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Documenting Tensions in Communities: Three Films by Eduardo Coutinho

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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December 2013

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## ABSTRACT

Documenting Tensions in Communities: Three Films by Eduardo Coutinho

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This project analyzes three documentaries that explore the inherent tensions and difficulties in building a sense of community in three different settings in Rio de Janeiro. The documentaries *Boca de Lixo* (1993), *Santo forte* (1999), and *Edifício Master* (2002) by Eduardo Coutinho present an in-depth look at the tensions inherent in developing communal identity based on vocation in *Boca de Lixo*, religion in *Santo forte*, and location in *Edifício Master*.

Through these documentaries, Eduardo Coutinho presents the difficulties faced by different groups of people in Brazil as they explore the development of a sense of community. *Boca de Lixo* endeavors to understand the tension between using a sense of community to bolster one's self-respect and personal pride in the face of perceived outsider contempt. *Santo forte* addresses the problems associated with establishing a sense of community in a favela that contains various different religious traditions, each vying for more members at the cost of the others. *Edifício Master* focuses on the difficulties of developing a sense of community within an apartment building in Copacabana, and in this film Coutinho explores the power of storytelling as an alternative method for creating communal identity. Together these three films examine the resiliency of the human spirit while challenging various forms of prejudice and stereotypes within Brazilian culture.

Keywords: Eduardo Coutinho, community, identity, stereotypes, prejudice, *Boca de Lixo*, *Santo forte*, *Edifício Master*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I must thank my wife for her countless hours of love, support and assistance as I completed this project – I could not have done it without her. I am very grateful for the many hours of assistance and counsel provided by Dr. Rex P. Nielson, thank you for introducing me to Eduardo Coutinho. I also wish to thank Dr. James R. Krause and Dr. Douglas J. Weatherford for their patience, assistance, and advice as I worked through this project. Thanks to Dr. Vanessa C. Fitzgibbon who opened for me the world of Brazilian cinema. Finally, thank you to those in the department that have helped me through this program, I appreciate all your support and guidance.

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## Introduction

Towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, Realism entered the literary scene in Brazil as the predominant aesthetic. As the antithesis of Romanticism, Realism in Brazil endeavored to “buscar o máximo de objetividade na fotografia da realidade concreta, e [. . .] preconizava como realidade objetiva não a aparência, mas a essência, dos seres e das coisas” (Moisés 231). Realist authors paid close attention to the details in their works without trying to hide the heavier things of life. Their novels often emphasized the development of their characters as a function of larger social and political forces.

Although the literary period of Realism has passed, the desire to represent reality as authentically as possible has continued throughout Brazilian literature. One sees examples of this continuity throughout the history of Brazilian literature and film, from Bento’s inclusion of episodes that cast him in both good and bad lights in Machado de Assis’s primary work *Dom Casmurro* (1899) and Cao Hamburger’s *O Ano em que Meus Pais Saíram de Férias* (2006) chronicling the difficult reality of a young boy waiting for the return of his parents who had fled the military dictatorship to the documentaries of Eduardo Coutinho who strives to document the authentic reality he finds around him.

Recognized by many as being the “mais influente realizador [de documentários] em atividade” (Labaki 77), Eduardo Coutinho, born on 11 May 1933 in São Paulo, has had a long and productive career in Brazilian media. In 1957, Coutinho traveled to Europe after winning \$2000 USD for correctly answering questions about Charles Chaplin in the television quiz show, *O Dobro ou Nada* (Mattos 87). Accepted to the prestigious Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques in Paris, he graduated in 1960 and returned to Brazil (Sayad, “Self-Staging Auteurs” 235). Beginning his career in Brazilian film in 1962, he has since directed seventeen

films (including thirteen documentaries), written fourteen, acted in seven films, produced three, and also worked as a filmmaker, composer, and production manager for three films (“Eduardo Coutinho” [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)).

Although he graduated from a prestigious film school, Coutinho considers his time at the Globo television network as having truly been his “documentary school” (Sayad, “Self-Staging Auteurs” 235). He spent nine years as a member of the Globo Repórter team (1975-1984) but did not enjoy it very much because of the different type of interaction with people in television as opposed to a documentary: “Eu quero a dimensão temporal das coisas [. . .] As pessoas têm um tempo, têm uma memória, têm um passado, mas para isso vir à tona tem uma temporalidade, que precisa estar nos planos, na edição. Essa dimensão do tempo está no conteúdo e na forma, na memória e no plano. Por isso a televisão não me interessa, ela vive no presente puro” (Coutinho, “O Silêncio” 70). Coutinho realized that flat and one-dimensional portrayals of individuals do not accurately characterize them and he desired to look at the whole person, not just one aspect. Television proved difficult for him to pursue this interest, leading him to focus on documentaries.

He did learn many good things during his service in the television industry, from the abilities and impact of direct sound to what could or could not go on air (Coutinho, “O Olhar” 18). Coutinho developed his style of “conversation cinema” based on what he learned in his time with television, including the importance of allowing silence and the question of distance between the director and his subjects. Understanding the importance of silence became a technique that he utilizes in all of his documentaries: “Foi [na televisão] que aprendi que as longas pausas de silêncio, cujo uso era absolutamente vetado, eram tão ou mais importantes do que as falas” (Coutinho, “O Olhar” 18). Coutinho goes on to say that “o silêncio depois de uma



fala é a coisa mais linda que tem” (“O Silêncio” 78). His time in television also provided him with insight on the question of distance: “se você se posta a uma distância de três metros do seu interlocutor para não aparecer na imagem, você não está conversando com essa pessoa. Ninguém conversa a essa distância. Você tem que estar junto” (Coutinho, “O Real” 30). When one stops to consider the anatomy of conversations with close friends, one cannot help but notice that most, if not all, friendly conversations have an element of intimacy or closeness. People generally reserve distance for more formal conversations, such as those between a superior and a subordinate. Although Coutinho does not have a relationship with the individuals with whom he converses in his documentaries, he carefully considers physical space and distance so as to put his interviewees more at ease, allowing them to feel that he really cares about what they have to say, as if they were longtime acquaintances and friends.

Coutinho’s unique style of making a documentary using “conversation cinema” diverges completely from other documentarians in Brazil around the same time and in a way, his style becomes a response to that of other filmmakers. For example, we have the movie *Ônibus 174* (2002), directed by José Padilha, a contemporary of Coutinho’s. This “documentary” takes a look at the events of Sandro do Nascimento’s taking Bus 174 and its passengers hostage in Rio de Janeiro, an event that was played out on national television for the entire four hours of its duration. The movie uses actual footage from the event but also uses interviews and official documents to tell the story of Nascimento’s life. Lisa Shaw and Stephanie Dennison point out that the director aimed to tell this story in an unbiased and impartial manner, carefully avoiding showing interviewees in visible distress so as to avoid the manipulative and exploitative techniques that many reality television and sensationalist news shows in Brazil prefer (107).

These critics continue with a comparison between *Ônibus 174* and the works of Coutinho, saying:

Padilha's documentary, like those of Eduardo Coutinho referred to above [*Santa Marta – duas semanas no morro* (1987), *Santo forte* (1999), and *Babilônia 2000* (2000)], calls into question the dividing line between fact and fiction [. . .] In contrast to Coutinho's work, however, it incorporates aesthetic choices that traditionally belong to fiction films, such as slow-motion sequences, the repetition of certain scenes, music video-style editing, sound and colour effects, extra-diegetic music, and the manipulation of real and diegetic time. (108)

Coutinho endeavors to avoid all aspects of fictional films in his works, going so far as to leave in extraneous sounds in the background of his conversations so that the viewer can get a more authentic glimpse into the lives of the people featured in his documentaries. His style of documentary responds to that of other documentarians and filmmakers such as Padilha as he strives to present the most authentic reality he can. Coutinho named his style "conversation cinema" and uses that term as a reminder that he does not interview these people, rather he has a personal conversation with them.

Coutinho finalized the fine-tuning of his "conversation cinema" style during the filming of *Santo forte* and thereafter turned his focus completely to documentaries. When asked about his style of documentary making, Coutinho explains: "No que eu faço, eu que nunca pensei que *entrevisto* pessoas, eu tento estabelecer um troço que se diferencia por ser a *conversa*" ("A Pessoa" 105, emphasis in original). With this summation of his philosophy, Coutinho emphasizes to the viewers that we do not watch a series of interviews in his documentaries but rather conversations. Consuelo Lins explains one of the effects of Coutinho's documentaries: "A

possibilidade de ‘filmar o que existe’, ou de aceitar ‘tudo o que existe pelo simples fato de existir’, é um dos efeitos dos dispositivos de Coutinho” (*O Documentário* 12). He endeavors to establish a relationship with his subjects, thereby enabling them to have a conversation rather than an interview. Through his conversations with individual residents in *Boca de Lixo* (1993), *Santo forte* (1999), and *Edifício Master* (2002), Eduardo Coutinho demonstrates the unique set of circumstances wherein residents endeavor to maintain a balance between the tensions of developing a sense of self versus one of community in three different settings, vocation in *Boca de Lixo*, religion in *Santo forte*, and location in *Edifício Master*. These three documentaries exemplify the aspects of realist aesthetic that appear in Coutinho’s works. A series of conversations comprise each of the three movies, focusing on the individuals with whom Coutinho speaks as opposed to developing a plot or building a storyline.

The conversations that Coutinho includes in the final productions of *Boca de Lixo*, *Santo forte*, and *Edifício Master* all have identity as a common theme: both individual identity and communal identity. *Boca de Lixo* considers communal identity as a way for the waste pickers to band together with pride and self-worth, thereby staying ahead of perceived outsider contempt. *Santo forte* looks at the difficulties of developing a sense of religious community among residents of Vila Parque da Cidade and their varied individual religious beliefs. *Edifício Master* analyzes the use of the documentary as a vehicle to create a sense of community in an apartment building in Copacabana where one might not exist otherwise based solely on geographical proximity or interactions among residents. Each documentary looks at the issue of identity from a different perspective: vocation, religion, and location respectively which begs the question: what is identity?

*Jogo de Cena* (2007), another of Coutinho's more recent films, examines this exact question in detail. This movie chronicles the result of his placing an advertisement in the newspaper for women to come tell their life stories in a documentary. In addition, Coutinho hires actresses to memorize the lines and then re-tell the same stories to the camera as if they were their own, often without the audience knowing which person actually experienced the events. One cannot use the presence (or lack) of emotion as a way to tell the actress from the "real" woman as at some points the actresses display more emotion than the "real" women and vice versa. Joanna Page points out: "Coutinho's design is not to set 'real' emotion against faked, but to show the process of acting as the sharing of experience" (79). As these women share their stories with the camera, a sense of community develops among the women and Coutinho and his team. In the same way, the audience joins this community through participating in the telling of these experiences. Ultimately, Coutinho challenges the viewers to consider what constitutes identity: the words we speak or the experiences we have in our lives?

This question of identity has been debated for thousands of years. Plutarch, the Greek philosopher and historian (46-120 AD) poses the following situation for consideration:

The ship wherein Theseus and the youth of Athens returned had thirty oars, and was preserved by the Athenians down even to the time of Demetrius Phalereus, for they took away the old planks as they decayed, putting in new and stronger timber in their place, insomuch that this ship became a standing example among the philosophers, for the logical question of things that grow; one side holding that the ship remained the same, and the other contending that it was not the same. (Plutarch n. pag.)

The question of whether or not it remains the same ship could seem a non-issue for some (of course it is not the same, everything about it is new) but when one points out that every growing thing will change and adapt to different circumstances in life, what may have been a clear answer becomes more obscure. Plutarch's question of whether new planks made it a new ship coincides with Coutinho's portrayal of whether the stories gave the women identity or if it was the experiences themselves. Joanna Page points out that as the actresses prepared their lines and rehearsed the stories they received, some felt like they partially assumed the identity of the other women: "The actress telling Aleta's story explains that she felt during rehearsal that Aleta's memories had become her own" (80). However, by the end of the film, the viewer gets the sense that it does not really matter which women were acting and which were telling their own stories, the importance lies in the sharing of the experiences. In the words of Andreea Sprinceana: "Al final de la película quedamos con la sensación de haber visto a muchas mujeres y a una sola" ("Jogo de Cena" n. pag.). A sense of community has been established by the sharing of individuals' stories and the film itself becomes the vehicle for this sense of community.

Coutinho strives to follow the principles of *cinema vérité* by trying to show things as they truly exist without embellishments or fictionalization. Erik Barnouw points out that the difficulty with this genre lies in the fact that although documentarians try to maintain their objectivity, every decision they make expresses a point of view which influences the final production (344). The fact that observation changes behavior makes remaining objective difficult for the documentarian, as people often change their behavior as soon as the camera emerges. We might view this as the artistic manifestation of a well-known principle of quantum physics: "by the very act of watching, the observer affects the observed reality" ("Quantum Theory" n. pag.). *Jogo de Cena* provides an excellent example of this concept, as noted by José Carlos Avellar: "The

actress [ . . . ] empties herself out to embody her alter ego, the I of the character she plays. And the real character, while she is being interviewed, transforms herself into a fictional version of herself in order to narrate with more precision the story she experienced in reality” (19). It does not matter if we watch an actress or the “real” woman, both put on a performance for the camera.

Erwin Schrödinger presents a theory about the importance of observation involving a cat in a box. He suggests that one needs a cat, penned up in a steel box along with a Geiger counter with a tiny bit of radioactive material, a hammer, and a flask of hydrocyanic acid in order to explain the Copenhagen Interpretation of the theory of quantum mechanics. Over the course of an hour, one of the atoms may decay with the equal probability of not decaying. If the Geiger counter detects any radioactive decay, the system releases the hammer, breaking the flask of acid, thereby killing the cat. However, one does not know if the atom has decayed, therefore the cat could theoretically still be alive. Schrödinger states that at the end of the hour, since we do not know what happened inside of the box, the cat is both simultaneously alive and dead (5). Werner Heisenberg comments on Schrödinger’s postulation saying: “The transition from the ‘possible’ to the ‘actual’ takes place during the act of observation” (23). Until one opens the box, we cannot know whether the cat is dead or alive. Once we open the box, we know for certain as to the state of being of the cat, demonstrating that the act of observation has changed the observed reality.

This idea constitutes a central concern of all documentaries. People tend to act in the way they expect that the person behind the camera wants them to act. With reference to the presence of the camera in *Edifício Master*, Coutinho says: “Por um lado, a câmera está totalmente presente, e a pessoa produz uma performance diante da câmera, uma atuação quase teatral. Por outro lado, depois de 20 minutos ela nem se lembra mais que tem camera ligada” (“Se Eu

Definisse” 141). Oftentimes one might suppose that the conversations we see in the final production do not last more than a few minutes, as we do not see more than that in the documentary. However, Coutinho indicates that he spends much more time with the people in order to help them feel at ease and help them forget the presence of the camera so they act more natural. He explains further: “Eu não escondo a câmera, mas ao mesmo tempo escondo, no sentido de que depois de começar a filmar, ninguém mexe, silêncio absoluto. Pode ter seis pessoas numa sala, mas há um jogo dramático entre mim e a pessoa que fala, e que gera eventualmente confissões extraordinárias, performances extraordinárias, a pessoa canta” (“Se Eu Definisse” 141). Coutinho makes the person with whom he speaks feel as though nothing besides them matters at that point and time, including his own crew. This plays a large part in why the people feel comfortable opening up to him, a complete stranger, in all three movies treated in this analysis.

*Boca de Lixo* marks the first film we will consider in depth. An analysis of this documentary in terms of aesthetics and content demonstrates that Eduardo Coutinho and his team uncover a community bound by tensions between the pride and honor inherently felt by the residents and a perception of outsider contempt. The residents of the Itaoca landfill on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro feel a deep sense of pride and self-respect for the honest work that they do every day though there exists a perception that outsiders constantly judge and criticize them for working in a landfill. Coutinho does not focus on producing a social or political commentary but rather endeavors to give these residents a voice and, in the process, bring awareness of the reality of life in the landfills of Brazil to all who watch this documentary.

This chapter also considers the works of Lucy Walker (*Lixo Extraordinário*, 2010) and Jorge Furtado (*Ilha das Flores*, 1990) in order to better understand the underlying tension present

in *Boca de Lixo*. Both films also consider the situations of waste pickers in Brazil, however, *Lixo Extraordinário* focuses on the pride and self-respect of the waste pickers while *Ilha das Flores* emphasizes the contempt with which society can view these people. Analyzing the different perspectives on waste pickers provided by these two documentaries allows us to better understand the tension between the inherent self-respect and perceived outsider contempt that exist in the Itaoca landfill in *Boca de Lixo*.

Whereas *Boca de Lixo* marks a shift towards the “conversational cinema” style employed by Eduardo Coutinho, the director does not fully adopt this approach to documentaries until *Santo forte*. While utilizing this new style in talking with the residents of the Vila Parque da Cidade *favela* (shanty town), Coutinho demonstrates the tension inherent in developing a sense of religious community among residents based on their individual religious beliefs. At the same time, the film shows that many smaller communities may exist within the larger geographical whole. The topic of religion in Brazil had always fascinated Coutinho as an idea for a documentary, as he had noticed that whereas people often hesitate to openly share their opinions concerning race, gender, or sexuality, they usually talk freely about their beliefs and their religion.

While exploring the contrasts of disparate religious traditions, this documentary emphasizes the ways that religion and faith unite and define the residents of this favela. Four main religions receive discussion in *Santo forte*: Umbanda, Candomblé, Kardecist Spiritism, and Catholicism, and Coutinho does an admirable job demonstrating how each religion interacts within the greater favela but also within the lives of the individual. Drawing upon Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, we manage to delve into the question of the creation of



communities, real or imagined, within this favela, specifically based on the religious traditions existing herein.

Whereas religion obviously manifests itself as a vehicle for creating a sense of community in *Santo forte, Edifício Master* considers the fact that a sense of community might not necessarily exist based on personal interaction or geographical proximity in this lower-middle class apartment building in Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro. Coutinho provides an alternative method for developing a sense of community through the sharing of experiences in this film. The honesty of the stories that residents share with the camera, in addition to the honesty of the storytelling process, allows Coutinho to create an ethos with resident and viewer alike while establishing the overall documentary as the vehicle for truly creating a sense of community within the Master building.

This documentary seeks to break down stereotypes, as Coutinho does not establish a dichotomy of poverty and paradise as one might expect in a movie about people who live in Copacabana. In fact, aside from a story about an assault and other brief vignettes, Coutinho does not focus or even mention the stereotypical things that come to mind when one typically thinks of Rio de Janeiro and Copacabana specifically such as beaches, tourism, drugs, Carnival, favelas, and more. Once again, Benedict Anderson's work serves as a framework for understanding the difficulties of building communities in small locations. This documentary empowers the residents of the Master building as Coutinho gives them a voice to share their experiences, inviting all who watch the film to participate in their community, understand more about the day-to-day life in Copacabana, and break down prejudices and stereotypes typically associated with this city.

## Chapter 1

### *Boca de Lixo: Communal Identity versus Perceived Outsider Contempt*

When one types “Brazilian culture” into the Google search site, results appear about soccer, samba, the beach, and other tourist sites in Brazil. What does not appear are images of the hundreds of landfills and the tens of thousands of Brazilians who work within them with their families. But why not? The absence of images of waste pickers, commonly referred to as catadores in Brazil, raises a question of visibility as these people receive no representation in Brazilian media. To combat this lack of representation, Eduardo Coutinho and other documentarians have made great strides in helping these people gain voice and visibility. As one watches Eduardo Coutinho’s documentary *Boca de Lixo* and analyzes the nature of the questions asked and answers received, it quickly becomes obvious that society does have knowledge of what happens in the landfills of the country but does not want to recognize these facts. In his film, Coutinho enters the Itaoca landfill on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro and converses with the people who work and live there, and in doing so he demonstrates some of the difficulties they face on a daily basis. In effect, Coutinho’s documentary works to humanize a group of people frequently viewed as sub-human or inhuman in Brazilian culture. An analysis of *Boca de Lixo* in terms of aesthetics and content demonstrates that Eduardo Coutinho and his team uncover a community bound by tensions between the pride and honor inherently felt by the residents and a perception of outsider contempt.

After directing *O Fio da Memória* in 1991 concerning the centennial of the abolition of slavery, Coutinho said of the experience: “Espero ter aprendido duas coisas: não faço mais temas gerais; segundo, não entro em coisas que dêem culpa” (qtd. in Labaki 77). Coutinho seeks to make his documentaries about people who often have no voice or representation in the

media. Consuelo Lins similarly observes: “Coutinho faz parte dos documentaristas que no lugar de se ocuparem de grandes acontecimentos e de grandes homens da história, ou de acontecimentos e homens exemplares, identifica acontecimentos quaisquer e homens insignificantes, aqueles que foram esquecidos e recusados pela história oficial e pela mídia” (“O Cinema” 181). This sentiment defines the documentary *Boca de Lixo* as this group of people live in a landfill, working to support their families. The setting is not readily identifiable as the location for a story of human triumph.

Coutinho utilizes a series of conversations between himself and residents of the Itaoca landfill to produce this documentary. Tatiana Heise comments on his process of making documentaries: “[Coutinho] selects a theme, the location and the sample of interviewees. He then interviews each subject in a personal and informal manner. The intent [. . .] is to reveal the interviewees' singularities, their outlook on life and capacity for self-expression” (68). This film has no plot or well-developed storyline. Merely through the conversations, Coutinho manages to express the principal message of the film – the resiliency of the human spirit – underlined by the tension inherent in working and living in a landfill.

Speaking generally about the genre, McEnteer describes the documentary as an attempt to handle authentic reality creatively, saying: “Documentary makers use actual people, settings, and situations, rather than inventing their own” (xv). The difficulty in making a documentary lies in the fact that once someone sees the camera that person often starts to act in a false way or according to their perception of what the director expects to see. Anyone who has ever tried to take spontaneous pictures of a gathering of people knows this fact well – as soon as the camera appears, people stop what they were doing that invoked the desire to take the picture in the first place to smile or pose. When physicists discuss this aspect of quantum theory, they generally

refer to how the behavior of electrons change because of observation but this idea seems relevant for documentaries as well. This film genre focuses on the perceptions of the individuals: how the subjects perceive the nature of the questions asked, how they perceive the situation they find themselves in, but especially the way in which they perceive the director's purpose in making the film, as they often modify their mannerisms to match the supposed desired behavior.

Erik Barnouw articulates this difficulty very clearly, saying: “[Documentarians] are enjoined to be ‘objective.’ This is, of course, a nonsensical injunction [as they] make endless choices: of topic, people, vistas, angles, lenses, juxtapositions, sounds, words. Each selection expresses a point of view, whether conscious or not, acknowledged or not [ . . . ] the ‘creative treatment’ of real subjects includes various forms and levels of manipulation” (344). Although documentarians recognize the tendency of people to act in a different way for the camera, the filmmaker often strives to show an authentic reality, or rather, things as they really occur. Encouraging subjects to trust the documentarian becomes one of the crucial tasks that must occur so that they can feel comfortable talking openly with the camera.

Instead of trying to talk to the workers on the edges of the landfill, Coutinho and his camera crew make the extra effort to go inside and talk to people in the place where they could feel more comfortable talking about their lives. With this courtesy, Coutinho clearly tries to demonstrate to the residents that he does not subscribe to the criticism and contempt typical of outsiders. Even with this effort on the director's part, several of the documentary's subjects refuse to show the camera their faces, such as Dona Teresa. As Coutinho interviews Dona Cícera, she indicates that her friend, Dona Teresa, probably felt embarrassed by the fact that these images would come out in the cinema and on television. When Coutinho asks if she felt any embarrassment, she replies: “Nem ligo que isto vai sair na televisão, no jornal, nem ligo aí

meu filho! Porque esta cara bonita não deve sair na televisão?” (*Boca*). In another scene, Alice tells Coutinho she will not sell the recyclables they collect from the trash in the junkyard or anywhere else because she feels ashamed at being seen and judged by others. She says her husband Enock always goes to sell the things they find and that he has no shame because he is crazy. Coutinho asks if she felt ashamed of her husband's work in the landfill and she replies: “Não, não, ele tá bom, isto tá bom” (*Boca*). Even though she feels ashamed and will not sell what they find, she willingly allows Coutinho to film their conversation, knowing that it will appear in a documentary. This willingness stems from Coutinho's efforts to establish trust and openness with Alice, allowing her to feel comfortable in response.

This level of comfort enjoyed by those with whom Coutinho converses does not always extend to the audience. The initial scenes of the movie show the mountains of garbage and the animals with which residents must compete for food, such as birds, pigs, dogs, and even horses. Robert Drew, frequently identified as the father of direct cinema and modern documentary, notes the following when documentaries use images to tell the story: “Não se trata mais de uma voz que dá lições, como nos documentários da época (e de hoje...), mas que apenas informa o contexto...e em seguida se cala, de modo que as imagens, e não um locutor, encaminhem a história” (qtd. in Salles 31). These first scenes set the tone for the remainder of the documentary, as Coutinho intends to make the audience uncomfortable by demonstrating the squalid conditions wherein these people live and work, thereby challenging any preconceived stereotypes or perceptions about these waste pickers. No narrator performs the role of lecturing professor, talking about the horrors of life in the landfill or explaining the images to the audience, rather Coutinho lets the images speak for themselves, maintaining his focus on the conversations with residents.

We see images of Coutinho and his team climbing the mountains of trash, just as the residents do every day, again distancing himself from the image of the contemptuous outsider as he demonstrates a willingness to experience how the waste pickers live. The American film critic, Stephen Mamber, states the following about the documentary genre: “At its very simplest, [the documentary or *film vérité*] can be described as a method of filming employing hand-held camera and live, synchronous sound” (qtd. in Lee-Wright 94). During *Boca de Lixo*, it becomes clear to the viewers that Coutinho and his team have at least two cameras, used in a very effective way. For example, we see a man coming up the hill with a camera in hand but the man with the active camera has the presence of mind to stay in place so that the screen does not start swinging. Throughout the documentary, we see the microphone dip down onto the screen or the camera capture the secondary camera in the image. One could consider this a great lack of professionalism but as we analyze the film, we realize that while Coutinho does not plan for these instances to occur, he likes to keep these images in the final cut of his documentaries as he wants to remind those watching that they witness an authentic look into the lives of these people, not a fictional representation.

Dziga Vertov, a Russian inventor, coined the idea *cinéma vérité* (originally called *kinopravda*) in 1920 as a way to attempt to express the hidden authentic reality through furtive edits of a film. Lee-Wright further explains: “[*Cinéma vérité*] has come to describe the tradition of observational documentary that grew up in the late 1950s and early 1960s” (93). This phrase describes the effort of documentarians to show things as they truly exist. In the words of Edgar Morin: “Il y a deux façons de concevoir le cinéma du réel: la première est de prétendre donner à voir le réel; la seconde est de se poser le problème du réel. Du même, il y avait deux façons de concevoir le cinéma-vérité. La première était de prétendre apporter la vérité. La seconde était de

se poser le problème de la vérité” (qtd. in Lee-Wright 94). Coutinho clearly does not merely pretend to bring an authentic reality to the viewer; his film shows the real problems faced by waste pickers in order to educate the audience and emphasize the tenacity of the human spirit in adverse conditions.

The reality of the problem these people encounter on a daily basis lies in the fact that they must live and work in a landfill to support themselves and their families. However, not everyone in the documentary struggles with their situation. One of the ladies with whom Coutinho speaks at the very beginning of the film previously worked as a housekeeper in the home of a family and asserts that the work of the landfill has been an hundred times better. In her mind, the relaxed nature of the work allows her to enjoy laboring in the landfill: “A gente poderia pegar o ônibus e buscar trabalho num outro lugar mas não quer, é muito relaxado aqui!” (*Boca*). Coutinho converses with another lady, Jurema, who works in Itaoca with her husband Ivan. She explains that the garbage has become “o braço direito da gente” (*Boca*). They get everything they need from the garbage, including clothes, shoes, food, and many other discarded products that still function well. What they cannot procure from the garbage, they manage to purchase using the money earned through selling recyclables. She exhibits an air of resignation to the life they live but tells Coutinho that they have no problem with the work.

Another resident tells Coutinho that he lost his job eight days prior to their conversation, forcing him to work in the landfill. Coutinho asks him what job he would prefer if he were able to choose and he replies: “Puxa meu, já tenho trabalhado no lixo então para mim não tem problema, qualquer serviço é serviço mesmo, entendeu?” (*Boca*). His attitude toward life does not change because of the change in vocation, his happiness comes from the fact that he has work. He feels a sense of pride because he has found an honest occupation, wherein he can work

to support himself. We do not know what job he lost but we can assume that it was not as a trash picker as one does not get fired from working in such an environment. Therefore, we know that he has spent time outside of landfills and most likely has encountered some of the criticism and contempt, either overt or subconscious, with which outsiders sometimes view waste pickers. Regardless, his self-respect remains high because he has a job. Oftentimes the kind of job people hold directly impacts their feeling of self-worth but through the images and conversations in *Boca de Lixo*, Coutinho shows us a group of people with pride in what they do.

This sentiment of self-worth engendered by the majority of the waste pickers is exemplified by the way Enock goes about his daily life. Having worked at the Itaoca landfill for four years, he expresses no issues with the nature of the work or what others may think of him. Coutinho asks him to share his first impression upon arriving at Itaoca: “Na verdade, não era boa, não era ruim, eu sabia que iria ser direito com a vida” (*Boca*). Enock has worked in various parts of the country and in many different occupations but has no problem with life or work in the landfill though he acknowledges that dangers exist from the content of the trash to the smell of the landfill. Through Coutinho’s portrayal of Enock, we can tell that this man takes pride in doing a good job, no matter where he works.

Returning to Mamber’s quote regarding realism in cinema: “at its very simplest, *cinéma vérité* can be described as a method of filming employing hand-held camera and live, synchronous sound” (qtd. in Lee-Wright 94), Coutinho includes a succinct example of the accurateness of Mamber’s words. While he converses with Enock, some dogs, cats, and chickens start fighting off the screen, making a horrible noise. Coutinho, in his effort to stay as close to reality as possible, does not remove these sounds in the final version of the documentary so that we can hear Enock better, as we know he could have done with today’s technology. Instead, he



purposefully leaves them in, thereby demonstrating to viewers some of the realities of life in this landfill.

The extraneous noise from the daily lives of the residents constitutes the soundtrack or musical score for *Boca de Lixo* that further distances the waste pickers from the rest of Brazilian society as their daily noise differs from that which any other Brazilian would experience. The sounds of trash comprise the majority of the background music for this documentary: aluminum cans banging against each other, the sound of a hammer hitting a rock or a metal object, the sounds of heavy machinery, people conversing, animals making noise and more. These sounds of their life, mixed with a bit of traditional Brazilian percussion, create a powerful musical score. The way Coutinho included the musicality of the landfill for this documentary reminds viewers of the film *Cinco vezes favela: Episódio 5 – A Pedreira de São Diogo* wherein Coutinho acted as production manager. In that short film, the sounds of the bricklayer's work and the music from the favela on top of the hill comprise the score at the beginning as they compete against each other for the viewers' attention. Only once the quarry workers and the favelados work together do their individual sounds come together to create an impressive musical backdrop (*Cinco*). In this same way, all the sounds of life in Itaoca depicted in this documentary form a cacophonous, though beautiful, background for the day-to-day life of these people.

Not everyone enjoys the various aspects of life in Itaoca, from the work involved to the sights, sounds, and smells, though they still maintain a sense of pride and self-worth. Coutinho shares the story of Nirinha, a woman who has labored here for over fifteen years with her father, her sister, and now her son. Previously, she worked in the home of a family and considers that work much better because of the cleanliness of the job and the fact that it allowed time for lunch and dinner whereas now she only manages to eat dinner because she has no time for lunch. She

estimates that she will carry more than four thousand tons of garbage per fortnight by herself, saying: “Eu trabalho direito, moço, quase não paro!” (*Boca*). She tells Coutinho about life in the landfill, always walking around looking for aluminum cans, cardboard, pieces of metal, anything and everything recyclable. Once she finds enough to make the trip worth her while, she will go to the shops that take recyclable material to sell everything she has found. She notes that the buyers outside the landfill provide a much greater profit than those within, making it worth the extra distance she travels. This woman works incredibly hard at a very difficult, laborious job to provide for her family. Her efforts directly contradict the perceived outsider’s contempt for waste pickers, as no-one can look at her and see a lazy person thieving to make a living.

Coutinho meets another woman who shares Nirinha’s opinion concerning life in the landfill. She has only worked there for four years but does not like her situation, emphasizing the potential dangers. Only two days before, she recounts an injury she suffered when stabbed by a hypodermic needle she said came from hospital trash. The camera pans around the piles of garbage and finds another needle while she tells Coutinho about the supposed origins of the needle but does not see anything else that could possibly appear to have come from a hospital. This woman’s account provides yet another look at the difficulty of life in Itaoca and the complexities of issues the waste pickers deal with on a daily basis. Even with these challenges, they present themselves to the camera in such a way that demonstrates an effort to stave off negative perceptions and attitudes from people who have no idea what really goes on in the different landfills across the country.

As already noted, the recurring theme in the documentary that reflects the underlying tension of perceived outsider criticism colors almost every conversation Coutinho has with the residents. Various people echo the cry of “Não há ninguém roubando aqui não, viu?!” throughout

the course of the film. People respond with this phrase when Coutinho acknowledges the legitimacy of their job, but the residents also offer it up without any provocation. Very early in the documentary a young man exclaims: “Todo mundo tá trabalhando aqui meu! Ninguém tá roubando não, viu? Se a gente tivesse roubando, não teria ninguém trabalhando cara mas ’tamos trabalhando viu?” (*Boca*). Another woman states the following: “A gente tá trabalhado duro aqui, não tem ninguém de vagabundo por aqui não!” (*Boca*). A strong feeling of social stigma or something akin to shame pervades the community as residents feel they need to justify their actions and their work to someone on the outside who might potentially judge them. This effort on the residents’ part to stay ahead of the criticism stokes the underlying tension of the legitimacy of their work.

This tension finds expression in the title of this documentary. This phrase, full of symbolism, elicits various meanings, as Stam, Vieira and Xavier explain: “The title of [ . . . ] Eduardo Coutinho’s documentary *Boca de Lixo* [ . . . ] is triply allusive: literally, ‘mouth of garbage,’ the phrase also evokes ‘red-light district’ and ‘garbage cinema’” (451). The residents themselves have titled the Itaoca landfill “Boca de Lixo,” as Nirinha explains: “Este lugar não tem nome não senhor, eu só o chama de Boca de Lixo” (*Boca*). The tension between residents and perceived outsider contempt manifests itself when one considers the fact that the residents have named their place of residence “Boca de Lixo,” consciously or subconsciously endeavoring to prove that this community has more substance and value than that of the red-light district or garbage cinema.

The tension between perceived outsider contempt and feelings of pride, self-worth and a sense of community are not unique to Coutinho’s *Boca de Lixo*. Two additional documentaries: *Lixo Extraordinário* (2010, directed by Lucy Walker) and *Ilha das Flores* (1990, directed by

Jorge Furtado) also powerfully engage these tensions present in the lives of waste pickers. A comparative analysis of *Boca de Lixo* with these two films highlights the dynamics at play in Coutinho's film.

*Lixo Extraordinário* follows artist Vik Muniz as he undertakes a project to recreate famous works of art using waste pickers as his subjects and the recyclables from Jardim Gramacho as his materials. He became successful as an artist after observing and photographing a group of children at a sugar plantation. He noticed how very cheerful they were but observed that their parents were typically depressed and forlorn with respect to life. As he thought about this disconnect, he realized that the “sweetness” leaves their lives as they transition to adulthood so he resolved to recreate their portraits using sugar. The critical acclaim he received for this series of portraits motivated him to use uncommon materials for his works, as demonstrated in this inscription on a placard hanging by one of his works in a New York art gallery: “[Muniz] incorporates everyday objects into his photographic process to create witty, bold, and often deceiving, images. Often working in series, the New York-based artist makes pictures from unlikely materials including dirt, diamonds, sugar, wire, string, chocolate syrup, peanut butter, and pigment” (*Lixo*). For this particular project, he resolved to return to Brazil and focus on the waste pickers of Jardim Gramacho, observing that were it not for a fortuitous incident earlier in his life, he could have easily ended up a waste picker himself. He was drawn to the Jardim Gramacho landfill on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, the largest landfill in the world as it takes in 70% of the trash produced by the citizens of Rio.

Early on, as Muniz develops a relationship with the waste pickers here, he notices something about the group as a whole, saying: “It’s not as bad as I thought it would be really, you know? Here we are at the largest sanitary facility in the world and the people are chatting

there, I don't see people depressed or anything, they seem very proud of what they are doing" (*Lixo*). Gratitude and pride make up the prevailing attitudes among all the people interviewed; gratitude for the jobs that they have and pride in doing honest work. Even as one trying to go in with an open mind, the feelings of pride, gratitude, self-worth, and self-respect shock Muniz, emphasizing the fact that outsiders do not understand what goes on in the landfills.

Valter, an elderly gentleman who acts as the vice president of the Associação dos Catadores do Aterro Metropolitano de Jardim Gramacho (ACAMJG), personifies this aspect of the underlying tension seen in *Boca de Lixo*. Well known throughout the landfill for his positive attitude, Valter always encourages the workers, trying to teach them the importance of their jobs as recyclers. He summarizes his overall attitude towards his situation in one phrase: "Ser pobre não é ruim. Ruim é ser rico no mais alto degrau da fama com a moral coberta em lama" (*Lixo*). He feels proud to work where he does and does not consider himself at a disadvantage to others that might have more material possessions in their lives.

This theme of pride in the work they do expresses itself in nearly every interview with the women in Jardim Gramacho as they emphasize their gratitude for honest work as opposed to being involved in drug trafficking or prostitution. A woman named Magna becomes particularly emphatic about this point, telling Walker about a day when the woman next to her on the bus acted as if she smelled something rotten. Magna turned to her and said: "Estou ferdendo? 'Tá sentindo mal cheiro? É porque 'tava trabalhando lá no lixão. É melhor do que se eu estivesse lá em Copacabana rodando bolsinhas. Eu acho que é mais interessante e mais honesto. Mais digno. Estou ferdendo mas chegar em casa, vou tomar banho e fica melhor" (*Lixo*). She chooses her words very careful when describing the differences between picking through the landfill and

prostitution. She does not say that her work is cleaner or even safer than that of a prostitute but rather more interesting, more honest, and more worthwhile.

*Lixo Extraordinário* uses the way that people view art in a museum as a metaphor for the breaking down of prejudices with respect to the waste pickers. Towards the end of the documentary, Muniz teaches the workers about how people view art in a museum, explaining that they start out looking at it from a distance, then they close in and look again, continuing this cycle until they feel that they understand the overall image and why the artist used what he or she did to create it. From a distance, the big picture takes over, dominating what one can see. Only when one comes closer will the individual details that make up the piece appear. The cinematography of this documentary demonstrates this concept from the beginning, alternating between close and far as the camera focuses on some of Muniz's pieces, showing aerial shots of the landfill as a whole and gradually descending closer and closer, enabling us to see more and more details until we can clearly see each individual worker that makes up the greater whole. One can easily dismiss the trials and difficulties of the workers at the Jardim Gramacho landfill and view them with contempt when considered collectively, lumped into a community based on the shared nature of the work they engage in. However, once the individual breaks away from the overall picture and distinguished himself or herself, the story becomes much more personal, more poignant, and harder to dismiss. The waste pickers do not have an immunity to the negative perceptions of outsiders. Irmã, one of his participants, observes the following: "As vezes, a gente se põem muito pequeno, né? Mas as pessoas lá fora acham a gente tão grande, tão bonita, né?" (*Lixo*). At times they feel belittled and criticized though they always maintain their sense of pride. This self-worth becomes vindicated as they see the public start to remove their preconceived notions of those in this line of work as they enjoy the works of art created in a

landfill by waste pickers. *Lixo Extraordinário* helps to break down the negative perceptions held by outsiders by focusing on the pride and self-respect enjoyed by the residents who live and work in this landfill.

*Ilha das Flores* takes a completely opposite approach, endeavoring to group everyone together and minimize the individual, as it emphasizes the social contempt with which the general public views waste pickers. The documentary takes the form of an essay – not a written one but one placed on the screen. Furtado’s thesis statement displays on the screen in the initial seconds of the film: “Este não é um filme de ficção. Existe um lugar chamado Ilha das Flores. Deus não existe” (*Ilha*). He recognizes that people might not believe what they will see on the screen and uses that disbelief to emphasize the overall problem with a society that allows things such as this to happen.

We learn that the grower of the tomato (Mr. Suzuki) is Japanese, that the Japanese are human beings and human beings are animals, specifically mammals, though differing from other mammals because of their highly developed brains and the fact that they have opposable thumbs. This distinction returns again and again throughout the movie, emphasizing that this distinction makes humans different from the rest of the world. Furtado declares that because of these characteristics, God decided to allow humans to make changes to the world. While the narrator thusly instructs us, we see a collage of images of these changes including the pyramids, Greek and Roman architecture, atomic bombs, and of course, the tomato.

Through a series of tangents such as the one described above, we learn about many things; for example, the history of the tomato and its uses, the history of the creation of money by Giges, the king of Lydia which was a kingdom in Asia Minor seven centuries before Christ was born, who we are informed was incidentally a Jew. The narrator explains more about Jews in

this manner: “Os judeus possuíam um cérebro altamente desenvolvido e um polegar opositor. São portanto, seres humanos” (*Ilha*). While this seemingly innocuous voice-over occurs, we catch our first glimpse of the deeper meaning behind the history lessons, the tangents and even the tale of the saga of the tomato as we witness images of Jews in the Holocaust of the Second World War. We see emaciated bodies piled on top of each other as the narrator blithely states “São portanto, seres humanos,” strongly emphasizing the atrocities that human beings commit against one another.

As the film continues, we see the end of the path for the tomato: rejected by the urban housewife for her family, rejected by the farmer for his pigs, it goes to the women and children of Ilha das Flores. In the words of the narrator, “O tomate, plantado pelo Senhor Suzuki, trocado por dinheiro com o supermercado, trocado por dinheiro que Dona Anete trocou por perfumes extraídos das flores, recusado pelo molho do porco, jogado no lixo e recusado pelos porcos como alimento, está agora disponível para os seres humanos na Ilha das Flores” (*Ilha*). These women and children, defined as human beings because they have highly developed brains and opposable thumbs, do not have money or someone to take care of them and therefore have been relegated to a position inferior to that of swine.

Furtado makes a strong criticism against society with this movie, as described by Stam, Vieira, and Xavier:

Furtado invokes the old carnival motif of pigs and sausage, but with a political twist; here the pigs, given inequitable distribution down the food chain, eat better than people. We are given a social examination of garbage; the truth of a society is in its detritus. Rather than having the margins invade the center as in carnival, here the center creates the margins, or better, there are no margins; the urban



bourgeois family is linked to the rural poor via the sausage and the tomato within a web of global relationality. (451)

The images of this documentary provide an intense reminder of how uncaring and unthinking actions on the part of one person can greatly affect the lives of many other people. At the end of the film, the camera pans across the landfill, shooting images of women and children as they pick through the heaps of garbage. A group was gathered and filmed with great detail, focusing on their faces and the beaten-down expressions therein. Whereas *Boca de Lixo* contains an underlying tension between the pride and sense of community enjoyed by the waste pickers and the perceived contempt with which they are viewed, Furtado focuses on an outright criticism of a society that allows these atrocities to occur.

The documentary ends with a discussion of freedom and being free. The narrator tells us that human beings differ from the rest of the life on Planet Earth because of our highly developed brains, our opposable thumbs, and the fact that we enjoy freedom. What exactly does freedom mean, however? Furtado borrows a quote from the Brazilian poet Cecília Meireles to define it: “Liberdade – essa palavra, que o sonho humano alimenta: que não há ninguém que explique, e ninguém que não entenda!” (70). These women and children do not have freedom, as they have become trapped by their circumstances and the fact that society does not care enough to try and help them. Furtado stated at the beginning of the film that God does not exist and through subtle implications throughout the film, he raises the question of how God could allow people to commit these kinds of atrocities against others or live in these kinds of situations. Ultimately, he leaves it to the individual viewer to decide whether or not to believe in God or blame Him for the circumstances wherein they find themselves.

This same idea of abandonment surfaces in *Boca de Lixo*, as demonstrated in one of the opening scenes of the documentary. Seeing Coutinho arrive at the dump with his camera crew, a young man engages the director in the following dialogue:

Youth: “O que vai fazer, botando esse negócio aí na cara da gente aí, meu?”

Coutinho: “É para mostrar a vida real de vocês.”

Youth: “Puxa meu! Sabe pra quem pode mostrar este negócio cara? O Presidente Collor meu!” (*Boca*)

For this young man, and even for those of us that watch the film, it seems that everyone has forgotten about these people: the government, churches, the agencies that could help them, and, in the eyes of some of the residents, even God. The woman injured by the hypodermic needle tells Coutinho about the difficulty of life in the landfill: “Ah, aqui dentro não dá! Até nem Deus me ajuda aqui dentro!” (*Boca*). This feeling of abandonment adds to the underlying tension, as residents feel like any outsider that would watch this kind of documentary would do so only to judge and criticize those who work in these conditions.

Whereas all three documentaries discuss people who live and work in landfills, they do not approach it in the same manner. *Ilha das Flores*, the earliest of the three, has a much more pessimistic tone. Furtado makes a striking social commentary as he compares what happened to the Jews in the Holocaust to the neglect demonstrated towards the women and children of the Ilha das Flores landfill. For the short time they appear at the end of the film, expressions of misery and depression abound. The director does not speak with any of the residents, allowing the images to speak for themselves. *Boca de Lixo*, the next film in this “series,” includes a social commentary though the focus is on the tension between perceived contempt and internal pride as opposed to focusing on the former. Finally, *Lixo Extraordinário*, the most recent of these films,

focuses almost entirely on the positive manner in which the waste pickers view themselves and the work they perform. The residents, for the most part, feel pride of the work they do and consider it much better work than drugs or prostitution.

The development of a sense of the individual within the context of the community at large in *Boca de Lixo* is expanded upon through consideration of these other two films. This topic does not receive overt discussion in *Ilha das Flores*, which does not indicate its absence from the film. Furtado's lack of discussion of the individual by casting the women and children into a group further dehumanized them. Society views these people as a single group unworthy of attention or concern. Vik Muniz agrees with the unspoken criticism in Furtado's work, commenting: "This is the most poisonous thing about Brazilian culture and society, this classism, you know? It's horrible how people really believe, and I'm talking about educated people, they really believe they're better than other people" (*Lixo*). The critical thinker recognizes this sentiment as the overarching theme of all three films, that this way of thinking ought not exist as these people exist are proud individuals with a strong work ethic.

One of the most powerful scenes in *Boca de Lixo* happens early on in the filming. Coutinho and his team have some pictures of the residents of the dump and they show these photographs to the people around them. The residents know all of the people in the photos and say the names out loud as they look at the pictures in their hands. As we hear these names, the camera focuses on each person named briefly, giving the viewer a personal experience with the residents of Itaoca. Through this filmic technique, Coutinho offers his viewers a sense of familiarity with these people, they no longer remain faceless names or nameless faces but people that, in some small sense, we know and recognize.

The analysis of the underlying tension in *Boca de Lixo* becomes easier to grasp and understand through an analysis of *Ilha das Flores* and *Lixo Extraordinário*, given that each focuses almost exclusively on one aspect of this tension. Notwithstanding the underlying tension of how residents perceive outside opinion, Coutinho portrays the resiliency of the human spirit and the importance of community within the Itaoca landfill. His cameras show the people drinking and smoking with friends, listening to music, playing card games or a game of soccer with a ball found in the trash, friends sitting around talking to each other and many other images commonplace around Brazil in general. The waste pickers of Brazil, though looked down upon by some in society, generally manage to rise above the perceived criticism through reliance on the community around them, hard work, and dedication in order to maintain their self-respect. They prove that we cannot judge others just because of the jobs that they have or where they live. Through Coutinho's efforts to "se poser le problème de la vérité" (qtd. in Lee-Wright 94), viewers have the opportunity to change their perspective and begin to break down the stereotypes they may have concerning the lives of those who eke out their existence in the landfills of Brazil.

## Chapter 2

### *Santo forte*: Community amid Conflicting Ideologies

*Santo forte* marks a shift in style for Brazilian documentarian Eduardo Coutinho (Heise 136) and, according to Coutinho himself “foi uma ressurreição” (“Não Encontro” 93). Filmed and edited from 1997 to 1999, the documentary emphasizes how religious faith influences the lives of the inhabitants of the favela Vila Parque da Cidade, a community of approximately 1500 residents in the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro. This film discusses various religious traditions, including Umbanda, Candomblé, Kardecist Spiritism, and Catholicism, along with the impact these religions have on the lives on their followers. While utilizing his new style of “conversational cinema” in talking with the residents of this favela, Coutinho demonstrates the tension inherent in developing a sense of religious community among residents based on their individual religious beliefs. At the same time, the film shows that many smaller communities may exist within the larger geographical whole. We meet residents who profess neutrality in religion, some who adhere to multiple religious traditions and others who do not believe in anything at all. This documentary differs from Coutinho’s other works, as it looks at the difficulties of creating religious identity and analyzes the focal issue of maintaining a functional community that has multiple factions or sub-communities within it while considering the lives and stories of the residents.

In an interview with Valéria Macedo, Coutinho discusses his intention to make a film about religion in Brazil:

Minha vontade agora é fazer um filme [. . .] sobre religião no Brasil. [. . .]. O que há no Brasil é uma luta de santos de que ninguém conhece a dimensão, pelo menos no cinema. Em cada momento da vida está presente o mágico, cada ato

tem significado. São histórias extraordinárias. Não me interesse filmar os rituais afros, os caras matando animais, só a fala me interessa, a narração das experiências. Falar de religião, você acaba entrelaçando histórias de família, sexo etc. E você descobre a coerência daquelas pessoas, elas não são loucas. E pessoas de religiões diferentes, você vai ver, são pai, filha. Só me interessa trabalhar no micro e ir até o fim [. . .]. Eu sou apaixonado por esse caráter obsessivo da fala, dos santos, e queria que fosse um filme tão obsessivo quanto é o pensamento deles. (“O Silêncio” 76)

Coutinho felt that he struggled with the three documentaries that followed *Cabra marcado para morrer* (1985), as he produced someone else’s project in *Santa Marta: Duas semanas no morro* (1987), and *O fio da memória* (1991) required more time, energy and resources than the Fundação de Artes do Estado Rio de Janeiro provided. As far as *Boca de Lixo* was concerned, it did bring greater satisfaction to Coutinho than the other two, though he knew he needed to do something that he wanted to, simply because it interested him (Lins, *O Documentário* 76). In his words: “Hoje eu não quero nem ouvir falar [de fazer uma adaptação de um livro] porque [. . .] já entro vencido [. . .] não quero a prisão de começar da grande obra, eu construo a minha prisão. A prisão que eu construo é o seguinte: vou filmar num lugar só, vou conversar com pessoas, não vou fazer cobertura visual [. . .] Você constrói os limites em que você quer trabalhar” (qtd. in Lins, “O Cinema” 189). Working within narrow limits, especially those set by others, often hinders our ability to create something new and original, a stifling environment for an artist such as Coutinho. As a documentarian, he knows what he wants to do and where his interests lie and he must construct his own boundaries and constraints in order to produce material in which he himself can take pride.

Producing films that others wanted him to make, without his total vestment, contributed to the construction of his so-called prison, leading to his films not receiving the reception both critically and publicly that he desired. In recalling the time between *Cabra* and *Santo forte*, Coutinho said: “Daí eu ’tava morto e fiz o *Santo forte*, pelo qual eu ressuscitei [. . .] porque senão, vocês nem ’tavam conversando comigo aqui. Se eu tivesse feito o *Cabra* e três vídeos, ninguém ’tava conversando comigo” (“A Pessoa” 116). Granted, *Santo forte* did not come together without significant effort, as indicated by the fact that nobody believed in Coutinho or the project: “Fiz o *Santo forte* contra tudo e contra todos, no sentido de que ninguém acreditava, e eu não me queixo disso, isso é normal” (116). However, his career was revived thanks to the success that *Santo forte* enjoyed both with critics and the public (Lins, *O Documentário* 119).

One of the issues Coutinho discovered in his early documentaries consisted of the problem of perceived authority: “Você vai falar com pessoas de outra classe social e se pergunta como chegar a elas. É uma relação de pessoa a pessoa. Da primeira vez eu fui com as idéias prontas, com coisas que ‘tinham que aparecer’ [. . .] a pessoa fala como se estivesse falando para a polícia ou para o ‘cinema’, quer dizer, está prestando um depoimento” (Coutinho, “O Real” 30). Coutinho did not want a testimony or formal statement in his works, as this overall sense did not lend to the feeling of reality. Instead of gathering testimonies and interviewing the people who would appear in his documentaries, Coutinho began to focus on “conversation cinema,” his personal style of communicating that appears with particular prominence in *Santo forte*, though definitely noticeable in all his documentaries (Heise 68).

Tatiana Heise describes the rules of Coutinho’s “conversation cinema” in the following terms: “[Coutinho] selects a theme, a location and a sample of interviewees. He then interviews each subject in a personal and informal manner. The intent, according to Coutinho, is to reveal

the interviewees' singularities, their outlook on life and capacity for self-expression" (68). As a matter of procedure, Coutinho never speaks to any of the residents during the initial survey – he reserves his first contact for the filmed experience: “Nunca sou eu quem fala com eles [no processo de pesquisa], são meus pesquisadores. [. . .] Normalmente só vou conhecer a pessoa na hora da filmagem. Então, elas não me conhecem e contam mil histórias que já contaram na pesquisa e outras pela primeira vez. Então ninguém me diz: ‘como eu já lhe disse...’. Sem a camera, eu prefiro que não me contem nada” (“Tem Discursos” 128) and again “A primeira regra é que ninguém me contará uma coisa na camera que já tenha me contado fora [. . .]. Para mim, o momento da filmagem é sempre o momento da relação, isso é essencial. O transe do cinema ocorre nesse momento, nem antes, nem depois” (“O Silêncio” 68) and finally “A primeira providência é manter essa virgindade da relação. O sujeito vai falar como se fosse a primeira vez não só para mim, mas também para o público e para ele mesmo (“Em Nome” 164). People can easily tell when someone puts on a show or hides behind false emotion and Coutinho manages to avoid all of that through this carefully planned process. The final product reflects the effort and planning Coutinho puts into his works as the audience witnesses a very real first encounter between documentarian and subject. In the words of Coutinho regarding his intent for “conversation cinema”: “A improvisação, a casualidade, a relação amigável, à vezes conflitiva, entre os conversadores dispostos, em tese, nos dois lados da camera — é esse o alimento essencial do documentário que tento fazer” (qtd. in Labaki 78). As a result, all the emotion that one can see on the screen comes unforced from the moment, no-one pretends interest in a story for the camera's sake, oblique references to things that had been told in the past do not exist making it much more engaging for the audience.



Coutinho does realize that although he endeavors to make his documentaries as real as possible, the mere fact that he will edit the footage makes the film about reality from his perspective. He equates his work to that of a scientist, saying: “Eu não sou cientista, mas tratamos dos mesmos problemas: o que é um relato, a fidelidade de um relato, como traduzi-lo. Eu não preciso traduzir o oral para o escrito, mas tenho que editar, e a edição também é um ato de intervenção” (“O Silêncio” 73). He points out that no film actually manages to show reality: “Se você fizer um filme etnográfico, a camera ficar parade três horas no quintal e depois quatro horas em uma mulher socando pilão, é uma ilusão que o cineasta está conhecendo o real. Ele está documentando um encontro entre o cineasta e o mundo, sempre. Eu não filmo senão esse encontro, filmo uma relação” (“A Pessoa” 109). Coutinho’s blunt attitude about the reality of his cinema and the relationship he films allows the audience to focus on the stories as opposed to trying to keep their attention through clever gimmicks and focusing on one aspect of the character’s development.

Coutinho’s maintains a focus on the speaker’s mannerisms. During his interview with Macedo, he says:

Se eu tiver que escolher entre dois projects – um sobre um tema mediocre filmado no sertão do Nordeste e um sobre um tema quente filmado na cidade de São Paulo – eu escolho o do Nordeste. [. . .] O cara que é analfabeto ou pouco alfabetizado e que vive num espaço em que a cultura oral é predominante, ele tem uma necessidade mais absoluta de se expressar bem do que o cara que vive numa cultura industrial. As pessoas da cidade de São Paulo falam mal, enquanto que no sertão a expressão é riquíssima, não só no que dizem, não só porque é eloquente, mas porque no fundo é mais precisa que a linguagem urbana. [. . .] Essa

eloquência você não vai encontrar na cidade. (“O Silêncio” 67)

This idea becomes noticeable in *Santo forte* as the people with whom Coutinho converses have an ability to express themselves in ways completely different from urban dwellers. They do not mince words and just say what they want to say without being burdened about what others will think of their words. Coutinho points out that in every documentary since *Cabra* he has tried to demonstrate that two different sides of the camera exist and always interact during his conversations: “Tem sempre alguém do outro lado da câmera, ninguém fala sozinho. 90% do que me interessa num filme é o diálogo [. . .] pelo diálogo, a diferença abre uma possibilidade de igualdade [entre pessoas diferentes socialmente], temporária e utópica, mas que pode existir” (“O Silêncio” 71). Coutinho must keep this in mind as he strives to avoid the imbalance of power that can exist in an interview/testimony situation, as previously mentioned.

The film begins with a description by a man (André, as we later learn) about some episodes where a *pomba-gira* possessed his wife, threatened to kill him, to the point where they had to contact a *preta velha* to perform a spiritual intervention to cleanse her (*Santo*). Immediately following this scene, we see images of Pope John Paul II conducting Mass at *Aterro do Flamengo*. These first few minutes of the documentary set the stage for the entire rest of the film as they superimpose Umbanda with Catholicism in the minds of the audience which becomes a major theme. The idea of creating communities, both real and imaginary, also emerges as another crucial theme of this documentary.

Benedict Anderson’s book *Imagined Communities* adapts well to the situation of the residents of Vila Parque da Cidade (i.e. Vila Parque da Cidade becomes the nation and the different religious groups the communities that make up said nation). The following quote, adapted from his text, aptly describes the central difficulty of this documentary: “Many ‘old

nations', once thoughtfully consolidated, find themselves challenged by 'sub'-nationalisms within their borders – nationalisms which, naturally, dream of shedding this sub-ness one happy day” (Anderson 3). Vila Parque da Cidade receives the status of a community based on geography, if nothing else. Within the favela, however, each different religion, from Catholicism to Umbanda, and from Kardecist Spiritism to Candomblé, gains followers and becomes stronger, turning into more developed 'sub-communities' which vie with each other to become the prominent religion within the overall 'nation.' We ought to take note of the religion statistics from the 2010 Census in Brazil: 123,280,172 people self-identified as Católica Apostólica Romana, 3,848,876 as Espírita, 407,331 as Umbanda, 167,363 as Candomblé and 615,096 as Ateu (Brazil). Of the sixteen people portrayed in this documentary, only two self-identified as Catholic with nothing on the side, seven as practicing a mix of Candomblé or Umbanda and Catholicism together, two Espíritas, three Evangelists, two who have left active participation in Umbanda, and one atheist. An analysis of the census numbers would lead us to expect that 96% of the people with whom Coutinho speaks would identify as Catholic though only 12% claimed outright Catholicism, the number rising to 50% when one includes the other variations of Catholicism as well. This discrepancy leads one to question if the census allows for the selection of more than one religion or if you can only indicate one. However, throughout the documentary patterns emerge that demonstrate the difficulty of self-identifying and developing a sense of community with the variety of different religions present in Vila Parque da Cidade.

As a quick note, the Pope visited Rio for the Second World Meeting with Families from 2-5 October of 1997. Cable News Network (CNN) reports the following on the first day of the visit indicating, that although he was there for the conference:

Local Catholic leaders are also hoping that his visit can reenergize a church

fighting to maintain its religious dominance in Brazil. Two decades ago, almost all Brazilians described themselves as Roman Catholic. Today, that number is 80 percent and shrinking – and less than a quarter of those bother to go to Mass [. . .]. Cutting into the ranks of Catholics are evangelical Protestant churches [and] powerful African-based religions, such as Candomblé, [which] have also attracted millions of followers in this multi-ethnic country. (Mirabella)

This short news clipping captures the general feeling behind many of Coutinho's questions throughout the course of the film and aptly demonstrates one of the documentary's main tensions: the various religions do not merely coexist; they actively fight in the community in order to swell the numbers of their faithful.

The Mass conducted by the Pope at the end of his visit raises an interesting question of community. Over one hundred thousand people attended this final Mass, with countless more watching on the television or listening in on the radio (Georing). It stands to reason that each person participating in this event, either live or via transmission, could feel some sort of connection with the other participants, even though they will never meet nor know the names of more than just a handful of those people. In exploring this idea, Benedict Anderson states the following: “[They have] no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But [they have] complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity” (26). It does not matter that they do not personally know the majority of people participating in this Mass, the important thing at that moment becomes the fact that they share the common link of Catholicism and participating in the same event at the same time. Just knowing this fact gives one a sense of direction, purpose and community.

We can extrapolate this idea further, considering the prayers and rituals performed by followers of Umbanda, Candomblé, or any of the other religions portrayed in this documentary. Oftentimes the faithful perform these acts in churches or *terreiros* (worship sites for Umbanda and Candomblé) but that does not exclude the possibility of performing these same acts on a personal level in the comfort of one's own home. Coutinho explores a different way that religious rites can bind people together in the case of Vanilda, a young Catholic woman, as we hear the following conversation:

Coutinho: "Promessa se faz ou não?"

Vanilda: "Faço, já fiz uma e tenho certeza que, espero que Ele vai escutar o meu pedido [ . . . ] pra ter um filho, sou louca por crianças."

Coutinho: "Você pediu na igreja ou pediu em casa?"

Vanilda: "Não, pedi aqui, rezando a Missa." (*Santo*)

The Pope's Mass allowed Vanilda to feel comfortable with making a promise to God in her own home, as opposed to needing to go to a church to do so. This idea of practicing one's religion at home also helps develop a sense of community, even though the person finds oneself completely alone. We return to Anderson for the following clarification: "The significance of this mass ceremony [ . . . ] is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slight notion" (35). Vanilda had the advantage of watching the Pope's Mass and seeing thousands and thousands of people praying while she said her personal prayer though this special circumstance indicates an exception. Usually, one would perform an act like this one without seeing other people in the same situation while subconsciously assuming the simultaneous and

similar action of many others around the world, creating a sense of international religious community.

Many of the initial interviews have the Pope's Mass on the television in the background. Braulino, a middle-aged gentleman recording the Mass with his wife Marlene, told Coutinho that he wanted a remembrance of this occasion, as "sem dúvida, é importante para [ele]" (*Santo*). Coutinho asked another man, Adilson, what the Pope meant to him and received an interesting answer: "Pois é né? Uma benção aqui né? Tem os que vão criticar o Papa que veio aqui. Não falo mal de ninguém que vem aqui pra dar benção a todo mundo né? Mas as pessoas da Universal criticam a ele, deixo quem quiser falar o que né?" (*Santo*). This marks the first time in the film that another religion receives mention in a critical manner though it becomes a recurring theme in many of the conversation's Coutinho has with the residents of Vila Parque da Cidade.

In the course of the film, we meet Lidia and Nira, two women members of the Universal Church who really enjoy their religion. Lidia explains a little about what they believe and tells Coutinho that she worries for her sister: "Se não for batizado, não pode ser salvo e os Católicos não são batizados na água [. . .]. Tenho uma irmã muito Católica, ela não pode morrer Católica" (*Santo*). According to her understanding of the Universal Church's doctrine, Catholic baptism lacks validity though one may safely assume that the Catholics would take issue with that idea.

However, we also met Dejair, Nira's brother, who believes that all of the African-based religions such as Umbanda, Candomblé and others were created during slavery based on the traditions brought over from Africa. Although his sister frequents the Universal Church, he takes issue with the amount of mention that the devil receives in Universal services: "Existe o ponto que chama [o diabo] aparece mesmo [. . .] tem hora [. . .] dentro da Universal só falando no diabo direto. Na Universal é direto, chama ele direto, não sei... Acredito se é uma coisa do mal, não

pode 'tar toda hora chamando o nome dele toda hora" (*Santo*). Dejour's comments demonstrate a central tension between religions: the doctrines taught and the flow of church services. This tension undoubtedly has an impact on the various residents of the favela as they can choose which church to affiliate with based on the content of the sermons they will hear.

Some of the comments the residents share with Coutinho seem to indicate outright hostility and disdain for other religions, indicating a lack of a sense of community. A man named Taninha describes his religious affiliation as being "Católico Apostólico Romano... e Umbanda" though he tells Coutinho that he does not have a single friend within the community "porque não [acredita] em ninguém" (*Santo*). He shares some very pointed feelings for the Universal Church: "Na Universal – não sei. O pessoal bate no chão, o pastor vem e faz aquele escândolo que ele faz, é um escândolo mesmo. Coloca mão na cabeça da pessoa, gritando aí e a pessoa levanta – é uma palhaçada" (*Santo*). Although Taninha identifies with the Catholic Church and Umbanda, apparently only in the global, generic, "imagined community" sense as described by Anderson as he does not identify with anybody in his immediate community.

At this point, we need to introduce another resident who figures prominently in the film, a young woman named Vera who shares her opinion about the saints and other worshiped statues. This entire project would have failed without Vera, as she arranged for Coutinho and his team to work in the community, conversing with and filming the residents. She tells her own story as having been born into Kardecist Spiritism since her mother faithfully adhered to the tenants of the religion though she herself never really felt comfortable and at times downright depressed: "[No Espiritismo, Ele] é um Deus que você é obrigada a servir. Eu antes de conhecer [a Universal], quando vivia no espiritismo, eu tinha tensão, tinha uma depressão, vivia com calmantes [. . .] tentei suicídio várias vezes" (*Santo*). She entered the Universal Church while she

searched for a different religion after breaking up with her fiancé though she has since left the Universal and now just visits many different churches. She feels like she knows many of the residents of Vila Parque da Cidade as she has lived there for almost thirty-five years and works in the health station of the community. Once again, we have an instance of a person who does not define her identity based on religion and feels no sense of community because of religion, but rather the geographical area in which she lives. She tells Coutinho what she learned in the Universal church about demons and saints: “As imagens são demônios. Aprendi na igreja que os demônios se escondem atrás das imagens porque os demônios gostam de ser adorados” (*Santo*). We have an indication of one church teaching their practitioners the incorrectness of another religion’s beliefs in an apparent attempt to fortify their particular sub-community and avoid losing members to any of the other groups.

The film never shows any outright violent protests against differing religions but the various commentaries allow us to understand that conflictual views regarding religion exist in the greater community, with the different religions trying to emphasize the wrongness of the other groups and that only through their particular church can one attain salvation. Returning to the quote by Anderson, each of these “sub-communities” seems to want to leave their “sub-ness” behind and become “the” community within the greater nation of Vila Parque da Cidade. However, it becomes apparent throughout the course of the documentary that the community lines do not always divide smoothly.

Of the sixteen people with whom Coutinho conversed, nine identify themselves as Catholic, at least to some degree, as seven of those nine stated that Catholicism comes first with either a little Umbanda, Candomblé, or Kardecist Spiritism on the side. Braulino explains: “Eu sou Católico, né? E a gente tem um poquinho do espiritismo, né? É mas o catolicismo porque eu



sou batizado na Igreja Católica, né? Então não deixo de ser Católico. [ . . . ] E o lado de espiritismo é exatamente isto, né, um pouco de Umbanda” (*Santo*). Adilson responds to Coutinho’s question about religious identity in the following manner: “Vou ser difícil poder me identificar mas eu digo pro senhor né? Porque a gente é o umbandismo e que eu digo, sou Católico” (*Santo*). None phrased it better than Alex as far as the idea of being a faithful Catholic does not prevent the majority of the residents from practicing other religions. When Coutinho asked him about the apparent contradiction of performing two baptisms in the same day (baptizing his son in the Roman Catholic Church in the morning and in Umbanda that night), he was told the following: “Não há problema nenhum por que eu sempre coloquei na minha cabeça que o mais importante é a Igreja Católica. Não existe religião pra mim, mas sim a Igreja Católica no primeiro lugar. Eu não sigo a ela, não vou aos domingos, pra as missas, nada, mas eu acredito na Umbanda” (*Santo*). The fluid definitions of these people’s religious identity might seem contradictory to some but it raises an important issue that goes back to the early days of slavery in Brazil.

Stephen Prothero, in his book *God Is Not One*, discusses the Yoruba religion which stems from West Africa, from which Umbanda and Candomblé split off. We know that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries slave owners “strongly encouraged” their African slaves to become “Christianized” (Hawthorne 211). In fact, Anderson talks about Dom Manuel I, the king of Portugal in the late fifteenth century who felt that he “could still ‘solve’ his ‘Jewish question’ [in Portugal] by mass, forcible *conversion*” (59, emphasis in original). The Portuguese royalty promulgated this attitude through the years, spilling over to their slaves in Brazil. Anderson indicates the significance of this fact, pointing out that in 1800 slaves accounted for close to a million of the 2,500,000 inhabitants of Brazil (60). Prothero tells us that: “Yoruba practitioners

kept their religious traditions alive by marrying them to Catholicism. When ordered to cease and desist from the beliefs and practices of their ancestors, Yoruba slaves took their [orixás] underground and then resurrected them in the guise of the saints: [Ogum] as [São Jorge], [Iemanjá] as [Nossa Senhora da Conceição] and [Iansã] as [Santa Bárbara]" (222; Brazilian equivalents of names in Prothero's quote courtesy of Cintra 60). Knowing this, it becomes easy to understand why so many people identify with both Catholicism and Umbanda or Candomblé: the mixture constitutes a part of their daily understanding of their religions.

In fact, a young woman named Carla has a slip of the tongue when she says: "Vejo os orixás da Católica, os santos da Igreja Católica – Nossa Senhora Aparecida lá na Umbanda é Oxum, São Jorge na Umbanda é Ogum" (*Santo*). It bears mention that not everyone enjoys the so-called Christianization of the African religions, with some practitioners considering Umbanda and Candomblé as "bastardizations" and "rather than trying to purify their tradition of African superstitions, they are trying to decatholicize it [. . .] they are intent on divorcing themselves from Catholic influences" (Prothero 227). The situation has recently reached the point that Mãe Stella, the popular and powerful Bahian Candomblé priestess, "has challenged all [Candomblé] practitioners to take off the fig leaf of the Catholic saints and worship Africans [orixás] in the open, without apology, guilt, or fear. Catholicism is no longer required, and [Candomblé] is no longer outlawed, Stella reasons, so 'the saints should be dumped, like a mask after Carnaval'" (227, spelling updated to Portuguese). Although Mãe Stella and others currently push for reform as far as Candomblé worship goes, the combination of the saints and the orixás remain so ingrained in the minds of the people that they do not seem to have a problem with using the two interchangeably: "Though many practitioners today see the saints as masks put on the faces of [orixás], others see [orixá] and saint alike as manifestations of the divinity that underlies and

infuses each” (223, spelling updated to Portuguese). The fact that many people view orixás and saints as interchangeable and synonymous indicate that the situation will likely continue in the same vein for some time, as people, by nature, resist change.

It behooves us to discuss the stories of two of the residents who describe themselves as having left Umbanda and currently find themselves religion-neutral. First, we meet Dona Thereza who self-identifies as “Católica Espírita,” telling Coutinho that she actively participated in Umbanda for many, many years: “Frequentei a Umbanda muitos anos, agora parei – deixei por causa de muita decepção, ingratidão mas eles [os orixás] não me abandonaram. Mesmo eu deixando ainda cuidado deles” (*Santo*). She obviously does not feel a sense of community with the other Umbanda practitioners in Vila Parque da Cidade though she never goes in to details about the deception and ungratefulness that drove her away from active public participation in Umbanda. She has a multitude of bracelets on her arm and when asked what they represent, she responds that they serve as reminders and security, as each bracelet pertains to a different Umbanda orixá to which she pays devotion. In sum, she maintains her identity as a practitioner of Umbanda however lacks a sense of community through the faith as she no longer associates with the public aspects of the religion.

She confides to Coutinho that she knows many people within the greater community but experiences a lot of difficulty responding to his question regarding her happiness: “Essa é uma pergunta que me doi muita pra responder, porque numa parte eu sou feliz mas na outra não estou. Não quero chora né? Eu sou emotivo né? Na outra não sou” (*Santo*). The way that they end this conversation represents the quality of relationships that Coutinho manages to develop with the residents in such a short amount of time:

Dona Thereza: “Tenho que responder esta pergunta?”

Coutinho: “Não, a senhora ’tá bem.”

Dona Thereza: “Desculpe.” (*Santo forte*)

She feels comfortable enough him to ask if she really needs to answer the question and feels badly when he tells her not to worry, as she apologizes for not managing to respond. This episode represents the respect that Coutinho shows those with whom he converses, as why else would she feel bad for not answering a question of a complete stranger? Coutinho receives praise for this aspect of his documentaries: “*Santo forte* [is] often praised for [its] honest and respectful portrayal of ordinary people, and for humanely revealing the dignity and ‘spiritual richness’ of individuals whom the average middle-class cinema spectator would never have the opportunity to meet” (Heise 70) and again: “*Santo forte* é [. . .] um cinema que dá aos personagens vontade de falar mais, de dizer mais alguma coisa” (Lins, “O Cinema” 181). Given the respect Coutinho shows the residents of Vila Parque da Cidade and the interest he takes in what they have to say, they feel comfortable sharing personal things with him while still feeling as though they refuse to answer a question if they feel like they cannot.

We turn now to another young woman who identifies herself as being neutral at the moment. Carla recounts how she passed through a very difficult period of time as she saw visions of skulls and images of the devil. She shares experiences of being possessed by “os santos” and being thrown from one side of the room to the other, never being injured but always feeling pain throughout her entire body. She does clarify that she does not imply anything bad about “os santos”: “Eles não são ruins, as pessoas são ruins. Quem tem dinheiro pode fazer tudo, o mundo inteiro é assim” (*Santo*). She continues, saying: “Não vou negar que eu não gosto da Umbanda, porque eu gosto. Umbanda, Candomblé, me encanto destas coisas porque são bonitas mas por enquanto, estou neutra” (*Santo*). Again, she has taken leave of the public Umbanda

worship, presumably because someone wanted the orixás to possess her, causing her pain, though she does not hold this against the orixás. She still depends on them for protection as she dances as a show-girl in the clubs at night and frequents places which she will not enter without protection. Coutinho includes brief scenes of her going to work at night and dancing in the clubs and comments on his decision of placing these scenes in the final documentary: “Eu botei [Carla] dançando na boate [ . . . ] podia não ter. Não interessa! Se ela dança, não dança, ou como dança. . . ‘À noita eu sou pomba-gira, eu trabalho de noite e danço’. Isso é dito, isso é forte e acabou” (“A Pessoa” 124). These images strongly demonstrate that she still depends heavily on the protection and comfort of the orixás of Umbanda, even though she maintains herself in a neutral position as far as public worship goes.

As Carla speaks with Coutinho, we can hear children screaming in the background, off camera. Could Coutinho have edited this extraneous noise? Yes, easily. Would editing it out have added to the documentary? Possibly, as it could have made it easier to concentrate on what Carla was saying. Did leaving it in the final version contribute to the overall feel of the film? Absolutely. In fact, this technique and mindset manifest themselves prevalently in this documentary (and all those that follow) as Coutinho consciously “[rejects] voiceovers or other interpreting voices [ . . . ], chooses not to edit out extraneous diegetic noise or redundancy and lapses in the dialogue, giving the impression that the viewer is witnessing a film in the making” (Shaw and Dennison 107). By leaving the noise of the screaming children in the final documentary, Coutinho helps the audience to identify and connect with the scene as most everyone can relate with it. Who among us has not been trying to accomplish a task or have a conversation with someone and has not had their focus interrupted by the screaming of children? As previously discussed, Coutinho always endeavors to film the “encontro entre o cineasta e o

mundo [ . . . ] filme uma relação” (Coutinho, “A Pessoa” 109), a sentiment that receives emphasis with the inclusion of this aspect of the relationship between Carla and Coutinho.

Next, Elizabeth lives with Dona Thereza and tells Coutinho that she likes life, just not religion: “Nem acredito em Deus. Tem muita coisa na vida que não vejo, se visse Deus, seria fácil pra crer” (*Santo*). Returning to the census numbers, people claimed atheism far more than either Candomblé or Umbanda but no one besides Elizabeth in the documentary professed to not believe in any form of God. Once again, Coutinho conveys the feeling that while she constitutes part of the community in geographic terms, she does not have a sense of religious community which somewhat alienates her from the rest of the residents of Vila Parque da Cidade. Religion plays a very important part of the lives of these people, defining their every thought and action.

To create some of the ideas mentioned by the residents in order to produce a work of fiction, one would have to work very hard. We have already mentioned the episodes where a spirit possessed Andre’s wife and wanted to murder him. He also recounts an incident that occurred after his mother passed away. He tells Coutinho that he became very moody, started smoking, drinking, and even contemplated suicide at work as his life spiraled into a deep depression. One day, his wife sat next to him on the couch and said, in the voice of his mother: “Meu filho, o que aconteceu comigo é do destino. Você ’tá bebendo, você ’tá fumando, você não dorme mais, vi você no trabalho, pondo arma na cabeça. [ . . . ] Meu filho, não adianta querer [morrer] sem a [vontade de Deus]” (*Santo*). From that moment on, he dropped all of his vices and returned to a normal life.

Nira also tells Coutinho of a supernatural healing that occurred to her son, Alex. Twice he had asked her to pray for him, as he did not feel well. She did and the sickness went away. The third time he came to her, she refused, saying: “Vai na igreja. Ouve a palavra e pede o

obreiro lá pra te orar e você vai ficar bom. Você sabe que Deus cura! E ele foi, quase morrendo, arrastando e saiu de lá pulando!” (*Santo*). Coutinho asks Alex about the incident and he says: “Eu acho que o que aconteceu foi fé muito grande” (*Santo*). If we remember, Alex identifies himself as a practitioner of both Catholicism and Umbanda, and as this incident shows, his participation in one does not diminish his faith in the other.

Finally, we hear the story from Dona Thereza where her friend looked at her strangely and told her that she did not see Dona Thereza, rather she had seen a queen in her place. She began to think about it, as she did like all the fancy things (gold, silver, crystals, etc.) but she lived in a favela and could not afford such luxuries. She went to the Umbanda center and spoke with a woman there who told her that in another life she had lived as a queen in a period of time where the queens were not kind as they could just torture or kill whomever they pleased. Dona Thereza told Coutinho: “Acho que estou pagando um pouco da dívida que trouxe da outra vida, por isto moro assim [agora]” (*Santo*). She also believed that in a different past life, she lived in the time of Beethoven: “Nós temos muitas vidas, por isto conheço e gosto da música dele pois sou analfabeto e não entendo nada. Como poderia entender Beethoven de outro jeito?” (*Santo*). Coutinho entered this project with the intent to film the narration of experiences about the magic present in the everyday acts of the faithful practitioners of religion and heard incredible stories of faith, of healing, and of the supernatural.

How can we discern between truth and fiction and does it really matter? Coutinho says the following concerning the documentary in general:

A religião foi fantástica, não creio que volte a fazer um filme tão ficcional quanto este. As pessoas gostam do filme porque todo mundo quer o imaginário, o delirante, o maravilhoso, a ficção em estado puro. Talvez seja a coisa da religião,

que é um salto para a ficção. Você não pode mais dizer o que é verdade ou mentira. Você tem uma preta velha que conversa com você [. . .] é verdade; passa a ser verdade [. . .] tem um teor ficcional. [. . .] Eu não trabalho com nitômana, eu não trabalho só com a ‘verdade’, mas não com mitômana. [. . .] Eu estou no nível em que a verdade e a mentire se confundem, mas não na mentira total, factual.

(qtd. in Lins, “O Cinema” 193)

His interest does not depend on whether or not the residents tell him the truth. In their minds, these things truly exist, they sincerely believed that all this happens in their lives. In the words of Coutinho: “Não interessa [. . .] se o relato é verdadeiro. Interessa a narrativa em si [. . .] se o cara me contar algo bem, não tenho como não acreditar, seja lá o que ele estiver contando. É uma relação subjetiva, não objetiva, a que mantenho com os personagens” (“Não Encontro” 84). Religion, by nature, implies a supernatural belief in a higher power or higher powers that can influence lives. These stories of the supernatural add the flavor of authenticity to these residents’ stories as they share what their religious beliefs mean to them.

*Santo forte* represents a fresh view of the favelas in Rio de Janeiro because “[it displays] not only the vision of this outsider [Coutinho] who went up the hill, but the image of the *favela* inhabitants as they would like to be seen” (Dias 108, emphasis in original). The residents have a difficult time feeling a sense of community with everybody who lives in Vila Parque da Cidade as religion plays such an integral part of their identity. A strongly developed sense of “sub-community” did exist as most every religious group felt a strong bond with others who believed and practiced in the same way. However, Coutinho also demonstrates that, based on situations that had occurred within the separate religious communities, some people felt no sense of belonging with those that lived in their same favela, but rather only identified on a global level



with those that practice the same faith. Returning to the words of Anderson, he emphasizes that, in this situation, “Each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slight notion” (35). *Santo forte* shows us in a very respectful manner the intricacies of imagined communities, from smaller communities within the greater community as a whole and the individual connecting with a globally imagined community based on shared beliefs and practices. This documentary marks another success for Eduardo Coutinho as he strives to develop the individual’s identity within the greater community while giving voice to the underrepresented population in Brazil.

## Chapter 3

### *Edificio Master: Storytelling and Community Building*

Produced and directed by Eduardo Coutinho, *Edificio Master* displays the lives of the inhabitants of a particular apartment building in Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro called Edificio Master. The film reveals another side of life in Copacabana very different from the typical stereotypes of Rio de Janeiro. A careful analysis of this movie demonstrates that this documentary offers not only a radically different perspective of Rio de Janeiro but also a unique set of principles for defining community. While conversing with individuals and avoiding the sensational aspects of life in Copacabana, Coutinho manages to create a series of parallel stories that, when taken together, allow him to examine how communities form within this particular apartment building. Coutinho problematizes how we think about community, showing the tension between the appearance of fragmentation within the apartment building and the superficial ways in which people connect and those close to their neighbors. Two main schools of thought prevail within the Master building: the residents who feel a definite community exists and those who feel they live in an individualistic environment. In addition to geographical proximity and interpersonal interaction as methods for developing community, Coutinho introduces a third method: shared storytelling. The honesty of the stories that residents share with the camera and the honesty of Coutinho's own storytelling process allow him to create an ethos with resident and viewer alike while establishing the overall documentary as the vehicle for truly creating a sense of community within the Master building.

David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson emphasize in *Film Art: An Introduction* several unique dimensions of documentaries, primarily based on stages of production. They note that the director of a documentary typically only controls some parts of the film, for example the

preparation, shooting and editing. Other common aspects of film, such as the script and rehearsals do not usually factor into the documentary process. Finally, there exist some general aspects of film present in the documentary genre but typically in an uncontrolled sense, such as the configuration of the locations for filming, the lighting, and the behavior of the actors (40). Coutinho takes all these aspects into consideration and uses them to enhance the storytelling throughout the film. With the complete elimination of scripts, rehearsals, even avoiding meeting the people before he speaks with them on camera, Coutinho creates sense of honesty and genuineness that encourages viewers to identify with the people on screen as we trust that what Coutinho shows us accurately represents these people's lives.

Eduardo Coutinho himself has commented on the process of documentary storytelling, saying: “O documentário é inacabado, imperfeito, tem que deixar lacuna. O filmar está presente nos meus trabalhos, o processo sempre está presente. A câmera, a equipe, minhas perguntas. Não tenho roteiro, tento fazer uma montagem, que é o meu roteiro, que não seja ficcionalizante” (“Fala de Seu Trabalho”). We can see examples of this very clearly in *Edifício Master*, often seeing the microphone dip down into the camera screen during some of the conversations. Some people will think this a sign of an unprofessional team but we know that that does not accurately portray the situation. Coutinho often allows this equipmental interference in his films to remind his viewers that this film takes an intimate look at real life, not a fictional tale. When asked why he makes it a point to have the equipment appear in the scene, he says: “Não faço questão, acaba entrando. Se fosse uma questão, seria algo terrível. Mas tem um processo de filmagem, uma lócia do acerto, da invasão consentida. Fazia parte do filme isso, essa é minha visão, embora não seja essencial” (“Não Encontro” 85). In his book *Introdução ao Documentário Brasileiro*, Amir Labaki comments on the documentaries of Coutinho, saying the following: “as obras de

Coutinho são sùtis sinfonias de olhares, gestos e fala nas variações da língua portuguesaa dominadas por seus personagens. É isso o filme — e não muito mais. Decifrar essa tessitura desafia a sensibilidade de públicos que não dominam o português e transcende muito o potencial expressivo de legendas para outras línguas” (79). Viewers know what a real conversation looks like and can differentiate between one that is faked or staged. Coutinho’s inclusion of the gestures, the body language, the pauses in conversation and the various dialects of Portuguese all combine to tell a convincing story, one that viewers believe because of the ethos he creates.

Coutinho’s storytelling manages to achieve its compelling nature largely in part because of the methods he utilizes to film this documentary. The Master building has twelve floors, two hundred, seventy-six condos, and more than five hundred residents overall. Eduardo Coutinho and his team rent one of these apartments for a month and over the course of a week, Coutinho, with the help of three camera teams, manages to talk with thirty-seven residents. As the audience watches these conversations, we meet several people courageous enough to share their stories with the world. Cecilia Sayad writes an essay on the works of Coutinho, saying “his onscreen performance allows for the investigation of an under-explored authorial function: that of giving voice to the Other” (“Flesh for the Author” 136). These individuals typically do not receive representation in society, often being ignored by the media simply based on the fact that they account for merely a few of the thousands of people who live in the high-rise buildings of Copacabana.

Eduardo Coutinho has earned the status of a renowned documentarian in Brazil which begs the question of why he would focus an entire documentary on the lives of a few middle-class residents of a high-rise in Copacabana. In describing why he had the desire to make this documentary, he states: “Eu vou fazer esse filme porque ninguém mais vai querer fazer [. . .]

vou tentar descobrir a vida dessas pessoas que vivem num prédio em Copacabana” (“Fala de Seu Trabalho”). Society typically ignores these people, as does the media because they do nothing but live their lives. So many things happen in Rio de Janeiro that become sensationalized in the media that it seems nobody wants to take the time to talk to people who merely try to live normal lives.

For example, the Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security in the US Department of State published a report on the crime and safety in Rio de Janeiro on 1 May 2013. Before the report even begins, the author presents a list of keywords that include: “Stolen items; Theft; Rape/Sexual Violence; Fraud, Burglary; Murder, Other Threat/Incident; [etc.]” (United States). As soon as a tourist interested in traveling to Rio clicks on this report to learn about the crime and safety, these compelling words will immediately color their remaining reading. As we continue to read through the report, sentences such as the following perpetuate the stereotypes of Rio:

In 2012, there were [. . .] 4,041 homicides in Rio de Janeiro state and 1,029 homicides in the city of Rio de Janeiro” and “If confronted by an individual who has a weapon, stay calm and simply hand over your valuables. Do not resist or talk back to the assailant. Death may result from resistance. Many muggers have weapons and may be under the effects of crack cocaine. They will not hesitate to harm you if you resist. (United States).

While these words of warning potentially depict some occurrences, they focus on and perpetuate the stereotypes about Rio de Janeiro. Coutinho, however, takes a different approach in making a documentary about life in Rio: “O trabalho é o horror e o não-horror de viver num lugar assim” (“Fala de Seu Trabalho”). In this particular documentary, Coutinho does not focus on those

things that typically come to mind when someone thinks of Copacabana and Rio de Janeiro which explains why *Edifício Master* presents such a new and fresh perspective.

A great example of Coutinho's lack of focus on the sensational aspects of life comes at the very beginning of the documentary when the viewers meet Esther, a woman who has lived in Copacabana for many years. One night, a handsome, well-dressed white man assaulted her, forcing her to go to the bank and withdraw all of her money. At the end of this assault, he returned a bag to her that seemed to have all of her money in it but turned out that it was only scraps of paper. Apparently, the assailant had been waiting for her in her apartment and walked her at gunpoint to the bank and not one of her neighbors noticed anything or, if they did, they failed to react to the situation in any way. Esther relates that she seriously considered suicide after this particular encounter. We know that reports of assaults and suicides happen often in newspapers of Rio; however, the way Coutinho treats this experience and the fact that he does not end the conversations after her telling him that she considered suicide emphasizes the lack of focus on the sensational aspects of life in Copacabana. He continues talking to Esther and we learn the reason she did not commit suicide was that she owed money to some stores: "Não sou destas pessoas que dizem, ah morrer, defuntos não pagam. Quando tiver de morrer, quero morrer em paz. Quero morrer não devendo a ninguém" (*Edifício*). Coutinho asks about her current life after the assault, after the suicidal thoughts and she responds telling him about her "muito bacana" boyfriend and summarizes her life as currently going very well. This case shows just one of the examples of the way in which Coutinho avoids sensationalism in his storytelling, making the effort to look beyond the heavy things in life to show the resiliency of the human spirit.

Coutinho believes that the lives of the characters in his documentaries exist as works of art that deserve the opportunity for display across the world. Filipe Furtado published an essay on the figure of the actor in contemporary Brazilian cinema, saying the following about the “actors” in the works of Coutinho: “ele não se preocupa com a veracidade das histórias desfilados por seus personagens, já que o importante é sua existência na tela de cinema” (129). Coutinho recognizes that, although he strives for objectivity, showing only the truth and reality of the people, the presence of microphones and a camera team automatically (and sometimes imperceptibly) changes the behavior and mannerisms of the characters: “Às vezes o câmera vem com luz e tal e ela [a pessoa entrevistada] fica inibida [. . .]. Mas, como eu não mexo mais na câmera, eu não falo nada para o câmera, eu só fico olhando pros olhos dela, e só fico ouvindo o que ela diz, ela esquece que tem uma câmera [. . .]. Isso sim que é real, a câmera ela esquece depois de 15 minutos” (Coutinho, “Se Eu Definisse” 153). Eventually the residents become accustomed to the presence of the film crew and almost subconsciously revert to their normal selves: the show that they put on for the camera fades away, leaving Coutinho with a demonstration of how they really live and act.

Fernando Andacht has researched the representation of reality in media culture, saying: “Tudo no [*Edifício Master*] indica que o testemunho produzido é necessário e suficiente, não há nenhum interesse em outros documentos, nem lugar para o que não foi visível no tempo da filmagem do documentário no preciso instante de co-presença do realizador e dos filmados” (106-07). Coutinho does not find it necessary to verify the stories or research other sources to get more information about these people. He simply wants to hear what they have to say. For this reason, he chose a building in the middle of Copacabana full of residents who often have no

representation to show that normal people live in places typically associated with sensationalism and tourism.

After watching the film, viewers could potentially wonder why the residents of this building display such a willingness to speak with Coutinho, a total stranger. In an interview, Gardnier, Valente, and Eduardo ask this very question and the director provides an intriguing response: “Todo mundo quer ser escutado [. . .] não tem impulso maior no ser humano que o interesse em ser reconhecido e escutado [. . .]. Por que falam? Acho que porque sentem que estão sendo ouvidas” (“Não Encontro” 86). Coutinho focuses on telling a story and does a admirable job in inviting people to share their individual stories. He speaks openly with Alessandra about her career as a call girl, asking if she would tell her daughter the things she had to do to support the two of them. Emphatically, she responds: “Vou, claro que vou contar tudo para ela! Quero que ela saiba destas coisas, pois ninguém falou para mim” (*Edifício*). This level of honesty pervades the entire documentary. She had an opportunity to tell her story and she would not miss out on it. Coutinho points out that when the people “tem alguém que bebe o que ela diz, que a escuta como ela nunca foi escutada” (“Se Eu Definisse” 153) they will share their stories willingly, without hesitation.

The idea that the conversations become an opportunity for the residents of the Master building to tell their stories emerges as a central theme of the documentary. As already discussed, these people make up part of a group that typically has no representation in the Brazilian media. Coutinho takes the time to stop, talk with them, and really hear them and by so doing, they reward him with some very personal and candid stories. In one case, a man named Antonio Carlos explains his nervousness at talking with Coutinho, confessing that he stutters often and considers himself very shy. However, not once during the whole episode, do we hear



him stutter. He also takes this opportunity to share his story with the world and by so doing, has the confidence to speak without problems.

These residents know their stories will comprise a film that would appear in Brazil (and perhaps the world) but still have the courage to take this opportunity and share things of importance from their lives. Coutinho helps these people open up to a stranger through his honesty and listening without judging: “Por que falam para mim e não para outros documentaristas? Porque eu preciso que falem. Os outros não. Eles já têm idéias prontas. Os outros julgam, querem ver o que projetaram antes, têm todo um *a priori*. Querem mudar o mundo mudando o personagem. Eu não quero nada do personagem. Não quero julgar. O cara pode ser pedófilo e eu digo ‘vamos lá’ (Coutinho, “Não Encontro” 86, emphasis in original). By so doing, Coutinho develops an ethos with the residents of Edifício Master, enabling them to trust him as they know he will truly listen without making judgments.

Coutinho himself provides another reason why these residents offer up their stories. He explains that he often discovers excitement when the camera comes around, as those whom he encounters think they will appear on television, though he quickly dissuades them of that notion, given his policy of honesty. He says: “já digo de cara que não sou da televisão, é cinema e é documentário, eles mal sabem o que é isso. Perde a magia que eles esperam, mas ao mesmo tempo agrada ter uma câmera pra ouvi-los. E então as pessoas falam para a câmera, elas gostam e sai cada coisa maravilhosa” (“Fala de Seu Trabalho”). Once again, we see the effect that Coutinho’s creation of ethos in storytelling has on the residents. His honesty and candor, coupled with the opportunity for the residents to share their stories produces quality, yet sometimes surprising, results.

Returning to Alessandra's story, she very calmly tells Coutinho that she is a habitual liar. When he asks how many times she lied to him during their conversation, she promises that she was truthful the entire time. In fact, she admits that she lied to the camera crew the day before when they asked if they would find her home the next day so that they could talk with her, saying she would leave early that day and did not know when she would return. They only found her because she completely forgot about this conversation and stayed home. Coutinho states that the manner in which people speak about themselves, not the things they say, make the conversations in this documentary so different from his other films: "Não interessa [. . .] se o relato é verdadeiro. Interessa a narrativa em si [. . .] se o cara me contar algo bem, não tenho como não acreditar, seja lá o que ele estiver contando. É uma relação subjetiva, não objetiva, a que mantenho com os personagens" ("Não Encontro" 84). Coutinho does not concern himself with whether or not the stories are truthful, instead creating the aforementioned ethos through his honesty and frankness in his dealings with the residents. This allows him to focus on the act of storytelling itself and how it transforms those with whom he converses, helping the residents to foster a sense of community with the others who also share their stories.

Throughout all of the conversations Coutinho has with the various residents, the question of community in the building kept surfacing. Overall, one gets the sense that two schools of thought exist on this particular question: those residents who felt as though they live in a very individualistic environment and those that experience a definite sense of community. Some residents were very outspoken about the idea of community (or lack thereof) that they feel whereas others did not mention it at all. *Webster's College Dictionary* defines "community" as "as group of people who reside in a specific locality, share government, and often have a

common cultural and historical heritage” (269). A careful analysis of the conversations in *Edifício Master* sheds light on the accuracy of Webster’s definition in this particular case.

One of the stories we hear comes from Vera, a middle-aged woman who paints a stark picture of the way life was at the Edifício Master building. She has lived there for over forty-nine years in twenty-eight different apartments and tells Coutinho of how rough life had become with suicides, deaths of the security guards, drugs, alcohol, and murders: “A vida era muito pesada. Nos corredores havia mulheres caídas, havia filas de mulheres e homens esperando a frigüesa para entrar outro, havia muitas cafetinas [. . .] foi muito pesado mesmo” (*Edifício*). However, once Sérgio began working as the manager of the building, all of that changed: “As pessoas mal-gradadas saírem, agora [só] têm pessoas de boa gradas” (*Edifício*). She feels that only good people now live in the Edifício Master building and thoroughly enjoys her neighbors.

Coutinho tells the viewers Henrique’s story, an elderly gentleman who lived and worked in the United States for many years and even had the opportunity to meet and sing with Frank Sinatra. He firmly believes that his life would have ended if not for his neighbors. A few months prior to his conversation with Coutinho, he arrived home on a rainy day, slipped on the wet tile in the entrance to his apartment and hit his head forcefully on the floor, possibly going unconscious for a short time. His neighbor, Geni, passing by his apartment when she heard Henrique moaning as he came to, thought to herself “algo está errado com Henrique” so she entered, found him and called for medical help. At this point of the story, Coutinho interjects, asking: “E se não ter passado esta pessoa, por acaso?” Henrique responds without hesitation “Estava morto!” (*Edifício Master*). He credits being alive to his relationship with his neighbor and feels like he has developed good rapport with many people in the complex. His relationship with those around him has reached the point where he plays Frank Sinatra on his sound system

two Saturdays a month so that the people outside his window can hear. He gathers quite a following for these music sessions, telling Coutinho: “Então todo mundo que passa fica lá na janela fazendo “Ah! Ok! Ok! Ok! Ok!”” (*Edifício*). Henrique has a very positive sense of community based on the incidents recounted here.

Returning to Alessandra, the nineteen-year old call girl, we learn that she works in the sex trade in order to provide for herself and her daughter. She spoke openly about the trials and difficulties of being a call girl, emphasizing that this particular line of work does not mean easy money as people might think, given that she feels humiliated all the time while she works and has taken to drinking on a daily basis in order to go to work. Coutinho asks Alessandra how she found the courage to discuss her work and her life with him, knowing that the things she shares would become part of a movie and that many people would see her openly discuss being a call girl. Her response is poignant and well-delivered:

Não é coragem, para mim isso é uma coisa normal. O pessoal hoje em dia, no mundo que a gente tal, o pessoal tá com a cabeça nos anos antes de Cristo, já passou. Hoje no mundo é tudo normal. Nasce gente que ’tão contra jeito. É homem com homem, mulher com mulher, né? É 50 mulher pra cada homem. É cada coisa que não deve ser normal. É gente roubando gente. É político roubando gente. É ladrão roubando de pobre, né? Ladrão pobre manda pobre a roubar rico roubando pobre, é gente roubando gente, aquela coisa o pessoal acha normal, por que que se eu fazer programa é anormal? É coisa de alguém me apedrejar? Não acho isso não. (*Edifício*)

She emphasizes that her entire family, as well as those who live around her, know her profession and she does not feel that they judge her because of her work. It stands to reason that if she did

not have a good relationship with the people that lived in the Master building with her, she might have been much more reluctant to share such personal details about her life with the documentarian that would include this information for display on the big screen.

Fernando José rounds out the discussion of residents who feel that a sense of community exists in the Master building. Coutinho asks this seventy-three-year old retired actor if he likes living in this apartment building and if he gets along with everyone. Fernando provides a quick response: “[Gosto] todo, pessoal todo, conheço todo mundo!” (*Edifício*). He continues and relates a specific relationship with the elderly couple that lives across the hall from him: “Cuido, por exemplo, tem um casal de velhinhos que mora aqui em frente, já idosos. Eles não têm telefone, não têm campainha na porta, ele está esclerosado e ela está muito doente. Eles têm mais de 90 anos, então eu que cuido deles” (*Edifício*). He has only good things to say about the residents with whom he comes in contact and, as mentioned previously, “[ele conhece] todo mundo!”

If the documentary had only included these conversations, one would leave with the idea that within the Edifício Master building exists a closely-knit community in lower-middle-class Copacabana. However, Coutinho does not ignore the residents that might not agree with this assessment, taking care to show both sides of the story. Daniela teaches English in Rio after living in New Orleans for eight years while her mother worked in the consulate. Now she lives alone with her three cats, though her boyfriend comes over and usually spends about half of the week with her. A self-diagnosed, self-titled neurotic, she suffers from social phobia: “a aglomeração típica do vai e vem de Copacabana faz com que eu chego em casa muito estressada. Não sei se é pessoas de mais ou calçadas muito estreitas ou se é uma fusão desagradável dos dois elementos” (*Edifício*). Once again, the candid and honest nature of Coutinho’s style extract an

intimate look into Daniela's psyche from her perspective. Such candor rarely manifests itself in conversations between strangers but Coutinho's developed ethos enables her to feel at ease.

Interestingly, Daniela rarely looks directly at Coutinho and the camera during the entire conversation. José Carlos Avellar comments on this and Coutinho's subsequent response in his article "Camera lucida": "At one moment [Coutinho] turns to Daniela and asks her something that, at least in principle, need not be asked, because asking questions is the very essence of an interview: 'Can I ask you something?'" (24). And yet the query does seem out of place, given that the basis for the entire conversation consists of the question and answer format. Avellar suggests that the inquiries utilized in a documentary do not necessarily seek to receive answers or gain clarification but rather to provide an opportunity for the interviewee to converse with the documentarian about the past experiences that shaped this person's development: "Cinema, in a documentary, in fact documents nothing but the will to ask: 'Can I ask you something?'" (25). In this sense, Coutinho's question becomes representative of the quintessential task of any documentarian who endeavors to create an authentic portrayal in their films that accurately captures reality.

Coutinho wants to know why Daniela would not look at him while they were talking. She replies: "Não porque o que estou dizendo não tem veracidade mas porque eu não sei se tenho a auto-confiança para encará-lo, sem talvez gaguejar ou piscar compulsivamente. Não estou devendo nem mentindo mas estou temendo. O fator de pessoas não ter tetê-a-tetê é o medo" (*Edifício*). Although she worries that he will think her untruthful, she nevertheless continues to avoid looking at him. She confesses the following during the conversation regarding how she feels about interacting with those around her: "Eu sei que pode ser feio tá, mas eu, muitas vezes, fico contente quando eu subo e desço no elevador sozinha. Não porque eu não vou perder tempo

parando num andar, mas porque eu sei que eu não ter que ver nem ser vista” (*Edifício*). She tries to avoid contact with those around her and seems grateful to not feel a sense of participating in a close-knit community in the apartment building.

Coutinho discusses this particular conversation in detail, saying that his interrupting Daniela to ask why she would not look at him became essential to the integrity of this particular conversation:

Essencial é a interferência da minha voz para intervir na conversa e esclarecer alguma coisa [ . . . ]. Como não perguntar para [Daniela] por que ela insiste em não olhar para mim? Esse filme também é sobre olhar, ver sem ser visto, ser visto sem ser, ver sem ouvir, ouvir sem ver, sabe? E [Daniela] de repente acaba falando disso. Ela sobe o elevador torcendo para ninguém entra. E eu tenho isso.

Precisava interrompê-la e aí ela faz um quadro da selva de pedra. Afirma que não olha para ninguém, que teme as pessoas. Isso é maravilhoso. (“Não Encontro” 85)

He points out that in an classic American documentary, critics would look upon this type of interruption as one of the worst things a documentarian could do. They typically endeavor to avoid appearing in the final product, without interrupting the person with whom they converse (85). Coutinho learned something very important while working in the television industry, before ever making a documentary: “Se você se posta a uma distância de três metros do seu interlocutor para não aparecer na imagem, você não está conversando com essa pessoa. Ninguém conversa a essa distância. Você tem que estar junto. Senão é como se houvesse uma barreira, a pessoa fala com se estivesse falando para a polícia ou para o ‘cinema’, quer dizer, está prestando um depoimento” (“O Real” 30). For this reason, one often sees Coutinho in the image as well as the

person with whom he speaks, as it helps them to feel as though he considers it a conversation between people instead of them merely giving a statement or testimony to an official.

Returning to the idea of lack of community, we hear the story of Marcelo who first entered the Master building four years prior and did not like what he saw. Twenty years before the making of the documentary, Marcelo had spent a lot of time in apartment buildings like this one, living a life that was “uma mistura entre o sórdido e o amoroso [. . .] não fazia muita distinção [e] não dava para sentir muito bem” (*Edifício*). He has gotten used to living in the Edifício Master building and even enjoys the diversity of people that live in the building even though he feels claustrophobic because of the number of people: “O fato de ter esta diversidade de pessoas aqui não me incomoda muito, eu acho que é mais a concentração. O número é muito opressivo, é muita gente” (*Edifício*). Any sense of community in the building that could exist for Marcelo becomes drowned out by the sheer number of people who live there.

Cristina, a young girl kicked out of her father’s house at the age of eighteen as she had become pregnant against his wishes, relates to Coutinho the difficulty in leaving her father’s large house, bringing the contents of her room to her own apartment in Copacabana. In fact, she called her father that first night and asked him to allow her to return and sleep at his house but he refused. When she first moved in, she hated her apartment but now it has become her home. She does not feel as though a sense of community exists and feels annoyed by many aspects of the apartment building: “O que me incomoda é o barulho assim, conviver com as vidas das outras pessoas entrando pelo vão assim das janelas, basicamente [. . .] você sabe quando os meus vizinhos em baixo estão cozinhando ou discutindo ou brigando com os filhos [. . .] adoraria isolar aquilo. [Têm] muitas brigas e isto me incomoda” (*Edifício*). It would not seem as difficult



to overlook annoying things that your neighbor might do if you enjoy a sense of community but if you do not, these same things drive a wedge farther and farther between you both.

Coutinho includes an interesting conversation in the final production, a Spanish woman named Maria Pia. Born in a small village in Spain and having moved all over the world, she finally ended up in Brazil where her children were living. Currently, she lives in the apartment with her grandson, Felipe, whose father has trouble keeping a job and cannot adequately care for his son. She has some very strong opinions about poverty and Brazilians that some people could take offense to: “Só tem pobreza em lugares com guerra. Neste país, não tem pobreza, eles só não querem trabalhar” (*Edifício*). Coutinho explains the importance to him of leaving such a strong statement in his final product: “[Ela] fala que ‘o brasileiro é preguiçoso’ a partir de uma formação de ética católica [. . .] espanhola que veio pra cá e ficou 50 anos trabalhando e tal! Então tem uma vida, que para não destruir a vida passada dela, ela vai dizer aquilo [. . .] E o que ela fala é forte porque ela acredita naquilo, isso não quer dizer que eu lhe dei razão” (“Se Eu Definisso” 141). This notion of hers of the lazy Brazilian has a detrimental effect on her perception of community within the building.

We also hear the story of Fabiana, a young lady who moved to the Master building only four months before being filmed for this documentary. She relates that ever since she moved in, she could hear the parents call the name of the little girl that lived above her, Tainá. Fabiana relates that she can hear her voice as she sings in the shower and even felt the desire to comfort her when she cried but always felt too embarrassed to say anything. The day she spoke with Coutinho, she rode in the elevator with a group of girls that she sees often and wonders if Tainá could be one of them. She shares the following story: “Daí eu já estava descendo no elevador quando abriu a porta e a mãe dela, talvez a empregada não sei falou ‘Pega estas compras aí

Tainá' e eu fiquei olhando pra ela assim, hoje vi quem é Tainá depois de quatro meses”  
(*Edifício*). After all that time of living below this family, being curious to meet and learn more about them but always being too embarrassed, we understand that Fabiana does not feel comfortable enough in the apartment building to reach out to try and get to know her neighbors. Maybe, if there existed a better sense of community and friendliness in the complex, her reluctance to reach out could have dissipated.

The final conversation that indicates some residents' belief that an individualistic environment prevails in the Master building involves a man named José Carlos. In his opinion, this particular apartment complex marks the worst he has ever lived in as far as a sense of community goes. He recently moved from Rio's North Zone to the South Zone and shares the following vignette about the differences of community between North and South:

Quando eu cheguei aqui, me estressei muito, eu gostava uma cervejinha com meus amigos, fazemos isto na Zona Norte, as casas estão todas cercas, então falava “Tudo bem, Seu Joaquim, Dona Maria, Seu João? Aqui nos trancamos num apartamento e só temos notícias se morreu um vizinho quando some durante mais, Seu Henrique, um vizinho nosso, muito amigo inclusive de Dona Maria Americana, Seu Henrique teve uma queda dentro de casa, ficou dois dias sumido e só sabemos de Senhor Henrique porque ele conseguiu se arrastar, ligou pra o portaria me parece, (não foi meu filho?) e vieram socorrê-lo e daí nos ficamos sabendo de nosso vizinho. Lá não, quando morava na Zona Norte “Olha não vi Dona Maria hoje, o que aconteceu” e batiu na porta e a vizinha aparecia.

(*Edifício*)

The fact that he did not even know what really happened with Henrique (as discussed earlier in this chapter) becomes an indictment of how he views the state of things in this building. His wife, apparently good friends with Henrique, still does not know him well enough to know that he had been seriously hurt until much later. José Carlos plainly feels nostalgia for the close-knit community that he had left behind in the North Zone.

If we consider all of the conversations together, we tend to get the sense that the residents overall do not feel that there exists any sense of community in their building. We do need to take into account the rest of the film as Coutinho's team recorded footage that lends credence to both sides of the question. These images, used as interludes between the different conversations, help us to better understand life in the Edifício Master building. The first such scene captured a young boy returning to his home from school and saw his neighbor's cat on the doorstep of his apartment, trying to get back inside. We see a moment of hesitation as the boy considers whether to go inside his own home or go help his neighbor's cat though he ultimately decides to help. He had to knock three times on the door before the neighbor heard it and answered, demonstrating apparent gratitude for the boy's help. We do not know if they thought they had lost their cat or how it escaped in the first place but the boy's willingness to help indicates that he (and by extension, his family) feel a sense of belonging with their neighbors, which had cultivated a desire to help those around him. Coutinho comments on this episode in an interview with Gardnier, Valente, and Eduardo:

A cena mais espantosa não foi filmada nem por mim nem pelo fotógrafo, foi filmada pelo primeiro assistente. É a cena do gato [. . .] [Ele] estava filmando e entra aquele garoto do prédio [. . .] É uma cena espantosa, que parece dramaticamente ensaiada. Não foi nem sequer pensada. Foi por acaso, dada de

presente [ . . . ] É fantástica pelo seguinte: o cara vem, olha, hesita, vai abrir a porta, existe, vai até o gato, toca a campainha, a vizinha abre e invade aquele som “new age.” (“Não Encontro” 101)

Remarks like this assist Coutinho in developing ethos with the viewers, as the scene appears planned because of how well it fit with the overall message of the documentary, in actuality captured a random occurrence that demonstrates what really goes on in this apartment building, at least for this young boy and his neighbor.

In another scene, Coutinho’s team captures a group of women hurrying along the hallways with an already lit birthday cake, headed to surprise a friend and sing “Happy Birthday”. A close-knit community would expect this kind of thing, and it goes to show that friendships do exist within the apartment building. Finally, we see a short clip of the crew as they enter the various apartments to begin filming. Every single resident receives these strangers warmly and affectionately, demonstrating their kindness and hospitality.

However, when we juxtapose the image of the friendly greetings with the conversations that indicate the possibility of the lack of community within the building, we must stop and consider the intended message. In one scene, the team must go to the next-door neighbor and ask them to turn down their music as the interview progresses live in the next apartment. Would not it have been easier for the neighbor to go make the request instead of a group of strangers? Does this pose a contradictory image to that of the friendly greetings? What constitutes the overall image Coutinho portrays with the production of this documentary? The final image of the documentary shows the exterior of the Edifício Master building once night has fallen. The camera starts out with a wide angle, showing many of the apartments with their internal lights on, providing a sense of communality. Finally, as the camera pans across the building, it zooms

in until no more than one lit apartment fits on the screen at a time, highlighting the people or person moving around inside. This summarizes Coutinho's problematization of how we consider community, emphasizing the appearance of fragmentation within the apartment building.

Through a careful analysis of the film, it appears that Coutinho suggests a third idea as to how communities form: through shared experiences. As the residents of the Edifício Master building share their stories with Coutinho, they subconsciously invite him in as part of their community. They share their experiences and by so doing, invited Coutinho to take part in the memories thereof. Likewise, through Coutinho's subsequent sharing of their stories with us, the viewers, through the final production of the film, also receive an implicit invitation to share in these people's memories and experiences, thus becoming a part of their community whereas before watching the documentary, we had no idea they even existed. Therefore, the documentary in and of itself becomes a vehicle by which a sense of community forms among residents. As Consuelo Lins states, "A distância que [vizinhos] normalmente [mantêm] se transformaria em intimidade [ao entrevistá-los]" (*O Documentário* 140). Before they had this opportunity to share their stories, only a fragmented vision of community existed between residents. Benedict Anderson talks about this phenomenon in his book *Imagined Communities*, saying: "[The community] is *imagined* because members of even the smallest [apartment building] will never know most of their fellow-members, [or even] meet them. . .yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (49, emphasis in original). This mental image of the residents' communion became a reality through the shared telling of their stories to Coutinho, and by default, to the world. Interestingly, the version of this film on DVD provides the viewer with an option to watch the film with random sequencing. The conversations do not follow the same order, the interlude scenes come at different times throughout the course of the film, making it

highly unlikely that one would see the film in the exact same way twice. Mathematically speaking, based on the twenty-seven conversations and eight transitional film sequences, we use the factorial  $35!$  to find that over  $1.03 \times 10^{40}$  different viewing sequences exist (Hughes-Hallett et al. 436). This means that one could see all the positive indications of community at the beginning and the negative ones at the end, leaving a viewer with an overall negative impression or vice versa. This randomization option provides strong support for the documentary itself being the vehicle for developing a sense of community as that becomes the one constant: no matter what order the conversations appear, they always create a sense of community through the sharing of experiences.

The words of early twentieth century film-maker Alberto Cavalcanti provide a succinct summation of this documentary: “sinon pour les monuments, les villes seraient tous égaux” (*Rien*). Every major city in the world has similar people who try to live their lives day by day. Each city has their own newspapers that report the sensational but these cities also have normal people who would share their stories with the world if they had the opportunity. We must take care not to stereotype anyone because of what is in the news or see on the television, remembering that people who try to live their lives in all corners of the world, no matter what goes on around them.

*Edificio Master* presents a powerful look at the lives of residents of Copacabana who viewers would not meet otherwise. In their interview, Coutinho tells Gardnier, Valente, and Eduardo that he chose this particular building because of the building, not the people he would find inside, precisely because it was one of many apartment buildings in Copacabana (“Não Encontro” 87). Through his honesty and ability to listen without judging, Coutinho manages to create an ethos both with the residents and with the ultimate viewers of the film, enabling the

residents to share intimate details of their lives, thereby inviting Coutinho and every viewer to share in their community. Coutinho proves in *Edifício Master* that Webster's Dictionary does not comprise the only way to define and establish a sense a community. He successfully problematizes the typical interpretation of community based on proximity of location, suggesting that the sharing of experiences creates a sense of community where one may not have existed before merely based on interaction or geographical location. Coutinho reminds us that this documentary does not intend to portray lower-middle class Brazilians: "Eu não encontro o povo, encontro pessoas [ . . . ] Depois você pode generalizer e dizer que é um filme sobre a classe media [ . . . ] fiz o filme em um lugar onde tem pessoas, com nomes, e vou tentar ver se me aprofundo nessa individualidade" ("Não Encontro" 91). His documentaries always maintain their focus on the individual while allowing for the development of a sense of community through the impetus of shared experiences.

## Conclusions

In the context of Brazilian documentaries, Eduardo Coutinho distinguishes himself through his distinct style of “conversation cinema” as he looks at the question of documenting authentic reality in his films. *Boca de lixo*, *Santo forte*, and *Edifício Master* each provide a different look at the tension inherent in the building of communal identity in various venues. These three films demonstrate the difficulties in making a documentary that authentically represents reality, from how perceived authority influences Coutinho’s style of filming and the issues in ensuring that his documentaries remain authentic to the fact that observation changes the reality of the observed.

The issue of perceived authority becomes problematic for any documentarian. Oftentimes, when a person arrives with a camera team to interview and film someone, this person might assume that there exists a disparate relationship of authority, potentially leading them to act as though the police were asking them for a statement. In Coutinho’s words: “Você vai falar com pessoas de outra classe social e se pergunta como chegar a elas. É uma relação de pessoa a pessoa. Da primeira vez eu fui com as idéias prontas, com coisas que ‘tinham que aparecer’ [ . . . ] a pessoa fala como se estivesse falando para a polícia ou para o ‘cinema’, quer dizer, está prestando um depoimento” (“O Real” 30). Throughout all three documentaries discussed herein, Coutinho endeavors to converse with the residents as opposed to interviewing them through focusing on the amount of distance between each other. He also takes the time to sit and listen to these peoples’ stories without judgment, enabling them to feel at ease so they can answer his questions and tell their stories in a truthful manner with minimum embellishments.

Throughout all three films, one notes that Coutinho does not make the effort to keep the sound equipment and film crew out of the final production. We could easily assume that this



indicates a lack of professionalism but a careful analysis indicates that this might not be the case. Coutinho responds to criticism about including images of the support crew, saying: “Não faço questão, acaba entrando. Se fosse uma questão, seria algo terrível. Mas tem um processo de filmagem, uma lócia do acerto, da invasão consentida. Fazia parte do filme isso, essa é minha visão, embora não seja essencial” (“Não Encontro” 85). When one produces a documentary, we know that the documentarian often must utilize sound equipment and support personnel. By including these images, Coutinho creates an ethos with the viewers as he does not try to hide essential parts of the making of the documentary. These images also provide a reminder that these films are not fictional renderings, rather they demonstrate an authentic look at the reality of three different groups of Brazilians..

The fact that observation changes the reality of the observed becomes an underlying theme through all of Coutinho’s works. The difficulty in producing a documentary that authentically represents reality lies in human nature, as people consciously or subconsciously put on their best face once someone places them under observation. This fact constitutes an integral part of quantum theory, which according to the Weizemann Institute of Science, “by the very act of watching, the observer affects the observed reality. [. . .] The greater the amount of ‘watching,’ the greater the observer’s influence on what actually takes place” (“Quantum Theory”). Coutinho comments on how he handles this phenomenon: “Já digo de cara que não sou da televisão, é cinema e é documentário, eles mal sabem o que é isso. Perde a magia que eles esperam, mas ao mesmo tempo agrada ter uma câmera pra ouvi-los. E então as pessoas falam para a câmera, elas gostam e sai cada coisa maravilhosa” (“Fala de Seu Trabalho”). In addition to his upfront honesty, Coutinho uses another technique to help encourage authentic interaction and minimize the effect of the camera: “Eu não mexo mais na câmera, eu não falo nada para o

câmera, eu só fico olhando pros olhos dela, e só fico ouvindo o que ela diz, ela esquece que tem uma câmera” (“Se Eu Definissem” 153). Because Coutinho shows genuine interest in the stories these people have to tell and actively listens to the things they say, they discard their inhibitions and relax.

Coutinho’s attention to the difficulties inherent in producing quality, authentic documentaries enables the audience to focus more on the tensions that he documents in all three movies, namely that of developing self identity versus communal identity. In *Boca de Lixo*, the residents struggle daily against perceived outsider contempt and must rely on their communal identity to bolster their individual sense of self-respect and pride in the work they perform every day. In order to better understand the different sides of this particular tension, we incorporate an analysis of *Lixo Extraordinário* and *Ilha das Flores*. *Lixo Extraordinário* focuses almost exclusively on the pride and self-respect felt by the waste pickers in Jardim Gramacho outside of Rio de Janeiro whereas *Ilha das Flores* provides a scathing criticism of a society that conspires to keep these people in the situation wherein they find themselves, without endeavoring to sufficiently assist them. Coutinho includes both of these aspects in *Boca de Lixo*, providing a comprehensive look at the difficulties the waste pickers in the Itaoca landfill face on a daily basis, emphasizing the role of the community in helping the individual maintain their feelings of self-worth.

*Santo forte* develops the tension between developing a sense of religious community among residents based on their individual religious beliefs. At the same time, however, the film shows that many smaller communities may exist within the larger geographical whole. A strong sense of community exists within most every distinct religious group in Vila Parque da Cidade though an underlying tension exists because of those who do not feel a sense of community or

belonging with those around them. There also exists a tension between the different religious sects within the favela as each try to increase their membership. As each different religion, from Catholicism to Umbanda, and from Kardecist Spiritism to Candomblé, gains followers and becomes stronger, they turn into more developed ‘sub-communities’ which vie with each other to become the prominent religion within the overall ‘nation,’ to borrow from the ideas of Benedict Anderson. Through *Santo forte*, Coutinho demonstrates the intricacies of imagined communities, from smaller communities within the greater community as a whole and the individual connecting with a globally imagined community based on shared beliefs and practices.

Finally, *Edificio Master* provides a detailed look at the difficulty of creating a sense of community among the individuals who live in an apartment building in Copacabana. From the conversations with residents, Coutinho demonstrates that geographical proximity and personal interactions do not necessarily create a sense of community. As Benedict Anderson says, “[The community] is *imagined* because members of even the smallest [apartment building] will never know most of their fellow-members, [or even] meet them...yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (49, emphasis in original). Coutinho provides the residents with a third option to create a sense of community, that of shared experiences. As they converse with the camera, they manage to come together through this common experience and create a community where the residents might not have felt that one existed before.

Through a careful analysis of the tensions in all three documentaries, one can see that Coutinho helps his subjects to develop a sense of communal identity through their participation in his films. In this sense, the documentary itself becomes the vehicle for developing this identity, enabling the residents of the Itaoca landfill, Vila Parque da Cidade and Edificio Master to feel part of something larger than themselves. By providing the documentary itself as a vehicle

for creating community through shared experiences, Coutinho and his subjects invite the viewers to come and participate in their community as well as we watch and listen to the stories they tell. As Coutinho gives voice to a generally ignored segment of the Brazilian population, all viewers around the world join in these different communities, giving us a better understanding of life and human nature.

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