

# Lights, Camera: Fiction

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Inverting the aphorism 'my life could become a novel', where fiction would be a copy of reality, the traditional strategy of mimesis, it may be said today that fiction produces reality. This reproductive function of fiction manifests itself and becomes ever clearer, in a world where images proliferate and confound the principles of reality, the issue of reality and of an original, which exist before language.

If the world of theatre, stage, of the relation to the public, of the manipulation of all kinds of fireworks has always created an aura around the actress or the actor, nowadays, the fascination of images has gained a new glow, on television, in the cinema and in literature, where all the visual games are introduced. The strategy of the visual image with all it involves in terms of a new perception of reality invades the world of literature, penetrates the book, not only referring to the visual world of images, but reproducing itself there.

This special space, which developed in industrialized societies, makes it possible to reproduce the simulacrum, since the exchange, or concomitance, between life/fiction/life or fantasy/reality, with itself, facilitates the breakdown of the borders between one and the other, and therefore weakens the radical breaks between reality and imagination. Then the figures of the self show themselves, all madness is permitted in the seductive traffic of the forms and formulas of fantasy.

If the *mimesis* as *imitatio* or imitation sought the original, the generation of the *simulacrum* does not want to be a copy - which presupposes an original - but shows itself as a mask, a device, playing with the opposition between true and false in order to mix them; to make the difference impossible, to show the artificial as a paradigm of a time which knows it is impossible to get to the origin, the source, the truth. Therefore, truth is the device and the game of seduction is the gesture, the fetish-object, the sidelong glance.

The interest in reading the memoirs of actresses, evident by the success of their books, is explained not only by the curiosity about the life of the great stars of the theatre, cinema or television, but also because their lives seem to be 'theatrical' lives, which blend with the theatre itself or television. It is the theatrical that fascinates, it is the theatrical that distinguishes these memoirs from others or questions them - since the self that narrates itself or is narrated continues on the stage, but becomes intimate with the public.

It can be said that a reader-public is created which is moved by the eyes, by the very fascination that flows from these women who, in the eighties, began to describe themselves in Brazil. In contrast to the interest raised by the traditional books of memoirs, of known or unknown personalities, what matters in these texts is not so much the truth of the fact, but the possibility of undoing even further the border between reality and fiction. Look at what, for example, the celebrated actress Tônia Carrero states about it:

Better than acting in the theatre? I don't know. But better than almost anything, much stronger than giving interviews about yourself, concentrated, or talk to a friend, with your analyst even, is to dive, in writing, in the still unconscious, intact cellars of memory. It is to visit a friendly house. Your stuff. Loved and unloved, eternal dwelling while alive.

But can you not cheat? Has it got to be all exactly just so?

What about the all important fantasy? Without mentioning the natural will of the beautiful story in itself: Oh, no! Let's sacrifice Literature, let's sacrifice reality, the ideal reporting of personality, fine, but not the taste for inventiveness. Even the cheapest kind. Never.<sup>1</sup>

For the spectator-reader, beside the voyeuristic wish to know intimacies, to look through the keyhole, there is the fascination for images, the mix of fiction and reality, transforming the commonplace into a stage. This is the rhetoric of television, radio and theatre magazines: to blend stages, to make the lives of the actors into scenes, as if they continued to act, blotting out the differences between daily routine and artistic life: loves, tastes, spending, homes, clothes, all this comes full of intrigue, rumours, stories that imitate soap operas, in the case of television.

Therefore, TV magazines exhaust the device of using the name of the actress for that of the character she plays, still creating the interest, the curiosity of the *déjà vu*. Paradoxically. Television sweethearts must become real sweethearts,

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1 Tônia Carrero, *O monstro de olhos azuis* (memórias), Porto Alegre/ São Paulo, L&PM, 1986, 9: Melhor que atuar em teatro? Não sei. Mas melhor do que quase tudo. Muito mais forte do que dar entrevistas sobre si, concentrada, ou conversar com amigo, com analista até, é mergulhar, escrevendo, nos porões ainda inconscientes, intactos da memória. É visitar casa amiga. Coisa sua. Amada e desamada, morada eterna enquanto viva. Mas não se pode fraudar? Tem que ser tudo tim-tim por tim-tim? E a fantasia tão importante onde fica? Sem falar na natural vontade da bela história em si mesma. Ah, não! Sacrifique-se a Literatura, sacrifique-se a realidade, o relato ideal da personalidade, está bem, mas não o gosto da invencionice. Mesmo a mais barata. Isso nunca.

the characters should continue to be characters in the living person of their protagonists. In order to do this, it is necessary not to establish differences, create continuity between life and the theatre, to strengthen seduction, the fascination that hides the discontinuity of day-to-day living. Even this discontinuity which is present in routine, in the banal description of trivial facts, has to be glamourised, by phrases and sayings that make one out of the character-actor-person, a triad that must remain undifferentiated.

If the feminine does not inscribe itself, does not act as such, one can speak of a special kind of acting, or better, of simulation, with endless signifiers (since the *One* is missing), masks, seduction, in an endless play of poses, clothes, make-up. Even when you want it very simple - we know - the strategy is that of the artificial. Therefore, if the feminine does not act itself, woman, each in her singularity, acts herself. This is her universal: paradoxically.

In the eighties, many books by actresses appeared, besides one in 1990, by Fernanda Montenegro. At least three of these texts are focused on here: that of Tônia Carrero, which has already been mentioned, that of Dina Sfat,<sup>2</sup> and that of Fernanda.<sup>3</sup> All three are theatre and TV actresses, all are at the height of their fame, all of them voluntarily having their lives seen and admired as we see and admire that which happens on a stage.

All three are very famous in Brazil. Fernanda Montenegro and Tônia Carrero are considered the *grandes dames* of the Brazilian stage, having acted in very important plays. They have, besides, acted in the cinema and in many successful T.V. soap operas, especially in the Globo T.V. series. Fernanda's whole family consists of such stars: herself, her husband Fernando Torres and her daughter, Fernanda Torres. Tônia Carrero, besides her importance as an actress, is famous for her beauty. Dina Sfat, also a cinema, stage and TV actress, died soon after the publication of her memoirs.

Tonia's book is the only one that was written without a co-author's help and it is interesting to note how she represents herself. In Tônia's book, at the very beginning, there is the issue of the narrator/subject's self, which immediately disguises itself as *she*, acting as a third person, as if, even without noticing it, the narrating self represented itself in the discourse, always acting before someone else, as in the theatre. In Tônia's case, she renames herself, gaining the status of a character, with a new name, or a variety of names, pseudonyms, such as Luzia, Luiza, Luzinha - the same name, Luiza, as Bá's, her false mother, more real than the real, distant, cold, beautiful mother, on the stage of her daughter's fantasies.

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2 Dina Sfat and Mara Caballero, *Palmas pra que te quero*, Rio de Janeiro, Nórdica, 1988.

3 Lúcia Rito, Fernanda Montenegro, *O exercício da paixão*, Rio de Janeiro, Rocco, 1991.

Not only in Tônia's book, but in those of the other actresses, the self literally acts itself, revealing its condition of subject-actor, represented in a phrase, moving in it, showing itself off, changing its costumes. If the subject always divides itself up on the oblique track of discourse, staying out, but acting itself out, in order to show itself as it wishes to see and let itself be seen, actresses' memoirs or their biographies are the ideal stage so that the metaphor of their selves may become literal.

The awareness of acting, of being on stage, is clear in these texts, not only through the resource used by Tônia, becoming a character, but also in the memoirs of Dina or Fernanda, which are furnished with an alter-ego, of another voice that announces or enunciates them: Lúcia Brito, in Fernanda's case, Nara Caballero, in Dina's. It is not possible to ignore that a lot that will be read in these books is already known, is public knowledge, through newspapers, and, mainly, through magazines: loves, separations, illnesses, relations with children and husbands. All this is already partially, fragmentally known, through rumours, or real news, but one not always wants to know *more*, but *again* and in a different way.

In the specific case of these actresses, it may be emphasized that not only are they actresses, in the theatre, with all its history on the Brazilian scene, but Globo actresses on the all-powerful TV Globo channel, which reigns supreme in the Brazilian media kingdom, through soap operas, shows, and the news, and are duly consumed by readers, who are assiduous television watchers.

In Dina's case, her illness or talking about her illness, already known by the public, or the breakdown of her marriage, her relationship with her daughters, her devotion to the esoteric, seer, or guru Thomas Green, all this was part of the success of the book, published just before her death. Dina herself often speaks clearly of being a character, of mixing with characters, as in her relationship with Paulo José:

There are stories made up by me, as there are characters of my authorship. Paulo José, whom I married, is an example. For 17 years, he said to me: 'I am not the person you say I am'. I used to say: 'you are, although you don't know you are'. And he proved to me, year after year, that he wasn't the character I thought he was. Therefore, there is no point in discussing the real Paulo José. What matters is talking about the character I created — extremely interesting, by the way. Therefore, when we broke up, I had the sensation of failure and not of frustration: my character did not exist.

(...) The character did not exist and I ended up talking to myself. I created a fiction and failed.<sup>4</sup>

Tônia, in another tone, speaks of herself as a character, actress or simulacrum, as she learned to simulate or dissimulate her own feelings, in order to defend herself on the family stage. The 'blue-eyed monster', as she refers to herself, is the simulation built in discourse, this other one who became familiar and, at the same time, a stranger. This 'monster' produces effects in Tônia's speech, revealing an ambiguous relationship of admiration, surprise and fear before her own image. True or false as it may be, a bridge made by this other subject which is beyond the stage, the borders, the margins of a silenced form, but acting itself out.

If so much is said about the subject-actor, the surface subject, the subject that glides or moves metonymically, which does not have the illusionary integrity which it was believed to have, this subject, however, acts the *Other*, the subject of the unconscious, outside the discourse, but sustains it. This subject which acts has a listener that he believes has a knowledge, a knowledge which he says is his, that is his make up.

Tônia the actress speaks to a reader public that continues to be her spectator, creates the monster to look at, to show itself: a monster, but with blue eyes, of which she is proud, she, the daughter of the father fascinated by her beauty. A beauty she wants to eternalize on the stage, in life, in the iconographic register of the book: in the photographs that show the blue eyes in several poses, places where she seeks herself. In the photographs, in the eyes of the reader or in other eyes, another look beyond, in this Other that is not.

There is nothing so similar to the concept of the photograph in Barthes<sup>5</sup> as that of the feminine in Lacan. Without essence, without a signifier to define it, the photograph is produced in the instant, is defined in the contingent, in the specific. If there is not *The* photograph, there is not *The* woman, but each woman plays herself at every moment, the way she glances at people, the clothes ...

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4 Sfat, 11: Há histórias inventadas por mim, como há personagens de minha autoria. Paulo José, com quem me casei, é um exemplo. Durante 17 anos, ele me disse: não sou essa pessoa que você diz que eu sou. Eu dizia: você é, embora não saiba que é. E ele me provou, ano após ano, não ser o personagem que eu achava que ele era. Então, não interessa discutir o Paulo José verdadeiro: interessa falar do personagem que criei-interestantíssimo, aliás. Por isso, com a separação, tive uma sensação de fracasso e não de frustração: meu personagem não existia(...) O personagem não existia e acabei falando sozinha. Criei uma ficção e fracasei.

5 Roland Barthes, *Camara Lucida*, translated by Richard Howard, London, Fontana, 1984.

she wears, the pose she makes, manufacturing a body that metamorphoses itself always.

When I pose, I manufacture my body, I change, says Barthes.<sup>6</sup> But I want, on the other hand, my authentic picture, I want to capture or I want my real I to be captured. It, however, escapes, it never appears: *I* of a thousand faces. In the photograph, the subject photographed imitates itself, reproduces itself. By posing, it wants to be natural, as if it were not watching itself, simple, authentic. However, it stiffens, becomes a statue and only manages to pose, non-authentic. The photograph demands our imposture and our wish to be admired as we wish to be, as we wish to be seen.

Living under the focus of looks, monsters of many looks, it is not by chance that all the books we talked about show photographs of the actresses, all of them in their poses, their families, the theatre scenes next to the family scenes. Tônia the baby, the girl with the blue eyes, the parents, the brothers and sisters, the grandparents, the family album with a story, with the places she lived in, people from the past speak of an existence. *This was*, Barthes would say. *I am, I exist*. The photographs, the people mean and make meaning.

The wish to make oneself be seen makes the photographs multiply and vary. Thus, the pose of her last picture, seductive, like a *vamp*, with her body bent in a dance, Hollywoodian, mimics in her own body the fiction of an American star. We also have blond, blue-eyed stars here in these tropics: Tônia, the simulacrum of the great cinema actress, moves about with ease before the camera-eyes of the mass-media, at ease in her replica pose of a thousand other similar poses printed in magazines that show the blond stars of the star system. In another photograph, she shows herself dressed as a tap-dancer, in long black silk slacks, a *carioca* Ginger Rogers, that is, one that lives in Rio de Janeiro .

Tônia's text, however, has its gaps, where the pain of the girl hurt by the lack of her mother's gaze can be seen. There are complaints, resentment, a lack of care, which she transformed into the thousand eyes of a voyeur public, looking at her beauty sung in prose and verse, a beauty considered rare in this part of the southern hemisphere, 'a monster with blue eyes'. And in this way, that which is lacking becomes excess, in excess, or making exception, the auspicious answer of the feminine which if it does not represent The woman, has women fully, utterly represented.

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6 'Now, once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of 'posing': I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image' (*Camera Lucida*, 10).

The iconographic part of the book carries on a dialogue with the written memoirs, silences the complaints of the girl, lets the star shine with all the seduction she learned to use to hide the need, to signify: make-up, crescent eyebrows, cinematographic gestures, seductive object ready to be seen. Nothing is more important for the person that covers herself with the signs of the great actress than the look of the one whom she believes to be the Other. It is for the Other - beyond the gaze of each subject in the role of spectator - that the woman sparkles, that she shines with the attributes of what Lacan calls the masquerade. This masking is the scenic resource of the costume that covers the emptiness, the lack of the feminine signifier; these resources are many and on them focuses the gaze. It is not by chance that the books are made up of photographs.

Thus, there is nothing better or more spectacular than an actress acting that which a woman is not in herself - the clothes, the jewels, the look, the perfume - but makes her signify, exactly by the excess of signifiers, since the *one* is lacking, that which would identify the feminine. That which is not. In a way, this opening brings about, in an extraordinary way, the seduction and the several appearances which put into motion the machine of desire.

If the actor is double by the very act of acting, the Other he addresses may, in an imaginary way, realize this duplicity, mimicking a dialogue, an intersubjectivity, which eventually reveals itself to be a stage, a place where a personality dwells. Therefore, if Tônia makes herself a character for an ambiguous narrator, who is and is not herself, Fernanda Montenegro and Dina Sfat represent themselves through the writing of a journalist who interviews them, listens, writes down and witnesses. To write Fernanda, to write Dina is a writing that goes through the listening of another woman, which still reveals a play of voices, a play of discourses which builds a figure, an image of a woman, or better, a simulacrum, an object built with the resources of the world of the mass media and of the show.

It is impossible to try to find the true woman underlying these images in the depth of the text. It is impossible to have an epiphanous meeting with Dina, Tônia or Fernanda, in their 'truth', devoid of the veils and devices of the stage, since that is where they are to be found, in the multiplicity of names, doubles, clear voices and *off the record*. The truth is appearance itself: Tônia is Luzia, Luiza, Luzinha. Fernanda is Arlette, Fernanda Montenegro, who doubles as Torres. It proliferates, as Borges would say, in the photographs, the family, the names, daughters, granddaughters. All buy the true reality, knowing that it is not, or that it cannot be captured.

In Fernanda's book, more than in Tônia's (surprisingly), one admires, in a show, the full picture of the *Grande Dame*, without flaws, without needs, without cracks. An actress is erected who coincides with the complete woman: wife, mother, professional. In the photographs, her large eyes are reproduced, which look at us, which look at themselves, look at the children in the pages of the book.

The books, then, are the stages. The characters are really characters, constructions, as the public expects, in the sparkle of their portrayability, in the reality of their necessary illusion.

Translated by Charles Bacon