TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH APPROACH TO NATURALISTIC FILM ACTING

POR UM MÉTODO DE PESQUISA SOCIOLÓGICO DO ATOR NATURALISTA NO CINEMA

HACIA UN ENFOQUE DE INVESTIGACIÓN SOCIOLÓGICA DE LA ACTUACIÓN NATURALISTA EN EL CINE

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ABSTRACT: The history of professional film acting in narrative-representative cinema is marked not only by an everlasting search for technique and repertoire 'authenticity', but also by the emulation of behaviors aiming for the desired authority of imitation. Naturalistic film acting, in order to achieve such 'efficiency' throughout the production of fictional characters, used a type of research approach that Damour (2019) named 'sociological method of film acting'. This work attempts to weave an interdisciplinary path (actor studies – sociology) for acting work, therefore quoting its steps, setbacks, and most important characteristics[1].

KEYWORDS: Acting Studies. Film acting. Sociological Research. Narrative-representative movies.

RESUMO: *A história do trabalho do ator profissional em filmes narrativos-representativos é marcada por uma busca incessante pela autenticidade de técnica, repertórios e também a emulação de comportamentos que ambiciona a autoridade*

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[1] Thisx article is the result of research conducted at the Office of the Vice President for Research (PrP) of the State University of Goiás, entitled *O ator experimental nos cinemas independentes: poéticas atorais fora do enquadre dos filmes narrativos-representativos*" (2024-2026).

da imitação. O jogo do ator naturalista, para atingir tal eficiência na produção de personagens ficcionais, lançou mão de um trabalho de pesquisa que Damour (2019) nomeou de método sociológico do ator cinematográfico. Este trabalho intenta, portanto, tecer um percurso interdisciplinar (estudos atorais – sociologia) do trabalho atoral, enfatizando seus passos, percalços e características mais pregnantes.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Estudos atorais. Ator cinematográfico. Pesquisa Sociológica. Cinema narrativo-representativo.*

RESUMEN: *La historia del trabajo del actor profesional en películas narrativas-representativas está marcada por una búsqueda incesante de la autenticidad de la técnica y de los repertorios y también por la emulación de conductas que apuntan a la autoridad de la imitación. El juego del actor naturalista, para lograr tal eficiencia en la producción de personajes de ficción, se sirvió de un trabajo de investigación que Damour (2019) denominó el método sociológico del actor cinematográfico. Por lo tanto, este trabajo intenta tejer un camino interdisciplinario (estudios actorales – sociología) del trabajo actoral, resaltando sus pasos, retrocesos y características más importantes.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Estudios actorales. Actor de películas. Investigación sociológica. Cine narrativo-representativo.*

Introduction

Belonging to the mythic pantheon of naturalistic cinematic performance is the hard work that actors and actresses claim to have undertaken to embody a character. Our most effective memories of television, theater, and film idols attest to these interdisciplinary inquiries (cinema and sociology) developed by these professionals. They go into the field to become acquainted with the daily lives of people who are, for the most part, invisible to mainstream media – either due to their material precarity and geographic isolation or because they belong to the opulent and aristocratic strata of society. Actress Maeve Jinkings (2022, n.p.), lead in the film *Carvão* (Carolina Markowicz, 2022, our translation), stated that she went to:

Spend the day with real women, and experience the reality of [a] resident of Joanópolis – SP. These women are driven by daily necessities, with little time for abstraction. I tried to immerse myself in the accent, which is a major challenge for me, to embody a rural woman in a reality very distant from mine: an urban bourgeois woman.

These displacements into environments entirely foreign to professional performers sound to us non-actors like emotional and intriguing stories of romantic and sometimes dangerous journeys[2]. The professional actor's work consists of collecting information about utilitarian gestures, clothing, jargon, and accents, learning their human interaction modes, and then, in a professional context, mimicking the *habitus* of these individuals and structuring a performance that feels sufficiently organic to the audience[3].

Cinema operates a kind of intersemiotic translation that, at first glance, seems paradoxical: the actor observes real, anonymous individuals in their everyday environments and carries that record of gestures, facial expressions, and postures, breaking from their original use. What we see on the cinema screen is not, however, a literal transposition (*ipsis litteris*) of the behavior observed *in situ* by the actor's research, but rather a filtered, edited, and elaborated version tailored to fit the narrative framework of the film, within the condensed economy of the actor's craft. This discursive construction by the actor-researcher occurs as follows:

> The anonymous individuals [...] serve as raw material for the construction of types. They lend their persons, clothes, facial and verbal expressions to the [researcher], who uses them to mold the type – an abstract construct detached from the individuals encountered [in the earlier research stages]. The sociological type, an abstraction, is clothed in the concrete appearances of the raw material drawn from the individuals, resulting in a dramatic character (Bernardet, 1985, p. 19, author's emphasis, our translation).

The modern professional actor invests significant interest, time, and energy in what Damour (2026, p. 92, our translation) describes as the "analysis of the human being and their moods, generating a scientific posture in multiple fields of exploration." This analyzed human is also a social animal, worthy of being the object of clinical study in terms of their pathologies, whatever they may be. This individual who serves as the subject of research becomes, on screen, a dramatic character with a life of their own, the product of an acting performance that is merely "the most visible and identifiable dimension not only of a director's aesthetic choices but also

[2] Fátima Toledo, an acting coach, visited three Indigenous ethnic groups in the Amazon rainforest during the production of the film *Brincando nos campos do Senhor* (Hector Babenco, 1991): "I ate tanajura ants; I woke up next to a huge snake, coiled at the foot of the bed in the infirmary where we were sleeping. I observed the way they spoke, how they related to one another, and, most importantly, how they welcomed visitors" (Cardoso, 2014, p. 54, our translation).

[3] "Culture is, for [Bourdieu], history embodied and internalized, like a second nature, and therefore forgotten as history. The *habitus* brings together physical and psychic inclinations, which are determined by a series of social factors and embodied in bodies, tastes, and dispositions. The *habitus*, 'a product of patterns of incorporation' (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 172), is comparable to the *gestus* that embodies social determinations" (Bordieu, 1994 *apud* Pavis, 2000, p. 82, our translation).

of the sociological and economic conditions of a production system" (Guimarães, 2019, p. 82–83, our translation).

The actor's field research in cinema finds its greatest pioneer, architect, and most profound source of inspiration in Konstantin Stanislavski's (1863–1938) studies of physical actions. He came from the bourgeois European theater scene of the 19th century, when research meant the professional survival of the actor, preventing their work from sinking into the formal monotony of performance. This entire sociological laboratory methodology of the actor's work reached mainstream cinema largely due to the Hollywood industrial production model. Directors and acting coaches such as Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler worked with actresses and actors, demanding, in naturalistic fashion, research of an individual nature so that each actor could get to know their primary work instrument: their body. After this process, they would move on to more complex composition work, so that external investigations could take form. The *in loco* laboratories served, according to Adler (2000), to observe the action of the common subject occurring in their exact place of daily expression, among their coworkers. Thus, what the professional actor sees in the field is something so vivid and concrete that the gesture "becomes a kind of second nature to them" (Adler, 2000, p. 116, our translation).

Naturalism, as an artistic ethic, values the almost obsessive imitation of life, investigating and studying human nature conceived not only as a symbolic entity, but also as a body inevitably influenced by the physical environment that surrounds it, thus giving it a biological dimension. Numerous naturalist works emphasized the most animalistic aspects of human existence, describing people with their emaciated, festering, or necrotic bodies to underscore the thanatological nature of beings. In preparing the plays *The Lower Depths* (Maxim Gorky, 1902) and *The Power of Darkness* (Leo Tolstoy, 1902), Stanislavski (1989) and his troupe of actors and actresses recount that they organized:

> An expedition with the participation of many theater artists who were working on the play. [...] There, we freely observed the large platforms with endless cots, where many tired people were lying down, men and women looking like corpses. [...] When we explained that the purpose of our visit was to study the lives of these "ex-humans" for Gorky's play, the vagrants cried with emotion (Stanislavski, 1989, p. 345–346, our translation).

The idea of linking the actor's research in cinema with the sociological ambiance of their working method came from Christophe Damour (verbal communication), during a course offered within the Multimeios, Media and Communication program at the University of Campinas (Unicamp) between April 9 and 19, 2019,

as part of the activities of GEAs: Study Group on the Actor in Audiovisual Media[4]. Damour believes that the sociologist-actor is one who goes into the field to investigate, document, and collect data that will be effectively used in character construction, as a kind of laboratory for dissecting social interactions within the environment inhabited by the observed subject[5].

It was Max Weber (1864–1920) who first considered the individual and their *modus vivendi* as the fundamental methodological principle for sociological investigation. He made an ethically significant choice by selecting the individual – and not "social institutions" or "social groups" – as the first step in sociology to understand social actions and the motivations of individuals embedded in society (Weber, 2003, *passim*). The aim of empirical research was to understand the influence and conduct of individuals in society, whether economic, symbolic, or political in nature. It was at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century that the social sciences began to decisively influence the pursuit of vital knowledge for naturalism in cinematic acting, especially within the industrial production model that flourished after the systematization of what Bordwell (et al., 2005) calls classical découpage. This form of naturalism draws upon research and data collection methods that reinforce a worldview focused on "human nature and the moods of man as a social animal" (Damour, 2016, p. 92, author's translation).

The work of the professional film actor would benefit most decisively from the microsociology of everyday life developed by the Canadian theorist Erving Goffman (1922–1982). Through Goffman's work, the performing arts found in sociological studies one of their most influential sources of contribution. Goffman referred to the common citizen as a social actor during face-to-face interactions, as seen in works like *A Representação do Eu na Vida Cotidiana* (1985) and *Frame analysis–An essay on the organization of experience* (1986). Perhaps Goffman's greatest contribution to the qualitative assessment of knowledge acquired by the actor-researcher was the use of the theatrical metaphor (*theatrum mundi*) to apprehend the "mechanisms that sustain interaction processes at the moment when individuals are in immediate physical presence […]" (Martins; Coelho, 2022, s/p, our translation).

This kind of sociology of social interactions materializes in moments when subjects seek to understand others within networks of relationships that often become invisible due to their seemingly low significance. Because of their repetitive, everyday, and utilitarian nature, such interactions are considered irrelevant by interlocutors and team members. Goffman's work used the theater actor's working

[4] Course by Prof. Christophe Damour, professor at the Université de Strasbourg, France, entitled "The actor as a filmic form", Institute of Arts (IAR), Unicamp, on April 19, 2019.

[5] The sociological concern in actor studies has already been present in Edgar Morin's studies in The stars-An account of the star-system in motion pictures (1960); Richard Dyer's semiotic-sociological analysis in *Stars* (1998); and Augusto Boal's theater-arena research in *Jogos para atores e não-atores* (1998).

environment to implement the emergence of a certain interpretive sociology of personal relationships, developed through meticulous empirical research. He coined the term *frame* to designate the meaning structure of interactions, in which behavioral markers, protocols, and codes are established. The frame would be a habitable universe, endowed with internal rules, in which:

> Situations are constructed in accordance with principles of organization which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them. […] My analysis of these frames is a slogan to refer to the examination, in these terms, of what I mean by the organization of experience (Goffman, 1986, p. 10–11, author's translation).

Our objective in this work, therefore, is to connect the sociological method of actor-based research with the meaning attributed to it by Christophe Damour (2009; 2016), within the microsociological perspective of Erving Goffman. In this way, we are interested in the activity that is subliminally present in the work of the actor we see on the cinema screen: the product of qualitative research carried out *in loco* during film production. We aim to inquire into the fragments of material recorded, the careful field studies in which the actor engages with their primary data source – studying customs, rituals, daily life, utensils, clothing, accents, and forms of sociability. To that end, we will divide this work into two areas of analysis: the first will address how everyday life is structured with its social interactions, which the actor-researcher will encounter during their empirical investigations with social actors; and the second will describe, we believe for the first time, the construction method of this actor-based observational activity with a sociological nature – its challenges, characteristics, procedures of inclusion and exclusion, and issues related to sampling.

Microsociology of Everyday Life and the Structure of Social Interactions

When the actor-researcher goes into the field to investigate the interactional structures in which the research subjects – Goffman's (1985) social actors – are involved, they are, in fact, confronted with a complex web of frames, roles, functions, beliefs, discursive cynicisms, displays, concealments, audiences, and settings that compose the daily life of the ordinary subject. This subject constructs their social image through a highly collaborative process, in which groups of people (team and audience) provide the available supports for the staging of scenes that will serve as the setting where possible selves will emerge.

Marquis (2008) reminds us that, due to the social need for interaction, the social actor is almost always engaged in the "performative or acting task of con-

veying information about [themselves] and the circumstances in which they appear. And in this respect, we are all artists in one way or another" (Marquis, 2008, p. 06, our translation). This may seem, at times, unsettling, since common sense holds that the personal mask worn by the social actor is something fused to their body, and that mask and body are, in fact, elements of a unified, unbreakable organic whole. Nothing could be further from the truth, since Goffman himself (1985, p. 74) stated that, unlike theater, TV, or film actors who are aware of the roles they play, the ordinary subject is unaware of the masks they operate. What they present in daily life, therefore, is not a single specific role, but rather a self-delusional psychological stability grounded in the roles (characters) that best suit the expected behavior of the moment.

Goffman (1985) reiterates that the social actor strives to stage the best possible image of themselves through manipulation techniques that attempt to maintain expressive coherence. When it comes to a dramatic character in film, on the other hand, we refer to the fabulous, aesthetic, and discursive creation (the role) that the cinematic apparatus individualizes through three clearly verifiable instances: 1) the body of the actor or actress, which bears in its flesh the demarcating forms and marks of class, skin color, ethnicity, among others; 2) the easily recognizable and synecdochic identity of the human group to which they belong and the socially credible behavior resulting from it; 3) elements of cinematic language related to shot scale and angles, camera movements, and editing protocols. Regarding this synecdochic relationship with a broader human group, the dramatic character displays the face of an individual who represents one side of the coin, the other being their broader social existence. Thus, the biographical dimension of this representation is usually emphasized.

Microsociology of everyday life (1985; 1986) considers that the word *role* can be used to designate both stage/film (actorial) activities and daily (utilitarian) ones, and that the social actor (or actor-researcher) would have no difficulty in distinguishing them. The function of the social actor, as an individual immersed in events outside the theatrical or cinematic frame, is to uphold and perform their role before interlocutors in social situations. Goffman makes it clear that there is a profound understanding, on the part of the social actor, of their interface with their role and the frame in which they are involved. The role undertaken during social interaction must indicate or suggest that the social situation/interaction in which the social actors are engaged is a role, and that this is being carried out under the mask chosen for such interactions[6]. The attitude of making it clear that a role is being

[6] I said (above) that Goffman (1985) believed that we are not aware of the masks we wear and that we change them according to the frames we are in. He spoke of two environments in which it is used: a) the one we use in a more "tender" way (**me**); b) and the ones we consciously use for other roles (Goffman, 1985, p. 166-167, our translation).

enacted is crucial so that the potential team-interlocutors who share the same role and frame are aware of it and align their discourse to keep their objectives intact before the audience (Goffman, 1985, p. 80–84). The role being enacted by the social actor and the team is an instance that may be symbolic or tacit, rehearsed, planned, or orchestrated. Therefore, to maintain intact the objectives in social interactions – among ordinary subjects, team, and audience – it is vital that:

> Each [team] member must possess dramaturgical discipline and exercise it when presenting their own role. I refer to the fact that, although the actor is ostensibly immersed in the activity they are portraying – engaged in it and, apparently, absorbed in their actions in a spontaneous and uncalculated manner – they must, nonetheless, remain emotionally detached from their performance so as to be free to respond to dramaturgical contingencies as they arise (Goffman, 1985, p. 198, our translation).

The maintenance of the role and rehearsal with the (possible) team are vital activities for preserving the nature of the interaction. It is worth noting that social roles tend to hierarchize and compartmentalize people, dividing them between those aware of the roles being performed and the audience that is unaware of them.

Regarding the awareness and belief (or lack thereof) in the role the ordinary subject plays in social life, Goffman (1985) divided the activity of the social actor in everyday life into sincere and cynical. The former would be one who "may be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality they are staging is the real reality," that is, so convinced of the image they convey that they are unaware they are engaging in strategies of representation (Goffman, 1985, p. 25). The cynical subject, by contrast, maintains a certain distance from the role – that is, they are aware they are attempting to project a certain image of themselves and choose the strategies they consider most effective. In this case, they "do not believe in their own performance and are ultimately unconcerned with what their audience believes[7]." The theoretical importance of this distinction lies in allowing us to address self-awareness as a problem of social theory and to elevate the importance of the actor-researcher during empirical research, wherein they can identify sincerity and cynicism within the same social interaction.

Among the set of factors that constitute self-presentation, there is a "standardized expressive apparatus intentionally or unconsciously employed by the individual during their performance," which Goffman (1985, p. 29) called the *front*. This consists of external elements of behavior used to assist the ordinary subject in convincing the audience. The front may include the setting and its components

[7] *Ibidem*, *loc. cit.*

(furniture, props, equipment, various devices) to build a credible stage that inspires audience belief. There is also a subdivision of the front – the personal front – which comprises the personal accessories used by the interlocutors to support their role performance: makeup, clothing, uniforms, sophisticated or work-related tools. If there is a region where the display of props, equipment, and scenery plays a key persuasive role, there is also the flip side of this: situations in which certain facts must be concealed for the performance to be convincing – what Goffman terms the back region. This is defined as:

> The place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course. [...] It is here that the capacity of a performance to express something more than itself is painstakingly fabricated. [...] It is where illusions and impressions are openly constructed, [where] stage props and elements of the personal front can be stored, in a sort of stockpile of entire repertoires of actions and characters (Goffman, 1985, p. 106, our translation).

We know from everyday practice that much of the life of the social actor consists of planning, structuring, collecting data, and composing roles during social interactions. Most of these activities – or almost all of them, we might say – must remain concealed from the social interaction due to their less commendable aspects, as these would undermine the persuasive effort or the maintenance of the role. Ultimately, much of the life of the social actor consists of maintaining different roles for different types of persuasion and, above all, hiding from the public sphere the mechanisms, strategies, rehearsals, and preparations that are carried out in the back region.

The Sociological Actor: Constructing a Method

Naturalistic industrial cinema has skillfully taken advantage of the scientific impulse in the work of professional actors, suggesting – or even requiring – as early as the first decades of the 20th century, that actors immerse themselves in environments completely unfamiliar to their private lives, engaging with primary sources in order to understand the motivations of dramatic characters. Paul Newman (1925–2008), an American actor, undertook this kind of research outside of his studio contracts, personally covering the expenses involved. François Guérif (1987, passim) describes in detail how Newman would go undercover in unfamiliar small towns, frequenting bars and restaurants, mingling with local residents, speaking with everyone he encountered, and exploring places in order to absorb the local atmo-

sphere. It was not uncommon, therefore, for certain actors to possess a professional conscience that compelled them to dedicate this unpaid time to the studios, until they felt prepared for the work on set.

This method of research, carried out in naturalistic industrial film productions, was always interested in social actors who structure different frames or have everyday experience with events that occur within *performances* and scenes. What emerges from these descriptions is that the sociological method is, first and foremost, concerned with lived experiences – with those who actually live the facts, the real. This method also has an inductive character, meaning the social actor will always serve as an example of more or less consistent patterns that form a general mosaic of experiences. These will need to align with the guidelines provided by the screenplay, the casting preparation, and the film direction regarding how the dramatic character should be realized on screen.

This negotiation between the actor-researcher and the members of the film's creative team does not occur without friction, disagreements, and lengthy negotiation processes. What often arises in these clashes are contrasting conceptions of artistic work, sometimes placing the cast and the film's artistic team on a collision course. Additionally, the real data gathered by the actor at the research site may not fully align with the character design that originated in the written script. In such cases, if the artistic team and the cast cannot reach a consensus, the process may fail.

The method and research technique must not become an end in themselves. The actor-researcher must always remain aware that they are working with human beings embedded in social contexts – often very different from their own – including contexts marked by exclusion and violence, or, conversely, by extreme wealth and opulence. The work of art cannot be detached from the social context in which the social actor being studied is situated. It must collect not only the gestures, facial expressions, and body postures, but also understand that this raw material is merely the outward expression of behaviors shaped by a plethora of cultural, material, geographic, historical, and political inputs. It collects empirical data from reality and molds it through the fiduciary processes of cinematic language: condensation, fragmentation, juxtaposition, and even possible distortions. The spectator, during the act of film spectatorship, uses this real data as tools to understand the diegesis, which is an artistic and therefore modified version of everyday facts.

Ideally, the actor-researcher always positions themselves incognito in the study environment, seeking in the other their source material. Their voice materializes, therefore, when the dramatic character is ready – drawing from the interactions, gestures, and speech of social actors several examples of material useful to their research. The actor-researcher is a singular agent, whereas the social actors may be numerous, as Bernardet (1985, p. 13) described when he stated that research "dissolves the individual into statistics," making generalizations based on isolated

but analogous occurrences. It is the actor-researcher who, by compiling gestures, facial expressions, postures, and actions, systematizes and clarifies the fragmented, imprecise, hybrid, and ambiguous data of certain human groups' behaviors, imposing an interpretation that rationalizes and organizes what is otherwise pure sensation, chaos, emotion, and – why not – also objectivity, within the utilitarian behaviors of real life.

The relationship between the professional actor and their object of study – the social actors – is established under the principle that one observes the other preferably from a distance, and that the researcher's active participation in the life of the ordinary subject would be a contradiction. The method proposed here suggests that the actor's active engagement in the life and experiences of the research subject would constitute a denial of their technical knowledge as a researcher. By being immersed in the subject's life, the actor would collect data that is fragmented, imprecise, and contaminated by their own presence in the research locus. Therefore, the actor's exteriority in relation to the field is recommended as a core principle of their technical practice. This establishes a hierarchical relationship between the real-life subjects in the field and the method used by the professional actor. These individuals:

> They are the experience from which they provide immediate information; the general, social, and profound meaning of the experience – this they do not access (in the film). [It is the actor-researcher] who elaborates, from outside the experience, based on surface data, and provides us with the deeper meaning (Bernardet, 1985, p. 13, our translation).

The gestures, speech, postures, and facial expressions – already filtered, selected, and arranged to form an organic set of data – are materialized in the film's dramatic character. This character becomes a product that blends a range of inputs from various real-life sources, which find a powerful amalgam in the cinematic weave: the actor's body, which unifies this raw material into a singular form.

The social actors become merely a passive sample that serves to corroborate materials or inputs for the dramatic character appearing on screen. The actor becomes a kind of demiurge, using the collected real-life material to validate their discourse in the film: the constructed dramatic character. Even without having had the lived experience mentioned above, the actor-researcher builds the character using the records that they and the creative team believe to be the most appropriate and effective inputs for shaping it. What we see on screen manifests as a kind of fictional Frankenstein, as it is in fact a montage – or bricolage – resulting from a complex process of selection, exclusion, hierarchy, decomposition, and assembly of fragments of real-world discourse.

Thus, the sociological actor must necessarily select the sample for their study and data collection – a research technique and practice that must follow the pertinent standard of events within the human universe being studied. One must always bear in mind that every sampling process involves a degree of variability. The selection of the research corpus often occurs within a reference framework that would ideally have strict boundaries. What differentiates sociological research from actor-based work is that the latter collects material that is difficult to adapt to verification rules due to the evanescent nature of the gathered object. The only way to make this material available for verification would be to record the utilitarian behaviors of the researched subjects in images and sounds.

Verification is not the only issue that arises for the actor-researcher. Consider this: they select specific social groups through contact with the field of research – most often marked by personal interactions previously chosen by them. The sampling model for the actor's sociological method must satisfy certain beliefs, preconceived ideas, biases, and archetypes that the actor-researcher already carries from their own social and cultural background, artistic framework, educational level, among many other factors. This relativizes the question of objectivity in sociological research:

> There is no such thing as a purely "objective" scientific analysis of cultural life – or, what may be a more limited but certainly not essentially different notion for our purposes – of "social phenomena," independent of specific and particularly selective viewpoints, through which these phenomena are explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously, selected, analyzed, and organized as objects of research (Weber, 2003, p. 87, our translation).

When the actor-researcher selects the social actor, they do so because that individual fits – at varying and hybrid degrees – the general model of real-life events brought by the actor-researcher. If the researched subject displays idiosyncrasies that render them an overly eccentric manifestation of reality, the actor-researcher discards the object and searches for another more aligned with their hypotheses:

> It is this cleansing that enables the basic functioning of meaning production [...] the particular/general relationship. The [dramatic character] works because it is capable of conveying information that does not refer solely to the individuals we see on screen, nor to a much larger number of them, but to a class of individuals and to a phenomenon (Bernardet, 1985, p. 15, our translation).

What is ultimately constructed in the actor's sociological research is a dramatic character that dissolves all the idiosyncratic, complex, discordant, and eccentric

manifestations that we know emanate from reality. What we see on screen is such a perfect coupling between abstraction/type and manifestation/real person – this coupling is nothing more than a rigorous filtering process of everything that does not meet the expectations of the archetype and of the social facts with their external and coercive character, as acquired by the actor-researcher and by the constraints of the film script.

Typically, the naturalistic actor does not inform us – through their screen performance – about the processes of acquisition and exclusion carried out during the sociological research phase. The actor model that has permeated the history of narrative-representational cinema rarely includes, in its working material, information or data about the production processes that led to the final performance. This final product is presented to us in a polished form, free from the messiness, exclusions, and (potential) noise of the research and data collection processes in the real world. The actor's technique and method live in near-total public invisibility, treated as dispensable elements in both the final performance and in discussions about the actor's craft.

Whereas in studies related to censuses (actuarial), the sociological thesis presented is corroborated with documents and statistics that numerically (statistically) support the hypothesis, the sociological actor works with data that fall within the sphere of the ineffable: has any statistical measurement ever been made regarding the best gesture to use when asking for the check at a restaurant? The weight of the countable and the objectifiable does not belong to the actor-researcher's field of work, who is compelled to work with extremely singular data and, therefore, hardly verifiable in statistical terms. Thus, behavioral and gestural data that occur in real life serve, with varying degrees of accuracy, to validate (or not) the actor-researcher's choice of a given gesture, facial expression, or posture.

It is not only the actor's performance techniques that refine the events and data of reality into an organic set of elements. Other cinematic forms also contribute information so that we may obtain a broader portrait of the environment and the researched subjects. Art direction (costumes, makeup, color palette, props, equipment, devices, among many other examples), set decoration, staging, and lighting are also ethical-creative cinematic dimensions that may corroborate the actor's sociological thesis. With the aim of securing the viewer's authentication that the world exhibited through pro-filmic elements bears an aspectual resemblance to empirical reality, the set production crew, set designers, costume designers, and stylists in general also collect potential inputs from the original research environment for their creative work. The goal of naturalistic film production is, therefore, to artistically recreate the original environment of the dramatic characters in all its nuances and details, anchored in the pursuit of the much-coveted authority of imitation – this precious and at the same time ineffable product that industrial cinema

presents as its flagship. In naturalistic-realist cinema, there is rarely any disparity or lack of authentication between the actor's performance and the surrounding artistic elements – each feeding into the other in a perfect ensemble where all components function harmoniously and respond reciprocally to the performance[8].

Final considerations

In the sociological actor's research process, a construction of real-world events takes place, consisting of individual manifestations of subjects embedded in specific environments, professions, activities, and diverse human groups, which – once refined, selected, and grouped by the actor-researcher – become a general behavioral model of that specific group. From the particularities of the researched subject arises the abstract idea of the general, which manifests in the actor's performance that generates the dramatic character.

The eccentric, personal, and unique traits of the researched individuals are effectively erased. This armor of reality imposes itself on each human interaction, causing a certain model of anomie in sociological research. What the performance does to "cleanse" the dramatic character of these uncomfortable real-life manifestations is to dissolve the raw material into it – now processed through performance. This performative treatment offers the spectator the (false) impression that the real, which reaches our sensory organs, perfectly merges with the fiction that emanates from the cinema screen: the social actor, full of noise and cracks, becomes the "vacuum-packed," filtered, pure, and coherent being that is the dramatic character. The performance, therefore, stages the character's drama by "organizing the expression of the actor's behavior before the camera, as a means of narrative conveyance" (Santeiro, 1978, p. 81, our translation), serving the artistic ethic that adheres to the procedures of a previously architected narration.

The actor's performance aligns with a phenomenal manifestation of real-world facts and produces an artistic result that legitimizes it precisely through its attachment to appearances, transmitting to us the idea of what constitutes the pantheon of cinematic mimesis: the authority of imitation. The naturalistic-realist actor is then marketed as a product due to their ability to imitate the reality of phenomena and to exhibit, subliminally, through performance, this technical capacity to appropriately represent it – well-suited to the tastes of middle-class cinema consumers. What we ultimately witness is a reverence for the representation of an abstraction – a construction – and not for examples directly derived from reality, with all their incoherencies, eccentricities, and ambiguities.

[8] Except in more experimental cinemas, where the relationships between the artistic elements of the film are freer of constraints, when the noise of using stylistically disparate elements is more present.

Finally, it must be said that the sociology of the actor could, in cinemas less constrained by the restrictions imposed by economic power, carry out data collection work within society aimed at transforming the living conditions of those being researched. Augusto Boal (1931–2009), Brazilian director, actor, and theater researcher, advocated the principle that the naturalistic-realist actor should possess a sociological observation approach, but along with it, an unnegotiable relationship of mutual aid with the social actors around them, during his theatrical workshops conducted in countries that formed part of the so-called "Third World" (Boal, 1998, passim). In this sense, art would serve as a showcase for exposing people's living conditions in society, aligning itself with the more traditional objectives of sociology – that is, an intellectual response to the challenges posed by the new forms and economic arrangements of postmodernity.

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