

Representations of Women in Germaine Dulac's Visual Pedagogy

Rosália Duarte¹

Milene Gusmão²

¹Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-RIO), Rio de Janeiro/RJ – Brazil

²Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia (UESB), Vitória da Conquista/BA – Brazil

ABSTRACT – Representations of Women in Germaine Dulac's Visual Pedagogy. This paper presents the results of a study about representations of women in movies by the French filmmaker Germaine Dulac in the 1920s. Based on articles written by the director and the analyze of two of her films, namely *La souriente madame Beudet* (1922) and *L'Invitation au Voyage* (1927), the aesthetic options that guided her visual pedagogy are described and analyzed. In this perspective, it is taken into account the controversy around the aesthetic/political configuration of cinema as art and the struggle for the emancipation of women, of which she actively participated. The arguments highlight the role of education by/for the cinema within the framework of the relations between movies, memory and formative processes.

Keywords: Germaine Dulac. Visual Pedagogy. Representation of Women. Cinema.

RESUMO – Representações de Mulher na Pedagogia Visual de Germaine Dulac. Este artigo apresenta resultados de estudo que analisa representações da mulher em filmes realizados pela cineasta francesa Germaine Dulac, na década de 1920. Com base em artigos escritos pela diretora e na análise de dois de seus filmes: *La souriente madame Beudet* (1922) e *L'Invitation au Voyage* (1927), são descritas e analisadas as opções estéticas que orientaram a construção de sua pedagogia visual, no contexto das disputas em torno da configuração estético/política do cinema como arte e da luta pela emancipação das mulheres, do qual participou ativamente. A estrutura argumentativa destaca o papel da educação pelo/para o cinema nas relações entre cinema, memória e processos formativos.

Palavras-chave: Germaine Dulac. Pedagogia Visual. Representação da Mulher. Cinema.

Introduction

Cinema – understood here as a set of processes and inter articulated fields, which have in the film its major product – can be characterized as means, language and expressive possibility, as much as memories' material support, mediation that enables learning processes, engendering and re-signifying social practices. From this point of view, it can be supposed the existence of a close relation between cinema and memory, either in the historical perspective – as a record, in time, of the history of cinema itself, as art and as technique, and as documental/fictional record of the human history, in regards to happenings and social practices – or in the continuities and ruptures in which training processes are outlined.

When the relations between cinema and memory are taken into account, one of the analytical perspectives opening up relates to the way in which certain paths from the past integrate routes in the present, even in different places and distinct cultural contexts. It is possible to identify, for instance, in contemporary films, evident marks of aesthetic options and narratives proposed in experimentations which originated the cinematographic art, as well as references to framing modes, light or characters complexion, originated from other arts, such as fine arts or literature. This way, experiences lived by others, in other places and time, especially those expressing or referring to artistic productions, configure modes of expression of meanings that preserve themselves, and are reconfigured and re-signified in practices, *ethos*, visions of the world and life styles. This concerns, above all, cultural practices that, inscribed in the present, result from the manner in which we are influenced by material results, expressed in works, and symbolic results, expressed in constituted knowledge, of certain artistic, aesthetic and biographic itineraries.

In the continuities and ruptures that outline the history of social practices, the dialectic relation between memory and oblivion is also inscribed. From the cognitive point of view, it is admitted, as Gondar states (2000), that oblivion is constitutive of the memory, for “we only remember because we forget”. The author argues that “[...] amongst so many different stimulus coming to us from the world, some will be invested to a point that they will become mnemonic traces, at the same time as others will be segregated, forgotten and never converted into memory” (Gondar, 2000, p. 36). On an individual level, the dynamics of this relation is intrinsically measured by emotions and (socially built) meaning, attributed to experience (Izquierdo, 2002). On the social level, the sphere in which records of human history are outlined, what must be remembered and what can be forgotten result, fundamentally, from power relations. History is told by the dominator and traces, marks and voices of the dominated are erased (Benjamin, 1987). This is the main problem faced by the memory of the routes taken by blacks, women, indigenous, homosexuals and all social groups which have been, in some way, submitted to domination relations.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the complex and prestigious world of the movie industry, led and controlled by white men of the North hegemony, has made films, cinematographies (the African, for instance), aesthetical movements and paths *invisible*. Many are the *forgotten ones* by the history of cinema, amongst them, female filmmakers.

This oblivion is especially perceptible in French studies of cinema, where gender approaches still today struggle for recognition of its legitimacy (Veiga; Silva, 2014). According to Sellier (2009), one of the precursors of the theme, in France, the resistance of French film studies *aux approches genrées* are structural, both in the institutional plan (research organization in universities) and in the political and ideological plan, intrinsically linked to the French conception of culture. For the researcher (Sellier, 2009, p. 126-127, free translation), this is due, mainly, because of two factors:

The French vision of *legitimate culture* [italics in the original] continues majorly to dominate the departments of performing arts, to which the cinema paths are linked, a view restricting the authors worth studying to a pantheon 'of white males!' [italics in the original], outlining the elite culture. Cinephilia, as it was conceived by the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, is the filmic version of this culture; The French ideal of universalism postulates that culture, like politics, has no gender. The 'masterpieces' of the '7th Art!' [italics in the original] are considered, in the footsteps of literature works, as belonging to this male ideal, supposedly transcending sex differences¹.

It is important to highlight the precedence and prevalence, in this field, of Anglo-Saxon research, especially those with theoretical contribution from the Cultural Studies. Some of these works (Kaplan, 1995, Center..., 2018; Flitterman-Lewis, 1990; Burch; Sellier, 1996) point to a significant performance of women in the outlining processes of cinema, as art and as industry, and their determinant participation in the aesthetical movements which have impacted the history of cinematographic achievement and in the original constitution of the cine club movement.

In our studies, we find the strength and the predominance of the performance of women in the education through/for cinema in Brazil and Latin America, specifically concerning the outline of a cine club pedagogy, an area where the significant female prominence acquired considerable advancements (Gusmão; Costa; Duarte, 2017). The recognition of the importance and the legitimacy of this conspicuousness in the education for cinema in Brazil must take into account that the space conquered by women in this field might be due, to a certain extent, to strategies of control of their professional insertion in the market place, that sought to restrict their performance to the educational realm, as indicated by studies on the feminization of teaching (Vianna, 2013).

Our encounter with Germaine Dulac, a filmmaker to whom the official cinema history dedicates only a few lines, and with her explicit-

ly feminist films (Flitterman-Lewis, 1990) came from our studies about pedagogical practices of cine clubs in Brazil, strongly influenced by practices adopted in French cinema clubs of the 1920s, many of which had in Dulac one of its main formulators. The filmmaker dedicated great part of her activities in cinema to the theoretical debate about the processes of audience education, believing that in order to produce a cinema model alternative to the narrative already imposed at that time, spectators would have to be educated to understand it. With this purpose, Dulac acted in two fronts: in addition to being one of the founders of the French cine club movement, she was a cinema activist, in the search for a *purely image related* expression, that could allow the art of movement to escape the narrative model of literature and theatre. In this path, she created a unique, innovative, feminine and feminist way of representing women.

Although the analysis of the cinematographic production commonly takes the director's activity with a major authorial highlight, it is known that the cinematographic making is an eminently collective activity. Even when an individual's performance stands out, in creations and learnings that inspire potential technical and aesthetical innovation, it is important to take into account that certain individual expressions are only possible because they bring in their composition *know hows* built by others, that are learned, transforming into continuities, ruptures or re-significations, in education processes among members of a same generation or of distinct ones. As Benjamin states (1987), in the present, we are touched by a blow of the air that was breathed before; in the voices we hear there are echoes of voices that have become mute and there is always a secret encounter set between us and the preceding generations.

This perspective allows us to formulate the hypothesis that certain contemporary practices adopted in the education for and by cinema owe some of their configuration to the path trailed by Germaine Dulac, as much as she owes part of hers to those preceding her and to those with whom she shared her creative processes, like Louis Delluc, Abel Gance, Jean Epstein, Marcel L'Herbier, Léon Moussinac and Jacques Feyder. These paths reveal the importance of the conditions of transmission and incorporation of knowledge amongst individuals for continuities or changes in the field of cultural expressions and practices.

When revisiting the past, seeking to understand the role performed by Germaine Dulac in the composition of certain educational practices for the cinema, we have done it by contingency of the present – the interest in understanding the role of women in the relation between cinema and education in Brazil. With this path of remembrance, we found the way through which this director, within the struggle for legitimacy of the cinema as an art, configured new forms of female representation, in the realm of a *feminist visual pedagogy*. Thus, beyond the influence of practices to education *for* the cinema, her films and writings about cinema allowed us to formulate questions concerning the political-pedagogic role of filmmaker women in the education *through*

cinema. As stated by Gondar (2000, p. 36) “[...] in order for the memory to outline, delimit, place itself, before anything else, the problem of choice (be it conscientious or unconscientious)”, that is, in the flux of time, something we believe must be remembered is framed. Nevertheless, this frame almost always surpasses the barriers of what was sought in the first place, unveiling new themes and analysis perspectives.

Thus, it comes to highlight the work and writings of filmmaker, whose participation in the history of cinema and of cine club has less visibility and less recognition than that of her fellows, even if her performance has been equally important. For Flitterman-Lewis (1990, p. 35), Dulac’s innovative experimentalism, her continuous interest for the many sources of cinematographic expression and her “[...] effort to link the filmic translation of subjectivity to a specifically female conscience, configures a productive formulation of aesthetical resistance in the sphere of cinematographic language”². We intend, in this text, to point out the aesthetical choices adopted by Dulac in the creation of a feminine form of image representation of women that, joining form and content, contribute both to the development of cinematographic language and to the struggle for the emancipation of women.

Theoretical and Methodological Path

We have started off from the premise that memory is a social active process, of continuous re-signification, and when we highlight certain occurrences or routes from the past we are not *rescuing* them from a given space or time, as if they had been kept there, waiting to be brought back to light. With re-signification, the activation of memories grants continuity to the experience and to life, in their turn discontinued and fragmented, and this way generates permanent learning processes. These processes guide expressive possibilities and take part effectively in the life styles and construction of social practices.

Another important reference for the considerations made here concerns the studies about the spaces of possibilities configured by social origin. The idea that each new artistic creation brings the marks of an incorporated social inheritance constitutes one of the assumptions in which lies the descriptive analysis of the aesthetical choices of this filmmaker in the composition of her female portrayals. Dulac is heir to a significant cultural capital, born in a cult environment of the high bourgeoisie of Amiens and an art student in the best *licées* of Paris. The daughter of a cavalry official, her mother was a sophisticated and intelligent woman, an enthusiast appreciator of the arts, who provided her the access to studies of erudite music before the age of five (Flitterman-Lewis, 1990). With the death of her parents, she went to live in Paris with her maternal grandmother, where still as an adolescent, she studied various forms of art, with emphasis on music and opera, especially the works of Wagner. In her youth, she studied journalism and photography. For Flitterman-Lewis (1990), Dulac’s artistic education allowed her to notice art’s great evocative power, beyond the simple

reproduction of objective reality, and this conception would have been absolutely central in her theory of cinema and in the composition of her filmic narratives.

We cannot help recording that from this inheritance, taken here as a social memory, were also part the struggle of women in the French Revolution. Joan Scott³, in her studies about the history of feminism (apud Frota, 2012) starts off from the paths walked by four French suffragettes – Olympe de Gouges, Jeanne Deroin, Hubertine Auclert and Madeleine Pelletier –, in distinct moments of the modern history of France, to understand the dilemmas of contemporary feminism. Scott highlights (2005) that Olympe de Gouges (Marie Gouze) is the most well-known amongst the revolutionary, because in addition to the authorship of *Declaration of the Rights of Women and Citizens*, written in 1791, in which she argued that every right of men, listed by the revolutionary in 1789, also belonged to women. She wrote a long treaty, in 1788, considering her version of the Social Contract⁴. According to Scott (2005, p. 13) “In this treaty, Olympe de Gouges offered a dozen proposals for political and social change, as well as long criticism to the attitudes and practices of her contemporary individuals”. Amongst the suffragette's propositions stood the right of women to participation in the political, social and cultural life of their country, in equal conditions with men; the defense of the right of children resulting of adulterous relations to bear a name and to be considered heirs of their family's assets, in equivalence to those born from the marriage, as well as demands for the end of slavery in the French colonies and the universal right to vote. Also integrating the field of influence of the female perspective, expressed in Dulac's works, the women's movement, in different countries of Europe, and in special in the United Kingdom and France, in the first decade of the 20th century, for the right to vote and the access to the professional careers restricted to men in the university courses.

Guided by these assumptions, we have set about to read and interpret Germaine Dulac's texts published in French newspapers and magazines, between 1920 and 1930 – gathered by Hillairet to be republished in 1994, under the title *Écris sur le Cinema* – and to analyze her films, seeking to understand the argumentative structure of her visual pedagogy, in the creation of a mode of image representation of women. Content analysis from two of her major films have been laid out, *La souriente madame Beudet* (1922) and *L'Invitation au Voyage* (1927), as they were taken as language artefacts able to mediate the relation between past and present and to turn viable the concretization of a better understanding of the education possibilities present in the production and audiovisual consumption sphere. In this analytical process, we focused on the modes of women representation; the aesthetical construction of the feminine; modes of men representation; the aesthetical construction of the masculine; configuration modes of the representations of the interior world; fusion shape/content and light as narrative option. The texts written by the filmmaker and the transcription of some of her lectures, compiled in the book *Écris sur le Cinema* (Dulac, 1994), have

subsidized the analysis of the films' contents, for we understand that it was important to take into account the director's intentions in the composition of her characters and the structure of her narratives.

Germaine Dulac and the Cinema *Avant-Garde* in the Beginning of the 20th Century

Germaine Dulac was a journalist (1909-1913), before becoming a filmmaker, having integrated the team of one of the first French feminist publications, *La Française*, where she interviewed renowned female artists, writers and actresses. In 1910, she started to work with cinema. Those were the first years of experimentation of a new movement reproduction technique, despised by some, and object of great interest amongst the *avant-garde* intellectuals, involved in the debate over the role of art in social transformation. To the members of the French *avant-garde*, the social legitimacy of cinema implied placing this new technique at service of the outline of a new form of art.

Revising the studies on the issue, Bovier (2008, p. 1) states that the term *avant-garde* does not designate a movement, but “[...] a set of movements, active from the 1910s up to the 1930s”, where its relation with cinema is the object of an intense historiographical debate. Proposing the work of Malte Hagener – *Moving Forward, Looking Back. The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture, 1919-1939* – as a fertile starting point to view the field⁵, Bovier (2008, p. 2) points that the author refers to the so called “[...] cinematographic *avant-garde*” as “[...] a net with a fluid composition and in constant movement”, inside which four levels of interaction can be identified:

First, the great European cities – Berlin, Paris, London, Amsterdam and Moscow – where artists and filmmakers used to gather and create organizations; secondly, the institutions that backed and supported the movements, such as directors associations, cinema clubs and production support structures; third, the events organized by them, like conferences, meetings with the public, photography and film exhibitions; and, lastly, the ideas that were expressed in these manifestations and in its institutions⁶ (Bovier, 2008, p. 3).

Education for the cinema can be noted as a transversal element to these different levels of interaction, disposed in filmmakers' associations, in cinema clubs, in conferences and in meetings with the public, as well as in distinct forms of diffusion of the movement's ideas regarding cinema.

According to Gubern (1974, p. 190), in this period, Paris had been converted into an *artistic navel* of the West, becoming “[...] a jungle of isms and a melting pot made from all experiments ever done in the name of culture”. For the author, the art produced there, in that particular moment, bared the marks of life's emergence, of the effervescence of novelty and the renovation of hope, after the catastrophe, material

and human, caused by World War I. However, the fact that the European cinematographic companies had to drastically reduce their production due to the war, resulted in a significant increase of imports of Hollywood films. The American West coast hegemony in the European market has hit France, in particular, where intellectuals and artists were proposing to the cinema the art statute – an art at the same time popular and of the masses, but different from popular vulgar and, mainly, different from the commercial model adopted by Hollywood (Gubern, 1974).

In this context, Louis Delluc, already recognized as a writer, moved himself closer to cinema, becoming not only a reviewer and essayist, but also a scriptwriter and a producer. Other artists have gathered around him – Abel Gance, Jean Epstein, Marcel L'Herbier and Germaine Dulac. Sharing ideas and experimentations with the cinematographic language, they sought to understand and express the complexity of the human perception over the world, as well as the inwards of human thought (Cousins, 2013). Together, they promoted an aesthetical movement that would later be considered by cinema historians as the Impressionist School (influenced by the paintings of Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro, along with the literature of Charles Baudelaire). Their technical and style masteries incorporated over impressions, optical deformations and subjective plans, marked by duration, as well as by framing and by the rhythm of editing (Martins, 2006). The search for technical improvement in the production of impressionist works has led these filmmakers to incorporate technicians and collaborators in other areas of film production, such as screenwriters, camera operators, production assistants, editors, composers, set designers, all led by the director or cinematographer (Martins, 2006).

Most books on the movement analyze with a certain degree of detail the works of Delluc, Marcel L'Herbier, Abel Gance and Jean Epstein, granting little projection to Germaine Dulac's accomplishments, even though she was the creator of the first of impressionist films: *L'Invitation au Voyage*. This is probably due to three associated factors: being the only woman in the group; her fiction films bare explicitly feminist messages; and to the fact that she had been publicly criticized by Antoine Artaud, French poet, actor, writer, playwright and theatre director, linked to surrealism who, because of all that, enjoyed great prestige amongst artistic circles. In 1928, Dulac launched *La coquille et le clergyman*, after a screenplay written by Artaud, who due to lack of financial resources, had delegated to her the mission of producing and directing the film. The writer made severe critics to the film and its director, accusing her of betraying the script's original ideas.

No one knows exactly what could have caused Artaud's critics to the film, because he never published them. According to Flitterman-Lewis (1990), the French movie actor and director, Jacques Brunius, declared in a book, published in 1954, that Artaud would have got annoyed by the film because Germaine had submerged the screenplay in an "orgy of cinematographic tricks" (Brunius apud Flitterman-Lewis, 1990, p. 98) to "feminize it". Nevertheless, Flitterman-Lewis assures that

Artaud has never said that, and, in fact, the expression would have been used, at the time of the film launching by cinema reviewer Yvonne Allendy.

We believe that Artaud may have felt betrayed by Dulac's cinematographic style, which went against his expectations regarding cinema. According to Vasconcellos (2008, p. 158), Artaud, despite of "[...] aspiring to the redemption of the masses, like the pioneers", complained about "[...] a certain level of abstraction and excess of figurativeness" in the cinema made by them, a criticism specially directed to D. W. Griffith, of whom Germaine was an open admirer⁷. For Vasconcellos (2008, p. 158), "[...] even experimental cinema surrealism did not completely correspond to its intent: to provoke thought. Artaud would disturb the whole of cinematographic relations, both those seeking to rebuild the whole through editing and those which articulated the interior monologue by image".

No matter what his criticism should be, in a field of male hegemony, the director seems to have suffered a considerable political abrasion in the collision with a renowned and admired intellectual, even due to criticism to cinema itself. This has probably compromised the path of *La coquille et le Clergyman*, a film that, according to Flitterman-Lewis (1990, p. 99), reveals "[...] amazing structural originality, exploding all character and script myths, in the urge of creating phantasmagoric process of dream, in itself".

Political and Artistic Path

Germaine Dulac stood out in cinema, in the 1920s, as a director of a series of innovative feature films, among which are the two films object of this article, *La souriante madame Beudet* (1922) and *L'invitation au voyage* (1927), a landmark of impressionist cinema. Her educational pathway includes the participation in the impressionist movement and the creation, in 1920, of Paris' first cinema club. In 1924, she took over, along with Léon Moussinac and Jacques Feyder, the direction of the *Ciné-Club de France* (CCF), a result of the fusion of the cinema club founded by Delluc with the *Club des Amis du 7ème Art* (CASA), created by Ricardo Canuto, in 1921 (Hoare, n/d). The CCF was responsible for the first exhibition of Serguei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, in Paris, on November 12th, 1926.

She was an influent cinema reviewer, with articles and comments published in newspapers and magazines. She was a defender of the proposal to turn cinema into an eminently visual art, free from literature and its dramatic and Romanesque conceptions, so that it could develop new experiences with light, in the search of *pure movement*. For her, cinema had definitely conquered an outstanding place in the world of arts, "[...] for it teaches what we wouldn't know without it" (Dulac, 1994, p. 65) and she would see it as a visual idea, rooted in nature, in reality and in evanescence (Dulac, 1994).

Convinced that the spectator was part of the path that the new art form would take, Dulac actively acted in the emerging French cine club movement, aiming to disseminate the true *cinematographic art* and contribute to the establishment of the aesthetic taste. Different from the thesis defended today by Jacques Rancière, Dulac's conception of viewer assumed the need of a systematical pedagogic action, offering the cinema audience the technical and conceptual base of the moving image composition, so that they could be able to understand the structure of the new language, without expecting from it the same record and signification modes to which they were already familiarized with. For this reason, she would take every opportunity when she was invited to speak about cinema to explain the specificities of the art of *writing with light*.

In 1930, she set up a small producing company, France-Actualités, associated to Gaumont, but editorially independent, to make current news and documentaries (1932 to 1935). Following a stroke, in the mid-1930s, she directed fewer films but, involved with cultural groups associated to the Popular Front⁸, in 1936 she acted as a consultant in the production of other directors' features. Having progressively lost her movement capacity in virtue of the stroke, she died at the age of 60, during the German occupation in France.

Germaine Dulac Visual Pedagogy

Dulac believed that one of the main characteristics of the cinematographic art was its educative power: cinema was, for her, "[...] a large eye opened to life, an eye more potent than ours, that sees what we don't see" (Dulac, 1994, p. 65). Her visual approach of themes she considered relevant evidences her political activist and aesthetical *avant-garde* condition; the fusion of form and content – ideas that subvert the order printed in images outside the normal pattern – is perceptible both in short documentaries of current news and in feature films, whose images are composed by crosscutting of takes, with antagonist connotation (similar to Eisenstein's dialectical editing), in the expectation that the viewer would produce, himself, the possible synthesis.

Relations can be established between this expectation and the emancipated viewer's conception, systematized by Jacques Rancière (2012). Just as, for Rancière (2012, p. 9), the theatrical spectacle can recover the power from the spectator, "[...] in the performance, in the intelligence that this performance builds, in the energy it conveys", for Germaine moving image brings in itself the spiritual strength of ideas, "[...] necessary cause of movement" (Hillairet, 1994, p. 15). In the conception defended by the director, the idea guides the movement, it serves the movement, and as movement-ideas they express facts, expose problems, liberate emotions (Hillairet, 1994), displacing the viewer from the passive condition of watching.

In the construction of this *visual pedagogy*, Dulac also used the juxtaposition of photograms and a camera resource she defined as *le*

gross premier plan [gross first plan] or *psychological plan* – improving a strategy that had been used, originally by Delluc, to express the interior life of human beings in face of the idiosyncrasies of the real world. The *gross first plan* was, in her own words, “[...] the impressionist note, the passing influence in us, of things that are around us” (Dulac, 1994, p. 37). She used this resource many times in the representation of her female characters, with the intention of making the viewer understand the psychic universe of these women and the way through which they saw the world.

The short documentaries that composed her news shows portrayed the lives, love, suffering and jobs of ordinary people. With no additional comments or theoretical interpretations, the format had as purpose to make the spectator produce his own interpretation of the reported fact. In one of them, she crosscut the image of two lovers that had agreed on a suicidal pact, with a scene of a body being removed from the Seine⁹. She adopted crosscut images as visual expression of thoughts, of interior life, of dreams and the fantasy that, for her, are not presented to us in a sequential form, but in image compositions:

Imagine [...] moral ghosts, beliefs, regrets, remembrances, hopes, taking shape and bumping one into the others, in a fierce combat. Fairies, hell... phantasmagories of reality. [...] what we are, beyond ourselves! Something only possible in the cinematographic field, thanks to juxtaposition! (Dulac, 1994, p. 38).

She believed that the making of films, either narrative or abstract, had to face the problem of “[...] touching the sensibility through the view and grant predominance to the image, removing everything that could not be exclusively expressed by it” (Dulac, 1994, p. 121). Within her expectancies lied the concern that, as art of movement, the cinema *would teach* the spectator to appreciate nonliterary forms of narrative composition, without preventing reflection. For Dulac, cinema was a fundamental tool to express reality, without the deformations of the imagination and theoretical rationality, as much as to express the illusory, the imaginary and the inconspicuous to the human eye.

Gender Representations in Germaine Dulac’s Visual Pedagogy

In an interview granted in 1925, the director stated that if she wasn’t to do cinema she would have made politics, and that, politically, she identified with feminist ideas. For Flitterman-Lewis (1990, p. 27), the film arguments and the aesthetical options adopted by the director in the representation of the female unconsciousness can be considered “[...] one of the first attempts to formally conceptualize the feminist cinema”. The *gender representations* – that Burch and Sellier (1996) classify, in their studies, as *sex representations* – produced by Dulac, in the context of an obstinate aesthetical/political dispute around the cinemato-

graphic art, as much as the works produced by other artists of her time (like Camille Claudel and Sonia Delaunay, for instance), have contributed to expose:

Misogyny behind the great masters, schools and isms, bringing to the surface the elitist and segregating character of the milieu. Gender, and later feminism, have created bridges of dialogue with the female universe inside the artistic world, until then strictly masculine. During a great part of the history of Western art, women were featured as muses or assistants and not as artist creators (Trizoli, 2009, p. 1497).

This article analyzes these representations in the films *La souriente madame Beudet* and *L'Invitation au Voyage*. These, as most fiction films, as noted by Sellier in an interview to Veiga and Silva (2014), tell stories of relations between men and women. However, contrary to what was usual at the time in the cinema, they address the theme through a female's perspective, highlighting the problem of relations of dominance established within marriages.

La souriente madame Boudet portrays, in an exemplary way, the assumptions of her maker and is, according to Flitterman-Lewis (1990, p. 27), "[...] a powerful example of the incorporation of the subjective dimension in a traditional narrative structure and of Dulac's experiments with the cinematographic interpretation of interiority". Filmed in 1922, the movie is an adaptation for the cinema, made by Andre Obey, of the play of the same title, written by him and by Deny Amle. It addresses daily aspects of the life of a woman of well cultivated spirit, a lover of music and literature (maybe an indirect mention to the director's mother), married to a mediocre and unpleasant fabric salesman.

In a conference held in June 1924 in the Galliera Museum (transcribed in *Écrits sur le cinéma*), Dulac lists the foundations of the cinematographic language to the aesthetical options she made use of to tell this story, through a woman's point of view. Taking into account that the meanings of the art works carry along the intentions of their author (Eco, 2013), this lecture was taken as subside to the interpretative analysis of the film.

It is important to point out that the film was exhibited before the lecture and that, after the exhibition, the director called the public's attention to the role performed by the *game of plans* in the production of meanings, highlighting the relevance of the point of view (more distant or closer, isolating or integrating objects and characters) in the production of meanings. Next, she explained the meanings attributed by her to each one of the plans, in which the female and male characters have been portrayed. Even if there is, from the part of the director, an expressly pedagogic intention to present the cinematographic technique, it also seems to be the expectation to ensure a *full understanding* by the public of the role and place assigned by her to each one of the characters. This attitude contradicts, to a certain extent, the deep trust mani-

fested by Dulac, in all her writings and lectures, in the capacity of the moving image to express the idea by itself – *necessary cause of movement* – in the cinematographic language.

Madame and *Monsieur* Beudet live in a small city, in which “[...] poor spirited people” (Dulac, 1994, p. 37) have as main occupation *taking care* of each other’s lives. This narrative option seems to indicate to whom Dulac was addressing her arguments: women from the small bourgeoisie of the countryside. Living in Paris and acting as a creator in an art of such a popular appeal, she might have wanted to use her condition to take the debate about the feminine condition to women who possibly would have less contact with the issue. This cannot be asserted, but the fact that the story is set outside the great urban centers, and its protagonist being a woman from the local bourgeoisie, allows the assumption of the intention to address her speech in other environments.

In the opening sequence, overview plans describe the place; the first take shows a street in which a church stands proud behind the houses, possibly suggesting the ascendance of religious conventions over the inhabitants’ domestic lives. In the consecutive plans, people walk in almost empty streets, covered in snow: “marks of sadness”, “empty streets, small characters”, says Dulac (1994, p. 36).

In the presentation of the two main characters of the film, *Madame* and *Monsieur* Boudet, the director lays down the aesthetical option that will guide this woman’s representation, in this narrative context – visual opposition (parallel editing of images showing clashing behaviors) and discursive opposition (psychological profiles, education, interests). In crosscut plans, a woman is seen playing the piano while male hands weigh up a few coins; “[...] opposed ideals [...] distinct dreams” (Dulac, 1994) indicate the couple’s complete incompatibility.

A placard announces: *Behind the façades of quiet houses, souls... passions*. In the following scene, a medium shot, in *plongée*, shows the piano, behind which the face of a woman can be seen. The association between the music and her becomes evident. The face has a serious and absorbed look. The woman gets up, grabs a music sheet and returns to her seat. The camera makes a *traveling* in the opposite direction and shows, in first plan, the music sheet where *Claude Debussy, Works for Piano* is written. Then, a female hand writes on the sheet: *Madame* Beudet. Dulac outlines thus the profile of her protagonist: approximating her personal identity (expressed in the name) to the work of the Parisian composer. With an innovative musical production, of impressionist and symbolist inspiration, Debussy, who had died four years before the launching of the movie, was already considered, at that time, one of the major articulators of the French artistic revolution from the beginning of the 20th century. This woman who identifies herself with the works of Debussy must be, therefore, someone with a free spirit, with ideas outside the standard.

On the following scene, a parallel editing shows *Madame* Beudet at the piano while *Monsieur* Beudet, in his store, measures fabrics and

looks up the account's booklet. A sequence of plans start from there, alternating images of husband and wife, offering the viewer the possibility to compare attitudes and gestures that characterize each one of them and to notice the deep opposition that characterizes them: "All of a sudden, a joint plan will unite the two beings, abruptly revealing the huge paradox of that marriage" (Dulac, 1994, p. 37). In a cinematographic context in which the marriage is portrayed as privileged *locus* of romantic love (an argument perfectly defended in the film *The Sheik*, launched in 1921 and starred by Rodolfo Valentino), the Beudet couple's incompatibility is, in itself, a questioning towards the matrimonial institution.

In another moment of the plot, a sequence, in plan and counterplan, in which the couple appears having dinner, emphasizes the educational distance between both of them. The camera shows, on the left end of the table, framed at the center of the plan, *Monsieur* Beudet having soup in a grotesque and loud manner, with a huge white napkin under his chin, where he always drops part of his spoon's content. At the other end, *Madame* Beudet eats with knife and fork, in an elegant and restrained manner; the camera moves again to *Monsieur* Beudet, who cleans his teeth with the tip of the knife, alternating, in counterplan, *Madame* Beudet, cleaning her lips with a napkin and placing her silverware on the plate. Next, a joint plan shows husband and wife, on their respective seats, preparing to leave the table.

This sequence indicates Dulac's class condition, an heir of the habits and fancies of the French high bourgeoisie. It is worth pointing out the intrinsic relation, in the Western bourgeoisie societies, between *civilization* and manners at the table (Elias, 1989). In these societies, the eating etiquette, the manner of handling the silverware and napkin, the techniques to cut the meat and the bread have been naturalized and universalized as indicators of civility, of class and of education. *Monsieur* Beudet is, therefore, defined by Dulac, as *gross, savage, uncivilized*, before his wife's *cultivated* condition.

The director instigates the spectator to share the dislike of *Madame* Beudet for her *vulgar husband* – who comes from vulgarly, the populace, the banal, the ordinary – exacerbating his unpleasant characteristics, such as his grotesque laughter, displayed in a very first plan: a large open mouth, with ugly dark teeth. In the director's words: "This laughter had to occupy all the screen, all the room [...] in order to impress and terrify the spectator", so that they could understand the feelings of the wife (Dulac, 1994, p. 37).

In alternation with the laughter's first plan, first plan of the disheartened, sad face of *Madame* Beudet, with an embarrassed look, and a discreet condescending smile, suggesting to the spectator what goes on in her intra psychic life. Immediately after this sequence, the director resorts to the juxtaposition of images to narrate the dynamics of *Madame* Beudet's thought, moving from the comprehension of the incompatibility to fantasy: seating in front of the window, a woman sees a

tennis player (whose picture she had just seen on a varieties magazine she had in her hands) entering her house. The sportsman, contrary to what is expected, does not go to her; he only grabs *Monsieur* Beudet and takes him away from there. She does not desire to replace her husband for another man, not even for a younger, more handsome, more educated one. She only seems to want that unpleasant man to cease being part of her life.

The images describing the protagonist's imaginary are fluid and translucent, and are superimposed to the clear and solid image of *Monsieur* Beudet, who writes, seating at his desk. In face of the supposed kidnapping, *Madame* Beudet smiles relieved, and this is the only time, in the whole movie, that one can see a smile on her face. The sequence seems to indicate a certain contradiction on the filmmaker's approach of the theme. At the conference about the film, when talking about the technical aspects of this scene, Dulac says she shows an *intangibile and fluid* man, a ghost who "[...] struggles with *Monsieur* Beudet's coward soul" (Dulac, 1994, p. 37). Nevertheless, she adds: the "[...] poor woman" [...], tired of the noisy accountant husband, "[...] dreams of a powerful and strong man" that could take her far from there (Dulac, 1994, p. 37), in franc contradiction to the way she described her character in the beginning of the film. However, it is important to note that this and other contradictions that may be identified between her speech and the images she produced certainly result from her endeavor in the *self-assigned* task, of creating alternative forms to represent the feminine desire cinematographically.

Monsieur Beudet has the habit of playing out a parody of suicide, in front of his wife and friends, placing an unloaded gun on his own face and pulling the trigger. This practice is observed by his wife with an expression of dislike and monotony. One night, he invites her to the opera and, in face of her refusal, deeply irritated, he performs a series of rude gestures against her: he screams, violently takes the magazine she was reading from her hands, displaces decoration objects and, noticing his actions' lack of success, gives up convincing her to go and goes with a couple of friends. However, before leaving the house, he locks the piano and takes the key with him.

That night, alone in the bedroom, the woman remembers her husband's attitudes. Over the flashback images, her face, in first plan, revealing anguish and affliction. After a few minutes, she goes downstairs, goes to her husband's desk and loads the gun he uses on his suicide pantomime.

On the following morning, *Monsieur* Beudet retrieves the complaints upon her refusal to his invitation for the theatre, in another of his suicide pantomimes, which this turn does not get a complacent smile from the wife, but a tense expression, transformed in dread, when suddenly the husband, in the middle of one of his laughter, points the gun to her and shoots. The shot does not reach her, but she faints and the narrative ends there. The ending remains opened.

The director does the same in *L'Invitation au Voyage*, she leaves

the closure opened, so that the spectator can give the story the ending he finds more appropriate. The plot takes place in a single night, in a bar, decorated like a ship. On the first scene, it can be seen, from the bar's door, a woman inside a car with the face covered by the thick neck of her fur coat, observing clients entering and leaving the bar. Finally, she leaves the car, enters the bar and sits at the table located the farthest from the dance floor. She asks the waiter for a drink.

On the next sequence, transparent images, juxtaposed to the curious, ill at ease face of the woman, *gross* first plan, show her next to a child's cradle. The scene shows a clock on the wall; the clock arms move, registering a routine repeating itself, every night, at the same time, for many years: the woman is seated in an armchair, with needles, threads and embroidery devices; sitting in an armchair in front of her, a man reads the newspapers. After a few minutes, he stands up, kisses the woman's hand, in a farewell gesture; the camera focuses once again in the clock, same time showing; the man leaves and the woman remains seated, under the light of a reading lamp.

The remembrance seems to encourage her to do what she had come to do. On the next sequence, she takes off her coat, sips her drink and smiles. A young and elegant Navy official sees her, approaches and sits by her side. A joint plan featuring both of them shows the delicate exchange of looks and smiles, suggesting a mutual immediate interest.

In this film, unapologetically impressionist, the focus is the least of what really happens and more of what goes on in the female character's internal world, represented by transparent and shiny images. In the construction of this narrative, the director produces dichotomy and contrast between the male and female psychic worlds. On an exemplary sequence of this option, both imagine how it would be if they were together outside that context.

In the 1920s, it was already technically possible to produce an accurate image of the first plan, and, at the same time, of the background. However, when presenting the fantasies of the two characters, in relation to a possible future in common, the director chooses to put the two plans into contrast, composing the first one with clear images (representing reality and the present moment) and the background plan with blurred and imprecise images (representing the imaginary). The director also resorts to the juxtaposition of images, but removes the filters of light, increasing luminosity to accentuate the sensation of unreality.

This way, we see in the first plan the face of the woman, and at the back, her fantasy: she is standing up, in the prow of a ship, with fair fluttery clothes; the wind moves her hair softly; a smile lightens her face. Next to her, the ship captain, elegantly dressed, has his eyes turned to her. Her look stares ahead, his makes her way. With a dry cut, the director puts us before the Navy official's fantasy: stormy clouds cross the sky in high speed; on the sea, war vessels, with huge cannons, pointed to the spectators, gradually positioned, one by one, side by side, creating a powerful, insurmountable line of attack on the horizon. Suddenly,

this image is replaced by another, in which the naked torso of a woman can be seen with small solid breasts. Dulac delimits through an image in this sequence the place and the nature of desire in each one of them, accentuating the strong and impenetrable condition she believes to exist between these two interior worlds.

Going back to the bar, in another sequence, the director creates a dreamy atmosphere, that seems to suggest the joy and intimacy involved in a free consensual love encounter. The couple dances among other couples and, in overlapped translucent and luminous images, dancers' legs and feet entwine to one another, in choreographed movements; laces and adornments from the skirts follow smoothly, ankles covered by nylon tights and touch slightly the trousers pleated hemlines. The light creates the sound! It is possible to feel the presence of music in the movement composed by the images.

The couple returns to the table and, when touching the woman's hand, the military sees on her bracelet's cameo the picture of a child. Visibly irritated, he gets up and walks towards another woman in the ballroom. The protagonist then gets up, dresses her coat, covers her face again, and leaves the bar.

In both films, Dulac seems to suggest that her protagonists are unhappy and lonely, and that this condition will apparently prevail while they are stuck to their romantic fantasies. In the cinema of the 1920s, inside and outside France, women played, in general, supporting roles. Whether loved, admired, mistreated or even saved from danger by a male hero of the plot, their condition was always that of an object, placed in the plot to highlight the role of men, protagonists of the action. Generally speaking, classical cinema reproduced and spread the image of a *captive* and dependent woman, unable to understand the complexity of social life, to make decisions and take care of herself on her own. Germaine Dulac broke this logic. Her female characters are intelligent and reflective, and have a rich and complex interior life. Through poetical and not narrative means, proper to the cinematographic language, she has improved the representation of women, creating a new form of representation of the female consciousness, focused on unconscious and subjective processes (Flitterman-Lewis, 1990).

The critical situation of both characters, at the end of the two analyzed films, indicates that their choices probably would not take them to a better situation than their previous one. The director does not point out the way. Her argumentative strategy is anchored in the exhibition of contradictions, sometimes intensifying oppositions, like she acknowledges in one of her lectures, to force the spectator to think the problem through women's point of view. The option for antithetical and dichotomist representations was maybe, to her, the possible way of subverting the predominant representation mode of women of the cinema of her time. In her visual pedagogy, overlapping, juxtaposition, translucency and luminosity accentuate the complexity of feminine subjectivity and write with light the dimension of desire.

Final Remarks

The studies on the memory have become, in the last decades, an important tendency in Western societies. According to Huyssen (2000, p. 9), “[...] a shift in the focus from the present futures to the present pasts”, has occurred and, pointing out some aspects of what he calls full recollection, the author measures the political use of the memory, since the mobilization of mythical pasts in support to chauvinist or fundamentalist policies to the creation of public spheres of memories against oblivion policies (Huyssen, 2000). In the dynamics between memory and oblivion, what takes place is a relation of confrontation, a game of power. Revisiting Germaine Dulac's films and her route in the constitution of the notable cinematographic effervescence of the 1920s, moment of the dawn of the cinematographic aesthetics and the defense of the artistic specifics of cinema as the seventh art, meant to us the update of the reflection about the pedagogical mobilization of cinema. Also, it expanded the comprehension of the political role of women in the cinematographic context, as well as their creative potentiality to imagine and guide transformations.

The path taken by this director and her feminist films lead us to contemporary issues, involving the struggle of women in the cinematographic industry against sexual harassment, for the recognition, until today, of their place as filmmakers and for alternative modes of representation of the female bodies, lives, thoughts and subjectivity. Updating Germaine Dulac's thoughts, almost one century later, means, amongst other things, to establish a fight against the wall of oblivion of the female engagement in the cinema world. It also says something about the way through which, in a time of excessive production of images, the relations between cinema, audiovisual formation processes acquire even more relevance.

The route of the research enabled the understanding of cultural formation processes involving certain generations of artists and intellectuals. Educated in the midst of disputes of meaning about the world of life, when learning in these relational environments, they were concerned with making culture and knowledge accessible to the *people* or, in the case of Germaine, to take a new discourse about women to them. The impressionist movement in the French cinema, of which Germaine Dulac was a highlight, has contributed to create a new cultural apparatus, enabling the interlocution between the analytical practice of films, through cinema club sessions, of a theoretical production about the artistic potentiality and cinematographic style, as well as the development of cinema reviews generating a cinematographic culture in France.

As discussed by Martin-Barbero (2001) in his map of mediations between communication, culture and politics, the relation between cultural matrixes and industrial formats refers to the history of changes, and, here, it is interesting to add: history of permanence, expressed

in the articulation between social movements and public speech, mediated by sociability generated in the threads of human relations. For the author, it is in this process that the cultural matrixes activate and mold the *habitus* that conform the various competences of reception and expression. In the dynamics of the relations between cinema, memory and formative routes, Germaine Dulac's path, her performance in cinema, cine clubs and her feminist visual pedagogy have significantly contributed to the outline of knowledge and competences that are conveyed, still today, in the educational processes for cinema and by the cinema.

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Notes

- 1 La vision française de la *culture légitime* continue majoritairement à dominer les départements d'arts du spectacle dans lesquels sont installés les cursus de cinéma, vision qui restreint les auteurs dignes d'être étudiés à un panthéon 'd'hommes blancs!' constituant la culture d'élite. La cinéphilie telle qu'elle s'est constituée autour des *Cahiers du cinéma* est la version filmique de cette culture. L'idée française d'universalisme postule que la culture, à l'instar de la politique, n'est pas genrée. [...] Les 'chefs-d'oeuvre!' du '7e art!' sont considérés, dans le sillage de ceux de la littérature, comme relevant de cet universel masculin censé transcender la différence des sexes constituant la culture d'élite.
- 2 In the original: "[...] her effort to link the filmic rendering of subjectivity to a specifically feminine consciousness, comprise a productive formulation of aesthetic resistance in terms of the cinematic language".
- 3 [...] author of the study about the history of feminism, from the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century, entitled – *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*, published in 1996 by *Harvard University Press*, translated and published in Brazil in 2002, by Editora Mulheres, with the title *A Cidadã Paradoxal – as feministas francesas e os direitos do homem*.
- 4 According to Joan Scott (2005), Olympe de Gouges, with no false modesty, considered her treaty equal, or even superior to J. J. Rousseau's Social Contract.
- 5 In the original: [...] un point de départ fécond pour envisager ce champ.
- 6 In the original: [...] en premier lieu, les grandes villes européennes – Berlin, Paris, Londres, Amsterdam et Moscou – où les artistes et les cinéastes se rencontrent et se fédèrent; en deuxième lieu, les institutions qui supportent ces mouvements, à l'instar des associations de cinéastes, des ciné-clubs et des structures d'aides à la production; en troisième lieu, les événements qui sont organisés en leur sein, tels que conférences, rencontres avec le public, expositions de photographies et de films; et en dernier lieu, les idées qui s'expriment à travers ces manifestations et ces institutions.
- 7 In 1921, Dulac has published in the *Cinéa* magazine the article *Chez D. W. Griffith*, where she reports, with unconcealed enchantment and deep admiration, her encounter with the director and the visit she took to his studios in New York.

8 Coalition of left winged parties, governing France from 1936 to 1938, to which movements of intellectuals and artists were associated.

9 Available at: <<http://www.ubu.com/film/dulac.html>>. Accessed: 13 April 2018.

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Rosália Duarte is Associate Professor of the Department of Education and the Graduate Program of Education of Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio).

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5758-2529>

E-mail: rosalia@puc-rio.br

Milene Gusmão is Adjunct Professor of the Department of Philosophy and Human Sciences of Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia (UESB) and the Graduate Program in Memory: Language and Society and the BA in Cinema and Audiovisual.

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6170-9326>

E-mail: mcsusmao@gmail.com

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