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Original Research

Reading at the Present Time: Reflections Based on *Jogo de Cena*

Vitor Soster, State University of Campinas, Brazil

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Abstract: This essay ponders on reading based on *Jogo de Cena*. Following a perspective built on the Literary Studies field, three objectives are established: (1) examine the literary aspect of the film in simultaneity to its commodity character; (2) search for an understanding of how fiction and nonfiction are disposed in Coutinho's film; and (3) approach what could be understood as transparent and opaque in that work. Attaining those goals is a manner of approaching an issue related to the apparent waning of the distinction between fiction and nonfiction caused by media, to the impoverishment of fiction in literature, and its spread in daily life. This discussion searches for contributions to cinema, theater, and literature studies. It involves reviewing publications on that film, a description of the work, and some theoretical references from the fields mentioned previously, including the formalist notion of literariness related to the presence of narrative, dramatic, and poetic elements in works beyond literature. Starting with a close reading of that descriptive study and the selection of excerpts from the film, a discussion confronts the analysis with some bibliographical sources. The results are as follows: (1) it is not possible to categorize *Jogo de Cena* in terms of being just a commodity or an artistic work; (2) reading narratives should consider the simultaneity of fiction and nonfiction; (3) apparent transparency takes the reader directly outward the work while its opacity, endowed with literariness, plunges the reader in the materiality of the film where historicity is present among the work, the author, the reader, and the world. Therefore, the notion of reading is rethought to face current configurations of cinematographic and literary works.

Keywords: Cinema, Literature, Commodity, Fiction, Nonfiction, Transparency, Opacity, Literariness

Introduction

How to conceive reading is one of the main topics, if not the most relevant one, in Literary Studies. Especially in terms of how it is presented nowadays—not only in literary works but also in theater and cinema—analyzing works endowed with literariness, as proposed by Benthien, Lau, and Marxsen (2019) in a formalist approach, might be an appropriate manner to address such a point. Despite the pervasive immediacy of audiovisual language which is a major influence on how meaning to reality is attributed nowadays, a reading that considers literary features may help restore attention to aesthetics (thus, making the world understood through the inside of language). Adorno, in his course on *Aesthetics*, delivered between the years of 1958 and 1959 at the Institute of Social Research in West Germany, defines narrating not as a practice emanating from a narrator but as an exchange given between the story being told and its public—a relationship that does not involve just a “passive concentration” of the reader (Adorno 2018, 185), but a sharing

of responsibilities. It implies reading is regarded as a process of encountering, shaping works, and constituting a place for the reader in the world. However, as Brown (2019, 13) emphasizes, the search for meaning in works is not random but relates to an “immanent purposiveness of the work,” transforming meaning in a “public ascription of intention.”

Stemming from the importance of discussing the reading of works that are constituted by literariness, one can take a broader sense of “reading” to refer not just to the ascription of meaning to verbal compositions or to works in different artistic languages but also to the relationship between artistic modalities. For instance, following Eisenstein’s arguments, François Albera calls attention to the relevance of cinema as a “reader” of other artistic forms (Albera 2014). That perception finds special interest for this article since its main material for discussion is a film while its main goal is to discuss reading so that contributions to Literary Studies as well as Cinema and Drama studies might be found since an interartistic approach is adopted. Such a selection is justified through the major role assumed by audiovisual language in forming the reader’s imagination nowadays—a fact that is also related to the current commodification of narratives and experiences in the way discussed by Durão (2015) and to be further developed in this article. For the moment, what must be made clear is that literary and filmic works are regarded as being autonomous not as a “metaphysical independence from external circumstances,” but considering “those external circumstances [which] are actively taken up by us in ways that are irreducibly normative” (Brown 2019, 30). Hence, differently from what is commonly found in terms of studies that look for a relationship or a comparison between literature and cinema (considering the latter as a point of arrival)—as it can be found in Corseuil (2003)—I move from audiovisual language toward literature, the artistic language that could defictionalize the world as I intend to argue. That is how I find in a Brazilian film a research material that brings forth relevant issues connected to reading narratives and to what could be called literariness.

I refer here to *Jogo de Cena*—or, in English, *Playing*—a film directed by one of the most acclaimed Brazilian documentarians, Eduardo Coutinho. It is through that work, released in 2007, that I pose the questions: if literariness in autonomous works defictionalizes the world, to what extent could Coutinho’s film be also regarded as sharing literary features? Besides, what could be the advantage of acknowledging literariness to a film in terms of investigations in the Literary Studies field? Considering those issues, three objectives are presented for this article: (1) examine the literary aspect of *Jogo de Cena*, in its essayistic form (Alter 2018), in simultaneity to its commodity character; (2) search for an understanding of how fiction and nonfiction are disposed in Coutinho’s film; and (3) approach what could be understood as transparent and opaque in that work. Thus, attaining those three specific objectives may give some indications of a possible framework for reading in our days.

Therefore, in the three forthcoming sections, I present: (1) regarding *Materials and Methods*, the making of the film as a study material, referencing to some of the already existent academic works and to pertinent concepts coming from the fields of cinema, theater, and

literary studies; in order to read the film closely, I also point out to a manner of understanding literariness based on features of the three elementary literary genres (narration, drama, and poetry) as discussed by Benthien, Lau, and Marxsen (2019); still in that section, I explain the steps followed in the analysis—from a detailed transcription of the film, passing through the distinction of two dimensions in Coutinho’s work (a *verbal–corporal* one and a *filmic* one) to how features of the literary genres were found in those dimensions; (2) then, related to *Results and Discussion*, examples are provided and ideas are developed based on the objectives referred previously; (3) at last, in *Conclusion*, I highlight the pertinence of reflecting on reading to face current sociopolitical challenges and distinguish some possibilities of further research that may contribute to cinema, theater, and literary studies.

Materials and Methods

To introduce a discussion on how the film becomes a material for analysis and how it can be studied, I turn to Adorno (2018, 6) once again when he affirms that “in aesthetics, there is no method that could be presented in isolation from the matter itself”—that is, reading is a process of building itself and the result of the encounter of readers with a specific material. In short, there is no presettled object or method. Therefore, presenting them is also producing them.

Thus, starting to recognize the first supposedly obvious elements in the film—the seemingly transparent ones—to reflect on reading, one cannot avoid noticing their metalinguistic inclination since *Jogo de Cena* ponders over representation on the stage of a theater. Focusing on its title, literally translating to English, it would be “stage business” which, according to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, means “the actions of performers on a stage, intended to create a situation and feeling.” Searching for a more specific meaning in a specialized dictionary, one can discover the English phrase is translated to French as *jeu de scène*, which is closer to what is found in Portuguese. According to Pavis (1998), “stage business” is defined as

wordless action by the actor that uses exclusively the actor’s presence or gestures to express a feeling or situation *before or during a speech*. Classical theorists spoke of *jeu de tréâtre* in this sense, as when one “put pantomime in the place of eloquence” (Voltaire). (emphasis added, 352)

Besides, still consulting Pavis’s (1998) dictionary, in the “acting” entry, it says:

In order to grasp the actor’s work, both reader and spectator must compare the enunciation as a whole (gesture, facial expression, intonation, vocal quality, rhythm) with the given text or situation. (7)

In other words, the phrase that entitles the film mobilizes a common-sense imaginary related to pretense, originating from the theater which relates to a work of body expression of “a feeling or situation” (Pavis 1998, 352), despite the use of words which, from the

reader/spectator's point of view, is seen as liable of fitting or not in the speaker's body. Thus, transposing the idea of *Jogo de Cena* to the cinema, one can consider that if the body is fundamental in theater, the cinematographic correspondent is the editing, that is, one may consider that Coutinho's *Jogo de Cena* consists on how audiovisual resources are mobilized to express an idea concerning cinema itself while a theatrical acting is represented cinematographically. That perception allows us to distinguish two dimensions in the work: a *verbal-corporal* one encompassed by a *filmic* one. Thus, issues related to the mirroring of elements and structures in *mise-en-abyme*—procedures that were already followed in literature at the turn of the twentieth century as found in André Gide (Baldick 2001)—are delineated as central to the literariness in *Jogo de Cena*.

In addition to that reflection about the whole phrase which names the film, just considering the word “*cena*” (etymologically closer to the English word “scene,” but related to the concept of “stage” in the English language), some notes may be presented regarding how it is defined in correlated fields (literature, theater, and cinema). First, according to Baldick (2001, 229), in the Literature realm, “scene is a ‘dramatic’ method of narration that presents events at roughly the same pace as that at which they are supposed to be occurring.” I also highlight what appears in a dictionary of cinema (Aumont and Marie 2003) in relation to the literary “scene”:

By a new extension of meaning [in relation to theater], the word designated...a fragment of dramatic action that takes place on a determinate scene, that is, a unitary part of the action. Hence a certain temporal value attached to the word: the scene values a certain, indeterminate unity of duration. (own translation, 45)

In other words, while in the first dictionary, the author talks about “same pace” (Baldick 2001, 229), in the second one, the authors mention “temporal value” and “certain, indeterminate unity of duration” (Aumont and Marie 2003, 45). Accordingly, what comes to the fore is the *temporal realm* of the *scene*. On the other hand, still following Aumont and Marie (2003, 45) on the origins of the word in theater, one can read: “In Greek theater, the ‘scene’ means...a wooden building...in the middle of the staging area..., later it is the imaginary spot where the action takes place.” With the same meaning, Pavis's (1998, 350) *Dictionary of the Theater* relates the Greek word “*skênê*” to the English word “stage,” thus bringing to the fore the *spatial realm* of the *scene*.

Those temporal and spatial realms are the elements to be considered both in the *verbal-corporal* and *filmic* dimensions of Coutinho's work. While focusing on the spoken words and the bodily expressions of the performers in the first dimension, the second one is concerned with the characterization of the moving image endowed with sound (constructed by what could be called a camera body) and the editing—responsible to create sequences of scenes, understood in the filmic sphere, as sequences of shots delimited by cuts (Passek 2001).

Another possibility of defining “scene” in cinematographic terms—strongly influenced by Metz’s semiotic studies—is as a “possible form of segments...of the image-track, the one that shows a unitary and totally continuous action, with no ellipsis nor any jump from one shot to the other—while the sequence shows a continuous action, with ellipses” (own translation, Aumont and Marie 2003, 45). That is, in the *filmic dimension*, there seems to be a merging of the temporal and the spatial axes.

However, before going into more detail about the categories of analysis, some extra information about the film is needed. In *Jogo de Cena*, all the performers are women (whose names are partly made public during the conversations and just fully presented in the final credits): some, including an actress, joined the shooting, thanks to a newspaper ad published by the film crew (it is exhibited in extreme close-up right at the beginning of the movie. It invites women to share a story for, what is called, a documentary); other participants are actresses (known or unknown by the Brazilian audience) who are integrated among the performers because of an invitation made by the film crew. In all cases, the women either talk about personal experiences or play the role of another participant in such a way that, thanks to the editing, a set of mirrors is created, making the audience lose the reference of the ones who would be sharing a personal story and the ones who would be telling a story lived by another woman. That is how the film takes the difference and the sharing of experiences among participants as the creative material to compose narratives with the spectators in a way that the reports are presented as either singular or the merging of what is commonly shared, producing, in each narrative, different possibilities of testimonies of women’s life in the Brazilian society. According to critics who have published works about the film, this mixing of actual experiences with a fictional elaboration is a common characteristic of Brazilian documentaries from the 2000s (Lins and Mesquita 2008; Marzochi 2012), also inheriting the tradition from the “French style” (own translation, Costa 2014, 8) or, even, merging the American Direct Cinema with the French *Cinéma Vérité* (Diniz 2012).

As mentioned earlier, words and bodies are seen in the same dimension, the *verbal-corporal* one. Despite that, the *filmic* dimension detaches the reports from the “speaking bodies” (own translation, Bernardet 2013, 627). The “autonomization of narratives” (own translation, 634–635) challenges the reader/spectator to relate to the opacity of the work. Related to that separation, it is curious to notice some possible misunderstandings in the already published papers on *Jogo de Cena*, reinforcing Bernardet’s (2013) arguments that, in Coutinho’s film, “speech speaks on its own” since “about the middle of the film or a little further on, a woman tells her story, but I heard that story a few minutes ago, which woman really told it?” (own translation, 627). Besides, as Mager (2020, 253) calls it, the movie creates a “collective subject” (own translation), prompting Sprinceana (2009, 4) to affirm that “all those women are just one.” Just to illustrate the misleading form of the film, Idez (2014) refers to Débora Almeida, one of the nonfamous actresses in the film, as if she were called Claudilea de Lemos, the woman who tells the story of the death of her son, killed during a

robbery, and is played by Lana Guelero, another nonfamous actress. Other examples: as stated in Bragança (2007), the actresses would be just the famous ones—what makes possible, however, to infer that, for the author, it would be a coincidence that two anonymous women may tell the same story or a very similar one; Costa (2014) characterizes Débora Almeida as being poor and from the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, attributes of the character she plays, Maria Nilza Gonçalves dos Santos; Rodrigues and Farias (2009) refer to Andrea Beltrão, a Brazilian famous actress, as being the first story-teller, but, in fact, Gisele Alves Moura—the character played by Andrea—had already started telling her story and, before that, Mary Sheyla had already done her performance, whose story is partially repeated in Jackie Brown's turn to perform six sequences later.

From the point of view of the reader, the uncertainty related to the sources places the reception/consumption of the film in an impasse. Two consequences are articulated: the creation of expectations related to the cathartic appeal of the participants of the film—suggesting to the public the contact with a testimony of an actual experience—and the dismantlement of those expectations through the dissociation of the participants with the narratives. In any case, the attribution of a source to the reported events and the creation/dismantlement of expectations produce a central role for the public. It is in that relationship between the work and the public where it is possible to delimit the impasse itself, a recurrent issue found in Literary Studies. Just to mention two examples, some connections could be found with the *Studies in Testimony*, which understand the testimony as calling into question the frontiers between the literary, the fictional, and the descriptive (Seligmann-Silva 2005), and the concept of *autofiction*, which involves a reading contract between the author and the reader (Faedrich 2015)—recalling some published statements on the auto *mise-en-scène* in *Jogo de Cena*. While Aguilera (2018) is very critical of the attention drawn to the form of the film despite the content of the stories, most authors argue that the most interesting feature of the film is exactly this exploration of the fictional that constitutes reality (Couto 2007) and, considering Josette Féral's concept of *theatricality*, Xavier (2014) argues that this is the core of Coutinho's work, making it part of a whole generation of Brazilian documentaries of the 2000s (Marzochi 2012).

It is remarkable how the public is constantly put in a position of appreciating the testimonies with suspicion due to the editing. Even when the performers are famous actresses—and that is the case of Andrea Beltrão, Fernanda Torres, and Marília Pêra whose fame comes, above all, from their works for the Brazilian television—the audience does not have access just to one more of their performances (a doubt is settled in the relation between person and character). Moreover, the film does not approach those TV celebrities with glamour. The film tends to erase the effect of celebrities being above daily life as it would be found in more commercial productions. However, at the same time, one cannot say they talk about their private lives. According to journalistic research (Mattos 2019), Fernanda Torres and Andrea Beltrão offer private stories to Coutinho's film, but there is nothing in the materiality of *Jogo de Cena* that would allow such an assertion. That is an example of how the

film deals all the time with ambiguity. Another illustration comes from the manner the stage is presented. It is simultaneously the space for dramatic representation and the appropriate spot for testimonial narratives—in between the interview or the report forms and the theatrical representation. In all cases, the material is basically given in the form of female participants/characters' answers to Coutinho, the inquirer and director of the film. Besides, the ambiguity is reinforced through the shooting when images of the participants are shown since they leave backstage toward the stage (would it be the entry for acting or for the testimony destined to a documentary?)—in short, the concept of “scene” appears merged in its different meanings in literature, theater, and cinema. The editing, in its turn, is in charge of making the ambiguity definitive when it, simultaneously, puts the testimonies into question and suggests that some of the acted fragments may be closer to a lived experience than the ones coming from the “authentic” protagonists. For that reason, the interview, as a typical genre present in documentaries, is put in perspective as a dubious tool and, for the purposes adopted here, other terms become more accurate (even though more generic) to name the main output of the performances as, for instance, “narrative”—without dismissing the presence of dramatic and poetic elements. Likewise, the scenario is constituted by empty stalls of a theater (the performers sit on the stage with their backs to the stalls)—that is, what used to be the space of the real in theater (as opposed to the stage) becomes also a space of fiction in the materiality of the work. In short, all those features provide elements for a discussion of the opacity of reality along with an invitation for mere enjoyment due to the emotional bondage provoked by the narratives, independently of them being or not attached to the facts external to language. The point is to search for an approach that suspends its commodity character, even though not forgetting the film is also a commodity, to interpret it as a work of art (Brown 2019).

The impressive number of publications about the film sixteen years after its release testifies how intriguing its form is. At its debut, between the years 2007 and 2008, the film, which was applauded in festivals (Dick 2008), was subject to, at least, sixteen critical reviews published in newspapers, magazines, and websites focused on cinema; among academic articles, articles published in annals, and chapters of the book, published between 2008 and 2023, the number of publications reaches forty-four; finally, among MA and PhD dissertations and books, sixteen monographs were found, coming out between 2011 and 2021 (this gathering of data was possible, thanks to academic repositories on the internet where two keywords were used for the research: “Jogo de Cena” and “Eduardo Coutinho”; because of the limited space of this article, I include here only the references directly mentioned). In relation to the academic works, they cover different research fields: from film studies—making up more than half of all the published articles—to unconventional approaches such as the ones found in information science and in ergology; other fields also discussed the film as journalism, drama studies, psychology, history, literary and linguistic studies, and cultural studies.

Returning to what concerns Literary Studies in relation to cinema, based on what *Jogo de Cena* presents as material for thought, the notion of *dispositif* is a key. Considering the divergences of how to understand it in cinema, I adopt here the most common definition among Brazilian documentarians as Rosa (2019) puts it. Converting into English (just as I did with all the other quotations from publications written in Portuguese), his definition of *dispositif* could be put as “a set of rules, selections, strategies or limits which serve as a driving force to make a documentary happen” (own translation, Rosa 2019, 16). Namely, considering the *dispositif* means considering the materiality of the film that, in the case of Coutinho’s production, comprises the blurring of the frontiers between “the binarities which make part of the history of art and cinema: reality and fiction, stage and audience, actor and character, performance and interview” (69). Hence, it is through *Jogo de Cena*’s *dispositif* that its literariness is reached.

In this regard, literariness, the quality of being literary, establishes a parallel with Eisenstein’s concept of *imagicity* or, in Russian, *obraznost* (Pereira 2023). In his investigation of the cinematographic language in relation to the other arts, especially with literature, Eisenstein defends a possible cinematography predating cinema in the sense that literature would be a source of images whose “cinematographic nature is based on the capacity of creating rich audiovisual images which provoke the reader in the same way a spectator should be provoked in contact with the cinematographic image” (Pereira 2023, 18). As observed, the relationship is not built through the borrowing of procedures from one language to lend them to another one (for example, as is the case of modernist literature in relation to cinema—see Mota 2010); it happens through the image, “understood as a wide category which involves the human sensoriality and a collection of artistic knowledge that was accumulated by the humankind over the centuries” (Pereira 2023, 20). In short, while *literary imagicity* is sought for the study of cinema, identifying the literariness in audiovisual productions may constitute a manner of mapping key issues to literary reading, remembering the Brazilian philosopher Marilena Chauí (2023) when she defines literature. She says,

the writer [just as the form of *Jogo de Cena*] does not invite the one who reads to reencounter what was already known, but touches in already existent meanings to transform them into something out of place and conquers, thanks to that estrangement effect, a new harmony that takes over the reader. (Chauí 2023)

From that, one can delineate literature as a booster for thought through the combination of contradictory elements, granted by the estrangement effect of *literariness*.

Benthien, Lau, and Marxsen (2019), quoting Chklovski, define literariness as the de-automatization of language. Thus, one can say that, through literariness, language, in a broader sense, is extracted from the consumerist logic, which numbs the senses. From this perspective, as the authors affirm, aesthetic literary features might be found in other forms of artistic expression (Benthien, Lau, and Marxsen 2019). However, in their analysis of media art, they choose to consider literariness only when constructed through verbal language even recognizing that sound,

music, images, colors, movement, and rhythm could be audiovisual elements contributing to a literary experience (Benthien, Lau, and Marxsen 2019). At that point, this study intends to keep this expansion, focusing on this characteristic of works that highlights their own materiality in a self-referential form regardless of the language or languages constituting those works. In a certain sense, one can approximate that comprehension to how Jakobson understands literature since he defends that “the primary goal of literary language is not to construct meaning but rather to explore the linguistic material self-reflexively” (Benthien, Lau, and Marxsen 2019, 5). Hence, the importance of reading for this object to exist since there is no preexisting meaning in a work.

According to formalists, estrangement and reflexivity are built on syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic deviations (Benthien, Lau, and Marxsen 2019). Those deviations can be handled in analysis through four different manners: (1) the use of spoken poetic language; (2) poetically motivated integration in written texts; (3) exploration of the literary genres; and (4) the adaptation of literary works (Benthien, Lau, and Marxsen 2019). As can be noticed, manners (1), (2), and (4) are especially concerned with concrete manifestations of verbal language. On the other hand, exploring the literary genres—as indicated in (3)—means exploring characteristics related to narration, drama, and lyric poetry, which are broader and could also be found in audiovisual language. According to the authors, “literary genre theory may sharpen one’s focus on the structure of an artwork, and on the interaction of its forms and the effects they create” (Benthien, Lau, and Marxsen 2019, 112).

Therefore, what are those characteristics traditionally attributed to the literary genres? First, on the *narrative*, referring to Lahn and Meister’s study on the subject, Benthien, Lau, and Marxsen (2019) highlight: *linear description* or *recounting*, *mediation*, and *arrangement*. For *linear description* or *recounting*, one considers the necessarily continuous experience of telling fictional or nonfictional events. It is an experience in which the flow of language gives preponderance to time. For *mediation*, one refers to a perspective or an adopted point of view that is necessary to make a story (differently from drama in which actions would happen on their own). At last, for *arrangement*, one acknowledges a manner through which the mediating instance offers a temporal experience. On this last topic, the “what” is distinguished from the “how” which is what, finally, gives an aesthetic quality to a narrative as the Russian formalists defended, especially following Chklovsky who defended narratives as being as elaborate as poetry (Benthien, Lau, and Marxsen 2019).

In relation to *drama*, besides the lack of mediation, its specificity is in the direct relationship between bodies (Benthien, Lau, and Marxsen 2019)—understanding a body as a theatrical element that is not necessarily human. That is, while narrative experience was primarily temporal, in drama, the experience appears as being relational and, therefore, spatialized. In fact, it is possible that, through an understanding of the “body” as a theatrical element, one can reach a possible common denominator for drama as a literary text or as a performance—despite not having an acknowledged approach that unifies theater as an object belonging to the Literary Studies and the Scenic Arts (Benthien, Lau, and Marxsen 2019).

Finally, related to the subjective expression, there is the *lyric poetry*. As mentioned previously, narratives and poems are mediated. While narratives are mediated through the perspective of a narrator, poems are mediated by a speaker that, especially in lyric poems, expresses feelings and thoughts (differently from what happens in epic and dramatic poems) as Benthien, Lau, and Marxsen (2019) warn. However, through the formalist perspective, the genre is built based on four elements. According to Burdorf, mentioned by Benthien, Lau, and Marxsen (2019), the lyric genre presents in literature: (1) grammatical deviations, deformed words, and uncommon syntax; (2) self-reflexivity; (3) direct addressing to the reader; and (4) condensed use of words through repetition and deliberate variation. As for the neoformalists in the Cinema Studies (as it is the case of Bordwell and Thompson 2008), poetic films, having literature as a reference, would present: (1) structures that allow the grouping of images; (2) a principle of variation; (3) repetition of certain motifs; and (4) a form that invites interpretation (Benthien, Lau, and Marxsen 2019). Interestingly, those films are closely related to what Nichols (2010, 211) would call “reflexive documentary” and Alter (2018), “essay film.”

Therefore, considering the Eissensteinian concept of cinema, the estrangement provoked by literature as described by Benthien, Lau, and Marxsen (2019), and the autonomization of art in our days as proposed by Brown (2019), three axes are distinguished in *Jogo de Cena*. They are as follows: (1) the simultaneity of the commodity and the artistic forms, (2) the coexistence of fiction and nonfiction; and, at last, (3) the juxtaposition of the apparent transparency and opacity of the work.

For the procedures used to analyze the film: first, a descriptive study was carried out (considering image, sound, and performance of the participants); second, sequences of scenes were identified; third, literariness is observed in terms of how it constitutes the *verbal-corporal* and the *filmic* dimensions; finally, patterns were identified and interpreted. In the following section, a sample of the results and the ensuing discussion are presented, obeying the specific goals of this article.

Results and Discussion

To organize the obtained results and the subsequent discussion, I return to the three specific objectives. The first one was concerned with examining the film as a literary object in simultaneity to its commodity character. That is why I move to a sample of analysis coming from the first sequence of *Jogo de Cena* so that the first result can be clear. I refer to a performance done by a young Black woman, unknown by the large audience, whose name is only acknowledged in the final credits, Mary Sheyla. Her appearance shortly after the previously mentioned ad makes the public infer she is one of the candidates to participate in the film (spectators may suppose a linear narrative is on its way). However, as soon as she starts speaking, something in her tone of voice and body language tells the opposite. It seems she is acting, but as she gets involved in sharing her life story—from being a poor illiterate girl in a favela in Rio de Janeiro to becoming an actress,

thanks to a nongovernmental organization (NGO), advertised on TV—she feels moved and tears roll down her face. Then, that initial perception that there would be an acting body is completely erased. Nonetheless, by the end of their conversation, Coutinho asks her to play a fragment from a Brazilian adaptation of *Medea*, the Ancient Greek tragedy whose protagonist, in the Brazilian version, is a poor woman like Mary Sheyla. Mary complies, but her acting sounds very artificial (maybe due to the actress's difficulty in establishing a relationship with the character that, despite being poor, erases the specificity of the experience of a poor Black woman as Mary Sheyla). It is also meaningful that Coutinho pushes her into mixing fiction with nonfiction when he asks her: "Could you say what you say when you decide to kill the children?" (that is, instead of referring to the character's actions, he refers to them as belonging to the actress, creating a mirroring between character and actress). By the end of her acting, she adds: "then I get out of the stage and I come back dead" (the merging between character and actress remains). Later, another interviewee, Jackie Brown, a rapper, is asked to sing one of her compositions and she decides to sing a song in which she talks about herself. To the spectator's surprise, elements from Mary Sheyla's life story appear in Jackie's narrative, creating a mirrored structure, making it impossible to distinguish if one of them is acting or if it was just a coincidence since Jackie also comes from a similar social background. Therefore, from the mere appeal to melodrama (Baltar 2019), the movie mobilizes narrative, dramatic, and poetic elements that demand interpretation. The narrative mediation coming from the *filmic* and *verbal-corporal* dimensions added to the ambiguous dramatic relationship between the bodies of Coutinho, the filmed women, the camera, and the spectator and the intriguing poetic self-reflexive structure of the story-telling and editing demand for interpretation.

Therefore, in terms of reading that sequence as a commodity or as entertainment, one could be satisfied just to compare Mary's and Jackie's interventions to decide which one has a more convincing performance, the most touching or funniest testimonial, or even one could just relate their life stories as illustrations of the struggles faced by poor Black women in Brazil. In all those cases, the movement of reading is directed outward Coutinho's work—which is a very tempting way of reading, given the immediacy of the audiovisual language. However, as Bernardet (2013) noticed, the editing is conducted in such a manner by Coutinho that words are separate from the speaking bodies, and as Mager (2020) defends: images become subordinate to words. Thus, reading *Jogo de Cena* involves considering artistic procedures such as the poetic mise-en-abyme and parallel structures to establish a relationship with the storytellers. In other words, the spectator of this film is driven into the work to be put in contact with the literariness of this film or, as Brown (2019, 13) would put it, "the immanent purposiveness" of it. It does not seem a coincidence that many film critics claimed *Jogo de Cena*, as being an essay (Marzochi 2012; Xavier 2014; Oliveira 2017). The indeterminacy created around Mary's performance moves the spectator from what she says to the act of saying itself, in this case, the act of narrating. Oppositions such as falseness and truthfulness or fiction and nonfiction lose their relevance facing reflexivity as it is stated by

Mary herself when she asks rhetorically: “What does it mean to be an actress?”—one of the many excerpts where poetry arises incidentally. However, in narrative terms, this question could be transposed to my purposes as “what does it mean to tell a story?” Coutinho takes the question seriously throughout the film, conducting different experiments with the thirteen female participants, permitting the delimitation of the film as a literary object that thinks about itself in its boundaries with cinema, theater, and literature. Marzochi (2012) argues that *Jogo de Cena* belongs to a generation of films in which fiction moves toward documentary language and documentaries become more fictional:

Thus, by rebelling against the immediate reality promised by the realist appeal or against the artificialities of an aesthetically conservative, televised, and “nouveau riche” Brazilian cinema, such as comedies of manners and films that are often thought of as franchises, Brazilian documentary production can show us, in reverse, the impossibility of reaching the “real” or of speaking in its name. (own translation, 14)

Therefore, considering Mary Sheyla’s sequence as an example, Marzochi’s perception can be probably explained because documentaries (as much as they assume the essay form) are increasingly deepening their relationship with literariness, not meaning that they have been abandoning their search for truth, but exactly to make this search possible in our days through its own language and not outside it.

To approach the second objective, the one which aims to understand how fiction and nonfiction function in Coutinho’s work, I start with a characteristic noticed in its form: *Jogo de Cena* is not made of oppositions, but of simultaneities. The coexistence of fiction and nonfiction is made clear from the very first frame when the spectators watch Mary Sheyla going upstairs, from the backstage to the stage where the film crew can be seen among the filmmaking equipment. It gives the impression that the camera is grasping reality, but, at the same time, the setting for the film is a theater and, most of the time, on its stage—the traditional space dedicated to acting. It is the spot where the transformation of a person into a character takes place. Nonfiction is placed inside fiction. Likewise, fiction is placed inside nonfiction through film editing evidencing a language characteristic. Reexamining Mary Sheyla’s sequence, layers of fiction can be distinguished in a poetic arrangement since we listen to an actress talking about her illusions of becoming part of the Paquitas, a Brazilian girl band from the 1980s—exclusively composed of blondes, despite the fact she is Black—while not being clear if those illusions belong to Mary Sheyla or to Jackie Brown who could be Mary’s character or vice versa (not to mention that Mary’s name resembles the name of Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein*, an early example of science fiction—a genre that presents a peculiar mix of fiction with nonfiction; moreover, the name Jackie Brown seems a misspelled quotation from the 1997 homonymous film directed by Tarantino—that is Jackie, born as Jaqueline, adopts a name of a character to be called in real life). Besides, Mary, being

herself or acting as Jackie, plays the role of Joana in *Gota d'água*, the Brazilian version of *Medea*, the Ancient Greek tragedy. In the excerpt acted due to Coutinho's request, another fictional layer is found: Joana invents a story to convince her children to eat poisoned cake. Once again, literary features are mobilized to engage the public that tends, at first, to believe Mary Sheyla is not an actress, but just an anonymous woman willing to share personal stories. Aguilera (2018) notices that while all famous actresses shown in the film are White, the Black actresses are all unknown by the large public and are not interviewed by Coutinho to reflect on their own performances (in the case of the White famous actresses, it always happens). For example, Lana Guelero, a Black participant in the film, just has her performance relativized by the end of the film when Claudilea Lemos, another Black woman, tells her story using the very same words Lana did. The stunning mirroring of narratives tells the public that one of them is acting, but who? A dramatic ambiguity is settled. Another example comes from Débora de Almeida, a Black actress presented in the film as Nilza. The audience just discovers the story was acted out because she closes her narrative, saying "and that was what she said." According to Aguilera (2018), the place Black women have in the film would reinforce racism. Instead, I believe this choice of separating White and Black actresses does not make the film racist but throws light on the racism that might be present among the public when assuming, at first, that those Black women could not be actresses. In other words, what is at stake is a literary procedure, especially found in a dislocation of expectations in the dramatic relationship between the performing bodies in the film and the spectators. It is part of the game played by Coutinho in which assumptions of truthfulness from the public often prove false, reinforcing the artistic feature of dealing with it through its internal norms.

Finally, the third objective addresses the issue of how apparent transparency and opacity are built in the film—as a form of situating its literariness and reinforcing the movement that is at stake when reading. According to Xavier (2018), while transparency is concerned with apparent meanings immediately grasped by the audience through continuity, absorbing the audience in the narrative whose procedures become invisible, opacity is a manner of characterizing the materiality of a film; it is related not to what is represented, but to how it happens to be the way it is. Considering, then, the arguments presented by Durão (2015) which refer to the omnipresence of fiction in life due to the generalized spreading of advertising, literature has been less and less concerned with fiction. In this sense, examining the presented elements of *Jogo de Cena*, one can realize that the supposed transparency (with its outward movement) is related to the film as a commodity; on the other hand, any attempt of a literary reading of the film is directed toward opacity (an inward movement constructed with narrative, dramatic, and poetic elements is at stake), defictionalizing the world. Dealing with opacity also means dealing with historicity in language as it is exemplified by what happens to *Jogo de Cena*, as it becomes clear how exhausted interviews have become as a source of transparent truth in our days, as pointed out by Lins and Mesquita (2008)—two experts on Coutinho's works—and the case of the Black actresses, mentioned previously, exemplifies.

Conclusion

In our daily lives, under the form of a movement that insinuates itself almost as something natural, the assumption of language as the starting point of truth has stood out. As a general phenomenon, it is a discourse that intends itself as being the opening contact with reality and would have the prerogative of being the truth. Despite not being an unprecedented movement in the recent history of capitalist societies (Schindler 2020), this phenomenon is back in the spotlight nowadays as a participant element of the sociopolitical movement that culminated in recent facts—such as the election of Donald Trump in the United States, the approval of the Brexit agreement in the UK, and, in Brazil, the impeachment of president Dilma Roussef, all happening in 2016 (Bucci 2018), besides the Brazilian elections in 2018 could be mentioned as well. Also dating back to 2016, we find the *Oxford Dictionaries* electing “post-truth” as the word of the year (Oxford Languages, n.d.) and one year later it is the turn of “fake news” being elected the word of the year too, but this time by *Collins Dictionary* (Language Lovers 2017).

Amid this context, thinking about *Jogo de Cena*, through the point of view of Literary Studies may be very relevant, facing the challenges presented by the present time. For that reason, I started by presenting the film, highlighting important aspects of its constitution as an object endowed with literariness. Aspects were identified as (1) the central role performed by the spectator/reader; (2) similarities between, on one side, the reflexivity and the metalanguage present in the film, and on the other one, the essay, as a literary genre; (3) the importance of words and of what could be regarded as a poetic use of images; and, finally, (4) the incidental motivation for the name of some of the performers (besides Mary Sheyla and Jackie Brown, there are other cases not discussed in this article) and the reference to literary works. Despite traditional approaches to dealing with the relationship between cinema and literature, I chose to start an investigation in the aesthetic domain shared by cinema and literature (in terms of a literariness constituted by narrative, dramatic, and poetic features) in three distinct axes: first, the one between the commodity form and the artistic one; second, the one between fiction and nonfiction; and, third, the one between apparent transparency and opacity. To illustrate, the first sequence—the one performed by Mary Sheyla—was discussed since it might be regarded as a motto for the film.

Therefore, considering those identified features in *Jogo de Cena* which create a zone of indeterminacy, it is possible to notice that when just what is transparent is considered, the film becomes one commodity more in the context referred earlier; on the other side, any effort toward opacity represents a gesture of resistance to the spread of fiction into the world. Fiction is withdrawn from the world and returned to language. Dealing with the opacity also means dealing with the historicity of language as exemplified in *Jogo de Cena* with the problematization of the interview, a resource that has worn its appearance of a transparent source of truth out. Similar to literature at the turn of the twentieth century, the essay film turns itself to opacity (while a work of art that is also constituted as a commodity, working with fiction and

nonfiction as a unity), widening the scope of literary and the understanding of what is involved in the attribution of meanings in both cinematographic and literary works.

In short, looking at *Jogo de Cena* as a literary work—with narrative, dramatic, and poetic characteristics—opens the way for a differentiated analysis and interpretation of the film, which may become a way of understanding the constitution of essay films in general. From a theater perspective, the notion of the acting body should be further investigated as a common component between theatrical text and performance. Finally, in terms of contributions to Literary Studies, seeing literariness in a film forces us to rethink what is meant by “literary” in literature since, as I have intended to demonstrate, the literary is not only in words, nor in fictionality.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vitor Soster: PhD Student, Department of Literary Theory and History, Institute of Language Studies of the State University of Campinas (IEL-Unicamp), Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil

Email: sosterv@gmail.com