

## (En)acting Rio: law, desire and the production of the city in Jose Padilha's *Tropa de Elite*

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Abstract: Our engagement with Jose Padilha's 2007 film *Tropa de Elite* is apropos to larger discussions of the role of desire and law in the formations of geographies of place. It is *Tropa de Elite*'s exploration of the transformative potentialities of law within the everyday and mundane world through its central character, Captain Roberto Nascimento (Wagner Moura), that evokes the film's true social and cultural significance. Contextualizing the Rio de Janeiro landscape as a particular economic order through which its characters have literally and metaphorically profited and lost uncovers *Tropa de Elite* as a powerful example of what Deleuze (1989, 206-207) has described as landscapes as mental states, and mental states as cartographies, "both [of which are] crystallized in each other, geometrized, mineralized." Through the connections and folds between mental states, landscapes and cartographies, we can see how, through the transformation of the urban landscapes and spaces within *Tropa de Elite*, Padilha accomplishes a qualitative task of exposing often marginalizing and exploitative forces bound up in space, social organization, the politics of place and capitalistic production and consumption.

Key words: capitalism; desire; landscape; law; Rio.

### Introduction

Our engagement of José Padilha's 2007 film *Tropa de Elite* (Elite Squad) is apropos to larger discussions of the role of the city in material and imagined formations of geographies of place identity (Curti et al. 2007). The *favela* settings of the film offer several disconcerting scenes highlighting both the spatial natures of the imaginings and (un)makings of place and the movements and relations of capitalism in the mundane world. It is particularly Padilha's transgressive use of the clashing spatialities of the BOPE (*Batalhão de Operações Policiais Especiais*, or Special Police Operations Battalion) elite police squad with that of the Turano *favela* in Rio de Janeiro that presents a unique way to approach relations of social order and to study the politics and meaning of place as they are attached to issues of law, desire, production and consumption. More specifically, contextualizing the Rio de Janeiro landscape as a personification of a capitalist social and economic order turns *Tropa de Elite* into what Benjamin (1969, 250) refers to as an "art form that is in keeping with the increased threat to his life which modern man has to face. Man's need to expose himself to shock effects is his adjustment to the dangers threatening him." It is this danger, or the realities of law and desire caught up in a capitalist ethos, which unfold

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through the film's central character, Captain Roberto Nascimento (Wagner Moura); and it is Nascimento's own "shock effects" that, instead of merely adjusting to the dangers facing him and the city, work towards their social and spatial actualization and perpetuation. Ultimately, we argue that it is most forcefully in and through the capitalist spaces embodied and instigated by Nascimento that Padilha pushes us to question the relationship between urban space, social organization, modes of production, and law and desire.

### "People will die"

In *Tropa de Elite* Captain Nascimento leads the incorruptible BOPE in an all-out war against drug lords who rule Rio's *favelas*. A soon-to-be father now contemplating retirement, Nascimento wages quixotic battles against rival gangs as well as corrupt elements in his own police department. Early on, Nascimento is informed that his squad has three months to "clean up" the Turano *favela* in preparation for Pope John Paul II's visit. The Pope will be staying at a bishop's house outside the perimeter of Turano and it is BOPE's responsibility to put a stop to the intermittent gunfire emanating from its grounds in order to "guarantee him a good night's sleep." Despite Nascimento's protestations that Turano is a "war zone" and that "people will die" in this operation, he begrudgingly accepts his orders. It is in and through the Turano operation where Rio most noticeably becomes a space of capitalist ethos and Nascimento its embodiment; a point of departure of the multiplicitous forces absorbing and emanating from both Rio and Nascimento.

Nascimento's protestations ultimately give way to his notions of hierarchy and duty, and he uses the operation as an opportunity to choose and train his replacement. Stymied in his quest by his corrupt superiors, Nascimento's policing interests quickly deteriorate and he wields a threat of violent retaliation over both his police rivals and the *favela* gangs. Nascimento and the milieu of the *favela* come together to produce a space where his value of judgment is continually subsumed back into normative capitalist relations, regardless of their wider social implications and effects. What follows is a slow, Machiavellian dance between Nascimento's BOPE squad and his police and gang adversaries. This finally comes to a head in a *favela* tenement far above the spaces of formal juridical administration that serve as an impotent symbol of "Law."

How Nascimento carries out his duties and how the drug lords function in and through Rio's *favelas* point to a different formation of the life and nature of law: a distinctly Spinozan concern *not* with *Law as transcendent code* but with *law as effects*:

Spinoza insists on *effectiveness* as a decisive defining element of the concept of law, and from this he infers that what is true with the laws of nature in general has to be true with the laws of the state as well: every law that is really law is effective – in general. Now, as the effectiveness of a law in the state is dependent not only on the will and power of the sovereign, but on the will and power of the multitude as well, which surpasses every group of

ruling men by far, it is the interaction of these two powers that constitutes and defines a law. From this it follows that law is never identical with the imperative given by the government or with the law in the books, but that law is always “law in life,” i.e. the vector of the diverse acting forces in society. (Walther 1997, 295)

Thus, in a very Spinozan sense, the Law and the capitalist relations it seeks to uphold through the Turano operation are always secondary to negotiations and formations of acting *collectives of desire*. What law is and does and for who is always a (re)negotiated process as “law in life.” Any recourse to ‘higher’ *Law* is simply an attempt at reasserting one’s own socially and spatially privileged position. Coupled with a capitalist ethos of self-interested profit and the ‘right’ to unlimited gains present throughout Rio’s different milieus (e.g. politicians, the police force, the *favelas*), the law in *Tropa de Elite* is less about what is ‘good’ according to a pre-established and reified moral system and more about forces and strivings of want and desire. Indeed, “we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it” (*Ethics* III, Prop. 9, Scholia). It is for this reason that Deleuze and Guattari (1986, 49) can say, “*where one believed there was the law, there is in fact desire and desire alone.*” It is through this nature of law and desire that Padilha displays through Nascimento and Rio’s landscapes that illustrate how a capitalist propagated ethos of duty and Law cannot simply be reduced to the unfoldings of pre-established and reified matters of ‘good’ and ‘evil’. More specifically, it is Nascimento’s desire that informs how capitalist relations *representationally* set themselves up as eternal examples to recognize and follow that permits insight into the political and economic self-interests underlying the production of cultural and social relations and spatialities in Rio.

The Pope must not hear gunfire. This is an order from the governor, and as Nascimento tells us, “No politician wants to see the Pope take a bullet in his city.” The marketing of the city, its *representation*, both to the Pope and to the wider international community, takes precedence over the material lives of the poor in the Turano *favela*. There must be action against the drug lords because gunfire would portray a wrong image of the city, and a shot Pope would sound its death knell. The more difficult material and spatial realities of Rio, including the circumstances and lives of the underprivileged populating its *favelas*, must be hidden from the Pope and the wider community. In other words, how the Pope assembles with the city of Rio, and by wider implication the State of Brazil, must be in such a way that its “naturalization of social inequality” (Souza 2003, 17; cited in Burity 2008, 740) would not risk tainting its global image. In this way the Pope and his movements become a marketing tool, or rather a tool of marketing, a Papal commodification working as a jeweled adornment to and for Rio’s representation: “The Pope had already been to Rio twice before. Didn’t he know how things worked around here? No politician wants to see the Pope take a bullet in his city. If His Holiness wants to sleep close to a slum, what do you think the governor’s gonna do, take that kind of risk? Of course

not. The governor would call on BOPE.” There must be BOPE action against the life of the *favela* because the Pope’s safety and quality of sleep (and thus his experience and projection of the city) is more important to the politicians and Rio’s ability to promote and produce its global image capital than the fact that this milieu is a product of capitalist neglect, waste and inequality, where the “the Brazilian modern capitalist order condemns to oblivion and exclusion millions of its citizens” (Burity 2008, 742) and, as Professor Gusmão (Bernardo Jablonski) puts it in the film, these “poor and underprivileged...are compelled to commit crimes because of their condition.” Whatever the Pope’s intent or message is by staying near the *favela*, his effects cannot be detached from the capitalist interests of the business people and politicians of Rio: it is the money changers and dove sellers who are paid alms in this temple, a fact Nascimento well understands.

Instead of working for the social betterment of the *favela*, a process somewhat ironically (at least from a perspective of dominant capitalism) carried out by the drug lords through their funding of various social works in their now ghetto-ized neighborhoods, the BOPE are to put a thin (and temporary) sheen of silence over it for the Pope’s short stay; spatial proximity requiring a sort of temporary aural gentrification. The lives that will be lost for these moments of silence are a small advertising price to pay for politicians, an exploitation of bodies and lives for economic and political gain: the quintessential capitalist ethos of relations whose validity is dependent on the self-serving Law which Nascimento at times transgresses but ultimately honors. In the end, the socio-cultural relations and spatialities of society are reified through Nascimento’s actions – his conflicting perceptions (re)embodying the capitalist ethos of the Deleuzian-Guattarian (1983) Oedipalized subject who is categorized and overcoded by the “centering, unification, totalization, integration, hierarchization, and finalization” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 41) of the social order of the State yet caught in a social milieu where desire is actualized in and through “a particular mix between fascism-paranoia and anarchy-schizophrenia” (Massumi 1992, 131). It is the movements and actions of Nascimento which are equal part fascism and anarchy which work to legitimize (both under the Law and in effect) his policing through his spatial actions and his reproductions of Rio’s inequalities; instead of finding a way out of the categories of capitalist subjection through the creativity of schizophrenic movements or the heightened intensities of fascistic paranoia, Nascimento ultimately reterritorializes them within the uneven relations and spaces of capitalism and their justificational recourse to Law.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the capitalist relations of *Tropa de Elite* are not only about material relations of capitalist production and consumption (though there certainly are material images, spatialities and perceptions being produced and consumed in and for Rio) but of relations of law and desire, and of a simultaneous use and alienation that law and desire in a capitalist milieu promotes and permits beyond mere user values of commodities and fetishisms: an exploitation and alienation of bodies for the sake of the city as an

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<sup>1</sup> In regard to the questions of whether *Tropa de Elite* is or is not fascistic (Catterall 2009, 160-161), our answer is yes – to both.

image or product. “People will die” in the production and for the consumption of this image, people for whom political and capitalistic economic desires dominate their own underprivileged and marginalized existence; sacrificial lambs for appetites of capitalism. (But then, what is new?)

### The city as judg(e)/ment

It is useful to understand the construction of Rio as a place that clearly establishes the social identities of the Nascimento character as an embodiment of its multiplicitous forces, relations and exploitations. In this respect, the city forms a space of production that creates social and spatial class divisions, especially in terms of the order that Nascimento so desperately seeks to uphold. Understanding what *Law* (as transcendent code or origin to return to or be subsumed under) and *law* (as a process of effects) is for Nascimento and how Rio functions as a site of identity construction and social/spatial formation provides our insight into Nascimento’s character and his actions throughout the film. Nascimento’s schizophrenic embodiment ultimately in service of a capitalist ethos manifests in panic attacks: his anarchic mo(ve)ments are as dynamic and conflicted as the city; his fascism is as brutal and unforgiving. Rio therefore literally becomes a fold of inside/outside for the activities of Nascimento and his like-minded compatriots. And while Nascimento’s space is ostensibly one of Law – the film clearly delineates Nascimento as both a normative and conflicted judge – it places our discussion of law and desire securely within the emergent qualities and spatialities of Rio. Indeed, it is Rio’s milieu and their spatialities which serve as Nascimento’s basis for judgments of guilt or innocence.

While it is an accumulation of desire that creates the dispositions towards judgment and constructs one’s ‘place’ in a social hierarchy (Dovey, 2005), as our discussion of Spinoza above points to, the power and form of any given hierarchy is only such when the multitude allows it. Therefore, no hierarchy is static or set, even that of capitalist relations. Negotiations of desire trump any preconceived notions of what order ought to or must be. In this sense, Nascimento’s character as equal parts gangster and law-man, preacher and sinner, takes on Rio’s schizophrenic and fascistic nature while contributing to capitalism’s ultimate failure, becoming the spatial and institutional embodiment of an Oedipalized Rio. These concepts are manifested in his actions for quiet and order while desiring a better life for himself, his wife and their coming child. Yet, this desire, to the frustration of his wife, comes second to his fascistic need to honor his role as an agent of the State and producer of cultural capital, of a *particular* image of Rio, for Brazilian politicians and their capitalistic interests. It rarely occurs to Nascimento, or if it does it is in such imperceptible increments that they are overlaid by his Oedipalized passions, that the system he is fighting for is the very one creating and reproducing the conditions of marginalization and discontent of the *favelas* inhabitants; the bullets (and violence) of the *favelas* materially and symbolically parallel those of BOPE and the capitalist State. From the moment Nascimento decides to leave BOPE, he moves towards a literal

domination of space, accomplished by restructuring and manipulating social bodies and their practices around him: “With war, you always pay the price. And when it gets to high, it’s time to bail. That’s when I found Neto and Matias.”

Nascimento and his BOPE troops invade the Turano *favela* to reestablish dominance through violence and intimidation. The networks of desire that BOPE provides grant Nascimento both a material and symbolic domination of space and thus, from his first occupation of the spaces of the *favela*, Nascimento is able to use this accumulated and networked desire in all its forms and its concomitant power to establish the legitimacy of his unique system of judgment by using the predispositions of the Law to reconstruct it as *law* in his own image: his law is effective, it works, but for what and for whom?

### Cinematic space and landscapes of the social

*Tropa de Elite* provides a modality to gain an understanding of theories of creativity in judgment and adjudication. The film operates as a spatial form – it both presents and represents space, place, and landscape within a series of frames and these spatial contexts shape the practices of cinema and the meanings contained within the film. Of interest here is how *Tropa de Elite* and Rio de Janeiro play central roles in constituting and sustaining both individual and collective notions of landscape, law and identity. In addition, *Tropa de Elite* plays a central role in making social imagery (particularly Rio) concrete as part of the ‘real’ – the film has a material effect for those individuals and social groupings that construct and view it. Therefore, any analysis of the role of the film in making ‘imaginative geographies’ involves blurring the distinction between the concrete and the imagined. Too often we only consider space as the site of geographical places and their associated processes but *Tropa de Elite* functions as a representational macro-environment that exists in space-time and contains complex processes and meaning. Importantly, the film can be seen as urban spaces of cinematic geography that are the products of Spinoza’s conception of the law. This is a crucial to our understanding of how (and why) these landscapes are engaged and transgressed by Captain Nascimento.

Cinematic urban places like the filmed Rio de Janeiro are not neutral: relatively molar socialized power structures are involved in the filmic transformation of cityscapes, reflecting the response to a contested urban space. Nascimento’s attempt at the urban reconstruction of the social relationships found within *Tropa de Elite* is a reactionary (if not paranoiac) responsive contestation of the urban signifiers of traditional capitalist spatialities. As a police captain, Nascimento’s social order becomes increasingly challenged in his battle against perceived forces of illegality and is then finally split by cultural demands in the formation of adjudicated judgment. Once out of the recognized encounters of his home and back within the interruptive encounters of the urban spatialities of Rio, Nascimento finds it necessary to reconstruct the cultural battlefield in order to legitimize and promote capitalism’s own Oedipalized desires. It is a move beyond ideology, where, “[w]ithout a wince[, c]apitalism no longer has to justify itself. It no longer has to hide behind fascist-

paranoid quasicauses and argue that it serves the common good. It can dispense with belief and good sense, because it is now stronger than molarity, and stronger than the ideologies that help to reproduce it” (Massumi 1992, 131). Indeed, within the dynamic spaces of Rio, irrational attitudes and incommensurable desires continuously clash, creating such restlessness that Nascimento’s reconstruction and enactment of violent judgment in the city “may be partly an expression of satisfaction at the destruction of an emblem of irresolvable conflict” (Pike, 1981: 244-45). Nascimento’s attempt at restructuring judgment is accomplished through a symbolic (and quite hyperviolent) manipulation of space that results, by the end of the film, in the (re)production of capitalist marginalization and exploitation.

To more fully comprehend how Nascimento’s transgressive action – his ‘irresolvable conflict’ – is manifested in his destruction/reconstruction of the cinematic urban landscapes of *Tropa de Elite*, it is useful to point to how landscapes are placed into contexts of social formation designed to perpetuate a certain social and spatial order. As Deleuze (1989, 206-207) says, “Landscapes are mental states, just as mental states are cartographies, both crystallized in each other, geometrized, mineralized.” An engagement with this relation between mental states (including their parallel emotions) and landscapes points to how Nascimento’s desire to transform the terrain – to transmute the built environment into a tactile image subsumed under Capitalist Law and desire – provides the propulsion and momentum for his movements through space. Nascimento uses the forces of juridical judgment as a form of displacement, a process to exclude and impoverish his rivals (whatever their level of guilt or innocence), thereby reforming urban space and creating a new and ‘more’ *supra*legal order for the sake of an image. The act of establishing this new image through an adjudicated space requires the complete repression of all traces of alternative histories, memories and desires – if only momentarily – from the immediate landscape narrative of the city; as Donald (1999: 86) indicates, the most compelling narrative “concerns forces which, once unleashed, have an unmanageable capacity for destruction.” This ‘capacity for destruction’ is certainly evident in Nascimento’s quest to become a literal *and* figurative ‘Judge’ and informs his every decision as he struggles to re-colonize the ‘place’ of Turano under his power and position as both a BOPE captain and an agent of capitalistic morality and desire. The Turano *favela* is a locale in which capitalist ideals, mores, values and roles are sustained, transformed and subverted; the *favela* itself certainly exudes a strange mix of fascistic paranoia and schizophrenic anarchy along with an Oedipalized categorization which imbues its drug lords. And, indeed, through Nascimento the *favela* becomes a charged cultural creation that apprehends the society–film relationship and its implications for the larger social, political, and geographical realms of which it is a part. It is precisely (with)in this cinematic landscape, this filmic (re)presentation of the sounds, forces, relations and folds of an actual milieu, that the role of Nascimento must be delineated.

Hay (1997, 226), paraphrasing Benjamin, states “Modern cities are comprised of remnants from earlier landscapes, always susceptible to erasure or brought into different relations with emerging structures – social relations redefined spatially as

habitat.” Thus Rio de Janeiro and its *favelas*, the cinematic landscapes presenting and signifying the concrete world and also expressing the reproduction of place, embody a power in which spatial relations push people to simultaneously resist and conform to a particular set of Laws that function to enforce the “habitat” or will of the dominant culture, that is, the strategy of class in action. Indeed, this character of “[c]ulture... both illustrates how capitalism takes roots and how its intimations are invariably negotiated by local elites and adapted to local *mores*, whether reinforcing asymmetries or contributing to dislocate them” (Burity 2008, 740). Pile (1995, 163) explains that, like those who seek to define culture, the control of space “presumes, establishes and maintains an arrogant will to power and a...space is produced which acts to reproduce the value systems of the powerful. Space is marked, then, by...arrogance, the will to power and brutality. It is a repressive space that does not allow or permit other spaces.” While space and culture certainly do function in this way, as *Trope de Elite* shows, such characterizations are too one-sided. Culture and space can never be fully dominated or “definitively purified” (Massey 2005, 95) to “not allow or permit other spaces.” Like law, they are always negotiated and produced through different relations of power of the multitude. Nascimento is well aware of this: it the very reason he seeks to produce an adequate and capable replacement with the capacity for his own will and desire to dominate both Rio’s transgressive spaces through schizophrenia-anarchy (“Neto was impulsive: he acted before thinking) and define its culture through the fascism-paranoia (“Matias thought way too much before acting”) of its institutional organs: “See that pile of paperwork: Each is a crime that the cops didn’t stop. In Neto’s hands they would turn to flames. With Matias they would become statistics.”

The very nature of the *favelas*, with their cultural architectural features, gives the cinematic landscape a specificity that ties its transgression of Law together as an event of difference. It is this event, the “bringing low of those monuments that stand as symbols of modern civilization’s aspiration and pride” (Sobchack, 1988, 10) that permits the landscape to become recontextualized on a different cultural and economic cartography than the normative city, something clearly evident as Nascimento moves from the safety of his home to the grittier spaces of the Rio streets and their much more challenging transgressive, yet equally capitalistic, activities of desire. Through these cartographic spaces Nascimento’s desire is constructed with a concept of place identity more appropriate to the wants and needs of dominant capitalism and the State but still nonetheless deeply connected to the places, spaces and activities of the schizophrenic-anarchy and fascistic-paranoia of the *favela*.

Social and cultural hierarchies often work to reproduce themselves across various material systems such as the human body, geographical spaces, and social orders. Indeed, “Panopticism is no longer ‘to see without being seen’ but to *impose a particular conduct on a particular human multiplicity*. We need only insist that the multiplicity is reduced and confined to a tight space and that the imposition of a form of conduct is done by distributing in space, laying out and serializing in time, composing in space-time, and so on” (Deleuze 1988, 34). To justify these



(con)figurations, one system will refer to or fold onto the other to stratify and territorialize social and bodily practices. Thus, for Nascimento it is the existence of ‘capitalist hierarchies’ that create the tension and conflict in his own conflicting desires: he knows that class and status are necessary dimensions of capitalist life, yet he is troubled by the potential effects of their inequalities on his own life and safety. Therefore his occupation of the *favela* functions as an ‘interruption’ – that is, as a space that provides him with fascistic- paranoiac legitimacy while he prepares his assault against the drug lords’ capitalist productions which threaten the image of the city, and thus dominant capital’s spaces of privilege. The *favela* becomes a place that inevitably reflects negatively the desires of Rio’s political culture, which in turn regenerates and legitimates class structures through marginalization and repression, and it serves as an example of how city spaces and their inhabitants can be made visible or invisible in order to accentuate or mask an image it does or does not seek to project. “Visibilities are not defined by sight but are complexes of actions and passions, actions and reactions, multisensorial complexes, which emerge into the light of day” (Deleuze 1988, 59). In this way *Tropa de Elite* becomes a way of illuminating the larger process adjudicating the landscapes of Rio in general and its capitalist urban spaces in particular, especially the ways in which uneven social relations are reproduced through recourse to a biased and self-serving Law normalizing the relations of Capitalism through visibility/invisibility.

### The law of tropa de elite

It is by joining Spinoza’s insights of the verticality of relations of the *formation of law* to Deleuze’s *concept of law*, or more precisely *jurisprudence* as a general perspective from which to view things – and the entanglement of multiplicitous spaces of class and capitalism therein – that we can most clearly see how *Tropa de Elite* works to greatest effect. Deleuze (Lefebvre 2008, 54) argues

that *institutions* are necessary to concretely coordinate and resolve specific, ever-emerging problems. If, however, society is understood to form in order to guarantee certain preexisting rights, then *laws* are necessary to limit the harm subjects may do to each other. Law and institution, therefore, correspond to, or map onto, two different appreciations of the social...institution and law correspond to different ways to understand the need for and function of the institution of law; the terms designate perspectives, not entities.

The duel for dominance between Nascimento and his competition – the advantage changing hands frequently, and its true possessor always clouded by Padilha’s trope of judicial doubt and institutional uncertainty (an Institution Without Organs) – grants the film its spatial tension. This tension is enhanced as the battle of wills plays out against the backdrop of Rio’s *favelas* and within Nascimento’s spatially confined perspective of jurisprudence. The ensuing claustrophobia affects both viewer and actor alike, effectively mirroring the moral entrapment Nascimento initially feels. It also frames the inevitable re-emergence of Nascimento’s murderous

nature, a transformation marked by a horrific upsurge in violence against both the police and rival gangs where any “right to the city” (Mitchell 2003) by the poor and underprivileged is secondary to desires of capitalism and their want for a specific image. As Nascimento slowly employs *his* juridical perspective and begins asserting his *dominant* desire – as he re-occupies *his* institutional position in a different way – the viewer is carried through his movements through space and time which eventually belie a burgeoning, conniving power; one which fails to escape Oedipalized categorizations and which ultimately reterritorializes his fascistic and schizophrenic movements into and along the “perverse” institutional organs of capitalism. This reabsorption into an already constituted and defined organ system is made more profound as Neto (Caio Junqueira) and Matias (André Ramiro), Nascimento’s less-than-sympathetic replacements, echo Nascimento’s desires on a much more banal, yet equally Oedipalized and institutionally organic, level. The only problems that they work to coordinate and resolve, despite their own internal conflicts, are ultimately those affecting dominant capital under the name of the Law.

Nascimento’s conflicting desires convey the stifling world in which he is trying to live. He has been forced to hide within a contradictory institution of capitalist normalcy and, once he is no longer comfortable with society’s conventions and norms (i.e. the law), Nascimento’s actions and spatial maneuverings become almost pathological, especially when juxtaposed with his more controlled, collected performance in the BOPE boot camp. It becomes necessary for Nascimento to regain control of his life and he does so by remaking *place*, by producing a new and different spatial experience, and by reconfiguring a new juridical space through violent negotiation. Nascimento counters the spectacle of Rio by creating an even more spectacular spectacle – by working in the name of the Law through an almost fetishized production he subverts the viewers’ notions of institutions of Law and law enforcement and their inherent spectacularity, with a spectacle of power all his own. Nascimento, through his drug-fighting activities, reorders the normative spaces of jurisprudence thereby transgressing it as a formal institution, becoming a victim and victimizer of his own desires. In the end, Nascimento forces his replacement to occupy his former position – not only in form (as a BOPE Captain) but in content (as a judge and jury) and function (as executioner); an embodied interplay of his own anarchic desires for cooperative fairness and justice entangled with his fascistic anger and desire for vengeance. The viewer, then, is left to meditate on not only the what-could-have-beens of the mo(ve)ments of schizophrenia-anarchy and fascism-paranoia challenging capitalist spaces and power but the genesis of everyday “shock effects” presented by Nascimento’s own juridical desires ultimately subsumed under and justified by capitalist categories and Law attempting to define Rio’s social and spatial realities.

The recontextualization and subsequent reproduction of Nascimento’s space is then integral to not only the material relations of Rio society, but to urban space(s) in general: in some ways, “all contemporary urban space is organized according to the logic of [the] *favela*” (Diken 2005, 318). According to Mitchell (2000, 54), “reproduction can be defined as the everyday perpetuation of the social institutions

and relations that make possible the material conditions of life. The important point is that social reproduction is never guaranteed, but is also a moment of potential struggle and transformation.” Through Nascimento, we are made aware of how the law works in and through individuals and collectives in society, and how institutional desires can serve particular interests in productions and images of desirability. A set of social-geographic institutions – working before or beyond Law and contract – are created and displayed throughout *Tropa de Elite* and their realities have the effect of both reinforcing and transgressing certain cultural norms, societal orders, and spatial organizations. The maintenance of these institutions then is a goal and desire of those they benefit – be it Nascimento himself or the police or the drug lords or the political hegemonic structure – who want them to be understood not as social constructions or negotiations but as normative orders, relations and formations. For Nascimento, the temporary occupation of the *favela* is an attempt to gain juridical control over a milieu beyond State Law. That is, its relations and productions define the law; the Law does not define them. Importantly, while these horizontally adjudicated spaces are shared by people of similar social status, they *vary* across different social groups – *law* becomes both the product *and* the generator of the division of society into groups and classes. We can point to one key scene in the film that locates Nascimento within the symbolic ordering of institutional space, but is also illustrative of how the transgressive use of his office as the leader of BOPE works to create new meanings within that space thus generating different relations of adjudication.

Baiano, the drug dealer (shot by BOPE): Listen, boss . . . I can give you thirty grand. Just take me to the hospital!

Nascimento (rubbing his boot into the wound): It’s over, you son of a bitch. You’re a goner, and now you’re gonna die!

Baiano: Not in the face, though!

Nascimento: What?

Baiano: Because of the wake, man.

Nascimento (to himself): I already had Baiano. [outloud] 0-7, give me the 12-gauge. Let the kid go. Let him go. [to himself] Now I just needed Matias’ heart. Then my mission would be accomplished. Then I could go back to my family knowing I had been replaced by someone worthy of the job. [gives shotgun to Matias] Take him out. He’s all yours. [Matias shoots Baiano in the face and the film ends].

This speaks of the division of Nascimento’s desire into a clear distinction between two very dissimilar judicial spaces: the Law as State institution *or* reified space and the law as reality *or* negotiated process. Nascimento has, in essence, remade *place* according to his conflicting desires – he has reconstructed his dwelling, at least for the time being, replacing the drab, non-violent, cage-like spaces of his home and office with a new space of juridical anarchy defined by his occupation, not of an agent of the Law, but of a warped enforcer of a Deleuzian *particular* – that

singular mo(ve)ment of jurisprudence unique to Nascimento and his situation which he then attempts to reify and “change into an expression of general law...condem[ing]...thing[s] to a particular *kind* of change, a particular understanding of what change is” (Lefebvre 2008, 67). In other words, he works to raise his desire and its particularities to the level of a universal. He has gone from a schizophrenic pace of conflicting singularities to a fascistic place of imposed judgment that *is* itself a powerful (re)presentation of the law-cum-Law by virtue of his position as an institutional and Oedipalized organ and agent of the State and dominant capital interests.

The *law* can thus be seen as an emerging force that enables Nascimento to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations; however, because of his position – a position which permits him definition over what Law is according to his own desires in the *favela* – it is also a system of lasting and transposable movements that function at every moment as a matrix of perception, appreciations and actions with wide social effects, including alternative law formation and social resistance. Nascimento’s Law, or the way Nascimento conflates his desire with universal or State Truth, points to his position under capital as an embodied mixture of fascistic enforcer and schizophrenic subject which ultimately fails to break out of the Oedipalized organs of duty and Law. Seeking to reoccupy his old dwelling – his desire to dislocate from the juridical battleground and take to the spaces off the streets of Rio generates the motion and movement of space and time within the film that produces the merging situations that help construct his experiences. It is no mistake then, as Catterall (2009, 160) observes, that Nascimento “is the only character allowed a substantial home and inner life,” as *Tropa de Elite* redefines the conflicts of law between and through Nascimento, his job, his family, his duty, and the *favelas* of Rio – an entangled set of distinct adjudicated spaces which are, in essence, a creative yet oppressive (re)production of law continually reterritorialized under State capitalism through Nascimento, his acts and desires.

From Pile and Thrift (1995, 31), we can interpret the law as operating within “a social field...a domain consisting of a set of objective relational configurations between positions based on certain forms of power.” The juridical inequities created by these forms of power become a major motivation for action in *Tropa de Elite*: Nascimento tries to follow the basic tenets of ‘human rights’ but when negotiations fail, he reconfigures the landscape by killing those who stand in his way, as we can see in his interrogation of a group of suspects (29:35):

You’re the one who killed him! You faggot! You’re the one who finances this shit! You pothead piece of shit! We come here to fix what you fuck up! You’re the ones who finance it! You faggots! Who’s the dealer, god damn it! 0-7, bring the lookout. Let’s see. Now we’ll see. Say it, kid! Say it! Say it! [Nascimento points his pistol at the young kid’s head]. Point him out! Point him out! Point him out! Who’s the dealer? Tell me right now!

Nascimento reclaims space for dominant capital in his occupation of the *favela*; his domain exists as a ‘form of power’ protecting certain privileged class interests. His ‘office’ as BOPE captain is the juridical capital of Nascimento’s reclaimed and reconfigured space which (re)establishes his new position in an urban world that still threatens his very existence. Through BOPE and his networks of desire – networks of power on which he is dependent to carry out his judgments and spectacles – Nascimento reconfigures and establishes his institutional space as legitimate – it is now a unique State domain with its own relational configurations based on both the material and symbolic transgressions of Nascimento and his attempts to *effectively* adjudicate space. Yet, as Shubert (1995, 4) points out, “transgression is violent. It can hurt. While it is dangerous for the transgressor, it is potentially dangerous to those who occupy privileged positions as well. The legitimacy of privilege is placed in question by transgression. For that reason the transgressor can expect reactionary condemnation, in any of its various guises, of his acts. Privilege is not likely to be abandoned without a fight.” As *Tropa de Elite* unfolds, Nascimento and his actions have the potential to challenge privilege through both his fascistic paranoia and schizophrenic anarchy. But he ultimately bypasses this more difficult task of challenging the irrational desires of capital by subsuming his acts under a duty and Law which work as privilege’s prop. Nascimento’s violence is not pointed at the practices of privilege, but at the practices which *threaten* privilege. But violence begets violence; whether it is the explicit physical violence of bullets and guns of the *favela* or the more insidious violence of capitalistic exploitation and marginalization. Because law and desire presuppose one another, it is only when the latter has the capacities to socially and spatially realize itself that the former can effectively function. Thus, Nascimento’s ultimate failure is not found in either his actions of fascist-paranoia or his schizophrenic-anarchy, but in the inability to escape the Oedipalization of his mental states and desires.

## Considerations

The judicial sensibilities of *Tropa de Elite* exist within the limits of normative adjudicated institutions but once resisted by the spectacular violence of Nascimento’s BOPE and their transgressive judicial policies, they are reconstructed into a new system of juridical relations. BOPE’s use of violence is both an expression of and justification for Nascimento’s arrogance, one that leads BOPE to act as if they had a monopoly over desire and reason. To understand the motivations of the characters of *Tropa de Elite* we must comprehend how their engagement of the Rio landscape depends on their social and economic condition and their ability to perceive that condition and its functions as adjudicated spaces used (and abused) for specific purposes. Most importantly, the landscapes of *Tropa de Elite* – particularly the concrete and symbolic judicial spaces of the *favela* and the BOPE headquarters – are used to reinforce dominant (and judicially transgressive) desires and function as spaces that shape and advance the sociopolitical environment of those that occupy and reconfigure them. In *Tropa de Elite* the important issue is the relative levels of power of various competing collectives of desire: the degree to which these

collectives have the power to create their own image of the world – from Captain Nascimento to the Rio de Janeiro Police Department to the *favela* gang lords – informs landscape (re)presentations, *or* incorporations of power, both concrete and symbolic.

The use of BOPE in *Tropa de Elite* presents the concept of adjudicated space as being both social and individual – and as being a product of the power of desire. Nascimento’s role as the BOPE leader emphasizes the need for judicial activity and resistance. The conflict in *Tropa de Elite* is between different social orders and different social configurations, not simply between normative society and the transgressive drug lords. The film’s portrayal of adjudicated space enables *Tropa de Elite* to give a more intensified and complex sense of why people like Nascimento might be willing to succumb to systems and pressures, while simultaneously pointing to the *need* in the *favelas* for alternative economic productions different than, and often contrary to, dominant capitalistic moralities. In *Tropa de Elite* the law in *favelas* and its spaces can be ‘produced’ anywhere and at any time to reproduce or transgress the value systems of the privileged. Attempts to reconfigure the law under the Law thus becomes both repressive and a hollow symbol that internalizes and embodies Nascimento’s way of knowing and engaging with the world. It is a space that frames and structures social practice for him. He labors extremely hard to keep capitalistic order both fluid and intact, but once the material and symbolic spaces of that world do not serve dominant class interests he reconfigures space through his transgressive actions, paralleling the conditions *of those spaces* and eventually transferring his particular onto that of Matias, his replacement as BOPE captain. As Nascimento moves through the cinematic geographies of *Tropa de Elite*, his particular judgmental processes become oppressive Law, closed off from and insensitive to the emergent inequalities of capitalism. In this, Nascimento is a reflection of the life of Rio and present day Brazil whose

reiteration of a lasting failure of capitalism to harmonize economic freedom with social equality, point[s] to what extent globalization can give us more of the same, and...[shows] what role cultural [and, we would add, spatial] politics—understood as symbolic disputes for the meaning and direction of social situations and processes, as well as the political mobilization of [place] identities as symptoms of social failure to produce inclusion and justice—can play in the future. (Burity 2008, 745)

The life conditions and class relations displayed in *Tropa de Elite* are shaped by the real life practices and cultural and spatial structures of privilege of capitalist societies, their “perverse institutions” and their recourse to Law. Yet, just as in life, at the end of the film there is no end, as the inequalities of capitalism are always (re)negotiated and challenged through the focused intensities of fascism-paranoia and the dynamic creativities of anarchy-schizophrenia of the multitude and the “law in life.”

## Notes

1. All times, chapters and quotes come from *Elite Squad (Tropa de Elite)* released by The Weinstein Company in 2007 under the Genius Products brand #81548.

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