Like the previous films that depict this dump, *Waste Land* presented the waste pickers as empowered subjects capable of transforming the reality of their community through action. It focuses on a series of collaborations between the Brazilian artist Vik Muniz and a group of *catadores* (pickers of recyclable material) who use recyclable materials to transform waste into impressive portraits of themselves. The documentary depicts the pickers as friendly, optimistic people who perceive themselves as playing an important role in alleviating the consequences of overconsumption in modern culture. Far from victims of a consumerist society, the *catadores* are portrayed as resisting capitalism (or at least as perceiving themselves in that way).

Ilha das flores, in contrast, overlooks any type of active resistance against the oppressive conditions produced by the economic logic of capitalism—either creative, discursive, or violent. Furtado's perspective seems to be more pessimistic than those of the other filmmakers discussed here: the dump dwellers never acquire a voice and are (ironically) reduced to subjects of analysis of "positivistic" knowledge. They have no names or personal stories. They are there to be seen—not as individuals, but as an illustration of the deep

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inequality that affects Brazil. The film depicts those hungry bodies as passive by-products of the production-consumption chain. In this sense, hunger is not exclusively understood as the deprivation of food; it is a more complex phenomenon that pervades and defines the complete worldview—social role, daily habits, and aspirations—of those who endure it.

In his account of his encounters with hungry people around the world, Caparrós (2004) showed that hunger is the product of a lifestyle that is accepted as natural. In Niger, for instance, Caparrós met Aisha, a thirty-five-year-old woman who lived with her family in a small rural town. Their conversation took place just after Aisha, her mother, and her sister returned from a tragic trip to the city hospital: one of Aisha's sons had died as a result of malnutrition. The boy probably arrived at the hospital too late, when giving him food was not enough to save his life, because a prolonged diet of millet flour balls had slowly destroyed his body. Sitting in front of her house, Aisha answered one of Caparrós's questions: if you could ask a magician capable of granting your wishes for anything, what would you ask for? "I want a cow that gives me a lot of milk," she replies. "Then, if I sell some milk I can buy the ingredients to make donuts to sell in the market. With that much I would manage to survive." Caparrós responded, as if Aisha had not understood the question, "But what I am saying is that the magician can give you anything, whatever you want." "Really, anything?" she asked, surprised, and then replied: "Two cows? . . . With two I will never be hungry again" (10).

Furtado (2001) narrated a similar anecdote, which he originally intended to use as the final sequence of *Ilha das flores*. In the dump, he asked a girl what she thought about being forced to stand in line waiting for the pigs to finish, and then having to dig in the trash for some food while the pig keepers count down for five minutes: "I asked her: 'What would you like to change about this situation, what do you think should change?' And she replied: 'I

wish we had more time'" (15).[114] At this point, it is inevitable to ask what kind of oppression

has transformed those individuals into passive bodies that day after day wait to eat waste

rejected by pigs and wish for nothing more than additional time inside the fence. What kind of

freedom do they enjoy (if it is true that they are free, as the final words of the film suggest)?

Is that final reflection on freedom another ironic statement that reaffirms the oppression of the

dump dwellers?

The living conditions of the inhabitants of the Island of Flowers do not fit into a

traditional definition of freedom. In his reflection on freedom and the emergence of Nazism,

for instance, Erich Fromm (1994) distinguished between two notions of freedom: a negative

one ("freedom from"), defined as the emancipation from any restriction against one's will;

and a positive one ("freedom to"), defined as the capacity to use that emancipation to create

and promote the spontaneous realization of the self. Both notions converge in the same

assumption: freedom is the ability to make decisions according to one's desire (Lake and

Dagostino 2013). Based on this definition, Fromm explored the reasons behind the rise of

Nazism in Europe—that is, the motives that explain the voluntary submission of thousands of

people to an oppressive ideology. Why do men tend to accept oppression instead of fighting

for their emancipation? They are afraid of freedom, Fromm answered. Despite having been

liberated from the archaic bonds that determined his behavior in the past, modern man is

powerless and lives an isolated and helpless life. Modern man "has become free from the

external bonds that would prevent him from doing and thinking as he sees fit. He would be

free to act according to his own will, if he knew what he wanted, thought, and felt. But he

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[114] Furtado affirmed that he wanted to use that conversation as the end of the film, but he did not have the
necessary equipment to record direct sound.

does not know. He conforms to anonymous authorities and adopts a self which is not his"
(Fromm 1994, 254).

This distortion of the self, a consequence of ignoring humans' needs and desires, became the conceptual basis for one of the most influential theories of education in Brazil. Paulo Freire's ([1968] 2005) notion of critical pedagogy, formulated in the 1960s, was based on Fromm's diagnosis of a modern fear of freedom. According to Freire, the oppressed have internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines and prescriptions. That process of internalization explains the passive role of the oppressed, who seem to have accepted oppression as an ineluctable fact. By affirming that the main goal of pedagogy should be to make the oppressed reflect on the causes of their own oppression, Freire assumed that the fear of freedom that prevents them from acting is based on ignorance of such causes. In short, the oppressed passively accept their subordinate role in the production system because they do not understand the causes and conditions of their oppression. Marxist social theory explains that condition through the concept of alienation. According to Baudrillard (2004), in a society in which everything is a commodity, in which "everything alive or not alive . . . can be exchanged for money," as the film's narrator affirms, alienation is total. The consequence is that individuals are not able to perceive their true needs or to imagine another way of life. That total alienation results from the "irrationally systematic nature of this society," which covers all the spaces of freedom and governs individuals' entire lives through self-regulated and morally empty laws (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002, 120).

From that perspective, the hungry scavengers in *Ilha das flores* are not free, as the film suggests, but oppressed bodies afraid of affirming their freedom. Their passive acceptance of their marginal place is the result of a long process of oppression that has also resulted in the incorporation of the oppressor. Their hunger is a consequence of their deprivation of freedom,

of the impossibility of making autonomous decisions about their own lives. In this sense, the film is wrong in assuming that freedom is an essential feature of humans. Indeed, far from a given fact, Freire (2005) affirmed that "freedom is acquired by conquest. . . . It must be pursued constantly and responsibly" (47). The passive role of the hungry scavengers—the result of their fear of freedom—places them far from freedom.

Ilha das flores seems to suggest, however, that the dump dwellers are hungry *and* free, and that there is no contradiction between those terms. The marginalized inhabitants of the Island of Flowers are oppressed by the organization of the production system, which has relegated them to the lowest level of the food chain. Yet they are essentially free—unlike the pigs, who live in conditions of food security thanks to their owner, but cannot determine their own fate. I argue that the implicit question in the last sequence of the film is how theoretically free humans can be subjected to such oppressive conditions, instead of how those oppressive conditions result in a loss of freedom. A negative notion of freedom—as the autonomous development of will in the absence of oppression—seems to be inoperative in this context. Although the film refuses to provide a definition of freedom, it is clear that freedom is not the opposite of power (in the form of oppression).

Michel Foucault (2007) keenly showed that freedom is an active technology of government (and management) in capitalist societies, instead of the target of state repression. In precapitalist societies, the exercise of governance is based on disciplinary techniques that restrict the life of the masses through prohibition and normalization. Freedom is the subject of such restrictions, which aim to prevent acts of rebellion or transgression. Capitalism, in contrast, introduces an important variation: a positive mode of governance based on the promotion of freedom as a common telos. The new art of government of capitalism is not based on prohibitions and exclusions; instead, it is "carried out through and by reliance on

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freedom of each" (Foucault 2007, 49). As Ali Muhammad Rizvi (2012) affirmed, the lesson that emerges from Foucault's genealogy "is that capitalism is not essentially repressive; its positive principle is freedom not repression, inclusion not exclusion, maximization not minimization, diversity not singularity, etc." (502).

In a capitalist market, the way to manage goods is not to put limits on their circulation, but instead to increase their circulation as much as possible. In a similar way, in order to govern (manage) people, we must avoid putting limits on their will and desires and, in fact, actively promote those desires within the dynamics of circulation. Thus, instead of repressing individual will, capitalism has succeeded in managing the very production of desire, privileging production instead of repression. Capitalism operates as a desiring-production machine: "Everything is production: *production of productions*, of actions and of passions; *productions of recording processes*, of distributions and of coordinates that serve as points of reference; *production of consumptions*, of sensual pleasures, of anxieties, and of pain" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000, 4).

It is important to clarify, though, that the freedom promoted by capitalism is not a false freedom that overshadows and represses a true freedom waiting to be deployed. The notion of a false and illusory freedom is only operative within a negative approach to government techniques and power relationships. An illusion of freedom oppresses the real potential of individuals to deploy their true will and desire. In Foucault's description of capitalism, the problem is not, as Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) affirmed, that the marginalized are outsiders of the disciplinary apparatus, who reject (voluntarily or not) the false idea of a "formal freedom" that the system attempts to guarantee for everyone (120). Instead of a division between true and false liberty, Foucault identified the double nature of freedom: as government technique and as the possibility of resistance.

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I propose a similar interpretation of the final sequence of *Ilha das flores*. By discarding the division between true and false liberty, a possible reading of the sequence as an ironic critique against a false idea of freedom created by capitalism can be rejected as well. It is clear by the tone of the voiceover and the formal composition of the sequence that the final reflection on the problem of freedom is not an ironic description of the dump dwellers' oppressive conditions. In a previous sequence of the film, the narrator mentions freedom with clear ironic intentions: when he explains how Mrs. Anete earns money to buy food in the supermarket, the narrator defines profit as the difference between the money Mrs. Anete pays for the perfumes she sells and the money her buyers pay for the same perfumes. "Profit," the narrator explains, "was once forbidden to Catholics, but today all human beings are free to make it." There is a short pause as the narrator speaks the word *free* and the film shows an animated graphic of the term with two men (presumably workers) and a sun rising in the background. In the film's final sequence, however, the ironic tone seems to gradually disappear the more the narrator delves into the description of the living conditions in the Island of Flowers.

If there is no contradiction between hunger and freedom in the film, it is precisely because the marginalized are not depicted as oppressed subjects, forced to starve at the margins of modern society, but rather as an active part of the dynamics of production. Those marginalized scavengers are the product of the capitalist desiring machine. Their will and desire have been shaped by the necessities of the production machine, so they accept, with minimal indignation, their social and economic role. The hungry body is docile *because* it is free, governed (administered) through that freedom.

A different face of freedom emerges at the end of *Ilha das flores* with the inclusion of a line of poetry from Cecilia Meireles's collection of poems *Romanceiro da inconfidência*

(1965). That book reconstructs the history of the state of Minas Gerais from the beginning of colonization in the seventeenth century until the Minas Gerais Conspiracy, an unsuccessful separatist attempt at the end of the eighteenth century. The fragment used in the film is part of the poem "Romance XXIV or the Banner of Treason," in which Meireles narrated the rise of the conspiracy: "Freedom, albeit late, is heard around the table.[115] And the flag is already alive, and rises in the vast night. And its sad inventors are already defendants—because they dared to speak of freedom (that nobody knows what is)" (70). The fragment that Furtado included in the film is, therefore, part of an ode to the idea of independence from a colonial repressing power. Freedom, in this context, is connected to the possibility of imagining a radical transformation. It emerges as a regulative principle that guides human actions, in spite of a presaged failure. From this perspective, the final sequence of the film is not a simple corroboration of human freedom as a natural attribute (even in the case of those marginalized by capitalism), but rather an active call to freedom, seen as the realization of independence. Instead of an invitation to rebellion or the exacerbation of class struggle, the final sequence of the film is a radical affirmation of human equality.

In the end, rather than a statement about the social reality of the dump dwellers, *Ilha das flores* poses an open question about the absurd extremes of inequality. The film fails to explain the paradoxical condition of free but hungry humans who choose to dig in a dump for food. And that is precisely its intention: to fail. "That is the furthest I can go," Furtado (2001) explained, "that is all I can explain to you. What you do not know, if you have not understood so far. . . . Is there any difference? That is your problem, because I do not know how to explain that" (16). That limit, that paradox, is what the film makes visible.

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[115] In the original poem, the text is in Portuguese. This motto is part of the current flag of the state of Minas Gerais.

The passivity of the hungry bodies in *Ilha das flores* contrasts with their active role in *A marvada carne*. At first glance, the latter seems to portray a form of submission similar to the one that oppresses the dump's inhabitants: the construction of desiring bodies. Quim's meat hunger is a product of the market's dynamics disguised as an individual desire (autonomous will). In that sense, his irrepressible appetite illustrates the modern conditions of alienation in an unequal society of production. The end of the film, however, introduces a subtle turn that transforms Quim's passive role: consumption is transformed into an act of communitarian cohesion. After stealing the meat and fleeing through the streets of the big metropolis, Quim chooses to share the beef with his community in an open barbecue. His appetite no longer tends toward individual satisfaction; instead, it has been transformed into a vehicle to create community ties. That simple gesture can be interpreted as an inverse to the process of extreme commodification ironically described in *Ilha das flores*. From a metaphor of capitalist alienation, meat becomes a symbol of the common.

When does this change take place within the story? The transformation seems to occur precisely during the looting scene. While wandering the streets of the city, with no money or hopes of satisfying his hunger, Quim discovers an angry mass looting a supermarket. He had no intentions of arriving at that specific place, but he finds himself in the midst of the looting, as if in the middle of a public spectacle. At first he is astonished and passively contemplates the collective action: some men angrily empty the shelves, taking everything that fits in their hands; and an elderly woman seems to enjoy the collective chaos, frenetically filling her shopping cart while laughing. Others seem engaged in destroying the shop by pulling the shelves to the floor and breaking what is on hand. It is clear that the goal of the looting is not only the plundering of food and basic goods, but also the destruction of a symbol of capitalism and social inequality. After a few minutes contemplating the mob and facing his

object of desire, Quim joins the unsettled mass and takes the piece of beef. He is transformed by this simple action, acquiring an active role as the subject of desire.

Supermarket looting is a common practice in modern Latin American history, as testified to by the substantial number of academic texts on the subject analyzing different geographical contexts and periods.[116] Since the 1980s, several scholars have begun to study small uprisings as forms of resistance and social organization (Filguera 1985; Jelin 1985; Alvarez 1990), opposing the traditional literature on Latin American social movements produced during the 1960s and 1970s that focused on massive expressions of protest as revolutions or large-scale rebellions that explicitly defied state power (Serulnikov 1994). Most of these studies attempted to identify the motivations behind the looting, exposing a complex network of forces that led the masses to such radical actions: political interests (with the secret intervention of political parties), material necessities, antiestablishment ideologies, opportunism, and ongoing violence all composed the intricate scenario in which supermarket looting emerged as an act of protest.

In *A marvada carne,* however, the looting is not explained—maybe because this kind of action had become familiar in Brazilian urban centers during the 1980s. In the absence of a clear motivation, I propose an understanding of the looting as a means without end, following Slavoj Zizek's (2008) notion of divine violence:

> When those outside the structured social field strike "blindly,"
> demanding and enacting immediate justice/vengeance, this is divine
> violence. Recall, a decade or so ago, the panic in Rio de Janeiro when

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[116] It is not my intention to provide a comprehensive list of the main studies on the subject, but rather to illustrate the recurrence of the practice of looting through a short list of references. Among the academic texts on the subject of looting are an analysis of social struggles in Brazil in 2001 (Galvão et al. 2002); a report on the looting in Chile after the earthquake in 2010 (Grandón et al. 2014); a study of the series of looting episodes that took place in Rosario, Argentina, in 1989 (Dalla-Corte Caballero 2014); a consideration of the so-called *Caracazo* in Venezuela in 1989 (Vasquez Lezama 2012); and studies of the Andean conflict in countries like Bolivia and Ecuador (Ramírez 2005; Torres 2006).

> crowds descended from *favelas* into the rich part of the city and started
> looting and burning supermarkets. This was indeed divine violence. . . .
> They were like biblical locusts, the divine punishment for men's sinful
> ways. This divine violence strikes out of nowhere, a means without end
> (202).

As Zizek explained, that type of violence is not divine because it responds to a divine will or

authority; on the contrary, it is a decision made in the absence of any sovereign power, in

"absolute solitude." It is not planned, and it does not follow any rule or regulation. It is the

opposite of what Walter Benjamin called "mythic violence": a means to establish the rule of

law. Divine violence is the brutal intrusion of justice beyond law (Zizek 2008, 178). In this

context, justice does not mean a simple redistribution of food and goods, but rather the

establishment of a new comprehension of commonwealth. What matters is not the production

of a new (and temporal) division of the common as much as the questioning of the very

existence of such a distribution. That is the reason for the destruction that accompanies

looting: the looters' purpose is not the utilitarian goal of obtaining free food, but rather the

resistance to the familiarization and naturalization of certain comprehension and division of

the common.

From this perspective, hunger is not simply an immediate material need that finds

satisfaction in the desperate act of pillaging. Hunger is transformed into violence as a way of

opposing its own familiarization, the normalization of injustice. A looting mass refuses to

normalize hunger, to integrate it into ordinary life, to assimilate it as an explainable

phenomenon that defines our contemporary status quo. Only the divine violence of looting

can oppose the systemic violence of such normalization operated in the context of capitalism.

Looting transforms the hungry body into an active producer of dissensus. The marginalized,

the anonymous part of no-part, calls for a redefinition (not only a redistribution) of the common. That is the justice of divine violence.

To what extent does Quim participate in that redefinition of the common by joining in the supermarket looting? Quim does not take anything in the looting but the piece of beef, his object of desire. He does not destroy the store or help others to take off with food. He seems to take advantage of the situation only in order to satisfy his individual appetite. The stolen beef, however, is transformed into the catalyst for the emergence of a new community. Quim's actions, consciously or not, become a protest against the distribution of the common that determines who has access to certain goods and who does not. In this sense, he is not a simple symbol of total alienation (by the subordination of his individual desire to the logic of the market), but neither is he an emblem of rebellion against capitalism. Quim embodies a paradoxical condition that defines the very condition of marginalization: he is a product of the market (as a desire machine), not a remainder outside of it. But, at the same time, he has the power to crack its logic (not to escape from it) by questioning the distribution of the common that defines his very role as a marginalized citizen. Quim reveals a disturbing possibility for capitalism: hunger can be subversive.

5. The Cosmetics of Hunger and the Politics of Visibility

During the first weeks of October 2014, two weeks before the definitive polling that led to Dilma Rousseff's reelection as president of Brazil, her political campaign staff published a television commercial (part of a long series) that stressed one major achievement from her first term in office: the end of hunger. The thirty-second video is set in a photo lab, where a fictional photographer develops different pictures. The first shot shows a series of black-and-white photographs—a close-up of a man's weather-beaten face with a sorrowful expression, followed by a close-up of what seems to be a child's dusty feet wearing a pair of worn sandals and standing on a rough rock surface—while a voiceover states: "This was, for more than 500 years, the sad portrait of hunger in Brazil. But 12 years of commitment to the poorest radically transformed that situation." The image shifts to the photographer looking carefully at two color pictures depicting former president of Brazil Jose Inácio Lula da Silva and Rousseff interacting with poor people. The black-and-white portrait of the man's face appears again, this time submerged in a tray of chemicals; the image immediately begins to disappear, until the paper is completely white. As the other images in the lab suddenly vanish, leaving empty frames, the narrator proclaims, "Last month, the FAO, part of the UN, permanently removed our country from the hunger world map." Now the white paper that remained in the tray is appropriated by a new image: a full-color portrait of a smiling child with a pencil in his right hand. Multiple images of joyful children and families fill the empty frames within the lab, while the narrator stresses that this achievement was only possible thanks to "Lula and Dilma," who knew how to "change Brazil for the better."

This commercial replicates the official discourse about the policies of social development that became popular in the last decade, since former president Lula da Silva

established the fight against hunger as the main goal of his administration. In his inaugural

address in 2002, he affirmed: "If, at the end of my term, each Brazilian could eat three times a

day, I would have achieved the mission of my life" (quoted in Veiga Aranha 2010, 57).

In one of his first official acts as president, Lula implemented the program Fome Zero

[Zero Hunger]. This program focused on improving access to food, practices of family

agriculture, the generation of income, and general practices of social articulation,

mobilization, and control.[117] Together with other special and regional programs, Fome Zero

aimed at reducing the conditions of misery of the more than fifty-five million Brazilians who

experienced food insecurity at the beginning of the twenty-first century.[118] The official

emphasis on the issues of nutrition and food production positioned hunger at the center of the

national agenda and public debates. According to statistical data collected by the Instituto

Datafolha in April 2003, hunger was the second major concern of the Brazilian people

(behind only unemployment). The public's worry about the problem of hunger rose from six

percent in September 2002 to twenty-two percent in 2003 (Takagi 2010, 58).[119]

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[117] The program was created in 2001 by a multidisciplinary team at the Instituto Cidadania [Citizenship Institute], a nongovernmental organization directed by Luiz Inácio Lula. The organization produced a document that defined a new concept of food security and established it as a major priority for the country. The program was released in Brazil on October 12, 2001, in the context of the celebrations for the World Food Day.

[118] According to Ricardo Henriques (2003), in 2003 fifty-five million people in Brazil lived on half the minimum wage per capita. Among them, twenty-four million lived on less than one-quarter of the minimum wage, in conditions of extreme poverty. While ten percent of the population received fifty percent of the national income, the poorest population (fifty percent of the country) received just ten percent of the income. One in four Brazilians was subject to extreme food insecurity. Together with Fome Zero, Lula's government created a series of national programs to alleviate these conditions: the Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar [National Family Farming Strengthening Program], the Programa Nacional de Aquisição de Alimentos da Agricultura Familiar [National Food Acquisition Family Agriculture Program], the Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar [National School Feeding Program], the popular restaurants program, and several community kitchens.

[119] It is important to consider that the very definition of hunger at the basis of the Fome Zero program was a subject of discussion in Brazil, especially in the scientific community. Marília Coutinho and Márcio Lucatelli (2006) affirmed that the number of hungry people in Brazil promoted by the government—forty million—was a "cabalistic number," the product of measuring hunger by the income level of families (and, therefore, by the concept of food security) instead of by the number of low-weight individuals. Instead of food security, the authors explained that the criterion defining hunger should be the body mass index of adult individuals (3). From

Rousseff's advertisement seems to promote the end of the cycle that originated with

the Fome Zero program more than a decade earlier (the video explicitly identifies Rousseff as

part of a tradition initiated during Lula's first term). The video suggests that the centrality of

hunger as a public topic of discussion and as a main issue in the imagery of the nation has

come to an end as rates of hunger and undernourishment have been dramatically reduced—to

the point of having obtained official recognition from the United Nations. Thus, this short but

efficient video not only promotes the more than eighty percent reduction in the

undernourished population in Brazil (rhetorically called "the end of hunger"), but also depicts

the metaphorical disappearance of the images and representations of hunger in the country.

Apparently, as hunger came to an end, the entire gallery of images linked to that reality, one

that had been shaped for centuries, also evaporated. Although it is not completely clear what

composed that imaginary, it is obvious that it is something from the past, a black-and-white

image of suffering that literally vanishes and is replaced by colorful pictures of joy, using a

suggestive metaphor of technical development that can be applied to the fields of social and

economic relationships.

In this chapter, I am interested in that apparent disappearance of an imagery of hunger.

Rather than analyzing what specific images replaced the "sad portrait of hunger" and the

political implications of that discursive process of substitution (a common narrative strategy

in political advertisements), I explore the symbolic instant when the pictures vanished and a

new image emerged. I focus on the rhetorical creation of that white space, that empty frame,

which suggests the triumph over not only the material realities of hunger and

undernourishment in Brazil, but also their visibility. I am interested in the communal effort to

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that perspective, the problem of hunger would have been "almost under control" since 2003 (Coutinho and
Lucatelli 2006, 3).

create that white space, to make hunger visible both as a picture from the past and as an image that is slowly vanishing in front of our eyes.[120]

5.1   Invisibilities: The Rhetorical Construction of the "End of Hunger"

In 2004, after finishing a thirty-minute documentary about the conditions of food security in three states of Brazil, commissioned by the Conselho de Segurança Alimentar [Council of Food Security], Theresa Jessouroun initiated an independent project about the reality of hunger in the *sertão* in northeast Brazil.[121] The film, called *Vida severina*, was conceived as a road trip through the states of Maranhão, Piauí, and Paraíba, finishing in the favela Rocinha at Rio de Janeiro, where many northeastern migrants have settled over the past five decades.[122] Although Jessouroun was able to film most of the trip, the movie was never finished due to lack of sponsorship.[123] When asked about her failure to raise funds for editing the film, the filmmaker explained: "Nobody is interested in showing a documentary about hunger. People question me and ask why to focus on these and other problems like public

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[120] It is not my intention to suggest that an analysis of the specific images and discourses that replaced the imagery of hunger in Brazil is not relevant. I believe that a critical approach to the use of images as tools of political advertisement is always pertinent, and even urgent. In this chapter, however, I am interested in the process of the disappearance of that imagery, rather than in the new imagery that the government is trying to create in order to replace the original.

[121] The film *Por uma vida melhor* [For a better life] stresses the importance of food security policies in Brazil through a portrait of the conditions of hunger in three different states. It was produced as part of the project Formation of Social Actors in Food and Nutritional Security, funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

[122] The term *severina* is an adjective derived from the male name Severino. That was the name of the main character in João Cabral's novel *Morte e vida severina* (1955), in which the author portrayed the harsh and severe journey of a northeastern migrant in search of a better life in the south of Brazil. In a famous fragment of the novel, Severino affirms that, like him, there are several Severinos in the country, alluding to the poor conditions of the inhabitants of the northeast. In this sense, *severina* means a life of misery, hard work, and hardships.

[123] According to Jessouroun, she finished a working version of the film that lasted for seventy-five minutes, but she was never able to edit a definitive version. In 2010 Jessouroun finished a fifty-two-minute version for the television cultural channel SESC TV (personal communication, Dec. 9, 2014).

security in Brazil, for example, which they tell me they have overcome . . . who is going to leave the comfort of his/her home to watch a film on hunger?" (Jessouroun 2012, 7).

The film critic Carlos Alberto Mattos agreed with Jessouroun's description of a shared perception of hunger as an issue that had been overcome in Brazil. In his words, "the topic of hunger, if not totally overcome, at least is not within the most urgent issues for filmmakers, critics and public anymore" (Mattos 2014). This perception of hunger as a problem of the past seems to be confirmed by the reception that other recent films about the topic have received. After almost thirty years without producing a feature film, Rodolfo Nanni finished *O retorno* [The return] in 2008; this documentary film reenacts the trip to the northeast *sertão* that Nanni made in 1958, when he filmed *O drama das secas*.[124] The filmmaker's intention in *O retorno* was to find what had changed in the region, one traditionally affected by droughts and famine. The answer to this question came almost immediately: "Half century later, I do not find important transformations in the way the smallholders live." Thus, Nanni connected the images of misery and hunger that he had filmed fifty years before with the current reality of life in the northeast, attempting to condemn Brazil's stagnation and backwardness.

Yet several film critics criticized the images of hunger presented in *O retorno*. Mattos (2009) believed that Nanni only turned his camera toward the scenes that would prove his idea about the permanence of death, hunger, and misery in the region, and decided to ignore several improvements in the living conditions of the population achieved in the last decade (decrease in mortality rate, increase in income, and reduction of inequality). According to Eduardo Valente (2008), Nanni repeated the same formula of representation in *O retorno* that he successfully used in 1958, one that became familiar to the Brazilian public through films

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[124] The film is described in the first chapter of this dissertation as part of the reflection on Josué de Castro's ideas on hunger. See p. 23.

like Nelson Pereira dos Santos's 1962 *Vidas secas* [Barren lives]. As a consequence, *O retorno* offered what the public perceived as a familiar image of hunger, one repeatedly seen in different mediums. "It is a fact," Valente concluded, "that there is no audience for a product like *O Retorno*, at least not in the cinema theaters of Brazil today." That critical impression seemed to be confirmed by the low number of people who watched the film. According to the monthly reports produced by the Agencia Nacional do Cinema (ANCINE) [National Cinema Agency] and the Observátorio Brasileiro do Cinema e do Audiovisual [Brazilian Observatory of Cinema and Audiovisual], the film had twenty-six viewers in November 2008 and eighty-two in December 2008. During the first six months of 2009, the film had only 136 spectators.[125]

Even a film like *Garapa* (2009), directed by José Padilha, one of the most renowned filmmakers in Brazil, did not have a massive reception in the country. Two years before, in 2007, Padilha had attracted 2.4 million spectators to the theater with his first fictional feature film, *Tropa de elite* [Elite squad]. At the end of the year, it was the only Brazilian film in the box-office top ten films in Brazil.[126] In 2010 Padilha debuted *Tropa de elite 2*, breaking all the box-office records for a Brazilian film in the country; today it is still the most-watched film in the history of Brazil, with more than eleven million viewers. Between those two blockbusters, Padilha produced *Garapa*, a documentary film about hunger in the northeastern state of Ceará. The film was released in March 2009 and attracted just 4,698 viewers that year. Padhila implicitly accepted the low impact of the film—compared not only to his

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[125] The film was released at the end of Aug. 2008 in only two copies (*Revista de Cinema*, Aug. 2008); however, its viewership was not included in the reports for Sept. and Oct. 2008. It also did not appear in the report of the second semester of 2009, which suggests that it was not exhibited anymore at that point.

[126] The other nine were Hollywood productions, including *Spiderman 3* (6.1 million), *Shrek III* (4.7 million), *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (4.3 million), *Pirates of the Caribbean* (3.8 million), *Night at the Museum* (3 million), and *300* (2.7 million). *Tropa de elite* was in the seventh place, with 2.4 million spectators.

previous box-office successes, but also to other Brazilian films released the same year[127]—in

a number of interviews, in which he nonetheless defined *Garapa* as his most important film

and defended its power to raise awareness about a universal issue regardless of its

viewership.[128]

The lack of interest in representations of hunger has been connected to the efficacy of

the official propaganda surrounding the Fome Zero program. From the conception of the

program in 2003, Lula was very aware that the visibility of hunger was central to Fome

Zero's implementation and acceptance in Brazil. According to an article published in *Diãrio*

do grande ABC the following day, on October 23, 2002, while he was still a candidate, Lula

announced that one of his first acts as president would be to "put the ministers into a plane

and take them to see the hunger of the semi-arid Northeast." The *caravana da fome* (caravan

against hunger), as the government called it—or the *fometur* (hunger tour), as some critics

ironically labeled it—took place in the second week of January 2003 (nine days after Lula

took office); the president and the complete Cabinet visited the states of Piauí, Pernambuco,

and Minas Gerais over two days.

The trip was widely covered by the media and became a metaphor for the country's

new relationship with hunger. Symbolically, through the eyes of their leaders, who were

always escorted by cameras, the people of Brazil witnessed a reality that only a few had

directly experienced. Even before implementing any real action, Lula knew that the country

must "see the hunger"—not with scientific eyes hoping to create a diagnosis for a future

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[127] According to ANCINE, the most watched Brazilian film in 2009 was the romantic comedy *Se eu fosse você 2* [If I was you 2], which had more than six million viewers. The most watched Brazilian documentary was Cláudio Manoel's biography of the singer Wilson Simonal (*Simonal: Ninguém sabe o duro que dei*), which had 64,957 viewers.

[128] In an interview for the magazine *Slant*, for instance, Gary Kramer asked Padilha about his goal as a filmmaker. Padilha replied: "I make films in my heart. *Garapa* was a very important film for me, maybe the most important I ever shot. It's dear to me, regardless of how many people will see it" (Padilha 2011).

agenda, but with the eyes of someone who had not experienced the reality of hunger and was

awakening to its magnitude and severity. The *caravana da fome* clearly established a division

that became the basis for the promotional campaigns publicizing Fome Zero and that created a

new imagery of hunger: well-fed Brazilians were represented by ministers and government

officials (not by Lula, who always declared that he had endured hunger during his childhood);

the undernourished population of the northeast, marginalized and unseen, served as a symbol

of all the hungry in Brazil. This imagery harmonized with the slogan that the government

released in January 2003: "The Brazil that eats helping the Brazil that is hungry."[129]

The division between the well fed and the hungry was central to producing sympathy

in viewers and, therefore, encouraging donations and aid. The theory of publicity embraced

by Fome Zero was the same as that used by newspapers during the second half of the

nineteenth century to narrate massive famines: bring the suffering of the other to those who

had never experienced the condition of hunger. In this way, the hungry became visible as

objects of humanitarian intervention, as a problem that needed to be solved. Nourishment and

nutrition were made national priorities, while hunger was named Brazil's greatest enemy.[130]

That was the main idea that Lula (2003) defended in his inaugural speech, defining the

present as offering a definitive break with Brazil's past:

> Brazil experienced the wealth of the sugar cane mills and plantations
> in early colonial times, but it did not overcome hunger. It proclaimed
> its national independence and abolished slavery, but it did not
> overcome hunger. It experienced the wealth of gold deposits in Minas
> Gerais, and coffee production in the Paraíba Valley, but it did not
> overcome hunger. It became industrialized and forged a remarkable
> and diversified industrial park, but it did not overcome hunger. This

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[129] The original Portuguese slogan is "O Brasil que come ajudando o Brasil que tem fome."

[130] Fome Zero's television commercials metaphorically described the program as a war and invited the whole country to join the struggle: "This really is a war worth fighting. . . . It is a great challenge, but it was about time for the people to face this war, isn't it? Be involved." Thus, hunger was represented as a common enemy.

cannot continue. . . . That is why today I call: let's end hunger in our
country. Let's turn the end of hunger into a major national cause.

The communal nature of the quest to overcome hunger was also metaphorically
described in one of the first Fome Zero commercials, released in 2003. The national flag of
Brazil transforms into a plate of food: People of all ages and races, all wearing white, create a
huge flag in the middle of a green and sunny field. Sitting within a yellow rhombus on a green
background, the blue disc at the center of Brazil's flag, which depicts a starry sky, is
transformed into an enormous plate through the addition of a fork and knife. Hunger became
the core of the nation, occupying the center of a common symbol of Brazil's social and
economic issues.[131]

The new dynamics of the representation of hunger had, however, a paradoxical nature.
Hunger was placed at the center of a communal imagery, but it was made visible only with
the purpose of watching it disappear. The official campaigns to fight hunger initiated a
process that simultaneously created the conditions of visibility and invisibility of hunger
during the next years. From 2003 to 2010, the government implemented a series of articulated
policies in order to reduce poverty and eliminate hunger. The program Bolsa Família [Family
Allowance] was, in Lula's words, the flagship of more than twenty-one national projects that
covered "from the construction of water tanks in the most arid regions of the country, to the

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[131] That does not mean that former governments had not taken action against hunger and undernourishment in
previous decades. Several authors pointed out that, although Lula presented his program as a historical novelty,
there were precedents in the 1990s. According to Jarbas Passarinho, for instance, when President Fernando
Henrique Cardoso took office in 1995, he promised "to clear hunger and misery out of the map of Brazil" (n.d.,
5). In 1996 the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) updated the map of hunger that it had produced
three years before, celebrating a reduction from thirty-two million people in conditions of misery to twenty-one
million. What seems to have changed with Lula and the introduction of Fome Zero was the visibility of the
reality of hunger, and of the national policies that came to occupy a central place in the economic and social
development of the country.

improvement of school meals" (quoted in Chagas 2007, 6).[132] The implementation and results

of these programs were made available to the country through images presented in the mass

media and official numbers and data.[133]

Despite multiple critiques of the program, Brazil seemed to get used to thinking of

hunger as a problem that was being resolved, and therefore as a fading image.[134] According to

the website of Fome Zero, for instance, since 2006 there have been no papers published in the

media on the topic of hunger, and the focus of attention has turned toward the Bolsa Família

subprogram (Coutinho and Lucatelli 2006, 5).[135] In 2011, according to the IPEA (2011), only

six percent of the population considered hunger a national problem (compared to twenty-two

percent in 2003); instead, urban security and health occupied the first places among the

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[132] Bolsa Familia is a social welfare program that provides financial aid to poor families across the country. The program benefits all families with a per-capita monthly income below the poverty line ($140 BRL or $56 USD) by giving them a monthly stipend of $32 BRL ($13 USD) per child (children must attend school and be vaccinated), and $38 BRL ($15 USD) per youth. To families with a per-capita monthly income below the extreme poverty line ($70 BRL), the program gives $70 BRL per month. This aid is provided through special debit cards (Citizen Cards) mailed to each family (Veiga Aranha 2010).

[133] The official reports show that in 2010 Bolsa Familia covered more than fifty million people (a quarter of Brazil's population). According to the Ministry of Health, child malnutrition decreased 61.6% between 2003 and 2008. In 2013 Lula affirmed that thirty-six million people overcame poverty during the first ten years of the program (Lula 2013). The IPEA reported that while in 2003 the country was divided into two equal halves (46.8% under the poverty line, and 53.2% above that line), in 2010 more than 70% of the population was above the poverty line. Between 2001 and 2007, the annual growth rate of income for the poorest population was almost three times the national average (Tapajós and Abreu 2010).

[134] From the first months of implementation, the program faced multiple critiques focused on different concerns, from the very definition of hunger (that allowed the government to identify forty million hungry people in the country in the first place) to the mechanisms of distribution of aid and the program's inability to cover the entire population. In September 2005, for instance, the president of the Partido da frente liberal, Murilo Zauith, claimed that Fome Zero had completely failed because it was not reducing the rates of hunger and malnutrition in some rural regions of the country. He used as an example the deaths by malnutrition of several indigenous children in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul. According to Felipe Corral de Freitas (2011), the Partido da frente liberal insisted on labeling the program as an example of assistentialism that represented an excessive cost to the nation and was unsustainable in the long term. One of the most common critiques of Fome Zero was the promotion of the program as the symbolic center of the nation. Authors like Rosa Maria Marques and Áquilas Mendes (2006) labeled the program as an example of "new populism," used by Lula to build solid and trusting political support in order to remain in office. The Fundação Tarso Dutra published a booklet called *Fome de propaganda? Propaganda da fome?* [Hunger of propaganda? Propaganda of hunger?], suggesting that the government expended an excessive budget on advertising that could have been used for the program itself.

[135] While in 2003 there were fourteen papers on the topic of hunger, there were only seven in 2005 and none in 2006 (up to Mar.).

population's major concerns (22.3% and 23%). The release of the United Nations (UN) report

"The State of Food Insecurity in the World" in September 2014 seemed to bring Brazil's

process of overcoming hunger to a close, as the UN finally removed the country from the

World Hunger Map. The report not only recognized Brazil's effective reduction of poverty

and hunger, but it also used the country (together with other six nations) as a model to teach

important lessons to the world (FAO, IFAD, WFP 2014, 18). Those important achievements

are presented as the result of a process that began "when ending hunger was put at the center

of Brazil's political agenda" in 2003 (FAO, IFAD, WFP 2014, 23).

In spite of the optimistic discourse of the "end of hunger" promoted in institutional

commercials and by the UN, hunger has not completely disappeared in Brazil.[136] Nonetheless,

I am interested in the perception of end of hunger, in deciphering what images of hunger seem

to be disappearing from the communal imagery. I argue that the disappearance of images of

hunger (the most obvious symptom of which seems to be the lack of interest in

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[136] According to the Instituo Brasileiro de Geografía e Estatística (IBGE), [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics] more than seven million people still live in conditions of food insecurity in Brazil. During 2014 almost one-fifth of Brazilian families (22.6%) experienced some type of alimentary restriction; among them 3.2% experienced hunger. Most of those people live in rural areas, where food insecurity increased from 19.5% to 21.4% (while in urban areas it decreased from 4.6% to 2.8%). In the same year, for the first time in a decade, the national rate of extreme poverty increased from 3.6% to 4% (Spitz 2014). In addition to the problems of food production and distribution, several authors pointed out other issues connected to the consumption of water in different regions of the country. In 2014, for instance, the state of São Paulo, one of the wealthiest in Brazil, experienced a water supply crisis that threatens to worsen in the coming years. In a column published in *Folha de São Paulo* on Dec.17, 2014, Arlindo Falco Junior denounced the causes of the crisis. While the state government attributed the crisis to lack of rain, Falco Junior noted that in recent years only ten percent of the water supply has been used for human consumption, while seventy percent has been used for sugarcane crops. São Paulo is the world's largest producer of ethanol from sugarcane (more than half of the sugarcane harvest is used for biofuel), although it is not the only Brazilian state that increased the production of biofuel feedstock. Currently, Brazil and the United States account for the majority of global bioethanol production. Multiple organizations, like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank, have stated a direct relationship between rising food prices and the increasing biofuel crop production. Several authors dismantled the myth of biofuels as an eco-friendly, sustainable alternative to fossil fuels by showing the reckless exploitation of resources it implies (producing 1 liter of biofuels requires 2.5 liters of water). In 2007 Jean Ziegler, the UN Special Rapporteur on The Right to Food, affirmed that there was a direct connection between the increase in biofuel production and world hunger: "It is a crime against humanity to convert agriculturally productive soil into soil which produces foodstuffs that will be burned into [as] biofuel" ("UN Independent Rights," 2007). The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) published a report in 2013 warning about the consequences of biofuel production for global food security.

filming/watching films on the topic) implies the emergence of new forms and dynamics of visibility determined by the contemporary conditions of film production. I am interested in thinking about what the disappearance of an imagery of hunger means, what exactly disappears, and how the dynamics of visibility are transformed.

5.2   Cosmetics: New Images of Hunger

Beyond the few films mentioned earlier in this chapter that explicitly focus on hunger as a collective social problem, several contemporary Brazilian films address the phenomenon of hunger as part of their narrative construction. Multiple contemporary films highlight hunger as part of broader issues, especially poverty and violence. Indeed, far from disappearing, those topics still have a central place in Brazilian film production. According to Paula Diniz Lins (2009), between 1995 and 2006, ninety-two films released in Brazil included at least one character living in conditions of poverty. In several of these films, hunger is one of the many manifestations of characters' misery and marginal conditions. One of the fragments of the 2010 film *5X favela—Agora por nós mesmos* [5X favela—Now by ourselves], for instance, uses hunger as the hinge of the story. In the short film, *Rice and Beans*, a father, not knowing that his son is listening, complains about having to eat only rice and beans every day without any variation. In response to this statement, his son, Wesley, tries to earn some money in the streets of Rio de Janeiro to buy a chicken for his father's birthday. The story, however, does not focus on hunger—and even acquires a comic tone— diverting the viewer's attention from the poor living conditions of this family in the slums of Rio de Janeiro.

Something similar happens in Marcos Jorge's 2010 *Estômago* [Stomach], the story of Raimundo Nonato, an immigrant from the northeast who arrives in a big city looking for

opportunities to improve his life. The first sequence of the film shows Nonato arriving at the bus terminal and wandering in an urban environment that seems to be completely new to him. After passing several restaurants, and eagerly looking through their windows, he decides to stop at a small cafeteria, where he devours three snacks even though he knows that he does not have the money to pay for them. That desperate act, a by-product of hunger, is the trigger for events that eventually lead Nonato to a successful life as a cook. Hunger does not appear again in the film; instead, it becomes a story about abundance and food. Even in the sequences set in prison, where Nonato cooks for the top criminal, Bujiú, who controls the illegal entry of food into the jail, the story is not about hunger.

Authors like Ivana Bentes (2003), Esther Hamburger (2007), and Marta Peixoto (2007) analyzed the continuous presence of traditional spaces of exclusion, especially the *sertão* and the favela, in contemporary Brazilian cinema since the late 1990s. Far from having disappeared, these real and symbolic spaces—directly associated with stories of droughts, famines, and violence—have had a central role in recent cinema. What has changed, though, is the type of visibility these marginal spaces have, in comparison to their cinematic representations in the mid-twentieth century.

One of the most provocative analyses of these transformations is Bentes's critique of contemporary productions. In July 2001, she published a short article in the newspaper *Jornal do Brasil* that became a point of reference for the reflections on Brazilian cinema of the early 2000s. In the article, "'Cosmética da fome' marca o cinema do país," [Cosmetics of hunger marks national cinema] Bentes proposed an explicit comparison between the Cinema Novo movement of the 1960s and some contemporary films, including *Guerra de canudos* [War of canudos] (1997), *Central do Brasil* [Central station] (1998), and *Orfeu* (1999). From her perspective, these films and others constitute the so-called *retomada* [rebirth] of Brazilian

cinema at the end of the 1990s. The films promote a spectacular and exotic representation of poverty and hunger by depicting the marginal spaces of the *sertão* and the favelas through the lens of an international style that embellishes those social issues by rendering them easily consumable.[137]

The "cosmetics of hunger" that Bentes identified opposes Cinema Novo's aesthetics of hunger: while the latter questioned the colonial biases of European and American cinema that transformed the intolerable reality of hunger into the familiar categories of developed/underdeveloped or product/raw material, contemporary Brazilian cinema reduces the complexity of such realities by using the superfluous makeup of a globalized style (close to the language of video clips or advertisements). Bentes's "cosmetics" refers to a global language of entertainment and spectacle, while Cinema Novo's "aesthetics" names the reflexive depth of a political cinema committed to the construction of a local and national identity.[138]

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[137] Although he did not use the term *cosmetics*, the critic Gilberto Vasconcelos published an article criticizing Walter Salles's *Central do Brasil* in Feb. 1999 in the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*. Vasconcelos claimed that the film was an expression of the neoliberal and globalized standards dictated by Hollywood.

[138] Although Bentes did not provide a clear definition of *aesthetics* (in opposition to the notion of *cosmetics*), it is possible to understand this term in the same way that Glauber Rocha used it when he formulated his *Aesthetics of Hunger* in 1965. It is clear that Rocha did not inscribe himself within the modern aesthetic tradition (which had emerged in the mid-eighteenth century with Alexander Baumgarten) that defined aesthetics as the science of matters perceptible by the senses (*aisthêta*). Focused on sensation or feeling, modern aesthetics emerged as an attempt to understand our relationship to the beautiful. As Martin Heidegger (1991) affirmed, "Aesthetics is that kind of meditation on art in which humanity's state of feeling in relation to the beautiful represented in art is the point of departure and the goal that sets the standard for all its definitions and explanations" (78). The problem with the modern notion of aesthetics, according to Heidegger, is that it reduces art objects to express human subjects' experiences: the work of art is understood as an expression of an individual's life capable of producing intense experiences in viewers. In short, the modern notion of aesthetics reduces art to subjectivism. Opposing this notion, Heidegger defended the revolutionary dimension of art. Instead of being a subjective experience, art is capable of grounding history by embodying what is and what matters for a concrete historical community. In a similar sense, Rocha always connected aesthetics to revolution. In 1967 he published a short text called "A revolução é uma eztetyka" ["Revolution is an aesthetics"], in which he defended the practice of creation as a way to resist underdevelopment and colonialism. Aesthetics was not a philosophical theory on art (as Rocha affirmed in *Aesthetics of Dream* from 1970), but rather a revolutionary practice based on the reflection of the powers of art.

Ultimately, what Bentes was denouncing was the invisibility of hunger. From her perspective, although the subject had reemerged in recent productions, it had done so only as an object of spectacle that concealed the real conditions of marginalized communities in Brazil. There were films about hunger, but not a cinema of hunger—one that made hunger an aesthetic principle—like the one the 1960s had conceived. Thus, paradoxically, the new images of hunger did not imply a new form of visibility, but rather the distortion of an intolerable reality.

The release of Fernando Meirelles's 2002 *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] intensified this criticism. The film attracted 3.2 million spectators before being nominated for an Oscar in 2004, creating unprecedented discussion in Brazil. In the journal *Época*, for instance, Cléber Eduardo (2002) accused the film of narrating the realities of poverty and violence in the favelas from the perspective of a stranger, a foreigner who never delves into the real causes of such social issues. The result was, in his words, a story for hypnotized spectators eating popcorn. The basis of Eduardo's critique was the same one that Bentes had assumed to coin the phrase "cosmetics of hunger": an explicit comparison to Cinema Novo. He affirmed that *Cidade de Deus* was "a fashionable grandson, tattooed and full of piercings, of Nelson Pereira dos Santos's *Rio 40 Graus*."[139] This comparison to Cinema Novo and its images of the *sertão* became commonplace, almost a cliché, in contemporary film criticism. Edgardo Dieleke

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[139] According to Luiz Zanin Oricchio (2003), the discussion created recognizable factions: besides Bentes and Eduardo, other critics like Eduardo Souza de Lima (2002) and Alexandre Werneck (2002) published short articles criticizing the film in newspapers like *O Globo* and *Jornal do Brasil*. On the opposite side, authors like Ely Azeredo, Marcelo Coelho, Arnaldo Jabor, Carlos Alberto Mattos, and Matthew Shirts wrote texts defending some aspects of the film. Some months after the film was released, in Sept. 16–19, 2002, the Canal Brasil and the Paulista Association of Art Critics organized a public debate called "From Aesthetics to Cosmetics of Hunger" in São Paulo with the participation of Bentes and Meirelles, among other renowned filmmakers and intellectuals.

(2009) affirmed that this comparison is foundational to any discussion of the images of contemporary cinema in Brazil (69).

Cidade de Deus represented a new paradigm of production that illustrates a series of transformations that the film industry in Brazil experienced beginning in the early 1990s. The emergence of the notion of the cosmetics of hunger was directly connected to these changes. Several authors carefully described the multiple transformations of the context of production and circulation of Brazilian cinema that has taken place over the last decades, stressing the deep differences in comparison to the context of the 1960s and 1970s, when Cinema Novo reached its peak (Oricchio 2003; Butcher 2006; Gatti 2006; Azulay 2007; Sangion 2012; Labre de Oliveira 2013). In the early-1990s, the national film industry launched its most important transformation: President Collor de Mello ended the federal policy that ensured state financial support to national productions. Such a policy had been responsible for much of Brazilian film production since the 1930s, reaching its peak with the creation of the Instituto Nacional de Cine [National Film Institute] in 1966 and Embrafilme (Empresa Brasileira de Cinema) in 1969. Consistent with the broad shift toward neoliberalism, Collor de Mello's idea was to transfer the state's role as the sole source of financing to private industry through the promotion of tax incentives. Thus, policies like the Rouanet Law (originally passed in 1991 and revived in 1995) or the 1993 Audiovisual Law fostered the investment of private resources in national films in exchange for credit benefits and tax exemption. Randal Johnson (2005) affirmed that the main goal behind the implementation of that new model was to promote the connections between the film industry and the private

sector—to create a new production system based on market profitability, a self-sustainable film industry that did not depend on state subsidies.[140]

This new model had multiple consequences. The companies associated with the Motion Pictures Association (the trade association that represents the six major Hollywood studios) began to invest in national projects in the stages of production and distribution. Fifty-one films were produced following this model of coproduction between 1996 and 2003—among them, the most important box-office successes of the last two decades, including Hector Babenco's *Carandirú* (2003), which had more than four million viewers. Most of these films had an exclusive commercial character that, in some cases, came from their direct connection to television networks. The best examples are the children movies featuring the television star Xuxa and Renato Aragão's comedies, both from the TV Globo network. The connection between film production and the television industry strengthened during these years—not only for blockbusters, but also for the films of renowned filmmakers like Bruno Barreto, Carlos Diegues, and Sergio Resende.

The pinnacle of this new relationship was the 1998 foundation of Globo Filmes, a production company associated with the Globo Organizations, a media conglomerate that, at the end of the 1990s, owned the world's fourth largest open television network. The television industry, thus, provided films with both actors (ensuring an increase in box office traffic) and technical staff. In some cases, even directors (like Guel Arraes and Fernando Meirelles) came from the television and advertising industries. The incursion of Globo Filmes in the Brazilian film industry transformed the national production. Authors like Oricchio (2003) affirmed that

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[140] This goal is still far from being accomplished for a number of reasons, among them a structural failure in the conception of the incentives policy: this production system promotes production, but the circuits and dynamics of distribution remain untouched (Caetano et al. 2005). Thus, it was impossible for private interests to recover their investment in most of the films made during this period.

it was a historical turning point for Brazilian cinema: the so-called Pós-Retomada [post-rebirth]. In fact, Globo Filmes rapidly monopolized the audiovisual market in the early 2000s.[141]

Thus, in the last two decades, film production in Brazil has followed a free-market model, made possible by state policies that fostered the association among independent producers, the television industry, and international distribution companies (Johnson 2005, 27). This new industrial model has influenced and transformed the dynamics of film production as much as the aesthetic and narrative decisions made in the creation of movies, sometimes in direct and explicit ways. Carlos Eduardo Rodrigues, chief operating officer of Globo Filmes from 2002 to 2013, recognized in an interview in 2008 that the company intervened on the screenplays of the films it financed. Indeed, the filmmakers Arraes and Daniel Filho were hired as artistic consultants in order to "improve" scripts and choose a cast that best suited each project, making it economically viable and attractive to the public (Rodrigues 2008, 8).

The direct influence of the entertainment industry on the composition of films defined the context in which the notion of a cosmetics of hunger emerged. While Cinema Novo, thanks to its production autonomy (assured through state subsidies), stood out as a counter-discourse that opposed the images of hunger produced in traditional media, contemporary cinema is produced *within* the circuits of traditional media. According to authors like Bentes

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[141] In 2003 and 2004, for instance, the films produced or coproduced by Globo Filmes were responsible for ninety-two percent of the national film viewership in Brazil (Ballerini 2012). From 1998 to 2014, Globo Filmes produced 140 films with a total of more than 160 million spectators throughout the country (almost 84% of the total population of the country according to the 2010 census). Among the twenty most watched films in the country between 2000 and 2010, Globo Filmes participated in eighteen.

(2003), the result is the contamination of film aesthetics by the superficial monetary interests of the industry.

Some of the most influential names in contemporary Brazilian cinematic criticism and theory opposed the category of cosmetics and the definition of several contemporary productions as futile commodifications of poverty. Scholars like Ana Paula Sousa (2002), Paulo Jorge Ribeiro (2003), Dieleke (2009), and Sophia McClennen (2011) defended the aesthetic choices of contemporary cinema, which utilized advertisement and television language, precisely because those influences enabled films to establish a massive connection with the public (unprecedented in the history of Brazilian cinema) and to make visible phenomena that otherwise remained ignored.[142]

Following a similar argument, Randal Johnson (2006) and Jean-Claude Bernardet (2007a) both pointed out that the close connection between films and the public is vital—not only because it creates spaces of visibility that the cinema of the 1960s never achieved (in spite of its explicit intention to create a popular cinema), but also because it exposes the transformations of the context of production and reception in the first decades of the twenty-first century. The comparison between contemporary productions and Cinema Novo is, according to Johnson and Bernardet, anachronistic, as it assumes a romantic idealization of the militant cinema of the 1960s that prevents new comprehensions of political cinema from

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[142] Sousa (2002) affirmed, for instance, that the language of video clips, criticized by Bentes, is not a problem in itself; she wondered whether the dynamism and speed of contemporary visual languages should be condemned as incapable of presenting realities like hunger and misery. Ribeiro (2003) defended the formal decisions in *Cidade de Deus* by using the concept of an "aesthetics of brutalism" to separate the discussion on the violence in Rio de Janeiro from a repressive discursive regime, and to insert it into a more democratic, plural space. McClennen (2011) correctly pointed out that the notion of a cosmetics of hunger seems to create a polarization between the revolutionary aesthetics of Cinema Novo and the neoliberal aesthetics of Meirelles and the Retomada films. From her perspective, however, the problem is not choosing between one of those poles, but rather thinking "whether politically provocative cinema can also be successful at the box office and whether it can co-opt the language of Hollywood in order to make a film about important social issues" (104).

developing. Johnson (2005) affirmed, for instance, that critiques like Bentes's or Vasconcelos's "are symptomatic of a certain current within Brazilian film criticism (and among some independent filmmakers) who prefer ideological purity to successful communication with the audience, an attitude that contributes to the continued marginalization of Brazilian cinema in its own film market. In the 1970s, Carlos Diegues referred to such criticism as 'ideological patrols'" (33).

Fernando Mascarello (2003) proposed one of the most complete and rigorous critiques of the notion of cosmetics. From his perspective, the concept of a cosmetics of hunger reveals a fundamental flaw in the academic space in which it was created: the complete lack of studies on film reception in Brazilian universities. According to Mascarello, discrediting the films that achieved a massive attendance demonstrates an "elitist theoretical entrenchment" typical of the academy. This was evident not only in the academy's isolation from the opinions of the general audience, but also in its assumption of a canonization of taste, demonstrated through the radical separation between a modern, revolutionary high culture (symbolized by Cinema Novo) and a classical, industrial cinema characteristic of medium/low culture.[143]

The controversy over the cosmetics of hunger had a considerable impact in the field of cultural production in Brazil, and the phrase itself was also popularized in the following years, not only in academic production but also in more informal spaces like journalistic criticism and entertainment magazines. Influential authors like Ismail Xavier (2009) recognized the importance of the concept for the analysis of contemporary Brazilian cinema

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[143] Mascarello pointed out that the brief surveys given out after the screening of *Cidade de Deus* showed a totally different perception than that of the supporters of the cosmetics of hunger. The viewers' opinions suggested that the film had a strong ethical and political impact on them, and they massively approved of it.

but showed the limits of Bentes's approach. In their thorough review of Brazilian production

between 1995 and 2005, Daniel Caetano, Eduardo Valente, Luís Alberto Rocha, and Luiz

Carlos Oliveira Jr. (2005) included the debate on the notion of cosmetics as one of the most

relevant critical trends to develop during the second half of the decade (in spite of its

anachronistic comparisons to Cinema Novo). However, they also pointed out the decadence

of this concept, which was originally part of aesthetics debates but eventually led to a

"sociologia de almanaque" (34).[144] The journalist Isabela Boscov (2004) dismissed the

controversy as a "byzantine discussion" on the "supposed glamorization of national misery"

(80) and defended the importance of a film like *Cidade de Deus* for being at the same level of

quality of several Hollywood productions.[145] Eventually, the concept of the cosmetics of

hunger became a cliché that was mechanically applied to any contemporary film in order to

test its political and ethical commitment (Oricchio 2003, 222). As the critic José Geraldo

Couto (2002) affirmed, the cosmetics of hunger became a defensive and resentful slogan.

Probably because of this decadence, and in spite of the impact that the concept had in

the early 2000s, the debate on the cosmetics of hunger is perceived today as a discussion that

has already been exhausted in Brazil. The texts written in Portuguese on the topic have

decreased considerably since 2004, while several texts written in English have recovered the

notion in recent years.[146] The latter not only revise and propose new readings of the Retomada

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[144] This is a colloquial pejorative expression designating fake or amateurish knowledge on a specific topic. It can also be used as a translation for the English expression "armchair theorizing," which implies the creation of new developments in a field that do not involve collection of new primary information but only a synthesis of existing texts.

[145] Boscov (2004) proudly explained that at the 2004 Academy Awards ceremony, the filmmaker Fernando Meirelles competed with stars like Peter Jackson (the winner), Sofia Coppola, Clint Eastwood, and Peter Weir for the title of Best Director. Boscov exalted the film's four Oscar nominations as a major achievement in the history of Brazilian cinema.

[146] An interesting exception is Franthiesco Ballerini (2012), who reflected on Brazilian cinema in the twenty-first century. Ballerini noted that some films in the late 2000s explicitly and "blatantly" adopted a cosmetics of

films, but also apply the notion of cosmetics to other fields and issues of cultural

production.[147] In other Latin American countries, even though the term was not widely

appropriated, the the idea of the spectacle of hunger that it condensed is still relevant and

occupies a central place in several debates on the representation of the social and economic

realities of the region.[148] In Brazil, in contrast, the notion of the cosmetics of hunger is

associated with a precise period of film production: from 1992 to 2003. The triumph over the

hunger style—imitating films like *Central do Brasil*, *Cidade de Deus* and *Tropa de elite* [Elite squad]—in order to become blockbusters. That is the case for films about the favelas, including Antônio Carlos da Fontoura's 2006 *No meio da rua* [In the street] and Lúcia Murat's 2007 *Maré, nossa história de amor* [Maré, our love story]. Ballerini identified a "favelização" [favelization] of Brazilian cinema in the last decade (77).

[147] Emanuelle Oliveira (2008), Felicia Chan and Valentina Vitali (2010), McClennen (2011), and Rita Maeseneer (2014), among others, are good examples of the revisionist approach. Instead of comparing films like *Cidade de Deus* to Cinema Novo's productions, they used other contemporary films to demonstrate more successful ways of representing the realities of misery, hunger, and violence in Brazil. Oliveira (2008) compared the representations of the favelas in *Cidade de Deus* to the contemporary films Helvécio Ratton's 2002 *Uma onda no ar* [A wave in the air] and Ricardo Elias's 2003 *De passagem* [In passing]. From her perspective, *Cidade de Deus* was based on an "aesthetics of violence" that did not reflect the social and economic structures of inequality, and that stigmatized the social spaces of misery. Chan and Vitali (2010) compared *Cidade de Deus* to José Padilha's 2002 *Ônibus 174* [Bus 174] in order to show that Meirelles's film presents a sensationalist version of poverty under the rhetoric of a "true reality," which, at the end, is reduced to a plot suitable for universal consumption. Maeseneer (2014) offered a good example of the application of the concept to other contexts in Latin America. She appropriated the notion of cosmetics (and the comparison to Rocha's aesthetics of hunger) to criticize some Cuban films on the Special Period (period of economic crisis that began in 1989), like Fernando Pérez's *Suite Habana* (2003), for embellishing poverty and hunger.

[148] It is interesting to compare Brazil with other Latin American countries, where the realities of poverty and violence have had a central place in contemporary film production. In Colombia, for instance, the discussion of the transformation of those social issues into a spectacle for consumption began in the 1970s, when the filmmakers Luís Ospina and Carlos Mayolo coined the term *pornomiseria* to criticize a current trend in documentary production that distorted the politically committed cinema of the 1960s and transformed it into a genre that used misery as an exotic attraction for middle-class spectators eager for social commitment and fun. According to the Colombian filmmakers, those deformations "were leading Colombian cinema through a dangerous way since misery was presented as a spectacle among others, where the spectator was able to wash his/her guilty conscience, being affected, and calm down" (Ospina and Mayolo 2012). Far from being outdated, the term is still widely used to discuss representations of poverty and violence in the country. In 2010, for instance, a public debate on the aesthetization of misery arose after the release of Rubén Mendoza's *La sociedad del semáforo* [The spotlight society]. The term has even been appropriated in other contexts to reflect on the problem of the representation of misery. In 2014, for instance, the Bolivian essayist Guillermo Mariaca Iturri published a short text criticizing two award-winning pieces on the miserable conditions of mine workers in Bolivia: Ander Izagirre's article "The Mine as School," published in 2010 (which won three journalism awards in Spain), and Raúl de la Fuente's documentary film *Minerita* [Little miner], winner of a Goya Award in 2014. According to Mariaca Iturri (2014), while the article presents an accurate and lucid image of the reality of the miners, the film has "too many moments around misfortune." The filmmaker rejoiced in poverty and created a sensationalist picture of that harsh reality: "Porno-misery is now the tourism to territories of poverty. We contemplate it without explaining it. . . . Porno-misery has become a political drug that invades our consciousness and makes us addict to impotence and charity."

discussion of the cosmetics of hunger coincided with the process of consolidation of a state discourse according to which hunger was in the process of disappearing.

It is not my intention here to revive the debate in order to defend Bentes's perspective or to add another argument against the notion of cosmetics; instead, I want to point out a fundamental problem derived from her critique, which, from my perspective, has not been solved—in spite of the multiple attempts to overcome (and, sometimes, to discredit) the cosmetics of hunger.

Even though the most rigorous criticism of the implicit anachronism and elitism of the notion of the cosmetics of hunger rightly emphasized its failures, Bentes did point out an implicit problem in her critique that has remained unsolved: the representation of the intolerable. The central aim of Glauber Rocha's *Aesthetics of Hunger* (1965) was to question not only the invisibility of the reality of hunger in Brazil, but also the traditional representations of the phenomenon that was beginning to emerge thanks to the development of the nutritional sciences and the social humanitarianism of the previous decades. The concept of the aesthetics of hunger was not simply an attempt to show the conditions of misery in Brazil, but also a reflection on how to make visible that reality without adapting it to the language of science and humanitarianism, which reduced its complexity to familiar, commensurable, normalizing terms.

Through the notion of the cosmetics of hunger, Bentes (2007) attempted to stress the importance of reflection on the mechanisms of representation. The explicit comparison between contemporary films and Cinema Novo's aesthetics of hunger posed an essential question about the processes of representation: "How to show suffering and represent territories of poverty and the excluded, without falling into folklore, paternalism, and conformist and lacrimose (sic) humanism" (122). In other words, how do we avoid reducing

the intolerable reality of hunger into a familiar language? How do we make visible the intolerable without making it tolerable and appropriate for the pleasurable experience of the spectator? It is true that, as Bentes's opponents pointed out, the use of commercial language in contemporary films implied a broader visibility for the social issues of the marginalized communities in Brazil. However, it is still important to question whether those films created a reduction of the intolerable. Is it necessary to reduce the complexity of social phenomena to a familiar audiovisual language in order to create a close link with viewers? Is the cinema of cosmetics inevitably a reduction that translates an irreducible reality into a digestible and pleasing language?

This series of problems, however, is not exclusive to a concrete period in Brazilian cinema and is still relevant today, not only in Brazil but also in several other countries. Although Bentes's critique did not exclusively focus on the phenomenon of hunger, using the term as a broad metaphor to designate other issues like poverty and violence, I find the concept particularly useful in thinking about the problem of visibility of hunger in contemporary cinema. Thus, I propose a redefinition of the notion of cosmetics, one that moves beyond a simple opposition to the concept of aesthetics and defends the existence of a critical space within the contemporary processes of representation in which the intolerable becomes visible.

Beyond analyzing existing films, my interest is also in the potency of the concept of cosmetics for a cinema that, perhaps, is yet to come. As the Brazilian critic Luiz Carlos Merten (2003) affirmed, "It is quite possible that the Brazilian films of the so debased 'cosmetics of hunger,' with its sunrises and sunsets that still irritate some critics, have not yet produced excellent works." In this sense, I am interested in thinking about the possibilities for

film creation through a reflection on the contemporary production conditions of images of the intolerable.

5.3   The Power of the Artifice

Few terms seem to carry such a definitive pejorative consensus as the notion of cosmetics. From the use of perfumes and makeup in ancient Greece through contemporary cosmetic surgery, numerous authors have condemned the practices, discourses, and forms of perception associated with such a term. Plato (2008), for instance, included cosmetics—together with cookery, rhetoric, and sophistry—in a list of practices of flattery exclusively aimed to produce pleasure. These were, he believed, opposed to the four arts that nourish man's body and soul: medicine (opposed to cookery), justice (opposed to rhetoric), legislation (opposed to sophistry), and gymnastics (opposed to cosmetics). Plato, thus, discarded cosmetics as "knavish, false, ignoble, illiberal, working deceitfully by the help of lines, and colours, and enamels, and garments, and making men affect a spurious beauty to the neglect of the true beauty which is given by gymnastic" (465b). But far from a simple critique of a social practice, Plato's contempt for cosmetics was based in an ontological perspective on images in general. Rosalind Galt (2011) highlighted Plato's disdain for images, which he considered simple copies incapable of articulating philosophical reason, and, therefore, sources of deception. He saw images as empty appearances, cosmetic artifices with no connection to truth. His condemnation of poetry in Book X of *The Republic* is the most radical illustration of this perspective.

According to Jean-Luc Nancy (2005), the condemnation of images as imitative, secondary, lifeless productions (and, therefore, deceitful and weak) has been a central motif in Western thought, especially since an alliance between the principle of monotheism and the

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Greek criticism of artifice was forged. Thus, the comprehension of cosmetics that placed it in radical opposition to the notion of truth found its peak with the development of Christianity. The Church promoted the conviction that any kind of makeup destroyed the image of God present in women. Some priests and clergymen considered wearing makeup to be sufficient cause to expel women from their temples. During the Reformation, for instance, cosmetics was generally defined as idolatry of the flesh, associated with laziness and an aristocratic way of life. Multiple texts detailed the punishments that God would send to women who succumbed to the temptation of artifice (Gunn 1983).

At the end of the nineteenth century, the connection between laziness and cosmetics defended by the Church was reaffirmed by economic sciences. Thorstein Veblen, in his treaty *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), affirmed that the use of ornaments and makeup demonstrated the absence of labor and the ability to consume in abundance (Turner 2000, 384). During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the association among cosmetics, deception, and consumption (which would find paradigmatic expressions in cosmetology and, more recently, the boom in cosmetic surgery) continued.[149] This alliance, in Nancy's words, "is also the source of the mistrust toward images that continues unabated into our own time (and this in a culture that produces images in abundance), a mistrust that has, in its turn, produced a deep suspicion regarding 'appearances' or 'the spectacle'" (2005, 31).

The association of cosmetics, deception, and consumption was the basic assumption behind Bentes's critique of the cosmetics of hunger in Brazilian cinema. She believed that the cosmetics of hunger hid the true intolerable character of reality by artificially embellishing

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[149] According to a note published in *The Independent* on July 30, 2014, in Brazil more than 1.4 million cosmetic surgeries took place in 2013, placing Brazil's citizens among the top consumers of these kinds of procedures in the world.

certain realities through the imitation of an international style. In fact, such concealment or deformation had only one goal: the transformation of misery into a commodity that would produce pleasure for viewers who had no direct contact with the subject. This means, in turn, that pleasure numbed of any critical capacity. From that perspective, it makes sense to compare those contemporary films to Rocha's aesthetics of hunger and Cinema Novo's "commitment to truth" (as opposed to an industrial cinema that only presented "elaborated lies with the appearance of truths") (Rocha 2004, 65). All the pejorative meanings of the notion of cosmetics seem to assume the existence of a truth that is deformed, concealed by the artifice, one that can only be recaptured by overcoming simple representation. In the case of the reality of hunger, the existence of that truth seems to be indisputable: the bare and crude reality of the hungry, the misery and material scarcity that is the product of a complex network of political, economic, and social relationships. Cosmetic artifice deforms this truth through the production of empty images that take the form of commodities. In Bentes's words, this truth is the intolerable character of hunger, which would vanish and disappear as a consequence of the pleasures of cosmetics. That critique implies a fundamental prohibition, analogous to the religious proscription against makeup, which is considered a source of deceit and seduction: images of hunger must not seduce or produce pleasure; they must directly shock the perception of the viewer (Werneck 2003).[150]

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[150] A good example of this type of argument is Chan and Vitali's (2010) critique of *Cidade de Deus*. According to the authors, the film lacks of any self-reflexive dimension and therefore presents a pleasurable image of the favelas in Rio de Janeiro for a middle-class public that has no direct contact with that reality. The film's formal mechanisms act as a "narcotic" that numbs the spectator in the joyful contemplation of the *favelados* killing one another. Thus, *Cidade de Deus* does not push the spectator to indignation and, therefore, to a compulsion to act for social transformation (as a film like Padilha's *Tropa de elite* does). Chan and Vitali assumed that a shocking effect for the spectator is directly and necessarily connected to action (or at least to the will to act), while pleasure is linked to the numbing of any critical thought and, especially, any impulse to action.

The pejorative use of the notion of cosmetics in Brazilian cinema replicates a long tradition that, as Jacqueline Lichtenstein (1993) affirmed, defines cosmetics as an original defect and reiterates the certainty that "only what is insipid, odorless, and colorless may be said to be true, beautiful, and good" (42). Galt (2011) rigorously traced the inheritance of this tradition in the field of film studies, showing how an association between pretty images and lack of meaning is intertwined with the history of cinema: "The rhetoric of cinema has consistently denigrated surface decoration, finding the attractive skin of the screen to be false, shallow, feminine, or apolitical" (2). Galt mentioned Michel Chion's description of what he called a "neogaudy style of postclassical cinema" as a paradigmatic example of this trend: films that use a surface of color and glossy cinematography to replace engagement with the world itself (4). Binary opposition between image and reality was a main assumption in some classical film theories, like those of Louis Delluc and Sigfried Kracauer.

In Latin America, certain appropriations of Marxist film theory in the 1960s identified beautiful images and ornaments as an expression of the capitalist market. Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, for instance, followed some of Guy Debord's ideas on spectacle and defined consumer society by its capacity to veil reality behind a screen of appearances: "The image of reality is more important than reality itself. It is a world peopled with fantasies and phantoms in which what is hideous is clothed in beauty, while beauty is disguised as the hideous" (quoted in Galt 2011, 205). Thus, artifice was the essence of capitalism, which operates through the production of empty, alienated images that, in turn, alienate our perception of reality.

More recently, renowned authors like Beatriz Sarlo (1994), Carlos Monsiváis (2001), Jean Franco (2002), and Nelly Richard (2004) connected the narrative techniques of mass media to a culture of immediacy and condemned any cultural product that established bounds

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to the narrative and production models of the entertainment industry. Monsiváis (2001), for instance, condemned films like *Y tu mama también* [And your mother too] (2001) and *Amores perros* (2000) as paradigmatic examples of a superficial postmodern cinema that imitated the style of video clips and Quentin Tarantino's films. This rejection of mass culture implies an idealization of avant-garde aesthetics. Franco (2002) affirmed that films like *La historia oficial* [The official history] (1985) did not represent the complex nature of an event like the dictatorship in Argentina. In contrast, the avant-garde language of writers like Griselda Gambaro was an accurate medium to present such an event, to the extent that it interrupted the process of identification of the viewer (Podalsky 2011).

I propose a redefinition of the category of cosmetics in order to understand its political implications for the creation of new dynamics of visibility of hunger. In other words, I am interested in developing one of Galt's (2011) most provocative questions: "Can the pretty be put to critical, even political, use?" (6). In her elaborate response to this question, she analyzed the construction of the notion of Third Cinema in Latin America in the 1960s. Galt proposed an interpretation of the Third Cinema filmmakers that directly contradicts the main assumptions behind the concept of cosmetics of hunger: authors like Julio García Espinosa, Octavio Getino, Glauber Rocha, Jorge Sanjinés, and Fernando Solanas, although traditionally associated with a Marxist tradition that rejected any decorative function of film images, defended the idea of beauty as a revolutionary locus (208). As the basis of her argument, Galt used Sanjinés's comparison between revolutionary art and the collective creation of beautiful clothes in indigenous Andean communities. According to Sanjinés, for both the villagers and the revolutionary artists, beauty is not an objective, but a method through which to bring a whole community together to express its unique spirituality. The core of this argument is the comprehension of beauty as an integral part of local processes, as something culturally

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specific, instead of as a universal abstraction. The decorative patterns of the Andean textiles

are revolutionary because they affirm the singular conception of beauty as the product of an

entire people, opposed to a colonial, Eurocentric perspective. In the same way, the political

film "is well made, decorative, and attractive, and the worldview it expresses merges political

thought with aesthetic pleasure" (Galt 2011, 210). Thus, Galt affirmed, cinematic beauty can

perform an important communal function. Sanjinés's practice of a participatory and collective

cinema with the Ukamau Group is a paradigmatic example.[151]

The problem with that particular defense of the political potencies of a "pretty"

cinema is that it assumes that the local community practices of creation produce a different

idea of beauty, one separated from the elitist, abstract, Eurocentric concept that has influenced

cultural production in the Third World for centuries: a beauty that, as Sanjinés (1971)

affirmed, "imperialism attempts to destroy" (157). That other beauty assumes the existence of

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[151] This group was formed between 1962 and 1965, when Sanjinés began to work with Óscar Soria. In 1966 it took the name of its first film, *Ukamau*. Traditionally, Sanjinés, Soria, Antonio Equino, Ricardo Rada, and Alberto Villapando are recognized as the main figures of the group, which produced three main films in Bolivia from 1966 to 1971. From one film to the next, the group went through a strong process of redefinition based on its own reflections about the relationship between the filmmakers and the people (el pueblo). Sanjinés affirmed that after makings their second film, *The Blood of the Condor*, in 1969, the group members realized that they were still privileging their personal taste in the selection of shots without taking into account the needs of the spectators for whom they were making the film: "They [the viewers] needed the images, and complained later when the film was shown to them" (Pick 1993, 118). The filmmakers came to question the contradictions inherent to their attempt to document the reality of their indigenous countrymen (the group of privileged middle-class, white filmmakers produced its films at a time when only ten percent of the national population of Bolivia was not indigenous). For this reason, its third film, *The Courage of the People*, was based on a close discussion with the actual protagonists of the story. As Sanjinés recalled, "Many scenes were shot in the same place as the events discussed with the actual protagonists of those historical accounts we were reconstructing, with those who at bottom had more of a claim on deciding how things ought to be reconstructed than we did" (quoted in Martin 1997, 64). With this last long feature film, released in 1971, the Ukamau Group experienced a radically new relationship with its spectators (who were able to discuss the film in collective viewings as well as to intervene in its composition throughout the process of production) that other Latin American filmmakers only enunciate. Another similar example is the experience of Fernando Birri and the Instituto de Cinematografía de la Universidad Nacional del Litoral (also known as the School of Santa Fe) in Argentina with the production of the film *Tire dié* [Toss me a dime], created by Birri and 120 students of the school in one of the most interesting examples of collective cinema in Latin America. Birri offered a complete description of the experience of creating the film in his 2007 text *Soñar con los ojos abiertos* [Dreaming with open eyes].

a space untouched by the global dynamics of capitalism (the contemporary vehicle of colonialism), either a geographical place or an internal worldview. Several contemporary experiences of collective film production question that very assumption: what happens when the idea of local beauty that emerges in a collective film coincides with the universal style of global spectacle. Is it discarded as an example of cultural alienation in which the global has colonized the spaces of resistance of the local?

5x Favela: Agora por nós mesmos illustrates these problems. The film is a remake of the influential *Cinco vezes favela* [Five times favela], filmed in 1962 with the participation of five important directors: Miguel Borges, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, Carlos Diegues, Marcos Farias, and Leon Hirszman. The film was considered one of the main influences on the emergence of the Cinema Novo movement in the 1960s. The remake was produced by Carlos Diegues and directed by seven young filmmakers, residents of the Rio de Janeiro favelas (each of them in charge of one short). According to the film's official website, the film is the first in Brazilian history to be conceived, written, and directed by residents of the favelas. Far from an expression of a marginal style, the film, produced by Globo Filmes, follows the main composition principles of most Brazilian commercial cinema. Indeed, some of the filmmakers, like Luciana Bezerra and Luciano Vidigal, already had experience as writers, actors, and even directors in other films and television series. In this case, it was clear that a collective production that attempted to show the local reality of the favelas from the perspective of their inhabitants was, nonetheless, an industrial production.

Instead of interpreting this case as an example of alienation, one in which the economic interests of media conglomerates distort the perspective of local marginal communities, I follow Andreas Huyssen's (2003) analysis of contemporary commodification in order to understand the political dimension of contemporary cinema's connection to the

notion of spectacle. Reflecting on the recent emergence of memory as a key cultural and political concern in Western societies, Huyssen affirmed that today it is not possible to think of traumatic events, like the Holocaust, as serious ethical and political issues apart from their commodification in mass media. Even if the Holocaust has been endlessly commoditized and turned into spectacle, Huyssen noted, it does not mean that each commodification inevitably minimalizes its historical relevance. "There is no pure space outside of commodity culture, however much we may desire such a space," he concluded (19). Thus, the idea of another definition of beauty produced in a local space of community practices seems inoperative in a context in which the very notion of the local is produced through a series of global dynamics.[152] It is necessary, then, to think of the political potencies of a cosmetic cinema *within* the contemporary industrial spaces of commodification, instead of as an external other. It is crucial to understand how cinema can make visible the intolerable character of hunger within those spaces without assuming that, in order to represent the true reality of hunger, images must reject any connection to the superficial language of the culture of spectacle.

I argue that it is possible to think of the cosmetics of hunger as a type of image in which the intolerable is not the represented reality (hunger, in this case), but the very existence of images about that reality. The intolerable character of hunger today is not only the physical existence of misery and famine (which would be represented through a politically

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[152] Bentes's notion of cosmetics seems to yearn for that pure and real space that Huyssen identified. That is precisely why she reproached films like Diegues's *Orfeu* (1999), which, from her perspective, presented an image of the favelas in which the overwhelming presence of mass media left no room for a possible redemption of the characters (Bentes 2003). Something similar happened with her defense of the rapper MV Bill in the last section of her text. There she celebrated how marginal communities appropriated media language to produce their own cultural products. However, such "media militancy" is only acceptable when used as form of activism by individuals from "real territories" of poverty that, only later, became part of the media sphere. The separation between real territory and media images is the main assumption of the appropriation of media language; only people from real territories of poverty are able to appropriate the language of spectacle without falling into a superficial cosmetics of hunger.

committed cinema, as Bentes affirmed), but also the circulation of images that shape our comprehension of what we call hunger. Today the truth of hunger—its intolerable character—is tied to both material lack and the different ways in which that lack has been shaped as such through a series of representations and discourses. It is possible to interpret the notion of cosmetics of hunger as an attempt to make visible that intolerable reality through an affirmation of the artificial character of the image. In order to do so, however, it is necessary to define the notion of cosmetics outside the dichotomy between truth and appearance.

In 1863 the journal *Le figaro* published (in three installments) one of Charles Baudelaire's most popular texts: "The Painter of Modern Life." The essay, dedicated to the figure of Constantin Guys (without ever mentioning his name), includes a section called "In Praise of Cosmetics." There, Baudelaire, following his own definition of beauty as something that directly emanates from the aesthetic sensibility of a time, defended the importance of fashion and cosmetic practices as superior expressions of morality, reason, and the human soul. At the core of his defense, Baudelaire (1995) opposed an essential assumption that is the basis for all condemnations of cosmetics: there is a connection among beauty, nature, and truth. The French poet challenged his readers in order to demonstrate that no beautiful and morally good object is natural: "I ask you to review and scrutinize whatever is natural—all the actions and desires of the purely natural man: you will find nothing but frightfulness" (32). Baudelaire opposed the supernatural power of the artifice, believing that moral virtue, as well as beauty, is a product of reason, whose fundamental task is to redeem and reform nature by correcting its "crude, terrestrial and loathsome" essence (32). Thus, the artificial character of cosmetics allowed Baudelaire to define it as a sublime, positive deformation of nature.

I must stress that Baudelaire did not defend the idea of cosmetics as an imitation of nature, an artifice disguised as truth. He believed, on the contrary, that the importance of

cosmetics lies in making its artificial character evident. An apparent puerile element like rice powder, for instance, is praised for its ability to distance the wearer from natural human beauty and to bringing him or her closer to the divine:

> Anyone can see that the use of rice-powder, so stupidly anathematized by our Arcadian philosophers, is successfully designed to rid the complexion of those blemishes that Nature has outrageously strewn there, and thus to create an abstract unity in the colour and texture of the skin, a unity, which, like that produced by the tights of a dancer, immediately approximates the human being to the statue, that is to something superior and divine (Baudelaire 1995, 33).

For this reason, Baudelaire concluded, makeup should not be concealed; indeed, its significance lies in deploying its artificial character.

A few years later, Friedrich Nietzsche (2001) radicalized this defense of artifice by affirming that its worth does not simply lie in exhibiting itself as such but, especially, in making visible the artificial character of truth: "What is 'appearance' to me now! Certainly not the opposite of some essence. . . . To me, appearance is the active and living itself, which goes so far in its self-mockery that it makes me feel that here there is appearance and will-o'-the-wisp and dance of the spirits and nothing else" (63). From this perspective, the notion of cosmetics does not imply a seductive deception that distorts truth, but rather an artifice that, when presented as such, reveals the fictitious character of what we call truth.

In this sense, the notion of cosmetics does not designate the futile language of mass media, as opposed to the aesthetic depth of cinema; instead, it demonstrates the capacity of cinema to make evident the artifice of the representation. A cosmetic cinema is not one that imitates the formats and language of spectacle, but one that reflects on the artificiality of its

object and on itself as a medium.[153] I reflect on the consequences of this redefinition of the

notion of cosmetics in order to establish a critical reading of contemporary Brazilian cinema.

How are we to understand the cosmetics of hunger if instead of designating a fallacious

maquillage that conceals reality, it questions the very notion of reality? What are the

consequences of that affirmation of artifice for the visibility of the intolerable character of

hunger?

5.4   <u>Visibilities: From Images of the Intolerable to Intolerable Images</u>

Several authors identified a reflexive and critical approach to media discourses and

representations, including cinema itself, as one of the main elements that defined Brazilian

productions after 1994–95 (Xavier 2003; Caetano et al. 2005; Lins and Mesquita 2008).

Although some filmmakers were not engaged in raising questions of representation—and

simply followed established conventions in order to generate larger audiences—a series of

"low budget films concerned with self-expression and authorship" established a critical

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[153] Here the artificiality of object and medium are not rendered as a negative consequence of a process in which reality is replaced with empty symbols and signs. Jean Baudrillard popularized this perspective on the relationship between reality and signs through his concept of simulacra, coined in the 1980s. According to Baudrillard (1994), our time has not only erased any difference between reality and simulation, but also produced models of a reality without origin. We live in a hyperreality due to the overproduction of signs with no real meaning. Baudrillard called this contemporary saturation the precession of simulacra: "The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory" (1). According to Baudrillard, this inversion in which the simulacra precedes (and replaces) reality is what defines the postmodern era of late capitalism, when the distinction between reality and representation disappears (here Baudrillard assumed that there was a premodern period when representation depended on the existence of a real fact and could not exist separate from it). His perspective on this transformation was completely catastrophic: "Never again will the real have the chance to produce itself—such is the vital function of the model in a system of death, or rather of anticipated resurrection, that no longer even gives the event of death a chance" (3). My intention is not to denounce the excess of artifices, but rather to reflect on a kind of cinema that is capable of thinking of its own character as a medium and that, by doing so, reveals the artificiality of its objects. Instead of affirming that the real has been replaced by artifice, I propose that what we consider and understand as real is always the product of an artificial historical construction (not in an ontological sense, but in terms of discursive production). I am interested in the political dimension of artifice rather than in its ontological implications: how our reality is shaped through a series of discursive and representational procedures that define what is visible and what remains obscured.

interaction between film narrative genres and models of production (Xavier 2003, 42). For instance, Murillo Salles's 1996 *Como nascem os anjos* [How angels are born], Beto Brant's 1997 *Os matadores* [Belly up], Tata Amaral's 1997 *Um céu de estrelas* [A starry sky], Eduardo Coutinho's documentary *Babilônia 2000* (2001), and José Padilha's documentary *Ônibus 174* (2002) all question media representations of contemporary social reality without rejecting the aesthetic, narrative, and production models of the film industry.[154]

An interesting case is *Baile perfumado* [Perfumed Ball], directed by Lírio Ferreira and Paulo Caldas, which was released in 1996. The film focuses on the Lebanese photographer Benjamin Abrahão, the first person to film the *cangaceiros* of the Brazilian northeast—among them, the famous leader Lampião. The figure of the *cangaceiro* was incorporated into Brazilian popular culture—first through music and literature, and later through cinema, with important films like Lima Barreto's 1954 *O cangaceiro* [The cangaceiro] and Rocha's 1965 *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* [Black god, white devil]. *Baile perfumado*, however, introduced an important transformation in the representations of life in the *sertão* popularized by Cinema Novo. According to Xavier (2003), this film reflects a displacement from the isolated, autonomous, and allegorical space of Rocha's *sertão* to a space defined by a dynamics of total circulation (of objects, relationships, spaces, etc.).[155] The *sertão* in *Baile perfumado* is not a romantic place of resistance, but a space defined by the omnipresent

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[154] Authors like Robert Stam, João Luiz Vieira, and Xavier showed that a metacinema (or cinema of reflexivity) that reflected on its own representational character had already emerged in the 1980s. Films that foregrounded the filmmaker, the film's intertext, its textual procedures, or its reception or production were common during that decade (Johnson and Stam 1995, 396). However, as the authors recognized, there are several types of reflexivity, so it is necessary to understand what specific reflection on the processes of representation was introduced with the Retomada films.

[155] In Rocha's films, the *sertão* is isolated from the dynamics of market circulation in both a geographical sense (causing its condition of misery) and an allegorical and ideological sense: it is an autonomous space of resistance, outside of the system it attempts to oppose. The values that the characters Manuel and Rosa find in the *sertão* when they join the *cangaceiro* Corisco in *Deus e o diabo*, for instance, are completely different than the ones that ruled their previous life. That autonomy is precisely the essence of the *sertão* as a way of life.

exchange value of goods and commodities: Scotch whiskey, a camera, or the French perfume that Lampião used for the improvised balls that he and his army held in open fields. Within the dynamics of circulation and exchange, one element stands out over the others: images.

In the first scene of *Baile perfumado*, Lampião, dressed as an ordinary citizen, goes to a cinema with his girlfriend, Maria Bonita, portending the close connection to images that will be developed in the film. This Lampião radically contrasts with the ruthless bandit who, some scenes later, murders two of his enemies in cold blood. The Lampião who goes to the movies is the one who is fascinated with a movie camera and poses in front of it with his girlfriend and the rest of his gang. He is the same Lampião who becomes fascinated with the perfumes that the photographer Abrahão buys for him in the city and agrees to stage a "true *cangaceiro* attack" for the camera. This Lampião's personality becomes evident when Abrahão tries to convince him to be filmed. The photographer employs two arguments: the money they could earn with the movie, and the fame that it will bring to the *cangaceiro*. Lampião's main motivation is not to spread the revolutionary ideals of the group of *cangaceiros*, or to make its actions visible; instead, he wants fame and money just like any other mass pop culture figure. Lampião begins filming the next day.

Thus, *Baile perfumado* portrays a different Lampião than other traditional representations. The film distorts the usual image of the *cangaceiro* as a revolutionary bandit who is a product of social injustice, depicting him instead as a bourgeois gangster fascinated with the incipient process of modernization. The film does not attempt to show the true face of a historical figure; instead, it makes Lampião visible as the product of multiple circulation dynamics: the exchange of commodities, the production of images, and traditional representations of his character, which are present in the film in the form of archival images filmed by the real Abrahão in the 1930s. All of these elements converge to compose an

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artificial Lampião, a pop-culture icon. His identity is a combined image, a series of representations that become visible throughout the film.

According to Bentes (2007), the main problem of *Baile perfumado* is the fact that the *sertão* is transformed into a pop icon. The film, instead of proposing a new perspective on Brazilian identity, devotes itself to stylized images of the *sertão* that are part of an urban pop culture (246). I propose precisely the opposite: it is that implicit reflection on the artificial character of its object that distances *Baile perfumado* from the industrial cinema that only imitated formal and narrative models of commercial success. Bentes was correct when she affirmed that the film presents a pop reinterpretation of the classic *sertão*, but that does not imply a defense or mechanical capitulation to the principles of spectacle. It is clear that *Baile perfumado* is not an example of Brechtian cinema, reflecting on its own composition in order to create a distance effect in the spectator, like the Cinema Novo films of the 1960s.[156] It is possible, however, to interpret the film as part of a new trend in contemporary cinema that tends to make visible the construction of its object as the product of a series of dynamics of images circulation. While directors like Rocha opposed fake appearances of hunger by revealing an intolerable reality through images that dislocated the viewer's perception, films like *Baile perfumado* show that, today, that reality is shaped within the appearance of hunger as part of a unique and unified flow of images. Using Jacques Rancière's terms (2010), an important trend in Brazilian contemporary cinema does not produce images of an intolerable reality (hunger) in order to contrast them with the cosmetic artifices of the industry, but rather to expose how the current dynamics of circulation of images and discourses shape what

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[156] In contemporary Brazilian cinema, a film like Sergio Bianchi's *Cronicamente inviável* (2000) [Chronically unfeasible is close to that avant-garde self-reflexive cinema that makes visible its own artificial character through formal and narrative dislocations.

becomes visible as reality. The value of *Baile perfumado* lies, from this perspective, in revealing the contemporary iconographic character of a territory of poverty like the *sertão*.

Hamburger (2005) affirmed that this trend of reflecting on the artificial character of the represented object in contemporary cinema can be interpreted as a dispute for control over the representations of a series of territories and characters that remained invisible for the mass media during the previous decades (1980s and 1990s). Although this dispute is not exclusive to Brazilian cinema, Hamburger stated that in Brazil the struggle for representation is directly connected to the mechanisms of reproduction of social inequality. In this sense, any struggle against social divisions is a struggle for control of the representations of such divisions. I would like to appropriate (or, maybe, distort) Hamburger's concept in order to show that beyond a conflict for control of the representations (with the marginalized subjects on one side and the mass media on the other), some contemporary Brazilian cinema reveals this conflict as constitutive of such representations.

The film *Ônibus 174*, directed by Padilha in 2002, is an interesting example. It stages a struggle for visibility by revealing the artificial character of its own object. The documentary reconstructs the June 2000 hijacking of bus #174 in Rio de Janeiro by the homeless young man Sandro Rosa do Nascimento. Besides describing the events, the film explores Sandro's motives through a series of interviews with his family and friends, victims of the hijacking, and social workers. These testimonies alternate with images of the event that were broadcasted live on national television over more than four hours (including images from traffic cameras in the city). Although it is possible to interpret the filmmaker's intention as an attempt to contrast the interviews and the television images in order to reveal a new face of the event ignored by the media, the relationship between testimonies and archival images is more complex. The interviews with the hostages, social workers, and police officers alternate

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from the beginning with the testimonies of journalists and cameramen who covered the hijacking. Indeed, the presence of cameras was crucial in the development of the event, which evolved, like one interviewee suggests, as a spectacle rather than as a crisis of public order. Several testimonies even suggest that the outcome of the abduction would have been different without the permanent presence of cameras broadcasting the event to the entire country.

Sandro asked to be filmed while affirming the gravity of his threats. In order to intimidate the police, he compared the kidnapping with a film that he had watched on TV the night before: "I'm going to kill her. Like in the film about the plane that was on TV last night. It was great, wasn't it? I saw it all. I will do the same." Later he insisted: "Hey officer, didn't you watch this film? The guy threw her out of the plane. I'm not throwing her out. I'm going to make her kneel and shoot her when I feel like it." Some of the hostages narrate how Sandro seemed to adapt his behavior in the presence of cameras. He asked some of the women to cry and scream louder, and he even managed to stage the murder of one of them by pretending to shoot her while she was on the floor. As some of the interviewees suggest, for some moments it seemed that the only goal behind the hijacking was to gain visibility in a space that Sandro was able to control. Some days before, he had told to his adopted mother that she was going to see him on television: "He said that I would see him on TV, that he would be famous. I told him: 'I really hope so. I want you as a big success'."

By focusing on the media coverage of the hijacking, the documentary reflects on the role of images in the construction of events. The film shows that the hijacking became a protest against the social invisibility of marginal individuals like Sandro, who had lived surrounded by hunger, violence, and permanent exclusion. According to the sociologist Luis Eduardo, interviewed by Padilha for the film, the kidnapping was a medium to gain a kind of visibility that had always been denied to Sandro. Through that radical act, he redefined the

social narrative of marginalization and his own position in it. Padilha may have thought that he was revealing something that the mass media did not show in *Ônibus 174*, that he was giving Sandro the voice that the media had denied to him. The release of a suppressed voice, which assumes an opposition between the superficial nature of television images and the reflexive depth of cinema, is the most common interpretation of the film. In this sense, the documentary deconstructs the facade that the Brazilian media created around the event to reveal the true social conditions that influenced Sandro's desperate act (Hamburger 2005; Lins and Mesquita 2008; Fagioli 2010). Hamburger (2005), for instance, placed the film as part of a long tradition initiated in the 1980s that attempts to make visible the realities of marginal communities that have been systematically ignored by mass media, especially in Brazilian television.

Although the film provides a new social context for understanding an event as an isolated act of a perturbed individual, it does not confer Sandro with a new visibility. What the film shows, maybe beyond Padilha's intentions, is that Sandro only became visible within the same regime of visibility in which he always had a marginal place. As Dieleke (2009) explained, the film creates an uncomfortable place for the subaltern subject by contextualizing his violent actions. It therefore inevitably returns him to the place of nonsubject, outside of society and the demand for equality (77). Although Padilha denounced the fact that the television cameras only made Sandro visible as a mad criminal working against the social order, the film demonstrates how his very visibility depends on his marginal character. In spite of all the explanations and contextualization, Sandro remains a marginal character and only acquires visibility as such; the film never questions that type of visibility.

Padilha opposed the stereotype of the villain created by the media, but he reinserted Sandro into a melodramatic narrative structure that portrays him as a victim of social

inequality. When Sandro was five years old, he witnessed the murder of his mother in one of Rio's slums. This traumatic event changed him forever and led him to live on the streets, where he survived another violent atrocity: the murder of a group of homeless children by police officers. In spite of all these tragic events, Sandro enjoyed a period of tranquility while he was part of a capoeira school. However, his addictions led him to the streets again and, presumably, to hijack the bus as an act of protest against social violence (including the violence he had been a victim of).

Indirectly, *Ônibus 174* reveals the need not simply to unveil the intolerable reality of the social invisibility of marginalized subjects, but also to expose the existence of a universal regime of visibility in which the invisible marginal population only becomes visible because of its marginality. The film is part of that regime—maybe because it never doubts its own artificiality, never questions cinema itself.

Something similar to that failed attempt in *Ônibus 174* happens in Padilha's *Garapa* (2009), which focuses on the daily lives of three families in the northeast state of Ceará—on the presence of hunger in their lives and on the multiple problems that aggravate their condition. The title of the film refers to the habit of some mothers of families living in poverty to cook an infusion of water and sugar (called *garapa*) to feed their children and fool hunger (generating, obviously, serious nutritional problems). Padilha decided to film *Garapa* on 16mm black-and-white film with a handheld camera and no incidental music or evident compositional effects in response to the economic scarcity depicted in the story. Thus, Padilha (1999) expounded, the goal of the film was to show, not to explain, the phenomenon of hunger to those who have never experienced such a reality. For this purpose, he claimed to have assumed the point of view of the victims, of those who daily deal with hunger, by getting as close as possible to the ideals of the *cinéma vérité*. In short, *Garapa* aimed to give

voice to the hungry, to allow them to narrate their true reality and, therefore, to transform the perception and representation of hunger for others.

Although the film attempts to portray a concrete reality that has vanished (or, at least, is in the process of disappearing), it contradicts its objective since it does not question the regime of visibility in which that reality of hunger is invisible. The result is a familiar depiction of marginalized subjects, which has a predictable effect on the spectators (strikingly similar to the effect produced by the photographs of starving people created at the end of the nineteenth century).[157] Several reviews of the film (in both entertainment and academic journals) stressed the shock that it produced in the viewers, who seemed to learn, for the first time, that there was still hunger in Brazil. The shock, as expected, led to a deep indignation promoted by the viewers' new sympathy for the victim, and, in some cases, to criticism of the state for its inability to definitively alleviate hunger across the country.

My criticism of *Garapa*, besides its naive objective of showing the daily existence of hunger in the most "pure" way (in Padilha's words), is that it never questions the medium of representation. Padilha assumed that it was enough to place the camera in front of his subjects and record their daily actions in order to reveal the intolerable reality of hunger. However, he never questioned the use of cinema as the medium through which to show that phenomenon. As a consequence, *Garapa* familiarizes the intolerable to expected effect. In a review published in the cinema journal of the Universidade Federal da Bahía, Jessé Patrício (2012) described the film in very familiar terms:

> *Garapa* presents the suffering of people that do not lose faith in life, and
> that, despite the many adversities the world imposes, transform each day
> into a fight for survival. . . . The effect is a feeling of anguish and
> rebellion. Let us think of the courage of those people who, in the midst of

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[157] See chapter 1, pp. 34-35.

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such conditions, accept that their life is filmed with the hope that someone else notices the problems they face.

Thus, instead of producing a new visibility for the hungry families of the Brazilian northeast, *Garapa* creates a familiar representation that reaffirms the system in which they are already invisible. The hungry only become visible in the same way that they do in other media, thus producing the same effects of sympathy and indignation in viewers. Despite the inherent cruelty of the depicted reality, the middle-class urban spectators for whom the film was made were able to experience a comfortable anger, a pleasurable discomfort that reaffirmed their ideas about social injustice while their own social place remained unquestioned. Padilha attempted to oppose the invisibility of hunger without questioning the regime of visibility that defines its invisible character (and the role of cinema in such a regime).

The existence of that universal regime of visibility is what the filmmaker Eduardo Coutinho has attempted to demonstrate in his documentaries since the 1980s. Because he is one of the most influential figures in Brazilian cinema, Coutinho's films have been subject to multiple comments and reflections. Since the release of *Cabra marcado para morrer* [Man marked for death] in 1984, critics have stressed the self-reflective character of his documentary films. Instead of filming the real lives of actual people, Coutinho registers his encounters with them, presenting the result of the interaction between the filmmaker and the subjects. This demonstrates both an ethical commitment to show the place of the filmmaker in the image and an important revelation about the filmed subjects:

> In Brazil, at least eighty percent of the people in the big cities have been filmed, or have a friend or relative who has been filmed, or have seen someone being filmed. That is good actually, because some people have a romantic idea about this: "I am going to film in Ceará because people are pure there." That is a lie. You can go to the confines of Amazonia, and you will find Indians watching a soap opera (Coutinho et al. 2005, 119).

Today filmed subjects are no strangers to the production of images. That is why, rather than simply producing images of such individuals, Coutinho makes visible the result of the encounter between them and the camera, understood as a particular dynamic of representation. At the end, his films stage a game of representations about the subjects and about cinema itself.

The problem of the visibility of individuals living in conditions of marginality plays a central role in Coutinho's films. Roseli, one of the inhabitants of the favela in *Babilônia 2000* (2001), condenses this issue by questioning the motifs of the film. At first she thinks that the crew is filming a television show and graciously tells them that she is not going to appear on television while peeling potatoes. When the cameraman explains to her that it is a movie, she invites the crew into her parents' house and promptly questions their intentions again: "Please come on in, if you'd like to have a beer. No. . . . Where is it going to show? Wait a minute! This will be shown in the United States, there will be a contest. . . . I have to change clothes, improve my looks. Or is it poverty that you want?" This last question exposes the complex game of representation that the film makes visible. *Babilônia 2000* reveals the whole mechanism of the production of images and questions the roles of the characters and the crew behind the camera.

After a few minutes, Roseli asks again what the purpose of the film is: "But your film, explain to me about your film." The cameraman, repeating a memorized discourse, explains for the third time the goal of the movie: "It's a documentary about the turning of the millennium. We want to hear about what will change, what won't change." If Roseli repeats the question about the purpose of the film almost obsessively, it is not because she cannot understand the idea behind it, or because the camera is something new for her. As another

subject explains, the presence of shooting teams is common in the neighborhood (three or four every month, she says), so the community members are fully aware of the type of visibility they have in national and international mass media.[158] Roseli insists on knowing about the film because she wants to be sure about what role she is supposed to perform in front of the crew, of what specific representation the filmmaker is looking for. She is aware of the role that the favela inhabitants have traditionally played in the representations of marginality and is ready to perform that same role if necessary.

A similar situation occurs in Coutinho's *Boca de lixo* [The scavengers] (1993), in which he filmed a group of scavengers in a rubbish dump in São Gonçalo (twenty-four miles from Rio de Janeiro). Unlike Roseli, however, these marginal subjects are reluctant to be filmed. They hide their faces, run away from the camera, and directly confront the crew with hand gestures to communicate that they are not welcome. When Coutinho tries to initiate a conversation with Jurema, the woman who plays the most significant part in the film, she refuses to be filmed, saying: "I don't have anything to say." Coutinho decided to show this awkward part of the filming process (common in most documentary film production, but traditionally cut from the finished product) because he wanted to stress the relationship between the subjects and their own representations (incarnated here by the camera). The tension between the subjects and the crew demonstrates the scavengers' awareness of the negative image the media portrays and their resulting reluctance to participate in the construction of that stereotype (Da Cunha 2009). The film registers Coutinho's efforts to earn the scavengers' trust, beginning with him bringing them a series of photographs of themselves

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[158] In her 2003 article "A cinema of conversation—Eduardo Coutinho's *Santo Forte* and *Babilônia 2000*," Verônica Ferreira Dias enumerated the different films that had been shot in the favela Babilônia and the number of times that favela inhabitants had participated as performers in national films (117, n. 4).

(photocopied prints taken from the images he shot during his first visit to the dump). Instead of retreating from the filming until the subjects accepted his presence, Coutinho centered the negotiation on the very production of images.

Like *Ônibus 174*, Coutinho's films have traditionally been interpreted as an attempt to oppose the superficial representations of mass media (Lins 1996, 2004; Ferreira Dias 2003; Da Cunha 2009). Consuelo Lins (1996) described Coutinho's cinema as a "war of images" that opposes two conflicting logics of representation: "The scavengers are aware of the negative image that society has of them, the same that is shown in TV news, and they do not want to reinforce it; Coutinho wants to show that another image is possible" (52). Thus, Coutinho's films symbolize a victory in the war of representation, a process in which the filmmaker replaces the traditional stereotypes of marginality with "other" images that foster individual and collective inventions. From Lins's perspective, Coutinho's films force the spectator to watch images that we all perceive as phantoms that appear and disappear, due to the speed of television spectacle, at a slower pace (56). Ferreira (2003) affirmed that Coutinho's films let the subjects determine how they whish to be seen, and, therefore, they reveal the truth of those marginal people and spaces.[159]

Contrary to these traditional readings, I propose that Coutinho's films do not oppose the reflective depth of cinema to the superficiality of television images, but reveal a constitutive conflict that defines the visibility of the marginalized: a battle between the subjects' desire to achieve "other" visibility, and their tendency to repeat what is expected from them. Coutinho's films do not reveal the true face of the marginalized individuals behind the fake stereotypes of the mass media, but open the space for the creation of other

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[159] Ferreira (2003) quoted one of the *Babilônia 2000* , who declared to the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* a year after the shooting that the film showed "what a *favela* really is" (110).

fictions, as artificial as the ones produced by the spectacle industry, but, this time, produced by the represented subject.

Other films attempted to question traditional representations of the marginalized by giving them the voice to present their own reality. In 1986, for instance, Paulo Morelli, Marcelo Machado, and Renato Barbieri produced *Do outro lado de sua casa* [On the other side of your home], a documentary film about homeless people in São Paulo. The filmmakers rejected any condescending approach to their subjects, so they decided to give them the control of the conversations—to the point that one of the subjects begins to ask the questions and to guide the interviews. Coutinho, however, doubts the exercise of giving the voice to the represented subject, because he understands that any voice is an artifice. Giving voice to the subjects does not open a deeper truth about them, but opposes different fictions that are intertwined.

Da Cunha (2009) showed how traditional media representations of the marginalized in Coutinho's films affected their behavior, even when they knew that the filmmaker was interested in "other" kind of images. In *Boca de lixo*, in her first conversation in front of the camera, Jurema explains her reluctance to be filmed: "We don't pick this trash to eat! You write in your papers and people think we eat this. But we don't. That can't be . . . I'm angry with this: filming her father's basket of vegetables is disgusting. People see and think: 'That's what they eat.'" Just before Jurema's speech, however, the film shows scenes of different people eating food from the rubbish (later in the film, Jurema accepts that the dump scavengers "benefit" from the food that the supermarket truck takes to the dump). Rather than denying or undervaluing Jurema's words, these images reveal the artificiality of her discourse. Jurema is addressing that other who does not share the misery and hunger of the scavengers but has created a social imaginary around their reality. She wants to oppose the widespread

negative image of the scavengers, but she does not do it by showing their true living conditions; instead, she creates a fiction in which they are close to that "normal" other who does not eat junk.

A similar contradiction emerges in the testimonies of some of the favela inhabitants in *Babilônia 2000*. When asked if it is good to live in the favela, a child replies: "No, it's bad, because there are daily water cuts, just try this tap. But it's good to live up here" (Ferreira 2003, 108). In order to oppose the negative stereotype that exists around the favela, the interviewees exaggerate their praise about the neighborhood, even ignoring the multiple problems they face on a daily basis. They are not lying; they are composing a new fiction that they consider appropriate for the camera. Instead of opposing artificial media stereotypes with images of the true reality of favela residents, the film reveals a complex game of representations that composes the visibility of the marginalized.

The depth that cinema reveals is not something beyond the superficial nature of television, but rather the centrality of artifice in the dynamics of the visibility of the other. Coutinho's cinema questions our common regime of visibility (and the role of the marginalized within it) by showing the main contradictions that define it and opening a space *within* contemporary representations for the marginalized to produce new fictions about themselves. Coutinho deconstructs the spectacular artifice of cinema by giving the marginalized control over it. Instead of denying the artificial representations of media, he allows his subjects to produce their own artifices. In *Babilônia 2000*, Fátima, the widow of a drug dealer, asks for a minute to check her appearance: "It's not because we're poor that we are sloppy. . . . We must take care of our appearance. Appearance is fundamental to human life." This banal request condenses the position of Coutinho's cinema.

Coutinho's films are a paradigmatic example of a trend in Brazilian production that

emerged in the late 1980s, when media representations became a central subject for

cinema.[160] It was during those years that television began to show images of poverty and

violence in different regions of the country, after decades of ignoring the plight of

marginalized Brazilians in favor of an image of a clean, wealthy, healthy, and white country

(Lins and Mesquita 2008, 44). Television shows like *Aqui agora* [Here, now], created in

1991, inaugurated a decade during which television images were identified as journalistic

sensationalism.[161] During those years, cinema was still perceived as television's other, a space

to reflect on the spectacle and reduction of misery that television images presented. Since the

late 1990s and the so-called Retomada, however, television and cinema have been part of the

same model of production. As Orrichio (2003) affirmed, today it is not possible to think about

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[160] Other films, like Evaldo Mocarzel's *À margen da imagen* [On the margins of the image] from 2002 and *Jardim Ângela* from 2006, have addressed the issue of the representation of marginality. *À margen da imagen*, as the title suggests, reflects on the traditional representations of homeless people in mass media—particularly their marginalization in images—through a series of interviews conducted on the streets of São Paulo. The issue for these subjects is not that they have been ignored and left out of media images, but on the contrary, that they have been overexposed, using repetitive codes and language, and assigned a specific role in our distribution of the visible. In the very first interview of *À margen da imagen*, for instance, Sister Ivete, a nun in charge of a soup kitchen in São Paulo, narrates a confrontation with the famous Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado, who suddenly appeared in her house ready to take pictures of the homeless people that frequented the place. According to her, Salgado did not ask for permission or even talk to the people (he only showed a "permit" from the town hall) before he began taking pictures of the cooking process. Ivete and all the other people in the kitchen did not allow him to complete the pictures, and he had to leave the house while muttering and reminding them about his status as an international artist. According to Ivete, this anecdote shows how the marginalized have been exploited through images: they are assumed to be available subjects for the production of the representations of marginal realities that the middle classes eagerly consume. Following Coutinho's style of production, *À margen da imagen* attempts to avoid the exploitation of its subjects by openly showing the interaction between the film crew and the individuals being filmed (sometimes even showing that the interviews have been paid for). In a critical comment on the film, the Brazilian filmmaker Felipe Bragança (2002) stressed the risk of transforming Coutinho's approach to documentary film into a formula, resulting in a "formal moralism." According to Bragança and other critics like Rodrigo de Oliveira, *À margen da imagen* simply replicates Coutinho's approach to marginalized subjects by attempting to reveal the mechanism behind the image, as if that is enough to produce a critical approach to the visibility of homeless people in Brazil.
[161] According to Lins and Mesquita (2008), the television show boasted of depicting "life as it actually is" in the favelas and poor peripheral neighborhoods of São Paulo. By appropriating elements of the *cinéma verité* from the 1960s, it transformed misery into a media spectacle, always under the rhetoric of truth.

the problem of the representation of marginality assuming a conflicting relationship between cinema and other media and languages, like television and advertisements (226).

A group of contemporary filmmakers revealed the impossibility of thinking of certain social realities as ethical and political issues separate from the multiple modes of commodification and spectacularization of such realities. Authors like McClennen (2011) suggested that even blockbusters like *Cidade de Deus* can be interpreted as reflections on the spectacles of hunger and violence. She explained that there is an important difference between using visual effects in a film without any critical content, and using them as a means to create a commentary on concrete social issues. From her perspective, the non-realist composition of the film, instead of deceiving the spectator through an artificial image of the favelas, "opens up the question of hunger, or consumption, and of violence within an aesthetic that is both pleasurable and critical while also participating in a marketplace" (103).

It is within the contemporary conditions of production that the notion of cosmetics, understood as a self-reflexive artifice, acquires a political dimension. The pejorative use of the term "cosmetics of hunger" assumed a space outside the frivolous spectacle of the media and its representations of marginalized realities. Contemporary cinema, in contrast, emerged from the loss of that space. While the cinema of the 1960s attempted to produce images of the intolerable, contemporary cinema reveals that the very existence of images (understood as a regime of visibility) constitutes the intolerable. That is the power of a cosmetic cinema: to expose the regime of visibility that determines the representations of the other.

Today the intolerable lies in the imposition of a universal regime of visibility that covers all the spaces of the construction of reality, from the territories of misery (as shown by the omnipresence of the cameras in Carlos Diegues's *Orfeu* [1999]) to the aspirations of visibility for the marginalized (illustrated in the daydreams of the main character in Renato

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Falcão's 2002 *A festa de Margarette* [Margarette's feast], which was clearly influenced by advertisements). In this sense, making the intolerable character of phenomena like hunger visible does not mean presenting images that are *outside* of the industrial circuits of circulation of spectacle, but rather showing precisely how the circuits define the ways in which hunger becomes visible and, therefore, normalized. The images of hunger coexist with the experience of the hungry within the same space of production and signification. It is precisely the existence of this unified space that constitutes the intolerable today.

5.5   The Politics of Artifice

Based on the redefinition of the cosmetics of hunger as the possibility of exposing the existence of a unified regime of visibility through the composition of a self-reflexive artifice, it is possible to understand the political dimension of contemporary cinema in new terms. If Cinema Novo has always been recognized as a politically committed cinema (which defended the need for a social transformation through images that revealed the true face of hunger in Brazil), contemporary cinema may open the possibility of understanding the politics of images apart from any notion of truth. The political potency of the cosmetic lies in revealing the excesses, reductions, and violence of a regime of visibility that frames itself as global. The so-called international style in cinema, for instance, involves the homogenization of the practices of production and, with them, of the experience and modes of perception of the spectator—that is, it establishes a common regime of visibility that unceasingly repeats the distribution of the sensible through the apparently infinite multiplication of images.

I propose an understanding of cosmetics as the possibility of deconstructing the global, that is as any kind of attempt to expose the excesses of a global regime of visibility. That is the political dimension of the cosmetic artifice: instead of showing us the true image

of the real (a supposed local space that escapes from the global), it reveals the logics of circulation, the relationships of power, and the dynamics of invisibility that compose what we consider as real. The cosmetics of hunger reveals that the main issue for cinema today is not to find an autonomous language in order to make the singularity of an intolerable situation visible (in a local context), but rather to show that the intolerable today is the very existence of images of hunger and poverty within a global circuit of visibility—that is, the adaptation (and production) of phenomena like hunger to a universal regime of visibility. As Rancière (2010) affirmed, contemporary cinema has produced a shift from "the intolerable in the image to the intolerability of the image" (84).[162]

Far from being an unreflective concession to prevailing styles, the cosmetic may be understood as a way to resist power or oppose the dominant forms of visibility. Baudelaire (1995) suggested this political dimension of cosmetics when he opposed the figures of Louis XV and his lover, Madame du Barry. Baudelaire referenced a popular myth according to which Madame du Barry used lipstick every time she wanted to avoid receiving the king in her chamber. That simple gesture was enough to ward off the king, who, according to Baudelaire, deeply despised the artificiality of maquillage and had reached the point where he only enjoyed "simple nature" (123). Laura Mulvey (1996) suggested that, in a similar way, Cindy Sherman's frequent role transformations (made possible by cosmetic alterations) and

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[162] In this sense, the traditional interpretations of the images of hunger as mediums for the spectator to face the intolerable are insufficient for understanding the political character of contemporary cinema. Lins (2004), for instance, interpreted Coutinho's *Boca de lixo* as a direct portrait of hunger and misery that explicitly avoided any reduction that would have taken the spectator to a comfortable place through a possible happy ending. Instead, she affirmed, Coutinho produced a cruel image of the intolerable character of such realities without any solution or hopeful reduction: in the final sequence, after attending the projection of the film and watching themselves on the big screen, the characters return to their daily activities. The final shot of the film shows a boy walking through mountains of waste next to a vulture. Thus, according to Lins, "the spectator is forced to face a vision of Brazilian misery" (96). This interpretation, however, loses sight of the centrality of the image in the film. Beyond depicting the intolerable nature of the realities of hunger and marginality, Coutinho reflected on that very depiction, on the construction of the images of the intolerable.

even some of Madonna's concert performances reveal a use of maquillage as a strategy to destabilize any identity narrative imposed on female bodies (75). These artists' use of cosmetics to transform their appearance contrasts with figures like Marilyn Monroe, who, despite having changed her image and performed different roles, always maintained an instantly recognizable sign of identity.

As Dieleke (2009) suggested, the discussion about the uses and representations of hunger becomes political not because it uses (or does not use) the postmodern language of MTV or because it rejects an explanatory discourse (like the one featured in *Garapa*), but rather because "of the role given to the represented marginalized subjects" (79). Giving them a new visibility neither reaffirms their role as marginal (in order to denounce the injustice of our social system) nor rejects that role (in order to include them among the group of people who do not suffer from hunger or marginalization). The power of cinema is its ability to reveal the contradictions and excesses of the very visibility of the marginalized and, by doing so, to open a space of freedom in which to create new representations. Returning to the notion of the "war of representations" that Hamburger (2005) used to describe contemporary cinema, I argue that the political dimension of cinema consists of exposing the conflicts that define the visibility of the marginalized today.

To return to our original question, it is clear that—contrary to what Brazil's official propaganda has promoted over the last decade—hunger, and images of hunger, have not disappeared. While state campaigns insist on promoting hunger as a past phenomenon that is slowly vanishing in front of our eyes, cinema has transformed the very attempt to determine the visibility (and invisibility) of hunger into its object. In other words, contemporary Brazilian cinema does the official discourse on the end of hunger in order to demonstrate that hunger still exists in the country; instead, it reflects on the dynamics of visibility that have

shaped that perception of the "end of hunger." If something is disappearing today, it is a mode of visibility of hunger based on direct images of the material reality of the hungry. However, another form of visibility has emerged: a concern not for the intolerable object in itself, but for the modes of representation of that object and for exposing how those modes define the object. Thus, explicit images of hunger can disappear because filmmakers understand that today the problem is not simply producing direct images of the intolerable, but also reflecting on how the intolerable is shaped through a series of dynamics of visibility.

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VITA

NAME: Juan Carlos Arias Herrera

EDUCATION: B.A. Film and Television, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogota, Colombia, 2003.

B.A. Philosophy, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogota, Colombia, 2005.

M.A. Art History and Theory, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogota, Colombia, 2008.

Ph.D. Art History, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, 2015.

TEACHING: Assistant Professor (Full time). Department of Visual Arts, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogota, Colombia, 2008-2015.

Adjunct Professor. Department of Art History, Theory and Criticism, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2014.

Teaching Assistant. Department of Art History, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2011-2014.

Adjunct Professor. Department of Latin American and Latino Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2011-2015.

HONORS: Chancellor's Graduate Research Fellowship. University of Illinois at Chicago. 2013.

Fulbright Grant for Faculty Development for doctoral studies in the US. 2010-2012. Fulbright   Colombia. 2009.

M.A. fellowship for the best grade point average in B.A. studies. Universidad Nacional de Colombia.   School of Arts. 2004.

CONFERENCES: "Imágenes de lo real intolerable: examinando el paradigm documental del 'dar la voz'". Conference presented at the *16 Muestra Internacional de Documental de Bogotá*, October 14 – 16, Bogota, Colombia, 2014.

"Imágenes de lo inimaginable". Paper presented at the *Tercer*

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