



# Class relations in contemporary Brazilian documentaries

*Relações de classe em documentários brasileiros contemporâneos*



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**Abstract:** This study investigates the way extra-filmic class relations inform and modulate documentaries, as well as discusses the notion of *outro de classe* in situations where bosses film their domestic servants. We analyze films of the contemporary Brazilian context such as *Santiago* (João Moreira Salles, 2007), *Nannies* (Consuelo Lins, 2010) and *Housemaids* (Gabriel Mascaro, 2012).

**Keywords:** social classes; documentary; domestic employees; contemporary Brazilian cinema.

**Resumo:** Este artigo propõe investigar como as relações de classe extra fílmicas informam e modulam obras documentais, além de promover uma discussão atualizada sobre a noção de “outro de classe” nas situações em que patrões filmam seus empregados domésticos. São analisados filmes do contexto brasileiro contemporâneo como *Santiago* (João Moreira Salles, 2007), *Babás* (Consuelo Lins, 2010) e *Doméstica* (Gabriel Mascaro, 2012).

**Palavras-chave:** classes sociais; documentário; emprego doméstico; cinema brasileiro contemporâneo.

In documentary cinema, in addition to the themes and subjects turned into image, the marks of the relationship between documentarians and documented are also painted, a relationship permeated by ingredients of power. An important element is often interposed between these two ends of the camera: the difference in social class. This modulator of relationships can be found in several cinemas – since *Workers leaving the Lumière factory* (Louis Lumière, 1895), made by the owners of the Lumière industry registering their own employees, the cinema is based on this relationship in which whoever holds the camera usually also has greater economic and social power. This is especially relevant in Brazil, a country of marked income inequality and with several conflicts, sometimes acute and sometimes veiled, between different classes. Jean-Louis Comolli (2010) discusses this relationship in the scope of the documentary, pointing out that, to understand the coordinates of a plan, it is necessary to take into account not only its spatio-temporal and political-historical conditions, but what happens between those who shoot and who is filmed. “I would say that if something is documented, it is this relationship” (COMOLLI, 2010, p. 339).

This article intends to question what happens when that cinematographic relation of power is juxtaposed with a social relation of power or, conversely, what happens when a pre-existing social relation of power is added to a cinematic relation of power.

These questions are aroused when the films *Nannies* (2010), a short film by Consuelo Lins, approached professionals who took care of the filmmaker, her children and friends; *Santiago* (2007), a feature film by João Moreira Salles, is named after the ex-butler of the director’s family; and *Housemaids* (Gabriel Mascaro, 2012), about domestic workers filmed by the teenage children of their employers. The first two share characteristics such as the strong subjective inflection, the essayistic character, the confessional narration in the first person and the coincidence between boss and filmmaker and will be analyzed in greater depth, while the third will add up with more punctual participations. Despite many differences, the three films bring the eyes of the bosses to domestic workers. It seeks to investigate to what extent extra-film class relations inform and modulate such documentary works, in addition to promoting an updated discussion on the notion of *outro de classe* (BERNARDET, 2003).

## Bosses and employees, filmmakers and filmed

The relations between bosses and domestic servants seem to have been constituted as one of the main strongholds of class relations in Brazilian cinema today<sup>2</sup>. If the current documentaries deal with a smaller proportion of shop floor workers, unionists or strikers in relation to capitalist bourgeoisies, or of northeastern immigrants, miserable and illiterate countrymen in relation to farmers or construction employers in large cities – as in *Viramundo* (1965), *Maioria absoluta* (1964), *ABC of a Strike* (1979-90), *Linha de montagem* (1982), *Braços cruzados, máquinas paradas* (1979), among others –, the domestic professions have been especially present. *Nannies*, *Santiago* and *Housemaids* approach employees who work inside the apartments, houses or buildings of middle and upper-class employers, configuring relationships that blur the boundaries between public and private space, professional and personal life, formality and intimacy. If, as Carla Barros points out, “intimacy acts, in a way, ‘diluting’ the dryness of power relations” (BARROS, 2007, p. 123), on the other hand it is capable of shuffling expectations, leaving subjects in unstable places, confused about rights and duties – “she is almost family,” says the old phrase. While softening orders, affective proximity masks hierarchies and disguises abuses of authority.

*Nannies* and *Santiago* start from images taken from archives, both personal and unrelated (be they photographs of children and their wet nurses, homemade filming or the raw material of a documentary filmed thirteen years ago) to weave an essay, an errant investigation, populated by uncertainties and drifts (BRASIL, 2010). In both films, the filmmakers peek, investigate and analyze, through personal experiences, power relations that extrapolate them.

Thus, we observed, when dealing with intimate stories, the possibility of mobilizing contrasts, distances and proximity between, on the one hand, elites and middle classes and, on the other, the lower classes. The films, which assume a *plongée* view of the Brazilian social pyramid, bear the mark of bad class conscience. In this sense, perhaps they are works mobilized by a desire to indemnify a historic debt. We cannot fail to notice that they appear as a certain novelty in Brazilian cinema not exactly because they are based on the elite’s perspectives, but because of their explicitness – inequality is confessed and the debt is dramatized.

<sup>2</sup>In fictions such as *Hard Labor*, *Neighbouring Sounds*, *The second mother*, relationships between bosses and domestic workers are also problematized, in otherness relationships that represent an intense feeling of discomfort, fear or paranoia – the threat of the *other of class* inside their home (SOUTO, 2019).

Both Consuelo Lins and João Salles seek to compensate for a previous invisibility by producing portraits of their interviewees, listening to them while revisiting their own mistakes and limits. In the narration, Salles expresses *mea culpa* when he says that, when capturing the images, he treated Santiago in an authoritarian way and did not pay attention when he wanted to share a secret. About a former nanny for his son, Lins says: “I couldn’t imagine a job that would force me to stay six days away from my son. I preferred not to think about her situation at that time.”

We see that, in working with archival images, the retaking evokes the moment of taking (LINDEPERG; COMOLLI, 2010), making clear a distance between the two times that is guided by a kind of evolution (EDUARDO, 2007). I did not listen before, now I do. Before I denied it, now I see it. Still, certain attempts at repair carry an ambiguity: to what extent do the positions of boss/employee approach or distance from those of documentary/documentated? To what extent are the working relationship and the belonging to opposite classes printed in the films? Even though employees are the protagonists and name the works, what is their true possibility of expression?

In this sense, we are interested in investigating, in *Nannies and Santiago*, the relationships between filmmakers and filmed subjects, mainly through the observation of the *mise-en-scène*, the crucial moment of interaction between the parties mediated by the camera and through editing. The latter has a decisive role in the films, which use images from other times, articulating the past (whether personal or national) and present and adding the layer of voice-over commentary. We also seek to consider the singularities of the essayistic/reflective form in documentary cinema.

*Nannies and Santiago*, as reflective documentaries, which think their own way and expose traces of their making, end up calling *elements out of the frame for the analysis*<sup>3</sup>, of what participates in the film production process, but which is generally not visible and is not even present in the scene. We do not think the out of frame only in the most practical sense of the backstage, as everything that is put on the set and ends up constraining the filming, but also, in a broader way, as the crossings, in the image, of macrodimensions as the extra-film power relations, the capitalist mode of production, the material relations that guide the whole process.

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<sup>3</sup>This concept is different from that of “off the field,” which although not seen, prolongs the field, being integrated into the film’s imaginary, still immersed in its illusion.

## *Nannies*

Throughout *Nannies*, Consuelo Lins observes, describes, speculates and notes the historical invisibility of nannies in the Brazilian context, analyzing some of their few appearances. For this analysis, she moves between macro and micro dimensions, investigating both national archives and her own life and that of her close ones. The filmmaker goes from her personal experiences – like her childhood, when she was cared for by nannies, such as the current employer whose son is assisted by them – to interviews with nannies of friends’ children, observation of working professionals, analysis of newspaper ads, archival photos and films spread throughout the 20th century. Observations and interviews with a variety of women in the present are linked to the craft of wet nurse in the colonial period, bringing out of this connection the perpetuity of social structures in Brazil, with its immense inequality and abuses in dealing with one social segment over another.

A voice, in a sweet, reflective and confessional tone, organizes and sews this extremely heterogeneous material. It is interesting to note that, both in *Nannies* and *Santiago*, the narrator speaks in the first person, but it is not the director’s own voice: *Nannies* is narrated by Flávia Castro, a filmmaker who is a friend of the director, while the voice in João Salles’s film is his brother Fernando’s. It is an “outsourced first person,” as noted by Ilana Feldman (2013) regarding *Santiago*, but which also applies to *Nannies*.

Although varied, the material used in the film goes in the same direction of attesting the nannies’ invisibility in the production of familiar images. The documentary seems to have its existence motivated by the desire to compensate for this historical failure, a desire that seems to be driven by a feeling of guilt and by the attempt to compensate for an infringement.

Consuelo Lins describes relationships critically, interprets images with insight. With the strength of all her method, she confirms an injustice; in this sense, she is involved in the attempt to minimize it. In her reflection, however, we hardly notice a search for the reasons for the said invisibility. We only know that it is a phenomenon of ancient, historical roots, which is repeated until contemporary times, although with updates and transformations.

Faced with this complex relationship, Lins regrets rather than asks in depth – the anomalies of a *status quo* are revealed, now we can make some compensations. There are moments when the director frankly exposes her limitations, her refusals, as in the report about Denise, who spent six days without seeing her daughter to care for the director’s son.

Noticing the gap between the treatment that the nannies should receive and the one that they actually receive, Consuelo Lins seems mobilized to produce, herself, the portraits (in motion) that these women possibly never had. In a given sequence (Figure 1), the director films five nannies who have worked with her over the years. They are placed side by side, facing the camera, in a frame that takes them in full length, while a voice-over narration says: “Vera Lúcia, Denise, Vera, Creuza, Andrea. I couldn’t say here how much these girls have helped me in many moments of my life.” After that sentence, there is a cut. The nannies, who were in their own clothes, colorful and different from each other, now wear white, still occupying the same layout in the space. The voice continues: “*With my son and my nephews, with the house, with the food, with the shopping, with the comings and goings of the children.*” This passage in a way mimics the process of transforming *girls*, who have their own names, subjectivities, individualities and personal preferences, into uniformed *nannies* (not just in clothing), who have roles and responsibilities when they enter the employers’ homes.



Figure 1: Frame from *Nannies*.

As much as Consuelo Lins tried to offer attention and gratitude to the girls who were excluded from the family’s images in previous years, thus seeking to reestablish a balance in the unequal power relations, her portraits in this film may prolong a *mise-en-scène* guided by relationship of obedience, the designation of a body to a specific space, a request for posture, for a dress, for a look. The position of boss here seems to be confused with that of director. At one point, the narrator says: “I didn’t feel comfortable interviewing those who still work with me. I thought that these conversations could be compromised by the employer-employee situation. But I talked to the nannies of friends and acquaintances.” It is true that the interviews with the contractors themselves could be compromised by social roles, but the conversation with the nannies of friends is not exempt from similar crossings.

The director is not only the boss of her nanny but has a kind of social status as the boss, carrying the marks of one social class with an advantage over another.

This process of “whitening” the clothes, homogenizing and turning “aseptic” the employees is often accompanied by an erasure of personality traits, differences, the sphere of personal relationships outside the work environment, especially for those who sleep at the service. It is as if these women existed solely because of their jobs, having usurped some spheres of their life, such as the possibility of a loving relationship or the development of a family of their own. In the ads, nannies are sought “without commitment”; some report their employers’ protests when they learn of their wedding plans.

Such choices, limits and difficulties are, in fact, symptomatic of a film steeped in Brazilian culture. If, on the one hand, direct involvement in the subject of the documentary brings many reflections, an authentic view from within, on the other hand it can also act as a hindrance in problematizing certain issues. Although it is courageous that guilt and bad conscience become manifest, they some way end up compromising the confrontation of causes and discomfort. Without a more interrogative reflection, more prone to displacing subjects and knowledge from their places, some cultural traits, so ingrained, end up repeating themselves, perhaps unconsciously, maintaining hierarchies and distances when the purpose was precisely to break them.

## ***Santiago***

In 1992, João Moreira Salles filmed Santiago, the butler who worked for many years at his family’s mansion in Rio de Janeiro. Eccentric, with an extraordinary memory and a taste for the aristocracy, Santiago was a retired Argentine gentleman who was about 80 years old. At the time, Salles was dissatisfied with the editing and abandoned the project without finalizing it. Thirteen years later, he revisited the material and rethought the entire process, focusing especially on the way in which he treated the butler and on the confusion between the roles of boss/documentarian and character/employee. In 2007, he launched *Santiago – a reflection on the raw material*.

*Santiago* is, therefore, a film in two moments. The editing starts from a perspective envisioned by the present to peer into the past. The images from thirteen years ago are questioned, examined, analyzed in themselves and behind the scenes, since dead times, silences, instructions, mistakes and repetitions of the first are made known in this second film. Salles intends to reveal what would remain



hidden, hidden from the viewer's judgment, who would have access only to the "well-finished product," with trimmed edges. The invisible threads of the direction of actors, which the ordinary viewer often considers to be non-existent in the documentary, are brought up by this decision. In the narration: "My mother used to say: 'Santiago makes the most beautiful flower arrangements I know'. Today I don't know why, but I asked Santiago to talk to me about flowers standing up and looking at the wall." The real character was asked for a body posture, a speech, a look. In another moment: "Stay in that position, think a little about your grandmother, my mother... now go back to that position." Another very direct request, this time including a request for interiorization, as if the introspection and remembrance of the mother and grandmother facilitated the arrival of an expected feeling for that scene, the effect of a fictional interpretation technique.

In the review of the raw material, the calculated choices and the strong control of the director over the performance of the subject are clear, leaving little scope for the character's spontaneous expression. There was no room for discovery, for a real and open meeting with the ex-butler. At the confluence of class relations and cinema relations, narrating oneself oriented, directed, framed, stifled and interrupted may have deprived the former employee of the gesture of revealing himself to shed light on a cut defined by the former boss; what is manifested to the camera is almost only what he already knew and found interesting. There remains a feeling that the images did not yield in 1992 because João Salles considered that the character would not be enough to sustain a film. In his view, it was necessary that the film was also about himself (João) and about the cinema itself in order to guarantee interest and justify a documentary. The work, after all, received the subtitle of *a reflection on the raw material* – not a reflection on the person.

Right at the beginning, the narrator says: "Santiago died a few years after this shoot. He left 30 thousand pages and 9 hours of filmed material, in addition to my memory and the memory of my brothers." This is a narration made in the present, a time that is presented as if all the neglect and contempt that weighed on Santiago had been overcome. However, the wording suggests the existence of Santiago due to the Moreira Salles family, as if his life could be apprehended quantitatively, in pages, hours and in the memories of the contractors. Would not Santiago have also remained in other people's memories? Would not he have left other marks that the director did not even consider looking for?

The edges of the 1992 film, the fragments that would be dispensed in the editing, are transmuted into the motto of the 2007 film. A kind of inversion takes place

in which João Salles' attention turns to the backstage, to the outside of the frame, leaving the character himself and his stories, previously central, almost relegated to the margins; the center becomes the margin, the margin becomes the center. It is still a contradiction in which, in order to give due importance to Santiago, it is necessary to take some of the importance out of Santiago. This ends up being the counterpart for a mistake to be unveiled, an injustice to be exposed, a retraction to be made.

One of the remains of the image, which is not directly addressed by João Salles, but remains in both films, is the melancholy of Santiago. Twice the ex-butler says, commenting on moments of great personal satisfaction, that he could not say he was happy, "*pero muy content.*" His facial expressions, his loneliness, the secret he kept, all of this leads us to think about his unhappiness, which was not investigated by the filmmaker in filming (but partially in editing, when he dwells on poems, for example).

In another scene, Santiago reports that he was called on a toast for his birthday, in the middle of a boss' party: "that was the biggest prize for me. I celebrated my birthday with French champagne," as he was working there during his vacation, summoned by his employer, at a party for someone else. Santiago is extremely proud to be greeted by important people, who frequent the Moreira Salles mansion. As much as he expresses contentment, the exceptional character of these "small recognitions" is clear there, revealing the size of the inequality.

Santiago was fascinated by the nobility. He appreciated classical culture, fine arts, ceremony, luxury and pomp. He writes endless pages narrating the history of the universal aristocracy, focusing on the biography of kings, princes, marquises and counts. But even in his fantasies and delusions of grandeur, he still sees himself as an employee – of rich people, but an employee. He has an interest in the servants of yore, those who served the great figures and personalities. He was raised by his grandmother, who had been "chaperone to a Piedmontese marquise," revealing a lineage that preceded him, explaining the historical permanences of the division between lords and servants.

Near the end of the film, João presents a crucial reflection that provokes the viewer to reread the film under another key. The narrator says, in the first person:

This is the last shot I did with Santiago. It allows me to make a final observation. There are no closed plans in this film, no face close-up. He is always distant. I think that the distance was not by chance. Throughout the edition, I understood what now seems evident. The way I conducted the interviews took me away from him. From the beginning, there was an

insurmountable ambiguity between us that explains Santiago's discomfort. It is just that he was not just my character; I was not just a documentary filmmaker. During the five days of filming, I never stopped being the owner of the house's son and he never stopped being our butler. (SANTIAGO, 2007)

This reflection is postponed by the film, delayed to the last moments as if to crown it. In it there is a content of *insight*, of final revelation – the discovery of something that has the power of retroactive explanation. Salles condenses a thought about extra-film power relations and the way they cross the cinematographic language, modulating frames, for example. We can see that the compositions that involve Santiago actually put him at a distance, always with different objects as obstacles between him and the camera (Figure 2). In addition to the fact that the film is in black and white, one has the impression that Santiago is as if camouflaged among the other objects, almost as if he were mixed with the scenery. Instigating is also the choice of the kitchen as the main space of the film. If it were at the bosses' house it would make more sense, but inside his own house? Social distances, distances of the cinema.



Figure 2: Frame from *Santiago*.

### The ancestors

The network that connects *Nannies* to *Santiago* comes from far away. Perhaps it started with the workers filmed by the bosses Lumière, in what is considered

the first film projected in the history of cinema – *Workers leaving the Lumière factory* works, here, as an almost archetypal reference. We imagine that the three are part of a constellation of films, that cross times and countries, in which bosses film employees, presenting images split by power relations<sup>4</sup>.

*Workers leaving the Lumière factory* (1895) was filmed in three versions, with differentiation in clothing and closing the gates, which is not complete in some of them. Because of this repetition of plans, the choreography of the characters that come out harmoniously to the right and to the left, and also because of the few glances at the camera, we understand that this is a rehearsed action, to a certain extent, directed. There was an attempt to complete the action (start, middle and end, ended by closing the gates) within the duration of the plan, that is, the workers were probably instructed to hurry up. What we understand as “out of the picture” is symbolized by the workers at the Lumière factory who need to run to “fit” in a single roll of film.

In *Workers leaving the factory* (1995), Harun Farocki examines a set of archival images – from different sources – of workers leaving the industry. In the narration, his voice searches for this visual motif so repeated in iconography. About the Lumières’ images, Farocki comments: “From this first projection, the workers’ haste to leave is left in memory, as if something was pulling them. Nobody stays on the factory grounds.” Soon the documentary filmmaker advances to three other contexts of images, saying:

1975 in Emden, just outside Volkswagen. Workers run as if something is pulling them out.

1926 in Detroit: workers run as if they have already wasted too much time.

Again in Lyon, 1957. They run as if they know where everything is better. (ARBEITER..., 1995)

Speed can be understood in two ways: whether it is inflicted by the boss in search of greater productivity in less time, or that which comes from the worker himself, anxious for freedom and the compensation of lost time dedicated to the generation of wealth that will not be his. After the long hours of work, you have to run to enjoy your own short time.

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<sup>4</sup> *In the intense now* (2017), the most recent film by João Moreira Salles, could join this constellation. The documentary takes up and thematizes the short film by Lumière, previously just a ghost in *Santiago*. In addition, it begins with a discussion of a nanny’s archival image.

A century after the Lumière, haste is also a recurring point in the shooting of the butler Santiago. João Salles and his team, in 1992, constantly rushed the character, made him tell his stories and memories with speed, and was interrupted without any ceremony. In one scene, Santiago needs to recite a Latin prayer in a rush due to the team's running time and the economics of filming, since they were shot on film, an expensive material. In another, he receives the following instruction from João Salles: "Tell me that story about the paintings, that you closed your eyes and Monet became Piero della Francesca... but tell us that quickly." Later, when, in the middle of his speech, Santiago mentions João – "Joãozinho, wonderful, João Moreira Salles" –, the director interrupts him and says, rectifying: "Tell again without mentioning my name, go! Go on. Tell the story quick because we're in a hurry. No, you can go, go!". Santiago talks with such speed that he almost stumbles over words. With some frequency, we hear the voices of the two overlapping, as if João did not wait for Santiago to finish speaking and gave orders over his testimonies, cutting and "correcting" his speech as it went on, to conform it to his designs<sup>5</sup>.

Could the interruptions and the pressure that the filmmaker exerts by shortening the speech times of the characters be taxed to the specificity of the meeting between directors and characters united by work relationships prior to the making of the film? Would the relationship, the deal between the parties, be different if there was no such link?

Both the viewer and the character themselves are led to imagine that the price/duration of the film or the agenda of the filmmaker are more important than his speech, even if he is the protagonist. In a classic demonstration of the mode of operation of capitalism – which here merges with the operation of the cinematographic device –, the boss's time is worth more than the worker's time.

It is said that the first version of *Workers leaving the Lumière factory* was filmed in March. For the others, besides the assumption of European summer, the date is not known. From the workers' clothes, possibly more formal than those worn at work, it is assumed that they were called to the factory (not to say "invited" or "summoned") one day in June, the Sunday after Mass. Whether they were paid for this "activity" or even if they had the choice not to attend, we can only speculate. In the free and inventive narration of *The Lumière brothers' first films* (1996),

<sup>5</sup> Interruptions and disregard for the employee's time are also seen in *Housemaids*: in the middle of a delicate interview in which the employee Dilma shares painful episodes of her personal and conjugal life, the phone rings and the girl, Perla, leaves to answer it, interrupting the moment and leaving the lone interviewee to wait. In this film, however, the interruption is made by teenagers, subjects less aware of the posture expected from a professional documentary filmmaker in an interview situation.

the historian and filmmaker Bertrand Tavernier comments on the images: “*Lumière puts his camera in front of his factory and asks, begs, orders his employees to leave*” (we emphasize the triple repetition of the possessive pronoun: *his* camera, *his* factory, *his* employees).

In *Santiago* and *Nannies* (but also in *Housemaids*), we have class relations no longer in a factory environment, but in a domestic one – which is really symptomatic of a historical passage, from the focus of labor relations from an industrial to a post-industrial context. The scenarios change, however there remains something of the uncertainty of limits and boundaries in class relations, an appropriation of surplus value by the capitalist who extrapolates time and space due to work.

*Workers leaving the Lumière factory*, *Santiago* and *Housemaids* (and *Nannies*, in parts) are carried out not exactly by the boss, but by the boss’s son, the “young master,” the “heir,” an emblematic figure. In the popular imagination, the character of the “owner’s son” is usually attributed to the capricious character, the one who is born rich, who does not work and to whom the employees owe obedience and satisfaction of their wishes. At the same time, he can be a sympathetic figure, sometimes raised more by the employees than by the parents themselves and with whom the employees form more affectionate and less distant relations than with the bosses, the *de facto* contractors.

This could result in an understanding, on the part of the employees, of the film itself as the whim of the owner’s son to which they must yield and obey. The question of the character’s consent, an important theme in the field of documentary ethics, is highlighted. It is very likely that the characters/employees do not feel free to deny participation in the films, understanding this activity as another one of their contract assignments, an unpaid overtime. Their body belongs to the boss, their image does not belong to them. If the film is a burden, acting is one more task. In *Housemaids*, Gabriel Mascaro exposes in the editing the moment when one of the teenagers approaches the maid Lucimar, asks if he can film her, to which the girl simply answers “yes” and signs the term of image transfer without even reading it, her hands still wet from washing dishes.

However, some loopholes reveal possibilities of resistance in the face of this power that sounds inescapable: images of the characters with expressions of boredom, tiredness or embarrassment populate these films, as well as elusive responses or silences, which exposes the viewer to a condition of dissatisfaction or disgust. And the viewer remains with an uneasy feeling of connivance, for being the recipient of a film about a character who might not want to be filmed in the first place. This is the case,

for example, of the employee Sérgio<sup>6</sup>, in *Housemaids*, clearly uncomfortable with the filming, which seems to feel like an invasion. Santiago often expresses annoyance and sadness at the denials of his questions and suggestions, the harsh orders and the sudden cuts by João Salles. There is a significant difference between them: in the case of Santiago, it was Salles' option to maintain these "resistances" in the editing – and it is only through this decision that this discussion is possible; in the case of *Housemaids*, Mascaro is the one who works them, in spite of the teen bosses. It is an instance of detachment that allows the employees' displeasure to be seen and themed in the finished film: in the case of João Salles, a time of maturation after the filming; in the case of *Housemaids*, Mascaro's intervention on the images filmed by the teenagers. Otherwise, everything would be easily hidden and would not reach the viewer. It is the directors' bad conscience that allows their emergence.

These are films marked by a great contradiction. On the one hand, employees are honored. Although not intentional, the Lumière factory workers were somehow immortalized by cinema. Santiago was "embalmed" (a term used by the film itself) by João Salles. Consuelo Lins promotes portraits, once rare, of women so ignored for centuries. Therefore, there is the homage, the interest, the reverence for the characters, supposedly saved – by the cinema – from social injustice and erasure. However, despite their intentions, they are works in which a situation of domination is prolonged, which repeat in the cinema a social *mise-en-scène* guided by the relationship of obedience, the designation of a body in a certain space, a request for immobility, for a pose, for a costume. The position of filmmaker in front of these filmed subjects does not seem to be so different from that of boss, after all.

Therefore, such films are not just about the workers at the Lumière factory, about Santiago, about the seven maids or about the nannies. They are documents, records of power relations, of the submission of beings by others, of different forms of exploitation, of masked violence. In this sense, seeing so many points repeating themselves in this trajectory of more than a century of cinema, from the cinematographer of the Lumière to the digital device films, helps to glimpse the complexity of the issue and to understand a little more the ways in which cinema is crossed by class relations. It is important to note that in all these cases, even with the camera in the hands of the pole that holds more power, the films allow asymmetries and hierarchies to be inscribed, sometimes even despite their thematization and recognition by the participants.

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<sup>6</sup>Sérgio and Santiago represent an exception in Brazil: male domestic workers.

### The *outro de classe*?

In *Cineastas e imagens do povo*, Jean-Claude Bernardet (2003) alludes to the *outro de classe* to refer to the type of otherness treated in the films of the 1960s that he addresses. Proletarians and peasants constituted “the other” in relation to filmmakers and the public, who shared roots in the middle strata. Not just any other, therefore; the class difference was the main crossing in question.

For Bernardet (2003), the transition to films that aimed at the middle class hindered the constitution of this “other” because they belonged to the filmmaker and the public. There was no longer the same distance, the same possibility of objectivity. “This turning on oneself makes the film oscillate between the scientific stance, which institutes the other, and identification. Looking into the mirror disturbs the method” (BERNARDET, 2003, p. 60). That is why, at a much later time, we come across *Nannies*, *Santiago* and *Housemaids*, films that target *outro de classe* in the domestic sphere. In some way, there is also a mirror there to disturb the process, because this other directly links those who shoot: when recording the employee in a film that somehow addresses the work, the boss is inevitably summoned, not to say sucked in. Their place also ends up being questioned and problematized, opening up a propitious field for self-reflection and positioning. In the conclusion of *Cineastas e imagens do povo*, whose first publication dates from 1985, Bernardet talks about the unfolding of the sociological model, its crisis and the transition to other forms. Films appear that more centrally position the intellectual, anguish and questions. In this regard, he points out:

This movement has two effects: on the one hand, it contributes to relativize the discourse of the documentary filmmaker and, on the other hand, puts it in the foreground. This foreground, which may involve a desire for narcissism (.....), is at the same time an indication of the limits of this discourse. Working on their speech, the documentary filmmaker takes the stage, under the spotlight, instead of pulling the strings behind the scenes, and for this very reason invites us to perceive and reflect on their class position. (BERNARDET, 2003, p. 219)

Of course, Bernardet did not have in mind the films that we discuss here, but it is interesting to see how his speech takes on the tone of a prediction, attentive to some of the directions that cinema was gradually taking. In the mid-1970s, we moved from more expository films, with a more formatted and rigorous language, to more fragmented, ambiguous, reflective works. On the other hand, in his opinion,



some of them did not have the radical character, the spirit of research and search that the films of his analysis presented. If the former gave little voice to the other, fitting it into a previously established speech, the latter did not guarantee the other's appearance either. The freer language also ended up falling into a formula, a routine that revealed little. In no case did the other take the floor, which was only lent to them. Although there were films that were less anchored in univocal knowledge, less centralizing, with the possibility of making a pluricentrism appear, Bernardet notes, categorical: "They overturned the documentary filmmaker's pedestal. So did the other arise? I answer: no" (BERNARDET, 2003, p. 217).

But it is a very specific *outro de classe*, one that depends financially on the filmmaker. How to deal with this filmic alterity with whom the roof is sometimes divided? Previous domestic work relationships often make it difficult for the subjects filmed to be actual interlocutors. If we understand the "other" as a pair, it is difficult to accept the expression *outro de classe* without discomfort for these cases. Surrounded in their expression, interrupted, they often do not manage to constitute themselves as one endowed with speech, in a reciprocal relationship. There is no establishment of equality or parity. There is no dialogue at the same level.

In studies of otherness, whether in the midst of anthropology or communication, the other appears as the one from which I define myself, the one I need to know who I am. The other is a constitutive element of the self, since identity and otherness are inseparable pairs (FRANÇA, 2002; LANDOWSKI, 2002). Alterity and identity are forged together. This is not a simple and harmonious process; the way we relate to the other does not entirely pass through consciousness. There, hidden affections permeate, mixed reactions between assimilation and exclusion, identifications, projections.

How to welcome the other in the image? Although not always peaceful, relationships of otherness are often understood as positive and uplifting, conceived in a romanticized way, as part of a process of parity in which the two ends benefit from a reciprocal exchange. But that is not always the case.

João Moreira Salles (2001), in a text for Folha de São Paulo before launching *Santiago*, when speaking of the delicate situation of the Brazilian documentary filmmaker of "someone favored filming who is not," understands that some degree of social guilt ends up becoming an ingredient of the relationship: "the result is that, most of the time, the documentary filmmaker starts to like them, which means to be condescending, or to feel sorry, which is worse, because it turns people into victims" and, according to the director, victims are hardly interlocutors.

A great disparity in the relationship often causes the figures of this *outro de classe* to be crossed by different elements: bad conscience, paternalism, commiseration, authoritarianism, harshness, negligence.

In *Can the subaltern speak?* (2010), Gayatri Spivak raises awareness for the complicity of the intellectuals who think they can speak for the other, but who, after all, reproduces structures of power and oppression by keeping the other silenced. Without being offered a speaking position, a space from which to speak and in which to be heard, the other ends up being only the object of knowledge of an intellectual who wishes to speak for him/herself. The author's position is made explicit in the preface by Sandra Almeida (2010, p. 16) when she says that the speech process is characterized by a transaction between speaker and listener and that Spivak concludes that "this dialogical space of interaction never materializes for the subaltern subject who, divested of any form of agency, in fact, cannot speak." "Speech," here, should not be taken in its literality, as mere vocalization, because the question that arises is the real possibility of interlocution, of alternating listening, of a speech that comes by free expression and desire, and not entirely subjected to a demand from others.

This work is not a defense of the abandonment of the expression *outro de classe*, which has both relevance and analytical power, but a desire to highlight its nuances and tension it, demonstrating how, depending on the way it is marked out, sometimes it does not reach the description of what is happening. The *outro de classe* in the films in which bosses film their domestic servants is endowed with some singularities, sometimes marked by a certain silence, sometimes by the prolongation of the obedience relationship. Animated by feelings of justice, gratitude and recognition mixed with a little narcissism, but also by the possibility of elaborating and reinventing documentary language, these are films that have their strength, the merit of addressing little-said issues and a capacity for cinematic seduction, but which are the target of our mistrust here – suspects with regard to the real dialogue, the situation of parity and the construction of true listening.

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