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Just a Fable: Notes on the Politics of Speech Acts in Bamako

LENNON MACEDO

Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) - Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. E-mail: lennon-macedo@hotmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0002-3686-0550.

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Abstract

This text seeks to describe the way in which the fabulatory speech acts configure the politics of the film *Bamako* (2006), directed by Abderrahmane Sissako. In order to do so, we carried out a bibliographic study of the concept of fabulatory speech act in the works of Gilles Deleuze and a bibliographic study of the relations between film, politics and speech in the work of Jacques Rancière. We unfolded the paradigms of political cinema as described by Rancière and found, in the post-Brechtian paradigm, a possible dialogue with Sissako's film. We analyzed some of the film's speech acts, identified by photograms, and we found a unique way of assembling the fabulatory word and the everyday word in the production of new visibilities and new worlds.

Keywords

Abderrahmane Sissako; Bamako; Fabulation; Political Cinema; Speech acts.

Introduction

Serge Daney (2007) notes that the emergence of Third World cinema in the festivals of the 1960s and 1970s created a European expectation of discovering a new cinema of the body, an aesthetic that would lead its characters to the sound of Afro-Latin dance and music to enchant the bourgeois rationalities of the old continent. What a surprise for these critics when they came across filmmakers like Glauber Rocha or Ousmane Sembène and noticed a cinema that makes speech, not the body, the foundation of its politics. Films like *Entranced Earth* (1967) and *Outsiders* (1977) transform Latin and African subjectivities into subjects of enunciation, of speech, of voice.

But there is something singular about the politics of speech in these films. They are not mere dialectical argumentations that scrutinize the details of class exploitation, they are ways of mobilizing the visible and the speechable to conjure other worlds. It is a way of organizing the spoken word to produce a visibility that is not limited to what is actually shown on the screen. It is as if the subject of discourse, by enunciating himself as Other, fictionalized his own existence.

It is none other than the exercise of fabulation that runs through this Third World cinema, from the 1960s to the present. To fabulate as an operation that produces the document within fiction and vice-versa. To fabulate as a procedure to make indiscernible the limit between the true and the false, between resemblance and dissemblance.

This is because the fabulation act, as an exercise of words, necessarily harbors a tension, a disjunction. It is a form that dissociates image and word, that separates what is shown of a character from the statements that she utters about herself. Gilles Deleuze (1990) works on the concept of fabulation based on the case of Jean Rouch's *The Mad Masters* (1955), where a Hauka ceremony makes the members of the Ghanaian ritual incorporate the spirits of their colonizers, enunciating themselves as former British soldiers who actively participated in the imperialist violence in the country.

The act of fabulation, therefore, stems from a colonial conflict, from the need to oppose the discourse of the colonizer with one's own enunciation that identifies other potentialities for the invention of collective narratives. It is necessary to produce a people that does not homogenize itself according to a totalitarian norm, but that proliferates in a multiplicity of minorities: and thus make the words of the empire nothing more than one among several lines of force that influence official history. It is precisely this "colonial-capitalist unconscious" (Rolnik, 2018, our translation) that fabulatory cinemas seek to bring into conflict by dissociating what is possible to see from what is possible to hear in a given filmic segment.

This is the problem that Daney and Deleuze elaborate with regard to these films of the sixties and seventies. However, it is necessary to distinguish the fabulatory operations that permeate the sixties and contemporary cinemas. What we see in the contemporary, especially in films like Abderrahmane Sissako's *Bamako* (2006), are specific ways of holding court against the injustices of colonialism, in which the argument between opposites is diluted by irruptions of everyday intrigue, of words alien to what has traditionally constituted political debate; it is a singular way of mixing the public and the private, of making the personal political. In this relationship between word and image, between speech acts and spatial play, we will discover fabulation in a path of surplus, in the scraps of signification.

In Glauber and Sembène the fabulatory speech act carries with it traces of a type of political cinema strong in the 1960s and 1970s[1]. It is the presence of Brechtian-influenced staging, its dialectic of opposing lines and its procedures of distancing, in which characters report events instead of experiencing

1 Such Brechtian influence can be attested, besides the Rancierean argument, by texts by Glauber himself (Rocha, 2004) alleging the epic and didactic character of his works, and by David Murphy's (2002) insight on Sembène's work. The latter does not directly declare the Brechtian influence in his films, but recognizes the heritage of Marxist aesthetics in his formation (Gadjigo et al., 1993).

them as immersive action. That this critical way of eradicating the transparency of narrative has become rare in contemporary cinema says a lot about the moment cinema is going through today, in which the dialectical materialist notions of conflating word and image are falling into disuse. On one hand, it is as if the revolutionary horizon is swallowed up by an aesthetic of the ordinary in which late capitalism can be mistaken for the real. On the other hand, there is an act of belief in this world we live in when the dissociative forces that run between image and word unfold in the private lives of simple people, of characters who discover a politics other than armed guerrilla warfare.

It is in the horizon of a post-Brechtian paradigm (Rancière, 2012a) in political cinema that we are interested in seeking the ways in which fabulation is transformed in the contemporary. From this, we seek to understand the ways in which speech acts are configured in *Bamako* from the relations between the film's thought and the theories of the visible and the sayable in political cinema (Rancière, 2012a; 2012b) and the theory of the ways in which a speech act manages to fabulate other worlds (Deleuze, 1990). Thus, less than an analysis, we chose to make the text an encounter between filmic ideas and theoretical ideas, in the articulation between Deleuze, Rancière and Sissako.

Distributing the Image: Visibilities and Sayabilities of Politics

For Rancière (2012b), we can understand the image as an operation that puts into action three relations: the relation between resemblance and the artistic operations of dissemblance; the play between causes and effects; singular relations between the visible and the sayable. These aesthetic images, furthermore, mobilize their operations in two functions: a semiological function of inscribing signs on a surface – that is, the ability to produce signification – and an affective function of presenting themselves in their raw, insignificant presence. A function of signification and a function of insignificance, this coexistence of opposites, this interchange between meaning and its leftovers is characteristic of aesthetic images. It is as if the work of the symbolic always produces a surplus, a surplus that forces itself upon the sign and forces it to embrace dissensus.

It is then revealed an understanding of politics not as a social field, a property of the citizens or of the State. Rather, politics is a scene of dissensus in which one verbally disputes the very situation of speech based on an argumentation around the object of speech and the part that the subject of enunciation occupies in a giving distribution of the sensible. Politics is a scene, but a specific scene: a scene of dissensus. This dissensus is based on the Aristotelian distinction between *phoné* and *logos*, according to which the human being becomes a political animal when he succeeds in transposing voice into speech. *Phoné* is a medium that expresses pains and pleasures, feelings that are too individual, too particular, while *logos* is able to communicate judgements about what is fair and what is unfair, about what is useful and what is harmful for the common life. From this, it is possible to recognize in a scene a conflict between a police distribution that codifies certain ways of speaking, acting and existing according to a principle of redundancy and a political distribution that claims a principle of equality of all speaking beings in order to legitimize the noise of those without part in the distribution as a speech, as a *logos*.

> Politics is primarily conflict over the existence of a common stage and over the existence and status of those present on it. It must be established that the stage exists for the use of an interlocutor who can't see it and who can't see it for good reason *because* it doesn't exist. Parties do not exist prior to the conflict they name and in which they are counted as parties. The "discussion" of wrong is not an exchange – not even a violent one – between constituent partners. It concerns the speech situation itself and its performers. Politics does not exist because men, through the privilege of speech, place their interests in common. Politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account, setting up a community by the fact of placing in common a wrong that is nothing more than

> this very confrontation, the contradiction of two worlds in a single world: the world where they are and the world where they are not, the world where there is something "between" them and those who do not acknowledge them as speaking being who count and the world where there is nothing (Rancière, 1999, p. 26-27).

In this sense, the idea of play between causes and effects that is proper of the image is not that of Aristotelian representational logic, in which the enchainment works according to principles of necessity and verisimilitude, but a kind of ordering of signs (Rancière, 2005) that runs between a cause and its effect a multiplicity of signification traces.

> It is the association between, on the one hand, accelerations or decelerations of language, its shuffling of images or sudden changes of tone, all its differences of potential between the insignificant and the overly significant or overly meaningful, and on the other hand, the modalities of a trip through the landscape of significant traits deposited in the topography of spaces, the physiology of social circles, the silent expression of bodies. The 'fictionality' specific to the aesthetic age is consequently distributed between two poles: the potential of meaning inherent in everything silent and the proliferation of modes of speech and levels of meaning (Rancière, 2004, p. 37).

About the interplay of resemblances, it is the question of analogy that is posed. At the same time that cinematic images do not submit to a mimetic principle of identification with the world as an external object, Rancière does not exclude analogy from the image – on the contrary, the image contains within itself equally resemblance and the artistic operations that modify it; analogy and its possible encodings.

> 'Image' therefore refers to two different things. There is the simple relationship that produces the likeness of an original: not necessarily its faithful copy, but simply what suffices to stand in for it. And there is the interplay of operations that produces what we call art: or precisely an alteration of resemblance (Rancière, 2009, p. 6).

Finally, the relation between the visible and the sayable, between showing and saying. The interplay of resemblances is only possible from these signifying operations between what is possible to see in a certain image and what is possible to say about a certain image.

> In the first place, the images of art are, as such, dissemblances. Secondly, the image is not exclusive to the visible. There is visibility that does not amount to an image; there are images which consist wholly in words. But the commonest regime of the image is one that presents a relationship between the sayable and the visible, a relationship which plays on both the analogy and the dissemblance between them. This relationship by no means requires the two terms to be materially present. The visible can be arranged in meaningful tropes; words deploy a visibility that can be blinding (Rancière, 2009, p. 7).

It is in this relation between the word and the image that the politics in cinema resides, in the conflicting distribution of distinct visibilities and sayabilities (visible of the word and visible of the image, sayable of the word and sayable of the image). Even so, the philosopher thinks that there is a privilege of the word in theater and literature that does not exist in cinema; and, when the latter welcomes the word, it ends up producing a play within the visible, of what we see on the screen and of what it is possible to see through speech.

> Inversely, cinema, whatever the effort made to intellectualize it, is bound to the visibility of speaking bodies and the things they speak of. From that are deduced two contradictory effects: one is intensification of the visual aspect of the word, of the bodies that carry it and the things they speak of; the other is intensification of the visible as somethings that disclaims the word or shows the absence of what it speaks of (Rancière, 2014, p. 108).

There is always in cinema this possibility that word and image disassemble one another, making visible what the other did not show. Let us now look at some of the ways in which the word is operationalized in cinema.

Making See and Making Speak: Speech Acts of Political Cinema

Speech acts begin with the talkies. If what was verbal in the silent image were the intertitles and their indirect indication, with the advent of sound the word assumes a new dimension of the image, it becomes a new component of the visible. This is because the "heard speech-act, as a component of the visual image, makes something visible in that image" (Deleuze, 1989, p. 233). We can then think of three types of speech act in cinema: the conversation, in this case, the oral interaction independent of the subjects of enunciation; the reflexion, the off-camera monologue that operates the absolute out-of-field within the image; and the fabulation, the falsifying discourse that establishes a dissociation between the visual image and the sound image, producing a short-circuit of the visible and the sayable.

As far as political cinema is concerned, we understand that it is in the relationship between conversation and fabulation that we find the key to understanding the path we trace here. Conversation, as Deleuze conceptualizes it, is itself a verbal distribution of the common, a form that is not tied to the bearers of speech, but that organizes the social interaction between the characters.

> And conversation is undoubtedly inseparable from structures, places and functions, from interests and motives, from actions and reactions which are external to it. But it also possesses the power of artificially subordinating all these determinations, of making them a stake, or rather of making them the variables of an interaction which corresponds to it. Interests, feeling or love no longer determine conversation, they themselves depend on the division of stimulation in conversation, the latter determining relations of force and structurations which are particular to it. This is why there is always something mad, schizophrenic, in a conversation taken for itself (with bar conversations, lovers' conversations, money conversations, or small talk as its essence). […] It would be wrong to consider conversation in terms of partners who are already joined or linked. Even in this case, the specificity of conversation lies in its redistributing the stakes, and its initiation of interactions between supposedly dispersed and independent people who pass through the scene by chance: so that conversation is a contracted rumor, and rumor an expanded conversation, both of which reveal the autonomy of communication or circulation (Deleuze, 1989, p. 230).

Conversation, here, is something necessarily conflictive, since it rearranges disparate elements, removes their authorship in order to make the difference between the parties flow. An emancipated form of the talking characters, talk has been used a lot in cinema to prolong the problematic of the world. It is in theater, however, that we see the two most important paradigms of political art as the art of dialogue appear.

> From Aeschylus to Brecht and Sartre, the theatrical dialogue has often concerned itself with discussion of the relationship between two injustices. It has done so under two main forms which make the dialectical morality supporting the dialogue function in opposite ways. The first is the tragedy form, which is openly indecisive on the relationship between two injustices (Rancière, 2014, p. 107).

This tragic form of conversation involves confronting the injustice of the gods and the injustice of the humans, it is a speech act that enunciates the fulfillment of destiny, the imprisonment of the characters between two injustices. The word is inserted in a regime of continuity and narrative progression, towards the tragic end. It is by breaking this continuum that Rancière sees in Brecht another teleology, producing the talk as a dialectical science. Busy with exposing tensions and contradictions within situations, Brechtian dialectical art is concerned with a new measure between causes and effects, between means and ends.

> A second form asserts itself in the modern age, when injustice becomes a wrong done not to the gods but humans and conflict over injustice bears on the very division between the small number of those deciding for others and the multitude of those subject to their power. Deciding then becomes a task for the oppressed themselves and dialectic is the weapon they need to seize. At that moment the dialectic unfolds: it is the tension between opposed arguments but it is also the science of means and ends. And this last ranks injustices in the interest of the majority. So theater decides between injustices (Rancière, 2014, p. 107-108).

This choice of injustices highlights the pedagogical character of the Brechtian paradigm, of trying to scientifically present a truth – namely, the truth of dialectical materialism. To build the new rationality of the oppressed, the playwright will make use of the procedure of distancing: "a protocol of philosophical surveillance "in act" of the educational purposes of theater. Appearance must be placed at a distance from itself in order to show, in the very distance, the extrinsic objectivity of the true" (Badiou, 2002, p. 16, our translation). This distance between the word and the image will produce opposing visibilities: visibility of the profit of the owners of the means of production, visibility of the exploitation of the working class. But such coexistence of opposites does not remain unresolved, it does not become dissensus, it will be didactically translated into a synthesis, in the necessity of the revolution.

> Brecht's entire dramaturgy is subject to a necessity of *distance*, and on the realization of this distance the essentials of theater are gambled: it is not the success of any one dramatic style that is at stake, it is the spectator's own consciousness, and therefore his power to make history (Barthes, 2013, p. 127, highlighted by the author, our translation).

It is not uncontested that Bertolt Brecht's work is the great reference of a paradigm that aims to produce synthesis between opposites. Didi-Huberman (2017, p. 87, our translation), for example, will use the playwright's diaries to think about a way of disposing the truth, an aesthetic of montage that "will be more the infernal glimpse of contradictions and, therefore, the fatality of a non-synthesis". What Rancière and Badiou seem to point out in relation to the Brechtian paradigm, in turn, is that there is still a given teleology there that translates itself into a revolutionary horizon that makes the disposition of truths in art a form of pedagogical awareness of spectators.

It is in the sixties and seventies that, within the Brechtian paradigm, new possibilities of making cinema see and speak emerge. Rancière points out Jean-Luc Godard and the couple Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub as those who will articulate the issues of dialectical didacticism in such a way as not to practice synthesis, not to resolve the conflict established by the tension between opposites. About Huillet-Straub's *From the Cloud to the Resistance* (1979), the philosopher indicates a departure from the Brechtian paradigm:

> Classically, the fragmentary form and dialectical confrontation of opposites was aimed at sharpening the gaze and judgment so as to raise the level of certainty supporting adherence to a particular explanation of the world, the Marxist explanation. In this film they become, both through the texts chosen and through the way the words are staged, the basis of an unresolved tension that was to characterize all Straub's subsequent films. I propose to name the form constructed in this way post-Brechtian, and to reflect on the relationship contemporary film directors have with 'doing politics' and this post-Brechtian form (Rancière, 2014, p. 104).

And when the fabulation is translated into a speech act, making the visibilities of the word proliferate in opposition to the visibility of the image, what we have is the very rupture between the image and the word, characterizing what Deleuze (1989, p. 256) understands to be the true audiovisual image:

> What constitutes the audio-visual image is a disjunction, a disassociation of the

> visual and the sound, each autonomous, but at the same time an incommensurable or 'irrational' relation which connects them to each other, without forming a whole, without offering the least whole. It is a resistance stemming from the collapse of the sensory-motor schema, and which separates the visual image and the sound image, but puts them all the more into a non-totalizable relation.

We explored, therefore, the ways in which talk articulates with politics in cinema after Rancière and Deleuze. The conversation is an operation that rearranges heterogeneous arguments, being able to exercise a synthetic function, in the case of dialectical art, or being able to maintain the dissensus of tensions without resolution, as in the post-Brechtian paradigm. The fabulatory speech act, in its turn, is responsible for the dissociation between the visibility of the image and the visibility of the word, the possibility of producing another world inside this one in which we live.

Speaking Another World: Fabulatory Politics

Deleuze (1990) writes that the cinema of the time-image – which can be taken as some sort of modern cinema, although Deleuzean regimes of the image are not reducible to a historical determination – produces a thought that calls into question the criteria of truth and veracity inherent to the narratives of the cinema of the moving-image, highlighting what he calls powers of the false. These powers are expressed by purely optical and aural descriptions of what happens in a scene and of a falsifying narration of what a character is in a situation. Such an arrangement refers to a cinematic way of breaking with the thought of identity: "contrary to the form of the true which is unifying and tends to identify a character (his discovery or simply his coherence), the power of the false cannot be separated from an irreducible multiplicity. 'I is another' has replaced Ego = Ego" (Deleuze, 1989, p. 133).

It is in the wake of the powers of the false that Deleuze will think about fabulation. The act of fable-making is precisely the procedure of this "I" becoming Other, in which a character reinvents himself in front of the cameras or reinvents the world he inhabits through the intercession of the filmmaker. Thus, the character erupts as a moment of the becoming-other in which it is captured in its before and after. This procedure, furthermore, is responsible for inventing a people, for fictionally producing a people from the characters' reinvention of themselves.

> What cinema must grasp is not the identity of a character, whether real or fictional, through his objective and subjective aspects. It is the becoming of the real character when he himself starts to 'make fiction', when he enters into 'the flagrant offense of making up legends' and so contributes to the invention of his people (Deleuze, 1989, p. 150).

This relationship between fabulation and the production of people also emerges when the philosopher looks at modern political cinema. The political cinema of the time-image regime is configured from some characteristics: the absence of The People, the national representation of a people as already existing is what is missing on the screen and therefore it needs to be invented; also the indiscernibility between private and public, which makes private matters become political; the awareness of the fragmentation of the people into a series of minority communities rather than faith in a single people as national identity; and the idea that the filmmaker is the one who acts as an agent for the fabulation of a people to come, who makes himself the intercessor of a people rather than its representative. "The whole problem of this cinema, ceasing to be an investment of faith in a transformed world, to become a reinvestment of "belief in this world". Hence its crucial perception of the fragmentation and shattering of the people into a multitude of minorities" (Teixeira, 2003, p. 62, our translation).

Let's see how the issues of fabulation permeate the speech acts and politics of the contemporary

in *Bamako*. There is in this film a singular operation of crossing the collective utterances with the ordinary word and the quotidian space, producing a multiplicity of visibilities. And then, we will think about the tense relations that are produced between Rancière's and Deleuze's descriptions of political cinema and the formal operations that are inscribed in the film.

Fabulating the Stage of Law

The people of Mali are filing a lawsuit against the IMF and the World Bank to bring an end to African countries' debt to the international institutions. The trial takes place in the inner courtyard of a housing development in Bamako, the country's capital. Surrounding the court, the neighborhood maintains its daily routine despite the robes, the cameras, the microphones, and the audience. Amidst the legal drama, several private intrigues develop: Melé (Aïssa Maïga) and Chaka (Tiécoura Traoré) star in a couple's crisis, and a sick man endures death without being able to get out of bed; but much more banal situations are also presented, such a purchase of sunglasses or the washing of clothes in the backyard.

Abderrahmane Sissako's feature film relies on the two types of speech act explained above to recite its politics: conversation and fabulation. *Bamako* proposes from the beginning of the film a legal fabulation of the everyday world (Picture 1). The characters of judges, lawyers, and witnesses stage the theater of law by using formal mannerisms and arguments heavily based on statistics and socioeconomic data. If the end credits indicate that most of these characters are playing themselves, long before that we are already convinced that a game between the true and the false, between documentary and fiction, is at work.

Image 1 - The Fabulation of the Legal in the Daily Space (00:02:24)

Source: Bamako (2006)

As the trial unfolds, scenes from everyday life pop up here and there, interspersing the lines of the trial (Picture 2). Sometimes the speeches persist in the other scenes, amplified by a sound system that projects the words to those who are not allowed to enter the courtroom (Picture 3). At times, the relationship between the speeches and the insertions of everyday life in the editing have a certain causal effect: while a witness testifies about the diseases that populates the continent, the image of the sick man in his bed is reiterated; the washerwomen are visually presented as another witness notes the absence of African gold on the hands and necks of African women.

Image 2 - The Daily Life of Washerwomen (00:11:43)

Source: Bamako (2006)

Image 3 - Those Who Remain Outside the Court (01:04:49)

Source: Bamako (2006)

There are, therefore, moments in which the visibility of the image and the visibility of the word complement each other, reinforcing a certain causality in the narrative. But this veridical operation between causes and effects is not the predominant one, and throughout the film we are affected by the randomness of the sequencing between speech acts, sometimes with the interruption of a deposition to introduce an everyday conversation, sometimes with ellipses that do not allow us to understand how much time has passed between one witness and another.

In a text about the film, Amarant César (2013, p. 584) states that the play with the "trial film" format refers to a need of the African people to *take the word*. The staging of the international court amidst a corner of the Malian capital would therefore be a way to insert utopia into the present; and the space works to make visible this place of enunciation requested by speech.

> Indeed, the strength of the *Bamako* device consists in its ability to push the limits of reality, to widen the field of the possible, through the invention of a place (or non-place) that is a place of speech, against a systematic silencing. The operation that gives rise to a utopian narrative, in the case of this film, is due to *a spatial composition whose purpose is the restitution of a place of enunciation*. Now, *Bamako* is a film about speech – the act and the place of speech (César, 2013, p. 584, our highlights and translation).

For the author, therefore, even at times when images of daily life randomly appear in the midst of legal discourse, they are at the service of a specific meaning: to give body to the place of speech, to locate historically and geographically the African population's claim to the right to speak. This is one of the image-functions, as we saw earlier, that of mapping the meaning of the signs inscribed in the visible.

If this were so, the conflicting visibility proposed by the speech acts of the prosecution and the defense – unresolved throughout the trial, which ends without a sentence – would have their resolution in the visibility of space. The film, like Brechtian dialectics, would choose among the opposing arguments which one will be reinforced, reiterated, repeated by the image, directing the tensions to an end.

In this regard, unlike César, we believe that the random moments of word and image do not submit themselves to a sense of exemplification of the place of enunciation. We bet here on the second image-function identified by Rancière, the function of surplus. The idea that some visibilities are left over from the process of signification determined by the production of collective enunciations is necessary for us to think of a politics in cinema beyond the sociological content of the speeches; it is to recognize that dissensus is the basis of politics and that dissensual cinema is a cinema of the disjunction of the visible.

Let's look at two short scenes that do not participate in the idea of the spatialization of word-taking or exemplifying the struggle for the place of enunciation. Melé, at three different moments in the film, demands that the back of her dress be fastened (Picture 4). The first two times, it is Bei who does her the favor; the third time, the policeman. Each time, the character bursts into the legal theater, interrupting the session, to have the favor done. In the rest of the film, Melé does not maintain any direct contact with the court on her doorstep, nor does she echo the debate in private conversations. The character's drama is personal, the drama of the end of her marriage, of the possible immigration to Senegal, and of being separated from her daughter. The request for others to fix her dress, therefore, may be subject to this parallel narrative line. Yet it breaks out in the middle of the trial three times. There is a conflict of visibilities in this relationship between image and speech acts that is not exhausted in the sign of the African struggle for the right to speak.

Image 4 - Melé Asks Bei to Tie her Dress (00:10:19)

Source: Bamako (2006)

Likewise, there is also the scene in which Samba Diakité mutes in front of the microphone (Picture 5). The character, who gets up from the audience and asks for permission to testify, when he stops in front of the judge, says his name, his former occupation (teacher) and nothing else. Some characters find Diakité's behavior strange and question his silence, but they don't get a word out of the deponent. The teacher, here, is less a symptom of the systemic silencing of African enunciation than a mute force of the word, an impossibility of making one see through the word. It is a small, innocent gesture, just like Melé's, that institutes the random disjunction between the visibilities and does not allow the conciliation of opposites.

Image 5 - Samba Diakité and the Mute Word (01:03:34)

Source: Bamako (2006)

What then do these insignificant moments of interruption, of pause, of deviation mean? There is something in daily life that interrupts the play of opposites. It is a kind of observation that seeks the microsociological, despite the scale of the problems brought up on the stand. *Bamako* is a praise to the fragment and the duration, to the small events and the insurgency power of the ordinary. Tying a knot becomes a scene, occupies space and time, interrupts the grand narratives, and produces visibility.

A Temporary Diagram of Ideas

We can then glimpse how the ideas operating in *Bamako* resonate or not with the ideas in Deleuze's and Rancière's books. There is a court-form in *Bamako* that refers less to Brecht, perhaps, than to Aimé Césaire (1978)[2], a strong influence on Sissako's films as seen in the direct quotations from his work – most evident in the director's first feature, *Life on Earth* (1998). However, the Césairean argument still seeks a synthesis, a resolution of the colonial problem in the universalist body of the proletariat.

What Rancière seems to describe in the absence of synthesis of the post-Brechtian regime (post-Césairean, in the case of Sissako?) does not necessarily require a court-form, but one sees that there is an importance in the argumentative demonstration: one must demonstrate that there is a dissensus, a tension between authorized speech and speech unauthorized by the distribution. In *Bamako*, however, the dissensual power seems to reveal itself less in the argumentative exchange of the trial that closes without resolution, but precisely in the tension between the court and the daily life, in the moments in which the place of law, the court, and the place of fact, the courtyard, enter into a zone of indiscernibility, where signs run one after the other and shuffle the relations of truth and fiction – the English title of the film, *The Court*, reinforces this imbrication between court and courtyard, space of judgment and space of play.

In the meantime, it seems that the power of the false is produced through a game of overlapping discourses which both present themselves in the form of the true. The argumentation of the defense of the Malian people, anchored in statistical, historical, and economic data, shapes the discourse with the image of truth, the image of the given. But there is also an addition of truth in the way the daily life of the community in Bamako is presented, in the duration of the shots and the distance from which the washerwoman's work is filmed, alluding to a documentary form. However, the truth of the argument with

2 From the very beginning of his Discourse, the juridical aesthetics of his argument is laid out: "The fact is that the so-called European civilization – "Western" civilization – as it has been shaped by two centuries of bourgeois rule, is incapable of solving the two major problems to which its existence has given rise: the problem of the proletariat and the colonial problem; that Europe is unable to justify itself either before the bar of "reason" or before the bar of "conscience"; and that, increasingly, it takes refuge in a hypocrisy which is all the more odious because it is less and less likely to deceive" (Césaire, 2000, p. 31).

statistical data and the truth of the daily life of the washerwomen coexist in a space that, according to legal codes, would not allow their coexistence. Still, the fabulation of *Bamako* runs less through characters who assert in a Rimbaudian manner, as discussed by Deleuze, than characters who assert their "I" in unlikely spaces, impossible to mutually assert the "I's" inscribed there. It is as if the "I" of the document and the "I" of the fiction share the same stage, intoning the same chant.

To the enthusiasm of a witness of the Malian people, the World Bank defense lawyer replies that "all excess is insignificant". Somehow, this is exactly what the power says: the people who are left have no place; they must be deprived of their part – or never even get any part – in the process of signification, they must be excluded by the work of the symbolic. It is not only through the sphere of word-taking, already present in modern cinema and in the Brechtian paradigm, that one can design politics in contemporary cinema.

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Lennon Macedo *is a PhD candidate in the Graduate Program in Communication at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). He holds a Master's and Bachelor's degree in Communication from the same institution. He is a member of the Semiotics and Communication Cultures Research Group (GPESC), the Critical Semiotics Research Center (NPESC), and the Image Agencements Research Group (GPAGI). His research focuses on the intersections between contemporary cinema, film theories, and semiotics of communication.*