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## ***Correspondências* by Rita Azevedo Gomes. The Complex Hybrid Image of Contemporary Epistolary Cinema and Contemporary Essay Film**

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**Abstract.** Rita Azevedo Gomes' *Correspondências* (2016) draws on the epistolary correspondence between Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen and Jorge de Sena, as well as their respective poetic works, to build an epistolary-poetic, audio-visual and sensory-emotional kaleidoscope based on their reading, recitation and representation in different languages. In this way, the filmmaker generates a kind of phenomenology of reception that uses all the audiovisual possibilities: the different formats, digital and analogue; their multiples textures; and the diverse options of the texts' enunciation. The experimentation with different combinations, also using various image and sound effects, materialises in an epistolary-poetic essay film which reflects on the aesthetic experience and attains a hybrid, complex image defining contemporary cinema: between person and character, diegesis and extradiegesis, digital and analogue images, voice-in and voiceover, private and public, life and work, present and past, absence and presence, that is, between reproduction and representation. Azevedo's essayistic reflection on creation, exile and absence is generated through parataxic thinking and interstitial thinking that create dialectical and symbolic sentence-images. Thus, *Correspondências* becomes an avant-garde expression of both contemporary epistolary cinema and contemporary essay film.

**Keywords:** contemporary cinema, correspondence, poetry, essay film, cinematic thinking, hybridisation.

## 1. Introduction

Rita Azevedo Gomes is one of the most innovative and international filmmakers of contemporary Portuguese cinema, whose work belongs almost completely to the 21st century. Her films are deeply linked to modern cinema and its interest in the relationships with literature and theatre. Her first film *O Som da Terra a Tremar* (1990) shows the creative process of a writer dedicated to the construction of the first-person narration of his main character. The split between the author self and the narrator self allows the filmmaker to experiment with the hybridisation of both narratives, instrumentalising the voiceover as the main tool of this narrative unfolding. This element will be characteristic of all her work. The enunciation of *Frágil como o Mundo* (2001) is built on a literary narrative voiceover that tells us about the characters' actions at different times and from which different literary quotations also appear: by Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen (the title corresponds to one of her verses), Agustina Bessa-Luís, Bernardim Ribeiro, Luís Vaz de Camões, Cecilia Mireles and Rilke. In *Altar* (2003), a writer recalls, this time, the past image of a woman, Madeleine, on which he builds a story addressed to a silent female listener and also to the spectator. The voiceover is once again crucial, since through it the enigmatic enunciation of the female figure emerges. The cinematic matter is then related not only to literature and theatre, but also to painting. Various pictorial images are associated with Madeleine's identity and with the narrative developed by the protagonist. The short film *A Conquista de Faro* (2005) features the screenplay by Agustina Bessa-Luís, one of the great names of contemporary Portuguese literature and also screenwriter of several films by Manoel de Oliveira. *A Coleção Invisível* (2009) is the first adaptation of a literary work, that of the homonymous story by Stefan Zweig (1925). On this occasion, literature and theatre are combined with first-person enunciations and the presence of the extradiegetic space. *A Vingança de uma Mulher* (2012) is an adaptation

of the homonymous story by Barbey d'Aurevilly (1874) and the work in which Azevedo deepens with greater success these relationships between literature, theatre and cinema, in which voiceovers are essential, as well as the fractures of the diegetic space. Equally remarkable is the work on the space-time transitions in that theatrical-cinematic space. Finally, *A Portuguesa* (2018), adaptation of the story by Robert Musil (1924), scripted again by Agustina Bessa-Luís, continues her exploration of the relationships between literature and cinema in accordance with the inquisitiveness of modern cinema. *Correspondências* (2016), abandoning the purely fictional space, means a relevant transformation of that relationship with literature and theatre and also with the epistolary material. Undoubtedly, it is a work that clearly differs from the rest of her production and that, as I will try to analyse next, immerses us in a lucid experience of contemporary cinema. In this sense, her last film, *Danses macabres, squelettes et autres fantasies* (2019), codirected with Pierre Léon and Jean-Louis Schefer, follows the phenomenological approach of *Correspondências* to build another experience of artistic reception but in this case of image in general and painting in particular.

## **2. Contemporary Epistolary Cinema**

The instrumentalisation of the epistolary device throughout cinema history shows an exciting evolution (Monterrubio 2018). Classical cinema and its Institutional Representation Mode, as defined by Noel Burch (1970), used the epistle as a diegetic narrative element that triggers the plot or makes it advance. This use gained prominence and the letter became the central element of the story, always linked with the development of cinema genres: from the love letter in the romantic drama – *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Max Ophüls, 1948) – or comedy – *The Shop Around the Corner* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1940) – to the testimonial letter that contains the answer to the intrigue in suspense cinema – *The Letter* (William Wyler, 1940), *The Big Heat* (Fritz Lang, 1953). Modern cinema

brought the letter-film, a new materialisation of the epistolary device allowing the expression of subjectivity, thinking and imagination. Its author can express his/her world vision. Chris Marker and Jean-Luc Godard were the two pioneers of this practice, revealing the possibilities of the letter-film as enunciative device of a new cinematic form: the essay film. While *Lettre de Sibérie* (Chris Marker, 1957) explores its possibilities of subjectivity and imagination's expression before the experience of militant cinema, *Letter to Jane* (Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, 1972) researches its potential as a tool for the revolution at the end of this activist period (Monterrubio 2016). Besides, the letter-film is also used to create a limit-experience of modern cinema, regarding the relationships between literature and cinema, in *Aurélia Steiner* (Marguerite Duras, 1979). Both short-films, *Melbourne* and *Vancouver*, materialise in letter-films about the Deleuzian time-image and the Durasian subjective non-representational cinema.

With the advent of postmodernity, the concept of alterity becomes hegemonic and the epistolary device also embodies this paradigm shift in filmic creation, giving relevance to the epistolary addressee and causing the evolution from the letter-film to the epistolary film. While the letter-film of modern cinema was focused on the subjective expression of the addresser, the importance of the alterity makes the epistolary act include the presence of the addressee, as *Letter to Jane* already anticipated. First, the letter-film is converted into an epistolary film by replacing the writing of a single letter with the reading of a set of them. Two films are essential to enable this evolution: *Sans soleil* (Chris Marker, 1983) transforms the epistolary writing of *Lettre de Sibérie* into the reading that the addressee (an unknown woman) makes of Krasna's letters; *News from Home* (Chantal Akerman, 1977) becomes an epistolary film by constructing its enunciation through Akerman's reading of the letters from her mother, during her stay in New York. Second, the epistolary *you* becomes the protagonist of the writing, as Godard

already anticipated and as Marker confirms with Aleksandr Medvedkin in *Le Tombeau d'Alexandre* (Chris Marker, 1993). Third, the epistolary film finally reaches its literary model and the film is enunciated through the letters of different people or characters. In this sense, and starting from this premise, contemporary cinema generates filmic experiences of great interest (Monterrubio 2019b), which are placed in the hybridisation between fiction and non-fiction, such as *From Hetty to Nancy* (Deborah Stratman, 1997), *Endless Dreams and Water Between* (Renée Green, 2009) or *Redemption* (Miguel Gomes, 2013). Fourth, the filmic correspondences appear, defined as the exchange of audio-visual missives, of letter-films, which give rise to an epistolary film, and in which the prominence of alterity moves to the concept of intersubjectivity (Monterrubio 2019c). Finally, *Correspondências*, by Rita Azevedo Gomes, as well as *The Dreamed Ones (Die Geträumten*, Ruth Beckermann, 2016), generates one more level of hybridisation and complexity since the premise of the film is the reading of an existing epistolary correspondence by external characters. Continuing the practice of contemporary epistolary essay films –*Las variaciones Marker* (Isaki Lacuesta, 2007), *Dos cartas a Ana* (José Luis Guerin, 2011) (Monterrubio 2019a), or *Letters from Panduranga* (Nguyen Trinh Thi, 2015) (Rascaroli 2017) , Azevedo's film is a milestone in this evolution, since it reaches new levels of hybridisation and complexification in order to embody a cinematic subjective thinking.

### **3. Contemporary Essay Film**

*Correspondências* is built through the epistolary exchange of two great Portuguese authors, Jorge de Sena and Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen, both crucial in 20th-century Portuguese Poetry. Their correspondence began as a result of Sena's exile in 1959, first to Brazil and then to the United States, and lasted until his death in 1978. Under the Estado Novo, and due to Mello Breyner's and Sena's political ideas, their letters were

censored and even confiscated by the Portuguese Political Police (PIDE), which searched Mello Breyner's home and took Sena's letters, as she relates herself in her missive of 7<sup>th</sup> November 1962. As Fabiana Miraz de Freitas Grecco says:

It can be said that Sophia and Jorge's epistolography is marked by the deepest and most unwavering friendship. Truthful because it does not exclude the critical capacity of both of them in regard to observations, naked of any qualm, directed at every detail that could unbalance the work of the admired friend. And, more than the exchange of ideas about Portuguese poetry and the situation of literature in Portugal, their letters are historical testimonies of a time marked by the horror of the dictatorship, added to the barbarism of the colonial war. Therefore, the naked sincerity of the letters, which does not allow the slightest hint of hypocrisy to penetrate, not only reveals the genesis of the works of two great poets of the Portuguese language, but also penetrates a touching space of humanity: the exposure of fear and absence, which are perceived in each word mutually exchanged (2016, 207).

*Correspondências* merges this epistolary exchange and the poetic creation of both authors. From this textual duality, Azevedo does not create a fiction about the life of both writers, nor a documentary that turns to the testimonies of their contemporaries and to archival material. As the filmmaker states: 'I quickly understood what I didn't want to do. I knew I wasn't going to make a didactic documentary. It seemed to me even worse to call an actress and an actor to represent Sophia and Jorge' (Koza 2017). Instead, Azevedo builds a hybridisation, defining contemporary cinema, as described by Àngel Quintana:

At this time, the real of representation does not cease to occupy the space of the representation of the real. In order to regain its authentic meaning, cinema seems to need to recover its ties with the document. The digital has fuelled that desire to capture the vestiges of the transitory, the desire to register the world to make it visible again. This gesture has not served to resurrect a category such as documentary cinema, understood in the orthodox sense of the term, but to question the faint frontier that separates the fictitious from the real. The authentically new does not arise from the path that leads to the virtual, but from the hybridisation process of the

image [...] Hybridisation between reproduction and representation is what marks the signs of the times and what makes the nature of images complex. When there are all kind of forms of circulation for the images, the hybridisation of the medium has become the starting point of a possible hybridisation of the images of the real, while the relationship of the image with the time factor does not stop strengthening itself (2011, 81-82).

What the filmmaker proposes is precisely this hybrid creation generated from multiple hybridisations that I will develop in the following sections. First, between epistolarity and poetry, generating in turn a hybridisation between narration and counter-narration. Second, between reading, recitation and representation, in several languages (Portuguese, French, Spanish, English, Italian and Greek). These different degrees of reception then generate the reflection about the blurred borders between reproduction and representation regarding literary texts. Third, and linked with the previous one, the hybridisation between the real person who reproduces a text and the character who plays it, creating a *presence* who becomes the incarnation of the aesthetic experience. Fourth, between voice-in and voiceover, generating a sort of community mental space of the same aesthetic experience. Thus, the film offers both its incarnation and its abstraction. Fifth, the hybridisation of digital and analogue image in order to deautomatise their respective usual interpretations regarding past reproduction –archive analogue images– and present representation –digital images– and also linked to the hybridisation between diegesis –created in front of the camera– and extradiegesis –consisting of the crew behind it. And finally, the hybridisation between the absence and presence of the correspondents, inherent in epistolarity. All these cinematic elements also generate a reflection on some aspects of the protagonists' lives: the interactions between intimacy and public activity, personal life and literary work.

Therefore, using Quintana's definition, the film offers an outstanding hybridisation between reproduction and representation. Azevedo observes:



I thought it had to have the same multiplicity in terms of filmic matter. I wanted to experience how Super 8, the digital, iPhone and other media all work together in the same film. This amalgam of formats was, in turn, in line with the variety of people who spoke other languages. The result was a mosaic, and it organically corresponded to everything I was doing” (Koza 2017).

Although Azevedo refers to a mosaic, a term that we can associate with the hybridisation that arises from modern cinema (as well as collage) I want to argue the appropriateness of the term kaleidoscope, since it includes the image complexification from multiplication and modification processes, essential features of this film. A reflection is then generated on the aesthetic experience, which will instrumentalise all the audio-visual possibilities, creating a poetic-epistolary, sensory-emotional kaleidoscope around creation, exile and absence. Therefore, *Correspondências* constitutes an essay film, as Ana Cabral Martins (2020) analyses considering its defining characteristics described by different authors (Liandrat-Guigues and Gagnebin 2004; Corrigan 2011; Montero 2012; Rascaroli, 2017; Alter 2018). Taking into account these and other essential texts (Weinrichter 2007; Català 2014; Bacqué et al. 2015; Apazian and Eades 2016; Alter and Corrigan 2018; Hollweg and Krstic 2019), I will analyse how Azevedo Gomes’ film embodies the thinking process and the self-reflection of a subjectivity, that of the filmmaker, using the following concepts from different authors.

Firstly, Gilles Deleuze offers a definition of interstice regarding modern time-image: ‘a spacing which means that each image is plucked from the void and falls back into it [...] an operation [...] of differentiation [...] of disappearance’ (1989, 179). Therefore, interstices ‘have a disjunctive, and no longer a conjunctive, value’ (248), which transforms them into ‘germ of the cinematic thinking’ (Monterrubio 2018, 94). Secondly, and starting from the Deleuzian concept, Laura Rascaroli proposes the analysis of the essay film as the materialisation of an ‘interstitial thinking’: ‘I say that the essay film, as

thinking cinema, thinks interstitially – and that, to understand how the essay film works, we must look at how it forges gaps, how it creates disjunction’ (2017, 190, 11). Thirdly, and complementary to Rascaroli’s concept, Josep Maria Català uses the concept of ‘parataxic thinking’, focusing on the juxtaposition of different elements:

The essay film is primarily parataxic [...] It is composed of heterogeneous elements that are not organised through syntactic relationships, but, due to their hybrid quality, they generate a reflection process that is open thanks to the fact that not being regulated by a given syntax (2014, 209).

And finally, Jacques Rancière establishes the concept of ‘sentence-image’: ‘The sentence is not the sayable and the image is not the visible. By sentence-image, I intend the combination of two functions that are to be defined aesthetically – that is, by the way in which they undo the representative relationship between text and image’ (Rancière 2009, 46). Thus, the sentence-image, which embodies cinematic thinking, oscillates ‘between two poles, dialectical and symbolic [...] between the image that separates and the sentence which strives for continuous phrasing’ (58).

I will analyse how *Correspondências* is generated through an interstitial and a parataxic thinking which produces the mentioned hybridisations and embodies different sentence-images. Cinematic thinking emerges from the juxtaposition of different materials and the interstices among them, and their hybridisations create both dialectic and symbolic sentence-images belonging to the essayistic subjectivity. As Michael Renov indicates, the advent of digital technology gives way to an ‘electronic essay’ (2004, 182-190) that implies an exponential increase in the tools and elements available for the essay film to generate cinematic thinking: the easier ways to work with found footage, the endless possibilities of image manipulation, the different options of text inscription on the screen and, of course, the inscription of the essayist self.

#### 4. Epistolarity and Poetry

The epistolarity of the film is intrinsically linked to exile, as Hamid Naficy notes: ‘[E]xile and epistolarity are constitutively linked because both are driven by distance, separation, absence, and loss and by the desire to bridge the multiple gaps’ (2001, 101), and its aspiration of presence: ‘The very fact of addressing someone in an epistle creates an illusion of presence that transforms the addressee from an absent figure into a presence, which hovers in the text’s interstices’ (103).

Thus, the respect for the chronological order of the letters – published in 2006 and extended in its third edition in 2010 (Mello Breyner and Sena) – with some changes, as indicated below, is the only narrative thread of this aesthetic experience. Regarding the content, the filmmaker selects fragments and even reorders them with respect to the real missives.

<b>Mello Breyner’s letters</b>	<b>Sena’s letters</b>
06 <sup>th</sup> January 1960 – Lisbon	30 <sup>th</sup> October 1959 – Assis, Brazil
20 <sup>th</sup> March 1961 – Lisbon	24 <sup>th</sup> December 1960
22 <sup>nd</sup> September 1961 – Lagos	02 <sup>nd</sup> April and 17 <sup>th</sup> July 1961 – Assis
March 1962 – Paris	June 1962 – Araraquara, Brazil
28 <sup>th</sup> June 1962	20 <sup>th</sup> December 1962 – Sao Paolo
26 <sup>th</sup> November 1971 – Mexico	04 <sup>th</sup> December 1971 – Santa Barbara, USA
10 <sup>th</sup> June 1963 – Lisbon	12 <sup>th</sup> July 1964 – Araraquara, Brazil
May 1964 – (Greece)	21 <sup>st</sup> May 1966 – Madison, USA
10 <sup>th</sup> November 1969 – Lisbon	22 <sup>nd</sup> December 1972 – Santa Barbara
31 <sup>st</sup> December 1967 – Lisbon	09 <sup>th</sup> January 1968 – Madison. USA
14 <sup>th</sup> April 1978 – Rome	19 <sup>th</sup> February 1969 – Halifax
01 <sup>st</sup> July 1978 – Lisbon	

The poetic texts of both writers, on the other hand, emerge throughout the film without any specific mention to their authorships. As shown below, they intermingle in order to reveal many of the poetic correspondences between both works, as demonstrated

in the mixed recitation of both *Villa Adriana* poems, Mello Breyner's and Sena's (along with Mello Breyner's *Antinoo*).

<b>Mello Breyner's poems</b>	<b>Sena's poems</b>
<i>Carta(s) a Jorge de Sena</i>	<i>Glória</i>
<i>Poesía</i>	<i>Camões dirige-se aos seus contemporâneos</i>
<i>Carta(s) a Jorge de Sena</i>	<i>Madrugada</i>
<i>Assassinato de Simonetta Vespucci</i>	<i>Andante</i>
<i>Marinero sin mar</i>	<i>Suplica final</i>
	<i>Falareis de nós...</i>
	<i>Uma pequenina luz bruxuleante</i>
<i>Patria</i>	
<i>O primeiro homen</i>	
<i>Escuto</i>	
<i>Homero</i>	
<i>Rei de Itaca</i>	
<i>Musa</i>	
<i>Nao se perdeu</i>	<i>Quem muito viu</i>
	<i>Quem a tem...</i>
<i>Apesar das ruínas</i>	<i>Glória</i>
<i>A escrita</i>	<i>Piazza Narboni e Benini</i>
<i>O colar</i>	
<i>Ítaca</i>	
<i>Cidade</i>	
<i>Villa Adriana</i> - <i>Antinoo</i>	<i>Villa Adriana</i>
	<i>Os paraísos artificiais</i>
<i>La pequena praça</i>	
<i>Alep</i>	
<i>Pasam os carros</i>	
<i>Há jardins invadidos</i>	<i>Em Creta, com o Minotauro</i>
	<i>Súplica final</i>
<i>Cantar</i>	
<i>La pequena praça</i>	
<i>Tempo de nao</i>	<i>Soneto XXIII de Evidências</i>
<i>As grutas</i>	

Azevedo hybridises epistolarity and poetry, instrumentalising two possibilities of the essay film as analysed by Rascaroli. On the one hand, there is the epistolary essay film, in which epistolary becomes 'a disjunctive narrative form marked by distance and by absence' (2017, 20) which emerges from its interstitial nature: 'this split and this in-betweenness' (154). On the other hand, there is the poetic essay film, in which: '[T]he

lyrical in the essay film is not subordinate to logical thinking or separate from it, as an addendum; rather, it is argument and instrument of argumentation' (157). That is, two opposed materials at the service of filmic thinking: '[E]pistolary and lyricism as examples of narration and counter-narration, both seen as disjunctive strategies that may be mobilised by the essay film to create a "form that thinks"' (163). Epistolary narration and poetic counter-narration embody an interstitial thinking between personal daily reality and its poetic abstraction, since the themes addressed are the same. A verse of Mello Breyner's *Patria* [Homeland] offers the synthesis of her experience of exile: 'And exile stamps the heat of time.' Many of Sena's verses express his own experience, as these of *Quem muito viu...* [He who saw so much...]: 'Restless and forthright, noble and loving, he'll always be without a country. Death itself, when seeking him, shall find him dead.' Sena's poem *Uma pequenina luz bruxuleante* [A little flickering light] and Mello Breyner's *Homero* [Homer] offer descriptions of artistic creation that also define Azevedo's cinematic creation:

Everything is certain or false	To write the poem just as an ox plows the field
Or violent: it shines	Without thought stumbling over meter
Everything is terror, futility pride,	With nothing reduced or banished
stubbornness: it shines	With nothing separating man from living life
Everything is thought reality feeling	
Knowledge: it shines	
Everything is darkness or light	
Against the same darkness: it shines	

Two sentences by the two poets embody the bond between poetry and cinema. We see the rocks above the sea caves after listening to Sena's sentence: 'Maybe life is the struggle of images that don't die?' We see the caves while listening to the verse of Mello Breyner's *As grutas* [The caves]: 'Terror of facing the images buried deeper than my own thoughts.' Making reference to Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo's work

(2005,11-12), Nuno Barradas Jorge observes: ‘Azevedo Gomes’ preoccupation with depicting the parallels between cinema and literature reminds us that, in a “post-celluloid world,” literary adaptation became less reliant on “translation” and more on forms of “reformatting” and “transcoding” (2019, 429). Moreover, the filmmaker establishes another *correspondence* in the film, since she chooses the text that each presence will read, recite or represent regarding her personal relationship to him/her, thus transforming Mello Breyner’s and Sena’s texts in her own letters to her collaborators. Besides, the reproduction of these texts in six different languages finally consolidates the idea of another crucial form of interstitial thinking: between the single subjectivity of this cinematic thinking and the necessary community to embody it; between the essayistic *I* and the indispensable cinematic *We*. As will be analysed below, this reflection is generated through the hybridisation between diegetic and extradiegetic spaces.

## **5. Person and Character Hybridisation into Presence**

The film also hybridises people and characters. Different *presences*, neither identified people nor characters, very close to the aesthetic experience proposed by Azevedo – colleagues and collaborators with whom she has worked in her filmic activity over the years and the film’s own technical crew– read, recite or represent different passages of Mello Breyner’s and Sena’s poetic work or their correspondence. In this sense, the film generates an interesting reflection on artistic reception, its reproduction and representation. This hybridisation between reproduction and representation, between people and characters, is embodied through a concrete presence, that of Pierre Léon, who goes through the film as a kind of kaleidoscopic presence, with different facets.

First, he appears as an emotional personification of the artistic work, who, dressed in black, witnesses diverse readings and recitations. He is first seen along with the voiceover recitation of *Carta(s) a Jorge de Sena* [Letter(s) to Jorge de Sena], by Mello

Breyner, written after the death of his friend, lonely and facing a wall at the beginning of the film (Figure 1):

You had been away for a long time  
But letters, poems and news would arrive  
And we thought you would always return  
As long as friends here waited for you  
And you sometimes came from the foreign land  
Not as prodigal son but as a wise brother  
And we laughed and talked around the table  
Glasses, forks and china clinked  
As if rejoicing in your arrival  
You brought a certain air as of a captain of storms  
- Grandiose victor and a very bitter loser -  
And there was eagerness haste and hurry  
In our desire to stifle of distance in hours of talk [...]  
And around the table we celebrated the feast  
Of the moment that shone amid fruits and faces  
And now the news that you have died  
Death arrives like no letter

Figure 1

Secondly, he witnesses the listening of the poem *Camões dirige-se aos seus contemporâneos* [Camões addresses his contemporaries]. Later, he listens to the cello player and he seems to recite, but we can hear him. He also listens to Mello Breyner's letter of 10 June 1963 in the theatre space. Finally, we perceive his dejection while we first listen to his own voiceover reciting *A pequena praça* [A little square] in French, the music after, and finally the painful trilling of the telephone of Mello Breyner's call to Mecia de Sena (Figure 2):

I tried to become you  
For you were going to die  
And all life there would cease being mine

I tried to smile the way you smiled  
At the newspaper at the tobacconist  
And at the woman without legs who sold violets

Figure 2

This emotional presence, at the same time, evolves from reception to reproduction of the texts. Firstly, he plays the recording of the recitation of *Assassinato de Simonetta Vespucci* [The murder of Simonetta Vespucci] in the theatre space and later, after listening to the reading of one of Sena's letter, he reads himself *Apesar das ruínas* [Despite the ruins]. Secondly, as a fiction character in a sort of mise-en-scène that evokes the family space shared by both writers and described in their letters. And finally, as the real person reading and reciting *Patria* [Homeland] and later reciting *Alep* [Aleph]. And finally, he also appears in the extradiegetic space of cinematic community.

## 6. Voice-in and Voiceover

Azevedo also hybridises voice-in and voiceover. The texts enunciated in the image make them present and offer a reflection on reception phenomenology: the texts are read (for oneself or for others), recited and represented, but also listened to, reread and reflected on. Voiceover instrumentalises all the possibilities of Michel Chion's (1982) acousmatic sound: '[A] sound that is heard without its cause or source being seen' (1999, 18), and acousmatic voice: 'When the acousmatic presence is a voice, and especially when this voice has not yet been visualised –that is, when we cannot yet connect it to a face– we get a special being, a kind of talking and acting shadow' (21). The hybridisation of the different categories of this acousmetre invite to the reverie of the images:

[T]he complete acousmetre, the one who is not-yet-seen, but who remains liable to appear in the visual field at any moment. The already visualised acousmetre, the one temporarily absent from the picture. is more familiar and reassuring-even though in



the dark regions of the acousmatic field, which surrounds the visible field, this kind can acquire by contagion some of the powers of the complete acousmetre. Also more familiar is the commentator-acousmetre. he who never shows himself but who has no personal stake in the image. (21)

The first two possibilities fuse and confuse because the identification between voiceovers and presences is inapprehensible, and the third one just disappears since every voice has a personal stake in the image, even if this one remains unreachable yet still perceived by the spectator. Besides, the frontier between ‘in’ and ‘over’ is also blurred: voiceovers turn into voice-ins or become internal monologues of the presences on screen. In one of the last epistolary texts this hybridisation is even more complex. In Mello Breyner’s letter of 10 November 1969, voice-in is treated as a voiceover that, in this manner, moves away from the presence who reads it. The opposite procedure occurs in Mello Breyner’s letter of 22 December 1972, as will be analysed later, as a crucial complex sentence-image of this contemporary essay film. Of course, Mello Breyner’s and Sena’s voices are crucial. We hear them used as voiceovers –*Marinero sin mar* [Sailor without sea], *O primeiro homem* [The first man], *Cidade* [City], *Quem a tem...* [He who has it], *Os paraísos artificiais* [The artificial paradises]– but also, as recorded voice-ins which are listened to by the on-screen presences –*Camões dirige-se aos seus contemporâneos* [Camões addresses his contemporaries] and *Assassinato de Simonetta Vespucci* [The murder of Simonetta Vespucci]. Thus, the different hybridisations of voice-in and voiceover generate a sort of abstract mental space of the aesthetic experience, complementary to the incarnation created through Léon’s presence.

## **7. Digital and Analogue Images. Diegetic and Extradiegetic Spaces**

This hybridisation between voice-in and voiceover is intrinsically linked to two other hybridisations: between digital and analogue images and between diegetic and

extradiegetic spaces. Through the first one, Azevedo destroys the usual reading that would interpret the analogue images as personal archive images, therefore belonging to the past, in order to give them other meanings. Firstly, they are linked to the reverie that the texts would cause. In addition, they present again or anticipate a digital image, in order to provoke reflection on the different perception of both types of images. This utilisation of the analogue image is joined by another element, that of the projected image, introducing one more layer of reading and thus continuing the development of this contemporary filmic kaleidoscope. In this same sense of deconstruction, the analogue image is used to show the extradiegetic space, as will be analysed below. Finally, another procedure used in this hybridisation is superimposition: an analogue image is superimposed on another (analogue or digital) – the first belonging to the extradiegetic space and the second to the diegetic one. The reverse process also occurs. On an analogue image (before being accompanied by the reading of one of Sena's letters), another one is superimposed, again from the extradiegetic space: that of the recording of Sena's poem that we now hear *Falareis de nós as de um sonho ...* [You will speak of us as of a dream ...] in French. The overlap between diegetic and extradiegetic spaces then gives way to its inverse image. The extradiegetic space becomes diegetic with the poem recitation on screen, and the previous diegetic image is now multiplied on various screens within this digital image (Figures 3 and 4). Thus, it generates a new dialectical sentence-image of the multiple disjunctions on which the work is based, thanks to the interstitial and parataxic thinking: I – You, in – off, here – there, presence – absence, digital – analogue, diegesis – extradiegesis. They are linked to the reverie that the texts would cause.

#### Figures 3 and 4

As exposed above, the presence of the extradiegetic space embodies another crucial form of interstitial thinking: between the single subjectivity of this cinematic

thinking and the community that is necessary to embody it; between the essayistic *I* and the indispensable cinematic *We*. This space almost always shown through the analogue image that in turn is manipulated: superimpositions and projections. In this way, Azevedo recognises its value and places it at the same level as the diegetic space, since it is hybridised and manipulated with the same procedures. The film understands and recognises the indispensable collective thinking capable of embodying the filmmaker's cinematic thinking. It is necessary to point out here how the recitation of Sena's *Uma pequenina luz bruxuleante* [A little flickering light] is enunciated on a montage sequence of that extradiegetic space (superimposed images also projected, even digital images reformatted as analogue) as a metaphor for artistic creation; that *little flickering light* from which a poem and a film is born, again thanks to community (Figure 5).

A little flickering light  
Shining uncertain but shining  
Here among us  
Between the crowd's warm breath

Figure 5

Later, another montage sequence emerges from the theatrical extradiegetic space of Mello Breyner's *O collar* [The necklace], accompanied by some of its verses recorded in rehearsal (Figure 6). In this way, Azevedo includes theatrical art, crucial in some of her fiction films, to her homage to collaborative artistic creation.

Figure 6

## 8. Absence and Presence

The archival materials, sound, photography and film, are reserved almost exclusively for the protagonists' appearances in an interesting progression from absence to presence, thus embodying the epistolary phenomenon described by Naficy, and already mentioned, in

the filmic creation. Regarding Mello Breyner, we first hear her voice, through the recordings of several poems. Next, her voice reciting *Marinheiro sem mar* [Sailor without sea] meets her photographic image, on which her poem *Para atravessar contigo o deserto do mundo* [To cross the desert of the world with you] in French is superimposed. Mello Breyner's voice, image and written poem join for the only time in the film (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Three more photographs of the writer are associated with her poetic work. The third image is inserted after listening to the recitation of *O primeiro homem* [The first man]. The fourth accompanies her voice giving a description of poetry that also understands it as a hybridisation (Figure 8):

Poetry asks two contradictory things of people; one, to place ourselves in the void; and other, to place ourselves in communion. They are totally opposite things, and I think the character of a poem lies between the intensity of the void and the intensity of communion that one desires and needs. It is a play of contradictions.

Figure 8

We found here the first identification between the woman poet and the filmmaker, between Mello Breyner's poetry and Azevedo's essay film: between the loneliness of the essayistic writing and the communion of its materialisation. Maybe cinematic art, as a collaborative creation, is capable of surpassing the contradictions exposed by Mello Breyner. After voiceovers and still images, the moving image emerges. First, the closest to the present: Mello Breyner reciting *Musa* [Muse]. Second, the epicentre of the work, the interview that she and her husband Francisco Sousa Tavares granted in 1962 to French television. The intimate space and the poetic space are completed here with the public space.

Sena's presence, although scarcer, follows this same progression. While Mello Breyner's presence in the image is displayed in the first part of the work, Sena's shows in the second. After having also heard his voice in different poems, the first image, next to his wife Mecia, is placed after the interview with Mello Breyner and her husband, next to the recitation of *Quem muito viu...* [Who saw so much...]. Sena's first moving, analogue and silent image follows his voice reciting the final verses of *Os paraísos artificiais* [The artificial paradises] (Figure 9). The second one, another television image, corresponds to an interview in the United States the same year of his death. First, the voiceover emerges, Sena's voice reciting *Em Creta, com o Minotauro* [In Crete, with Minotaur] until his image bursts into the film, giving ultimate value to the poetic recitation (Figure 10).

Figures 9 and 10

## 9. The Complex Image

The construction of this essay film is generated as a reflection of the filmmaker's subjectivity. Regarding its inscription in the film, I would like to analyse two images, two symbolic sentence-images, which define the complex image of contemporary cinema.

The first one is the only image that will be repeated several times throughout the film. An analogue image of a garden, in which a swing oscillates, arises at the beginning of the film, in the second minute of the footage. In this first moment, it is inevitable (usual reading) that we interpret it as a personal archive image. It is repeated again in minute 14, then projected, and showing a different frame. The repetition from two different camera positions detracts from our perception of it as an archive image to identify it with the authorial essayistic subjectivity, which repeatedly recorded it. Onto the image of that same space, extradiegetic images are then superimposed while we hear again some verses of *Carta(s) a Jorge de Sena* [Letter(s) to Jorge de Sena]. The image is also superimposed on itself and a poem by Sena, *Madrugada* [Dawn], emerges. A symbolic sentence-image

of Azevedo's subjectivity is created: that of the swing moving backwards and forwards, always in motion, on this occasion as a symbol of the poetic correspondences between Mello Breyner's and Sena's creations. The image reappears in minutes 25 and 40 after the photographic images of Mello Breyner. First, accompanied by music but without any text; second, accompanied by Mello Breyner's voice, giving the definition of poetry already quoted. The swing oscillating is then identified with the swinging that Mello Breyner describes between void and loneliness and the need for company. In minute 69 the digital image shows us that same space but without the presence of the swing (Figure 11). As on other occasions, the digital image updates the analogue one and, in this case, vindicates it as a subjective sentence-image, built by the filmmaker's subjectivity in her present, as a reflection on her own work: oscillation, swinging, hybridisation among multiple perspectives and materials. Three more appearances of this image, in minutes 76 (Figure 12), 82 and 109, filmed from different camera positions and frames, and without text, confirm it as belonging to the author's reflective subjectivity, her thinking in action around the aesthetic experience the film proposes.

#### Figures 11 and 12

The second image of this subjective reflexivity arises at the end of the enunciation of Mello Breyner's letter of 31<sup>st</sup> December 1967, in which she tells Sena about the deaths of her brother and her mother, which occurred only a few months apart. The image hybridises the images of trees that traverses the film with that of Azevedo, who reads the text we have so far heard through the voiceover (Figure 13). This hybrid image exemplifies and synthesises the essayistic nature of the work and defines that complex image, kaleidoscope image, of contemporary cinema I described at the beginning: between reproduction and representation; a sentence-image that 'verge[s] on the

indiscernible' (Rancière 2009, 60). The words Mello Breyner dedicated to her mother through the letter are now assumed by Azevedo, addressed through the cinematic work:

To me, my mother was connected to the root of essential things. She's one of the rare people to appear in the first three books, which contain mostly trees and beaches. Only time can help me clarify this separation inside me. Francisco and I are always thinking of you all. When will we see each other? I miss you not showing up for lunch.

### Figure13

The bond with the mother and the pain of her absence joins the one imposed by exile and Azevedo identifies herself with Mello Breyner. The filmmaker thus gives her filmic answer, her reflection, to the question a little girl enunciates in the film and that Azevedo shared in her childhood: Where is the exile? This question undoubtedly prompts the search proposed by the film and also confirms the identification between the woman poet and the filmmaker.

Until this final and crucial appearance, we have seen Azevedo in the extradiegetic space, as part of the community, the cinematic *We*, that makes the film possible, and in the diegetic space, giving the text to read to Mello Breyner's daughter, Maria. Once again, her cinematic thinking advances through the film showing that it belongs to the different spaces: extradiegetic space as a member of the film community, diegetic space as filmmaker and the complex image of cinematic thinking as essayist.

## 10. Conclusion

The thinking process of this epistolary-poetic essay film materialises in another image that instrumentalises the metadiscourse. On a white wall the camera goes through a kind of *film contacts*, which order the film, since each image corresponds to a sequence shot. The camera movement shows at the end an isolated image, in the middle of the white

wall, asking the filmmaker's constant question: Where should each image be inserted? (Figure 14). Regarding the aforementioned sentence by Sena's, this is the filmmaker's fight with those images that will never die. On the final black image, we listen to Azevedo's voice talking in the extradiegetic space at the end of a take: 'It's done. We can't do it again!' The image will remain, unchangeable and eternal. We point out here that the film production lasted over three years and that the editing work generated 33 different versions before reaching its final form. This process confirms the *thinking in progress* the film embodies.

#### Figure 14

Through Mello Breyner's and Sena's epistolary and poetic texts, it is Azevedo's subjectivity and thinking process which materialises in a contemporary essay film, a complex, filmic kaleidoscope, which becomes an avant-garde expression of contemporary epistolary cinema.

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