SHAKING THE DUST OF LITTLE SECRETS¹

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ABSTRACT
The documentary maker Bertrand Lira decided to venture, for the first time, into the realm of fiction, adapting to film the tale Dust of the Little Secrets by Geraldo Maciel (to whom the film is dedicated), published in the book The Inventory of Little Passions, by Manufatura Publishing House, in 2008. In his homonymous film, the tale reveals the complex and tense relationship between the couple who are the protagonists. While its synopsis shows a drama of a countryside man, fascinated by the mystery of the world and its greatness, we see that the direction of Bertrand Lira and his assistant Cristiane Fragoso as the editing by Ely Marques, indicate the choice of a filmic narrative that suggests more than shows, being woven mainly by ellipses which gives clues when it chooses to focus more on the fringe and crevices of the wife’s universe on everyday life, which is revealed in frank expansion process, impossible to be contained by the walls of the house or the backyard fences. We conclude that the fact that educators present and discuss such filmic production in the educational environment, paves their way (with regard to the conscious choice processes in the use of film language); and, as much as its deep content (the female uprising when faces the wicked and unequal division of pleasures and disappointments in the enjoyment of the public and private worlds, according to the genre to which one belongs) also exerts powerful forms of activism.

KEYWORDS
Cinema from Paraíba; Gender (Male and Female); Public and Private; Cinema and Education.

The private public and the public private

Had a clock
made of crab shell
to set the minutes
the hours I don’t see you.
(Folk song by Quinteto Violado)

The Dust of Little Secrets (Fiction, 21 min, HD, 2012), from the director Bertrand Lira was shot in the Cariri region of Paraíba state (northeastern Brazil), with the support of the Congo City Hall (a city of Paraíba) and the funding of the Municipal Culture Fund (FMC in Portuguese) of João Pessoa Cultural Foundation (FUNJOPE in Portuguese). Passages of time in this filmic product are inferred from the different and sequential scenes of meals, capriciously set on the table of the couple’s home, and through changes from light to dark, suggested between day and night, in which characters are presented in various ways: with different haircuts, she with a new arrangement in hairstyle, they wearing different clothes,

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she alone or with him, he with a long beard or even clean-shaven displaying only a mustache. This contributes greatly to the perception of changes in time and mood of the characters, the expert direction of work of art and costume design executed by Zeno Zanardi.

![Figure 1 - Frame of The Dust of Little Secrets - Internal - Night - Reproduction](image1)

![Figure 2 - Frame of The Dust of Little Secrets – Internal - Day - Reproduction](image2)

The light designed by experienced cinematographer João Carlos Beltrão, aided by Luiz Augusto Barbosa sometimes raises a “wall” between the two indelible characters who were sitting at the same table as they seem to inhabit completely different worlds. The fact is confirmed further in the narrative: the husband moves in the public world (an Aristotelian polis), crossing their paths and roads - but, unlike the content in the predication “public”, we are separated from it because we can only intuit what occurs outside the cinematic field - and the wife in the private space (an Aristotelian oikia) - predicative that in the film retains the same conceptual inversion already observed for the adjective “public” - strolling in front of the public eye-viewer her constant drudgery from the kitchen to the living room, from the room to the bedroom, from the bedroom to the backyard: we shamelessly invade at any time of the day the private space of her home...
While the real possibility of exploring the observable universe is reserved to the man, as it unfolds more and more every time he leaves, to the woman, the incessant amount of domestic and tedious chores: dealing with animals, sweeping, cooking, collecting water in the stream, sewing, washing, ironing ... Her exploring world, beyond the interior rooms of her home, does not cross the border of the pond margins.

Unravelling the rug

Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways, who was driven far journeys, after he had sacked Troy’s sacred citadel.
Many were they whose cities he saw, whose minds he learned of, many the pains he suffered in his spirit on the wide sea, struggling for his own life and the homecoming of his companions.
Even so he could not save his companions, hard though he strove to; they were destroyed by their own wild recklessness, fools, who devoured the oxen of Helios, the Sun God, and he took away the day of their homecoming. . .

Homer

The atmosphere led by Lira and created by Beltrão’s photography is dense, slow, building the ambience of the waiting wife/Penelope - played in a convincing performance by Veronica Sousa, member of Collective Alfenim Theater (who also starred in the soap opera Old Chico , directed by Luiz Fernando Carvalho), and in several films, such as Clarisse or Something About Us, by Petrus Cariry; Odete, by Clarissa Campolina, Ivo Lopes Araújo and Luiz Pretti; Water Drop, Latches and Where Borges Sees All, a black and white trilogy by Taciano Valério and Bud, by Andre Moraes) – that, even not making 10 years as in Homer’s Odyssey seems longer, more extended in time.

The chosen plans to capture the images of daily life of this couple, whom we are invited to observe for almost 21 minutes, the movie length, shows us the wife always in the background, the shadow of her husband - portrayed in a restrained way by Nanego Lira (Misery Tree, by Marcus Villar; The Grain, by Petrus Cariry, Cinema, Aspirin and Vultures, by Marcelo Gomes; Central Station, by Walter Salles; Gonzaga - from Father to Son, Breno Silveira; After the curve, by Helton Paulino, The Dog’s plan, by Arthur Lins and Ely Marques) - undermined in the foreground, larger than her.

In the process of adaptation between two different languages, from the short tale’s literary text to the film script, some changes were inevitably made. One is the total absence of names for the film characters; in the written story, Maciel reveals to the reader Otilia’s doubts (the wife) regarding whatever Gorgônio (the husband) does in his increasingly longer trips, by exposing literally the flow of her thoughts. The film’s well written script by Bertrand Lira, with Di Moretti consulting, makes the character hardly exposes herself orally, revealing much more through mise-en-scène and fast soliloquies, at the table in mealtimes, between observations that sounds more like a pout, showing no hopes to make any conversation with her silent husband. As Brito says:

Both, story and film, conceal the wanderings of Gorgônio, the husband, and focus on the private life of Otilia, the wife, who stays at home. However, while the tale of Maciel dedi-
cated a lot of paragraphs to the thoughts of this woman, intrigued by the mysterious husband’s behavior, the film hides much of such reflections that would not make an almost silent film (2012, web)

The man is of very few words as well and more action-oriented. No answer to the woman’s wishes, eats to restore the energy exhausted throughout his worldly search for answers, even if he does not know (and we the viewers, also do not know) what are the questions. This is irrelevant. What is important, even for him, is what his wife and we, as spectators do not witness, what in film language is called extra-field. In this film it translates in the search and the time it takes, the process of the husband’s speculation; the time spent and distance traveled between departure and return to his backwoods Ithaca.

**Dusting off the House-World**

...a reading that forces the look backwards, not forward.

Carlos Skliar

Surprisingly, the field of the cinematic narrative *The Dust of Little Secrets* focuses on who stays behind: the woman. There is no movement here dedicated to follow the character who leaves, hoping to accompany him, identifying ourselves with him in his adventures, defeats and victories; to see finally, after overcoming numerous internal and external barriers, how he returns transformed into another (and often enhanced, edified). There is nothing extraordinary to register, on the contrary, it is through the spent woman’s fingers in the mundane, everyday tasks that we slowly see the diegetic time draining. It is for her lost gaze in the horizon at the yard, on the threshold of the door and window that we measure the distance between her and the subject of her affection and desire. It’s the undead time from everyday life that we witness morosely parading across the screen, as Certeau explains:

The everyday is what is given to us daily (or what belong to us by sharing), press and oppress us day after day, because there is an oppression of this. Every day, in the morning, whatever we assume, when we wake up is the weight of life, the difficulty of living, or living in this or another condition, with this fatigue and this desire. The everyday is what binds us intimately, from the inside. It is a story in the middle of ourselves, almost retreating, sometimes veiled. One should not forget this “world memory”, according to Peguy expression. It is a world that we love deeply, smell memory, memory of childhood places, body memory, childhood gestures, pleasures. It may not be useless to underline the importance of mastery of this “irrational” history” or this “non-story”, as yet said by A. Dupront. What matters to everyday historian is invisible (...). (CERTEAU 1996 , p. 31).

The fact that the film has few dialogues does not prevent the sound work to stands out; on the contrary, it even helps. The direct sound capture was carried out by Bruno de Sales, also a filmmaker; and the sound design and mixing, by Débora Opolski who brings to her resume works in the sound field of cinema and TV, in films such as *Elite Squad 1 and 2* and *City of men*.

Early in the film, we hear the greedy beats of a heart, wood creaks and/or metal friction and the clatter of a horse, while we see images recorded by a rear camera in a persecutory
movement to a man who runs in slow motion and despair, toward the open door of the room, until the door, man and external light merge on a great burst of white light when the title of the movie appears to the sound of a fiddle advertising the *aboio* (kind of a folk song), a theme that rocks some of the scenes. We hear the wind and realize that it is dragging the dust of their settlements. There is a cut and comes a frame of the man in front of the house (in a faded pink and marked by the shadow of an extra-field tree), peering through the boundaries of his yard, while some birds sing.

Soon after, the woman appears in the background and seems too small behind the half closed strip door-balcony of the house, crossing her arms while she watches the man. This scene reveals at once, a bit the personality of these characters: the man, as though absent at the time, projects his look at what we do not see, since it is outside the framework of the cut, announcing his discomfort with the boundaries that surround him; and the woman, framed in the present moment, staring at the subject in the field, in both directions here possible to be used - cinematic and spatial, foreshadowing the focus of its most interest.

![Figure 3 - Frame of The Dust of the Little Secrets - External - Day - Reproduction](image)

There is a new dry cut again, this time we see both in an indoor scene and darker room, to the sound of crickets. The woman’s footsteps echoes through the house. She carries a bowl in her hands staring at the man, coming from the kitchen, which is at the bottom toward the camera. He seems gigantic in close and, once again, with his back to her and with a lost and distant look. She puts the bowl on the table, he turns toward the source of the sound that this gesture sends. The couple look to each other for a second and there is a new dry cut.

![Figure 4 - Frame of The Dust of Little Secrets – Internal - Night- Reproduction](image)
One night the wife complains about the increasing delay of her husband in his travels around the world only to obtain, as an answer, his silence and the sound of a stronger wind blowing, swinging her hair. After the couple’s night caresses presented to us in lateral traveling, comes a tree against the blue sky (and perhaps one that mark with it shadows the outer walls of the house), and we hear the cock crow, beyond the noise of others animals, announcing the dawn of a new day. There are several other interesting experiences about the sound work in this short film and we shall quote two more, involving horses. In one, the sound of galloping continues even when the man riding his horse has already left the scene, but all the way we realize that the sound is decreasing gradually, giving us the sound illusion of depth of field. In the second, the sound of horse’s hooves grows and decreases gradually arriving before the husband appears at the ambient in which his wife has set in front of the dining table with two dishes. The sound serves both as diegetic narrative’s records, linked to the actions that are presented like functions and as clues to render certain atmosphere and spatial depth to the film. “There is a choice in this work and this selection takes into account just the characteristics of each sound, its materiality and its uniqueness, besides all imagistic possibilities raised by them mentally.” (Flores, 2013, p. 30)

Débora Opolski is also responsible for the original soundtrack of the short film along with William Romanelli, Luis Bourscheidt and Maracajá (who sings the aboio, the folk song, in the credits and also punctuates the whole movie). The music *Full Star Night* (in the credits, “*Full Moon Stars*”) by Cândido das Neves, fulfills a little nocturnal solitude of the place, in the voice of Vicente Celestino, as the camera get closer in a front traveling of the woman, sitting alone in her pointless wait at the doorway.

**The Longing for Ulysses**

*Women are getting widows before theirs husband died ...*

Folk song

The wife, our backlands Penelope, without any other suitor or interlocutor, waits the return of her curious husband/Ulysses to his home/Ithaca, once more in a speculative journey around the mystery of the world far beyond the borders of his small ranch.

What makes a simple man to leave some mornings and to walk paths and trails on his horse, trying to ‘shake the dust of the world’ and unlock its possible secrets? What force makes him up with increasing momentum to proceed further in this incessant search? Brito (2013) calls it “crude metaphysics”. Neither the arms, affection, zeal, care nor gazes of the loved one change his mind. After all, the world and its mysteries are far more imperative and they call upon him! One must answer this call as the Siren’s song: but it seems there is not enough wax to seal his ears and to prevent him to leave ...
Upon one more of his returns, the husband’s desires search for his wife. The love scenes between the couple are squalid and even in bed, the woman appears submissive to her partner. Timid, she covers herself after missionary-style sex. When she feels desire, in the absence of her man, in a true tribute to Onan, she seeks his scent through his pajamas in which she rubs herself and masturbates, looking for his touch until reaching momentary satisfaction in the lonely dark little world of her double room.

Hopeful, she does her daily chores, the ritual of food preparation, the house cleaning and the act of setting up the table because, when he is present, is possible to speculate in the gestures and features of her beloved, the growth of his anticipation longing for the moment of his new departure, never knowing the exact time of his return. Not even if he is ever coming back. The bet is blind. However, one must always renew it like the thread points of the carpet, woven and cut daily, as Penelope in the Odyssey.
The turning point of the film coincides with the movement of the wife’s body upward on the bed, after the revelation of her husband over the infinitude of things and mysteries of the world: “We will never be able to shake off the dust that covers everything in this God’s big world!”

The woman turns aside, for the first time she is the one who gives the back to her husband and like the Mona Lisa, smiles toward us enigmatically, an idea seems to light up her eyes...

Figure 7 - Frame of The Dust of Small Secrets - Internal - Night - Reproduction

The intriguing parallel assembly that follows can offer the viewer a false clue. The gestures made by the husband before each departure, which we already watched before, are now focused on detail plan. Hands that operate some preparations: the making of the knapsack of meat and brown sugar and the horse sealing are shown pair wise, for a new journey.

The beginning and end join the points of this circular film. The first sequence, as said before, is mounted in objective camera that follows the male character, stricken, running through the rooms of the house and ends in a flash provided by the burst of sunlight, breaking through the door, the inside of the house and suggests diving in or out of a nightmare. Such movement reconfigures the scene of the end of the film, recorded in subjective camera that comes from the horizontal to a vertical position, representing someone who gets out of bed, passes close to the mosquito net and wrapped in a large node, points to all angles of the house as if looking for something or someone and leaves from the interior to the exterior of the private area, always accompanied by the distant sound of a horse’s hoof beats and by a sound close to a wheezing. Only when it gets outside the house, the camera reveals that the previous plan was the husband’s point of view who in the current plan comes outside in pajamas, still barely awake from sleep, breathless and in desperate search for his wife.
Although we do not see her in the frame, the sound of hoof beats that comes from the cinema speakers and by the man’s look into the pathway he always takes when leaves, we conclude that now the woman takes the reins of the horse and of her own destiny, beginning to invent new ways of her own. As the man awakens, literally, from his dream of seeing the world, to the reality of small things around (there is only one plate on the table now, for example), for the first time the woman is the one who goes away from her man and her home/Ithaca, making up her time to go on, personally, shake the dust off the little secrets of the immense public world.

Conclusion

For all that we have been weaving about this film so far, we believe that *The Dust of Small Secrets* has an important potential circulation, not only in commercial cinemas and/or cultural centers, but also provides full and rich potential into the educational environment which is our performance space as educators. By sharpening and/or deepening questions about various themes, both in relation to the specificities of each language: literary, from the reading of the homonymous Geraldo Maciel tale that was the basis for Bertrand Lira’s script and the film; from reading the script or the actual screening of the film, followed by a debate in which we seek to understand, discussing the options and choices that were made in the adaptation process between one language and another. Providing many other reflections, associated with the pre-production process, production and post-production of the film product itself (local, light, sound, costumes, direction, camera movement, angulation, acting, technical and artistic staff, set design, soundtrack, audiovisual policy development...) and those related to the themes that the film brings in the midst of his narrative: expected social roles performed by female and male; access and permanence in the public environment and private, from the notion of gender; the desire and sublimation; dreams and reality; the search and the wait...
We do not intend, nor should we here try to cover all the aspects of working this movie in class saying these would be the only and best ways to do it. We have just listed some possible examples, suggesting possibilities that can and must be expanded upon, changed and even discarded completely. The important thing here, in our view, is to consider the major force that the film presence has in the educational field to discuss urgent and necessary issues such as we weave in our article, in the light of the Work Group *Public Policy gender and agency: from body discipline to inclusion rights guarantees*, discovering, creating and inventing different ways of living with the art of cinema at school, not only using it to fulfill the class time of a particular discipline which has an absent teacher, for example.

**Analyzed Film**


**Technical File**

Director and Script – Bertrand Lira
Photography – João Carlos Beltrão
Camera Assistant – Luiz Augusto Barbosa
Atress – Verônica Sousa Cavalcanti
Actor – Nanego Lira
Assistant Director – Cristiane Fragoso
Direct Sound Technician – Bruno de Sales
Editing e Finalization - Ely Marques
Sound Design and Mixing – Débora Opolski
Original Soundtrack – Débora Opolski, Guilherme Romanelli (Viola e Rabeca), Luís Bourscheidt (Violencelo) e Maracajá (Aboio)
Executive Producer – Heleno Bernardo
Producer at Congo City – José Dhiones Nunes dos Santos

**Awards**

Best Actress – Verônica Sousa - I Festissauro – Festival de Audiovisual do Vale do Dinossauro - Sousa/PB - 26 a 30/05/2014.
Best Make Up and Best Original or adapted Soundtrack – 8º Comunicurtas - Festival Audiovisual de Campina Grande/PB - 26 a 31/08/2013.

**Bibliographical References**