

## SOUNDSCAPES OF LOW FIDELITY IN *O SOM AO REDOR* (2012) AND *VENTOS DE AGOSTO* (2014)

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### ABSTRACT

Considering two concepts of R. Murray Schafer (2001) of soundscape and low fidelity (lo-fi), we aim to approach the author to the study area of the audiovisual's sounds, having in mind that these concepts help us question aesthetics and sound aspects, which are found in some movies from the so-called *Novíssimo Cinema Brasileiro*. These movies were produced in the last ten years in Brazil and they use aesthetic possibilities provided by new technologies that enable sound and images alterations as well as edition changes. In order to reach our goal, we will trace the definition of soundscape in Schafer, emphasizing the interdisciplinary aspect of the concept. After that, we will think how this notion of lo-fi detaches from its common sense use can be applied in the area of communication, and especially in cinema. Finally, we will pilot an analysis of some scenes from two recent movies produced in the State of Pernambuco whose sound result helps to give an example of the connection that is intended to be made between Schafer concept and the area of cinema. The examples are *O som ao redor* (Kleber Mendonça Filho, 2012) and *Ventos de agosto* (Gabriel Mascaro, 2014).

### KEYWORDS

Brazilian cinema; cinema; low fidelity (lo-fi); sound analysis; soundscape

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### RESUMO

Partindo de dois conceitos de R. Murray Schafer (2001), de paisagem sonora e baixa fidelidade, pretendemos aproximar o autor do campo dos estudos de som no audiovisual, pois são conceitos que nos ajudam a problematizar aspectos estéticos e sonoros observáveis, especialmente, em filmes do chamado *Novíssimo Cinema Brasileiro*, produzidos nos últimos dez anos no país, e que se utilizam das possibilidades estéticas conferidas por novas tecnologias de captação de som e imagem, bem como de edição. Para tal, traçaremos a definição de paisagem sonora em Schafer, ressaltando o aspecto interdisciplinar do conceito. Depois pensaremos como a noção de baixa fidelidade, afastada de seu uso no senso comum, pode ser aplicada no campo da comunicação e, mais especificamente, do cinema. Por fim, faremos um piloto de análise em algumas cenas de dois filmes recentes realizados no Estado de Pernambuco, cujo trabalho sonoro ajuda a exemplificar a aproximação que se quer fazer entre os conceitos de Schafer e o campo do cinema. São eles: *O som ao redor* (Kleber Mendonça Filho, 2012) e *Ventos de agosto* (Gabriel Mascaro, 2014).

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Análise de som; baixa fidelidade; cinema; cinema brasileiro; paisagem sonora

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## INTRODUCTION

R. Murray Schafer, in his book dedicated to the study of soundscapes, quotes the novel *O jogo das contas de vidro*, from Hermann Hesse, to justify the reason why it is so important to consider the sounds made by a specific society. In a reference to a Chinese fountain, the German writer sets a relationship between the political nature of a State and the art created by its influence. Paraphrasing him it is possible to say that a harmonic society produces calm works, whereas a chaotic society generates choleric art (Schafer, 2001, p. 22).

Such an attempt can be found in the reviews about *O som ao redor* (2012), from Kleber Mendonça Filho<sup>1</sup>: “the noises we produce (...) reveal who we are. Those we hear, say much about where and how we live. It is in this plan – in their clash – that the social contradictions of our country become concrete” (Oliveira, 2013). It is not only at this point that we can find some connections between the work from Schafer and the one from Kleber Mendonça Filho. The Canadian theorist characterizes the technological urban soundscapes as lo-fi, which means that there is no difference between figure and background (a psychological concept created by the psychology of shape as a way to explain the cognitive mechanism of the visual perspective). Here we interpret the concept the way Schafer defines it: “the figure can be seen, while the background existence is only possible in order to shape and form the figure. But a figure cannot exist without a background; in case it is removed the figure becomes shapeless, that is cannot exist” (Schafer, 2001, p. 26). It is this absence, which is observed on the sound project of the film, that can be noticed in the work of Mendonça Filho.

In *O som ao redor* (2012), the director deals with a banal plot: the daily life of a middle class group of residents from a block which is in a neighborhood of Recife (capital of Pernambuco), and their minor daily tensions. In the narrative, the audio is used to subvert the expectations of the spectator, and by doing this, it is not clear when it comes from the internal or from the external presented spaces. The sound of home appliances, mobile phones, television sets and other devices and screens have an active participation in the scenes, and produce textures during the film. Besides that, there are at least three occasions that could be interpreted as delirium of the main character where there is a complete rupture between sound and visual image, which gives a surreal sensation to the scenes.

In *Ventos de agosto* (2014), by Gabriel Mascaro<sup>2</sup>, the sound is also used as a surprise element. The plot takes place at a seaside community that makes its living by the extraction of coconut, and evolves with the arrival of a meteorologist that is Mascaro himself, who comes to record the sounds of the local winds. As a result, the film is filled

<sup>1</sup> Kleber Mendonça Filho (Recife, 1968) started his career in the movie industry in the 90s, and made remarkable work with short-cut films such as *Vinil Verde* (2004), *Eletrodomésticas* (2005) and *Recife Frio* (2009). After the long documentary *Crítico* (2008), his focus turned to fiction as shown in *O som ao redor* (2012) and *Aquarius* (2016), which was released at Cannes Festival and was nominated to various awards.

<sup>2</sup> Gabriel Mascaro (1958, Recife) has a degree in Journalism by the Federal University of Pernambuco. He started his career making documentaries, and among other films, he directed *Um lugar ao sol* (2009) and *Domésticas* (2012). It was from *Ventos de agosto* (2014) that he started to focus on fiction films, which reached a top in *Boi Neon* (2015).

by unmasterized sounds, or apparently unmasterized from the captions made by the main character. The director turns the soundtrack even more peculiar by cyclic editing the soundtrack in almost absolute silence sequences, which suddenly flow into peaks of intense distorted noise.

Therefore the two productions induce to this effect of sound flattening, both considering the lack of discernibility between figure and background – in *O som ao redor* –, as well as in the granulation of the microphone and the intensity peaks – in *Ventos de agosto* –, which allows us to put together the concept of soundscape and lo-fi in Schafer. We must however state that we are not using here lo-fi in its common sense, since both movies soundtrack work was effusively praised by the renowned critic.

Kleber Mendonça Filho and Gabriel Mascaro belong to the so-called group known as *Novo Ciclo do Cinema Pernambucano* (Nogueira, 2009), which includes young directors as Mendonça, Mascaro and Hilton Lacerda (*Tatuagem*, 2013), as well as consolidated names as Cláudio Assis (*A Febre do Rato*, 2011). These young filmmakers have connections with the previous generation that started to make films in Pernambuco right after the revival of the Brazilian cinema in the 1990s. This group was known as the generation from the Arid Movie (they would update the “sertão” theme with the beat of the *manguebeat*). On the other hand, the generation coming after the year 2000 in Pernambuco would bring aesthetic and narrative references from some trends of international cinema, such as the sound design of the two films analyzed in this article. The contrast between these two generations is expressed by the researcher Angela Prysthon while commenting the film *Avenida Brasília Formosa* (2010), by Gabriel Mascaro:

the look of Mascaro, contrary to the films from the Arid Movie generation from the 1990s and 2000, seeks to dehumanize the landscape and the city instead of turning it into a folk object, and it also clearly shows the influence of international cinema from the end of the 90s and beginning of the year 2000, especially from Pedro Costa and Jia Zhang-Ke. (Prysthon, 2017)

Therefore, both films we have chosen to analyze belong to this contemporary film production from Pernambuco (as defined in Prysthon, 2017 and Flôres, 2015), which currently is one of the most thought provoking of the contemporary Brazilian cinema due to its aesthetic and narrative proposals. We believe that the low definition of the sound of the cinema as an aesthetic choice besides following a trend from international film making, as for example the Portuguese, Chinese, and Thai productions –, allows updating themes that have tradition in the Brazilian cinema, especially the one that analyzes the construction of the social space.

If we consider the Brazilian films that use low definition of the sound as an aesthetic effect, we can observe by means of bibliographic research and by a state of art on the topic that the two films cited in this article are, at least from a commercial aspect, the ones that present the biggest use of the lo-fi soundscape.

Therefore, we will start by giving details of the concept of soundscape, pointing out reviews and exposing the author’s methodological proposal; afterwards the notion of low

fidelity will be discussed by giving examples, considering its frequency in the history of the cinema, and finally we will present an essay on film analysis using some scenes of the two films, which we believe can justify such connection.

## SOUNDSCAPES

There has been a recent increase in studies that establish a relationship between space and the soundscape concept developed by R. Murray Schafer. The Canadian musician proposes a sound ecology, and by doing so the soundscape is about any physical or abstract space (considering abstract as any mediated space), which is filled by sound, whether natural or not (Schafer, 2001, p. 13). The study of the soundscape would be, as a result, an interdisciplinary approach among Natural and Social, and the field of Arts. The last category is justified by the author since he considers the field of Arts as not only performing the function of soundscape register, but also the formation of what is heard in the cities, small towns and the countryside. This exchange is still reinforced by the industrial project and by the influence of aesthetics in the daily life in modern times. John Cage, for example, reinforces this relationship by the insertion of external noises in his music, (which is a tendency in contemporary music, noticeable once you listen to the experiments of concrete music). In his interviews and written works, Cage used to say: “music is about sounds, sounds that are around us, whether we are inside or outside concert rooms” (quoted in Schafer, 2001, p. 19).

When he proposes his concept of sounds landscapes, or *soundscapes* from the original, Schafer has two preoccupations: one is about criticizing the evolution of our sound perception of space due to industrial sounds, and therefore there is a division between ambiances of high (*hi-fi*) and low (*lo-fi*) fidelity, which will be discussed later, and the other preoccupation that is providing elements of analysis for this notion of soundscape. It is not by chance that Schafer, the musician, uses the elements from his original area to support his academic work. Moreover, the effort is made to provide elements for a new study field (the one about the sound landscape), which does not have as many registers as the studies about visual landscapes in Arts. Therefore it is easy to understand the reason why the theorist has chosen a broad definition of a sound landscape: “by this term we could either refer to a musical composition, to a radio program or even to an acoustic environment” (Schafer, 2001, p. 23). In this space are included all the elements that constitute the universe of sounds: sound, silence, noise, timbres, amplitudes, melodies, texture, rhythm, that is, the field of acoustic field no matter which one it is (José & Sergi, 2007, p. 8).

In his essay, Giuliano Obici (2006) criticizes the concept of soundscape by Schafer, using instead the idea of sound territory. He argues that the notion of landscape is the result of a kind of idealism in the Canadian’s work that

determines a reference of sound contemplation, and implies the search for an ambient that returns the conception of sublime and idealized nature which was lost and needs to be restored, and besides that discourages to face the sound of the machines in a creative way. (Obici, 2006, p. 50)

The concept of territory, considering its use according to Deleuze and Guattari, would refer to a more organic and positive notion of facing sounds in daily life. Nevertheless, we have opted in this work for keeping the concept of soundscape<sup>3</sup> essentially for two reasons: (1) we are in fact working with something that was deliberately set in that place by a movie maker, likewise the long tradition of visual landscapes can be thought as something that represents or relates to a territory, and (2) allows an approach with the theories and historiography of Arts and of films.

As a matter of fact, the historiography of Art can offer different concept instruments to reflect on our topic. First, it is in this field that the landscape is thought as an element of space redefinition through a human creative activity (Guerreiro, 2013, p. 70), and also by the dissociation between the functional use of the genre of landscape paintings and its artistic autonomy (Gombrich, 1990, p. 147) and finally, the idea of soundscape as a great device for the development of the perspective notion (Guerreiro, 2013, p. 75), which has a direct connection to the discussion about lo-fi that will be done later.

The French researcher and curator Jacques Leenhardt proposes two genealogies of the soundscape concept. The first one would be related to the taming of nature in the principles of sedentary settlements, that is, a manifestation of the urbanization process. The second one, which is more relevant to us, is related to the surge of painting in the landscape. The author emphasizes the fact that the word *landscape* (first ancestral) is born in the Netherlands in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, along with the artistic genre.

By doing this, it is possible to point two basic senses that were historically formed around the landscape concept:

the clash of these two etymological channels, upon the two ways of imagining the way the landscapes are sustained, shows a complex relationship between what is elaborated in legal, economic or political practices on one side, and on the other the representations, images, speeches and images as observed by Michel Foucault. (Leenhardt, 2014)

The soundscape in films, however, since early times starts to differ from its pictorial pair for several reasons. The possibility of using the camera movements, and the notion of duration, besides the pictorial art of the landscape, are the first ones to be noticed. As long as technology advances the “landscape thought” takes control. The possibility to record *in loco* reinforces the sensation of materiality inside the space. The development, either technical or aesthetical of the focus depth increases the usage options, and little developments of action inside the landscapes scenes can be included. Eventually, the sound introduction adds new dimensions to the landscape. One reason is that the landscape immersion goes only through a visual point of view in order to have a listening or

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<sup>3</sup> The researcher Luiza Alvim uses a similar logic in her thesis while mentioning the soundtrack of Bresson films and by doing these contests Obici's reviews: “considering the objects of study of Obici, the use of ‘sound territory’ instead of using ‘soundscape’ seems appropriate. But we do not consider it suitable when referring to cinema since the territory is built, while the film is already given to us (there are of course many different ways of reception, but they all occur from the same material). Again, the musical character in the sound of Bresson films is a reason to be against Obici reviews and thus choose the term of Schafer ‘soundscape’” (Alvim, 2011, pp. 64-65).

sound point of view, or listening point as coined by Michel Chion (1994). The sensation of space would become more complete to the spectator. Another reason is the paradoxical increase of silence in sound cinema. As explained by Fernando Morais da Costa (2010, p. 102): “the creation of a new space for loud-speakers in the rooms, with their presences in all four corners of the walls, would paradoxically create new sensations of emptiness, since these spaces are not filled the whole time”. These are all the reasons that lead us preferably talking of a landscape staging, rather than of a representation.

In order to study the soundscape, Schafer sketches a method that he named sonography. The very first thing to know about sonography, says the author, is to think about the difficulty in getting records prior to recording technologies. Hence the importance of the testimony found in traveler’s notes and its prevalence over reports, perpetrated descriptions done by people who have never faced a determined landscape. He presents its main categories, which mostly derived from the musical theory. They are fundamental sounds, signs, marks and archetypes.

The fundamental sounds are to the soundscape as the tonic is to the musical scale. That means that they are sounds that represent some soundscapes; the rest around them can vary, but while they are there it is possible to identify the soundscape. Some examples could be the sound of birds for the woods or the cars for a city. Here Schafer forwards an important discussion for our work, which is the background figure, which implies that the fundamental sound usually works as a background where figures will show up.

In this way, the author clearly realizes the impoverishment of this relation in the city. There are other elements that compound the soundscape. The signs are the figures, the sound that excel the soundscape. It is not rare, argues Schafer, that they are organized in messages and very complex codes, such as the bell striking in certain communities telling the time of a day, or announcing someone’s death. We may also think of the sirens in an urban ambient as a sign of an accident.

On the other hand, the sound mark is a sound that only exists in a determined society. Within the thought of an acoustic ecology, it is quite important to recognize these sounds, and to place them as something that must be preserved for the sake of a certain sound diversity.

In order to study cinema, this importance is not so big, even considering the films recording processes and the direct use in the locations as a kind of document of the sound marks. Archetypes are the exact opposite of the marks, and they are characterized by clichés related to specific communities.

## **LOW FIDELITY**

Once defined soundscape, Schafer investigates what happens with it as communities transit between the rural and the urban ambient. In this process he realizes by the collected registers, two kinds of sound settings. One of them, which is abundant in big cities, he defines as lo-fi soundscapes, in contrast to the other one, the one roam the countryside, designated as hi-fi. The difference between them is the question of the

background figure, the perspective and the proportion sign/noise. Thus, hi-fi soundscape is defined as the one that has positive sound-noise reason, and the lo-fi one is the opposite. That is to say that while in hi-fi it is clearly identified the nature and the distance of the sound source (for example: the bird singing in a rural area), in the lo-fi soundscape the different sound triggers form a block, a kind of wall since the city sounds are so loud that become hard to discern (Schafer, 2001, p. 107).

In order to avoid confusions, it is important to make clear that Schafer neither think his soundscape theory, nor the division between hi-fi and lo-fi in as a way to talk about sound in cinema or any other media device. This is a proposal from this work that – according to our bibliography research – seems to find support in studies developed by Schafer's colleagues, which is the case of McLuhan that addresses the effects of low definition sound in early XX century devices emergence (McLuhan, 2005, p. 301), and from others of his contemporaries as Friedrich Kittler, who considered high definition as a mechanism of the speech of the real (Kittler, 1999, p. 36).

Others will discuss the low definition, although it is not done in the same way as Schafer, in the media (Conter, 2010) and in the cinema (Flores, 2015; Rodriguez, 2006). We also stress that although Schafer is worried about the ecological question of the sound, and also of the sound in space, he has many records about the questions of soundscapes in works of art. There is a moment that, for example, he addresses the chamber music intensity growth in the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century as a response to the lo-fi soundscape of the big cities. In a general way for the purpose of this article, we tend to agree with Luiza Alvim:

although Schafer (2001) tries hard to make a survey of natural soundscapes around the whole world, he observes that it is also possible to use this term for constructed soundscapes as in music compositions and radio programs. Schafer does not refer to cinema, but considers his acoustic project as interdisciplinary, and in his acknowledgements mentions researchers from diverse fields, as for example, the ones from audiovisual. (Alvim, 2011, p. 23)

If there is an excess of noise in the lo-fi soundscapes, there is also an excess of information. This excess of information in the cities is reflected by the increase of information in shortage of space of the recordings and digital storage. As explained by Marcelo Conter:

we are more surrounded by information in the big cities in comparison with the countryside, and the difficulty to decide which information will get our attention is what results into a lo-fi soundscape (...) Lo-fi, in soundscapes is the result of the increase in information, which is the opposite of what the term apparently proposes. It is an excess of aesthetics, of superabundance of sound sources. (Conter, 2015, pp. 25-26)

Conter's thesis about lo-fi in pop music helps us think about low fidelity not only as the simple use of an outdated sound caption device, once many bands use the latest

recording technology to create this kind of loudness (Conter, 2015, p. 13), but, in fact, as an aesthetic resource.

The lo-fi media products would, on this perspective, assume a different posture in relation to the mainstream products of their area, and would take part of an underground proposal. On the other hand, this resource allows us associating these products with two important concepts for the theory of communications: the one about superficiality, in Flusser, and the one about acoustic space, in McLuhan.

When writing about superficiality, Flusser sets a difference between “surfaces lacking volumes”, which would be the traditional images, and the surfaces “made from points”, that is to say, the technical images (Flusser, 2008, p. 15). While the first ones suggest a way to read the world in its two-dimension-nature, the second ones put themselves as an erasure of dimensions. This is related to what the philosopher defines as an “abstraction climbing”. The more technical resources these abstractions have, that is, the higher is their definition, the closer to abstraction gets the spectator, and eventually forgets the “concrete trail” (Flusser, 2008, p. 39) of the processes that image went through, thus is impelled to see these surfaces as they really are.

Flusser’s reasoning applied to images can be expanded to think about sound, to an extent that the philosopher addresses the technological process involved in photography and film production, which is similar to a phonograph, or to digital means, which are even more similar, and its consequences – nominally, the lack of depth and the absence of corporality. What we want to highlight here is this confluence between the consequences pointed by Flusser and the notions of low fidelity and the indistinctness between figure and background in Schafer. It seems that the report helps to understand how Schafer’s thought can be associated to themes addressed to communication studies.

Likewise, Marshall McLuhan talks about the emergency of an “acoustic space” opposing the virtual space prevailing in modernity. Radio, films, and other reproduction technologies have brought, from McLuhan’s perspective, a revival to the aural and verbal senses. Concerning audition, it imposes another perceptive schema to the individual, since this sense is closer to tact and sensitivity instead of rationality (Schafer, 2001, p. 29). It is also interesting to notice that one of the consequences of this process would be in fact, the lack of depth (McLuhan, 2005, p. 60). Thus, the three thinkers, Schafer, Flusser and McLuhan, have a similar approach when describing what would turn to be the superficiality thought. The binomial depth/superficiality, by the sense used by the authors, refers to the perspective theories, and therefore is also placed within the figure and background discussion, proposed by Schafer.

It is clear that this concern with fidelity in cinema is popular among sound technicians, film critics, and the spectators. In such a way, speaking about low fidelity establishes, in the common sense, an argument that associates it to a “bad” sound, and the high fidelity to a “good” sound. This is palpable even in the records of some of the most important theorists of sound cinema. Ángel Rodríguez, for example, in his book *A dimensão sonora da linguagem audiovisual* (2006), explains the foundations of a “high-fidelity engineering”, whose function would be that, “after any electronic manipulation,

recording and transmission, reorganization, and so forth, the audio keeps exactly the same original sound specter” (Rodríguez, 2006, p. 44). It is necessary to say that there is no original sound specter to be preserved in the films mentioned in this work; the low fidelity effects are placed and thought within a perceptive schema of sound design. Therefore, for the purpose of this article, there is no sense in thinking of high fidelity as a way to preserve an imaginary sound, or thinking of low fidelity as a defect of production or lack of work in sound design.

In fact, the low fidelity resource goes in the opposite direction of the mainstream cinema. The 3D, 4D images, and the surround sound, for example, provide a sensation of depth, which allows the spectator to emerge into the space of the film, and the illusion of being inside the story. Schafer has also observed a similar development in the advent of the quadraphonic system, which in his words,

made a soundscape of stationary event sounds possible or even in a movement of 360 degrees, which allows simulating in time and spacing any sound in the ambient, and allows the complete transposition of the acoustic space as well. Now any ambient sound can become any other ambient. (Schafer, 2001, p. 134)

Considering the flat sound in our *corpus*, it suggests another way to face the construction of space, much more connected with the corporal perception and the sensitivity than with mimesis. Costa mentions the fact that the new technologies of recording, edition and exhibition of films have also enlarged the acoustic ceiling of the rooms in the cinema (2010, p. 100). If we think of low fidelity as an excess of information as mentioned above, it seems clear that it is the own advance of the equipment that provides the elements for this aesthetic possibility. This is fundamental to wonder why the question of low fidelity cannot be only understood as an index of precariousness in cinema production.

It is important to make it clear that we do not understand this current production as unique, but as the one that brings related themes in the history of cinema, as well as in contemporary productions. Concerning the visual image, the question of the sensation of perspective through the sound, and of the spaces raised by it, the sensation has always been present. Gilles Deleuze, for example, describes: “the abandon of field depth, an assumption of a certain clearness in the image, would have had among its main causes soundtrack movies, which constituted a fourth dimension of the visual image, replacing the third one” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 276).

Depth<sup>4</sup> has also been a question in the consolidation of American cinema. In *Citizen Kane* (1941), Orson Welles constructs deformed film sets and strongly uses depth of field as a way to suggest detachment among the characters. The critic Luiz Carlos Merten explains that this “caused a real revolution in cinema syntax. It altered the edition, the

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<sup>4</sup> The advent of field depth in visual images is connected to a series of technological developments, such as retractable lens and lightening scheme. In the audio part this effect is more connected to mixing, which in fact appeared much later. Although in general it is possible to say that the same perceptive scheme is applied, and therefore it allows to see more clearly the background of the frame or to listen more accurately to what goes on far from the diegesis space.

own style of narration” (Merten, 1995, p. 47). After Welles, the resume of the visual flattening in the visual image occurs as a response to a technological unfolding. Francis Ford Coppola shoots *One from the heart* (1981), justifying the sets assembly that eliminate depth as a way to reflect the adaptation of our view of the video, a medium naturally endowed of less depth, as explained by Machado (1997).

The acoustic image has also been guided by this logic in cinema. As an example, we can cite the films of the Danish director Winding Refn, the postindustrial noises of *Eraserhead* (David Lynch, 1977), the dirty guitars of *Dead Man* (Jim Jarmusch, 1995) or the meta audio of *Aquele querido mês de agosto* (Miguel Gomes, 2008). On a more extensive way, Asian films that fit into what has been known as “flux cinema”<sup>5</sup> also propound an absence of distinction between figure and background in the sound specter (Vieira Jr, 2013, p. 492). By doing so, what Mascaro and Mendonça do in their films approaches them to an international cinema trend.

### THE SOUNDSCAPES IN MENDONÇA AND MASCARO

The sound analysis in cinema is usually divided into three registers: the soundtrack, the ambience or sound design, and the voice or dialogues (Berchmans, 2006; Carreiro & Alvim, 2016). Although we consider that in both films of our *corpus* low fidelity can be found in these three aspects, we will focus our analysis on the second one. It is the ambience that provides more data about this space constitution through the sound, at least if we have in mind the lo-fi concept of Schafer. Due to extension and time matters, we will concentrate the analysis on sonography, as suggested by the Canadian author. The procedure will be to select scenes in the two films, especially the ones that show urban and rural landscapes and register the occurrence of fundamental sounds, sound marks and signs. After that, we will consider what in the sequences could be figures and background, and how these elements interact in the scenes and in the comparison among them. We will also take into account the elements proposed by Chion: “from an image element, out of field or out of diagesis” (Carreiro & Alvim, 2016, p. 181), because we consider they can help to formulate the hypothesis of lo-fi in films. The last step would be the comparison of the thematically divided scenes between urban and rural, in order to try to understand how the works in question see this division proposed by Schafer.

There are two themes in the journalistic criticism that work as a moto for this work, which are the film sensitiveness and the concern with the technological mediations. When talking about *Ventos de agosto* for the newspaper *Estadão*, Oricchio (2014) points that what Gabriel Mascaro makes is “a sensorial cinema, from the body, no matter how important certain lines are”. This statement refers to what many movie reviews address in relation to a sense of disorientation in Mendonça, which “seems to surround and derive from the characters at the same time” (Nagib, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> According to Oliveira Jr’s dissertation (2010), the flux cinema is a tendency in international cinema, pointed by some theorists of abandoning the stiffness of the plans and of the *raccord*, and changing to a fluid *mise-én-scene*, of a contemplative look. Vieira Jr (2013) will address the existence of some of the traces of that aesthetic in the work of some Asian directors as Apitchapong Weerasethakul and Hou Hsiao-Hsien.

On the matter of technological ambience, some authors explain how Mendonça fills his film with other surfaces, making use of noise from diverse devices to create space. Dias explains: “at the same time that it is divided in three parts – ‘Cães de guarda’, [Guardian dogs] ‘Guardas noturnos’ [Night Guards] and ‘Guarda-costas’ [Body guards] –, *O som ao redor* can also be observed from these three recurring presences: fences, electronic devices and children” (Dias, 2016), highlighting the importance of devices in the film.

An interesting contribution comes from Geography. Costa proposes to think the urban soundscapes of *Recife Frio* (2009) and *O som ao redor* as dystopian spaces. From the author’s perspective, “the natural soundscape and in its diverse forms of representation, must be understood as a text” (2016, p. 2). Therefore,

the soundscape of a film is neither a neutral place for entertainment nor for objective documentation, and by no means a mirror of the real, but indeed it is a cultural and ideological creation where the meanings of places and societies are legitimized, questioned and obscured. (Costa, 2016, p. 8)

When Angela Prysthon comments about the soundscapes from the Northeast in the *Novo Cinema Pernambucano*, she comes to similar conclusions. In *Ventos de agosto*, for example, there is a cemetery at the beach shore that is usually robbed by the high tides, which creates a great inconvenience to the local dwellers who frequently bump into corpses that are brought back to the shore. In fact, this is a true story. Mascaro found it while visiting some villages when he was a documentarist. The authorities denied all efforts done by the community to stop the problem. The landscapes from this location show a paradisiac and distant Brazil, but having specific problems reinforced by the government detachment. It is a movie that derives from the bucolic, the technological (many devices are used by the dwellers, which break the own pace of the exuberant nature) and the sense of forgetfulness. About this film, Prysthon says:

the look over the field prevails, more specifically over the huge plantations from the coastal zone and the little fishermen villages and coastal beaches of the south of Pernambuco. The initial sequence (twenty minutes of very few plans, almost all of them from the plantations and the road) seem to emphasize the option of shrinking the human figure by the alienating and diffused general plan of the landscape: two adolescents, a boy and a girl, abandoned on a road up to the point of almost not perceiving where the human figures are, already absorbed by the environment. (Prysthon, 2017, p. 12)

Many texts from the journalistic fortune also address the work of the sound design in the two films (Hessel, 2013). Migliano and Lima (2013) deal with the issue of fear in the urban experience as represented by Kleber Mendonça Filho. We consider it interesting the way the authors see the sound as an integral part of the tension atmosphere, by even emulating the soundtrack from the horror genre (Migliano & Lima, 2013, p. 202).

At last, the article of Rocha (2013) is the one that gets the closest to our initial theoretical perspective. As starting from Schafer’s soundscape, and connected with

Rodríguez, de Sá, Chion, Wisnik, among others, Rocha traces this entire theoretical path to propose the sound as a sensorial experience in the film. We believe that it is possible to distinguish our work from contrasting with other authors that deal with the matters of technological mediations and the film space.

In *O som ao redor*, we observe that the lo-fi sound effect happens in three different ways: first, in the great majority of the scenes, it is not possible to distinguish if the sound comes from the inside or the outside; second, that are at least three scenes in the film that can be interpreted as the character's deliria, with the sound breaking the image and creating a surreal sensation; and finally, there are diverse mentions to soundtracks of director's horror movies (Migliano & Lima, 2013, p. 203), as John Carpenter and Dario Argento, promoting a clash of styles.

In order to better fitting our proposal, we decided to focus on the first occurrences style, although elements from the others might appear. For this reason, we chose scenes that are developed in Bia's plot, who is annoyed by the dog's (17'37"-24'00", 77'00"-81'32"; 45'55"-47'04"; 26'01"-30'01"). These scenes focus, inside the plot, the issue of the house invasion itself by street sounds, emphasizing the first scene. And in order to show contrast, the passage of João's oniric visit to the family's sugarcane property (66'40"-72'20"), scene that has hi-fi element, although it turns into noise in the end.

The initial fact to be noticed about the first scene we analyze in *O som ao redor* is a constant static in all Bia's house rooms, enlarging in some ambiances (the hall of the house, yard) and diminishing in others (living room, bedrooms), but always present. The noise can be explained as a sub product of electronic devices from the neighborhood (air-conditioning, electric fences, etc.). Schafer defined this "continuous lane of pink noise" (Schafer, 2001, p. 142), produced by air-conditioning as a sound wall. A volume of continuous sounds and broad intensity always brings, in the schafferian thought, the characteristic of isolating the world perception around us, serving as a tool of "audio-analgesia" (Schafer, 2011, p. 142).

Besides this noise, the soundscape of the scene is reasonably hi-fi. We can hear from the background, apart from the static, wind (18'26"-19'15"), birds (18'26"), children playing (21'14"), a bell ringing (19'21") and people talking (22'31", 22'40", 22'54", 23'02", 23'20"). In spite of having much information, this sound is the background, which is not invading the scene, as the dog barking in later scenes. This can be explained in the plot due to the objective to present Bia's problem with the dog in this moment. She happily observes while the dog sleeps in the neighbor's yard in certain moment (19'15"). In this way, we believe that the relative silence inside the scene (in five out of 16 instances noted by our record, there is no sound on the first plan) has the dramatic objective to establish a peaceful moment before the central conflict.

In the end of the scene (23'40"), Bia turns on the vacuum cleaner, as a way to disguise the smell of the pot cigarette. This is the moment when the noise of the vacuum cleaner leaks, occupying both figure and background. At this point it is interesting to realize how Mendonça fills his film also with other surfaces, by using different noise to form space: "from mobile phone to laptop, from the small screen to 40 inches TV,

from binoculars to radio amateur, from ultra sound against dogs to washing machines, diverse home appliances are presented during the two hours of the film” (Dias, 2016).

The second analyzed scene takes place inside the house, so there is no surprise in finding that most of the sound of the house is hi-fi. Silence is also present in the first plan (68’50”, 70’30”, 71’34”, 71’45”). The most revealing here (and what in some moments approaches to the sound design of low fidelity) are the extra diegetic sounds. When João and Sofia visit an abandoned cinema in a countryside town where it is located the sugarcane farm of Seu Francisco, who is João’s grandfather, a tension soundtrack begins (71’11”). The soundtrack by itself is an anomaly in the film, because the sounds usually come from sources within the story. In the sequence (71’34”), we can hear screams, first from a man and after from a woman. We notice a rupture in the realistic pact when Sofia makes a gesture (71’45”), there is a sharp cut in the soundtrack and we turn into silence. The screams are back later (72’24”), this time performed by João and Francisco in a waterfall next to Sofia. Then (72’27”) the third instance of extra diegetic sound appears. The camera shows João; there is a strong and dry noise and water turns into blood.

A new abrupt cut (72’31”), and we are inside João and Sofia’s bedroom, in Recife, giving the idea that it was just a dream.

In the comparison of the two scenes, the dichotomy urban/ lo-fi and rural/ hi-fi is less present that we expected, but it is necessary to consider the nature of the scenes. The first one, as being an introduction to a theme related to lack of fidelity in urban ambient theme, might be intended by the director to move the spectators little by little. The second is an oneiric scene, and therefore is not concerned in representing the ambient sound of the sugarcane farm, but means to cause a nightmare sensation, the same one that João’s character faces. Considering all, it is still possible to realize that the soundscape is considerably of less quality in Bia’s urban ambient. Although in both scenes the noises remain in the background, with little influence to what happens in the first plan, there is a bigger depth and even more diversity of the sounds of birds, for example, at João’s arrival to the sugarcane than in the best moments of Bia’s sequence. The statics, the noises from people talking, the children playing are louder than any other identified sound object in João’s dream, but by the extradiegetic sounds.

It is the beginning of the film that will demonstrate what to expect from the diegetic spaces in *Ventos de agosto*. From the opening scene (00’44-02’41”), we can already see a lonely character, lost in a natural immensity and silence only broken by the sounds of birds from a distance. It is interesting to note how the soundscape changes with the arrival of the sound technician, who comes to the community attracted by the winds that name the film. In this sense it is precisely the soundscapes and the images that will give the dimension of this atmospherically alteration. For instance, there are two moments (approximately in 01’07” and 58’29”) that the same soundscape is repeated, but each time in another ambient.

The sounds of the wind change, provoking another sensation of space. By doing so, as spectators we are informed about the way this internal world operates.

The opening of *Ventos de agosto* is marked by silence (0’38”-03’03”). Here we see Shirley driving a boat, leaving from the mangrove to a point at the sea, where she goes

to sunbathe and gets tanned. The soundscape is idyllic at first (0'59"). While Shirley navigates through the mangrove with the engine off, we can accurately hear the sound of birds and other animals. When the boat reaches the open sea (02'11"), we get to hear the engine noise, always out of the field, once the camera is set in the middle of the boat. An attentive listening observes the noise of the boat against the water. This is what evidences that the engines does not take all the sound space as it happens with Bia's vacuum cleaner, that is to say that there is still some sound depth. This depth is reduced in the following moment (02'56"), when Shirley sunbathes with a Coca-Cola can, listening to a battery radio. The Rolling Stones music then, takes the role of figure and background of the scene.

This cyclical design is common in *Ventos de agosto*, we only have to observe the sound graphs in any software to prove this interpretation true. In the two mentioned scenes, moments of silence and of incessant noise alternate. Sometimes, by means of gradation as in the first scene, at other times by simple alternation.

This is the second case of our pilot study. The sequence that refers to sound recording (31'34"-39'34") done by the nameless character, interpreted by the director himself, is possibly the noisiest of the whole film. There are altered times when the sound of the wind takes up the completely sound band, showing its strength (30'12", 31'30", 36'40", 37'01"), and those in which they are more calm (30'02", 31'02", 33'57") and other noises can be clearly heard.

An interesting detail is always to observe the movements the sound technician makes with the microphone in scene, and as a consequence, to the soundscape. There is a moment (35'14"), when he asks a village dweller where he could hear the winds better. Meanwhile, the young girl is listening to music coming from the radio inside her house. While they talk, we can clearly hear the dialogue as first plan and the music as background. When the conversation is over (35'40"), the technician takes two steps to one side and redirects the microphone to the house door. Then we hear the mechanical sound of the radio turning up suddenly, invading the first plan, which was previously from the dialogue, and now has become figure and background.

We can observe a similar effect when the technician records the sound of the tides in a stormy day (35'40"). All that we can hear in a moment is the back and forth of the waves. The technician is seated with the microphone aiming a hole on the rocks that is noisily filled up to the top and then the water moves back, by his side there is a fisherman from the community. Moving his arm (37'01"), the technician lifts the microphone towards the fisherman and asks about the "legend of the lungs of the rocks". After that follows the village dweller explanation about this phenomenon. His voice takes the space of the figure, the sounds from the ocean are not very audible in the background, as it is also low the technician's voice asking questions, but as he is behind the microphones, they can barely be heard.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

By this experience of analysis based in sonography, we have observed that the concept of lo-fi soundscape finds correspondence in these two films from the recent national production. We could also observe that the concept is closely connected (1) with the division between urban/rural within the plots, and with the consequent constitution of the film space and (2) with the presence of devices in the scene. The division between urban and rural is linked to the noises from outside the ambiances. It is also important to emphasize that in *Ventos de agosto* the urban figure is associated to the presence of technological devices and characters that lead to this landscape (such as the radio in the first scene or the sound technician arrival during the film). And these are the same noises that become scary in the city, since they leave no space for silence. The devices, either forming wall sounds as Bia's vacuum cleaner does, or serving as soundscape mediators as the statics near Bia's house, in *O som ao redor*, or from the microphone and the barometer caught of the sound technician in *Ventos de agosto*, they fill up the space of the soundscapes, establishing its lo-fi characteristics. The low fidelity, especially the one concerning figure and background, which would be Schafer's main characteristic is patent in a bigger or smaller level, at least in scenes related to a urban ambient and to technological mediations.

An important point to consider from this first approach between theory and object is in our opinion, the observation of methodological issues. The sound is naturally one of the most difficult analysis elements in the cinema. There is not a material to manipulate as in the case of images and texts. Especially concerning sound design, in which we are not referring to dialogues that can be scripted or transcribed, or from original or pre-existing songs, for which there is a whole musical theory vocabulary. In this sense, we are eager to contribute to the debate about these elements, that are not so quantifiable but fundamental in the sound design of audiovisual products.

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\* **Submitted: 30-11-2017**

\* **Accepted: 15-02-2018**