

## **Dismembering Body and Voice: Raúl Ruiz's Mammame and the Critique of Cinematic Dualism**

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*Raúl Ruiz's Mammame (1986), a cinematographic adaptation of the ballet play of the same name created by Jean-Claude Gallotta, is one of his most understudied films. In this article we propose that this film is a privileged site to explore the complex relationship that Ruiz established between sound and image during his whole career. At first, Mammame appears to be a film that documents something like the rehearsals of the Emile Dubois dance company. A close study of the film, however, makes apparent that Ruiz uses the movements of the bodies on screen, as well as the soundtrack (with music composed by Henry Torgue and Serge Houppin), in order to further explore the creative and experimental displacement of sound and image, language and bodies. This displacement points to a fundamental and more general problematization of cinematic dualism. Mammame, we argue, is a film that manages to deconstruct the experience of cinematographic synchronicity by breaking up its components: it makes soundtrack (music, sounds, silences, and noises) and image (bodies, shadows, and locations) work separately throughout the film. The dissolution of voice into exhalations, the blurring of bodily shapes into shadows, and the disjunction of music and moving image – via different strategies to establish cinematic continuity – are all elements that contribute to the experimental display of a general disarticulation of sound and image. More specifically, Mammame establishes a double relation between voice and mouth: on the one hand, voice appears as an overflowing noise (guttural, harsh, rough noises coming out of the mouth); on the other, mouth appears as a body part able to dance (emphasizing dislocated facial gestures). By subverting the notion of cinema as a systematic display of an accordance between what is seen and what is heard, this film puts into question the dualism between body and*

*discourse. Nevertheless, image and sound constantly refer to each other, thus contaminating one another and invading their respective and (quasi) autonomous regimes of representation.*

## Introduction

When Raúl Ruiz's *Mammame*<sup>[1]</sup> was screened in 1986, the film was considered as an odd one within the filmmaker's trajectory. To put it briefly, *Mammame* – a film that adapts the homonymous theatrical ballet created by Jean-Claude Gallotta – shows members of the Emile Dubois company dancing apparently without subverting (therefore, 'respecting') the choreography taking place in front of the camera. Spoken language – an element that played a crucial role in Ruiz's work, from his first films made in Chile during the 1960s until his last production, *La noche de enfrente* (The Night Across the Street, 2012) – is almost completely absent from *Mammame*.

Film critics picked up on these elements and thus expressed that *Mammame* was somewhat of an exception to Ruiz's previous works. Eric Derobert pointed out that, considering Gallotta's play was the material with which the filmmaker had to work, "Raúl Ruiz's customary subversion and undermining of fiction is somewhat unsustainable"<sup>[2]</sup> (1986, 75). Iannis Katsahnias, in turn, expressed that *Mammame* showed some of the same qualities found throughout Ruiz's filmography; "paradoxically," however, "Ruiz has decided to integrally respect Gallotta's choreography"<sup>[3]</sup> (1986, 56). With regard to language, Barbara Kruger stated that "it is with much curiosity that we approach *Mammame*" since here we have "Ruiz without words, Ruiz and the document, Ruiz and the body" (1993, 196). And, finally, Raphaël Bassan wrote that here we find "Ruiz himself to be uncharacteristically respectful of the base material – Gallotta's creation – which he filmed as plainly as possible."<sup>[4]</sup> For Bassan *Mammame* is so strange that "one does not have much to say about this film, in which Ruiz restricted himself to registering the scene in a relatively neutral way, without adding any personal points of view, barring some tricks here and there. Ruiz's system appears to be breathless"<sup>[5]</sup> (1986, 52–53).

With no personal cinematographic irruptions or words, the film ends up seeming like a curious experiment. Although some of the above-mentioned critics did find some typical stylistic elements, in other cases they were left virtually speechless.

In this article we would like to propose that *Mammame* is a film that stands in continuity with Ruiz's *œuvre*, particularly through a reflection on the nature of language. *Mammame* is, indeed, probably the only film in Ruiz's career where virtually no words are uttered; but this is precisely why Ruiz's engagement with Gallotta's dance-based material constitutes a privileged insight,

showing that the filmmaker's reflection on language goes beyond the spoken word or even its relationship with images.

Ruiz's film is only one of the forms that Gallotta's ballet has taken from the time of its original creation in 1985. During the late 1980s, at least three versions of the ballet were performed, and Claude Mouriéras also made a film based on the play (Burt, 2003, 177). After touring the world in its original form, a renewed version of the choreography, adapted for a younger audience, was performed in 2014 under the title of *L'enfance de Mammame*. This version included a narrator telling the story of several characters (so-called *mammames*) and their adventures within the theatre where they live. Such a narrative structure does not exist in the original choreography or in Ruiz's film. The original *Mammame* does not contain dialogue. Rather, it has been described as presenting a collection of danced movements performed by members of a tribe-like community.[\[6\]](#)

*Mammame* reflects a tendency in Ruiz's cinematographic production and its relation to other media. Since the beginning of his career, Ruiz established a dialogue between film and other artistic forms. Some of his early works in Chile such as *Tres tristes tigres* (Three Sad Tigers, 1968) and *Palomita blanca* (White Dove, 1973) directly engage with theatre and literature. This tendency continued in his work in France during the late 1970s and early 1980s, as can be seen in films such as *La Vocation suspendue* (The Suspended Vocation, 1977), *L'Hypothèse du tableau volé* (The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting, 1978), *Bérénice* (1983) and *Richard III* (1986). *Mammame* is no exception. During the mid-1980s Ruiz embraced transmedia practices, not only by incorporating literature and theatre, but also by engaging with musical film, performance art, and installation (Goddard, 2013, 87–88).

*Mammame* is not the only link Ruiz established between film and ballet throughout his career. In 2010, under the auspices of the Centre Pompidou, he made *Le ballet aquatique* (The Aquatic Ballet), a film that can be considered a reflection on the relationship between movement, voice, and animality. Despite the many differences between *Mammame* and *The Aquatic Ballet*, both films point to a network of references linking language (and its breakdown) and movement. *The Aquatic Ballet* also alludes to the experimental *avant-garde* film by Fernand Léger, *Ballet mécanique* (1924). Such a reference situates Ruiz's exploration of movement within the dynamics of silent film, insofar as it problematizes the synchronicity of sound, discourse, and bodily movement. This reference to silent film is also present in Ruiz's first cinematographic work, *La maleta* (The Suitcase), shot in 1963 and finished later in 2008, when the filmmaker himself recorded the soundtrack. *The Suitcase* shows not only an engagement with silent film, but also with silence, the

synchronicity of sound and movement, and the nature of human discourse (Jordán and Lema Habash 2013).

We contend that the problematization of the relationship between bodily movement, language, and sound is a key aspect in *Mammame*. The film shows that Ruiz's reflection on language points to dismantling the hegemony of *logos* considered as an instance of sonic speaking. It also implies understanding language as a specific cinematic instance (so-called 'language of cinema') able to express a notion of language beyond the seemingly inextricable linkage between the speaking subject and the moving body. Instead, it appears here as a corporeal, somatic element linked to sonic instances that connect bodies, movement, and images.

This article studies *Mammame* from three different angles. First, it explores some of the critical conventions that establish an inextricable relationship between body and *logos*, image and sound, and more specifically between mouth and spoken discourse, as found in the realms of philosophy and filmmaking. The second section closely examines *Mammame*'s soundtrack pointing out the different strategies adopted by Ruiz to disrupt such conventions, while at the same time providing continuity through the montage of sound-track and image-track. Third, the dislocation between moving lips and spoken voice is considered, by highlighting the mouth as a body part and thus pointing to further explorations of this same disruption.

Our aim is to make a contribution to the growing body of research on Ruiz's *œuvre* through the study one of his films which has received virtually no attention. In this sense, we propose an immanent reading of *Mammame*, through an analysis of its parts as a sound film document. Our aim is also to attempt a reading of the film that explores how it engages with some theoretical and philosophical traditions specifically concerning the problem of synchronicity between sound and language; thus our use of Aristotle as a philosophical background to introduce this issue and our interest in highlighting the critical engagement that we believe Ruiz's cinema entails vis-à-vis the Aristotelian perspective. Hence we propose a reading of the film from a philosophical viewpoint, but, by the same token, we believe that the film itself may operate a philosophical intervention. This intervention, as will be noted in the concluding remarks, indicates how *Mammame* proves key in unpacking Ruiz's complex understanding of language beyond spoken *logos*, as well as a powerful critique of dualism understood broadly as a cinematic issue, but also a philosophical-cum-theoretical topic. This article thus follows a tradition in aesthetics that can be ascribed to Ruiz himself, who, in his project on the *Poetics of Cinema* (2013) constantly supports the intermingling of art and theory to analyze culture.

## From Aristotle to the Moving Image

In the last paragraph of *De Anima*, Aristotle summarizes his teleological view regarding animal senses and their usages for ‘well-living’. He states:

All the other senses are necessary to animals, as we have said, not for their being, but for their well-being. Such, e.g. is sight, which, since it lives in air or water, or generally in what is pellucid, it must have in order to see, and taste because of what is pleasant or painful to it, in order that it may perceive these qualities in its nutriment and so may desire to be set in motion, and hearing that it may have communication made [*sēmainētai*] to it, and a tongue [*glōttan*] that it may communicate [*sēmainē*] with its fellows. (III, 435b19-25, trans. Smith.)

Animal senses aid animals in achieving their well-being. Senses have a specific function associated with the fact that living creatures need to inhabit an environment, obtain nutrients, and live with other creatures.

In order to establish this specific relationship between the body of a living creature and its environment, Aristotle states that each body part and its corresponding sense have a specific function. His inclusion of the relationship between the tongue and communication points to a specific function related to the mouth. The animal mouth or at least one of its parts – the tongue – is given a specific purpose: communication with others. We know from the famous passage in *Politics* I, 2 – where Aristotle states the political nature of the human – that, in the case of human beings, the specific content of communication relates to the notion of *logos*; in the case of human beings *legein* (speaking) goes beyond – or we may even say that it completes – *sēmainēin* (indicating, pointing out). That is, the human being communicates with other fellow species via language, namely, by speaking rationally. If we connect these two passages we acknowledge that Aristotle assigns a fixed teleological function related to communication to the human mouth: speaking, expressing *logos*. Such a function also points to the fact that speaking human subjects are expressing some inner realm corresponding to their rational soul. The human body – through the specific function of the mouth – is thus inextricably attached to the uttered *logos* that present itself by way of the voice.<sup>[7]</sup>

The influence of Aristotle’s theory of poetry on the development of film – in terms of the ideal composition of a play in three acts (beginning, middle, and end) – has been underscored in the case of industrial Hollywood cinema (Hiltunen 2001). There is, however, a less acknowledged dimension that also links Aristotle’s theory to film, given precisely by the pre-established and

teleological identity between a speaking subject and a speaking body. *De Anima* intimates a view of the human mouth as teleologically designed for a main, specific purpose. Thus, a dislocation of this scheme would presumably also dislocate the natural function of the mouth.

Cinema, by the same token, traditionally establishes an identity linking the human voice and the image of the speaking subject who (apparently) expresses his or her inner realm and desires through the voice. In a relevant article on this issue, Rick Altman has stressed the need to acknowledge how film has given its spectators the impression of an inextricable identity of sound and image, and, most importantly, between human language and body. According to Altman, the cinematic industrial complex has managed to disguise the discursive origins of cinema as well as its technological tools, as:

Portraying moving lips on the screen convinces us that the individual thus portrayed – and not the loudspeaker – has spoken the words we have heard. The redundancy of the image – seeing the “speaker” while we hear “his” words – thus serves a double purpose. By creating a new myth of origins, it displaces our attention 1) from the technological, mechanical, and thus industrial status of the cinema, and 2) from the scandalous fact that sound films begin as language – the screen-writer’s – and not as pure image. (Altman, 1980, 69.)

Altman critiques the ideological underpinnings behind the apparent identity established between sound-language and image-body. Film works as a ventriloquist who makes its dummy – the image – speak, while we, spectators, believe that the dummy – the image of the moving body – expresses itself.

As a technology that unites body and language, film shows how appealing the Aristotelian notion of a speaking subject, whose body is naturally made for speaking its inner self, may be. But, unlike Aristotle’s view, the shared identity of language-voice and moving lips is not a necessary function of cinema. The sound-track and image-track are separate. Cinematic technology thus allows for a dislocation of the Aristotelian paradigm that teleologically unites body and *logos*. Moreover, cinema began as ‘silent,’ where no sonic utterances were possible, at least stemming from the precise synchronization between lips and voices. Altman is therefore correct when he describes the development of film into the image-sound (synchronic) identity structure as ‘ideological.’ It is a scheme crafted by the industrial apparatus of which film is part; but is it not ‘natural’ to cinema.

Filmmakers and film theorists have in fact questioned this ideological and technological identity scheme. Michel Chion's groundbreaking 1982 work *La Voix au cinéma* (The Voice in Cinema) precisely highlights the technological possibilities opened up by film to disarticulate the paradigm regarding the shared identity of voice and image. The removal of the discursive soundtrack from a moving body entails a dislocation of the seemingly everyday experience of one hearing someone else's body speak.

Chion's study highlights cinematic efforts to disrupt the ideological complex described by Altman, specifically stressing the treatment of what he calls an 'acousmatic' voice. Chion focuses on films in which characters whose bodies we cannot see, or have 'doubled,' still speak, such as in Fritz Lang's *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (The Testament of Dr. Mabuse, 1933). He also discusses films that include disappearing bodies and a multiplicity of voices-off (Marguerite Duras' *India Song*, 1935), vocalizations by dead speakers (Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*, 1950), a screaming mouth that one cannot hear (Brian De Palma's *Blow-Out*, 1981) – dubbed "*point de cri*" – and voices lacking bodies (Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, 1960), which he literally terms "*en souffrance de corps*". (Chion 1982, 117.)

In many of these examples, voices overflow bodies. Here we certainly find a cluster of films – often marked by a spectral voice-over – that displace moving lips from uttered language. Nevertheless, following the Aristotelian tradition, we, spectators, still suppose that the speaking voice-over indeed *has* a mouth that is actually uttering sounds – not any sounds but a spoken *logos* or discourse.

The point we would like to highlight is that the link between Aristotle and cinema, in terms of the body-logos identity, shows that the issue at stake here goes beyond the technological disguising of the separation of sound-track and image-track. Rather, what the Aristotelian notion of a teleologically driven function of the mouth implies, and what the shared identity of moving lips and discourse helps to perpetuate, is the fact that, before a *logos*, there lies the materiality of the body. What remains hidden behind the shared identity of *logos* and body is the power of body (and the mouth) beyond its capacity for discursive speaking. For both Aristotle and the film industry, as depicted by Altman, the body in its capacity as matter appears only as a backdrop against (or from) which a *logos* is projected. Beyond its capacity for speaking, the mouth appears to lack value. The relevant element in this paradigm is *logos*, namely, a non-corporeal entity to which a well-functioning body –through one of its parts, namely, the mouth – is subservient.

We found no *logos* in *Mammame*. Ruiz's film depicts, not only a displacement of the synchronicity between sound-track and image-track (as groundbreakingly studied by Chion) but also of the synchronicity between body and *logos*. As such, the film insinuates a critique of Aristotle's teleological view on the body and its mouth.

### **Asynchronicity, Continuity, and Music Montage**

Before we move to the study of Ruiz's *Mammame*, let us point out some musical features of the film's soundtrack, which comes directly from Gallotta's play. The score was composed by musicians Henry Torgue and Serge Houppin, both of whom collaborated with Gallotta in several works during the 1980s. This score displays a *mélange* of classical orchestral music with electro-pop sounds fashionable in the 1980s. The soundtrack, including noises (from bodies and other objects) and music, appears constructed through the overlap of sonic layers, all of them finely manipulated via localisations and audio levels. The result of such a procedure is that sound superposition becomes patent.

The music created for *Mammame* expresses a tendency to silence and minimal sound gestures. The first half of the Ruiz's film is exemplary in this regard, as the soundtrack is dominated by bodily noises captured on scene, intercut with several silent moments. Musical instruments are used in a limited manner. Indeed, most of the music is played by a synthesizer, which accompanies a plethora of noises. These noises become gradually accompanied by a few basic chords played *pianissimo* in the mid-high range of a keyboard. But despite this tendency to silence and bodily noises, there are some segments in *Mammame* where a fully composed score emerges. Interestingly enough, these segments prove to be portions of the film during which Ruiz more exquisitely experiments with image-sound synchronicity, as we later show.

A close listening of *Mammame*'s soundtrack reveals a host of strategies deployed by Ruiz in order to problematize both the convention of cinematic synchronicity as well as the inextricable link between mouth and discourse. The study of the way in which music serves to emphasize bodily movements, while speechless voices stress the materiality of body, allows us to explore some of Ruiz's strategies regarding the disjunction of sound and image. Such disjunction, however, must be carefully distinguished from the correlation between dance steps and music, as it appears in the choreography itself. In fact, what we highlight is precisely the various ways in which *the film*, through its own linguistic devices, manages to dislocate the synchronicity established by the dance movements and the ballet music.

In apparent contradiction to what we have been arguing, *Mammame*'s opening seems to establish synchronicity between sound-track and image-track: bird-like sounds, accompanied by a regular beat, come together for a perfectly synchronic first shot. Here, the sound of exhaling serves as the backdrop to a series of jumps performed by a number of dancers who, one by one, traverse the screen from left to right (Image 1). From a low-angle shot, the observer is led to believe that such synchronicity responds to a perfect match between those sounds and the moving bodies: those sounds must come from those bodies. This match evokes what Steven Connor has noticed with regard to the usual bond established between voice and someone or something that vocalizes, that is, a voice cannot be conceived without a vocalizing being, due to its "continuing power to animate" (Connor 2000, 12). The correspondence between the exhalations and jumps also confirms a well-known convention in film, which, as we have seen, consists in creating the illusion of an inner self precisely by synchronizing image-track and sound-track to represent living bodies that produce sound. Nevertheless, the synchronicity between sound and image presented in this opening sequence stands as an *exception* in *Mammame*.



Image 1. *Mammame*'s opening images: bodies traversing the screen from left to right.

In fact, even though the exhalations appear to come from the moving-dancing bodies, we already have a reduction of the voice to a soft corporeal noise: that of breath coming out the chest and then passing through the trachea and mouth. As "quasi-locutions" and un-voice-like sounds, "the air is not expressed, pressed out into audibility, impressed into audible shapes and postures, but seems rather to be escaping, as though through a rent or gash" (Connor 2014, 34). Therefore, displaying a vocalizing body that does not speak serves to disrupt synchronicity. As such, it is important to highlight the concept of vocalization to characterize the sounds that seem to come out of bodies; these sounds are not spoken words, but simply vocalizations which are recognized almost as 'outputs' or 'outcomes' resulting from the movement of the bodies themselves. The sounds come from the body's own activity *as a body*, and not as materiality made to logically express itself.

These remains of synchronicity between sound and body – now established in terms of a relationship between the body and its own activity materially moving – is further broken down throughout the course of the film. One of the more compelling – though not necessarily synchronic – parallels is that established between shadows and exhalations. As disfigured projections of torsos, arms, and legs, several aspects of the choreography are delivered to the spectator through spectral figures. As either ephemeral characters projected against the walls (Image 2, left) or translucent reflections of some of the bodies onto the floor (Image 2, middle) or onto others (Image 2, right), the portrayal of shadows throughout *Mammame* points to a blurring of bodily materiality.<sup>[8]</sup> Simultaneously, the same exhalations presented at the beginning of the film unfold as gasping and panting noises, underlining the aery nature of the sound. Shadows and noises thus effectively avoid any resemblance to the conventional partnership between flesh and speech, body and discourse. As Connor suggests, “it is above all the noise of the breath that has seemed to constitute the shadow song, this whisper music, the voice of the unvoiced in the voiced” (Connor 2014, 35).



Image 2. Shadows.

Jean-François Lyotard stressed in a 1973 essay that images in film receive value according to the place they occupy within a string of other images (1973, 58), which relates to the issue of continuity. The value of an image, however, is not only established through its relation to other images. Indeed, as theorists have argued, music plays a crucial role in creating a sense of continuity, given the “intrinsic,” fragmentary nature of the image-track (Cooke 2010). In *Mammame*, Ruiz chose to sidestep any systematic approach to the link between music and image-track continuity, by offering up different solutions to the assemblage of sound and image. The dislocation of their synchronic relation is taken even further: it not only pertains to the collapse of language into airy quasi-locutions coming from of an unstable shadowy body, but also to a cinematic landscape where music and moving images function separately. As such, Ruiz provides different solutions to the issue of cinematic continuity, by emphasizing either the sound-track or image-track. Let us examine a couple of examples.

Towards the middle of the film, a sequence presents the entire troupe positioned as if its members were practicing in a studio. Jean-Claude Gallotta himself acts as an instructor. They seem to rehearse a series of actions, as can be seen in the quick change from (1) a courtesan-like dance (28:40), to (2) some training-like steps (33:11), and then to (3) a contemporary-electronic music set of movements (34:50). The sequence only comes to an end with a sudden silence (38:45). In turn, the music acts as a curtain situated in close proximity to the point of view of the camera or, in other words, close to the perspective of the listener. While the music comes to the fore, energetic voices and noises remain in the back, combining diverse settings of audio levels with recorded instrumental melodies. At the beginning of the sequence, we hear an (1) instrumental march orchestrated with woodwinds and strings, presenting a classical symphonic idiom. When the dancers stress the downbeats, or mark unique rhythmic figures, they produce a quasi-synchronic relation to an extra-diegetic track, whose development need not follow strictly what is being visually shown. This becomes apparent when the dancers enter into the room crawling (28:50), signaling a similar *tempo* to the *andante* established by the music, but without producing any systematic rhythmic relation to it. In fact, in this sequence, the music appears as a quasi-autonomous track that mingles more or less closely with what is happening on scene. A sort of distance is thus created by openly revealing the manipulation of audio levels (from 29:50 onwards), that is, by making postproduction of the music unmistakably evident. The music develops later on by creating tension through harmonic classical tonal procedures and a sustained bass line, whose indications on the score could be *marcato* or *sostenuto*. At this moment, the montage of shots showing body parts stresses the dramatic effect of dissonances. As a kind of melancholic epilogue evocated by the music, the dancers seem to imitate farewell gestures. The middle section of this sequence, portraying some (2) training-steps accompanied by voices counting “one-two-three” out loud, toys again with synchronicity. It shows a seemingly perfect match between diegetic sound coming from the dancers’ chanting and bodily movements – a match only disrupted by means of distorting the focus of attention. This is accomplished both via unbalanced camera moves and, once again, by accentuating shadows instead of muscles. In doing so, Ruiz creates a fuzzy effect that undermines the simple, rhythmic correspondence between the voice counting and the bodies moving – an effect that is later corroborated by the progressive disfiguration of pronounced numbers into pure gibberish, while shimmering jazz drums in 6/8 join in with the vocal sounds. The final section (3) fully incorporates drums. *Tempo* speeds up, while a synthesizer plays a driving melody full of triplets. By stressing every four beats, the metric appears like 12/8. Mostly structured

in short four bars phrases, the driving force of this restless melody reinforces the electronic pop music style, embracing repetition and “artificial” sounds.

As a whole, extending over more than 10 minutes, the style of music that is being danced is changed three times throughout this sequence. While the manipulation of the music becomes apparent, the bodies respond to this operation by changing their dancing style. Music and moving bodies provide no straight continuous unity to the scene. In other words, the image-track is marked by the fragmentary nature of movements established by music and subsequent dancing styles. The continuity of this sequence is given by the space occupied by the dancers and the camera movements. Thus the visual continuity of the site in which dancing is staged appears constantly disrupted by changes in music and bodily movements. We also found a fine combination of these two through the participation of voice, like when the connection between (1) the courtesan-like part and (2) the training steps is marked by a prolonged quasi-sung vocalization that seems to come – descending and *glissando* – from one of the dancer’s voice-off (33:09). A similar procedure is repeated to transition from (2) the training-like steps to (3) the contemporary-electronic section, this time with a stronger collective and growling voice. In these cases, as in many others, it is not clear as to whether the bodies follow the music or the music follows the (sound-producing) bodies.

A totally different strategy is applied to the scene in which a couple of dancers display a romantic encounter, surrounded by three different scenarios (40:29). In this scene, conversely, the music, as well as the dance performed by the bodies, is continuous throughout the entire sequence. The sound of wind passing through a fan strikes as one of the most prominent noises framing this scene that simulates an open-air encounter. Then, two voices intercut with silences fulfill the soundtrack: a high-pitched sigh of a man followed by a deep grunt of a woman. The music makes its appearance to accompany a couple’s slow dance. The score consists of a fragment for solo keyboard, with piano timbre. By building on a kind of sonority conventionally suitable for a romantic setting, this music reminds us of a “pop” love ballad while it at the same time appeals to the sensitivity of moonlight piano pieces. What changes in this case is the place in which the couple dances. Taking advantage on the possibilities provided by a flexible set – a common aspect of Ruiz’s cinematography – the camera moves across a space that fully transforms itself three times. Several simultaneous movements – camera, bodies, and walls – provide a malleable context that hosts the encounter of two lovers. While the choreography continues unabated despite the several image cuts (Image 3), a single piano piece provides continuity to the sequence. As opposed to the previously described sequence, here the cuts are not in the music or dancing, but in the image montage.



Image 3. A couple of dancers.

Each of these two sequences includes three major cuts: in the first, they are product of the music montage, while in the second they are result of the image montage, or more specifically, of the change of locations. What the comparison of these two sequences shows is the instability of the relationship between music and image. It also reveals, however, that in both cases each of the tracks (sound or image) can become a source of continuity, precisely because both function in parallel, but distantly to each other. Hence any illusion of a naturalized synchronicity dissolves when one notices the ineluctable distance between the music and what is seen.

As a film that, to a certain extent, ‘documents’ the performance of a work or art – Gallotta’s ballet, – the strategies displayed by Ruiz to connect sound-track and image-track often hover between the aesthetics of documentary and that of fiction, however porous the border between the two may be. More importantly, the *mise-en-scène* of the music, to which the dance supposedly reacts, reveals that most of the takes have been created without the music playing *in situ*. This means that, rather than the documentation of a realistic ballet choreography, the music is thus experienced as ‘extra-diegetic’ sound, coupled with the images as part of post-production. By the same token, however, it results in the enhancement of the noises coming directly from the moving bodies, heightening their central role in the narrative.

One of the final sequences is a case in point (46:17). This open-air sequence, filmed near the sea, alternates from a long shot that presents all the characters walking through a beach-like landscape to a medium shot showing them sitting around a table. The characters tap on it and make funny movements. As per the audio levels, they once again make us perceive the music closer to the listener than the seen bodies. The characters dance to music that they apparently cannot hear but simultaneously make noises, thus letting spectators know the specific sounds that dancers ‘really’

(on-location) produce. The score seems to mimic playful circus music. It turns once again to the synthesizer to execute short and repetitive descending chromatic melodies. The overlap of noises and music produces an openly noticeable coexistence of two soundtracks (one produced extra-diegetically and the other diegetically), each of which relates in a different way to the dance movements.

### **Lips Moving Beyond Discourse**

*Mammame* constitutes a cinematic exploration that disarticulates the apparently natural and inseparable link between sound-track and image-track, one that is especially comfortable for conventional films about dance. As we have seen, the dissolution of voice into exhalations, the blurring of bodily shapes into shadows, and the disjunction of music and moving image – via different strategies to establish cinematic continuity – are all elements that contribute to the experimental display of a general disarticulation of sound and image.

But let us now go back to the specific relationship between moving lips and voice. As Altman correctly highlighted, the cinema industrial complex was ideologically established, among other things, around the possibility of displaying a spoken discourse via synchronizing spoken words (stemming from the soundtrack) and moving lips. Altman delved into the issue of how the industry hid its ideological message specifically in the uttered discourse seemingly pronounced by film characters. Moreover, this also underscores the fact that overlapping spoken discourse onto the images of moving bodies effectively undervalues the image-track itself (as well as the moving bodies on it). What would then count as the main cinematic device is in the soundtrack: namely spoken discourse, the *logoi*.

From this perspective, moving lips are at the service of language, just as the tongue – and the mouth – is at the service of *logos*. As stated above, Aristotle and the cinema industrial complex appear to naturally allocate a teleological function to the body: ‘discoursing,’ or *legein*. This function goes beyond the materiality of the body itself. For its full-fledged realization, ‘discoursing’ requires, as it were, something that complements the activity of a body that moves: *logos*, reason, or a human ‘soul’ in the case of Aristotle and, in the case of the cinema industrial complex, spoken words located on the soundtrack. In both cases we are in the presence of a kind of dualism composed of a material element (moving bodies) and a non-material element (reason triggering the sonic display of noise). Moving bodies themselves – conceived of as either biological or seen-on-screen entities – do not suffice for proper discoursing to take place.

*Mammame* produces a rupture in this kind of dualism that presupposes the preeminence of *logos* or spoken discourse over moving bodies. It recovers, we argue, the body insofar as it moves on screen; moving lips are autonomously displayed, thus restoring the autonomy, not only of a moving body hidden behind a *logos*, but also potentially of the moving image itself.

In fact, the title of the film seems to refer, from the outset, to an in-completion or certain structural immaturity of discourse. As critics have mentioned, Ruiz takes on Gallotta's title of the ballet, *Mammame*, thus pointing to the realm of a certain type of uttering related to the French (and, we would also add, the Castilian) pronunciation of the word 'mom' (Derobert 1986, 75). The title *Mammame* and the French term for mom, '*maman*,' are both pronounced in same way (/ma.mã/). The Castilian word 'mamá' sounds almost the same as well (/ma'ma/). Needless to say, this is also the case for the English 'mama,' both in British (/mə'mɑ:/) and US (/ˈmɑːmə/) pronunciation. The title of the film (or the French *maman*) is one of the few recognizable words that can be understood coming out from dancers' mouths, reappearing several times throughout the film. Such vocalization inscribes this would-be word in the realm of discursive rudiments, baby-talk, and babbling. By the same token, the 'm' sound, considered as a "primary phoneme," relates to imitative infantine pronunciations delivered as "a state of hesitation or vacillation" (Connor 2014, 74) and is directly connected to similar actions such as humming or stammering. The vocalization of *Mammame* signals a certain presence of a term (*maman*) which is pronounced technically as a word that does not officially exist (*Mammame*). Therefore, the annihilation of discourse is not only established via reference to a stage of childhood development in which a *logos* is not fully developed, but also via the open annihilation of an actual word that is being uttered.

*Mammame* highlights the relationship of one body to another. Such a relationship does not involve communication in terms of logical discourse. Pronounced literally in Castilian – Ruiz's mother tongue – the film title sounds '*mamame*' (/ˈmamame/). If accented on the first vowel (*mámame*), the word literally means 'suck me!' It indeed stems from the verb *mamar*, which, although commonly used in the context of vulgar, sexual references, means to suck, nurse, or breastfeed. Without going into the psychoanalytic underpinnings at stake here, *mámame* thus points to a verbal use that emphasizes the relationship established between a mouth and the body parts of another being (especially the breasts, but also the penis or vagina). Such a relationship may include the exchange of bodily fluids, involving nourishment, sexual (often gendered) violence, and/or pleasure. It is a kind of exchange involving the materiality of two bodies, where spoken discourse tends to disappear since the mouth is 'occupied' in the act of sucking or because the one sucking or being

sucked would rarely be articulating what Aristotle deemed a *logos*; they would be rather gasping, moaning, screaming, or simply remain silent.

By the same token, the Castilian informal imperative form of the verb *mamar* – which, when accompanied with a direct object pronoun, forms *mámame* – need not be uttered for the action to come to fruition: it commonly involves an action that simply happens; just as in English, ‘suck!’ need not be uttered in order for bodies to come together. Instead, the mother gently brings the child to her breast; lovers come close to each other and, through bodily gestures, it is understood that their mouths will touch their mutual bodies; or, in the case of sexual violence, the aggressor will grab the other’s face and penetrate his/her mouth. In none of these scenarios is it necessary to actually pronounce the imperative ‘suck me!’; it is rather implied in the bodily gestures. Contrary to the Aristotelian notion of the mouth made for pronouncing words, we find here a conception of the mouth that gestures towards the touching of other bodies. Therefore, the title *Mammame* – just as other relevant elements present in the film – refers to actions that happen between bodies, where bodies cause each other to interact, without the ‘command’ of an extra-material realm such as the human rational soul.

If the title *Mammame* already points to a disruption of the synchronic structure between a *logos* and a moving body, it is even more interesting that the film problematizes this synchronicity precisely by showing moving lips. The first close-up of a face in the film shows moving lips and, in the background, a dancer moving along with her shadow on a wall (Image 4), all of which are in focus. Therefore, although the face and moving lips appear to be closer to the camera than the dancer and her shadow, there is no hierarchy established between the face-mouth-lips structure, her dancing body, and her shadow. More importantly, however, the moving lips vocalize whispering sounds that do not constitute a discourse. The spectator’s understanding is that the whispering and, more generally, the sounds that overflow the soundtrack do stem from a human bodily source. But these sounds begin to *detach* themselves from the rhythmic synchronization established with the bodies as they move, which, as previously mentioned, is characteristic (and an exception) of the film’s opening.



Image 4. Moving lips, a dancer, and her shadow

In fact, we recognize two forms of detachment of bodily sounds from bodily movements. The first – which is a constant throughout much of the film – is established by the progressive divorcing of the above-mentioned whisper-like vocalizations from moving lips themselves. As if Ruiz were mocking the cinematographic structure that synchronizes moving lips and discourse, he begins the film by visually articulating that very synchronicity in order to then detach the realms of vocalization and moving bodies from each other. Ruiz transforms the moving-lips/discourse structure in that he does not articulate an over-imposed *logos* or discourse via moving lips, but rather makes use of the bodies as a material structure that sonically account for what those moving bodies do. In other words, lips move, but they do not speak.

The conventional articulation of voice and lips is furthermore disjointed throughout the film when those whispering vocalizations are gradually heard almost as a voice-off, this time not anchored to moving lips. Progressively, the soundtrack of *Mammame* overflows with vocalizations that, like a rumor, accompany the music. But these vocalizations are fully detached from the moving lips we first saw as their plausible source. If Chion had recognized in a film like *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* the presence of a sonic discourse that became progressively separated from the lips uttering it (Chion 1982, 41–52), in *Mammame* we find a radicalization of this operation; here what is detached from the moving lips is not a discourse or *logos*, but the vocalizing, the sonic result of moving lips themselves. This process of detachment allows, again, for a more autonomous display of moving bodies-image vis-à-vis the soundtrack.

The second form of detachment between bodily movements and sounds relates to the subject matter of the film itself, namely, dance. Moving lips and mouths are established, not primarily as a source of discourse – and, perhaps, not even as a source of sound – but as moving matter which becomes part of the choreography composed of other bodies. The film's montage gestures towards a significant relationship between the movement of lips and that of other body parts. This is apparent

when, in the first sequence of collective dancing, we see an ongoing alternation of close-up shots of faces with their lips articulating sounds (indeed, whispering, groaning, babbling, and vocalizing a sound that progressively accelerates the tempo of the whole sequence) and of dancing limbs (Image 5). Although these sonic vocalizations provide the tempo for the moving bodies, it is important to mention again that these vocalizations lose their attachment to the mouths that can be seen on camera. The sounds progressively detach from the bodies (the image-track) and blend in with the music (the sound-track).



Image 5. Dancing limbs.

The point we would like to highlight here is that the mouth reveals itself as a bodily part fully integrated with the other extremities. Bodies dance, and their parts also include mouths and lips. We can say that the mouth is portrayed, primarily, as a body part that dances, and not as a source of sound. If there is vocalization, or even words, the mouth is revealed as the corporeal/material ground of that vocalization and not simply as body part subservient to, and commanded by, discourse. This integration of moving lips-mouths into the arsenal of dancing body parts is accomplished through cinematographic montage and notably through the possibility of closing up. Focusing on moving faces makes it possible for viewers to see them as dancing parts and not simply sonic sources. *Mammame* is therefore not simply a film that ‘respects’ Gallotta’s play, but also one that expressively transforms it by means of cinematographic language.[\[9\]](#)

At the end of the first sequence we are presented with Gallotta himself standing in front of the troupe. He appears to be about to give instructions to the dancers; in fact, we expect him to speak. Gallotta’s body and outfit are stylized as that of a mime, wearing white makeup and gesticulating like one. This becomes apparent through a series of close ups on his face (Image 6). It is not surprising, then, that our expectations to hear him commanding the troupe are betrayed. Mime artists traditionally do not speak; all emotions, actions, or affections they produce on the bodies surrounding them happen as a result of the mime’s movement, including that of his or her face. If there are sounds and vocalizations they are never articulated as discourse.



Image 6. Jean-Claude Gallotta as a mime.

Gallotta, indeed, produces vocalizations by moving his lips – just as the other dancers do – while clapping and tapping his feet on the floor. He does not command his troupe to move by ‘telling’ them what to do. He does not use speech to give an ‘order’ that would then trigger the movement of other bodies. If Gallotta is causing others to move, he does so as a moving, rather than a speaking body (Image 7).



Image 7. Jean-Claude Gallotta in front of the troupe.

Ruiz seems to be interrogating, once again, a dualistic structure. Only bodies can move bodies; only bodies can affect bodies. *Logos* has been left out as an extra-corporeal element produced by speech. Such a problematization of a dualistic structure in which bodies move due to the command of extra-corporeal entities (*logos*, the soul, thought) reminds us of Spinoza’s famous Proposition II of the third Part of his *Ethics*. Implicitly questioning Descartes’ dualism of body and soul, Spinoza

proposes that, “The body cannot determine the mind to think, nor can the mind determine the body to motion or rest, or to anything else (if there is anything else)” (2002). Inspired by Gilles Deleuze, scholars have indeed related this proposition – whose Demonstration states that “the motion-and-rest of a body must arise from another body” – to a kind of parallelism between the chain of words producing language and that of bodies affecting other bodies (McNamara 2013). Leaving aside the problematic use of the term ‘parallelism’ to describe the series of determinations pertaining to the mind and those pertaining to bodies, we believe it is appropriate to consider Spinoza’s notion of bodily interaction as also a critique relating to the dualism that posits *logos* or discourse as a commanding extra-corporeal structure able to put bodies in motion, either for the purpose of speaking or simply moving.

Such is the nature of the dualism between what we have termed a ‘discoursing’ structure – stemming from both the cinema industrial complex and Aristotle’s view on human *logos* – and the body. In this form of dualism – let us repeat it once again – the body is subservient to the command of discourse. This type of dualism is rejected via the expulsion of spoken discourse from *Mammame*. At least in this film, Ruiz reveals himself to be close to Spinoza’s notion that only bodies can move other bodies. [\[10\]](#) He separates body from *logos*, thus focusing on the series in which bodies cause bodies to move. If there are sonic vocalizations, they reveal bodily non-over-imposed sounds and, moreover, they become further and further detached from moving lips. *Mammame* uses dance in order to integrate the mouth as a body part that can affect other bodies; the mouth is conceived of as a member of the body and not a discursive sound board.

### **Concluding Remarks: Raúl Ruiz’s Critique of Dualism**

We have examined Raúl Ruiz’s *Mammame* by tracing a cinematic structure that tends to detach sound-track from image-track. More specifically, we have highlighted that the various mechanisms through which sound-track and image-track become disjointed point to a cinematic structure that puts into question the dualism between body and discourse. Besides its presence in philosophical discourse, we have stressed that this dualism has become naturalized in film due to the (apparently necessary) synchronic relationship between moving lips and discourse. *Mammame* not only problematizes this type of synchronicity, but effectively focuses on the body as a material structure acting autonomously, able to affect other bodies, without being subservient to an extra-corporeal entity due to which it moves. *Mammame* generates an isolation of mouth from *logos*, thus focusing on the series of bodies causing other bodies to move. As a concluding note, we would like to propose a reading of *Mammame* as a film that critiques dualism broadly understood.

Descartes' philosophical system established a dualism inherent to human beings, consisting of the soul and the body. Bodily movements can eventually be controlled due to the action of an extra-corporeal substance, that is, the soul or mind. This dualistic understanding of human action was questioned, among others, by Elisabeth, Princess of Bohemia, who, in her correspondence with Descartes (2007), repeatedly intimated that there was a problem with his argument regarding the possibility of the soul to act on the body. If, according to Descartes' own physics, only matter can act on matter, then how is it possible for an extra-corporeal substance – the soul – to act on and eventually control the movements of the human body?

The critique of Descartes' view on mind-body interaction was later taken up by Spinoza. As we have seen, Spinoza argues that there cannot be any mutual causal interaction between what he understands as the non-corporeal mode of 'mind' and the mode of 'body.' Only bodies act on bodies and only ideas act on ideas. Spinoza thus offers one way out of dualism: what has been traditionally termed as monism. Descartes wrongly thought that there exist two substances composing the human. Rather, Spinoza argues, there exists only one substance – God or nature – with infinite attributes, two of which are known to us: thought and extension. Mind and body are modes of the one substance and, as the attributes, they express the essence of this substance.

Aside from monism, however, there is another strategy for putting dualism into question. Although we have mentioned that there are proximities between Ruiz's and Spinoza's work on the nature of bodies, Ruiz's critique of dualism, at least that found in *Mammame*, follows a different strategy. This strategy does not consist in subsuming corporeal and non-corporeal entities to an expression of one substantial essence. Rather, it consists of disjoining or dismembering the elements comprising that dual structure, to such an extent that they appear as acting in separate reels. *Mammame* interrogates the regimes of cinematic dualism (body/discourse, moving lips/spoken words, image/sound) by pulling out and dismembering its two main components: sound-track and image-track. Dance as cinematic object is thus not a fortuitous or strange choice for deploying this critique. Insofar as it is based on the presence of moving bodies and music, dance becomes a privileged site for exploring the dislocation between moving bodies and sound by means of cinematographic language.

If the disarticulation of image-track from sound-track in general, or moving bodies from *logos* in particular, is also present in other of Ruiz's films is an issue that goes beyond the scope of this article. We may add, however, that if such a focus on bodily affection and movement – isolated from an extra-material entity (soul, *logos*) – can also be found in Ruiz's other theoretical and artistic

work (two realms with porous borders), *Mammame* would likely constitute a reading key for interpreting those other instances in which this division takes place. This is simply because, as mentioned in the introduction, *Mammame* offers a radical depiction of the isolation of the components of the dual structure that composes cinema, sound-track and image-track, since it is Ruiz's only film where we find no chain of spoken discourse. Therefore, even if a full expunging of discourse may not be the only way to problematize and break up the cinematic dualist structure between body and discourse, we could consider it as one of the most radical explorations in that direction, as well as a key for interpreting other similar endeavors.

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All links verified 7.12.2016.

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## Notes

- [1] In this article we will always refer to the version of Raúl Ruiz's *Mammame*, produced by Arcanal, Cinématique National de la danse, Maison de la Culture de Grenoble and Théâtre de la Ville de Paris, kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, whose duration is 65 minutes. A version of this copy can also be found online at [http://www.numeridanse.tv/en/video/280\\_mammame](http://www.numeridanse.tv/en/video/280_mammame).
- [2] "[L]e travail habituel de Raoul Ruiz, de subversion et de sape de la fiction, n'a pas vraiment de support possible."
- [3] "[U]ne chorégraphie de Jean-Claude Gallotta (...) que Ruiz a été invité à filmer et que, paradoxalement, il a décidé de respecter dans son intégralité."
- [4] "Contrariament à son habitude, Ruiz s'est montré respectueux du matériau de base – la création de Gallotta – qu'il a filmé le plus simplement possible."
- [5] "On ne saurait en dire autant du film de Ruiz qui s'est contenté de filmer, de manière relativement neutre, le spectacle, sans y apporter de véritable regard personnel, à l'exception de petits tics. Le système de Ruiz paraît à bout de souffle."

[6] “The dance is essentially a suite of duets in which one couple or another attempts to grab a few private moments together as members of the tribe engage in a series of small skirmishes, both sexual and tribal, taut and warily abandoned” ([Dunning](#) 1988). *Mammame* itself as an *œuvre* (including *L'enfance de mammame*) points to an experimentation on the relationship between bodies and languages. This kind of relationship is the core subject of this article, as one that focuses on Ruiz’s filmic version of *Mammame*. A complete study of how the articulation between languages and bodies works in Gallotta’s ballet, however, goes beyond the scope of the article.

[7] A structure of “presentation” or “presentification” also recognized by Jacques Derrida (1972, 34) who, following Martin Heidegger, points out that in Greek thought, even before Aristotle, there exists a relationship between *legein* and *noein*.

[8] The dematerialization of bodies into shadows expresses one of the main characteristics that Chantal Jaquet identifies in dancing as an art that de-singularizes the body: “L’art chorégraphique fait voler en éclats la particularité physique et soustrait à l’homme à l’emprise de l’entendue déterminée. Le danseur n’est pas plus asservi à ce corps-ci ou ce corps-là, il devient cette chose sans corps qui peut tout incarner en transcendant ses limites singulières” (2001, 247). Let us mention that *Mammame* is not the only site where Ruiz showed his fascination on shadows as expressive material. The film *Ombres chinoises* (Chinese Shadows, 1982), where all characters are shadows, stands as the clearest example of this fascination in Ruiz’s filmography.

[9] [Dunning](#) (1988) also captured the fact that Ruiz’s film entails a transformation of the original play: “Jacques Bouquin’s photography and Mr. Ruiz’s visual conception abolish the frame for dance that exists even in nonproscenium spaces. The camera moves up at the dancers from below them and low to the ground, and views them from high above, rather than at eye level. The dancers move in corridors and crannies that do not open out to anywhere. They are caught in compressed, concrete rooms perfect for forced confessions.”

[10] The relationship between the works of Ruiz and Spinoza has not yet been amply researched. A good start on the study of this relationship is Cristián Sánchez’s 2011 book *La aventura del cuerpo*. According to the editor of Ruiz’s diaries, Bruno Cuneo, their forthcoming publication will show his complex engagement with Spinoza’s work (personal communication).