

CINEMA 12

JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE MOVING IMAGE
REVISTA DE FILOSOFIA E DA IMAGEM EM MOVIMENTO

IMAGES OF THE REAL
Philosophy and Documentary Film

IMAGENS DO REAL.
Filosofia e Filme Documentário

edited by/ editado por

Stefanie Baumann &
Susana Nascimento Duarte

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PUBLICATION

IFILNOVA - Nova Institute of Philosophy
Faculty of Social and Human Sciences
Nova University of Lisbon
Edifício ID, 4.º Piso
Av. de Berna 26
1069-061 Lisboa
Portugal
www.ifilnova.pt

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CINEMA: JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE MOVING IMAGE 12 "IMAGES OF THE REAL. Philosophy and Documentary Film."

Editors: Stefanie Baumann & Susana Nascimento Duarte

Cover: *Les Immobiles* (2013), dir. Marie Voignier
Publication date: Dec. 2020

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PUBLICAÇÃO

IFILNOVA - Instituto de Filosofia da Nova
Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas
Universidade NOVA de Lisboa
Edifício ID, 4.º Piso
Av. de Berna 26
1069-061 Lisboa
Portugal
www.ifilnova.pt

SÍTIO ELECTRÓNICO

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Editores: Stefanie Baumann & Susana Nascimento Duarte

Data de publicação: Dez. 2020

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EDITORIAL
THINKING DOCUMENTARY FILM

Stefanie Baumann (IFILNOVA)

Susana Nascimento Duarte (School of Arts and Design, Caldas da Rainha/IFILNOVA)

Documentary films constitute a challenge for philosophical thinking. Based on reality and addressing it explicitly as well, they raise the problem of the encounter between world and images in a particularly acute way. The images they feature do not merely reproduce the real in its immediacy, but also constitute, in themselves, a relation to it. Rather than a pure objective material, they are always a product of a dialogue between the visible and its perception, the historically developed reality and the meanings ascribed to it. This issue of *Cinema-Philosophy and the Moving Image* aims to address this complex relationship between film and reality in documentary films.

Opening this issue are two introductory texts written by the editors, which are conceived as complementary approaches to the subject, akin to the cinematic technique of shot and counter-shot: Stefanie Baumann develops the potential meaning of the concept of reality in and through documentary film, while Susana Nascimento Duarte addresses the reality of film images themselves, as they compose and recompose ‘phenomenal reality’. Thereafter, a series of original articles approach the philosophical dimension of documentary through particular examples. Francesco Cattaneo examines through the lenses of Jacques Ellul’s philosophy the meditation on technology and on machines generated in Godfrey Reggio’s *Qatsi Trilogy*, while Vittorio Lubrano explores the potential of posthuman aesthetics through the experimental documentary films of Johann Lurf and Jodie Mack. Jeremy Hamers questions the idiosyncratic stance taken on by Christoph Schlingensiefel in his late film *The African Twin Towers*. Pedro Florêncio engages in an investigation of Wang Bing’s “most discreet – and yet monumental” film *Traces*, and Anna Wiehl analyses through the film *Racing Home* how Korsakow documentary, a type of interactive database documentary, mediates the conjunction between ‘reality’ and its medial constructions.

The following special section features three contributions of particular interest to the questions raised by the issue: the English translation of Jacques Rancière’s text “The Uncertainties of Dialectics” (*Les incertitudes de la dialectique*) on Harun Farocki’s *Images of the World and the*

Inscription of War, Paula Rabinovitch's sensitive reevaluation of documentary in times of COVID, and the Portuguese translation of Trinh T. Minh-ha's seminal text "The Totalizing Question of Meaning".

Instead of the usual classical interview, the editors decided to conclude this issue with a "virtual round table" bringing together various outstanding filmmakers, artists, philosophers, and theorists from different backgrounds around the question of philosophy and documentary film. The round table is virtual in a particular sense: the participants did not actually communicate with each other, but sent their comments, elaborations and thoughts on the proposed subjects directly to the editors, who, in turn, orchestrated these heterogeneous contributions experimentally so as to crystallize them into a readable constellation. Thereby, they attempted to generate a sort of imaginary dialogue between complementary positions expressed through different languages (English, French and Portuguese). In order to emphasize the experimental character of the "virtual round table", two versions of the round table are proposed: one that adopts the linear form of an imaginary discussion transposed as a text, the other that takes on the form of an associative atlas inspired by the montage principles of Aby Warburg's *Atlas Mnemosyne*.

The editors would like to warmly thank the authors and the translators who took part in this issue, the contributors to the "virtual round table", Maile Colbert for her correction of the English parts, and Philip Farah and Margaux Dauby for her assistance in the editing process.

This work is funded by national funds through FCT –
Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia

ABSTRACTS

THE TECHNO-SCIENTIFIC CIVILIZATION AND THE DE-REALIZATION OF THE IMAGE. GODFREY REGGIO'S *QATSI TRILOGY* IN THE LIGHT OF JACQUES ELLUL'S REFLECTION ON TECHNOLOGY.

Francesco Cattaneo, University of Bologna

Spanning twenty years, from 1982 (*Koyaanisqatsi*) to 2002 (*Naqoyqatsi*), Godfrey Reggio's so-called *Qatsi Trilogy* (that also comprehends *Powaqqatsi*, 1988) is a very compelling and significant example of how documentary film can move far beyond the positivist claims of an objective reproduction of "reality", of a neutral observation and of a primacy of content, and directly confront itself with the complexity and ambiguity of our experience. The *Qatsi Trilogy* has contributed to the process that has expanded documentary film towards art film and essay film and that has brought, in contemporary art, to what has been described as a *documentary turn*. In Reggio's trilogy the indexicality of images is embodied within an aesthetic project that stages the very act of seeing and the very production of images themselves, so that the films become a metacinematographical meditation with multiple philosophical implications. This result is achieved by Reggio through many "spectacular" filming and editing techniques (such as aerial shots, time-lapse recording, super slow motion, etc.) and through the soundtrack (the iterative musical score composed by Philip Glass, the power of which contributes in making the *Qatsi Trilogy* an audio-visual symphony). An in-depth analysis of the *Qatsi Trilogy* turns out to be very relevant for a twofold reason. First of all, despite the success and deep aesthetical impact of *Koyaanisqatsi*, the trilogy has been rarely studied as a whole. Secondly, the trilogy deals with themes that are at the center of the current debate, such as the nature/culture relationship and its ecological implications. From this point of view, *Koyaanisqatsi* in particular has been seen as a Manichean and dichotomous essay film, that unilaterally condemns the devastation perpetrated by techno-scientific civilization on the pristine beauty of nature. But recently some more convincing perspectives have been presented, that underscore how the main feature of Reggio's films is to de-familiarize our perception of things, be it nature, be it city-life in modern metropolises, be it third-world environments and cultures, be it the war of information that permeates the global world. In doing so, Reggio develops a meditation on technology and on machines, a meditation that obviously concerns cinema itself as "eye of the century". In *Koyaanisqatsi* Reggio explicitly stresses that the aerial shots he so widely uses have a military background. They are thus linked to what Paul Virilio would call the "logistics of

perception”. These technologies are aimed at surveillance, automation and control and so build and reinforce that “mimicry”, that synchronization of the emotions and standardization of behavior that characterize the industrial age within the framework of a subjectivist humanism. This leads directly to *derealization* as a possibility connected with the society of information, where *weapons of mass destruction* are enhanced by *weapons of mass communication* (see *Naqoyqatsi*). But technology itself (see Reggio’s editing process) offers possibilities that go far beyond the usual construction of perception and of meaning, and that challenge us to understand technology outside an “anthropocentric-instrumental” framework.

Keywords: Godfrey Reggio; Documentary; Techno-scientific Civilization; *Qatsi Trilogy*; Jacques Ellul

POSTHUMAN PERSPECTIVES: THE STRANGE CASE OF JODIE MACK AND JOHANN LURF

Vittorio Lubrano, New University of Lisbon

In this article, I analyze two documentaries screened in the 2019 edition of Doc’s Kingdom: ★ by Johann Lurf and *The Grand Bizarre* by Jodie Mack. I suggest that these works stand at the juncture between a posthuman sensibility and an original way of conceiving documentary films. Indeed, they constitute an instance of what can be called a *machinic documentary* – where an excess of sensorial stimulations meets the suspension of the quest for the real. In the first section, I introduce shortly the posthuman turn within the realm of the arts. The disciplines of Literary Studies, Visual Arts, and Moving Images have been among the first to address the challenges raised by the posthuman paradigm and the aesthetic field still seems to be the crucial laboratory for the future of posthumanities. In order to emphasize some of the most innovative aspects of the posthuman transition, I explore in the central section the works of Mack and Lurf according to the following hypothesis: although multilayered and problematic, both artworks can be interpreted as “strange cases” of posthuman documentaries. Despite the singularity of each work and despite their different strategies of film-making and image-editing, both developed original ways of expelling the human from the screen despite the persistence of some traces. Thus, I insist on the main lines of tension that appear from such liberation from the human in film normativity, giving a particular emphasis to the status of spectatorship and to the mutated paradigm of authorship. In both cases, new correlations within the history of documentaries and a dialogue with certain cinema theorists are

made possible. I conclude the article with a brief reflection that cannot but remain an open challenge. Surely, notwithstanding the radicality of the project, it is not an easy task to “get rid” of the human. Yet at the same time, what the films of Jodie Mack and Johann Lurf may be insinuating is that the production of a new kind of gaze can enable us to find room for a different ecological and techno-mediated sensibility, beyond self-destructive anthropocentric perspectivism. A peculiar re-reading of the Oedipus complex allows me to raise the fundamental issue: what is it that remains from our *aesthetic perception* once it has been de-anthropocentered?

Keywords: posthuman; documentary films; posthuman aesthetics; philosophy of cinema; machinic documentary

THE AFRICAN TWIN TOWERS: UNVEILING THE CREATIVE PROCESS IN CHRISTOPH SCHLINGENSIEF’S LATE FILM WORK

Jeremy Hamers, University of Liège

In 2004, Christoph Schlingensiefel presented the first version of his *Animatograph*, a rotating stage made of objects, projections and performances at the Bayreuther Festspiele where he directed his controversial version of *Parsifal*. Later, he rebuilt a version of this multimedia device in *Area 7*, a township of the Namibian city of Lüderitz. The *Animatograph* has given rise to several analyses focusing on the aesthetic, political, philosophical and historical issues of the device. However, while working on the installation of the *Animatograph* in Namibia, Schlingensiefel also made a film, which documented his failed attempt to shoot a free adaptation of Wagner’s *Ring* in this former German colony. Finally released in 2008 under the title *The African Twin Towers*, this documentary proved to be Schlingensiefel’s last film, with the director dying of cancer just two years later. Overshadowed by the impressive and ambitious theatrical and multimedia mother-project, *The African Twin Towers* has received less analytical debate, particularly about its role as a documentary film. This article reconsiders the documentary as part of Schlingensiefel’s film work, looking at both its crucial contribution to a global reflection on German cinema and its impact on nonfiction film in a post-modern context. To that end, it focuses on the apparent contradiction between the destructive gesture of conventional cinema that is at work in *The African Twin Towers* and the preservation of a nevertheless superior and sometimes apparently cynical director.

Keywords: Christoph Schlingensief; cynical reason; postmodern cinema; Irm Hermann; Animatograph

ON TIREDNESS – NOTES ON LANDSCAPE, DURATION AND ABSTRACTION IN WANG BING'S TRACES (PARA UM CINEMA DA COMUNHÃO: NOTAS A PARTIR DE TRACES (2014), DE WANG BING)

Pedro Florêncio, Universidade Nova de Lisboa

In Wang Bing's filmography, we find possibilities for a cinema of the encounter. This article will deal with one of his most discreet – and yet monumental – films: *Traces* (2014). While preparing the shooting for *The Ditch* (2010), the Chinese director made a detour to collect images and sounds, exhaustively, during a long pedestrian walk through the deserts of the Gansu region, one of several places where the ideological dissidents of the Chinese communist regime were sent to be 're-educated' by forced labor. From this investigative deviation transformed into an aesthetic and ethical experience of tiredness emerged *Traces*, a 'small' film of 28 minutes, consisting of repetitive, nauseating and unstable images that seek to reveal human or material vestiges that remained on the surface of that tragic historical space. In accordance with a famous theory by Paul Virilio, we can glimpse in Wang Bing's cinema a combative idea of polar inertia, from which a massification of man's physical and mental inactivity is predicted, in a world in which everything but man himself, is increasingly on the move. If thought according to Virilio's thesis, Wang Bing's cinema is formally constituted by a desire for physical experimentation in the cinematographic space. Exploring cinema's capacity to create effects of monumentality, the director uncomfortably traverses the vast historical landscape, so that, when moving away from it, a "long-range look" is produced, a look which, as in Adorno's words, "is always the one in which the impulse in the direction of the object is detained and subjected to reflection". Through *Traces*, we intend to outline an aesthetic theory in which a radical humanization of the technical condition invites us to think historically about the real. In other words, *Traces* takes the cinematic experience to its boundaries by making it a form of contact experience. This text aims to develop an analysis on a form of expression in which the historical space can only be thought of in correlation with a cinema of the encounter. We will therefore speak of a cinematographic experience that takes place precisely because of a perceptual time that is anchored in a particular experience of tiredness.

Keywords: Cinema; History; Wang Bing; Monumentality; Tiredness

WORKING THROUGH COMPLEXITY AND THE STRANGE CASE OF KORSAKOW DOCUMENTARY

Anna Wiehl, University of Bayreuth

This contribution explores in how far Korsakow documentary, one type of interactive database documentary, (re-)mediates 'reality' and its medial representations/constructions. *Racing Home* (Hoffman & McMahon 2014), a multi-authored poetic, self-reflexive, interactive assemblage serves as a test stone for the hypothesis that due to its algorithmic complexity and narrative multi-layeredness, the configuration opens up dimensions of intertwined 'realities' that are otherwise difficult to access.

Tackling the controversial topic of the racial past of a small American town, *Racing Home* probes into what can be called 'home'. However, Korsakow documentaries rely on non-linear, procedural, algorithmic editing, on *ostranenie*, loose and ephemeral probabilities, on more or less likely connections between clips which are obscured to the 'authors' themselves due to the sheer combinatorial complexity of rules which are hidden under the surface of the experience. Thus, Korsakow documentaries not only fathom the (im)possibility to represent 'the real' (i.e. the documentary endeavor), they also question the notion of 'the real' as such as well as conceptualizations of 'memory' and 'commemoration'.

Revisiting traditional documentary theory and bringing them into dialogue with positions deriving from so called 'new media studies', this essay reviews the different ways in which interactive documentary assemblages of the Korsakow-type figure as art, as representations/constructions of some sort of 'reality' (subjective? objective?) and as an agentic interactor in the world – and it examines in how far these considerations meet philosophical thinking.

Keywords: non-linearity, digital media cultures, database documentary, plurivocality, interactivity

IMAGES OF THE REAL
INTRODUCTORY NOTES 1

Stefanie Baumann (New University of Lisbon/IFILNOVA)

“The term ‘documentary’...presupposes that *there is something real to document*”, writes Jean-Louis Comolli in *Cinema against Spectacle*. “[S]ome corner of the world, the reality of a relationship, the singularity of a subject; whatever is still obscure, rough and hoarse in the world...The documentary has an interest in the war of facts and narratives as something real, something which takes place in our world and in our lives.”¹ Documentaries, non-fiction films, filmic essays or, as filmmaker Jill Godmilow prefers to say, edification films,² ineluctably confront us with the question of the real. However, what precisely is considered real and how such films relate to it, is much less obvious. On the one hand, the real appears in documentary film as the material, social, and historical reality that constitutes the collective world shared by the filmmaker, the spectators, and the people appearing in the film. As such, it is a concrete matter that imposes certain conditions and limits. For “documentary cinema poses a buttress of the real against the desire to be in command of everything, to reinvent everything...In documentary cinema, death, when filmed, cannot be reversed, repeated or replayed. There is no ‘second take’. The diseased, the wounded, the dead are so forever, even after the camera has stopped filming. This *hors-film* is another name for the real.”³ On the other hand, however, the real of documentary is also a debatable, uncertain, conflictual territory, in which heterogeneous ways of perceiving, grasping, comprehending and making sense intertwine and constantly challenge each other. How objective reality is apprehended, how the relation between the factual realm, the historical becoming of society, and the multiple mediations through which an object, a detail, a situation, or an event acquires a meaning is grasped – such questions are always, in one way or another, implicitly addressed through documentary film.

The reality exposed by documentary films is also complex in another sense. On the one hand, the images and sounds are, at least most of the time, recorded through technical devices. Hence, they constitute material traces which function as indices in the sense attributed by Charles S. Peirce, because they witness an actual encounter between the camera and the apparent reality. That which is captured by a technical device is substantially different from what is accessible to human perception alone. “For it is another nature which speaks to the camera rather than to the eye,” as Walter Benjamin writes, “‘other’ above all in the sense that a space informed by human

consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious”.⁴ The camera thus opens an access to that which Benjamin called an “optical unconscious”⁵, or that which Dziga Vertov attempted to grasp through his notion of a “Kino-Eye”.⁶ Which is not to say, however, that such camera recordings provide immediate access to empirical reality. Even without taking into account the advent of the digital, which has profoundly destabilized the evidential force of images,⁷ the process of filming and editing subjects the reality that appears in front of the camera to multiple alterations. No film encompasses the totality of the reality at stake; there is always much that remains omitted, ineluctably out of frame, out of focus, *hors-champ*. Consequently, film images and sounds transform the reality that appears during the seizure: through the process of filming, fragments of the real are fixed in a moment of their past, extracted from their context, cut into segments, reduced in size, translated into a two-dimensional format or into pixels, before they are repositioned and reworked during the editing process. However little the intentional intervention of the filmmaker, the respective reality is always affected, somehow or other, by the technical device that records it, just as it is always shaped by the artistic, political, and intellectual choices of those who conceive, direct, and produce the film. The ways the fragments of the real are selected and framed, how the visual and audible material is assembled, combined, contextualized, or processed through montage – all these mediations ineluctably convert an apparent reality into a film that orients the perception and charges it with particular layers of meaning. Therefore, films constitute a reality of their own and, to say it with the words of Trinh T. Min-ha, “[t]o deny the reality of film in claiming (to capture) reality is to stay ‘in ideology’ – that is, to indulge in the (deliberate or not) confusion of filmic with phenomenal reality.”⁸

Already John Grierson, who is said to have coined the term,⁹ had understood documentary as something other than merely an accurate recording of empirical reality. While he argued that the realness of represented objects, people, and events played an important role in the effects produced by the film, he nevertheless considered the direct connection between the filmed material and the reality it seized as necessary though insufficient condition for the comprehension of the particular potential of those films that he understood as documentaries in the truest sense of the word. Grierson’s point was not so much that an immediate reproduction of the real was impossible. But the mere depiction of empirical reality was, at best, of minor interest to him. Hence, he distinguished documentaries from “plain (or fancy) descriptions of natural material” as to be found, for example, in “peacetime newsreel” or purely informative journalistic formats which “describe, and even expose, but, in any aesthetic sense, only rarely reveal.”¹⁰ Documentary film, by contrast, is for Grierson the “creative treatment of actuality”, as his famous definition of documentary goes.¹¹ Through artistic means, underlying layers of sense are laid bare and compellingly exposed, thereby

inducing “a philosophic attitude on the part of the spectator”, as he notes with regards to Flaherty’s *Moana*.¹² It is precisely because documentaries are not solely based on neutral camera recordings of apparently objective reality, but produced through the encounter between this reality and an artistic subject who aesthetically mediates it, that they are able to unfold a hitherto concealed truth-content of the real.

But what exactly does it mean to treat actuality creatively? Wherein lies the particular agency of images and sounds that address the real directly? How can the particular tension between the real and its filmic expression, between objective reality and the mediations through which it appears in a documentary, be conceptually grasped? What concept of the real is implicitly or explicitly mobilized in documentary filmmaking and the thinking about reality it generates?

REALITY, WHAT REALITY?

For Grierson and his followers, the answer to the question of the reality to be addressed through documentary film was at least clear. At stake was the concrete social reality as it is actually constituted. He thought that compelling representations of social problems, disasters, or humanitarian crises would not only draw attention to lived conditions in need of improvement, but could also steer public opinion towards political reform, social justice, and the stabilization of democracy. Grierson, who followed a Hegelian model of the State apparatus as a rational agent for harmonizing social unity, defended the idea that social crisis could and should be solved through the intervention of strong political institutions.¹³ Documentary, therefore, played the important role of a “corrective social agency”, as Jonathan Kahana puts it.¹⁴ In other words, documentary was first and foremost a potent medium of communication, which should be put in the service of public education. Hence, the particular value of documentary film lays for him in its transformative force: since that which is exposed through a documentary film is based on reality itself, and since this reality directly concerns viewers, ethical and political injunctions arise inevitably out of this mode of representation. Accordingly, Grierson presumed that the perception of reality was an inherently political concern – and that documentaries were capable of guiding it in a responsible way when put in the service of the right cause.

Throughout its history, this idea of documentary film as a means for raising and negotiating social issues has been an important motor for its development. Documentary has been considered a powerful tool for propagandistic endeavors and has been instrumentalized for the transmission of educational, ideological, and moralistic messages from above. Yet, it has also been a privileged form of expression for artists, independent filmmakers, and activists, who used it to contest

hegemonic claims and discriminatory practices, and the denunciation of authoritarian, misguided, and illegitimate uses of the medium and the information it conveys. By dint of its demonstrative potency, documentary has thus appealed – and continues to appeal – to those in power and their critics alike.¹⁵

Nevertheless, many documentary films ostensibly refrain from adopting a discernable stance, at least a stance other than the “assertive stance” that characterizes them, according to Carl Plantinga, as documentary.¹⁶ Rather than considering “the war of facts and narratives as something real”, as Comolli puts it above, they take reality as a coherent given. By alleging to present reality simply ‘as it really is’, seemingly impartial documentaries tacitly postulate a general consensus about the constitution of this reality. This does not only concern the concrete details of the reality they expose, but also – maybe even more importantly – the forms, figures, and concepts employed for their mediation. Often, such documentaries base their claim of the realistic apprehension of reality on a double assumption. First, that authentic audiovisual material would provide a straightforward access to the reality at stake. Second, that the complementary consolidation through established facts and rational explanations would supply a comprehensive contextualization based on reliable information. What is presupposed is not only that technically produced images provide accurate representations, but also a certain uncritically adopted conception of reality. The latter is understood as comprising two distinguishable spheres: the objective realm, constituted by cold facts, on the one hand; and the sphere of subjectivity, which is understood as everything concerning sense perception, sensitivities, opinions, and social tendencies, on the other. However, rather than being as self-evident a conception as it is often presented, this positivistic approach to reality is anything but devoid of questionable premises. In particular, the critical tradition of philosophy has persistently problematized its theoretical shortages and alignments with the dominant power structures. Max Horkheimer, for example, criticized such positivistic positions for failing to grasp their own multifold entanglements with the society from which they pretend to be independent. Instead of neutrally analyzing so-called given facts, they (re)produce a prevalent pattern of capitalism. “[M]odern science, as positivists understand it, refers essentially to statements about facts, and therefore presupposes the reification of life in general and of perception in particular”, Horkheimer writes in *Eclipse of Reason*. “It looks upon the world as a world of facts and things, and fails to connect the transformation of the world into facts and things with the social process. The very concept of ‘fact’ is a product—a product of social alienation; in it, the abstract object of exchange is conceived as a model for all objects of experience in the given category. The task of critical reflection is not merely to understand the various facts in their historical development...but also to see through the notion of fact itself, in its development and therefore in its relativity. The

so-called facts ascertained by quantitative methods, which the positivists are inclined to regard as the only scientific ones, are often surface phenomena that obscure rather than disclose the underlying reality.”¹⁷

The very idea of the factual as self-explanatory evidence and the concomitant concept of objectivity as quantifiable, measurable empirical reality, are historically developed, controversial conceptions that are intrinsically tied to a specific power structure of society. They presuppose and constantly reiterate the capitalistic principle of the division of labor and the generalized process of reification, and entail the depreciation of everything that does not fit into their frame as dubious, biased and subjective. Hence, the positivistic approach to objectivity dogmatically poses the conditions for knowledge production to the detriment of divergent conceptions of reality, and disregards the antagonisms inherent to its own conception. In his critique of the predominance of positivistic rationality, Adorno goes as far as to note that “[t]he notions of subjective and objective have been completely reversed. Objective means the non-controversial aspect of things, their unquestioned impression, the façade made up of classified data, that is, the subjective; and they call subjective anything which breaches that façade, engages the specific experience of a matter, casts off all ready-made judgements and substitutes relatedness to the object for the majority consensus of those who do not even look at it, let alone think about it – that is, the objective.”¹⁸ What is more, such an idea of the factual as the major criterium for the determination of the real, which presents itself as disinterested and neutral, is far from immune against actual distortion even within its own premises. As Jacques Rancière writes, “Negationists have already shown that to deny what has happened, it isn’t necessary to deny fact after fact: denying the links that run through them and give them the weight of history is enough.”¹⁹ The idea of factual reality as conclusive actuality, as something dissociable from both, its historical becoming, and the multifold mediations through which it appears as such and becomes meaningful in society, is thus anything but neutral.

Documentary filmmaker Robert Kramer put it in a nutshell when he wrote that “Power is the possibility to define what is real”.²⁰ By determining what is actually real, authoritative instances appropriate the agency to determine what is genuine, truthful, and pertinent in it. Documentaries that uncritically reproduce hegemonic ideas about reality by taking on a detached, allegedly impartial position, corroborate their assumed universal validity and endorse implicit attributions such as the supremacy of allegedly serious sources, trustworthy methods and coherent models of knowledge production. What is more, they even increase their authority by setting (and constantly reproducing) standards for the perception of reality. For documentaries shape the audiovisual appearance of reality and reiterate schemas which directly associate images and sounds with specific meanings. They do not merely *reproduce* what is already there, but *forge* a particular

discernment that appears to logically stem from the representation itself. In this sense, documentary and complementary media productions have a transformative effect: they normalize certain representational conventions through which something acquires a particular value as real, effective, decent, credible, and true. Common features such as authoritative voice-overs, interviews with experts, the recourse to apparently authentic footage, archive material, or statistical data mirror that form of veracity to such an extent that their constructedness passes almost unnoticed. “Each statement, each piece of news, each thought has been preformed by the centres of the culture industry”, writes Adorno in *Minima Moralia*. “Whatever lacks the familiar trace of such preformation lacks credibility, the more so because the institutions of public opinion accompany what they send forth by a thousand factual proofs and all the plausibility that total power can lay hands on.”²¹ It is this omnipresence and implicitness of conventionalized patterns that eventually exacerbate the distinction between populist productions, films resulting from thorough research and documentaries that respond to mere market orientation.²²

SUBVERTING THE STANDARD

When standardized forms associated with hegemonic conceptions about the very constitution of the real are unquestionably reproduced over and over again, they tend to culminate in homogenized idea of reality as a coherent whole – a reality principle. The latter is to be understood “not simply [as] some kind of natural way associated with how things are [...]”, as Alenka Zupančič puts it. “The reality principle itself is ideologically mediated; one could even claim that it constitutes the highest form of ideology, the ideology that presents itself as empirical fact or (biological, economic...) necessity (and that we tend to perceive as nonideological).”²³ The problem lies in the fact that such an impenetrable, self-evident representation of reality pervades society through and through, and encourages an equally pervasive reactive attitude. For that which appears as imperatively real imposes its validity, and what results out of it as its logical or natural consequences cannot but be accepted – even if that which thereby appears as ineluctable is repression, discrimination and misery. Adorno called such an attitude an “overvalued realism”²⁴ (*überwertiger Realismus*). If reality is ineluctably thus, then there is nothing to be done about it; the current conditions have to be endured, because any attempt to transform them would be in vain. The critique of presenting an actual reality as inevitable or natural is not new.

Already Karl Marx criticized the claim to present a situation as naturally given rather than as historically developed social configuration as a strategy to sanction the ruling power structure of capitalism.²⁵ In a similar vein, Alain Badiou defines the dominant economic discourse and its self-

proclamation as the current “guardian of the real”²⁶. Presenting itself as a neutral analyst of the global situation rather than its foremost agent, this authoritative discourse and the corresponding media formats pose the current conditions and the status quo as given. This is how, time and again, the logics, values and effects of capitalism are tacitly reiterated as incontestable, fateful norms rather than as permanent generators of the situation. Even the periodic revelation of scandals – an increasingly popular theme in contemporary commercial documentary - does not challenge its hegemony. Quite the contrary: scandals only confirm the rule when they are presented as an exception. For rather than questioning the underlying power structures through which society is constituted and which facilitate that such scandals erupt, they isolate particular cases of wrongdoing and treat them in a particularistic manner. “And so”, writes Badiou, “the scandal is something which is useful to the system because it presents, as an exception, the rule itself.”²⁷ By neglecting to consider the internal antagonisms of capitalism and its complex entanglements with colonialism, imperialism, the ecological crises, etc., such assertions to cover the real realistically block every radical transformation – an issue that has also been addressed by Mark Fisher under the label of “capitalist realism” in an eponymous book.²⁸ Documentary formats that unquestionably reproduce such paradigms and give it a recognizable, conclusive shape, both contribute to the hegemony of such “realistic” determinations and anchor their impact on society.

Against such fatalistic, unilateral understandings of reality and the respective ways it is supposed to be realistically represented, artists and documentary filmmakers have joined critical philosophers in their effort to elaborate a critical stance. Alexander Kluge, for example, declared that “The motive for realism is never confirmation of reality but protest.”²⁹ Realism as he conceives it, “takes the imagination and wishes of human beings just as seriously as the world of facts”.³⁰ It is an “antagonistic realism” or “realism of the senses” that counters the overpowering effects of the persisting reality principle. Rather than providing an unquestionable truth about reality or injunctions to follow, rather than imposing conventions to respect or even explaining the real in a comprehensive way, Kluge – and many other contemporary artists and documentary filmmakers – aims at critically apprehending reality without pacifying its conflicting layers of sense, matter and rationality. Actual reality, as he understands it, is not an objective realm opposed to the ambiguous realm of subjectivity or the illusory realm of images. On the contrary, the objective realm is itself mediated through societal apprehension and saturated by images, sounds, patterns and schemas. The latter not only mould its audio-visual appearance and self-representation, but also have become an integral part of it. The predominance of the male gaze, of imperialist, colonial, heteronormative or eurocentrist depiction of “us” and the other, or the seemingly self-evident value of work, consumption or the idea of progress – all these allegedly ‘realistic’ representations have shaped

reality and continue to form it further through constant repetition of the ever-same stereotypes and benchmarks.

Countering the common imagery of society and its corresponding norm and value structure thus means undermining conventions, carving out that which is hidden in the folds of representation, and configuring relations anew. It means not only showing things differently and giving visibility to hitherto neglected or oppressed subjects, but also to consider the actual ramifications of the common sensical perception of reality as a crucial part of its constitution as such. Films proceeding in such a critical manner aim to “extract an Image from all the clichés and to set it up against them”, in Gilles Deleuze’s words.³¹ It is thus not simply a matter of proposing an alternative version of the real “as it really is”, but of breaking open a gridlocked way of representing reality through a conscientious reassessment of the sensory and intelligible configuration of the real. The aim is neither, for such artists and filmmakers, to redefine what reality really is, nor to provide definite answers. On the contrary, it is to reopen a space for difference, alterity and contradiction through filmic means. As Trinh T Min-ha puts it, “To compose is not always synonymous with ordering-so-as-to-persuade, and to give the filmed document another sense, another meaning, is not necessarily to distort it. If life’s paradoxes and complexities are not to be suppressed, the question of degree and nuance is incessantly crucial. Meaning can therefore be political only when it does not let itself easily stabilized, and when it does not rely on any single source of authority, but, rather, empties or decentralizes it.”³²

What is at stake is thus an artistic intervention in the relation between contents and the forms that mediate them. “The formal construction of a work is far from an add-on or surface feature,” as Michael Renov puts it. “Rather the formal domain is about the work of construction, the play of the signifier, the vehicle of meaning for every instance of human communication. The formal regime is the very portal of sense-making; it determines the viewer’s access to the expression of ideas, its power to move and transform an audience.”³³ In this sense, form itself is to be understood as “sedimented content,” as Adorno writes with regards to what he understands as genuine art.³⁴ For form and content cannot be fully dissociated; they are mediated one through the other and acquire their meaning only in conjunction. Standardized forms convey the very societal logic that put them forth, and which they cannot but subliminally reproduce. Therefore, to carve out a truth content beyond the societal facade of consentaneity and perspicuity means to elaborate forms that are able to resist direct assimilation into established patterns.

This cannot, of course, be achieved by following a however predefined model, style or procedure. Filmmakers have developed very different filmic means with regards to particular constellations of the real. Even the direct cinema of the 1960s, reputedly aspiring to provide a

direct reproduction of that which appears in front of the camera, proceeds in this critical sense. As Jean-Louis Comolli wrote in 1969, “In direct cinema...filming is never a moment of repetition or reconstruction of ‘reality’. Nor is it quite that of a selection inside a pre-filmic reality (as the reproduction and elaboration of the script is in re-presentational cinema). Rather it is a moment of *accumulation*. Often without any fixed ‘programme’, a whole quantity of film is shot, the ultimate end of which is neither determined nor known. What this involves is of course images of ‘reality’, filmed events, but in some sense these are floating images without a referent, divested of any stable significance and open to all-comers...Direct cinema rejects all *a priori* forms or signification, and all pre-determination and aims, not to reproduce things ‘as they are’ (as they are intended by the scenario of the film or of ‘life’ - i.e. of ideology), but positively to transform them, to take them from an unformed, uncinematic stage to the stage of cinematic form.”³⁵ Other artistic strategies consist in radically deflecting the focus and thereby producing hitherto unexperienced perspectives, or in presenting a reality in a completely different way from how it is usually represented. Often, they take a reflexive stance or intermingle subjective considerations and objective conditions, or subvert the obvious appearance of an actual situation through experimental editing. Some documentary filmmakers revisit archive material or found footage in order to carve out inherent layers of meaning by rearranging it in unexpected, challenging ways, or turn the focus onto the question the agency of images themselves and examine the ways how they frame and control society, or how they are employed for military, disciplinary or economic purposes. In any case, the artistic intervention meshes with the political element of perception and emphasizes, in one way or another, its societal impact on reality. The reality such critical artists and filmmakers deal with is not considered a consistent unity, but a conflictual field in which the very reality of representation is as important a layer to ponder as the factual reality and its societal mediation.

PROBLEMATIZING THE REAL

Jacques Rancière’s writings on documentary film address precisely such critical artistic practices that oppose, through their work, established standards and interpretations of hegemonic conceptions of reality. Rather than aiming to define documentary as a genre, to analyze its characteristic features, or to examine how to represent the real truthfully, Rancière upholds, first and foremost, that the real is itself to be problematized. Herein lies for him the particular potential of documentary film: while feature films usually expend great effort in producing a realistic feel (and thereby all too often succumb to stereotypical representations), “so-called documentary film” is able to address the real directly as a problem.³⁶ More precisely, it is because the reference to the

real is immanent to documentary film that the latter is able to concomitantly penetrate it and take critical distance from established representations and attributions, in order to experiment with alternative compositions of the signs, bodies, actions, and meanings of the real.

But what is the real Rancière refers to? On the one hand, he neither conceives of it as one stable, external referent, nor as an eternal essence concealed under a veil of false appearances. Rather than an objective, coherent entity awaiting its adequate portrayal, the real is a contradictory force field whose very constitution cannot be fully dissociated from the divergent perceptions, experiences, and meanings through which it is mediated and which constitute its movements. Objective conditions and subjective experiences, aesthetical and political configurations, sensory and intellectual modes of comprehending are interlaced on many levels. On the other hand, however, the actual conditions reigning in reality, its political constitution and implicit social formation of values and norms, impose manifold restrictions. Societal organization appears as an effective construction based on an underlying consensus about that which is visible, sayable, and feasible and that which is (and those who are) excluded from public consideration. Reality is thus tacitly regulated through a configuration of that which is deemed as real or imaginary, as significant or meaningless, rational or irrational, important or irrelevant, normal or deviant. How reality is perceived is a question of the “distribution of the sensible” [*partage du sensible*] which provides the conditions of possibility not only for experience, perception, and knowledge, but also for social change and political action. Problematizing the real means, in this sense, to wrest that which appears as all too obvious, ineluctable or common from its natural appearance, and to challenge the hegemonic determinations operating in reality. It is, in Rancière’s words, the production of a *dissensus* - “a division inserted in ‘common sense’: a dispute over what is given and about the frame within which we see something as given.”³⁷ Problematizing the real thus means penetrating into its entrenched constitution and disrupting its manifest appearance so as to break its established forms and logics open and configure it anew.

The process of disassembling and reconfiguring the signs and meanings, the bodies, objects, and movements of the real is what Rancière calls fiction: “Fiction is a way of changing existing modes of sensory presentations and forms of enunciation; of varying frames, scales and rhythms; and of building new relationships between reality and appearance, the individual and the collective.”³⁸ It does so by “undo[ing], and then re-articulat[ing], connections between signs and images, images and times, and signs and spaces, framing a given sense of reality, a given ‘commonsense’. It is a practice that invents new trajectories between what can be seen, what can be said and what can be done.”³⁹ Documentary, which is “capable of greater fictional invention than ‘fiction’ film,”⁴⁰ is thus for him anything but “non-fiction”. For fiction is not equated with the

denial of facts. That which is produced through fiction is not merely a pure illusory fantasy beyond the real world either. On the contrary: fiction is for Rancière a particular mode of intelligibility that reassesses the facts and the ways of making sense of them through sensory and intelligible means. This mode is not limited to the sphere of the arts: it permeates society through and through, and determines political and historiographical ways of perceiving and interpreting reality. For “the real has to be fictionalized in order to be thought”, as Rancière writes with regards to both, artistic and historical approaches to the real – an idea that resonates with Alexander Kluge’s famous dictum that “it must be possible to present reality as the historical fiction that it is.”⁴¹ Against the positivistic understanding of an objective realm, a factual reality that could be fully dissociated from a subjective sphere, both Rancière and Kluge uphold the transformative potential of the work of fiction which makes it possible to articulate them together.

Accordingly, the dividing line lies not between documentary and fiction, but between different stances towards reality taken on by a film. In a sense, Rancière’s approach is itself a redistribution of the common understanding, which opposes fiction and documentary as complementary genres. Moreover, it is also a division of the very notion of documentary itself. For Rancière not only discards quite a lot of films that are usually considered as such; he even mobilizes a certain idea of documentary as problematization of reality through artistic means *against* another conception of documentary – the commonly accepted idea mentioned above that documentaries ought to provide a coherent, affirmative, “realistic” representation of reality, as adopted in many mainstream productions, television or internet formats, or educational films. For what is challenged in the artistic documentary practices to which Rancière refers, are precisely the hegemonic ideas of reality that such films claiming to present reality “as it really is” corroborate by alleging to provide a direct, objective access to the real.

The question of the real as addressed by and through documentary is thus more complex than it might seem at first. For neither is the real a unilateral concept independent of the ways it is apprehended, grasped and framed, nor is documentary film a purely disinterested, clearly definable genre. What comes to the fore is the intricate interplay between the constitution of reality and its perception as real. It is not only a matter of how documentary images and sounds acquire their status as reliable conveyers of knowledge or of what enters into public consideration through its medial representation, but also of how that which is presented as real, truthful and meaningful is framed, shaped, configured. The political element of perception is always, explicitly or implicitly, mobilized in documentary film. Medial representations affect the real while they mediate it: either they enshrine the current conditions, attributions and values of reality through the reproduction of

rigid schemas and conventionalized patterns, or they intercept its smooth apprehension as coherent entity by reconfiguring it differently and generating dissensual logics of perception.

*This work is funded by national funds through FCT –
Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia under the project UIDB/00183/2020.*

¹ Jean-Louis Comolli, *Cinema against Spectacle. Technique and Ideology Revisited*, trans. and ed. by Daniel Fairfax (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 133.

² Cf. Jill Godmilow and Ann-Louise Shapiro, “How Real is the Reality in Documentary Film?” in *History and Theory*, Vol. 36, No. 4, Theme Issue 36: Producing the Past: Making Histories Inside and Outside the Academy (Dec., 1997), 80-101, 81.

³ Comolli, *Cinema against Spectacle.*, 134

⁴ Walter Benjamin, “Little History of Photography”, in *Selected Writings Volume 2, part 2 1931-1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. trans. Rodney Livingstone *et.al.* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2005), 507-530, 510.

⁵ Benjamin, *Photography*, 512.

⁶ See e.g. Dziga Vertov, “The Council of Three” where he writes “The main and essential thing is: The sensory exploration of the world through film. We therefore take as a point of departure the use of the camera as kino-eye, more perfect than the human eye, for the exploration of the visual chaos of visual phenomena that fill space. The kino-eye lives and moves in time and space; it gathers and records impressions in a manner wholly different from that of the human eye.” In *Kino-Eye. The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O’Brian (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984), 14-21, 14-15.

⁷ See for example Mary Ann Doane (ed.), “Indexicality: Trace and Sign”, *differences* 18 (1), March 2007.

⁸ Trinh T. Minh-Ha. 1990. “Documentary Is/Not a Name” in *October* 52:76-98, 90.

⁹ The first mention of the “documentary value” of a film is to be found in John Grierson, “Flaherty’s Poetic *Moana* (1926), in *The Documentary Film Reader. History, Theory, Criticism*, ed. Jonathan Kahana (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 86-87, 86

¹⁰ John Grierson, “First Principles of Documentary” (1932-34) in *Documentary Film Reader*, 217-225, 218.

¹¹ John Grierson, “The Documentary Producer” (1933). In *Documentary Film Reader*, 215-216.

¹² Grierson, *Moana*, p.87.

¹³ Cf. Ian Aitken, “John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement” in *The Documentary Film Book*, ed. Brian Winsten (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, New York : Palgrave Macmillan on behalf of the British Film Institute, 2013), 129-137.

¹⁴ Jonathan Kahana, *Intelligence Work. The Politics of American Documentary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 11

¹⁵ See for example Kahana, *Intelligence Work*; Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary* (London and New York: Verso, 1994); Bill Nichols, *Representing reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real II: Documentary:*

Grierson and Beyond (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire [England], New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹⁶ In the article “Documentary”, Plantinga writes: “In nonfiction, the filmmaker takes the assertive stance, presenting states of affairs as occurring in the actual world. Thus the characteristic illocutionary act of the documentary filmmaker is to present the world of the work assertively.”, in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, ed. Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga (London, New York: Routledge, 2009), 494-504, 498.

¹⁷ Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (London, New York: Continuum, 2004), 56.

¹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflections from a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London, New York: Verso books, 2005) 69-70.

¹⁹ Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables*, trans. Emiliano Battista (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2006) 158.

²⁰ Robert Kramer. “Être ou ne pas être dans le plan?” 1991, <http://derives.tv/etre-ou-ne-pas-etre-dans-le-plan/> Accessed January 2, 2021, (translated by the author).

²¹ Theodor W Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 208.

²² See Stefanie Baumann, “How to Mediate Reality: Thinking Documentary Film with Adorno and Horkheimer” in *How to Critique Authoritarian Populism. Methodologies of the Frankfurt School*, ed. Jeremiah Morelock, (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2021), 412-430.

²³ Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow. Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two* (Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 2003), 77

²⁴ See Theodor W. Adorno, “Erziehung-Wozu?”, in *Theodor W. Adorno. Erziehung zur Mündigkeit*, ed. Gerd Kadelbach (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), 105-119 (translation by the author).

²⁵ In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, for example, he polemically writes: “Economists have a singular method of procedure. There are only two kinds of institutions for them, artificial and natural. The institutions of feudalism are artificial institutions, those of the bourgeoisie are natural institutions. In this they resemble the theologians, who likewise establish two kinds of religion. Every religion which is not theirs is an invention of men, while their own is an emanation from God. When the economists say that present-day relations—the relations of bourgeois production—are natural, they imply that these are the relations in which wealth is created and productive forces developed in conformity with the laws of nature. These relations therefore are themselves natural laws independent of the influence of time. They are eternal laws which must always govern society. Thus there has been history, but there is no longer any. There has been history, since there were the institutions of feudalism, and in these institutions of feudalism we find quite different relations of production from those of bourgeois society, which the economists try to pass off as natural and as such, eternal.” Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works Vol. 6 1845-1848* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 105-212, 201.

²⁶ Alain Badiou, “In Search of the Lost Real” in *Badiou and his Interlocutors. Lectures, Interviews, Responses*, ed. A.J. Bartlett and Justin Clemens (London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 7-16, 7.

²⁷ Badiou, *Search of the Lost Real*, p. 10.

²⁸ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: is There no Alternative?* (Winchester, Washington: Zero Books, 2009).

²⁹ Alexander Kluge, “The Sharpest Ideology: That Reality Appeals to its Realistic Character” (trans. David Roberts), in Alexander Kluge. *Raw Materials for the Imagination*, ed. Tara Forest (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 192.

³⁰ Alexander Kluge, “Ein Hauptansatz des Ulmer Instituts (1980)”, in *In Gefahr und größter Not bringt der Mittelweg den Tod: Texte zu Kino, Film, Politik*, ed. Christian Schulte (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 1999), 59. Quoted and translated by Tara Forrest in *Realism as Protest. Kluge, Schlingensiefel, Haneke* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015), 18.

³¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1. The Movement Image*, trans. by H. Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 210.

³² Trinh T. Minh-Há, *Documentary*, 89.

³³ Michael Renov, “Art, Documentary as Art”, in *The Documentary Film Book*, 345-352, 348.

³⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 198.

³⁵ Jean-Louis Comolli, “The Detour Through the Direct”, in *Realism and the Cinema*, ed. Christopher Williams (London: BFO, 1980), 225-243, 243; first published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* 209 and 211, February and April 1969, 243.

³⁶ Rancière, *Film Fables*, 17-18.

³⁷ Jacques Rancière, “Who is the subject of the Rights of Man?” in *Dissensus. On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran (London, New York: Continuum, 2010), 62-75, 69.

³⁸ Jacques Rancière, “The Paradoxes of Political Art” in *Dissensus. On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran (London, New York: Continuum, 2010), 134-151, 141.

³⁹ Rancière, *Paradoxes*, 149.

⁴⁰ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetic. The Distribution of the Sensible*, ed. and trans. Gabriel Rockhill, (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), 34.

⁴¹ Kluge, *The Sharpest Ideology*, 191.

A REALIDADE DAS IMAGENS

NOTAS INTRODUTÓRIAS 2

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A ligação indexical ao real que caracteriza o cinema, tornou-se no caso do documentário a sua condição legitimadora e problematizadora, enquanto forma supostamente ‘não ficcional’ de fabricar imagens,¹ ou seja, enquanto forma que produz imagens do real, da realidade do mundo num dado momento, decorrentes da capacidade única e inquietante do cinema de capturar, registar e expor automaticamente a “fisiologia da existência,” ao mesmo tempo que armazena blocos dessa experiência perceptiva da realidade para memória futura. Assim, do automatismo da imagem cinematográfica resulta a crença na sua essência documental, que por sua vez funda a nossa crença no real que se inscreveu nas imagens. A partir daqui é a relação da imagem filmada à verdade que passa a estar em jogo e os vários modos de sobre ela reflectir. De facto, a afinidade essencial do cinema com a realidade física, graças ao modo de produção automático da imagem-movimento, vocaciona-o para o registo e exposição da realidade, mas abre também o espaço para que se instale a dúvida sobre se uma tal descrição da realidade a descreve adequadamente: se por um lado, o cinema em geral e o documentário em particular trabalham com o elemento da cópia, da ‘estenografia’ da realidade perceptiva actual, com o traço deixado pela experiência de uma dada duração, e não se pode ir para lá deles arbitrariamente, como diz Alexander Kluge,² por outro, a cópia como inscrição na imagem “do tecido complexo do [dito] mundo objectivo”³ não acontece directa e mecanicamente. Não é apenas a realidade que é descrita, mas também a relação a ela. Neste sentido, no caso do cinema de abordagem documental, a imagem é não só constitutiva da realidade que se quer retratar, como uma certa configuração para a experimentação e investigação sobre o factual está desde logo presente. O factual emerge na imagem enquadrada pela câmara, mas é investido de significações e interpretações diversas, quer com a selecção da imagem pelo realizador e sua combinação com outras imagens, quer no contacto com a experiência posterior do filme pelo espectador, por sua vez determinadas pelo que pode ser dito e visto num dado momento histórico, e também pelo que fica de fora.

Assim, se podemos falar do documentário no sentido de uma certa conexão ao real, que é diferente da convocada pelos filmes de ficção, também podemos abordá-lo como sendo uma forma de reflectir sobre a própria natureza das imagens - o que significa fazer, produzir uma imagem?

Neste caso, mais do que com a realidade, o diálogo de cada realizador é um diálogo com imagens, imagens do presente e imagens da história.

Nestas notas introdutórias, vamos partir desta constatação da ontologia da imagem cinematográfica, deste encontro entre cinema e realidade física, fundadores de uma série de considerações sobre a sua especificidade, para mais do que procurar associá-los ao documentário como prática de não-ficção, entendida nos termos acima mencionados, ligá-los a uma ideia de documentário indissociável de uma ideia mais abrangente de cinema como terreno de experimentação, onde a realidade se compõe e recompõe ao sabor da interrogação sobre e do diálogo com as imagens, em sintonia com a actualidade do mundo a cada época.

Pretende-se, então, acentuar, para as questionar, nas imagens do real associadas às práticas do documentário, as *imagens* e não o real, a realidade referencial e mundana para que reenviam - daí o título *a realidade das imagens* -, como forma de sublinhar que não existe o mero factual, que não há descrição directa da realidade, no sentido em que, e ao contrário do que pretendia a ‘tradição e concepção pseudo-científica do documentário’, a verdade não é garantida pela inscrição indicial e directa. É impossível encontrar a realidade directamente, todos os filmes assentam em pressupostos e convenções a partir dos quais se desenvolve uma certa configuração cinematográfica, que nunca coincide com as estruturas do mundo real; no sentido também, em que a verdade não é senão um momento do falso, ou seja, a realidade retratada pelo cinema é também a realidade do próprio cinema, sem que o movimento do mundo se possa distinguir do movimento das imagens; no sentido, por fim, em que fabricar uma imagem é arrancar o tema, o motivo, mais ou menos enfática e explicitamente ao seu contexto, criando-o de novo, e assumir a condição de *ready-made* de qualquer imagem, como afirma Hartmut Bitomsky.⁴ De facto, o advento do filme marca a primeira vez na História em que se podia capturar o momento, o efémero e transportá-lo. Ou seja, não só os filmes são um reflexo do seu tempo, uma prova ou evidência de que algo teve lugar, como as imagens, com as suas qualidades documentais, são como *objects trouvés*, materiais brutos, nem boas, nem más, que podem ser remontadas para contar uma história completamente diferente da que determinou a sua origem. Um cinema das potências do falso como diria Gilles Deleuze, a propósito de Orson Welles. É importante mencionar que o cinema deste realizador é uma ininterrupta meditação sobre o acto de criação, e a relação que este estabelece com a verdade e com a mentira, que culmina, numa obra como *F for fake*, 1973, na radicalização do modo como os procedimentos formais e estilísticos de Welles se passam a exhibir enquanto tais, evidenciados como componentes de uma ‘falsidade’ necessária à manifestação da verdade. É um filme que, sendo um auto-retrato de Welles enquanto criador e do que foram o seus truques (também no sentido de *tricks*, trapaças), estende a sua auto-reflexividade ao próprio cinema, dado que Welles, ao contrário do que aparenta,

exibe a sua própria metodologia de trabalho, e a estreita coerência que é possível vislumbrar entre esta e o que sempre foram as suas obsessões temáticas e os motivos recorrentes que retrospectivamente é possível retrair na sua obra, nomeadamente o seu interesse pela criação de personagens e de figuras de outro modo que não pelos estritos meios da representação, figuras que se disseminam pelas suas múltiplas imagens, como num jogo de espelhos, sem que nenhuma nos dê a chave para a sua identidade: qual a imagem verdadeira, autêntica, qual a história com princípio meio e fim a que corresponde a figura? Impossível decidir, impossível dizer.

F for fake é um filme que materializa de forma explícita (e de certa maneira, precocemente), como num manifesto, através da grande liberdade na utilização dos materiais, excertos de filmes, que são o seu arquivo de partida, as considerações sobre a realidade das imagens do cinema a que aludíamos e que são bem traduzidas por Bitomsky quando diz que as imagens não são mero material neutro, objectivo, factual intocado pelo processo de visionamento. São ao invés, o produto de uma interacção entre o visível e a imaginação do realizador ou do espectador. Assim, o material de arquivo usado nos filmes, como o próprio material original, funcionam ambos como citações, no sentido em que se trata de extrair as imagens seja da própria realidade apreendida em primeira mão pelo realizador, seja de outro filme, para as fabricar de novo com a cumplicidade do espectador. Por conseguinte, a chave para os filmes de Welles - a referência a esta chave é parodiada e tematizada no início de *F for Fake* - é precisamente a parte de completude da imagem que traz a imaginação da audiência e a sua activa e criativa colaboração, mesmo que involuntária e inconsciente, nos desígnios do realizador, sendo que este, qual mágico, o que nos mostra são aparências em que a verdade mais não é do que um momento da falsidade. No caso de Welles, somos nós que pomos em prática a sua magia, e somos neste sentido, como indica o genérico, bem analisado por Jonathan Rosenbaum, os verdadeiros colaboradores de Orson Welles na feitura do filme.⁵ E, tal como para os *experts* no filme, isso significa que o que sabemos a partir do que nos é mostrado, depende em parte do que nos foi escondido ou iludido à vista de todos. Qual a verdade? O que vemos ou o que se esconde sob o que vemos e que permitiu a sua visibilidade e credibilidade?

Daqui decorre a constatação do cinema e da sua prática como território de contaminações entre o valor documental das imagens e procedimentos inventivos de análise e montagem, que vão no sentido da sua reescrita ou modulação, ensaiando formas de as recompor, fazer colidir, religar e articular, desafiando visões consensuais e hegemónicas do real, ao mesmo tempo que nos fazem ver e ler nas imagens que elas são o efeito de escolhas, decisões, selecções sobre o que recortar, apropriar, conservar, retomar, que supõem igualmente o reverso - a exclusão, a obliteração, o esquecimento, a destruição.

Desde os primórdios que as práticas cinematográficas nos foram pondo face a procedimentos de constrangimento dos registos, duplicações da realidade e experiência perceptiva, numa estrutura ou narrativa de alguma espécie - sujeição desta primeira mediação a configurações abstractas ‘destruidoras’ da integridade do *continuum* da experiência da realidade. Basta pensar em como o nascimento do documentário, enquanto género, na sequência dos irmãos Lumière e da redução da imagem ao essencial, é indissociável da experimentação inaugural sobre os limites do cinema, em que as fronteiras entre ficção e não ficção, documentar a realidade e experimentar com a forma, mostrar e contar, narrativa e retórica eram muito ténues.

Pensemos depois no fraccionamento da realidade documental numa série de fragmentos, reconfigurados depois pela montagem, caro à vanguarda cinematográfica herdeira do modernismo (fiel, aqui, ao estilhaçamento cubista e futurista da superfície, apresentando não só as diversas faces de um mesmo objecto ou evento, mas o dinamismo de várias forças, cores, formas, ritmos, movimentos que os atravessam), ou na associação livre e ambígua de impressões, acções, gestos, na exploração de um surrealismo dos fenómenos ou de um inconsciente da matéria e do espectáculo do mundo natural e humano. De um lado, o cinema inaugural da pseudo-contradição entre criatividade da montagem e integridade do real, como o de Dziga Vertov, experimentação sobre os limites do cinema, em que as fronteiras entre ficção e não ficção, documentar a realidade e experimentar com a forma, eram muito ténues; do outro, por exemplo, o excesso de real, que a máquina inteligente, i.e., o cinema, segundo Jean Epstein, inscreve como traço de um pensamento que nos mostra, revela, aquilo que desconhecíamos da realidade e de nós próprios.

Pensemos em Robert Flaherty, tido como um dos pioneiros do cinema documental, que torna indissociáveis nos seus filmes o registo e exploração ‘da vida natural’ dos autóctones, da sua reconstituição ou reencenação (*Nanook of the North*, 1922, ou *Moana*, 1926, por exemplo).

Pensemos também no advento de “toda uma estética da objectividade” associada à criação de uma identidade do documentário, indissociável de uma função social que o cinema se atribuiu através dela, e como ela dependeu do “desenvolvimento de tecnologias organizadas da verdade,” em que “a procura do naturalismo,”⁶ vai de par com a organização das ‘imagens-facto’ recolhidas no mundo, em linhas argumentativas ou narrativas (em geral conduzidas e articuladas por um comentário - voz anónima ou voz da autoridade), orientadas por imperativos éticos e políticos: o documentário serve causas e defende os injustiçados, trazendo-os para a esfera da representação, mas esta ‘mediação’ é criativa e artisticamente relevante apenas na medida em que serve a construção do olhar ou ponto de vista ‘ideológico’ que é suposto exercer-se sobre eles e sobre a realidade que os torna possíveis. Ora produz um olhar alinhado com a propaganda de Estado ou institucional, em que a dita objectividade se confunde com “a capacidade de promover o que está

certo e errado no mundo, o que é ‘honesto’ e ‘manipulador’ no documentário,” segundo Trinh T. Minh-ha,⁷ e se liga à naturalização dos ideais e valores consensuais e instituídos, para produzir filmes assentes na noção de consenso, neutros e ‘conservadores’, que não avançam tomadas de posição políticas; ora fabrica um ponto de vista desalinhado dos poderes dominantes, pondo a forma, os seus códigos e convenções em consolidação, ao serviço do activismo e da intervenção militante, para mobilizar esteticamente e transformar politicamente. No fundo, no primeiro caso estamos perante o protótipo do documentário tornado convencional, didáctico e ilustrativo, que mostra e testemunha sobre o estado das coisas e do mundo, subordinando o “tratamento criativo da actualidade”,⁸ caro a Grierson, a intenções pedagógicas, de educação, esclarecimento, e de orientação; já no segundo caso, à imagem do que acontece com, por exemplo, *Misère au Borinage* (1934) de Joris Ivens e Henri Storck, ou *The Spanish Earth* (1937) de Joris Ivens, o mesmo ‘tratamento criativo’ serve para apontar novas direcções para o agir comum, o *medium* do documentário implicando-se activamente nas lutas políticas e sociais. O documentário é concebido e praticado aqui como vanguarda política e tomada de posição contra os governos e os interesses industriais e económicos, como colaboração com os desfavorecidos da terra e desencadeia um cinema de envolvimento participativo, feito em conjunto, que gera as próprias qualidades que se querem documentar, o sentido de comunidade, de esforço colectivo ou de causa comum, forjado no calor do conflito social.⁹

No entanto, se a questão política, ou seja, a justiça dos temas e assuntos abordados, não pode também aqui ser separada da sua *mise-en-scène* cinematográfica, a verdade é que esta última era muitas vezes o lugar de identificação da objectividade ou do objectivismo com um certo dispositivo de mostração da realidade, cujo poder dependia do seu funcionamento metonímico (a parte pelo todo): de um lado, é suposto as imagens serem o registo fiel do livre curso do próprio fluxo do real, do outro o comentário, a voz, dá conta dessa objectividade dos factos que falam por si. O que decorre destes procedimentos é a evidência de uma dramatização, de uma narração ou sentido prescrito às imagens; nos casos menos inspirados, essa dramatização e sentido são unívocos e antecipadamente previstos, feito dos clichés linguísticos e das palavras de ordem que se associam às imagens, elas próprias reduzidas, assim, a clichés visuais. O comentário, nas palavras de Pascal Bonitzer, “representa aqui um poder, o de dispor da imagem e do que ela reflecte, a partir de um lugar diverso e indeterminado daquele que a banda de imagem inscreve.”¹⁰ Nesse sentido, é um lugar transcendente que funda o suposto saber e o torna incontestável e incontestado.

Pensemos igualmente no esforço para emancipar o documentário do imperativo de propaganda ou de militância por uma causa, e assimilá-lo directamente à experiência da autenticidade associada ao real retratado e à matéria filmada num dado presente, fazendo sobressair assim a capacidade do

filme de redimir o mundo material graças à sua capacidade de replicar e retratar a experiência perceptiva na sua concretude, ao “exibir o *continuum* da vida, da realidade material.”¹¹ À ideia de documentário como *media* de reencantamento, não apenas para mostrar os grandes eventos, mas “as últimas coisas antes das últimas,”¹² aquelas que nos são imperceptíveis, que estão sob o que sabemos ou julgamos saber, as que são ignoradas ou inexistentes para os poderes (ou *media*) dominantes, e que vão para lá da compreensão estereotipada do mundo, vem juntar-se a convicção na possibilidade de um cinema assente na observação directa das pessoas e das coisas, à custa da imperceptibilidade do seu dispositivo. Os métodos cinematográficos, apoiados no aparecimento de equipamento mais leve, ajustam-se à procura de uma restituição dos acontecimentos próxima do que estes seriam se a câmara não estivesse presente e traduzem-se na minimização da intervenção do realizador, evitando o comentário, e privilegiando o que a câmara regista, de um modo não intrusivo.

Trata-se do “deixar a câmara filmar o que lá está,” lema pelo qual ficou conhecido o *direct cinema* de realizadores como Richard Leacock, D. A. Pennebaker, Albert e David Maysles, que rompiam com a anterior coerência diegética, orientada ideologicamente, reivindicando o mergulho nas realidades de filmagem durante períodos longos, e uma montagem próxima do desenvolvimento linear dos acontecimentos, como forma de limitar a influência dos realizadores sobre as situações. No entanto, eliminar as tecnologias narrativas, os procedimentos de linguagem previamente estabilizados e estilizados, e tornados marcas de reconhecimento do documentário como género, equivale no *direct cinema*, a uma relativa ausência de problematização do próprio aparato cinematográfico, como se procurar o mero registo - como forma de eliminar ao máximo o que no processo de filmagem pode afectar o que é filmado -, eliminasse automaticamente quer as marcas do dispositivo, quer as marcas de subjectividade; como se da sua descrição dependesse a possibilidade de se chegar a uma apreensão mais objectiva de uma dada situação; como se se pudesse transportar o espectador para cena, fazendo esquecer a mediação.

A esta ruptura com a anterior concordância entre as imagens e uma dada ‘narrativa’ da realidade, orientada pela perspectiva da consciencialização sobre os mais fracos ou pela sua transformação utópica, vem acrescentar-se uma outra, com contornos radicalmente opostos, a determinada pelo *Cinéma-vérité*, como primeiro movimento de um cinema reflexivo, que se caracteriza por integrar as opiniões e impressões dos sujeitos filmados sobre o próprio processo e objecto acabado, e por assim fazer passar intencionalmente a estrutura técnica para primeiro plano, bem como a discussão de eventuais pressupostos e posições ‘ideológicas’. Um cinema da ambiguidade das coisas, das realidades e personagens, em que a verdade não é a do que lá está na representação, mas uma verdade criada do encontro entre a câmara e a realidade. Um cinema de

fabulação, como o de Jean Rouch, de *Les maîtres fous* (1955) a *Chronique d'un été* (1961), ou o de Pierre Perrault, sobre a constituição do povo do Quebec enquanto, nas palavras de Deleuze, “acto político de fabulação:” nem documentário, nem ficção, trata-se de um cinema que, através do acto de palavra, ‘do encontro com a palavra do outro’, entra em devir arrastando consigo, num movimento transformador, o filme e a realidade e o próprio realizador - o “je est un autre,” a que se refere Deleuze, citando Rimbaud.¹³

O aparecimento do digital veio acentuar e introduzir novos contornos neste cinema não só da *mise en scène* da palavra, mas de certo modo performativo da experiência, da encenação dos corpos e dos gestos, a rejeição da tendência observacional do documentário fazendo-se agora acompanhar de uma dobra extra de suspeição na relação ao real; a perturbação das fronteiras entre documentário e ficção, verdade e encenação, caras ao filme-ensaio, surgem como formas paradigmáticas que melhor traduzem este abandono da proclamação da evidência e a sua substituição por um acesso à realidade por intermédio do artifício (ou seja, através de estratégias de re-encenação, da criação de docu-dramas, sublinhando e exacerbando a dimensão performativa e subjectiva do discurso documental tradicionalmente identificado com a objectividade e a não intervenção). No fundo podemos afirmar, acompanhando Jean-Louis Comolli, que não se trata de mais do que revestir de novos contornos, radicalizando-a, a tensão entre realidade e imagem, crença na realidade e crença na imagem, que está presente no cinema desde sempre.¹⁴ É assim que o ‘novo documentário’, tal como o cunhou Linda Williams,¹⁵ abandona a pretensão à evidência, à prova, trocando o facto pela ‘verdade extática’, tal como a concebe Werner Herzog - uma verdade mais profunda do que a exigida pela observação da realidade, acedida apenas pela “fabricação e imaginação.”¹⁶

Por sua vez, se hoje, como diz Erika Balsom, assistimos a “uma reabilitação da observação,” sintoma da era dos factos alternativos, e se ela responde ao lado inquietante que adquire a mistura entre realidade e ficção no espaço público mediático, esta parte do revivalismo dos elementos do modo observacional, “contesta os pressupostos epistemológicos que historicamente o acompanham, através de estratégias de opacidade, parcialidade, obstrução.”¹⁷ A etnografia cinematográfica experimental de Lucien Castaing-Taylor, Véréna Paravel, J.P. Sniadecki, etc.; a etnoficção de realizadores como Adirley Queirós, Raúl Perrone, as novas possibilidades de observação de filmes de cineastas como Éric Baudelaire, Kevin Jerome Everson ou Harun Farocki denunciam a fidelidade ao mundo, que nos dão a experienciar em duração. Este retorno do real baseia-se, contudo, num “encontro com a alteridade e a contingência,” assente numa troca “indeterminada e sem significação garantida”¹⁸ entre o mundo, os que são filmados, os realizadores, o dispositivo e os espectadores, e que faz emergir uma nova definição de autenticidade, que não é a do cinema de

observação tradicional, e dos seus pressupostos bazinianos de transparência da imagem cinematográfica.

O reverso disto são as contendas sobre o valor de verdade das imagens, associadas à sua manipulação para efeitos políticos ou de rejeição de verdades científicas e históricas, à disseminação de factos alternativos, *fake news*, *deep fakes*, etc., que caracteriza a nossa paisagem mediática, e que exige que articulemos a nossa crença (ou descrença) nas imagens ao desejo de saber mais sobre elas e com elas, e ao labor a isto associado.

Na nossa cultura audiovisual e digital, é cada vez mais importante interromper o fluxo de imagens e sons, repetir as imagens, deslocando-as de um contexto para outro, a fim de dar ao acontecimento e à realidade uma outra hipótese de serem vistos e pensados.

O trabalho de realizadores como Graeme Thomson e Silvia Maglioni vai neste sentido, quando numa série de curtas-metragens a que chamam de *Tube-tracs*, procuram, através do trabalho de montagem, reinscrever as imagens que são produzidas no YouTube e nos media virais, com o único objetivo de serem imediatamente transmitidas e consumidas, numa outra economia, que rompe com o circuito que legitimou a sua produção, inserindo-as numa outra lógica temporal, de desvio em relação ao potencial esquecimento a que estão destinadas. No outro extremo deste contributo para uma nova ecologia das imagens, temos a relação com o arquivo ausente, já não com o excesso, mas com a rarefacção das imagens, em que o infilmado, os filmes que não foram feitos, os espaços em branco da história do cinema, criticam os filmes e as imagens feitas.¹⁹ É assim que, a partir do interesse, por exemplo, pelo que não chegou a ganhar a estrutura de filme, pelas mãos do seu autor, o argumento não realizado do filósofo Félix Guattari, para um filme de ficção científica, chamado *Un Amour d'UIQ*, mais do que realizar finalmente esse filme, se tratou, em *In search of UIQ* (2017), de o actualizar através do cinema e possibilidades de montagem, mantendo nele em reserva a potência da obra não realizada, o que significa que o cinema serve de ferramenta arqueológica para auscultar a força e o impacto do que não aconteceu, mas podia ter acontecido.

Estas diferentes concepções e aproximações à prática do cinema e do documentário, reenviam para a impossibilidade de os dissociar da constante crítica do que é ou deve ser a relação ao real dos objectos fílmicos.

Crer na realidade do mundo a partir das suas imagens filmadas/em movimento, significa ao mesmo tempo poder duvidar delas ou pô-las em causa. Se a (re)produção cinematográfica do mundo e da realidade se mostra problemática, se nela o lado documental dificilmente se separa de questões de ficção, é na medida em que qualquer filme, enquanto tal, traduz automaticamente uma crítica do conceito de realismo e essa dimensão reflexiva é desde cedo absorvida pela própria prática dos realizadores, através da variabilidade de estilos, estratégias, dispositivos e modos de ver

e ouvir implicados ou prescritos a cada variação da relação contínua e automática, mas ‘não isomórfica’ entre realidade e imagem.

De facto, a capacidade do cinema de apreender e capturar directamente o espectáculo da vida, é indissociável da sua própria problematização na relação com a realidade, o que é sinónimo de uma reflexão profunda sobre a tensão ou relação dialéctica entre o princípio ‘objectivo’ de descrição do mundo material pelo cinema e o processo ‘subjectivo’ da sua condensação ‘poética’, graças ao trabalho de intervenção e projecção sobre factos e realidades por parte de realizadores e espectadores.

Também para Gilles Deleuze - como fica patente nos argumentos que avança em relação a André Bazin, a propósito dos seus comentários ao neo-realismo e ao acrescento ou suplemento de realidade que aquele suporia, justamente em termos do critério da imagem não ser tanto o real como a relação que este mantém com o imaginário, o mental: “não é antes ao nível mental, em termos de pensamento que o problema deve ser colocado?,” pergunta Deleuze -, o movimento da imagem mais do que índice de realismo (o registo das relações espaço-temporais certas, de acordo com Bazin), é índice do processo pelo qual a imagem se faz realidade e os objectos, pelos quais o movimento se reparte, se fazem imagem, tal como o filósofo refere a propósito de Pier Paolo Pasolini. Com efeito, Pasolini considera que cinema e realidade estão unidos, não por um mecanismo de reflexo da mimésis, mas pela organicidade de um movimento de pensamento que envolve, simultaneamente, cinema e realidade, de modo a que um e outro só unidos adquirem sentido. Neste sentido, a leitura de Deleuze do “cinema como língua da realidade,” de Pasolini, permite-lhe uma primeira aproximação ao cinema como pressupondo a existência de uma matéria inteligível composta de signos pré-linguísticos, como condição de direito do cinema. A realidade reproduzida pelas imagens é, ao mesmo tempo, o que é exprimível pela matéria sinaléctica do cinema, enquanto liberta da contingência do aqui e agora, e atravessada por processos de pensamento, que são diferentes para a imagem-movimento e para a imagem-tempo.²⁰

Dado que o movimento do cinema se constitui, então, na ultrapassagem do mero mecanismo de reprodução automática do movimento do mundo, inerente ao dispositivo, podemos ver nele o equivalente de um movimento psíquico e espiritual que faz advir o pensamento das imagens, anulando-as parcialmente enquanto fragmentos brutos retirados ao fluxo da vida, para lhes incutir novas dinâmicas criativas e inventivas. Nem uma técnica da mimésis indicial, nem uma arte da imagem fabricada, acrescentada e expressiva, mas, usando os termos de Jean-Luc Godard, “uma poética da citação.” Tal como o afirma Jacques Aumont, a citação vista como motor do cinema, desde os Lumière, da citação obrigada da realidade, do signo imediatamente citável produzido a

custo, até à prática rodopiante, em carrossel, *ad infinito* da citação,²¹ quando já não se trata de citar o mundo directamente para lhe restituir o movimento, mas de citar as suas imagens, para refazer o movimento “a partir de retalhos já caídos do mundo filmado, a partir de imagens já registadas, saturadas de sentido e emoção.”²²

Expor esta condição de ruína das imagens, no sentido da sua natureza fragmentária, esta simultaneidade do significante de cinema como uma citação do mundo e um fragmento memorial, desviado daquela relação imediata que alguma vez teve com a realidade, que pode ser posto a circular “como moeda de troca,” abstraído do seu contexto de partida ou significado, significa também tornar manifesta as condições da sua produção, i.e., de novo, a condição de *ready made* ou *objet trouvé* de qualquer imagem, inseparável de um processo de distanciação, de deslocação da imagem para além de uma suposta origem a que ela permitiria aceder.

De facto, a par da sua aceção dominante de representações ou índices de uma realidade fora delas ou exterior a elas, as imagens ganharam a partir do século XX uma vida própria; postas em circulação, graças à reproductibilidade técnica, adquiriram o carácter fétiche das mercadorias, incorporando num reverso de invisibilidade a retórica e a metalinguagem que nelas se cristalizou, e, por conseguinte, eclipsando as relações de poder e de forças que lhes deram origem, a inteligibilidade da realidade social e o trabalho humano que as produziram. Esta invisibilidade, não no sentido de uma ausência ou falta, acentuada hoje por novas invisibilidades produzidas pelo digital, é um desafio para o cinema. Daqui decorre a necessidade de um cinema de crítica da representação, para lá da diferença entre documentário e ficção, que ponha a tónica na fabricação das imagens, não como quem vai à sua fonte, no sentido, de procurar através delas os traços e a origem ou verdade dos factos, mas como quem se entrega com elas e através delas a construções que permitem a extracção de relações essenciais não imediatamente visíveis. Isto graças ao trabalho de montagem (e de todos os procedimentos de mistura que lhe estão associados, reenquadramentos, manipulações fotográficas, *ralentis*, etc.)

Trata-se de propor um outro ponto de vista sobre as imagens do cinema: mais do que formas de aceder à realidade de um dado momento, é a realidade que é uma elaboração a partir delas, o que implica concebê-las e praticá-las como documentos, à maneira da arqueologia de Foucault. Ou seja, simultaneamente abordá-las e criticá-las como efeitos de construções, de convenções e retóricas cinematográficas e dos media, e da consequente naturalização de modalidades estagnadas de representação do mundo, mantidas inquestionadas; de ir da imagem à sua representação, ao seu modo de produção - no fundo, entendê-las como parte da massa de documentos que integra o que Foucault chama de arquivo, i.e., o que é possível de ver e dizer num dado momento - , e também,

em sentido inverso, como material sobre o qual se trata de exercer um novo corte, um novo olhar, de as abrir a todas conexões, permitindo a libertação de virtualidades insuspeitas.

Para Michel Foucault a arqueologia é uma nova forma de aceder à configuração de enunciados e visibilidades que correspondem ao saber ou ao pensamento dominante de uma dada época, ou seja, ao seu arquivo. O filósofo propõe uma nova perspectiva sobre a história e o papel do documento na sua leitura.²³

J'appellerai archive, non pas la totalité des textes qui ont été conservés par une civilisation, ni l'ensemble des traces qu'on a pu sauver de son désastre, mais le jeu des règles qui déterminent dans une culture l'apparition et la disparition des énoncés, leur rémanence et leur effacement, leur existence paradoxale d'événements et de choses. Analyser les faits de discours dans l'élément général de l'archive, c'est les considérer non point comme documents (d'une signification cachée, ou d'une règle de construction), mais comme monuments; c'est - en dehors de toute métaphore géologique, sans aucune assignation d'origine, sans le moindre geste vers le commencement d'une arché - faire ce qu'on pourrait appeler, selon les droits ludiques de l'étymologie, quelque chose comme une archéologie.²⁴

O arquivo confunde-se com as condições de possibilidade do saber, com o pode ser dito e visto, percebido e agido, num dado momento e, portanto, num certo sentido não há exterior do Arquivo. O trabalho da arqueologia é, colocando-se ao nível dos enunciados, conseguir dar visibilidade, trazer à luz essas condições de enunciação num dado momento e os jogos de verdade que possibilitam. Mostrar esse grande dispositivo de produção de verdade, como não natural, não universal, como contingente e histórico, significa também pôr-nos face à dimensão de intolerável, de *bêtise* dos nossos modos de pensar, agir, etc.. À semelhança da arqueologia, a arte em geral, e o cinema em particular, são outros tantos pontos de vista sobre o arquivo ou arquivos dominantes de uma época, permitindo uma descolagem crítica em relação a eles ou ao modo de ligação a esses arquivos - ponto de vista do autor, do sujeito de conhecimento, da ideologia.

A prática cinematográfica de Harun Farocki permitir-nos-á elucidar, em jeito de conclusão, este funcionamento do cinema como arqueologia das imagens nesta acepção, pois mostra-nos, à semelhança do que faz Foucault, que o que torna a visualidade e a discursividade inteligíveis, é ele mesmo não dito e não visto. É um corpo de dispositivos e práticas anónimas dispersas por vários lugares. As visibilidades não são nem actos de um sujeito, nem dados de um sentido visual, tal como os enunciados não são privilégio de um autor ou de uma obra. Farocki retraça a formação do

que se passa por detrás das evidências do que vemos, dizemos, fazemos, devolvendo-nos a visibilidade imperceptível da nossa época e de nós próprios.

É por isto que Harun Farocki é um autor que não cessa de nos permitir interrogar o estatuto ontológico de realismo fotográfico e cinematográfico na era do arquivo digital, ao mesmo tempo que se coloca para lá da distinção proposta por Bazin no texto “A evolução da linguagem cinematográfica,” entre cineastas da crença na realidade ou pelo menos no que se pode designar de realidade pró-filmica, e cineastas da crença na imagem.²⁵ De facto, na verdade, em Farocki, os dois pólos da distinção aproximam-se, e a sua separação tende para a erosão, na medida em que a fé na imagem pode suceder, mais do que anteceder a uma desconfiança e crítica em relação à imagem, e a fé na realidade pode estar ancorada numa profunda constatação de que “o que vemos não é o que lá está.”²⁶ É assim que uma sequência como a das fotografias aéreas de Auschwitz no filme *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges (Imagens do mundo e inscrição da guerra, 1988)*, serve de metáfora para o que está em causa na obra de Farocki, um cineasta, como diz Thomas Elsaesser, que investiga a relação entre a imagem e o devir progressivamente supérfluo do mundo e da realidade.²⁷

O pressuposto do olho esclarecido herdado do Iluminismo, responsável por uma concepção ilusória de que as imagens dos media visariam ainda a representação de uma realidade pré-filmica, no que seria um contributo para o conhecimento aprofundado e informado da mesma, não é mais possível e tem de ser contrariado criticamente. Por outro lado, o que era ainda um trabalho humano, um trabalho de produção e recepção de imagens do e sobre o mundo, através da visão tecnicamente assistida por aparelhos ópticos de registo e reprodução, passou completamente para o lado das máquinas, que produzem um visual que releva totalmente do cálculo, e que se emancipa da realidade, ou seja, imagens que são cegas, são *repérages* destinadas a ver e vigiar ou controlar um processo, e em geral não são para ver e não são vistas. São imagens tomadas de uma posição que não pode ser ocupada por uma pessoa real - as imagens operacionais. Estamos perante uma outra filiação para o cinema, não como fazendo parte da história da narração, mas da história de outras técnicas e tecnologias de vigilância, medição, cálculo e automação. Segundo Farocki, as imagens aparecem aqui como uma subcategoria de um certo tipo de medições e de cálculos. Os números, os *bits* são o material primeiro. São calculados as estatísticas e os números e, às vezes, um botão é pressionado e há uma imagem que podemos ver, mas que é supérflua. O olho humano, tal como o trabalho físico, já não é essencial para o processo de produção de imagens. O campo da visão é cada vez mais automatizado. Nesta perspectiva, a função das imagens do cinema e da televisão é a de manter os nossos olhos alerta e em movimento, tal como se exercitam cavalos quando não estão no exterior a ‘trabalhar’.²⁸

Os filmes de Farocki mostram essa transformação do mundo em imagem e literalmente pela imagem: é sobre a imagem e em função dela que se age. Daí a necessidade de construção de “laboratórios de imagem,” de simulações como as que se mostram no filme *Die Schöpfer der Einkaufswelten* (The Creators of the Shopping Worlds, 2001) e que tentam esgotar, no sentido de os prever, todos os gestos possíveis do futuro consumidor dos espaços comerciais em projeção, num esforço para condicionar cada gesto actual, esboçado na realidade, a encaixar, a ir ao encontro dos quadros previstos pela simulação do real; a realidade acolherá, assim, um gesto desde logo constringido na sua aparente liberdade. É no território da imagem digital, virtual, simulada, que a realidade se enforma, que se determina a arquitectura do real. Esta desenha-se na expectativa de responder e coincidir o mais possível com a sua simulação. É a sua simulação que a determina e não o contrário. Age-se sobre a imagem e não mais directamente sobre o real, à distância, evitando o contacto e a proximidade. As imagens não são mais representações de um real que lhes pré-existe, elas são simulações de um real que as irá decalcar.²⁹

Farocki vai trabalhar sobre a história das imagens-técnicas, na relação com o Ocidente, com a história da civilização moderna, no modo como aquelas cruzam, tornando-as produtivas em termos epistemológicos para finalidades biopolíticas e de controlo, diversas esferas da vida (e da morte), guerra, trabalho, consumo. À semelhança de Foucault, trata-se de pôr em prática a capacidade descritiva do digital e do cinema, para através dos próprios meios da imagem servir para perscrutar no arquivo audiovisual e digital, no sentido literal, material e no de Foucault, em função de critérios formais, e não de significação das imagens, ou seja, sem recorrer a uma dimensão meta-discursiva.

Isto significa usar o cinema (e a montagem) para se colocar ao nível das imagens, numa crítica imanente das mesmas. O que lhe interessa não é o seu ponto de vista sobre as imagens, mesmo se os seus filmes implicam um ponto de vista preciso, e decorrem da interpelação que se estabelece entre as imagens e o processo do seu visionamento por parte do realizador. Também não lhe interessa tratar o seu tema ou o comportamento dos personagens, quando as há, nas imagens que estuda, i.e., permanecer ao nível do conteúdo das imagens - mesmo se isto nem sempre é possível -, mas, sim, tentar evitar as interpretações que fazem o filme desaparecer na exegese, para procurar salvar alguma coisa através de estratégias de sobreinterpretação e de subinterpretação. No texto *Towards an archive for visual concepts*,³⁰ por exemplo, refere a este respeito que nos seus filmes sobre alguns motivos cinematográficos recorrentes, *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik*, (*Workers leaving the factory*, 1995), *Der ausdrück der Hande*, (*The expression of Hands*, 1997), quando procurava uma ordem para o material, foi guiado pela ideia de constituição de um arquivo das expressões filmicas, que pudesse ajudar a inculcar uma consciência da linguagem cinematográfica.

Num primeiro momento, nos primeiros filmes desta série, precisamente os que acabamos de referir, trata-se de ir da imagem a uma interrogação sobre a linguagem, sobre o léxico e sintaxe cinematográficas para documentar o uso e a recorrência de certos motivos e expressões (*Feasting or flying*, 2008, e *War Tropes*, 2011, realizados com Antje Ehmann, seriam as ocorrências mais recentes deste arquivo imaginário); num segundo momento, nos seus trabalhos sobre controlo e vigilância, como *Auge/Maschine I-III (Eye/Machine I-III)*, 2001), *Gefängnisbilder (Prison Images)*, 2000), *I thought I was seeing convicts*, 2000, trata-se de ir das imagens aos dispositivos da sua produção. O que lhe interessa é de certo modo, a neutralidade do ponto de vista do arquivo, o ponto e vista da articulação saber-poder, ou seja, a explicitação das condições de produção e existência das próprias imagens e das redes de discurso e significação que as determinam. Para isso é necessário operar uma distanciação, uma deslocação da imagem, das imagens, para além de uma suposta origem - suposta significação, referente ou factualidade, a que ela(s) permitiria(m) aceder e nas quais o seu sentido se esgotaria.

Esta distanciação e deslocação são indissociáveis da sua reflexão sobre a própria montagem e de uma vontade ou preocupação em definir o seu alcance precisamente enquanto ferramenta com propriedades arqueológicas.

A *soft montage*, como a apelidou, ferramenta analítica e discursiva, é a forma de criar ligações entre os planos e as imagens, por um lado dismantelando outros textos fílmicos, por outro reinscrevendo-os e unindo estas componentes e criando ligações que de outro modo permaneceriam invisíveis. A montagem entendida nestes termos é um exercício teórico, de compilação, em que a descrição e a repetição visam produzir novos significados, fazê-los explodir num processo interminável (de produção), que envolve o espectador, para lá do controlo do autor,³¹ fazendo precisamente jus à necessidade de uma nova crítica das imagens, uma crítica não textual ou semiológica, como a em voga nos anos sessenta e setenta, para lá da predominância do discurso sobre as visibilidades, e que se realiza através de uma renovação da concepção de ensaio em contraposição à subjectividade produzida e homogeneizada pelos media e hoje pelas tecnologias digitais e redes sociais.

Ao mesmo tempo, a prática arqueológica do cinema de Farocki elucida-nos também, e por extensão, sobre a condição de *ready made* ou *object trouvé* de qualquer imagem, e permite descrever criticamente não só o material de arquivo que usa nos seus filmes '*found-footage*', como o seu próprio material original, entendido como uma citação da realidade, na medida em que se trata de ocupar precisamente o lugar que denuncia nos outros filmes de *found-footage*. De facto, também nos seus filmes de 'cinema directo' se trata de trabalhar através de "guiões" pré-existentes. Farocki não constrói a história, encontra-a já dada.

Images and sounds that we find without already having been aware that they exist are like an *objet trouvé*. Imagine a child who is walking on the beach and suddenly reaches for a pebble that evokes the lines of a human face. *The objet-trouvé* artist tries to preserve this notion of amazement. This also expresses that you cannot create meaning systematically, as the big production companies, cinema, and TV stations try to do. One needs chances and the luck of a finder. Documentary films often refuse to take the ideal and allocated point of view in order to seek out their own—which could be the back of the building. I like looking at something as it is being presented to me. And then I make the picture appear a little bit different from how it wants to be seen, to perform a small alteration as we know it from pop art.³²

Ein neues Produkt (*The New Product*, 2012), mas também os anteriores *Die Umschulung* (*Retraining in Another Profession*, 1994), or *Die Bewerbung* (*The Interview*, 1997), entre outros, pertencem a este segundo grupo de filmes, em que se trata para Farocki não tanto de uma política das imagens, como de um trabalho com as palavras, no sentido em que as pessoas realizam o seu trabalho através das palavras, como refere Antje Ehmann.³³ A linguagem em causa nestes filmes é a dos *role-playing games*, e estende-se ao corpo, gestos e expressões faciais, sendo a outra faceta da criação já referida de simulacros da experiência e da realidade. É também a linguagem associada à construção de novos modelos de vida e de trabalho pelas empresas de marketing e consultoria. Estes filmes abstêm-se de explicar e enquadrar sociológica e biograficamente as pessoas que retratam. Instalam-se nos meios laborais associados às acções de formação contínua, aos treinos consecutivos de adaptação às exigências das nossas sociedades de hoje, à incorporação e aplicação da cultura corporativa e da ideologia neo-liberal do mercado, sem a preocupação de nos fornecerem qualquer tipo de *background*, como acontece no cinema convencional. Isto permite-lhes colocarem-se ao nível da própria transitividade da linguagem, e dos actos de fala, que mais do que pertencer a alguém em particular, se fala a si própria.³⁴ “O sonho de Farocki era documentar processos na realidade que dão a impressão, quando em filme, de que não podem ser verdade - de que estamos a assistir a um filme de ficção. O seu objectivo era um nível de hiperrealismo que pode ser lido como um salto no futuro,”³⁵ mas que na verdade remete para o imperceptível do nosso mundo, no que tem de absurdo, aberrante, etc..

Mesmo as imagens directamente filmadas por Farocki enquadram-se num espírito de forte consciência da natureza em segundo grau das imagens, de análise da ideia de reproductibilidade contida nas constelações de imagens que medeiam o espaço público, entendidas como a própria matéria de que é feito o mundo.

Mostra-nos, assim, que as passagens entre documentário e ficção, mais do que a sua distinção, são a condição do cinema, no sentido em que aceder à realidade devém inseparável da ideia de *fingere*, modelar, moldar, procurar a figura, cara ao ensaio, mas o ensaio entendido menos como um género e mais como uma polaridade do cinema, tal como o concebe Jean-Pierre Gorin: via a potência da montagem, uma forma de pensamento subjectiva que atravessa modos do documentário e modos da ficção e tende a ultrapassá-los, a apagar a sua diferença. As imagens são consideradas não como simples traços da realidade, com pretensão à evidência, à prova, mas como ‘documentos’ imbuídos de uma retórica ou como monumentos, em que não se trata de operar a restituição de uma origem para a qual reenviam as imagens na sua relação com o mundo – uma *arché*, mas de as deixar insinuar-se a partir da manifestação de uma vida e realidade próprias.

¹ Mesmo se a categoria da não-ficção serve hoje para qualificar uma série de manifestações artísticas e expressivas que extravasam, no interior do cinema, e para fora dele, o âmbito mais estrito do que é considerado documentário, sugerindo a possibilidade de alargar o espectro do que aí cabe a formas e experimentações que se dão no cruzamento com o cinema experimental e a arte contemporânea (cf. a este propósito o contributo de Christa Blümlinger, na Mesa redonda do presente número), aqui reenviamos para a relação desta categoria com uma definição de documentário que, histórica e pragmaticamente, se instituiu e consolidou por diferença em relação à ficção, e assentou essa diferença na oposição um pouco esquemática entre um cinema que teria a seu cargo retratar a realidade na sua actualidade histórica, sem excluir o seu “tratamento criativo,” e um cinema do imaginário, que chamaria a si “a velha arte de contar histórias.”

² Cf. Alexander Kluge and Klaus Eder, “Debate on the Documentary Film: Conversation with Klaus Eder”, 1980, in *Alexander Kluge Raw Materials for the Imagination*, Ed. Tara Forrest (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 197-198.

³ Cf. André Bazin, “L’ontologie de l’image photographique”, in *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?* (Paris: les Éditions du Cerf, 1958), 16; Thomas Elssaesser, “Simulation and the Labour of Invisibility: Harun Farocki’s Life Manuals”. First Published November 29, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1746847717740095>.

⁴ Hartmut Bitomsky, “The documentary world”, in *Hartmut Bitomsky Retrospective* (Goethe Institut München, 1997), 10-20. Esta consciência da actividade de filmagem como produzindo futuro material de arquivo relaciona-se com as escolhas temáticas e formais em filmes deste realizador, como *Reichautobahn* (1986), *Der VW komplex* (1989), *B-52 (2001)*, em que Bitomsky filma ou lida com imagens de objectos, como o carro, a auto-estrada ou o bombardeiro B-52. Por exemplo, em *B-52*, o escultor que aparece diz que está interessado em peças que ganham vida depois de partidas, de destruídas, que tudo pode ser usado uma segunda vez: “O que é reciclar? É retomar o material, encontrar-lhe uma segunda função, dar-lhe uma nova forma, assegurar uma nova pertença.”

⁵ Jonathan Rosenbaum, “Orson Welles’s Purloined Letter. F for Fake”, in *Discovering Orson Welles* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: California University Press, 2007), 289-295.

⁶ Trinh T. Minh-ha, “The Totalising Quest for meaning”, in *Theorizing Documentary*, Ed. Michael Renov (New York, London: Routledge, 1993), 94.

⁷ Trinh T. Minh-ha, “The Totalising Quest for meaning”, 94.

⁸ John Grierson, “The Documentary Producer (1933)”, in *The Documentary Film Reader. History, Theory, Criticism*, Ed. Jonathan Kahana (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 216.

⁹ Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 149.

¹⁰ Pascal Bonitzer, “Les silences de la voix”, in *Le regard et la voix* (Paris: Union Générale d’Éditions, 1976), 33.

¹¹ Siegfried Kracauer, *Théorie du film. La rédemption de la réalité matérielle*, Trad. Daniel Blanchard et Claude Orsoni (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), 123.

¹² Siegfried Kracauer, *L’Histoire des avant-dernières choses*, Trad. Claude Orsoni (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2006).

¹³ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 2. L’image-Temps* (Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985). 197-199.

¹⁴ Cf. Jean-Louis Comolli et Avishag Zafrani, “Mouvement/arrêt–cinéma et pensé. Entretien”, *Cités* no. 77 (2019/1): 33-42.

¹⁵ Cf. Linda Williams, “Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History and the New Documentary”, *Film Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (Spring 1993): 9-21.

¹⁶ Cf. a este propósito Erika Balsom. “The reality-based community”, in *e-flux journal* #83, republicado em *A máquina do Mundo. Textos de Apoio*. org. Patrícia Mourão e Margaux Dauby (Doc’s Kingdom, 2018), 23 e Werner Herzog “Minnesota Declaration: truth and fact in documentary Cinema, 1999”. <https://www.wernerherzog.com/complete-works-text.html#2>.

¹⁷ Erika Balsom, “The reality-based community”, 25.

¹⁸ Erika Balsom, “The reality-based community”, 25.

¹⁹ Cf. Graeme Thomson, Silvia Maglioni, Olivier Marboeuf. “Entretien avec Silvia Maglioni & Graeme Thomson”. Propos recueillis à l’occasion du programme “Three lost films” au mk2 Beaubourg, septembre 2015; Cf. Silvia Maglioni, Graeme Thomson, Érik Bullot, “La Matière noire du cinéma. Entretien avec Silvia Maglioni & Graeme Thomson”, Les Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers. <http://www.leslaboratoires.org/article/la-matiere-noire-du-cinema-entretien-avec-silvia-maglioni-graeme-thomson>

²⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 2. L’image-Temps*, 7, 42-43, nota 8.

²¹ Jacques Aumont, *Amnésies. Fictions du cinéma d’après Jean-Luc Godard* (Paris: P.O.L., 1999), 61.

²² Serge Daney, “Do desfilar ao desfile”, in *O cinema que faz escrever*, Ed. Clara Rowland, Francisco Frazão, Susana Nascimento Duarte, Trad. Ana Eliseu e Joana Frazão (Coimbra: Angelus Novus, 2016), 227.

²³ Supõe uma concepção de documento entendido não como uma matéria inerte ou ferramenta de reconstituição do passado, mas como materialidade documental que devemos pôr em obra, desenvolver a partir de dentro - ficção do arquivista.

²⁴ Michel Foucault, “Sur l’archéologie des sciences. Réponse au Cercle d’épistémologie”, *Cahiers pour l’analyse*, no. 9 (été 1968), 9-40, in *Dits et écrits I, 1954-1975*, Ed. D. Defert et F. Ewald, 724-759 (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 736.

²⁵ André Bazin, “L’Évolution du langage cinématographique”, in *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?* (Paris: les Éditions du Cerf, 1958), 132.

²⁶ Cf. Thomas Elssaesser, “Simulation and the Labour of Invisibility: Harun Farocki’s Life Manuals”.

²⁷ “In an interview with me many years ago, Farocki conceded that he was, as a filmmaker and image producer, part of those whose task it was to ‘make the world superfluous’, meaning that a world that puts its faith in the image, can become careless about the fate of that world ‘in reality’.” Thomas Elssaesser, “Simulation and the Labour of Invisibility: Harun Farocki’s Life Manuals”.

²⁸ Thomas Elssaesser, “Making the world superfluous: an interview with Harun Farocki”, in *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight-lines*, Ed. Thomas Elssaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), 184.

²⁹ Como refere Thomas Elssaesser, estas imagens digitais produzem invisibilidade em relação ao mundo e à realidade, que são o seu fora de campo, o limite do visível que elas produzem, mas de duas formas: no sentido do que “vemos e experienciamos todos os dias e que pode não ter nada a ver com a realidade que de facto afecta as nossas vidas e determina a nossa sorte;” e no sentido “da materialidade dura e nefasta,” experienciada por muitos, “dos efeitos de um mundo que passou a viver em função da sua imagem (simulada);” esta presença bruta e directa do mundo é também o que foi votado à invisibilidade e que emerge como contra-campo ausente para onde reenviam muitos dos filmes de Harun Farocki. Cf. Thomas Elssaesser, “Simulation and the Labour of Invisibility: Harun Farocki’s Life Manuals”.

³⁰ Cf. Wolfgang Ernst and Harun Farocki, “Towards an archive for visual concepts”, in *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight-lines*, Ed. Thomas Elssaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004).

³¹ Cf. Carles Guerra, “Expanded Soft Montage”, in *Harun Farocki. Another Kind of Empathy*, Ed. A. Ehmann & C. Guerra (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2016), 50-51.

³² Harun Farocki and Randall Hale, “History Is Not a Matter of Generations: Interview with Harun Farocki”, *Camera Obscura* 46, Vol. 16, no. 1 (2001), 56.

³³ Antje Ehmann, “Working with Harun Farocki’s Work”, in *Harun Farocki. Another Kind of Empathy*, Ed. A. Ehmann & C. Guerra (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2016), 30.

³⁴ Antje Ehmann, “Working with Harun Farocki’s Work”, 33.

³⁵ Antje Ehmann, “Working with Harun Farocki’s Work”, 34.

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THE TECHNO-SCIENTIFIC CIVILIZATION AND THE DE-REALIZATION
OF THE IMAGE. GODFREY REGGIO'S *QATSI TRILOGY* IN THE LIGHT OF JACQUES
ELLUL'S REFLECTION ON TECHNOLOGY.

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Godfrey Reggio's so-called "*Qatsi* trilogy" – a triptych put together in the course of thirty years and featuring *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982), *Powaqqatsi* (1988) and *Naqoyqatsi* (2002) – is an excellent example of how documentary film can overcome the positivistic claim of an objective reproduction of "reality," of a neutral observation and of a primacy of content, to take on directly the complexity and ambiguity of our experience, in which what is seen (the "object") is inseparable from the act of seeing (the "subject"). This correlation between subject and object, the perceiver and the perceived, the eye and the world is the fulcrum of the most advanced practices in the documentary film landscape of the last quarter of a century. This deep transformation process, of which Reggio's experimentations have been a significant harbinger, has brought documentary film into the apparently alien and unrelated territory of art and essay film, and has put it with ever increasing clarity at the heart of contemporary artistic research. Contemporary artistic research, as a matter of fact, appears to be characterized by a *documentary turn*.¹

The *Qatsi* trilogy is a deeply coherent audiovisual experience, that has, as a matter of fact, two authors: the director, Godfrey Reggio, and the composer of the musical score of each of the three films, Philip Glass. In what follows I will try to point out the main aesthetic features of the trilogy. I'll be doing so by taking into consideration Reggio's main concern, that is the articulation of a broad reflection on the philosophical-anthropological pair humankind/nature within the framework of the fundamental trends of present-day society. The *Qatsi* trilogy constitutes Reggio's most relevant contribution to a crucial debate spanning the XXth and XXIth centuries, namely the debate around techno-scientific civilization.² To better understand the complexities of Reggio's *mise-en-scène* it is crucial to consider his perspective on the techno-scientific civilization, acknowledging the intellectual influences he explicitly points out and clarifying on that backdrop what his work on images and sound brings about (or, put another way, how he specifically thinks through images). Despite the "audiovisual coherence" I have mentioned, one of the most compelling traits of the *Qatsi* universe is that its unity of inspiration, approach and vision takes a new and original shape in each of its three "galaxies." In discussing the trilogy it is of paramount importance to account for these differences; therefore, I will divide my article in three parts, one for each film.

1. LIFE IN THE TECHNOLOGICAL SYSTEM

In order to delve into the trilogy, a good course of action is to start from the end credits of the three films. In *Koyaanisqatsi* there is an extremely interesting “Inspiration&ideas” section where the names of Jaques Ellul, Ivan Illich, David Monongye, Guy Debord e Leopold Kohr are singled out. Some of these names come up in the other two films as well. In the “Special thanks” section of *Powaqqatsi* one can find the names of Jacques Ellul, Ivan Illich and Leopold Kohr (there Monongye and Debord are missing). Finally, in *Naqoyqatsi*, an “Inspiration” section includes Ivan Illich, Jacques Ellul, David Monongye and La Gente / YCFA³ (Debord is still missing, Kohr is removed, while Monongye is back in). David Monongye has been a traditional leader of the Hopi Native Americans, who now primarily live in the Hopi Reservation in northeastern Arizona. In 1946, after the dropping of the nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he revealed to the world, together with three other members of his tribe, the traditional wisdom, the teachings and the prophecies of his people. The titles of the films of the trilogy come right from the Hopi language (the linguistic root “qatsi” means “life”).⁴ On top of that, in the last musical piece of *Koyaanisqatsi*, a choir sings the prophecies of the Hopi tribe in their original language.⁵ In contrast to these indigenous people, whose culture has been marginalized and reduced to irrelevance, stands North America as avant-garde of the Westernization of the world and of its transformation into a technicalized Global Village. The other intellectual “mentors” mentioned in the end credits have all dealt with Western society and have in various ways developed a critique of it: Jacques Ellul (1912-1994) from the point of view of technology; Ivan Illich (1926-2002) from the point of view of institutions (mainly the school and medical systems); Guy Debord (1931-1994) from the Marxist point of view of the transformation of reality into *spectacle*; and, finally, Leopold Kohr (1909-1994) from the point of view of the “cult of greatness” that underlies centralized political and economic structures.⁶

The interpretative work that will be conducted in the present contribution aims at highlighting some focal points of the audio-visual meditation on technology developed in the *Qatsi* trilogy. Therefore, among all the above-mentioned cultural guides, I will dwell mainly on the thinking of Jacques Ellul, evaluating not so much the extent and the form of its presence in the cinematic works taken into consideration, but rather its ability to enlighten some aspects of Reggio’s triptych. In short, I will put to test its hermeneutic incisiveness and productivity, without *directly* discussing the consistency of Ellul’s main theses. The choice of this approach doesn’t have to do only with the necessity to narrow the field of investigation, but also with a more strategic and intrinsic motivation. Son of its times, cinema – real «eye of the 20th century»⁷ – is a technological product

that performs a mechanical sight. Choosing the cinematic medium, Reggio is perfectly aware that he is developing a reflection on technology *from within technology itself*. The visual angle of technology thus allows us to grasp the meta-cinematographic character of the director's endeavor and to follow his indications regarding the "nature" and the possibilities of moving images.

Beginning in the fifties Ellul put together one of the most rigorous, documented and comprehensive critical investigations of technological development, expressing it in a lively and indomitable research, whose most important junctures have been the books *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* (1954), *Propaganda* (1962), *L'Illusion politique* (1965), *Métamorphose du bourgeois* (1967), *Les Nouveaux Possédés* (1973), *Le Système technicien* (1977), *L'Empire du non-sens* (1980) e *Le Bluff technologique* (1988).⁸ His questioning of the "tyranny" of technology has earned him the truly simplistic and self-justifying label of "obscurantist and terrible retrograde" (Jean-Luc Porquet).

In order to understand the impact of Ellul's theses on Reggio's work, it is very instructive to listen to an interview in which the director tries to point out the main goal of *Koyaanisqatsi*:

What I tried to show is that the main event today is not seen by those of us that live in it. We see the surface of the newspapers, the obviousness of conflict, of social injustice, of the market, the welling up of culture. But to me the greatest event or the most important event of perhaps our entire history – nothing comparable in the past – this event is fundamentally gone unnoticed and the event is the following: the transiting from all nature, or the natural environment as our host of life for human habitation, into a technological *milieu*, into mass technology as the environment of life. So these films have never been about the effect of technology, of industry on people; it's been that everyone – politics, education, things of the financial structure, the nation-state structure, language, the culture, religion, all of that exists within the host of technology. So it's not the effect of..., it's that everything exists within. It's not that we use technology, we live technology. Technology has become as ubiquitous as the air we breathe. So we are no longer conscious of its presence. So what I decided to do in making this film is to rip out all the foreground of a traditional film, the foreground being the actors, the characterization, the plot, the story; I tried to take the background – all of that that just supported like wallpaper – move that up into the foreground, make that the subject, ennoble it with the virtues of portraiture and make that the presence. So we looked at traffic as the event. We looked at the organization of a city as the equivalent of what a computer chip looks like. We looked at acceleration and density as qualities of a way of life that is not seen and goes unquestioned. Life unquestioned is life lived in a religious state.⁹

Reggio, therefore, intends to bring to the foreground what usually stays in the background. The background is in itself elusive and inconspicuous, because it leaves room for the individual phenomena that follow one another in plain sight. They can be there, be present in so far as they are allowed to stand out against the background and attract attention. But the background remains the encompassing dimension, the phantom thread that binds together all that steps temporarily into the limelight. That's why Reggio deems it so important to bring to the foreground that which usually is a mere "wallpaper" of flashy events. To bring to the foreground the background *in itself*, that is, in its withdrawing, is something that blatantly edges close to a paradox – a paradox that, as we will see, lies at the very center of Reggio's cinematic trilogy, and perhaps of human experience as such. If one looks beyond the kaleidoscopic horizontality of the fragmented multiplicity and adopts a "vertical" gaze, if one dwells on the background and becomes aware of it, one can try and grasp the overall logic of our reality. This overall logic of the contemporary world is called by Jacques Ellul the *technological system* – an expression that, as recalled before, features as the title of an important study published by the French author in 1977 and translated into English in 1980, just a couple years before the completion of *Koyaanisqatsi*. Ellul points out that work and the means produced and used by it represent a "mediation between man and his natural environment. [...] Man has thus created a whole set of mediations around him."¹⁰ But if technological operation "has always existed throughout history", this is not the case for the "technological phenomenon", that, according to Ellul, "has been specific to Western civilization since the eighteenth century" and is characterized by "consciousness, criticalness, rationality."¹¹ By virtue of the four industrial revolutions (the revolutions of carbon, of electricity, of nuclear energy and of computing machines), the technological phenomenon has established itself as an autonomous system, self-regulated through the feed-back of information, a system that moves in the direction of a *complete closure*. Technological mediations, which as such have the tendency to crystallize and be detachable from those who produced them, have proliferated and multiplied themselves to such an extent that they form "both a continuous screen and a generalized mode of involvement."¹² Technology, in the end, must be taken "not only as a means", but as a "universe of means – in the original sense of *Universum*: both exclusive and total."¹³ This could look like the result of quantitative growth. But the fundamental difference lies elsewhere, and has to do with the relationship between science and technology. Their relationship is no longer conceivable in terms of the pair theory/praxis, as if technology were an *application* of science. Inasmuch as *functionality*, *efficiency* and *effectiveness* have become the benchmarks, the applicative dimension has acquired a primacy over the epistemological one. If scientific knowledge, in its modern philosophical foundation, aims at

establishing humans – in René Descartes’ words – as “the masters and possessors of nature,”¹⁴ it finds an essential counterpart in technology. The link appears even more intrinsic, if we consider that scientific knowledge, becoming experimental and abstracting from sensitive intuition and perception, ends up studying phenomena that are produced artificially through technical equipment. Theories become therefore *explicative models* that are evaluated on the basis of their being more or less beneficial and useful. Ellul writes:

Technology is both ahead of and behind science, and it is also at the very heart of science; the latter projects itself into technology and is absorbed into it, and technology is formulated in scientific theory. All science, having become experimental, depends on technology, which alone permits reproducing phenomena technologically. Now, technology abstractly reproduces nature to permit scientific experimenting. Hence, the temptation to make nature conform to theoretical models, to reduce nature to techno-scientific artificiality. "Nature is what I produce in my laboratory," says a modern physicist.

In these conditions, science becomes violence (in regard to everything it bears upon), and the technology expressing the scientific violence becomes power exclusively. Thus, we have a new correlation, which I consider fundamental, between science and technology. The scientific method itself determines technology's calling to be a technology of power. And technology, by the means it makes available to science, induces science into the process of violence (against the ecology, for instance).¹⁵

The technological system must therefore be more appropriately defined as a *techno-scientific* system. The technological system is based mainly on *information technology*, on the computer, which is able to “integrate the parts of the *technological* subsystems.”¹⁶ “It is the computer,” states Ellul, “that allows the technological system to definitively establish itself as a system.”¹⁷ The computer promotes (and imposes) better data-processing via the connection of the various networks of data, and this integration is the *World Wide Web*, the *Internet* (“inter-net” literally means the net that stands between and connects all the sub-nets – it is the net of nets, a second-degree net that enhances connectivity itself and the reduction of the world to the circulation and elaboration of data). Through fragmentation and division, the technological system tries to make the totality of human experience computable, and so to translate it into *information*. This translation process is the way in which the technological system substitutes for the natural environment and becomes the new human milieu. “Technology reduces a whole to simple units,” underlines Ellul, “by analyzing it and generally compartmentalizing it.”¹⁸ Technology “is inevitably *simplifying, reductive,*

operational, instrumental, and rearranging. It reduces all that was natural to the fragment of a manageable object. And anything that cannot be thus managed, manipulated, utilized, is rejected and discarded as worthless. On the huge debit side of possibilities, value is placed only on things that can be utilized. [...] This environment is totally artificial (which is not a criticism; the natural does not have an eminent and normative value for me). Each factor in this environment results not from the combative creation of a living whole, but from an addition of processes that can be isolated and combined as artificially as they were created, *ex post facto*. Each factor can be examined, measured, isolated from the rest because we establish the connection; and we can test the result. The technological environment is in fact characterized by the growth of abstraction and controls. It is obvious that in such conditions, the technological environment scarcely favors spontaneity, creativity. Nor can it know living rhythms (which are obviously tied to the natural environment).”¹⁹

To understand the technological phenomenon it is not enough to take into consideration the single devices and instruments that stay each time in the foreground. As we were saying before, it is necessary to turn one’s attention to the background, and thus regard the technological phenomenon “as a whole, in its unity.”²⁰ A parcellary vision of technological discoveries and machines leads to an “abstract empiricism”, that claims to study immediate reality with exact methods, but is destined to lose sight of “overall reality” and of “interactions.”²¹ Ellul stresses that such fallacious approach involves the assumption of a false view of “not only the whole, but also every particular technology; for each one can be truly comprehended only in its relationship to the others.”²² The technological system, as a matter of fact, is “a qualitatively different phenomenon from an addition of multiple technologies and objects.”²³

The technological system has another relevant consequence. If one considers the use and the production of *single* techniques, technology looks neutral and human beings appear to be in charge. The “sovereign man” acts in full independence: “All technological elements come from him, have no existence outside of him, and return to him; in short, man gives them their coherence.”²⁴ Ellul underlines that “there is great reluctance to admit that a specific organization of technology exists, relatively independent of man, a sort of schematizing of life by technology.”²⁵ Such belief is based on the “Platonic” assumption that “ultimately nothing has changed, man is still man, society is still society, nature is still nature.”²⁶ On the contrary, in the *mediatized environment* there is an essential integration and correlation between human being and technology, so that within this framework human beings themselves become officers of technology, they are shaped and molded on the basis of its needs. The logic of integration and correlation consists precisely in this: humanity establishes a system that, in turn, determines human beings (or, at least, a certain *type* of human). “Man, who is to act upon this system, who is to use these technological objects, is not a man per se, an absolute

subject either. He himself is incorporated in a technological society”, writes Ellul.²⁷ Human consciousness has become “the simple reflection of the technological environment.”²⁸ Marshall McLuhan’s well known formula – “The medium is the message” – is confirmed, in the sense that “the message that man is trying to transmit has become the pure reflection of the technological system, of technological objects, of images and discourses which can only be technological images and discourses on technology.”²⁹ In Heideggerian terms, it could be argued that the “anthropological-instrumental”, or *humanistic*,³⁰ view of technology is no longer viable, because human beings are not the masters of technology. The experience of *belonging* to the technological environment, the fact that human beings aren’t entities isolated from the whole, can help them rethink at once their very nature and their relationship with the environment in general, or, as Heidegger would say, with *being*. This implies the overcoming of the traditional, humanistic definition of human beings.

The techno-scientific system, or environment, is the very background of contemporary society that Reggio was talking about in the aforementioned interview. In *Koyaanisqatsi* he brings it to the foreground cinematically through an array of very specific and powerful decisions regarding the *mise-en-scène*. First of all, Reggio gets storytelling out of the way. By eliminating that veritable catalyst for attention (or attention-centralizer) that is the plot, the director is able to obtain a more distributed attention, that gets spread on what usually is the mere “wallpaper” of “big scenes” and “climaxes.” The effect of the dilution of attention is attained through a paratactic and associative editing: the director does undoubtedly resort to striking visual syntheses, to stunning images loaded with an emblematic, symbolic and synecdochic significance (the “virtues of portraiture”, to recall Reggio’s interview), but he simultaneously defuses their uniqueness by virtue of multiplication, that is, by putting together, at a rapid pace, a series or collection of them. Despite its impact, each image gets re-absorbed in the flow: what really dominates is, here too, the “bigger picture,” the mosaic, to which the individual images belong as small, partial tiles. The same result is also achieved through Glass’s music, a minimalist soundscape (or carpet of sound), that is spread evenly on the images and that via its repetitive character does not create attention peaks (as would normally happen in the musical accompaniment of a story, that reinforces its dramatic structure), but produces instead an equivalence: it places all the “portraits” on the same level. Through the deep audio-visual consistency of *Koyaanisqatsi*, Reggio finds a convincing equivalent of Ellul’s belief that technical phenomena must not be considered separately, but in their overall network of interactions: only in this way does it become possible not to get “distracted” by the newest and most prominent inventions and products, and to bring forward the “background,” that is the techno-

scientific system, or environment. Through a thumping succession of audio-visual elements, through the juxtaposition of heterogeneous images, picked up from different contexts and moments of everyday life, Reggio is able to bring out what properly makes techno-science a system and an environment: its *pervasiveness* and *ubiquity*, its addressing all the areas of experience (work, free time, values, forms of perception, etc.). As Ellul states, techno-science can take into consideration only what can be translated techno-scientifically, what can be transformed in numbers and calculated: the rest is discarded, ignored, and, ultimately, degraded to the point of irrelevance (in the techno-scientific environment only what is *effective* is *real*). In a relevant anthropological transformation, human beings are determined by their *function*: they are holograms of the technological environment. Hence Reggio's choice to punctuate the movie with portraits of men and women (alone or in groups) busy carrying out their tasks, which are indicated by their very outfits. These outfits are *uniforms*: they standardize workers, they literally give them a *unitary form* on the basis of their duties, and at the same time set them apart from other types of workers. What turns out to be useless – or, likewise, what has ceased to be useful (*in primis*, old people, who are no longer up to date and cannot keep up with the frenzied pace of technological development) – gets marginalized, sidelined, or rejected. Hence the portraits of outsiders and outcasts, of human “wrecks,” that appear in the movie with their now *formless* apparel.

However, the most striking stylistic choice through which Reggio tries to bring forward the “background” of contemporary society – a stylistic choice that has become very popular and that has penetrated widely in the mass media, although often only as a flashy gimmick and certainly outside of the director's vision – is the extensive use of fast motion, the impressive acceleration imposed on scenes by means of *time-lapse recording* (*Koyaanisqatsi* literally means “life in turmoil”). This technique is adopted by Reggio within a precise aesthetic project. It does not just produce a hyper-realistic or hyperbolic effect, by increasing the frenzy and the hysteria that often afflict daily routine in the outposts of (Western, but now largely global) techno-scientific civilization. The acceleration sparks a deeper view, an effect of surprise, of disorientation, of estrangement, and even of choc:³¹ suddenly, through a simple change of pace, something unexpected emerges within the fabric of the habitual acts we perform every day, something at first invisible because covered by the very variety of those acts. What emerges is the mind-numbing impression of mechanical repetition, of modularity, of iteration. The activities we normally perceive as free, reveal *ex abrupto* their belonging to a widespread schematization of life, a meticulous regulation of conducts, a calculated and millimetric management of fluxes of human beings, means and goods, in a sort of general application of a tayloristic paradigm of assembly line fragmentation.

The technological system becomes a *totality*, and so constantly runs the risk of imposing itself in a *totalitarian* fashion. The technological system has an essential drive towards universality: it wants to embed everything, to standardize, to uniform, to *normalize*. The epicenter of these transformations are the big cities, the metropolises or megalopolises, real central nervous systems of technicization – even though the latter, as Ellul remarks, does not consist only in urbanization and in the related depopulation of the countryside through the automation of agriculture. Cities are the *utopian* places³² of an all-pervading control, of a self-handling of human beings and of a man-made duplication (or *simulation*) of the world, of a complete replacement of the natural with the artificial – a replacement that Paul Virilio, in many ways a successor of Ellul,³³ has traced back to what he calls the *gnostic* project of modern science³⁴ (that aims at recreating from scratch the perishable matter things are made of, especially human beings). Relying on an interesting physiognomic approach, able to understand a phenomenon through the identification of morphological analogies, Reggio puts side by side aerial shots of cities and images of integrated circuits: the staggering similarity between the two triggers the aforementioned estrangement.

Tracing *Koyaanisqatsi* back to its proper cultural horizon, one can avoid serious misconceptions, for example the idea that the movie expresses a dualistic, Manichean perspective, within which the “pristine beauty of unspoiled nature” would be set against the “more ambiguous ‘terrible’ beauty of humanity and its creations.”³⁵ Actually, for Reggio, as for Ellul, human beings are “technological animals” that transform their environment and themselves. What Reggio, on the basis of the teachings of the French philosopher, sociologist and theologian, wants to underline is the epochal hiatus that happens when techno-science turns into a system, an environment. Reggio’s aim is not to expose the effect of technology on human beings – as if an unchanging human nature stayed outside technology – but to describe *life within technology*. Ellul has stressed that a “detechnicization” of man and society is out of the question.³⁶ The only sensible goal is to establish a different, *freer* relationship with technology, to make it less dominant.

Those who have recognized a dualistic structure in *Koyaanisqatsi*, have always recalled against Reggio the rift running between the first part of the movie, in which the viewer supposedly meets an Edenic nature, and the second part, devoted to “wild” urbanization. This kind of oversimplified hermeneutic scheme finds little to no confirmation in the movie: *Koyaanisqatsi*’s incipit does not show a peaceful and joyful nature, but instead an arid one, devoid of life, reduced to mere geosphere, to its four elements and to their processes. Between the two parts, moreover, there is a fundamental *trait d’union* that has not been emphasized enough: the technological gaze. The shooting modes adopted by Reggio (aerial shots, fast motion, slow motion, etc.) go beyond the possibilities of human sight: they therefore bring into play a *post-human perspective* that concerns

both the geosphere and the biosphere. This perspective deeply marks cinematography as a mechanical form of sight tied to military technologies and propaganda. In his book *War and Cinema*, Paul Virilio has underlined that from the XIX century the “war machine” started going hand in hand with a “watching machine,” producing a *logistics of military perception* that in the course of the XXth century has evolved into a *strategy of global vision* (put in place through electronic tele-detection systems such as spy satellites, drones, etc.).³⁷ As many images of *Koyaanisqatsi* witness, Reggio is perfectly aware of the technological contiguity between cinema and the military. To discredit Reggio’s film on the basis of the belief that it contradicts itself, condemning technology through technological means, clearly shows a short-sightedness and a fundamental misunderstanding. Precisely because Reggio sees technology as a system, as a new environment, he knows it is impossible to pretend to just jump out of it. A reflection on technology must be conducted *within* technology. The point is, instead, to employ technological sight to overcome humanistic subjectivism and to prepare the conditions to rethink humanity as such.

2. A MELANCHOLIC MONUMENTALIZATION

Powaqqatsi constitutes to some extent a complement to *Koyaanisqatsi*, first of all because from a geographical point of view it deals with what lies outside the Western world, the so-called “Third-World” or “underdeveloped” world. From the end credits it can be gathered that the film has been mostly shot in the following locations: Peru, Brazil, Kenya, Egypt, Israel, Hong Kong, Nepal, India. But the film doesn’t just go for a translation in space, moving away from the Western world: it is human experience as a whole that changes. This shift is immediately apparent in the new, different forms assumed by the collaboration between Reggio and Glass. As said, *Koyaanisqatsi* is based on aerial shots and fast motion: the “human” perspective ends up being exceeded and the true protagonist becomes the technological system. *Powaqqatsi*, on the contrary, stays at eye level: it dwells on human actions, it amplifies and expands them through a wide use of slow motion. In contrast to *Koyaanisqatsi*’s fast motion, *Powaqqatsi*’s slow motion does not feel like a “magic trick”, it does not have the function of abruptly letting something astonishing come up, that sparks estrangement and shock; it aims, instead, at intensifying what is seen, at emphasizing characteristics that, at normal speed, risk being overlooked. Reggio has openly admitted that his goal was to “slow it down, so that, in effect, it becomes monumentalized. In freezing a moment, you create a monument, and that’s what we tried to do with the film, to have it become a monument of 100 minutes.”³⁸ *Powaqqatsi* is a monument erected to humankind, to its practices, its abilities, its genius, its application and perseverance, to the incredible variety of the ways it inhabits the world

(as in Leopold Kohr's perspective, the polychromy of the *local* – the *small* – is opposed to uniformity of the *global* – the *big*).³⁹ In this respect, *Powaqqatsi* has a humanistic approach. The central role of human beings brings about a shift on the level of color values and musical sonorities: the synthetic colors of *Koyaanisqatsi* – either too dull and lifeless or, conversely, too explosive – are replaced by vivid, saturated and mellow ones; the metallic notes are replaced by a score that weaves the hammering and repetitive patterns with Oriental motifs and children choirs. The two films have, however, a structural homology: both feature a paratactic editing that puts a bunch of images side by side without letting any of them get the upper hand. The editing reveals, thus, the *trait d'union* of the images, their *family resemblance*: the technological environment in *Koyaanisqatsi*, the human environment in *Powaqqatsi*. This does not boil down to a mere opposition between a negative, *inhuman* dimension, and a positive one, where the *humanitas* of the *homo humanus* is (sometimes precariously) safeguarded. Yet again, Reggio stays away from ideological simplification. If we look at the film closely, it cannot be ignored that all the countries and places shown are besieged by the advent of techno-scientific civilization, whose hasty diffusion causes dramatic imbalances between the appearing of new values and organizations and the erosion of traditional cultures. Reggio does not let himself be tempted by the siren song of nostalgia: the past is not idealized, nor depicted as a realm of superior realization of humanity – a stance implying that the only true “progress” would be a return to the old, a rewinding of the tape of history. *Powaqqatsi*'s humanistic perspective is knowingly based on a step back from the domination of the technological system, which in “underdeveloped” areas is still to come, even though it is actually making inroads and spreading like wildfire. *Powaqqatsi* gives voice to an *elsewhere* that, coming before the technological system, does not belong to it *yet* – the technological system has not yet reached its *perfection* there. However, if the *otherness* of the “Third World” consists in its *coming before*, the result is that it is destined to be subdued and incorporated by technology. The evidence stemming from a *not yet uniform elsewhere* can help question the technological system in genealogical terms, it can help us to understand it better, rethinking it, it can in this sense assume a “predictive” character (as with the use of the Hopi language and of the Hopi prophecies), but it cannot represent *in itself* an alternative, or prepare a trespassing beyond the absoluteness of the technological environment. In order to make that possible, a “knight's move” is needed: not a step backwards, but a step sideways.

The very same labels of “Third World” and “underdeveloped” world result from a sequential logic of *before* and *after* – a logic that takes hold exactly when technological development becomes the universal measuring unit. Here too Reggio's visual thinking appears close to some stimulating ideas of Jacques Ellul, who stresses that the advent of the global village has given rise to a

previously impossible direct comparison. Earlier, before the establishment of a universal measuring unit happened, societies were “too different to compare themselves with one another:”

Once there is universality of a type, technology, in which everybody aligns himself on this structure and adopts its ideology, comparison becomes inevitable, and inequality sticks out like a sore thumb. Raymond Aron is perfectly correct when he says that “the very notion of inequality in development is meaningless outside of industrial civilization.” The “problem” of development has become a “problem” because of the ideal of well-being and the general spread of technicization.⁴⁰

Technology, therefore, promotes an integration of the world, a synchronization of its dynamics and processes, but this unification triggers competition and causes fragmentation and deep divisions.⁴¹ “The universalization of the technological system – writes Ellul – does produce an identity of foundations and structures in diverse societies, bringing human groups together materially; but it puts them, without fail, in a position of power conflict. For we must never forget that technology is never anything but a means of power.”⁴² Accordingly, the “Third World”, in order to “survive” and to play a role, must accept the disintegration of its traditions, of its rites, of its beliefs, of its social tissues, in favor of a difficult and painful (because uprooting) transition to an anonymous technological environment, whose development is an end in itself. Hence the distress of the “underdeveloped” societies and the crisis they have to go through:

The tragedy of the third world is precisely its (present, of course, but not essential)⁴³ incapacity for using technologies. It is perfectly moral but intellectually ludicrous to be scandalized because the rich countries are getting richer and the poor ones poorer. Posing the problem in this way is very idealistic and virtuous, but it dooms us from the very outset to understanding nothing. The matter is in no wise “capitalist;” it is technological. The “technological gap” is widening because the third world is not yet fully integrated into the technological system. So long as this is the case, the third world can only keep growing poorer while being more and more outclassed by the technological powers. [...] The only possible route for the third world is technicization (I am not saying, industrialization!), the establishment of political and economic structures able to make optimal use of technology – a psychology of work and yield, a social organization that is “individualistic and massified,” etc. In other words, the development conditions of the technological system in its entirety, as a system. [...] Furthermore, when I state that the only possible route is technicization, I am merely saying

that it is the route imposed by the technological system, by universalism. I am not saying that this route is morally, ideologically, or humanely *desirable*, or that it is *good*.⁴⁴

The only viable survival strategy, therefore, lies, *despite everything*, in the process of technicization, which can be implemented in various ways, but in the end remains true to its automatism. This process doesn't require a total standardization, provided that all the local differences are "translated" in terms of *spectacle* and *tourism*:

There will still be (more and more) local crafts, folk songs and folk costumes; festivals and marriage rites will be marvelously aboriginal, and religions will flourish. [...] The technological world does not entail the great rectilinear avenues of the identity of ideologies! The greatest apparent diversity can reign, provided it does not interfere with the basic fact! For, under the seeming pluralism of cultural forms, a universal and common system is crystallizing, identical in all parts of the world.⁴⁵

There is an additional Ellul observation that helps, perhaps more than any other, to understand the fundamental tone of *Powaqqatsi*. Ellul points out that in the second half of the XXth century, exactly when technology has become the all-inclusive dimension and has begone to develop independently, a counter-movement has shown up that has led to historians, sociologists and ethnologists acknowledging the "dignity of all cultures"⁴⁶ and the originality of each history. On this basis the distinction between primitive people and evolved people has been discarded: their different structures appear to be all "well equipped" and "well adapted."⁴⁷ But this acknowledgement has been possible, in some ways, thanks to a preliminary *technological appropriation*, that completely shifts the terms of the problem and introduces an ambiguous note:

To believe in universal history, interpreting savages in terms of a future that is merely our own present, is tantamount, for Lévi-Strauss, to projecting upon other societies the system of thought that characterizes ourselves and to interpreting by our own myths" (M. A. Burnier). No doubt, no doubt... But we have discovered this exactly at the point when technology is invading these nations more surely than colonial armies and assimilating these cultures. Right now, at the very moment that their value is being discovered, technology is destroying them. And technology is today confirming the earlier discourse of the superiority, the truth of Western culture. Western culture is the future of those societies, just as it is our present, and

there is no myth involved; except precisely the myth that these cultures have a different future ahead of them. Practically all we have left of them is a poignant memory.⁴⁸

In the light of this consideration it is possible to grasp the authentic framework of the monumentalization pursued by Reggio in *Powaqqatsi*. This monumentalization has a distinct melancholic and elegiac vein: it's a farewell, uttered via a technological instrument as the camera (the monumental intensification and expansion of focus is attained through the slow motion). On one side, unique cultural manifestations, unique histories are recorded and celebrated; on the other side, the method itself of the recording and celebrating implies their end, their sunset. They are eternalized by what is consuming them, immortalized by what turns them into the inconsistency of shadows printed on film and brought back to life through a beam of light, perpetuated by what reduces them to archaeological findings of celluloid, ready to be included in the endless archive of images and spectacles. *Powaqqatsi* literally means “an entity, a way of life, that consumes the life forces of other beings in order to further its own life” – a *vampiric life* that belongs, in general, to the technological system, and, in particular, to cinema, to its *abstract and tautological mimesis*, to its artificial fragmentation and reconstruction of time and movement.

3. SIMULATION OF PROXIMITY AND THE COLLAPSE OF SPACE-TIME

The cinematic short-circuit – or short-circuit of the image – is skillfully shown in *Naqoyqatsi*, the last and definitive chapter of the trilogy. The film undertakes the exploration of the deepest core of the techno-scientific system, *information technology*, which encompasses “electronic brains” (computers – *ordinateurs* in French) and the network for the storage and the instant sharing of data. The techno-scientific system is to be understood, in the end, as an information technology system, a system based on information theory, on *cybernetics* as first theorized by Norbert Wiener in 1948.⁴⁹ In the incipit of the movie the fundamental characters of the new computer language appear: strings of 0 and 1, that build up *bits* of data (“bit” means “binary digit”). We are looking at a formal, codified language, that has a precursor in the Morse code. It has been developed on the basis of Boolean algebra, which features only two values, or logical states: *true* and *false* (1/0). Computer language ultimately consists of a sequence of yes/no decisions – it is based on an extreme polarization (usually represented by an electrical voltage or current pulse, or by the electrical state of a flip-flop circuit), which allows maximum effectiveness of communication, since it minimizes possible interferences, distortions, and background noises in encoding, transmission and decoding processes. Computer language achieves maximum effectiveness of communication through the

combination of *speed*, *safety* and *univocity*.⁵⁰ Its binary language is depurated, inert, non-dialectic,⁵¹ a language that, in Heidegger's terms, limits itself to a *signal* (a set of information that is conveyed in the form of bits). As in the first two chapters of the trilogy, even in *Naqoyqatsi* the paratactic editing and the iterative music bring out the fundamental character of the computer system: its "*phantomization*" of the world.⁵² Every dimension of life and experience is translated in information, schemes, diagrams; it is transformed in a computable, manipulatable and operational double. "The computer, writes Ellul, "can process only technological data, for they are the only decipherable and the only profitable data".⁵³ Either something can be mathematizable and reduced to technological subsystems, or it gets confined in the realm of the *irrational*, of the *unusable* (in some way the two tend to coincide). The artificial, electronic, computerized images of the movie are not articulated only horizontally, via juxtaposition, but also vertically, via interweaving, intersection, stratification and overlapping. They acquire, thus, an ectoplasmic semblance: they are ghosts of light and energy, fluctuating in the void,⁵⁴ and busy enhancing one another and acquiring some depth and consistency. However elusive, there is a distinct trend of *virtualization* at work here. Paraphrasing Hegel, we could say that *what is real is virtual*; or, in Debord's terms: "What appears is good; what is good appears."⁵⁵ The completely mediatized reality consists in the evidence and in the force of impact of the explicative model put in place. The computer, therefore, "creates a new reality:"

The transcription, the perfect transposition taking place through it will devalue any ascertainable reality – always uncertain, fragmentary, subjective – for the sake of an overall grasp, that is numerical, objective, synthesized, and imposes itself upon us as the only effective reality. [...] We are at present living in that uncertain universe. But along comes a rigorously objective and neutral organism and offers us a transposition which seems certain because it is mathematical. How can we help but believe that this image is resolutely true. [...] The other mental pole that helps us to enter this computer reality is, of course, our habit of translating the world in which we live into numbers, or even viewing it in terms that are infinitely huge (the galaxies) or infinitely small. It is probably the latter element that is the more decisive. When told that the wood we touch is made of empty spaces and atoms whirling at unbelievable speeds, when told that all our solid environment is actually menaced by antimatter, that energy and mass are interchangeable, we insert ourselves into an abstract universe, the reality surrounding us is neither meaningful nor assured, and all we can be certain about is numbers, for they at least are independent and autonomous. Hence, we are ready to lend reality to the universe manufactured by the computer, a universe that is both numerical, synthetic, nearly

all- inclusive, and indisputable. We are no longer capable of relativizing it; the view that the computer gives us of the world we are in strikes us as more true than the reality we live in. Over there, at least, we hold something indisputable and we refuse to see its purely fictive and figurative character.⁵⁶

Within this framework, the human brain itself is conceived as a computer: its learning ability is explained on the basis of a feed-back system – on the basis of *artificial intelligence*.

The entanglement of images in *Naqoyqatsi*, the overlapping and integration of data on the surface of the screen, suggests the collapse of space and time that characterize tele-technologies, their *simulation of proximity*. While the first technological revolution, according to Virilio,⁵⁷ was the revolution of transportation (fostered by the industrial revolution), the second is that of communication. Virilio identifies the discontinuity between past societies and contemporary society in the fact that the former experienced *relative speeds*, the latter experiences the *absolute speed* of electro-magnetic waves, the ubiquity and immediacy of *live broadcasts*. The tele-activity, or inter-activity, as driving force of the integration of technological subsystems, gives rise to a unified world, to a global space-time that replaces real space-time. In *Naqoyqatsi* Reggio also shows what Virilio calls the third technological revolution, the revolution of biotechnologies: micro- and nanotechnologies take hold of the human body and transform flesh and blood in an artificial product. The segmentation of motion in Eadweard Muybridge's chronophotography, the use of dummies for crash tests, the duplication of celebrities in Madame Tussaud's Wax Museums, the age-old dream of the construction of the Machine-Man (or, as we would say today, of a cybernetic organism, or cyborg) – all lead to a translation of human corporeality in information, schemes, measurable *performances* (hence the crucial role of the spectacle of sports, and the ultimate goal of competition: setting *records*). Technology, in the end, transforms the relationship with reality, it triggers a wide-ranging *de-realization*, that in the film is epitomized, for example, by the insistence on videogames. This de-realization takes the form of a *symbolic exchange*, in which simulacra and simulations become paramount (Baudrillard),⁵⁸ and of *spectacle*, which is “a concrete inversion of life, an autonomous movement of the nonliving” (Debord).⁵⁹ According to Debord, the mediations introduced by the hypnotic spectacle of technology bring about the “generalized abstraction of present-day society.”⁶⁰

Naqoyqatsi (literally, “life as war”, “civilized war”) insists on the military-industrial-technological complex even more than *Koyaanisqatsi*. In the course of the XXth century, war needs are at the origin of the most portentous technological accelerations.⁶¹ As Virilio has noticed, the increasing importance of the *control of perception* has led to a substitution of the “war of objects”

with a “war of pictures” – substitution that reveals, much like in Bentham’s *panopticon*, the drive for “a general system of illumination that will allow everything to be seen and known, at every moment and in every place”, “a technicians’ version of an all-seeing Divinity, ever ruling out accident and surprise.”⁶² If weapons of mass destruction give up their strategic primacy in favor of *weapons of mass communication* designed to strike people’s minds, it is because “the audio-visual impact (in real time)” outstrips “by a long shot, through its globe-spanning propagation velocity, the material impact, precisely targeted, of precision-guided explosive missiles.”⁶³ With the *infowars* the weapons of mass communication carry on a derealization based on the “*speeding up of reality*”, a “panic-induced movement that destroys our sense of orientation, in other words, our view of the world.”⁶⁴ This is the backdrop of Virilio’s assessment that, after the global integration established by interactivity, the eso-colonization of the empires of the past has been replaced by the “endo-colonization of the final empire,” in the framework of which the “synchronization of emotions of the information age” completes the “standardization of behaviours of the industrial age.”⁶⁵ With the rise of the global inter-active state, power becomes decentralized, “fractalized,” so that the structure of conflicts changes: conflicts are no longer the prerogative of nation-states, but (in cyberwars, for example) undergo a deterritorialization,⁶⁶ thus evolving into a *world civil war*⁶⁷ characterized by widespread, pulverized, liquid, pervasive confrontations, that involve all aspects of life. “Life as war” can be seen, for example, in athletic competition: the constant effort to overcome one’s limits finds a logical continuation in the making of the cyborg. There is also a product-war that is fought through *advertising* (hence the presence of spots and logotypes of multinational corporations in *Naqoyqatsi*) and a political war that is fought through *propaganda*.⁶⁸ As far as the latter is concerned, it is interesting to note that, much like Ellul, Reggio goes on equalizing all the main ideologies and political visions of the XXth century. Ellul’s idea is that technology is not ruled by politics, but rather it is politics that has to technify itself.⁶⁹

4. CONCLUSION: *LIFEWORLD* AND COMPUTER LANGUAGE

Reggio’s meditation on technology hardly offers any “solution.” Offering “solutions” to “problems” would obviously be a *technological approach*, whereas the director is trying to question the technological system itself. The possibilities for rethinking technology can therefore come up only *ex negativo*. This rethinking goes hand in hand with the identification of the *structural limits* of the technological system. And Ellul is yet again helpful. While it is true that the *feed-back* mechanism at the basis of the technological system always allows for a determination of the best reaction to changing conditions, it is also true that this mechanism can only work where the

lifeworld is translated in computer language. The *feed-back* is undoubtedly foolproof when it has to cope with numbers and quantities, but it doesn't have any hold on what is refractory to that reduction. In this dimension, it is incapable of any self-regulation: it goes straight ahead, blind and deaf, fueling its automatic growth. What is the dimension that the technological system can't totally embed? "The technological environment – writes Ellul – could not exist if it did not find its support and resources in the natural world (nature and society)." ⁷⁰ Nature and society remain the precondition of technological effectiveness, the background from which the codification of computer language rises, but that cannot be reduced to it. "It is quite fundamental to realize first," adds Ellul, "that the functioning of the human brain is essentially *of a nonformal type*."⁷¹ The more the technological system tries to become universal, the more it makes the divergence grow between what it is able to absorb and what remains alien to it. The more it causes imbalances to explode, the more it needs to be challenged. Questioning technology does not necessarily mean to embrace a form of neo-Luddism, but rather to avoid accepting it as a religion ("Life unquestioned is life lived in a religious state", says Reggio). The point is to acknowledge that not everything can be quantified and automatized; that some aspects of life – and usually the most radically human ones – escape the half-heartedness of standardized procedures and, instead, require full personal participation, responsibility and decision making. To become aware of this means to establish a freer relationship with technology and to stop living in the trance-like state described in *Visitors*.

¹ Marco Bertozzi, *Documentario come arte. Riuso, performance, autobiografia nell'esperienza del cinema contemporaneo* (Genova: Marsilio, 2018), 8. Among the recent, most interesting studies on the topic see B. Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010²); David LaRocca (ed.), *The Philosophy of Documentary Film: Image, Sound, Fiction, Truth* (London: Lexington Books, 2017); Daniele Dottorini, *La passione del reale. Il documentario o la creazione del mondo* (Milano – Udine: Mimesis, 2018); Dario Cecchi, *Immagini mancanti. L'estetica del documentario nell'epoca dell'intermedialità* (Cosenza: Pellegrini Editore, 2016).

² This is also the topic of Reggio's last feature film, *Visitors* (2013).

³ On La Gente and YCFA [Young Citizens for Action], see Reggio's biography at (<http://www.koyaanisqatsi.org/aboutus/godfrey.php>).

⁴ A translation of the titles is offered to the viewer at the end of each movie. Professor Ekkehart Malotki has performed the linguistic research on the Hopi language for the films (he is credited in all three of them).

⁵ In the end credits of *Koyaanisqatsi* an English translation of the prophecies is offered.

⁶ The authors are mostly tied to one another (Ellul, for example, makes extensive use of Illich and Debord).

⁷ See Francesco Casetti, *Eye of the Century. Film, Experience, Modernity*, trans. by Erin Larkin with Jennifer Pranolo (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

⁸ Ellul draws a distinction in French between "*technique*" and "*technologie*", the latter being a discussion (*logos*) of "*technique*". At the same time, he acknowledges, on the basis of Maurice Daumas' *Histoire générale des techniques*, that "technology" can be used as the name for the interaction between science and "*technique*". Daumas "shows in detail that today *technique* promotes scientific development; and he calls technology the science assuring the double mutual relationship between science and *technique*: it is

a scientific *technique* or a science of *technique*” (Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel [New York: The Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1980], 266, note 10). Alexandre Koyré also uses the term “technology” to designate the merger between *technique* and modern science, that cause the transition from the “world of more-or-less” to the “universe of precision” (Alexandre Koyré, “Du monde de l’‘à-peu-près’ à l’univers de la précision”, in *Études d’histoire de la pensée philosophique* [Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1971], 341-362).

⁹ The interview is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xj0XL-5S-Ew>.

¹⁰ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 34.

¹¹ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 79. Ellul had first discussed the concept of “technological phenomenon” in *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage books, 1964).

¹² Ellul, *The Technological System*, 35.

¹³ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 35.

¹⁴ René Descartes, *A Discourse on the Method*, trans. Ian Maclean (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 51.

¹⁵ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 129.

¹⁶ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 100.

¹⁷ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 98.

¹⁸ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 45.

¹⁹ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 45-47.

²⁰ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 90.

²¹ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 90.

²² Ellul, *The Technological System*, 90.

²³ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 89.

²⁴ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 88.

²⁵ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 88.

²⁶ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 88.

²⁷ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 87.

²⁸ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 59.

²⁹ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 59.

³⁰ See Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology”, in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York – London: Harper & Row, 1977); Martin Heidegger, *Letter on “Humanism”*, in *Pathmarks*, edited by William McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Martin Heidegger, “Traditional Language and Technological Language”, *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 23 (1998).

³¹ See Gary Matthew Varner, “*Koyaanisqatsi* and the Posthuman Aesthetics of a Mechanical Stare”, in *Film Criticism*, 41, no. 1 (February 2017), who poignantly explores this topic through the work of Rudolf Arnheim. This article is very helpful also as far as the posthuman dimension of the mechanical sight of the machine is concerned.

³² “The sole utopia is a technological one” (Ellul, *The Technological System*, 20). On technology as utopia see also Paul Virilio, *Ce qui arrive*, (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2002), 24-25. This utopian approach can be acknowledged, for example, in modernist, functionalist architecture, and particularly in the work of Le Corbusier.

³³ See Steve Redhead, *Paul Virilio. Theorist for an Accelerated Culture* (Toronto – Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 157-158.

³⁴ Virilio, *Ce qui arrive*, 24.

³⁵ Michael Dempsey, “Quatsi [sic!] Means Life: the Films of Godfrey Reggio”, *Film Quarterly*, 42, no. 3 (Spring 1989): 2. As far as this “terrible beauty” is concerned, I would like to point out the photographic works of Josef Koudelka and, more recently, of Edward Burtynsky, in which the industrial landscapes are grandiose and breathtaking as much as they are irreversibly destructive and toxic.

³⁶ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 82.

³⁷ Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema. The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso Books, 2009), 1-2.

³⁸ Dempsey, “Quatsi [sic!] Means Life: the Films of Godfrey Reggio”, 8-9.

³⁹ See Leopold Kohr, *The Breakdown of Nations* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

⁴⁰ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 190.

⁴¹ The opening image of *Naqoyqatsi* significantly is Pieter Breugel the Elder's painting *The Tower of Babel* (1563).

⁴² Ellul, *The Technological System*, 189.

⁴³ *Powaqqatsi* shows us the astonishing variety of techniques deployed by societies of the South of the world. The adaptation to the *technological system*, however, is a totally different process.

⁴⁴ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 182-183.

⁴⁵ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 190-191.

⁴⁶ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 195.

⁴⁷ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 195.

⁴⁸ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 195.

⁴⁹ Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1948¹, 1961²).

⁵⁰ See Heidegger, "Traditional Language and Technological Language", where Heidegger speaks of *Eindeutigkeit*, *Sicherheit* and *Schnelligkeit*.

⁵¹ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 105.

⁵² On this process see Giovanni Gurisatti, *Scacco alla realtà. Estetica e dialettica della derealizzazione* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2012).

⁵³ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 100.

⁵⁴ It is interesting to notice the constant, symbolical presence of *water* in *Naqoyqatsi*: everything melts down, becomes *liquid*.

⁵⁵ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014), 4.

⁵⁶ Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 104-105.

⁵⁷ See this interesting interview: <http://www.raiscuola.rai.it/articoli/virilio-la-terza-rivoluzione-tecnologica/5098/default.aspx>.

⁵⁸ See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

⁵⁹ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 2.

⁶⁰ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 6.

⁶¹ Ellul writes: "We realize that self-augmentation occurs only if there can be experimenting. That is why wars are so useful within this framework: at such times, all experiments are possible" (*The Technological System*, 222).

⁶² Virilio, *War and Cinema*, 5. This "eye of God" is able to see the earth from space, reducing it to a computable planet.

⁶³ Paul Virilio, *City of Panic*, trans. Julie Rose (Oxford – New York: Berg, 2005), 32.

⁶⁴ Virilio, *City of Panic*, 34.

⁶⁵ Virilio, *City of Panic*, 32.

⁶⁶ See Carlo Galli, *Political Spaces and Global War*, trans. Elizabeth Fay (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

⁶⁷ Virilio, *City of Panic*, 33.

⁶⁸ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 251. For an analysis of propaganda see also Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda. The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York City: Vintage Books, 1973).

⁶⁹ See, for example, Ellul, *The Technological System*, 141.

⁷⁰ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 44.

⁷¹ Ellul, *The Technological System*, 97. On this point see Heidegger, "Traditional Language and Technological Language", especially where Heidegger quotes Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker's essay *Sprache als Information*, and in particular the passage expressing the idea that "any attempt to make a part of language clear (through its formalization into a sign system) already presupposes the use of natural language, also there where it is not clear". For Heidegger through this statement it becomes clear that so called "natural language" represents a limit to all the attempts aimed at a technological manipulation and transformation of the essence of language. A broad and original discussion of the problem of a technological substitution of nature is offered in Eugenio Mazzarella, *L'uomo che deve rimanere. La "smoralizzazione" del mondo*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2017 (see in particular the chapter devoted to Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*).

POSTHUMAN PERSPECTIVES:
 THE STRANGE CASE OF JODIE MACK AND JOHANN LURF
 Vittorio Lubrano (New University of Lisbon)

To the community of Doc's Kingdom

Arcos de Valdevez 2019

«very soon we looked back and saw that
 he was nowhere any more and our lord was
 alone, holding his hand in front of his face to
 screen his eyes, as if he had seen some terrifying
 sight, one that no one could endure to behold»
 Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, 1648-1652¹

1. POSTHUMAN AESTHETICS? SKETCHES OF A CARTOGRAPHY

The idea of a “posthuman aesthetics” is more puzzling than it may first appear. Such an idea encompasses more than an aesthetics of the posthuman – a particular branch of philosophical aesthetics concerned with phenomena that can be described as posthuman – or an aesthetics that is posthuman in itself, challenging how we conceive of the discipline. In fact, the realm of the so-called posthuman and the domain of aesthetics – especially when understood in its broader sense as *aesthesis* – cannot be dissociated one from the other: they betray a stratified and multidimensional co-implication. On the one hand, the idea of the “posthuman” structurally involves an important aesthetic dimension; on the other hand, artworks provide privileged access to (and a stress test for) many focal points on this new (not merely) cultural and theoretical horizon.

Art has indeed played a central role in the very genesis of a “posthuman convergence.”² It is therefore unsurprising that the term “posthuman” was coined in a literary studies article on performance and the metaphor of Prometheus.³ The seminal exhibition “Post Human,” curated by Jeffrey Deitch in the early 1990s,⁴ can be considered the official inauguration of the alliance

between the field of art and the emerging field of posthuman studies in Europe. But there is more than just these generic encounters between theory and artistic practice. Both spheres are in fact entangled at several levels. Hence, many concepts, categories and theoretical elaborations associated with *posthumanism* indicate its embeddedness within the aesthetic domain, for example the frequent use of expressions such as “prosthetic,” “ecstatic,” “inter-action,” and the multiple hints at affective intensity and experimentation in the realm of perceptions. On the other hand, contemporary art strongly engages with the idea of the posthuman. Some artistic currents, such as neuronal aesthetics, living arts (bioart),⁵ biotechnological art, and digital art,⁶ all of which have flourished in recent decades, refer to it explicitly. Moreover, many artists have explored different kinds of hybridization – between animals, humans and technology, for instance – and the porosity of the human (see, for example, the works of Patricia Piccinini, Matthew Barney, SymbioticA and Ian Chen). Artists like Sterlac and Orlan go so far as to use their own bodies in metamorphic performances of a kind of posthuman avant-garde. And, last but not least, different features that constantly recur in the field of the posthuman have been addressed by films and other moving images in heterogeneous ways. The figure of the cyborg, for instance, has been very popular in culture industrial formats; avant-garde cinema has always experimented with unfamiliar, technologically mediated ways of seeing, and more recent artistic productions such as the documentary film *Leviathan* (Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel, 2012) continue to explore the possibilities of a non-human perspective.

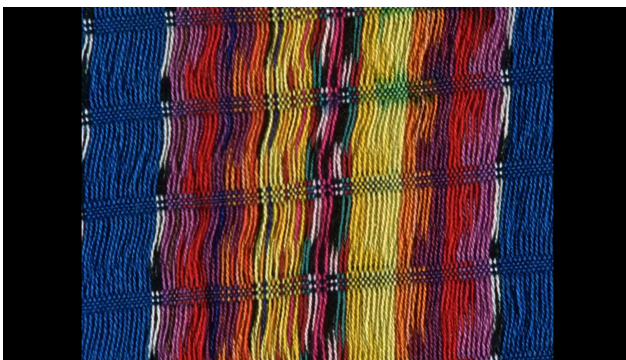
Bearing this in mind, it could thus be stated that the field of aesthetics might well function as a *fundamental laboratory* for imagining posthuman forms of life.⁷ If we take this task seriously, the term ‘laboratory’ does not serve as a simple metaphor for the long-term pursuit of a remote goal. Instead, it provides a sensuous space in which to situate oneself in an uncertain domain and to operate experimentally. In such a laboratory, hypotheses and beliefs, convictions and understandings, are constantly exposed to the irony of their limits, entangled with the corporeality of those who are admitted as experimenters and players. The focus on one particular artistic production would thus, in such an experimental laboratory, provide an opportunity to gain insight into the realm of the posthuman insofar as the latter is being put into play in an unpredicted scenario. In other words, the focus on a particular artwork engaged with the posthuman allows us to grasp something about the implicated relations that it generates, re-elaborates, perceives and immanently criticizes. It entails the experience of altering our affective and cognitive attitudes as sensitive beings and its potential reformulation without recurring to the dominant rhetoric.⁸ From this standpoint, a singular artwork can serve as an *experimentum crucis*, in which the relationship

between the realm of the posthuman and the realm of the senses is negotiated and reinvented, its inherent difficulties exposed.

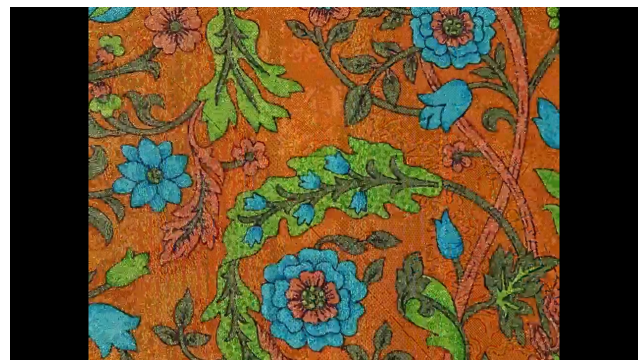
2.1. JODIE MACK'S *THE GRAND BIZARRE* + JOHANN LURF'S ★

In this section, we will focus on two artworks – more precisely, two complementary experimental documentaries – with the aim of grasping particular features of the posthuman through aesthetic experience: Jodie Mack's *The Grand Bizarre* (2018) and Johann Lurf's ★ (2017).

Let us begin with Jodie Mack's piece.⁹ Based entirely on animation, *The Grand Bizarre* is an exemplary case of the art of putting together and disposing of the universe of textiles through different rhythms and verses. In the span of an hour, we are confronted with a non-stop shifting of diverse symbols and the materials on which they are inscribed: infinite chains of signifiers are depicted on carpets, towels, costumes, and foulards. This “trippy travelogue,”¹⁰ which seems to last indefinitely, conveys the power of patterns and their convergence with the materiality that supports them. With the complicity of the author, a map of the world seems to be reassembled, not through geographical correlations but through symbolic links: the segments of the world are displayed in endless, constantly changing connections that avoid standard, linear associations. Jodie Mack seems to tell us that the world is indeed unified, especially if we consider the overarching analogies between signs that originate from different places such as Mexico, Poland, Indonesia, Turkey, Israel and Greece. Rather than an atlas of territories, we are led through an eclectic kind of geo-symbolism that can be retraced across the globe.



The Grand Bizarre extract 00:16:28



The Grand Bizarre extract 00:54:34

Undoubtedly, Posthuman tendencies inheres *The Grand Bizarre*. Human presences are few, always marginal, never in focus – for the most part removed from the screen. One could say that this work

can be considered a visual reinterpretation of an object-oriented ontology because of its firm rejection of subjectivity and its praise for the ontological reality of differential elements (*differences that differ*). What monopolizes the space on the screen are brief appearances of objects and forms, which are constantly superposed and exchanged by others. The constant shifting of images is accompanied by an electronic score that imitates some of the basic phonemes of the international phonetic alphabet of human languages (IPA). However, this can be understood only *a posteriori* and through Jodie Mack's explicit admission; when first listening to it, the sounds are indistinguishable from other samples of electronic music.¹¹ It seems ironic that the only human trace displayed in the film is human speech in camouflage – as if it were a kind of sophisticated revenge against the *zōon logon echôn*, the living being who has language. Picture after picture, frame after frame, a mesmerizing rumble affects the eyes and the body of the spectator. A technological force seems to destabilize those who stare at the screen, an uncanny *horror vacui*: a non-human Unidentified Object.

Nevertheless, some perplexities persist. As in a game of mirrors, this work of art, which certainly points to posthumanism, releases traces and visible fingerprints of *homo sapiens*, although the latter are no longer present. I am not referring to the occasional human traces that we sometimes encounter as apparitions strewn across the screen. Nor am I referring to the human presence that is immediately deducible from the fact that all the materials shown are, in fact, human commodities, even if only via the position of towels on a clothesline.

The human is present despite its disappearance from the screen – not as actor, but both through the idiosyncratic quality of Jodie Mack's animations and editing and in the form of the (human) audience member. While it is true that no human beings are depicted in *The Grand Bizarre*, it is nevertheless also very clear that a human spectator is supposed to watch the film and to engage with its automatic flux and obsessive circulation of signs; hence the persistence of a humanly conceived *perspective*, which is associated with Renaissance art and humanistic culture.¹² The adaptation of reality and the multidimensional complexity of the world to human perception through a bi-dimensional, figurative technique has been (and still is, in some cases) a hegemonic paradigm of vision and representation. This human perspective also orients the gaze in Mack's documentary, and many of the materials appear, well framed, in the center of the screen. This result is most clearly observed when Mack experiments with a vortex effect, the different signs presented in increasing or decreasing order so as to resemble living organisms in transformation.

*The Grand Bizarre* extract

00:43:22

*The Grand Bizarre* extract

00:43:25

*The Grand Bizarre* extract

00:43:27

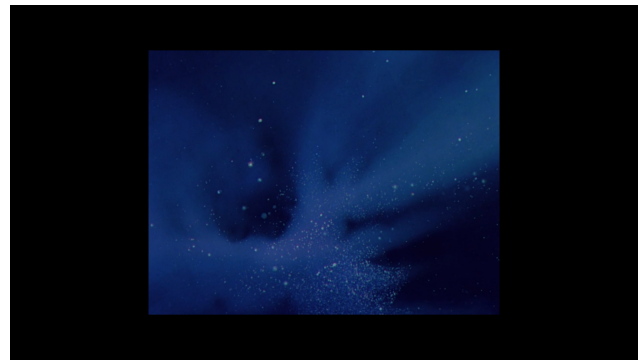
By contrast, Johann Lurf's ★ cuts all encompassing perspectival temptations at their roots insofar as what is displayed takes place not in a human environment – not even on earth – but in that which surrounds it: the universe. Featuring footage originating from “more than 550 different films that are the sources for these starry night skies,”¹³ ★ (which is in fact an ongoing project rather than a finished film) can be described as an overloaded, “astral archive of the stars throughout 115 years of film history.”¹⁴ The film does not provide the audience with a point of orientation in this space: “There are no landscapes, no frames for the sky, no objects (unidentified or otherwise), no human figures, no moon, no planets.”¹⁵ Indeed, one has the impression of experiencing the eternal return of the “*bestirnte Himmel*” above one, a repetition of differences (or the difference), emerging from looping reiterations, that transforms cinema into a work of *fascination* – in the broad sense of being “bewitching” – that is, something that shifts from being amusing to being strange, while still generating a kind of enchantment. We delve into “a plotless, brain-cleansing and calming movement through the skylscapes of cinema,”¹⁶ following intersections of lights and bright points, starry trajectories and trails. Some of these elements also appear in other works by Lurf, which likewise have a hypnotizing effect on their viewer. In *Cavalcade* (2019), for instance, light is an important element: what we experience are recorded ludo-hypnotic variations of a stroboscopic waterwheel and the reiterated circulation of signs made of light (again, a repetition of difference). *Vertigo Rush* (2007) offers a more extreme audio-visual experience. While a dolly zoom is obsessively instantiated, evoking the experience of swinging back and forth, a constant shifting takes place, until it reaches a paroxysmal point. The spectators' visual experience is pushed to the extreme: at one point, they inevitably lose orientation and enter into a kind of ecstatic trance. This film also deals with repetitions and difference, which forces the viewers to feel the tension and the temptation of light.

Let us now turn to ★. Its title alone is worthy of commentary: unpronounceable as it is, it refuses to be a human “thing of language” at our disposal, one that can be reduced to a phoneme or to an alphabetical sign.¹⁷ A mere symbol, it recalls those unpronounceable palindromes with which

Italo Calvino entertained his readers.¹⁸ In order not to get lost in absolute ineffability, Lurf opts for an iconic definition that subtly reverses, in an inherent reference, that which is shown on the screen (the title appearing in dark shapes against a pale background, while the film projects flashing lights onto dark scenery) and which is at the same time an infallible but mechanic denotation arising through a particular combination of signs on a keyboard (U + 2605). The film itself, even if it is entirely based on human cultural production – as we have seen, the footage stems from existing films and thus has a crucial cultural dimension – nevertheless seems to remove any residual presence of humanity. While all of the images are indeed the fruit of human representation of the universe – through different filmic (that is, technological) means – the punctiform structure and the editing reveal a centerless blanket of stars that is irreducible to any one perspective. Confronted with such an extent of unspecified stellar constellations, we are given the impression that there is no firm, no human gaze that could give it order. After encountering the umpteenth vault of stars, the process of cogitating is overwhelmed by a sensorial overload of lights. It seems that we are lost in a philosophical *Ur-erfahrung* – the ancient experience described in the fable of Thales, who is perpetually gazing at the stars and ignoring what lies under his feet. Reflection is also activated in another sense, however. Before the magnitude of the universe, the disorienting abundance of “deep-space skiescapes,”¹⁹ we as human beings are minimized in our importance to such an extent that the differences between us and other species on earth appear negligible compared to the mysteries of space. This existential experience can reveal the potential of a trans-specific audience that may share an interest in light, as they depend on the same earthly conditions as human beings.



Stars extract from the trailer



Stars extract from the trailer

The soundtrack further adds to the destabilizing effect of the decontextualized images and sequences in Lurf’s film. Although re-edited, the audio that accompanies the visuals is nonetheless a recuperation of the soundtracks of the original footage.²⁰ Consequently, fragments of sentences, exclamations, and both long and brief discourses pop up here and there among the stars, without

resulting in coherent meaning. At times, it seems as if the human presence in *★* is conceived of as the waste of non-human protagonists. Despite this tendency to erase all signs of human presence in the film, however, a presence of this sort nonetheless persists – not only because every single image has been made by a human being – every framing, editing choice and animation has undergone the mediation of both the original filmmaker and Johann Lurf – but also because certain audio/video combinations were clearly intended by the latter to be seen by human beings. For example, the very last frames of the film indicate a fundamental reference to human activity: featuring a seemingly endless list of quotations akin to the index of an archive, the form and content of the closing credits seem to allow for a rational classification of the visually overwhelming experience that precedes them – conjectural analogies, a “cinematic archaeology” of representation of the universe through films, and the generational past of starry visions ground every image in a context. The film thus reveals an explicit *philological* intention that is manifested in the chronological nature of film – alongside an entirely anthropocentric timeline. It is thus an underlying idea of order that motivates the film. An architecture full of meaning gives the work a human face. This type of analysis always presupposes an *anthropomorphic transcendental*. To be specific, both a human timing and an anthropocentric order animate the scenes of this machinic documentary, and it is precisely this familiarity that transpires, despite our disorientation, which triggers our enjoyment when following the delicate maneuvers in Lurf’s work. Indeed, it is undeniable that among the theatrical effects of the film, the so-called “public response,” its humor is an important element. Mainly due to the audio track, an ironic moment is unleashed that is perhaps something more than a *boutade* in the performance. In this respect, this work is still permeated with a *postmodern* (rather than a *posthuman*) flavor insofar as the meta-cinematographic *genius* of the author dwells in the way he pilots cross-references that otherwise remain random and excessively destabilizing. When we grasp how Lurf has reconstructed sense out of the complexity with which he is faced, alongside his cine-erudite *esprit de finesse*, we respond with complicit astonishment and a frank, liberating laughter.

And yet some questions remain: What would happen if this bastion were to fall? What if the machine were to take the lead, once and for all? What if our gaze, or properly our whole body, were to be immersed without an ironic filter in a posthuman documentary? Would we still be in the mood for laughter?

2.2. DREAMS OF MACHINIC DOCUMENTARIES

In order to take our enquiry into a posthuman approach further, in this section we will investigate two features shared by the two films analyzed above: 1) both point to a certain crisis of authoriality,

and 2) both intensify affective spectatorship. These aspects are oriented toward a precise *ligne de fuite*: the generation of a machinic perspective.

2.2.1. AUTHOR AND COMPOSITION

In the two experimental documentaries we are examining, the binomial relationship between author and artwork, director and filmed material, is even more uncertain than it always is when one deals with filmic material. Representations of signifying material are substituted by a chain of effects and automatism. This shifts the perspective of the traditional idea of art: rather than conveying the idea of an artistic subject (creator) expressing something through her artwork (creature), we are confronted with automata, not authors, that trigger the connections between images.

With reference to Mack's and Lurf's creative processes, what appears is a tendency to abstract ways of conceiving films through redundant strategies of combined repetitions that supersede the intentional production of meaning: we are confronted with a complex *program* for the circulation of images rather than a subversive intentional *mise-en-scene* of filmed material. Especially in [★],^a certain randomness in the flux and its relentlessness suggests that the film proceeds quasi-automatically. Watching the film, one is given the impression that a machinic intelligence lies behind its images – an autonomous algorithm, able to edit audio/video according to a predefined, mathematical logic. It would seem that film production has already moved beyond human involvement, replaced by independent, machinic agencies. Whereas in *The Grand Bizarre*, by virtue of a combination that is apparently automatic, what is projected on the screen imitates a serial production (thus pointing to modern capitalism and industrialization), in [★] the process of automatic selection appears as an abstraction from materiality and fabrication processes.²¹ At first sight, this de-subjectivation through mechanic proceduralism seems to be aimed at the *dream of emancipation from human labor* (including creative fatigue) by means of a substitution by the *automaton*: algorithms are now able to proceed independently, to lead deliberation; the composition can be reduced to simple operations generated by a computer program without the need to recur to human time and living labor. The documentary seems to compose itself, as it were, while the author and her/his body seem to step behind it, thereby becoming increasingly superfluous. The artwork increasingly appears to be *techno-logy in action* – the autopoiesis of the technological itself.

In Jodie Mack's *The Great Bizarre*, we also encounter another dimension of the alliance between filmmaker and technology, which is not directly visible in the film but becomes apparent in her "making of" lecture at Doc's Kingdom.²² This time, this concerns the engagement of the filmmaker's own body, which seems to be *mechanized by the machine*: the laborious process of

animating material.²³ The filmmaker's body seems to be trapped in a frenetic combination of repetitions, recalling the assembly line satirized by Chaplin in *Modern Times* – a symbiotic, undefined organic-mechanic agent reiterating the same actions, over and over. In Mack's case, instead of being expelled by the machine, the human body is retroactively reshaped by its feedback stimuli. In a dialectic of inversion, what is being created re-creates its creator, forcing the entity that has organized the performance to react – as in a puppet show.²⁴ What we encounter is thus a contamination with the machine as an alternative to substitution. Both in filmmaking and in the diligent post-production phase, the director thus tends towards a *continuum with the machine that recalls the productive transformation of our time*:²⁵ being a machine or becoming a machine, being this body *as if it always already belonged* to the machine. At least in the act of supplanting authoriality and making room for a sort of *machinic hybrid*, there seems to be hope for a possible reconciliation of documentary formats with the experimental energy that motivated the avant-garde works of the twentieth century.²⁶ In this sense, these experimental documentary practices reiterate a particular cinematographic moment – perhaps the most significant one: the cinema of attractions.²⁷

2.2.2. RECEPTION AND SPECTATORSHIP

In *What Makes a Film Tick?* Anne Rutherford asks herself: “How can we develop an aesthetics of documentary that acknowledges the role of affect and embodied experience in cinema spectatorship?”²⁸ This is a particularly important task with regard to the works of Mack and Lurf, which rely heavily on the production of sensuous, bodily experiences. Their films undoubtedly trigger strong physical reactions, which make it impossible to take a contemplative stance toward them. Insofar as they directly impact the body, the latter is stripped of habitual forms of coordination – as if the *machine* turned the body itself into a machine, functioning according to impersonal directives. Nausea and exhaustion derail our control over our psycho-physical apparatus; confusion and growing excitement are provoked – in any case, a placid, passive quietness is made impossible. There is no narration to follow, no inner meaning to discover in the mesh, while the body is constantly stimulated through rhythm and light. We are confronted with mere depersonalizing fluxes through which, it seems, localized hallucinations occur: an ecstatic experience.

This evokes a new kind of protagonism of the body, which neglects both its impermeability and its Vitruvian purity²⁹ so as to open it up for unexpected encounters with “eteromorphic emergence.”³⁰ A process of de-subjectivation, already ongoing on the part of the author, is referred to the side of the spectator and seems to reactivate the expectations of an effective cinema that will

initiate a posthuman revolution – a revived Vertov, with neither man nor camera. The machinic documentary moves in the direction of those once-minoritarian attempts to rethink the aesthetic reception of documentary film. For example, Mack and Lurf help us to relativize disembodied imaginings and to take an interest in reactivating the “mimetic faculty”³¹ and haptic spectatorship beyond visual mastery.³² The cinema functioning as a fetish³³ that holds the power to alienate our usual standards of hearing and viewing is here undoubtedly present. The cinematic experience recalls the impactful derailing of the Deleuzian “noochock”: “It is only when movement becomes automatic that the artistic essence of the image is realized: producing a shock to thought, communicating vibrations to the cortex, touching the nervous and cerebral system directly”,³⁴ he writes in *Cinema 2*. What he describes is the moment when the automatic processes implicit in cinematographic praxis are finally unleashed and intensified up to the point of generating a *zoe*-technological apparatus: metamorphoses of a machinic-pulsional *assemblage*.³⁵ A similar idea can be found in Shaviro’s *Cinematic Body*, where he describes filmic images as the “raw content of sensations” and emphasizes that “human perception and consciousness are only secondary differentiations within this field of images in play.”³⁶ Machinic documentaries thus correspond to the description of cinematographic experience in terms of “viscerality” (beyond monoprospectivist spectatorship), “vulnerability” (the exposition and hybridization of the body), and the transfiguration and profanation of the Ego.³⁷ In addition to this, however, they add an *uncanny element* by virtue of their posthuman torsion, which complicates calls for the emancipation of the senses or a renewed bodily awareness. If rethinking spectatorship is a mandatory premise of rejecting hegemonic approaches to documentary film,³⁸ *The Grand Bizarre* and *★* push the focus on bodily experiences to the extreme. Reiterations and accelerations on the screen generate physical stimulations so intense that the issue of bodily sustainability arises in the face of non-human automatism. Indeed, the extent to which the body can sustain this invasive capacity of the technological machine remains uncertain. This forces us to reconsider the very meaning of filmmaking, of experimentation beyond human limits.³⁹ The extraordinary effort of posthuman aesthetics would then consist in surpassing Shaviro’s intuitions in order to articulate a principle of spectatorship *beyond masochism*.

The *documentaire machinique*⁴⁰ virulently extends its effects and contaminates production and perception, interpretation and composition, alike. In doing so, it disrupts our usual orientation in film production and reception, forcing us to rethink the limits of multisensory spectatorship and new connections in experimental film. *The Grand Bizarre* and *★* are ambiguous projects in this sense: on the one hand, they repress human presence; on the other hand, residues of the human persist on a level beyond the representational. We are confronted with a becoming-machine that

facilitates new bodily experiences while being phagocytized into a machinic flux that overtakes the metabolic capacity of the body.

3. OEDIPUS AS *ANTHROPOS*

Both *★* and *The Grand Bizarre* can be understood as part of a thoughtful laboratory of posthuman aesthetics.⁴¹ They are certainly not self-evident, *exemplary cases* of posthuman art, however, for although they reveal the potentiality of new forms in the broad field of documentary film, they risk a double aporetic stalemate. On the one hand, they still linger in an *anthropic complex* in which, despite the strategies adopted, an ineluctable human trait appears to disturb the project of overwhelming anthropomorphisms in art. On the other hand, however, the process of de-subjectivation that involves both subject-author and subject-spectator makes room for the emergence of a mechanic hybridization while exposing the body to regimes of cyborg toxicity and to its own potential unsustainability. We are thus dealing with a *strange case*, an insidious experiment that twice risks ending in a human tragedy – the destruction of the body – while at the same time revealing an uncommon, ecstatic potentiality. This potential can be understood by bringing into play the figure of Oedipus, giving emphasis to a particular aspect that is briefly noted by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.⁴²

Oedipus' story is the tragedy of the *anthropos*⁴³ – more precisely, the tragedy of chasing (away) the *anthropos*: (hu)manh(a)unt. In this sense, the tragedy can be interpreted as a perennial compassing of the polysemic reference to the *anthropos*. *Anthropos* is precisely the long-awaited hero who must save the city from the menace of the “riddling Sphynx”; *anthropos* is the word needed to solve the riddle; *anthropos* is the infesting presence that must be identified and expelled from the city. *Anthropos* is Oedipus, and therefore he is the one to be chased. Once chased – and chased away – in the tragedy at Colonus, he will again be the chased *anthropos*: the object of a manhunt by Polyneices and Creon, for a different purpose.

Part of the fascination with this tragedy results from the progressive captivation of Oedipus in this *anthropic complex*: the more he tries to erase *this* human being (the human being he is) from the public sphere, the more he is involved in misunderstandings. He is the one who will be flushed out and then expelled, eternally chased away. He is the one who must fulfil this assignment, even though he cannot divest himself of his own being-human – he is both hunter and hunted, haunting and haunted. His machinations are therefore destined to face the impossibility of eliminating his own humanness and to assist, at the same time, in his return as a destabilizing factor for his entire existence. A human trait opposes his obsession and condemns him to a never-before-seen end – the

destiny of never seeing what lies before one. The same trait returns, then, notwithstanding the systematic repression.

Addressing Oedipus from this standpoint allows us to conceive of him as a paradigmatic figure of the *vertigo* that we encounter in posthuman aesthetics. A subtle affinity with the myth resounds in the relentless battle to expel the infesting (although apparently reassuring) presence of the *anthropos* and in the idea of focusing on the human as a modern bias that compromises the possibility of a more decentered, “ecological”⁴⁴ kind of thought. If a promising and liberating potential inheres in problematizing human presence and deconstructing it through artistic practice, the attempt to wipe out the influence of the *anthropos* testifies both to its perseverative subterranean, insidious reappearance and to the difficulty of imagining a completely dehumanized horizon.⁴⁵ In other words, we are confronted with two complementary aspects when trying to think of a posthuman attitude: first, the perpetual removing and returning of the *anthropos*, and second, the emergence of radically other forms of life that shatter all preceding aesthetics. Here, one may locate one of the most decisive moments in conceiving of the possibility of a posthuman proposal for the arts.

Oedipus, the hero who bears the “human” on his lips, is also the man who stabs himself in the eyes. The radicalness of his gesture lies not in the act of wiping blood from his eyes (as it appears in the films of Lucio Fulci or Quentin Tarantino) but in the generation of a visual rupture through which the gaze of the *anthropos* is irremediably lost. Oedipus eradicates his eyes and is lost in visual non-sense, but, at the same time, this allows him to make room for a new, hitherto unknown, unexperienced sense. After so many misunderstandings, this new sense finally *makes sense*. What the films of Jodie Mack and Johann Lurf may be insinuating is that the production of a new kind of gaze can enable us to find room for a different ecological and techno-mediated sensibility, beyond self-destructive anthropocentric perspectivism. With Oedipus, we venture towards other senses, to the brink of non-sense, but in order to reach these we must deprive ourselves of the senses on which we have hitherto relied. Herein lies the ineffable, unlocatable, blinding oedipal wisdom achieved at the end of his journey.⁴⁶ We will hopefully achieve this wisdom at the end of our artistic *dérives*. There, our aesthetics may be called posthuman, even if this implies an apparent delirium.

¹ Sophocles. *The Oedipus at Colonus of Sophocles*. trans. Richard Jebb. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1889.

² Braidotti, Rosi. *Posthuman Knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013, 1-2.

³ Hassan, Ihab Habib. "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?," *The Georgia Review* 31/4 (1977): 830-50. See also, Ferrando, Francesca "Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations," *Existenz* 8/2 (2013), 27.

⁴ In Lausanne and Rivoli in 1992, then in Athens and Hamburg until May 1993. See Deitch, Jeffrey. *Post Human*. Lausanne: FAE Musée d'Art Contemporain, 1992.

⁵ Braidotti, Rosi and Hlavajova Maria. *Posthuman Glossary*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, 64-65; See also Ivi, 285-287.

⁶ LaGrandeur, Kevin. "Art and the Posthuman," in *Posthumanism. The Future of Homo Sapiens*. edited by Michael Bess and Diana Walsh Pasulka, 377-388. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Macmillan Reference USA, 2018.

⁷ In this direction see also Wamberg, Jacob. "Dehumanizing Danto and Fukuyama: Towards a Post-Hegelian Role for Art in Evolution," in *The Posthuman Condition. Ethics, Aesthetics and Politics of Biotechnological Challenges* edited by Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, Jacob Wamberg, 141-156. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2012, 151.

⁸ See for example Chen, Nancy N. "'Speaking Nearby: A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha'" *Visual Anthropology Review* 8 (1992): 82-91.

⁹ I had the privilege of attending the International Seminar on documentary film "Doc's Kingdom" in 2019. This was part of an intense week of debate, screenings and meditative moments.

¹⁰ Clarke, Cath. "The Grand Bizarre Review - Trippy Travelogue to Who Knows Where." *The Guardian*. [Guardian News and Media](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/apr/08/the-grand-bizarre-review-jodie-mack-travelogue-documentary). last accessed 29 June 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/apr/08/the-grand-bizarre-review-jodie-mack-travelogue-documentary>

¹¹ Ivi: "The DIY soundtrack is a trance-y smorgasbord of traffic noises, bippy-boppy electronic beats, birdsong, the clanks and rhythmic whirs of industrial sewing machines, and even that universal sound of connectivity, the Skype ringtone."

¹² For a critical approach to humanism, see also Cacciari, *La mente inquieta*. Torino: Einaudi, 2019; Davies, *Humanism*. London: Routledge, 1997, chapter 3. On the photographic paradigm in perspective, see Hoelzl, Ingrid, and Remi Marie, *Softimages. Towards a New Theory of the Digital Image*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015, 3.

¹³ Clarke, "The Grand Bizarre Review - Trippy Travelogue to Who Knows Where."

¹⁴ Perrin, David. "The Reflection of Stars: An Interview with Johann Lurf." MUBI. last accessed 26 June 2020. <https://mubi.com/pt/notebook/posts/the-reflection-of-stars-an-interview-with-johann-lurf>

¹⁵ Carroll Harris, Lauren. "Space Is Not a Landscape: Johann Lurf's ★." *Kill Your Darlings*. last accessed 26 June 2020. <https://www.killyourdarlings.com.au/article/space-is-not-a-landscape-johann-lurfs-star/>

¹⁶ Ivi.

¹⁷ I would like to personally thank Johann Lurf for this posthuman insight, which has remarkable consequences for internet search engines. From the 2019 Press Kit for ★: "The only title of the film is ★ and not Star, (Star), Star-Film, *, Star Symbol, ... or any other verbal form. Your graphic designer may copypaste the symbol from this PDF or use its Unicode Character ›black star‹ (U + 2605). However you can use the font of your choice."

¹⁸ See Qfwfq, Kgwgk and Pfwfp in Calvino, *The Complete Cosmicomics*. London: Penguin UK, 2009.

¹⁹ Carroll Harris, "Space Is Not a Landscape: Johann Lurf's ★."

²⁰ From the 2019 Press Kit for ★: "The spoken languages are: English, Japanese, French, German, Russian, Spanish, Dutch, Italian, Swedish, Hindi, Finnish, Norwegian, Bulgarian and Portuguese. No subtitles will be provided in any form for this film."

²¹ This parallel may give rise to equivocation: although undeniable attention is given to the human fabrication of textiles, in *The Grand Bizarre* the latter are always understood as products, conclusions of the process of labor and the deposited result of working activity. Consequently, they are objectified entities that can easily be translated into signifiers for abstract composition.

²² Jodie Mack held a *lectio magistralis* titled "Motion's not dead" at Doc's Kingdom 2019 on 5 September.

²³ In a minute, hundreds of images alternate with each other. Cf. passages from the interview given by Mack: "That film, and this idea of animated long takes. I couldn't shoot anything longer than 30 seconds because that's the duration of a full wind on the Bolex, and so while I did have a couple of shots that go the

full 30, most of the time you have this ultra-compression of time under the illusion of a long take, where you can see the light passing super-quickly”; in Williams, Blake (2018) “The Grand Bizarre (Jodie Mack, US) — Wavelengths”. *Cinema Scope*, 76.

²⁴ Puppeteers of the past would commonly deform, distort and shape their gestures in a symbiotic relation to the puppet. In a certain sense, the puppeteer is captivated by the creature he is trying to animate. He therefore ends up re-animating himself, restructuring his bodily functions so as to energize what would have otherwise been a clumsy assemblage without coordination (giving rise to a paradox: the puppeteer himself becomes an uncoordinated, clumsy assemblage for governing the action). On marionettes, puppets and mimes, see the pioneering works by Elenio Cicchini. Cf. Cicchini, Elenio, *Vita mimica. Etica e linguaggio dei mimi*. Cagliari: Università di Cagliari, 2018.

²⁵ See Lazzarato, Maurizio. “Immaterial Labor,” in *Radical thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* edited by Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2010.

²⁶ A philological reading will easily detect quotations from structuralist films, from the delirious cyclicities of Snow, or the acoustic-visual distortions of Sharits and Blach’s *The Cut-Ups*, etc.

²⁷ See Tom Gunning’s list in Webster, Sam. “Works Consulted.” film110/ Works Consulted. last accessed 10.11.2020. <http://film110.pbworks.com/w/page/12610319/Works%20>

²⁸ Rutherford, Anne. *What Makes a Film Tick? Cinematic Affect, Materiality and Mimetic Innervation*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2011, 126.

²⁹ On the impermeability of the body (the belief in the integrity of the body profile as a container of all perception) and on Vitruvian purity (a self-transparent, soon-to-be-clothed body according to the most creative variations of the *techne*), see Marchesini, Roberto. *Estetica Postumanista*. Milano: Meltemi 2019, 7-62; on the Vitruvian Man as a paradigm, see also Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013, 13-55.

³⁰ This formula recalls a recent attempt to define the mutation of the modern paradigm, from a reception based on aesthetic reflective judgments to a new kind of interaction with non-human alterities. See Marchesini, *Estetica postumanista*, 248. The “technomorphic sublime” could be a fair definition in this case.

³¹ Cf. Benjamin, Walter. “On the Mimetic Faculty.” in *Reflections*. New York: Harcourt. 333-36 and Laura Marks’s reinterpretation of it.

³² Marks, Laura. *The Skin of the Film. Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000, 129-193.

³³ The word “fetish” recalls William Pietz’s idea of an object whose power of representation comes by virtue of our contact with it.

³⁴ Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, 156.

³⁵ In *Anti-Oedipus* and *Milles Plateaux*, Deleuze and Guattari discuss this aspect at length.

³⁶ Shaviro, Steven. *The Cinematic Body*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, 29-30.

³⁷ On “masochistic aesthetics” see especially Ivi, 57-65.

³⁸ Laura Marks insists on the metaphor of the skin, which is helpful for expressing porosity and open-ended relationality (see also Preciado, Paul Beatriz, *El deseo homosexual*. Barcelona: Melusina, 2009) but without taking into account the element of toxicity and radical pervasiveness of posthuman aesthetics. In this sense, the threshold of a membrane-like contact with the body is still an irenic vision compared to that of molecular “strangeness.”

³⁹ Will we need (more-than) human enhancements in order to endure the new frontiers of aesthetic experimentation?

⁴⁰ This expression was coined in a friendly conversation with Jean-Jacques Adrien, Jacques Lemièrre and Rui Teigão.

⁴¹ A set of elements testifies to the departure from the human referent: the absence or highly reduced presence of humans on the screen, as well as their gazes, their faces, their words; the compositional form of sequences – compulsive repetition, obsessive loops of images and sound, the absence of a narrative *fil rouge*; the centrality given to non-human elements – a certain matter and its symbolic implications or certain symbols and its material implications; a certain estrangement or *Benommenheit* in perception (this impedes interpretative approaches based on author/spectator identification, on the hermeneutics applied to the plot, and on the “psychologizing” of the author’s intentions); a mechanic/automatic component that involves both production and reception. These remarks do not pretend to be exhaustive, but they support the above hypothesis.

⁴² See Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, 4: “Oedipus’s answer to the riddle of the Sphinx – ‘That being is man’ - is repeated indiscriminately as enlightenment’s stereotyped message.”

⁴³ The word *anthropos* has two referents that are distinguished in many modern languages: ‘Mensch’/human being – the generic universal for the *rational animal* – and ‘Mann’/man – the most privileged and impositive kind of *Mensch*.

⁴⁴ Morton, Timothy. *The Ecological Thought*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.

⁴⁵ “The technique of reflexivity favored by posthumanist thinking implicitly follows a humane-itarian politics of visibility that reinstates the very form of life that posthumanism strives to displace” in Rangan, Pooja. *Immediations. The Humanitarian Impulse in Documentary*. London: Duke University Press, 2017, 175.

⁴⁶ “The extinction of sight is the positive condition for a new space and time, the strange realm of fascination and the image” (Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, 54).

THE AFRICAN TWIN TOWERS

UNVEILING THE CREATIVE PROCESS IN CHRISTOPH SCHLINGENSIEF'S
LATE FILM WORK

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In 1999, during one of Christoph Schlingensiefel's appearances in the German talk show "Grüner Salon" (N-TV), journalist Erich Böhme blamed the director, political performer and dramatic author for having invited Horst Mahler, an (in)famous member of the far right party NPD², to give a public speech at the Berlin *Volksbühne*. The interview soon became very tense. But during this short conflictual exchange, Schlingensiefel made a remarkable statement about broadcasted pictures, the material body and the political.

- Böhme: "Don't you run the risk of promoting the right-wing scene? After all, they could say, 'Aha! He even includes us in his performance. He gives Mahler, who's closely linked to the NPD, excellent publicity!'"

- Schlingensiefel [interrupting Böhme]: "Mr Böhme, I didn't want to say this, but when you, in your show... that was interesting... I had Mr Mahler and Mr Oberlercher³ down here at the *Volksbühne*, on the stage – and one could jump on the stage, and some people actually did. And Oberlercher shouted at some point, 'Leibstandarte, Leibstandarte!'⁴ and whatever else. This man is completely nuts. This man is running on empty. Mr Mahler is also running on empty. They are all people who are running on empty. And I'm absolutely not."

- B.: "But why do you put them on the stage?"

- S.: "But sitting in your show, Mr Böhme, was Mr Haider.⁵ And you just played with your glasses while asking in a jokey way, 'Are you a populist? Are you a neonazi?' Right? And I was sitting in front of my television screen, I was sitting there – and I wished I could put my hand inside the television! I thought, 'That just can't be true. What is the man doing? What's up with Mr Böhme now?'"

[...]

- B.: "Why do you give Mahler the stage here at the theatre?"

- S.: "Why do you give Haider the stage without defending yourself? Down there, people could get close [to Mahler and Oberlercher]. I always ensure that one can get close to the people [who are on the stage] in my performances."⁶

INTRODUCTION

In 2004, the German *enfant terrible* of theatrical and film creation Christoph Schlingensiefel presented the first version of his *Animatograph*. This was a rotating stage made of objects, projections and performances and was the centerpiece of his direction of *Parsifal* at the Bayreuther Festspiele. Later, he installed different variations of this multimedia device in various places in the world, one example being *Area 7*, a township of the Namibian city of Lüderitz.

The *Animatograph* has given rise to several analyses focusing on the aesthetic, political, philosophical and historical issues of the device.⁷ However, while working on the installation of the *Animatograph* in Namibia, Schlingensiefel also made a film, which documented his failed attempt to shoot a free adaptation of Wagner's *Ring* in this former German colony. Finally released in 2008 under the title *The African Twin Towers*, this documentary proved to be Schlingensiefel's last film, with the director dying of cancer just two years later. Overshadowed by the impressive and ambitious theatrical and multimedia mother-project, *The African Twin Towers* has received less analytical debate, particularly about its role as a documentary film or project.⁸ This article reconsiders the documentary as part of Schlingensiefel's film work, looking at both its crucial contribution to a global reflection on German cinema and its impact on nonfiction film in a post-modern context.

When confronted with *The African Twin Towers* (2008), spectators are first impressed by the director's ability to undermine all categories, genres and discursive regimes the documentary might claim to belong to. Although announced in the title as a *Tagebuchfilm* (a filmed diary), it barely follows a structure organized by dates. Similarly, after the first collapse of his original project – his attempt to organize the *Bach* or *Wagner Festspiele* in Namibia – Schlingensiefel makes the decision to rewrite the project as a succession of different remakes. Yet, even before it gains any systematicity, this intention vanishes too; the only obvious – but nevertheless very partial – remake the audience is able to recognize is the approximate restaging of some scenes of the cult B movie *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (Russ Meyer, 1965) or of Conrad Rooks' autobiographical *Chappaqua* (1966). Finally, what looks like a DVD-bonus of a disjointed movie, also leaves viewers with the undeniable fact that the original film will forever remain missing. To put it in a nutshell, Schlingensiefel's *The African Twin Towers* is a chaotic 'making-of documentary' of a project that never existed at all, at least in a conventional filmic version. Unlike the famous *Lost in La Mancha* (Keith Fulton & Louis Pepe, 2002) about Terry Gilliam's aborted project, or Herzog's mesmerizing

Fata Morgana (1971) that came out of a failed film shoot, *The African Twin Towers* is not the sublimating vestige of a failure; it is the staging of this very failure.

One could argue that this filmed diary is, as other previous films by the same director, a work about destruction, and specifically a film about the destruction of conventional cinema and its production tools and methods: the script is lost after a few days of the film shoot and, instead of directing his actors, Schlingensief runs around the set, shouting barely understandable instructions at them. Further, a casting that is haphazardly organized after several days, turns out to be a useless pastiche of improvised auditions. Finally, the director himself confesses that he probably never knew what this entire project was actually about. Facing such an apparently unstructured chaos, cinephile spectators or analysts are led to conclude that Schlingensief's film should be included in a history of aesthetic and political subversion based on the irreverent rejection and destruction of past and actual conventions, of professional technological tools, of German film history, and certainly of the artistic legacy of New German cinema every German director has had to cope with since the eighties.⁹

However, suppressing our perplexity in that way would make us miss the point that beyond his destructive/subversive gesture, the director of *The African Twin Towers* is still a superior, omniscient commentator who, via a voice-over recorded three years after the chaotic shoot, contextualizes and reads his pictures, sometimes in an amused manner, sometimes in a distressed tone. If this film is about the destruction of conventional cinema (whatever this may mean), it nevertheless relies on the position of an ironical, superior, and sometimes apparently cynical director. In short, in Schlingensief's film the destruction of conventional cinema implies the preservation of the classical designer and orchestrator of this destruction.¹⁰

It is this very opposition between the destruction of ordinary cinematographic and historical conventions on the one hand, and the preservation of a superior director or orchestrator on the other hand, that I would like to challenge in the present paper. For this purpose, I will first identify some of the many ironical references to other films which *The African Twin Towers* is saturated with: by examining these, I will see if the hypothesis of a superior director who consciously plays around with film history, canonic art, and classical conventions of auctorial representation through intertextual moves can be confirmed. In the second part of the paper, these references will be re-evaluated through an extended analysis of what is being represented in the scenes in which Fassbinder's iconic actress Irm Hermann plays a leading role. This analysis reconsiders Schlingensief's last film as a crucial non-fictional representation of his characters' and actors' bodies and challenges the assumption of him being a cynical director. In the third and last part of this essay, I will look more closely at a central and very tangible motif in the film: the wrapping,

veiling and covering of the bodies present on the screen. This motif will enable me to circumscribe what conception of reality the director in fact advocates, assuming the image of a superior, cynical or, at least, ironical author is now rejected.

All three sections of this text will be introduced by a simple but nevertheless crucial question to help explore what *The African Twin Towers* is about. The question is this: if *The African Twin Towers* is a documentary, what does it show?

SATURATION, IRONY AND THE CYNICAL SPECTATOR

One way to answer this apparently straightforward question is to recall once again we are dealing with a film that is constituted by dense web of references and variations on intertextual allusions. These range from direct topical quotes from Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) (Schlingensiefel wants to build a rotating ship-opera stage in the Namibian desert) to a sardonic homage to Fassbinder's approach of a shoot that has gone wrong (*Warnung vor einer heiligen Nutte*, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1971). Pictures range from those akin to *Fata Morgana* to ambiguous references to pop culture: for example, the bombshell of the unexpected appearance of Patti Smith towards the end of the film. Likewise, sources range from Germanic mythological texts to opaque allusions to the events of 9/11. As a consequence, *The African Twin Towers* can easily induce a reflexive stance: the analyst in search for readability will first consider Schlingensiefel's film as a web of intertextual references that desacralize or demystify the director's artistic, historical and political influences and backgrounds.

However, rather than identify each quote or allusion, I would like to highlight the process of quoting itself. I will do this by focusing on one of the most recurrent references in *The African Twin Towers*, namely Werner Herzog's visual work. My aim is not only to show how Schlingensiefel's saturated web of allusions eventually sets him in a mocking position towards the famous director, but also to outline the kind of spectators such a position tends to encourage.

As previously mentioned, Schlingensiefel wants to transport an old ship through the Namibian desert and to construct his rotating stage in a forsaken post-colonial environment. Therefore, he seeks the help of local participants who do not seem to understand what all this is about. The reference to Fitzcarraldo's project is obvious.¹¹ However, Schlingensiefel pushes the allusions to Herzog's oeuvre further by disseminating numerous secondary hints in his film. Among others, I can mention the permanent presence of a dwarf, who is artificially sexualized by a grotesque and self-negating latex catsuit; the carnival-like processions Schlingensiefel tries to stage with barely controllable locals; and a car that drives in circles around the actors with the purpose to surround

the crew with Wagner's *Rheingold*. Each of these ideas are recurrent themes in Herzog's cinema. This demystifying play with references reaches a kind of climax in Schlingensief's statement about the overall project of his film: "It's what we're doing here, taking the mountain across the boat" he declares in his voice-over commentary. With this short sentence, the director not only mocks Herzog's 1982 feature film; he also demystifies the very basis of his quest for fictional authenticity by increasing *ad absurdum* the director's attempts to blur the distinction between reality (of the film shoot) and realism.

All these references to *Auch Zwerge haben klein angefangen* (1971), *Stroszeck* (1972), *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), *Cobra Verde* (1987) and other Herzog films, undergo a process of estrangement due to multiple transformations, distortions and exaggerations. As a consequence, Schlingensief appears as the irreverent heir of some leading figures of the so called New German Cinema, an ambiguous role the director born in Oberhausen in 1960 has repeatedly embraced throughout his career.¹² Furthermore, his disrespectful stance towards some canonic elements of film history is also echoed in other polemical stances towards his own country's historiography. To take but one example, Schlingensief reimports the highly politicized "total work of art" of Wagner (that can become Bach as well in the film) along with the history-laden character of Hagen von Tronje in the former German and Lutheran colony of Lüderitz. In doing so, he puts back into play some key elements of German history and culture in order to create a historical multilayered and sometimes ideologically obscene chaos that seems to come straight out of the overloaded memory of an amnesic or blind creator. Indeed, by explicitly addressing the elephant in the room of German nationalism and colonization, without even seeming to be aware that there is an elephant, Schlingensief plays an awkward, clumsy and simple-minded western author who does not understand how inconvenient his behaviour is.

The cinephile spectators of *The African Twin Towers* may react to this mess of irreverent and politically incorrect allusions in one of two ways. The first is that they may feel distinctly uncomfortable with the naive freedom of the director since this deprives them of the possibility of the use of irony in shying away from major issues in political or historical terms. Observing Schlingensief running around as a German director in Lüderitz, wearing a safari-like cowboy hat and making fun of unemployed locals who dream of a better future in the Western film industry, could be considered to be extremely problematic. This reaction has credibility: Schlingensief's creations have always generated radical disapproval.

The second reaction to *The African Twin Towers* is one where spectators will play the game and share a knowing smile with its creator, enjoying the free, provocative and iconoclastic references to various cultural and political legacies. As a corollary, those spectators will resist any

primary or first-degree reception of the film and just relish the experience of being part of a particularly complex and satisfying patchwork of countless historical and intertextual threads.

Clearly, it is almost impossible to draw a demarcation line between disapproval of and amused commitment to Schlingensiefel's provocative creations: throughout his career, his theatre plays, performances and films often met with ambiguous receptions that contributed to the director's international success. Nevertheless, in what follows I would like to focus on the second of these reactions, one which can easily be linked to a broader postmodernist paradigm. Indeed, the pastiche-like homage to some authors, the historical trivializing allusions, and the pervasive mix of lower and higher cultural references (for example, the encounter of *Fitzcarraldo* and *Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*) seem to call for a reception of the film that focuses on the work's self-reflexivity and the self-sufficient complicity between director and spectators.¹³ Yet, in order to avoid endless debates on postmodernist cinema and, most importantly, to reflect on the political implications of such a reception, I would like to read this complicity in the light of another theoretical framework, one that enables us to better assess how far the ironical distortion of references actually calls for *cynical* spectators.

In his first long philosophical essay, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Peter Sloterdijk describes contemporary society as marked by a generalized cynicism, a statement that echoes – and tears to pieces – the Adornian diagnosis of a “generalized coldness,”¹⁴ a cynicism that cannot be opposed by the preservation of a sentient and suffering subject anymore.¹⁵ According to Sloterdijk, his time is indeed marked by a counter-critical generalized “knowing smile,” a “false consciousness” with which every subject can resist a too complex reality:

It is the universally widespread way in which enlightened people see to it that they are not taken for suckers. There even seems to be something healthy in this attitude, which, after all, the will to self-preservation generally supports. [...] Cynicism is enlightened false consciousness. It is that modernized, unhappy consciousness, on which enlightenment has labored both successfully and in vain. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to, put them into practice. Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered.¹⁶

Sloterdijk describes the modern cynical subjects as social actors who have learnt to live in contemporary society, not *despite of*, but *thanks to* its assumed contradictions. They have learned to adapt to society by resisting and voluntarily suppressing every attack of some higher critique.

Their strategy is simple: by knowing that they are intellectually able to activate this critique whenever they want to, they actually never do. As a result, they can be described as schizoid figures which survive thanks to a permanent contradiction or inner conflict that does not affect their moral solidity or capacity of (re)action anymore. According to the philosopher, modern cynicism as a generalized tool of self-oppression can thus nip critique and emancipation in the bud since the modern cynic is able to cope with any fundamental contradiction:

Cynicism proceeds by way of a diffusion of the subject of knowledge, so that the present-day servant of the system can very well do with the right hand what the left hand never allowed. By day, colonizer, at night, colonized; by occupation, valorizer and administrator, during leisure time, valorized and administered; officially a cynical functionary, privately a sensitive soul; at the office a giver of orders, ideologically a discussant; outwardly a follower of the reality principle, inwardly a subject oriented toward pleasure; [...]. With the enlightened integrated person – in this world of clever, instinctive conformists – the body says no to the compulsions of the head, and the head says no to the way in which the body procures its comfortable self-preservation. This mixture is our moral status quo.¹⁷

Needless to say, a thorough understanding of the subtle distinctions between postmodern irony and cynical reason should be theorized at some point. This would help identify how political (or indeed unpolitical) postmodernist spectators – insofar as such a heterogeneous category could be circumscribed – can remain.¹⁸ However, in the limited framework of this article, I would like to suggest that the spectators of *The African Twin Towers* can become “modern cynics” when they engage with Schlingensief’s play with cultural references. Like the modern cynical subject, they are indeed able to position themselves ambiguously and to deal ironically with their own critical conscience. They know that they are not fooled by the author’s provocative treatment of German history and cultural references, but for this very reason, they are also in a position in which their higher awareness makes it possible for them to play along with the director. To put it simply: they share a “knowing laughter” with the author that pushes them out of any real critical reflexive process.¹⁹ Consequently, one could say that the spectators’ critical and reflexive handling of the potentially polemical historical and ideological components of *The African Twin Towers* is a major facilitating factor of the status quo.²⁰

It is certainly the case that several works by Christoph Schlingensief, if not the majority, rely on the critical potential of recycling and ironically exceeding cultural references.²¹ Indeed, as previously shown, *The African Twin Towers* is no exception to this rule. Through exacerbation, de-

or transfiguration, and grotesque restaging of cultural canonical references of modern film history, Schlingensiefel explores an approach that departs both from some major documentary traditions and from a part of the film history to which he inevitably belongs himself.

In this first section of my article, I have argued that such a playing around with a cultural heritage runs the risk of feeding the spectators' passivity and promoting a self-misled consciousness. However, beside the fact that in my own experience of the film something has definitely resisted a cynical reception, encouraging me to persevere with my search for another possible understanding of Schlingensiefel's last documentary, this first approach to the film creates a twofold problem. First, it ignores Schlingensiefel's assertion that an artwork should never be a matter of "Textverständlichkeit" (text comprehensibility), as he claimed metaphorically in one of his numerous interviews with Alexander Kluge.²² Secondly, and more decisively, reading *The African Twin Towers* as a postmodern documentary that calls for cynical spectators, would equally miss the point: Schlingensiefel's creative process has always been driven by the primary belief that every artistic performance can change our experience of life, as he stated a couple of months before his death in an interview for the German television program *Aspekte* (2010).²³ Hence, in order to understand how the film can be understood, in spite of its apparently self-sufficient and (self-) iconoclastic reflexivity, I will try to answer this very simple question again in the next section: what does the film actually show? This time, however, I will switch my focus from the obvious saturation and superposition of cultural references to another process of saturation which is visually central to the documentary: the multiple coverings of bodies by clothes, accessories and makeup.

IRM HERMANN UNVEILED

After a mysterious opening shot showing a man with a wig walking along the edge of a cliff in the Namibian desert, the first scene of the film introduces the spectator to the private apartment of the director a couple of hours before the film crew takes off. At this moment, his living-room is still a disarray of hundreds of costumes. Schlingensiefel comments:

I don't know. I'm excited, we're starting soon. Costumes? [addressing an assistant] What's this? The place is a mess! Who's been here? What a mess. Crazy. [voice-over] Shall I say what this is? My place, Schwedter Strasse, the living room. There is stuff everywhere. Aino has dumped everything here, the costumes to take along.

This focus on costumes in the first scene introduces the theme of the second. After having tried to discuss a first sketch of his script that mixes up German mythology and a complex oppositional encounter between the Wagner and the Bach families in a VIP lounge of the airport, Schlingensiefel accompanies his crew to the departure lounge. Nobody seems to know exactly where to go or what to do. But again, despite the chaos that prevails, the director thinks the situation is worth filming. Indeed, in his voice-over commentary, he elaborates on the oddest element of the scene: while waiting, the actors are wearing costumes.

It was important that they act out their roles in costume and were filmed during preparation and while we were thinking things up. So I look like the sloppy director from a really bad movie here. Running around like that is embarrassing enough. Embarrassment is part of exposing yourself to hardship, not knowing the part you're going to play.

According to my first approach to the film, this quite grotesque opening of *The African Twin Towers* can be read as a new mockery of Werner Herzog's (and several modern authors') immersive method to reach authenticity or a higher degree of realism by blurring the boundaries between staged fiction and the reality of the set. Moreover, it also mocks some star-directors – Schlingensiefel mentions Verhoeven and Wenders while entering the plane wearing a cowboy hat and a silk scarf – who tend to cultivate a recognizable public appearance. However, the centrality of costumes right from the start also points to other costumes, wigs, face-paintings and eye patches that abound in the film and encourages me to contemplate the opening scene with a broader interpretative scope. Schlingensiefel indeed saturates the entire film with all kinds of body covering accessories and techniques. As a consequence, every actor is exposed to a process of estrangement that turns her or him into a grotesque character. For example, Karin Witt, in the role of the mythological dwarf Edda, becomes an unlikely S&M mistress, while Norbert Losch, embodying Hagen von Tronje, has to wear an eye-patch. The director himself is no exception to the rule, as he is totally ridiculed by his explorer-cowboy-reporter costume. This abundance of different costumes reaches a climax in a scene which shows Schlingensiefel running around among shouting children in an impoverished suburb of Lüderitz while wearing a penguin costume. This scene will be further explored later on in the article.

In the light of my first reading of the film, this profusion of costumes could be understood as just another expression of the multiple layers of representations and references. Indeed, at first sight, the bodies of Schlingensiefel's characters undergo a destructive process of covering: once again, this profusion could be said to turn a critical satire into an uncritical pastiche, a process that

might confirm the director's and his complicit spectators' cynical postures. However, following the dialectical structure I have previously introduced, I would like to explore another hypothesis which is based on a possible resistance to the cynical posture this saturation seems to induce. In order to achieve this, I will concentrate in the rest of this section on the fate of one specific actress in the film, Irm Hermann. Best known as being Fassbinder's iconic star, she embodies the German cinematographic heritage Schlingensief mockes and partly destroys in his film. In this way, she can be perceived as a living reference.

In *The African Twin Towers*, Irm Hermann has to wear different costumes. Some of them seem to suit her well and come into line with her slow way of moving in every possible situation; such costumes, nevertheless, emphasize her odd presence as a kind of lost bourgeois tourist or carnival queen in various improbable film locations. This treatment of the former star of New German Cinema goes hand in hand with a general process of ridicule that is particularly highlighted in one scene, shot in a bar, and which is introduced by the director's statement that he "mistrusts conventional cinema." Schlingensief's commentary displays his mocking and superior posture towards his own pictures and the actors he has almost fooled:

There are films that leave a deep impression, but I can't stand these German films from the nineties and eighties which are so pretentious desperately trying for authenticity. I don't believe in that at all.

Then he goes on with an ambiguous statement about the possible link between the grotesque and (in)authenticity:

Authenticity...inauthenticity can be just letting go of yourself... Look at that. Irm Hermann wouldn't put that on her casting tape. I often produce images no actor would put in his casting tape.

In other scenes, however, this transformation into a grotesque character produces an effect that goes far beyond the sole superior mockery of an almighty director. The effect is jarring and sits uneasily with the audience. In this respect, Hermann's appearances in spandex leggings during Schlingensief's desperate restaging of some scenes of the erotic action film *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* are startling. Putting it mildly, Irm Hermann's transformation into Tura Satana is a complete failure. Instead of reminding us of the energetic but trashy ex-gogo dancer, her appearances in the remake scenes of Russ Meyer's cult film draw our attention to the incongruity of her presence,

accentuating her phlegmatic way of moving and her typical Bavarian accent. Furthermore, in contrast with a postmodernist Tarantino-like recycling of older popular references, Schlingensiefel's repeated casting of the famous actress with too tight clothes and filmic allusions to characters she obviously cannot embody anymore, has one concrete effect: the spectator is confronted with the crude reality of Irm Hermann's aging body. To put it shortly, by covering and dressing her body in inappropriate clothes, Schlingensiefel manages to expose her. As a consequence, if spectators still share a knowing laughter with the director, they also must deal with the profilmic coarse reality of her body.²⁴

On at least one occasion, this resistance to a cynical reception of the film is confirmed by the actress herself. During the shooting of one of Russ Meyer's scenes, she interrupts her performance, filled with shame:

I think I'll go mad soon. I'm ready for the loony bin. Really. Really. It's so embarrassing! This is no use for me. I'll be ruined for life. I can't go on with this.

Of course, this interruption won't last long, and soon, the actress goes on with the filming. Yet through her refusal to play the part any longer, Hermann has temporarily become a distancing commentator of her situation. In so doing, she has adopted a posture that until that moment was held only by Schlingensiefel himself.

In sum, we can identify three steps. First, Irm Hermann is a body steeped in (her) film history. Second, this total identification of the actress as an individual with her film history is destroyed and replaced with a new role: she is now repeatedly dressed in unexpected and ill-suited clothes (referring to films she never played in) and is required to act in an artificial and grotesque manner. Third, this immersion in her new role finally reveals what has all the time existed under her multiple representations of herself: her body. In *The African Twin Towers*, the former Fassbinder actress is thus a palimpsest which undergoes a paradoxical process of unveiling through the multiple veils she carries with her.

At this juncture, then, a second way of answering the central question "what does the film show?" could thus simply be: real bodies, paradoxically revealed in their primary concrete and visual nature through the considered use of multiple coverings. Needless to say, this new understanding of the film flies in the face of a classical postmodernist approach. Yet I am confident that the above analysis of Irm Hermann's appearances in *The African Twin Towers* sheds a new light on the first contradiction between the free destruction of conventional film and the preservation of a superior position as orchestrator of this destruction. Although Schlingensiefel frees

himself of his German modern cinematographic legacy through his mocking treatment of Hermann, her body, replete with her film history, is also an element of resistance: it has the capacity to question Schlingensiefel's superiority. Irrespective of the authenticity of Irm Hermann's refusal to fulfill the erratic intentions of the director, these moments of resistance indeed tackle the director's ability to play ironically with all the references and bodies he has decided to put in his film.

In this second section of my article, I have suggested that the complex treatment of Irm Hermann in the film undermines the credibility of the counter-productive cynical approach. Hermann's resistance to the superior orders of an almighty director shows that the potentially cynical message generated by an overloading of references is thrown into doubt by the exposition, or the "baring" effect, this overloading finally leads to.²⁵ However, if this resistance to a cynical play with the past and its norms partly prevents the knowing-laughter cinephile spectators could share with a superior director, it is nevertheless the result of an authorial choice, one which confirms rather than weakens Schlingensiefel's control of the film. This being so, in the last part of this text I would like to further find out if the director also exposes himself through a similar process of veiling and unveiling. This is a final piece of evidence which I present in order to disprove the validity of the cynical approach. To that end, I will take a closer look at the director's role itself by formulating a third version of my recurring question: what does the director show of himself? Does he remain untouched by the chaotic covering and uncovering of references, clothes and roles? Or is he exposed too, deprived of his superior and mocking power over his actresses and actors, as well as the entire cultural legacy he has decided to shake off?

SELF-ESTRANGEMENT

In the middle of the film, Schlingensiefel's Namibian enterprise documented by *The African Twin Towers* is about to collapse. The director leaves his collaborators, confesses that the entire project was a mistake, and calls his assistant to suggest that all crew members should go home. Staged or authentic, this scene advocates the total failure of his project. In view of Schlingensiefel's characteristic obstinacy, and despite the mess the film is since its very start, this surrender hits the spectators as a surprise. Interestingly, this moment of total despair is simultaneous with the director's decision to take off the costumes he has worn until then: wigs, hats and other accessories are discarded. In ordinary clothes, he finally walks to a deserted coast. Once more, this scene reminds us of Werner Herzog's cinema, more precisely of Cobra Verde's final attempt to drag an impossibly heavy boat into the waves before abandoning himself to the African sea. But, despite its high level of intertextuality, both filmic and symbolic, this scene also resists purely referring

either to the film itself or to German cinema more generally. As a matter of fact, the director leaves the spectator with an authentic and somehow awkward feeling that he is actually really collapsing. This feeling is partly determined by Schlingensiefel's voice-over. Until this moment, his filmed monologues straight to the camera and the comments he recorded in 2008 were either separated (see, for example, his first statement about the possible failure of the project)²⁶ or countered through distancing contrapuntal contrasts, as his comment of the penguin scene shows:

All this pressure to have to tell a story and my own refusal... I didn't want to incite anti-colonialism. I don't want to make a film against colonial times, as I'd earlier told some press lady, that I was intending to say sorry to the Herero. Who do I think I am? See the Herero and say sorry for German crimes? It would make the headlines, that's it. I increasingly reject all that. Playing the fool, like in this silly penguin costume. It all plays a part. I could have used an actor. All this self-rejection, making a fool of oneself... It's not fatalistic or lethargic, though.

But when he finally interrupts the filming to walk alone to the sea, his commentary doesn't induce any ironical or self-distancing posture towards his footage anymore:

I increasingly withdrew, abandoned the team. Didn't get on with the cameraman anymore, then I went off into the desert with one of the camera ladies where I shot my own piece of film, which expressed how there was no point in going on. [calling his assistant on the phone; voice becomes "in"] Hi, it's me. Just wanted to say that I'm aborting the film... Just tell them they can pack up and leave. I've had it. There's no point in going on. I can't tell any stories. I don't want to look out for images to illustrate something.

When Schlingensiefel abandons the entire project, it is to shoot "[his] own piece of film." This verbalisation of his intention unambiguously reveals that the director can no longer identify with the role he was performing up until that moment. As a corollary, the enunciator who inflicted his ironical treatment on film history, cultural references, actors and finally on himself, no longer exists. The mocking director is unveiled; too many layers of conventions, requirements, and destructive mockery have finally exposed him. Over-immersion in his own ironic strategies has finally turned him into a bare, helpless and devastated man who cannot help but acknowledge that his refusal to accept some dramatic conventions was a way of hiding his inability to tell any stories. This shift from a superior commentator towards a basically despairing character is finally summed

up in Schlingensief's observation that he feels as if he is in the wrong place. This feeling of hopelessness is compounded by the news that his father is seriously ill. The director, lost in Africa, struggles to reach him by phone:

Even here I feel like the commissioner of misery. You can't cope with circumstances. You haven't prepared properly. You didn't determine the takes. You haven't done your homework hoping to find something incredible... Just as you start losing control... And with dad falling ill... And all these reasons to say: You poor guy!

In this seemingly final statement, Schlingensief confesses that he has failed to behave like a conventional film director. On the level of conventional film, nothing has emerged from his destructive gesture except the fact that his refusal of the classical role as a film director throws him into despair. However, this crucial moment of self-estrangement or dispossession of both his ability to play the role of a "good director" who has done "his homework," and his inability to be *another* kind of director, is suddenly interrupted by Patti Smith's unexpected arrival. The director welcomes the singer, his entire body covered with wet sand, and apologizes for having forgotten to take off his shoes. Interestingly, although he cries and explains how everything went wrong, Schlingensief seems at this moment to go beyond his crisis of self-estrangement. Patti Smith comforts her friend by reflecting philosophically on his feeling of spatial and temporal inadequacy. "Sometimes you are present and not present at all" she says. This observation seems to get the creative process back on track as the director finally announces: "And now, I show you the ship." This moment of rebirth, however, cannot be equated with a return to the director's initial superior position. Indeed, from now until the end of the film, he is no longer an exterior commentator who can ironically or critically look down at his pictures and actors. He has become a character who has undergone a process of total weakening and baring. He resumes his creative work convinced that sometimes it is better to be "not present at all."

I would like to suggest that through the successive processes of total immersion of self with cultural references or filmic roles, and corollary unveiling, Schlingensief stages himself in his last film as an artist who struggles with his own inadequacy: he expresses his own feelings of displacement and self-marginalization. In the words of Edward W. Said: he develops a *late style*.²⁷ We can, indeed, understand that *The African Twin Towers* is neither the climax of an ironical gesture, nor the breakdown of a subversive method that has become cynical in the sense used by Sloterdijk and which feeds the status quo. It is much more a moment of confrontation in which an author, instead of reaching his artistic maturity, tries to free himself. This attempt at escape is not

only from all artistic legacies, but also from his own institutionalization (and the risk of his subsequent transformation into an apolitical, cynical author). This final hypothesis enables me to reformulate my basic question. If the film shows the struggle of a filmmaker who tries to make a documentary while being oppressed by conventions and expectations, the question should thus be: what can a documentary show of a world in which every documentary approach, every character, every situation and every creative process is already laden with history, multiple references and pictures?

CODA

At the end of the film, in a retrospective monologue, Schlingensiefel imagines that a day will come when archeologists may unearth the remains of his “animatograph” and his ship:

Archaeologists will then excavate this place with bits of food and a boat, and they’ll say, ok, there’s been a river where boats could navigate. So this project can be used to distort history and produce a greater truth than the mind can process. That’s why it defies beauty. Because you can’t find closure.

Intentionally or not, the director’s words echo the closing scene of *Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* (Werner Herzog, 1972), when the conquistador raves on his raft, filmed by a circling camera, imagining that he will marry his own daughter before “stag[ing] history like others stage plays.” At first glance, Schlingensiefel’s reflection on the possible falsification of history seems far-fetched and entirely determined by a kind of self-confident pathos. Moreover, this reflection is immediately negated by the last pictures of the film which accompany the end credits: it now becomes obvious that the *Animatograph*, along with the Namibian ship, was finally moved to a Western theater stage, the Burgtheater in Vienna. However, another understanding of his final statement is possible if we consider it as a way of putting, for one last time, a complex link with Herzog into play.

On one level, this final commentary refers to Herzog’s singular conception of filmic authenticity. The Bavarian director has repeatedly argued that his way of shooting films is opposed to other, modern forms of non-fiction films; he claims that his way expresses a higher degree of truth. To put it shortly, although Herzog may dismiss the suggestion, it can be said that he allows himself to transfigure recorded facts in the name of what he repeatedly called “ecstatic truth,”²⁸ a creative process that is obviously self-centered. In contrast, Schlingensiefel imagines that future significations of parts of his project do not belong to his creative work, but will be initiated by

others. Yet although the beliefs of Herzog and Schlingensief are opposed, they nevertheless both respond to one and the same quest for another order of authenticity and significance.

On a second, more general level, however, Schlingensief's final statement acknowledges that the signification of a representation can always be imagined anew. This is certainly true for the numerous references the director has distorted and mocked in *The African Twin Towers* in order to break with, as well as to perpetuate, a certain cinematographic, cultural and historical legacy. It also, however, applies to his own creations.

One last time: what can a documentary show? In this final stage of the analysis, I should now add a finer focus to the question, so that it now becomes: what can a documentary show when it has already been preceded by countless representations that ineluctably mediate our understanding of the real? This question has led other directors and intellectuals to posit a postmodernist paradigm, and the answer remains uncertain. Yet the search for an answer, as documented in this article, has eventually resulted in a simple conception of documentary cinema: the signification of every image will remain beyond the control of its designer and gain multiple significations over time. For this reason, documentary cinema should never be a matter of *Textverständlichkeit*, because every misinterpretation can be the vector of its survival through the ages. Without doubt, this conception is anything but cynical, because it negates the possibility of a final signification one could share with an almighty director, albeit blurred, ironical or self-referential. To that extent, *The African Twin Towers* can be understood as the cinematic (anti-)testament left by Schlingensief before his death. It problematizes the idea of an artistic legacy while showing, through a self-reflexive gesture that radically exposes the director as an uncertain and fragile creator, that the very idea of legacy should be reshaped. As a matter of fact, this (anti-)testament encourages us to think of documentary representation as a permanent *late style*, deprived of any final signification: it is a representation that is never at peace with itself because it continuously acknowledges an inadequacy to its time. For this very reason, it remains deeply political.

¹ The author wants to thank Lison Jousten (University of Liège) for her crucial contribution to the drafting of this text.

² Before joining the neo-Nazi party NPD, the lawyer Horst Mahler made his name in the early 1970s as one of the founders of the terrorist left radical group "Rote Armee Fraktion".

³ Reinhold Oberlercher is a far right essayist who started his political career as a leader of the far left students association SDS before becoming one of Germany's leading far right intellectuals.

⁴ The "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler" was a unit of the Waffen SS in charge of Adolf Hitler's personal protection.

⁵ Jörg Haider was an Austrian politician, founder of the conservative party BZÖ. He built part of his political success on populist, nationalist and xenophobic statements.

⁶ Erich Böhme, Christoph Schlingensiefel, *Grüner Salon*, n-tv, October 11, 1999, video, 00:02, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLctMayFURI>.

⁷ See e.g. : Sarah Hegenbart, “Psychic Interiors : Christoph Schlingensiefel’s Animatograph,” in *Art of Wagnis. Christoph Schlingensiefel’s Crossing of Wagner and Africa*, ed. Fabian Lehmann, Nadine Siegert, and Ulf Vierke (Vienna: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2017) 89-100 ; Mirjam Schaub, “Burrowing into the Global Context : Schlingensiefel’s *Animatograph*, Read through Aristotle and Hegel,” in *Figura Cuncta Videntis. The All-Seeing Eye. Homage to Christoph Schlingensiefel*, ed. Eva Ebersberger, Daniela Zyman (Cologne: König, 2011), 31-51 ; Roman Berka, *Christoph Schlingensiefel’s Animatograph. Zum Raum wird hier die Zeit* (Vienna : Springer, 2011).

⁸ One of the few exceptions is Georg Seeßlen’s fascinating monograph *Der Filmemacher Christoph Schlingensiefel*. Georg Seeßlen, *Der Filmemacher Christoph Schlingensiefel* (Berlin : Getidan, 2015).

⁹ David Ashley Hughes, “Everything in Excess. Christoph Schlingensiefel and the Crisis of the German Left”, *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 81, no. 4 (2006): 319-22, <https://doi.org/10.3200/GERR.81.4.317-339>.

¹⁰ Following Anna Teresa Scheer’s analysis of the early theater play *100 Jahre CDU* (1993), this “role as a master of ceremonies who oversees his theatrical spectacle” is at the roots of Schlingensiefel’s artistic and subversive work. But, unlike Scheer who argues that the author “encourag[es] situations in which the performers, including himself, lose control so that the ‘real’ momentarily eclipses the theatrical,” I would like to question the contradiction that emerges from the double game he plays when destroying and nevertheless preserving the very basis of the creative process. Anna Teresa Scheer, *Christoph Schlingensiefel. Staging Chaos, Performing Politics and Theatrical Phantasmagoria* (London: Methuen, 2018), 75.

¹¹ In April 2007, Schlingensiefel followed again in Herzog’s/Fitzcarraldo’s footsteps and directed Wagner’s *Flying Dutchman* at the Teatro Amazonas in Manaus.

¹² Schlingensiefel has regularly worked with iconic actors of New German Cinema (Volker Spengler, Margit Carstensen, Alfred Edel, Norbert Losch a.o.). He considered his polemical movie *Die 120 Tage von Bottrop* (1997) as an eccentric homage to Fassbinder. Additionally, he repeatedly claimed that his films were part of the tradition of New German Cinema. Georg Seeßlen, “Vom barbarischen Film zur nomadischen Politik,” in *Schlingensiefel! Notruf für Deutschland: Über die Mission, das Theater und die Welt des Christoph Schlingensiefel*, ed. Julia Lochte, Wilfried Schulz (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 1998), 40-78.

¹³ In his 2005 critique about the project that will later give rise to *The African Twin Towers*, Thilo Thielke describes the director as someone who “gets high on himself” and is “doped by autologous blood.” Thilo Thielke, “Dada. Die Wüste lebt!,” *Der Spiegel*, November 21, 2005, 143.

¹⁴ This diagnosis underlies his 1966 seminal radio lecture “Education After Auschwitz.” In a letter to Alexander Kluge, Adorno mentions a never actually completed project, asserting that he is about to write an essay about coldness, a topic that “concerns [him] increasingly.” Theodor W. Adorno, letter to Alexander Kluge (13 May 1967), partially reproduced in: Alexander Kluge, “Vorwort,” in *Stroh im Eis* [booklet of *Wer sich traut reißt die Kälte vom Pferd*] (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), 4; Theodor W. Adorno, “Education After Auschwitz”, in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 191-204.

¹⁵ On Sloterdijk’s critique of the sentient and suffering subject as a basis of Critical Theory, see a.o. : Jeremy Hamers, “Au-delà de l’exil : la critique cynique de Peter Sloterdijk,” in *Le discours « néo-réactionnaire »*, ed. Pascal Durand, Sarah Sindaco (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2015), 347-58.

¹⁶ Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* [1983], trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 5.

¹⁷ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 113.

¹⁸ Again, I do not intend to investigate the obvious but also sometimes hidden links between a hypothetical postmodern subject and the modern cynical. Yet, to be sure, if the spectator of Schlingensiefel is a modern cynical subject, *The African Twin Towers* could be read as a parody “amputated of the satiric impulse,” that is to say a *pastiche*, according to Jameson’s famous distinction. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 17.

¹⁹ At first sight, this “knowing laughter” is inconsistent with Jameson’s observation about the *pastiche* that is “devoid of laughter.” However, the laughter my text is concerned with can actually be understood as a symptom of what Jameson called a “blank parody,” that is to say a parody without any source object. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 18.

²⁰ In the previously mentioned *Spiegel* article (see endnote 13), Thilo Thielke ends up presenting Schlingensiefel himself as absolutely able to compromise, a rebel but perfectly adapted to the norm, reminding

us of Sloterdijk's metaphorical description of the cynical subject: "[T]he present-day servant of the system can very well do with the right hand what the left hand never allowed." Thielke, "Dada. Die Wüste lebt!," 145; Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 113.

²¹ To take but one example, his very controversial performance *Bitte liebt Österreich* (2000) is based, as Tara Forrest has argued, on the critical translation of the *Big Brother* narrative into a methodology of migration policy, with the obvious purpose to turn the audience participation these programs latently generate into a new participation in the political debate. Furthermore, in her enlightening analysis of the film *Freakstars 3000* (2004), Forrest also tackles the issue of the possible conflict between political engagement and humor, reminding us of the fact that Schlingensiefel himself has explicitly problematized the risk of becoming a funny entertainer and thus an agent of the status quo. Tara Forrest, *Realism as Protest. Kluge, Schlingensiefel, Haneke* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015), 69-115.

²² Christoph Schlingensiefel, "In erster Linie bin ich Filmemacher! Begegnung mit Christoph Schlingensiefel," interview by Alexander Kluge, *10 vor 11*, dctp.tv, December 4, 2006, video, 12:55, <https://www.dctp.tv/filme/ich-bin-erster-linie-filmemacher/>. In this talk, Schlingensiefel also implicitly questions another tenet in my first reading of the film. According to him, handling memory is indeed first of all a matter of oblivion, deformation and transformation, as well as reconstructing new "synapses" between past elements. Schlingensiefel, Kluge, interview, 06:20.

²³ Christoph Schlingensiefel, "Ich will mein Sterben aushalten," interview, *Aspekte*, ZDF, April 17, 2009, video, 05:24, https://www.schlingensiefel.com/mediathek/flashvideo2.php?type=f4v&b=640&h=360&id=20090417_zdf_aspekte_640x360.

²⁴ Other scenes I won't develop further in this text also refer to this process of recovering the actor's bodies not only with different materials (see, for instance, the bar scene wherein the director runs from one actor to the next while sprinkling baby talc on their inert bodies) but also with older representations. The casting scene introduced by Stefan Kolosko explaining that he is looking for "Condoleezza Rice, George W. Bush, Osama Bin Laden" and others, is another example of the omnipresent motif of covered bodies by prefigured representations.

²⁵ Alexander Kluge reminds us of the modern perspective that underlies Schlingensiefel's reworking of postmodern forms in his foreword to *Christoph Schlingensiefel: Art Without Borders*: "Schlingensiefel is open to all postmodern expressive forms, he likes to draw on this reservoir, but he grinds it through the mills of the modern." Alexander Kluge, "Foreword," in *Christoph Schlingensiefel: Art Without Borders*, ed. Tara Forrest, Anna Teresa Scheer (Chicago: Intellect, The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 1.

²⁶ Lying on his bed, staring into his handheld amateur camera, he declares: "Total blackout in my head. It was stupid to try to create some kind of causality and tell a story. Kills of all the fun. Ruins everything."

²⁷ Following Said's reading of Adorno's reflection on the "Spätstil Beethovens," late works are symptomatic of a refusal of serene harmony that usually characterizes maturity. Fragmentary, unfinished and sometimes tormented, these works stay clear of their own present time and try to survive in a state of exile. Edward W. Said, *On Late Style. Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 6-8; Theodor W. Adorno, "Late Style in Beethoven" [1937], in *Essays on Music*, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 564-68.

²⁸ Moreover, Schlingensiefel's closing commentary reminds us in multiple other ways of Werner Herzog's numerous statements about greater or higher truths in documentary cinema, for instance in his seminal manifesto "Minnesota Declaration." Earlier in the film, when Schlingensiefel complained about his "stupid[ity] to try to create some kind of causality and tell a story," he also declared that he felt "like some civil servant ['Verwaltungsbeamter'] working off his chores," a comparison that unavoidably reminds us of Herzog's denial of what he calls "the truth of accountants." Werner Herzog, "Minnesota Declaration. Truth and Fact in Documentary Cinema. Lessons of Darkness," 1999, <https://www.wernerherzog.com/complete-works-text.html#2>.

PARA UM CINEMA DA COMUNHÃO:
NOTAS A PARTIR DE *TRACES* (2014), DE WANG BING
Pedro Florêncio (Universidade Nova de Lisboa)

O problema do tempo histórico tem de ser apreendido em correlação com o do espaço histórico (a história do *cenário dos acontecimentos*).

Walter Benjamin

DA COMUNHÃO – HIPÓTESES PARA UM CONCEITO DE CINEMA

Quando Alfred Hitchcock disse que “o cinema é acima de tudo cadeiras com gente sentada”,¹ salientou, de forma certa, que as salas de cinema não são somente o suporte: elas são também consubstanciais aos filmes que vemos. Por outras palavras, as condições de recepção, ainda que se pautem por uma intencional invisibilidade, são consubstanciais às imagens de um mundo que percebemos, imóveis mas não necessariamente em passividade, no nosso lugar de espectadores.

Questionar a essência do cinema enquanto arte (ou as suas fronteiras enquanto forma de mediação) não é apenas um exercício de definição, pois tal passa por tomar uma posição cada vez mais política. Que as opiniões de alguns dos patrocinadores e responsáveis de altos cargos dos sectores da cultura confundam a transição das formas cinematográficas para os mais variados suportes digitais com democratização e pluralização, no que respeita aos avanços tecnológicos das condições de recepção, é apenas um reflexo tardio do sofisticado prenúncio que Walter Benjamin lançou no famoso texto “A obra de arte na era da reprodutibilidade técnica”.² Nunca como hoje se verificou de forma tão evidente a importância das questões levantadas nesse texto, no qual se sublinha a pergunta capital que o cinema veio pôr ‘em cima da mesa’: a partir do momento em que as imagens perdem a sua correlação estrita com a esfera da arte e passam a ser artefactos na posse dos mais diversos ‘usuários’ (deixando, portanto, de ser mero objecto de contemplação distanciado), que futuro podemos esperar de um mundo em que as imagens que nos chegam aos olhos passaram a ser uma ferramenta de transformação a todos os níveis? Walter Benjamin disse-

nos que, se o cinema se pode pensar para além do domínio da arte, é justamente porque o cinema é a arte através da qual as imagens começaram a reconfigurar ampla e decisivamente a nossa relação com o real.

No entanto, pergunta-se hoje, mais acentuadamente do que nesse momento (mas não de forma mais relevante), se o cinema é menos cinematográfico por o vermos cada vez mais noutros lugares que não o das salas públicas de exibição. Uma resposta possível é ‘sim’, tendo em conta as condições do suporte de exibição que acrescentam qualidade às imagens. Outra resposta, mais artilosa, é que é mais cinema aquilo que se testemunha nas melhores salas, e menos aquele que se mostra naquelas com piores condições; tal como é mais cinema aquele que se vê numa sala comum, por mais pobre que seja, do que aquele a que simplesmente se assiste num qualquer televisor; tal como é mais cinema o que nos chega pelos televisores, do que aquele que se percepção aos solavancos no ecrã de um dispositivo móvel – e assim sucessivamente, enquanto as comparações por proximidade o permitam.

Enveredar por tais relativismos é fugir ao centro de um problema fundamental – aquele em que a essência da experiência cinematográfica se afigura sob a forma de uma paradoxal bipolaridade. Se, por um lado, as imagens cinematográficas (como todas as outras) sempre estiveram destinadas à sua diluição e proliferação,³ qual fuga inevitável de um corpo/território (o filme) no qual foram engenhosamente inscritas para um universo de infindáveis texturas materiais e imateriais, por outro lado, é na sala de cinema (qualquer sala em que se conceba a existência de mais que um só observador) que se *teatralizam* as condições de possibilidade, que transcendem a mera fruição estética ou a interiorização de imagens-movimento. Esta teatralização, no entendimento de Hans Belting, é o que delimita toda a história da imagem no campo da história das obras de arte que as *encerram*; no entanto, prossegue Belting, a imagem escapa sempre à obra de arte, pois que, independentemente do seu suporte, género e estilo, ela é

(...) um objecto tangível com uma história, um objecto [que] pode ser classificado, datado e exibido. Por seu lado, uma imagem desafia tais tentativas de reificação, até na medida em que, amiúde, se apresenta no limiar entre a existência física e mental. Pode viver numa obra de arte, mas a imagem não coincide necessariamente com a obra artística.⁴

Uma possível e produtiva definição de cinema que transcenda a mera fruição artística dos filmes reside, pois, nessa unidade de opostos onde se encena um momento de *comunhão*, por mais que a tal momento se suceda a imprevisibilidade de um percurso por “vias abertas” que as suas imagens e espectadores estão destinados a percorrer livremente. É neste sentido que, a propósito

das produtivas formas de derivação de um qualquer conceito de cinema, José Bragança de Miranda diz:

Quanto muito podem fazer-se história(s) do cinema, à maneira de Jean-Luc Godard, mas o que ele nos restitui é uma certa forma de cancelar o conceito [de cinema], fracturando-o pela memória das imagens. Ou então, pode-se sempre praticar uma metafísica do conceito, como a de Gilles Deleuze, estendendo-o à plasticidade das imagens, que assim se tornam deleuzianas. Histórias godardianas, metafísicas deleuzianas, trata-se de vias abertas a todos, e todos a praticam, embora não da mesma maneira, nem com o mesmo interesse.⁵

Para que esse *cinema da comunhão*, como desde sempre o conhecemos,⁶ se mantenha *vital* (e não apenas vivo), é no entanto necessário que alguns filmes, independentemente do destino que lhes está reservado, continuem a ser pensados de acordo com as condições de possibilidade que são consubstanciais a certos modos de ver, da mesma maneira que qualquer outra obra de arte ou operação artística tem por fim uma forma de se dar a conhecer no interior de certos limites espaciais. Isto é, independentemente da arbitrariedade do seu destino, se as imagens do cinema vieram ao mundo, foi porque foram pensadas de acordo com as contingências de um desejável aparecimento ou momento de comunhão, no qual diferentes olhares coincidem sobre a mesma imagem.

Os filmes que hoje ainda ‘pensam’ as suas imagens de acordo com determinadas condições de possibilidade, por maior ou menor que seja o seu grau de concretização, são como segredos orientados para o futuro, enigmas compostos por formas organizadas em função de uma experiência comunitária, espacial, logo, necessariamente relacional. Só dessa clausura forçada sobre os corpos e as imagens pode sobrevir uma produtiva libertação (dos corpos e imagens), sendo ao produtor⁷ que cabe a palavra final sobre a materialização de uma sequência de tempo, que o próprio tempo se encarregará de destruir ou preservar.

A tais filmes é comum o desejo não de uma experiência necessariamente colectiva ou fusional, mas de uma experiência intersubjectiva indirecta: apesar da coincidência dos olhares sobre as imagens que dão a ver, a partilha do que é visto nunca é verdadeiramente síncrona. Ao *cinema da comunhão* são necessárias, pois, possibilidades de correspondências que já no interior da própria experiência pessoal e de qualquer filme se presente: o olhar do Outro. Dizer que o cinema é sempre uma experiência intersubjectiva indirecta, é dizer, portanto, que o cinema historicamente constituído nos momentos da sua materialização, experiência dialéctica em devir e constante (re)elaboração, por vezes um diálogo mudo entre vozes através do espaço e do tempo, só se concretiza no momento em que, mais do que visto, é reconhecido por mais que uma voz.⁸

Ora, desse ponto de vista, o cinema em sala não é somente um suporte: é lugar de encenação de imagens da história que, por sua vez, estão tão dependentes de condições materiais do teatro que as abriga, como das contingências historicamente específicas que circundam esse teatro. É neste sentido que a acepção de Hans Belting, extensível a todas as imagens que pretendamos estudar, é certa – a história das imagens, quando subjugadas às obras de arte, é a história dos seus meios e suportes:

Pela minha parte, entendo os meios como suportes ou anfitriões de que as imagens precisam para aceder à visibilidade. (...) Cada meio tem uma expressão temporal muito própria que deixa bem gravada a sua marca. A questão dos meios é, portanto, desde início, uma questão da história dos meios.⁹

No que respeita à produtividade que advém de um momento de comunhão, só no contra-campo do anfiteatro que abriga as imagens (seja ele palco, tela ou ecrã) o cinema se concretiza verdadeiramente: sem um espectador crítico do outro lado, não há receptor para o que é tecnicamente reproduzível. Como Walter Benjamin apontou, nesse momento, até as atitudes mais “reaccionárias, diante, por exemplo, de um Picasso, transformam-se nas mais progressistas frente a um Chaplin”, pois, aqui, “o comportamento progressista é caracterizado pelo facto de o prazer do espectáculo e da vivência nele suscitar uma ligação íntima e imediata com a atitude do observador especializado”.¹⁰ Se ao espectador do que é reproduzível tecnicamente é inerente, em potência, a atitude do crítico “especializado”, é porque é sobretudo para além do momento de recepção que o cinema realmente se concretiza – ainda que tal momento se fique pela promessa de uma concretização.

Tais considerações tornam urgente pensar os filmes que hoje se pressupõem como teatro e lugar de encontro *público*, ainda antes que os seus programadores, amadores e críticos deles façam uso, um teatro que tenha em conta a potencialidade dos corpos presentes no seu contra-campo. Falamos naturalmente de filmes-lugares que ajudem a clarificar o que ainda é distinto no cinema que temos vindo a definir, no qual se dê co-existência de uma sala de exibição com a diversidade dos olhares atentos, no qual seja também estabelecido um exigente compromisso entre aquilo que dá a ver e aqueles que vêem.

Quando estes filmes são potenciados por critérios de programação e circunstâncias de exibição que têm em conta as suas particularidades, não é tanto “o aqui e agora da obra de arte – sua existência única no local em que se encontra”¹¹ – que destaca a sua dimensão performativa, mas mais uma convocatória implícita do espectador para um encontro, um evento de cumplicidades, de

que resultará uma transformação da própria realidade. No que respeita aos filmes que exigem tais condições de possibilidade, estão ainda por estudar as diversas formas de encenação que põem em relevo o estatuto do cinema enquanto “escola do ver”,¹² de que os seus filmes são breves “aulas públicas”. Os filmes, assim com os programadores, exibidores e espectadores implicados *nesses* filmes, ao longo de uma extensão temporal que denominaremos de ‘linha de montagem horizontal’, trabalham tais condições de possibilidade relacionais, tomam a história como assunto capital. Por outras palavras: para lá das ‘linhas de montagem horizontais’ do circuito cinematográfico, advogamos que cabe também a programadores (nestes incluídos os professores, curadores e museólogos) que continuem (ou comecem) a entender o cinema como dependente de uma qualquer forma de “instalação em sala”; são eles que mais podem esclarecer qualquer alma confusa quanto ao que a essência do cinema é – ou que nunca deixou de ser.

Quando os filmes interferem com a História, tratando daquilo que dela resta (não o que dela sobra, mas o que a revitaliza), deixam-se impregnar de contexto, tanto quanto impregnam o próprio mundo real com as suas formas. Chamaremos a tal interferência de *efeito de monumentalidade*.

De algum modo, podemos dizer que esse é um efeito tão velho como as mais velhas histórias do cinema: é ele que preside a todos filmes que compõem e vão compondo cânones intocáveis, justamente por, com a sua monumentalidade, se terem tornado mais impermeáveis ao esquecimento. Entre os poucos projectos colectivos mais ambiciosos de que alguns desses filmes brotam, o cinema da Hollywood na era dourada dos estúdios (1910s – 1960s), cedo tomou consciência do seu *efeito de monumentalidade*, não porque todos os seus filmes almejassem superar-se de um ponto de vista qualitativo, mas por serem filmes intrínseca e extrinsecamente compostos pela própria história – leia-se, que os rodeava – de tal forma que ver hoje *Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Citizen Kane* (1948) ou *Cleopatra* (1963), é necessariamente ‘ver’ a sua técnica e também tudo o que os circunda fora de campo; é ver as suas condições de produção, recepção e o tipo de espectador por elas (en)formado. É para esta dimensão historiográfica, consubstancial ao próprio modo de percepção dos filmes, que Arthur Danto¹³ aponta quando afirma:

Then a film achieves something spectacular, not merely showing what it shows, but showing the fact that it is shown; giving us not merely an object but a perception of that object, a world and a way of seeing that world at once; the artist's mode of vision being as importantly in his work as what it is a vision of.¹⁴

Se esse efeito está hoje em perda, não é só porque os movimentos, sistemas ou impulsos colectivos que circundam historicamente os filmes mais monumentais sejam espectros de um

passado distante, nem tão pouco porque a história do mundo em que têm lugar os melhores filmes de hoje seja menos consubstancial do que era aos filmes de outrora. É, sim, porque é cada vez mais raro haver cineastas com a noção da monumentalidade que um filme pode ainda ter, isto é, com uma tomada de consciência de uma medida de grandeza que transcenda a *utopia do imediato* em que vivemos – e que é o efeito de qualquer filme (ou obra de arte) que não procure simplesmente ficar na história, mas sim fazer história.¹⁵ Nesse regime de criação, os últimos herdeiros de uma noção de monumentalidade cinematográfica têm vindo a cessar funções: depois do falecimento nos últimos anos de Danièle Huillet, Harun Farocki, Manoel de Oliveira ou Chantal Akerman, sobram Michael Snow, Frederick Wiseman, Pedro Costa, Jean-Luc Godard entre outros poucos,¹⁶ para manter vivo o *efeito de monumentalidade* a cada novo filme que põem no mundo. Entre os poucos que já começaram uma travessia nesse exigente horizonte está Wang Bing. É de um discreto – e ainda assim absolutamente monumental – filme do realizador chinês que mais à frente falaremos.

DA MONUMENTALIDADE DAS FORMAS CINEMATOGRAFICAS

Ao falar da sala de cinema como se de uma pele extensiva às imagens se tratasse, Alfred Hitchcock antecipou não só uma produtiva consubstancialidade entre o que é visto e o acto de ver, mas também o seu reverso: um mundo de salas escuras, com janelas feitas à medida de mónadas imobilizados, observadores inertes e imersos no mundo tornado visível que é gentilmente oferecido aos mesmos sentidos que tende a incapacitar.

Muitos – entre os quais se destacam Tom Gunning, Jonathan Crary ou Wolfgang Shivelbusch – têm identificado o cinema como uma consequência ou parceiro ‘natural’ da emergência de novas tecnologias ópticas, de deslocação ou movimento na modernidade, mas foi Paul Virilio quem viu nessa mudança de paradigma perceptivo um epicentro de um novo pessimismo civilizacional, cuja palavra-chave culminaria na era da televisualidade: a inércia. Esse cenário catastrófico e unidimensional paira não só numa desvalorização do que foi sendo construído, mas sobretudo numa crescente imobilização dos sentidos humanos pelas tecnologias da percepção que vão sendo actualizadas. O que está em risco é a perda de uma dimensão ‘física’ que a relação estética com o que nos rodeia comporta, sob caução de uma imersão óptica nas imagens que permite (ou que deixa de interessar-se em identificar) a distância que se interpõe *entre nós e mundo*.¹⁷

Se a tese de Virilio aqui nos interessa é devido ao seu materialismo radical, a partir do qual se prevê uma massificação da sedentariedade física e mental do homem num mundo em que tudo, menos o próprio homem, está cada vez mais em permanente deslocação: “*Doravante, tudo acontece sem que seja necessário partir*. À chegada restrita dos veículos dinâmicos, móveis e depois

automóveis, sucede bruscamente a chegada generalizada das imagens e dos sons, dos veículos estáticos do audiovisual. A inércia polar começa”.¹⁸ Virilio vislumbra assim não só um futuro cada vez mais imóvel, mas sobretudo uma progressiva desmobilização de ferramentas de entendimento político do mundo enquanto fenómeno estético.

A ideia de que estamos paralisados e inertes no seio de uma tempestade de imagens, por mais verificável que seja, é sintoma do pessimismo pós-moderno, pois nunca deixará de haver quem procure criar condições para que o pensamento se mobilize. Esse é o “projecto inacabado da modernidade”,¹⁹ para citar um poderoso optimista, em que o cinema ainda ocupa uma quota parte. Se queremos pensar as possibilidades de transformação psicológicas e sociais num mundo reduzido à experiência óptica, isto é, se queremos construir novas imagens que provoquem variações e abalos na estrutura ‘normal’ do real, podemos debruçar-nos sobre casos que tornem explícito um campo de conhecimento que é gerado materialmente pelo próprio filme – experiências de contacto que tornem explícita a necessidade de pensar o enigma implícito nesses filmes.

A sala de cinema é, pois, o lugar no qual ainda se germinam tais filmes potencialmente transformadores. E quando os próprios filmes propõem um jogo de escala intencionalmente trabalhado para a sala pública e escura, o espectador é convocado para um encontro no qual um jogo de escala põe em relação os observadores e a vasta amplitude dos acontecimentos com que o filme os confronta. Nesse caso, são os filmes que estão em busca de um certo modelo de relação cinematográfica, que só pode ocorrer através de um *efeito de monumentalidade*.

Tal efeito convida a um exigente estudo das formas da história que estão gravadas nas imagens. Cada filme-monumental é ponto de partida para uma investigação maior, qual lugar na carruagem de uma viagem que atravessa o vasto “cenário dos acontecimentos”. Não só dá forma ao que era invisível, não só cria uma ligação entre o olhar e as formas monumentais do mundo representado, como possibilita uma relação de forças entre o real tornado matéria e o corpo que com essa matéria se relaciona. Uma relação profundamente activa e vital é estabelecida: formas cinemáticas e corpos humanos são convocados para uma dança viva de imagens do real, tornadas matéria na sala escura, uma dança potencialmente transformadora.²⁰

O *efeito de monumentalidade* – no sentido moderno a que atrás aludimos – causa uma forte impressão *física*, por via do modo como se impõe/expõe.²¹ É entendido literalmente como algo que não pode escapar-nos, visto que se impõe à atenção. Dá-se a ver, não só pela via da sua dimensão ou pela radicalidade das suas formas, mas também pelo tipo de envolvimento exaustivo que requer do espectador.

Ao espectador é exigido um compromisso que vai além da mera fruição estética. A experiência íntima com o estético abre-se a modalidades de entendimento da paisagem cinematográfica, que se

apresenta como uma vastidão sem fim à vista. Um convite é feito para uma viagem simultaneamente interior (imóvel, imanente) e exterior (contingente, relacional), de que as condições de recepção são absolutamente consubstanciais. A compreensão da obra é complicada por um leque de possibilidades que vai além da mera contemplação: a escala da proposta estética é tal, que há um ancoramento do mundo do filme no mundo real. Um esforço conjunto é convocado nesse ancoramento, que toma a forma de um compromisso e não põe de parte a força das emoções – pelo contrário, é posto em movimento pelas mesmas.²²

Há um risco necessário que tais filmes correm, ao infligir uma espécie de golpe no espectador: o filme tanto pode produzir admiração e adesão, como incompreensibilidade e afastamento. Exemplo desta confrontação radical é o cinema de Wang Bing, que tem vindo a desestabilizar a noção de observação do real e de fruição estética da imagem no caso do cinema, sujeitando o lugar do espectador a um rol de circunstâncias condicionantes (a duração, a resistência, a fadiga ou o interesse), inerentes à experiência de contacto – no sentido físico do termo – com o filme.

DO EFEITO DO SUBLIME NO CINEMA DE WANG BING

Wang Bing é dos poucos realizadores contemporâneos a explorar a dimensão monumental das formas cinematográficas. Se as imagens estão ao alcance da percepção óptica, é na *força implicada nas formas* das imagens que se clama por um corpo sensível que com elas se pode relacionar. É neste sentido que o cinema de Wang Bing, como o de poucos outros, actua, através de um jogo corpo-a-corpo que é próprio da pintura e da escultura de grande escala: as imagens não se interiorizam simplesmente, pois, ainda antes de as percebermos, a sua dimensão assombra-nos.

Na acepção de Burke, o *assombro* “é o efeito do sublime no seu maior grau”, ocorrendo quando “a mente está tão completamente cheia com o seu objecto que não consegue atender a nenhum outro, nem, conseqüentemente, raciocinar acerca do objecto que a ocupa”.²³ Encontramos nesse *assombro* uma possibilidade para redefinirmos o próprio conceito de sublime no caso representacional do cinema de Wang Bing.

Wang Bing é um cineasta do sublime. Cada um dos seus filmes, mais do que dar a ver uma certa realidade, confronta-nos, a nós, espectadores, com o real, que, mais do que ser representado, se liga à materialidade da superfície em que é projectado. Apesar de imobilizados na sala escura, a contemplação é extática: perdemos de vista a paisagem que se esconde atrás das imagens de um vasto mundo “assombroso” que nos é dado a ver. Não imergimos simplesmente num campo de visibilidade: somos postos perante esse imenso campo conceptual, em face do qual nos podemos ora aproximar, ora afastar. Assim, é de uma distância *decisiva* delegada ao espectador que se trata:

todos os filmes de Wang Bing implicam uma postura crítica (uma exigente forma de atenção) face à performatividade duracional das imagens. É para esta dimensão “afectiva” que Vincent Amiel aponta, ao falar de uma “consciência da imagem como um espaço de percepção sensível, e não somente como um canal de informações abstractas.²⁴ A título de exemplo, lembre-se *Crude Oil* (2008), um documentário sobre o duro trabalho de um grupo de trabalhadores chineses numa plataforma petrolífera, localizada numa montanha da Mongólia interior, que tem a duração de 840 minutos. No monumental *West of the Tracks* (2003), de 551 minutos, Wang Bing estrear-se logo como cineasta afecto à elasticidade dos seus documentos da realidade. Mais do que pela longa metragem, *Crude Oil* e *West of the Tracks* destacam-se pela maneira como se estende a sua duração. Apesar de mais curtos, encaixam na linha de argumentação proposta outros filmes mais recentes de Wang Bing, como *Three Sisters* (2012), *Till Madness Do Us Part* (2013), *Ta’ang* (2016) ou *Mrs. Fang* (2017). No entanto, eles levar-nos-iam para um campo teórico no qual a dimensão temática do documentário contemporâneo ganha outro relevo – e à qual Antony Fiant procurou dar resposta num brilhante e recente ensaio.²⁵

O cinema de Wang Bing só pode funcionar como ‘instalação’ em salas *de* cinema, convocando o espectador para um jogo exigente, físico e móvel com a história. Habitamos os seus filmes como arquitecturas, lugares, como se nos deparássemos esculturas postas num espaço de experiência comum. A burocracia do mercado de distribuição e exibição é assim posta em causa, desde logo por se deparar problemáticamente com as formas (e forças) internas da própria obra. Como tal, cada novo filme do realizador levanta questões determinantes para os agentes culturais face ao conceito de cinema, sendo uma delas a que tenha em conta não só os filmes, mas acima de tudo a forma como estes, para circularem, têm de ser necessária e individualmente pensados enquanto *acontecimento*, isto é, enquanto *feito monumental*.

O princípio construtivo dos filmes de Wang Bing reconfigura e problematiza a noção de ‘larga produção’ dos grandes estúdios. Por um lado, ao nível da recepção estes não são filmes desenhados para museus, televisores ou dispositivos móveis, pois que a ‘instalação’ fora da sala de cinema oferece ao espectador uma experiência menos avassaladora, porque menos exigente, permitindo-lhe a entrada e saída da ‘sala’ quando quiser. Por outro, são filmes que abordam temáticas (a fome, o desemprego, a doença mental, a exploração laboral, etc.) de urgência *pública* – no sentido mais politizado do termo. É neste sentido que tais filmes rejeitam estruturalmente a ‘privatização’ da obra de arte ou a sua ‘domesticação’ em lugares que promovem a individualização da experiência cinematográfica. As suas longas e exigentes observações do real são antinómicas da ‘domesticidade’ (televisiva, museológica ou institucional) que se apropria do horror do real como mais um entre vários conteúdos; as suas longas durações, as amplas escalas visuais e as urgentes

temáticas pressupõem uma particularização da experiência, própria do cinema que é feito para acontecer (e não somente ser visto) como um quase ‘escândalo’ público – com esta palavra aparentemente deslocada aludimos não só às ‘escandalosas’ durações de *Crude Oil* e *West of the Tracks*, mas também aos longuíssimos planos de *Ta’ang* ou *Mrs. Fang*, sem aparente preocupação com a lógica das economias narrativas tradicionais.

Depois de cada filme de Wang Bing, é-nos impossível ficar indiferente à realidade que (e como) foi dada a conhecer; ver é estar implicado, é ser cúmplice de um mundo que deixou de ser desconhecido e passou a estar “instalado” entre nós. Da experiência do sublime advêm novas formas de historicidade.

Como tal, a dimensão da produção destes filmes deve ser entendida para além do momento de fabrico. Há uma ética da criação, partilhada por várias entidades em diversos momentos, na qual se exige uma compreensão politizada do objecto estético, sendo os filmes um produto (re)concebido ao longo de várias fases. A dimensão co-criativa desta linha de montagem, tendo sempre em vista uma potencial concretização do seu *efeito de monumentalidade*, baseia-se na sua horizontalidade, ao invés de uma sistémica verticalidade típica dos modelos de produção dominantes: não pressupõe uma ordem de comando que tem por princípio a margem de lucro baseada no jogo de oferta e procura, mas, sim, uma responsabilidade partilhada por distribuidores, exibidores, programadores e espectadores.

Os filmes de Wang Bing baseiam-se no pressuposto de que o cinema é, por definição, um lugar de re(construção), co-criação e responsabilidade partilhada ao longo do tempo, no qual uma relação com as narrativas do real é intensificada através de uma compreensão composta e conjunta de *imagens-facto*.²⁶

DA EXPERIÊNCIA CINEMATOGRAFICA EM *TRACES* (2014)

O *efeito de monumentalidade* até agora descrito é levado ao limite em *Traces* (2014). Bem aquém do que pode definir um filme, *Traces* é um desvio. Em primeiro lugar, um desvio metodológico que Wang Bing levou a cabo durante as viagens de *repérage* e produção da sua única longa metragem de ficção *The Ditch* (2010) – filme que, como tantos outros do realizador, nos fala dos corpos destinados a morrer de cansaço no desertos de Gansu e Jiabiangou, nos quais foram montados ‘campos de reeducação’ para dissidentes ideológicos na China pós-socialista. São sítios politicamente votados ao esquecimento onde, ainda hoje, Wang Bing passa algum tempo em pesquisa, com a missão de recolher testemunhos ou evidências sobre um dos mais impiedosos massacres levados a cabo na segunda metade do séc. XX. *Traces*, um filme-desvio, é por isso mais

um entre os monumentais objectos de testemunho audiovisual que Bing continua a produzir sobre um determinado espaço histórico, que é também um dos objectos principais de matéria de reflexão historiográfica.

Por outro lado, *Traces* é sobretudo um filme-performativo, exercício de reprodução sensorial da experiência física, que o autor terá levado a cabo nestes trajectos pedonais pelo deserto e pelas ruínas da história, caminhada na qual a memória se afirma como gesto de re-presentificação e não somente como forma de documentação face a um horror irrepresentável.²⁷ Nesse gesto de produção de uma forma de conhecimento, a imagem do espaço coincide com a sua temporalização, afinal, como se “pela primeira vez, a imagem das coisas” fosse também “a sua duração”.²⁸

Através do insistente gesto de busca fotográfica por vestígios soterrados, em *Traces*, o trabalho exaustivo e repetitivo da câmara faz coincidir a lógica da abstracção óptica com a latência do cansaço físico. A duração dessa coincidência dá azo a um impasse imersivo: o espectador encontra-se simultaneamente entre um constante exame de sentido das imagens documentais e um desconforto face às mesmas. À pergunta ‘O que se vê?’ sobrepõe-se não poucas vezes um ‘Por quê ver mais do mesmo?’. Mas, quando visto em retrospectiva e, sobretudo, depois de sermos informados nos créditos finais do filme sobre o vasto território que este filme percorreu, *Traces* fica imediatamente carregado de sentido histórico. *À exigente imersão num espaço histórico sobrevém o recuo necessário para o repensarmos à distância do olhar longínquo.*

Falamos de um *efeito de monumentalidade* que, pela sua estética ‘enjoativa’, reiterativa e incessantemente repetitiva, possui a capacidade de se inculcar psico-fisiologicamente no corpo de cada espectador que se mostre disponível para, ao longo de quase trinta minutos, tolerar uma crescente vaga de aturdimento audiovisual. O filme faz do gesto da caminhada um projecto de investigação, no qual *se vão vendo* os vestígios que, à distância, se tornam invisíveis na paisagem imensa do deserto. O movimento do espectador (sincronizado com o do olhar investigativo da câmara) é assim ligado à morfologia espacial do terreno – experiência de aproximação e afastamento da ‘paisagem’ histórica, a que corresponde a desocultação e ocultação do sentido.

Assistir ao filme assemelha-se a um intenso exercício físico de meia hora, no qual só podemos compreender o real através da proximidade, mas do qual só podemos ter consciência crítica *a posteriori*. A expressão ‘no terreno’ ganha uma qualidade física e potencialmente transformadora: o terreno não é só representado: é matéria que se nos apresenta. A documentação de vestígios torna-se indissociável da acção da câmara e o olhar torna-se gesto de força crítica.

Nesse sentido, a tripla essência da imagem cinematográfica de *Traces* é a distância, o gesto e a sua duração. Esta tríade composta começa na corporalidade da câmara e termina no momento da

sua ‘instalação’ em sala, tornando este filme num jogo escultórico. O filme é pensado de acordo com “a realidade do ecrã”,²⁹ isto é, como um imagem-corpo.

Os movimentos da câmara ora revelam, ora reduzem as imagens captadas a um magma perceptivo. A experiência da história ganha uma forma telúrica. Trata-se de uma corporalização³⁰ do processo de conhecimento: corpo-filme-espaco, enquanto suporte composto, produz um lastro de evidência que transcende o campo visual da imagem. Falamos assim de uma operação não-óptica, uma visão corporalizada, por oposição e como crítica à ideia de uma opticalidade retiniana que preside a todo o discurso contemplativo de qualquer paisagem. Falamos de um processo de representação em que a imagem é a epiderme de contacto entre o observador e a materialidade do ecrã – uma epiderme que se faz sentir, num último passo, através da fadiga que a duração dos gestos repetitivos provoca em nós.

Esse modo representacional corporaliza a experiência estética, transformando-a numa experiência essencialmente ética: o corpo-câmara representado na tela é também o nosso. Ou seja, *Traces* realça a capacidade que o cinema ainda tem de intensificar a nossa relação com o real tornado visível, ao ligar-nos *dolorosamente* à imagem; neste sentido, Manuel Ramos-Martínez fala de um modo de observação ao qual subjaz uma certa forma de “sofrimento”.³¹ Não se trata somente de compreender a informação que nele há para apreender, porque estamos longe da possibilidade de interpretação da história através dos seus vestígios. Trata-se de *sentir corporalmente* esses detritos da história, para a poder reconstruir através da nossa vivência. A proposta estética de *Traces* passa precisamente pela radical humanização de uma condição técnica em que nos vemos suspensos do mundo exterior numa sala escura, mas nunca do nosso corpo, nem da sua capacidade de, com ele, pensarmos historicamente.

Nem a historicidade nem a artisticidade de *Traces* residem, pois, nos seus 28 minutos de duração total, mas antes e depois dos mesmos: antes, nos próprios vestígios da tragédia humana que permanecem naquele lugar; depois, nos vestígios que permanecerão no corpo de quem suportou esta experiência da fadiga. *Traces* está aquém e além do mero momento de visionamento de um filme, partindo do seu *efeito de monumentalidade* para aquilo que Adorno designava como um “olhar de longo alcance”, que “é sempre aquele em que o impulso na direcção do objecto se encontra detido e submetido à reflexão”.³² *Traces* radicaliza a dimensão relacional do cinema como momento de *comunhão*, ao orquestrar um tipo de encontro com uma imagem de ruínas tornada em matéria concreta, uma história reconfigurada pela “pós-vida do objecto de compreensão, cujo pulsar se faz sentir até ao presente”.³³

O que está em causa nesta encenação sublime da história é também o cinema em si mesmo: o cinema entendido não mais como um processo de cinematização do real, mas como matéria real

tornada sensível; não como um mero jogo de formas que contemplamos, mas como um jogo de forças potencialmente transformadoras. Enfim, um *efeito de monumentalidade* simbolizado pelo gesto de uma câmara que não cessa de gravar, como se levar até ao fim o que lhe resta de película (ou bateria) fosse forma de resistir ao inevitável apagamento dos vestígios humanos naquele deserto. Por outras palavras, *Traces* leva ao limite a experiência cinematográfica enquanto experiência de contacto com a história.

DA FADIGA – CONSIDERAÇÕES FINAIS

Se certos filmes intensificam a questão capital do cinema enquanto acto perceptivo (a da sua correlação entre objectividade e subjectividade), é porque, lembremos as palavras de Arthur Danto, um filme não mostra somente o que mostra, mas mostra o facto de que é mostrado. A imagem cinematográfica é simultaneamente um objecto e forma de ver. A imagem em movimento fixa o visível, logo, seduz-nos com o poder da evidência que lhe é própria, mas também com o poder de ver essa evidência de uma forma própria.

Através da instrumentalização da duração e da fadiga, o cinema de Wang Bing demonstra que a transmutação da contemplação do visível em experiência de contacto é possível. Este cinema pauta-se poeticamente pelas longas durações, pelo que vem abalar a simples ‘ingestão’ óptica e sonora de imagens que se deslocam até nós, na era da *inércia polar*. Em *Traces*, somos postos em *movimento* com o que sobra daqueles que morreram naquele deserto. Estamos perante uma forma de corporalização do saber face ao horror da morte gerada por cansaço; somos confrontados com a força do incompreensível. Falamos, pois, de forma física, intensa e performativa de se (re)pensar a história – e, com ela, a função vital do documentário contemporâneo,³⁴ que talvez só na reclusão da sala de cinema possa ainda ser verdadeiramente possível.

No caso de *Traces*, a chave dessa encenação relacional é o incómodo, o efeito de saturação, que obriga a um deferido mental (espécie de *Se Isto É Um Homem*, de Primo Lévy). O incómodo vincula-nos ao presente e imediato; a experiência do imediato, no cinema de Wang Bing, passa sempre por uma encenação da saturação, uma forma de construção sensorial e dramática da fadiga. Como defende Luke Robinson, a propósito do *modus faciendi* do documentarista chinês, há de alguma forma uma consubstancialidade entre a contingência do imediato e a sua incorporação no acto de encenação.³⁵ A experiência estética e ética da fadiga impede-nos de imergir num tempo só nosso; a materialidade de *Traces* impede-nos de imergir na imagem, visto que ela se nos apresenta como uma parede ou escultura, uma força que nos desgasta. É este jogo de forças numa escala tornada ampla que adquire a dimensão de um exercício literalmente físico e colectivo.

Estamos no domínio do cinema como não-arte, como o designa Alain Badiou, ou daquilo que o filósofo chamou de “cinema impuro”.³⁶ O exemplo que Badiou usa para ilustrar esta aceção é o de um “som impuro”³⁷ no cinema de Godard, por com ele se questionar uma suposta pureza dos valores de produção e mediação dominantes no sistema da indústria cinematográfica. Nesse sentido, podemos identificar em *Traces* uma *duração impura*, que é, talvez, o que melhor define a estética do cinema de Wang Bing.

O que caracteriza a estética binguiana são as suas monstruosas formas duracionais. Das durações *impuras* (extremamente longas e absolutamente imprevisíveis) sobressai uma fadiga necessariamente vivida não só entre nós e os que conosco permanecem na sala, em contacto profundo com interior desta paisagem, mas também entre nós e os que vemos re-presentificados na tela. Trata-se de uma fadiga única e irrepitível.³⁸

O cinema de Wang Bing demonstra que é possível fazer das formas cinematográficas uma força política através de uma particular ética da atenção. É cinema que materializa o acto de observação: confere ao olhar uma matéria, imprime-lhe fisicalidade. Trata-se de uma poética da observação em que o olhar se torna em acto historiográfico, em que a janela por onde espreitamos as evidências que restam da história se torna convocatória para um espaço de compreensão crítica. De novo, ver é estar implicado; ser é ser cúmplice. Um cinema da comunhão, portanto.

¹ Apud Paul Virilio, *A Inércia Polar* (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 1993), 30.

² Walter Benjamin. “A obra de arte na era da reprodutibilidade técnica”, in *Sobre Arte, Técnica, Linguagem e Política* (Lisboa: Relógio D’Água, 2012), 59-95.

³ É esta a perspectiva traçada por Victor Burgin: “film may be broken up, and its fragments dispersed throughout the environment in which we conduct our daily lives”. Tal perspectiva implica um gesto de indiferenciação no que respeita à teoria da imagem, pois, como explicita Burgin, “Film studies must now confront as heterogeneous an ‘object’ as that which confounds photography and television studies – in fact it is largely the same object”. Victor Burgin, *The Remembered Film* (UK, London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 109 e 9.

⁴ Hans Belting, *Antropologia da Imagem – Para uma Ciência da Imagem* (Lisboa: KKYM + EAUM, 2014), 9-10.

⁵ José Bragança de Miranda, “A prosa das imagens”, in *Imagens e Pensamento*, eds. M. L. Martins, J. B. de Miranda, M. Oliveira, J. Godinho (V.N. Famalicão: Edições Húmus, 2017), 260.

⁶ Remetemos para a data da célebre primeira sessão, realizada a 28 de Dezembro de 1895, no salão indiano do Grand Café de Paris, sob orientação dos irmãos Auguste e Louis Lumière.

⁷ No entendimento de Robert Rossen, realizador interessante de citar por sempre ter trabalhado nos limites dos constrangimentos industriais de produção cinematográfica norte-americana, “produzir significa – em termos da estrutura da indústria cinematográfica americana – ter o controlo do material do começo até ao fim”. In José Bogalheiro, *Empatia e Alteridade – A Figuração Cinematográfica como Jogo* (Lisboa: Sistema Solar – Documenta, 2014), 374. Tal entendimento correlaciona-se com o texto de Walter Benjamin, “O Autor

como Produtor”, que providencia, como sempre, um ângulo de interpretação política sobre o papel do produtor na era da reprodutibilidade técnica.

⁸ Os filmes que vemos em casa também são cinema neste sentido. Os filmes que vimos na infância transformam-se noutra coisa quando, mais tarde, nos deparamos com o olhar do Outro sobre o mesmo filme. O isolamento da experiência cinematográfica, sendo um obstáculo à sua recepção partilhada, não retira ao filme as suas condições de possibilidade relacional. Nem a televisão nem os ecrãs portáteis deixam de conter em si a potência teatralizante do cinema, apesar de operarem na lógica de contiguidade com o mundo da vida, que é oposta à experiência suspensiva do cinema numa sala escura – logo, que intensifica o efeito teatral de se ver um filme.

⁹ Belting, *Antropologia da Imagem – Para uma Ciência da Imagem*, 40. O contributo de Belting é fundamental para entender este paradoxo, pois relativiza a ligação de dependência visual que o homem sempre estabeleceu com a imagem ou os seus meios e suportes contingentes. Se a imagem ‘vive em nós’, ela é necessariamente multidimensional. Isto é, a imagem, como reminiscência e reverberação, provém de sensações igualmente tácteis, odoríficas, visuais ou sonoras. A intermedialidade essencial da imagem antropológica, de que Belting fala, realça uma zona onde as imagens transcendem os limites da historicidade do seu meio e suportes, sem no entanto a sua história ser independente da mesma. É porque incorporamos as imagens em nós que elas se libertam dos quadros ou lugares que as condicionaram materialmente; e é por as incorporarmos de forma singular que os quadros e os lugares em que essa incorporação acontece têm um papel fundamental na relação histórica e particular que promovem.

¹⁰ Benjamin, “A obra de arte na era da reprodutibilidade técnica”, 93.

¹¹ Benjamin, “A obra de arte na era da reprodutibilidade técnica”, 64.

¹² Seguimos a aceção de João Maria Mendes: “darei que o cinema é uma *escola do ver* que nunca deixou de estar em instalação, e que cada um dos seus filmes é uma aula dessa escola, uma aula do ver”. João Maria Mendes, *Sentidos Figurados: Cinema, Imagem, Simulacro*, Narrativa, vol. I (Lisboa: Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa, 2018), 83.

¹³ Arthur C. Danto, “Moving Pictures”. *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 4:1 (1979), 1-21

¹⁴ Danto, “Moving Pictures”, 20 (itálico do texto).

¹⁵ É essa a potência política implícita no gesto inerente a todo o cinema moderno a que Deleuze alude. Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *A Imagem-Tempo – Cinema 2* (Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim, 2006).

¹⁶ Mencionamos alguns dos cineastas que, até recentemente, pensaram ou continuam a pensar os filmes na sua aceção verdadeiramente moderna, isto é, enquanto *formas de acontecimento*, logo, *monumentos do gesto*.

¹⁷ Hans Belting, menos pessimista, encontra uma possível resposta que contrabalança esta tendência: “[A] actual sobreprodução de imagens estimula os nossos órgãos visuais na mesma medida em que, felizmente, os paralisa ou imuniza”. Belting, *Antropologia da Imagem*, 46.

¹⁸ Virilio, *A Inércia Polar*, 38.

¹⁹ Aludimos ao título do ensaio de Jürgen Habermas, *Modernidade: Um Projecto Inacabado* (Lisboa: Nova Vega, 2017).

²⁰ Os anos 1920 foram talvez o período em que o cinema mais se pensou como *efeito de monumentalidade*. Basta pensar no quão interferentes no mundo actual ainda são os efeitos dos filmes alemães do período de Weimar ou os das grandes experiências de montagem soviética.

²¹ A título de exemplo, pense-se na experiência monumental do tempo ou do som que filmes do cinema moderno, como *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du commerce, 1080, Bruxelles* (1975), de Chantal Akerman, ou *Le Livre d’Image* (2018), de Jean-Luc Godard, ensaiam.

²² Pequenas emoções podem dar forma a violentas transformações, como Didi-Huberman sugere a partir da análise do monumental *O Couraçado Potemkine* (1925): “É que as *emoções*, como são *moções*, movimentos, comoções, são também *transformações* daqueles ou daquelas que estão comovidos. Transformar-se é passar de um estado a outro: está então bem reforçada a nossa ideia de que a emoção não se pode definir como um estado de pura e simples passividade. É mesmo através das emoções que podemos,

eventualmente, transformar o nosso mundo, na condição, é certo, de que elas se transformem elas próprias em pensamentos e em acções.” Georges Didi-Huberman, *Que Emoção! Que Emoção?* (Lisboa: KKYM, 2015), 39.

²³ Edmund Burke, *Uma Investigação Filosófica acerca da Origem das Nossas Ideias do Sublime e do Belo* (Lisboa: Edições 70, 2015), 78.

²⁴ Vincent Amiel, “Wang Bing, Paysagiste Chinois”. *Esprit* (Outobre 2014). Disponível em <https://esprit.presse.fr/article/vincent-amiel/wang-bing-paysagiste-chinois-38114>

²⁵ Cf. Antony Fiant, *Wang Bing, un Gest Documentarie de notre Temps* (Laval: Warm Editions, 2019).

²⁶ André Bazin, numa passagem sobre *Paisà* (1946), afirma: “A unidade da narrativa cinematográfica em Paisà não é o ‘plano’, mas o ‘facto’. Fragmento de realidade bruta, em si mesmo múltiplo e equívoco, cujo ‘sentido’ se manifesta apenas a posteriori graças a outros ‘factos’ entre os quais o espírito estabelece relação”. André Bazin, *O que É o Cinema?* (Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 1992), 299. Poderíamos especular que era já este lugar de co-criação e responsabilidade partilhada que Bazin entrevia no cinema neo-realista de Rossellini.

²⁷ Aludimos às discussões em torno do irrepresentável, como aquelas levadas a cabo por autores como Georges Didi-Huberman, Giorgio Agamben ou Jacques Rancière, geradoras de polémicas em torno do holocausto, de que o *Shoah* (1985), de Claude Lanzmann, está no epicentro.

²⁸ Bazin, *O que É o Cinema?*, 20.

²⁹ Recorremos a um raciocínio usado no seguinte aforismo de Bresson: “O fim é o ecrã que se torna apenas uma superfície. Submete o teu filme à realidade do ecrã, como um pintor submete o seu quadro à própria realidade da tela e das cores com que a cobriu, o escultor as suas figuras à realidade do mármore ou do bronze.” Robert Bresson, *Notas sobre o Cinematógrafo* (Porto: Porto Editora, 2000), 102.

³⁰ A este propósito, ver a noção de “corporal vision” desenvolvida no belíssimo artigo de Manuel Ramos-Martínez, a partir da qual a noção de observação “passiva” é problematizada através do cinema de Wang Bing. Manuel Ramos-Martínez. “The Oxidation of Documentary”, *Third Text* 29 (May 2015). Disponível em: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276441889_The_Oxidation_of_the_Documentary

³¹ Ramos-Martínez, “The Oxidation of Documentary”, 11 e 12.

³² Theodor W. Adorno. *Minima Moralia* (Lisboa: Edições 70, 2001), 86.

³³ Walter Benjamin, *O Anjo da História* (Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim, 2010), 110.

³⁴ A esta forma de pensar a história corresponde uma modalidade representacional do documentário independente chinês, o *Xianchang*, que Luke Robinson, no seu extenso estudo, define enquanto “poética da contingência”. Luke Robinson, *Independent Chinese Documentary. From the Studio to the Street* (Basingstoke/ New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

³⁵ Luke Robinson, *Independent Chinese Documentary. From the Studio to the Street*, 152.

³⁶ Alain Badiou, “Considerations on the current state of cinema and on the ways of thinking this state without having to conclude that cinema is dead or dying”. In *Cinema* (UK, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 138-150.

³⁷ Badiou, “Considerations on the current state of cinema...”, 140.

³⁸ Peter Handke defende que a fadiga não obedece a uma receita ou método reproduzível, pois está estritamente dependente das contingências inerentes ao momento de comunhão: “Eu não conheço receita alguma, nem mesmo para mim próprio. Sei tão-somente: tais fadigas não são premeditáveis; não podem constituir-se previamente em desígnio. Contudo, sei igualmente que nunca surgem sem fundamento, mas sempre após algum esforço, numa transição, numa superação.” Peter Handke, *Para uma Abordagem da Fadiga* (Lisboa: Difel, 1990), 60.

ON REMEDIATIONS OF REALITY AND POETICS OF PHILOSOPHY.
WORKING THROUGH COMPLEXITY AND THE STRANGE CASE OF
KORSAKOW DOCUMENTARY

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*Documentary has always been a question of making sense of the world.
In the process, documentary has not only challenged the sense
of the world, but the sense of sense itself.
Have digital and networked media changed documentary's making sense
of the world? Have they changed the sense of sense itself?*¹

INTRODUCTION – OR: DIVING INTO THE OCEAN OF QUESTIONS OF PHILOSOPHY *IN*
AND *THROUGH* INTERACTIVE DOCUMENTARY PRACTICES

Within the context of ‘digital culture,’ hybrid genres, practices and configurations of documentary keep emerging and various forms of so-called ‘interactive factuals’ are developing – all with “an intention to document the ‘real’ [using] digital interactive technology to realize this intention.”²

This contribution explores in how far the partly algorithmically edited Korsakow documentary, a highly experimental type of interactive database documentary, (re-)mediates ‘reality’/reality³ and its medial representations/constructions.⁴ In contrast to other tools for creating interactive documentaries which work towards a the building of pluri-linear coherent factual textures, which help those formerly known as documentary authors (which are now rather curators) to craft ‘well-built stories’ and which afford satisfactory, consistent documentary experiences for the ‘viewers’ (which now rather become users or (inter-)actors), Korsakow is quite demanding for authors and users alike: On the one hand, due to the algorithmic editing, it means a loss of control over the narrative structure, its dramaturgic unfolding and the line of argument – which affects the documentary author when creating the interactive documentary and the user-interactor when exploring the material; at the same time, however, it promises a potential gain of unforeseen insight due its unpredictable turnarounds.

One key question will be in how far the epistemology and ontology of such complex configurations enable users and authors to think *about* and to think through digital practices as well as philosophical issues. In this context, Korsakow, which radically plays with non-linearity and contingency in order to challenge usual causality, will be considered as a documentary “counter-practice.”⁵ Hence, it not only breaks with the expectations of the user-interactors and documentary authors; it also serves as a litmus test for the reliance of narratology, linearity and epistemological insight in times of multiple entanglements.⁶

Many Korsakow documentaries do not only tackle philosophical issues by *addressing* them in form of an interactive documentary essay / essayistic documentary; rather, they also afford individual reflection on the process of doing philosophy *through* the configuration which can only be accessed online and thus by its nature promotes personal, sometimes even intimate moments of epiphany in a private space – moments of revelation which are much more difficult to achieved in the setting of cinematic screenings as it is the case with linear documentary film. Still, what does it mean – ‘doing philosophy?’ ‘Doing philosophy’ is hereby understood in the sense of posing general and fundamental questions as to our being in the world, as to what we know and how we perceive ‘the world around us’ – and what we make out of these perceptions.⁷ In this contribution, there will possibly more *questions* be raised than *definite answers* provided – though at least *provisionary* answers or rather propositions will be presented. How, for example, can the complex assemblage of authors, user-interactors, documentary subjects, historical material, found footage, poetic audiovisual vignettes and algorithms be used as a prompt for philosophical considerations? Does this – at first sight – unwieldy form instigate the agents involved to ponder on the relatedness and contingency of a deeply intermingled ‘being in the world?’ In how far do the specific characteristics of digital environments such as non-linearity, interactivity and contingency affect our notions of authorship and argument? And in how far are Korsakow documentaries an invitation to fathom the potential of the form of documentary essay/essayistic documentary as genre and as a ‘tool for thought’?⁸ Does the shift from linearity in narrative to non- or post-linear forms and the following shift in ‘making sense’ alter our notion of narrative – maybe even alter our sense of sense itself?

To tackle these issues, traditional documentary theory connected with the striving for ‘truth,’ theories of making sense⁹ will be brought into dialogue with positions deriving from so called ‘new media studies’¹⁰, especially considerations on interactive factials.¹¹ Thus, we will examine the different ways in which interactive documentary assemblages of the Korsakow-type figure as art, as representations/constructions of some sort of ‘reality’ (subjective? objective?) and as an agentic interactor in the world – and in how far all this meets philosophical thinking.

The multi-authored, poetic, self-reflexive, interactive assemblage *Racing Home*¹² will be a test-stone for our hypothesis that due to its algorithmic editing and narrative multi-layeredness, the Korsakow configuration opens dimensions of intertwined ‘realities’ that are otherwise difficult to access. In this process, following Hoffman and McMahon, we ourselves will dig deeper and deeper through the complexity of the documentary endeavour as such and the specifically ‘strange case of Korsakow documentary’ – whereby complexity will not be reduced by moving from layer to layer, but, on the contrary, further augmented. We will move from philosophies *of* documentary to philosophical thinking *through* documentary practices. Thus, we will equally be concerned with the epistemology of documentary as documentary ontology – especially when the ‘documentary moment’ is to be found in ‘the digital.’¹³

So let us enter the complex world of heterogeneity, non-linearity, contingency, complexity and thematic density of Korsakow and of *Racing Home*.

RACING HOME – A STORY OF LOSS AND FINDING

The story behind the documentary project *Racing Home* reads like a story of failure and loss: Originally, *Racing Home* by the Canadian filmmaker Marian McMahon was meant to become a linear documentary film on highly complex philosophical issues: McMahon was interested in the metaphysical implications of ethical, political and psychological concerns connected to identity, race and belonging. However, the project could never be finished – at least not as a linear documentary essay. In 1996, Marian died of cancer and left an apartment full of 8mm and 16mm footage – factual cinematic vignettes but also highly personal reflections, sound recordings and archival material she had collected. Apart from this *filmic* legacy, she also bequeathed boxes full of diaries and notes, maps, photographs, letters, newspaper clippings and objects from everyday culture which had become meaningful to her – either with regard to her research for the film or to her own identity forming the past which she, in the process of making the film, had become to explore.

Thus, after Marian McMahon’s death, her partner Phil Hoffman found himself confronted with a large array of different artefacts. Being a filmmaker himself, Phil made Marian’s project his own, trying to edit Marian’s footage. Still, he never managed to come up with a linear documentary film: Neither was he able to select footage, nor did he feel in the position to force the amount of the material into the form of a documentary film which in his eyes would neither be truthful to Marian’s (potential) intentions or the ‘truth’ of the material. Foremost, however, he wanted to somehow express the epistemologic twists the journey had taken: for both Marian and himself, due to the new

doubled meaning of belonging with regard to Marian's death. Thus, he faced the problem to be truthful to his potential audience, truthful to Marian's original project and truthful to his relationship with Marian which he thought should be brought into the documentary as well as the process of making the documentary. The mediality of thinking through these matters should have an adequate place in the final result.

For almost 20 years, Phil struggled with the material and his own place in this ethical as well as very personal entanglement. His restless search for finding a form and for gaining control over the material ended when he discovered an alternative way of convening documentary experience and when he started embracing the loss of control which was inherent to his mission. This was the case when Phil learned about a documentary editing tool named Korsakow, developed by the German media artist and documentary maker Florian Thalhofer.¹⁴

This was a turning point in Phil's search – mainly due to two features of Korsakow configurations. First of all, Korsakow offers an elegant possibility of not only juxtaposing factual and fictional discourses and oscillating between objective and subjective perspectives but also of complexly entangling them. This allows a self-reflexive probing into an issue which has accompanied documentary discourses since their beginnings, namely the specific relation of documentary to 'reality' and its inherent truth claim. Secondly, Hoffman was finally able to realize his project, because Korsakow frees the author from the pressure of creating a linear documentary narrative. Thus, he was able to come to terms with issues which evade linear narratability such as the functioning of reasoning and memory, what it means to lose one's own place in the world, to lose a beloved person, how commemoration works – and on a meta-level: how all this can be rendered 'truthfully' experiential "counter-narratives".

And yet – how can these issues already highly complex in themselves be brought together? How can the heterogeneous material and the different approaches to different facets of personal and collective 'realities' be combined in one documentary project? As *Racing Home* already proves within the first sequences, the answers to these issues are as complex as the questions, as the material and as the philosophical implications of the issues negotiated. And they do not go without ruptures in what can be described as the documentary texture.

ENTERING *RACING HOME* – A COMPLEX NETWORK OF INTERWOVEN MATERIAL POSING MORE QUESTIONS THAN PROVIDING ANSWERS

When accessing the interactive documentary *Racing Home*, the user is confronted with a first breakup of the usual textuality of documentary. The opening scene of *Racing Home*, accessible on

<http://racinghome.ca/>, presents a wide angle shot in sepia, probably shot on 16mm film (fig. 1). The shot itself and the first 30 seconds are highly subjective and can be characterized as ‘poetic’ in Nichols’ sense.¹⁵ But what follows disturbs the users’ expectations of what ‘documentary is.’

In the opening scene of *Racing Home*, the camera follows a person walking from the right to the left behind enormous columns of an Egyptian temple. From far away, one can hear the atmospheric ‘white noise’ captured by a microphone presumably turned on accidentally. Interestingly, the frame in which the short sequence is shown does not fill the full screen, even if one activates the ‘full-screen’-mode; instead, it runs in a small frame in the centre of an otherwise black screen. Below the window with the clip, an excerpt from a text written by Marian McMahon appears in white letters – maybe an entry taken from her production notebook, a passage from her personal diary, or a letter to a friend or her partner Phil:

In this film, I begin with my own experience, my own ethnicity and background. In doing so, I return to my hometown, Windsor, Ontario, to see how this landscape, this location has worked to produce a ‘raced’ identity. I was especially interested in examining how I was living this past. What if geography is a wound, but equally a place we call home?

I wanted to know how I have been taught to see myself as white, what were the specific dimensions of this identity and how were they shaped in this specific landscape – a border town facing a large U.S. city and separated by a river. To get caught up in histories of which we are largely unaware is inevitable. Yet we have a historical responsibility – the past shapes us in ways that are still with us.

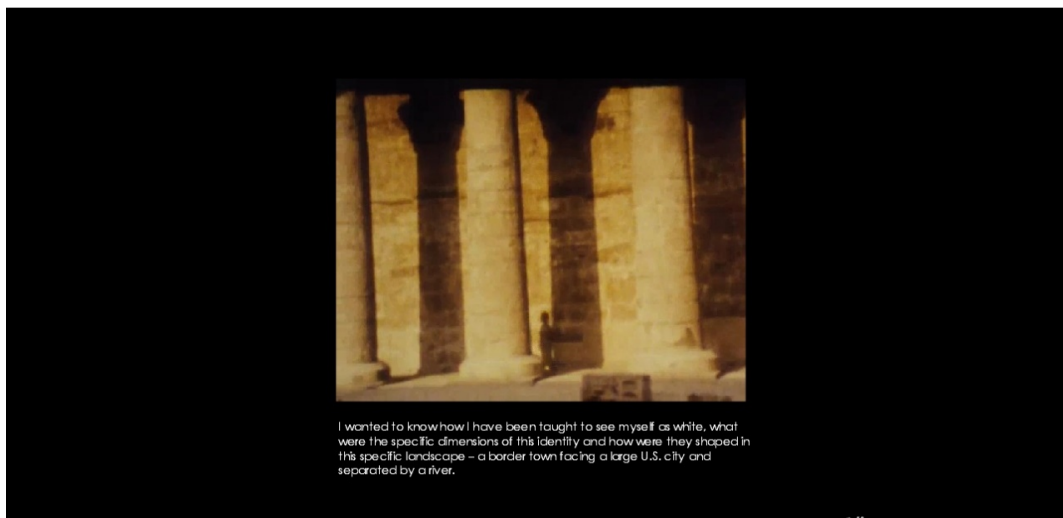


Fig. 1: Screenshot from the opening sequence of *Racing Home*

This rather enigmatic visual impression which is accompanied by the mysterious sound of wind and at the same time the rather straightforward textual inserts introduce the user to a documentary project that questions the documentary mission from the very first shots: What can images, sounds and texts – and especially their combination – tell us about ‘reality?’ And if so – which form of ‘reality’ do they relate to? The represented reality or the reality of representation – the process of exploring the phenomenological world through doing documentary? Can images, sounds and texts go beyond the surface, can they come close to the core of issues, can they allow us to travel in time, to change perspectives? Are there answers to the questions Marian asked herself when she set off on her enquiry, and are there – on a meta-level – answers to the questions concerning the whole endeavour and its mediality? Or is it rather the process of making these queries that is the key to what documentary means in the 21st century? Is this reality of doing documentary maybe the ultimate goal in itself? All these questions set the tone of the following experience – an experience which is marked by challenging the mainstream documentary expectations – and to some extent also the expectations user-interactors have with regard to interactive documentary.¹⁶

The next rupture of the conventions of documentary texture occurs when the users have to notice that ‘playing the film’ is actually to be understood in a sense that deviates from the ‘normal’ expectations such a labelling triggers. To access the world seen through Marian’s and Phil’s eyes, it is them who have to actively play the film. The film doesn’t ‘play itself.’ It is up to the users to interact within the assemblage and to co-develop a fluid documentary text as in fact, there is no film or coherent pre-figured documentary to be receptively ‘consumed.’ This means, as Judith Aston and Sandra Gaudenzi put it, that “the viewer is positioned within the artefact itself, demanding him, or her, to play an active role in the negotiation of the ‘reality’ being conveyed through the i-doc.”¹⁷ In this sense, text – or rather documentary texture as an ephemeral sedimentation of the user’s interactivity within the configuration – can be characterized as dialogic and dynamic.¹⁸

A first intervention from the side of the user is required right after this opening sequence: Towards the end of this clip, a small thumbnail still appears on the right side of this image. By ‘mouse over,’ it offers the option to activate this frame, which then moves into the large frame, substituting the previous clip. This sequence, filmed by a shaky handheld camera in a first-person perspective, presents a slightly untidy room. The perspective is that of the person handling the camera – Phil, as one learns later – who explores a room in which the objects Marian left to him are kept. After a panning point-of-view shot, the still unsteady handheld camera shows some close-

ups: a small figurine, earrings, a button, a timber box (fig. 2). The narrating voice contextualizes the actions seen so far and currently performed.



Fig. 2: Screenshots from the second clip of the Korsakow documentary *Racing Home*

When the clip ends, the frame in which the video has just been played becomes smaller and three thumbnail stills of potentially following clips appear (cf. fig. 3). Though the stills do not give away factual information of what clip might lie beneath the thumbnails, they clearly show that the users are on the threshold of entering into a complex interactive environment that entangles material from many sources – ranging from more or less objective to highly subjective clips – adding up to a plurivocal chorus modulating on the themes of loss, race, ‘History,’ memory and identity. In this tempting exploration, the users will encounter various materials: material shot by Marian herself, found footage, material from her family archive, old newsreels, sketches from her travels and videos shot in the style of *cinéma vérité* questioning the documentary mission to represent reality as such, as well as interventions in a highly participative mode, are combined with enigmatic atmospheric shots, poetic reflections and sequences which seem to be b-roll material, presenting Marian commenting ‘in private’ on her project. All these elements will be contingently woven into material shot posthumously by Phil Hoffman. A round-dance of more and more questions – and again more referral of meaning than definitive expository statements starts.



Fig. 3: Screenshot from one of the potentially presented arrays of audio-visual material of Racing Home

KORSAKOW AS AUTHORING SYSTEM: SPECIFICITIES OF ALGORITHMIC EDITING AND THE UNRULY USE OF DATABASE LOGICS

However – which choreography stands behind this? Or in other words: Why was coming across the authoring software called Korsakow a turning-point in Phil Hoffman’s so far unsuccessful attempts to come to terms with the legacy bequeathed by Marian? In what does Korsakow as a software and as a ‘tool for thought’ consist precisely, and what sets it apart from other digital tools to create interactive documentary?

The key idea in Korsakow is that it flips the database logic around, that it allows to find alternatives to the epistemological value of deliberately crafted narrative and linearity, and that it probes into the beauty of contingency and complexity. The system works on the basis of short video clips, so-called ‘smallest narrative units or short ‘SNUs.’¹⁹ Such SNUs can be made up from more than one cut or dissolve: the unity of a SNU consists in the coherency of a thought, not a formal unity of film or video. The fact that a medium is made of SNUs and that these are to be regarded as undividable wholes which form units of their own is also known as “modularity”²⁰ of a medium or its “granularity”.²¹ Essential hereby is that the clips maintain their independence. Though they form (as will be seen) conjunctions with other SNUs, these couplings are flexible. In contrast to linear film where material is brought into one fixed linear order, Korsakow (as well as many other interactive database documentaries) probe into multi- or even non-linearity which relies on the multiple possibilities of how and when clips are integrated into the texture of the filmic experience. Each time the user clicks on one thumbnail representation of a SNU, the otherwise disparate SNUs

are organized into different combinations – a process that Seth Keen described as “connecting granules of video together into a web of relations.”²²

This brings us to the second aspect which sets Korsakow configurations apart from most other manifestations of emerging interactive documentary: the unruly ‘use’ of “database logics” (Luers 2014).²³ To be retrieved from the database, each SNU has two sets of ‘points of contact’ or short ‘POCs’: one set of in-POCs and one set of out-POCs. A POC is a set of keywords allocated to a SNU. These POCs can be metadata concerning the content of the SNU, but they can also hold information about formal properties, e.g. dominant colours, information on the camera angle, on the location or date it was shot etc. The two sets of data – of the in- and out-POCs – define the potential connections between clips. However, in contrast to usual keyword allocation in functional databases with un-ambiguous sets of keywords (‘one keyword – one destination’), one and the same keyword can be an in- and an out-POC in Korsakow. Thus, the user-interactor is confronted with an asymmetry of keywords. Moreover, as the first interactive sequence of *Racing Home* has shown, the user-interactor can only form assumptions on what expects him or her, but the key-wording itself and the logic behind the linking are hidden to the user and thus appear haphazard; there is no clear ‘labelling’ of the clips on the surface of the database documentary. The only possibility of experiencing the material is by tentatively probing into what might be ‘hidden’ under the thumbnail. Thus, the users are invited “to explore the pleasures of engaging with the combinatorial possibilities of audiovisual documents.”²⁴

What enhances the feeling of free floating in a complex network that evades clear structural analysis is also the fact that keywords in Korsakow are unstable as to their temporal validity. Each keyword has only a limited lifetime – i.e. a defined number of times that it can be displayed. Depending on the process of viewing, keywords are ‘weighed’ as to their ‘relevance’ for the unfolding of the documentary. This makes clips more or less likely to be presented as options.

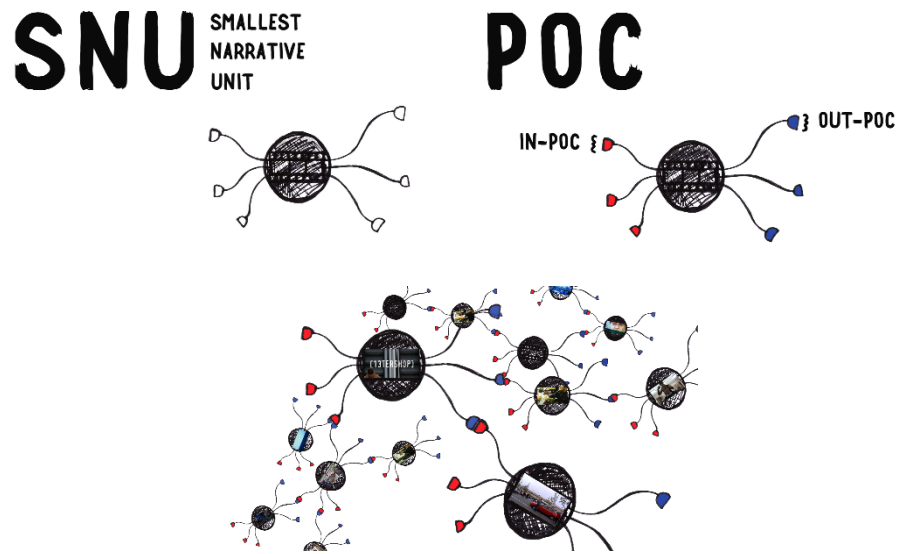


Fig. 3: SNUs and POCs in Korsakow

From this follows the third specificity of Korsakow. In contrast to determined and deterministic databases relying on a symmetry of in- and out-keyword, keywords in Korsakow are ‘fuzzy’: any keyword, set of keywords or parts of a set can be shared by more than one clip. Consequently, there exist many possible connections between the out-keywords of one SNU and the matching in-keywords of another SNU. Clips in Korsakow simultaneously have multiple destinations and thus, they can figure at various positions in the viewing experience.

As such, Korsakow’s all-over default behaviour obstructs linear sequencing of clips. The documentary does *not* expose a clearly structured chain of (mono-causal) cause-and-effect, of unidirectional relations; and it does *not* allow for creating a strong narrative line to develop a documentary argument and to make some sort of truth claim about ‘reality’. Rather, the interpretation of database in Korsakow as ‘combinatory engines’ brings forward a complex network of affective narratives which are explicitly *not* instructive or informational, but which open *a field* of perspectives through a heterogeneous variety of material. In line with the primary requisite for asking the right questions vis-à-vis audio-visual documentary material in order to more self-reflexively approach one’s own thinking, Korsakow allows both the users and the authors to work (and think) through evocative modes to approach complex issues in a way that differs from documentary *film*. Due to the system’s “simultaneous multiplicity”²⁵ and the multi-directional, syntagmatic and paradigmatic density and depth, the procedural nature of the documentary configuration based upon the interaction of all ‘authoring’ instances (curators/authors, interactors/producers²⁶ and algorithms) and of the unique procedurally produced experience based

upon Korsakow offers an alternative to linear continuity and narrative coherence as the usual default organizing principles of documentary film. Korsakow documentaries hereby disrupt the often morally biased didacticism that has been dominant in different variations of documentary in the tradition of documentary film, especially in documentaries of the type the Nichols describes as ‘expository mode.’²⁷

As various documentary scholars like Plantinga and Renov state, there exists rising scepticism against “the mainstream documentary tradition’s ‘self-assurance’ with misplaced modernist certainty.”²⁸ This sceptical position stems from “a general suspicion about any ‘optimistic’ or positive accounts of knowledge (the target has various labels, including positivism, rationalism, scientism, but the core view can usually be characterized as some form of epistemic realism).”²⁹ The unsettling momentum that Korsakow poses has at least the potential to open new horizons for doing documentary – and for doing philosophy through and in documentary. It offers possibilities of exploring techniques that are aligned to essayistic pondering, intellectual *flâneuring*, *écriture automatique* or performative artistic interventions as in the tradition of Dada or the Fluxus movement.

RACING HOME AND QUESTIONS OF EPISTEMOLOGY – THE AFFORDANCE TO ASK QUESTIONS GENERATIVELY

As the first glimpses into the world unfolding in *Racing Home* have already shown, not only the issues negotiated in this documentary project are intricate and of highly philosophical nature – also the way in which these issues are convened are complex and multi-layered.

But let’s take one step after the other to analytically disentangle the conglomerate of concerns. If one takes the array of topics first, they all touch upon essential issues of what it means ‘to be in this world’ – and the project into how these issues can be audio-visually convened.

First of all, there is the theme of loss – personal as well collective. This theme of course also falls into the field of individual and social psychology, but in the end, it all comes back to the essential question of what it means to live, not only as a monad, but as a social being. The same goes for History, especially in the context of public commemoration and the representation of the past. What can documentary contribute to this endeavour? To what extend can documentary film be part of what can be called collective memory? What epistemologic insight can documentary media offer? How objective can documentary be, how subjective is it by its very nature? How does ‘multiple first-person documentary’³⁰ figure in this nexus of practices? And last but not least: What is identity? What do we know about ourselves? What do we know about ‘the other?’ What does, in

this context, belonging mean? Belonging to a place, to a community, to another person? To what extent do personal history and experiences play a role at least as important as presumably ‘factual knowledge?’ And what about the inter-actional, para-social contact-building through the dialogic nature of the procedural documentary experience?

The configuration – *Racing Home* as a complex performative texture – does, however, not really present answers to all these questions which arise in the exploration of the material and its double movement to the core of belonging – private as public, individual as collective – as well as memory and commemoration. Rather, the configuration dares to ask questions, to trigger thought – and to do so interactively. As already said, the ‘film’ does not play ‘itself;’ rather, the material needs to be actively explored by the user-interactors.

Which brings us to the second point: the formal, aesthetic as well as the algorithmic realization of *Racing Home*. As has been shown, not only does *Racing Home* dare to ask more questions than it answers, with each time ‘playing’ the documentary, it also creates new questions – accruing from the always novel contexts that are generated in the interplay of SNUs and their strange dance evading any obvious mono-causal logic. Moreover, due to the granularity of material, each element “retains the sum of all possible relations it might share with others even after the work is distributed, supporting a ‘future-oriented’ rather than a ‘backward-looking hermeneutics.’”³¹

Nonetheless, at first sight, from an epistemological perspective, the approach of *Racing Home* is rather unsatisfying as the project does not provide answers (and in fact many users of Korsakow documentaries criticize the lack of coherence and complain about a stale feeling of disorientation).³² The configurations necessitate an attentive exploration, a willingness of the user-interactors (as well as the curating ‘authors’) to surrender control and to engage in openness. Korsakow “challenge[s] the easy consumption of ideas” and “may require time and effort on the part of the receiver, just as they probably did on the part of the maker. Experiencing concentrated engagement, duration, immersion and the gathering of ideas over several sittings even may be of the essence of such works, both in form and content.”³³ In this sense, despite the frustration generated by the complex rhizomatic associative worlds that Korsakow opens, the configurations can probably be regarded as highly productive at a different level. In fact, Korsakow documentaries can be characterized as decidedly dialogical as proposed by Aston and Odorico in their work on interactive documentary and Bakhtin’s dialogism.³⁴ There is no story that unfolds, rather the user-interactors have to create texts themselves – together with the material, the algorithms lying at the deep-structure of the computational configuration and the author.

But if the author does not suggest any answers – where then do (provisionary) responses to the issues brought forward arise? Do they come from the audiovisual material? Are they ‘in the SNU’s?’ Or is the process of ‘making sense’ transposed rather somewhere else?

POETICS OF PHILOSOPHY IN KORSAKOW: THE AFFECTIVE INTERVAL AND THE STRIVING FOR MAKING SENSE IN HYPERMEDIAL ENVIRONMENTS

This question and Miles’ observation about a ‘future-oriented hermeneutics’ bring the discussion of philosophy in Korsakow documentary to a meta-level and lead us to the concern of how documentary – how film in general – makes meaning and conveys sense. And they bring us to the question that serves as an epigraph to this contribution – the question that probably stands at the core of any documentary project: the question of the notion of ‘sense’ of in the specific context of documentary’s striving for ‘truth’ and ‘insight’, for entangling complex matters and for coping with complexity – or, as Murphie puts it: “the sense of sense itself.”³⁵

Though it has so far rarely been employed in the context of interactive documentary, Bergson’s thoughts on perception, interval and the living image as well as Deleuze’s specifications as to cinematic movement images can be highly productive in this context, and they can serve as a bridge between media philosophical consideration on film and the actualization of these thoughts in new media. In this sense, they can be seen as a direct link to what new media scholar Adrian Miles describes as ‘affective assemblage’³⁶ in networked media: the interdependence of human and non-human agents, knowledge, expectations, affect and (inter)action that is often summarized as the process of both making meaning and making sense.³⁷

As delineated in detail elsewhere,³⁸ according to Deleuze’s ‘ecological’ reading of Bergson’s concept of the universe and the world of images, everything reacts to everything else and everything is interrelated and in a constant flux, a movement of interdependent action and reaction. These flows, however, are not predetermined; still, they are not absolutely hazardous either. For Bergson, “movement is reality itself.”³⁹ This approach to ‘reality’ leads Deleuze to the concept of a ‘world-in-a-flux’ which he combines with a conceptualization of the world as a series of kaleidoscopic and multifaceted ‘living images.’ Foremost, however, this train of thought inspires Deleuze’s understanding of perception in relation to affect and reaction and makes him focus on the interval between them – a phenomenon which he describes as the sensory motor schema. Although the interpretation of images is virtually open and undetermined, the perception of a *particular* living image in a *particular* situation always invites a reading and a *particular* action. Or in other words: neither making sense in terms of semiosis nor in terms of ‘making meaning’ are to be found in the

audiovisual sign *only* (in the case of Korsakow, the ‘reality’ represented in the SNU) nor is interpretation absolutely undetermined. The epistemological moment can rather be detected in the interplay of the individual clips by themselves and their always volatile new contextualization through the process of ‘doing documentary’ in terms of tentatively exploring the material. While all facets of the living image are still co-present in the image, only some are actively and consciously perceived, filtered, and only those aspects which seem to be relevant guide our reaction – whereby ‘action’ in the case of (linear) film is to be understood as ‘interpretation,’ while in the case of interactive media, this also comprises physical action, for example a ‘click’ to play the next SNU.⁴⁰

In linear documentary film, this interval is bridged by temporal montage – the flow of images linearly arranged in time. All ‘gaps’ between shots are overcome by the film itself. From this follows that indeterminacy and consequently complexity are at least partly reduced (partly, as they are still subliminally present if one considers alternative interpretations or subversive readings of a film). In interactive audio-visual media, by contrast, the viewer must assume the role of an *active interactor*, which makes her/him much more engaged in the process of producing meaning. The “ongoing site of indetermination” is now mainly located in the user who becomes “an affective relay between perception and action, watching and clicking.”⁴¹ The experience of the user-interactor is based on the oscillation between the cinematic flux within the single SNUs and the rupture between them – the moment at which one clip ends and the user-interactor has to choose the next one. In a dynamic assemblage this engagement produces the immersion in the vignettes as well as a dissociation from the narrative when the next action of the user-interactor is required. This double-take on the material – the interdependency and oscillation between perception and subjective experiences – suggests a psychodynamics that brings together conscious and unconscious levels of sense- and meaning-making. Users potentially get immersed in the flow of images and thereupon, they are thrown back on their own when the SNU stops, forced to step back and reflect on what they have just perceived. In this gap – the affective interval – something that has not been there before comes into being. This ‘new’ third can be neither found in the single SNUs, i.e. the audio-visual material, nor in the key-words allocated to them but it bares the performative dimension of ‘being made’ at the moment of interaction – the moment Miles describes as the triad of “click, think and link.”⁴² This moment can be described as ‘poetic’ in the philosophical sense, based on the ancient Greek term ποιεῖν which means ‘to make.’⁴³

In Korsakow, the affective intervals are driven to the extreme. Moments of indeterminacy are prolonged, complexity is enhanced rather than reduced, and the situation opens for an affective relation to the items perceived and experienced. One reason for this lies in the fact that all links

which appear on the surface of the interface – i.e. the computer display – are ‘opaque’ in Korsakow documentaries. ‘Opaque’ in this context means that the thumbnails of the clips are unlabelled: there is no information by sort of a visualized ‘keyword’ like the inscription of functional links in classic hypertext-environments. Thus, ‘navigating’ the material becomes a tentative exploration of the universe of a database. Intentionally following dramaturgic or argumentative lines as in ‘well-plotted’ (rather didactic) interactive documentaries becomes impossible. As such, the experiences afforded by Korsakow are quite often intimate and individually touching, as at the end of each SNU the user-interactor oscillates between personal decisions and indecisions, wondering and struggling. Within the Korsakow configuration, each experience is unique, co-creatively formed by the organization of the single SNUs and their ‘inner truth,’ partly dictated by the database logics that drive the combination of POCs and to a large extent dependent on the individual decisions by the user-interactors. This leads to a manifold ‘Chinese-box’ situation in which each ‘story’ and (subjective) documentary glimpse is a miniature narrative in itself (a SNU in the literal sense – a ‘smallest narrative unit’) which at the same time exists within a larger uniquely told story keyed to the interaction of the producer/curator, the user-interactor and the database – which again is situated in an even much more complex ‘story-world’ of potentialities – i.e. the configuration as a whole.

This stance, which is also inherent in some modes of representation in documentary film, particularly the poetic and the reflexive mode according to Nichols, draws attention to inherent ambiguities and contradictions, to the unsaid and the often otherwise unacknowledged of documentary experiences. It underlines the mediated nature of all experience – whether mediated through our senses (which are for example challenged by the white noise in the very first clip) or through media ‘in the narrower sense’ of technical *apparati*. In *Remediation*, Bolter and Grusin not only ponder on what makes new media ‘new’ (or rather to which extend new media remediate ‘older’ media such as film), they also introduce the term ‘hypermediacy.’ “In every manifestation, hypermediacy makes us aware of the medium or media and (in sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious ways) reminds us of our desire for immediacy,”⁴⁴ i.e. our longing for really getting to the core of things. “In all its various forms, the logic of hypermediacy expresses the tension between regarding a visual space as mediated and as a ‘real space’ that lies beyond mediation.”⁴⁵

As such, there is more to the hypermedial interface of interactive documentary – and this goes for such opaque and poetic, self-reflexive interactive documentary forms as Korsakow documentaries in particular: They are more than only a functional retrieval surface (which is led to absurdity in Korsakow due to opaque key-wording) or an aesthetic feature. Rather, the interface can be considered as being part of the ‘documentary argument’ (or the special kind of argument Korsakow documentaries suggest, considering their non-linear and non-causal layout)⁴⁶ – and

maybe, this is not too inadequate a way to help one find provisional answers to the essential questions of life is to ask the right questions and to be aware of the mediated nature of the propositions we get through the complex openness of impressions and experiences – given the complex and volatile nature of such issues?

RACING HOME AS PHILOSOPHIC THINKING THROUGH KORSAKOW

These considerations on epistemology bring us right into the core of issues of philosophical thinking *through* and *within* the Korsakow configuration – namely what it means to author material with a fuzzy algorithmic authoring tool and to explore this material as user-interactor. And it brings us to two further interrelated issues. Firstly: Are we dealing here with a digital *tool*, a means to convey documentary experiences? Or does Korsakow rather present a *method*, a way of thinking through things by thinking through media?⁴⁷ And secondly: Does the experience of ‘doing documentary’ (as *process*) with and through interactive, procedural documentary have the potential to be more ‘truthful’ to the functioning of our reasoning and the complex entanglements of issues ‘in the world’ than efforts to force material and ideas into a linear sequence, a ‘*line* of thought?’ This ultimately leads to the question: Are we on the threshold of a realm where we are moving from a *representational* paradigm of documentary to a *performative* one?

All these issues are related to the question of the algorithmic nature of Korsakow – its medial algorithmic ontology.⁴⁸ In Korsakow, the role of the author significantly changes: The author passes control to the system and to rule-driven automatized algorithmic editing procedures. Though it is still the author who assigns strings of key-words to the SNUs, and though it is still the author who edits the linear sequence within the SNUs – which means that she/he can make micro-arguments in these audio-visual vignettes –, a large part of the agency is handed to the system. Which SNUs are actually matching when the Korsakow documentary is ‘performed’ is only *partially* visible and ‘trackable’ for the ‘author’ or curator, as she/he loses the *total* overview of the multiple combinations of possible connections. As Gaudenzi observes, a “field of possible relations”⁴⁹ is opened – for both user-interactors and authors –, and as Nash describes it in the case of interactive documentary, the potential of such configurations does not lie in “the temporal ordering of elements” but rather in “the comparisons and associations that the user [as well as the author] is invited to make between the documentary’s elements.”⁵⁰

This is also the idea that initially motivated Florian Thalhoffer, the creator of the Korsakow system, to develop Korsakow. He wanted to develop a tool “that can re-shuffle your mind; even as an author I want to do this, to change my thoughts so that I get a different angle on things. [...]”

[W]hen I make a documentary with Korsakow, I don't really structure a single reality, I just think about the connections between things and then different experiences come out of that."⁵¹

This ultimately brings us to the core of doing documentary with Korsakow. One can argue that Korsakow becomes a *method of thinking* – a 'tool for thought' rather than a digital editing software. Korsakow provides a framework for pondering about things differently from in a linear philosophical treatise with a line of argument or a linear documentary film. This relates both to the interaction of the documentary 'author' and the experience and the user. In its contingency and due to the opaque key-wording in Korsakow, there is also a certain serendipity: user-interactors can only *guess* what the selected SNU might bring; definite *knowing* beforehand is never possible. The same is true for the documentary author: she/he can only specify and determine *probable* connections – but the *actual realization* of a documentary experience is always a unique momentum.⁵² As such, Korsakow emulates in its logics the (il-)logics of life: though certain actions might lead to certain re-actions, one can never be sure what will come next. Life in fact is not working on the base of linear, mono-directional one-hundred percent predictable chains of cause and effect. As such, the seemingly 'un-plotted' but deeply networked Korsakow documentaries emulates the logics of 'reality'. That said, despite the serendipity user-interactors have to give themselves to, Korsakow documentaries are still not *completely* arbitrary.

The configuration becomes a kind of laboratory to think *through* digital media – a feature that is important for the material Marian McMahon gathered when trying to come to terms with her hometown's racial past, when digging into the collective memory of her town and her own childhood memories, and which was essential for Phil Hoffman, his tribute to his partner and his grieving over her death. Hence, with regard to concepts of interactive storytelling, memory and commemoration, of perception and cognition as well as existential topics as death and remembrance, Korsakow opens options to (re)mediate material and to meditate on it at the same time – both as an author and as a user-interactor. Or as Thalhoffer puts it: "Korsakow is a method of arguing, a tool to make sense of the world. *Watching* Korsakow Films, and even more *making* Korsakow Films is an exercise for the brain to see different connections, to find new patterns in things."⁵³ At this point, the train of thought comes full circle – presenting the idea that Korsakow despite its non-linearity and despite the non-causal train of thoughts which are triggered, can be considered a very specific but potentially insightful method or tool for thought and unexpected emerging 'lines' or rather 'serpentine of argument'.

CONCLUSION – COMPLEXITY, CONTINGENCY AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL-ONTOLOGICAL ENTANGLEMENT IN THE STRANGE CASE OF KORSAKOW DOCUMENTARY

In the introduction, I postulated that Korsakow documentaries do not only question the representation of ‘the real’ – they question the documentary endeavour and contribute to what Murphie has described as the “changed [...] sense of sense itself.”⁵⁴ As the discussion of both the epistemological and media-ontological nature of Korsakow documentary as a very specific case of interactive database documentary has shown, documentary practices in new media ecologies potentially provide a fresh perspective on the documentary endeavour as such as well as upon classic and post-modern concerns of philosophy.

Renov notes that many strands in currently emerging documentary *theory* (especially in the field of interactive documentary and new media documentary)⁵⁵ are rather interested in the “contingency, hybridity, knowledge as situated and particular, identity as ascribed and performed” and how documentary potentially can overcome the modernist rationalist’s “dreams of universal reason.”⁵⁶ Instead of trying further to find “Truth in History”, instead of trying to develop protocols of inquiry, and instead of a belief in “disinterested knowledge,”⁵⁷ in Korsakow documentaries, one potentially explores ways to convey the complexity of experience; they experiment with alternatives to exposing some straight forward, logically unfolding documentary argument with ways of thinking *in* and *through* documentary in ways that are more adept to the actual working of our cognition and reasoning.

Due to the algorithmically complex ontology of the configuration, the stress of the affective interval and the unruly application of database logics which circumvents the possibility of linear, transparent causal storytelling and narration and which includes the loss of control over the narrative on the part of the ‘author’ as well as the serendipity of the exploration of an ephemeral texture on the part of the interactor – in short: due to this very nature of Korsakow documentary, both author and user are thrown back to the post-modern condition of contingency and disconcerting experience of *not*-knowing. Self-reflexivity as well as the hypermediacy of the medium are employed as “means of counteracting the tendency of documentaries to wear the mantle of epistemic authority, and to counteract the supposed gullibility of spectators,” as Plantinga puts it, and as he continues: skepticism “often favor[s] reflexive techniques that remind spectators of the mediated nature of documentary discourse, make the implicit perspectives of the filmmakers apparent, and perhaps even introduce a bit of epistemic humility into the film.”⁵⁸

In Korsakow, authors and users have to face the contingency of life, the multi-layeredness of realities and the fact that in order to detect some kind of meaning in seemingly random patterns, to make sense of things and sense of sense itself, it is sometimes as vital to find the right questions as it is necessary to strive for definite answers. What kinds of temporal propositions about vital questions of our being in the world will arise from this intersection of philosophy and new media documentary practices is an open-ended question. Whatever the case, in these strange times of global precariousness – whether political or social, whether pandemic or environmental – the need for ‘tools for thought’ such as Korsakow which can facilitate engagement with uncertainties, contingencies and the fact that one can never predict what the flux of life will bring, is surely stronger than ever.

Acknowledgements:

My kindest thanks go to Florian Thalsofer and especially to Dr. Judith Aston for the inspirational exchange and for turning my thoughts into proper English which certainly contributed to the clearness of the line of argument.

¹ Andrew Murphie, “Making sense: the transformation of documentary by digital and networked media,” *Studies in Documentary Film* 8, no. 3 (2014): 188.

² Judith Aston, and Sandra Gaudenzi, “Interactive documentary: setting the field,” *Studies in Documentary Film* 6, no. 2 (2012): 126.

³ In the following, we will differentiate between ‘reality’ in inverted commas as a universal philosophical concept and different facets of reality in the sense of experiential phenomenological world around us that we encounter in life (respectively subjective constructions of what one experiences to be real).

⁴ Cf. Jay David Bolter, and Richard Grusin, *Remediation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

⁵ Franziska Weidle, “Korsakow Perspective(s): Rethinking Documentary Knowledge in Digital Multilinear Environments,” *VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture* 10, no. 5 (2016): 110.

⁶ As especially Miles and Aston and also Gaudenzi observe, multiple, complex and fluid or ‘messy’ entanglements are the heart of interactive documentary. In their view, “interactive media creates a dynamic relationship between authors, users, technology and environment that allows for fluidity, [the] emergence and co-emergence of reality.” Miles even goes one step further when he postulates that interactive documentary – especially those of the Korsakow type – do “not seem to feel a need to domesticate this messiness [of the world] by accounting for it by attributing some sort of theoretical or explanatory *primum movens*.” In these observations, we find condensed the existential problem that faces any work defined as ‘documentary’ – whether interactive or otherwise: those who perceive the documentary artefact usually expect that there is some form of ‘truth’ or ‘reality’ that anchors the storytelling, and even Aston and Gaudenzi, as already said, characterize interactive documentary as works that are based on “an intention to document the ‘real.’” As will be shown in the following, the key to a better understanding of this paradox lies in taking into account both the level of the documentary narration and what is represented *and* the reality of the process of documenting – which includes in interactive artefacts *per definitionem* the active

engagement and participation of all agents involved – also the ‘viewer’ or rather user-interactor, who in contrast to a cinematic audience in a traditional screening plays an essential role in the unfolding of the documentary experience.

Adrian Miles, “a murmuration is not a story,” in *The Material Turn and Interactive Documentary*, ed. Adrian Miles (s.l.: UnPublish, 2017), 3.

Aston, and Gaudenzi, “Interactive Documentary”, 126.

⁷ Due to this quite comprehensive approach to philosophy, the focus of this paper examines the interrelations between philosophy, digital media, interactive documentary practices and the making of sense. Hereby, the discussion will range from metaphysical issues (being concerned with the fundamental nature of ‘reality,’ existence and being as such and their representation/construction in/through documentary) to epistemology (the question how we think to know things, closely connected to the documentary truth claim but also to the question of how we know things by doing documentary); further, we will touch upon logics (namely what has been described as ‘database logic,’ aesthetics, historiography, narratology and ethics.

Cf, William Luers, “Plotting the database,” in: *DNAntology*, ed. Matt Soar and Monika Gagnon, published 2014, accessed December 17, 2020, <http://dnaanthology.com/anvc/dna/plotting-the-database>.

⁸ For the concept of tools for thought, cf, Howard Rheingold, *Tools for thought. The history and future of mind-expanding technology* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1985); cf, also Judith Aston and Stefano Odorico, “The Poetics and Politics of Polyphony: Towards a Research Method for Interactive Documentary,” *Alphaville. Journal of Film and Screen Media* 15, (2018) 63-93.

⁹ Cf, among others Michael Renov, *The subject of documentary* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); cf, Michael Renov, “Towards a Poetic of Documentary,” in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012) 12-36; cf, Carl Plantinga, “Documentary,” in *The Routledge companion to philosophy and film*, ed. Paisley Livingston (London: Routledge, 2009) 494-504; cf, Tia DeNora, *Making sense of reality. Culture and perception in everyday life* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014).

¹⁰ Cf, Lev Manovich, “Database as Symbolic Form,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 5, no. 2 (1999): 80-99; cf, also Lev Manovich, *The language of new media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001); cf, Bolter, and Grusin, *Remediation*.

¹¹ Cf, Adrian Miles, “Interactive Documentary and Affective Ecologies,” in *New Documentary Ecologies. Emerging Platforms, Practices and Discourses*, ed. Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 67-82.

Aston, and Gaudenzi, “Interactive Documentary”; cf, Matt Soar, “Making (with) the Korsakow System: Database Documentaries as Articulation and Assemblage,” in *New Documentary Ecologies. Emerging Platforms, Practices and Discourses*, ed. Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 154-218.

¹² Phil Hoffman, and Marian McMahon, *Racing Home*, interactive documentary launched 2014, <http://racinghome.ca/>.

¹³ In this context, it needs to be said that though interactivity, non-linearity and procedurality are defining characteristics of ‘the digital,’ these properties are not *exclusive* features of digital media or works of art. This becomes clear if one widens the scope and thinks of (post-)modern novels (such as Borges formative *Garden of forking paths* [1941] or Calvino’s *Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore* [1979]), of surrealist works of art such as Buñuel’s *Chien andalou* [1929], of non-linearity and complex plot structures in movies which Buckland (2009) and Elsaesser describe as puzzle film or mind game movies (such as Nolan’s *Tenet* [2000] or *Memento* [2001]) or artistic interventions in the style of the Dada movement which still live on in current movements of performance art. However, one cannot deny that there is a tendency to non-linear complex works in correlation with the proliferation of digital media practices. More and more complex plot structures and non-linear serial narratives emerge if one thinks of many *Netflix* productions or pluri-linear cross- and trans-media narratives which comprise television on online communities (e.g. HBO’s notorious *Lost*).

Cf, Thomas Elsaesser, “The Mind-Game Film,” in *Puzzle Films*, ed. Warren Buckland (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 13-41.

¹⁴ Korsakow, released in 2009, is a software for creating browser-based dynamic documentaries. Thalhofer programmed this tool to produce a documentary essay about the consequences of alcohol abuse. In the course of his research, Thalhofer came across the medical diagnosis of the Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome – a form of neurologic consequential dementia due to heavy alcoholism. This syndrome is characterized by short-term memory loss accompanied by confabulation (i.e. the production of fabricated,

distorted or misinterpreted memories about oneself or the world) and a compulsion to invent stories which – however – seem to be out of adequacy and focus. Thalhoffer borrowed the name for his both his first Korsakow film *Korsakow Syndrom* and for software which emulates at first sight the production of confabulated, difficult to access ‘stories.’

¹⁵Cf, Bill Nichols, *Introduction to documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

¹⁶ As will become clear in the following, non-linear interactive documentary configurations of the Korsakow type differ not only from linear documentary *film* but also from more straightforward pluri-linear (but still linear) didactic forms of interactive documentaries. The most obvious feature of Korsakow documentaries is that they rely on contingency and probabilities which are generated by the programmatic engine that drives the documentary experience. This causes a non-linear experience (which is to be distinguished from pluri-linear experiences which are less complex as they ‘only’ offer more than one path through the story-world – but in this story-world, paths are still distinguishable). As Miles notes, “Korsakow is not an engine for building informational, didactic, instrumental interactive documentaries, but kludges together, within the constraints that programmatic media requires, a system to enable generative, associative patterns to emerge amongst its parts while the work is being authored and played.”

Adrian Miles, “Materialism and Interactive Documentary: Sketch Notes,” *Studies in Documentary Film* 8, no. 3 (2014): 211.

¹⁷ Aston, and Gaudenzi, “Interactive Documentary”, 126.

¹⁸ As will be seen in detail later, this shifts the focus from the epistemology of the documentary ‘content’ and its relation to some existing ‘outer reality’ to the ontology of the documentary process – the reality of doing documentary. This again, stresses the role of the user-interactor without whom this facet of the documentary ‘reality’ would not come into existence, and it adds a further twist to multiple authorship in Korsakow: As Cohen proclaims in his essay which already in its title “From Authorship to Authoring in Remediated/Remixed Documentary” carries his main argument (and as other new media documentary scholars observe), the status of authorship as well as individual agency need to be rethought in interactive documentary configurations. The role of an interactive documentary producer is closer to that of a *curator* or designer rather than to that of a classic filmic *auteur*, and the opening of the form to a ‘live’ response and productivity by user-interactors changes the role of the authorial presence in the work and the nature of the work itself – especially with regard to documentary texture and its narrative logic: The multiplication of authoring instances (primary authors, user-interactors and algorithms) and the stress of contingency and process disrupt the temporality of the narrative delivering the ‘story’ in the ever-present ‘now’ based upon the choices made from that presented by the narratology of the software. Cf, Hart Cohen, “Database Documentary. From Authorship to Authoring in Remediated/Remixed Documentary,” *Culture Unbound* no. 4 (2012), 327-346.

¹⁹ For a detailed analysis see Anna Wiehl, *The ‘New’ Documentary Nexus. Networked|Networking in Interactive Assemblages* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019). Excerpts from the chapter of the book regarding the description of the working-mechanisms of Korsakow are published with the permission of Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

²⁰ Manovich, *Language of New Media*, 27.

²¹ Adrian Miles, “Programmatic statements for a faceted videography,” in *Video Vortex reader. Moving Images Beyond Youtube*, ed. Geert Lovink (Amsterdam: Inst. of Network Cultures, 2008), 149.

²² Seth Ken, “Netvideo, Nonvideo, Newvideo: Designing a Multilinear Nonnarrative Form for Interactive Documentary,” (PhD diss., RMIT University, 2014), 26.

²³ Though Korsakow in this aspect deviates from most other emerging interactive documentary practices, it is nevertheless extremely illuminating to have a close look at this kind of doing documentary, as it self-reflexively ponders on the documentary mission and the (im)possibility of representing ‘the Real’ – or rather (re)constructing documentary realities. As will be seen, the self-reflexive nature of most Korsakow configurations – and of *Racing Home* in particular – highlights the potential and the challenges of interactive documentary as an emerging phenomenon and it questions – in ultimate consequence – the hegemony of the concept of the narratability of ‘the Real’, the concept of the linearity of thought in doing documentary and the status of documentary text itself.

²⁴ Craig Hight, “Software as co-creators in interactive documentary,” in *i-docs – The Evolving Practices of Interactive Documentary*, ed. Sandra Gaudenzi, Mandy Rose, and Judith Aston (New York: Wallflower, 2017), 88.

²⁵ Miles, “Materialism and Interactive Documentary”, 209.

²⁶ Cf. Axel Bruns, “From presumption to produsage,” in *Handbook on the Digital Creative Economy*, ed. Ruth Towse, and Christine Handke (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014), 67-78.

²⁷ Cf. Nichols, *Introduction to documentary*.

²⁸ Plantinga, “Documentary,” 499.

²⁹ Plantinga, “Documentary,” 499.

³⁰ Actually, in *Racing Home*, we are dealing with a multi-authored first-person documentary: Marian’s original view of her sense of home, as well as Phil’s coping with Marian’s death – not to forget the at least co-authoring and co-producing instance of the user-interactor who tentatively explores the glimpses on ‘reality’ presented in the SNUs and who makes his/her very individual ‘sense’ of the material.

³¹ Miles in an interview with Weidle, 26 October 2015, quoted in Franziska Weidle, “Gaining control over the loss of it. Software as focusing media in digital visual ethnography,” *Social Anthropology* 27, no. 1 (2019): 24.

³² For a critique of the reception of web documentaries cf. among others Siobhan O’Flynn, “Documentary’s metamorphic form: Webdoc, interactive, transmedia, participatory and beyond,” *Studies in Documentary Film* 6, no. 2 (2012): 141–157.

³³ Roderick Coover, “Visual research and the new documentary,” *Studies in Documentary Film* 6, no. 2 (2012): 204.

³⁴ Cf. Aston and Odorico, “The Poetics and Politics of Polyphony”, 64 f.

³⁵ Murphie, “Making Sense”, 188.

³⁶ Miles, “Interactive Documentary and Affective Ecologies,” 204.

³⁷ Hight underlines that it is useful to make a distinction between “‘making meaning’ which is possible through the spatial and temporal combination of any variety of media elements, and the more difficult strategic exercise of encouraging users to ‘make sense’ through their engagement with specific pathways through media fragments.” This distinction points at the difference between the epistemic driven striving for deeper insight and the mere cognitive deciphering of information. (Hight, “Software as co-creators in interactive documentary,” 89.

³⁸ Cf. Anna Wiehl, “Beyond ‘Toolness’: Korsakow Documentary as a Methodology for Plurivocal Interventions in Complexity,” *Alphaville. Journal of Film and Screen Media* 15 (2018): 33-48; cf. Wiehl, *The ‘New’ Documentary Nexus. Networked|Networking in Interactive Assemblages*.

³⁹ Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, trans. by Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946): 169.

⁴⁰ These re-actions can at least partly be directed by the documentary author if one thinks back to the possibility of photographic framing which is e.g. the case in the close-ups in the second SNU.

⁴¹ Miles, “Click, Think, Link: Interval and Affective Narrative.”

⁴² Cf. Miles, “Click, Think, Link: Interval and Affective Narrative.”

⁴³ In the context of *living documentaries* Sandra Gaudenzi even speaks of *auto-poesis*, which she directly relates to inter-activity as a sort of making, of ‘acting’: “Inter-activity is therefore seen as our fundamental way of being, our way of relating and existing through doing. If we extend this logic to interactive artefacts, such as interactive documentaries, then our interacting with them is a way to relate, and construct, our world. Also, if life is defined as self-organisation, adaptivity and change through inter-action, then the interactive documentary can be seen as a living entity.” (Sandra Gaudenzi, “The Living Documentary. From representing reality to co-creating reality in digital interactive documentary,” (PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, London, 2013): 21.

This train of thought again strengthens the argument of ‘the reality of documenting’ – which has to be distinguished from ‘the reality documented’ (which, according to many post-modern thinkers is rather elusive. As not only Foucault stresses, any form of knowledge is always to be seen as a medial effect deriving from cultural techniques, institutions and ‘the poeology’ of the medial.

⁴⁴ Bolter, and Grusin, *Remediation*, 34.

⁴⁵ Bolter, and Grusin, *Remediation*, 14.

⁴⁶ For the notion of ‘interface as argument,’ cf. among others Soar, “Making (with) the Korsakow System”, 156

⁴⁷For interactive documentaries as research method, cf. Aston and Odorico, “The Poetics and Politics of Polyphony.”

⁴⁸ In this context Miles speaks also of the material side. For a detailed analysis of his media ecological considerations which are influenced by new materialism and Actor-Network-Theory, cf. Adrian Miles, *Digital materiality: making, networks, media*, (Melbourne: Australian Screen Production and Education

Research Association, 2013); cf, also Miles, “Click, Think, Link”; cf, Miles. “Interactive Documentary and Affective Ecologies”.

⁴⁹ Gaudenzi, *Living Documentary*, 87.

⁵⁰ Kate Nash, “Modes of Interactivity: Analysing a Webdoc,” *Media, Culture and Society* 34, no 2 (2012): 205.

⁵¹ Kate Nash, and Florian Thalhofer, “An Interview with Florian Thalhofer, Media Artist and Documentary Maker,” in *New Documentary Ecologies. Emerging Platforms, Practices and Discourses*, ed. Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): 195.

⁵² The concept of the duality of form and matter, of the real and the virtual, of the actual and the potential connects to the reflections by Lévi which again link back to Greek scholastics, especially Aristotle and his *Metaphysics*, particularly Book IX, chapters 6-8. Lévi’s line of argument is based on the assumption that what is currently described as the virtual and what is usually called ‘the Real’ (or in philosophical terms the actual) are only two sides of the same coin: “Le mot virtuel vient du latin médiéval *virtualis*, lui-même issu de *virtus*, force, puissance. Dans la philosophie scolastique, est virtuel ce qui existe en puissance et non en acte. Le virtuel tend à s’actualiser, sans être passé cependant à la concrétisation effective ou formelle.”

Pierre Lévy, *Qu’est-ce que le virtuel?* (Paris: La Découverte, 1989): 12 ; cf. also Aristotle, *Metaphysics. Book Theta*, translated by Stephen Makin (Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press, 2010).

Though both sides are interdependent, one needs to discriminate between them: Aristotle differentiates in his *Metaphysics* between ‘the Real’ as the physical existence or ‘thingness’ and ‘the Truth’ or creative arrangement of the signification of ‘thingness,’ i.e. its actuality. At the same time, he introduces the distinction between matter and form in terms of synchrony: The matter of a substance is the materiality it is made of; the form is the way this material is put together so that a whole is formed which then features certain characteristics. Yet, applying this differentiation *diachronically*, across time, it connects the duality of matter and its composite form to another key Aristotelian distinction – that between potentiality (*dunamis*) and actuality (*entelecheia* or *energeia*) – which leads to the procedural nature of interactive documentary.

Moreover – as to the question of the documentary argument and the documentary truth claim – one must not forget that in this scholastic tradition, ‘the Real’ is not identical with ‘the Truth’ it constitutes. Transposing these ideas into our evolving (media) culture, DeNora deduces from this in *Making sense of reality* that “realities are often multiple and are realized through artful practices that weave together words, acts, objects, meanings, perceptions and people” (DeNora, *Making sense of reality*, 125). This matches the central idea of Korsakow configurations that a multiply layered ‘reality’ or rather co-existing realities (with different probabilities) are in a never-ending flux, subject to mediation and remediation, performative dialogic negotiation and renegotiation in which the database logics, the (inter-)actions of the agents in the configuration and the material itself constitute the (potential) range of actualized or now focused trains of thought in the complex assemblage.

For the notion of actuality and potentiality as well as Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, see also *Stanford University*, “Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,” accessed December 12, 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu>.

⁵³ Florian Thalhofer, “Korsakow Film – Korsakow Institut,” accessed December 12, 2020, <http://korsakow.tv/formats/korsakow-film/>; emphasis A.W.;

⁵⁴ Murphie, “Making Sense,” 188.

⁵⁵ What is important to note is that we are speaking here of documentary *theory*, not so much of practices, as experimental documentary approaches such as Korsakow or projects at the intersection of artistic intervention and artistic research are nonetheless far from being mainstream and have to face reluctance on the part of audiences/users. In fact, one rather can observe a rise of factual entertainment formats which still pretend to provide a direct access to ‘truth’ and ‘life as it is.’

⁵⁶ Renov, “Towards a Poetics of Documentary,” 136.

⁵⁷ Renov, “Towards a Poetics of Documentary,” 136-137.

⁵⁸ Plantinga, “Documentary,” 501.

SPECIAL DOSSIER | DOSSIÊ ESPECIAL

THE UNCERTAINTIES OF DIALECTICS¹

Jacques Rancière (University of Paris 8)

Images of the World and the Inscription of War: this film, more than any other, produces the kind of vertigo peculiar to Farocki's films. The principle underlying this vertigo is easy to define. From the first image, the viewer feels that he is led securely by the hand, firmly guided through a demonstration. However, as the film moves forward, he is less and less sure of what the filmmaker wants to demonstrate to him, less and less sure that the pedagogue himself knows where he is taking him. Yet everything seems to proceed according to the principles of the most rigorous dialectics. Unlike ordinary pedagogues, the guide is not content to dissuade the student from believing what he sees and incite him to see what he does not see. He keeps on shaking his head through this double operation that dialecticians master so well: to compare and oppose; to compare things that have nothing in common apparently in order to show that they belong to the same overarching logic; to show that activities falling under the same principle produce opposite effects, because contradiction is the law of history. One could say that the film comes down to illustrating the relation between two simple Heraclitean propositions: that which shows hides; that which produces destroys. At this point, however, arises a twofold question: what operations should be undertaken to show the relation between the four terms? What effects do they produce in return on this relation? What form of visibility is involved in revealing what was hidden? What is produced in showing the link between producing and destroying? In brief, the simple dialectics borrowed from Marx and Brecht, which consists in revealing behind the visible appearance the power of the totality made of contradictions, meets its underside, as formulated by Adorno and Horkheimer: the light shed in this way on the connection of phenomena is itself part of the destructive operation that knows things only to better subject them to an operation of absolute control. Hence the need for dialectics to endlessly redouble itself, uncertain as to how it should show and to what the demonstration should lead, in order to avoid the risk of contributing to what it is denouncing.

Images of the World and the Inscription of War takes this contradictory relationship between dialectical rigor and dialectical irresolution to the extreme. The first image, which shows swirls of water in an experimental canal with no visible connection to any inscription of the war, announces the structure of the film, itself made of the comings and goings of dialectics: blocks of images, like musical themes, appear and disappear in order to reappear again, the overall meaning having to be established from the apparent lack of connection between them: the history of the invention of

“photogrammetry”, a posing session in a painting academy, colored virtual images, grey archive images, make-up sessions, operations of simulation, digitization, interpretation of digitized images, which take us on a journey between the photography of the 19th century and the computer programs of the end of the 20th century, between the hushed universe of architecture offices and the images of the arrival of trains and the selection process on the Birkenau ramp. From a distance, the overall meaning of the demonstration is clear: to produce images is to ensure control over the things thus recorded; to ensure control over things is to acquire the means to destroy them. Destruction itself is an instance of productive industry. Seeing machines, producing machines, and war machines of destruction belong to the same global scheme. An exemplary case of knowledge/power: Foucault, in short, brings Marx and Adorno into agreement, even if he integrates their arguments into sequences of a different tonality. Yet this dialectics falters at what should have been the point of absolute coincidence: the coincidence between production of images and destruction, in the specific case of absolute destruction. Two images come to confuse the demonstration: two images from Auschwitz, one that is faulty, the other excessive.

The first image is, of course, the photograph taken on April 4, 1944, by an American airplane: a photograph showing without seeing the installations of the Birkenau camp – without seeing them because the pilots were not in charge of that but of dropping their bombs on the nearby installations of the Buna factories, and because the cameras were embarked on the fighter planes in the first place in order to monitor the performance of the pilots. Neither did those who were entrusted at the time with the task of analyzing the image see therein the operation of destruction of a people carried out nearby, because they were interested in another destruction, that of a factory producing war material useful to the enemies. The situation is therefore clear: if no one saw what was in the image, it is because one destruction was hiding another; because seeing was entirely determined by its submission to the logic of industrial and military warfare. This explanation does not raise any problem. The problem is to know what to do in 1987 with this image that shows something that had not been seen in 1944, what can be revealed and produced with it. For it is not because this image was not seen in 1944 that the question arises about it, but because it was seen anew thirty years later: because, in 1977, the interest aroused by the series *Holocaust* led two CIA agents to examine what was seen on these archive photos and to recognize in the apparently abstract grid of uniform rectangles the buildings of the inmates, the administration offices, the gas chamber, and perhaps even the vehicles transporting Zyklon B. But what did they exactly do thereby, asks the dialectician commentator? They identified on the photograph the knowledge acquired in the meantime by the sketches of Alfred Kantor and the account of Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler. Revealing nothing that was not already known, doesn't this gesture of monstration participate itself

in the logic of mastery that commands the will to visibility without rest? “There must be pictures of everything [...]. The evaluators ‘verify’ – that means, they establish the verity of the existence of the camp down to the last detail, and they do this with relish for their role as specialists.”² This is what the commentator tells us, while “looking” at the two agents at work. But what is the filmmaker himself doing? He also examines the photos, enlarges them, helps us see on the blackened and white spots what the American pilots and the British intelligence officers could have seen: the crematorium, a flowerbed next to it, the room for undressing, the gas chamber, the four openings through which the Zyklon B was poured, and not far off, those who were not directly sent to death and lined up to be registered. “Here in August 1944 we see them waiting to be tattooed, to have their hair shorn and to be allocated work.”³ Yet we don’t see any of that: at most we perceive, thanks to the big enlargement, a small serpentine black line that we could, *because we know it*, identify as a queue, the commentator having to tell us, moreover, who the people composing it were and what lay in store for them. The demonstration of what there was to be seen, which the allies in 1944 did not see, is in a way superfluous: the first time we “see” the image taken by the American pilots on the screen, we see it in the form of an enlarged detail on which the camp buildings already bore the names inscribed in 1977. Like the CIA employees and the filmmaker, we are pleased to see an image illustrating what we know. The Allied analysts of 1944 had obviously no reason to share this pleasure, nor the possibility to do so.

The virtues of reading images are therefore quite minimal in this logic. In order to reinforce the demonstration one more step is needed: not only the photographs of Auschwitz but also the way to look at them needs to be included in a dialectical series, which questions not simply the defect of the image but also the reason for that defect, the way in which the image was produced, and the way it was looked at: not only a desire for mastery but the quest for a certain mode of mastery that produces a certain worldview: visibility from a distance, from above, the kind that avoids the risks involved in being too close to one’s target, where vision is blurred and the body is also in danger. This worldview can be summed up in one word, one that explains how the desire to know and the desires for power can coincide and how the clarity of the image can serve the goals of destruction: *Aufklärung* – the Enlightenment of Reason inventing new means of seeing and knowing, but also military reconnaissance and police identification. It is this dialectics of reason that is developed with the introduction of the block of images on the history of the invention of photogrammetry: the indirect technique of measuring buildings that we owe to the ingenuity of another civil servant, the architect Meydenbauer, who was commissioned to draw the plans of the façade of Wetzlar Cathedral. Having almost fallen from the basket he was using for this purpose, Meydenbauer realized that there was a less perilous way of taking these measurements by applying to the

automatic recordings provided by the new technique of photography the old formulas of the theory of perspective taught by the masters of the Renaissance. In this way, it was possible to combine two seemingly contradictory advantages: seeing from above and seeing without risk – seeing better what one wishes to see, at the price of not seeing everything. It is this double advantage – and this “marginal” risk – that aerial photography offers and that is illustrated by the photographs of April 1944. However, the straight line going from Meydenbauer’s basket to the aerial photographs of Auschwitz is itself deviated by another two apparently contradictory series: first, the catalog of photographs of Algerian women taken by a French soldier during the Algerian war to make their identity cards: photos of women as if assaulted by the obligation of showing their faces unveiled in front of a stranger. These images would easily fit into the dialectics of the gaze that captures in order to dominate and hurts while capturing. Yet this is not the aspect emphasized in the commentary. Indeed, the question that is raised is apparently unconnected with the demonstration of the effects of geometry: how to face a camera? However, this question raised by the faces taken in close-up seems in turn to be suspended by the play of another series of images that exclude any face to face with a photographer or a viewer: digitally produced images, whose context is sometimes explained to us – an analysis program that is capable of recognizing moving objects and identifying people and vehicles in aerial photographs –, and sometimes not – flight and landing simulations whose function remains obscure. The meaning of their insertion is less to be sought in the night of domination where all cows are gray than in a specific property they have: they are also images from a distance, images “from above”. And images “from above” have specific properties: they present the world “like a carpet”; a set of abstract patterns, a grid that reflects a calculation. To put it in a nutshell: every image “from above”, every image taken from a distance, without risk for the bodies taking it, is already a “digital” image: an inhuman image that is only the result of a calculation and that lends itself thereby to every kind of inhumanity. Here, Meydenbauer’s story takes on its full meaning and perhaps Adorno – not to say Heidegger – indisputably takes precedence over Marx; the evil in images is what subordinates them to the operation of mastery par excellence: the operation of measurement. Meydenbauer does not see: he measures. And thus, his inventions foreshadow a future where the images of the world will in fact become numbers. The link between photography, war, and destruction should be understood within this logic. The successful/failed photograph of Auschwitz, with its abstract grid, is already a digital photograph. But photography carries within itself, since it was subjected to the task of measuring, a death of the image that belongs to a broader enterprise of production/destruction. Though not stated, this is what is shown in these undercommented surveillance or digital simulation images that look like children’s games in a virtual universe. If the voiceover that accompanies them is inconspicuous,

the filmmaker is not afraid, when questioned, to dot the i's and cross the t's – at the risk of surprising his interpreter: is this really how one should understand you, asks Thomas Elsaesser; is it indeed the disappearance of images that makes the link between fascism and virtual reality? Yes, replies Farocki, “a process of human self-abolition is underway.” The film inserts the history of Auschwitz and its images in a broader process whose current manifestation is the nuclear threat, even though this prophetic aspect of the film “has largely passed unnoticed.”⁴

To be sure, this denunciation of digital technology will not prevent the artist Farocki from using its resources in the future. But in *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*, it allows us to understand the problematic place of the category of “up-close” or on-site images: photographs that wound their subjects or those that preserve the image of individuals whom the photographers of the moment had the task of destroying. As those taken by the Allied pilots, the images taken by the SS on the ramp of Auschwitz also pertain to the dialectics that relates showing to hiding and producing to destroying. However, the relation functions differently in each case: the aerial photographs do not see the work of destruction carried out next to their target; the SS from the Kanada section fix the image of those they had the task to send to the gas chamber. But the difference is not only between images taken from a distance and images taken at close range. What distinguishes the photographs from the Auschwitz album is that we do not know what they were supposed to be used for. To be sure, the commentary compensates for this ignorance with a well-balanced sentence: “Since the authorities began to take photographs, everything is accompanied by pictures. Including the crimes they themselves commit.”⁵ But the filmmaker is not fooled by his own rhetoric. He knows that the strength of an image comes from the uncertainty as to why it was taken. That is why he paused on a very peculiar photograph, one that was overlooked by the video presented at Yad Vashem, which showed the path that led the Jews from Ruthenia to the gas chamber, but also by the sites of negationists, who selected their images in order to show that the alleged march towards extermination was nothing more than a picnic. He paused on the most up-close, the most individualized, but also the most enigmatic image: a young woman walking alone, away from the queue, gazing sideways. This is the second problematic photograph: an image serving no purpose, showing nothing about the extermination, guided only, one might think, by the desire to take a photograph, and staging a relationship entirely independent of what is happening in that place: the pure desire of a man to capture the face and the gait of a woman passing by, simply because she is beautiful; the pure defensive reflex of the woman who becomes aware of this gaze and feigns to look elsewhere: in short, a normal human relationship, even though it is marked by the usual male chauvinist supremacy. Here, the question raised by the images of Berber women takes on its full meaning: how to face the lens? However, the problem is shifted. Farocki had

previously shown the violence of the colonizing gesture that unveiled the face to extort its identity. He had shown the suffering of a woman who didn't know how to look barefaced at a stranger. The situation is quite different here: the photograph is not used to identify the woman but simply, it seems, to stare at her, and for her part, she had learned the art of withstanding the gaze of men in the streets. The stringency of the dialectical couple preserve/destroy is thus exposed to an unknown, or at least to something untimely, allowing a commentary whose irony made some feminist teeth grind: "The woman understands how to pose her face so as to catch the eye of the photographer, and how to look with a slight sideways glance. On a boulevard she would look in the same way just past a man casting his eye over her at a shop window, and with this sideways glance she seeks to displace herself onto a world of boulevards, men, and shop windows. Far from here."⁶ The "bad taste" of the commentary should be here understood as an expression of the double bind marking the relation of the commentary to the image. The commentary is made as if to prolong and deny at the same time the charm of this obviously inappropriate image, an image of a passerby à la Baudelaire taken by a photographer forgetting for a second his role in the death machine. This "human", all too human charm is to be resisted, both because death is near, and because dialectics demands that the relations suspended the instant of a glance be reestablished. The irony of the commentary dismisses the fascination for the image, which would only be a complicity with the "humanity" shown by the torturer. The denegation here is very close to that of Barthes when he associates the beauty of the condemned Lewis Payne, which fascinates him, with the *studium* in order to insist on the *punctum* "he is going to die", although it is not legible anywhere on the image. It is true though that the author of *Camera Lucida* was no longer a dialectician. The author of *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*, as for him, was more so than ever. That is why he can adopt in a sarcastic sentence this cynical tone of Brecht that remained foreign to the Brechtianism of Barthes. That is also why he supplemented the "amorous" operation that enlarges the image to isolate the face with a "critical" operation: the filmmaker shows his hands busy cutting and reframing the image. The same hands that put back previously on the face of the Berber woman the veil that the military photographer made her take off. Here too, the filmmaker who showed the enlargement in the first place has to prove to us that he does not allow himself for all that to be fascinated by the image, that he is at work, manipulating the photograph in order to reveal the logic of conservation/destruction to which it belongs. But the double bind seems then to entrap his demonstration more firmly: for to resist with one's laboring hands the charm of the image is to make the digital of the hand that shows compatible with the digital logic that submits the visible world to the law of measurement. The laboring hand must criticize the analogic human gaze, which,

in turn, must undermine through the burning real of photography the operations of digital manipulation.

Nonetheless, it is perhaps possible to break this circle: the gesture of the fingers can itself be inserted in another series: the one that links the precision of manual actions to the courage of action, opposing a human logic in act both to the inhumanity of technique and to the ambiguous humanity of the gaze on the unknown woman of Auschwitz. The pure pleasure of identification of the CIA agents is at odds with the actions that led to their knowledge: the drawings of Alfred Kantor who had carefully engraved in his mind the configuration of the site so as to provide an exact drawing of it after his liberation; the actions of two prisoners from the Kanada section, Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler, who transformed their task of selection into an archival work of memory in order to organize meticulously their escape thereafter and write the report that was to reveal the functioning of the death machine. The bombs of the American pilots, their photographs from seven thousand meters which transform the images of destruction into a digital carpet, or the algorithms producing virtual images, all contrast with the action of the inmates of Auschwitz who used the numbers of a coded language in order to prepare their rebellion, whose result can be seen in one corner of an aerial photograph: the partial destruction of crematorium IV by members of the *Sonderkommandos*, using powder stolen by young women working in the munition factories. This is how the dialectical path of the film ends: by the mention of the heroic action of these inmates who managed to do what the gigantic war machine of the Allies was unable to do: to make a death facility unusable. This opposition can certainly be formulated as a strict dialectical reversal: a movement going from numbers to the image against one that transforms images into numbers. But it is also the point where the result of the dialectical demonstration comes to disrupt its all too perfect machinery. One can indefinitely follow in the footsteps of the enemy and use the images of the great machine in order to make people see what it shows without saying it and explain the logic of power that is at work in showing without showing. But at some point, it becomes clear that this critical operation is completely futile and that the only thing that counts is the action that simultaneously interrupts the functioning of both the machine of power and the machine of interpretation that unveils it. It is no longer Roland Barthes that comes to mind here but Guy Debord. Debord knew that the unveiling of the machine of the spectacle is bound to last as long as the machine itself for a reason that he summed up in a short sentence: "In a world that is really turned upside down, the true is a moment of the false"⁷. Hence, there is no need to reveal the truth of what the riders filling the screens in westerns do. What is needed is to do in the real what they do in the image: charge at the enemy. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, this was not without a paradox: the image of the struggle against imperialism, which was to be carried out *hic et nunc*,

was to be taken from Errol Flynn/Custer charging, sword in hand, at the head of the 7th Cavalry Regiment. To turn his film into an action against the death machines of 1987, and no longer a useless demonstration of how yesterday's death machines worked, Harun Farocki undoubtedly has a less ambiguous example than the fictional stampedes of Errol Flynn or John Wayne: the action of the five young women of Auschwitz who stole the gunpowder and of the members of the *Sonderkommandos* who, on October 7, 1944, attacked the executors of the industrial death machine with hammers, axes, and stones. But the eyes of the viewer, when called upon to see in the image the effect of the numbers used by the insurgents, have great difficulty discerning it: no matter how enlarged the image is, it only shows the destruction of crematorium IV to those who already know that it took place. All that is left of this heroic action are words: these, we know it since Burke, have to take the place of images when it comes to expressing or producing an exceptional affect. But yet, there are words and words, and there is always a moment when the words of criticism must give way to words of indignation and admiration. It is also the moment when dialectics, in order to reach a conclusion, must call for pure action that interrupts all dialectics. "Reality has to begin", Farocki tells us, echoing the words of Günther Anders.⁸ Originally, the film had effectively an objective: to call on the Germans of 1987 to do, by preventing nuclear installations on German soil, what the Allies had not done in 1944 on Silesian soil: to sever the channels of the work of death. Twenty-seven years later, it became a classic in the well-established genre of image criticism. To be sure, it is difficult to measure as much the effect of images as the effects of their criticism. Reality is slow to begin.

Translated by Philip Farah

This work is funded by national funds through FCT –
Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia under the project UIDB/00183/2020

¹ Translated from French. Originally published in French as "Les incertitudes de la dialectique", in *Traffic* n.93, Spring 2015, pp. 96-103.

² Harun Farocki, "Commentary from 'Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges'", Karen Margolis & Bert Papenfuß-Gorek (trans.), in: *Discourse*, 1993, 15(3), pp. 78-92, pp. 81-82.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴ Harun Farocki, "Making the World Superfluous: An Interview with Harun Farocki", in *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight Lines*, Thomas Elsaesser (ed.), Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2004, p. 185.

⁵ Harun Farocki, "Commentary", *op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.

⁷ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Ken Knabb (trans.), Canberra, Hogoblin Press, 2002, p. 8.

⁸ Harun Farocki, "Reality would have to begin", Marek Wieczorek, Tom Keenan & Thomas Y. Levin (trans.), in: *Harun Farocki. Working on the Sight Lines*, *op. cit.*, pp. 193-202, p. 193.

DEATHS OF DOCUMENTARY

Paula Rabinowitz (University of Minnesota)

The film I am not making begins: David died. 3:47 am EDT, May 1, 2020, Queens, New York.

Why document anything—an event, a moment, a person, a place? Memory being what it is, fragile and deceptive, relics help to stabilize these fleeting images but each quickly becomes another relic, almost as fleeting as the first. Memorializing the past, remembering the past, revisiting the past—a past that will have already evaporated at the moment of its technological recording as image, as sound, even now with instantaneous digital recording—always occurs under pressure: a way to ward off forgetting, historical obliteration, death.

This is what Roland Barthes teaches in *Camera Lucida*, a book written in the wake of his mother's death, a book that relentlessly turns its regard backward to recognize how the images of and from the past recalibrate the lived now, and with it, those living now. Documentary, at once a refutation and deep acknowledgment of death, serves as a memento mori. Why else the fascination with archival images—old newsreel footage, photographs retrieved from a family album, haunting street scenes from an earlier time? Why else the desire to hear the shouts and murmurs of voices speaking out against tyranny or muffled in fear of discovery? Whether moving or still, silent or capturing recorded sound uttered at the moment or recalled later, synced up or not, the document testifies to presence... even a presence that cannot be seen. Especially a presence that cannot be seen. Fiction intrudes. The question of why slides into another: how to document anything?

For Barthes, that lighted room of memory curled within the still image can only be approached through language. Withholding the photograph of his mother that apparently triggers his flood of memories, his writing to and for us the readers, diverts the original document. Access to it is blocked yet fulfilled by words. Parenthetically. He explains, emphasizing by bracketing the thought: "(I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me. For you...at most it would interest your *studium*: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you no wound.)¹ His wound, his *punctum*, comes out of a past that precedes his past. It cannot be resurrected by or for another.

Speaking of her desire to film during her trip through Poland, Russia and the other Eastern European lands emerging into view after the fall of the Soviet system, after its demise, its death, you might

say, Chantal Akerman called her mode of working “my own style of documentary bordering on fiction.” A desire seen in *D’Est* “to shoot everything. Everything that moves me.”² Everything is qualified, though; everything that moves her, which, like Barthes’s photograph of his mother, is private, hidden, apart from what might move you or me.

In his film, *Tracking Edith* (2016), about his great aunt, the documentary photographer Edith Tudor-Hart, Peter Stephan Jungk incorporates animation as a means to fill in the numerous gaps in her life, a life purposely lived invisibly, leaving few traces. Edith Tudor-Hart died in obscure poverty in Brighton, England, in 1973, a sad final chapter in a complex life lived across Europe’s nations and history. During the 1920s, she had trained as a kindergarten teacher under Maria Montessori, studied photography at the Bauhaus, and in the 1930s, notoriously helped recruit Kim Philby and the Cambridge 5 as spies for the Soviet Union. Despite her reputation as a socially committed photographer in the 1930s, her death barely registered; she ran a small antiques shop when Tudor-Hart died alone of cancer, her grave essentially unmarked.

So, like Akerman’s quest in *D’Est* (“Why make this trip to Eastern Europe?” she asks, answering herself: “There are obvious historical, social and political reasons...There might also be personal reasons for going.”),³ Jungk’s journey of remembrance is at once a personal mission—a great nephew’s effort to retrieve the memory of a family member—and an intellectual and historical act of recovery—a search through archives and records and other’ memories for details of a story almost nobody wanted to recall. Although Tudor-Hart lived at the center of many of the crucial events of the 20th century, interacting with those personalities, philosophies, movements that shaped them—communism, fascism, psychoanalysis (she’d had an affair with her son’s psychologist, Donald Winnicott, in the 1950s), radical education, documentary modernism, the Spanish Civil War (where her husband served as a physician), the British film industry (her brother is a noted cinematographer)—she nevertheless eludes. Memories of her had evaporated. There were reasons: shame, madness, treason. Even now, few want to acknowledge this disreputable past. Photographs remain. But her story required imagination to recreate. A spy’s hidden life revived through animation—a process that literally brings stillness into motion.

What cannot be said or shown about a Stalinist past burrowed within?

To retrieve the shameful history of a state—for instance, Stalin’s show trials—all that might be needed is to uncover the original document itself: archival footage of the theatrical performance of confession and abasement by those deemed enemies of the state.

In *The Trial* (2018), Sergei Loznitsa reconstructs found footage of one of the first show trials staged by and for Stalin in 1930. Loznitsa's film is made from the actual film orchestrated, in fact, directed by Stalin himself, who watched the daily rushes of the filming and choreographed the next day's action. It reveals how the mechanisms of state power are lodged in the literal fiction of confession. Over the course of eleven days, the engineers and economists accused of sabotaging the USSR through their adherence to "The Industrial Party," while spying for French Prime Minister Raymond Poincaré, confess to elaborate conspiracies to wreck the Soviet economy by repeating rote language they must learn to the letter.

Distilling the entire event, staged for a large audience, both present in the hall and following on radios throughout the nation, Loznitsa's two-hour documentary edits down the source material of the 11-day show trial.

The original filmed trial functioned as a lesson plan for future prosecutions. The trial, designed not to elicit the truth but to enforce a systematic approach to public confessions of guilt, determined how all subsequent trials would proceed, eliciting the expressions of treasonous guilt from those facing exile and execution for their fabricated crimes against the state, against Stalin. They must confess—and do so in the dead language they have memorized. They are already dead and they know it. Many more would follow in their path until Stalin's death in 1953.⁴ Then, his crimes exposed, evidence, including official documentation, was culled; some of it made visible but much got expunged, purged, and so efforts at truth-telling turned into more and other falsehoods. What is the status of a falsified truth or a truthful fiction as a document, when the tellers are the disappeared?

My husband died of Covid-19 this May. He was among the first 100,000 to die in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic raging through New York City, with Queens, where I live, the epicenter of disease and death.⁵ Death has haunted me since. Now, it is "coming after all of us," as Mike DeWine, governor of the state of Ohio, said on November 6, a few days after the presidential election resulted in Donald Trump's defeat.⁶

Actually, death and documentary haunt me. More than a quarter of a century ago, I published *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary*, culminating decades of thought on the subject of realism, representation and political activism. Walter Benjamin, who never got to finish a book, dying by suicide *en route* to Spain as the Nazis closed in on his group of refugees, astutely noted in "The Writer's Technique in Thirteen Theses": "The work is the death mask of the idea."⁷ The idea is death-haunted too.

On and off since 1994, I have returned to thinking about documentary through image, sound and word, recently writing on the films of Herbert Kline, Chantal Akerman, Julia Reichert, Barbara

Kopple, Louis Malle and Daniel Blaufuks and the photographs of nuclear bombs. Death is behind this work: of people (Akerman's suicide enshrouds her last film about her mother's death, her mother dislocated by twice surviving Auschwitz; Blaufuks's restoration of the images, real and fictional, past and present, of the dead at Theresienstadt); and of places: Reichert and Kopple making films (at least the ones I was writing about) depicting the death of American factory jobs and with them their unions and communities, Malle's detailing the demise of *God's Country*, the American Midwest; Kline's portrait of untreated illness in a Mexican fishing village; and most terrifying, Hiroshima.⁸

David's presence is still palpable: I ride his bike around my neighborhood; his picture, holding a hammer aloft as he stands on a pile of rubble in the warehouse he transformed into a small experimental theater in the 1970s when we met, sits near me as I write, a painted terra cotta portrait of him at our son's medical school graduation made by artist Judy Glantzman hangs next to a painting by my mother, dead almost ten years.⁹ I have yet to move from my side of the bed when I sleep. He invades my dreams, dreams revving through my brain as they did when I was much younger, of him and my mother being driven off in a black van by an attendant dressed in white. They are gone. Their work remains.

This work includes David Bernstein's sole performance on screen in the extraordinary 1975 film, *Milestones*, directed by Robert Kramer and John Douglas. At once documentary and fiction, *Milestones* was restored and revived from obscurity in the United States by Icarus Films in 2006. I had heard about this film, of course from David when he reminisced about shooting his scenes; but also from former Weatherman Bill Ayers who recounted to me and David, many years later, that, while living underground following the Greenwich Village townhouse explosion, he had watched the film numerous times; not only did it feature friends and comrades and so held a nostalgic pull, but at 195 minutes, it provided cover of darkness for most of an afternoon. In early November 2020, it was shown as part of New York's Metrograph Theater retrospective of Kramer's work. David Fresko describes it:

Mixing documentary and fiction with a poetic, free-associative logic, *Milestones* is a cross-country journey that moves from the mountains of Vermont to the sculptural landscapes of the American Southwest and back to New York City's streets. But above all, *Milestones* is a film about history and how people understand themselves historically, exploring how an American past characterized by slavery, indigenous subjugation, labor suppression, and imperialist aggression persists into the present and therefore weighs upon the future.¹⁰

It screened at the Cannes Film Festival on April 30, 1975, the day the last helicopter departed the roof of the United States embassy in Saigon. The war that had dominated the lives and work of the filmmakers and those in the film was over, the US defeated, leaving millions dead in Southeast Asia.

The film's title derives from the Hồ Chí Minh poem, "The Milestone," collected in his *Prison Diary* published in English in Hanoi, 1972. When I met David shortly after the film appeared, we discovered that we both owned a copy and we took as an epigraph for our wedding invitations one of Hồ's lines: "Let the prison door open and the real dragon will fly out," which seemed obscure and counterintuitive to most—weren't we getting married, thus imprisoning ourselves together?—but, for us, marriage was release, a stab at forming a new collective, forgoing the loneliness and alienation of living in demented times in a debased country.¹¹ Much like the film. *Milestones*, a thoroughly scripted yet improvised film, documents itself: "The process of making the film was the process of getting mobilized again," the directors wrote in *Cahiers du Cinema* in 1975.¹² So, a fiction bordering on documentary.

In part about the death of 1960s movements against racism, imperialism, fascism and in support of the people of Vietnam, Newark, Wounded Knee, this film is a deeply introspective look into "how white our life was," as it explores the loose-knit "subculture part lumpen, part declassé [sic] intellectual, part proletarianized—greatly shared by, but not limited to the cultural explosions of the 60's," the directors explain. It is also a film about the impact of feminism on what the filmmakers call "anti-imperialism," as the characters struggle continuously to articulate "feelings." Their "hopeful dreams become their opposites, a kind of grim caricature or [sic] our failures to struggle, to really grapple with the problems, to get it on..."¹³

In staging its fictional encounters, conveyed through a style of *cinéma vérité*, the film interrogates its own failure within the larger failure of radical documentary, as well as "the battered politics" of 1960s activists.¹⁴ Each character plays some attenuated version of him/herself—Grace Paley's character is finishing a documentary about Vietnam, for example—with the exception of the pregnant woman, Paley's fictional daughter, whose difficult birth concludes the final long section of the film.

David is first glimpsed early, fixing an ancient Chevy truck for one of the main cross-country seekers, his friend Lou, and reappears a few times later when Lou, now traveling West, passes through Detroit. He's become an autoworker organizing an insurgent takeover of the union and trying to forge multiracial coalitions on the plant floor; but his life is lonely, this loneliness made visible as the two men walk among delivery trucks serving Detroit's Eastern Market and along rows of tanks standing like a dead army behind chain link fencing. His efforts to unite radicals with

the working class seem futile, but necessary. Ad-libbing most of the dialogue, David based his made-up character on one of his friends, but he spoke his truth about dislocation and futility, not the truth; it's fiction, but true nevertheless.¹⁵

But there is something dangerous here—blurring fiction and truth; bringing past into present; death into life. Years ago, when I first saw the film, I couldn't recognize David. He looked so different, skinny with long hair and his voice not his as he shed his New York accent for the role. This time his presence stabs me. He's a minor figure in the film, you wouldn't notice him. I do and it wounds, this cinematic *punctum*.

It's chilling to watch *Milestones* again, now, as Donald Trump claims his defeat at the polls a fraud, as the nation clocks in over 100,000 new coronavirus cases a day with more than a quarter million deaths, as Black men continue to be killed by police...

I started writing this in early November, shortly after Trump told us not to let Covid "dominate your life." But my life is dominated by this disease. And it is through documentary, "its concerns, its content, its form [that] are inseparable from the dialectical processes, the struggles inside this history" that death might be approached.¹⁶

For documentary allows viewers, if only fleetingly, a chance to actively participate in these processes, this struggle—to find a way to live together even in the face of death....to serve as witness again...the secondary, really tertiary witness after the filmmaker and after the ones filmed. Witness to bare existence, to life, almost.

Documentary photographer and filmmaker Alice Arnold has been riding her bicycle around New York City for many years. This year, at least during the "pause" as New York's spring lockdown was called, it was far less dangerous with cars mostly off the roads, so she could cruise the avenues at night with her camera. She forged a remarkable series of still images, "Covid Nites," recording the garish emptiness of a city held under cover of death. Everywhere signs remind the very few people out walking dogs, delivering takeout, sorting cans and bottles from refuse that once this city thrived day and night. Now, the fluorescent lights cast eerie reflections on the sidewalks, a solitary customer peers from among the liquor bottles arrayed in the window; a walk signals to no walkers. Disease stalks everyone; but, as Arnold comments, so does "a restless energy bubbling up from the strangeness and disruptions to our everyday life activities."¹⁷

Arnold teaches documentary filmmaking at Hunter College (or she did until coronavirus destroyed higher education in the US) and I was her student a few years ago. I had met her in Prague while researching the story of André Simone in the Czech National Archives. That story is told elsewhere (see footnote 5). I had been telling her about my current project about two fathers—mine

and David's—entitled “Cold War Dads,” bemoaning that I was not sure I had the stamina to write another book and instead was considering making a film with the compelling material I had unearthed among archives and boxes stored in closets. She replied something to the effect: “You don't have the energy for a book...well, what do you think goes into making a documentary?” She invited me to enroll in her introductory documentary filmmaking class to find out. I quickly realized that I would rather be a documentary film critic than a documentary filmmaker...and my book remains unwritten. Its narrative stalled by too many dead ends.

Just as archaeologists understand objects placed near the bones of our human ancestors to serve as funerary mementos—the stuff of life made over for death—in the Society of the Spectacle, that Guy DeBord calls the age of the image, *our* age, documentary collects visual and auditory detritus, marks the passing of time and thus life.

Or, in Akerman's words, it “move[s] between the lines of the lines.”¹⁸

No Home Movie (2015), Akerman's last film about her mother, last film about herself, last film, travels across the familiar: kitchen, bedroom, living room and corridor of her mother's Brussels apartment, where Chantal has come to care for her ill and injured mother. We know these spaces almost as well as Chantal and Natalia do from past films intensely focused on hallways and bedrooms and on their “same eyes and hair, now the same body.” The walls encase them, as does the computer screen and its camera when they speak over Skype. “Because,” as Natalia says, “we are the only ones left...I kiss you.” Mother and daughter apart, alone, together, loving in the dark and an overexposed daytime across the spaces inside a city and out on a windy plain.¹⁹ When her mother asks, “Are you still working on your documentary?” Chantal replies: “No, I'm in New York.” Then another question and response: Why are you filming me? I film everybody.

An effort to record a world before it is gone, knowing it is already gone, that is the work Barthes and Akerman perform: “History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it—and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it.”²⁰ Another's life, another's death. Yours and theirs...and mine. (Then again, as Barthes makes clear: “*For you no wound.*”. So mine and *not* yours.) These days, death stalks us all. But I can only speak of the death that I live with, that of the one I loved and with whom I lived for most of my life.



Title: No Mask, No Entry Deli
Date: 25 April 2020
Location: Avenue B at 6th Street, East Village, NYC
© Alice Arnold 2020 (www.a2studio.org)



Title: The Plot Against America Busstop

Date: 25 April 2020

Location: Avenue C and 11th Street, East Village, NYC

© Alice Arnold 2020 (www.a2studio.org)



Title: Lady with Shopping Carts

Date: 17 April 2020

Location: First Ave (btw 5th and 6th Streets), East Village, NYC

© Alice Arnold 2020 (www.a2studio.org)



Title: Discount Liquor

Date: 25 April 2020

Location: Avenue C and 10th Street, East Village, NYC

© Alice Arnold 2020 (www.a2studio.org)



Title: Neon Hat, Ludlow Street

Date: 29 May 2020

Location: Stanton and Ludlow Streets, Lower East Side, NYC

© Alice Arnold 2020 (www.a2studio.org)



Title: Lady Standing Outside Tobacco Shop

Date: 25 April 2020

Location: Avenue C (btw 2nd and 3rd Streets), East Village, NYC

© Alice Arnold 2020 (www.a2studio.org)



Title: Lady with Phone on a Park Bench
Date: 25 April 2020
Location: Tompkins Square Park, East Village, NYC
© Alice Arnold 2020 (www.a2studio.org)

¹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucid: Reflections on Photograph*. Trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 73.

² This became the title of her 1995-96 installation and its catalogue: *Bordering on Fiction: Chantal Akerman's D'Est*. (Minneapolis: Walker Arts Center, 1995), 17.

³ Akerman, 20.

⁴ One of the last show trials, the 1952 so-called Slánský Trials in Czechoslovakia, fictionalized by Costa-Gavras in *The Confession* (1970), was based on the memoir by Artur London, one of the few accused of “the Zionist-Imperialist plot” not executed. Among those executed, journalist André Simone, cited my father-in-law Joseph Milton Bernstein as someone who could exonerate him from illogical charges of spying in and for and against France. See Paula Rabinowitz, “My Prague Summer,” ANZASA Online <https://anzasablog.wordpress.com/2018/10/29/my-prague-summer/>

⁵ “An Incalculable Loss,” *New York Times* 27 May 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/05/24/us/us-coronavirus-deaths-100000.html>

⁶ See *Newsweek* 6 November, 2020. <https://www.newsweek.com/ohio-gov-mike-dewine-says-covid-coming-after-all-us-cases-state-skyrocket-1545400>

⁷ Walter Benjamin, “Post No Bills” in “One-Way Street,” *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Ed. Peter Demetz. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1978), 80-81. NB: I have slightly altered the translation.

⁸ “It’s Still There: The Vanishing Point of Daniel Blaufuks’s *Als Ob/As If*,” *boundary 2* 47 (February 2020): 115-144.

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⁹ Judy Glantzman, “On Obituaries and Shadows: Art in Isolation,” *POP* <https://paintersonpaintings.com/judy-glantzman-on-obituaries-and-shadows-art-in-isolation/>

¹⁰ David Fresko, “Robert Kramer: Cinema/Politics/Community.” *Metrograph Journal* <https://metrograph.com/robert-kramer-cinema-politics-community/>

¹¹ Hô Chí Minh, “Ideograms Analysed,” *Prison Diary* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1972), 88. “The Milestone” appears on page 97.

¹² Robert Kramer and John Douglas, “Milestones,” *Cahier du Cinema* 258-59 (July 1975): 56-61. The original in English appears in the notes to the Icarus Films DVD (November 2011) from which further quotations come.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Richard Eder, “‘Milestones’, a Film on Radical Youth,” *New York Times* (8 October 1975): 24.

¹⁵ In the epigraph to *Auschwitz and After*, Charlotte Delbo says of her memories of the concentration camp: “Today, I am not sure that what I wrote is true. I am certain it is truthful.” Trans. Rosette C. Lamont. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1. I thank Jani Scandura for bringing this quotation to my attention.

¹⁶ Kramer and Douglas.

¹⁷ Personal communication, Email AA to PR (30 November 2020). The full suite of images can be seen at www.a2studio.org

¹⁸ Akerman, 35.

¹⁹ *No Home Movie* was shot as Akerman was also writing about the images and contexts of them. See Chantal Akerman, *My Mother Laughs* Trans. Daniella Shreir (Great Britain: Silver Press, 2019).

²⁰ Barthes, 65.

A BUSCA TOTALIZANTE DE SENTIDO¹

Trinh T. Minh-ha

O documentário não existe — quer o termo designe uma categoria de material, um género, uma abordagem, ou um conjunto de técnicas. Esta afirmação — tão antiga e fundamental quanto o antagonismo entre nomes e realidade — precisa de ser incessantemente reafirmada, apesar da muito visível existência de uma tradição documental. No cinema, longe de atravessar actualmente uma crise, tal tradição tende a fortalecer-se através de uma recorrência de declínios e renascimentos. De facto, são inúmeras as narrativas que tentam unificar/purificar as suas práticas ao postularem uma evolução e continuidade de um período para o outro, apoiando-se profundamente em conceitos de periodização tradicionais e historicistas.

Não há nada de mais pobre que uma verdade expressa tal como foi pensada.

Walter Benjamin²

Num mundo completamente catalogado, o cinema é muitas vezes reificado como um corpo de tradições. O seu conhecimento pode constituir a sua própria destruição, a não ser que o jogo mude constantemente as suas regras, jamais convencido do seu desfecho e sempre disposto a ir além dos seus próprios princípios. Por um lado, a verdade é produzida, induzida e alargada de acordo com o regime que detém o poder. Por outro, ela encontra-se entre os vários regimes de verdade. Como diz a fábula, “o que te contar três vezes é verdade”. Questionar o relato historicista do documentário como um desenrolar contínuo não significa necessariamente defender a descontinuidade, assim como resistir ao sentido não conduz necessariamente à sua simples negação. A verdade, “mesmo quando apanhada em fuga”, não se entrega em nomes, enquadramentos ou fotogramas; o sentido deve ser impedido de se fechar no que é dito ou mostrado. Verdade e sentido: os dois tendem a ser equiparados. No entanto, muitas vezes o que é proposto como verdade não é nada mais do que *um* sentido. E o que perdura entre o sentido de algo e a sua verdade é o intervalo, uma interrupção sem a qual o sentido estaria fixado e a verdade solidificada. Talvez por isso seja tão difícil falar sobre o intervalo. Sobre o cinema. Sobre. As palavras soam a falsas. O que fazer com filmes que se propõem destrinçar a verdade da mentira quando a visibilidade dessa verdade assenta precisamente no facto de ser falsa? Como lidar com uma “teoria do cinema” que nunca pode teorizar “sobre” o

cinema, mas apenas *com* os conceitos que o cinema convoca, relacionando-os com os conceitos de outras práticas?

*Um homem dirigiu-se a um templo taoista e pediu que lhe lessem a sina.
“Primeiro deve doar dinheiro para incenso, ou a adivinhação não será o mais
exacta possível,” disse-lhe o sacerdote. “De facto, sem a doação nada se tornará
realidade!”*

“The Words Will Not Ring True”, *Wit and Humor from Old Cathay*³

Os conceitos não são menos práticos do que a imagem ou o som. Mas a ligação entre o nome e o que é nomeado é convencional, não fenomenal. Produzir teoria do cinema (ou melhor, filosofar com o cinema), o que não é o mesmo que fazer filmes, é também uma prática — relacionada com aquela mas diferente —, pois a teoria deve ser (des)construída assim como ela (des)constrói o seu objeto de estudo. Se os conceitos cinematográficos não são *ready-mades* nem preexistem no cinema, também não são teoria *sobre* o cinema. Na melhor das hipóteses, opor a prática à teoria (e vice-versa) pode ser um instrumento de desafio recíproco. No entanto, como todas as oposições binárias, também esta acaba enredada no pensamento positivista, cujo ímpeto é fornecer respostas a todo o custo, assim reduzindo tanto a teoria como a prática a um processo de totalização. *Desculpem, mas se vamos usar palavras temos de ser precisos na forma como as usamos. Não é uma questão de técnica, é uma questão de material. Se o material é real, então é um documentário. Se o material é inventado, então não é um documentário... Se ficam assim tão baralhados com o termo, por favor deixem de o usar. Falem só de filmes. De qualquer modo, muitas vezes usamos estes termos para evitar discutir verdadeiramente o filme* (Lindsay Anderson)⁴.

No esforço geral de analisar o cinema e produzir “teoria sobre cinema” há uma tendência inevitável para reduzir a teoria do cinema a uma área de especialização e conhecimento, a qual permite a constituição de uma *disciplina*. Para além disso, encontramos a defesa de uma concepção iluminista e “burguesa” da linguagem, segundo a qual o meio de comunicação é a palavra, o seu objeto é factual, e o seu destinatário é o sujeito humano (a ordem linear e hierárquica das coisas no mundo da reificação). Ora, toda a linguagem, como meio de comunicação no seu sentido mais radical, “se comunica a si mesma”⁵. Deste modo, a função referencial da linguagem não é negada, mas liberta da sua falsa identificação com o mundo fenomenal e da sua suposta autoridade como meio de cognição sobre esse mundo. A teoria pode surgir precisamente como o local onde temos acesso a este conhecimento negativo sobre a fiabilidade dos próprios princípios operativos da

teoria, e onde as categorias teóricas, à semelhança de outros esquemas de classificação, continuam a ser invalidadas, em vez de apropriadas, reiteradas e preservadas.

Quão verdadeira é a adivinhação do teórico do cinema? Enquanto mulher desvalorizada no contexto da Igreja, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (um nome entre muitos outros) diria provavelmente que o conhecimento “verdadeiro” deve ser separado do seu uso instrumental⁶. A ligação entre dinheiro e factos emerge precisamente nas situações em que passa despercebida ou é veemente negada. No que toca à exactidão ou verdade, a questão da qualidade parece depender em grande medida do peso ou quantidade da doação — dinheiro para incenso, como especifica o sacerdote referido acima. De facto, algumas das questões invariavelmente colocadas aos realizadores em debates públicos são: “Qual a *shooting ratio*? O orçamento? Quanto tempo levou a terminar o filme?” Quando mais alta a aposta, melhor o produto; quanto mais dinheiro envolvido, mais valioso o filme e mais credível a verdade que encerra. Quanto mais tempo tiver levado a rodagem, mais valorizada é a experiência e mais fiável a informação. Os filmes são transformados em verdadeiros produtos de “baixo orçamento” ou de “grande orçamento”. É isto que se ouve constantemente e que acabamos também nós por dizer. “Baixa tecnologia”, “alta tecnologia”, “lixo de alta qualidade”, “imagens de qualidade inferior”. Pressão, dinheiro, ambição são as palavras de ordem... O *slogan* generalizado nos meios factuais e “alternativos” bem pode afirmar que “quanto maior o grão, melhor a política”, mas o que circula exclusivamente na cultura dos meios de comunicação de massa é sem dúvida a imagem do dinheiro. O dinheiro enquanto dinheiro e o dinheiro enquanto capital são muitas vezes vistos como um só. No entanto, as limitações financeiras são não só um problema de dinheiro, mas também de controlo e standardização de imagens e sons. Que verdade? Verdade de quem? Quão verdade? (A famosa afirmação de Andy Warhol soa a verdadeira: “Comprar é muito mais americano do que pensar.”) Em nome do serviço público e da comunicação de massas, o olho obcecado com fazer dinheiro (ou melhor, o olho escravo do dinheiro) permanece colado ao cenário permanente da imagem valorizada em função do efeito e/ou da produção.

Diz-se que o documentário surgiu da necessidade de informar o povo (a *Kino-Pravda* ou “Câmara-Verdade” de Dziga Vertov) e mais tarde se afirmou como uma reacção contra o cinema de entretenimento, o qual monopolizou os vários usos do cinema. O cinema foi redefinido como um meio ideal de doutrinação e comentário social, cujas virtudes residiam na sua capacidade para “observar e seleccionar a partir da própria vida”, “abrir a cortina para o mundo real”, fotografar “a cena e história vivas”, dar ao cinema “poder sobre um milhão de imagens”, assim como alcançar “uma intimidade de conhecimento e efeito impossível às piruetas mecânicas do estúdio e à interpretação copinho-de-leite do actor metropolitano” (John Grierson)⁷. Afirmando a sua

independência em relação ao estúdio e às grandes estrelas, o documentário encontra a sua *raison d'être* numa distinção estratégica. Ele coloca a função social do cinema *no mercado*. Pega em pessoas e problemas do mundo real e *lida com elas*. *Dá valor* à observação íntima e *avalia o seu mérito* em função da sua capacidade para capturar a realidade em fuga, “sem interferência material, ou intermediário”. Histórias vivas e marcantes, numa infinidade de situações autênticas. Tudo gravado num só *take*. O palco é nada mais nada menos do que a própria vida. *Com a abordagem documental o cinema regressa aos seus fundamentos... Através da selecção, eliminação e coordenação de elementos naturais, desenvolveu-se uma forma filmica original e não condicionada pela tradição teatral ou literária... O documentário é uma forma artística original. Enfrenta os factos de maneira única e original. Abrange a parte racional das nossas vidas, desde a experiência científica ao estudo poético da paisagem, mas sem nunca se afastar do factual* (Hans Richter)⁸.

O mundo real: tão real que o Real se torna o único referente básico — puro, concreto, fixo, visível, demasiado visível. O resultado é a elaboração de toda uma estética de objectividade e o desenvolvimento de amplas tecnologias de verdade, capazes de promover o que está certo ou errado no mundo e, por extensão, o que é “honesto” ou “manipulador” no documentário. Isto implica uma procura alargada e incansável de naturalismo em todos os elementos da tecnologia cinematográfica. Indispensáveis a este cinema da imagem autêntica e da palavra falada são, por exemplo, o microfone direccionado (que localiza e restringe no seu processo de seleccionar o som para o tornar decifrável) e o gravador portátil Nagra (inigualável na sua capacidade de documentar de forma fidedigna). O som sincronizado com os movimentos labiais é validado como a norma. É uma exigência, não tanto para reproduzir a realidade (isto concedem os fazedores de factos), mas para “mostrar pessoas reais em lugares reais entregues a tarefas reais.” (Mesmo sons assíncronos gravados no contexto são considerados “menos autênticos”, uma vez que a técnica de sincronização sonora e o seu uso institucionalizado se tornaram “naturais” na cultura cinematográfica). Considera-se que o tempo real é mais “verdadeiro” do que o tempo cinematográfico, por isso o *take* longo (ou seja, um *take* que dure os 120 metros de comprimento do rolo de película disponível comercialmente) e a montagem minimal ou inexistente (mudanças na fase do corte final são vistas como “engodo”, como se a montagem não estivesse já presente nas fases de concepção e rodagem) são vistos como mais apropriados para evitar distorções na estruturação do material. A câmara é o interruptor para a vida. Assim, o grande plano é condenado pela sua parcialidade, enquanto o plano geral é visto como mais objectivo, porque inclui mais no enquadramento, retratando mais fielmente o acontecimento dentro do seu contexto. (Quanto maior e mais amplo, mais verdadeiro — como se o plano geral não fosse também ele uma forma de enquadramento, à semelhança dos planos mais

fechados.) A câmara leve, portátil, independente de tripé — o ponto fixo de observação — é louvada pela sua capacidade de “passar despercebida”, já que esta deve ser simultaneamente móvel e invisível, integrada no meio de forma a mudá-lo o menos possível, mas também capaz de ser intrusiva e provocar as pessoas a dizerem a “verdade” que não revelariam em situações normais.

Milhares de ineptos levaram a que a palavra [documentário] signifique hoje uma forma enfadonha e rotineira de fazer cinema, o género de cinema que uma sociedade de consumo alienada pode parecer merecer — a arte de falar continuamente durante um filme, com um comentário imposto de fora, de forma a não se dizer nada e a não se mostrar nada (Louis Marcorelles)⁹. O acontecimento puro. Só o acontecimento: inalterado, não regulado pelo olho que o regista ou o olho que o vê. Se o observador social perfeitamente objectivo já não surge como o modelo almejado pelos documentaristas contemporâneos, ainda assim o Homem Comum continua a ser ensinado, a cada emissão, de que Ele é antes de mais um Espectador. Ou não é responsável pelo que vê (porque só o acontecimento que lhe é apresentado conta), ou a única forma de ter alguma influência sobre as coisas é enviando uma doação monetária. Assim, embora a percepção do realizador possa ser facilmente aceite como irremediavelmente pessoal, a objectividade da realidade do que é visto e representado permanece incontestável. [Cinéma-vérité]: seria mais correcto chamar-lhe cinema-sinceridade... Ou seja, pede-se ao público que confie na evidência. Diz-se ao público, foi isto que eu vi, não falsifiquei nada, foi mesmo isto que aconteceu... Olho para o que aconteceu com o meu olho subjectivo e é isto que acho que ocorreu... É uma questão de honestidade (Jean Rouch)¹⁰.

O que é apresentado como evidência mantém-se uma evidência, quer o olho observador se defina como subjectivo ou objectivo. No centro desta lógica, encontra-se intacta a divisão cartesiana entre sujeito e objecto, que perpetua uma visão do mundo dualista e opõe dentro/fora, mente/matéria. Aqui, a ênfase é novamente colocada no poder que o cinema tem de capturar a realidade “lá fora” para nós “aqui dentro”. O momento de apropriação e consumo ou é simplesmente ignorado, ou é cuidadosamente invisibilizado de acordo com as regras do bom ou mau documentário. A arte de falar e não dizer nada vai de mão dada com a vontade de dizer, e nesse dizer confinar algo a um sentido. A verdade tem que ser apresentada de forma vívida e interessante, ou seja, tem de ser “dramatizada” se se quer convencer o público da evidência. É essa sua “confiança” na evidência que permite que a verdade ganhe forma. *Documentário — a apresentação de factos reais de modo a que as pessoas os vejam como credíveis e reveladores num determinado momento (William Stott)¹¹.*

O real? Ou a repetida e artificial ressurreição do real? Uma operação cujo sucesso esmagador na substituição do real pelos signos visuais e verbais do real acaba por permitir o próprio questionamento do real, assim intensificando as incertezas geradas por uma divisão clara entre os dois. Na escala do que é mais ou menos real, o tema assume uma importância fundamental (“É muito difícil, senão mesmo impossível,” diz o coordenador de um festival de cinema, “pedir ao júri da secção de documentário que não confunda a qualidade do filme com o tema de que este trata.”) O foco recai inegavelmente sobre a experiência comum, a partir da qual o “social” é definido — uma experiência cujo protagonista é “o homem simples que nunca se exprimiu”, na formulação paternalista de um famoso realizador de documentários (Pierre Perrault)¹².

Deste modo, o cineasta de orientação social é uma figura todo-poderosa que dá voz (aqui num contexto vocalizador exclusivamente masculino) e a sua posição de autoridade na produção de sentido permanece inquestionada, habilmente mascarada de missão justa. A relação entre mediador e meio (ou actividade mediadora) ou é ignorada — ou seja, presume-se transparente, livre de julgamentos e inconsciente como qualquer instrumento de reprodução deve ser — ou então é tratada de forma conveniente: ao humanizar a recolha de evidência com o fim de manter o *status quo*. (Sou subjectivo como qualquer ser humano, claro, mas ainda assim você deve confiar na evidência!) Os bons documentários são aqueles cujo tema está “correcto” e que apresentam um ponto de vista com que o espectador concorda. O que está em causa pode ser uma questão de honestidade (em relação ao material), mas é também muitas vezes uma questão de adesão (ideológica), ou seja, de legitimação.

Para além disso, os filmes feitos sobre pessoas comuns são naturalmente promovidos como feitos para essas mesmas pessoas, e só para elas. Na ânsia de servir as necessidades dos que não têm voz há frequentemente a vontade de os definir, bem como às suas necessidades. Por exemplo, quando os realizadores participam em debates em que um filme é criticado pelo seu tratamento simplista e redutor de um tema, resultando na manutenção do próprio *status quo* que se propõe contestar, a sua tendência é a de rejeitar a crítica, alegando que o filme não se destina a “espectadores sofisticados como nós, mas ao grande público”, assim se colocando acima e à margem do público *real*, aqueles “lá fora”, os pobres de espírito que precisam que lhes expliquem tudo o que vêem. Apesar da mudança de foco — do mundo da mobilidade ascendente e da grande opulência que domina os meios de comunicação para o dos “seus pobres” —, o que perdura é a velha oposição entre o fornecedor criativo e inteligente e o consumidor medíocre e ignorante. O pretexto para perpetuar esta divisão é a crença de que as relações sociais são determinadas e por isso dotadas de objectividade. Pela “*impossibilidade do social*” entendo... a afirmação da *impossibilidade de toda a “objectividade”*... Em grande medida, a sociedade apresenta-se, não

como uma ordem objectiva e harmoniosa, mas como um conjunto de forças divergentes que não parecem obedecer a nenhuma lógica unificada ou unificante. Como é que esta experiência do fracasso da objectividade pode ser compatibilizada com a afirmação da objectividade do real? (Ernesto Laclau)¹³.

As pessoas comuns silenciosas — as que “nunca se exprimiram”, a não ser que lhes tenha sido dada a oportunidade de comunicar os seus pensamentos por aquele que as veio redimir — são constantemente chamadas a representarem o mundo real. São o referente fundamental do social, por isso basta apontar a câmara na sua direcção, mostrar a sua pobreza (industrializada), ou contextualizar e empacotar os seus estilos de vida estranhos para o grande público “daqui” (sempre pronto a comprar e doar) para se entrar no reino consagrado do moralmente justo, ou do social. Por outras palavras, quando reina o chamado “social”, não se questiona a forma como eles(/nós) ganham visibilidade nos meios de comunicação, como é dado sentido às suas(/nossas) vidas, como a sua(/nossa) verdade é interpretada ou como a verdade é estabelecida para eles(/nós) e apesar deles(/nós), como a representação se relaciona com ou é ideologia, como a hegemonia mediática prossegue a sua trajectória implacável.

Não existe cinema-vérité. Torna-se necessariamente uma mentira a partir do momento em que o realizador intervém — ou nem se pode chamar cinema (Georges Franju)¹⁴.

Quando o social é hipostasiado e consagrado como um ideal de transparência, quando ele próprio é mercantilizado como uma forma de gestão pura (melhor serviço, melhor controlo), o intervalo entre o real e a imagem, ou entre o real e o racional, defínha até à irrealidade. Assim, pensar as relações de produção como o fizemos anteriormente significa revisitar continuamente a seguinte questão: como é que se produz o real (ou o ideal social da boa representação)? Em vez de nos orientarmos para ele, procurando capturar e descobrir a sua verdade como um objecto escondido ou perdido, é também importante continuar a perguntar: Como é que se determina a verdade? *O castigo do realismo é ser sobre a realidade e ter de se preocupar para sempre não com ser “belo”, mas com estar certo* (John Grierson)¹⁵. Inicialmente, os pioneiros do documentário insistiram que ele não era Jornalismo, mas Arte (uma “forma artística nova e vital”, como proclamou Grierson). Que a sua essência não era a informação (como no caso das “centenas de filmes institucionais idênticos destinados a educar os trabalhadores”), a reportagem, ou o filme de actualidades, mas algo próximo de “um tratamento criativo da realidade” (na conhecida definição de Grierson). *Se Joris Ivens fez os mais belos documentários que alguém já viu, isso é porque os seus filmes são compostos e trabalhados, mas têm um ar de verdade. Claro que a parte documental*

*é verdadeira, mas em redor das secções documentais há uma interpretação. Então não se pode falar de cinema-vérité (Georges Franju)*¹⁶.

O documentário pode ser antiestético, como alguns ainda afirmam na senda do pioneiro britânico, mas ainda assim defende-se que é uma arte, embora uma arte nos limites da factualidade. (A interpretação, por exemplo, não é vista como constituindo o próprio processo de documentar e tornar acessível a informação; pelo contrário, é entendida como a margem que rodeia um centro *dado* e intocado, que seria a “parte documental” ou “secção documental”, segundo Franju.) Quando, no mundo da reificação, a verdade é confundida com os factos, qualquer uso explícito das qualidades mágicas, poéticas ou irracionais próprias do meio cinematográfico teria de ser excluído *a priori* como não factual. Não é tanto uma questão de identificar — por mais ilusório que isto seja — o que é inerentemente factual ou não num corpo de técnicas cinematográficas *pré-existentes*, mas de respeitar as convenções do naturalismo no cinema. Na realidade dos filmes-fórmula, só as técnicas validadas estão *correctas*, as outras estão *de facto* erradas. Os critérios baseiam-se todos no seu grau de invisibilidade na produção de sentido. Assim, filmar a uma velocidade diferente dos habituais 24 fotogramas por segundo (a velocidade necessária para a sincronia labial) é muitas vezes condenado como forma de manipulação, insinuando-se com isso que a manipulação tem de ser discreta — ou seja, só é aceitável quando não é facilmente perceptível pelo “público real”. Embora toda a realização seja uma questão de manipulação — quer “criativa”, quer não — mais uma vez todos os que apoiam a lei decretam impreterivelmente qual técnica é manipulativa e qual supostamente não é (e este julgamento é certamente feito de acordo com o grau de visibilidade de cada uma). *Um documentário é filmado com três câmaras: 1) a câmara no sentido técnico; 2) a mente do cineasta; 3) os padrões genéricos do documentário, que são fundados nas expectativas do seu público. Por esta razão, não se pode simplesmente dizer que o documentário retrata factos. Ele fotografa factos isolados e a partir deles monta um conjunto coerente de factos, de acordo com três esquemas divergentes. Quaisquer factos ou contextos factuais restantes são excluídos. O tratamento ingénio da documentação representa assim uma oportunidade única de inventar fábulas. No fundo, o documentário não é mais realista do que um filme de ficção (Alexander Kluge)*¹⁷.

A realidade é mais fabulosa, mais enlouquecedora, mais estranhamente manipuladora do que a ficção. Compreender isto é reconhecer a ingenuidade do desenvolvimento de uma tecnologia cinematográfica que promova o “acesso” cada vez menos mediado à realidade. É não se deixar enganar pela pobreza de “uma verdade expressa tal como foi pensada”, como lamentou Benjamin, e perceber porque é que os filmes de ficção progressivos se interessam e prestam constantemente

homenagem às técnicas do documentário. Estes filmes recorrem ao “efeito documentário”, jogando com a expectativa do espectador de modo a “inventar fábulas”. (Exemplos comuns deste efeito incluem: a impressão de participar num momento da realidade aparentemente verdadeiro e captado à revelia do sujeito filmado; o sentido de urgência, imediatismo e autenticidade conferido pela instabilidade da câmara portátil; a aparência de filme de atualidades da imagem com grão, e o carácter de testemunho oral da entrevista directa — para mencionar apenas alguns.)

O documentário pode então tornar-se facilmente um “estilo”: já não constitui um modo de produção ou uma atitude perante a vida, mas revela-se apenas como um elemento da estética (ou antiestética) — o que tende a ser, de qualquer modo, no melhor dos casos e sem o reconhecer, quando dentro dos seus próprios limites factuais, se reduz a uma mera categoria, ou a um conjunto de técnicas persuasivas. Muitas destas técnicas tornaram-se hoje tão “naturais” à linguagem da televisão que “passam despercebidas”. Por exemplo: a técnica do “testemunho pessoal” (uma estrela aparece no ecrã a publicitar o uso de um certo produto); a técnica da “pessoa comum” (um político come cachorros quentes em público); a técnica do “rebanho” (a qual passa a mensagem de que “todos o fazem, porque não você?”); ou a técnica de “controlar as cartas” (na qual os preparativos de uma “sondagem” mostram que uma certa marca de produto é a mais popular entre os habitantes de uma determinada zona)¹⁸.

Tens de recriar a realidade porque a realidade foge; a realidade nega a realidade. Primeiro tens de interpretá-la, ou recriá-la... Quando faço um documentário, tento dar ao realismo um aspecto artificial... Sinto que a estética de um documento vem do seu aspecto artificial... deve ser mais belo do que o realismo, e por isso deve ser composto... para ganhar outro sentido (Franju)¹⁹.

Um documentário consciente do seu próprio artifício é aquele que se mantém sensível ao fluxo entre facto e ficção. Não se esforça por ocultar ou excluir o que é normalizado como “não factual”, uma vez que compreende a dependência mútua entre o realismo e a “artificialidade” no processo de realização. Ele reconhece a necessidade de compor a vida (a partir dela) ao vivê-la ou fazê-la. O documentário reduzido a um mero veículo de factos pode ser usado para defender uma causa, mas não constitui uma causa. Daí a perpetuação do sistema bipartido que opõe o conteúdo à forma.

Compor nem sempre é sinónimo de ordenar-para-persuadir, assim como dar ao documento filmado outro sentido, outro significado, não significa necessariamente distorcê-lo. Se não se quer suprimir os paradoxos e complexidades da vida, a questão dos graus e *nuances* é incessantemente crucial. Por isso, o sentido só pode ser político quando não se deixa estabilizar facilmente e quando não depende de uma fonte única de autoridade, mas antes a esvazia ou descentraliza. Assim, mesmo quando esta fonte é referida, surge como uma entre muitas outras, simultaneamente plural e

profundamente singular. Na sua insistência em *ter sentido* a qualquer custo, muitas vezes o “documentário” esquece-se da forma como surge e que a estética e a política se mantêm inseparáveis na sua constituição. De facto, desde que não seja confundida com uma mera técnica de embelezamento, a estética permite-nos experienciar a vida de forma diferente, ou, como diriam alguns, dar-lhe “outro sentido”, permanecendo em sintonia com as suas derivas e mudanças.

Tem de ser possível representar a realidade como a ficção histórica que é. A realidade é um tigre de papel. O indivíduo encontra-a, como destino. Não é destino, contudo, mas o resultado do trabalho de várias gerações de seres humanos, que sempre quiseram e continuam a querer algo completamente diferente. Em vários sentidos, a realidade é simultaneamente real e irreal (Alexander Kluge)²⁰.

Das suas descrições às suas ordenações e reordenações, a realidade em movimento pode ser intensificada ou empobrecida mas nunca é neutra (ou seja, objectivista). “O documentário na sua versão mais pura e poética é uma forma em que os elementos que usamos são os elementos reais.²¹” Porquê sequer usar o qualificativo “artificial”, por exemplo? Haverá no processo de produzir um “documento” um aspecto artificial que possa ser seguramente separado do aspecto verdadeiro (excepto com um propósito analítico — ou seja, ao serviço de um outro “artifício” da linguagem?) Por outras palavras, será um enquadramento mais fechado da realidade mais artificial do que um mais aberto? A noção de “estranhamento” e de reflexividade permanecerá um mero mecanismo de distanciamento enquanto a divisão entre “artifício textual” e “atitude social” exercer o seu poder²². O “social” mantém-se inquestionado, a história continua a ser resgatada, enquanto a soberania do sujeito socio-historicizante é protegida. Preservado o *status quo* do sujeito criador/consumidor, o objectivo é corrigir “erros” (o falso) e construir uma perspectiva alternativa (apresentada como esta-é-a-verdadeira ou a-minha-é-a-mais-verdadeira versão da realidade). Ou seja, trata-se de substituir uma fonte de autoridade não reconhecida por outra, mas sem questionar a própria constituição da autoridade. Assim, o novo texto socio-histórico reina despoticamente como mais um texto centrado no senhor, pois contribui involuntariamente para perpetuar a posição ideológica do Senhor.

Quando o textual e o político nem se separam um do outro nem colapsam simplesmente num qualificativo único, a prática da representação também não pode ser tida como garantida nem simplesmente rejeitada como ideologicamente reaccionária. Ao colocar a representação sob escrutínio é mais provável que a teoria-prática textual tenha ajudado a abalar as ideologias enraizadas ao trazer os mecanismos do seu funcionamento para primeiro plano. Ela torna possível

a diferenciação fundamental entre a crítica autoritária e as análises e investigações rigorosas (incluindo da própria actividade analisadora/investigadora). Para além disso, contribui para o questionamento de abordagens reformistas “alternativas” que nunca se afastam muito da linhagem do humanismo centrado no homem branco. Apesar do seu explícito engajamento sociopolítico, estas abordagens permanecem inócuas — ou seja, “enquadradas”, e assim nem suficientemente sociais nem políticas.

A realidade foge, a realidade nega a realidade. No fundo, fazer um filme é uma questão de “enquadrar” a realidade no seu curso. No entanto, também pode ser o lugar onde a função referencial da imagem/som cinematográficos não é simplesmente negada, mas pensada nos seus princípios operativos e questionada na sua identificação autoritária com o mundo fenomenal. Nas tentativas de suprimir a mediação do dispositivo cinematográfico e o facto de a linguagem “se comunicar a si mesma” esconde-se sempre o que Benjamin designou de concepção “burguesa” da linguagem. *Qualquer estratégia revolucionária deve questionar a representação da realidade... para que se produza uma separação entre ideologia e texto* (Claire Johnston)²³.

Negar a *realidade* do cinema ao reivindicar (capturar) a *realidade* é ficar “na ideologia” — i.e. cair na confusão (deliberada ou não) entre a realidade cinematográfica e fenomenal. Ao condenar a auto-reflexividade como puro formalismo ao invés de questionar as suas diversas realizações, esta ideologia pode “passar despercebida”, mantendo as suas operações invisíveis e servindo o objectivo do expansionismo universal. Esta aversão à auto-reflexividade vai de mãos dadas com a sua apropriação generalizada como dispositivo formalista progressivo no cinema, uma vez que ambas se esforçam por reduzir a sua função a algo de decorativo e inofensivo. (Por exemplo, tornou-se comum ouvir comentários como “Um filme é um filme”, ou “Isto é um filme sobre um filme.” É cada vez mais difícil lidar com este tipo de afirmações, pois elas podem tornar-se presa fácil das suas próprias fórmulas e técnicas.) Para além disso, a reflexividade, por vezes equiparada à visão pessoal, é outras vezes defendida como rigor científico.

Dois homens estavam a discutir a produção conjunta de vinho. Um deles disse ao outro: “Tu forneces o arroz e eu a água.” O segundo perguntou: “Se sou eu a dar o arroz todo, como é que distribuimos o produto final?” O primeiro respondeu: “Serei absolutamente justo. Quando o vinho estiver pronto, cada um recebe exactamente aquilo que deu — eu extraio o líquido com um sifão e tu podes ficar com o resto.”

“Joint Production”, *Wit and Humor from Old Cathay*²⁴

Uma das áreas do documentário que se mantém mais resistente à realidade do cinema enquanto cinema é aquela conhecida como cinema antropológico. O material etnográfico filmado, que se pensava “reproduzir a percepção natural”, renunciou à sua autoridade para reproduzir e passou a pretender fornecer “dados” adequados à “amostragem” da cultura. A pretensão à objectividade pode já não valer em muitos círculos antropológicos, mas a sua autoridade será muito provavelmente substituída pela noção sacrossanta do “científico”. Assim, o registo e recolha de dados e testemunhos pessoais emergem como o escopo limitado do “filme etnográfico”. O que torna um filme antropológico ou científico é, tautologicamente, o seu “esforço académico [para] respectivamente documentar e interpretar de acordo com padrões antropológicos”²⁵. Não meramente etnográficos ou documentais, a definição específica incontestavelmente, mas académicos e antropológicos. Uma obsessão científica fundamental está presente em todas as tentativas de demarcar os territórios da antropologia. Para ser cientificamente válido, um filme depende da intervenção científica do antropólogo — apenas se aderir ao corpo de convenções estabelecidas pela comunidade de antropólogos acreditados pela sua “disciplina” é que um filme pode habilitar-se a esta classificação e passar como “esforço académico”.

O mito da ciência impressiona-nos. Mas que não se confunda a ciência com o seu escolaticismo. A ciência não encontra verdades nenhuma, quer matematizadas, quer formalizadas; descobre factos desconhecidos que podem ser interpretados de mil maneiras diferentes (Paul Veyne)²⁶. Um dos argumentos comuns apresentados pelos antropólogos para validar o uso prescritivamente instrumental do cinema e das pessoas é a rejeição de todas as obras de “antropólogos não-profissionais”, ou “etnógrafos amadores”, com o pretexto de que não são “antropologicamente esclarecidos”, logo, não têm “nenhuma relevância teórica do ponto de vista antropológico”. Defender uma lógica de auto-promoção tão descarada para instituir uma *forma enfadonha e rotineira de cinema* (para citar mais uma vez a expressão de Marcocelles) é também — através da tarefa antropológica primordial de “recolha de dados” para o conhecimento humano — uma tentativa de contornar o que é conhecido como “paradigma de salvamento” e as questões implicadas na implementação “científica” da apropriação ocidental do mundo²⁷. Quanto mais forte a insegurança da antropologia em relação ao seu próprio projecto, mais forte a sua vontade de sustentar um modelo normativo e mais aparentemente pacífica a sua tendência para se manter na ignorância.

No terreno santificado da antropologia, todo o cinema é reduzido a uma questão de metodologia. Nele demonstra-se que os filmes antropológicos vão mais longe do que os filmes etnográficos, já que, por exemplo, não mostram apenas actividades a serem realizadas, mas *explicam* também a “relevância antropológica” dessas actividades (relevância que, apesar do

qualificativo disciplinar “antropológico” é identificada, na prática, com o sentido dado pelos próprios nativos). Como é óbvio, no processo da fixação de sentido nem todas as explicações são válidas. É neste momento que entra o papel do antropólogo especialista e que as metodologias precisam de ser concebidas, legitimadas e implementadas. De facto, se uma explicação não-profissional é aqui rejeitada, não é tanto porque lhe falte discernimento ou fundamento teórico, mas porque escapa ao controlo antropológico, isto é, falta-lhe o selo de aprovação da ordem antropológica. Em nome da ciência, faz-se uma distinção entre informação fiável e não fiável. As explicações antropológicas e não antropológicas podem partilhar o mesmo tema, mas diferem na forma como produzem sentido. Os conceitos não fiáveis são aqueles que não obedecem às regras da autoridade antropológica, as quais o estudioso Evans-Pritchard descreve habilmente como um mero “hábito científico de pensamento”²⁸. A ciência definida como a abordagem mais apropriada ao objecto de investigação serve de bandeira a todas as tentativas científicas para promover o papel paternalista do Ocidente como sujeito de conhecimento e a sua historicidade do Mesmo. *Tal como nós, hoje o Ocidente reconhece que a via da Verdade passa por muitos caminhos para além da lógica aristotélica-tomista ou da dialética hegeliana. Mas as ciências sociais e humanas também devem ser descolonizadas* (E. Mveng)²⁹.

Na sua busca cientifista de “criar sentido”, a antropologia reactiva constantemente as relações de poder inscritas nos discursos confiantes do Senhor sobre Si Próprio e sobre o Seu Outro, assim contribuindo para os movimentos *centrípeto* e *centrífugo* que caracterizam sua disseminação global. Com os diversos desafios colocados hoje ao próprio processo de produzir uma interpretação “científica” da cultura, assim como de tornar possível o conhecimento antropológico, os membros visualmente orientados desta comunidade encontraram uma posição epistemológica na qual a noção de reflexividade é geralmente reduzida a uma questão de técnica e método. Associada a uma forma de auto-exposição comum no trabalho de campo, por vezes é discutida como *auto-reflexividade*, outras vezes é condenada como idealismo individualista a precisar urgentemente de ser controlado se se quiser evitar que o criador individual assuma maior importância do que a comunidade científica ou as pessoas observadas. Assim, “ser reflexivo é praticamente sinónimo de ser científico”³⁰.

São muitas as razões que sustentam esta afirmação, mas há uma que a atravessa apesar de si própria: enquanto o realizador seguir uma série de técnicas “reflexivas” concebidas com o propósito de expor o “contexto” de produção, e enquanto o fizer de forma metódica e metodológica, pode estar seguro de que a “reflexividade” é elevada ao estatuto de rigor científico. Estas técnicas reflexivas incluiriam a inserção de uma narrativa verbal ou visual sobre o antropólogo, a metodologia adoptada e as condições de produção — ou seja, todos os meios convencionais de

validação de um texto antropológico através da prática disciplinar de notas introdutórias e de rodapé e do conceito totalitário da apresentação de pré-produção. Os que rejeitam esta lógica fazem-no pensando na “comunidade de cientistas”, cujo juízo colectivo deveria ser a única e verdadeira forma de reflexão (a validação individual de uma obra só pode ser suspeita, já que “ignora o desenvolvimento histórico da ciência”). Nestas tentativas constantes de impor a antropologia como (uma) disciplina e de recentrar a representação dominante da cultura (apesar de todas as mudanças de metodologias), o que parece ser estranhamente suprimido na noção de reflexividade aplicada ao cinema é a sua prática enquanto processo para evitar que o sentido se reduza ao que é dito ou mostrado — enquanto investigação das relações de produção. Um processo que questiona a própria representação, realçando a realidade da experiência do cinema e o papel fundamental que a realidade desempenha nas vidas dos espetadores.

A não ser que uma imagem se desloque do seu estado natural, ela não adquire relevância. O deslocamento causa a ressonância (Shanta Gokhale)³¹.

Depois de se entregar voluntariamente, Zheng Guang, pirata activo na costa de Fujian, deveria receber um cargo oficial (em troca da sua rendição). Quando um superior lhe pediu para escrever um poema, Zheng respondeu com um verso cómico: “Quer sejam civis ou militares, os oficiais são todos iguais. Os oficiais assumiram os seus cargos antes de se tornarem ladrões, mas eu, Zheng Guang, era ladrão antes me tornar oficial.”

“The Significance of Officialdom”,
*Wit and Humor from Old Cathay*³²

Como fechamento estético ou velha jogada relativizante no processo de absolutização de sentido, a reflexividade revela-se criticamente in/significante quando serve apenas para afinar ou promover a acumulação de conhecimento. Nenhum ir-além, nenhum outro-lugar-aqui parece possível se a reflexão sobre nós mesmos não implicar simultaneamente a análise de formas estabelecidas do social que definem os nossos limites. Assim, conduzir o eu a um abismo não constitui nem uma auto-restrição moralista (para aperfeiçoamento futuro), nem uma tarefa crítica que humaniza o eu descodificador, sem nunca questionar as próprias noções de eu e de descodificador. Intocado na sua posicionalidade e urgência de decretar sentido, o eu concebido como chave e mediador transparente tenderá a transformar a responsabilidade em liberdade. Liberdade de *nomear*, como se o sentido se desse a ser decifrado sem mediação ideológica. Como se especificar um contexto só pudesse resultar na finalização do que é mostrado ou dito. Como se nomear pudesse travar o processo de nomeação — o tal abismo da relação do eu com o eu.

Esta consideração do eu ultrapassa necessariamente a preocupação com os erros humanos, pois não pode deixar de incluir o problema inerente à representação e comunicação. Radicalmente plural no seu alcance, a reflexividade não é uma mera questão de *rectificação* e *justificação* (*subjectivando*). O que é accionado na sua prática são as ligações auto-geradas entre diferentes formas de reflexividade. Deste modo, um sujeito que aponta para si próprio/a como sujeito-em-processo, ou uma obra que mostra as suas propriedades formais ou constituição como obra só pode desestabilizar o nosso sentido de identidade — a distinção familiar entre o Mesmo e o Outro, pois este último já não é mantido numa reconhecível relação de dependência, derivação ou apropriação. O processo de auto-constituição é também aquele em que o eu vacila e perde as suas certezas. O paradoxo deste processo reside na sua instabilidade fundamental, uma instabilidade que gera a desordem inerente a toda a ordem. O “centro” da representação é o intervalo reflexivo. É o lugar onde o jogo dentro do quadro textual é um jogo sobre esse próprio quadro, logo, nos limites do textual e extratextual, em que o posicionamento interno corre constantemente o risco de desposicionamento, e em que a obra, nunca liberta de contextos históricos e sociopolíticos, nem inteiramente sujeita a eles, só pode ser ela própria se arriscar constantemente não ser nada.

Uma obra que reflecte sobre si própria oferece-se infinitamente como apenas obra... e vazio. O seu olhar é simultaneamente um impulso que leva a obra a desintegrar-se (a regressar à sua qualidade de não-obra) e uma dádiva maior à sua constituição, já que através dela a obra é liberta da tirania de sentido, assim como da omnipresença de um sujeito de sentido. Soltar as amarras no preciso momento em que elas são mais fortes é permitir à obra viver e perdurar independentemente das ligações pretendidas, comunicando-se a si mesma, ou, como em Benjamin, “o *ego* é um texto” — precisamente “qualquer coisa que é necessário construir”³³. *O olhar de Orfeu... é o impulso do desejo que estilhaça o destino e a preocupação da canção, e nesta decisão inspirada e despreocupada alcança a origem e consagra a canção (Maurice Blanchot)*³⁴.

O sentido não pode ser imposto nem negado. Embora cada filme seja em si mesmo uma forma de ordenar e fechar, cada fechamento pode desafiar o seu próprio fechamento, abrindo para outros fechamentos, assim realçando o intervalo entre aberturas e criando um espaço no qual o sentido permanece fascinado por aquilo que lhe escapa e o excede. A necessidade de abandonar a noção de intencionalidade que domina a questão do “social”, assim como a de criatividade não deve, portanto, ser confundida com o ideal de não intervenção, em relação ao qual o realizador, tentando tornar-se o mais invisível possível no processo de produzir sentido, promove a subjectividade enfática à custa da investigação crítica, mesmo quando a intenção é mostrar e condenar a opressão. *É uma mistificação idealista acreditar que a “verdade” pode ser capturada pela câmara ou que as condições de produção de um filme (por exemplo, um filme feito colectivamente por mulheres)*

*podem por si mesmas reflectir as suas condições de produção. Isto é mera utopia: um novo sentido tem de ser fabricado dentro do texto do filme... O que a câmara efectivamente capta é o mundo “natural” da ideologia dominante (Claire Johnston)*³⁵.

Na busca de sentido totalizante ou na ânsia de conhecer-por-conhecer, o pior sentido é a ausência de sentido. Uma missionária branca sediada numa remota aldeia africana classifica a sua tarefa de forma simples e convicta: “Estamos aqui para ajudar as pessoas a darem sentido às suas vidas.” A posse é monotonamente circular nas suas exigências de dar e receber. É uma visão monolítica do mundo, cuja irracionalidade se expressa no imperativo de dar e significar, cuja irrealdade se manifesta na necessidade de exigir que os constructos visuais e verbais produzam sentido até ao seu mais ínfimo detalhe. *O Ocidente humedece tudo com sentido, como uma religião autoritária que impõe o baptismo a populações inteiras (Roland Barthes)*³⁶. No entanto, esta ilusão é real; ela tem a sua própria realidade, na qual o sujeito de Conhecimento, o sujeito de Visão, ou o sujeito de Sentido continua a mobilizar relações de poder estabelecidas, assumindo-se como reserva básica de referência na busca totalitária de referente — esse referente verdadeiro que se encontra lá fora na natureza, envolto em escuridão, aguardando pacientemente ser revelado e decifrado correctamente: ser redimido. Talvez uma imaginação que vá de encontro à textura da realidade seja aquela capaz de jogar com a ilusão em causa e o poder que esta exerce. A produção de uma irrealdade sobre a outra e o jogo do *nonsense* (que não é um mero sem-sentido) com o sentido pode ajudar então a aliviar o referente básico da sua ocupação, já que a situação actual de investigação crítica parece constituir menos um ataque à ilusão da realidade do que um deslocamento e esvaziamento do estabelecimento da totalidade.

Traduzido do inglês por Ana Macedo.

*Este trabalho é financiado por Fundos Nacionais através da FCT –
Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia no âmbito do projecto UIDB/00183/2020.*

¹ Uma versão mais curta deste artigo foi publicada com o título “Documentary Is/Not a Name”, *October*, nº 52 (Verão 1990), 76–98. Capítulo retirado de Trinh Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Nova Iorque: Routledge, 1991), 29–50..

² *Rua de Sentido Único e Infância em Berlim por volta de 1900*, trad. Isabel de Almeida e Sousa, e Cláudia de Miranda Rodrigues (Lisboa: Relógio d’Água, 1992), 97.

³ “The Words Will Not Ring True”, *Wit and Humor from Old Cathay*, trad. J. Kowallis (Beijing: Panda Books, 1986), 164.

⁴ Lindsay Anderson, citada por G. Roy Levin, *Documentary Explorations: Fifteen Interviews with Film-Makers* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1971), 66.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, "Sobre a linguagem em geral e sobre a linguagem humana", in *Sobre Arte, Técnica, Linguagem e Política*, trad. Manuel Alberto, Maria Amélia Cruz, Maria Luz Moita (Lisboa: Relógio d'Água, 1992), 179.

⁶ Veja-se a releitura que Jean Franco fez do seu trabalho em *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (Nova Iorque: Columbia University Press, 1989), 23-54.

⁷ John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsyth Hardy (Nova Iorque: Praeger, 1966, reeditado em 1971), 146-47.

⁸ Hans Richter McCann, "Film as an Original Art Form", in *Film: A Montage of Theories*, ed. R. Dyer MacCann (Nova Iorque: E. P. Dutton, 1966), 183.

⁹ Louis Marcorelles, *Living Cinema: New Directions in Contemporary Film-making*, trad. L. Quigly (Nova Iorque: Praeger, 1973), 37.

¹⁰ Jean Rouch, in G. Roy Levin, *Documentary Explorations*, 135.

¹¹ William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (Nova Iorque: Oxford University Press, 1973, reeditado em 1976), 73.

¹² Citado em Louis Marcorelles, *Living Cinema*, 26.

¹³ Ernesto Laclau, "Building a New Left: An Interview with Ernesto Laclau", *Strategies*, nº 1 (Outono 1988), 15.

¹⁴ Georges Franju, in G. Roy Levin, *Documentary Explorations*, 119.

¹⁵ Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, 249.

¹⁶ Georges Franju, in Levin, *Documentary Explorations*, 119.

¹⁷ Alexander Kluge, *Alexander Kluge: A Retrospective*, The Goethe Institutes of North America, 1988, 4.

¹⁸ John Mercer, *An Introduction to Cinematography* (Champaign, IL: Stipes Publishing Co, 1968), 159.

¹⁹ Georges Franju, in G. Roy Levin, *Documentary Explorations*, 121, 128.

²⁰ Alexander Kluge, *Alexander Kluge: A Retrospective*, 6.

²¹ Lindsay Anderson, *Alexander Kluge: A Retrospective*, 66.

²² Esta distinção motiva o argumento de Dana Polan em "A Brechtian Cinema? Towards a Politics of Self-Reflexive Film", ed. B. Nichols, *Movies and Methods*, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 661-672.

²³ Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema", in ed. B. Nichols, *Movies and Method*, vol. 1 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 215.

²⁴ *Wit and Humor*, trad. Jon Kowallis (Beijing: Panda Books, 1986), 98.

²⁵ Henk Ketelaar, "Methodology in Anthropological Filmmaking: A Filmmaking Anthropologist's Poltergeist?", *Methodology in Anthropological Filmmaking*, ed. N. Bogaart e H. Ketelaar (Gottingen: Herodot, 1983), 182.

²⁶ Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*, trad. P. Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 115.

²⁷ Ver James Clifford, "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the 'Salvage Paradigm'", *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 121-130.

²⁸ Ver *Theories of Primitive*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.

²⁹ E. Mveng, "Recents developpements de la theologie africaine," *Bulletin of African Theology*, vol. 5, nº 9. Citado em V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 37.

³⁰ Jay Ruby, "Exposing Yourself: Reflexivity, Anthropology and Film," *Semiotica*, vol. 30, nº 1-2 (1980), 165.

³¹ Shanta Gakhale, in *The New Generation. 1960-1980*, ed. Uma de Cunha (Nova Deli: The Directorate of Film Festivals, 1981), 114.

³² Kowallis, *Wit and Humor*, 39.

³³ Susan Sontag, na Introdução a Benjamin, *Rua de Sentido Único*, 15.

³⁴ Maurice Blanchot, *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays*, ed. P. Adams Sitney, trad. L. Davis, Barrytown (Nova Iorque: Station Hill Press, 1981), 104.

³⁵ Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema", 214.

³⁶ Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trad. R. Howard (Nova Iorque: Hill & Wang, 1982), 70.

VIRTUAL ROUND TABLE: AN EXPERIMENT
MESA REDONDA VIRTUAL: UM ENSAIO

Composed by Susana Nascimento Duarte and Stefanie Baumann

The following pages are the outcome of an experimental approach. Rather than including a classical interview, we decided to compose an imaginary conversation between documentary filmmakers, film scholars and philosophers from different contexts concerned with the philosophical, aesthetic and political dimensions of documentary film. In order to engage the discussion, we have sent a set of questions to each participant, requesting to either answer them directly, or to comment on related subjects. With the statements we have received, we have attempted to compose, through a dialogical structure, a virtual round table discussion. The following version is thus only a possible configuration. Another hypothetical version – which emphasizes potential connections between the contributions through a spatial and constellational montage – is available in the annex of this issue.

PARTICIPANTS:

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Christa BLÜMLINGER is Professor in film studies at the University Paris VIII. Her publications include books about essay film, media art, avant-garde cinema and archival film aesthetics. Forthcoming: *Harun Farocki. Du cinéma au musée* (2021, P.O.L.).

Dario CECCHI is Assistant Professor of Aesthetics at Sapienza University of Rome. His research focuses on film and media aesthetics, especially documentary and Iranian cinema.

Ilana FELDMAN is a researcher, critic and essayist. She is currently a postdoctoral fellow at ECA-USP. Her research focuses on the modes of production of subjectivity and narrative construction within the scope of contemporary cinema, with an emphasis on the relationship between subjectivity, politics and culture. As a critic and essayist, in addition to academic publications, she has written about cinema, literature and culture for several newspapers and magazines.

David LARocca is the author, editor, or coeditor of a dozen books, including *The Philosophy of War Films* (2014), *The Philosophy of Documentary Film* (2017), and *The Thought of Stanley Cavell and Cinema* (2020). Formerly Harvard's Sinclair Kennedy Fellow in the United Kingdom, and a participant in an NEH Institute, the School of Criticism and Theory, a workshop with Abbas Kiarostami, and Werner Herzog's Rogue Film School, he has held visiting research or teaching positions at Binghamton, Cornell, Cortland, Harvard, Ithaca College, the School of Visual Arts, and Vanderbilt. www.DavidLaRocca.org

Volker PANTENBURG is professor for Film Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. He has published widely on essayistic film and video practices, experimental cinema, and contemporary moving image installations.

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Fernão PESSOA RAMOS is Professor at the Multimedia Department and Coordinator of the 'Research Center for Documentary Film' (CEPECIDOC) at UNICAMP (State University of Campinas/Brazil). He is the author of 'Mas afinal... o que é mesmo documentário?' ('After all, what is documentary?').

Raed RAFEI is a Lebanese filmmaker, researcher, and multimedia journalist. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate in film and digital Media at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Narimane MARI is a French-Algerian filmmaker and producer.

Filipe MARTINS is film director, professor (ESMAD), researcher (IF-UP) and film curator. He holds a PhD in Communication Sciences (UM) and is a postdoctoral fellow in Philosophy (FLUP).

Catarina MOURÃO studied Music, Law and Film (MA Bristol University). In 1998 she founded AporDOC, Portuguese Documentary Association. Since 2000 she has been teaching Film and Documentary since. With another filmmaker (Catarina Alves Costa) she started Laranja Azul, an independent production company for creative documentary and visual arts in Lisbon.

NGUYEN Trinh Thi is a Hanoi-base independent filmmaker and moving image artist. She is founder and director of Hanoi DOCLAB, an independent center for documentary film and the moving image art in Hanoi since 2009.

Susana de SOUSA DIAS is a filmmaker and professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts/University of Lisbon. She also holds a PhD in aesthetics.

Marie VOIGNIER is an artist and a filmmaker based in Paris.

Phillip WARNELL is an artist, filmmaker and academic, based in London.

Mohanad YAQUBI is co-founder of Idioms Film, a leading production house based in Ramallah, Palestine. He practices film and archival research through Subversive Film, a collective that focuses on militant cinema practices. In 2016, he released his first feature "Off Frame aka Revolution until Victory". He is currently a resident research at CRAMP "Centre of Research on Archival Memory Practices", part of KASK school of the arts, Gent, Belgium.

QUESTIONS SENT TO THE PARTICIPANTS:

- When in his text "The Documentary Producer" (1933), John Grierson proposed to define the documentary as a "creative treatment of actuality", he alluded to the two conflicting poles that constitute the genre. On the one hand, documentary films are directly concerned with the social and political reality they address (thus raising the question of what is constitutive of this very reality). On the other hand, they are the fruit of artistic production (thus raising the question of subjective mediation of contemporary reality, and that of the impact of form). How would you address this tension inherent to documentary formats? What is at stake when talking about documentary today?

- Documentary has traditionally been associated with political struggle and emancipatory aims: it gave voice to those people and subjects that have been underrepresented or silenced, and problematized the hegemonic truth claims of reigning institutions. Some of these films are straightforwardly conceived as activist films and intended to actively participate in the struggle in question. Others are political in a subtler sense: they disturb the commonsensical perception of reality and produce, as Jacques Rancière says, dissensus. For such documentaries, the question of form is fundamental, in the sense that rather than claiming to be political through the choice of their topic, they make films politically, as Godard famously puts it. How do you consider the political potential of documentary with relation to form? Is Adorno's understanding of form as "sedimented content" valuable according to you in the context of documentary films?
- Documentaries are both, representations of reality and constitutive of this reality, as they contribute to shaping its perception. Today, they intervene in a reality in which images are omnipresent. At the same time, however, they are more prone to being manipulated or instrumentalized. Moreover, the idea of the factual as a stable, reliable realm has been challenged not only by philosophical interventions (cf. Marxist and critical theory's critique of positivism), but also by the growing proliferation of "fake news", "alternative facts", or conspiracy theories, which pervade the public sphere. In your view, what does this imply for documentary theory and praxis?
- Many contemporary filmmakers and theorists refuse the division between documentary and fiction, and prefer to describe films as hybrid formats or essay films. In fact, filming and editing are seen as inherently creative acts, relying on an intrinsic fictional *puissance*: rather than simply capturing reality, they are considered as means of producing it. How do you understand the work of fiction in relation to documentary? Does such a distinction as the one between fiction and documentary still make sense for you? What about the fictional *constituens* of reality itself?
- The reality addressed by documentary films is always, one way or another, the reality of images, and many contemporary documentary formats reflect upon the nature of images through specific aesthetic devices. Hartmut Bitomsky for example stresses that images are not merely objective material unaffected by the viewing process, but products of the interaction between the visible and the imagination of the director or viewer. Reflecting on different kinds of images – as in films using surveillance footage, different kinds of archival material or found footage, media recording, or private videos – documentary films often recur to existing material and problematize its specific agency. They do so, for instance, by interrupting the constant flow of images and sounds, displacing them from one context into another, making it possible to look at them anew and think of their meaning afresh; or by recurring to estrangement effects. According to you, what kind of critique is facilitated through documentary formats? How do you consider documentary cinema as a tool of memory, which at the same time bears witness to the past and enables its critical reassessment? More generally speaking, how can documentary films subvert, challenge, or expand conceptual thinking about images and aesthetics? Is there a philosophy through filmic means? Which forms would be appropriate to do so?

WHAT IS DOCUMENTARY?
O QUE É O DOCUMENTÁRIO

I believe all cinema is a “creative treatment of actuality”, as Grierson defines it. When a filmmaker deals with footage, those images are the actuality. No matter how frame and stage were previously organized, images will overcome the filmmaker’s intentionality. To use Roland Barthes’ vocabulary, photographic images, including motion pictures, present both ‘studium’ and ‘punctum’. The difference of motion pictures is that creative work with them requires assemblage or montage. Therefore, cinema is not a creative *act*: it is a creative *treatment* of images. But this is true in all cases, either you realize a fiction or a documentary.

Dario Cecchi

The “creative treatment” that Grierson talks about have taken over my own documentaries in unlimited/unpredictable ways. I think, at stake is what balance each filmmaker decides for him/herself, between depicting “the real” / reality/facts / actuality, and how much they get “treated.” For me, this balance fluctuates between different works. Sometimes my “authority” or authorship is more apparent – materials and footages get more “intervened”, are more edited, more “treated”. Sometimes I restrain myself from making too many “treatments,” for example, by using a lot of long shots. I think the art is the balance, and negotiations between these untreated materials of the real and the treatments from the author. However, when I say “untreated materials” it just means “untreated” in a relative way, because every time you have a person behind a camera, you already have a treatment.

Nguyen Trinh Thi

As the earliest theorists of “documentary” film were aware, the inherent tension between *objective* and *subjective* is part of what animates the works we are offered. We know how every feature film is, in some genuine sense, a documentary of its own making, that is, until we are faced with computer generated imagery (CGI) and the striking presentations of generative adversarial networks (GANs). We remain sensitive to the “presumptive assertions” (Carroll) of films, which allow and encourage us to take them seriously as testimonies of truth and fact, that is, until we are given “director commentary” (or other input) that upends our faith—the chronology was

changed, the subjects were fed lines, some details were left out, other details were added, and so on.

David LaRocca

Em última análise é difícil sustentar que exista uma realidade em cinema independentemente de um ponto de vista que lhe confere sentido. Sabemos que existe sempre uma construção social ligada a essa dita realidade. Ou seja, hoje em dia, os elementos que compõem o documentário complexificaram-se, a realidade que se observa ou filma é já de si uma realidade que contém a sua própria construção e mediação. Na medida em que reduz o documentário a estas duas variáveis, a definição de Grierson é talvez demasiado ingénua ou simplista. Se calhar é impossível arranjar uma definição nova enquanto não se encontrar outro nome para os filmes que partem desta raiz da “actualidade”. A palavra “documentário” parece-me sempre um pouco redutora e pouco inspiradora, na medida em que é demasiado normativa contendo uma hierarquia implícita entre a realidade/documento e o seu autor e parece fechar-nos em vez de nos abrir para novas formas de tratar a realidade.

Catarina Mourão

In 1979, in a text on Jean-Pierre Gorin’s film *Poto and Cabengo*, Harun Farocki wrote: “If someone sits at a table with his or her back to the camera, this means ‘fiction film’; if this place is left free, it means: Experiment, presentation.” While Farocki doesn’t explicitly use the word “documentary,” he seems to have this difference in mind; documentary, in his model, would be a different term for “experiment, presentation.”

Volker Pantenburg

La première question serait de savoir s’il s’agit vraiment d’un genre quand nous parlons du documentaire. Pour échapper à des conventions pragmatiques, liées aux marchés de l’audiovisuel, on pourrait parler d’une *forme documentaire* au sens d’un style, visant par là un mode qui dépasse le medium du film, une manière de témoigner de quelque chose qui circule, se transforme, se perd et revient, des gestes ou des modes d’exister, comme le dit par exemple Marielle Macé. On juge trop facilement la qualité d’un documentaire du point de vue de ce qu’il « raconte ». Il faudrait davantage saisir ses manières de composer, de structurer et de rythmer les éléments audio-visuels.

Christa Blümlinger

For the filmmaker, the question then is whether you stretch the definition of documentary so it includes your work, or just drop it and find other terms that

are a bit more inclusive. I guess I have chosen the latter solution, although none is really satisfying. Because there is just too much to explain when you say “documentary,” because, I think, the perceptions and expectations people normally rely on when they hear “documentary” are quite narrow. I found myself moving further and further away from describing my films as documentary. At the beginning, I used “experimental documentary”, or “experimental film”, then “essay film”, “hybrid essay film”, or sometimes “moving image.” I remember sometimes at festivals, or somewhere else, I’d be reluctant when people ask “What kind of film do you make?” “Documentary, but...” I thought, the next time people ask that question, I’m just going to say: “Good films!”

Nguyen Trinh Thi

Documentário, em nosso caso, é um filme (a sua forma). Isto quer dizer que é uma coisa audiovisual disposta em unidade narrativa, transcorrendo numa medida e em direção a um fim futuro (‘The End’), que é seu presente pelo passado, aberto no agora da duração. Nesta medida é finalista, é aquilo que transcorre, pela tomada, para o fim do filme – que é um ponto, uma ‘protensão’ ainda aberta, mas que sabemos fechá-la. Mais ainda (e assim o caracterizando definitivamente) documentário é um filme que asseve sobre o mundo, basicamente em dois modos: num modo proposicional ou num modo estético – muitas vezes sobrepostos entre si. Asserir ‘filmicamente’ não implica, necessariamente, uma proposição audiovisual (embora esta forma intencional seja preponderante na tradição documentária). Constelações estéticas (aquelas trazem a expressão de uma ‘aesthesis’) podem sobrepor-se às proposições audiovisuais em sua intencionalidade, mas sempre trazem, ainda que como um eco ao fundo, a dimensão assertiva as torna documentárias. Distinguimos assim, por exemplo, o documentário estético de um filme experimental-abstrato. Um modo fácil de analisar, ou localizar, documentários, é nos centrarmos nas particularidades de sua mise-en-scène. Jacques Aumont, David Bordwell, Michel Mourlet, desenvolveram trabalhos estimulantes sobre a encenação ficcional. Dziga Vertov e Jean-Louis Comolli, entre outros, debruçaram-se de modo mais decidido sobre as particularidades da mise-en-scène documentária em sua inflexão filmica, como sendo aquilo que, paradoxalmente, a determina a partir da circunstância da tomada.

Fernão Pessoa Ramos

It happens that I often work with first feature film directors, and funnily enough, none of them had graduated from conventional film schools. What I noticed that they all have in common is this recurring question of what a film is. At their beginnings, these films are never determined to be either documentary or fiction. For them, as for me, it all starts with an unsettling feeling, a wondering

that keeps returning as a metaphor into stories, images, poems, where actuality stops to be affiliated in any way to an actuality; it rather becomes a segment in a narrative, layered with multiple realities, a complex of possibilities in time. The best part is when the filmmaker realizes they are able to manufacture a reality, to realize their ability of reclaiming images, sounds, and time. Practicing filmmakers continue to remind us that there are no realities in films other than the reality they create in their own films. There are only intensions, motives, and ideologies, and this is a point I will just leave behind as a fact, and ask a more basic question: What is the need to define reality, and where does this obsession to contextualize actuality come from? And why does this inherited obsession find its way into scholarly discussions in western academia and not elsewhere?

Mohanad Yaqubi

Pour moi, le cinéma, documentaire ou non, est une forme de réagencement de faits existants, ou de faits inventés, qu'on capture ou qu'on fait jouer ; on les réarrange autrement que la façon dont ils se présentent dans la totalité chaotique du réel ou de l'imagination, on leur donne possiblement un autre sens, une autre forme. C'est une mise en corrélation d'éléments épars, un collage, même dans la forme du plan-séquence. Mais cela peut aussi être un réagencement d'images ou de sons trouvés. Préexistants, non pas dans la continuité du réel, mais dans la réalité qui est celle d'un autre film, d'une archive visuelle ou sonore.

Marie Voignier

A movie is a documentary when the creative treatment of images is continued, at least virtually, by the spectator. In other words, the spectator should be incited to consider images as documents that are available for new investigations. Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica applied this principle to their documentary about the fall of the Communist regime in Romania (*Videograms of a Revolution*). They assembled videos of the upheaval against the Romanian dictator Ceausescu. They show the arrest, trial, and execution of him and his wife. These videos were produced by both the State TV channel and independent video makers. The voice-over explains the variations of perspective according to the points of view and presumable political stances of the different operators. But this highly regulative treatment of images aims at training the spectator to be a critical observer and eventually an engaged witness in a world whose actuality is increasingly mediated by media and information. Vilém Flusser theorizes the affinity of imagination and information: they are both a form of *Einbildung*. Flusser's theory influenced Farocki's work, and vice versa. This is what I mean when I say that a documentary is the continuation of the creative treatment of images by the spectator. Vertov imagined films that

produced other films. I would speak of creative treatments of images that produce other creative treatments of images.

Dario Cecchi

In writing about the films of Chris Marker, Uriel Orlow likened images to Proustian madeleines because of their power to evoke and trigger the process of memory, and create unforeseen networks of relations. He described viewers and makers of film as agents that merely generate an otherwise independent process of connectivity between images. He wrote: “Rather than solely serving the film’s narrative, the image operates according to its own logic of association that links it to other images, in the same sequence or across the film, effectively becoming a kind of hinge between places, times, and images.”

Raed Rafei

En ce sens, le cinéma est une création de la mémoire, une invention de souvenirs, et non une conservation de mémoire. C’est une mémoire active, qui invente, qui construit le souvenir plus qu’il ne le fixe. Il est nécessairement lié à un point de vue, affirmé ou hésitant voire contradictoire ou erroné, mais situé quelque part.

Marie Voignier

I see documentary filmmaking as a craft where filmmakers mold and work their stories as if they were pieces of clay. They suture fragmented images together and these fragments end up having a life of their own. They communicate with each other horizontally across the timeline of the film in unexpected and unpredictable ways. What is more is that this horizontal communication is renewed every time the film is screened to different publics. So even though films are made of recorded definitive images, they still have the power to generate “newness” every time they are viewed or screened.

Raed Rafei

A história do documentário, de suas inovações estéticas e técnicas, de seus debates críticos e impacto cultural, sempre foi atravessada pela ideia de ficção. No cinema, seja no âmbito da ficção propriamente dita, do documentário ou das produções híbridas (aquelas que jogam com a indeterminação e ambiguidade entre encenação e autenticidade), a verdade só pode existir enquanto efeito de uma série de convenções gramaticais e operações de linguagem, enquanto efeito de um pacto de crença com o espectador. Não é por outra razão que, depois de inventores como Robert Flaherty e John Grierson, Jean Rouch, etnógrafo e documentarista que revolucionou a prática documentária, tornando-se um dos

criadores do cinema moderno com *Eu, um negro* (1958) e *Crônica de um verão* (1960), dizia que “a ficção é o único caminho para se penetrar a realidade” e que “a câmera não deve ser um obstáculo para a expressão dos personagens, mas uma testemunha indispensável que motivará sua expressão”. Para Rouch, assim como para o cinema moderno, nascido no pós-guerra, a câmera teria uma função produtiva, mobilizando realidades e reações das pessoas filmadas que não existiriam sem ela, como uma catalisadora das verdades dos personagens. Como consequência, o momento da filmagem seria não um instante de “representação” do mundo tal qual é, mas o momento de uma singular metamorfose entre quem filma e quem é filmado, embate entre os meios de produção da imagem e os meios de construção da realidade.

Ilana Feldman

What is actuality? Is it a circle or is it a square? Is it a moment or a context? Is it what happens in front of your eyes or in a YouTube video? Can we see, for example, *Moana*, as a reflection of Moana’s reality, or Flaherty’s perspective? Also, can we as spectators today, in the year 2021, really strip our eyes and minds of the colonial racial discourse when we find ourselves watching the restored version of *Moana with Sound*, and simply admire the great effort to restore the film and provide it with sound?

If we were to use these questions to look at the history of exploration films, which are somehow considered to be the origin of documentary, then we would see that films such as *Moana*, *Nanook*, *90° South*, *Kon-Tiki*, are intimately linked to the idea of exploring geographies which have not yet been reached by “civilized” humans. Meanwhile, when looking at the political context of the time, we see that a wave of hyper aggressive colonial expansions was spreading around the world, in search of more territory waiting to be claimed. The origins of documentary thus reflect in many ways colonial fantasies, empowered by the scientific and ethnographic rhetoric of the era; fantasies that still dominate the medium, producing histories around it, and keeping film and its industry prisoners in its essence.

Mohanad Yaqubi

‘History is a delightful fantasy’ told Marcel Duchamp, as are its documents, texts, events, archives and recordings, which continually spawn a spectacle of a brightly coloured array. Colonial violence is a pre-condition of genre, a subspecies of modernity and its history. This noise afflicts the filmmaker, affirming trading pathways, shipping routes in-person, of missionary or cultural theft. Companies, shooters, corporations and end credits don’t blink at the sight of real tears. See *from the pole to the equator* (Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi, 1988) which repurposes how the western eye performs the mutilation of prodigious creatures and trophy hunters.

The institutional rules of docu-grammar, cinematic threshold and structured learning emanate from these abeyances. Ethnography is them studied by us, uncompromised by an ethical filmmaker and release mechanisms. Cinephiles know that non-fiction is a program of both modernist and colonialist technique. Listen to the wilderness, as voiced by those without care. Chantal Akerman saw a truer falsehood, a cusp described in *From the Other Side*. 'It's a total fiction, but it could have been true' (on the film's final monologue). Certainty and belief sustain humanity in a world actually populated by ambiguity, lack of veracity, concern, contestation and precariousness. Afflicted by the temperature of 'collections' and 'investments', film oscillates in a wealthy bubble of feverish antics, where finitude is set alongside a cinematic reality comprised of an impossible search for missing persons. Unassailable, ungraspable unknowns are cast in an algorithmic manner, where nothing can ever be fully identified.

Phillip Warnell

Ce que je peux dire c'est que le documentaire est le sol de l'existence
 où se côtoient les mondes qui forment le monde
 c'est donc un point de rencontre des visibles
 Pas dans un - entre-nous - sinon c'est un raté
 mais dans un entre-mondes qui se crée là
 dépossédé du déterminant pour accueillir et être accueilli
 dans le mouvement du récit humain
 Édouard Glissant parle de la langue Créole : "une langue composite,
 née de la mise en contact d'éléments linguistiques
 absolument hétérogènes les uns par rapport aux autres »
 Entre alors le phénomène de création des connexions
 qui ne peut se définir que dans le « nouveau », pour chacun de nos films
 C'est à cet endroit que je travaille pour être débarrassée des questions
 et suivre la délicieuse sensation procurée par la découverte
 d'un nouveau paysage perceptible
 partagé avec une spectatrice dont la vue fragile
 l'empêche de lire les sous titres
 mais, qui une fois le film fini à l'écran, dit :
 « je n'ai pas une assez bonne vue pour lire,
 mais les couleurs, les voix, les sons, les mouvements,
 les lumières et la musique m'ont tellement emportés ».
 Je travaille aujourd'hui au montage d'un film
 qui a pour titre : On a eu la journée, bonsoir !
 Un titre transmis à Jean Rouch dans sa rencontre
 avec le peuple Dogon, qui le prononce sur la place publique,
 nommant chacun de leurs morts, n'en oubliant aucun
 jusqu'au buffle qui les a nourri.
 C'est la réunion intime du cycle des Vivants.

On a eu la journée, bonsoir ! est une traversée d'irruptions déstabilisantes
dans le vivant visible et invisible.

C'est le geste qui mène au voyage de l'amour de l'autre.

C'est un gros travail sur lequel je me concentre, avec l'autre's.

Narimane Mari

POLITICS OF PERCEPTION
POLÍTICAS DA PERCEPÇÃO

On dit parfois d'un certain cinéma documentaire qu'il « donne la parole à ». Je ne crois pas qu'un film même militant « donne » la parole à qui que ce soit. La parole est toujours prise en charge et détenue par le ou la cinéaste. Le ou la cinéaste (ou un collectif de cinéastes) peut faire partie d'un groupe discriminé, opprimé, en lutte, et donc s'exprimer depuis le cœur de cette lutte. Ou bien : le ou la cinéaste peut faire sienne la parole d'un groupe opprimé / en lutte et en relayer des parties choisies par lui ou elle. Il-elle ne donne pas la parole, mais la prend, la sélectionne. Et cela implique d'immenses précautions et responsabilités. Le ou la cinéaste fabrique dans un film la représentation de son point de vue à partir de la parole ou des images des autres, et c'est en cela qu'il ou elle peut ajouter une participation politique à une lutte, une histoire, un débat.

Marie Voignier

In a way, representing a community, a cause, a struggle, is an indication of affection, of holding responsibility toward an experience. The line between propaganda and film is really thin, it is a matter of the way how a critic can be presented within an image while being in solidarity, looking for the imperfects as an act of solidarity. Any film is a political statement, with or without the filmmaker's intention. The illusion of a depoliticized, objective cinema is simply related to how much the filmmaker is aware of the political and social contexts, and this won't prevent the spectators from recognizing the political stance. Thinking of the term, "imperfect cinema," is perhaps key to watching/analyzing film. Embedded in the form (and not the content) the filmmaker chooses, this conscious approach to the imperfect medium as a metaphor of the deflected reality it represents allows for a space of dialogue and interpretation with its audience. This is when audience becomes part of the process, and when the filmmaker becomes the spectator.

Mohanad Yaqubi

Il y a toujours avec le cinéma de fiction ou documentaire une instrumentalisation des images qui en soi n'est ni positive ni négative, c'est un outil, qui a cette puissance perverse de pouvoir activer notre croyance en lui et parfois à notre insu provoquer notre adhésion, notre projection. La puissance de cette réinvention/recomposition de la réalité peut servir plusieurs objectifs :

contester la réalité effective plutôt que la reproduire, fabriquer des contre-récits pour émanciper, discriminer, dénoncer, divertir ou faire histoire : si l'on prend pour exemple les films complotistes actuels, les pires/meilleurs films de propagande qu'ils soient fascistes ou révolutionnaires, ce sont des productions filmiques qui visent à « changer le monde », ou à « réveiller les consciences », et qui utilisent cette puissance d'invention et d'agencement des faits réels ou inventés pour créer un sens nouveau, « révéler » quelque chose du monde qui ne s'y trouve peut-être pas. Je suis très méfiante avec cet objectif-là du cinéma (souvent du côté de ce que l'on nomme cinéma documentaire) : faire un film pour « rendre visible ». C'est la plus mauvaise raison de faire un film. Tout le cinéma se construit sur un jeu de cache-cache, sur une ombre plutôt que sur une visibilisation. C'est pourquoi je suis dans l'incapacité de tracer une ligne nette autour du cinéma documentaire. D'un côté il n'y a pas vraiment de distinction radicale suffisante avec le cinéma de fiction, on le dit depuis longtemps, et de l'autre côté, le glissement vers le cinéma de propagande et le reportage d'actualité est évident et ne doit pas être considéré comme une dégradation d'une forme de pureté d'intentions du documentaire. Je ne me satisfais pas d'une distinction entre un cinéma documentaire « du bon côté » contre un cinéma de reportage ou de télévision intellectuellement/esthétiquement pauvre ou alors fascisant. Le cynisme ou l'hypocrisie que peuvent prendre la position de cinéastes documentaires est selon moi souvent bien plus scandaleux que la littéralité ou partialité d'un mauvais reportage.

Marie Voignier

Aquilo que me interessa em documentário é precisamente a procura de uma forma que se ajuste e que potencie a história que eu quero contar. E aqui reside para mim a dimensão verdadeiramente política do documentário, a questão do ponto de vista traduzida e reinventada na sua forma. De certa forma para mim o conteúdo separadamente da sua forma não existe. A partir do momento que quero contar uma história que tem as suas raízes no “real” o desafio é sempre como é que a vou contar, qual a forma justa para contar essa história, e o pensamento que quero gerar no espectador. Nesse processo de encontrar a forma, a própria história vai-se construindo e reinventando.

Catarina Mourão

Considero que o entendimento de Adorno de forma como "conteúdo sedimentado" é extremamente válido no contexto do documentário. Quanto a mim, a dicotomia entre forma e conteúdo é falaciosa. Não só porque tradicionalmente implica uma hierarquização — do conteúdo sobre a forma, da palavra sobre a matéria, dos sistemas verbais sobre os não verbais —, como esconde o papel que a forma tem na criação e sentido do próprio conteúdo e de

como ela pode ser um reflexo de concepções hegemónicas do mundo. Em termos políticos, este aspecto é de grande relevância. Aliás, percebi isto através da minha própria práxis, quando fiz um documentário em 2000, sobre um processo-crime instruído pela PIDE nos anos 50 que levou duas mulheres à prisão. O filme não só secundarizou as imagens de arquivo em relação às palavras, como as subsumiu a uma narrativa teleológica, perpetuando, sem eu ter disso consciência, uma visão da história de matriz positivista, totalmente decifrável e sem lacunas. Foi após esse filme que empreendi uma reflexão profunda sobre documentário, história e arquivo consciencializando algo que se tornou central nos meus filmes: que a forma *forma* o conteúdo. Considero que fazer cinema politicamente implica criar uma "forma que pensa", para utilizar a expressão de Godard, que também diz que no mau cinema é o "pensamento que forma". Por vezes, sucede não acontecer nem uma coisa nem outra. Surpreendo-me sempre que vejo documentários que abordam diretamente situações políticas — alguns cujas filmagens, inclusive, implicaram riscos — e que são, paradoxalmente, totalmente despolitizados. Para mim é muito importante encontrar aquilo que designo por *forma justa*, uma forma que deve estar intrinsecamente ligada às matérias sobre as quais se está a trabalhar e ser encontrada a cada novo documentário; uma forma não sujeita a modelos pré-estabelecidos ou já testados, e que, precisamente pela sua singularidade, permite expor algo de novo, residindo aí o seu potencial político.

Susana de Sousa Dias

One way of looking at the political and emancipatory potential of film form is to think of a politics of contestation with prevailing cinematic norms. Thus, as alluded to in the prompt, there is no need to have outright “political content” in some traditional sense (e.g., as activist, as proffering scenes of justice delivered or justice denied) in order to see the film as making claims to change what passes for the language of cinema. One instance that remains salient: RaMell Ross’ *Hale County This Morning This Evening* (2018), a work that regularly creates an overlap of fiction and nonfiction, of familiar human moments and estranging visuality, of recognizable grammar and an avant-garde interruption to the demotic. Ross’ film seems emblematic of the contemporary “political potential of documentary”—where a cameraperson is present with the world she encounters, and the subsequent film (made from those sounds and images) allows cinematic revelations to land upon audiences fully-formed and alive. Given that popular or mainstream cinema occupies a fairly narrow bandwidth of formal expression, it can seem that any work that broadens and deepens its scope undertakes a political act, whether it is Gene Kelly’s adaptation of the experimentalism he saw in the 1940s and 50s for his (and Stanley Donen’s) *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952) or Derek Cianfrance’s contact with the tradition of Stan Brakhage, Phil Solomon, and the legacies of the Binghamton Cinema Department, in his *Blue Valentine* (2010). As Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote,

“only as far as [people] are unsettled is there any hope for them,” so we can think of Adorno’s form as “sedimented content” as an invitation to become, indeed to continually be, unsettled. Yet why call such unsettling acts “political,” why not merely artistic or creative? Because the comforts of familiarity so offer conspire to constrain and defeat just such artistry and creativity. Thus, we could say that in unsettling our inheritances we encounter the political dimensions of form itself (whatever the art).

David LaRocca

Nous connaissons la critique fondamentale qu’Adorno adressait aux médias, dont le cinéma. Mais on peut penser le cinéma avec Adorno, contre Adorno, comme l’a montré Alexander Kluge et par ses propos sur l’espace public, son mode de production innovant, imposé à la télévision privée et par ses films mêmes. Ou encore Gertrud Koch, en transférant ses approches musico-philosophiques et esthétiques vers le cinéma. Ceci dit, l’idée du « contenu sédimenté » se réfère chez Adorno aux formes persistantes en musique et à une esthétique négative. On ne peut pas « appliquer » une telle idée à un art figuratif et mimétique, sans considérer d’abord ce que cette transposition implique. Si on veut penser le cinéma avec Adorno, on peut aussi retenir sa fameuse prise en considération de l’essai qui doit beaucoup à Max Bense et qui permet de souligner la fonction de la forme dans la pensée.

Christa Blümlinger

When I worked with my sister, Rania Rafei, on writing and directing *74 (The Reconstitution of a Struggle)* (2012), a film that recounts the occupation of the American University of Beirut in 1974 as a crucial era of mass social justice movements in Lebanon, we were not concerned with the “facts” of what exactly happened. History with a capital H is slippery and impossible to discern with all its facets. Particularly in Lebanon, history is a contested territory because it challenges different and clashing imaginaries of the nation state.

In practice, to allow for the magic of the revolutionary years of the 1970s to permeate our film, we had to move away from fixed truths and facts and create an experimental, permeable environment of remembrance. And by that, I mean an environment open to improvisation and chance. Rather than asking questions to former students who took part in the university’s occupation to remember what happened as it is done classically in a documentary about a certain incident, we worked with young political activists to re-enact the events of the occupation.

What we were after was an active and embodied engagement with the revolutionary spirit of that era. The film became the product of a collaboration with those activists, each one of them engaging with us and with others in the film by bringing in a mixture of their knowledge about that socially and

politically active era of the 70s (from books, archival documents, and conversations with people who had witnessed it) but also their doubts, hesitations, excitement, desires, aspirations, fears etc. The film was precisely troubling because it sought to destabilize notions of linear time and that the past is a sealed moment that admits one truth, or one reading, or one interpretation. We wanted to explore how the past leaks into the present and how the present as a moment always carries residues from both the past and the future. This felt especially true back when we were working on the film in 2011, when the entire Arab region was living an incredible moment of upheavals and hope and change. Suddenly, it felt that the ideals of the 1970s were seeping through the air again! We truly believed that spirits, ideas and affects are not immobilized on a rigid timeline, but actually travel through time and space.

The form of the film was certainly by itself our main political statement. The film was inspired by Peter Watkin's hybrid model of re-enactment that he used in *The Commune* and *Punishment Park*, and other films. Resistance to power structures are recurrent moments in history. Learning about movements of resistance through forms of documentary that are truly participatory is powerful because it allows for ideas and practices of resistance to oppressive institutions to get connected across spaces and times.

Raed Rafei

A political filmmaker will use what is available to deliver, be it photographs, newspapers, animation, advertisement, whatever it takes. This intervention is disturbing the norms of film industry and its commercial aspects, and that includes images immigrating from one film to another. The fluidity of images and realities is manifested through the process of editing, and writing. Making films politically is a statement against forms assigned by the markets and film schools; it is to reclaim freedom for the medium. Deciding to reside the cinematic tools for a struggle goes alongside the acceptance to analyze the film and the artist through the same factors that shade people's memory –be it a still image from a film, or a line from an interview, or a smile of a young freedom fighter. It is transferable, it is framed, and it refers to everyone. Maybe this is something overrated and obvious, but we are witnessing the pollution of generations of filmmakers through their education, which is reaching a close end. There is a need to open the film school pedagogies to include more dialectical thinking methodologies not only in filmmaking, but also in developing awareness towards the arts as a reflection of the collective consciousness of its society. This “practice” of thinking does not focus on funding or quality, it works with what is available and harnesses intellectual capacities into a message, with a clear and mature use of the medium and the tools that deliver the messages.

I am returning here a passage from Mustafa Abu Ali's memoir about his time as a film student in London. “It took me ten years to forget what I learned in the

film school. There was the need to tell the story of the people by the language of the people, and not by the film education, a medium developed by our colonizers.” This awareness of looking for a language that has not been taught, that can be elaborated only after forgetting what has been learned, is what makes the medium accessible. It took me ten years to understand what this means in practice, and having been operating between the practice of filmmaking and film education, I felt an urgency to start forming new and other canons, to lead the filmmakers back to the society, not to the industry.

Mohanad Yaqubi

A política da representação documentária traz essencialmente a dimensão da ação, a dimensão da práxis. Assim, ela pode, ou não, ser carregada no modo estético. Nos grandes modos documentários (Bill Nichols intuiu, de modo pioneiro, estas modalidades) a *mise-en-scène* da ação é aquela do Cinema Verdade (mas não a da ‘mosca’ retraída na parede do Cinema Direto): é aquela em que o cineasta intervém com sua performance no mundo e, na intersubjetividade pelo sujeito-da-câmera e com o sujeito-em-cena, figura o embate com a realidade social, na tomada. Ela, tomada, aparece então aberta para o indeterminado e para o imponderável, deixando de lado as amarras da decupagem e do roteiro. Para muitos, o documentário deve ser definido neste espaço, o da existência engajada pelo filme na tomada ‘direta’. O engajamento é o que justifica a presença na encenação como liberdade da existência, em sua previsão filmica.

Já a expressão estética audiovisual documentária é perceptiva, se quiserem, mas vai além disto. Como é sensorial, em seu modo pleno, torna-se também háptica, no sentido do encontro do corpo com aquilo que lhe transcende e naquilo que a câmera, como mundo, crê conseguir colar-se – pois sempre reflexo e automatismo. Tocar seria lançar nosso corpo (agora um imenso e quase infinito corpo, sem órgãos, sem imagem) desafiando a medida transcendental dos sentidos. E assim, qual seria a medida do toque que desafia a subjetividade?

Há certamente uma dimensão política no desafio do corpo que afirma a si no ‘tocar’. E, mais ainda, quando assim se coloca chocando-se ao biopoder que o restringe, para afirmar-se em potência. Se nos fixarmos a seu sentido mais estreito, aquele do engajamento existencial, política que se faz no campo da práxis, mas nela não é delimitada, pois foge ao campo da ação-reação e da medida pelo esquema sensorio motor. Para um novo sujeito pede-se uma nova medida e um corpo liberado: aquele capaz de tocar.

Fernão Pessoa Ramos

If you assume, as I do, that the primary object of aesthetics is not art, but perception, which is aesthesis for the Greeks, then the label ‘politics of perception’ is identical with ‘politics of aesthetics’. In “The Work of Art in the

Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, Walter Benjamin argues that the history of art is the history of how perception changes according to social or technological transformations. I believe Rancière would agree with him—although he disagrees with him about other formulations of that essay, such as ‘aestheticization of politics’. Rancière’s concept of ‘partage du sensible’ is at the same time political and aesthetic. He thinks that the constitution of political power, what he calls ‘police,’ depends on the introduction of an a priori principle that distributes different perceptual modes, and consequently different levels of experience, to groups and individuals. Police thus establishes an order within society.

I believe cinema does not replace this aesthetic-political device: its functioning is overruled, not deactivated. In the *Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, Esfir Shub used only archive materials. These materials were mainly a document of the Czarist propaganda, she reused for instance the footage of the celebration in Moscow for the three hundred years of the dynasty. But she changes the sense of the Czarist propaganda, which aimed to worship the almightiness of the empire. In her documentary, you see instead how an oppressive Leviathan destroys itself when pushed to war by a capitalist economy based on profit and appropriation. The aesthetics behind those images is not eliminated, it is assumed in a dialectical perspective. Shub judges the outburst of the revolution according to the progressive delegitimizing of the ancient rule. In this way, she unveils the peculiar ‘de-figurative’ power of documentary, which is the counterpart of the critical stance this kind of cinema claims for the spectator.

Dario Cecchi

En ce qui concerne Jacques Rancière et sa définition romantique du régime esthétique de l’art, celle-ci peut se référer au cinéma parmi d’autres arts. Si Rancière a lui-même montré comment on peut par exemple lire les films de Straub-Huillet ou de Costa à partir d’une idée de l’émancipation qui place le *dissensus* au centre, il associe par ailleurs cette idée à la notion de fiction. Nous pouvons de ce point de vue nous rappeler également les concepts des « puissances du faux » ou du « cri » chez Gilles Deleuze, repérés justement à partir d’une classification de formes hybrides, incluant des modes spécifiques de fabulation ou témoignant d’une capacité de résistance. S’il est difficile de définir le documentaire à partir de ces approches et idées, on peut en retenir des lignes esthétiques et des propositions éthiques, concernant par exemple la distribution du temps, du regard et de la pluralité des voix.

Christa Blümlinger

Aí estaria a dimensão política e dissensual da forma-cinema, compreendo o cinema na esteira das contribuições de um autor como Jacques Rancière: não como um conjunto de representações inteligíveis e consensuais da realidade,

mas como uma nova partilha e reconfiguração do sensível, pois, se a política opera esteticamente, os afetos gerados pelo cinema operariam politicamente. Sendo assim, o cinema documentário não é simplesmente um conjunto de imagens e sons comprometidos com uma ideia factual de verdade, uma reunião de representações visuais e sonoras da realidade, mas um agente cognitivo e sensível, um operador, potencialmente transformador, da própria realidade. É por isso que, sem dúvida, o documentário, campo de forças plurais e práticas distintas, com toda a sua instabilidade, deslizamento e indeterminação enquanto gênero específico, institui um espaço comum de visibilidade, experiência e de pensamento. Nesse sentido, não apenas existe a possibilidade de uma filosofia através de meios cinematográficos como ela precisa ser reinventada, singularmente, no corpo a corpo entre cada obra e as leituras críticas que dela se podem fazer. Uma filosofia por meio do cinema tem de ser assim não apenas uma filosofia do movimento, mas uma filosofia em movimento.

Ilana Feldman

TRUSTING IMAGES
CRENÇA NAS IMAGENS

I think that the present moment requires us to rethink the boundaries of what a documentary is. Any person has the ability with a mobile phone and an internet to capture and stream potentially to millions of viewers images of a certain event or moment. They can further comment on the reality they capture and frame it in a certain way. They can also easily link it with other images and other realities. How do such actions compare to a documentary film? Where do we draw boundaries?

Raed Rafei

I always keep thinking of the surveillance camera video file that is replaced every 48 hours with a new file, and the millions of hours that are being documented every day, while billions of frames are being erased at the same time. This mp4 file is only saved if there was an event: an accident, a complaint. This one lucky file suddenly becomes a reference to reality, keeping in mind that this salvation from erasure is based on suspicion, on something that has happened in a frame of that video file; an interruption in real time that required saving the file from the bottomless void. And so the file comes as an indication, a fragment of an investigation, a reference in a research, and in this case, we trust the image.

Early visual depiction of the Orient, in both painting and photography, captured ancient monuments and cultures; sketching up an imaginary full of mysticism, chaos and strangeness, with the images of Bedouins, camels, desserts, and ruins. For the mid 19th century Europe and America, these were the only references. When the worshipers, who were used to seeing Jan Van Eyck's depiction of the Orient in his Altarpiece at the St Bavo's Cathedral in Ghent, were suddenly able to witness the Orient through photographs, the role of science as the absolute seemed to be confirmed. Images were considered to be reflecting truth, a certain truth which is not that which appears in the frame itself, but a truth existing in the imagination of the photographers and their audience. Do we trust images in this case, aren't all images an illustration of the imaginary rather than a depiction of reality?

When revisiting the discussions held during the 1920's around sound and film, it is astonishing to see the extent of awareness about the distance between the image and reality - I specifically think of here Sergei Eisenstein's manifesto on film sound which he wrote with Vsevolod Pudovkin and Grigori Aleksandrov

in 1928. In their manifesto, the three argue that making sound coincide with the images threatens the process of “neutralizing” the image. It restores the power and autonomy to the photographed object, and limits the ability of an editor to deal with the image as a block, which would create a meaning with other blocks of images (in other words, a film). It is striking to think of images as such disconnected elements employed to form a discourse, a discourse which is not related to the content of the image, but to the death of the image, which only then can be used in a film.

This trust in the image can also be traced back to the memorial portraiture of family members that have passed away. The dead would be dressed in their best clothing and positioned in a frame for a final photograph that will hang for a longtime in their family’s home, as an evidence of death, and as a proof of the past. In a way, this is a testament to the mechanical abilities of the 19th century man to capture the truth; a sign of trust in this medium as a source of facticity.

Mohanad Yaqubi

The crisis of mimesis stretches back to Plato and before him. Writing itself was thought a scandal to the power of memory. Storytelling—especially fanciful fictions—was a threat to integrity. Perhaps we should admit, then, that art and moral panic are perpetual companions. That said, the one difference is the asymptotic acceleration of technological change. If we have had a couple millennia to get our minds around the potential (and perils) of the written word (along with the effects of the printing press), the scale of development for digital media is on another scale altogether. From Woody Allen’s playful photo compositing in *Zelig* (1983) to the synthetic audiovisual creations of today fewer than forty years have elapsed. Yet, a quick dip into the dirty pool of California politics of the 1930s will show that moviemakers—way back when—were trading on their power to fabricate fictions from facts, as with the Hollywood-backed propaganda that successfully sunk the gubernatorial hopes of novelist Upton Sinclair. As Sinclair stirred the state to imagine an end to poverty, his talented filmmaking adversaries (including Irving Thalberg) unleashed a heap of fake newsreels to scare the public from his morally sound mission. Nearly a century later, as the internet spawns untold thousands of such fakes per second, we are still very far from any such thing as reliable content moderation. Indeed, U.S. Code Title 47, section 230, protects platforms from being held liable for hosting dubious, dangerous, or otherwise damaging content.

David LaRocca

Acreditar numa imagem significa acreditar que ela encontra algo, significa acreditar na interpretação. Mas, como sabemos, há uma hermenêutica que desconfia da interpretação. É aquela que descreve modalidades de um encontro

que se afirma na negação da interpretação. Neste caso, a verdade estaria no encontro e não na exegese, compondo no mesmo fôlego, como essência, a pergunta e a compreensão que a dirige. Traçar um panorama aqui pode nos ajudar. Fica mais fácil apreender o que é acreditar numa, ainda que não seja seu pensamento definitivo que se busca. Temos o documentário clássico, aquele que Grierson teorizou tão bem, que acredita saber as imagens; o moderno que se dedica à ação ou a nega pelo recuo no mundo; e o pós-moderno que se debate em torno dos dilemas que a desconstrução do sujeito provoca. Assim abre-se uma porta, um portal, no qual se vislumbra uma tradição fílmica, audiovisual: a tradição documentária.

A mentira seria, então, uma das modalidades da crença na ação. Acreditar em nós, ou em nossa visão da crença, inaugura necessariamente uma intervenção, uma afirmação. Crença seria o que encontramos no espaço da afirmação e do poder, constructo que cobre sua genealogia.

Fernão Pessoa Ramos

Culprits, outlaws and stolen goods are a necessity in vicarious living. As Michel Serres put it, victims are a substitute for a non-original. I adventure to the edges of my sensibility, in which I taste only uncertainty and ambiguity. In the infinite mix of the unknowable, however, I am rewarded. The screen always replaces the indescribable with an ‘eminent’ equivalence for it, according to Jean-Charles Masséta. In discord, dissonance and compelling lost voices migrate in absentia, like a scream of souls heard only through the ages. Tune into the plurality of their truths and customs. A failed audition speaks only once it is properly forgotten, having evolved into a space of absence (which might then be reignited elsewhere); or as in-existent, incorporeal anatomy, which can then be touched (or not touched), or felt. Any or all of us sense slow conditions, as per that of background intelligence and things, in which the absent question posed by the nature documentary format is disputed in answer: “please speak to me, you who once upon a time influenced me to speak.”

Phillip Warnell

In *Milestones* (1975, dir: Robert Kramer and John Douglas), we get to spent 200 minutes with people from the leftist movement a few years after 1968. They are dispersed over the country, a bit lost, and try to make sense of their lives, coming up with livable models of existence. One of them is Helen, an activist filmmaker finishing a film on the Vietnam war. We meet her in the editing room, looking at her footage on the Steenbeck table. However, the footage looks strangely familiar: it is material from *Peoples’ War* (1969) that Douglas, Kramer and Norm Fruchter shot in North Vietnam in 1969 for the Newsreel collective. How should we make sense of this? Did Kramer and Douglas fool us? I guess so. We might feel all the more betrayed because “Helen” is not

Helen, but played by Grace Paley (just like the others are “playing roles,” even if they sometimes keep their names). Has the material suddenly become “fictional” because it is attributed to a person that it does not belong to? I don’t think so. Kramer and Douglas (who is the cameraman and also plays a blind ceramicist) have worked with reality. They have teased something out of it by travelling, speaking with people, accumulating experience to then condense into stories. They have used what they saw and heard, and since their own past (including *Peoples’ War*) essentially belongs to this history, it has become one element in it. This stretches our understanding of documentary; it is quite far from the notion of “direct cinema.” And yet it also feels “right” to me, like an adequate and “just” rendering of these people in the early 1970s.

And at the same time, I cannot reproach anyone from feeling fooled.

Volker Pantenburg

Today philosophers, especially the once called ‘continental’ philosophers, reflect intensively upon the fact that images and imagination may both deceive and enhance trust: I think of Paul Ricoeur for instance. With regard to cinema, Pietro Montani argues that the trust of images should be considered for the process of ‘validation’ (‘autenticazione’) of actuality, rather than for their intrinsic authenticity. I believe this issue needs to be reconsidered according to four phenomena: a) the rise of post-ideological politics, b) the increase of a certain rhetoric of affect in public speech, c) the spread of social media and the emergence of the so-called influencers, d) the revival of the epic, especially in series but also in cinema. These four factors do not only concern ‘alternative facts,’ bullshit, and fake news, but also a series of other phenomena we usually refer to as sovereignism and populism. Liberal politicians have also exploited the rhetoric of affects in the last years. From this point of view the slogans, ‘Yes we can,’ and ‘Make America great again,’ highlight the same conception of ‘thrilling politics.’

As far as images are concerned, trust concerns more a process of working through, in the sense of Freud’s *Durcharbeitung*, than authenticity. Therefore, it claims for revitalizing forms of catharsis, but with an important difference with regard to Aristotle’s very concept. Ancient tragedy enjoyed a preexisting heritage of myths, from which the poets borrowed the stories they put on stage. The public’s attention was focused on pathos: we could also say that the real object of tragedy was a certain ‘distribution of affect’. The public assimilated this distribution, and were thus ‘purified’ from pity and fear. Myths empowered this process, which was indeed a working through. But myths succeeded in it because they were known to all. In a sense, they provided the spectators’ minds with the reproduction of a scene deeply rooted in their memory. We witness today that an outburst of affect creates new myths. In that sense, Obama and Trump are the same, as much as Matteo Salvini (‘il Capitano’) and Carola Rackete (‘la Capitana’)—I am referring to a dispute occurred in Italy last year.

On the contrary, if we care for youth's political conscience, also considering that our public sphere is essentially made of images, then we should try to imagine a new sort of *Verfremdungseffekt*. The image of Aylan Kurdi dead on the seashore while his family was trying to escape from civil war in Syria made him a sort of hero, and probably provoked a change in Angela Merkel's political agenda, but it did not affect the European political conscience in depth. Some days ago a video was released by the Italian TV news. The video shows a woman who lost her baby while on a boat in the Mediterranean Sea, waiting to be saved. That baby will remain nameless and deedless: he was only victim, not a hero. We should make the effort of understanding that this could be anybody's tragedy, although the political debate will polarize this story, like all similar stories, in a representation of heroes and antiheroes, friends and enemies. Furthermore, we have a sort of natural inclination to the 'apotheosis' of victims. It is at least as old as the rise of Christianity, where martyrs were called the 'champions of Christ' (*athletae Christi*). Some similar background could likely be discovered behind the spread of Islamist terrorists who believe to be martyrs. Iñárritu probably aimed to deconstruct this logic with the installation *Carne y arena*, in which the visitor performs the experience of being the victim like everybody else in the same situation.

I have just seen a video produced by the German government, in which youth are called to be 'COVID heroes'. An old man recalls Winter 2020, when he was a carefree 22-years-old student of medicine, who was suddenly obliged to become a hero of the pandemic. Interestingly, the video introduces an ironical element: staying at home is the young man's only act of heroism, watching series on the sofa, drinking beer, and waiting for the runner who brings him pizza. It is a small symptom, yet it is important that we start deconstructing this culture of heroism and hyper-affectivity. Of course, cinema could bring the elaboration of this U-turn much further.

Dario Cecchi

Images are not evidence of reality; they are symptoms of the imaginary of this reality. Trusting images is just a mechanism of reclaiming the reality they produce. An image of an empty landscape of the holy land made it reclaimable by the Zionist movement. Images and films about vast wilderness, wildlife, islands, made them evidence of a possible territory to be exploited. This is what happens when the image becomes scientific (especially aerial photography), used for marking territories, opening roads, installing signs with new names replacing the indigenous ones, creating an illusion of a reality for the sake of colonial claim over the land. Film, furthermore, provide these ambitions with the ability to capture time as well, to construct a narrative, claimed as the only evidence of history. To have trust in images is to have trust in their ability to expose the mental and ideological motives behind it. If the image is a tool for the colonial project, it is also a tool for the decolonial project, using the same

images, re-labeling them, creating new inventories for them, attaching them to other histories, stories, and people. Take for example *The Seekers*, a boring and over the top racist film. When this romantic musical set in a newly discovered land with a tribal background was restored and made available in the New Zealand film archive, it suddenly became a very popular movie among the indigenous communities: the Maoris found an archive of their own culture in the film. They recognized an aunt, a father, a location, and spent time laughing, talking, and drinking while watching the film, without paying attention to the film plot itself. These blocks, as Eisenstein describes, neutral and objective, are what the Maoris are seeing: not the colonial mental image, not the montage, but what is actually in the image.

Mohanad Yaqubi

Em um momento em que, mais do que nunca, a exigência da performance converte-se em um imperativo imanente ao corpo social (contexto no qual, diria o crítico francês Jean-Louis Comolli, a mise en scène se torna um fato social, “talvez o fato social principal”) e o valor de verdade da imagem torna-se o grande território de disputa contemporânea (haja visto a negação de verdades científicas e históricas, a proliferação de *fake news*, vídeos *deep fakes*, fatos alternativos e a manipulação política das imagens), a forma-documentário nos leva a pensar: o que vemos nas telas? Verdade, manipulação, realidade, ficção ou tudo ao mesmo tempo? Questões que, de acordo com Comolli, pertenciam apenas ao cinema, mas, no contexto do regime do espetáculo generalizado em que vivemos (em que as relações sociais são mediadas por imagens), se transformaram em questões que dizem respeito a todos nós. Sendo assim, diante da onipresença da imagem, alcançar ou se aproximar da verdade dá imenso trabalho e requer disposição: é preciso investigá-la, suportá-la e sustentá-la por meio de um estilo, de uma forma que cada cineasta precisa construir para si, bem como de um trabalho de desmontagem, remontagem e avaliação crítica da natureza da própria imagem – como dedicou-se a fazer, de maneira tão precisa quanto obstinada, o cineasta-ensaísta alemão Harun Farocki. De todo modo, a questão seria saber: por que ainda hoje associamos a imagem à verdade? Por que ainda hoje acreditamos no que vemos? Já não chegou a hora de nos darmos conta de que a máxima de São Tomé, “ver para crer”, atualmente, nesse cenário de “pós-verdades”, transformou-se em “crer para ver”?

Ilana Feldman

It is not hyperbole to say that at present, and therefore especially in the near-and-far-term, we should be prepared to doubt the validity of any image or sound we encounter. We are facing what may become a pandemic of “deep skepticism” to match the hyper-charged unreliability of the audiovisual environment. While we have been coming in and out of the uncanny valley for

a couple decades, our emergence on the other side appears, if not already accomplished, then certainly imminent. Generative adversarial networks will create a sea of sounds and images—especially of humans—that will easily trick the human mind and lead it down pathways of trust and therefore folly. If the rise of the Internet has gone hand-in-hand with the rise of digital tricksterism and fraud, then a new universe of such deceptions looms. We may, in fact, be fooled by images of “ourselves”—was I there? Is that really me?

David LaRocca

I think the growing proliferation of “fake news” and the like shifts the focus from ontological questions to ethical ones. In medical research (genetics, for instance), there are many things that are possible, but we quite simply should not make use of them since we cannot responsibly estimate their consequences. Similar ethical limits should apply in realms like AI or “deep fakes.” It may well be possible to create a fake moving image document showing Marilyn Monroe and JFK in an intimate moment behind the scenes, but what would it be good for? Those who are capable to fake this, should resist. Forgery and fake news have always been in the world, but the quantitative leaps and their speed of distribution raise the stakes. The question is how to regulate this. The production and dissemination of images will always be quicker than their regulation. It’s like trying to push toothpaste back into the tube.

Volker Pantenburg

Les débats sur la relation entre le cinéma et le réel se déplacent aujourd’hui en effet sur le terrain du *fake*, voir sur le *deepfake*, souvent loin des questions esthétiques, éthiques et anthropologiques concernant le documentaire et proposées par les cinéastes eux-mêmes. Il ne faut pas confondre les débats sur les médias et leur dialectique interne avec la question de l’activité des images documentaires. On peut certes observer d’un côté, une vision apocalyptique dans la tradition de la théorie critique, fustigeant l’hégémonie des capitaux régissant les nouveaux médias et de l’autre une position utopique cherchant dans les nouvelles technologies une sorte de possibilité de salut. Mais ce débat ne concerne pas ou rarement les formes singulières des documentaires. Les techniques n’existent que par la manière dont on s’en sert, dont on les rend opératoires. Le documentaire peut inventer des formes de subversion et il peut manifester une activité ou agentivité dans le domaine de l’art de l’image, tout en s’intéressant par exemple à la fonction de l’image comme preuve ou comme trace mémorielle. Aujourd’hui, c’est dans le contexte des projets collaboratifs et transdisciplinaires qu’il trouve une nouvelle place, ce qui ne veut pas dire que le cinéma cesse par ailleurs de fournir une expérience singulière et irremplaçable. Mais parfois, on y confère à un film ou à une vidéo une vocation purement opératoire, comme dans le cadre de projets pluri-disciplinaires de

recherche-action animée par le groupe *Forensic Architecture*, avec ses frises temporelles et ses tableaux infographiques, qui expose également ses recherches et traçages de faits par des vidéos : dans le cas des installations d'Eyal Weizman, je ne parlerais pas de forme ou de film documentaire, mais de support documentaire. Intégrant une articulation artistique multiforme, ce type d'image fonctionnelle peut en revanche faire partie d'une œuvre. Parfois, on recherche dans un tel cadre de recherche-action des formes poétiques, plus proches des traditions du cinéma, comme on peut le voir dans les projets engagés de la plate-forme européenne *Future Architecture* (le film récent *An English Garden* de Will Jennings en est un bon exemple : il fait preuve d'une autonomie esthétique tout en faisant partie d'un dialogue urbanistique plus large).

Christa Blümlinger

As we enter a new phase of mimesis and the hyperfake, it may be worth asking what the technologies can do for the good. If we are to contend with the deceptions that may lead us astray, what can be said for the deceptions that can illuminate? As film artists, such as Rithy Panh, have shown us: documentaries can be made with clay and collage, with found footage and painted emulsions. As something of a challenge to the documentarians among us: what about a documentary where the profilmic event is in the past (and thus “unfilmable” according to the prevailing logic of image/sound capture)? Can we *animate* our way to a film of presumptive assertion? If, as Lev Manovich has counseled, the digital is in fact a species of painting, then we are turned back upon the history of representation in a lovely moment of reflexivity. After all, as a species we have spent more time with paintings than films, so what can we say about historical paintings-as-documents-of-events in conversation with a GAN-film of, say, the Gettysburg Address? Instead of seeing deepfakes and their kind as a virus that threatens to overtake all image-sound creations (and subsume us in inescapable skepticism), why not fathom a countervailing movement—one that offers up creative treatments of actuality by means of artificial intelligence?

David LaRocca

Se por um lado é importante fazer documentários que não tenham a ingenuidade de acreditar que existem imagens puras e não manipuladas, e de dar pistas ao espectador para esta ideia da instabilidade do “factual” por outro lado é importante não ficarmos apenas nesta dimensão de suspeição que nos impede de emocionalmente entrar no universo do outro e na visão do realizador. Enquanto realizadora e espectadora, o meu envolvimento com as imagens e o seu sentido estão intrinsecamente ligados à forma do documentário, pois é ela que traduz o meu olhar e a minha visão sobre o mundo, e as pistas de percepção sobre essa visão da realidade

Catarina Mourão

I personally think that such a moment of “ease” of constant production and circulation of images demands more space for engaged filmmakers to critically question how we consume and relate to this incessant flow of images and information. I see the filmmaker’s voice as one that interrupts lazy habits of looking and understanding the world in a certain way. For me, engaged filmmaking asks viewers to constantly re-orient themselves and question their positionalities.

Raed Rafei

FICTION/DOCUMENTARY DIVIDE
DISTINÇÃO FICÇÃO/DOCUMENTÁRIO

It is a fact that the medium of film has a reality of itself, like any other medium able to produce a context, and therefore a consciousness. This contradicts the categorizations which are imposed on the medium, and seems to act as a compartmentalization strategy in order to tame the medium. In many ways, this reflects the general capitalist attitude toward sciences and arts, with the dismissal of inherited knowledge or cultural significance through the process of opening markets, with a requirement for a clear division and hierarchy like that between fiction and documentary. If we look at categorization as an industrial process, in order to label, package and distribute, then we can see how the medium is subject to exploitation. Any product is a result of the processing of resources, and includes extraction, manufacturing and distribution, like the chicken egg industry, or mobile phone industry, or simply the complex industries at work behind tourism. Films too, are the result of a similar process. Filmmaking is constituted of three main stages. First is writing, which includes the observation of subjects in order to extract stories, sketching the method in a timeline, followed by the manufacturing of this imaginative into the shape of breakdown excel sheets, floor plans, lists of equipment. Then comes the production phase, consisting in capturing frames and sounds that represent something, both metaphorically and directly. This capturing process can be of a group of actors on a stage delivering a dialogue, or an image of sleepy passengers on a night train, or even just a scene of a quiet morning in a forest. These images are recorded and unified into a format unrelated to the actual physics and realities of these frames, and so they receive a new form, a new time, a resurrection, ready for distribution.

Thinking of fiction or documentary, both films captured with the same camera, as different categories, means submitting oneself to the will of the market and its conditions of demand and supply. The capitalistic logic imposes a division on the medium, and thereby limits the potential exploration of the medium. The question that should be raised is resist imposed categorizations through the market trends. This implies the question of whose eyes are looking at this. If it is through the lenses of the industry that one is looking, then the artists/filmmakers have to compromise their artistic integrity in order to be fished out of the sea of talents. Dismantling these capitalist tendencies from within the film industry is necessary to reclaim the space(s) of creative and progressive exchange between filmmakers themselves, producers and the rest of the world.

Mohanad Yaqubi

I agree that the distinction between documentary and fiction is merely a convenience. It stems from our modern obsession with classification and compartmentalization so as to rationalize the world around us. This distinction also allows for entire capitalistic industries and structures to exist and sustain themselves. Personally, I have always attempted in my film work to trouble that distinction. In *Salam* (2017), for instance, I tried to give life to the words of an anonymous Syrian woman interviewed about her sexuality by asking an actor, Rawya El Chab, to say and perform her exact quotes. I think the mere gesture of another woman not only repeating the Syrian woman's words but also letting them inhabit her, exist and resonate inside her, amplified the original testimony about bodies, desire, societal power trying to control them, and resistance. I think the space between the original (or a fantasized idea of an original) and its performance is very generative for viewers because it reveals the gap between reality and its inevitable performance on camera.

Raed Rafei

Quite obviously, the distinction between fiction and documentary is not absolute; it rather points to a stylistic convention which, like all conventions, can be quoted, appropriated, used in a different context. The Dardenne brothers' films (to a certain extent) look like documentaries, even if they are scripted. Frederick Wiseman spends months and months in the editing room to condense the material into scenes that, despite their purely documentary ingredients, have the narrative flavor that we are accustomed to encountering in fiction films. Film as record (registration), and film as language (syntax, juxtaposition, montage): both elements are always present, as Dai Vaughan reminds us. If this is the case, trust is crucial. A "documentary contract" is established each time, and it involves various (human and non-human) actors: the people behind the camera, the camera (and microphone), those in front of it, the institutional context, and, not least, us as spectators. However, since this "contract" most of the times remains implicit, the conditions that it codifies are precarious and unstable.

Volker Pantenburg

Le plus important sont sans doute des lignées (historiques, généalogiques) esthétiques et politiques dans lesquelles s'inscrivent ces films. Ces lignées politiques ou esthétiques sont transversales aux catégories (documentaire / fiction / reportage / film expérimental / etc...), et ne leur sont pas superposables. Elles ne sont ni aisées à identifier, ni étanches, car elles s'ancrent sur les projets de chaque film, sur des affinités politiques, et engagent une généalogie historique ouverte et pensante.

Marie Voignier

Se por um lado a distinção entre documentário e ficção continua a ser interessante do ponto de vista histórico, ético, e no seu modelo de produção, e exibição, a verdade é que o cinema mais interessante se encontra cada vez mais na fronteira entre ficção e não ficção. Do ponto de vista do realizador e do académico a distinção que talvez faça mais sentido é aquela que remete para formas diferentes de convocar o espectador: por um lado um cinema que utiliza uma construção dramática em que existe uma suspensão involuntária da descrença e um cinema que envolve uma narrativa mais épica, mais reflexiva e ensaística. Se identificamos a primeira categoria mais com a ficção e a segunda com o documentário, cada vez mais são os filmes que combinam os dois tipos de construção. E esta discussão não é puramente académica nem filosófica, ela tem consequências na produção de um filme, na sua mise-en-scène na escolha de actores profissionais ou não actores, na escolha dos decor. Neste sentido, hoje em dia, a distinção entre documentário e ficção pode até ser contraproducente para quem realiza e produz um cinema mais híbrido.

Catarina Mourão

I believe that all cinema is hybrid, and that there is no “pure documentary” or “pure fiction.” Only “impure cinema.” This happens because on one hand, with the exception of animated films, photography is at the root of all films. As a consequence of this, there is an apodictic character to cinema that makes its images testify to certain events that happened in a specific place and at a specific time. A film always works as an audiovisual proof that something *real* happened. It is a document. But on the other hand, where there’s human intervention, there is necessarily something along the lines of fiction. Photography is fiction. Science is fiction (remember Jean Painlevé). Religion is also fiction. Language is the touchstone of fiction (remember Jorge Luis Borges’s *Tlön*). Film editing and framing are certainly related to the principle of fiction. With this in mind, we should stress that fiction is no less real than anything else. Like cinema, reality is made of both the actual and the virtual (see Deleuze). All documentary films are “realist documentaries made of unreal events” (Cocteau) because, in the end, all reality is symbolic and impregnated with the imaginary. In addition, every fiction film is a documentary in its own shooting. It is an essay film in the sense that it is a rhetoric construct and an object that thinks about itself.

José Bértolo

La forme essayiste a une longue tradition au cinéma, comme le rappellent les textes de Hans Richter ou d’Alexandre Astruc, d’André Bazin ou d’André S. Labarthe. Si la notion connaît actuellement une sorte de renaissance dans le

domaine anglophone et ailleurs, elle risque de servir désormais comme passe-partout. Elle sert trop souvent pour classer non seulement toute hybridité ou forme expérimentale, mais aussi un certain type de discours critique, voire d'agentivité, attribué au cinéma. Si on trouve beaucoup de propositions philosophiques pour définir la fiction, les tentatives théoriques de définir le documentaire par rapport à la fiction sont souvent restées pragmatiques et liées aux pratiques de l'expérience des films. Une poétique du documentaire aurait peut-être plus de sens, car elle s'intéresserait davantage aux inventions des formes et à leur lien avec le quotidien et la vie. (Jacques Rancière parle d'une « poétique du savoir » quand il s'intéresse à la manière dont Fernand Braudel écrit de l'histoire.)

Christa Blümlinger

The division between documentary and fiction is still as relevant as always. However, their difference has little or perhaps nothing to do with their relationship to reality. As I see it, the important differences between documentary and fiction have to do with formal approaches. A film is a documentary because it looks and sounds like one. Of course, there are fictions that look like docs and vice-versa, but that happens when a filmmaker specifically chooses to draw from the formal toolbox of the other side.

The difference between capturing a representation of reality, or reality itself (or something close to it), is a subject that concerns equally fiction and documentary filmmakers.

When I film a person, I'm interested in their physical attributes, in how their body moves, in how they sound when they talk, etc. In a fiction film I choreograph this movement, rehearse it to the point that it becomes second nature to the actor, at which point their movements and sounds are triggered by muscle memory. In a documentary this muscle memory doesn't need to be generated, as it is part of the subject.

All movement is choreographed. Documentary aims to capture the movement that a subject has unconsciously learned throughout their life, while fiction aims to capture the movement that has been consciously learned and repeated over a short period of time. In both cases, a filmmaker aims to capture the essence of this choreography.

Nicolás Pereda

A diferença entre documentário e ficção não corresponde às distinções entre objetividade e subjetividade, entre acaso e manipulação ou entre realismo e expressionismo. O documentário insinua-se, antes de mais, enquanto *documento*, no sentido de um testemunho. Nestes termos, se o propósito for apenas a informação factual, como reclama a deontologia jornalística ou científica, então o cunho performativo tenderá a ser ignorado ou ficará

tecnicamente escondido. É esta aparente isenção metodológica que alimenta a associação direta entre o discurso documental e o realismo. Um documentarismo ingénuo, portanto. Situamos aqui o fundamento do termo e da sua aplicabilidade.

Mas o documentário, enquanto tal, também pode assumir uma vocação performativa ou estética. O documentário pode ser arte e o discurso da realidade pode ser poético. Os dois propósitos – realista e performativo – não se contrariam mutuamente, até porque também pode haver realismo através da performance. Não é na fidelidade ao plano dos factos – ou seja, no realismo epistémico – que reside a força poética do discurso documental, embora esse compromisso também possa ser usado pelo cineasta para objetivos artísticos (por exemplo, no cinema híbrido, a ambiguidade desconcertante onde a realidade e a ficção se tornam indiscerníveis). Não devemos, pois, confundir a busca de uma autenticidade estética, que é comum a todo o cinema, com o compromisso epistemológico próprio do discurso documental. No seu sentido mais abrangente, o realismo e a autenticidade não se confundem com a facticidade. A autenticidade estética transcende o realismo epistémico que é marca do documentário. Este não se distingue pela sua capacidade privilegiada de captar o autêntico ou o verdadeiro, mas simplesmente pelo seu compromisso com o plano dos factos.

Contudo, este compromisso particular não se encontra de modo inequívoco na própria forma do documentário, ainda que seja possível, até por conveniência taxonómica, distinguir traços, estilos e métodos tipicamente documentais. Em última análise, o compromisso próprio do discurso documental reside apenas no objetivo tácito do documentarista (que procura manter-se fiel aos factos), bem como na predisposição das audiências (confiantes nessa facticidade). É uma demarcação fenomenológica que escapa ao formalismo cinematográfico.

Filipe Martins

A couple of thoughts and sentences to remember: Frieda Grafe, in a text with the great title “Found Fiction: Better Documentaries” speaks of the “fictional formations that run through reality like narrative threads.” Dai Vaughan states: “Film is about something, whereas reality is not.” Maybe it is best to think of documentary and fiction as two aggregate states of the moving image; two potentials that can be activated and pushed in one direction or the other. Who would deny that a Douglas Sirk melodrama, say: *Written on the Wind*, is also a documentary that shows a *Universal* studio lot in 1956, and tells us how Lauren Bacall and Rock Hudson looked like at this very moment before the camera. Yet this does not prevent the film from being a wonderful fiction.

Volker Pantenburg

I agree with those who refuse to consider the distinction between fiction and document rigidly. They are not opposed, they belong to the same dialectic of narration, just as Ricoeur argues about the relationship of novel and history. Shub's interpretation of the Russian history was as strong as if she realized a fiction. But she was aware that interpretation can be even stronger if one finds the meaning of actuality in documents. But the opposite could be also true: Rithy Panh's documentary, *The Missing Picture*, reconstructs life in the camps under Pol Pot's regime in Cambodia with an original fiction device: traditional theater puppets. However, he precisely wants to show that the documents produced by the regime, which are the only documents available of the time, are fiction because they represent a fake version of history in which worker-prisoners are happy to be engaged in the effort of creating an authentic rural and communist Cambodia. In this case, the fiction in the movie unveils the fiction of the regime's propaganda.

Dario Cecchi

Se grande parte da produção documentária mais interessante, expressiva e arriscada que se realiza hoje lida, portanto, em sua própria forma fílmica e em sua metodologia com a fricção das fronteiras entre autenticidade e encenação, experiência e performance, vida e teatro, produzindo com isso efeitos estéticos e políticos desestabilizadores, é porque o documentário, longe de ser o regime da autenticidade, da verdade, da fidedignidade e da pureza documental, como acreditam os mais ingênuos, dogmáticos ou puristas, tem sido, desde sua origem, um espelho partido do mundo, no sentido de que a imagem que ele revela é sempre distinta, rasurada, fissurada. O documentário seria assim, desde sempre, um teatro vazado pelo real. O próprio documentarista brasileiro Eduardo Coutinho reconhece, após a realização de seu original e desestabilizador *Jogo de cena* (2007), que “o teatro é o próprio lugar de tudo”, o lugar em que todos os filmes estão e no qual a fala constitui um espaço de permanente encenação e auto-estilização. Sendo assim, se a verdade é então sempre construída (o que não significa dizer, evidentemente, que ela seja falsificada, manipulada ou deturpada) pela relação entre quem filma e quem é filmado, isto é, pelo encontro entre os modos de produção da imagem e os meios de construção da realidade, é porque, precisa-se ressaltar, o documentário é uma prática relacional profundamente ética, onde não há verdades prévias.

Prática ética desprovida de uma ontologia enquanto gênero específico, o documentário, portanto, só existe na condição de uma fronteira instável que, para permanecer como fronteira, precisa ser sempre atravessada – e ele será tão mais potente quando sua construção der forma à fabulação, desejos e memória de uma coletividade, quando sua construção der forma às forças sociais e subjetivas que o produz.

Ilana Feldman

The productive frisson between fiction and documentary has been explored with increasing regularity and sophistication in recent decades, whether from many works by Werner Herzog and the late Agnès Varda or experiments by the likes of Casey Affleck, Sarah Polley, Joshua Oppenheimer, and Rithy Panh. Though topically diverse, these directors show a penchant for Wellesian provocation—consider Orson Welles’ *F for Fake* (1973) as a handy touchstone. In each case, we are given an opportunity to decode and delineate the seen from the unseen, the truth from the lie, the unrepeatable present (caught on film) from the staging or re-staging of an event that never was. Essay films yield another genre that illuminates our epistemological (and dare I say, moral) predicament. Despite, or perhaps because of, a wonderful set of extended remarks on the essay film—recent volumes by Timothy Corrigan, Nora Alter, Laura Rascaroli, Elizabeth Papazian, and Caroline Eages come immediately to mind—we may recall that Phillip Lopate made an attempt at securing criteria for the essay film, now back some thirty years ago (after all he was in *search* of the centaur). While debating “What counts?” remains a useful exercise, the persistence of the question motivates much compelling reflection on the nature of medium and its various form/content assemblages. Returning us to our inherited sense of form and content—indeed, per Adorno, which is which? As theorized by Corrigan, et al., and the contributors to their volumes, the essay film involves a perpetual negotiation between what is “captured” and how it is presented. With Adorno surfacing earlier, we could turn profitably to his “The Essay as Form,” its title announcing the essay’s very shape as a candidate for “sedimented content.” Thus “capture” and “edit” are necessarily forms of production.

David LaRocca

Aqui não há mistérios, está tudo claro. Na medida em que um documentário pode encenar-se como ficção (e faz isso há décadas, desde sua origem), toma-se, às vezes, o pato pelo gato. Mas eles são diferentes basta olhar a forma, o corpo e a voz. A voz do documentário enuncia asserções por todos os lados: mais propositivas, em alguns casos; mais estéticas, em outros. O modo de encenação pode ser *construído* (a ação de distribuir cartas no interior de um vagão de trem em *Night Mail*), pode ser *direto* (Paul Brennan vendendo bíblias em *Salesman*) ou *estético* (o peixe que nos olha do lado de lá da câmera Go Pro, em *Leviathan*), mas há sempre um *megaenunciador*, com sua grande boca imagética e sua voz enunciativa, repetindo: “então é assim se distribuem cartas em caixa no vagão do correio noturno”, “então é assim que se vendem bíblias em residências”, “então é assim que peixes mortos nos olham no olho, do chão do convés de um barco no mar de New Bedford”.

Não se trata aqui de ficção, ficção é outra coisa. Isto é claro e límpido, como água cristalina.

Fernão Pessoa Ramos

THINKING IMAGES
PENSAR AS IMAGENS

The ontology of image has been a major question for philosophy since Plato. As far as motion pictures are concerned, I would like to mention at least two theories: Agamben's conception of image as 'gesture', and Derrida's conception of image as 'ghost'. The former thinks images dissect human habits and discover unconscious motions; the latter believes images are the products of a supplement that furnishes the subject's mind with imagery. Both philosophers displace intentionality from the mind to either an organic or machinic sort of pre-subjective unconscious. However, both philosophers fail to consider the role of assemblage. Motion pictures, as far as they are produced by media, depend indeed on an ontology of *mediation*, as argues Richard Grusin. There is no doubt both Agamben and Derrida would agree with this statement. But, in my view, their way of theorizing mediation denounces a sort of paralogism: they seek at the same time an authenticity beyond the media system and the very foundation of media. Gesture as well as supplement thus foreshadows a sort of 'original non-origin,' which is probably Heidegger's and before him Schelling's legacy. In my perspective, technological mediations are examined to figure out the modes of experimentation and communicability they display. Of course, I do not refer to a standard to which images ought to conform when I speak of communicability. The philosopher's task is to critically investigate what communication is, not develop strategies and models of communication.

Dario Cecchi

As imagens que vemos são reais. Assim oferecem-se para nós e assim existem. Quando existem em 'segunda mão', no filme, são chamadas imagens de arquivo: autorais, perdidas, familiares, de vigilância, etc. Pois imagens-câmera possuem esta qualidade, que herdaram das imagens reflexas: a de deixar o mundo se erguer em sua superfície como aparição, em bloco, em algo que lembra o automatismo maquínico. O campo imaginário, o sujeito imaginário, por aí se forma e assim caracteriza a fenda que introduz, rachadura no diamante do mundo. Pela desconstrução podemos até descobrir que nada habita esta fenda e nela o que está é o dilaceramento, ou a diferença. Mas é a partir de nosso campo existencial que a vemos. Nisto não há o que negar. Elas são, portanto, imagens reais, na medida em que nos encaminham neste encontro que somos nós mesmos, aquém de uma fenomenologia subtrativa da percepção. E esse encontro real é nossa carne, literalmente. Além dele existe o que sabemos existir

por nós e que é ainda nós, mesmo que no modo da ação ou da experiência audiovisual sensorial, naquilo que se segue ao recuo radical do ser.

Fernão Pessoa Ramos

Flora prospers in mould-like difficulty in the conditions of a cave. Enlightenment without sunlight features the entrapment of shadow play in only flickering narratives. The allegory of Plato's cave commences with beholden strange prisoners, having lived in the dark since childhood. They also serve a dark economy, their labour kept away from the daylight. A phantasmagoria stoked magical light show evinces animism in this hideout of secrecy, in an environment where only our inability to recognise is pronounced. The indeterminacy of prosopagnosia is both cinematic and mnemonic. Our first encounter within a garden of unknown, enigmatic fruits, sees ripening figments as those of a tree which escapes our classification, perhaps seen only in profile. Stranger still beliefs underscore attempts at defining a grammar for film. Here it comes again in wave after wave. Manifesto yes, exemplars maybe, form perhaps, review certainly, grammar, no. The edit is a 'space of potential, not fulfilment', suggests Claire Atherton. Conversely, conspiratorial paranoia shapes the industry of documentary practice, and its requirement is to take advantage, to expose, to piece together and tell us, to abide by the rules of its privileged access, always do it for the camera. However, if the documentary turn is part of our anatomical 'dossier', its motion comes towards us from behind. Dorsality is a turning distance and metabolic re-approach towards ourselves, whereby we meet ourselves as an always already technologized co-existent of intimate distances, as David Wills might describe it. In which case, why are there no counselling sessions at 'competition' documentary film festivals? Well, in most private gardens, trespassing is not allowed.

Phillip Warnell

One of the most promising and potentially productive paths for documentary to take involves a steady awareness of form/content interaction. It would seem that any given film can be used—indeed, like other art forms (such as painting)—to reflect back on itself, which is to say, it can summon us to reflect on it *as* a work of art. For some, such a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* undermines the suturing powers now familiar to film, and much loved. Yet, it may be that efforts at documentary are afforded some latitude on this score—that they can, in a word, allow *awareness* to be a more conspicuous feature of the practice, indeed, one of the attributes that most attracts us to making and watching such films in the first place. Indeed, *mise en abîme* would appear to function as a ready-made tool for critique, since it is both familiar and yet remains effective; its deployment can contribute to narrative coherence while simultaneously putting an audience in a position to judge the claims of such coherence. Thus, framing

devices and the status of “contained” footage, among other strategies, may encode self-critique, and in that gesture also generously extend an invitation to critique by those who experience the film as an object of inquiry. If immersion may blunt one’s critical faculties, then embedding any tricks for troubling that immersion appear promising. Critique, in turn, becomes inherent to the art’s status and our capacity to reflect upon it.

David LaRocca

O cinema documental se o entendermos da forma mais livre possível, numa abordagem ensaística que questiona os seus mecanismos de construção e a construção da própria realidade, será sempre um veículo ideal para questionar o que são as imagens, de onde vêm, como são produzidas. Esse questionamento implica para mim a apropriação dessas imagens, a sua dissecação, a sua descontextualização, manipulação e mesmo reinvenção. Há uma analogia possível que se opera entre o trabalho com o arquivo (imagens produzidas no passado), e o trabalho com a memória. Ambos são corpos em constante construção, fruto de um olhar muito subjectivo e que obrigam a uma reinterpretação no momento em que são reactivados. O arquivo exposto em bruto pode ser fascinante mas só na medida em que dá espaço ao realizador para o interpretar, o mesmo sucede com a memória quando é reavivada. Ela só existe quando materializada em imagens mentais ou palavras. Bem sei que estamos a falar de corpos com naturezas diferentes mas enquanto realizadora, eles serão apropriados e traduzidos para imagens e sons e nessa medida têm um estatuto parecido.

Catarina Mourão

Il n’y a pas une (seule) forme qui pense, comme l’a si bien dit Deleuze. Le cinéma, y compris le documentaire, articule justement des « blocs d’espace-durée », il n’invente pas de concepts. Quand il ré-enchaîne et retourne les images, quand il produit des intervalles entre la bande-son et la bande-image, permettant d’ouvrir vers d’autres champs et des imaginaires, il peut faire preuve de ce que Deleuze appelle un « acte de création ». A Godard, Straub-Huillet, Duras ou Marker on peut associer des cinéastes plus jeunes, Harun Farocki, Shelly Silver, Nicolas Rey.

Ceci dit, il y a aussi une tradition forte de l’avant-garde, née en partie de l’art (post-)conceptuel, se situant entre pensée et cinéma (Hollis Frampton, Morgan Fisher, Werner Nekes, Valie Export ...). Tout récemment, un chercheur américain en cinéma, se présentant à la fois comme philosophe et comme cinéaste, considère que les deux activités s’équivalent : ses films seraient de la philosophie par d’autres moyens, dit David N. Rodowick (« Philosophy by other means », conférence au Mass Culture Workshop, 2019, University of Chicago). Par cette affirmation, Rodowick ne vise pas le documentaire, mais ce

qu'on appelle la « non-fiction » et un débat concernant depuis quelques décennies déjà la fonction de l'art (contemporain). L'attrait du cinéma d'avant-garde et de l'art contemporain a beaucoup influencé les manières de considérer aujourd'hui le cinéma documentaire. Constatant qu'on invite aujourd'hui les films de James Benning dans des festivals de documentaire, on peut observer, du côté de la critique et de la diffusion des films, une volonté d'élargir la forme, intégrant des domaines d'expression qui étaient encore largement séparées ou réservées à des niches il y a 20 ans. On revient d'une certaine manière aussi vers des formes premières, quand le cinéma des premiers temps réclamait sa vocation d'enregistrer pour une mémoire du futur et quand l'attention portée au détail et au rythme importait.

Christa Blümlinger

In recent years, films by Joshua Oppenheimer and Rithy Panh come to mind as signal instances of getting us to think about the relationship—purported and otherwise—between mind and memory, memory and media. Where a generation or so ago Alain Resnais and Claude Lanzmann undertook similar experiments (e.g., respectively in *Night and Fog* and *Shoah*), Oppenheimer and Panh have pushed into new territory: the fabrication of facts, enactment and re-enactment, cross-fertilization of genres, de-centering the director-as-*auteur*, extending the number of viable media for storytelling or the expression of memory (e.g., drawings, clay figurines, playing dress-up, etc.). Yet, such territory, however novel, admits of being recognizable to the Griersonian legacy of the “creative treatment of actuality.” And we should not miss the chance to recommend the “creative treatment of possibility,” which is to say the way documentaries can experiment with the future, such as in Kirsten Johnson’s *Dick Johnson is Dead* (2020); here, while human death is assured, the time and manner of death remain unknown. We get gerund documentary: reenactments of events (in this case “dying”) that have yet to happen or may never transpire in precisely the ways we see on screen. The very notion of counterfactual is reconceived: alternatives arrive before actualities. Meanwhile, a different legacy, also familiar to earlier generations—perhaps exemplified by the notion of “bearing witness,” and including the language of primary and secondary witnesses—seems now, in the wake of Oppenheimer, Panh, and others, to be shaken. Oppenheimer and Panh do not present documentary films comprised of footage they took “at the time of” the events they describe (though, to be sure, found footage plays a role). Rather, there is something decidedly present-tense about the works I have in mind (e.g., *The Act of Killing* and *The Missing Picture*). The subjectivity and unreliability of memory itself becomes a central part of their interrogations of the past they address, if not summon. As Emerson once admonished: “[l]ive no longer to the expectation of these deceived and deceiving people with whom we converse.” Without any CGI or GAN, Oppenheimer and Panh have done just fine to challenge any lingering hopes for

the objectivity of memory and its “capture” on film. While training their attention on undeniable realities—the deaths of thousands of people—they, nevertheless, leave open the *manner* in which the truths of history and memory are rendered. Their films showcase how fact lives in communion with fiction; however troubling to admit, they are tandem enterprises.

David LaRocca

I think film, and particularly essay film as a subgenre of documentary, is a potent editorializing commentary on the past (as present). It can create associations and frictions that trouble how we consider the present and the past. I am particularly interested in the myriad of ways how different forms of documentaries have been able to engage with archives in order to engage with forgotten, marginalized or erased histories.

Raed Rafei

I think that in some ways, any film is an inventory of an archive, an index of shots. A film performs as a visual catalogue of an archive, an indication to its existence, the original shot. In many ways, the Lumiere brothers’ “*Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon*”, is the first and the last film at the same time. The film and its archive, together, in one shot, and in the same can. The film doesn’t exist outside of its archive, and since the reality of images only exists in its archives, it therefore can only be read from the traces of the archivist, which could be the filmmaker, a film lab, or an activist group. This archiving process – labeling, indexing and categorizing – can be considered the meta context, or the reality of a film. A reality that starts when a film is related to a particular context, for example to the location where it is kept, be it a personal collection, or a corner of a museum archive, something that allows us to make connections and deploy a narrative out of it. In that sense, it is impossible to isolate filmmaking as a process from its archival tendencies. Actually, this is a tension that many filmmakers are facing in the process of filmmaking. Many of them look precisely at the rushes that are not needed after the film is done. Somehow, rushes are that which needs to be forgotten. They expose the documentary aspect of a fiction, and vice versa. Rushes can tell more about the reality of making a documentary film, since archival practices show what was not included in the frame, that is, the narrative of the filmmaker.

Mohanad Yaqubi

In my new essay film, *Al-Atlal* (The Ruins), I was prompted by a drawing of a Hammam (bathhouse) in my hometown of Tripoli that I found in an old travel book from the 1500s by a French traveler. The text describing the Hammam and the image itself were striking in how they gestured towards power dynamics

between the West and the Middle East that are still relevant until today. They referenced in particular the complicated power dynamics between patrons of the Hammam, and attendants working there. I decided to reflect on the power of this archival image, itself a mediated representation of a specific experience of the Hammam, by conjuring other modern and not so-modern images and placing them in dialogue with it.

Raed Rafei

In a way, the archival approach to images would be the most reflective approach to the reality of the image; a documentation of the process that produces archives, traces of documentations, and the realistic understanding that there is a way out of the frame, in order to read the filmmakers intentions and their context. It eliminates any possibility of this notion of reality/authenticity of an image. I am trying to say that there is no such thing as a documentary that documents reality objectively. But what is this obsession with reality? And who benefits from this possibility and ability to represent reality?

Mohanad Yaqubi

BOOK REVIEWS | RECENSÕES DE LIVROS

A FILM-PHILOSOPHY OF ECOLOGY AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Maria Irene Aparício (NOVA-FCSH/IFILNOVA)

Rupert Read. New York: Routledge, 2019, 231 pp. ISBN: HB 978-1-138-59602-3.

Nos últimos anos o Cinema tem despertado um interesse crescente por parte de inúmeras áreas disciplinares, desde as Ciências às Humanidades, passando naturalmente pelas Artes. Um destaque particular vai para o debate filosófico em torno de muitos filmes cujas abordagens parecem ir muito além de uma vertente de mera ilustração dos problemas do século, e da (in)sustentável condição (e sobrevivência) humana, a médio prazo. Isto significa, em última análise, que se atribui cada vez mais ao cinema uma certa dimensão de (re)conhecimento, bem como alguma legitimidade para colocar questões sobre a vida e o mundo, a natureza e a cultura, entre outras questões mais específicas que preocupam a humanidade, em pleno século XXI; o dilema ambiental, o problema das migrações, a urgência do planeamento urbanístico, a desumanização, o poder da educação, o impacto sócio-cultural da política (e das políticas), etc. para dar, apenas, escassos exemplos.

É neste contexto que destacamos a relevância do livro de Rupert Read, *A Film-Philosophy of Ecology and Enlightenment*, enquanto estudo sobre a dimensão filosófica dos filmes e o urgente questionamento que muitos deles disseminam, ao mesmo tempo que descrevem a vida de todos os dias. Estruturado em oito capítulos, incluindo introdução e conclusão, o livro foi, segundo o autor, “profundamente inspirado por Wittgenstein” (p. ix). Para Read, “as representações artísticas quando são suficientemente boas e poderosas podem actuar como catalizadores e impactar a nossa forma de ver o mundo, alterando o modo como algo é conceptualizado e apresentado-o no contexto da vida actual. E isto é algo que o pensamento abstracto *per se* não pode fazer” (p. x). Nesta ordem de ideias, ao participar de duas dimensões – a popular e a artística –, o filme poderá ter um desempenho importante na mudança de mentalidades e na promoção de atitudes mais sustentáveis, nomeadamente perante as ameaças globais ao futuro do planeta.

Numa invocação clara e directa da obra póstuma de Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Read inicia a Introdução da obra, sob o título “Film as Freedom: The Meaning of Film as Philosophy”, com a seguinte afirmação: “Neste livro, os filmes são entendidos como investigações filosóficas. [...] ... são convites ao “diálogo” e à *reflexão* profunda” (p. 1). O autor é muito explícito ao afirmar que, à semelhança do postulado pelo pensamento Wittgensteiniano, o cinema não constitui uma descoberta de algo novo, mas trata de iluminar uma realidade que, por cegueira ou incompreensão, o espectador ignora. Alinhada com esta ideia é visível a coerência do método, na medida em que o autor afirma não pretender utilizar as teorias como instrumentos para compreender os filmes mas antes empreender o diálogo do cinema com “ideias filosóficas políticas e ecológicas” (p. 2) que poderão, por sua vez, dialecticamente, “emergir dos próprios filmes” (p. 2). O livro enforma, então, uma preocupação explícita com as questões ambientais do

século, propondo os filmes como agentes potenciais de uma mudança de atitudes perante o meio ambiente e o mundo em que vivemos.

Filósofo e Político activo nas questões do ambiente (tal como ele próprio se autodenomina no seu site)³⁸², autor de obras como *Film as Philosophy: Essays on Cinema after Wittgenstein and Cavell* (2005), a par de outras, em particular sobre Wittgenstein, Read reúne, neste livro, reflexões sobre um conjunto de filmes contemporâneos de autor e *mainstream* (e.g. *The Last Year in Marienbad*, *Waltz With Bashir*, *The Road*, *Melancholia*, *Avatar*, etc.) que, segundo o próprio, evidenciam algumas das “grandes questões do nosso tempo” (p. viii). O autor manifesta, logo no Prefácio, a convicção de que “os filmes podem operar verdadeiramente como textos filosóficos” (p. viii), para salvaguardar, em seguida, o dilema desta proposta: ou os filmes, devido à sua condição dialógica, podem ser parafraseados e então serão apenas “veículos para uma filosofia que os precede” (p. viii); ou o trabalho filosófico dos filmes não é parafraseável e, então, permanece de certo modo “misterioso / dúbio / sistematicamente obscuro” (p. viii). O autor propõe uma solução possível advogando o cinema (à semelhança da filosofia de Wittgenstein) como forma de “terapia” e “libertação” do interlocutor (o da filosofia e o do filme), processos que culminariam na autonomia e empoderamento do espectador perante as cosmovisões cinematográficas, e num convite à acção perante o impacto de uma (nova) visão do mundo. Tal como diz o próprio autor: “gostaria que os ‘teóricos’ e os ‘filósofos’ do cinema *olhassem* mais para os filmes que analisam e dissecam. Mais do que considerar os filmes como exemplos de ideias filosóficas pré-concebidas, como formas ideológicas ocultas, ou como simples material em bruto que projecta as respectivas ideias próprias, pretendo ajudar-nos a pensar o que está *para além do pensamento*, ou certamente para além de todas as heresias da paráfrase. [...] Porque *os despertares cinematográficos* que se seguem [a esse olhar em profundidade] produzem necessariamente formas persistentes [e ancestrais] de saber” (p. 9)³⁸³.

Read enceta tal olhar radiográfico com uma reflexão sobre dois filmes paradigmáticos, quer do ponto de vista da realização, quer do ponto de vista da recepção das formas narrativas. Sob o título “Implicating the Narrator, Implicating the Audience: *Waltz With Bashir* and *Apocalypto*” - seguido pela epígrafe de Theodor Adorno “*Auschwitz begins wherever someone looks at a slaughterhouse and thinks: they’re only animals*” -, o autor procura demonstrar a ambiguidade dos filmes caucionada por uma realidade complexa, e uma história do mundo que dificilmente poderá criar narrativas únicas. No caso de *Waltz With Bashir* (Ari Folman, Israel/França/Alemanha, 2008), um filme que segundo muitos críticos faz a apologia da política de Israel na Faixa de Gaza, Read considera que o que o filme mostra é, na verdade, a contradição: isto é, que um filme pode ser “o oposto de um *simples* filme” (p. 27), na medida em que pode “revelar a realidade, ao dar-nos a ver o que está por detrás do-desejo-de-distanciamento-da-realidade-através-do-tratamento-dessa-realidade-como-se-fosse-algo-a-que-estamos-simplesmente-a-assistir. [...] Um desporto do espectador.” (p. 27). Read alude, é claro, ao género gráfico e cinematográfico – a animação -, mas também às formas do filme e respectivas narrativas, incluindo o poder “encantatório” e disruptivo do som e da respectiva banda sonora. Formas essas que são brutalmente suspensas, quase no final do filme, quando o espectador é subitamente

mergulhado em imagens fotográficas, *found footage* que situa o filme no território bem menos suave, mais cru e cruel, do documentário de guerra.

No capítulo 2, “How to Represent a Past One Would Rather Forget: *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* and *The Last Year in Marienbad*”, Read propõe os filmes como diálogos filosóficos que convocam o que o autor considera ser uma possibilidade “impensável”; a destruição total do planeta na senda do desenvolvimento da tecnologia, o braço armado da ciência que permitiu a bomba atômica. Read desenvolve a ideia original de que não estamos perante duas personagens, mas diante da herança/testemunho universal de duas cidades – Hiroshima e Nevers; dois países – Japão e França; duas culturas diametralmente opostas. O diálogo filosófico a que se refere o autor seria, assim, também, um diálogo de civilizações perante os jogos de supremacia política e a ameaça de um passado presente (sempre alerta!); uma sombra perpetuada no tempo pela memória e por uma consciência da realidade que reside, em última análise, no próprio filme e nas suas formas e narrativas. No entender do autor, estes filmes – embora ficcionais – representam com extrema acuidade a actual inconcebível atrocidade, e o terror exercido pelo homem sobre o homem, e deste sobre a Terra, durante a II Guerra Mundial, mais ainda do que qualquer documentário poderia mostrar. O autor destaca a potência do cinema para “abrir os olhos”, agitar as consciências. Além disso, é a experiência de *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959) que lança uma luz sobre o outro filme de Alain Resnais, *O Último Ano em Marienbad* (1961). Ambos os filmes lidam com o problema da reconciliação dos indivíduos – as personagens e os espectadores –, com um passado traumático de uma história sangrenta. Em *Hiroshima...*, o monólogo interior de Nevers (Elle) que encarna aqui o sombrio colaboracionismo francês com os crimes de guerra é, segundo o autor do livro, um movimento do pensamento que nos mantém aprisionados na armadilha do real e da barbárie que pode irromper a qualquer momento; como, de resto, afirmaria Jean Cayrol, no final de outro filme emblemático de Resnais – *Noite e Nevoeiro* (1956) – que bem podia fazer parte desta mesma análise.

Quanto ao capítulo 3 “Learning From Conceptually Impossible Versions of Our World: *Never Let Me Go* and *The Road*”, a reflexão de Read sobre o primeiro filme incide sobre o hipotético problema da clonagem humana e respectivas consequências quanto ao livre arbítrio. Uma vez mais, o autor convoca o pensamento de Wittgenstein, nomeadamente no que o filósofo designa como “um objecto de comparação”. O filme *Never Let Me Go* (Mark Romanek, 2010) alude a um mundo impossível, cujas diferenças e/ou similaridades relativamente ao mundo actual podem, na verdade, ensinar-nos qualquer coisa; não necessariamente sobre esse mundo, mas sobre nós próprios e as nossas limitações constitutivas. Pela comparação de uma sociedade (ainda) impossível, composta por clones (seres constitutivamente não-livres), e a nossa própria sociedade, o filme equaciona o problema da liberdade e do livre arbítrio dos seres humanos. Esta e outras possibilidades de “experimentação” do espectador num mundo apenas simulado, pós-apocalíptico – mas seguro – de *Apocalypso* (2006), onde a biosfera está já morta ou em vias disso, são argumentos plausíveis do autor a favor dessa aprendizagem possível a partir de versões (cinematográficas) conceptualmente impossíveis do nosso mundo.

Sob o título “When Melancholia Is Exactly What Is Called For: *Melancholia* and *Solaris*”, o capítulo 4 é uma reflexão sobre os filmes de Lars Von Trier e Andrei Tarkovsky e as respectivas metáforas alienígenas

para o que o autor considera ser a experiência humana da infelicidade e autodestruição. Uma ideia, de resto, já assumida, também, a propósito dos filmes de Resnais. Read propõe a tese de que o filme *Melancholia* (2011) tem uma contribuição evidente para o debate em torno das mudanças climáticas e respectiva causalidade, incluindo o comportamento humano. O final do filme é, segundo o autor, a sequência que reclama uma reconciliação do espectador com uma história planetária, onde a Terra assume, de facto, a maior importância. Uma vez mais, o cenário de uma situação extrema de destruição, constitutiva de uma consciência (que é também a consciência do cinema); vergonha e melancolia, um lamento pelo mundo -, que poderá religar-nos à terra e aos demais seres humanos.

Em “Gravity’s Arc: Or *Gravity: A Space Odissey*”, no capítulo 5 do livro, Rupert Read retorna ao clássico de ficção científica *2001, Odisseia no Espaço* (1968) e ao subsequente *Gravity* (2013) para reflectir sobre questões ecológicas e as consequências (nada longínquas!) de uma *life out of balance*. O autor fala de “experiências transformadoras” do espectador, amplificadas pelo uso do POV que potencia a viagem de quem apenas pode olhar.

Já em “The Fantasy of Absolute Safety Through Absolute Power: *The Lord of The Rings* Trilogy and *Avatar*”, o sexto e último capítulo, o autor reclama a sua tese central de que o cinema na sua acepção de cultura popular pode ser “filosoficamente significante”. O autor vai até mais longe colocando a hipótese de um movimento dialógico (e dialéctico) que cauciona a hipótese de a popularidade destes filmes decorrer exactamente desse sentido filosófico. O tema da loucura do mundo e respectivas consequências políticas estaria no centro de gravidade das narrativas da Trilogia *O Senhor dos Anéis*. Sob as matrizes filosóficas de Derrida, Foucault e Wittgenstein, e através destes filmes, é possível equacionar com clareza o problema da alienação na senda do individualismo extremo e da cultura capitalista que favorecem comportamentos de eco-destruição e egocentrismo dos indivíduos, ilusoriamente em busca de sensações de controlo, poder e segurança. O contra-argumento de Read é o de que, na verdade, a Trilogia *O Senhor dos Anéis* (2001-2003), traduz bem o nível de desespero que assombra a humanidade no princípio do século XXI, desespero esse que parece regressar ciclicamente como um fantasma e, mais do que isso, a hipotética e estranha e contra-sensual atracção por esse estado. Neste ponto, o autor convoca outros nomes maiores da história, neste caso da Literatura, como Kafka e Primo Levi – diametralmente opostos e não comparáveis, na verdade -, em diálogo com Tolkien e Jackson, cujos “mundos” ficcionais estabelecem uma contiguidade essencial com as obras dos primeiros, ecoando dimensões “impossíveis” de experiências díspares e trágicas, como foi o caos de Primo Levi. A lição final, segundo Read, é prova de uma condição inalienável: a de que, perante as maiores privações, há sempre um resto de humanidade que permanece e resiste à barbárie. A questão da jornada do herói (que o cinema adaptou vezes sem conta) é, também, muito especial, na medida em que ela traduz, nos filmes analisados, uma consciência ecológica adquirida ao longo da viagem, no caso de *The Two Towers* (2002), por exemplo. De resto, a reflexão é complementada por uma abordagem assumidamente Kierkegaardiana e Pascaliana de *Avatar* (2009), sob a égide da fé. Mas Read é peremptório na sua conclusão: ao contrário do que é frequentemente assumido e escrito a propósito destes filmes, não se trata aqui de visões

escapistas. Cultura popular sim, mas com um profundo sentido de agenciamento que decorre das perspectivas intrinsecamente filosóficas das imagens e narrativas.

É neste sentido que a pergunta do título da “Conclusion: What Have We Learnt?” conduz indubitavelmente à constatação de que a relevância política e ecológica do cinema na contemporaneidade, e destes filmes em particular, não pode ser desligada de um olhar analítico do cinema, capaz de vislumbrar o elefante no seu todo (macrocosmo), mas também as suas partes (microcosmo), contagiando o espectador com a sua (da câmara bem entendido!) “consciência” salomónica da realidade.

Finalmente, resta acrescentar que esta brevíssima reflexão sobre o livro de Rupert Read está longe de fazer justiça à obra, cuja actualidade e pertinência se revela em cada uma das suas densas 231 páginas. A complexidade das questões enformadas e a o primor da escrita convidam a uma leitura atenta e necessária, não apenas pela academia, mas também por todos aqueles que se questionam hoje sobre os desequilíbrios da vida no planeta e a potência do cinema para mostrar os abismos do futuro.

³⁸² Cf. <https://rupertread.net>. Rupert Read é Professor Associado de Filosofia na *University of East Anglia*, no Reino Unido.

³⁸³ Tradução minha.

THE TECHNE OF GIVING: CINEMA AND THE GENEROUS FORM OF LIFE

Dong Yang (The University of Georgia, USA)

Timothy C. Campbell. New York: Fordham University Press, 2017. 240 pp. ISBN: 9780823273256

The growing interest in the discourses of vitalism and biopolitics over the past decade or so—themes elaborated primarily in the works of such philosophers as Deleuze, Derrida, Agamben, and more recently Branka Arsić and Byung-Chul Han—have brought about new lines of thought for film studies and media theory writ large. Perhaps we have moved a little further from André Bazin’s ontological inquiry concerning the vitality of photography, presented in the opening essay of his seminal work *What Is Cinema?*, when he writes, “For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man.”¹ In articulating the connection between the form of modern life and the art of film, the latest film scholarship, especially in the thoughtful writings of Deborah Levitt and Inga Pollmann, has made clear the enhanced interdependence between the spectator and the moving image. On the one hand, in addition to aesthetic pleasure and abstract reflection, the spectator demands practical, if not therapeutic, guidance from film that can help them prevail in the ever-complex status quo of society, be it labelled as late capitalism or accelerationism. On the other hand, philosophical filmmakers have consciously attempted experimentations on the visual apparatuses and narrative strategies that would, to use Jacques Rancière’s term, “emancipate” the viewers from sensory and mental controls.

Film, therefore, wants the audience to hone an intricate perception and to recognize the efforts it has made to liberate them from visual manipulation and subjection. The audience, in turn, demands more extensive and pragmatic knowledge from the arts to better live in the age of psychic exploitation and radical consumerism. It is precisely within such symbiotic tension that Timothy C. Campbell situates his monograph *The Techné of Giving: Cinema and the Generous Form of Life*, in which he seeks to formulate a theory of holding through a series of curious readings of post-war Italian auteurist films by Visconti, Rossellini, and Antonioni. At the center of his project is not merely an offer of another national film analysis; quite to the contrary, he rarely provides the historical or contextual details that would suffice for a comprehensive case study. What interests Campbell are perhaps the visual or affective antidotes these filmic masterpieces offer to counter biopolitical dominance and violence. The drifting away of the political, away from Carl Schmitt’s formulation of the binary between friend and foe, signifies for Agamben and Campbell a redirection

of focus on more concrete objects like biology and psychology; a desire for possession that only becomes catalyzed and intensified with the help of capitalism.

Italian neo-realist cinema—and perhaps we can extend the category to European art film in general—can teach us an ethical lesson about how to let go of objects at an individual level and how to practice generosity by giving gifts without pushing for a circulatory return of favor in our communal life. *The Techne of Giving*, therefore, can be read as the author's rigorous search for a philosophical formula that would reduce the tension between ourselves and the objects to which we are attached. He does this by way of interpreting the playful or even comic dexterity the selected Italian directors have exemplified in their decentered frameworks, shot compositions, mise-en-scène designs, and the performances of nonactors. We can eventually free ourselves from the fateful forms of life shaped and grounded by the biopolitical regime once we learn—while holding things tightly and becoming overly obsessed with them—to activate our pragmatic capacity and distance our minds from the reciprocal logic of giving and receiving.

The first chapter of *The Techne of Giving* lays out the philosophical foundation for the subsequent film analysis and shows the lines of thought in the expanding discourse of biopolitics. Deeming the incitation and administration of fear a core biopolitical strategy, Campbell goes on to unpack the dialectic model of mythic and divine violence to law through a series of readings of Benjamin, Agamben, Foucault, and Adorno. According to this view, a normalizing power reinforced by mythic violence is always at work to implement the function of law upon the living, framing tragic and invariable fate as a given form of life for the subjects of a government. Adorno and Benveniste's accounts of parataxis and gift reciprocity, Campbell continues to argue, could serve as a counterforce against the overwhelming tendency of such mythic violence, precisely because it allows the “arrange[ment of] forms of life next to one another without regard to rank” (10). Thus, the question is how to situate non-hierarchical rhetoric devices within the zone of biopolitics, which is an art we can observe in neo-realist film.

The scope of Campbell's text, in addition, does not only center on the perspective of the individual; he moves on to theorize about the concept of generosity. He does so by combining Benveniste's claim about the “second circuit” of gift giving, achieved when one is “without the thought of return” (11), with Winnicott's theory of “transitional objects,” in which he observes the non-possessive holding of material things in how children play. Perhaps implicit in such a chain of illustrative demonstrations is Campbell's disposition that the ideal form of communal life depends chiefly upon such a dexterous mindset. Near the end of the chapter, he builds on Lyotard's discussion of *manceps*—the man that holds—to *mancus*—the man with one hand missing—to

justify his further investigation: what we want from cinema is the twofold effort to show both what a generous form of life would look like and the specific approach for achieving that.

The second chapter begins with a neat analogy between political administration and the cinematic apparatus, both exemplifying a power of control and capture. As Deleuze and Guattari write in the plateau titled “Apparatus of Capture,” the imperial or despotic State operates primarily through “captures, bonds, knots, and nets,”² such that it “overcodes them [primitive communities], submitting them to the power of a despotic emperor, the sole and transcendent public-property owner.”³ In a similar pattern, the visual apparatus that film relies on could potentially numb the senses and intellect of the audience. Per Jacques Rancière, “Viewing is the opposite of knowing: the spectator is held before an appearance in a state of ignorance about the process of production of this appearance and about the reality it conceals.”⁴ Not all films, as Campbell claims, place an emphasis on capturing the human figure and transform them into objects for holding; rather, directors in the European art cinema tradition would consciously challenge this function of the camera and craft images so idiosyncratic that they would lessen the spectators’ attraction to the image and eventually liberate them from the capture of cinema. This functions as the principal criterion for his choice of films for analysis. Campbell writes, “The three directors under consideration shortly—Visconti, Rossellini, and Antonioni—work against precisely the idolatrous nature of the cinematic apparatus by forcing the spectator to pay attention and not to move immediately to what is visible” (56). For him, these directors demonstrate a masterful embodiment of the ideal form of generous giving that would, in turn, teach us how to adjust our own life. “A cinema of *techne* would feature that living quality of things that emerge in the moment of joined attentiveness when events, things, animals take form precisely because they no longer grip as they did before” (56).

The next three chapters offer a detailed and often insightful analysis of five Italian neo-realist films by the three directors, but the scarce historical concern or comprehensive discussions of the *auterist* style in the book hardly qualify it as a study of national cinema. The author quite strictly follows his initial theoretical framework to fathom practical advice for cultivating a generous form of life in both an individual and communal sense. Visconti’s *The Earth Trembles* rejects the conventional pattern of framing as capturing the target and subsequently transforming it into an imprisoned hostage on screen, but it also offers a counterexample of the generous form of life by allowing the spectator to observe the communal life of the villagers that render embodying the cinematic *mancus* an impossible task. Campbell is especially appreciative of the comic elements in the film, exemplified in the presentation of the protagonist Mara, comic, because the nonactor displays a gesture of “holding less tightly, touching what we do not possess” (83). The film is

therefore pedagogic in that it both raises our awareness of the potential violence in the cinematic apparatus and shows us, through the nonactor, how to explore the comic as a means to resist. The following chapter on Rossellini's *German, Year Zero* (1948) sets out to demonstrate a similar theme. However, what the film shows, as Campbell points out, is the exact opposite: the impossibility of practicing the generosity of gift-giving in a community where the mythic violence prevails. Campbell notes, "For us, generosity as a response to mythic violence requires a communal milieu to support more generous forms of life, especially more generous when it comes to oneself" (108). The function of such narrative design, however, does not entail any negativity. For Campbell, Rossellini uses the cinematic apparatus to demonstrate that the impossibility of generosity is mostly to effect a helpful feeling of frustration, such that it initiates a process of thoughtful reflection upon reality and the meaning of holding (113). The last chapter applies a similar set of narratives to the examination of Antonioni's trilogy composed of *L'Avventura* (1960), *La Notte* (1961), and *L'Eclisse* (1962). Antonioni's skepticism of the subjugating power of cinematic and photographic equipment is well demonstrated in *Blow-up* (1966). In an interview after its release, he shares an intriguing view about the camera: "Photographic enlargement modifies some effects, changes certain relationships with the object, gives colors a different tonality. It's a bit like putting a piece of pottery into a kiln: you never know what's going to come out of it. . . . But there's never any lack of surprises!"⁵ Following this line of thought, Campbell curiously and rightly builds his view around how Antonioni imbeds strong contrasts between characters by navigating shot composition and camerawork. *The Techne of Giving* presents thoughtful experimentation in testing the compatibility between classical art films and the relatively new discourse of biopolitics, and attending to both the theoretical and practical knowledge we can absorb and reabsorb from the masterpieces of neorealist cinema. We must wonder, still, if the art of dexterous holding needs to be strictly confined to Italian national cinema, especially because the cinematic aspects that Campbell bases his analysis on—gestures, shots of hand, and the wandering camera, to recall a few—are also commonly found in the works of Godard, Fassbinder, Sirk, or such contemporary filmmakers as Todd Haynes and Jim Jarmusch. Does the rampant planetary tendency of biopolitics not demand and deserve a perhaps more comprehensive and complex cinematic antidote? With that hope in mind, we await a few more stimulating volumes to come.

¹ André Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Vol. 1*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 13.

² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 424.

³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 427–428.

⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2011), 2.

⁵ Michelangelo Antonioni, *The Architecture of Vision: Writings & Interviews on Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 231.



Catarina Mourão

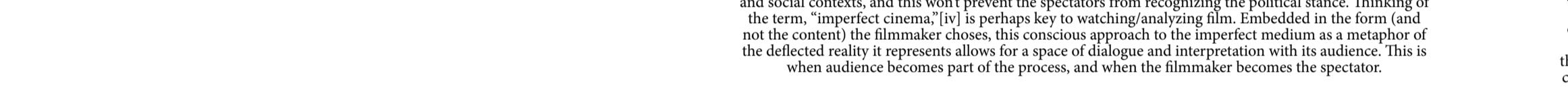
Aquilo que me interessa em documentário é precisamente a procura de uma forma que se ajuste e que potencie a história que eu quero contar. E aqui reside para mim a dimensão verdadeiramente política do documentário, a questão do ponto de vista traduzida e reinventada na sua forma. De certa forma para mim o conteúdo separadamente da sua forma não existe. A partir do momento que quero contar uma história que tem as suas raízes no "real" o desafio é sempre como é que a vou contar, qual a forma justa para contar essa história, e o pensamento que quero gerar no espectador. Nesse processo de encontrar a forma, a própria história vai-se construindo e reinventando.

Fernão Pessoa Ramos

A política da representação documentária traz essencialmente a dimensão da ação, a dimensão da práxis. Assim, ela pode, ou não, ser carregada no modo estético. Nos grandes modos documentários (Bill Nichols intuiu, de modo pioneiro, estas modalidades) a *mise-en-scène* da ação é aquela do Cinema Verdade (mas não a da 'mosca' retraida na parede do Cinema Direto): é aquela em que o cineasta intervém com sua performance no mundo e, na intersubjetividade pelo sujeito-da-câmera e com o sujeito-em-cena, figura o embate com a realidade social, na tomada. Ela, tomada, aparece então aberta para o indeterminado e para o imponderável, deixando de lado as amarras da decupagem e do roteiro. Para muitos, o documentário deve ser definido neste espaço, o da existência engajada pelo filme na tomada 'direta'. O engajamento é o que justifica a presença na encenação como liberdade da existência, em sua previsão filmica.

Já a expressão estética audiovisual documentária é perceptiva, se quiserem, mas vai além disto. Como é sensorial, em seu modo plano, torna-se também háptica, no sentido do encontro do corpo com aquilo que lhe transcende e naquilo que a câmera, como mundo, crê conseguir colar-se – pois sempre reflexo e automatismo. Tocar seria lançar nosso corpo (agora um imenso e quase infinito corpo, sem órgãos, sem imagem) desafiando a medida transcendental dos sentidos. E assim, qual seria a medida do toque que desafia a subjetividade?

Há certamente uma dimensão política no desafio do corpo que afirma a si no 'tocar'. E, mais ainda, quando assim se coloca chocando-se ao biopoder que o restringe, para afirmar-se em potência. Se nos fixarmos a seu sentido mais estreito, aquele do engajamento existencial, política que se faz no campo da práxis, mas nela não é delimitada, pois foge ao campo da ação-reação e da medida pelo esquema sensório-motor. Para um novo sujeito pede-se uma nova medida e um corpo liberado: aquele capaz de tocar.



Any film is a political statement, with or without the filmmaker's intention. The illusion of a de-politicised, objective cinema is simply related to how much the filmmaker is aware of the political and social contexts, and this won't prevent the spectators from looking at the politics. Thinking of the term "the imperfect cinema", is perhaps key to watching/analysing film. Embedded in the form (and not the content) the filmmaker chooses, this conscious approach to the imperfect medium as a metaphor of the deflected reality it represents, allows for a space of dialogue and interpretation with its audience. This is when audience becomes part of the process, and when the filmmaker becomes the spectator.

[iv] From the text "For an Imperfect Cinema", written by Julio García Espinosa, 1968

David LaRocca

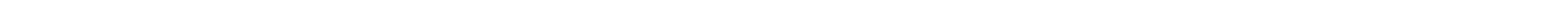
One way of looking at the political and emancipatory potential of film form is to think of a politics of contestation with prevailing cinematic norms. Thus, as alluded to in the prompt, there is no need to have outright "political content" in some traditional sense (e.g., as activist, as proffering scenes of justice delivered or justice denied) in order to see the film as making claims to change what passes for the language of cinema.

One instance that remains salient: Rafeel Ross' *Hale County This Morning This Evening* (2018), a work that regularly creates an overlap of fiction and nonfiction, of familiar human moments and estranging visuality, of recognizable grammar and an avant-garde interruption to the demotic. Ross' film seems emblematic of the contemporary "political potential of documentary"—where a cameraperson is present with the world she encounters, and the subsequent film (made from those sounds and images) allows cinematic revelations to land upon audiences fully-formed and alive.

Given that popular or mainstream cinema occupies a fairly narrow bandwidth of formal expression, it can seem that any work that broadens and deepens its scope undertakes a political act, whether it is Gene Kelly's adaptation of the experimentalism he saw in the 1940s and 50s for his (and Stanley Donen's) *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) or Derek Cianfrance's contact with the tradition of Stan Brakhage, Phil Solomon, and the legacies of the Binghamton Cinema Department, in his



Blue Valentine (2010). As Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "only as far as [people] are unsettled is there any hope for them," so we can think of Adorno's form as "sedimented content" as an invitation to become, indeed to continually be, unsettled. Yet why call such unsettling acts "political," why not merely artistic or creative? Because the comforts of familiarity so often conspire to constrain and defeat just such artistry and creativity. Thus, we could say that in unsettling our inheritances we encounter the political dimensions of form itself (whatever the art).



When I worked with my sister, Rania Rafei, on writing and directing *74 (The Reconstruction of a Struggle)* (2012), a film that recounts the occupation of the American University of Beirut in 1974 as a crucial era of mass social justice movements in Lebanon, we were not concerned with the "facts" of what exactly happened. History with a capital H is slippery and impossible to discern with all its facets. Particularly in Lebanon, history is a contested territory because it challenges different and clashing imaginaries of the nation state.

In practice, to allow for the magic of the revolutionary years of the 1970s to permeate our film, we had to move away from fixed truths and facts and create an experimental, permeable environment of remembrance. And by that, I mean an environment open to improvisation and chance. Rather than asking questions to former students who took part in the university's occupation to remember what happened as it is done classically in a documentary about a certain incident, we worked with young political activists to re-enact the events of the occupation.

What we were after was an active and embodied engagement with the revolutionary spirit of that era. The film became the product of a collaboration with those activists, each one of them engaging with us and with others in the film by bringing in a mixture of their knowledge about that socially and politically active era of the 70s (from books, archival documents, and conversations with people who had witnessed it) but also their doubts, hesitations, excitement, desires, aspirations, fears etc. The film was precisely troubling because it sought to destabilize notions of linear time and that the past is a sealed moment that admits one truth, or one reading, or one interpretation. We wanted to explore how the past leaks into the present and how the present as a moment always carries residues from both the past and the future. This felt especially true back when we were working on the film in 2011, when the entire Arab region was living an incredible moment of upheavals and hope and change. Suddenly, it felt that the ideals of the 1970s were seeping through the air again! We truly believed that spirits, ideas and affects are not immobilized on a rigid timeline, but actually travel through time and space.

The form of the film was certainly by itself our main political statement. The film was inspired by Peter Watkins's hybrid model of re-enactment that he used in *The Communist and Parisishment Park*, and other films. Resistance to power structures are recurrent moments in history. Learning about movements of resistance through forms of documentary that are truly participatory is powerful because it allows for ideas and practices of resistance to oppressive institutions to get connected across spaces and times.



Ilana Feldman

Aí estaria a dimensão política e dissensual da forma-cinema, compreendo o cinema na esteira das contribuições de um autor como Jacques Rancière: não como um conjunto de representações inteligíveis e consensuais da realidade, mas como uma nova partilha e reconfguração do sensível, pois, se a política opera esteticamente, os afetos gerados pelo cinema operariam politicamente. Sendo assim, o cinema documentário não é simplesmente um conjunto de imagens e sons comprometidos com uma ideia factual de verdade, uma reunião de representações visuais e sonoras da realidade, mas um agente cognitivo e sensível, um operador, potencialmente transformador, da própria realidade. É por isso que, sem dívida, o documentário, campo de forças plurais e práticas distintas, com toda a sua instabilidade, deslizamento e indeterminação enquanto género específico, institui um espaço comum de visibilidade, experiência e de pensamento. Nesse sentido, não apenas existe a possibilidade de uma filosofia através de meios cinematográficos como ela precisa ser reinventada, singularmente, no corpo a corpo entre cada obra e as leituras críticas que dela se podem fazer. Uma filosofia por meio do cinema tem de ser assim não apenas uma filosofia do movimento, mas uma filosofia em movimento.

Dario Cecchi

If you assume, as I do, that the primary object of aesthetics is not art, but perception, which is aesthesis for the Greeks, then the label 'politics of perception' is identical with 'politics of aesthetics'. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Walter Benjamin argues that the history of art is the history of how perception changes according to social or technological transformations. I believe Rancière would agree with him–although he disagrees with him about other formulations of that essay, such as 'aestheticization of politics'. Rancière's concept of 'partage du sensible' is at the same time political and aesthetic. He thinks that the constitution of political power, what he calls 'police', depends on the introduction of an a priori principle that distributes different perceptual modes, and consequently different levels of experience, to groups and individuals. Police thus establishes an order within society.

I believe cinema does not replace this aesthetic-political device: its functioning is overruled, not deactivated. In the *Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, Esfir Shub used only archive materials. These materials were mainly a document of the Czarist propaganda, she reused for instance the footage of the celebration in Moscow for the three hundred years of the dynasty. But she changes the sense of the Czarist propaganda, which aimed to worship the almightiness of the empire. In her documentary, you see instead how an oppressive Leviathan destroys itself when pushed to war by a capitalist economy based on profit and appropriation. The aesthetics behind those images is not eliminated, it is assumed in a dialectical perspective. Shub judges the outburst of the revolution according to the progressive delegitimizing of the ancient rule. In this way, she unveils the peculiar 'de-figurative' power of documentary, which is the counterpart of the critical stance this kind of cinema claims for the spectator.

Christa Blümlinger

Nous connaissons la critique fondamentale qu'Adorno adressait aux média, dont le cinéma. Mais on peut penser le cinéma avec Adorno, contre Adorno, comme l'a montré Alexander Kluge et par ses propos sur l'espace public, son mode de production innovant, imposé à la télévision privée et par ses films mêmes. Ou encore Gertraud Koch, en transférant ses approches musico-philosophiques et esthétiques vers le cinéma. Ceci dit, l'idée du « contenu sédimenté » se réfère chez Adorno aux formes persistantes en musique et à une esthétique négative. On ne peut pas « appliquer » une telle idée à un art figuratif et mimétique, sans considérer d'abord ce que cette transposition implique. Si on veut penser le cinéma avec Adorno, on peut aussi renir sa fameuse prise en considération de l'essai qui doit beaucoup à Max Bense et qui permet de souligner la fonction de la forme dans la pensée.

En ce qui concerne Jacques Rancière et sa définition romantique du régime esthétique de l'art, celle-ci peut se référer au cinéma parmi d'autres arts. Si Rancière a lui-même montré comment on peut par exemple lire les films de Straub-Huillet ou de Costa à partir d'une idée de féminisation qui place le *dissensus* au centre, il associe par ailleurs cette idée à la notion de fiction. Nous pouvons de ce point de vue nous rappeler également les concepts des « puissances du faux » ou du « cri » chez Gilles Deleuze, repérés justement à partir d'une classification de formes hybrides, incluant des modes spécifiques de fabulation ou témoignant d'une capacité de résistance. S'il est difficile de définir le documentaire à partir de ces approches et idées, on peut en retenir des lignes esthétiques et des propositions éthiques, concernant par exemple la distribution du temps, du regard et de la pluralité des voix.

Marie Voinigier

On dit parfois d'un certain cinéma documentaire qu'il « donne la parole à », « Je ne crois pas qu'un film même militant » donne « la parole à qui que ce soit. La parole est toujours prise en charge et détenue par le ou la cinéaste. Le ou la cinéaste (ou un collectif de cinéastes) peut faire partie d'un groupe discriminé, opprimé, en lutte, et donc s'exprimer depuis le cœur de cette lutte. Ou bien: le ou la cinéaste peut faire sienne la parole d'un groupe opprimé / en lutte et en relayer des parties choisies par lui ou elle. Il/elle ne donne pas la parole, mais la prend, la sélectionne. Et cela implique d'innombrables précautions et responsabilités. Le ou la cinéaste fabrique dans un film la représentation de son point de vue à partir de la parole ou des images des autres, et c'est en cela qu'il ou elle peut ajouter une participation politique à une lutte, une histoire, un débat.

Mohanad Yaqubi

Looking for metaphors, cinematically speaking, is at the heart of the discussion on form. A political film will not regard the question of copyright for example.

A political filmmaker will use what is available to deliver, be it photographs, newspapers, animation, advertisement, whatever it takes. This intervention is disturbing the norms of film industry and its commercial aspects, and that includes images immigrating from one film to another. The fluidity of images and realities is manifested through the process of editing, and writing. Making films politically is a statement against forms assigned by the markets and film schools; it is to reclaim freedom for the medium. Deciding to reside the cinematic tools for a struggle goes alongside the acceptance to analyze the film and the artist through the same factors that shade people's memory – be it a still image from a film, or a line from an interview, or a smile of a young freedom fighter. It is transferable, it is framed, and it refers to everyone. Maybe this is something overrated and obvious, but we are witnessing the pollution of generations of filmmakers through their education, which is reaching a close end. There is a need to open the film school pedagogies to include more dialectical thinking methodologies not only in filmmaking, but also in developing awareness towards the arts as a reflection of the collective consciousness of its society. This 'practice' of thinking does not focus on funding or quality, it works with what is available and harnesses intellectual capacities into a message, with a clear and mature use of the medium and the tools that deliver the messages.

I am returning here a passage from Mustafa Abu Ali's memoir about his time as a film student in London. "It took me ten years to forget what I learned in the film school. There was the need to tell the story of the people by the language of the people, and not by the film education, a medium developed by our colonisers." [v] This awareness of looking for a language that has not been taught, that can be elaborated only after forgetting what has been learned, is what makes the medium accessible. It took me ten years to understand what this means in practice, and having been operating between the practice of filmmaking and film education, I felt an urgency to start forming new and other canons, to lead the filmmakers back to the society, not to the industry.

[v] "Diaries of filming a civil war", by Mustafa abu Ali. *The Palestinian Image*, Issue no.1, 1978

Susana de Sousa Dias

Considero que o entendimento de Adorno de forma como "conteúdo sedimentado" é extremamente válido no contexto do documentário. Quanto a mim, a dicotomia entre forma e conteúdo é falaciosa. Não só porque tradicionalmente implica uma hierarquização — do conteúdo sobre a forma, da palavra sobre a matéria, dos sistemas verbais sobre os não verbais —, como esconde o papel que a forma tem na criação e sentido do próprio conteúdo e de como ela pode ser um reflexo de concepções hegemónicas do mundo. Em termos políticos, este aspecto é de grande relevância. Aliás, percebi isto através da minha própria práxis, quando fiz um documentário em 2000, sobre um processo-crime instruído pela PIDE nos anos 50 que levou duas mulheres à prisão. O filme não só secundarizou as imagens de arquivo em relação às palavras, como as submeteu a uma narração teleológica, perpetuando, sem eu ter disso consciência, uma visão da história de matriz positivista, totalmente decifrável e sem lacunas. Foi após esse filme que empreendi uma reflexão profunda sobre documentário, história e arquivo, consciencializando algo que se tornou central nos meus filmes: que a forma *forma* o conteúdo. Considero que fazer cinema politicamente implica criar uma "forma que pensa", para utilizar a expressão de Godard, que também diz que no mau cinema é o "pensamento que forma". Por vezes, sucede não acontecer nem uma coisa nem outra. Surpreendo-me sempre que vejo documentários que abordam directamente situações políticas — alguns cujas filmagens, inclusive, implicaram riscos — e que são, paradoxalmente, totalmente despolitizados. Para mim é muito importante encontrar aquilo que designo por *forma justa*, uma forma que deve estar intrinsecamente ligada às matérias sobre as quais se está a trabalhar e ser encontrada a cada novo documentário; uma forma não sujeita a modelos pré-estabelecidos ou já testados, e que, precisamente pela sua singularidade, permite expor algo de novo, residindo aí o seu potencial político.



Phillip Warnell

Flora prospers in mould-like difficulty in the conditions of a cave. Enlightenment without sunlight features the entrapment of shadow play in only flickering narratives. The allegory of Plato’s cave commences with beholden strange prisoners, having lived in the dark since childhood. They also serve a dark economy, their labour kept away from the daylight. A phantasmagoria stoked magical light show evinces animism in this hideout of secrecy, in an environment where only our inability to recognise is pronounced. The indeterminacy of prosopagnosia is both cinematic and mnemonic. Our first encounter within a garden of unknown, enigmatic fruits, sees ripening figments as those of a tree which escapes our classification, perhaps seen only in profile. Stranger still beliefs underscore attempts at defining a grammar for film. Here it comes again in wave after wave. Manifesto yes, exemplars maybe, form perhaps, review certainly, grammar, no. The edit is a space of potential, not fulfillment, suggest Claire Atherton. Conversely, conspiratorial paranoia shapes the industry of documentary practice, and its requirement is to take advantage, to expose, to piece together and tell us, to abide by the rules of its privileged access, always do it for the camera. However, if the documentary turn is part of our anatomical ‘dossier’, its motion comes towards us from behind. Dorsality is a turning distance and metabolic re-approach towards ourselves, whereby we meet ourselves as an always already technologized co-existent of intimate distances, as David Wills might describe it. In which case, why are there no counselling sessions at competition documentary film festivals? Well, in most private gardens, trespassing is not allowed.



Mohanad Yaqubi

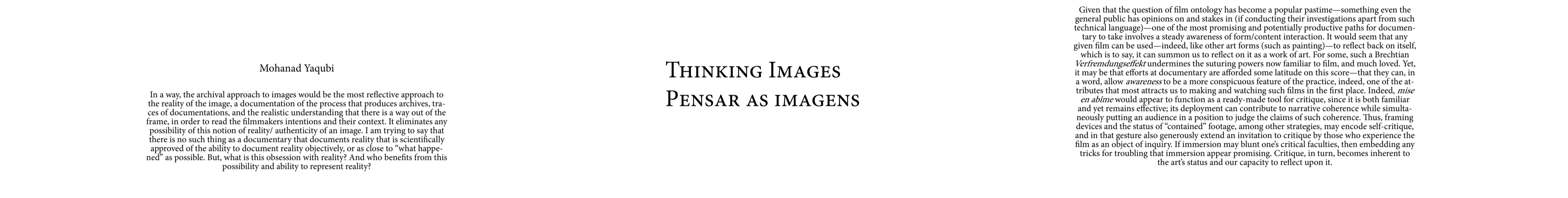
Looking at similarities between archival practices and filmic practices—in some ways, any film is an inventory of an archive, an index of shots. A film performs as a visual catalogue of an archive, an indication to its existence, the original shot. In many ways, the Lumiere brothers’ *Workers Leaving The Lumière Factory in Lyon*, is the first and the last film at the same time. The film and its archive, together, in one shot, and in the same can. The film doesn’t exist outside of its archive, and since the reality of images only exists in its archives, it therefore can only be read from the traces of the archivist, which could be the filmmaker, a film lab, or an activist group. This archiving process—labeling, indexing and categorising—can be considered the meta context, or the reality of a film. A reality that starts when this one film is related to a particular context, such as where it is kept, be it a personal collection, or a corner of a museum archive; we make connections and make a narrative out of it.



Christa Blümlinger

C’est une grande question à laquelle Gilles Deleuze a donné une belle réponse. Il n’y a pas une (seule) forme qui pense. Le cinéma, y compris le documentaire, articulé justement des « blocs d’espace-durée », il n’invente pas de concepts. Quand il ré-enchaîne et retourne les images, quand il produit des intervalles entre la bande-son et la bande-image, permettant d’ouvrir vers d’autres champs et des imaginaires, il peut faire preuve de ce que Deleuze appelle un « acte de création ». A Godard, Straub-Huillet, Duras ou Marker on peut associer des cinéastes plus jeunes, Harun Farocki, Shelly Silver, Nicolas Rey.

Ceci dit, il y a aussi une tradition forte de l’avant-garde, née en partie de l’art (post-)conceptuel, se situant entre pensée et cinéma (Hollis Frampton, Morgan Fisher, Werner Nekes, Valie Export ...). Tout récemment, un chercheur américain en cinéma, se présentant à la fois comme philosophe et comme cinéaste, considère que les deux activités séquivalent : ses films seraient de la philosophie par d’autres moyens, dit David N. Rodowick (« Philosophy by other means », conférence au Mass Culture Workshop, 2019, University of Chicago). Par cette affirmation, Rodowick ne vise pas le documentaire, mais ce qu’on appelle la « non-fiction » et un débat concernant depuis quelques décennies déjà la fonction de l’art (contemporain). L’atrait du cinéma d’avant-garde et de l’art contemporain a beaucoup influencé les manières de considérer aujourd’hui le cinéma documentaire. Constatant qu’on invite de nos jours les films de James Benning dans des festivals de documentaire, on peut observer, du côté de la critique et de la diffusion des films, une volonté d’élargir la forme, intégrant des domaines d’expression qui étaient encore largement séparées ou réservées à des niches il y a 20 ans. On revient d’une certaine manière aussi vers des formes premières, quand le cinéma des premiers temps réclamait sa vocation d’enregistrer pour une mémoire du futur et quand l’attention portée au détail et au rythme importait.



Mohanad Yaqubi

In a way, the archival approach to images would be the most reflective approach to the reality of the image, a documentation of the process that produces archives, traces of documentations, and the realistic understanding that there is a way out of the frame, in order to read the filmmakers intentions and their context. It eliminates any possibility of this notion of reality/ authenticity of an image. I am trying to say that there is no such thing as a documentary that documents reality that is scientifically approved of the ability to document reality objectively, or as close to “what happened” as possible. But, what is this obsession with reality? And who benefits from this possibility and ability to represent reality?



Raed Raféi

In my new essay film, *Al-Atfal*(The Ruins), I was prompted by a drawing of a Hammam (bathroom) in my hometown of Tripoli that I found in an old travel book from the 1500s by a French traveler. The text describing the Hammam and the image itself were striking in how they gestured towards power dynamics between the West and the Middle East that are still relevant until today. They referenced in particular the complicated power dynamics between patrons of the Hammam, and attendants working there. I decided to reflect on the power of this archival image, itself a mediated representation of a specific experience of the Hammam, by conjuring other modern and not so-modern images and placing them in dialogue with it.



David LaRocca

Cinema as a tool of memory? In recent years, films by Joshua Oppenheimer and Ritzy Panh come to mind as signal instances of getting us to think about the relationship—purported and otherwise—between mind and memory, memory and media. Where a generation or so ago Alain Resnais and Claude Lanzmann undertook similar experiments (e.g., respectively in *Night and Fog* and *Sobell*), Oppenheimer and Panh have pushed into new territory: the fabrication of facts, enactment and re-enactment, cross-fertilization of genres, de-centering the director-as-*auteur*, extending the number of viable media for storytelling or the expression of memory (e.g., drawings, clay figurines, playing dress-up, etc.). Yet, such territory, however novel, admits of being recognizable to the Griersonian legacy of the “creative treatment of actuality.” And we should not miss the chance to recommend the “creative treatment of possibility,” which is to say the way documentaries can experiment with the future, such as in Kirsten Johnson’s *Dick Johnson is Dead* (2020): here, while human death is assured, the time and manner of death remain unknown. We get grand documentary; reenactments of events (in this case “dying”) that have yet to happen or may never transpire in precisely the ways we see on screen. The very notion of counterfactual is reconceived: alternatives arrive before actualities.

Meanwhile, a different legacy, also familiar to earlier generations—perhaps exemplified by the notion of “bearing witness,” and including the language of primary and secondary witnesses—seems now, in the wake of Oppenheimer, Panh, and others, to be shaken. Oppenheimer and Panh do not present documentary films comprised of footage they took “at the time of” the events they describe (though, to be sure, found footage plays a role). Rather, there is something decidedly present-tense about the works I have in mind (e.g., *The Act of Killing* and *The Missing Picture*). The subjectivity and unreliability of memory itself becomes a central part of their interrogations of the past they address, if not summon. As Emerson once admonished: “[I]live no longer to the expectations of these deceived and deceiving people with whom we converse.” Without any CGI or GAN, Oppenheimer and Panh have done just fine to challenge any lingering hopes for the objectivity of memory and its “capture” on film. While training their attention on undeniable realities—the deaths of thousands of people—they, nevertheless, leave open the *manner* in which the truths of history and memory are rendered. Their films showcase how fact lives in communion with fiction; however troubling to admit, they are tandem enterprises.



Catarina Mourão

O cinema documental se o entendermos da forma mais livre possível, numa abordagem ensaística que questiona os seus mecanismos de construção e a construção da própria realidade, será sempre um veículo ideal para questionar o que são as imagens, de onde vêm, como são produzidas. Esse questionamento implica para mim a apropriação dessas imagens, a sua dissecação, a sua descontextualização, manipulação e mesmo reinvenção. Há uma analogia possível que se opera entre o trabalho com o arquivo (imagens produzidas no passado), e o trabalho com a memória. Ambos são corpos em constante construção, fruto de um olhar muito subjetivo e que obrigam a uma reinterpretação no momento em que são reativados. O arquivo exposto em bruto pode ser fascinante mas só na medida em que dá espaço ao realizador para o interpretar, o mesmo sucede com a memória quando é reavivada. Ela só existe quando materializada em imagens mentais ou palavras. Bem sei que estamos a falar de corpos com naturezas diferentes mas enquanto realizadora, eles serão apropriados e traduzidos para imagens e sons e nessa medida têm um estatuto parecido.



Raed Raféi

I think film, and particularly essay film as a subgenre of documentary, is a potent editorializing commentary on the past (as present). It can create associations and frictions that trouble how we consider the present and the past. I am particularly interested in the myriad of ways different forms of documentaries have been able to engage with archives in order to engage with forgotten, marginalized or erased histories.



Mohanad Yaqubi

In that sense, there is an impossibility in isolating filmmaking as a process from its archival tendencies, it’s actually a tension that many filmmakers face in the making process. Many of them look at film archives as the rushes that are not needed after the film is done. Somehow, rushes are what needs to be forgotten, it exposes the documentary aspect of a fiction, and vice versa. These rushes can tell more about a reality of making a documentary film, since archival practice shows what was not included in the frame, the narrative of the filmmaker. Referencing again my personal experience with first feature directors, with the crucial point being the editing: usually to separate between the film and its archive, and to realize that the film is not its archive, not its reality, that it has its own existence—a new index for the arrangement of the images. Once that happens, working toward building a healthy and mature relationship with the images—giving the space to breath, observing how the dialogue goes between frames—leads to learning how to look at the frame for what it is and not for what it was.

Dario Cecchi

This is the most philosophical question, since Plato so far: the ontology of image. As far as motion pictures are concerned, I must mention at least two theories: Agamben’s conception of image as ‘gesture’, and Derrida’s conception of image as ‘ghost’. The former thinks images dissect human habits and discover unconscious motions; the latter believes images are the products of a supplement that furnishes the subject’s mind with imagery. Both philosophers displace intentionality from the mind to either an organic or machine sort of pre-subjective unconscious. However, both philosophers fail to consider the role of assemblage. Motion pictures, as far as they are produced by media, depend indeed on an ontology of *mediation*, as argues Richard Grusin. There is no doubt both Agamben and Derrida would agree with this statement. But, in my view, their way of theorizing mediation denounces a sort of paralogism: they seek at the same time an authenticity beyond the media system and the very foundation of media. Gesture as well as supplement thus forehadows a sort of ‘original non-origin’, which is probably Heidegger’s and before him Schelling’s legacy. In my perspective, technological mediations are examined to figure out the modes of experimentation and communicability they display. Of course, I do not refer to a standard to which images ought to conform when I speak of communicability. The philosopher’s task is to critically investigate what communication is, not develop strategies and models of communication.



David LaRocca

Given that the question of film ontology has become a popular pastime—something even the general public has opinions on and stakes in (if conducting their investigations apart from such technical language)—one of the most promising and potentially productive paths for documentary to take involves a steady awareness of form/content interaction. It would seem that any given film can be used—indeed, like other art forms (such as painting)—to reflect back on itself, which is to say, it can summon us to reflect on it as a work of art. For some, such a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* undermines the suturing powers now familiar to film, and much loved. Yet, it may be that efforts at documentary are afforded some latitude on this score—that they can, in a word, allow *awareness* to be a more conspicuous feature of the practice, indeed, one of the attributes that most attracts us to making and watching such films in the first place. Indeed, *mise en abîme* would appear to function as a ready-made tool for critique, since it is both familiar and yet remains effective; its deployment can contribute to narrative coherence while simultaneously putting an audience in a position to judge the claims of such coherence. Thus, framing devices and the status of “contained” footage, among other strategies, may encode self-critique, and in that gesture also generously extend an invitation to critique by those who experience the film as an object of inquiry. If immersion may blunt one’s critical faculties, then embedding any tricks for troubling that immersion appear promising. Critique, in turn, becomes inherent to the art’s status and our capacity to reflect upon it.