



FIELD OF A MEMORY AND VISUALITY REGIMES: AN ANALYSIS OF THE DOCUMENTARY ÔNIBUS 174

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ABSTRACT

This present extract of the doctoral thesis *Field of a memory and regimes of visibility: the criminal subject in Youtube* (2019) analyzed the intersections between cinema and discursive social representations of violence in Brazil, through the analysis of the Brazilian documentary *Ônibus 174*. The theoretical and methodological basis was the philosophical notion of discourse and memory field, as taught by the philosopher Michel Foucault. The analysis showed that cinematographic production in Brazil, especially in the late 1990s and early 2000s, enabled the discussion and remembrance of violence in Brazil in the environment of favela, poverty conditions, drug trafficking relations and legal pluralism in the struggle for power against the State.

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INTRODUCTION

This essay aims to show some results of the doctoral thesis *Field of a memory and regimes of visibility: the criminal subject in Youtube* (2019). We study how the trajectory of Brazilian film productions that addresses crime and violence produces discursivity about the favela environment. This discursive production shapes the memory and the visibility about violence problems in Brazil. For instance, we study in this text the documentary *Ônibus 174*. Movies like this are well-known as *favela movies*. The documentary state of art points out some convergence and singularity by its aesthetics, such as scenes of crime and violence in low-income scenarios in the country. In the thesis, we used the word *favela-movie*. This nomenclature spread especially after the release of the movie *Cidade de Deus* (2002). Since then, this kind of Brazilian cinema gained international visibility. The dissemination of *Cidade de Deus* (2002) throughout the world consolidated several productions denominated by its critics and the media as *favela-movies*. It refers to movies that approaches the favela, the violence and the drug trafficking.

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First, we'll explain some concepts usually common in the memory field. The concept *discursive memory* was drawn by Foucault (2008), from the idea of a discursive statement. The second one comprises the forms of succession, correlation and rhetorical schemes of statements. When this statements works in its singularities, Foucault (2008) calls it a discourse. From the field's definition of a discursive statement, Foucault (2008) also comprises particular forms of coexistence: presence field, concomitance field and memory field. The formation of a memory field is understood through the subjects practices, the social practices, the forms of subjectivity and power relations in the present moment. This lines of flight sets up a priori in which affiliations are setted up with new statements. It is well-known that film production in Brazil, between the end of the 1990s and those subsequent to the 2000s, institutes a generation of movies that narrates life in the Brazilian favelas. When this occurs there is a mnemonic relation, according to Foucault, "between the statements that are neither admitted nor discussed, nor do they define, as a consequence, neither a body of truth nor a domain of validity, but in relation to which historical ties are established " (Foucault, 2008, 64). Prysthon (2012) argued that there is a clear concern with memory and history in cinema, perhaps as a nostalgic re-elaboration of discourses involving belonging and identity, such as the

difficulties of the backlands (*sertão*, a Brazilian region), violence in the favela, political crimes in urban centers, among others. According to the author, cinema is inclined to show the actions of the past. It is nostalgic and it emerges a more empathetic dialogue between tradition and modernity. Movies establish a dialogue that will presuppose a deconstruction of the very idea of nationality, from an eccentric cosmopolitanism. According to the author, "this cinema - identity - presents an attempt to rearticulate with tradition, and constantly affirms certain narratives of nation, but often seeks to subvert closed notions about identity" (Prythton, 2012, p.102). In Brazil, the growth of crime and violence in the peripheral scenarios mobilized the national cinematographic production in the 1990s and rescued mnemonic scenes until the present days. In the text *Violence and poverty in recent Brazilian cinema: reflections on the idea of spectacle*, Hamburger (2007) listed several Brazilian productions linked to the *favela-movie*: *Notícias de uma guerra particular* (1999), *Palace II* (2000), *Cidade de Deus* (2002), *O invasor* (2003), *Ônibus 174* (2003), *Cidade dos homens* (2003), *Meninos do tráfico* (2006), and also, most recent, *Tropa de Elite* (2007), *Era uma vez* (2008), *5x favela - agora por nós mesmos* (2010).

These are some examples of fictional works or documentaries that increased the visual presence of poor citizens, people of colour, slum dwellers and outskirts in Brazilian cinema and television. By bringing this universe to public attention, these films intensified and stimulated what Hamburger (2007) calls the dispute for control of visibility, by defining which subjects and characters have gained audiovisual expression, how and where they are consolidated and what strategic elements are used in the definition of contemporary order and / or disorder. In *Ônibus 174*, documentary film of 2003, produced by José Padilha and Marcos Prado, the reality of segregated spaces of the country were portrayed. The problems that arise from the segregation are evidenced in the narrative, such as police corruption, drugs, murders and state crises. Historically, cities memory production policies, especially cultural heritage promotion, have neglected the favelas and their residents, ignoring them regarding the city knowledge, but favela cinema has been and is a great tool for the preservation of this city memory. The visibility of the anti-romantic favela brought by *Ônibus 174*, as well as by several other films that narrates violence in Brazil from the favela spaces, creates a memory field that, on one hand, places the segregated space of poverty on the public policies, education, and inclusion agenda; and on the other hand, establishes stereotypes about life in the favela. The present essay, therefore, aims that the formation of a memory about the violence in Brazil occurred, among other reasons, from the subjectivation processes of the inhabitants of the favela shown in the *favela-movies* produced since the end of the 1990s. Those memories created in the social imaginary, in one side, segregated violence, a process of marginalization generated in the favelas, and in the other side, a more realistic image of the ineffectiveness of the State regarding the guarantee of fundamental human rights in poverty scenarios.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the thesis, we used as a theoretical and methodological support the archeology of Foucault, in order to understand that the objects, the concepts and the memory field only exist within a discontinuous historical analysis. From there, we investigate the narrative of violence in Brazil in the imagery or audiovisual field, especially in youtube movies and videos,

whose visibility involves poverty, spatial segregation - favela formation - drug trafficking and criminal practices. Besides, from this theoretical point of view, the research shows the concepts of: i - *the memory field*, in order to recognize a discourse about violence in Brazil; and ii - *visibility regimes*, with the objective of understanding the audiovisual profile of violence and the representation of the favela in films and videos. Thus, the methodology encompassed bibliographical research and documental investigation of Brazilian movies from the 1990s, that narrates about the formation of favelas in Brazil and the discursiveness of violence around them. Bibliographical research focused on primary sources of the legal field, philosophical and the interdisciplinary memory field and cinema studies. The *corpus* of the thesis was composed of three films - *favela movies* - and thirteen videos collected on the digital media Youtube. In the present essay, an extract was taken to demonstrate the results, and thus, the empirical study focused on an analysis of excerpts from the Brazilian documentary film *Ônibus 174*, released in 2002.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Firstly, the genre of the film in analysis - *Ônibus 174* - is documentary. It was produced by José Padilha and Marcos Prado, with the direction of the first, photograph by César Moraes and Marcelo Guru and edited by Felipe Lacerda. The documentary is based on real facts and shows a kidnapping that took place on June 12, 2000, by Sandro Rosa do Nascimento (21 years old), who, in the middle of that afternoon, took the passengers of a bus from line 174 - Gávea (in the city of Rio de Janeiro) - as hostages. Along with the kidnapping, the life story of the kidnapper is shown in the film. Son of an unknown father, still a child, with only 6 years old, he went to the streets after witnessing the cruel murder of the mother. Through the testimonies of some street children, relatives or acquaintances of Sandro and the comments of the anthropologist Luís Eduardo Soares, the documentary narrates the sad and short story of the young man.

The author of the crime, Sandro, was almost an indigent, relegated to the margins of society. In addition to the death of his mother in 1993, he survived the slaughter of Candelaria, when he witnessed comrades being killed by military police. Most of the images in the film shows the kidnapping and police actions in their effort to make Sandro surrender and negotiates the release of the 11 hostages. During the 4 hours and 20 minutes of the duration of the crime, eight people were released. In the documentary, at 27 minutes and 19 seconds minutes of the narrative, Sandro forces a hostage to write with a lipstick in the bus window "he will kill everyone at 6 o'clock". At 6 pm, Sandro gives the first shot inside the bus. A lot of television stations, radio and printed newspapers sent teams to follow the operation. A large number of onlookers also stayed on site to await the situation outcome. The negotiations have not progressed. At 6:50 pm, Sandro decided, by his own, to leave the bus, taking the hostage, Geisa Firmino Gonçalves, as a shield. A police officer from the Special Operations Battalion (BOPE), who was hiding on the side of the bus, decided to execute Sandro, but missed the shot and hit Geisa. Another policeman tried to take Sandro's gun, which fired three more times at the back of the hostage. Immobilized, Sandro was taken to the military police van and killed by suffocation. Geisa did not resist the wounds and passed away. According to Valadares (2010), the transmission of the kidnapping began the novelization of the fact. Sandro was

clearly stereotyped as the standard bandit and villain. Seen from this perspective, Sandro's action would have no other motive than pure evil. Valadares (2010) comments that the media coverage was engaged in a certain discursive formation in which Sandro's criminal motivations would have no connection to his social condition and he would be attacking society only by cruelty. Thus, the control procedures of a portion of society are clear in the report of the fact made by the media. The mediatic narrative treats Sandro as a misfit and not as an excluded, exempting from guilt the part of society that does not see the consequences of social inequality. Sandro was excluded from the ideal society, and in the words of the anthropologist Luís Eduardo Soares (documentary narrator): "Television allowed him to feel powerful ... Sandro imposed his visibility, he was then a character from another narrative (...) He reversed the narrative, since now he was the protagonist. He reaffirmed his social existence and had the small glory of being recognized". In the end, Sandro's death turned out to be an acceptable and even desirable outcome to society for the uncomfortable exposure of the consequences of social exclusion. The Brazilian Constitution establishes in article 6 that social rights are the education, health, work, housing, leisure, security, social security, maternity and childhood protection and assistance to the homeless. In the documentary, it is clear that these rights were never given to Sandro, and that their fate was sealed by the living conditions and environment of the favela and the processes of marginalization. Based on the notion of memory field, it is understood that the visuality of *Ônibus 174* - and other *favela movies* - updates a discourse about violence in Brazil, in addition to showing how true and acceptable is the story of people from the favelas, doomed to crime, victim of the neglect of the state and villain of a cruel and arbitrary violence network. In this relationship between cinema and discursivity of violence, legal relations appears in a legal pluralism and in the struggle over power.

Conclusion

From the Brazilian cinema of the late twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is possible to understand how and why the audience's view of these films

converged towards spaces of territorial segregation in the country, and how violence was delimited in new discourses. The representation of favelas and outskirts, the streets of large Brazilian cities and prisons shows, especially in *Ônibus 174*, a complex view of the social, economic and political context lived in Brazil at the same time. Also, the historical conditions of production of the documentary brought to analysis burst from a visuality of denunciation to social inequality to the lack of public policies to combat violence and drug trafficking in relation to an aesthetic realism, without romanticizing anti-heroes of the favela. Although the visuality generated from several favela movies cited revealed social, economic and cultural problems in Brazil, in the eyes of the great population, the memory field around the favela's image appropriation showed a country "out" (inert) and "within" the segregated spaces, the last being conditioned to violence, started out by the poor and black men. Thus an imaginary truth about the favela in Brazil is drawn - that is much more justified in the violence of its members than in the neglect of the State with the historical territorial problems of housing, income distribution and drug trafficking.

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