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THE RURAL SEEN FROM TWO VIEWPOINTS IN THE MOVIE *I TRAVEL BECAUSE I NEED IT, I RETURN BECAUSE I LOVE YOU*

ABSTRACT

This analysis focuses on rural representations of the Brazilian northeastern backwoods in the movie “I travel because I need it, I return because I love you”, directed by Karim Aïnouz and Marcelo Gomes and released in 2009. We assume that a cinematographic work, even if resulting from the subjective vision of a cinematographic narrator, when understood as a society cultural product, also carries in its discourse representations of that society and its historical time. In this article, the examination of these representations will be performed through the analysis of the significant elements of cinematographic language (framing, lighting, camera movements, etc.) used in the narrative construction, since we believe that it is from the choice of every element of language that a movie can reveal to its viewers the aesthetic and ideological representations of a given social time.

keywords

Movies; Rural; Social
representation; Language; Film
decomposition.

INTRODUCTION

In 1999, Karim Aïnouz and Marcelo Gomes traveled to Brazilian northeast documenting their landscapes and their people in several audiovisual formats (35mm, 16mm, Super-8 and video digital cameras) to produce the documentary “Sertão acrylic blue swimming pool”, released in 2004 for Itaú Cultural project.

Years later they reused the captured images and made a new movie called “I travel because I need it, I return because I love you”, released in 2009. In the absence of a character who led the plot, the directors created a protagonist - the geologist José Renato - and inserted him in the movie edition, thus connecting the old images. The viewer can't see José Renato since his presence is created by a voice-over¹, then the movie images are those seen by José Renato or captured by him.

In this movie the geologist leaves Fortaleza for a trip to work in north-east backwoods. His function is to technically evaluate the course of an aquifer channel that will be built to connect Xexéu (PE) to Rio das Almas (BA). In the thirty days that the trip lasts, José Renato analyzes the native vegetation, the soil and the rock formations of the places where the canal will pass. In the vacant hours it also captures the people's life in a video camera. And it's about the video recordings made by José Renato, or rather, on the records of the cinematographic narrators - the directors Karim Aïnouz and Marcelo Gomes - that this analysis concentrates.

Since its conception, a movie deals with choices and viewpoints that organize the perception and reconstruct the reality, “an aesthetic reality that results from the vision eminently subjective and personal of the director”, as Betton says (1987, 09). Thus, we believe that through the movie “I travel because I need it, I return because I love you”, we can find clues about the representations of rural life aspects in the Brazilian northeast of the 2000s. We assume that all movies, whether fictions or documentaries, carry social representations of historical world in which the narrator lives.

In this movie, the representations of the rural are not just constructed through the verbal signs, as the actor's speeches, but also through the various elements of meaning that constitute the cinematographic language, such as the shots, angles, camera movements, music, speech, noise, silence, lighting, costumes, scenery and editing. According to Citelli (1999, 26), for the study of values and ideas contained in a discourse, whatever it is, we should observe the nature of the signs that

1. Voice over - indication used when there is a flow of thinking; when the character is reflecting or dreaming, without it to appear in the picture.

construct it: “the way of disposing the sign, the choice of one or another resource, would reveal multiple ideological commitments.”

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

For the analysis of the significant elements of the cinematographic language we apply the methodology suggested by Penafria (2009): the so-called “image and sound analysis”, which concentrates on the decomposition of film space in each unit of action (a shot) and subsequent analysis of the various elements of meaning of the cinematographic language. For the author, the decomposition of the cinematographic narrative refers to concepts “about image (to make a plastic description of shots concerning framing, composition, angle, etc.), sound (as voice-over and outros resources) and film structure (plans, scenes, sequences)”.

Although this type of analysis has similarities to a purely structural study, the method is in fact tied to an examination of elements external to the movie: this analysis considers the movie as the result of a set of relations, “in which happened their production and realization, such as their social, cultural, political, economic, aesthetic and technological context” (Penafria, 2009, 07).

As already said, social representations can't be analyzed separately from the social time in which they are produced, because the cultural manifestations of a country are deeply linked to the dynamics of its society, and, as such, have the property of allowing a questioning about the same historical context. As Hall (2005, 50) confirms, a national culture is a discourse - “a way of constructing meanings that influences and organizes both our actions and our conception of ourselves.”

Therefore, it's essential to relate the image and sound analysis suggested by Manuela Penafria with an evaluation of the social context in which the movies were produced and exhibited. Particularly, here we analyze how San Francisco River transposition project, initiated by the Federal Government in 2007 and which provides the construction of more than 700 kilometers of concrete channels in two axes (north and east) along four states (Pernambuco, Paraíba, Ceará and Rio Grande do Norte), influences the vision of the cinematography narrator - the directors Karim Ainouz and Marcelo Gomes - when they created the Brazilian northeastern rural representations in the movie “I travel because I need, I return because I love you”.

THE EXTERNAL AND THE INTERNAL NARRATORS

The movie begins with a long shot of a road at night, from Jose Renato's viewpoint, who is alone driving his car. On the radio plays Peninha's

song “Dreams”, a classic corny about a failed relationship, which, as we let’s know later, is the loving condition of the geologist, abandoned by the woman he loves and calls Galega.

By day, always from your viewpoint and in low resolution images, we see the horizon ahead, the sky full of clouds and the arid landscape beside the road. The framing is fixed, despite the car’s movement and the bikes and trucks that travel along the road. Movements only exist outside the immobility of José Renato. In addition to his speech, the only sounds are the romantic songs that continue to play on the car radio and the vehicle noises, which set the type of diegetic sound².

This audiovisual structure is repeated almost throughout the movie, as well as the bitter remarks of José Renato, who making comments - for himself or, perhaps, recording them to a principal - about his working tools, the geography of the region and especially about his inadequacy to travel, the precariousness of the region and the lack of perspectives of its inhabitants.

Today is october 28, public agent’s day. In Fortaleza nobody works in the office, and I here in this dry clod giving a damn hard. [...] I’ve just started to travel and everything irritates me. The landscape does not change, it’s always the same. It seems that it does not leave the place ... [...] What agony this place. Everything drags on ... Fucking longing... (Ainouz and Gomes, 2009).

The use of the subjective camera³ to represent the geologist’s viewpoint it a narrative resource that leaves most clues about the cinematographic narrators. It leads the viewer to put yourself in the internal narrator viewpoint - José Renato - and, consequently, also leads to the external narrator viewpoint, the cinematographic.

At a glance, the subjectivity may refer to a recurring resource among the cinematographic works about the northeastern backwoods produced since 1995, a period known as Resumption, where the region stop being the scene of the political and social conflicts of Cinema Novo to be the place of personal conflicts. For Lucia Nagib (2000, 116), the Resumption filmmakers are more attracted to the exotic than to revolutionary feelings - “obsessively focused on the individuality of the characters to the detriment of the social context.”

2. Diegetic sound - all sound coming from a sound source that is seen in the image.

3. Subjective camera - camera that stands in the character’s point of view.

As Ismail Xavier (2001, 50) reminds us,

It seemed that cinema was now lighter, without the weight of a project of intervention or social transformation, [...] without that feeling of urgency in which each film showed behind the camera an intellectual to diagnose the country as a whole and to think for all of us, by the different segments of society.

But in a deeper analysis, we perceive that the movie social critique is not in the subjectivity of José Renato, that is, it isn't in his still and suffocating gaze to the arid and unoccupied places, nor in his sad speeches. It's in the *mise-en-scène*⁴ that the external narrator viewpoint reveals itself, denying at any moment the subjectivity of José Renato.

Soon, after the first break of the trip we find the clues left by the cinematographic narrator: the geologist is standing in front of a house on the road side, and the only thing that moves is a bird that crosses the frame. Contrasting this melancholic construction of the geologist's gaze, what is seen is a set of simple houses in a clear blue sky and a breeze that brings freshness and life, elements that invalidate the idea of an abandoned and sad backlands.

The following is an image of two residents - Mr. Nino and Mrs. Perpétua - inside the house, next to a small table with pictures and photographs of saints and some photos, probably from the relatives, almost an altar for the family. José Renato explains that they will be the first residents to be expropriated, but there is no reference in the movie about the reason of this expropriation.

The long shot, the speeches interspersed by lengthy silences and especially the couple's fixed and calm stare directed at the geologist, shows the respect of the cinematograph narrator for the integrity of the lives of those people. José Renato says: "They have been married for more than 50 years ... They never had another house, they never had a fight, they never slept a night away from each other ..." (Aïnouz and Gomes, 2009).

In the same shot, the presence of a radio indicates another cinematographic narrator viewpoint of rural life: "Mr. Nino left to turn off the radio and I asked him to come back ... I didn't want to leave them apart" (Aïnouz and Gomes, 2009), as José Renato remarks.

4. *Mise-en-scène* - of French origin, means "placed on the scene". Its origin comes from the classic theater and refers to the movement and positioning of the actors in the stage, as well as in the set of filming; art of theatrical or cinematographic staging.

As Lefebvre (2001, 19) reminds us, like cars and television, radio is an element of “urban material”, that is, coming from the urban society way of life, that is embedded in the countryside. In the scene, being turned off by Mr. Nino, the object is portrayed as disturbing the balance of country life - as a symbol of urbanization. It reinforces this impression the emphasis given to the song of the birds in the background⁵.

The situation of removal lived by the family of Mr. Nino and Mrs. Perpétua immediately refers to the social consequences of São Francisco River transposition project, which in some sections will have its course altered through the construction the irrigate waterways in regions affected by drought. The Brazilian government reasoning is that it will be a work that will lead to commercial development in that regions, but as Oliveira and Rothman (2007, 213) notes, “it forgets that there is a whole of social and anthropological network relations that will be fatally broken”.

In movie, José Renato’s technical comments do not include concerns about the social tension to be generated with the waterways construction:

Further study is needed on the economic viability of the waterway in this region. Shifting high voltage towers on so many roads may be unfeasible. Perhaps the ideal is opt for other places. [...] Why they insist build here? Really, it’s not my problem”. (Ainouz and Gomes, 2009)

But it is perceived by *mise-en-scène* that the cinematographic narrator is concerned about the social cost of people removing: the distance from their hometown and the loss of their culture. Is that Colito (2000, 283) evaluates when analyzes the buildings impacts of Jataizinho Hydroelectric Power Plant on Tibagi River, which we believe are the same as the São Francisco River transposition project:

The physical space socially constructed may lose the references built through the relations established in many years of daily life, but its multiple meanings will not be considered by the technocratic evaluation. [...] Family landscapes will cease to dwell. For some, the great lake will represent a “new thing” to be exploited, but for many people, especially those who have formed their properties, will mean losses that will not be restored (Colito, 2000, 283).

Another exemplary cinematographic sequence is the geologist visit to Manuel Constantino’s family house, where live the couple and their six

5. Background - Any sound that overlaps an image or another sound.

children. The boys help the father in the farm fields and the girls help the mother in domestic jobs. José Renato comments: “There is no electricity. The family lives in extreme isolation. But they seem happy ... but I doubt this happiness” (Aïnouz and Gomes, 2009).

But what the *mise-en-scène* presents is a simple, but large, clean and airy house, under a clear blue sky. All the family members are well dressed, and even without smiling they do not express discomfort or ignorance, how we perceived by the daughter with a book in her hands, which is the reason for more bitter geologist’s comments: “One of them reads and relays Dom Casmurro, from Machado de Assis” (Aïnouz and Gomes, 2009).

Most of the images in this sequence show the family members gathered in groups, also contradicting another José Renato’s comment: “On this trip I only see loneliness in front of me” (Aïnouz and Gomes, 2009).

After the visit to the Constantino’s house, the geologist back on the road again, and, on the way, he thinks about details of the local daily, like the clothes on the clothesline, a father tickling his son, mother and daughter sitting watching the road, a couple walking hugged by the road side. Everything is recorded in long shots, but unlike the road drawn shots from the beginning of the movie.

In that sequence, the slow montage reflects the respect of the external narrator by the way these people perceive their existence: a life rhythm more connected to the nature time, more contemplative and less stressful than the metropolis rhythm. This new audiovisual construction suggests a mixture between the two narrators viewpoints, the internal and external, which are get confused.

In the next scene, Renato also turns his gaze to the smiling pilgrims, who wave of trucks decorated with images of saints, flowers and colorful flags; and he hears the sound of joyful honks and the children’s clatter playing at dusk.

Arriving in Caruaru, the most populous city of the interior of Pernambuco State, José Renato searches for a hotel, but according himself, a “suitable” hotel with a double bed, minibar and air conditioning: “because I cannot take roadside’s slum anymore” (Aïnouz and Gomes, 2009).

According Candido (1971, 165), these material needs “contribute to creating or intensifying ties with the cities life”. Although the author’s statement is directed to his study of the peasants in the region of Bofete’s city (SP), we believe that the idea can be extended to this analysis, since the recurrent view of José Renato to other symbols of urbanization, such as

trucks, gas stations and neon signs, suggests the intention to reaffirm at all times his connection with the urban world.

At dawn, from the window of the hotel room, José Renato observes the montage of a fair. Then the geologist opens his heart, giving more information about his disillusionment love and his longing of the past with Galega. From this moment of the movie, the hard and suffocating frames used to characterize José Renato viewpoint become more flexible: the camera begins to move, following the workers movement.

The sound is designed in order to value the fair noise, with talks and laughs. In the following scenes the tone voice of José Renato is rejoicing, especially when he talks about the hotel's breakfast, suggesting an appreciation of the typical foods served in the hotel: "Breakfast was free. It included couscous, coffee with milk and guava pulp juice" (Ainouz and Gomes, 2009).

From this sequence, also we can see a more affectionate look of Jose Renato; a look built by mid shots⁶ that brings a greater approach to the people and the local things, as the details of a little music box and the hands of an artisan trimming synthetic foam rose leaves of strong color. Soon after the approach is strengthened, when a girl who begs for alms at the roadside is framed in close-up⁷ and José Renato compares his eyes to Galega's eyes.

The insertion of colored elements in the *mise-en-scène*, as the deep blue background behind the girl and the straw mattress quilt with flowery cloth that dries in the sun, also reinforces the suggestion a probable break in the José Renato's resistance to insert himself in the backwoods' life.

This idea is evidenced when José Renato begins to interact with the people he encounters along the way, whether through smiles thrown directly at the geologist - in the case of the circus's popcorn seller and the self-employed camped along the roadside - or through "interviews" he records with the couple Carlos and Selma and with the man who manufactures the straw mattress.

The strengthening of José Renato's dialogue with the hinterland is evident through the "interview" with Patricia, in the first moment of the film in which the protagonist addresses directly to someone. Patricia is dancer and call-girl, and her participation is highlighted perhaps because she desires the same as the geologist - a "life-leisure": "a life-leisure is like this: I in my house, me and my daughter, a mate that I have

6. Mid shot - a shot that frames someone or something closely.

7. Close - shot that frames only the face of the character. That a emphatic resource that privileges expressions and feelings.

by my side, to forget all those wrong moments. It is sad to love and not be loved” (Aïnouz and Gomes, 2009).

According Candido (1971, 254), the presence of prostitutes on the outskirts – as Patricia, Larissa and other women with whom the geologist relates – is one of the effects of the family disintegration caused by the migratory movement of poor people, from the interior to big cities, as Caruaru, one of the most populous of Pernambuco.

But in the movie, Caruaru city also reveals elements of cultural resistance, as shown in the scenes in which Patricia plays in a dance cheered up by a regional musical group composed of accordion and triangle players. Among the regulars is a couple dancing with a baby on their lap, indicative of the interaction between the outskirts people.

Like the small altar in Mr. Nino and Mrs. Perpétua’s house, the dance is one of the elements of preservation of rural culture, which, as Antônio Candido (1971, 202) says, “allow us to resist the impact of change [for the city] and mitigate its disorganizing effects”.

Almost at the end of the movie, when José Renato arrives at the Rio das Almas gorge, in Piranhas city, the starting point of the river transposition, the image becomes more defined, the boats are moving and the sky is a deep blue. The geologist records pictures of chairs in the street, the church tower and other details of the place, as if he wanted to keep a memory of the city’s quiet life, which has had most of its inhabitants removed.

In this place José Renato assumes the end of his love relationship and begins to dissociate himself from the bitterness and appreciate old daily experiences: “That’s why I made this trip: to move, to walk again. Return to eat fillet sandwich, go back to riding a motorcycle, return to see the Fortaleza Soccer Team win, to go back to the beach on Sunday, to return to live” (Aïnouz and Gomes, 2009).

The moment is translated by the moving camera that follows the geologist climbing stairs quickly, revealing, probably, his desire to untie himself from Galega. When he arrives at the end of the stairs, which leads to a monument, José Renato says that his will is to plunge into life, with courage, as do the Acapulco jumpers.

The images illustrate the story: men jumping from high cliffs to plunge into the sea. If at first glance the metaphor may seem poor, it may mean that José Renato has not completely broken his resistance to the northeastern backlands, because the reference to the Mexican

city and the jumpers could indicate that the protagonist is definitively connected to the urban, since Acapulco can be considered a urbanity sign for been a overseas tourist place, an exclusive destination of the rich city residents.

translation

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And, by extension, perhaps the cinematographic narrator is also trying to say that, even if the northeastern backlands is inside us, as character Riobaldo says in the Guimarães Rosa's book "The devil to pay in the backlands", irreversibly the urban world will immerse and swallow the rural communities of our country, as the waters swallow the jumpers of Acapulco and the Rio das Almas will swallow Piranhas.



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