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THE POETIC LANGUAGE OF CINEMA –
REPRESENTATIONS OF WATER
IN PETRA COSTA'S *ELENA*
AND JENI THORNLEY'S *TO THE OTHER SHORE*

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To my mother and sisters!

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ABSTRACT

The Poetic Language of Cinema – Representations of Water
in Petra Costa's E*lena* and Jeni Thornley's *To the Other Shore*

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2017

This study has as main objective to analyze the representations of water, from a poetic perspective, in the documentaries *Elena*, directed by Petra Costa, 2012, and *To the Other Shore*, directed by Jeni Thornley, 1996. In order to do so, I examine some sequences that present water both in the image and sound tracks, and interlace it with the contexts of each story. The first chapter focuses on theoretical questions, drawing discussions on documentary, the poetic mode, poetics and poetic image, metaphor, film studies and, mainly, studies on representations of water. The second and third chapter present, respectively, an analysis of the representations of water in the films *Elena* and *To the Other Shore*. The last chapter presents the final considerations about the work developed in thesis and, based on the analyses, it approaches succinctly both films.

Key-words: representations of water, poetics of cinema, *Elena*, *To the Other Shore*.

RESUMO

The Poetic Language of Cinema – Representations of Water in Petra Costa's E*lena* and Jeni Thornley's *To the Other Shore*

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Este estudo aborda os filmes documentários *Elena*, dirigido por Petra Costa, ano de 2012, e *To the Other Shore*, lançado em 1996, com direção de Jeni Thornley, com o intuito de realizar uma análise das representações da água nos filmes sob uma perspectiva poética. Para tanto, são consideradas, especialmente, algumas sequências de tais filmes as quais denotam o uso da água enquanto elemento imagético e, também, quando esse uso é percebido por meio de efeitos sonoros, em entrelaçamento com os contextos de cada história. O primeiro capítulo da dissertação se debruça sobre questões de cunho mais teórico, das quais se destacam discussões sobre documentário, o modo poético, o poético e a imagem poética, metáfora, estudos fílmicos e, principalmente, estudos sobre representações da água. O segundo e o terceiro capítulo apresentam, respectivamente, uma análise das representações da água nos filmes *Elena* e *To the Other Shore*. Já o último capítulo apresenta as considerações finais acerca do trabalho desenvolvido nesta tese, abordando sucintamente aspectos de ambos os filmes com base nas análises apresentadas.

Palavras-chave: representações da água, poética do cinema, *Elena, To The Other Shore.*

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CHAPTER I: DIVING IN

1.1 Introduction

When one thinks about the process through which films can convey messages, it is natural to draw attention, in a first moment, to the verbal and body languages used by characters, who can portray different facial expressions and say sentences that sometimes remain in our minds; one may also be alert to the narrator's words, and here I make reference to classical notions of the narrator as an individual, who uses oral, written language (as in silent films) or both ; in addition, it is not unusual to think that the ideas conveyed by movies are possible through the putting together of sequences that the viewer considers as the main ones, creating her/his own filmic interpretation. On this regard, on the one hand, one cannot say that such approaches are right or wrong. First, because the idea of 'right' and 'wrong' suggests a Manichean paradigm that seems not to fit well into cinema nor the arts in general; secondly, one could say that, from a superficial perspective, dealing with reading of movies, – such as dealing with the interpretation of a great variety of literary or art pieces – is something very particular, obeying, thus, criteria that are usually created by the spectators themselves, be they aware or not. On the other hand, it is possible to say that if one tries to understand what a film may convey, that is to say, an interpretation from a more profound perspective, one may be concerned with various other aspects that can pervade the cinematic language and field.

In a film reading process, the analysis of movies that are taken as poetic can offer more challenge. The imagery, the editing, the montage, the soundtrack, the organization of the narrative, among other things, tend to be differently approached in poetic movies in a comparison with "conventional" films. In addition to this, poetic movies can present interesting choices that, being recurrently utilized by the filmmaker, can propose new perspectives and possibilities of reading to the story that is being told. This is the case of water, a natural element that constantly appears or is suggested in the films that I analize in this thesis.

Having said that, the main objective of this thesis is to analyze the representations of water in two films that, from the perspective of this work, will be considered poetic: Elena (dir. Costa, 2012) and To the Other Shore (dir. Thornley, 1996).

In this chapter, along with this introduction, I will present a few considerations on documentary as a genre and also on the poetic mode, following Bill Nichols' ideas (2010). Next I briefly introduce the mentioned movies and approach issues on Brazilian and Australian female documentarists, for I deal with documentaries carried out by two women who represent these countries and cinemas. Then, I quickly point out the significance of this research, its objectives and the questions I have considered pertinent to the development of the research. After that, I review the literature on poetry/poetics, on the poetic image, on metaphor as well as on the critical history of the movies Elena and To the Other Shore; finally, I close chapter one by presenting some notions on poetic cinema, giving special attention to Eisenstein (1947) and Maya Deren (1970); next I bring a few filmic categories, using mainly Bordwell & Thompson (2008); then, I present studies on travel and scapes (Appadurai; 2009); finally, I elaborate on representations of water, drawing from the works of David Clarke (2010), Hugo Fortes (2016), and Gaston Bachelard (1997).

The second and third chapters deal specifically with the analyses of the films. Both chapters draw attention to the representations of water, taking into consideration the connotations enabled by the visual and aural imagery featured in both films. The second chapter has, as corpus of analysis, the movie Elena, and the third one approaches the representations of water in To the Other Shore.

In the last chapter, I present the final considerations, attempting not only to briefly compare the analyses of the two movies, but also to encapsulate the main ideas and objectives of the present work.

1.2 On Documentary

Since the corpus of this research consists of two documentaries, it is paramount to contextualize this filmic genre in cinema history. To do so, I mainly take into consideration studies accomplished by Bill Nichols (2010).

Many people can often tell fiction from documentary films based upon the reductionist consensus that fictional films are usually said to be fictional and have no relations with reality, and that documentaries, on the other hand, tend to represent the so-called truth. However, this issue offers much more complexity than one can imagine. In conformity to Nichols:

> Some documentaries make strong use of practices or conventions, such as scripting, staging, reenactment, rehearsal, and performance, for example, that we often associate with fiction. Some fiction makes strong use

> of practices or conventions, such as location shooting, the use of non-actors, hand-held cameras, improvisation, and found footage (footage not shot by the filmmaker) that we often associate with non-fiction or documentary. (1)

Actually, the issue on film's or documentary's conveying or not truth/reality have become very debatable for there have always been questionings and subjectivities around the concepts of truth and reality. Whether dealing with fact or fiction, movies and documentaries are carried out based upon a filmmaker's perspective and choices, which bring along with them a high level of relativization on truth related-aspects (Jordan 2003).

In *Introduction to Documentary*, one of the first aspects approached by Nichols concerns the discussions on what a documentary is. For him, the documentary exists and can be understood only through comparison with other types of films. Both fictional and non-fictional movies do not purely convey ideas, but rather represent them. In these terms, non-fictional films or documentaries tend to deal with the representation of the real or of reality. When watching a documentary, we actually see social actors speaking to or acting before the cameras and, by focusing on them, we may easily forget there is a filmmaker with his/her conceptions, ideologies, and intentions behind the camera. These professionals could directly or even very subtly and indirectly influence the social actors' beliefs and, thus, their behavior and the representation of the real, something that would, consequently, influence the audiences' perception of what documentaries show. This is why Nichols draws attention to the importance of considering ethical issues in the documentary filmmaking process.

Strengthening up this idea, Nichols points out the connections that coexist in what he calls "the triangle of communication":

> For every documentary there are at least three stories that intertwine: the filmmaker's, the film's, and the audience's. These stories are all, in different ways, part of what we attend to when we ask what a given film is about. That is to say, when we watch a film we become aware that the film comes from somewhere and someone. There is a story about how and why it got made. These stories are often more personal and idiosyncratic for documentary and avant-garde film than they are for feature films (61).

Nichols also addresses importance to voice, herein meaning the way the discourse and messages can be inserted into documentaries. In so doing, the author states that both images and sound and/or spoken words, together or separately, are necessary to convey the documentary ideas and discourse (41). According to Nichols:

> The voice of documentary is not restricted to what is verbally said, either by voices of unseen "gods" and plainly visible "authorities" who represent the filmmaker's point of view—who speak for the film, or by social actors who represent their own points of view—who speak in the film. The voice of documentary speaks with all the means available to its maker. (46)

In other words, the filmmaker's selections represent the means through which her/his voice appears in the documentary. To this extent, the moviemaker thinks through elements of cinematography such as montage, lighting, and editing, to name a few; elements that are usually related to the genre or type of documentary produced, as well as the mode picked out, i.e. the poetic mode, which will be more discussed in the next subsection.

Nichols also writes about the fact that the documentary film tradition – with the features that we can relate to it nowadays – was not premeditated. According to the author, rather than providing a path for the development of a documentary tradition itself, filmmakers were more interested in experiments on the limits and discoveries of new possibilities within the cinematic field (82); such experiments and discoveries ended up in what we currently understand as documentary and "[t]he continuation of this tradition of experimentation is what allows documentary itself to remain a lively, vital genre" (82-83).

1.3 The Poetic Mode

The poetic mode, used in many feature films, derives from the avant-gardes, i.e. Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism, Dadaism, and Surrealism, that revolutionized the artistic fields in the first decades of the twentieth century. According to Bill Nichols, the poetic mode was introduced into documentaries in the second decade of the twentieth century, and it worked as a reaction against the content and "the rapidly crystallizing grammar of the early fiction film" (2010: 102). For the theoretician, the poetic mode "moves away from the 'objective' reality of a given situation or people, to grasp at an 'inner truth' that can only be grasped by poetical manipulation"

(102). Thus, the viewer is shown a subjective, and non-realistic depiction of the world realized through techniques such as visual elements and a narrative. To this extent, Nichols (2010) states that:

> The poetic mode sacrifices the conventions of continuity editing and the sense of a very specific location in time and place that follows from it to explore associations and patterns that involve temporal rhythms and spatial juxtapositions. Social actors seldom take on the full-blooded form of characters with psychological complexity and a fixed view of the world. People more typically function on a par with other objects as raw material that filmmakers select and arrange into associations and patterns of their choosing. (102)

The poetic mode is deeply connected to subjectivity (usually the filmmaker's) and has aesthetics as a highly important element. Thus, this mode is closely related to the documentarist's plans and impressions. The construction of the poetic documentary film can involve an abundant variety of aspects, including poems, literary excerpts, uncommon montage and editing, visual and sound metaphors, among others.

1.4 A little about Elena and To the Other Shore

Elena consists of a film that presents a non-conventional narrative, mixing memories that are shown through family archives, such as voice and video recordings, pictures, and entries of diaries with the very *sui generis* authorship of Petra Costa. Costa started her career as an actress but became more successful as a moviemaker, especially for directing documentaries. In addition to *Elena* (2012), she also directed the documentary *Olhos de Ressaca*, which was released in 2009 and won the best short film award at the Rio de Janeiro Film Festival and, more recently, she co-directed with Lea Glob the movie *O Olmo e a Gaivota* (2015).

Petra Costa not only directed, but also wrote the film *Elena* (together with Carolina Ziskind). Besides, she acts in the movie, playing herself. *Elena* was released in the end of 2012. The movie received many prizes, including best director, best screen play, and mainly best documentary in festivals not only from Brazil, but also from France, U.S., Cuba, Mexico, among others.

The story has as main character Elena Andrade (Petra's sister), an actress who was part of Boi Voador[1] by the end of the 1980s. According to some artists who co-staged with Elena in Boi Voador, she stood out in the group[2]. Nevertheless, she had the audacious dream of becoming a famous Hollywood actress, and, willing to fulfill her professional dream, she decided to move to New York, where she would take acting classes and where her problems with depression and dissatisfaction with life would start and culminate with her suicide at the age of twenty, in the beginning of the 1990s. Petra was a seven-year-old girl when her sister committed suicide and, two decades after that tragedy, she tells her sister's story, guiding the spectators into Elena's artistic and melancholic world. It is a first-person documentary, whose narration is done by Petra, who is also a character in the film; thus, *Elena* can be seen as a pretext for Petra to talk about herself, conveying the concept of an (auto)biographical movie.

Elena is built upon fictional and documentary scenes concerning Elena's life and memories (re)created by her sister. Despite the fact that the movie raised debates on diverse feminist blogs – dealing with themes such as eating disorders, presenting texts that compare Elena Andrade to the poet Sylvia Plath –, the movie has been approached by only a few researchers, and I believe this fact is related to its considerably recent release. I mention two of these research studies here that, despite the lack of direct connection with the main objective of my thesis, are worth to be mentioned. They consist of articles taken from the online film journal *Rebeca: Revista Brasileira de Estudos de Cinema e Audiovisual*.

The first article, "Entre Afetos e Excessos – Respostas de Engajamento Sensório-sentimental no Documentário Brasileiro Contemporâneo" by Mariana Baltar (2013), establishes a comparison between *Elena*, and *A Falta que me Faz* (Marília Rocha, 2009), highlighting that her article "addresses the ways in which a sensorial and sentimental engagement can be constructed throughout the narrative in order to convey private, intimate and ordinary stories in what seems to be a major tendency among Brazilian contemporary documentaries" (61). The author also

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[1] Boi Voador was a group of artists researching theater language that was formed in the 1980s in the Theater Research Center of Antunes Filho. More than one hundred artists of remarkable talent staged with the group, which came to an end in 1992.

[2] These artists' reports can be watched in the YouTube Channel: Elena Filme, whose link is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFWYl5mmHJM

discusses the search for the perfect body as an element related to today's world.

The second article is "A Identidade no Documentário Elena", by Adriano Charles Cruz, (2014). In his study, Cruz analyzes the discursive construction of identity in the film, starting from the fact that identities are in constant crisis if one considers the postmodern context. According to Cruz, "[t]he film is marked by hybridity among the real and the fictional and the enunciation of women protagonists of this narrative". Thus, the author studies the intertwining between the memory games and the memory in the construction of the identity. (2-3)

On its turn, *To the Other Shore*, by Jeni Thornley, is an Australian (auto)biographical, compilation film which, not unlike *Elena,* was made through the use of archival footage, documentaries, independent feminist films, family home movies and photographs "to construct a public autobiographical memory of the female self as both mother and daughter (…) as autobiographical filmmaker" (Collins, 1, 2001).

According to Collins, although the film was released in 1996, its whole process and conception took more than ten years. The author points out the movie development can be split into five phases: the first was in 1983 when Thornley collected material on love and war, then, from the year of 1986-90 "the project took the form of a diary film about becoming a mother, *The Dawn of Love"*(2); After that, in 1991, the film was re-elaborated as a dramatized documentary, *To the Other Shore*; then, in 1993, it became a "low budget feature film about the psychoanalytic experience, *Room of Secrets*;" (2). Afterwards, in 1995, the film was considered a low budget, experimental, compilation film, *Requiem*. Finally, it was screened at the Chauvel cinema in Sydney in August 1996 as *To the Other Shore*.

The film presents traces of a whole historical period of about 13 years, and it deals with motherhood, death, psychoanalysis and cinema (Collins 2001), themes that can be associated with Petra's documentary to some extent. In the narrative, we follow the impressions of the documentarist during her years of psychoanalysis, learning of her memories and life digressions and accompanying the search for the figure of the mother.

Such as what happens with the movie *Elena,* the bibliography found about the film *To the Other Shore* does not deal with the themes and objectives of this thesis, that is, I did not find any information that would deal with the representations of water in the film. In addition, one can point out that in spite of the two decades since its release, Thornley's documentary has

not been much approached by scholars, perhaps due to the fact that it consists of a film that did not have an intense promotion. Nevertheless, the two texts by Felicity Collins are worth the reference: *Memory in Ruins: The Woman Filmmaker in Her Father's Cinema* (2001) and *Death and the Face of the Mother in the Auto/Biographical Films of Rivka Hartman, Jeni Thornley and William Yang* (2001-b). In the first text, Collins states that "A historical parallel for Thornley's personal filmmaking can be found in the autobiographical films of the New German cinema. In a study of women's "self-exploratory narratives", for we can see many sequences portraying scenes made by women[3] from Australia, and even the a few scenes from Eva Braun's homemade videos from the Nazi period.

  To the Other Shore also deals with the figure of the grieving daughter, which would be a reflection of Thorney's sad personal life events. Such issues involving grief are again taken into consideration in Collins's second text, which deals with themes such as the deaths of the filmmaker's relatives (brother, father and mother), approaching psychoanalytical elements by considering the studies of Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein.

1.5 Women Filmmakers: The Female Voice in Modern Documentaries

  The history of cinema and of many other types of artistic manifestations have been marked by the hegemony of male names and voices; even when the objective is to speak about or represent female-related issues, it is not unusual that a male point of view will guide us. That was something I had in mind when I chose to analyze the aforesaid movies, since they portray female perspectives not only on the screen, but also behind the cameras.

  In the following subsection I will discuss a little about women filmmakers and/or productions – firstly in Brazilian modern documentaries, and then in Australian ones. The choice of such nationalities is, of course, based on the fact I am dealing with two documentaries which come respectively from Brazil and Australia.

1.5.1 Women Documentary Productions in Brazil

  Before discussing modern female documentary productions in Brazil, it is necessary to mention three women that can be considered as

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[3] Thornley took part in the Sydney Women's Film Group, which will be better discussed henceforth, when we draw a few discussions on Australian women documentarists and films.

precursors in terms of Brazilian female cinema. According to Lucilene M. Pizoqueiro (2006), the first woman to occupy the position of filmmaker in our country was Cléo de Verberena, who not only directed but also produced and acted in her first film, *O Mistério do Dominó*, in 1930. The second one was Carmen Santos who was born in Portugal but developed all her career in Brazil. Carmen began as an actress – she acted in many Brazilian productions in the 1920s and early 1930s; her experiences as a moviemaker started in 1939, when she accepted directing the film *Inconfidência Mineira*, an ambitious project that was finished only in 1948. Finally, the third Brazilian woman cited by Pizoqueiro is Gilda de Abreu. Likewise Cléo de Verberena and Carmen Santos, Gilda de Abreu began her career as an actress – her first role was in the film *Bonequinha de Seda* (1936), by Oduvaldo Vianna –, then, from 1946 to 1951, Abreu started working as screenwriter, producer and filmmaker. She directed *O Ébrio* (made in 1946 and which was, for many decades, the most popular Brazilian film)*, Pinguinho de Gente* (1949)*,* and *Coração Materno* (1951). Pizoqueira points out that Gilda de Abreu was a pioneer in the female Brazilian cinema since she was the first Brazilian woman who directed three films and who obtained relative success in terms of audience through her productions (17-18).

Therefore, it is possible to say that the trajectory of these three women – and of several others from the world of the arts – contributed to what the Brazilian women filmmakers would experience later, from the 1960s on, in their production of both feature films and documentaries. According to Karla Holanda (2015), although the cinematic canon is usually comprised by men, various women began their filmic productions in Brazil around the decades of 1960s and 1970s, being part of such films dedicated to documentaries, which usually deal with issues directly interlaced with female interests, such as work, abortion, political insertion, social role construction, among others.

The documentaries produced in the late 1960s and in the 1970s were specially characterized by struggling against the paternalistic model that predominated and ruled the social relations in those years (and that, as we know, still do); a model that preconized that women were, for example, cut out for motherhood and house chores, and that they were irremediably some steps behind men in the professional field, having to depend on their fathers, husbands and brothers, as if they had no choice but living under such conditions (Cavalcante; Holanda, 2013).

Out of these documentary filmmakers and productions, one can point out Helena Solberg and her nonfiction movie, *Entrevista* (1966). As

stated by Veiga (2013), Solberg presented a critique of the Rio de Janeiro upper-class women's values. On the screen, while a bride is preparing for her wedding day, many women voices can be heard, on anonymous reports about their frustrating experiences with marriage. The narration comprised a selection of seventy interviews in which women from 18 to 27 years old talked about themes such as sex, sin, betrayal, freedom, passivity, and virginity (298).

Holanda (2015) draws attention to the fact that *Entrevista* is strangely out of the history of Brazilian modern documentary; strangely because it had inaugurated a style in the narration in the documentaries from Brazil. As maintained by the author, almost all Brazilian modern documentaries from the late 1960s and 1970s used a type of conducting voice off that characterized a narrator who intended to guide the viewer to what she or he was watching and hearing. Differently from that, Solberg's film was to make the discourses rise or interact on the screen, in a process that might have brought more freedom to the audience's choices of interpretation.

1.5.2 Australian Female Documentary Filmmakers and Films

Unlike what happened in Brazil, female Australian filmmakers were significantly integrated in the production of commercial feature films throughout the silent and early sound periods of Australian cinema (French, 2003). However, similarly to what I have mentioned in the previous subsection about Brazilian women filmmakers, it was in the late 1960s and mainly in the 1970s that Australian female films flourished, undergoing, too, the influence of the 'feminist agenda'.

According to Lisa French (2003), in general, it was in the 1970s and 1980s that various feminist groups were formed; such groups were to propel things such as "training, access and the status of women in the film industry" (12); besides, they were involved both in the production and exhibition of numerous films.

> These groups, devoted principally to the production of short films (in all genres), included The Sydney Women's Film Group (formed in 1972), The Feminist Film Workers (1970s—980s), The Melbourne Women's Film Group (established in 1973), Reel Women (1979—1983) and the Women's Film Unit (1984 in Sydney and 1984/5 in Melbourne). (13)

The Sydney Women's Film Group had as one of its main members Jeni Thornley, who not only directed, but also used to act in many of her oeuvres,

dedicating almost all of her production to documentary films. In addition, female documentary producers have been successful in the Australian cinema having won important awards both of best documentary and best documentary director in cinema festivals in that country (French, 2003).

Since the 1970s, the themes of Australian female documentaries have obviously varied a lot; however, in the great part of such films

> women have exposed aspects of their personal histories, self-consciously performing and constructing their identities. They have documented their lives through an exploration of visual evidence including old film footage, photographs, interviews with family members and even re-enactments. The self is most intensely performed in these films through self-portraiture, as the film-makers step not only onto the screen as subjects but in front of the mirror to view the reflection of their own image. (Seaman, 2003, 157)

Not unlike present-day Brazilian documentaries, Seaman comments about the fact that various Australian documentaries have been dealing with the moviemakers' own histories and have, thus, created possibilities to make the directors reflect, and then understand their own images and identities through their (auto)biographical productions. In documentaries such as *In this Life's Body* (Cantrill, 1984), *A Song of Air* (Bennett, 1987) and *The Butler* (Kannava, 1997) the filmmakers perform and construct

> identities through an exploration of the physical evidence of their lives through film footage and photographs. These films are powerful examples of women seeking to author their own on-screen visions of 'self'. The film-makers represent themselves physically on screen in their dual role as film-maker and filmic subject [4]. (French, 2003, 21)

As maintained by that author, "Australian women film-makers have had, and continue to have, an impact on the changing positions of women in society," and their films have not only given "space for a diversity of female representation", but also considered "the lack of diversity that has existed previously" (16).

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[4] Something similar to what one can perceive in *Elena* and *To the Other Shore*.

1.6 The Poetic Cinema

One of the first reasons that motivated this work is the scarcity of works dealing with the poetic in documentary cinema. Such scarcity is even more noticeable when it comes to studies on poetic documentary films directed by women. Moreover, as far as my findings show, Brazilian and/or Australian (auto)biographical films have not constantly been approached as corpora by theses and dissertations at PPGI – UFSC, so that I believe this research might contribute to the cinematic studies of this University as well as increase the possibilities of discussion on Brazilian and Australian cinema in general.

Dealing with autobiographical documentaries is always interesting and pertinent since this movie genre can present not only the life of famous people, but also of 'common' or 'ordinary' individuals in its development. To some extent, some of these movies bring a social reason along with their stories for 'giving voice' to the ones that are not usually put in evidence in conventional cinematic narratives. On this regard, the choice of the movie *To the Other Shore* as part of the corpus of this thesis discussions may stand out, for it depicts connections to its moviemaker's personal life: Jeni Thornley, although not famous, is very politically engaged, having fought for the women's rights during all her life and taken part in anti-war movements in her youth.

Finally, investigating metaphoric representations in art productions remains an unfinishable activity, providing many possibilities of interpretation that can only enrich and increase the discussions on artistic oeuvres.

Taking that into consideration, this thesis has as general objective the analysis of the representations of water in Costa's *Elena* and Thornley's *To the Other Shore,* by approaching some of the films sequences, with focus on visual and sound effects. The specific objectives are: i) to analyze the way the water is portrayed in the movies, pointing out allusions and interpretations that such representations can suggest; ii) to analyze both films in terms of visual elements, considering the use of cinematography; iii) to demonstrate the relations of the use of water to the narrators'/characters' sentimental memories in the films.

Therefore, the research questions raised in the present work are: a) What is the poetic mode? How can it be associated with the movies analyzed?; b) How does the cinematography contribute to the identification of the poetic mode and of the allusions suggested by water imagery in *Elena* and *To the Other Shore*?; c) Are there works of criticism published about

Costa's and Thornley's films? If so, what are they?; d) Are there similarities between the movies analyzed when it comes to cinematography and representations of water?

1.7 Review of the Literature

Bearing in mind the fact that I am dealing with two poetic films as my thesis corpus, and also taking into account the work accomplished in the analysis, more specifically in chapters II and III, in which allusions and sometimes metaphors are raised by the analysis of water images and sound effects taken from various sequences of the films, the inclusion of considerations on poetics, the poetic image and metaphor seem paramount to this review of the literature.

1.7.1 On Poetics

If one is interested in the poetics of anything, then there must be the awareness that she or he will be dealing with something that, perhaps because of its inherent nature, lacks objectivity and precise definitions. Analyzing the root of the word poetics, that is, the term poetry, one of the first attempts of concepts to which one can have access is possible through the ancient philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. Plato (2008) was an idealist, that is, the most important thing for him would be the so-called "world of ideas." According to Plato, poetry was considered as mimesis or imitation, being two levels far from the truth and/or reality, for it was a manifestation of things of the world or, in other words, an imitation of another imitation. Under Plato's point of view, since poetry was not "real", it should be expelled from his perfect/ideal republic.

Aristotle (2005), following Plato, also conceived poetry as an imitation, but, differently from his predecessor, he believed that human beings were naturally inclined to mimeses; then, the imitation would work as one of the most important basis for the development of human knowledge and experiences.

Octavio Paz, in the first edition of *The Bow and the Lyre* (1956), discusses about the difficulties of dealing with the adjective "poetic". According to him, there is nothing more evasive or undefinable than the word poetic, whose nature sometimes seems to be empty in terms of content. For the author, nothing can underpin the poetic, which ends up floating and going nowhere but to the encounter in the itself.

Such difficulties on defining what the poetic is can be perceived in the very beginning of *The Bow and the Lyre*, in which Paz states that

> Poetry is knowledge, salvation, power abandonment. An operation capable of changing the world, poetic activity is revolutionary by nature; a spiritual exercise, it is a means of interior liberation. Poetry reveals this world; it creates another. Bread of the chosen; accursed food. It isolates; it unites. Invitation to the journey; return to the homeland. Inspiration, respiration, muscular exercise. Prayer to the void, dialogue with absence: tedium, anguish, and despair nourish it. (1956, 15)

In trying to say what poetry is, Paz brings ideas and elements that are sometimes complementing and other times opposite to each other. Besides, in face of such hard task that is defining poetry/poetics, he invites us to know what he calls the being of the poetry, that is, the poem. About that, one can understand that according to Paz (1956), not all poems bear poetry into themselves. A poem should not be considered as such due to its literary elements; actually, in Paz's perspective, what characterizes a poem as a poem is its having been touched by poetry itself. In other words, poetry exists out of the poem and can be identified in things such as people, encounters, pictures, paintings and, we might add, movies.

1.7.2 The Poetic Image

Assuming that poetry can be manifested through different ways, and that it can appear in different artistic expressions, such as film, this subsection will briefly discuss the poetic image. To start with, we can quote Gaston Bachelard, who in the introduction of his book, *The Poetics of Space* (1957), states that

> One must be receptive, receptive to the image at the moment it appears […]. The poetic image is a sudden salience on the surface of the psyche, the lesser psychological causes of which have not been sufficiently investigated […]. The poetic image is not subject to an inner thrust. It is not an echo of the past. On the contrary: through the brilliance of an image, the distant past resounds with echoes, and it is hard to know at what depth these echoes will reverberate and die away. Because of its novelty and its action, the poetic image has an entity and a dynamism of its own; it is referable to a direct ontology. (1957, xv - xi)

Following Bachelard's passage, one can notice that it is important to consider and approach images when they appear at a specific moment. The poetic image can be related to the surfacing of a given image inside one's mind, and such image would interlace present and past.

According to Andrey Tarkovsky (1986), any concept of artistic image would be hard to be expressed or apprehended; maybe because "image stretches out into infinity, and leads to the absolute" (104). Tarkovsky defines image as something

> indivisible and elusive, dependent upon our consciousness and on the real world which it seeks to embody. If the world is inscrutable, then the image will be so too. It is a kind of equation, signifying the correlation between truth and the human consciousness […]. We cannot comprehend the totality of the universe, but the poetic image is able to express that totality. (106)

The poetic image can be expressed in innumerous ways. It is capable of being redefined and re-elaborated every time it appears. Each time that happens, the poetic image can present different connotations and meanings because it is approached according to a different perspective; thus, one can say the poetic image is comprised by infinite dimensions (Mendoza, 2006).

Following Paz's formulations quoted above, one could say that, obviously, not unlike poems, which may not always be touched by poetry, a film can feature images that are not always related to poetic elements or sensations. Moreover, films can be associated with poetics by means of visual images, lighting, among other elements of cinematographic language. The notion of what can be considered as poetic is usually a highly personal thing; thus, in my analysis I will consider a group of images which I judge as poetic because they provoke a concrete or abstract poetic experience on me, and I intend to show evidence for my choices of imagery and their association with poetry. Obviously, there might be questionings of such choices since I understand the experience of poetry varies a lot from individual to individual.

1.7.3 On Metaphor

Similarly to the discussions just seen on poetics and on the poetic image, the concepts and ideas regarding metaphor are also very liquid, perhaps because one can find interrelations pervading such terms to some extent, as we can comprehend from Marianne Boruch's words:

> Metaphor, that swift movement across time and space, is a place where stone does soften, where the willful forward movement toward resolution in the poem ceases […] The one simple thing about metaphor is that it moves us from one place to another, the word itself of restless parts, from buried Greek, *meta* meaning "over across behind" and *phoreo* – "to bring, bear, carry (1995; 122).

As we can grasp from this passage, for metaphor to exist it is necessary a sort of experience in which one is symbolically taken into or out of somewhere depending on the poetic proposal. Metaphor, thus, suggests a searching for unrevealed layers of interpretations, which, in the end, can provoke a sort of transformation in those who can accept the 'journey' around the process of figuring it out.

Further in her essay, Boruch writes that "[m]etaphor is a way of thinking in a poem but it's a way of slowing thought too, dreaming off on this seemingly rational thread of similarity. We control pace that way […] we let the poem loose that way" (123). In other words, metaphor makes us stop to reflect, to think of poetic resemblances or of something else, and then the poem or – why not say – the poetic energy, is set free.

Boruch cites Robert Lowell who called a poem a "controlled hallucination", then, for her, metaphor is surely inside of a sort of hallucination; it is like a shorter poem inside another poem, and it is "hardly new, always part of the human imagination" (126), which makes us think that metaphor is assuredly beyond words or images.

Later on, Boruch draws attention to the equivocated association of metaphor with expressions such as "red as a rose, blue as the sky" as if these verses could describe such "eternal treasures", she goes on by saying that "the rose, the sky, and the night itself, never really commonplace". Therefore, following the author words on expressions like 'red as rose' and 'blue as the sky', despite their inherent descriptive trait, they could not be associated with the transformation that a given metaphor would require (127).

That could be associated with the notions that not all verses nor images would entail metaphors because many times the association between a verse and an idea or between an image and a given connotation is, to some extent, very obvious. For example, if one takes a movie sequence of a burial ceremony, in a cemetery, in which the camera first focalizes the casket and then moves towards a woman in black, whose finger with a wedding ring is shown, it is not difficult to think that such character is very likely to represent the widow of the dead person in the occasion.

Boruch quotes Alice Munro, to whom we, human beings, live in flashes that we do not develop and which take us nowhere; based on such words, Boruch adds that "metaphor must have been invented to get at those flashes" due to its capacity of getting out of the comfortable position occupied by the main focus of a poem. Nevertheless, the author states that "Sometimes though, by dramatic juxtapositions, metaphor itself becomes the main focus, one focus after another in such a shifting" (130).

Indeed, juxtaposition in poetry, which is described by Boruch as the "habit of superimposing one image on another" and as something that represents "a more astonished way to make metaphor" (131), can be associated with the juxtaposition of shots in the process of editing in cinematic productions, even though not all juxtapositions would express metaphor.

When analyzing *Elena* and *To the Other Shore*, I try to approach and detect not only metaphors, but to read the presence of water in the films. Thus, I consider the allusions and possibilities of reading that one can find in studies of water imagery – such as Bachelard (1997) and Clarke (2010) – as well as taking into account the context of the sequences (and of the entire narratives) that I have chosen from the movies.

1.8 Theoretical Framework
1.8.1 Film and Poetry

In this subsection, I will attempt to bring a few notions surrounding poetic cinema under the light of some of Sergei Eisenstein's and Maya Deren's ideas, since my approach in this thesis is developed from a poetic perspective in face of two films that recurrently utilize water in their scenes.

Before getting to the point, we shall bear in mind all the discussions on metaphor, on the poetic image and on poetry done previously, and that, again, we are dealing with a term – poetics – that has frequently been loomed with a certain lack of objectivity, which may be due to the poetic nature itself, usually connected with subjectivity. On this regard, I need to say that, although I understand the notion of art and poetry as highly broad, I have always been more inclined to relate the poetics to one's internal sensations being externalized through a creative process, be it in poems, novels, films, paintings, etc.

Starting with Sergei Eisenstein's oeuvre *Film Form* (1949), one cannot forget to mention his contributions to the cinematic realm as a whole. Eisentein's studies and experiments on editing or montage can be seen as a breakthrough in the history of cinema. Montage is here approached, because

it is deeply related to a filmmaker's creative process – which is one of the core ideas present in the poetic cinema. Eisenstein was brilliant in this extent because he based his notion of montage on dialectal and historical materialism, which defends that in History, there is a constant conflict in which a force or thesis collides with a counter-force or anti-thesis to originate a new event called synthesis. In an attempt to explain such notion, one could say that Eisenstein saw the collision between two shots as a way to bring forth a conflict that, on its turn, produces a new concept, which would represent the synthesis; then, everything would start again, in a creative process that would drive the film forward.

In the realm of editing, Eisenstein points out five methods of montage or of how the conflicts between shots can be created. The first method is named 'metric montage', and "[t]he fundamental criterion for this construction is the absolute lengths of the pieces [which] are joined together according to their lengths, in a formula-scheme corresponding to a measure of music." (Eisenstein 1949, 72). The cutting of the pieces, based on the lengths of the shots, elicits a sort of emotional response in which the 'tempo' can be both raised and lowered.

The second method of montage is the rhythmic one, and, as the name suggests, it concerns rhythm of action in the shot. Differently from the metric montage, whose length of the piece is mathematically determined, the rhythmic montage owns a "practical length [that] derives from the specifics of the piece, and from its planned length according to the structure of the sequence." (74). In other words, the filmmakers' objectives towards the content of the pieces are determinant in the decision of the length of the shot; thus, a sequence can be decelerated or speeded up, for example.

The third method that Eisenstein elaborates about is the tonal montage. According to him, this montage goes a bit further in relation to the metric and the rhythmic ones because "[i]n tonal montage, movement is perceived in a wider sense. The concept of movement embraces all [effects] of the montage piece. Here montage is based on the characteristic emotional sound of the piece-of its dominant. The general tone of the piece." (75). The idea of tone here can encompass lighting, shadows and shapes in the frame, and one could associate the idea of the cutting between shots of different aesthetic tones with the creation of the so-called dialectics (referred above).

The fourth method of montage, namely, the over-tonal montage, concerns montage of large sequences. In a few words, this montage can be seen as essentially freer than the metric, the rhythmic and the tonal montages,

and it somewhat combines these three methods of montage to show how whole sequences play against each other.

Finally, we can draw attention to Eisenstein's fifth and most complex method, known as Intellectual montage. While the four first types of montage are focused on the induction of emotional responses, the intellectual montage is more interested in expressing nonconcrete ideas through the creation of relations between opposing visual intellectual concepts. The intellectual montage has to do with the insertion of ideas into a sequence of emotional appealing and, many times, the sequence would present the collision of two or more elements for the spectator to grasp the meaning of that combination or conflict, that is to say, the viewer would have to get to a sort of synthesis (82-83). One can claim, in a simplistic way, that Eisenstein used the process of montage to break free from the confines of time and space and to communicate abstract ideas in a new and modern approach.

Again, it is important to highlight the association that one can establish between the filmmaker's creative process and the process of montage itself. The possibilities brought forth by Eisenstein's study and filmic experimentations on montage were very important to the evolvement of cinema in general. Sergei Eisenstein was one of the most representative filmmakers to deal with editing and montage as abstraction and art form. Thus, it is possible to claim that poetic cinema was and has been significantly affected by Eisenstein's ideas, which have of course been mixed with various other ideas and enhanced through technological tools that came along the second half of the twentieth century – and even more nowadays, in the 2010s – but that are still very dependent on moviemakers' creativity.

Speaking about creativity may be a good way to introduce Maya Deren in the discussions since her cinema is marked by inventiveness and originality, and, in addition, because similarly to Eisenstein, she did experiments, developing her own cinematic approaches and theoretical assumptions.

Having said that, we can present Deren's relation to the art or the artistic process of creation. In *Cinema as an Independent Art Form*, Deren clarifies that "when we agree that a work of art is […] creative, we actually mean that it creates a reality and itself constitutes an experience" (1988 4). On this regard, it is paramount to mention that Deren created practically all the specificities inherent to her films, giving them her signature; thus, she not only wrote the ideas she would later transform into films, but also acted, and, of course, directed her works, intensifying her artistic experience. Moreover, one can say that such as a poet whose work with the words is constantly

thought and rethought – not only in terms of lexical choices but also of the position the words can occupy in a line –, Maya Deren conceived her labor with films as an artistic experience based on the fact that she lived her art and built on it continuously.

Maya Deren was persistent in establishing a relationship between film and poetry and the fact that she, as a filmmaker, seems to have lived every process in which her art was involved, somewhat made of her practice an expression of what she defended in terms of theory – the movie *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) can be an example of this.

Following Rafaela do Nascimento de Moraes's (2004) ideas, one could say that Deren was influenced by Dziga Vertov, mainly when it comes to his experimental discoveries known through the expression 'kino eye', which was a reference of the camera working as a human eye. In Vertov's assumption, the filmmaker was, to a certain degree, an extension of the camera, a sort of machine capturing what was around her/him (33). On this regard, we can state that, for Deren, the core of film remains on visual elements enabled by the camera and montage, something that, for being very particular to films, could bring forth notions of the cinematic art as independent from other artistic fields.

Nevertheless, one could say that reinforcing such independency does not seem to be a main concern for Deren; she appears to be more interested in demonstrating the conjunction of film and poetry. Maybe one of the most remarkable documents about interconnections between poetry and film lies on Deren's participation in a symposium that was held in 1953, by film society Cinema 16. In the symposium, Deren, sharing the floor with Dylan Thomas, Arthur Miller, Parker Tyler and Willard Maas, discussed the possibilities of approaching cinema as a poetic creative process.

In such occasion, Maya Deren begins her talk mentioning that what she was about to do was something risky in the sense that it was necessary, first of all, to understand what poetics meant and what could distinguish poetry from anything else. For her, the task of defining poetry was risky because it had been (and it still has been) discussed for many centuries and had been very difficult to pin down (1970: 173). For Deren, establishing distinctions between core terms could make the audience aware of what they were going to watch. Going straight to the point, Deren states her idea about what poetry is:

> Now poetry, to my mind, consists not of assonance, or rhythm, or rhyme, or any of these other qualities we associate as being characteristic of poetry. Poetry […]

> is an approach to experience, in the sense that a poet is looking at the same experience that a dramatist may be looking at. It comes out differently because they are looking at it from a different point of view and because they are concerned with different elements. (173)

As we can see, Deren emphasizes the role of experience within the poetic creation and, if we stick with Deren's definition of poetry, we will notice that, for her, poetry is somehow very personal and, thus, dependent on each artist's objective or concerns when creating her/his oeuvres.

Next, she introduces her ideas on verticality that, later on in that symposium, would be distinguished from the concept of horizontality in art works:

> The distinction of poetry is its construction and the poetic construct arises from the fact that it is a 'vertical' investigation of a situation, in that it probes the ramifications of the moment, and is concerned with its qualities and its depth, so that you have poetry concerned in a sense not with what is occurring, but with what it feels like or what it means. (173)

The vertical approach is, thus, poetic and does not concern "with what is occurring" as stated by Maya Deren, because such concerns on a story, being developed in a continuous – perhaps more logical – way, are associated with the idea of horizontality. For Deren, a horizontal development, which is not poetic, refers to the development of a narrative, something that, nowadays, could be more or less approximated to Bordwell & Thompson's (2008) definitions on narrative, that is, narrative as a chain of events in cause-effect relationship, which occurs in time and space.

At this point, it becomes necessary to mention that Deren's vertical and horizontal discussions were not well-received by the members of the panel in that symposium, especially by poet Dylan Thomas and writer Arthur Miller (something that becomes even more noticeable when we listen to the theorists). Nevertheless, she gave some examples to reinforce her perspective, trying to make herself clearer. To this extent, a narrative film – which according to her is not poetic in its essence – can centralize a few shots and, then, construct a poetic or vertical passage, for example through a dream or when during a filmic opening sequence the camera establishes the mood with a poetic montage of images that distinguishes that very sequence from the rest of the film.

1.8.2 Other filmic Considerations

      Throughout the development of my analyses in Chapters II and III, I directly and indirectly approach some filmic elements and, for this reason, I have decided to describe some of these elements in this subsection, namely, setting, which is an element of mise-en-scène; the categories of narration and character's construction (both influenced by the mise-en-scène); and voice-over narration. However, it is important to make it clear that the authors that will be mentioned in this subsection, mainly Bordwell and Thompson, do not offer help in terms of the poetic cinema, as their categorization follows patterns that have little to do with the poetic cinema, which is much more interwoven with an avant-gardist approach.

      Beginning with the *mise-en-scène*, one can state that it has to do with how the story is told. The expression comes from the French language and is derived from a theatrical context (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008: 112). *Mise-en-scène* is actually a part of the narrative process and involves, in general, various categories that end up in a greater concatenation: the final product/the film. In this subsection, I have also chosen to draw special attention to the setting, and, in addition, I briefly write about two other elements that are closely related to the *mise-en-scène*, but are not mise-en-scenic elements themselves, namely character construction and narration.

      Starting with the setting, one can say that it is mainly related to where he movie story takes place diagetically. Bordwell and Thompson state that the setting is considered to play a more active role in movies than it does in plays (115). It is part of the filmmaker's creative process and it can be decisive for the understanding of the story as a whole. The authors also claim that the setting may be controlled and constructed in several ways through which the filmmaker can emphasize some features instead of others in order to better tell/show a story.

      Having said that and since I am dealing, in this thesis, with movies whose stories are based upon "real" facts, with many voice and video-records, it becomes pertinent to analyze the filmmaker's construction of character, which is an element that, in conformity to film studies, comes along with the category of performance or acting.

      Throughout cinematic history, many discussions have been built on character construction, such as the notion of acting as being associated with human types, the tradition of the character or acting as the representation of social classes, as well as the characters that seem to relate more with psychological issues. Following Bordwell and Thompson (2008), it is possible to state that film performances used to be linked to the idea of being

realistic during the course of Hollywood hegemonic cinema history. However, as claimed by the same authors, this conception has changed over time, once not all movies have the conveying of realistic elements as purpose:

> Acting is often approached as a question of realism. But concepts of realistic acting have changed over film history. (…) [One needs] to be cautious in appealing to realism. Not all films try to achieve it. Since the performance an actor creates is part of the overall mise-en-scene, films contain a wide variety of acting styles. Instead of assuming that acting must be realistic, we should try to understand what kind of acting style the film is aiming at. (Bordwell and Thompson 133)

The analysis of a certain character can be complex because it is surrounded by many factors as one can perceive through the words of Dario Tomasi (1988), cited by Henriette Heidbrink (2010). According to him

> To analyze a cinematic character means to become aware of its articulations on different levels […], from the story, to the speech of the actors, […], to the narration, and the film. Only in consideration of all these elements can we ascertain the meaning of the cinematic character. (93)

The next cinematic element that is worth highlighting is narration. Narration can involve many elements such as voice, depth and authorship, once the story is being presented, that is, narrated from a person's or some people's point of view. In the case of *Elena* and of *To the Other Shore*, it is valuable to notice the use of voice-over narration, which according to Sarah Kozloff (1988), has been used in cinema since the thirties and is so common that it is probably unnoticed by the average moviegoer (2). The author explains that basically

> in voice-over narration all three words are very operative. Voice determines the medium: we must hear someone speaking (…); Over pertains to the relationship between the source of the sound and the images on the screen: the viewer does not see the person who is speaking at the time of hearing his or her voice (…); and narration relates to the content of the speech: someone is in the act of communicating a narrative – that is, recounting a series of events to an audience." (2-3)

As just mentioned above, the films I analyze in my work present voice-over narration. Petra Costa, for example, is not only narrating the story through voice-over, but also appearing and performing in many different scenes. In a more simplified view, Petra can be seen as the most explicit narrator, once she guides the viewer using her voice in order to make us, the spectators, go along with her and comprehend Elena's and her own life stories. On the other hand, in various moments it becomes a little problematic to tell if it is Petra or Elena the one responsible for guiding us or, in other words, for narrating the story.

1.8.3 Travels and *Scapes*

Considering the fact that the idea of travel is explicit in both movies, be it a trip to another country and/or a trip into the characters' (hi)stories and inner worlds, I present in this subsection the studies by Arjun Appadurai.

According to Appadurai, throughout the centuries, the world has presented cultural transactions across it, involving "long-distance journey of commodity (…) and of travelers and explorers of every type". The world is an interactive system and the interactions we currently have in this "new world" portray a new order and intensity (2009, 584). To that extent, the act of travelling has undergone gradual and significant evolution in the past few centuries. The current context, for instance, has presented not only easier spatial mobility but also the so-called virtual reality, which became possible through contemporary media such as the internet. The author mentions that in the new global cultural processes, imagination has been represented as a social practice. To Appadurai, "[t]he imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order" (587). The current global economy presents a level of complexity that can be associated with some given disjunctures, encompassing economy, culture, and politics, which, according to the author have only started to be theorized. Therefore, in order to explore such disjunctures, the theorist draws attention to the relations among five dimensions of global cultural flows which he coined as: "ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes." (588 – 589)

In a few words, ethnoscapes are linked to clusters or groups of people who inhabit the shifting world we live in, that is, "tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals"; technoscapes represent technology and all its fluid features, such as "high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries"; financescapes relate to the disposition of money or capital throughout the

world; mediascapes concern the production and dissemination of information. To this extent, Appadurai theorizes on the complex ways that the media can impact viewers, creating imaginary worlds and desire for other lives/things, and consequently, movement; ideoscapes are also related to chains of images, usually ideologically associated with politics. They can include ideological aspects such as "freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation, and the master term democracy", and its fluidity can be complex because of "the growing diasporas (both voluntary and involuntary) of intellectuals who continuously inject new meaning-streams into the discourse of democracy in different parts of the world." (589-592).

In general, Appadurai's ideas are pertinent to this analysis because my research corpus relate directly or indirectly to cultural encounters through travel and some of the previously mentioned *scapes* – ethnoscapes and mediascapes more precisely. In Costa's film, although travel and such *scapes* are not the documentary's main topic, they can be useful to help us comprehend both leading characters' search for themselves. Thus, the dislocation from Brazil to the U.S. and vice-versa (which is constantly shown in the movie) is important to convey the idea that the characters are somewhat displaced in their lives and that they, through the movement, wish for changes. In *To the Other Shore*, the theme concerning travel is approached mainly when it comes to the movement in the character's family lifetime, through the use of Jeni's family pictures and videos; thus, the travels in Thornley' movies are much more metaphoric.

1.8.4 A discussion on Representations of Water

Having in mind that my chapters of analysis approach especially how water imagery appear in the movies *Elena* and *To the Other Shore* as well as what such images may suggest, I will draw attention to a few studies on representations of water in this subsection.

Water, in its various forms, is an element constantly present in our lives; even when one thinks about the human body constitution, it is there, comprising many molecules, or enabling various allusions, such as the veins representing rivers that run throughout the whole body. In addition, water was and has been approached not only by scientific areas like chemistry or physics, but by realms of the human knowledge such as mythology, philosophy and the arts as well. Out of these areas I mentioned, the last two have presented several contributions to the accomplishment of this research for they offer concepts and allegories on the water, providing diverse possibilities of interpretation which will be better comprehended with the analyses of the representations of the water in the movies.

The artistic field, for its potential flexibility and fluidity of ideas and concepts, often refers to water and its intrinsic characteristics. Leonardo da Vinci was one of the artists who showed deep interest in water, accomplishing not only artistic, but also scientific studies about it. According to David Clarke (2010), there was another artist that preceded Leonardo, namely Canaletto, but his works were quite far from showing the profoundness encountered in da Vinci's oeuvres and free studies, whose representations of water are said to be close to an obsession (20). Clarke emphasizes Leonardo's scientific interests by mentioning several of his drawings and analyses, such as the *Composite Study of the Respiratory, Vascular and Urino-genital Systems in a Female Body* done in black chalk, pen and ink and wash on paper, which offers a synthesis of Leonardo's anatomical studies. However, according to Clarke, it is the drawing and treatise *Studies of Flowing Water[5]*, a study that was, by the way, published in 1826 in a collection of essays on hydraulics (Bramley, 1991, 9) –, the one that stands out from da Vinci's analytical drawings.

For Ernest Gombrich, such study demonstrates that:

> [I]t is clear that Leonardo's drawing is not a snap-shot of water falling upon water but a very elaborate diagram of his ideas on the subject. No waterfall or whirlpool permits us to see the lines of flow with similar clarity, nor do bubbles in turbulent water ever distribute themselves so tidily (316).

Consistent with Hugo Fortes (2006), although the water was represented in the work of other painters contemporary to Leonardo da Vinci, his paintings stood out for presenting such theme with a special atmosphere due to his soft employment of the light (35). Also, based on Fortes, we can state that Leonardo's obsession with water and all its features contributed to his formulation of the idea that pictorial art held a supremacy over sculpture works.

This idea, however, was gradually losing power due to works of artists such as Bernini, whose fountain sculptures were successful in attempting to capture the idea of aquatic movements as we can understand from Clarke (2010, 31). Nevertheless, one more time discussing the pictorial art, the mentioned author points out the representation of water in the paintings of William Turner, in the nineteenth century, a historical period under the influence of Romanticism and of nature in one of the phases of

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[5] *Del Moto e Mistura dell'Acqua* in the original.

such movement; Turner was mostly devoted to painting marine themes such as the waves and the water in movement (45).

Fortes emphasizes that while Turner's paintings present an abstract and dense atmosphere enabled through the intense use of colors, light and unconventional perspectives, the painters related to the German artistic-literary movement *Sturm und Drang* – that had its initial development in the end of the eighteenth century but influenced the Romanticism throughout the nineteenth century – were often more dedicated to representing the water hovering up in the air, e.g. the paintings by Caspar David Friedrich (2010, 41-43).

The free brushstrokes proposed and defended by the romantic painters were important for the coming out of the next movement, Symbolism, which would trigger Impressionism in pictorial art. As mentioned by Fortes, impressionists, like Monet, took advantage of the light and its transitory characteristics, encountering in the aquatic landscapes a good reason to develop their optical effects. In addition, such painters preferred calm waters, frequently associated with people's daily life and leisure (45).

Out of the aquatic representations in the avant-gardes from the twentieth century, Fortes mentions Surrealism and Expressionism. Having as main representatives Salvador Dali and René Magritte, the surrealists approached the liquid processes as being metaphorical representations of the unconscious, whereas Pollock and Morris Louis were concerned with the materiality of the ink, producing vivid and real effects from it and its watery fluidity (48).

One can also note the fact that after the second half of the twentieth century, aquatic artistic depictions were highly associated with the use of water itself, as an element constitutive of the oeuvres. Various contemporary artists such as Marina Abramovic, Teresa Margoles, and Síssi Fonseca, use water in their artistic creations, alluding to different meanings in which liquid fluids may work as a form of cleanness and purification. To this extent, Abramovic's work is interesting to compared with the movie *Elena*, since she deals with the idea of washing bones, referring to the aquatic healing powers, something that can also be apprehended from Petra's documentary as we will perceive at some point of the analysis in Chapter II.

Making reference to philosophical and poetic studies on water, I mention herein Gaston Bachelard and his oeuvre *Waters and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (1997). In this book, the author discusses, among other aspects, the way water can relate to the imagination and to

events into the human psyche. Bachelard writes about the clear waters and their important poetic component, the freshness, which he associates with purity myths and with the power of awakening (34). On the other hand, he presents the paradoxical fact that water can refer to both life and death in the chapter he draws attention to the complex of Ophelia. According to his ideas, based on Carl G. Jung, to die in the water would represent the most maternal of the deaths, working as a return to the mother's womb (75).

The philosopher is well known for his studies of metaphors and poetical sensations produced by the basic elements, namely water, fire, air, and earth. According to Freitas (2006), Bachelard started his phenomenology of sensations around the 1940s – that is, in a historical period in which psychoanalysis had not been totally accepted in the University yet; nevertheless, he postulated the inextricable tension between body, matter and imagination; a tension that was, a propos, guided by emotion. Thus, Bachelard creates an investigation system of the poetical image genesis – the literary imaginary – based on pragmatic ruptures of the new scientific spirit, on concepts from the relative physics, on the possibility of invention and/or creation apprehended from ultra-rationalism and from phenomenology, and mainly based on the archetypes of the four elements that have been present in the imaginary of every human being since the beginning of humankind (41-42).

Following Bachelard's ideas (1997), one can state that water, in its essence, is ontologically pure, symbolizing life and death, and, for this reason, it can be closely related to human beings, who start dying at every single moment since they are born, like river waters. According to Alvarez Ferreira (2013), the transitory characteristic of water, as explained by Bachelard, could also be associated to the same tediousness inherent to the human beings' daily life (13) since our life presents such liquidness, with emotions sticking to different circumstances, just like waters that can assume different shapes and characteristics according to diverse situations.

For Bachelard, the watery literary image reveals a type of imaginary determinism, triggering different allusions out of which we can highlight the water of the tranquil dreamer, which brings rest and peace of mind; the shadowy and black waters from Edgar Allan Poe; and the waters of Ophelia, whose concept, as well as other bachelardian ideas, will be approached along with the analysis of certain sequences of *Elena*. According to D'Aloia (2012) Gaston Bachelard highlighted is his studies on the 'imaginary waters' in poetry and literature that:

> [W]ater ranges from the clear, slow moving, innocent and transparent river, that is related to the natural beauty of a young naked woman, innocent and unmysterious […], to the deep, 'heavy' and running waters that symbolise the passing of time and death […]. Bachelard argued that human imagination does not draw on interpretation, but rather it is supported by "direct images of matter" […], images in which "the form is deeply sunk in a substance". (94)

As I will try to demonstrate throughout the next two chapters, water is an element that will resonate and be observed into many sequences throughout the films chosen, generating various metaphors and interpretations.

CHAPTER II:
FLOATING BODIES AND DRENCHED SOULS: *ELENA'S* WATERS

2.1 Representations of Water in *Elena*

    Opening sequence: dark, diffusing lights passing by horizontally and denoting the perspective from a car in movement, maybe late at night, maybe at daybreak, - we don't know exactly [figure 2.1]; reverse shot and we can notice the narrator speaking from a car, which is driven along New York City streets [figure 2.2]. The choice of dark colors and the fact the narrator (Petra Costa, as we will learn later in the film) is blurrily portrayed from behind the glass of the car windows suggest that there is something unclear about her, as if she were protecting herself (or hiding under layers that will be removed during the movie), as she tells and shows Elena's and her own (hi)stories.
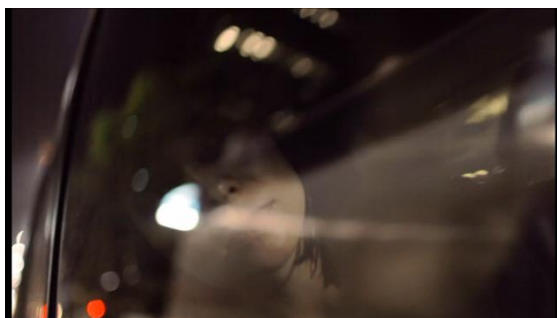

Figure 2. 1

Figure 2.2

In the same sequence, there are sounds of cars passing by, and we can hear Petra's narration talking to Elena as if she had been observing the latter through the car windows. Petra tells her a dream she had had that night, a dream about Elena and herself. In the dream, Elena was wearing a silk blouse and wandering softly through the streets of New York. Petra, according to her own narration, runs after Elena, trying to get close and touch her sister, who ends up on a wall, stuck in a mesh of electrical wires. Then, it is not Elena on the wall anymore, but Petra herself. Going on with the description of the dream, Petra mentions she wants to get a shock from the electrical wires, so she touches them, falls down, and dies. This narrated passage suggests how much the two sisters are interlaced in the film, where it is sometimes difficult telling one from the other, bringing forth the idea that Elena's artistry and feelings, were they positive or negative, reflected on Petra's life throughout the years. From this perspective, Elena could be seen as an (auto)biographical documentary.

After Petra's initial narration we hear sounds of running cars, as the street lights fade away and the screen becomes black; at this moment, there is a shift to another sequence, in which the camera moves obliquely along different items, starting from a dark, flowered fabric – maybe of a dress – going through other different items, frequently alluded to cultural representations of femininity, such as greenish leaves, a polka dot textile, a flower, etc. As the camera passes by all these objects, they gradually get wet. At this moment, one can interpret the constant, fast and diagonal movement of the camera in this second sequence to the stream of water from a river, which, by the way, can be progressively seen and heard in the movie. The water reverberations culminate at the end of the sequence, where it is possible to observe a white and yellowish fabric – again resembling a dress, down into the murky river water [figure 2.3].

The final segment of the sequence I have just mentioned corresponds to the first time that we notice the use and representation of water in the movie; however, one could say that, at this very moment, it is not clear to the viewer yet whether aquatic references will, or will not, be crucial to the development of the filmmaker's subjectivities in the movie. Nevertheless, it is as if the author, through the oblique travel of the camera, invited the viewer to note the intertwining motifs of femininity, liquidness and humidity. These associations become clearer as the story goes by.

The next sequence, after the film's opening, the camera continues to run softly and diagonally, but now in the opposite direction (from left to right), showing obscurely in the first shot, from a low angle, a building

structure resembling to be parts of a bridge. The wind blows hard and this can provoke the sensation that one is by the sea, listening very closely to the waves coming and going. As the camera passes by, we listen to Petra's narration. The filmmaker talks to Elena through her mind, mentioning that their mother did not want her, Petra, to be an actress nor living in New York – and later in the narrative we understand that her mother did not want Petra to follow Elena, for her choices led to a tragedy: her suicide.

Figure 2.3

Figure2. 4

In the second shot, there is a close-up of Petra; the images become a little blurred with lights obfuscating our vision, as if we gazed at an impressionist painting of water and tried to connect brushstrokes to check if

they make sense together. One can relate such image preferences in the documentary *Elena* to what D'Aloi (2012) mentions, that is, the fact that, in the middle of the first part of twentieth century, French directors, e.g. L'Herbier, Epstein and Vigo abundantly used the "visual and dramaturgic richness of water and created solutions inspired by its dynamic properties", such as the flow, superimposition, filters, and out-of-focus images (90).

In the same sequence, Petra's hair undulates in tandem with the sounds of the wind that keeps blowing hard [figure 2.4]. It is as if her hair followed the windy sounds; something that is similar to the prelude of a storm. Along with the shots from this sequence, we sometimes can perceive little distortions provoked by the use of lights, again alluding to water and to images reflected on it. Petra says, in voice off, she is in New York looking for Elena; she states that they could not make her forget her dead sister and, at the same time we listen to her voice full of emotion, we can hear aquatic sounds in the background. A possible interpretation of this sequence, as well as with the first one described previously, is that *Elena* consists of a memory that, such as the water and its fluid streams, cannot be attained or materialized. The blurriness could be linked to the fact that Petra and Elena are at times seen as only one, something that shows evidence later in a sequence which depicts people talking about the similarities between the two sisters, but also in the initial sequence, for we find Petra mentioning she had gone to New York carrying Elena's archives – photos, diaries, letters recorded on tapes, etc. –, and that she had been walking through the city streets hearing Elena's voice. Interestingly, Petra says that she identifies with Elena's words; the filmmaker loses herself in Elena, culminating, thus, in a convergence of the two sisters. This conjunction is stressed along with the following sequence, which portrays Petra on the streets of New York as we hear Elena's voice off:

> March 4, 1990 ... Hi again, I'm here in NY; now it's the first week of March, but it doesn't look like I've been here for over a month. Sometimes I feel like an Indian going to town, everything is so far ahead that it takes a while to get used to it. It's good but takes time. Here you have to think small, or rather, want very small, otherwise the city swallows you.[6]

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4 de março de 1990 … Oi de novo, tô aqui em NY; agora é a primeira semana de março, mas nem parece que eu tô aqui há mais de um mês. Às vezes eu me sinto que nem um índio que vai pra cidade, tudo tá tão lá na frente que leva um

Another sequence that is worth analyzing is the one that shows Elena's first home footages. Petra introduces this sequence telling that such images were possible after Elena received a video recorder as a gift when she turned 13 years old, exactly around the time Petra was born. Elena is depicted filming herself in the mirror; in another shot we see the then teenager girl's face, in an uncompromised smile and with curious eyes towards the camera. In the background, we can hear a piano being softly and happily played; a new shot shows baby Petra dancing on her father's arms; moving to the next shot we find Elena dancing with her father, too; then, very quickly, there comes a sequence of shots, which I want to focus on, depicting Elena dancing alone. The sequence starts showing Elena's face; the girl seems to be in a moment of concentration before starting her dance. When she finally dances, her spinning movements make her dress float; her hair covers her face as if they were a waterfall moving around her body, involving us in her subjectivity [figure 2.5].

Figure 2.5

This metaphor produced by the girl's hair is something mentioned by Bachelard, to whom hair can suggest a stream and the movements of a river, for example. Still about this metaphor, one can highlight Leonardo da Vinci's attempt to approximate the human hair with water traits in his drawings. We could also say, that if one is to give an attribute to this sequence connecting it to the Bachelardian waters, the sequence would represent the fresh waters, bringing joy and peace of mind. The dancing girl's shots could

tempo pra se acostumar. É bom mas leva tempo. Aqui tem que pensar pequeno, ou melhor, querer bem pequeno, senão a cidade te engole.

be associated with the relation between the solid elements and the liquid matters. To this extent, the movement of her hair could suggest what Deleuze remarks as:

> [A] passage from a mechanics of solids to a mechanics of fluids… [Water] provided better conditions to pass from the concrete to the abstract, a greater possibility of communicating an irreversible duration to movements, independently of their figurative characters, a more certain power of extracting movement from the thing moved (1986, 43).

After the dance scenes, we are taken to the interior of Petra and Elena's old house, more precisely to a bathroom. This time, the shot portrays a little blonde girl, who is happily singing during her bath time. After some minutes we understand the girl we watch is actually Petra. The scene goes on; the aquatic sounds and the soft and fun familiar environment allude, one more time, to the "fresh waters" [figure 2.6]. After this scene, we feel a shift of phase in the documentary.

Figure 2.6

"When you turn 15, our parents separate, and you stop filming". These words said by Petra mark the beginning of a new phase in the movie, and consequently, of different representations of water. In the sentence, the first two pieces of information are associated with people's usual problems: firstly, one can notice that Elena grew older and is living the climax of her adolescence, a life period that is naturally related to the development of concerns which encompass emotional, social relation, and self-esteem issues, to name a few; secondly, the girls' parents had divorced, a circumstance that usually brings problems not only to the couple, but also (and sometimes

mainly) to their kids. The third clause of the sentence, on its turn, is very specific to Elena as a person, and it is something that goes against the idea of the happily dancing girl that used to love filming, and wo is now a more serious and quiet person, who has gradually become distant from the members of her family. At this point of the narrative, one can interpret Elena's stopping filming as an interruption of the movement of water. That seems to suggest that by stopping the filming, Elena makes the "fresh waters" previously mentioned stop running, as if a profuse river had suddenly gotten dry. Also, the referred sentence could imply a symbolic death of the character Elena, and when she resurges in the documentary, the waters have gotten darker, colder, and gloomier. In the next shots of the same sequence, we can listen to a melancholic piano song as well as to Petra's voice, who is again looking for Elena on the streets of New York. It is interesting to remark from these shots the fact that the images show the street lights a little distorted and out-of-focus, something that can remind us of liquid themes, as if the streets were a huge river and Petra was a tiny being, lost in its waters, looking for something she could grab at.

The "new waters" would then give birth to a new Elena, who at the age of seventeen starts taking part into the theatre group Boi Voador in São Paulo. The young Elena resurfaces: her hair, which is not long anymore, helps us see a strong facial expression. She appears in a long dress and with a rope on the hands which she moves around her body while she dances, absorbed into her own verve as she acts in a play inspired by the stories from Guimarães Rosa's book *Noites do Sertão (Corpo de Baile),* first published in 1965 [figure 2.7]. In the video archive, it is possible to see and listen to Elena saying some lines of her acting performances. Interestingly, the scenes also highlight Angelo Antonio, a Brazilian actor that also worked in Boi Voador, and whose lines are heard: "I thought you were not coming anymore and that you had run away with a young girl… Come! I am sick with love. Touch me! I turn to water [7]", taken from Rosa's previously mentioned work – remarkably, it is another reference to water.

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[7] "Pensei que você não vinha mais; que tivesse fugido com alguma mocinha ... Vem! Estou doente de amor. Põe a mão em mim! Eu viro água."

Figure 2.7

Figure 2.8

When showing other dancing-acting performances of her sister, Petra keeps narrating the story, mentioning that during some conversation with the actors from Boi Voador, they said Elena was obsessed with perfection and used to rehearse for long hours. In the following scene, Petra says Elena was not satisfied and wished for more. Curiously, before presenting the shots of Elena's performances, the filmmaker chooses to show her, I mean Elena, looking at the mirror, preparing herself to play her character [figure 2.8]. As one knows, water can allude to a natural and living mirror, which has been, by the way, associated with myths, i.e. the well-known Myth of Narcissus, where the mythical character falls in desperate

love with his own image, and dies there in the water or, according to some versions, dies of inanition beside the water (Fortes 2006, 25-26). One could say that Elena fell desperately in love with art, something that can be confirmed through the words of Li An – Elena and Petra's mother who also takes part in the documentary – concerning Elena's obsession with art. According to Li An, one day Elena, during the period she had been undergoing a psychiatric treatment, said: "Art for me is everything, without art I'd rather die. If I can't do art … it'd be better to die."[8] In other words, it is possible to associate Elena with Narcissus not because of the so-called narcissism, but for her apparent need of plunging into herself, in search for her art. Elena wanted to be a movie actress and, in pursuing this dream, she decided to move to another country; as the documentary goes on, and although we do not know the exact reasons, we can notice that the tone of the movie becomes more and more melancholic since Costa starts to explore more profoundly her sister's trajectory.

Before moving to the U.S., Elena gave Petra a shell. According to the narration, the shell was a gift for Petra's 7-year birthday. Elena gave it to her, saying some words, which are interpreted by Petra in this sequence and which go like this: "You are going to be 7 years old; this is the worst age ever. I'm going to live far from here, and we will not see each other for some time. But I'm giving you this shell; whenever you miss me, you can place it like this, next to your ear. I'll also have a shell, this way we can speak[9]. As one can perceive, the shell would represent the way through which they would connect to each other, even with the distance between them. After that, Petra narrates that Elena put the shell onto her ear, and that she was then able to hear the sounds of the ocean. In the shots, while we hear the sounds of the ocean, we can observe family footage portraying the sisters in a long embrace by the time Petra was still a baby; a demonstration of a profuse sisterly love. [figure 2.9]

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[8] "Arte pra mim é tudo, sem a arte eu prefiro morrer. Se eu não consigo fazer arte ... melhor morrer."

[9] Você vai fazer sete anos; essa é a pior idade que tem. Eu tô indo morar longe e a gente vai ficar um tempo sem se ver. Mas eu vou te dar essa concha pra toda vez que você sentir saudade, você coloca-la assim, no seu ouvido. Eu também vou ter uma, assim a gente pode se falar.

The sounds of the shell, which culturally allude to the sounds coming from the sea, are a clear reference to the water motif. In the documentary, more precisely in the scene illustrated by the figure above, the position of the girls embracing each other could be interpreted as a metaphor of the shell. This way, we can say that Elena would be Petra's shell and vice-versa; both girls would offer protection to each other, being symbolic houses.

Figure 2.9
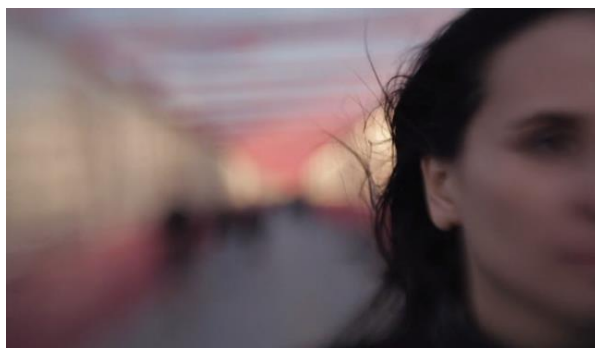
Figure 2.10

The sequence after the shell scene portrays Petra, now in adult life, again on the streets of New York; the "impressionist" images appear again, as a continuation of the first sequences previously discussed. The shots show notes and voice tapes with Elena's routine activities during the time she had been living alone in the U.S., as well as a video of an interview about which Elena had positive expectations, but which actually frustrated her and had no result to make her career as an actress to evolve. The tone in the scene is

highly sad, and we have the impression that Petra goes through a tunnel of liquid memories that snatches her into a turmoil of gloominess and melancholies [figure 2.10]. These feelings culminate with the depiction of Petra on a train, as if she were a reflection of her sister's travails and frustrations. It is a rainy night, and we can hear thunder; from the darkness, we see Petra's face through flashes coming from the interior of a train in movement (with the camera positioned outside it). The gloominess of the scene is intensified as we listen to another tape recorded by Elena when she was on a train in the 1990s; she mentions problems with keeping her weight, describing herself as "fat and empty". Out of the train, we see blurry images of Petra reflected on the wet streets while she walks; concomitantly, Elena's voice recordings show she had not been positive about her dwelling in the U.S., or perhaps she had not been positive about continuing living at all, as one can grasp from the following words: "I wonder if my roots will pierce asphalts, pipes and buildings to survive and bear fruits? Yes, if my roots were strong, big. But I feel my seed has not even sprouted yet. So, probably in a city, if it sprouted, small and sick it would live"[10] Depressive, but still hopeful, Elena comes back to Brazil. But the narration goes on, saying she was accepted at a university in New York.

Elena decides to go back to the U.S.; however, this time, Petra and Li An travel with her. Sadness is once again a theme explored by the filmmaker in the sequence that suggests their flight to New York. The first shot shows a picture of Petra and her mother, Li An. While Petra tells that Elena cried during the trip, the following shot depicts a window through which one can see a blue-grayish sky and, at the same time, a sad piano-based song is heard while the first drops of water can be observed beating against the window.

The association of water and sadness seems inevitable at that moment of the film. There is what one could relate to the cold and dark waters Bachelard associates to Edgar Allan Poe. Bachelard analyzes Poe's poetry as greatly influenced by what he calls the cold, shadowy, and heavy waters. In the second chapter of *L'Eau et les Rêves*, the philosopher explores Poe's poetics as staring in fresh, fast-stream, and soft waters but ending up in profound, dark and heavy ones. This way, one can interpret Poe's poetics as

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[10] "Será que a minha raiz vai conseguir arrebentar asfaltos, canos e prédios pra sobreviver e gerar frutos? Sim, se minha raiz fosse forte, grande. Mas sinto que minha semente nem chegou a brotar direito ainda. Então, provavelmente em uma cidade, ela, se brotasse, miúda e doente viveria"

being compared to people's lives, which usually begin more softly, without many concerns and progressively embraced by responsibilities and preoccupations inherent to living and surviving. Dealing with such problems, something that may come with time is not easy; so, many human beings would end up floating in dark and final waters, which could culminate with their meeting death. That seems to be suggested by the movie's depiction of Elena Andrade's trajectory.

Figure 2.11
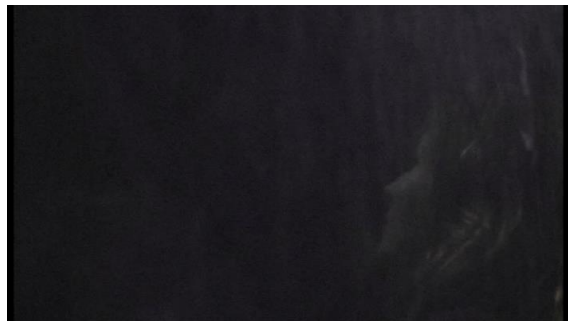
Figure 2.12

The sequence mentioned in the last paragraph finishes with the grayish-blue sky turning into an aerial footage of the island of Manhattan: New York is sadly portrayed apparently from a plane window, in what seems to be winter time [figure 2.11]. The following sequences of *Elena* depict the time the three characters — Petra, Elena and their mother — lived in New York in the 1990's. Elena was 20, and Petra, whose adaptation to a new

country and culture was not easy at the beginning, was only 7 years old. The narration goes back to that time, and Petra tells us of an occasion in which Elena took her to the movies to watch *The Little Mermaid* (Clements & Musker, 1989); she said that at that time she did not believe in god nor in Santa Claus, but believed in mermaids, whose existence seemed to be very possible to her. The shots show aquatic themes, such as a big aquarium with marine animals, strong streams of water and sprays; the colors are cold, and the music tone could be considered a little morbid [figure 2.12].

Petra goes on, telling Elena had started to play theatre with her again and that they happily walked home that day, feeling like they were the character Ariel, that is, the Little Mermaid. However, as the sequence continues, Petra says that in the evening of that same day, Elena told her the Little Mermaid's tragic "true" story, that is, when Ariel, at the end of the tale, throws herself into the sea, turning into foam. Water is a powerful element in the scene; it causes a strong impression on the characters and, at a certain point, the narrator tells us she and her sister wanted to be like the Little Mermaid and change their skins. That seems to suggest they were dreamers, longing for changes. In addition, it becomes clear that part of Petra's childish innocence died that night, through her learning of Ariel's "real" fate.

In some of the next sequences in the film, it is possible to observe Petra, now as an adult, suffering from similar anguishes Elena used to do. There are parallel shots to the ones that showed Elena in the first part of the documentary, as the one in which she films herself in front of a mirror [figures 2.13 and 2.14] as well as looking at herself the moment she looks at the mirror before acting in one of her performances. We do not know if Petra wants to repeat her sister's steps, but we comprehend the similarities between the girls' journeys. Looking at the mirror, as I said previously, can be associated with going under into oneself; to this extent, one can realize Petra becomes more introspective in the next passages, and besides Elena's, her narrative seems to reflect more directly her own life as well. This time in the film it is Petra herself who mentions the emptiness of the world: The world is empty, deserted. It is no usewaiting for anyone. You are alone … completely alone"[11]. Following this sequence, the shot portrays what seems to be Petra's shadow reflected on the wet ground and we can listen to her

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[11] "O mundo está vazio, deserto. Não adianta esperar por ninguém. Você está só… completamente só"

words: "I will degrade myself and go down this drain. Now, I'm getting into it. Good!"[12]

Figure 2.13

Figure 2.14

The little puddle of dark water that reflects her shadow on the asphalt seems to be a very appropriate replication of her feelings and moods in such hard times [figure 2.15]. Petra's situation could be connected to Bachelard's words when, studying the heavy and profound waters I mentioned above, he says that "sadness kills us daily; sadness is the shadow that falls on the stream [of water]"[13] (1997 78).

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[12] "Eu vou me degradar e escorrer por esse ralo. Agora eu tô entrando dentro dele. Que bom!"

[13] ''Quotidiennement le chagrin nous tue ; le chagrin c'est l'ombre qui tombe au flot'' (Bachelard, 1997 78)

Figure 2.15

From this sequence on, the narrative focuses on the period that approaches the events that happened around the time of Elena's suicide. In some of the scenes we hear sounds of water, for example when Li An mentions her daughter's psychological problems, and also during the interview of one of Elena's friends. Moreover, many of these sequences feature out-of-focus images, the use of imageries that, once again, resemble impressionist paintings, and the use of cold colors. All these techniques may be seen as subterfuges to enhance the sensation of liquid sensations. Sometimes it suggests being inside an aquarium, sometimes by the sea, and at other times one can feel as if hit by rain, mainly due to the sounds that can be heard. The out-of-focus technique is utilized even when the frame shows Elena's death certificate: we have the impression it is submerged in water. The melancholic atmosphere is clearly observed and the waters are no longer running as in the beginning of the film, for example. The actions and the words are much slower, sadder; it is like a river getting drier, little by little.

The final sequences also refer to water. They are scenes that clearly allude to the Shakespearean character, Ophelia, which, as we learn, was played by Petra herself in the beginning of her acting career. Before the beginning of such sequences portraying water, we have a scene from which we can hear Petra's voice off the moment she is looking at a mirror in the water, she says: "It's almost like I couldn't feel, and nothing comes back. An emptiness. I criticize myself a lot, all the time. Specially sex without love, it's a poison. It's like… there's a being in me that hates me. I'd dive under in this bath and I wanted to erase it all, sleep forever. I look at myself in the

mirror and see nothing behind my eyes [figure 2.16]." 14Such words could work very much as associations with suicide and, following them, there is a shot portraying Petra diving in a bathtub [figure 2.17]. After that, it is Li An we observe in the water; the girls' mother talks about herself, telling us she started to wish for death when she was 13, and that this feeling lasted until she was 16.
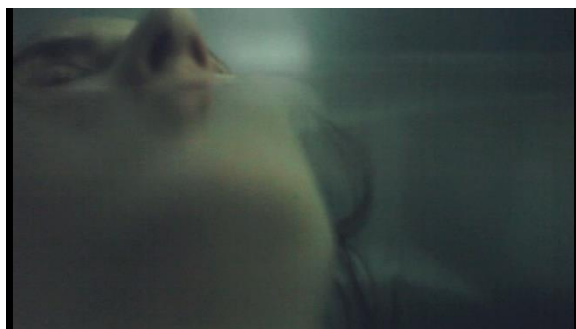

Figure 2.16

Figure 2.17

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14 "É quase como se eu não conseguisse sentir, e não vem nada de volta. Um vazio. Me critico muito, me critico o tempo todo. Principalmente sexo sem amor pra mim é um veneno. É assim como… um ser dentro de mim que me odeia. Eu mergulhava nessa banheira e queria apagar tudo, dormir pra sempre. Olho no espelho e não vejo nada atrás dos meus olhos.

According to Clarke (2010), in the late nineteenth century, drowning people were a recurring motif in European art. At the beginning, men were depicted, but then, the focus changed to women, as the author claims:

> A further shift towards the feminine in the representation of drowning in mid- to late nineteenth-century European art was a move away from the focus on the male victim that is implicit in marine paintings to a concern with the drowned female body. This shift coincided with a new conjuncture that was made in the art of that time and place between the theme of drowning and the theme of suicide, a subject which came into a new prominence and was itself strongly gendered in both artistic and literary representation, despite male suicides in actuality greatly outnumbering female ones in nineteenth-century England. (50)

The author writes on, mentioning that literature, with contributions coming from many writers and poets, helped to provide a context for visual allusions of female suicide by drowning in the later nineteenth century. (51-52).

In that interregnum, despite the fact that many of the paintings depicting female drowning were narrative inventions of suicide rather than events from historical facts, their orientation was taken from social reality and a destiny actually suffered by many women of that period. It was, thus, a different case if one considers the character Ophelia. On this regard, Clarke points out that:

> A particular sub-set of images of female suicide by drowning produced in the same era, however, was more detached from such real-world considerations. These were the images of Ophelia from Shakespeare's Hamlet, a subject that attracted the attention of a great many artists. More so than in the case of suicides belonging to the 'fallen woman' genre, the theme of Ophelia's suicide is linked with that of female insanity, and perhaps because of her status in Shakespeare as innocent victim as well as the detachment from reality encouraged by a literary source. (53)

Despite the fact that Clarke relates Ophelia's death to suicide, this is a questionable position. According to Marina Martins Amaral & José Roberto O'Shea's (2016), Ophelia is constantly approached in the arts, and her exposure is related to her depth and complexity as a character; however, the circumstances of her death remain mysterious (85).

In addition to this, for them, "when we analyze Ophelia, we must consider some intriguing thematic aspects that are intrinsic to her, such as, melancholy, gender issues, [and] psychological depression" (85), aspects that make possible an approximation between Elena's to Ophelia's death. However, in the case of Petra's sister, she clearly commits suicide.

Figure 2.18

The documentary shows flashes of Petra playing Ophelia on the stage. Following that, we see a sequence depicting women – possibly many Ophelias – in the water. The scene was shot in a river, according to the making-of that can be watched on YouTube as well as in the film's website.

Figure 2.19

The sequence begins with part of a female dress moving inside the water, making reference to the moving female-related objects we see in the opening sequence analyzed before at the beginning of this chapter; then the camera is positioned inside the water, filming a body (which seems to be Petra's) from below [figure 2.18]. The movement is soft and the water is shiny most of the

time. Petra appears floating in a flowered dress, as she may represent the first Ophelia. After two cuts, we can see another girl floating and moving softly and beautifully her legs and arms; her eyes closed, as if she was mesmerized by sensations of her encountering with the waters [figure 19]. Gradually, other women, as if they were other Ophelias, appear on the scene, composing a very beautiful and melancholic frame.

The lines taken from the book *Noite no Sertão (Corpo de Baile)*, by Guimarães Rosa, which I highlighted previously, reappear now in the soundtrack as a song, in English, "I Turn to Water", composed by Maggie Hasting Clifford, Petra Costa and Fil Pinheiro, whose lyrics say: "I'm sick with love. Touch me. I turn into water." It is sung by Maggie Hasting Clifford herself, and it presents a mixing of different instruments. The lyrics are in English, just as they can be heard in the film.

At a certain point of this scene, we hear Petra's narration in voice-over that says, "I drown in you, in Ophelias". However, at that moment in the documentary, although full of melancholic Ophelias floating by, the waters no longer seem to symbolize death or suffering; conversely, it is as if the waters turn into memory and into a kind of cure for the long mourning pain Petra had been holding towards her sister, Elena, throughout the years. The water ritual portrayed at the end of the film seems to represent the healing of one's soul that just time can provide; it also alludes to the idea that facing the problems – in the case of Petra, the big issue is the constant presence of Elena in her life and memories, a type of constant grief – can mean the best way of getting by with them. Saying "I drown in you, in Ophelias", Costa seems to suggest that the way she found to face the pain of having lost her sister was through a drowning into Elena's life, being the water simply a metaphor for this.

The movie ends showing Petra spinning around and around in dancing moves through the streets of New York, which one could relate to the return of the fresh waters of her present life.

CHAPTER III:
YOUR UTERUS, MY SWEET OCEAN

3.1 Representations of Water in *to the Other Shore*

  To the Other Shore, as mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, is a film that took approximately ten years to be concluded, and that is much based on the life of its director, Jeni Thornley. The film gives no names to its characters, and the story is centered in experiences of a woman's lifetime; such experiences come out to the screen through dream descriptions, family pictures and videos, and mainly through dialogues between a woman and her therapist. The main theme approached in the movie is motherhood – with different stages in a mother's life; it also deals with mourning, the search for the father, and other familiar and existential issues.

  As well as *Elena,* as we have examined in the previous chapter, the film *To the Other Shore* features many sequences in which we can notice the use of water and from which we can draw associations and detect metaphors. The movie opens with a dark screen and a one-vowel vocalized song (which seems to be sung by a woman); then, after a few seconds, we can perceive a girl[15] approaching the cam. While we listen to the girl's words, the song does not stop; there are sounds alluding to the wind, preparing us to the next sequence, and when it begins we hear the narrator's voice who says, "gone, gone to the other shore"; and we see the images of dark-bluish streams of water [figure 3.1], which run fast on the screen. The song in the background vocalizes notes that, despite an apparent sadness, can be associated with calmness.

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[15] It is possible to find out later in the film, as the girl narrates her story, appearing a few times during the movie, in short sequences, that she actually represents Gretel, from the fairy tale Hansel & Gretel. Nevertheless, I will not focus on these moments throughout this chapter – except for this first reference and another one, in the final part of the chapter – for I have not considered them (the girl's sequences) crucial to the development of the analysis of *To the Other Shore* from the perspective that I chose.

Figure 3.1

About this sequence, it is important to quote Bachelard (1997), who wrote that streams of water can be related to the idea of purification since they are said to take the dirtness away (148). Roving waters open the film, inviting us to get into the Woman[16]'s inner world and maybe the streams that we see do not search exactly for purification, but for washing away the pain caused by the losses in the Woman's life as we are going to understand better along with the analysis of the water imagery in the film and the story itself.

After that, the narrator – whose tone of voice, later in the film, makes us perceive that she is actually the Woman – describes a dream that she[17] had of her birth, possibly trying to make us get in touch with her origin, the beginning of her story. Then, on the screen, a woman appears in a very dark ambiance boiling some water in an ancient stove and then pouring part of the hot liquid down to a sort of basin [figure 3.2], as if she were going to help another woman to give birth to a baby. While we watch the scene, the sounds, which in the first moments seem to represent crepitation of fire, become watery; then, through womanlike moaning sounds of relief and pleasure, it is suggested that a baby is born.

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[16] Here, I have chosen to use the word "woman" in uppercase since there is no reference to her proper name in the film. I believe this way it gets easier to differentiate "Woman" as the main character in *To the Other Shore* from the word "woman" in its general sense.

[17] I will use pronouns such as "she" and "her" to refer to the narrator, since it becomes clear, during the documentary, that she is actually the Woman and is telling her experiences in first person.

After the baby's coming to life, a shift in the sounds and use of shadowy imagery helps produce sensations of discomfort in the spectators. If one compares the song of the film opening with the one of the "after-birth" sequence, one could say that in the former the song might allude to the moment we are in our mother's womb, metaphorically floating in soothing waters, for being soft. In this sequence, the song has changed because it is now associated with birth; thus, we hear the music of a sad violin and a baby that cries, probably due to her being born, losing the peacefulness of the maternal shell.

Figure 3.2
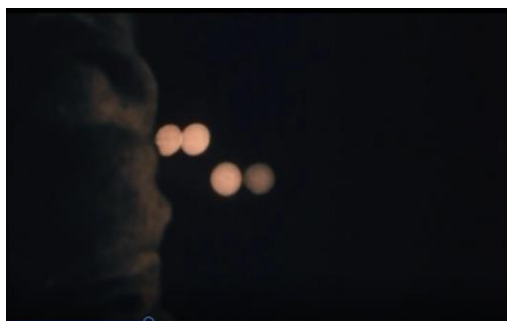
Figura 3.3

According to Bachelard, water is associated with femininity and invites us to an imaginary travel (1997: 137). In these first sequences of the film, we slowly start to understand that the story will be about a woman's life and memories, and the use of water seems to fit well to the story, building nuances that we only can perceive with certain attention. Moreover, as the film goes on, we can gradually comprehend that there is an interweaving between the Woman/narrator and the director Jeni Thornley, who, according

to Felicity Collins (2001), underwent several years of therapy with the same psychiatrist. Besides, in the movie credits, one can check that Thornley dedicates *To the Other Shore* to both her family and analyst.

In figure 3.3, we see two pairs of circular lights representing cars running throughout the streets in the darkness. The images are blurred and out of focus, suggesting impressionist painting, and also seem to allude to watery motives. In this case, one could say that it produces sensations of uncertainty and fear due to the lack of clarity that pervades the sequence.

The film as a whole, like therapy sessions that are made by constant reports of passages from the past but that contrast to the analysand's present life, can be confusing at times for showing several, and occasionally disconnected, images from the moviemaker's family and/or personal archive – photographs and footage, as mentioned in the film credits –, but also short sequences referring, for example, to the Nazi period. Nevertheless, these images are concatenated creatively with new ones in the movie, with many of them portraying water.

Although this thesis emphasizes the use of water imagery in the films, one must draw attention to the fact that we are dealing with how water is portrayed in the film considering the poetic cinematic language in general. Because of that, considering the use of water not just in visual images, but also in sound effects of *Elena* and *To the Other Shore* have been important to the development of many of this thesis ideas.

Having said that, one can point out, in one of the sequences in *To the Other Shore*, the fact that water appears both visually and aurally when a woman is bathing a baby. The narrator talks about the experience of giving birth and questions herself about what is like to become a mother. She says that when she gave birth her midwife said that the pain of children prepares you for the pain of motherhood, but then the narrator concludes that becoming a mother is a rite of passage and nothing prepares you for that. In the sequence, one can hear a song sung as a lullaby, whose lyrics go like this:

> By the waters, the waters of Babylon
> We lay down and wept, and wept for Thee, Zion
> We remember, we remember, we remember Thee, Zion

More than a song, these are actually verses taken from the Bible, more precisely from Psalm 137:1-6. Historically, such verses depict the suffering of Israel in exile; spiritually, they can represent the separation between people and their homeland or god. However, in the film, the verses can relate to the separation between the child and the mother at the moment of delivery. The water used to bathe the baby in the sequence can allude to something

that the movie constantly suggests, that is, the longing for the reconnection with the mother, for a return to the uterus. The idea of reconnection between mother and child can become even more evident through another sequence in which the narrator mentions a photograph [figure 3.4] of herself and her mother; she narrates: "I remember when she loved me once. When I saw this photograph I knew it was true, how she held me, how her breasts felt then, her body."

       In another sequence, when the Woman narrates the moment in which her brother was born, the documentary begins to feature a darker atmosphere. This is evidenced in the passage in which the narrator says that, at that time, being a four-year old kid, the Brother's birth was a shock for her, and that it felt like punishment mainly because at that period she had undergone an operation, having her tonsils taken out. When she narrates this sequence, the image shows what seems to be a glacial place with icy soil and a mountain in the background [figure 3.5], suggesting the coldness of that interregnum of her life and her breaking up with her mother. Furthermore, there are sounds of wind that blows hard and alludes to sensations of loneliness, as if we were walking through a never-ending, cold and windy desert, intensifying the sensation of solitude and abandonment – which to a certain degree can relate to the fact that the child is no longer the only one in her mother's life.

Figure 3.4

Figure 3.5

According to Bachelard (1997), the admiration of nature is so great in certain individuals because nature is in the origin of every feeling, and then, from a sentimental perspective, nature is a projection of the mother (120). Therefore, in the mentioned sequence, which is here exemplified in figure 3.5, it seems that the Woman had just begun to have problems with her mother. As we can see in such figure, there are cracks on the soil, almost forming a full line; this line can symbolically suggest, in the film, a separation between mother and daughter after the brother's birth. Such interpretation can also be based on the narrator's words, which highlight that she was left alone in a cold bath after her tonsils surgery, that her mother could not hold her and her brother on the lap at the same time, and all that culminates with the narrator mentioning her turning away from her mother, "never to return". To this extent, those words along with figure 3.5 work as a corroboration that difficult times were coming out.

After this sequence, the film shows the girl who appeared in the initial scenes of the film; she is walking alone between trees in the woods while we can hear the wind blowing hard, birds singing, ocean waves moving back and forth, and the song from the beginning of the film. Then, there is a cut to a black screen and another sequence begins. Interestingly, it portrays historical black and white scenes that show popular demonstrations against the Vietnam War in Sydney, Australia. During such scenes, we hear a voice that sounds like Hitler's at the time of the Nazi campaigns in the background as well as the narrator's, whose foregrounded words report: "My family was exploding: dad, drinking night and day; it was hell for mom. My brother and I joined the anti-war movement; then dad kicked him out of home for resisting national service".

The ruin of the narrator's family unity is spotlighted not only by her oral description, but also by one staged memory of her mom, pouring some of her father's bottles of beer down the sink. As we see her mother (interpreted by Judi Farr) doing that, there is a transition to a next sequence and, at that moment, it is possible to form a conjecture in which the Woman, interpreted by Anne Tenney, is symbolically plunged together with that liquid into the sink, since the next sequence features connotations about water. In such passage, the narrator says that she had withdrawn into a cold, yet safe and untouched world of film – and it is implicit that this immersion into cinema works as an attempt to evade her family issues.

Figure 3.6

Figure 3.7

When we hear such words in voice off, we see on the screen a close-up on the Woman's face; next, after a few seconds there are a few shots portraying juxtaposed images, as shown in figure 3.6. Then, a child's face [figure 3.7], appears. We can grasp by the moving lights on the Woman's

and the child's faces and eyes that both are watching something. The characters are in a dark ambiance, and when one thinks of a dark environment, it is easy to think of night, which is, for Bachelard (1997), something that takes us to an ocean, that brings rhythm to our lives and carries us maternally (81). In addition to this, in the same sequence, the narrator says, possibly in a dialogue with her therapist, "Then you say that I'm always searching for my mother in my father's cinema. But it's a lonely experience; just phantoms on screen." In other words, we can say that since the narrator points out that her moments into that room, watching movies, represented a lonely experience, it can also be understood as an experience that made her reflect and dive into herself. Besides, the light from the screen reflected on their faces could also be interpreted as the luminous water that seduces us for a drowning and makes us forget the existential problems.

The next sequences of the film show issues from which we can highlight the theme of motherhood. First, the therapist continues talking to the Woman and concludes that since she was angry at her mother for having another child, she turned her mother into her father, and that she wanted to make a baby with him in the darkness of his cinema – being the movies the symbolic babies since the Woman followed her father's steps and became a filmmaker in her adult life. Next, the narrator talks briefly about the circumstance in which she got pregnant for the first time, emphasizing that such pregnancy was an accident and that neither she nor the man that she had sex with could say yes to that baby. In spite of these words, in the film, it does not become clear whether the Woman had an abortion or not. This doubt intensifies even more because the next sequence begins with the Woman's voice saying, "I'm pregnant", and we see her sitting in a car backseat, apparently in a different moment of her life, remembering when she told about her pregnancy to her therapist.

There is a cut to what seems to be a homemade video of a girl is swinging alone back and forth as we hear the Narrator/Woman saying that that moment was a paradox in her life because just as she [her daughter] was becoming more independent, the desire for another baby had started to obsess her. Then, the Woman/Narrator mentions her mother's influence during the making of a film she [the woman] was doing. When the Woman was doing the film, her mother had an important role, helping her to understand motherhood, she narrates. Finally, the imagery portrays the figures of mothers and babies – at times during breastfeeding. Therefore, although there are no explicit references to water in such sequences, it is necessary to remember, as mentioned before, that according to Bachelard, the water has a

profoundly womanlike nature for it represents, among other things, elements associated with the motherhood such as the maternal milk, never supposed to dry up. All these elements are constantly alluded in the sequences mentioned not only in this paragraph but also throughout the entire film.

Subsequently, there are some sequences of the film that deal with paternal issues in the Woman /narrator's life. To talk about this, the narrator says that when she had her second child, she started practicing Yoga. Her analyst, as we perceive from the words exchanged to the Woman, says she was doing Yoga to diminish her painful feelings for having lost her mother and brother and because of her disappointments with her father. The psychoanalyst even compares the figure of the Woman's Yoga guru, who was said to have breasts and belly, with the perfect mother-father, as if the Woman was longing for both her mother and father in her guru.

Some pictures of men are shown, and we hear the narrator saying that about her father she could just remember the bad times, such as the fact that he had lost everything when television came; that his cinema had crashed; and that her father resorted to drinking.

The film returns to motherhood issues: the narrator says that she became pregnant for a second time and we see the silhouette of a pregnant woman in a very dark room; the song from the film opening can be heard again. There are some scenes portraying the room where the Woman said she gave birth, and to where she had returned to film a woman giving birth. According to the narrator, she had decided to return there and film that because she wished to remember her daughter's and her own birth. At this point, one can associate the longing for coming back to the tranquility of her mother's womb, which is, as already mentioned, a watery allusion, a searching for the peacefulness of the uterus. In addition, following the scenes of the filming of the child's birth, there is a sequence in which we see the Woman taking a shower [figure 3.8] as well as we hear the narrator's words describing another dream that she had had about her birth day. In the dream, she had been taken away from her mother, and she had then been left alone in a room full of yelling babies. The narrator also reports that in the dream her mother was dead to emotions and that she [the mother] could not embrace her in the arms; then, to conclude the scene, she asks herself "did she want a boy?."

Figure 3.8

Figure 3.9

From this shower scene on, we are shown a few sequences depicting the Woman's relation to her own motherhood. In a first moment, the images show some pictures (possibly from Jeni Thornley's personal archives) of a Woman breastfeeding a baby, and, concomitantly, we hear the narrator reporting how she loved staying with her baby girl. However, in a second phase, the atmosphere gets darker as soon as the narrator starts talking about a period of obsession with Sylvia Plath's biography and poems [figure 3.9]

The colors used in the sequence are cold and so are the Woman's words. In the final part of such sequence, with the sound of waves that go back and forth, we hear her talking about a dream she had with Plath, as if the poet was inside her. The woman appears wearing a black cloak and her words combine lines taken from two of Sylvia Plath's poems, namely, 'Confusion' and 'Morning Song': "The heart shuts/ The sea slides back/ The

mirrors are sheeted", taken from the former, and "I'm no more your mother", taken from the latter. Then, the sequence ends up with the sounds and imagery of the ocean water and waves beating up strongly against the rocks. About this scene, it is possible to allude to the fact that water, as pointed out before, can represent the mother's milk that never dries up. This relation is possible since in the next sequence, which marks a different phase in the film, a woman appears trying to breastfeed her baby as well as because of the narrator's claiming that she wanted to breastfeed her baby but could not do it – she used to question herself about that because she had read that the wish to breastfeed must come from the mother.

As we listen to the narrator, it is possible to see a toddler girl taking a bath alone as well as hear watery sounds in the background. The sunny room where the girl bathes alone seems to bring a new atmosphere to the film. The narrator soon starts talking of memories about her grandmother [figure 3.10]. She mentions that she could feel her close to the earth, the water, the elements, which suggests that her grandmother was the basis for everything in her family. Again, there is the soft sound of water as if it was a little fountain in the garden, and one can experience sensations of safety and belonging. Such sensations are intensified when we watch an old woman who, with a towel, embraces a little girl that had just come out of the bath. The sequence culminates with images of the ocean water, from which waves are dancing from side to side, engulfing the screen with nothing but water movement and mass, which may have been used to represent the grandiosity of the narrator's "grand-motherhood" memories. In addition, one can see several figures of pictorial art with women interacting with babies and toddlers, closing the sequence.

Figure 3. 10

As the film continues, the Woman is in another session with her therapist, who, from listening to her patient talk about a film that she had seen the other night in which two women were making love, insists on the idea of the Woman's never-ending search for the mother. Then, the therapist also talks about the fact that the Woman had always wished her brother dead when he was born; however, she emphasizes that when he did die, the Woman feared that her wishes had come true.

Maybe in order to emphasize sensations of anguish, the tone of the sequence becomes gray, with an old picture of the Woman's brother and then with a scene in which the Woman and her mother appear through the mirror wearing mourning clothes by the time we hear the mother laments twice: "why did he have to die?"

Images from the Second World War start appearing next. First, we see the Nazi soldiers who march in a very organized way, [figure 3.11] and whose movement could be associated with powerful and destroying waters, just as in a tsunami that is able to extinguish an entire community. Then, as if to intensify the passage with several painful sensation, depictions of mothers that seem to be crying their children's deaths in the war are portrayed on the screen. Their tears and despair as well as the use of cold colors in the sequence can allude to dark, profound, sludgy waters, which keep horrific memories alive since, in spite of the depth and distance brought by the time, it is very difficult to heal the sorrows and bruises of having lost a loved one. Closing this sequence, we see the Woman lying down on her analyst's couch, saying to the therapist that there is a landscape of death inside her, a collective image of war. One more time, the therapist, who appears sitting beside the woman, interweaves her analysand's pain to the fact of her mother having had another baby, a boy.

Figure 3. 11

The following sequence presents the Woman telling her therapist that she used to be struck by images from Eva Braun's home videos, which made her question herself about the children that lived with the Nazis; she wondered if they knew the Nazis were evil. As she says that, a few historic images are shown, being some of them colorful – the ones from Braun's home videos, from which we can point out Nazis playing with kids; and some black and white, the ones portraying the Jewish people in moments of surrender, humiliation, despair and sorrow.

All over the sequence, as we see the images, we hear the song *O Vis Aeternitas*, from 'Canticles of Ecstasy', by Hildegard von Bingen in the background. The sequence is finished with the cam focusing onto a picture [figure 3.12] portraying a half-illuminated path in the middle of the woods, as we hear the narrator's words:

> "Light and shadow falling in; projections from the outside, from the other world, from above. In the depths of the forest, we crawl deep into ourselves, taking the road inward to the centre of our life. We seek salvation far away from the collective guilt of the world, in the vast domain of our soul through the history of our recent past."

At the same time that we hear such narration, the camera keeps zooming in very slowly into figure 3.12. At this point, it becomes difficult to interpret the image as an allusion to water motifs; however, it is possible to interpret the sequence – with the camera that gradually approaches the picture of the

forest in tandem with the choice of words in the quotation above, i.e. "we crawl deep into ourselves, taking the road inward to the centre of our life"– as a manner of escaping the rough reality of this world through a plunge into oneself, as if we could run away from the problems by getting to know ourselves better.

This idea of escapism can be associated with Appadurai's concepts present in travels and *scapes*. As I have interpreted in other sequences, there are a few moments in which the Woman attempts to evade her "reality" or, as just mentioned, plunge into herself. Appadurai's ideas on *mediascapes*, as mentioned in chapter I, can help us think of the Woman's moments of escapism. According to the theoretician, there are varied and complex ways through which the viewers can be impacted by the media, which creates imaginary worlds and wishes on people. It is worth remembering, too, that the concept of *mediascapes* concerns the production and dissemination of information in general.

Figure 3. 12

To the Other Shore, again, puts the theme of the search for the paternal figure in evidence, as one can follow through the words exchanged in the therapy sessions portrayed in the film following sequences. First, the Woman mentions her fascination with her father's sex books, and the therapist soon defends the idea that she was actually fascinated by her father, obsessed with him. The Woman goes on, describing how she felt disgusted due to her father's presence and habits, such as the fact that he used to be constantly drunk and that because of that her mother had to sleep with her or in the car. Next, in a different part of the movie, the therapist associates the Woman's being violent and angry at her daughter, who did not want to go to school, to the idea that the woman did not like the child inside herself, a child

that needed a mother and, for this reason, she became angry and violent just like her father once did, expressing him out of her actions against her daughter. Then, the therapist draws attention to the fact that the Woman's father was a human being, with failures and strengths and that she (the Woman) loved him before he dies.

Then, as the Woman narrates, we see images that drive us into her memories. When the Woman is describing her memories, she mentions that she can see her father at that moment and, just when we close our eyes trying to remember a family image, specially of a family member, her father, who is interpreted by the actor Kevin Wheeler, appears on the screen, sitting in an armchair, caressing a cat, watching sports on TV and drinking beer. After that, the Woman/narrator mentions the interior of a house, and, although we see its representation on the screen, one cannot tell whether it is real or imaginary in the Woman's life.

Figure 3. 13

In the portrayed place [figure 3.13] the colors and slow movement of the soft veil-like curtains along with the sound effects presented in the sequence could work as a metaphor to waters of peacefulness, serenity. The image may suggest one's plunging and floating inside an aquarium based on the lights and the camera movements that softly enter the rooms of the house. Interestingly, as the cam wanders in the last room of the sequence, the narrator says that she carries that room within her. It is as if that place could

trigger the forgiveness she owed to her father. Moreover, the travel of the camera inside the room stops in front of a picture of a Madonna [figure 3.14] with a child on the lap at the same time in which we hear the Woman's voice saying/calling "dad?!"

Figure 3.14

Figure 3.15

The following frame shows the Woman entering her dad's room and seeing him lying on a bed, seemingly sick. She goes in his direction, sits beside his bed, takes his hands [figure 3.15] and the forgiveness between father and daughter comes through the first stanza of the poem 'I will Go with my Father a-Ploughing', by Joseph Campbell, which is beautifully sung by the Woman.

> I will go with my father a-ploughing
> To the green field by the sea,
> And the rooks and the crows and the sea-gulls
> Will come flocking after me.
> I will sing to the patient horses

> With the lark in the white of the air,
> And my father will sing the plough-song
> That blesses the cleaving share.

This poem illustrates well the moment of union between the Woman and her father in the film. In the sequence, while we hear the song, we see images of the sea. Its waters seem to dance happily through wave movements, not only bringing a moment of joy to the story, but also corroborating the idea of reconnection between the Woman and her father because of her forgiving. The sequence ends up with the woman waking up and describing a dream she had just had to her psychoanalyst and her walking by the sea. The Woman describes the sea from her dream as huge and vast, with violent and overwhelming sounds. According to the Woman's words, in the dream, the therapist warns her about a tidal wave that was coming and that was about to hit them [figure 3. 16].

Figure 3.16

Figure 3.17

"And we all become one with the sea, immersed and drowned in it." These are the words said by the therapist at the same time that she and the Woman appear walking by the sea, in what seems to be a windy afternoon. They are not speaking in the images as one can see, but we then listen to the Woman's words in the background saying that she was not frightened by that dream, something different from how she used to feel with other experiences.

Figure 3.18

Figure 3.19

A metalinguistic scene starts then. The Woman appears as if she was in a process of editing her film, for we can see images of her analyzing a few pictures on a computer [figure 3.17]. It seems to be a moment of contemplation; she is apparently getting to conclusions about relations she

holds/held with not only her father, but also, and principally, her mother. Water imagery come to our view once more: from a subaquatic perspective, we see home video scenes of a baby/toddler floating and playing in the water with a woman, who is likely her mother. One more time, there are sensations of interconnection between mother and daughter by means of waters as well as the sensation of tranquility and of being home, as if mother and baby were hugged by comforting waters. By the time one can observe and hear liquid sounds, the impression of belonging with the mother through water is enhanced even more because of the narrator/Woman's words, who finishes the sequence saying that she "dreamed of the ocean, seas and mothers." [figure 3.18]

At the end of the film, the Woman says that her mother had returned, but very weak, like a "tiny bird". She [the Mother] appears on the screen lying down a single bed, breathing very hardly; the Woman approaches her bed, sitting on it [figure 3.19], then says in voice-over "I remember when she took her last breath." After that, the girl from the beginning –who is now clearly representing Gretel –, begins to speak in voice off as we revisit a part of the room with veil-like hovering fabrics. Soon, the images take us to a calm sea shore where Gretel is coming towards the camera telling the end of her story, mentioning that when Hansel and she left the witch's house, they had been walking for hours until being taken to that shore. There was no bridge to cross the lake, so a white duck came over, and Hansel sat on her back, telling Gretel to sit beside him. However, the girl refused; according to her words, it would be too much for the duck and one needs to get to the other shore alone. Right afterwards, she says that she felt rejoiced for sitting on a good little duck's back and start her journey home across the great water. The magnitude of water is not only highlighted in Gretel's words, but also through the final images that show the girl turning around and walking slowly towards the lake, as if the water were the place to where everyone will return one day.

CHAPTER IV –
IT NEVER DRIES UP COMPLETELY

Final Considerations

The main objective of my thesis was to analyze water imagery, from a poetic perspective, in the movies *Elena* and *To the Other Shore*. I tried to demonstrate that the poetics could be detected through analyses of some sequences of Costa's and Thornley's films, considering both visual (mostly) and sound effects from the documentaries. In Chapter I, I delved into various theories, discussing mainly issues associated with poetics, i.e. the poetic mode in documentaries, interrelations between poetry and film, discussions on poetry and metaphor, and considerations on representations of water. In Chapters II and III, I analyzed various passages from the films, focusing on either depictions of water in the shots or constructions from which one could think of allusions to water.

Thinking about the outcomes of this research makes me remember Maya Deren's words at the famous Symposium on film and poetry held in 1953 in New York. On that occasion, she mentioned the risks and difficulties that one can find when dealing with definitions for the word poetry as well as when someone tries to propose interrelations between poetry and film. More than sixty years later, it is possible to say that one still has problems with such issues because, as I tried to show in chapter I, dealing with poetics is dealing with ideas with many definitions, but little precision. The poetics is fluid in a sense that sometimes it seems that we can only understand what it is or the sensations it provokes based on pure subjectivity.

On the other hand, we can say that the great amount of definitions and approaches concerning poetics contribute to the formation of different perspectives that end up enriching discussions in many areas of study to which this term – the poetic –can be applied. Poetic cinema, as I tried to demonstrate in the first chapter, receives attributes that can vary from theorist to theorist, from moviemaker to moviemaker, from movie genre to movie genre, and so on. However, despite all these variations, there was one point in common among the theoreticians studied, which is the filmmaker's work in the construing of the poetics of a film, that is, the role of the author is central to the process of creation of a poetic film. Although many people can say that the poetic may come by chance, – and it is worth saying it would not be inappropriate to think that way – Deren and Nichols, for example, defended the active participation of the filmmaker in order for the poetic to be produced.

In addition, as discussed in Chapter I, for Deren, the idea lies on the 'vertical attack' of poetry, that is, poetic films would not be, for example, concerned with the logic and the continuity of events in the narrative, but with sensations and meanings. Using elements of cinematography (such as montage, lighting, editing, etc.), in a particular way, is important in order to bring forth the poetics according to Deren and Nichols – and surely according to many other filmmakers and theoreticians. From Nichols, we could also point out his studies on the poetic mode, especially about the poetic mode in documentaries. Nichols spotlights that the poetic mode is drawn from the avant-gardes, having such mode been more used in documentaries after the 1950s. Based on Nichols' concepts on the poetic mode, it is possible to understand that, similarly to poetics, the idea about the poetic mode is significantly entangled to subjectivity and has the aesthetics and relations to other arts as important elements to its construction.

When I first thought of the films *Elena* and *To the Other Shore* as corpus of this thesis, I believed that the fact that they resorted to the use of water in diverse ways during the stories would be crucial to detect the poetics in the films. One cannot deny that all the sensations, allusions and metaphors enabled by the analyzed water images could contribute to the interpretation of the documentaries as poetic. However, thinking of the production of the poetics only by means of such imagery could sound too simplistic, because, as stated earlier, the poetics can encompass various, and at times, complex interpretations, varying significantly from individual to individual. Thus, it would sound more prudent to say that, in general, the poetics permeates both films in all their codes, techniques, and choices.

Still on this regard, it is important to highlight the idea that the poetic construction can also be noticed in the documentaries through several of their sequences resorting to other arts, such as dance, theater, music, pictorial arts, and especially the arts of photography and cinema itself, being this latter metalinguistically explored in the films through homemade videos. As we could notice, both Costa and Thornley, to some extent, deal with their own biographies, and consequently, with their own professions, their process of artistic creation, whereas concomitantly, they tell other characters'/people's stories within the films.

Another way to approach the poetics in the movies is by observing how the characters are interwoven. Particularly in *Elena*, mainly in its first half, when Elena goes to NY, it becomes very hard to tell Petra from Elena. The sequences are constructed in a way that their images, tone of voice and

even their physical similarities and same professions, contribute to the idea that Elena resonates in Petra and vice-versa.

When one compares both films, it is possible to notice that they present other similarities that are worth mentioning. Firstly, the movies present the camera moving across streams of water in their respective opening sequences. Although the camera movement is oblique in *Elena*, and horizontal in *To the Other Shore*, the choices made by the filmmakers seem to be analogous in such sequences, which end up giving a liquid tone to the movies since their beginning, contributing to the association of the characters' feelings and of the directors' memories with water depictions and sensations.

Secondly, the narrators of the documentaries sometimes describe dreams when dealing with their memories. In the first sequences of both films, the narrators exploit such descriptions, which make us enter their particular universe. In *To the Other Shore*, we can get closer, more intimate with the narrator when we hear her description of the dream she had of her birth day. In *Elena*, it is possible to perceive that the description of the dream that Petra had of Elena helps to create a melancholic atmosphere that will pervade the whole movie, as well as to reinforce the idea that Petra and Elena would intermingle as if they were one single character in several sequences of the film – as mentioned above.

It is also interesting to observe that the movies portray as main themes the characters' and narrators' sufferings and losses and the searching for healing the pain caused by the emptiness that such losses left in their lives. In addition, in both stories, by the time the characters and narrators have an encounter with what they were looking for, they end up having an encounter with themselves. In *Elena*, Petra not only follows her sister's steps, but also gets into the project of making a film about Elena and about herself, going to New York, interviewing one of Elena's friends, listening to her sister's voice tapes, reading her notes, etc. As we could see, this process of dealing with painful past reminiscences seems to be painful to Petra, but it is a necessary encounter to help her deal with her bruises and melancholic memories. *To the Other Shore*, in its turn, presents the story of a woman, who describes many of her experiences in therapy sessions and who was in pursuit of understanding herself. All the anguishes the Woman carries with her during the story seem to be related to problems she had with her mother, father and with her brother's birth and death. She needs to confront such problems in therapy, that is, to have these symbolic encounters with her family members again, so that she is able to comprehend herself as both a woman and a mother

in the present and overcome or just learn how to endure her existential problems.

Another similitude between the movies remains in the emphasis on female characters and subjects in general. On this regard, *Elena* seems to be a little more intense for portraying women during most of the film. The movie brings the interweaving between Elena's, Petra's and Li An's (their mother) stories, dealing with issues such as body acceptance, the fears and unsafeness from the adolescence and young adult lives, grieving, etc. *To the Other Shore* mentions some male characters, such as the father and the brother, but it mostly approaches female characters. Like *Elena,* it deals with grieving and losses, but its focus is surely in the search for the mother and in the women condition known as motherhood.

In general, this research consisted of an enriching experience because it enabled the contact with two women documentaries that feature trajectories of female characters and that present various similarities regarding cinematography, themes approached, and mainly regarding the use of water imagery to convey messages and enable the construing of interpretations and metaphors, which could be several times considered as poetic. Nevertheless, this is an initial study that surely can be broadened by other researchers in the future. In my thesis, I drew special attention to visual and sound effects that were associated with representations of water in an attempt to detect the poetics in the movies; however, I sometimes noticed that being restricted to the analysis of water imagery felt like a constraint in search for the poetics in the films. Thus, in the future, I believe it is necessary to consider other means to detect the poetics, which, in my opinion, would enable more interpretations and expand discussions on poetic cinema, a field of study whose many approaches and possibilities of analysis make it similar to an ocean that never dries up.

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