

# **EMPOWERING SCENES: COMMUNICATION AS A STRATEGIC AREA TO WOMEN'S AUTONOMY THROUGH AUDIOVISUAL NARRATIVES**

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#### RESUMEN

El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo desarrollar un análisis sobre las estructuras narrativas de las imágenes, enfocando las historias de los cambios en la vida de las mujeres, con el fin de entender los límites de la autonomía y sus flujos, y también para definir las posibilidades de construcción para el concepto de empoderamiento de las mujeres. Es un enfoque que se propone con cuatro productos audiovisuales realizados por las vías del consorcio internacional de capacitación de las mujeres, compilado en una serie llamada *The Right to Be*, dirigida por Kat Mansoor. ¿De qué manera podemos observar, a través de estas narrativas audiovisuales, la dislocación del sistema falocéntrico y del direccionamiento al masculino? ¿Cómo y dónde podemos apuntar a la construcción de una nueva figura femenina en estas películas? ¿A través de qué estructuras aparece el concepto de empoderamiento, pasando de la persona sujeta a un contexto colectivo? Para reflexionar sobre estas preguntas, se pone en relación la triada compuesta por: a) las narraciones de subjetivación y de sus procesos, b) los discursos de minorías sociales centradas en la mujer y con base en los estudios culturales y c) el análisis del direccionamiento de la película y sus eventos asociados.

#### ABSTRACT

The present work aims to develop an analysis about the images narrative structures involving stories of change in women's lives, in order to understand the limits of autonomy and its flows, and also to define the construction possibilities for women's empowerment concept. It's being proposed an approach with four audiovisual products made by the international consortium Pathways of Women's Empowerment, compiled in a series named *The Right to Be*, directed by Kat Mansoor. In which way can we observe, by these audiovisual narratives, the dislocation of phallogentrism and male addressing? How and where can we point to the construction of a new female figure in these films? Through which structures does the empowerment concept appear, moving from the individual subject to a collective context? To reflect about these questions, it's being related the triad a composed by: a) the subjectification narratives and its processes; b) the social minorities discourses focused on women and based in the Cultural Studies and c) by the film addressing analysis and those events associated with it..

## 1. FIRST SCENE: CONTEXTUALIZING WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

In recent decades, through questions raised by the feminist movements, the issue of gender inequalities has attracted a growing interest of society. This movement is not only to uncover the contexts that legitimize the hierarchical power structures, but also to identify mechanisms for understanding and finding alternatives to the problem. From this perspective, the term *women's empowerment* has been used, in post-modernity, to reflect on, produce narratives and implement effective policies focused on women as representatives of social minorities. In general, initiatives which target the deal approaching empowerment processes construction, above all, involving possibilities of thinking about the autonomy achievement for women, individually and collectively.

We note, for example, processes triggered in order to promote and/or analyze the political participation of women in society, as well as those directed to delimitate the scope for sexuality and relationships possibilities regarding the female body. But what, after all, does legitimize empowerment? Are some processes more crucial than others? Are some more relevant and others more durable?

In this context, two observations are worth being highlighted: a) the term empowerment has carried an intrinsic polysemy related to its possibilities of meaning, because of the broad spectrum of its uses b) paradoxically, the inclusion of empowerment in *gender agenda* has been restricted to policymaking, in general directed to governments and international institutions, not entering, in any substantial way, in those processes that permeate women's daily lives, leaving aside those trails that lead to more underlying and less obvious –but no less important– autonomy achievement (Cornwall, 2006).

It's possible to notice, for example, that, despite the way images and audiovisual culture has permeated our daily lives in all its possibilities of media coverage, this kind of narrative does not seem to have acquired the status of legitimacy on discussions involving the sense of autonomy for women on its various fields. Also, in the other direction of the track, only very recently the concern regarding gender differences in images addressing strategies was allocated in the considerations involving visual and audiovisual narratives, and yet seems to have acquired a prominent place in the (audio)visual culture studies.

Based on these reflections, this paper focuses on the compilation of four short films entitled *The Right to Be*, directed by Kat Mansoor and produced by Animal Monday, from the United Kingdom. Each of the four films is based on a female Brazilian character that, by different reasons for each, experienced significant stories of change in their lives and moved through the flows of autonomy and decision-making capacity from their own choices. Creuza, Cristina, Jane and Negra Jô: women who projected themselves to a

better circumstance in life by a sort of activism against prejudice and marginalization. Among a lot of possibilities, these characters were chosen because of their capacity of mobilization and transition from an individual to a collective sphere. To summarize briefly, the films were made by and addressed to women, containing a sort of narrative that aims explicitate the idea of empowerment. Some questions emerge from this scenario...

First, it is pertinent to ask how this discourse about autonomy is implemented in the filmic language: through which structures is it constructed in the films? By other look, is interesting to reflect about the subjetification processes presented in the screen play: can self report trigger identification processes and bonds of belonging, making a collective set from individual questions? Last but not least, it remains to inquire about the limits of negotiation between film and spectator in terms of addressing issues: is this kind of narrative establishing a new image addressing program, by destabilizing the places of power and introducing new narrative models, which assume *subject-position* (Ellsworth, 2001) through images?

To give embodiment to the proposed analisis, I bring the idea of *empowerment-images* in the films as rupture images, by the prospecting of its protagonists as agents of change. In a larger scene, then, is important to know if the burst discourse is sustained through its narratives. A scenario of autonomy for women can be traced through such types of narrative as it is possible to point out developments in the context of a broader transformation. Only then we will be able to consider women's empowerment processes through a feminist film narrative.

## 2. WHY DO MATTER EMPOWERMENT-IMAGES?

Laura Mulvey (1999: 833) affirms that the fascination for films has been historically "reinforced by pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formation that have moulded him". She writes from the starting point that the way the magic of cinema constructed its foundations has to do with "the way film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle" (*ibidem*).

There are no doubts that the actual spectacle society, together with the (not so) new possibilities of media coverage and images circulation possibilities seem to have approached all the thinkable themes and contexts (Castells, 1999). However, what appears as possibility does not guarantee transitions, or even inversions, in the addressing strategies. As Mulvey (1999) points out, the phallogentrism is structured unconsciously, and the strategies of breaking this order must deal with the very much introjected order of patriarchy. It is not uncommon the perception that many media products addressed to women, instead of dislocating the power structures historically established at the gender differentiation, end up just playing the role. As a consequence to the fact, we can usually observe a disconnection between lived experience, desired experience and sense of belonging to women.

In the media productions from the *mainstream*, mainly the audiovisual ones, the female figure is usually embodied in a passivity logics and expresses herself through the silence in what refers to male gaze. This seems to circumscribe on women a contradictory double movement: on the one hand, adhere to an imaginary of patriarchy as a given and stable situation, i.e., being mirror to the desire of otherness; on the other hand, reject the representation of the *me-woman* in this kind of imaginary, as a label which does not fit in what they construct as subject referencing. In this sense, feminist initiatives have been working on some underlined paths as a political issue, by approaching themes in a pathemic way, and creating new addressings in *subject-position* products targeted to women.

As one of the above mentioned projects, the Pathways of Women's Empowerment Consortium<sup>1</sup> tries to articulate a formal discourse involving the meanings of empowerment for women with the production of media narratives approaching stories of change in women's lives, seeking for alternatives that can promote changes in a broader scale, multiplying the voices that assume the female figure as an active and autonomous subject. Beyond the various audiovisual products made by the hubs from the consortium, I'm bringing to analysis the before mentioned compilation *The Right to Be* with the goal of understanding which paths are those, and rather if they really work in what they aim to. Is this initiative developing a new applicable methodology of film production and addressing, based on a new narrative structure?

From a brief look, it is evident in the films the way that their narratives gain strength personal testimonials and/or the ones that make direct reference to specific subjectivities focused on individual stories. Four characters who, by their lives stories, tell briefly (the films have three minutes duration each) the spectators about major women issues and concerns.

Creuza is a councilor candidate in the city of Salvador by her history of activism in defense of women domestic workers in Brazil. Having started to work when she was 10 years old, she narrates in the film, briefly, her stories of violent and unequal social relations according to her condition, as well as the social mobility due to the struggle for improvements in the trade union activist.

Cristina is an actress and feminist who linked her career to advocacy for women's rights (especially sexual and reproductive ones). She assembled a group of street performers in the city of Pernambuco named *Nuts Lilac Girls*,<sup>2</sup> which develops its action scripts based on themes which are configured as issues of global matters in women's lives, just as the abortion legalization, subject of her testimony and performance in the film.

Jane is a HIV positive former prostitute and current model working in the brand from Rio de Janeiro entitled DASPU. Founded by the also prostitute and activist Gabriela Leite, the brand was created in order to, both, create a fashion market addressed to the

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<sup>1</sup> The consortium's research program involves the following institutions: the Nucleus for Interdisciplinary Studies on Women –NEIM/UFBA, Salvador– BA, Brazil; the Center for Research on Gender in IDS Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, England; the Centre for Women's Studies at BRAC University, Dakha, Bangladesh; the American University in Cairo, Egypt, and the University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana.

<sup>2</sup> My translation of Loucas de Pedra Lilás.

universe of prostitution, as well as put on the agenda the theme of prejudice and morality associated with this profession. Throughout the film, while doing a photo shoot for the brand, Jane tells her story of prejudice and despair with the disease bringing the sense of how her career has changed the way she saw her life, her self-esteem and autonomy.

Negra Jho is a militant black woman who owns a hairdressing shop in the city of Salvador specialized in afro hairstyles and addressed mostly to black people. In her shop, it's not contemplated any possibility of assertion of whiteness through the hair, what leded, by this proposal, to the creation a niche audience and made her become one of the most respected owners in town, being a reference for her activism and work. In the film, while hairdressing one of her female clients, she tells about how her familiar and problematic history was strengthening to her self-esteem and conception of who she was and how should play her role.

What do the stories of these four women have in common? Cases of overcoming in their lives, reached by some sort (or a lot of them) of activism. How are these stories represented in the film audio and images? First, all of them are self-referential testimonials in which the characters introduce the *subject of the margins* in the background, allocated in the past, to contextualize the emergence of a new subject as the moment of placement in opposition to a inferiority condition. Negra Jho affirms that she thought she was ugly during a great time of her life, but now she knows that "beauty is political";<sup>3</sup> Cristina says that, from her life experience of fear, she intends to "arouse indignation";<sup>4</sup> Creuza refers to her candidacy –of a black, poor and former domestic worker woman– as a counterpoint to the white and rich men hegemony in politics, cause for which she will "struggle until the end";<sup>5</sup> Jane refers to the dream world and glamour present in the model's career as a weapon against despair and a powerful instrument for "the elimination of social differences".<sup>6</sup>

By these preliminar observations, we could already point to the construction of what I'm calling *empowerment-imagens*. But, before the assertive can be affirmed, it's important to investigate about how the discourse that narrates the audio tracks in those women's voices is represented by the sequences of images. To which tracks do these last ones lead us? I will, here, point two features present in all the films that seem to be significant to reflect about an identity trace in those images, indicating them as possible audiovisual narratives of empowerment.

The first aspect represented by the images refers to the dialogue between a close-up detail of the faces of the protagonists and shots that show the actions they perform. Gilles Deleuze (1983) discusses about this structure as a strategy, rather than simply a scene composition, that allows us to establish an affective relationship with the film. "The image-affection is the close-up, and close-up is the face..."<sup>7</sup> (103).

Starting from Henri Bergson's definition for the term *affectation*, Deleuze postulates that a film structure will be as more passionate as more it can work the micro movements

<sup>3</sup> My translation of "beleza é política".

<sup>4</sup> My translation of "despertar a indignação".

<sup>5</sup> My translation of "lutar até o fim".

<sup>6</sup> My translation of "eliminação das diferenças".

<sup>7</sup> My translation of "a imagem-afecção é o primeiro-plano, e o primeiro-plano é o rosto...".

in close-up shots as expressive unity. The face in close-up act, therefore, as a receiver plate, static, "who sacrificed the essential of its global mobility, and collects or expresses all kinds of small local movements, those which the rest of the body maintains commonly buried"<sup>8</sup> (*ibidem*: 104). From small, subtle nervous reactions, present in this shot that gains dimension on screen, we would be able to recognize expression strength in images, who would guide us from the quality of reflection to the expressed desire, leading us to a sense of belonging, within the narrative.

Under the circumstances, one can make two types of questions to a face: what do you think? Or: what's up with you, what do you have, or what you feel or resent? At one time, this face thinks about something, if fixed on an object, and this is the sense of admiration or astonishment, which the English wonder retained. To the extent that thinks about something, the face is especially true for its surrounding contour, its reflecting unit that elevates itself everywhere. At other time, instead, it tastes or resent something, and then goes through an intensive series that its parts cross until a paroxysm, each part assuming a kind of momentary independence (*ibidem*: 104-105).<sup>9</sup>

From this view, watching the four films (and regarding the time lapse corresponding to the context in which Deleuze developed the idea of affection-images and its use now), we could risk affirming that the junction of these two moments –the narrated testimonial one, composed by the close-ups, and the one from which the action is unfolded– guides us towards those intensive faces that are contrasted to the reflective quality present in stories of the past. We can see Cristina talking about her fear from images that show her mouth, occupying the whole screen. At the moment that follows, the film shows us dramaticity by the character's performance on the streets, just to guide us back to details of her face, trembling, when she affirms that she wants to arouse indignation.

Together with the *image-affection* idea deslocated to this analysis, the other feature related to the composition of *empowerment-images* reaches us through the use of frequent subjective shots, that keep on switching, along the plot, the subject's referential view: at one time, the viewer is the spectator; at the other, the protagonist. This strategy works as an explicit logic of approachment between the subjects of action in the films, i.e., the four women who recount their personal experiences as stories of autonomy achievement, and the receptor, i.e., all women (and men) watching the plot and who are, during these three brief minutes on each film, called to live the reported stories.

At Jane's story, for example, we can see through the eyes of the makeup artist, who prepares the model for the photo shoot, and also by the female photographer's gaze, when looking at the camera while makes image records from Jane. But we are also summoned to see through the eyes of the model, viewing the camera, or the makeup

<sup>8</sup> My translation of "que sacrificou o essencial de sua mobilidade global, e que recolhe ou exprime ao ar livre todo tipo de pequenos movimentos locais, que o resto do corpo mantém comumente soterrados".

<sup>9</sup> My translation of "de acordo com as circunstâncias, pode-se fazer dois tipos de perguntas a um rosto: em que você pensa? Ou então: o que há com você, o que você tem o que você sente ou ressentido? Ora o rosto pensa em algo, se fixa em um objeto, e este é o sentido da admiração ou do espanto, que o Wonder inglês conservou. Na medida em que pensa em algo, o rosto vale, sobretudo por seu contorno envolvente, sua unidade refletora que eleva a si todas as partes. Ora, ao contrário, ele prova ou ressentido algo, e então vale pela série intensiva que suas partes atravessam sucessivamente até um paroxismo, cada parte assumindo uma espécie de independência momentânea".

artist just in front of us, in close-up shots. The same happens in Negra Jho's film, when "we are", sometimes, the customer, who sees by the mirror the woman working at "our" hair, and sometimes the protagonist, looking at the hair "we're" working at, also through close-up shots.

What the proposals in these productions seem to want to highlight is justly this *pathos*, manifest through the introduction of subjects to the plot, which can be, both, who appears in the film and those who watch it. The activism of women is used here, therefore, not only as a political act, in which the power struggles and hierarchies are explicit, but as affirming subjective processes, giving rise to the "hidden areas of instability" (Bhabha, 1998) present in everyday women's lives narratives. The feeling is that the film refers to "them", but it could be "me". And, according to Maria Inácia D'Avila Neto and Cristiana Baptista (2007), the only way of reaching this goal is through the construction of a *pathemic*<sup>10</sup> structured narrative.

In our proposal, we are assimilating the *pathemical*, in one hand, by the narrators intent to provoke it, as, in the other, through a greater or lesser response from the audience to admit it. This leads us to the assumption that there is dialectic between the narrator and her/his narratee, i.e., the assistance that produces new temporality and spatiality, in every time when each story is told<sup>11</sup> (*ibidem*: 5).

No doubt that these subjective processes aim to confer a differential displacement of some of the power affirming spaces usually assigned to women. It is, therefore, a transgression discourse, as long as it gets to "places", in the plot, where other films do not. The social differences brought by these productions are not homogeneous or with no apparent conflicts, but maintains "its political will to assert the specificity of lived experience, bodily feminine, rejecting sexual difference in a disembodied and supposedly postmodern anti-essentialist subject"<sup>12</sup> (*ibidem*: 6).

### 3. BY THE TIME I WAS LIVING IT: CONSIDERINGS ABOUT THE REFERED EMPOWERMENT-IMAGES

The auto referred reports articulate the repressed desires that want to free themselves and be documented. In this context, "the subjects not only have experiences, but can narrate

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<sup>10</sup> The idea of *pathemic*, as described by the mentioed authors, is associated with the junction of narrative and passion, of cognition and affection. The authors advocate that this is the way to consider nominal narratives directed to the subject-women as effective ones.

<sup>11</sup> My translation of "em nossa proposta estamos assimilando o patêmico de um lado à intencionalidade das narradoras de provocá-lo, como, de outro, a uma maior ou menor receptividade do público em admiti-lo. Isso nos leva à assunção de que existe uma dialética entre o narrador e seu narratário, isto é, a assistência, com a produção de novas temporalidades e espacialidades, sempre que cada narração é contada".

<sup>12</sup> My translation of "sua vontade política de afirmar a especificidade da experiência vivida, corporalmente feminina, rechaçando a diferença sexual descorporificada em um sujeito supostamente pósmoderno e antiessencialista".



them, weave their meanings, and, doing so, assert themselves as a subject. Memory and memory testimonials would be a cure for alienation and reification<sup>13</sup> (Sarlo, 2007: 39).

It is possible to observe that "these marginal subjects, which would have been relatively ignored by other modes of narration in the past, "demand new method requirements and tend to a systematical listening of the "memory discourses": diaries, letters, advices, prays" (*ibidem*: 17). The nominal narratives made from and addressed to women recount, this way, how they negotiate their relations of approaching and shifting with an "I" and the "other" in their everyday life. The act of telling stories from intimacy to audience hits the screen loaded with significance not only by words, but by the body uses, acquiring a testimony narrative status, that is more than verbal: it is gestural, corporeal, visceral.

It is in this sense that the collective dynamics, often made possible in specific groups, stimulate the narrative process in community settings and may be considered as "transitional spaces", in which women make the passage from the private, domestic familiar life, to a public universe. By recounting their life stories in the public arena, these reports are transformed into ways of coping and social position achievement<sup>14</sup> (D'Avila Neto & Baptista, 2007: 2).

We must consider, however, that the effectiveness of a discourse translated into filmic narrative is directly associated with how it links image sequences, audio tracks and decodable cognitive systems. To bring out the questions and also to produce the effects to which it is proposed, it is important that the audiovisual narrative structure can go through a sort of gateway, establishing connective bonds between narrative and passion, between cognitive formats and generation of affection. These are mechanisms related to how form and content are articulated in films. In short, I would note the observation that, if a film is intended for a particular purpose from its narrative and also in relation to whom it is addressed, it needs to reach a certain stage of perceptual activation, which is difficult to be measured.

Bringing the reflection to the analyzed films, and contextualizing them as products of a major purpose, established by preexistent goals in the consortium, i.e., justify a certain approach to women's empowerment, it's pertinent to point out two considerings related to the effectiveness of the current narratives as imagetic constructions. In a first place, we must consider that the individual testimonials through memory always go through a process of reconstruction, in the present, of a given moment in the past. And, as reconstruction, the report is liable of expropriations and reappropriations. In addition, play the game of explicit addressing to a particular social group targeting a specific discourse means that these reconstructions can occur in a very predictable trajectory, i.e., the statements are based on what they are supposed to be. In

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<sup>13</sup> My translation of "o sujeito não só tem experiências, como pode comunicá-las, construir seu sentido, e ao fazê-lo, afirmar-se como sujeito. A memória e os relatos da memória seriam uma cura da alienação e coisificação".

<sup>14</sup> My translation of "É nesse sentido que as dinâmicas coletivas, viabilizadas muitas vezes em grupos específicos, estimulam o processo narrativo em contextos comunitários e podem ser consideradas "espaços de transição", pelos quais as mulheres fazem a passagem do âmbito privado, da vida doméstica familiar, para o universo público. Ao narrar suas histórias de vida no contexto público, seus relatos transformam-se em formas de enfrentamento e posicionamento social".

this sense, while telling our life memories under the aegis of empowerment, we are naturally tempted to fit these stories in what is expected to set them as stories of change towards autonomy. We must ask ourselves, then, about how much of this *now-telling* reports contains about the past: "in which present is narrated, in which it is remembered and what is the past that recovers"<sup>15</sup> (Sarlo, 2007: 48-49).

The testimonial reports are "discourse" in this sense, because they have a narrator as an implicated condition in the facts that does not chase one truth outside the moment it is announced. It is inevitable the mark of the present moment in the act of narrating the past, precisely because, at the discourse, the present has a recognized hegemony as inevitable and the past tenses are not free from a "phenomenologic experience" from the present time of the enunciation (*ibidem*: 49).

During the 12 minutes that make up the four life stories of women in *The Right to Be*, it is evident that the narrative construction is guided by the prospect of surrounding an idea of empowerment, permeating *a priori* the story-telling. In what extent this circumstance influenced the characters and how questionable can these reconstructions be? Far from pointing to a non-truth or non-legitimacy of the current narrative, I would indicate a caveat that cannot be left aside in the analysis, because the testimony in these audiovisual/media products work as the raw material for the viewer, urging her/him to do something with what is shown. It's implicit, in each of the stories told by the protagonists, a request for a "subject-position" taking, as affirms Elizabeth Ellsworth (2001).

Ellsworth assumes that the addressing modes of a film (or a set of them) lead to a reflective position of the interests and power play that drives the visual pleasure afforded by a narrative. This placement, in turn, is started from some assumptions and desires, leaving, inevitably, "intentional and unintentional traces in the film itself"<sup>16</sup> (*ibidem*: 16). The mentioned traits have direct effect on the possibilities of reaching the audience to whom the films are addressed, because we cannot think of addressing as "a visual or spoken moment, but as a structure –developed over time– mounted by the relationship between the film and its audience"<sup>17</sup> (*ibidem*: 17). The fact is, by taking this *subject-position*, "regardless of how it is mythical", the film speaks to "powerful fantasies of power, domination and control"<sup>18</sup> (*ibidem*: 25).

The second observation I would like to point, concerning to the construction of *empowerment-images*, refers to the thresholds that guide the seek for a format to represent discourses of autonomy in images. As currently set, they are positioned against the assumption of the male as universal and claim a place that disturbs the phallogocentric one, historically established for film productions over the years. If we consider that a pathemical connection between the *I-woman* and the scope for decision-making associated to her is what legitimizes the stories of change, proposed in the images, then we must take into account that the proposal of a "new" narrative format does not match the place of woman as *the other one*. *I-woman* represented by images must be focused

<sup>15</sup> My translation of "em que presente se narra em que presente se rememora e qual é o passado que se recupera".

<sup>16</sup> My translation of: "traços intencionais e não intencionais no próprio filme".

<sup>17</sup> My translation of: "um momento visual ou falado, mas uma estruturação –que se desenvolve ao longo do tempo– das relações entre o filme e os seus espectadores".

<sup>18</sup> My translation of: "independentemente de quanto ela seja mítica", o filme dialoga com "potentes fantasias de poder, domínio e controle".

on the search for the subjectification of this "new" female figure, not simply constituted by the figure of the *non-man*.

Being addressed to the female subject who stated her autonomy and act in view of bringing out her *own voice* does not presuppose that the productions regarding empowerment issues do break all addressing formats traditionally developed in the mainstream, i.e., does not mean they are actually *images-empowerment*. We can't think that a change in addressing modes for a particular type of film corresponds to a radical shift on its narrative structures, nor for those who produce and much less to the audience. There is a connection between the narrative of a certain kind of film experience and the spectator –that is, between form/content of an image sequence and how it drives the emotions of the beholder– that is geared to that specific type of production. In a large measure, it's a relationship established between a particular social practice and the ways it creates bonds with its subjects through one (or several) cultural identity(ies) (Ellsworth, 2001).

Approaching the theme in a more complex way, we can say that what is at stake here is not a mode, but an addressing event, which operates in the interstices between the narratives of empowerment and the uses that the reception makes of it. In order to reach the public to whom these audiovisual products are addressed, "the viewer must enter into a particular relationship with the history and imaging system of the films"<sup>19</sup> (Ellsworth, 2001: 14). Also according to Ellsworth:

If you understand what is the relationship between the text of a film and the experience of the viewer, for example, you may be able to change or influence, and even control, the response from the viewer, producing a film in a particular way. Or you may be able to teach viewers how to resist or subvert who the film thinks they are or who the film want them to be"<sup>20</sup> (2001: 12).

The viewers are never simply who images think they are. The fact that the films are addressed to the *woman-subject*, working her possibilities of decision-making does not mean that all women will feel identified with them. There are many possible variants, starting from the fact that the issues addressed as a prospect of empowerment may not interest all women. Furthermore, we could assume that the time in each of these short films is not enough to establish a pathemical relationship with the spectator, and, thus, a sense of belonging. Still, when dealing with a specific film genre, the viewer could simply not like documentaries, which does not mean she wouldn't like to view scenes about the theme depicted in a fiction film, for example.

Speaking of a particular audience to which a particular film or set of them is addressed does not presuppose that we can assume, therefore, the principle that there will necessarily be points of convergence among all individuals of that representative public, i.e., there isn't an identification process that is unique. By this, we can postulate

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<sup>19</sup> My translation of: "a espectadora deve entrar em uma relação particular com a história e o sistema de imagem dos filmes".

<sup>20</sup> My translation of: "Se você compreender qual é a relação entre o texto de um filme e a experiência do espectador, por exemplo, você poderá ser capaz de mudar ou influenciar, até mesmo controlar, a resposta do espectador; produzindo um filme de forma particular. Ou você poderá ser capaz de ensinar os espectadores como resistir ou subverter quem um filme pensa que eles são ou quem um filme quer que eles sejam" (2001: 12).

that the compilation *The Right to Be* provides empowerment processes for women in the measure of success of its addressing event.

It is noteworthy that we can only consider empowerment as a process, in a dynamics of continuities, transformations and even setbacks in relation to an existing setup. Thus, the fact that there is a film addressing event created to set a certain kind of narrative project, focused on autonomy for women, could already represent a rupture on production and media agency modes, through a logic that does not intend to be timeless, but, on the contrary, is allocated in the temporality of narration, "a body condition experienced as existential mediation between the *soi* and the world"<sup>21</sup> (D'Avila Neto & Baptista, 2007: 4). Could it be the tip of the iceberg, which drags the possibility of triggering more significant changes?

#### 4. DID YOU ENJOY IT? POST-ACT REFLECTIONS

When we deal with empowerment in the context of autonomy for women, we are referring to the need to get along with the articulation of social differences and the mapping of the power spheres related to gender issues, in their possibilities of mobility and destabilization. The idea of empowerment is primarily a discourse of representation (Bhabha, 1998) manifested in a process through which those who were denied the ability to make strategic choices involving their lives, acquire such capability (Kabeer, 1999).

Returning to some issues discussed in this article, it is worth noting, therefore, that the discourse in a film narrative that aims to stimulate women's empowerment processes can only be based upon the articulation of the three following remarks:

a) The audiovisual media culture is a significant phenomenon in our societies, and comprises, nowadays, a wide range of consumers/viewers. In this sense, it is legitimate to think in a production of image-empowerment as a representative locus of tensions, power assertions and construction of gender identities. To disregard women as subjects of enunciation through images means close our eyes to the influence that exerts its contents in our everyday lives.

b) Women as this "new" subject, which reverses the balance of forces present in the audiovisual narratives, can promote differentials in their statements as long as they enhance pathemical processes to construct the dramatic action, linking narrative and passion. This is because the pathemized subject, i.e., the one whose passion is called into the action narrative, comes into existence when feels identified and establishes bonds of belonging to the subject from the narrative. That's how, in fact, the representation of women as subjects of the autonomy processes may be associated with the imaginary of women as an experience, as an agent of change.

c) The addressing event related to the production of *empowerment-images* is all the more effective the more it calls to a position-taking. However, there is no way of thinking that the displacement of conventional forms of addressing involves an abandonment of narrative formats already established. Suggest this possibility (if it was

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<sup>21</sup> My translation of: "de uma condição corporal vivida como mediação existencial entre o *soi* e o mundo".

feasible) would mean fall in the risk of alienation by emptying the narrative. Still, we can't think on the categorizations of the subjects to whom the films are addressed simply as *this or that*. It is common to find out the falls on a dualism that restricts the forms of interpretation about addressing events, but these trends are, rather than simplistic, not achievable, and not even desirable. The spectrum of negotiations and contradictions is far more complex than that.

Women figure themselves in different ways, by many factors of self-identification and representation. It does matter, in this figuration, the place of voice and the embodiment strategies, in addition to the socio-cultural structures that are demarcated (or not) in the representation, such as class, sexual preference, ethnicity, etc. Thus, the different processes of figuration for women inevitably imply tensions that arise from the variants through which it (the processes) are expressed. "The body, in the same way that language, is also a place for expression of power"<sup>22</sup> (D'Avila Neto & Baptista, 2007: 8).

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<sup>22</sup> My translation of: "O corpo, do mesmo modo que a linguagem, também é um lugar de expressão do poder."

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