



Public fears in private places: the horror in Kleber Mendonça Filho's films

Medos públicos em lugares privados: o horror nos filmes de Kleber Mendonça Filho



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Abstract: The article uses filmic analysis to investigate three films by Brazilian director Kleber Mendonça Filho: *Vinil verde* (2004), *Som ao redor* (2012) and *Aquarius* (2016), seeking to identify the use of elements characteristic of the horror genre at different moments in these three works. The recurrence of these elements in the director's films and the way they relate to other representation regimes situate this production within a contemporary cinematographic trend already pointed out by researchers such as Cánepa (2013).
Keywords: horror; contemporary cinema; Brazilian cinema.

Resumo: O artigo investiga três filmes do diretor brasileiro Kleber Mendonça Filho, *Vinil Verde* (2004), *O Som ao Redor* (2012) e *Aquarius* (2016), buscando identificar, por meio da análise fílmica, o uso de elementos característicos do gênero cinematográfico do horror em diferentes momentos destas três obras. A recorrência destes elementos nos filmes do diretor e o modo como eles se relacionam com outros regimes de representação localizam essa produção dentro de uma tendência cinematográfica contemporânea já apontada por pesquisadores como Cánepa (2013).

Palavras-chave: horror; cinema contemporâneo; cinema brasileiro.

Introduction

In Kleber Mendonça Filho's cinema, it is possible to identify a dialogue with such popular audiovisual genres as science fiction and horror. The horror genre makes up works such as the short film *A menina do algodão* (2002) and appears more occasionally in *Vinil verde* (2004), *O Som ao redor* (2012) and *Aquarius* (2016).

According to David J. Russell (1998), despite the ease with which critics and the general public recognize a horror film, the exact limits of its definition as a cinematographic genre is something that has gradually become more difficult. Of fundamental importance for the area, the reflections of authors such as Noel Carroll (1999) and Linda Williams (1991)³, when compared, reflect this difficulty. Carroll and Williams single out different elements in their overall gender categorization efforts.

Russell (1998) argues that these difficulties can be partly explained by the very changeable nature of the genre, which seeks entertainment through fright and surprise. The difficulties encountered by theorists are encapsulated by Russell in an analogy in which the author describes the repertoire of distinctive elements of horror as beasts too ferocious to be contained in the “cages” of genre theories. Horror, therefore, would be prone to mutations in a rich and chaotic ecosystem of signs.

It is possible to observe in contemporary cinema, both in Brazil and in the world context, that, attentive to this fluidity, certain directors appropriate and incorporate elements that are admittedly horrific in a very free way in their films. Horror starts to be incorporated in these films in an asymmetric dialogue with other genres. It can be said that a “horrific way” is triggered (CAETANO, 2018), that is, horror as a more adjective representation mode than its generic counterpart⁴.

³ Noel Carroll is the author of *The philosophy of horror or paradoxes of the heart* (1990), a book in which he proposes a configuration of horror from the figure of the monster and the physiological and emotional reactions of horror caused by its presence in the narrative; Linda Williams is the author of the famous text *Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess* (1991), in which she argues that horror is linked to a series of resources capable of providing the spectator with sensations experienced by the bodies of the characters represented, which would configure a process of mimicry.

⁴ The term is derived from Peter Brooks' concept of “melodramatic mode”. In his book *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (1976), Peter Brooks conceptualizes the melodramatic mode in literature and theater as a lexicon of attitudes, phrases and gestures with a tendency to extreme dramatization and excess.

The Kleber Mendonça Filho' films selected in this article make similar use of characteristics typical of the cinematographic horror genre, in this case to expose social and racial conflicts that are superficially "pacified" by a fragile cordiality. This dynamic of sociability based on clientelism and patrimonialism characterizes the relationship between different classes and races in Brazil (SALES JÚNIOR, 2006).

Laura Cánepa identifies the use of a similar expedient in other national films, such as *Os inquilinos* (Sergio Bianchi, 2009) and *Trabalhar cansa* (Juliana Rojas and Marco Dutra, 2011), suggesting a trend in contemporary Brazilian cinema of "borderline experiences" with the genre, comparable to the work of directors like Michael Haneke, and the American David Lynch. In these films there would be "the more or less evident use of horror-style resources," which might allow them "to contribute to the understanding of aspects of the social and individual tensions in our country" (CÁNEPA, 2013, p. 37).

Such expedient invites the spectator to identify with the characters' perception that something terrible can happen at any moment, although the promise does not always come true. As Cánepa (2013) recalls, this sharing of tension is one of the most important characteristics of horror stories. But the author ponders that there is something different between the experiences produced by these films and those of more conventional works of the genre: the nature of the "terrible event" that lurks around the characters and the plot is not necessarily related to supernatural forces or to characters portrayed as "psychopaths." In these Brazilian films, the terrible element has a more diffuse and ambiguous character, suggesting a relationship with structural and historical issues of Brazilian society (CÁNEPA, 2013, p. 37).

Cánepa calls this axis "social horror," that is, films that explore a more diffuse perception of horror, where generational anxieties and national issues gain a hybrid approach with the horror universe:

In some ways, social inequality, the lack of perspectives and the legacy of slavery, treated throughout the history of Brazilian cinema in several keys (ironic, melodramatic, revolutionary, police, etc.) have gained, in these films, approaches from the point of view of an atmosphere of horror. Obviously, not of the horror genre, but of that understood as a representation of what we feel in the face of threats of explosions of violence. (CÁNEPA, 2013, p. 37)

It is precisely at this point that perhaps a different view is being born, not only of these Brazilian ailments, but also of the very use and modulation of horror in cinema. Many of these films propose new approaches to the country's perennial social issues. This article is dedicated to reflecting on the specificity of the approach proposed by Kleber Mendonça Filho in his works.

The limits of popular misdemeanor in *Vinil Verde* and *Um Som ao Redor*

In 2004, Kleber Mendonça Filho released the short film *Vinil verde*, in which he narrates, through photographs, the surreal and unusual journey of a mother who loses a part of her body every time her daughter listens to a particular little green disc. The girl had been warned never to play it, but she continues to listen to the record during the afternoons she spends alone at home. The film's diegesis betrays the apparent reproduction of the real-world logic, by introducing inexplicable events and disconcerting images. As the unusual process of losing both arms that the mother suffers in the plot is naturalized by the narrative, it can be said, therefore, that the film falls into the fantastic genre.

However, a specific scene uses many conventions of the horror genre, in order to cause strangeness in the daughter's character, as well as in the spectator. In this scene, a pair of green rubber gloves walk around the apartment where the characters live, with the apparent aim of suffocating the girl.

The scene, which mixes fairytale iconography/illusion tricks (inanimate objects coming to life) with elements of the horror genre (dismembered bodies, attacks during sleep, screams of terror), is motivated by the mother's last request to her daughter: that she never wore gloves of this color. The strange request, whose only correlation with the previous events is the gloves' green color, the same as the disc's, and the fact that, after this scene, the fantastic diegesis of the film is restored, suggests a reading in the allegory key.

In this sense, the horror scene of the green gloves chasing the girl can be understood as the resurgence of something still unknown in the daughter's infantile universe, but which appears during her growth process: the infeasibility of her transgressive posture, illustrated by the misdemeanor of hearing the disc. The girl, the daughter of a single mother, who lives in the Casa Amarela region, on the outskirts of Recife, who is left unattended at home while her mother is working, repeatedly disobeys her mother's orders.

The repetition of the misdemeanor and its tragic consequences seem to allow at least two readings: the first, of a more moralizing basis, which associates the girl's disobedience with a tragic destiny of repeating her mother's life trajectory; and the second, of a more critical social character, which diagnoses the girl's misdemeanor as a fruitless effort, since it would be barred by the "inescapability" of her social condition. Regardless of these two reading options, the structuring of the narrative based on static images and the repetition of an action (listening to the disc every afternoon) seems to mobilize the same social comment: the difficulty of social mobility that condemns generations of Brazilians to poverty. It also suggests an association between the girl's growth and domestic service based on the metonymic element of green latex gloves. The domestic service profession is directly associated in Brazil with the dynamics of exploitation and the impossibility of social ascension of the poorest sections of the population:

The economic exploitation of cheap labor allows the middle class not only to "steal" the time of the "rabble of new slaves" – engaged in the repetitive and stressful functions of domestic service and heavy and dangerous service in general –, but also to use it later in better paid tasks for their own benefit. (SOUZA, 2018, p. 60)



Figure 1: Unsettling images – the mother returning home without both arms and the gloves that come to life during the child's sleep.

The association between horror resources and situations that reflect acts of transgression also occurs in a sequence of *Um Som ao redor*, Kleber Mendonça Filho's first feature film. The film narrates the daily life of a Recife neighborhood in which residents find themselves in a spiral of paranoia due to urban violence and latent tension with the employees who work in their homes. In one scene, a housemaid and Clodoaldo, the security guard in the neighborhood where the film takes place, get into a local house to have sex. The "invasion" was possible because the house's owner had left the keys with the security guard so that he could take care of the maintenance of the house in his absence. Upon entering, there is a tension between the guard's concern not to leave traces of his movements on the spot and the maid's

transgressive attitude, who insists on using household utensils and the main bedroom. During the conflict, we hear the telephone of the house ring, putting back, through the sound, the unavoidable presence of the other of a higher class, the house's owner.

After some resistance, the security man meets the employee's request and the two go upstairs, where Clodoaldo first photographs the room and then starts to exchange caresses with his guest, on the bed of the absent owner. We continue to hear the phone ring, as the camera seems to move slowly, losing interest in the two characters, and zooms in on the hallway of the house. In next to no time a figure looms through the door, together with a characteristic sound of moments of surprise in horror movies. The characters do not see it, nor do they hear the sound, which is extradiegetic, so that the strange element is intended only for the spectator's reading. The figure of a black boy, wearing only white cotton pants and barefoot, reminds us of the figure of a slave. There is the insertion of another plane, in order to guarantee the capture of the ghostly figure, who moves around the house. One wonders if he was heading to the room to answer the phone.

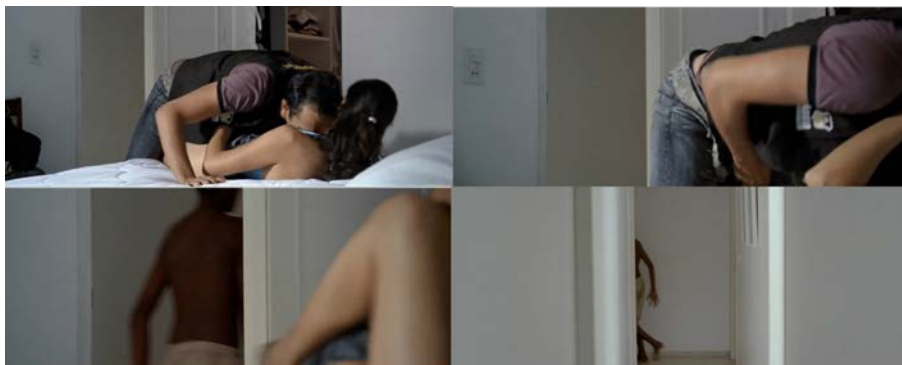


Figure 2: The couple exchanges caresses; the camera takes the focus off their bodies and emphasizes the door behind them; the boy crosses the frame, running; one last glimpse before it disappears.

This black figure is framed against predominantly white scenarios, an opposition that not only highlights its corporality, but also suggests, through the contrast of shades, these beings' non-belonging to these spaces, which are spaces of upper middle class white characters, who rarely notice these presences. The lighting of these specific scenes seems deliberately brighter, so as to enhance the effect.

The image of the figure that crosses the screen is a convention of horror films, especially those whose plots involve such supernatural elements as ghosts and demons and is usually meant to scare the spectator. For Robert Baird (2000), the typical construction of this effect, which he calls “the startle effect” depends on three basic elements: (1) the presence of a character; (2) the hint of a threat outside the frame; and (3) a disturbing and sudden intrusion into the space where the character is.

For the author, this would be the basic formula for a phenomenon indicating that something complicated or unusual is happening. Analogous to the gloves in *Vinil verde*, the ghostly presence of the slave during an act of transgression by the guard and the maid seems to want to remind the transience of this act, as well as the historical permanence of their servile status.

The bad conscience of the middle class in *Aquarius*

Second feature film by Kleber Mendonça Filho, in *Aquarius* we follow the story of Clara, a widow who lives in an old building called Aquarius facing the beach in Recife. Her permanence in the property is contrary to the interests of a construction company that bought all the other apartments in order to demolish the building to replace it with a modern and luxurious one. The impatience of the company’s representatives and engineers results in threats that are less and less subtle, while Clara seeks to resist in that space, together with her maid, with whom she seems to have a close relationship.

The film sparked several debates among spectators on social media and in specialized criticism. The texts published at the time highlighted such themes as feminism, the perseverance of a weakened and threatened left, and the feeling of guilt that plagues a certain part of the middle class.

Horror was definitely not a genre associated with the film due to critical fortune at first. However, some time after its debut, the perception emerged that there was a certain dialogue with the lexicon of horror in the film. Critic Luís Mendonça published a brief analysis of the film on the Portuguese blog À Pala de Walsh, in which he highlights the possibility that *Aquarius* could not only be understood as an adult drama about Clara’s resistance, but also as a home invasion film, in which “terror is always in the background, a kind of ‘white noise’ that contaminates and thickens the atmosphere of the film” (MENDONÇA, 2017).

In fact, the possibility of an invasion of Clara’s apartment, in retaliation for her uncompromising stand, remains suspended, tensing the plot. However, the only

invasion of the apartment we saw is that of a ghostly figure, the result of a nightmare of the protagonist.

At a certain point in the narrative, Clara begins to feel paranoid about having her apartment invaded by representatives of the construction company, and she starts to question herself frequently if she locked the apartment door. One day, family members come over to visit her and they review old photographs in order to select some for their nephews' wedding party. While one of the nieces uses an application on her cell phone to lighten the groom's skin in a childhood portrait, Clara tries to remember the name of a black maid who appears in the corners of several photographs, commenting that she ended up surprising everyone when she stole the family jewelry and vanished. "But it is inevitable, right!? We exploit them, they steal us from time to time, and so it goes, right !?" – comments Clara's sister-in-law. While her brother, sister-in-law and nephews go on talking, the maid who has just been remembered by the family crosses the corridor, from one room to another, so quickly that her presence is not noticed by them. It is interesting to note that the sister-in-law character, who is white and of the upper middle class, is shown in a close-up at this moment, and that the black maid appears in the background, crossing the white walls that frame the face in the foreground. It is just for a split second, in which the focus shifts from the face in close-up to the figure, and only then is there a cut to a new (and very brief) plane, now focused only on the maid figure.



Figure 3: Clara's sister-in-law in the foreground. In the background and out of focus, the maid seen in the photographs appears; the focus is inverted, favoring the figure that crosses the screen; a split second shot brings the camera close enough for even greater emphasis on the maid.

The figure of the maid who interrupts the narrative for a split second to materialize and cross the privileged (social and narrative) space of the other

characters, those who occupy the foreground, can also be understood in the key of the startle effect. However, the brief image in *Aquarius* seems to seek another effect.

Yes, there is the presence of characters in the scene, as well as the sudden appearance of a disturbing figure that interrupts the space occupied by these characters. But there is not the slightest hint that this could happen – typically the characters are framed in a way that they seem vulnerable to some type of attack, the soundtrack intensifies, among other strategies that feed the audience's expectations. The described moment occurs 96 minutes after the beginning of the film, breaking with a narrative that until then had not promoted indications that ghosts or other fantastic elements/characteristic to horror would arise. Not even the characters anticipate the passage of the maid between the rooms, nor do they notice it. And yet there is clearly a rupture that may or may not generate a scare, but that definitely creates an oddness effect by surprising the spectators and inviting them to reevaluate their perception of the film until then. Therefore, although the moment frustrates some of the principles of the startle effect, it certainly establishes a dialogue with the concept, and this lack of definition gives rise to a concern.

After the sudden and inexplicable apparition, Clara finally remembers that woman's name in the photos. "Juvenita" – she exclaims when she returns from the room with more photo albums in her hands; – "Juvenita was the name of that maid," she adds. It is as if the memory of that woman relegated to the corners of portraits rarely revisited evoked her presence so as to materialize her. But it is not yet a complete materialization: Juvenita is only visible to us, spectators, in a very brief and inaudible way, and not to the characters that did not even remember her name (even though they remembered her faults).

One night, the maid seen in the photos returns, this time washing the dishes in the apartment tinged by the shady tones of the small hours. As she finishes washing up, she goes to the corridor. Her black face blends with the bluish and nocturnal shadows and her gait is strange, because she moves forward but at the same time seems to move backwards too. She walks towards Clara's room, where she opens the wardrobe and takes out a jewelry box from which she takes out a pearl necklace and a diamond ring. Clara watches her motionless, lying on the bed. The eyes of the two women meet. It is then that the maid alerts her former employer: "You are bleeding." Clara looks at her chest and notices a big red spot. The image of the almost empty room takes over the screen, with only a dresser in the center and a few scattered boxes. A door bangs violently against the doorframe. Clara wakes up scared. It was a nightmare.

The bad conscience of the middle class in *Um som ao Redor*

In *O Som ao redor*, the property that seems to be surrounded by horror is the land of the character Francisco, in Bonito, in the interior of the state of Pernambuco, where he awaits his grandson João and his girlfriend Sofia. In this isolated environment of the suburb, where the traces of slavery and *coronelismo* are even more evident, horror is more manifest. During their stay at the site, the couple visits places such as Francisco's slave farm and an abandoned movie theater, around their property. As the place is explored, the soundtrack plays with extra-diegetic sounds typical of horror movies: screams, suspense sounds, etc. In a later scene, we see Francisco and the couple in a waterfall and then João in a close-up shot, but this time, the water that falls on his body is red colored, referring to a metaphorical "bloodbath."

The metaphor can be understood as the weight of the ruins of a colonelist past. After all, Francisco continues to play a role close to that of a mill owner from the last century, owning several properties in the neighborhood where he lives, which guarantees him a certain influence on the lives and working relationships of those who live there. In addition, the fact that water reaches only his grandson seems to associate this character with the idea of a financial inheritance, but also of social privileges, which the character, however critical he may be in relation to the maintenance of social inequality in the country, does not seem willing to resign.

This change in style begins as soon as the couple enters the ruins of the movie theater and there they fabulate another narrative, in which Sofia plays a spectator who wants to buy a ticket and João acts as the employee who works at the box office: "one ticket, please," she says as she passes the money over to her boyfriend, who is on the other side of what's left of the cinema's facade.

From this fabulation shared between the two, the soundtrack of a horror film that does not materialize in the image appears. Sofia heads for the interior of the cinema, but instead of seats and the screen, what she finds is a thicket. The scene is shot at a Dutch angle (slight diagonal tilt on the camera), contrasting with the horizontality of the previous scenes and intensifying the farcical notion of that moment.



Figure 4: The couple visits the ruins of an outdoor cinema; João looks directly at the camera while being bathed in blood.

The bloodbath concludes the sequence in the field, imagining the horrors that echo in those lands.

The disquieting familiar

In order to better understand the horrific occurrences in Kleber Mendonça Filho's films, we resort to the concept of the "disquieting familiar" (also referred to as "the uncanny"), originally proposed by Sigmund Freud, in the essay *Das unheimliche*, in 1919.

For the author, the concept is related to fear, something that is scary and causes horror. After studying the etymology of the word *Heimlich*, which, at first would be related to what is familiar, Freud discovers that it contains a certain ambivalence, because in some cases it can also mean something that has been concealed. He concludes that the word *heimlich* also holds within itself the meaning of its antonym *unheimlich*, i.e., the unknown, which led him to develop the hypothesis that we experience the *disquieting* feeling when we come into contact with something old and familiar, and not with something new or unknown, as we might assume. According to Freud, when something that has already been established in our mind and for some reason has been repressed, it emerges to the surface again, it is through the uncanny that we experience it.

For Freud, the uncanny that occurs in fiction has profound differences with the disturbing feeling that we experience in our reality, insofar as fantasy is an independent activity, which operates through other mechanisms than those of reality. A great deal that is not uncanny in fiction would be so if it happened in real life; in addition, there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life (FREUD, 1919). The author has this license that he can select his world of representation so that it either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases. Therefore, for the uncanny to exist and reach its powers in the realm of fiction, it must challenge the normativity parameters established within that universe. Since the occurrences, beings or objects are not foreign to the parameters of the fictional world in question, it is not possible

for the effect to reach its potency – no matter how these occurrences, beings or objects are foreign to our real world.

It is exactly this effect that occurs in many films of the horror genre. By watching a horror film that is indexed from the beginning as such, the audience creates expectations regarding certain events that are not replicated in the “real world.” The audience is supposedly willing to accept the presence of monsters or ghosts, as well as certain behaviors and reactions of the characters, events that do not always obey natural logic and certain narrative and iconographic mannerisms, such as a certain type of soundtrack, montage strategies, the very startling effect that possibly will result in scares, among others. This does not mean that every horror film will make use of this repertoire in its completeness and scope, but once these elements are used in a traditional way, there will be no strangeness or restlessness, and this is due to the audiences’ predisposition, which increasingly accumulates in their imaginary the possibilities that each genre can provide.

But this situation is altered when the author deceives the public, insinuating that their narrative world is similar to that of everyday reality, to later break this pact, revealing a world contaminated by the *uncanny*. In these cases the author can easily emulate the feeling of the *uncanny* from themes and beings that cause us this feeling in our daily lives, or he also can intensify this feeling by using it in ways that could not appear in real life:

But in this case, too, he can increase his effect and multiply it far beyond what could happen in reality, by bringing about events which never or very rarely happen in fact... [...] he deceives us into thinking that he is giving us the sober truth, and then after all oversteps the bounds of possibility. We react to his inventions as we should have reacted to real experiences; by the time we have seen through his trick it is already too late and the author has achieved his object. (FREUD, 1919, p. 18)

We believe that this artifice described by Freud is very similar to the strategy that is used in the scenes of Kleber Mendonça Filho’s films that we analyzed in this study, insofar as these films seem affiliated with other representation regimes – the fantastic in *Vinil verde* and naturalism in *Um som ao redor* and *Aquarius* –, but they surprise us in some scenes that evoke conventions of cinematographic horror, precipitating the effect of the *uncanny*, with the intention of bringing up some social conflict that was repressed in some way by the protagonists.

In the three cases, the spectator is led to believe over a large portion of the film's time that the diegetic world is governed by a certain set of rules and then, without further warning, is surprised by a breach of expectations, a nod to the conventions of another genre that is never completely consummated, on the contrary, lasts very little and is soon overcome by the following events, which do not mention or are affected by it – at least not in a concrete way. This nod does not constitute a sudden adherence to horror as a genre or even a hybridization, but a modal procedure of what is recognized as being cinematographically horrific (CAETANO, 2018).

Skeletons in the closet

In *Aquarius*, the affectionate relationship that Clara has with the housemaid Ladjane presupposes that the existing class tensions between the two are appeased or even overcome, so much so that the employee stands up for her boss when she suffers an attack from the contractor who seeks to expel her from *Aquarius*. However, Juvenita appears as the embodiment of these tensions that are still present and rooted in that space. And if in her first appearance the effect caused by her was that of sudden oddness, her return, literally a nightmare, occurs as the release of these postponed horrors. The scene in which Juvenita returns dialogues even more with elements typical of the horror genre, such as the palette of dark tones, the apartment filled with shadows, the menacing walk of the ghostly figure of Juvenita that is directed head-on as a lens trick⁵ distorts the background of the image, making her silhouette larger and disorienting the look that can no longer distinguish the direction of the character's walk. We know she walks. But forward or backward? In addition, there is uncertainty about Juvenita's nature, because before we understand that it is Clara's nightmare, her presence can be understood as a haunting, a supernatural intrusion. And finally, the scene ends with a start, caused by the sudden bang of a door that wakes Clara and cathartically closes both the dream and the apparition of this figure who returns after long repressed.

⁵ Referred to as Dolly Zoom or Vertigo Effect, this trick was originally developed by technician Irmin Roberts during the shooting of *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958). In order to cause the vertigo effect, the technique consists of a movement of the camera forward or backwards synchronized with the adjustments of the lenses, which can also zoom in and out from the filmed object.

The red spot on Clara's blouse appears where the character had to surgically remove her breast due to the cancer she faced in the past. It is at that moment that the character wakes up scared, revealing to herself and the spectator that she had a nightmare. In this sense, the other class, the maid, whom Clara seemed to have absolved in the family reunion, appears in her dream dialoguing with a repressed pain, a suffered violence, which has not been fully digested.

But the maid possibly represents more than someone who caused damage to the family, she represents the exploits committed by her family, as her sister-in-law recalls. And like João, Clara is a character who makes sure to remedy class tensions in her interpersonal relationships, with constant displays of affection and attempts at inclusion – she remembers Ladjane's birthday and makes a point of attending the party, while João plays with the granddaughters of Maria, the maid in his apartment, and shares the breakfast table with them.

In the impossibility of postponing these tensions, which emerge after long repressed, ghostly apparitions occur. Such “ghosts” seem to dialogue with the “Tia Anastácia complex,” proposed by sociologist Ronaldo Sales Júnior (2006, p. 230), to describe the relationship between bosses and domestic workers in Brazil, marked by relations of clientelism, patrimonialism and a fragile cordiality: “blacks appear ‘as if they were part of the family’ or ‘almost part of the family’”. Social proximity almost never crosses the ‘as if’ or ‘almost’ limit.”

In *O Som ao redor*, the appearance that we see in Clodoaldo's scene also resumes in other moments of the plot. One is also in the form of a nightmare. At one point in the film, Bia cannot get to sleep because of her neighbor's dog barking and decides to smoke on her balcony. She watches a shirtless black boy wearing only white shorts, who walks on the roof of the house opposite hers. The boy moves hunched over, like a quadruped, although his movements, intensified by the shadows of the night, resemble those of a spider. At this point, the soundtrack breaks out into a serious tone, which thickens the tension. It is then that Bia looks away and enters the interior of her house again. The musical track fades away.

Just as in *Aquarius* these moments of horror are concluded in the narrative through a dream centered on the invasion of private property, *O Som ao redor* illustrates the fears of its characters in Bia's daughter's nightmare. Sleepless, she goes to the window beside her bed and witnesses dozens of black boys appear from behind a tree, as if sprouting from there. In silence, the boys run towards the house. The girl, in turn, goes to her parents' room, only to find the room empty, with no mattresses on the beds. Upon returning to her room, she finds it in the same situation. It is then that she goes to the end of the stairs, where she meets a crowd of boys, covered by the shadows, who, motionless, reciprocate the gaze. She finally wakes up and realizes, with us, spectators, that it was just a dream. Anyway, to make sure she is safe, she pulls one of her bare feet under the blanket.

Kim Doria comments on this passage in the film, associating it with a repressed middle-class fear that lower classes may "invade" their space, literally and metaphorically:

The image of the house taken by an insurrectional crowd of black men, indifferent to us (since we are positioned by the filmic form in a perspective identified with that of the girl), but whose simple and silent presence makes the experience an amazing nightmare. Thus, malaise in contemporary Brazilian society is precisely formalized. Creepy, the sequence is the most frightening in the film and represents, with the simplicity of juvenile terror, the fear of otherness, of the class other and, above all, the fear of *proximity* to the other, who, when occupying the space of the 'I' arbitrarily bounded by walls and railings (architectural elements abundant in the film), becomes an *invader* and consequently *my enemy*. In addition, the large territory of the walled fortress of *home* is juxtaposed to the meager, because overcrowded, *prison* setting. The violence of inequality that constitutes our society, in the eyes of a middle-class preteen. (DORIA, 2016, p.91, emphasis added)

This set of scenes is from the half through the thickening⁶ of the narrative, which will result in the climax of *O Som ao redor*. After the girl's dream, the film clarifies that the boy seen walking on and inside the houses is not a ghost⁷, but rather

⁶ The first scene analyzed begins from one hour, six minutes and thirty seconds of the film, and the last one ends with one hour, forty minutes and twenty-eight seconds of the film.

⁷ There is a mysterious character in *O Som ao Redor*, always on the fringes of the plot, a black boy seen in positions that suggest that he is ready to trespass on others' private property, until the moment when the security team finally intercedes. Like many other elements of the film, the boy emerged directly from local history, a young man named Tiago João da Silva, who became famous at the turn of the 2000s for robbing

a young teenager whom street guards attack when they find him climbed onto a tree. Without us being able to know his name or anything about him, he is driven out of that neighborhood – and the narrative. And so, there are no more horrible inserts until the end of the movie.

In this sense, these scenes that use elements of classic horror seem to suggest that, in spite of the attempts of the protagonists of *O Som ao Redor* and *Aquarius*, to “pacify” class conflict in their daily lives, ignoring class differences, these are unavoidable and cannot be repressed.

Even though Juvenita’s second appearance can be explained as a result of Clara’s unconscious, the moment when she simply crosses the environment shared by the other characters is never clarified, it becomes a nuisance because it presents itself as a sudden mention of another genre to which until that moment *Aquarius* did not indicate to be related (horror). On the other hand, even though in *O Som ao redor* the figure is eventually explained, its appearances in the girl’s nightmare suggest that its nature may be more ambiguous.

Return of the repressed

As we have already mentioned, the uncanny scenes often involve some type of transgression or invasion of social boundaries: the figure appears in *O Som ao redor* at the time of the transgression and invasion of the house by service providers. In addition, the figure of the security guard Clodoaldo is inextricably tied to an idea of the return of the repressed: it turns out at the end of the film that the security guard’s real intention in that neighborhood was to avenge his father’s death, murdered at Francisco’s behest after a dispute over land. For Ismail Xavier (apud CAETANO, 2013, p. 98), the film’s very circular structure is symptomatic of the permanence of the past in the present: “At a time when open endings, with questions, have already become a convention, Kleber’s gesture is countercurrent, tying the prologue and the last scene as a return of the repressed.

apartments in Recife and was nicknamed Menino Aranha. Much of what *O Som ao Redor* does can be traced back to this figure, at first marginal, starting with the fact that he exists both in history and at the same time is inserted into the film as a creature of myth, a figure that emerges from a glimpse of a plane in an empty house, like a sort of bogeyman in miniature from a Brazilian horror film. [...] Kleber Mendonça Filho finds images that surprise precisely because they reveal themselves loaded with a very strong symbolic force and at the same time a casualty that disarms. *O Som ao Redor* proceeds to standardize the taste of Brazilian cinema for allegory, hence a figure like Menino Aranha at the same time bringing with it the character of mythological figure, the great invader, and being able to be shown as naturally as a kid that get spanked by a couple of security guards. It is a balance that comes very close to how this same unspoken dominates relationships: everything in *O Som ao Redor* means a lot and at the same time is emptied of this same meaning.” (FURTADO, 2013 apud DORIA, 2016, p. 92)

The revelation of Clodoaldo's true intentions at the end of the film subsumes the film into a contemporary Brazilian cinema movement, called by Ismail Xavier (2000) *resentment cinema*, populated by characters frustrated with a present of broken promises.

In this fixation on a state or situation of the past, or on something that has just been lost, there is a dramatic potential linked to projects of revenge, postponed, brooded over, which find in cinema a variety of manifestations that make the figure of resentment a remarkable fact that is worth to explore, almost a national (or continental) diagnosis. (XAVIER, 2000, p. 312)

Vinil verde also seems to dialogue, even if tangentially, with this trend, by using a horrible element (the green gloves) that “breaks” the fantastic universe of the film, scaring the child's character with the prophecy of lives that repeat themselves.

Its appearances to the middle class, often connected to the element of blood that strikes the protagonists, over João at the waterfall, in *O Som ao redor*, and in Clara's clothes at *Aquarius*, disclose a bad class conscience. Such characters, belonging to a traditional middle class, seem to assume daily attitudes that seek to conceal the huge gap between them and the poorer classes. This “cordial” attitude of the boss in relation to the employee is described by Sales Júnior (2006, p. 232) as follows: “the discriminators impose themselves limits, in such a way that the color of the individuals involved does not appear as a relevant factor for the organization of conduct. Thus, a pact of silence is instituted on both sides, a constituent of ‘cordiality.’” This cordiality can be understood as a gloss, which seeks to hide, superficially, a wood that rots inside. Ghostly apparitions appear to remind them of this.

The utilization of photographs, a resource used not only in the films analyzed in this article, but also in other productions by Kleber Mendonça Filho⁸, seems to activate or enhance this circular effect, of the return of the repressed. Species of magical objects seem to be able to activate and materialize the characters' memories, exposing old ghosts and unresolved issues.

⁸ The mockumentary *Recife Frio*, by Kleber Mendonça Filho (2009), also makes use of the same expedient in its initial sequences.

Both *O Som ao redor* and *Aquarius* have prologues composed of photographs, both in black and white: the former shows images of the old northeastern mills, their workers and owners; the latter, images of an exuberant past of the urban area of Recife, to the sound of the late song “Hoje,” by singer Taiguara. In the first case, the photographs represent a past in the countryside, which in theory has long been overcome and is quite distant temporally and spatially from the urban neighborhood where the plot is centered, but which serves precisely as an indication of the genesis of class tensions experienced by the characters. The use of the photo sequence in *O Som ao redor* suggests this reactivation of the past in the present:

At the outset, the film puts us before two historical moments: a past of social differences accentuated by the economic position between colonels and rural workers and the contemporary urban present, with its own noises and rhythms. If the cut between the photographs of the past and the moving images of the present first suggests a contrast, the film will also bet on the relations of continuity and resonance between each other, as if something from that space and time resonated in the current times, enunciating that contemporary urban society continues the old relations of colonial and colonelist exploitation in the countryside. (LIMA; MIGLIANO, 2013, p. 188-189)

In *Aquarius*, however, there seems to be a certain nostalgic appreciation, contained in those images, of a glorious past (or the idea of a past), which reflects the way Clara protects the building where she lives, the source of her most cherished memories.

The choice of photographs to represent the past (or the idea of the past) is linked to their immutability, capable of crystallizing the moment they capture. This immutability is associated with the present, and not with the past, in the case of *Vinil verde*, which uses the sequence of photos to narrate a plot set in a contemporary Recife. The sequence of photos emulates, at times, a scarcely fluid stop motion effect, suggesting that, despite the progress of the narrative, there is something static in the plot. Inserting them as a prologue to *O Som ao redor* and *Aquarius*, the director contrasts them with the moving images that follow and surpass them, as memories that are too fragile to remain immutable, or too deep to remain contained in the photographs.

Final remarks

It is necessary to emphasize the proposed separation between films unequivocally identified as belonging to the horror genre and films identified as “social horror” films. There is a clear dialogue with iconography and conventions typical of cinematographic horror, mentions that do not constitute an affiliation to the genre, but clearly refer to it. On the other hand, the horror stems from the characters’ fears, from indissoluble social conflicts and from an atmosphere of tension that either never reaches a climax or is appeased.

As we have seen, these scenes that mobilize elements of the horror genre are associated with an idea of *uncanny*. For Freud (1919), fiction creates new possibilities of disquieting sensation, which are not found in life. It is intimately connected with something repressed that no longer accepts its position relegated to the unconscious.

It is evident that these questions appear in other moments of these films with a more “naturalistic” key, such as in the scenes from *O Som ao redor* in which João, in a conversation with his maid’s son, compares the boy’s experience in working as a packer with his own working in bars in Europe; or also Clara’s discomfort in *Aquarius*, when the maid shows a picture of her dead, murdered son, on an occasion when she was leafing through old photos with other family members. But these examples occur within the scope of the narrative, while the horror scenes seem to be displaced from these in various aspects, sometimes due to their extradiegetic constitution, sometimes due to the fragile connection with the characters’ trajectory, such as the suggestion that “it was just a nightmare.” However, despite not having a strong connection with the narrative, they seem to reveal a lot about the characters. The ideal of preserving memory, for example, so defended by Clara, and the main argument for her refusal to sell the apartment, seems extremely limited after the nightmare scene, as the character seems to overestimate her family and personal memories, while her memory of the class other is limited to a maid who stole from her. In *O Som ao redor*, the waterfall scene suggests a familiar memory that, being relative to the exploitation of the other class, is repressed by João, but will be claimed by Clodaldo, the class other, at the end of the film.

The scenes that dialogue with horror in *Vinil verde*, *O Som ao redor* and *Aquarius*, therefore, seem to serve the narrative/expressive purpose of bringing up social concerns camouflaged by the fragile cordiality that is maintained daily among individuals from different social classes. The appearances that arise for lower class

characters in *Vinil verde* and *O Som ao redor* suggest states of mind in the key of *resentment* with the continuing unfulfilled promises of social ascension. On the other hand, the appearances that share the scenes with characters from more privileged classes seem to suggest the *bad class conscience* in relation to inherited privileges, at the same time as the fear that something will change significantly in this social framework, allowing the class other to “invade” their spaces.

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