AESTHETIC AUTHENTICITY IN CINEMA

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INTRODUCTION TO
AESTHETIC AUTHENTICITY IN CINEMA

FILIPE MARTINS

From very early on, realism has been one of the great guiding pillars of cinematographic theory, alongside with formalism. The realistic character of cinema is a commonplace that is based, from the outset, on the very technical nature of the device. However, beyond this basic premise, we can identify very different approaches to realism in cinema – or, if we prefer, different realisms. The same cinematographic work can be read in the light of the epistemological or testimonial accuracy of its content, the mimetic fidelity (verisimilitude), the correspondence with the sensitive and immanent truth of its images (for instance in the Deleuzian sense), the semantic literality, the ethical relevance, the ability to produce poetic or performative effects of authenticity, etc. There are more naive versions of realism – which relate directly to the literal, the natural or the factual – and there are less naive realisms that accept the inevitability of performance and artifice, even though, at the same time, they also seek to preserve, or even intensify, some form of truth or authenticity. For instance, this is what Werner Herzog proposes when he highlights the subjectivity and poetic effort involved in cinema, including documentary cinema. In his words: "There are deeper layers of truth in cinema and there is a

poetic and ecstatic truth. It is mysterious and elusive and can only be achieved through fabrication, imagination and stylization."[1]

All art seeks some kind of authenticity or "truth". We can recognize it in fiction or documentary, in painting or photography, in the abstract or the figurative. Authenticity can be pointed out in the immediacy of the senses or in the honesty of a purely conceptual proposal; it can emanate from the aura of the singular object or prevail in the multiple and the ephemeral; it can relate to objective exteriority or appeal to a phenomenological interiority (or even install itself on the perceptive threshold between exterior and interior, as in Impressionism); It can be mimetic, the result of a technical effort of meticulous recreation, or, on the contrary, it can invest in the opposite of technique and structuring, praising the artist's chaos, randomness or passivity, so that the raw virginity of the real is not corrupted.

Authenticity appears to be involved in aesthetic fruition in different ways, forming one of the axiological pillars of the artistic field, regardless of the historical regime in which one addresses it. But art's implicit contract with authenticity is in stark contrast to the polysemy of the latter concept. How to describe this authenticity in its transversality to the most diverse forms of artistic expression? How does it operate in the process of validating the different poetics? How does it manifest itself throughout different historical regimes and what resists over the successive paradigmatic revolutions in the art world? What is the properly aesthetic authenticity?

The problem of authenticity is inseparable from the very history of the concept, and the awareness of this historicity cannot fail to sentence a certain relativism. As David LaRocca points out: "we travel from Rousseau's sensibility for 'authenticity' (and hence its inverse, inauthenticity) to Heidegger's take on the 'authentic Self' to Adorno's counterprogramming that claims such talk as not just mere 'jargon,' but revealing a 'mendacity' in its 'vulgar' renderings

(thereby proving false, misleading, damaging–slipping from 'culture' to 'cult'), and at last, emerging in our present predicament in which few have a command of the concept, and fewer still have strident commitments to a single meaning of the term" (p. 42). And yet, the concept always returns, even if readjusted to new historical contexts and respective epistemological, ontological, aesthetic binders. Perhaps this recurrence is fundamentally driven by what Nietzsche described, in LaRocca words, as a "'truth drive' in humans, something that, ironically, [also] gives rise to a passion for dissimulation" (p. 37).

In art, the use of the term authenticity seems to remain transversal even to the distinction between realism and formalism. LaRocca notes: "If we turn to ask about formalism, especially in experimental and avant-garde cinematic traditions, its celebrated standard bearers may seem very far from "realistic"–and yet may still derive from an artist's 'authentic' vision"(p. 35). Ultimately, despite the ever-renewed attractiveness of the concept, perhaps we may be condemned to verify its theoretical indomitability, its resistance to watertight and transhistorical boundaries: "Authenticity is a buzz word–that is, a word with a charge (and occasionally a sting) but also without any fixed or formal or agreed upon definition. The word makes an impact–we feel its power when applied–but also cannot account for what it entails" (p. 39). However, this assumption should not deter us from realizing new uses or interpretations of the concept, namely from the perspective of the present time in which we live and from which we direct our questioning. According to LaRocca: "We're not so much in an age of post-authenticity as one whose parameters and definitions change continuously to suit new conditions" (p. 42).

That is, authenticity still stands, even if it is an everchanging concept. Thus, in order to restore a more stable and transversal definition, LaRocca proposes a variation on the concept: "We might temper our thinking about (and ongoing obsession with) authenticity by means of a spelling change that invites and inaugurates a conceptual shift. From authenticity to authentication" (p. 42). The question then arises: what kind of authentication is in question in contemporaneity, particularly when addressing cinema and its images?

Nearly three decades ago, Lev Manovich pointed to a profound paradigm shift regarding the modes of production and relationship with images[2]: the transition from *analogue* (committed to "lens-based recordings of reality" (p. 40)) towards the *digital* (which enabled new – more autonomous – ways of grasping the realistic purposes of cinema, especially blatant in the increasing photorealism of CGI or, more recently, in the so-called deepfake). Currently, as LaRocca notes, we are once again facing a profound paradigm shift, perhaps much more radical and disturbing than the previous one: the advent of artificial intelligence and its capability to produce textual, imagery and audiovisual discourses seemingly indistinguishable from human discourses. That is: no longer the passage from analogue to digital, but the passage from *human* to non-human or *synthetic*. In addition to the obvious implications that such new discourses might add to the wider problematic about truthfulness (a concern announced since the beginnings of the internet and the subsequent deluge of information that would culminate in a so-called post-truth era), it is now imposed, more profoundly, the questioning about the (human or non-human) source of those discourses. According to LaRocca, it is precisely in this context that the concept of *authentication* – which is to apply to discourses in general, including cinema – gets its ultimate significance today. In his words: "'Authenticated cinema' would be 'AI-free'–human created, even if by digital means. The desire, or demand, for such authentication might stem from an anxiety about taking ownership or authorship of content" (p. 43).

In the chapter "From Authenticity to Authentication: cinaesthetics and auteurship in the age of AI", David LaRocca explores the epistemological and aesthetic implications of artificial intelligence in the future of cinema, both in terms of production and reception. A future in which authenticity (or authentication) should be upheld above all by the notions of authorship and humanity. Concludes LaRocca: "Where we have lived for centuries in a contest between the categories of authentic and inauthentic–respectively marking a kind of mortal and moral success

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[2] Manovich, L. (1995). "What is Digital Cinema?". (Retrieved from *manovich.net/index.php/projects/what-is-digital-cinema*).

(or failure), deployed as assignments of genuineness or falsity–the application of 'authentic' to all human endeavor, as set in opposition to that of AI, dissolves the inherited distinction. Authentication–deciphering human from nonhuman artifacts–will supersede aesthetic judgment of the work itself as the first order of business" (p. 57).

The authentication of the discourses granted with human authorship (as opposed to AI discourses, which are denied such authenticity) is, essentially, an epistemological certificate. A bit like authenticating a Picasso proven to have been painted by Picasso himself (Picasso being the authorial entity that here bears the attribute – the signature – of authenticity). Both in the case of the human/synthetic pair and the case of the Picasso/Picasso-forger pair, authentication ultimately refers to objective criteria related to the factual origin of the artistic object: the human authorship in one case (and not AI), the authorship by Picasso himself on the other (and not by a forger). What is at stake in both cases is, above all, the empirical nature of the source, which can be, in principle, investigated: for example, through an infrared spectroscopy of the painting, or through the analysis of discursive patterns that may reveal algorithmic automatisms characteristic of (current) AI limitations. These are matters of fact, perhaps within reach of a rigorous laboratorial analysis, in order to distinguish the original from the imitation. The epistemological dimension here depends on the premise that Picasso (the individual) is a reliable anchor that serves as a criterion of authentication against falsification, in the same way that the human (humanity) constitutes a reliable anchor against the imitation of AI.

But authorship can also be understood in a phenomenological sense, as an attribute that is granted to the object (converted into a work of art) in the act of reception, more than in the act of its production. Modern art understood this very early: the urinal that is no longer a mere urinal because it has been granted an authorship, a performative value that is only truly realized in the (appropriate) context of reception. In these terms, authorship becomes the foundational condition of the work of art, even when the artist is essentially passive, or even when he is nothing more than an illusion or mistake on the part of the interpreter.

However, authorship, understood in these terms, collides with the concept of authenticity. If, on the one hand, authorship enables the performative dimension of the work of art, on the other hand it does not take part in its authenticity, first of all because the traces of authorship tend to denounce the artifice of the artistic work itself, as opposed to the natural, contingent, etc.

This does not mean that one shouldn't continue to speak of authenticity in the context of art. Such attribute remains undoubtedly one of the core values that influence artists' poetic choices as well as public and critics sensibilities. Authenticity can coexist with authorship. Besides, we must assume from the start that aesthetic authenticity does not exhaust the artistic value of the work. There is more to art, to its purpose, than the mere challenge of authenticity. The phenomenology of the work implies authorship (which refers to a certain type of aesthetic or pro-aesthetic figures[3]) and implies co-authorship (which refers to another type of figures[4]), but it also admits a movement contrary to authorship: a return to the contingency of the real. At this point, the problem of aesthetic authenticity reconciles with realism, although no longer an *epistemological realism* (like the one that, for example, allows to establish the authenticity of a Picasso), but an *aesthetic realism*. It is in the light of this latter form of realism that the notion of aesthetic authenticity may perhaps escape both naivety and relativism. However, the specificity of this aesthetic realism is not obtained by mere opposition to epistemological realism. There are several forms of realism that can coexist in the same work without opposing each other, although they do not necessarily contribute to its aesthetic authenticity.

Cinema's aesthetic complicity with realism largely transcends the realistic nature of the technical device or its ability to capture images and sounds. Nor is this complicity limited to the efforts to improve verisimilitude, understood in terms of the cinematographic

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[3]   See Martins, F. (2020). Persistence and Arbitrariness: considerations about repetition and duration in cinema. In F. Martins (org.), *Memory and Aesthetic Experience* (pp. 49-80). Porto: FLUP.

[4]   See Martins, F. (2023). Imersividade e Diferença no Cinema e nas Artes. *Aniki* vol. 10, n. 1 (2023): 138-155.

classicism and its naturalist principles of narrative transparency. In modernity – or in the so-called "aesthetic regime", according to Rancière –, the search for an aesthetic authenticity through cinema has historically gone through the readmission of chance and the deconstruction of narratives, in a sort of autophagy within the very compositional processes of cinematographic art. However, this appeal towards the contingency of the real, which extends to the arts in general, should not be reduced to a *naive realism,* such as the one that is expressed in the scientific piece, in the news report or in the mere recording of information through images and sounds. In the case of cinema, which is innately realistic, the kind of authorial exemption associated with aesthetic authenticity is not to be mistaken even with the absence of style, the anti-narrative or the artist's indifference. The contingency effect is not obtained directly by negating art, nor by adopting watertight realistic techniques or formulas, but is achieved through the poetic effort itself, that is, through an *indirect realism.*

The aesthetic realism of cinema is constructed not so much by its ability to directly register reality, but mainly by refining the self-concealment capacity of the poetic work. In its drive for aesthetic authenticity, cinematographic art sustains its realism against the traces of *authorship.* In this type of authenticity, it is the author who must somehow remain hidden, giving way to the *real* itself, where the contents no longer seem artificial or clotted, but orphaned and *contingent.* In cinematographic art, this reorientation towards the real – which precisely allows to speak of aesthetic authenticity – is expressed through a set of trends or poetic figures that can be recognized and described from a phenomenological perspective. Such figures are analyzed in the chapter "The Construction of Chance in Cinema: contingency figures".

Although there is always an implied distance, it is that very distance that allows to speak of authenticity. The distance can be narrowed (but not abolished) through art, especially when the artist deliberately seeks to deconstruct the duality between passivity and activity, between truth and falsehood or between chance and narrative, leading to an indiscernibility of opposites.

Perhaps it is possible, using cinema as a barometer, to point out a historical progression towards a refinement of aesthetic awareness. In other words, cinema may offer a privileged landscape for the study of the notion of aesthetic authenticity. Thanks to the very paradoxical nature of the device, which can combine a "perceptive, non-human automatism" with the interventional and poetic drive of its images, cinema seems to offer new possibilities for reconciling objectivity and subjectivity, the real and the fictional, the contingent and the artificial. In the words of Susana Nascimento Duarte: "This relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, the particular way in which the combination of passive and active elements of creation is constitutive of and inscribed inescapably in the cinematograph from its origin on, interferes with the notion of authenticity in cinema, or with the possibility of defining what makes the images in cinema authentic" (p. 102). Duarte speaks here, once again, of a particular type of authenticity. For instance, it is no longer about measuring the realism of the cinematographic image in terms of its "spontaneous mechanical reproduction of the real", nor in terms of the potential of its "narrative-representative dimension" through discursive methodologies of "transparency". It is a properly aesthetic authenticity, where neither objectivity nor subjectivity should be neglected. An "aesthetic regime", according to Rancière, which involves the very indiscernibility between objectivity and subjectivity. As Duarte notes: "This is why Jacques Rancière can see cinema as the representative par excellence of the aesthetic age, drawing attention to a new identity of the passive and the active" (p. 99).

Cinema, like photography before it, added to the problem of reproduction the question of reproducibility (in Benjamin's terms). But, according to Duarte, although the auratic effect of the work of art can find "its fugitive photographic equivalent in this capacity of the portrayed person to reflect, in the contingency of their appearance, the material conditions of their here and now" (p. 104), this presence or auratic force of photography and cinema, which is also a source of authenticity, tends to transform itself dialectically "into its negative counterpart, i.e., into facticity, mere objectivity" (p. 104). To avoid this summary reduction to the

mere objectivity or scientificity of images, it is the *reproducibility* itself that must become the focus. According to Duarte, "the nature of reproduction has changed with reproducibility, altering the relationship between the copy and the original: not only does the latter suffer in its uniqueness and integrity, but the entire experience now has its own reproduction as reference and justification. In other words, the real, any act, becomes inconceivable without its being recorded" (p. 105). This widening of the focus to the very reproductive (and transforming) character of the cinematographic device is essentially equivalent to the one pointed out very early in the history of cinema by Jean Epstein when he referred to the "excess of reality that the intelligent machine, i.e., cinema (…), registers as the feature of a thought that shows us, reveals to us, what we were unaware of about reality and ourselves" (p. 106). It is, according to Duarte, a "reflexive awareness of the medium and the new mode of non-human perception it introduces, turning the constitution of the image into a process that translates not only the duplication of the world through its mechanical and stenographic recording, the trace of an experience or situation, but also a new objectivity of the image as an image" (p. 106).

Although this self-reflexive nature of cinema cuts across all genres, it is in documentary and non-fiction cinema that we perhaps find the most suitable ground for deepening the questioning about aesthetic authenticity, considering the way in which different types of realism tend to converge and dialogue in these cinematographic trends. In any case, as Duarte emphasizes, we must always assume that, even in the documentary, the "authenticity is always a construction, a staging, a careful choice of what to show and what to hide" (p. 107).

Duarte considers that "there seem to be essentially two ways of approaching authenticity in cinema. The first is the discourse on the potential of the cinematograph to portray reality authentically, in the sense of being factual and objective. The second concerns how filmmakers and viewers work with authenticity within the fabric of filmic signs, so to speak, in the sense of making what depends on the artifice of cinema manifest" (p. 107).

In the documentary, these two aspects maintain a constant dialectical relationship: "documentary authenticity thrives on the

tension between the recording of the historical, objective trace of reality and the 'subjective' elements of its construction as an image. From this tension, it is possible to approach each period of documentary filmmaking based on an emphasis of one or the other pole of this dialectical relationship" (p. 109).

From this framework, Duarte, in her chapter, goes through some of the main historical moments of documentary and non-fiction cinema, from the realistic approaches of pioneers such as Robert Flaherty, John Grierson, Joris Ivens and Dziga Vertov, passing through the *cinéma-vérité* introduced by Jean Rouch, to the more reflective and performative manifestations by contemporary authors such as Ben Russell. As we follow this historical alignment, some trends tend to become more evident: for example, in cinéma-vérité, "the issue is not exactly to evoke staging and reenactment procedures with the aim of providing a documentary representation of reality [as in Flaherty], but to reflexively integrate into the film the provocative [and participative] dimension of cinema" (p. 113). And in Ben Russell there is an "exercise of subjective or reflexive ethnography" which requires us "to reposition ourselves not only in relation to the world but also to the image or mise-en-scène itself" (p. 125).

At the same time, there is also a projection towards the "other", the kind of intersubjective communion that Jean Rouch described as "shared anthropology", which is about "discovering a common and transversal ambition in the way the world is experienced, which is shared by all cultures" (p. 127). As noted by Duarte: "Rouch combines two approaches or methods in order to simultaneously guard against the trap of reproducing the colonial point of view and falling into a strictly observational perspective, supposedly legitimizing the use of cinema as a scientific tool for authenticating recorded reality" (p. 122).

From this comprehensive movement of convergence between subjectivity and objectivity, between activity and passivity, between the self and the other, Duarte concludes that "the authentication of the pre-filmic material, which is the foundation of documentary, takes place not only observationally but also experimentally and performatively: what is captured is not only the real but also the event of its perception" (p. 120). Aesthetic authenticity depends

on this readmission of subjectivity, performance and artifice: "The idea is that one must go through a moment of artifice in order to reach (similar to what happens in the possession ritual) another truth in cinema" (p. 117).

The aesthetic regime of cinema is characterized by this ambiguity or by this collapse of the dualities that classically separated the object from the subject and the contingent from the artificial. But the phenomenology of aesthetic authenticity goes beyond, preceding the material and cultural conditions of the aesthetic regime (associated, in the case of cinema, mostly with the post-World War II period). In all the historical stages of cinema, argues Duarte, there is always an "ever-changing agreement between reality, technical automatism(s), conventions of the image, and the poetic and expressive gestures that intersect with it, without the possibility of anticipating the form that reality will take or reveal from this encounter" (p.103).

Peter Freund points out that realism in cinema always implies a double facet that at the same time confirms and, in a way, debunks the realist project itself. In his words: "The 'suspension of disbelief' shows that, in a compromise formation, one takes the image at the same time as a reality and as a substitute for reality. As such, realism seems to have it both ways" (pp. 142-143). To speak of double sidedness in these terms can be misleading. Ultimately, it is not a question of opting for one or the other side, but of considering them in their absolute superimposition, beyond the "choice between seeming and being, between mediation and the unmediated, between the subjective and the objective" (p. 143). This overlap extends to the duality between the material (or mechanical) dimension of cinema and its content or diegetic dimension: cinema "presents us with fictional and documentary scenes and simultaneously a projection of recorded light (…): diegetic and mechanical time. We obviously know better but, on a good day, we instrumentalize the mechanical and get sucked into the story. In fact, (…) the experience of art offers nothing singular without the sucker" (p. 143). This sucker is not necessarily naive, on the contrary. According to Peter Freund, the experience of aesthetic authenticity before the cinematographic

image demands both sides simultaneously – for example "the aspects of content and empty instrument" (p. 144) –, superimposed on the same surface, like a Moebius band. The passage from one face to the other is imperceptible, without any inversion of the surface, and it is precisely in this flip that Freund locates the core of realism, which also corresponds to a moment of estrangement. in his words: "Realism at its conceptual core turns out to be a single continuous non-orientable surface. When it unexpectedly flips from veil to void, in an instant of utter contingency, the surface does so without registering any inversion. One suddenly finds oneself inexplicably on the other side. The shock of this illogical flip interjects the moment of the uncanny. (…) Realism realizes itself in this confounding instant" (pp. 144-145). This estrangement, although fleeting, can be sustained in art through a "structural distance" that relates with emblematic concepts such as the *alienation effect* (Brecht) or the *aura* (Benjamin). It is a distance that is at the same time proximity, or, as Freund calls it, an "unmediation", not to be confused with immediacy or non-mediation. Above all, in these terms, realism escapes naivety: "What is in question is not simply the pure 'self-presence' of spatio-temporal experience. (…) What is at stake is the palpable and productive function of realism" (p. 142). Understood as such, realism establishes a paradoxical relationship with authenticity: "Precisely by promising special access to reality, realism is capable of producing a glimpse of the authentic but only, paradoxically, by means of the failure of its promise" (p. 147). This failure does not correspond to an insufficiency of realism or realistic cinema, but, on the contrary, it refers to the profound ontology of cinematographic images, of images in general, and their relationship with absence. Freund speaks of a hole within the image, or the "experience of the image as hole" (p. 148). The image, as such, is always fundamentally differed from itself, or from what it shows. It is the case of the photographic act (and its context) that immediately falls behind the crystallized image that persists in time. An escape or vertigo from the context. This would be precisely the ultimate focus of realism in art, especially since modernity. In Freund's words: "The first lesson we have to learn from contemporary art is that every image is already

appropriated. That is, the image is intrinsically taken out of context. (…) Context is nothing more than the name for the structural hole in the image" (p. 139). And he continues: "The art of appropriation is best precisely where it fails to recontextualize. The past does not need to be reinterpreted" (p. 139).

Perhaps, after all, what is at stake in the realism of art is a kind of convergence between poetic effort and its practical materiality, a cross between *poiesis* and *praxis*. In a sense, a "culinary". Paula Rabinowitz asks herself: "what if the culinary is the aesthetic process that best captures not the 'spiritual processes', or not just the spiritual processes, but also the dynamic of material and labor?" (p. 152). Opposing Adorno's standpoint, which "repeatedly differentiates the artwork and its achievements of thought, feeling and critique–its aesthetic– from what he refers to as its 'practical appetitive behavior'" (p. 151), Rabinowitz considers, on the contrary, that culinary constitutes "the reigning metaphor" (p. 159) to describe the aesthetic dimension, not in the sense of advocating the downgrading of the artistic work and its purpose to mere craftsmanship or a prosaic activity, but of recognizing the highest elevation of art in its ability to penetrate the mundane.

From this theoretical standpoint, Rabinowitz focuses on the analysis of the Chantal Akerman's 1975 film, *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles,* which was recently named the greatest film of all time, according to the *Sight and Sound* ranking. It is a film that, notes Rabinowitz, concentrates influences of the greatest names of world cinema, both its contemporaries and those who preceded it: "Michael Snow, Robert Bresson, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Agnes Varda, Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Hullet, Carl Dreyer, Jean-Luc Godard" (p. 161), but also Marcel Ophuls, Joseph Losey, Bernardo Bertolucci, Jean-Pierre Melville, Andrei Tarkovsky, among others. Throughout her chapter dedicated to the Akerman's film, Rabinowitz points out various layers of this unique work: its autobiographical dimension (which reflects the director's condition as a "woman, Jew, first generation daughter of Holocaust survivors, restless inhabitant of our postwar world" (p. 162); its political, feminist, metaphorical character, as "Akerman's desire to show the mundane work of women in methodical detail subverts its oppressive repetitiveness; she makes

clear that the impossible act of keeping things the same is a form of resistance" (p. 166); but also the almost paradoxical overlap between the film's formalist dimension (visible in the methodical and repetitive behavior of the characters, in the dialogues, in the framing) and the realism of the integral situations of everyday domestic life, which are shown in "real time". As Rabinowitz says, using a culinary metaphor: "It's like watching a pot of potatoes boil; when will it be done?" (p. 155). This was precisely Akerman's intention: "I want to show time passing" (p. 157). Through its use of duration and repetition, the film acquires a disconcerting ambiguity, like a suspended dialectic, ambiguity being understood here in Benjamin's sense: "Ambiguity is the manifest imaging of dialectic, the law of dialects at a standstill" (p. 169). The result is a "hyperrealist everyday" effect (p. 158), a portrait whose authenticity combines cinematographic formalism (essential to its ambiguity and its paradoxicality as a "moving image that refuses motion" (p. 165) with the concreteness of integral situations (which largely take place in the kitchen), in such a way that Rabinowitz confesses, with a certain humorous irony: "I learned how to make meatloaf from watching the film" (p. 155).

Another film that explores and subverts the dimensions of repetition and temporality is *Os Verdes Anos* (Paulo Rocha, 1963), an essential film of the so-called New Portuguese Cinema. The film narrates the love relationship between two young people who meet in Lisbon, a shoemaker's apprentice and a maid. However, this background disperses as the film adopts a tone of narrative rarefaction. In the words of Maria Augusta Babo: "Routine is installed in the characters and in the temporality that is manufactured before the spectator's eyes: routine weeks of work for the young nephew as a shoemaker's apprentice; domestic affairs for the young maid. And, at certain intervals, the day off, Sunday" (p. 181). Babo points out that this particular way of treating time and repetition collides head-on with the classic principles of narrative construction: "The repetition of Sunday scenes takes the viewer to this routine where, apparently, that is, visually, 'nothing happens', to the point that it is possible to define the film as one where there is no story: an absence

or refusal of the narrative" (p. 181). There are several elements that, according to Babo, dictate the narrative subversion in *Os Verdes Anos*, allowing the film to be fully framed in the cinematographic modernity, heir to Italian neorealism and the French *nouvelle vague*: for example, the use of a homodiegetic narrator, or the way the key moments of the plot are silenced or devalued, in particular the *fait-divers* of the final plot sequence, which is left hanging, with no clear resolution or story morality.

But, above all, what cinematographic works like *Os Verdes Anos* seem to highlight is the mismatch between classic narrativity (based on the principle of causality) and the pure event (based on contingency). As Babo explains: "The principle of causality, like its symmetric one, the consequence, removes from the disruptive event, which is the core of the knot of intrigue, its character of pure contingency, in order to, in a certain way, explain it in the articulation of cause and effect" (p. 178). And she proceeds: "By linking the before and after through a logic of causality, the narrative ascribes reasons, consequences, and resolutions to events, thereby removing their pure contingency. The Latin aphoristic formulation post hoc, ergo propter hoc – "after this, then because of this" – sums up the narrative closure and its explanatory character" (p. 178).

In her chapter "*Os Verdes Anos*: cinema between the visible and the legible", Babo reflects on the subversion of this narrative classicism and on how this subversion relates to the problem of aesthetic authenticity. This reflection is carried out in two stages: Babo begins by noting that "there is a game here, a fusion between the narrative and the descriptive, between the dramatic and the documentary, between story – temporality – and exposure – spatiality. The failure of the narrative plot is due to, and through the emergence and prevalence of the spatial over the temporal" (p. 185). This observation should not, however, be read as a simple overcoming of the temporal dimension by the spatial one, on the contrary. When temporality comes to the fore, when it becomes more direct, it tends in a sense to become its very opposite, that is, a perverted form of spatiality. It is precisely this extreme implication of temporality that leads to filmic approaches that are more situational and less dependent on the chain of events,

more descriptive and less narrative, more related to *mise-en-scène* and less to *mise-en-intrigue*, more related to time-image than to the movement-image (to refer here the Deleuzian main distinction of cinematographic images). It is also in these terms that we should read the "two regimes of production of meaning" (p. 186) referred by Babo, namely "the narrative as a regime of time and the image as a regime of space" (p. 186).

Be that as it may, it is in this "spatial regime" that the narrative stands back, giving primacy to the visible: "It would then be said that, although the narrative plot is still there as a background (it is the plot and not the décor which constitutes the filmic backdrop), the cinematographic perspective adopted is descriptive, close to the documentary image" (p.186). It is also in this visual regime that Babo fits the aesthetic authenticity acknowledged in the cinematographic shots of *Os Verdes Anos*: "Authenticity is in the frames themselves, in these landscapes whose mark impregnates the characters" (p. 186). And she adds: "The truth of this imaginary is therefore inscribed in the authenticity of its images" (p. 186).

However – and this is the second key moment of Babo's reflection – the regime of the "spatial" or the "visible" does not constitute a mere direct realism, it does not just dictate a simple or immediate relationship with images: "The regime of the visible is not absolutely transparent since it still refers to the regime of the legible" (p. 188). According to Babo, films like *Le Notti di Cabiria* (Frederico Fellini, 1957) or *Os Verdes Anos* not only transcend the "traditional narrative" but also transcend "'realism' itself in the strict sense" (p. 190). Relying on a distinction proposed by Deleuze, Babo states that, in neorealism, contrary to conventional realism, it is no longer about making the object autonomous, but about creating a kind of indiscernibility between the real and the fictional.

This implies the readmission of poetry within the visible, through the visible. That is, it leads us "to understand how the legible is veiled by the visible and how the legible emerges through the visible" (p. 188). It is, in short, about reading, "under the documental realism of the image, the poetics of its relationships of meaning. Poetics emerges from the deepest layers of the image, either where it meets

other imagery textualities, or where legibility becomes possible" (p. 191). Thus, we are once again faced with an *indirect realism*, a realism that makes its authenticity depend on a poetic dimension that keeps a distance from (or a tension with) the real. In Babo's words: "The images gradually detach themselves from the captured real into a properly poetic plane, not due to any melodramatic trait, but due to the raw rigor from which the camera does not shy away" (p. 192).

The complicity between the visible and the legible – as complementary components of the poetic dimension – invites us to question other dichotomous pairs whose rigid borders also tend to blur. In the chapter "Genuine Poetics: expressive authenticity in film", Sérgio Dias Branco analyzes some of these dichotomies recurrent in the aesthetic discussion, noting how they tend to privilege one or the other side of the respective dichotomous separation, ignoring the overall "double character of art". Dichotomous pairs such as form/content, autonomy/heteronomy, timelessness/temporality, production/thought and entertainment/art tend, according to Branco, to perpetuate radicalized and unilateral ways of understanding artistic work and the aesthetic phenomenon. For example, valuing form over content can lead to radical aestheticism or formalism, i.e., reflects the "popular misconception […] that aesthetics is equivalent to Formalism: an adherence to form at the expense of content" (Klevan quoted by Branco, p. 207). In a similar way, the proclamation of the absolute autonomy of art seems to ignore that the *artistic value* is not just *aesthetic value* (assuming here the strictest etymological sense of the term *Aisthesis*), but, as Branco refers, "artistic value includes cognitive, historical, moral, interpretative aspects" (p.205) which have "much to do with the context in which the work emerges" (p. 205). Other dichotomous separations suggest, for example, an appreciation of the universal or timeless character of the cinematographic work (ignoring the material and historical conditions of its emergence) or they value the act of production to the detriment of the act of reception, or they defend the purism of the *avant-garde* art (associated with engagement and critical positioning) against mere entertainment (associated with ludic

escapism), even though this engagement of the "serious" art, in turn, can also be associated (pejoratively) with the instrumentalization of art, as opposed to the disinterested or "purposeless" character of the "art for art's sake" (*Ars Gratia Artis)*.

Against the dysfunctional rigidity of these dichotomous oppositions, Branco points to a dialectical approach based on a greater permeability of the different spheres involved in art, in order to appease the theoretical extremes and reconcile them with each other, thus contributing to a more inclusive understanding of the "*integral whole* that is a cinematic work" (p. 207). "In his words: "In each case, leaning only to one side or only to the other is a reduction of the complexity of the artistic phenomenon. These dichotomies can be contrasted with a dialectical relationship. In concrete terms, art is always situated between the need to isolate itself from other dimensions of reality and the need to fully insert itself into it" (p. 206).

Through the analysis of three different films – *The Band Wagon* (Vincente Minnelli, 1953), *Harlan County USA* (Barbara Kopple, 1976) and *Valse Triste* (Bruce Conner, 1977) – Branco proposes that overcoming dichotomous thinking can favor the path to an understanding of aesthetic authenticity in cinema, an authenticity no longer enclosed on one side of any dichotomy – for example an "objective" authenticity – but rather an "expressive authenticity", a term that Branco borrows from Denis Dutton to describe the cinema' permeability to the most diverse spheres that take part in its complexity. Quoting Branco: "My analysis of the three films sought to overcome these dichotomies very precisely through their expressive authenticity, based on a kind of poetics that genuinely uses, deepens, and expands the potential effects and meanings of cinema. Each of the films is expressively authentic in its own way" (p. 207).

The close interplay between proximity and distance – between the passive gaze that is linked to presence and contingency and the active gaze that is linked to deferral, reflexivity or fiction – seems to be, in general, implied in aesthetic authenticity. Fernando José Pereira uses a Portuguese term to describe this merge: "In

Portuguese, there is a word to signify stopping, *paragem* [let's consider 'stoppage' so as to approach this word in English], which contains within its core a paradoxical condition: two verbs which antagonize each other: *parar* [to stop] and *agir* [to act]" (pp. 219-220).

The bivalence of this state, which consists of being "still and at the same time in absolute reflexive activity" (p. 220), is especially suitable for describing the way in which art operates with the temporal dimension, whether as a "contemplation" or as "temporal distance". On the one hand, it is necessary to give time to time, it is necessary to respect the full duration of the events, so that the spectator has the opportunity to contemplate: "art is made from the reflection that it potentiates in the spectator, a reflection which may only exist if the time required for it also exists" (p. 220). On the other hand, there is also the potency of extemporaneousness, a seduction of the events distanced in time, as well as the drive to rescue them – what Hal Foster called "archival impulse"; not in the sense of an organization of memory from the perspective of the present, but above all as a movement of "counter-memory", another concept used by Foster, which Pereira describes as "a direct relationship with the past and, however, distant from History's generic and globalizing tendency" (p. 218).

Opposing both the tendency to gentrification of History (based on the hegemony of the present) and the tendency to "machinic instantaneity" characteristic of our time, Pereira speaks of "archives that resist the compression of contemporary temporalities that are interested only in instantaneity" (p. 222). It is, in effect, a resistance movement: "That cinema and art may embody a possibility of resistance is a very precious idea, albeit ambitious, that has to be put forward" (p. 221). This attitude of resistance on the part of the artist does not consist of a moral stand, remaining "outside from the bipolar condition of being moral or immoral, as it intends to be a-moral" (p. 213). What is at stake is, on the contrary, the construction of "anti-monuments" or objects of counter-memory that do not fit into the organizational structure of History. Such objects, according to Pereira, carry an aesthetic authenticity. In his words: "aesthetic authenticity appears as a kind of significant redoubt and resistance, absolutely a minority and yet decisive" (p. 222).

This authenticity, however, is not to be confused with the simple mechanical depiction of the real, on the contrary. In an apparently paradoxical way, the artist is more interested in "unrealizing", in assuming the passage through fiction, for a deeper penetration into the real. Referring to his film *permafrost (barentsburg)* – a black and white portray of a Soviet-era mining town located in the Arctic, currently almost abandoned and devoted almost exclusively to tourism – Pereira describes his approach to the subject as follows: "de-realized to be more realistic: authenticity is present on the black and white images of the fiction, not on the thousands of true bright color images made by tourists with their smartphones" (p. 219).

From an anthropological point of view – that is, in a wider context of epistemological and ontological questioning of the human dimension – we can further question the role of cinema, as an art form, in the faithful representation of cultural and social reality. More specifically, the challenge of objectively (or authentically) representing ourselves and others through cinema is imposed. In this context, as noted by the anthropologist Humberto Martins, the game between truth and falsehood (in the straightest sense of these words), essentially takes place in two opposite ways: "with a lie I can tell truths and with truths I can tell lies" (p. 242).

On the one hand, we intend to tell the truth through lies. Beyond the mere "indexicality of the technologically registered image" (p. 225), filmmakers manipulate images and sounds in order to bring out the truthiness of audiovisual contents. H. Martins gives the example of the opening scene in his film *Making Time* (2003), in which he documented Tourém, a rural location in Portugal. In his words: "In post-production, (...) I added a cleaner and clearer sound of the bell ringing, which had been recorded at another time. For what and why? To lie? To deceive? No. Indeed, it is a sound that was heard (I think it still is) every hour; a sound that echoed throughout the village. The local time signal. That artificial amplification in relation to that concrete image register was aimed precisely at giving the spectator a more credible access to the soundscape of the village" (p. 226). This example intends to show how the audiovisual refinement effort (which is often considered a veiled form of

inauthenticity), can contribute to greater authenticity by disguising the very inauthenticity of the film construction processes and its technical limitations, including in documentaries and ethnographic films. As summarized by H. Martins: "the inauthentic allows forms of knowing the authentic as it hides various inauthenticities" (p. 226).

On the other hand, we also lie through the truth: "Telling the truth, we lie about substantive aspects of a certain observed reality, because the selection of what is shown or what is told conditions the reading or integral vision of it (...). How many films have we seen that, with the pretense of extreme realism, deceive us or do not let us see other parallel or coexisting truths? A film always provides us with a (...) view determined not only by the author's more or less assumed options, but also by the scopic regime in which we are inserted, this communicational-cultural ecosystem where we exist as people" (pp. 226-227).

Anthropological questioning is, above all, faced with the challenge of faithfully representing the "Other", an epistemological challenge that becomes even trickier as we realize that even the very authenticity of the "Self" cannot be rigorously determined, first of all because it too is constructed through otherness, that is, under the primacy of intersubjectivity. As H. Martins says: "We are never alone" (p. 230). Therefore, the question arises of "how to (re)conciliate the search for difference and the cultural specificity of societies, groups and individuals with a necessary process of understanding this alterity, which always implies a process of translation or re-presentation of the Other" (p. 225).

Perhaps the solution comprises the refusal of "radical ethnocentrism" and the assimilation of "cultural relativism" within the filmmakers' own methodologies, thus enabling renewed paths of sincerity and authenticity, as in the emblematic case of the so-called "shared anthropology" by Jean Rouch, who, instead of pursuing an "instrumental authenticity that serves political and social purposes that legitimize certain truths" (p. 231), seeks, on the contrary, to achieve "a realism resulting from a new authenticity, provoked by the presence of a camera that acts as a catalyst for new actions and reactions by those with whom the director/anthropologist interacts" (p. 238).

Such "methodological sincerity" transcends the strict domain of documentary realism, also passing through the acceptance of performance and fiction, "understood in its original etymological sense, precisely, as an invention or creation and not a falsehood" (p. 229). H. Martins mentions, for example, the "*Essay-Cinema* of Agnés Varda or Trinh T. Minh-ha, although their creative and transformative solutions may be considered anti-realist from a formal and narrative point of view" (p. 242). And the same can be said of the most diverse movements and trends in the history of cinema, "from Italian *Neo-Realism* (by Vittorio de Sica, for example) to the more recent *British Social Realism* (by Mike Leigh, for instance), passing through the intensely raw recordings of the cinematography of Portuguese director Pedro Costa" (p. 241). Referring to these examples, H. Martins points out that "they are not proposals that fit, for example, in ethnographic film, but they are always present in lectures and in visual anthropology courses" (p. 241).

Aesthetic authenticity is also measured by the awareness that cinema acquires and expresses about its own spatial and temporal context – material, historical, ethical –, as well as by its self-awareness as a social instrument that influences the regimes of visibility. In these terms, cinema claims authenticity through its ethical seriousness (for example, through the choice of relevant social themes), and also through the self-denunciation of the audiovisual device (for example, as a mean for propaganda, surveillance, virtualization, etc.). These two dimensions have a certain "documentarist" character, given their proximity to material and socio-cultural reality, but their purpose is not merely epistemological, becoming aesthetic from the moment we position ourselves in the domain of art. It is not a question, for instance, of recording images and sounds for cartographic or statistical purposes, but of proposing an (artistic) metadiscourse aware of the potential of the audiovisual medium for statistical and cartographic uses. In this form of metadiscursivity, the audiovisual work simultaneously points to its own materiality, its historical circumstance and its comprehensive role in shaping the regimes of the visible, in a kind of triple relevance. However, in the field of

art, as we were saying, this relevance or commitment to the real transcends the epistemological scope and aspires to the aesthetic, to a properly aesthetic authenticity. In short, in this perspective, the epistemological and aesthetic planes, although not confused with each other, remain aligned in a kind of mutual resonance, and this complicity constitutes yet another form of aesthetic authenticity. To a certain extent, it is what Christa Blümlinger refers to as a "dual ambition [that]allows us to identify in certain films both a documentary dimension and the effects of figuration producing gestures that are properly filmic" (p. 248).

Let's consider, for example, the complexity of a gesture or the collective behavior of a crowd (examples that Blümlinger discusses in her chapter). How are these manifestations of human behavior portrayed by the cinematic machine over time? On the other hand, how does the audiovisual medium itself dictate or influence the gestures or behavior of the masses in each historical moment, from silent cinema to the so-called post-cinema in the digital age? It is a bidirectional process, a reciprocal interference. On the one hand, as Blümlinger reminds us, "as a leading visual medium and as art, film has accompanied the transformation of social experience throughout the 20th century" (p. 250).On the other hand, continues Blümlinger, based on the thesis of G. Simondon, "the human sensorium has always been connected to technical extensions" (p. 246), which means that the evolution of the "techniques of visibility", which has been largely dictated by the evolution of cinema, profoundly influences experience itself (sensory, social or otherwise). Since its inception, cinema has been, in fact, one of the main influencing agents of the modes of visibility, and its technological evolution interferes in the articulation of concepts such as "body, gesture, machine and image" (p. 248).

The influence of the audiovisual on the modes of human visibility perhaps became even more evident in the current digital or "post-optical" era, characterized by the "convergence of information technologies (computer, audiovisual, telecommunications)" (p. 249), where the production of images "does no longer require a physical lens" (p. 252). In this civilizational and technological context, it is once again up to art – and audiovisual art in particular – to

reflect on the impact of the audiovisual itself on the ways of being and seeing (and seeing oneself) in contemporary societies. Such metadiscursive works – which use the audiovisual to reflect on the very audiovisual dimension, as well as its impact on human self-reflexivity – are described by Blümlinger as "devices for the visualization, indeed the visibility, of the human body in the Foucauldian sense of the term: the point here is not so much to show things seen with the eye, but the system of thought that makes things visible." (pp. 258-259).

Focusing on the analysis of works by contemporary artists such as Manu Luksch, Clemens von Wedemeyer and Julien Prévieux, Blümlinger reflects on the ways in which art can contribute to "an archeology of the techniques of visibility" (p. 256) from a "dimension that is both epistemological and aesthetic" (p. 262). For the artists here referred by Blümlinger, it is important to denounce the "film-machine [as a] matrix that brings out certain uses of the moving image as an instrument of psychosocial control of the human body" (p. 253). And, through this denouncement, cinema (in all its historical scope, from pre-cinema to post-cinema) ends up being reappropriated and acknowledged as a "kind of technique of techniques" (p. 264) of visibility.

All the chapters in this book resulted from an invitation addressed to international researchers in the fields of film studies, aesthetics and anthropology, who were challenged to take part in a comprehensive discussion on the notion of aesthetic authenticity applied to cinema. The resulting contributions, as expected, are eclectic, but at the same time quite consensual in their lines of research, as well as in the pointed conclusions.

Through the set of original texts gathered in this book, the aim is to highlight and measure the weight that the notion of aesthetic authenticity continues to have in the realm of cinema and in the arts in general, influencing the poetic orientations involved in artistic creation, as well as the demands of the audiences, critics, programmers, and other decision-makers concerned with the aesthetic value of cinema.

As the editor of this publication, I would like to thank all the authors for having accepted the invitation and for their important contributions, which are especially relevant at this historical moment in which the notion of authenticity – and not just aesthetic authenticity – seems more compromised than ever.

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Filipe Martins (July 2023)

FROM AUTHENTICITY TO AUTHENTICATION: CINAESTHETICS AND AUTEURSHIP IN THE AGE OF AI

David LaRocca

We have heard much about people being, or claiming to be, "authentic"–about having or disclosing an "authentic self"–and as a measure of cultural criticism in response to such sentiments, Theodor Adorno chiding the "jargon of authenticity."[1] But what would "authenticity" mean with respect to cinema, in a past age or in our own? For instance, as the present forum generously invites, how might such authenticity be expressed or function as a matter of cinema aesthetics–cinaesthetics?[2] Or as some next-gen incarnation of auteur theory? Replies to such questions would do well to take stock of the triangulated network of concepts on offer–namely, cinema, authenticity, and aesthetics–by terminological investigation and also by way of illustrative examples. Yet what is the *motive* behind

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[1]   See Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* (New York: Routledge, 2006 [1964]). See also my "'You Must Change Your Life': *The Americans*, (Concepts and Cults of) Authenticity, and EST," *The Americans and Philosophy*, ed. Robert Arp and Kevin Guilfoy (Chicago: Open Court, 2018), 59-69.

[2]   See Nita Rollins, *Cinaesthetic Wondering: The Beautiful, the Ugly, the Sublime and the Kitsch in Post-Metaphysical Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), who preserves the "a," and those who don't, such as Stefan Sharff, *The Elements of Cinema: Toward a Theory of Cinesthetic Impact* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) and Vivian Sobchack, "What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh," *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 53-84.

such an exercise? One could choose from a few compelling ones, but established discourses about the demise, decay, or death of cinema stand out as do the skeptics who would imagine there is no such thing or attribute as authenticity to seek after (especially when speaking of the individual "self" and by extension the cinema such an alleged self would create). Hardly news, we live at a time when the very definition of cinema is contested–as medium, as artform, as mode of expression–and authenticity may seem very far from its mainstream offerings, such as the computer-generated frenzies of various Marvel, DC, and Disney dispensations, and now the onrushing emergence of generative artificial intelligence and its onslaught of deepfakes. In many cases, and as part of the proximate background that haunts these proceedings, there lurk suggestions that cinema, to some extent, has become televisual–and/or that television has become more cinematic.[3] What then, we ask anew, of cinematic authenticity? Or more generally, "*aesthetic* authenticity," which can seem even further from daily concerns and popular entertainments than cinema itself? And yet the powerful syntagma suggests we should want to make sense of it, as if coming to clarity about such a notion would be illuminating for what we take to be a gift of cinema itself, including, with some measure of sanguinity, its future.

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As our thoughtful hosts have noted, authenticity may be aligned with species of realism, including naïve versions. In a word, what is authentic is real, or "comes off" as realistic. Sometimes we hear of "gritty realism"–implying, perhaps, that there's a spectrum from "gritty" to "refined." Finding examples of extremes and the increments in between poses an amusing challenge. Are diegetic locations enough to make the call: where the midtown grime of *Uncut Gems* (2019, dir. Josh and Benny Safdie) marks it as gritty, while the lustrous accommodations of *The White Lotus* (2021-23, creator Mike White) make it refined? High-end hotels can't hide the moral dubiousness, double standards, and ethical breaches that

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[3]   See David LaRocca and Sandra Laugier, "The Fact and Fiction of Television: Stanley Cavell and the Terms of Television Philosophy," *Television with Stanley Cavell in Mind*, ed. David LaRocca and Sandra Laugier (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2023), 1-27.

make the resplendently-appointed scenes as "gritty" as some big city, backstreets, contraband thriller; those rarefied island getaways appear just as compromised as the sordid Manhattan stockroom trades, the five-star betrayals just as tawdry. *Cinematic* realism (or cinematic *realism*), then, may be a mismatch for a quick or satisfying definition of authenticity because the context of the diegetic space may shift the very conditions for what counts as realism, as realistic. And when one adds the passage of time, what appears realistic to one generation may seem campy or pantomime to another. The spell of (cinematic or televisual) "realism" is unpredictable in its potency and duration.

If we turn to ask about formalism, especially in experimental and avant-garde cinematic traditions, its celebrated standard bearers may seem very far from "realistic"–and yet may still derive from an artist's "authentic" vision. Indeed, it could be a filmmaker's uncompromising deployment of the medium–e.g., by way of structural techniques–that places the result beyond the appreciation of most moviegoers. Hollis Frampton's *Lemon* (1969) is nothing but an encounter with its eponymous fruit, and yet what film student is not (at first and perhaps, for most, for a long time after) confounded by the concentrated, durational portrait? Even with a studied long-take, one doesn't rush to declare the film a "realistic" encounter with a lemon. A filmmaker may cultivate certain styles that become recognizable such that in time we affiliate formal techniques with a given artist; such a habit, though, may make authenticity the enemy of innovation. When a celebrated auteur deviates from styles for which the filmmaker is well-known and perhaps highly esteemed, the artist may be derided. Formalism, then, resists a quick determination of authenticity, or should, since we may miss the surprises that await when an auteur moves on from signature traits and repetitions that made fame possible in the first place.

Then there is truth as it finds its associations with realism, formalism, and perhaps especially authenticity. As the convenors of this conversation note, "there are less naïve realisms that accept the inevitability of performance and artifice, even though, at the same time, they also seek to preserve, or even intensify, some form of truth or authenticity." The inclusive disjunction at the end–truth or

authenticity–underwrites an appreciation of their synonymity; and yet, after highlighting Werner Herzog's cinema as an exemplar of this type of realism, we note quotation marks in another claim soliciting our reflection: "all art seeks some kind of authenticity or 'truth.'" Suddenly, and not long after we had handy equivalents, truth has become "truth." The apparent debasement–an effect of ironizing, perhaps, or the result of a prevailing skepticism–can be explained, in part, by reference to the just invoked Herzog, who confides:

> I have, with every one of my films, attempted to move beyond facts and illuminate the audience with ecstatic truth. Facts might have normative power, but they don't constitute truth. Facts don't illuminate. Only truth illuminates. By making a clear distinction between "fact" and "truth," I penetrate a deeper stratum that most films don't even know exists. The truth inherent in cinema can be discovered only by not being bureaucratically, politically, and mathematically correct. In other words, I play with the facts as we know them. Through imagination and fabrication, I become more truthful than the bureaucrats.[4]

Some filmmakers and literary theorists might simply ask in reply: "why not call it *fiction*, then, since fiction is the art of 'moving beyond facts?'" But that wouldn't be as much fun. So we allow Herzog to prank us and play along with the quotation marks around "truth" as they find their bearings–and semiotic import. If Herzog is obscuring his rightful claim to "fiction" (or fictionalizing) he is, let us say more

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4   Werner Herzog, *A Guide for the Perplexed, Conversations with Paul Cronin* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2014), 288-89. See also my "I Am What My Films Are: Listening to Herzog's Ecstatic, Essayistic Pronouncements," *The Philosophy of Werner Herzog*, ed. Christopher Turner and M. Blake Wilson (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020); "The Autobiographical Sublime: Achieving Herzog's Persona at the Intersection of the Home Movie, Self-Citation, and Autofiction," *Estetica: Studi e Ricerche*, vol. X (January-June 2020), 79-98; "Hunger in the Heart of Nature: Werner Herzog's Anti-Sentimental Dispatches from the American Wilderness (Reflections on *Grizzly Man*)," *Dark Nature: Anti-Pastoral Essays in American Literature and Culture*, ed. Richard J. Schneider (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), 227-40; and "'Profoundly Unreconciled to Nature': Ecstatic Truth and the Humanistic Sublime in Werner Herzog's War Films," *The Philosophy of War Films*, ed. David LaRocca (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 437-82.

genuinely, scrambling the customary or inherited conversation about authenticity; he is, if with a wink, undertaking a revaluing of values. The Nietzschean uptake is poignant, since it was Nietzsche, another beloved provocateur, who gave us "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense"–and elsewhere gestated a crucial credo of contemporary authenticity talk in his commendation-cum-admonition to "become the person you are."[5] Note, in what follows, how Nietzsche drops the quotation marks around "truth," or never had them.

> [Humans] are deeply immersed in illusions and in dream images; their eyes merely glide over the surface of things and see "forms." Their senses nowhere lead to truth; on the contrary, they are content to receive stimuli and, as it were, to engage in a groping game on the back of things.[6]

Nietzsche's attention to "dream images" makes him seem positively Herzogian *avant la lettre*. And the scene takes us back even further to the protocinematic quality of Plato's cave, such as it depicts in striking, uncanny clarity the first principles of cinematic projection, illusion-making, and, for Plato at least (and allegorically speaking), confirmation of the human *distance* from truth. The flickering light of the projection flame, though made of the same substance as the sun, fails to provide adequate illumination for the perception of truth. In Plato's allegory, after all, we were (merely) present to the dance of shadows. Nietzsche appears to metabolize the Platonic heritage in his line of questions made twenty-three centuries after the fact: "where in the world could the drive for truth have come from?"[7] Nietzsche descries a "truth drive" in humans, something that, ironically, gives

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[5]   Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), sec. 270; see also sec. 335, where he writes, emphasis retained: "We, however, *want to become those we are*–human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves." Such a description could function as high-ranking subclause in an imagined dictionary entry for authenticity.

[6]   Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth*, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979), 80.

[7]   *Ibid.*

rise to a passion for dissimulation.[8] Now the quotation marks are replaced or rather, put in place:

> *[T]hat* which shall count as "truth" from now on is established. That is to say, a uniformly valid and binding designation is invented for things, and this legislation of language likewise establishes the first laws of truth. For the contrast between truth and lie arises here for the first time. The liar is a person who uses the valid designations, the words, in order to make something which is unreal appear to be real. [...] He misuses fixed conventions by means of arbitrary substitutions or even reversals of names.[9]

Again the cinematic affiliations declare themselves as we make a wider consideration of the whole fateful business of moving images (and accompanying sounds). Are they not all–from sincere documentary footage to the digital-effects blizzard of CGI-laden fantasy–aimed at making the "unreal appear to be real"? Film of whatever strip(e), or arriving with whatever intention, is under Nietzschean analysis, fundamentally a matter of proxies. We do not look *through* a window into the world that documentary filmmakers inhabit, but rather *at* a screen upon which the reflected and refracted findings of the filmmaker are presented (according to the structures and effects of filmstock, digital sensor, lens type, color grading, *syuzhet*, voiceover, score, computational software, and more).

Moreover, our artful philologist points out the emergent habits of invention as they pertain to the "legislation of language." Alas, another medium of surrogacy. We do not behold the object so much as handle its reality by means of names and the art of naming ("We separate things according to gender, designating the tree as masculine and the plant as feminine. What arbitrary assignments! How far this oversteps canons of certainty!"[10]). Once something has been named, we can easily–with but a typographical flourish–invert or reverse its definition: in one stroke,

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8   Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth*, 80-81.

9   *Ibid.*, 81.

10 *Ibid.*, 82.

truth becomes "truth." Metaphors become the currency of human perception and human knowledge: "Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins."[11] Using metaphors to describe metaphors–a bit of bold Nietzschean metaphilosophy to exhibit how the reversals and reflexivity in our thinking about any such thing (or attribute) as authenticity, realism, formalism, and truth are compromised by our embodied perceptual apparatuses, our thoughts as mediated by language and fleshy circuits, and perhaps most emphatically, our (perverse) *pleasure* in being deceived. For if we have a "truth drive," we sublimate it in our fascinated, fastidious movie watching–unreal realms that comfort and illuminate by dissimulation. Cinema has lost its embossing, hence our deliriously, generously applied willing suspension of disbelief. We love to be lied to; in this scheme, it's how we fathom truth. No quotation marks needed.

What began as an acknowledgment of the polysemy of authenticity now seems tied to a forced admission that it will remain a term of art designed and implemented to suit our disparate purposes. In today's parlance, authenticity is a buzz word–that is, a word with a charge (and occasionally a sting) but also without any fixed, formal, or agreed upon definition. The word makes an impact–we feel its power when applied–but also cannot account for what it entails. We have arrived at a picture of our world, or our circumstances within it: the material realm ruled by time and space; our image-making tools; our languages; and the human perceptual states–somatic, cognitive–that contend with the first three categories.

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The foregoing observations are retrospective, they seek to gain clarity on some contours of how our relationship to authenticity has been expressed in cinema and other arts. Yet they appear to occupy a grave interstitial space–one that lurches jarringly into a new reality beyond

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[11]   *Ibid.*, 84.

our own making and already, but perhaps irretrievably, beyond our comprehension. I speak of the dawning age of generative artificial intelligence (henceforth AI). In this new future-as-now-present, neural networks are poised to transform (are already transforming) the felt landscape of discernable words, sounds, and images (both still and moving, textual and auditory). The very adjective–"artificial"–being a common antonym of "authentic," and so a perspicuous first and foreboding sign that human life with "learning machines" will be vexed, antagonistic. "Authentic intelligence" is human, even if not always correct, smart, or wise.

We appear to have arrived at an historical position (correctly) prophesied by Lev Manovich, when he wrote–in the not too distant beyond of 1995:

> From the perspective of a future historian of visual culture, the differences between classical Hollywood films, European art films and avant-garde films (apart from abstract ones) may appear less significant than this common feature: that they relied on lens-based recordings of reality.[12]

There's that vaunted "reality" again–with Manovich sounding much like Andrei Tarkovsky, when the Russian formalist muses about how film operates by "using the images of reality itself."[13] But let's not lose track of Manovich's more salient and durable augury: we, as Manovich's future historians, can ratify his guess and in the process remove those qualifying parentheses, and for good measure, add a bunch more visual culture to the mix. Namely, that while the last nearly three decades since Manovich first published "What is Digital Cinema?" has been spent parsing differences between the "lens-based," or deciphering the nuances of medium specificity,[14] the

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[12]   Lev Manovich, "What is Digital Cinema?" (1995), n.p., manovich.net/index.php/projects/what-is-digital-cinema.

[13]   Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, trans. Kitty Hunger-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 93.

[14]   See Stephen Mulhall, "What a Genre of Film Might Be: Medium, Myth, and Morality," *The Thought of Stanley and Cinema: Turning Anew to the Ontology of Film a Half-Century after* The World Viewed, ed. David LaRocca (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 88-104.

current moment of AI's bold expressions–and promised (hostile?) takeover–suggest that even the deep digital experiments (CGI, VFX, related forms of animation, etc.) that have been so emphatically set in opposition to "lens-based" art (including art films, avant-garde works, etc.) will now seem to occupy a single, until yesterday, unnecessary categorical nomination: human-generated.

Though we aren't too early in the process to ask an essay prompt such as "What is AI Cinema?," we may be too soon for a satisfying answer. Yet, as the season would have it, ChatGPT has a ready reply:

> AI cinema, also known as "AI-generated films" or "AI-assisted filmmaking," refers to the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in various aspects of the filmmaking process, such as scriptwriting, character development, visual effects, and even the creation of entire scenes.
>
> AI cinema involves the use of machine learning algorithms, natural language processing, computer vision, and other advanced technologies to automate certain tasks and assist filmmakers in bringing their vision to life. For example, AI algorithms can analyze vast amounts of data to identify patterns and generate scripts, while machine learning can be used to improve the realism and quality of computer-generated visual effects.
>
> While AI cinema is still in its early stages, there have already been a few notable examples of AI-generated films, including *Zone Out*, a short film created entirely by AI and *Sunspring*, a sci-fi short film written by an AI algorithm named Benjamin.[15]

While we're told this passage is "made by AI," the whole affair is still laced with traces of human contribution (as it must be); human sources inform the source code–including the promise, germane to this topic, to "improve the realism." Time will tell. Question is: when will AI no longer need our input–and yet deliver to us output we prefer to our own (authentic?) efforts? Where Manovich wrote, in 1995, at a cleave point between an analog/digital binary, we are–while retaining this

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[15] ChatGPT prompt reply received on March 28, 2023.

distinction, now very well integrated into our reception of popular and experimental art–thrust into yet another bifurcation: the AI/human split. And while AI and its promoters, programmers, and prognosticators would regard such a reply as some form of evidence that AI is now a helpmeet to human expression, we might dwell on the fact that these lines (above) are, in essence, plagiarized–hoovered up from the bowels of the large language model and reconstituted for an unwitting (human) audience. But again, the point to underline now is not just the LLM's methodological slight-of-hand, but our nervous response to its phantasmic, if not quite fantastic, results.

Consequently, our thinking about authenticity takes on new valences of signification. Along some quick historical narrative of the concept, we travel from Rousseau's sensibility for "authenticity" (and hence its inverse, inauthenticity) to Heidegger's take on the "authentic Self"[16] to Adorno's counterprogramming that claims such talk as not just *mere* "jargon," but revealing a "mendacity" in its "vulgar" renderings (thereby proving false, misleading, damaging–slipping from "culture" to "cult"[17]), and at last, emerging in our present predicament in which few have a command of the concept, and fewer still have strident commitments to a single meaning of the term. We're not so much in an age of post-authenticity as one whose parameters and definitions change continuously to suit new conditions. Let me suggest that aside from an Adorno-inspired denigration of the word (and its inherited, often contradictory commitments), we might temper our thinking about (and ongoing obsession with) authenticity by means of a spelling change that invites and inaugurates a conceptual shift. From authenticity to authentication.

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[16]   In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes: "The Self of everyday Dasein is the *they-self*, which we distinguish from the *authentic Self*–that is, from the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way [eigens ergriffenen]" (sec. 129). In the same paragraph, Heidegger refers to "authentic Being," noting *eigentlich* translated here as "authentic," while recalling its affiliation with true, original, real, actual–and literal. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 167; italics in original.

[17]   Adorno, *The Jargon aof Authenticity*, xxi, 5.

"Authenticated cinema" would be "AI-free"–human-created, even if by digital means. The desire, or demand, for such authentication might stem from an anxiety about taking ownership or authorship of content. For instance, if an AI-generated film was offensive to human mores or laws, we would want to know who, or more accurately what, created it. Still more, we may not be entertained or impressed by AI cinema in terms of its aesthetics or its narrative concoctions; it may get us wrong as an audience–offend us, disturb us by its convoluted interpretations of the extended back catalog of culture that we fed into its large language models. In the wake of a recent film release, *Ghosted* (2023, dir. Dexter Fletcher), starring Chris Evans and Ana de Armas, a headline attests to as much: "It Feels Like ChatGPT Wrote It."[18] This is an insult . . . until it isn't. Generative AI learns as the model expands, as recombinations are refined, and as our responses to the serial results offer incremental clues and additional enrichment. With better prompts, we are told to expect better pictures. Armas' turn as the seductive hallucination, Joi, in *Blade Runner 2049* (2017, dir. Denis Villeneuve), anticipates this truth.

Relatedly, and by extension, as we've grown used to CAPTCHA tests–that "prove" the interface has at least one human agent, we are improving the model; as Jaron Lanier has pointed out with his proposal for "data dignity," humans provide free labor for tech companies, whose models and bottom lines benefit from our (human) responses to such challenges.[19] Meanwhile, for security–as well as aesthetic–purposes, we may come to value a similar sort of authentication for movies. Or, speaking analogically, the authentication would function like a declaration of difference between organically grown and a genetically-modified organism (GMO). Updating Manovich's schema, then, a near-future moviegoer will not ask to watch a film shot on celluloid using glass lenses; created in 3D; with or without CGI; in a neorealist or structuralist or screwball tradition, but simply one that is

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[18] *The News*, April 24, 2023. thenews.com.pk/latest/1063558-ghosted-it-feels-like-chatgpt-wrote-it.

[19] Jaron Lanier and E. Glen Weyl, "A Blueprint for a Better Digital Society," *Harvard Business Review*, September 26, 2018, hbr.org.

human-generated versus AI-generated. For instance, Kelly Reichardt's avoidance of VFX and her dedication to 16mm may make her future films pre-authorized–call them *auteurized*; against prevailing trends, a commitment to employ a certain set of non-AI tools will set one's work apart.[20] Despite such rarefied aesthetic commitments (to what may come into focus as "authentic human creation"), we can expect that a new category will start occupying our streaming feeds (viz., AI-generated content, or synthetic media), that is, until such generation becomes the dominant mode and human-generated becomes a single category that contains all of cinema and television history up to that point (again, the updated legacy of Manovich's late twentieth-century prediction). The human user may be increasingly desirous of front-end knowledge of a work's provenance; of course, worryingly, it will likely be AI itself that provides such authentication. Aside from trusting AI's capacity to distinguish human-generated from AI-generated (or even AI-*assisted*), the human user–or viewer of motion pictures–may find the experience, or encounter, depends (morally, aesthetically, epistemologically, ontologically) on who or what created it.

Then again, the notion of a categorial purity–human-only or AI-only–seems likely to diminish as time elapses. Notice that even in this essay, the lines of which do not contain AI assistance, I cited–and commented on–a passage from ChatGPT. The prose, while not profound, or stylistically distinguished, is nevertheless sufficiently informative to be helpful. And though the AI reply to my prompt is set off in a display quotation, there is a nascent paranoia whispering that I cannot be certain that I've not been affected by its presentation–say, the logic of its account–in my effort to compose the remarks that surround it. In short, though I've clearly marked out the AI contribution here (i.e., given ChatGPT credit for it), the surrounding text–my writing, or is it now or increasingly "my" writing, or a de facto collaborative affair?–may owe enough, even if a small amount, to an AI response that the essay is, or should

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[20]   See my "Contemplating the Sounds of Contemplative Cinema: Stanley Cavell and Kelly Reichardt," *Movies with Stanley Cavell in Mind*, ed. David LaRocca (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021), 274-318.

be in some future iteration, designated (by an AI authenticator) as "AI-assisted." Though the lifeblood of academic scholarship involves familiarity with–indeed, often dependency on–references to and citations from work by other authors (as I have here invoked and quoted Adorno, Heidegger, Herzog, Manovich, Nietzsche, et al.), with footnotes attesting to my debts, and so on, we don't often consider the *hybridity* of the result as problematic; we don't think of such work as "collaborative" even in its pre-AI cast or character. And yet, the authorless, disembodied LLM trading under the vapid moniker ChatGPT has, to my surprise and consternation, become part of my attempt to think things out on this occasion, and, as this vertiginous moment suggests, increasingly so. After Garrett Stewart, call this a *transmedial* outcome, including the imposition of a next state or status for art: conceptualism 3.0.[21] We haven't achieved a purported "post-medium condition" after all, but a scenario of splices and in-betweens.

Binaries and hybridities: the new tandem for our deliberation about the human relationship with artificial intelligence. We watch in real time as chatbots "write like" Jane Austen and Shakespeare: does the ever-evolving, never-static LLM's predictive approach to literary patrimony count as creativity or cribbing?[22] And what if they now amount to the same thing? The history of copyright controversies in music can seem quaint when put beside the aggressive ingestion/digestion of intellectual property by large language models. The perennial question in such historically-significant, precedent-setting legal cases is "whether those musical elements [. . .]–the chords, as well as the syncopated rhythmic pattern in which they were played" are "original and distinctive enough that their reappearance [. . .] is infringement, or just the recycling of common musical features."[23] But when any artist can adopt–re-skin or re-voice, as it were–the

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[21] Garrett Stewart, *Transmedium: Conceptualism 2.0 and the New Art Object* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

[22] Aatish Bhatia, "Watch an AI Learn to Write by Reading Nothing but [fill in the blank]," *The New York Times*, April 27, 2023, nytimes.com.

[23] Ben Sisario, "Stolen or Original? Hear Songs from Seven Landmark Copyright Cases," *The New York Times*, April 27, 2023, nytimes.com.

sonic qualities of another artist, putting the human identity *in the service of* the AI output, the very notion of authentic music, or in the related case, literature, become matters of judgment for the masses.[24] And not just whether a person can "tell apart" authentic Austen from ersatz Austen, but whether such a person *cares* about the difference. Sure, an Austen scholar may stake a hard-won reputation on the matter, but for most who welcome *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, generative AI versions of Austen will seem like the ultimate–and welcome–expression of fan fiction: endless "new" "Austen" into the distant horizon. Inverting Plato, *simulation* will be the preferred standard.

Dispatches from the front lines of the university classroom suggest not only a contest between human and non-human but between generations–along with the prevailing ideas and values that each cohort possesses or presumes. When writing essays, what, in effect, are the ethics of AI collaboration? Is it a pedagogical forum, an experimental space, or a laboratory for plagiarism? All three? The internet-based plagiarism detection service, Turnitin, now includes a mandatory add-on for assessing the quantity of content attributed to AI (e.g., by way of a numerical percentage); this procedure amounts to chatbots policing chatbots–AI turned on itself. "But what do any of those numbers really mean?" asks Ian Bogost. "Surprisingly–outrageously–it's very hard to say for sure."[25] They mean, to some degree, that a focus on quantity obscures attention to quality–or qualities: how much did AI generate compared with how well it did. A collaborationist model would explore the virtues of the prose style, rhetorical design, emergent insights, and the like. A writer/student/researcher would treat the chatbot like a client, asking it questions–"prompting" it in AI argot. In this kind of relationship, the human wouldn't get "credit" (e.g., in the academic or intellectual sense) for the AI output, but would be placed–as an analyst–to adjudicate the offerings, the findings. Long-held tropes of the human

24   Joe Coscarelli, "An AI Hit of Fake Drake and The Weeknd Rattles the Music World," *The New York Times*, April 19, 2023, nytimes.com.

25   Ian Bogost, "The First Year of AI College Ends in Ruin," *The Atlantic*, May 16, 2023, theatlantic.com.

(mind) as the "source" or "origin" of an idea would be replaced with (human) attention to assessments of downstream results generated by AI. Instead, as this first phase of classroom encounter illustrates, some parties are intent on *separating* human from non-human and judging the work accordingly (e.g., either by disparaging the value of the AI content or by denying a human claim to it). And the terms of our discussion here show up there: as Bogost notes, if a student "borrows a bit too much computer-generated language, Turnitin might still flag his work for being inauthentic." The imagery of "borrowing," then, as opposed to blending; and "authenticity" is designated–reaffirmed–as a human-only attribute.

For the time being, we're taking for granted that the many LLMs we're discussing, and their audiovisual correlates, are disembodied. Yet given how centrally *embodiment* is for a human understanding of authenticity–including its many philosophical uptakes, from the Stoics to Sartre–we may need to revise the terms and conditions. Despite acknowledging ChatGPT's advance in content (re)formation–or the "recycling" just noted–we might acknowledge an emerging bifurcation between information-that's-good-enough-to-be-useful-and/or-pleasurable (e.g., deepfakes as educative or entertaining) and intelligence-of-a-sort-that-can-be-profound-to-humans. Perhaps we, as a species, will soon enough (have to) decide that the kind of intelligence we care about most must (also) be embodied–derive from bodies. In popular press accounts, by contrast, there seems much more preoccupation with whether AI is, or will become, "conscious," than on the nature of consciousness unmoored from a fleshy, organic meat suit–i.e., the way the former is *conditioned* upon the latter.[26] Yes, AI models can trick us with freshly-minted Austen novels and fake Drake and Kanye songs, but the "creators" of these entities (morsels that we may enjoy–and even lend our attention and criticism to) were not the productive proceeds of three-dimensional human bodies that interpret the world *through the senses* (understood as an inseparable

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[26] See Erwin Schrödinger, "The Physical Basis of Consciousness," in *What is Life? with Mind and Matter and Autobiographical Sketches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [2018] 1958) 93-102.

blend of emotions, thoughts, and the full spectrum of phenomena that fall under the reality of embodied consciousness). Humans can enjoy, admire, even love the simulated "output" of neural networks without dissolving the division between human-created and AI-generated. Despite the speed, facility, and appealing results of their combinatorial and computational yields, given that AI models draw entirely from human offerings, the very notion of "*authentic* artificial intelligence" should be an oxymoron. Would embodied AI change that?

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In the ongoing inheritance of what amounts to a crisis of the documentary sound/image index, we appear blown back ceaselessly to a confrontation with the *evidentiary* nature of what we see and hear.[27] An earlier era of visual and media criticism might dwell on the way photography distorts what is otherwise experienced by

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[27] For more on related matters, see my "A Photograph as Evidence of Itself: Representation, Reflexivity, and Tautology in Light-Based Art," *Social Research*, vol. 89, no 4 (Winter 2022), 915-45; "From Lectiocentrism to Gramophonology: Listening to Cinema and Writing Sound Criticism," *The Geschlecht Complex: Addressing Untranslatable Aspects of Gender, Genre, and Ontology*, ed. Oscar Jansson and David LaRocca (New York: Bloomsbury, 2022), 201-67; "Memory Translation: Rithy Panh's Provocations to the Primacy and Virtues of the Documentary Sound/Image Index," in *Everything Has a Soul: The Cinema of Rithy Panh*, eds. Leslie Barnes and Joseph Mai (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 188–201; "Object Lessons: What Cyanotypes Teach Us About Digital Media," in *Photography's Materialities: Transatlantic Photographic Practices over the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Geoff Bender and Rasmus S. Simonsen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2021), 209–35; "Virtual Round Table: An Experiment," *Cinema: The Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image*, vol. 12, Images of the Real: Philosophy and Documentary Film (2021), 175–215; and "On the Aesthetics of Amateur Filmmaking in Narrative Cinema: Negotiating Home Movies after *Adam's Rib*," *The Thought of Stanley Cavell and Cinema*, ed. David LaRocca (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 245-90; "Shooting for the Truth: Amateur Documentary Filmmaking, Affective Optics, and the Ethical Impulse," *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities*, vol. 26, nos. 2 and 3 (Winter/Spring/Summer 2017), 46–60; "A Reality Rescinded: The Transformative Effects of Fraud in *I'm Still Here*," *The Philosophy of Documentary Film*, ed. David LaRocca (Lanham: Lexington Books of Rowman & Littlefield Press, 2017), 537-76; and "Unauthorized Autobiography: Truth and Fact in *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*," *The Philosophy of Charlie Kaufman*, ed. David LaRocca (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 89-108.

human viewers (e.g., among many disparate points, that humans have peripheral vision, while the photo frame does not). On this last point, there is a way of regarding the photo frame as "artificial" in so far as it draws a sharp perimeter around a segment of space (and time) and re-presents it to us. Yet even with this limited case study, what happens when the *content* of that already delineated or truncated portion of reality is said to be a fraud? The authenticity of the image would decidedly shift. Outside of a criminal circumstance, we may simply say that it went from being evidence (of a particular sort) to being art; it may remain of interest, but for aesthetic or sentimental or some other reasons.

Films and television serials are beginning to dramatize our emerging predicament vis-à-vis the inception of fake or falsified evidence by AI means. *Black Mirror* (2011-) takes up the mantle of what could be called near-term science fiction–visions of the future that, while excessive or extreme, were nevertheless plausible given certain technological trends. For the most part, these visions are dystopian in outlook and outcome. Now enters *The Capture* (2019-), from show creator Ben Chanan, which draws the future-fantastic into the everyday of police procedure and the operation of clandestine services. Film/video/TV are collapsed and made interactive in this television series about the assemblage, emplacement, and interpretation of screened content. The show provides a cross-sectional update to many of the core categories we garnered from Garrett Stewart's still-vital *Closed Circuits: Screening Narrative Surveillance* (2015), where he studies and theorizes the relationship between "film viewing" and "motivated surveillance"–a difference without a distinction, or a difference that makes all the difference?[28] In *The Capture*, we are given screens galore and a world of people obsessed with the varying veracity or duplicity of what they see (and hear), what Stewart had earlier anointed as a cinematic subgenre: surveillancinema. The screen-within-a-screen[29]

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[28]   Garrett Stewart, *Closed Circuits: Screening Narrative Surveillance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), ix.

[29]   See also my "When TV is on TV: Metatelevision and the Art of Watching TV with the Royal Family in *The Crown*," in *Television with Stanley Cavell in Mind*, ed. David LaRocca and Sandra Laugier (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2023), 85-98.

and the narrative-within-a-narrative have been prominent parts of our film and television landscape for decades: TV sets were a familiar presence in the diegesis of shows from the 1950s onwards; handheld film cameras, such as 8mm, gained new prominence after Zupruder and the adoption of home movies as a hobby and genre-unto-itself; later, cumbersome VHS camcorders took over before MiniDV and the rest. And the media *en abyme* has only deepened as formats and modes have expanded (among them GoPro footage, CCTV recordings, private surveillance mechanisms, iPhone video, drone perspectives, and more). We live, and increasingly so, not just in an environment that surveils us via digital feeds and drone footage–in what Stewart stylized as the technopticon–but also by way of fingerprints and keystrokes, electronic keys and biometrics.

So with *The Capture*, a show about a show. Or a show in search of understanding the content of what it shows its characters and in turn, its viewers. Are we more or less discerning than the detectives? To what extent is the titular "capture," in fact, a misdirect from a more accurate account of "generated"? Answers, of course, are forthcoming for metacinematic enthusiasts, since audiovisual *matryoshka* can be destabilizing as well as productively agitating. Yet, the usual "layering" or "nesting" familiar to the mode is complicated by the erasure of validity at certain points of expression. Though we've been coached to impose a "willing suspension of disbelief" in our habits of watching fiction (a sentiment invoked above), we are now–with *The Capture* and the synthetic media it alludes to–asked to, well, *disbelieve*. As metacinematic distanciantion often does, this latest twist on the *Verfremdungseffekt* erodes our immersion in the show itself. Watching it for the first time, we don't know whether what we see is "real" or "fake," that is, live footage or pre-recorded/augmented video.

A scene from *The Capture* as case study: a person is being detained by anonymous henchmen, his fingers splayed in preparation for cruel amputation via standard issue bolt cutters. Gruesome stuff. And we see it. First the thumb lobbed off, blood spilling freely on the table. The leader of the assay group, who gave the order to amputate, enters a control center and a person behind a screen says to him, with pride: "I thought it was some of our finest work" (s1:e3;

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00:13:08). In our well-trained mode as watchers of counterterrorism spy thrillers, we take him at first to mean torture–that is, some of our finest *torture* work. But we know what kind of show we're watching by now, three episodes in, so we're invited to consider a double-entendre–something until now unfamiliar to the genre. Oh, he means this is some of their finest *deepfake* work. And so it is that the detained person was unharmed, all digits (!) still attached, not a scratch or a spot of blood spilled. The digital (alternate) reality was a bit of theatre–one wants to say, with all etymological punning front and center, *legerdemain*–meant to coax a secret from an unwilling onlooker, Shaun Emery (Callum Turner). But of course, this is a parable of our situation as viewers–and not a favorable one, since it makes *us* also into unwilling onlookers. In a typical drama, we suffer the injuries on screen to understand the real pain and genuine motivation of characters (such as they exist in filmed *fictions*); this is how we assess whether justice has been served. But *The Capture* presents an unwelcome option: that we see the violence, the bloodshed, the pain suffered . . . and then it's all taken away. Nothing of the sort happened. And yet, we, the viewers, are still processing the (*real*) *effects* of unreal scenes (seens). The more fake-outs we have to hold in memory, the less sure we are about what has actually happened and what is the mere efflorescence of circuit boards and pixel arrays.

Deepfakes can be deployed for any number of reasons: to mobilize markets, to deceive as a measure of power allocation, and as in *The Capture*, as an aid to detention. That is, the familiar trope of a "bad cop" dropping a bag of cocaine in a pocket (i.e., planting evidence) is replaced with a desktop jockey manipulating video content to show what would be advantageous to interested parties: to detain a suspected (or actual) terrorist despite no found evidence (the path of the clandestine operations); and to use the technology to expose its corrosion of the presumed innocent/right-to-a-fair-trial fealty of liberal democracy (the path of activists challenging the opposing *modus operandi*). Both paths are in tension in *The Capture*, where the activity of creating video footage that doesn't align with historical reality is called "correction"–a decidedly ironic, even cynical name, since, of course, "correction" actively creates *incorrect* "capture." It is

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the latest form of falsifying evidence. Still more, the capture/correction dyad (as in "we captured the criminal and now will send him away for correction") is rendered a relic of a bygone, cause-and-effect carceral era. Similarly, we are not speaking any longer of the (cinematic) "capture" long-familiar to that made by the documentary camera, but from this new, *Black Mirror*-esque-in-our-own-time, world-creating generation by way of AI. A "correction" is made to historical reality so that it appears to offer an alternate reality. As *The Capture* dramatizes, when an alternate reality–a *fake* reality–may expose the troubling, perhaps necessary, logic of correction, what it purports to show must be made true (in a now decommissioned phrase) "after the fact." No such facts are on offer, only fictions treated as facts.

The Capture displays its writers' grasp of historical precedents with its clever referencing of Joseph Jastrow's duck-rabbit (familiar to readers of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*) and its invocation of the early-twentieth-century composite of Ulysses S. Grant atop a horse, before a field of Confederate prisoners-of-war. "General Grant at City Point" (c. 1902) is a photograph of an event that never happened. The archaic montage of three photo-chemical originals creates a reality that never was, a Frankenstein assembled from, as it were, portions of (photographic) reality. But three real images do not make a single "more real" image, but rather defeat the reality credentials of the attempt at a singular, hybridized representation. A decade ago, when Photoshop was the celebrated default software for a new standard of visual fakes, we saw elaborate, high-profile investigations such as *Faking It: Manipulated Photography Before Photoshop* mounted at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The ersatz "General Grant at City Point" was exposed among the early exemplars of such trickery. Along this continuum–from the early twentieth century to the present moment–the criterion for success has remained the same, despite radical transformations in technology, namely, that the image needed to be *just* cleverer than the viewer. Our contemporary predicament, defined as it is by the rise of AI machines, promises to change that: humans, unable to discern the difference between real and fake, will increasingly rely on AI itself to police AI chicanery.

Speaking of police, *The Capture*'s multi-angle interrogation gives weight to "both sides"–those trying to stop crime and those trying to retain civil liberties. But the technology can seem to be doing its own thing, progressing on its own terms at a distance from inherited, often antique, moral models and ethical protocols. Frank Napier (Ron Perlman), an American CIA agent in league with his British counterparts, narrates to Shaun that what he's been seeing–that is, what *we've* been seeing in *The Capture*–is still pretty primitive stuff, despite its capacity to convince people and thus disrupt the nature of a shared reality.

> Right now, Shaun, I believe we are standing at the precipice of something truly remarkable. The correction method that you have experienced so far, [*scoffs*], standard edition. But if you could see what we are working on now, you wouldn't believe your eyes. [*Hands over a tablet device with surveillance footage of Shaun taken from multiple angles.*] Our most advanced techniques involve some more time and require a greater quantity of source material. The results: 100% photo real manipulation. No face-mapping, no actors. Just sheer, unbridled imagination. Those recordings you're holding in your hand now, they're pure. Untouched, if you will. But if my guys decided to get creative? [*exhales dramatically*] They can go in any direction they want. I'm talking about images that'll haunt you for the rest of your life–and for the lives of your family (s1:e6; 00:40:01).

In another scene, Danny Hart (Ben Miles), trying to lure Rachel Carey (Holliday Grainger) to join the correction force, narrates his syllogism: "CCTV video evidence. Admissible, popular with juries, highly effective." She leans toward him, her emphasis in place: "Because, we *believe* it." Hart, undaunted, continues: "Correction turns intelligence into evidence. And keeps extremists off the street." Rachel intuitively draws from centuries of philosophical inquiry that has seeped into the wider culture, including utilitarian calculus: "The ends justify the means. The torturer's defense." Hart doesn't have a reply, or rather, appears to acknowledge the veracity of her analysis through his

silence. With the advent of generative AI media, the moral calculus of authenticity–familiar from Greek and Roman antiquity through the Romantics and even into the modern period–is decidedly scrambled. Gemma Garland (Lia Williams) glosses her colleague's grammar: "Correction isn't false evidence, it's the truth re-enacted." A trade is underway, then, in which the authentic is replaced by the synthetic. And when the synthetic is authenticated–made real or true by fiat, by "sheer, unbridled imagination"–the (cynical) cycle is complete.

In the dawning age of generative AI video, there is a chance that future films and television serials will become convoluted, silly even (are already so?).[30] Not because they aren't well-produced, incisively written, or compelling acted–*The Capture* possesses all three of these qualities. And yet, the new technology turned to the service of drama means no more *Endeavour* (2012-23, ITV), *Sherlock* (2010-17, BBC), or *C. B. Strike* (2017-, BBC), where in a pre-AI environment a detective's intellection prevails, in which the discernment of empirical facts is the measure of the show's plot and expressive of the special gifts of its lead characters. In the age of generative video, by contrast, we–that is, everyone, on screen and off–are facing one "fake out" after another; synthetic media forces the issue of trust frame-by-frame, bit-by-bit; nothing, it would seem, can be trusted–neither the screen we watch, nor the one "inside" it; neither the containing nor contained film/television image are "safe" from manipulation, or rather, artificial generation.

The same should be said of news and journalism–drawing the scripted into conversation with the unscripted. In this stream of concern, the fake image puts us in mind of the "pseudo-event," so presciently schematized by Daniel J. Boorstin. As the famed historian noted a shift from "news gathering to news making," from "hero to celebrity," from "traveler to tourist," we readily admit how the half-century-and-more that followed *The Image* (1961) proved faithful

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[30] Cade Metz, "Instant Videos Could Represent Next Leap in A.I. Technology," *The New York Times*, April 4, 2023, nytimes.com.

to his diagnosis.[31] If we propose an updated prognostication, *The AI Image*, the event is pseudo *twice over*, since it was fabricated as event and then fabricated (again, via AI) as representation.

Of course, the ground falling out from beneath our feet is the experience we're having not just in our entertainments and educational endeavors and news feeds, but, as the acronym encrypts, IRL. Hence a growing dread at the persistence of skepticism in our relationship to the (possible, prospective) truth claims of sounds and images (moving and still), and given the depth of the ruse, a foreboding, mounting sense of misgiving. Even in these earliest months of AI's first steps into the disruption of our already unsettled realities, we are receiving a new education in credulity. Indeed, for the gullible among us, the future looks bleak. And even for the savvy, not much better. Since, time and again in these early days, we hear confessions from the most dialed-in members of the techno-elite that they too were duped. For novices, though, the mental taxation is high. Shaun Emery keeps having different parties ask him to trust them; at one point, after serial frustrations, he says, "I'm so tired of believing people." Likewise, we may already discover our energy for discernment flagging, our exhaustion compounding, and yet the deepfake era–in video, audio, image, and text–is only just getting underway.

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Though the near-term specter of AI cinema may cause palpitations–not because the movies will be bad (though they may be for some time), but because they aren't sufficiently constituted by human-directed means–we can recall our long-term and inadvertent training in the fakes, frauds, and fabrications that have defined our discomfort with (in an unexpected twist of rebranding), analog-digital cinema. Herzog's films may provide a sufficient clinic to make the point, namely, that by tempting, tormenting, and in some cases terminating our naïve lust for truth, Herzog has shown us the glorious freedom

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[31]   Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Vintage, 1987 [1961]).

and pleasure that comes from fakery. After certain strains of Greek philosophy, namely Lucretius on the sublime, Herzog, as sketched above, proclaims his brand of manipulative metacinema to issue a veritable ecstatic truth.

Why should we not expect that generative AI–including neural nets fed on Herzog's own films and all the film criticism about them, such as this essay devoted in some measure to its inheritance–would not also provide fabrications that illuminate bona fide truths? That is, after Nietzsche, lies that are true (in a nonmoral sense). Or again, reaching back to Plato, we can marvel at the way the allegory of the cave was meant to show how humans–almost to a person–depend on fictions and myths to generate and sustain meaning, both individually and collectively. Whether those fictions be gods or money, a belief in human equality or the magic of movies, the strain on human reason has less to do with the *authenticity* of the fact at hand than on the way opinions about it are *shared* within the community. In effect, partaking in a common belief is the equivalent of what we have started to call authentication.

When the cinema and television we watch–increasingly a distinction without a difference, or one reduced to a simple difference between stand-alone feature and serial–becomes AI-generated, we may be tricked (after the fashion of the Herzogian documentary fabulists) or candidly told "this feature presentation was created via machine learning," etc., but the effect may be similarly striking: ecstatic truth could be the unexpected dividend. Just as it is in these early stages of generative pre-trained transformers (GPT): the results can be factually wrong and yet fascinating. Take the "infinite conversation" between Werner Herzog and Slavoj Žižek as a case in point–or, with simulacra in mind, "Herzog" and "Žižek."[32] As the disclaimer tells us, the infinite conversation is "an AI generated, never-ending discussion between Werner Herzog and Slavoj Žižek. Everything you hear is fully generated by a machine. The opinions and beliefs expressed do not represent anyone. They are the hallucinations of a slab of silicon."

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[32]   See infiniteconversation.com.

The conversation's "creator," Giacomo Miceli,[33] calls us to think about the notion of "hallucination" in an AI context: "a well-known phenomenon in large language models, in which the system provides an answer that is factually incorrect, irrelevant, or nonsensical, because of limitations in its training data and architecture."[34] Technically speaking, all of the infinite conversation is a hallucination and so all of it is "factually incorrect"; Herzog and Žižek have not authored these remarks (much less authorized them). And yet, and here's where authentication may not matter, or may not matter as much as we think: the hallucinations often bear a satisfying *resemblance* to thoughts and remarks by the historical personages we know as Herzog and Žižek. Take note of the proviso–in the spirit of an apology–"because of limitations in its training data and architecture." What happens when such limitations are diminished–in this case, when AI-Herzog and AI-Žižek sound *indistinguishable* from their human correlates? (And not just *vocally* by digital mimesis, but also *conceptually*–in terms of grammar and points of reference, familiarity with their own writing and films, etc.?) In the next-level AI performance, the infinite conversation will also convey a kind of immortality: Herzog and Žižek can go on talking, opining, and theorizing in the absence of their physical, formerly human manifestations. An ecstatic sublime if ever we have known one.

As we adapt to this new aesthetic regime, "authentic" as a modifier–as in "authentic cinema"–becomes a euphemism for human-generated. Where we have lived for centuries in a contest between the categories of authentic and inauthentic–respectively marking a kind of mortal and moral success (or failure), deployed as assignments of genuineness or falsity–the application of "authentic" to *all* human endeavor, as set in opposition to that of AI, dissolves the inherited distinction. Authentication–deciphering human from nonhuman artifacts–will supersede aesthetic judgment of the work itself as the first order of business. A certain liberation is found in the loss, since human

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[33]   See jamez.it.

[34]   Adam Pasick, "Artificial Intelligence Glossary," *The New York Times*, March 27, 2023, nytimes.com.

existence will cease to be judged in terms of achieving or achieved authenticity (not that we have ever possessed consistent, much less agreed upon, criteria). Concomitantly, a new and increasingly emergent tension will arise between the (authentic) human and the (synthetic) AI; humans will, in effect, outsource their existential and aesthetic anxieties, drawing us beyond a comparison of human forms of life (as occupying categories or grades of authenticity), in effect, between each other, and toward a new, nonhuman point of reference–variously as surrogate, as collaborator, and perhaps, as adversary.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF CHANCE IN CINEMA: CONTINGENCY FIGURES

FILIPE MARTINS

Disfiguration

What type of realism is intended by the artistic expression? What kind of real do we refer to when reasoning about aesthetic truth or authenticity? In what sense does one speak of authenticity by claiming that art stands against narrative, figurative naturalism or representation? According to J. Epstein, "cinema is truth, a story is a lie" (1983, p. 276); Heidegger considered that "truth happens in the Van Gogh's painting" (1992, p. 44); and G. Deleuze and F. Guattari declared that "no art, no sensation, was ever representational" (1992, p. 170). If the real is the beacon for aesthetic authenticity, inspiring art realisms – and, especially, as we will see, the drive to conceal authorial marks – then the question arises about what this movement implies.

More than faithfulness to the real as in classical realism or mimetic verism, modern art began to measure the terms of aesthetic authenticity in the struggle that the artist undertakes against himself, against his subjective prejudices. It is a contest against subjectivity. After overcoming the ambition of accessing the real through classic naturalist methods, modernity began to rescue the real, to a large extent, through the deconstruction of the artist's clichés and vices. In Deleuze's words: "There are psychic clichés, just as there are physical clichés, ready-made perceptions, memories, ghosts. In all of this there is a very important experience for the painter: before

the work begins, the frame is already occupied by a whole category of things that we can call 'clichés'. It's dramatic. (...) On the frame there are always clichés that are already there" (Deleuze, 2011, p. 152). It will thus be necessary to contradict such prejudices in order to access the "figural", the pure presence, which Deleuze associates with the "true". The artist (in this case the painter) must go through the catastrophe, through the chaos: "How can I make what I paint not be a cliché? It will be necessary to quickly make certain 'free marks' inside the painted image, to destroy the nascent figuration in it and to give an opportunity to the Figure, which is the improbable itself" (*Ibid.*, p. 161). This process, described by Deleuze as "deformation" or "disfiguration", aims to erase all evidence of regulation or subjective intention (the figuration), so that a new figuration (the Figure) can emerge from it – the true, non-representational image. The first figuration is false, the second is authentic. As Deleuze explains, the "two figurations, the figuration preserved despite everything and the figuration rediscovered, the falsely faithful and the true, do not have the same nature" (*Ibid.*, p. 167). It is the latter figuration, the one which is extracted by crossing the sieve of chaos, that can rescue a value of truth. Where does this truth come from? Perhaps from an "other world". Here is how Deleuze describes the process of passing through the catastrophe: "It is as if the hand gained independence and started to be at the service of other forces, tracing marks that no longer depend on our will and our gaze. These hand marks, almost blind, thus bear witness to the intrusion of another world into the visual world of figuration" (*Ibid.*, p. 171). In short, no longer the artist's world, but the "true" world, the "sensation" disconnected from the subject, the perception transferred to the interior of things themselves, the immanence plane. In this perspective, it is the human brain that subtracts authenticity from the world, submitting it to the sensorimotor needs of the organism; and it will then be up to the artist to restore that authenticity. Jacques Rancière describes this position as follows:

> If things need to be given a perceptive power that they already 'had', it is because they have lost it. And if they lost it, it was for a very precise reason: it was because the phosphorescence of the images of the world and their movements in all directions

were interrupted by this opaque image called the human brain (...). The voluntary work of art gives back to the events of sensitive matter the potentialities that the human brain took from them to constitute a sensorimotor universe adapted to its needs and submissive to its will. [It will then be up to art] to restore perception within things, to constitute an 'order' of art that returns the world to its essential disorder. (Rancière, 2014, pp. 182-183)

Simplicity

There are several poetic strategies aimed towards the restitution of an integral presence through the erasure of subjectivity or signifier traces. For example, the formal simplicity of minimalist art: just like the "disfiguration" described by Deleuze, this simplicity also aims to neutralize the representation, the illusionism, the message, the relational game between the parts of the composition, so that only remains the specific, literal object itself. The (paradoxical) claim to reduce art to the literal sense seems to have reached its most direct expression in the plasticist minimalism of the 1960s. Donald Judd, one of the main representatives of this artistic movement, adopted the term "literal space" to refer to the conceptual purpose of his works, opposing it to what he called "spatial illusionism". And the American critic Michael Fried used the term "literalist art" to refer (albeit pejoratively) to the minimal works of Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Tony Smith, among others (Fried, 1998). These works were often referred to as "specific objects", objects "without signification games, that is, without mistakes" (Didi-Huberman, 2011, p. 37). The effort to empty the content was, in fact, radical in these authors. Judd even accused the illusion of three-dimensionality in the paintings of Rothko, Pollock, Noland, Newman or Reinhardt. In Didi-Huberman's description: "It was enough for two colors to be presented for one to 'advance' and the other to 'retreat', immediately unleashing the whole game of unbearable spatial illusionism (...). Judd thus radicalized the demand for specificity – or 'literal space', as he called it – to the point of seeing in Rothko's paintings an 'almost traditional' spatial

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illusionism" (*Ibid.*, pp. 31-32). To prevent this illusionism, it was necessary to eliminate all the details, so that the work would become a homogeneous, non-relational totality, that is, without relational games between the parts and without compositional traits. In Judd's words: "Anything that is not absolutely plain begins to have parts in some way. The thing is to be able to work and do different things and yet not break up the wholeness that a piece has" (Judd interviewed by Glaser, 1995). The refusal of illusionism and the elimination of relational parts also aimed, in their own way, to extract or reveal the *presence* through "objects with excessively simple shapes, generally symmetrical, objects reduced to the 'minimal' form of an instantaneous and perfectly recognizable *Gestalt*. Objects reduced to the mere formality of their form" (Didi-Huberman, 2011, p. 34). In the same way that the disfiguration causes chance and disorder, minimalism rejects illusion and relationship. In both cases, it is a matter of rejecting the semiotic games associated with representation, figuration and narrative. In short, it is a matter of presenting without representing. As Frank Stella stated: "All I want anyone to get out of my paintings, and all I ever get out of them, is the fact that you can see the whole idea without any confusion... What you see is what you see" (Stella interviewed by Glaser, 1995).

Passivity

The formal simplicity of minimalist works fits into a broader strategy that modern cinema has also adopted: passivity. Unlike disfiguration, which accesses presence through excessive, chaotic or hysterical action by the artist who is committed to deconstructing all the envelopes (or "clichés"), passivity, in turn, is based on inaction, on preserving the real, which is intended to stay virgin, untouched, without traces of manipulation. In narrative arts such as cinema, this tendency marked a new way of relating to chance: "Suddenly – it is a case to say – we saw appearing (...) works that decisively broke with the traditional structures of the plot to show us a series of events without the conventional dramatic connections, a story in which nothing happens, or things happen that no longer have

the appearance of a narrated event, but of an event that happened by chance" (Eco, 1989, p. 215). Passivity assumes a major role in capturing this chance or contingency, expressing the recognition of an innate richness of the real, which must be respected. The images that art presents tend to show an adirectional landscape, an essential indifference or ambiguity. And passivity aims precisely at preserving this indifference, allowing the real to naturally come into the work instead of the artist whimsically selecting the elements of the real. The passivity assumed, in short, as a method – for example in the following description by Tacita Dean: "I shoot incredibly long takes and I just wait. It's extremely expensive, but I hope something happens within the frame because I don't like zooming or panning; I hope the bird flies across the frame" (Dean, 2012, p. 41).

Pure presence – embodied in the "figural" (Lyotard), or in the expression of "universal variation" (Deleuze) – may, in these terms, be accessible by two opposite ways: "one is complete immobility and the other the maximum possible mobility. In both cases, everything happens as if the filmmaker was trying to reach a reality prior to men" (Parente, 2005, p. 273). In the aesthetic purpose of art, these two opposing movements end up meeting. Rancière speaks of an identity of opposites: "identity of the active and the passive, of thought and non-thought, of the intentional and the unintentional (...). But what must this sovereign style produce? A work freed from any mark of the writer's intervention, which possesses the indifference, the absolute passivity of things without will or signification" (Rancière, 2014, p. 193). This indiscernibility is characteristic of modern cinema, which Rancière fits into an "aesthetic regime of art", as opposed to a "representational regime". It is in the aesthetic regime that activity and passivity are radicalized to meet in presence. The extreme of activity is chaos, the extreme of passivity is indifference. In the words of Rancière: "This logic [of the aesthetic regime of art] opposes to the representative model of chained actions and expressive codes, suitable to themes and events, it is an original power of art, initially divided between two extremes: between the pure activity of a creation henceforth without rules or models and the pure passivity of an expressive power inscribed in the things themselves, independently

of any work or desire for signification" (*Ibid.*, p. 19). This original power of art, which supposedly grants access to pure presence, has a double valence whose poles are blurred: activity becomes indistinguishable from passivity.

At times, it will seem that this indiscernibility takes place under the auspices of passivity, to the detriment of activity: "In the representational regime, the work of art is thought of in the model of the active form that imposes itself on inert matter in order to submit it to the purposes of representation. In the aesthetic regime, this idea of a voluntary imposition of form over matter is rejected" (*Ibid.*, p. 193). But, in order for this distinction between activity and passivity to be brought to coincide with the distinction between the representational regime and the aesthetic regime, activity must be read in a stricter sense that no longer contemplates the (active) work of disfiguration. Disfiguration works against representation, it is an activity directed against itself, an autophagic movement that, by deliberately diving into chaos, ends up being confused with passivity. In fact, it seems to be a blind movement that, although performed by the artist, no longer depends on his will (and, in that sense, constitutes a false activity).

Poetic effort and contingency

Contingency can come from two different sources: while disfiguration incites the contingencies of the work from within, passivity allows such elements to cut across the work from the outside. As Noel Burch describes: "There are those who make it so that a world of contingencies reacts on the work during its execution, entirely independent of the will of the composer or the performers, whose relations with the work will therefore be fortuitous: it is John Cage, for example" (Burch, 1973, p. 128). But there are also those who prefer "to see the breath of 'chance' pass over their works (the breath of an external contingency)" (*Ibid.*). In both cases, it is about contingency: an essential passivity, a withdrawal by the artist, even in the active work of disfiguration.

On the other hand, poetic activity is not reserved to the representational regime. Ultimately, we must accept that passivity

is illusory because it is a poetic strategy as any other within art. If passivity were absolute, there would be no art nor artist's purpose. The work cannot offer direct access to the real – a literal sense – because it always implies the performative arc of *returning* to the real. A poetic activity is required, however discreet it may be.

In any case, the question of whether the contingency was incited (via disfiguration) or merely encountered (via passivity) becomes secondary. The aesthetic experience does not require an explanation concerning the origin of the authenticity effect; there is no need to clarify whether the effect is due to the real itself or due to the poetic work of reconstructing the real. On the contrary, the work will seek to hide this origin, will seek to preserve the "doubt" about the mode by which it invoked contingency. It is this ambiguity that feeds the "identity of opposites" referred by Rancière.

But, within this indiscernibility of opposites, and despite it, it is still the disfiguration that prevails over passivity, even if, strictly speaking, it constitutes a false activity. According to Rancière:

> This unity of opposites, which leads to coincidence between the artistic idea of the work and the potency of the origin, is only achieved, in fact, in the lengthy work of dis-figuration (...). It is this work that undoes the compositions of fiction or of the representational picture, revealing the gesture of painting and the adventure of matter under the themes of figuration. Behind conflicts of dramatic or romantic will, it makes the flash of epiphany shine, the pure splendor of the being without reason. (...) The art of the aesthetic era intends to identify its unconditioned power with its opposite: the passivity of the being without reason, the dust of elementary particles, the originary emergence of things. (Rancière, 2014, pp. 19-20)

On the one hand, it is assumed that the work always presupposes a poetic effort. What we receive from cinematographic art is never the real itself (which is precisely why the realistic impression of cinema can become so admirable and unsettling). On the other hand, since it is not real, the filmic content is constantly threatened by the artificialness of representation. So that this work does not destroy the realistic

effect, representation is fought through the admission of chance, either through disfiguration, the passing through chaos, or through passivity, the artist's own inaction. And perhaps these strategies will be more effective the more they converge with each other.

In this context, cinema enjoys a privileged condition due to the intrinsically realistic characteristics of the device: "Cinema is, due to its material device, the literal incarnation of this unity of opposites, the union of the passive and automatic eye of the camera with the conscious eye of the filmmaker" (*Ibid.*, p. 194). But cinematographic art also must continually manage the balance between the filmmaker's activity and the device's realist automatism. The (apparently) active work of disfiguration cannot lose itself in arbitrariness, nor should the work of poetic structuring become too evident or imposing. And passivity, understood as an (apparent) absence of poetic work, cannot become orphan or idle either. The poetic work that focuses on aesthetic authenticity (that is, on the contingency, the effect of presence, the return to the real) implies an enduring game between passivity and activity, between safeguarding the real (where we also end up including the effort to disfigure the clichés) and the assertion of an authorial intention. In the artistic context, contingency is not to be mistaken with pure arbitrariness, which signals a structural deficit in the work, neither does it depend on a radical rejection of poetic structuring. The contingency results from a delicate balance between activity and passivity, without which the work will tend towards *arbitrariness*[1] (excessive passivity) or towards *artificialness* (excessive visibility of poetic activity). In both excesses, the aesthetic effect is lost, and the work runs the risk of failure.

The myth of total cinema and the rediscovery of chance

Cinema took up the old challenge of seeking authenticity through the reproduction of the real. André Bazin described this anthropological impulse as the *myth of total cinema*: "The guiding myth, then, inspiring the invention of cinema, is the accomplishment of

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[1]   See Martins, F. (2020).

that which dominated in a more or less vague fashion all the techniques of the mechanical reproduction of reality in the nineteenth century, from photography to the phonograph, namely an integral realism, a recreation of the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist" (Bazin, 2009, pp. 165-166). This appeal of the real is old and, evidently, did not come to a closure with the invention of cinema, continuing to shape its successive technical and poetic refinements. Ultimately, according to Bazin, cinema – as total cinema – is unachievable and utopian, even if the myth continues to drive cinematographic practice and inspire its improvement:

> If the origins of an art reveal something of its nature, then one may legitimately consider the silent and the sound film as stages of a technical development that little by little made a reality out of the original 'myth'. It is understandable from this point of view that it would be absurd to take the silent film as a state of primal perfection which has gradually been forsaken by the realism of sound and color. The primacy of the image is both historically and technically accidental. The nostalgia that some still feel for the silent screen does not go far enough back into the childhood of the seventh art. The real primitives of the cinema, existing only in the imaginations of a few men of the nineteenth century, are in complete imitation of nature. Every new development added to the cinema must, paradoxically, take it nearer and nearer to its origins. In short, cinema has not yet been invented! (*Ibid.*, p. 166)

On the other hand, this drive towards the real, as expressed in the myth of a total cinema, seems to irremediably collide with the very attempt to reproduce or capture it. If the virginity of the real implies the chance and unpredictability of a world prior to the artists' organizational work, then the realistic utopia is lost from the start and the "total cinema" can never really be invented. In this sense, one can even conclude, against Bazin, that it was in its beginnings that cinema came closest to realizing the myth of a

total cinema. In the words of Noël Burch: "It was in the beginnings of cinema that chance was most relevant: Lumière installs his camera on the quay at *La Ciotat* station and waits for the train to arrive. The handle turns when it appears, but it is always chance that drives the entirety of the 'staging': the action of the film consists, essentially, of unpredictable movements and gestures" (Burch, 1973, p. 131). The original purpose of the cinematograph technical demonstration was pure impression, still without narrative or poetic intensions, and even the visual theme was secondary, merely illustrative of the potential of the technical device. A pure sample of the real. The real is more in the pro-filmic than in the filmic. However, even in this original step, in this direct transfer of light patterns to film, cinema could no longer be total. The simple decision about the framing or placement of the camera was all it took to betray the real. Burch adds: "But it is also in this film, one of the first to be made, that Lumière inaugurates the fight against chance that would characterize almost all cinema for the next sixty years. (...) This is the case of *L'Arroseur Arrosé* and films of this style, a huge step forward in rejecting chance" (*Ibid.*, p. 131).

In the context of the arts, this domestication of chance, which is implied in the very notion of *poiesis* (however chaotic the artist's intention may be), is condemned to follow a double and, in a way, paradoxical path: on the one hand, the real is domesticated through the effort of poetic organization that contradicts chance; on the other hand, the poetic effort itself is disguised so that manipulation is not unmasked. During the first decades of cinema, maintaining the balance between these two trends led to the refinement of a mimetic realism based on illusionism and the invisibility of the author and his techniques – a *zero-degree of cinematographic writing.* In Burch words:

> Little by little, the studio became the refuge of an art that wanted to escape a world of chance, providing the means for an ever more perfect control, based on increasingly refined techniques. (...) Incidentally, it is interesting to note that this conquest, or rather, this neutralization of chance, was parallel to the progressive domination of the notion of the zero-degree

of cinematographic writing – which aimed, first of all, to make the technique invisible, but also to eliminate all the 'failures' due to the infiltrations of chance. (*Ibid.*, p. 132)

Burch considers that it was the overcoming of this "zero-degree" that marked the paradigm shift to the so-called modern cinema, especially since the post-war period: "It is not without reason that the rediscovery of chance and the refusal of this zero-degree intervened almost simultaneously in the history of cinema" (*Ibid.*, p. 132).

But it is not clear that Italian neorealism and other emerging cinematographic approaches have not pursued, by other means, the same dialectical articulation between the authorial drive and the preservation of an aesthetic authenticity. The zero-degree of cinematographic writing is not fixed, it evolves along with cinema itself and establishes, in each cultural moment, renewed demands on the terms of aesthetic authenticity.

The invisibility of narration: from classical realism to neorealism

In the first decades of cinema and, specially, in classic Hollywood cinema, the dominant model for authenticity manifested itself fundamentally through principles of narrative transparency, that is, through the concealment of the cinematographic apparatus, in order to optimize the visibility of the story or the diegetic world. "Transparency" corresponded to the invisibility of the cinematographic medium itself, in order to maximize the audience immersiveness. Invisibility that simultaneously implied the concealment of the production effort (absence of authorial marks), the narrator (reduced to an "ideal invisible observer"), or the *mise en scène* (believable and realistic, despite the use of manufactured sceneries). Of course, this effect of transparency was very artificial: "The aesthetic-ideological norm of classic Hollywood cinema was for a long time reduced to the ideal of 'transparency' (...). This norm actually implied quite complex significant work, aiming, among other things, at a kind of self-effacement, self-dissimulation" (Aumont, 2006, p. 54). But we must ask ourselves if this dissimulating work does not equally apply to neorealism or other expressions (not necessarily "realistic") of

modern cinema. We can, for example, admit that classical realism and neorealism share the same principle of separation between the domain of narrated events and the domain of narration; and both cinematographic paradigms sought to hide the narration, albeit in different ways. Despite its naive illusionism, classical cinema also invokes a rigid separation between the world of the narrator (and the implied author) and a certain objective exteriority that is intended to remain immaculate. In the words of David Bordwell: "Classical narration makes the world of the fable [story] an internally consistent construct upon which the narrative seems to intervene from the outside. The manipulation of the *mise-en-scène* (people's behavior, lighting, sets, costumes) creates an apparently independent pro-filmic event that becomes the tangible world of the story, framed, and recorded from the outside" (Bordwell, 2005, p. 288). This detachment of the story from the narration corresponds to the invisibility of the narrator, who does not interfere with the *mise-en-scène*, observing it from a distance. The *mise-en-scène* itself becomes autonomous thanks to the invisibility of the production apparatus. The fable does not seem to have been constructed, but to pre-exist its narrative representation. These classical purposes are also, according to Bordwell, those of neorealism. Only the methods have changed, such as the neorealists' preference for wide shots with depth of field and without cuts. Bazin sought to justify the neorealist premise through an ontology of the cinematographic device that could dictate the recipe for authenticity, but this premise is shared with classical cinema, or even with cinema in general.

It is at another level, transcendent to cinema, that the ontological question must be asked: aesthetic authenticity, which mobilizes all art, as well as the stylistic trends and manifestos within the specific arts, has its own founding ontology. Thus, in the case of neorealism, one can say that the goal remained essentially the same, only changing the realist approaches, which began to consider new aspects of the psychology of perception, such as those that motivated the rejection of montage. Quoting Bordwell:

> Bazin grants that classical editing mimics human acts of attention; he simply adds that those acts normally operate

in an *a priori* field of choice. Since an event exists within a continuum, a director who cuts denies us the perceptual options that a real observer on the scene would possess. The long take and staging in depth give the spectator the ability to create a mental decoupage as if he were actually on the scene. Whatever technique came to be privileged by any theorist or critic, the anthropomorphic premise of the invisible-observer account went unchallenged. (Bordwell, 1985, p. 10)

It is not the techniques or methods that define a greater or lesser ability to access the real, regardless of the historical moment. Indeed, the main stylistic characteristics of neorealism were reappropriated countless times for cinematographic purposes that hardly fit into realism (for example, in the work of Roy Andersson, the use of long shots and infinite depth of field, despite the clearly formalist tone of his films).

Behind the methods that distinguish the most varied cinematographic developments, we will always find the same premise of complicity with contingency. It is the very search for authenticity that is implicit in every aesthetic drive, regardless of the methods. The movement is more noticeable in realistic styles and manifestos, but it is always present wherever there is an aesthetic purpose, even when the work does not formally fit into realism or takes refuge in an inner realism (the honesty of a subjective voice, for example). It is not the concrete techniques and styles that are intrinsically realistic, but the premise of a fundamental complicity between art and the real.

This complicity is continually renewed: the relationship between art and contingency is not static, and the evolution of this relationship is imprinted in the paradigm shifts throughout the history of art. Since Plato, artificialness has been fought; and the opposite effect – the contingency of the real – assumes, in artistic expression, renewed garments that accompanied the times and techniques: naturalisms, immanentisms, neorealisms, etc.

Ambiguity and anti-narrative

When Bordwell describes "art cinema" based on two apparently contradictory qualities – realism and authorship –, he tries to reconcile them through the notion of *ambiguity*. In his words: "Realism and authorial expressivity, then, will be the means whereby the art film unifies itself. Yet these means now seem contradictory. Verisimilitude, objective or subjective, is inconsistent with an intrusive author (...). In short, a realist aesthetic and an expressionist aesthetic are hard to merge. The art cinema seeks to solve the problem in a sophisticated way: by the device of ambiguity" (Bordwell, 2008, pp. 155-156). This ambiguity ends up bringing the authorial aspects back to the realm of realism, providing them a certain plasticity; not only to the extent that "the author becomes a formal component" of the work (*Ibid.*, p. 154), but above all to the extent that authorship itself is expressed as a contingency of the spirit, a gesture of freedom, which is always ambiguous. Ambiguity therefore admits a complicity between realism and authorial expressiveness. And both characteristics of "art cinema" seem to equally partake in the anti-narrative tendency of cinematographic modernity: the refusal of narrative and representation can arise both from the passivity of the filmmaker who seeks to respect the virginity of the real and from his expressive freedom that shuffles the norms of reconstruction of that same real.

In fact, cinematographic modernity marked a new relationship with chance, proposing to deconstruct the classic narrative structures. This does not mean that cinema only then woke up to an aesthetic awareness; but it was mainly from the 1940s onwards that the aesthetic vocation of cinema became more apparent. The cinematographic avant-garde then began to invest in the rejection of narratives – which were associated with the suspension of realism and, therefore, barred from an aesthetic authenticity whose procedural arc depends on a *return to the real*. Quoting Burch:

> The notion of indeterminacy is very fashionable in art today. (...) Beyond the 'vanguardisms', these experiences reveal a confused and yet generalized impatience before a solidly constituted tradition, that of the 'closed' work, to which the

'open' work is opposed. What do terms such as 'indetermination' and 'open work' mean, however, in the field of cinema? (...) They mean, among other things, the sudden irruption, in a totally artificial world, of a universe of more or less 'natural' contingencies. (Burch, 1973, p. 127)

The reconciliation with chance inaugurated new ways of accessing the real or the cinematographic effect of contingency. The openness, which previously belonged to the real, came to belong also to the work of art. As Bordwell notes: "Life is more complex than art can ever be, and the only way to respect this complexity is to leave causes dangling, questions unanswered. With the open and arbitrary ending, the art film reasserts that ambiguity is the dominant principle of intelligibility (...), that life lacks the neatness of art and this art knows it" (Bordwell, 2008, p. 156). Naturally, this tendency could not fail to undermine the classic narrative principles based on "closure". According to Chatman: "such texts may be called 'antinarratives', since what they call into question is, precisely, narrative logic, that one thing leads to one and only one other, the second to a third and so on to the finale" (Chatman, 1978, p. 57). And he adds: "If the classical narrative is a network (or 'enchainment') of kernels affording avenues of choice only one of which is possible, the *anti-story* may be defined as an attack on this convention which treats all choices as equally valid" (*Ibid.*, p. 56). Gradually, the classic conception of narrative seems to have become one of the great victims of cinematographic modernity, reinforcing the incompatibility between the real (associated with contingency) and narrativity.

Metz dubbed this anti-narrative tendency the "great libertarian myth" (Metz, 1972, p. 175). Opposing the announced end of narrative and doubting the principle of refusal of narrative and representation in the context of cinema, Metz described the paradigm shift as follows: "A great and permanent misunderstanding hovers over the definition of 'modern' cinema. It is understood and sometimes affirmed that the 'young cinema', the 'new cinema', would have surpassed the narration stage, that the modern film would be an absolute object, a work that could be traversed in any direction, that would have in a way expelled the narrativity that guides classic cinema. This is the

great theme of the 'disruption of narration'" (*Ibid.*, p. 173). There are several stylistic forms that Metz associates with this anti-narrative drive: "dedramatization" (defined as "a kind of 'Antonioni tendency'" (*Ibid.*, p. 174), "improvised cinema" (taken to the limit in "*cinéma vérité*, in direct cinema and the like" (*Ibid.*)), the "cinema of filmmakers", the "cinema of the shot", the "cinema of freedom", the "language-cinema" (as opposed to "spectacle-cinema"), etc. In any case, although Metz relativizes the anti-narrative interpretation of such cinematographic tendencies, he admits, at the same time, that modern cinema has introduced a broad new level of authenticity: "It is still true – and this is immediately noticeable in certain films – that the best works of the new cinema, including some direct-cinema films, often provide the spectator with a kind of truth that was rarely found in the great works of the past, a truth infinitely difficult to define, but that we feel instinctively. Truth of an attitude, of an inflection of voice, of a gesture, naturalness of the tone…" (*Ibid.*, p. 185).

The contingency of the real within the narrative

What Metz and other cinema scholars tried to demonstrate was the possibility of reconciling this authenticity with the narrative fabric itself, henceforth permeable to the contingency of the real; that is, to demonstrate that the aesthetic experience is not necessarily incompatible with the narrative sense. From a narratological point of view, this conciliation involved introducing the concept of contingency in the field of narrativity, so that it could accommodate the most subversive logics of modern artistic expression. Jean Pouillon used the term to account for the most extreme cases in literature (Pouillon, 1946, pp. 26-27); and Seymour Chatman, referring to Pouillon's thesis, admits that: "the idea of contingency is attractively broad, for it can accommodate new organizing principles" (Chatman, 1978, p. 47). Adopting the concept of "contingency" to refer to the loosening of causality (which is, as we know, a fundamental pillar of narrative structuring), Chatman asks himself: "Is the relation between sequence and causality one of necessity or of probability? Can there be mere sequence, a

depiction of events that simply succeed one another but in no sense owe their existence to each other? Certainly, modern authors claim to reject or modify the notion of strict causality" (*Ibid.*). And he concludes: "But whether or not a single term like 'contingency' can capture the principle of organization of any narrative whatsoever, theory must recognize our powerful tendency to connect the most divergent events (...). Not even fortuitous circumstance – the random juxtaposition of pages – will deter us" (*Ibid.*). Contingency understood, in short, not as the abolition of nexuses, but as the engine of the liberation of nexuses, which are thus no longer tied in the stiffness of causality, chronological ordering, linearity, etc.

On the other hand, reconciling the narrative with aesthetic authenticity can also involve shifting the focus from the fable to the domain of narration. In this last sense, it is not a question of adapting the work of narration to the contingency of an autonomous realistic world (where the fable unfolds), but of reaffirming the narration itself. In the narrative context, the plot is always different from the real, it is always *mimesis* or *diegesis*, despite more or less realistic methods. No matter how autonomous the fable presents itself (as in classical cinema), this autonomy is always precarious because it depends on the concealment of the narration, and this concealment can never be absolute in the narrative context. The concealment of the narration is a deception that, even if it is tacitly accepted between the creator and the audience, ends up reinforcing the thesis of an incompatibility between narrative and aesthetic authenticity. So that there is no deception, the naive assumption of an autonomy of the fable must be abolished; and the contingency must then transcend the world of the fable and mix with the narration itself: for example, by breaking the fourth wall, by taking over the backstage (like the microphone that enters the frame in *cinéma-vérité*), by nourishing the author's style, by highlighting the honesty of confessions and metadiscourses, etc. More than an erasure of the narrative, it is a matter of privileging the narration itself, caught in the contingency of a domain that no longer distinguishes between story and plot. To a large extent, it is in the context of this permeability that we should read

Godard's following maxim: "All great fiction films tend towards documentary, as all great documentaries tend towards fiction. (...) And whoever opts for one necessarily finds the other at the end of the path" (Godard, 1985, p. 144).

Be that as it may, these perspectives of narrative reintegration contrast with an extensive tradition of aesthetic thought that rejects narrativity, either due to its complicity with *logos* (criticism of the diegetic tradition of the arts), or due to its complicity with representation (criticism of the mimetic tradition of the arts). Indebted to the path outlined by Baumgarten in the 18th century, narrative criticism is often linked to an understanding of aesthetic authenticity based on an immanentist or materialist version of realism. In film theory, Deleuze was perhaps the most influential representative of this theoretical position: his concept of *time-image*, dedicated mainly to cinema after the Second World War, describes the terms of an approach whose priority is no longer the chain of actions or the organic relationship between the narrative events, but above all the fragmentation, the episodic, the autonomous situation. Communication and narratology theorists speak of an anti-narrative movement.

However, more than a concerted disregard for the narrative conventions of cinema, this artistic drive constituted, in practice, a mere alternative way of poetic exploration among others. It was not so much a question of rejecting narrative, but of treading new paths of narrative expression in cinema, equally accessible to film studies in general. Although the condition of unreality of narratives seems to compromise the possibility of an authenticity based on presence, it is undeniable that the film narrativity itself has also evolved towards an integration of contingency and authenticity. Narrative is not necessarily opposed to aesthetic authenticity.

Naturalism and verisimilitude in classical cinema

If it is true that artistic practice tends to betray the real due to the implied authorship and its performative nature, then the effect of aesthetic authenticity must essentially imply a dissimulation of authorial intention, so that the (performative) work can trigger an

interpretation shift, redirecting it to the real. In other words, it is about counteracting the artificialness implied in the poetic game through that same poetic game.

But we no longer find ourselves in the domain of mimetic realism and its naturalistic or illusionistic cosmetics. The challenge goes deeper. In Tarkovsky's words: "You can play a scene with documentary precision, dress the actors in a naturalistically accurate way, work every detail so as to give them a close resemblance to real life, and still make a film that nothing resembles reality and conveys the impression of profound artificiality, that is, of non-fidelity to life, even though artificiality was exactly what the author tried to avoid" (Tarkovsky, 1998, pp. 19-20). It is not enough to simulate "life", it is necessary to neutralize the authorial presence, so that life can speak for itself, i.e., so that the voice is no longer that of the author, but of life itself: "For a work to be 'completed', everything that reveals or suggests its manufacture must become invisible. The artist (…) must continue his efforts until his work has eliminated all traces of work" (*ibid.*, p. 113). This is also what Heidegger meant when he described the *being-work-of-the-work* beyond its "being-object" or its "being-device". In his words: "Through [the artist], the work must be freed for pure being-in-itself. Precisely in great art, and this is the only art in question here, the artist remains somewhat indifferent to the work, almost as an access to the emergence of the work, an access that cancels itself in creation" (Heidegger, 1992, p. 31). Ultimately, this is a kind of autophagy of art: aesthetic authenticity depends on the work's ability to prevent the author from revealing himself as a craftsman. In short, it is a matter of avoiding the unmasking of the authorial operation or intention, even when the author's signature is explicit. This is one of the great challenges that artists face and always have faced. A paradoxical challenge, no doubt, and hence the autophagy of art, which proposes to build its authenticity at the cost of revoking itself. This poetic effort is notorious in artist's small dissimulating decisions, but also in the great movements and trends, being transversal to different arts and periods.

The foundation of this aesthetic authenticity is related to the figure of *contingency*. Things are contingent insofar as they

exhibit an essential indifference. They are casual, aimless, even when they obey a causality or offer a prediction of the future. It is assumed, for example, that natural laws are contingent; and even moral laws can be taken as contingent in the eyes of the relativist, the nihilist or even the biologist. Contingent things are free and offer freedom to whoever interpret them, regardless of whether we are referring to their past (they are the result of a succession of accidents), their present (they are as such as they could be otherwise) or their future (they have no special purpose, preference or helmsman, even when they are enmeshed in a deterministic system and are resolutely heading towards a specific point – itself caught up in the contingency).

Contingency implies a deficit of meaning: it is commonly said that "the real has no meaning" because it is contingent, unlike fiction, where there will be a purpose for things and events. In the real there is something that is fundamentally missing and sustains this deficit of meaning: the absence of a subjective guidance, a helmsman, an author. Strictly speaking, there will still be meaning, but it will be built on literal sense, it will be mere information from an orphan world. As soon as the author is reintroduced and the mediating object regains its performative dimension, contingency recedes and gives room to artifice. It will then be necessary to protect the contingency so that art can still fulfill its purpose of authenticity. More than fidelity to any preconceived notion of the real, it is a matter of denying the artificialness implied by the artist's own intrusion. It is the very dispute between contingency and artificialness.

The naivest mode of contingency is naturalism (the proper mimetic work) as well as naturalization (the use of stable grammars over time). This "zero degree of cinematographic writing" (Burch, 1973), although based on normativity and the rejection of chance, establishes the terms of a common sense that combines the realist potential of the device with a "natural" grammar, a kind of perceptive onomatopoeia of the cinematographic eye. In classical cinema – whose hegemony in production circuits was never lost – the contingency effect is essentially based on two principles: verisimilitude (the illusion of the real, the refinement of imitation

techniques) and the preservation of the fourth wall, which separates the inner space of the diegetic world from the space of reception, authorship and narration. With this separation, the world of the fable can remain autonomous – that is, apparently untouched or in a natural state, regardless of whether it is fictional or documental, inventive or historical – while the narration tends towards omniscience and invisibility. Such is the principle of "transparency" in classical cinema. It is, however, a false exemption, and hence the naivety and theatricality of this type of cinema, which seeks to simulate the contingency of the real through its technical and dramatic reconstruction, against the very notion of contingency.

It is true that this transparency is not watertight. Cinema assimilated new techniques and styles inherited from the successive avant-gardes, in addition to being influenced by other arts and by developments in the audiovisual medium itself, such as the impact of television language from the 1950s onwards, or the effects of the increasing portability of analogue and digital video, which culminated in the current radicalization of accessibility and uses. All these developments helped to shape the cinematographic language throughout its history, allowing it to naturalize new styles and approaches. In fact, cinema classicism has become more diffuse and difficult to circumscribe nowadays: a typical Hollywood film can either remain faithful to the sober and impersonal approach, investing in maximum denotative clarity, or it can assume a more informal style, resorting, for example, to camera shake and the use of jumpcuts to accentuate the illusion of casualness typical of documentary testimony[2]. Even so, it is in cinematic vanguard's experimentalism, and not in naturalism or naturalization, that cinema's commitment to aesthetic authenticity becomes most profound. This is where we should focus our analysis.

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[2] For example, in *Saving Private Ryan* (1999), by Steven Spielberg, the initial sequence of the allied troops arrival in Normandy follows a visual style of "war report", with chaotic camera movements and other cinematographic techniques – including the use of special lenses and color fading filters, lower shutter speed, etc. – to imitate what would have been an on-site filming during the historic event.

The principle of exemption in the cinema aesthetic regime

Post-war modern cinema introduced new levels of authorial exemption, seeking to circumvent the classical approach contradictions through a more direct use of contingency, without domestication or simulation. This principle of exemption affected the whole of cinema and its methodologies. It was not a documentary movement, but an evolution shared by all genres, from fiction to documentary. Sometimes a passive attitude (the refusal of poetic intervention, the artist's inaction), or else an active approach (the work of deconstructing clichés and passing through chaos, which Deleuze described as "disfiguration"). In any case, an impartial attitude towards the real, even when it is the artist who deliberately produces chaos or when the world of the fable is completely invented. Ultimately, in the cinema aesthetic regime, the very question of passivity and activity loses significance, giving way to an indiscernibility or "identity of opposites" (Rancière, 2014).

Paradoxically, the challenge of authorial exemption becomes more problematic in cinema due to its intrinsically realistic characteristics. Unlike other arts such as literature, where the link to reality is necessarily indirect, the cinematographic device offers a direct passage, what Bazin described as the very ontological realism of the photographic image. In the words of Rancière: "The machine eye naturally operates what literature should operate by artifice: the disappearance of the will towards art in its product (...). The truth of the movement machine is the equality of all movements" (Rancière, 2012, p. 46). In artistic purpose, this advantage is actually a disadvantage. If aesthetic authenticity calls for a *return to the real* rather than the real itself, then cinematographic art must counteract the innate immediacy of the cinematographic device. Rancière adds:

> [Cinema's] continuity with the ongoing aesthetic revolution that made it possible is necessarily paradoxical. If one finds in its initial technical apparatus the identity of the passive with the active that constitutes the principle of this revolution, it can only be faithful to the extent that it adds a point to its secular dialectic. (...) Its artistic procedures must constitute dramaturgies

> that contradict its natural powers (...) The cinematographic fable
> is a contradicted fable. (Rancière, 2014, pp. 24-25)

Art implies, by definition, an unavoidable complicity with the fictitious. By subscribing to performativity, even if only during the moment of reception, the work detaches itself from the real and introduces an additional dimension that comes to superimpose itself over the informative literality of the object or event, violating its immediacy. Thus, when Bazin praises the cinema without tricks or the neutral style of neorealist filmmakers, he doesn't just point out the intrinsic ambiguity of the projected real, but he describes concrete examples of poetic processes that contribute to disguising or neutralizing the author's intention. It is not so much a question of being faithful to the real (and its literal sense), but, above all, of disguising the artificialness of authorial intention or manipulation. It is in this game of disguises that authorial exemption makes sense as a method. In its drive towards contingency, modern cinema methodologically conspires against the classic cohesion in favor of the fortuitous and the accidental, as if the events had their own sufficiency, an autonomous order (or disorder), without planning.

Ambiguity

Based on this comprehensive principle of authorial exemption, modern cinema has implemented a whole new range of *contingency figures* that we group here into three main types: the figures of *ambiguity*, *autonomy* and *sincerity*.

The concept of "ambiguity" was adopted by André Bazin to account for the very ontological character of the real, assimilable by cinema. Especially since Italian neorealism, this ambiguity has influenced the choice of methods and approaches, setting the tone for a new cinematographic sensibility. Ambiguity is not a polyvalence, nor a difference, nor a collision of contrasts. More than presenting a range of choices, ambiguity makes choices fuzzy. Instead of multiplying, crossing, or overlapping paths, it erases them, makes them undefined.

Generally speaking, figures of ambiguity work towards openness and decentering. There is, first of all, a principle of neutrality through

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which the filmmaker avoids conditioning attention, either by refusing editing (which imposes new visual highlights in each cut), or by resorting to the long shot with depth of field (which allows to present the situation in its entirety without electing privileged elements). The visual frame itself loses its centralizing force as the framing borders become permeable, fostering a dialogue between the field (the interior of the cinematographic frame) and the out-of-field. Relevant events begin to take place outside the frame's visual range; the voice-over becomes more persistent; the reverse shot is given up (there are entire dialogues in which the interlocutor does not appear); the camera behavior is emancipated from the centers of action; characters circulate between the inside and outside of the frame without the camera following them. For example, in *Involuntary* (2008), by Ruben Östlund, the camera often assumes voyeuristic points of view with fixed framings where the characters appear partially cut or out of visual range: there are several shots with the heads left out of frame, a shot focused on the feet of the characters while they talk at a party, framings through half-open doors or windows, allowing to capture only part of the action that takes place on the other side, apparently uninterested shots in which someone remains hidden or momentarily enters and leaves the framing, etc. In such films, one gets the palpable impression that the diegetic world is unlimited, much larger than the limits of the frame, and that the cinematographic frame is only a sample, more than a center. At the same time, the framing also reflects an ontology of the non-place, of the passing space, always oblivious to what happens in it, essentially indifferent to the transits and events that cross it. This neutrality of the frame invites the freedom of the gaze and, eventually, leads to an existential effect of *presence* – the *hic et nunc*.

Parallel to this neutrality of the cinematographic gaze, the filmic contents also become more casual. *Casualty* is expressed in the choice of trivial, inconsequential events. Not only do the themes become more mundane, but the narrative directions also become ambiguous. There is a decentering of the dramatic axes, motivated by narrative digressions or by the inclusion of loose elements that confuse bearings and intentions. Casual events are no longer

organized within narrative arcs, occurring freely without showing a motivation or narrative function. Stories become unfinished, with plot holes and open endings. In general, a narrative drift is installed, apparently without a helmsman, without selectivity of events or without clues about their relevance.

This casualty of the filmic elements is reinforced by the author's *impartiality*. It is essentially a nihilistic stance: the author does not take sides, does not judge, is not biased, does not express an intention. All intentionality is transferred to the characters themselves (who embody heroism, perversion, beliefs, partialities), while the author remains exempt, even when the narration speaks in the first person. Tarkovsky says that "the greatness and ambiguity of art consist in the fact that it does not prove, does not explain and does not answer questions, even when it emits warning signals like 'Beware! Radiation! Danger!'" (Tarkovsky, 1998, p. 60). This impartiality neutralizes the propagandistic function of cinema, but also places it above any censorship. Cinema becomes free, not because it asserts its freedom (which would still be advertising), but in the sense that it assumes an almost naive indifference or amorality: for example, the lack of pudency in a nudity shot that shows without intending to show, or which doesn't show without intending to hide.

The figures of *neutrality*, *casualty* and *impartiality* all share the same ambiguous character that Bazin applauded in neorealist films, against classical illusionism. In all these figures, the ambiguity results from a decentering of the authorial intention: the focus disperses, and the filmic landscape becomes disinterested, adirectional, apparently orphaned.

Autonomization

A different way of accessing contingency can be described through the notion of *autonomy*. Autonomy resembles ambiguity, but its figures are dedicated to the deconstruction of structures and connections, more than to impassivity. Although autonomization and ambiguation intersect and converge in their effects, the respective figures sometimes point in opposite directions. While ambiguity

promotes a decentering of focus, autonomy tends to focus on isolated parts. The watchword here is fragmentation. There is, first, a tendency to disregard the narrative principle of organic chaining of actions and events. Instead of action, which follows a previous state and prepares the next, the autonomous, independent situation takes the fore. The situational event detaches from the narrative or compositional totality, installing itself in-between, that is, in situations that do not contribute to the evolution of the plot, although they enrich the diegetic world. In Terrence Malick's work, this replacement of action for situation is manifest: in *A Hidden Life* (2019), a film about the story of an Austrian farmer who refuses to fight for the Nazis during World War II, the filmmaker rarely focuses on the narrative turning points (plot points), preferring to get lost in the small moments of everyday life, in the impasses, in the tasks of the rural world, in the silent complicities. For example, when the protagonist is called by the regime's forces for basic military training, that moment is not shown: the narrative jumps directly from the rural world to the military world, ignoring the events that led from one state to the other, contrary to what would be expected in a conventional narrative. In Malick's contemplative style, the narrative steps (or beats) are continually silenced and replaced by atmospheric states, by pure situations, so that the viewer does not get the impression that he is being led by the narrative.

The same autonomization effect may appear through the stretching of situations, through duration itself. In *No Home Movie* (2015), by Chantal Akerman, the opening shot presents a windy and desolate scene, with a desert background and a tree in the foreground. The framing is fixed (albeit a bit rough) and without any evolution of the action. There is only the partially bare tree being buffeted by the wind. Perhaps a metaphor for the harsh passage of time. But what is to be highlighted here is the autonomizing effect that the stretched duration infuses in the shot: little by little, we give up any expectation of narrative continuity or connection between the visual parts of the shot itself and focus only on the sensoriality of the situation: the foliage of the tree takes on a life of its own, becomes expressive, and the shot tends to become self-sufficient, almost hypnotic.

Another mode of autonomization consists of temporal or spatial disorganization, either through the non-linear arrangement of narrative events or through the fragmentation of visual elements within sequences that refuse to reveal the global situation. A classic example of spatial fragmentation is Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959), in which the "scalpel-camera" dissects the action and produces an increasing abstraction of events due to the partial perspectives. Temporal nonlinearity also serves a similar effect of narrative fragmentation: in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), the nonlinear arrangement of events frees the narrative from any centralizing dramatic axis; and in *Memento* (2000), by Christopher Nolan, the inverted linearity of the plot expresses the very fragmentation of memory.

Fragmentation can also be obtained through visual interruptions, such as the use of formal separators that isolate sequences or shots. In *No Man's Land* (2012), by Salomé Lamas, a homeless man recounts episodes from his past as a mercenary and hired killer. The documentary is minimal, taking place almost entirely on an empty set, with the man sitting facing the camera in the center of the fixed frame. Whenever there is a cut in the interview, a black separator is inserted with the number of the following fragment. This separator, which constitutes an alternative solution to recurrent methods such as the use of jumpcuts or cutaway shots, gives the film a greater plasticity and stylization, but also contributes to accentuate the intrinsic weight of each shot by capitulating and isolating it from the rest. In *Love* (2015), by Gaspar Noé, all cuts of the film include a black separator. There is always a visual interruption, regardless of the type of spatiotemporal connection between contiguous shots. In these two examples, the visual fragmentation ends up reinforcing the autonomy and compositional integrity of the individual shots.

Another more transversal way of autonomy is *decontextualization*. Through the rarefaction of context, which is also common to the figures of ambiguity, the narrative is expropriated of its anchors. Stories of this type always seem to take place in between, without introductions or explanations, even when they respect a chronological order. Events and characters follow one another without a narrative pattern and the context gradually appears in the

uncompromising corollary of each new independent situation, so that the learning of the diegetic habitus reproduces the learning of the real, without a guide. In the opening minutes of *Hunger* (2008), by Steve McQueen, we follow the routine of a prison guard, a character who will not be particularly relevant to the plot, serving here as an introductory vehicle for the presentation of the prison where most of the action will take place. It is a casual character, out of context. This approach persists as we struggled to reach a broader context, like a hodgepodge of single pieces, each piece with its own autonomy. The protagonist appears relatively late, already caught up in this narrative tone: another casual piece. The typical mosaic of explanation of the historical event that serves as the subject of the film is never really formed, namely: the life of a group of IRA inmates in Maze prison, in 1981, when they prepare for a hunger strike. They are contingent characters in a contingent world, fragments without ostentation or special contextualization.

The autonomy effect does not only refer to the interior of narratives and filmic compositions, but it also applies to the relationship of individual works with other works and with the corresponding cultural and historical context. In this broader scope, the autonomy of the work – and the contingency effect associated with it – refers to the singularity of aesthetic experience. It is a defense of the sensible against the universality of the intelligible. Quoting Susan Sontag:

> When we employ the notion of style historically, to group works of art into schools and periods, we tend to efface the individuality of styles. But this is not our experience when we encounter a work of art from an aesthetic (...) point of view (...). Then, so far as the work is successful and still has the power to communicate with us, we experience only the individuality and contingency of the style. It is the same with our lives. If we see them from the outside, as the influence and popular dissemination of the social sciences and psychiatry has persuaded more and more people to do, we view ourselves as instances of generalities, and in doing so, we become profoundly and painfully alienated from our own experience and our humanity. (Sontag, 2009, pp. 28-29)

This singularity, after all, is yet another form of autonomization by suspending ties with a normalizing authority. The focus turns not only to the subversive styles of auteur cinema, but above all to the possibility of an inner realism, through which one can access a more volatile domain of contingency, supported by the uniqueness of autonomous voices. It is not so much a question of valuing here the subversiveness of singular cinematographic works, but instead recognizing the intimate potential of the singular experience, against the generalizing effect of norms or the law.

Sincerity

In addition to the figures of ambiguity and autonomy, we also recognize a third way of accessing contingency: *sincerity*[3]. It is said that cinema is sincere as it manages to hide the filmmaker's manipulative work, even when the authorial mark is very present. It is not a question of refusing the poetic effort and defending a radical passivity, but only of guiding the work in such a way that the result does not feel fake. All artists seek to refine this dissimulating intuition, which is transversal to the various arts. It is true that artistic work is always an artifice, but that does not necessarily make it false. How do you lie without lying? Through performativity. And, from the anchor of performativity, also in art. Aesthetic sincerity is not epistemological (at least not in the conventional sense), it results from a poetic game that aims to adapt the execution to the proposal and the proposal to the execution, without incurring in exaggeration (as the forced adjectives

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[3]   The concept of *sincerity*, as adopted by pragmatic intentionalism along the lines of H. P. Grice, is added to the concepts of *veracity* (true or false) and *normativity* (right or wrong), contributing to a comprehensive categorization of the semantic modes of language (Habermas, 2004). In the present context, we appropriate the concept in a phenomenological sense that is demarcated from the properly pragmatic studies of communication, although both approaches (phenomenological and pragmatic) preserve common traits. The pragmatic approach addresses sincerity as a discourse validation modality that assumes the intention as a reference, while the phenomenological approach assumes the concept in terms of the relationship – recognized in the act of reading – between the form of the discourse and the projection of an authorial intention. In both cases, the attribute of sincerity depends on some kind of agreement between discourse and discursive intention.

in a poem) or in insufficiency (as the naïve amateurism in a realistic drawing). Sincerity knows neither impositions (exaggerations) nor attempts (insufficiencies). In sincerity there is no instruction. For the work to be freed from its manipulative tone, the instructions, attempts and goals must somehow remain hidden.

We can recognize the sincerity in the sober and unpretentious styles where the author tries to go unnoticed; or in the irreverence or insubordination of an original voice; or in the confessional and autobiographical gesture; or even in the self-consciousness of metadiscursive approaches. There is, in first place, a sincerity oriented towards objectivity, either due to the transparency by which it exposes the narrative contents, or due to the coherence or simplicity of the narration itself. In such works, we approach a natural legitimacy of the filmic elements, narrated by silent, reliable or literal voices. Many of the great classics are as such. Although this sobriety may bring us closer to the real, capturing its rawness and sensoriality, it should not be confused with sensationalism or sentimentality; on the contrary, any guidance or manipulation of emotions will be carefully concealed so that manipulation does not become obvious. Audience reactions must emerge naturally, as if they were based solely on the spectator's enthusiasm, regardless of the film's purpose. Thus, the focus shifts away from the author (which remains neutral) to its discourse (which becomes autonomous, self-sustained). In cinema, composers comment that the soundtrack fails when it becomes perceptible; and editors speak of their craft as an "invisible art": the less they draw attention to themselves, the better they are doing their job[4]. This camouflage of the artistic work is shared by fiction, documentary or any other genre. It ranges from classical naturalism to avant-garde experimentalism, from Dziga Vertov's Kino-Pravda to the direct cinema of Robert Drew and Richard Leacock. The author's self-imposition distracts the viewer from immersiveness[5], suspends the literality that was invested in

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4   See Apple, Wendy (2004). *The Cutting Edge: The Magic of Movie Editing*. USA.

5   At this point, it should be noted that the problem of *immersiveness*, by itself, raises a whole other order of questions related to aesthetic experience, similarly to the questioning of artificialness. *Immersiveness* is related to the literalization of the performative content, while *artificialness* is related to the literalization of the authorial intention.

the performative world and redirects it to the literality of the artist's craft itself, that is, to craftsmanship or artifice. The *literalization of the authorial intention* corresponds to *artificialness*.

But there is also a poetic sincerity that does not try to hide, and even highlights, the authorial manifestation and even the processes inherent to production. There are cinematographic trends where filmic self-consciousness becomes more apparent, either because they explicitly assume a subjective voice, or because of their formal stripping, or due to the precariousness of their means of production. This is often the case with autobiographies, family-films (home-movies) and diaristic, confessional or commented cinema, where the filmmaker's intimacy is shown apparently without filters, and where the very imperfections of the execution become testimonial (from Jonas Mekas to Agnès Varda). It is also the case with much of the so-called statement-cinema or essay-cinema[6], the guerrilla-cinema[7], the autoethnographic cinema and other variants where the author shares his personal experience, living context and convictions, even if his presence doesn't necessarily become a thematic center. And it is also the case of archival and found-footage cinema, which combines plasticity with memory, experimentalism with historical evidence, appropriation with truth value, poetic freedom with the "archive effect" (Baron, 2014).

In both cases, we consider that literalization compromises the aesthetic experience. It is convenient, by the way, not to confuse the concept of *aesthetic authenticity* (which is here related specifically to *contingency*, against *artificialness*) with *aesthetic experience*, which involves other pro-aesthetic attractors besides contingency, namely *difference* (against *immersiveness*), and *persistence* (against *arbitrariness*). About these complementary angles of approach to the aesthetics of cinema, see Martins, 2020, *Persistence and Arbitrariness: considerations about repetition and duration in cinema*; and Martins, 2023, *Imersividade e Diferença no Cinema e nas Artes* [Immersiveness and Difference in Cinema and the Arts].

6   See, for example, Jean Luc Godard's *La Chinoise* (1967).

7   See, for example, the shorts *#Ya* (Ygor Gama and Florencia Rovlich, 2015) and *Balada de um Batráquio* (Leonor Teles, 2016). Although films like these clearly contain a political or ideological charge, their aesthetic dimension – or their aestheticization of images and sounds – somehow gives the films an amoral or trans-moral tone.

There is also the properly metadiscursive cinema, that informal cinema where everything becomes pro-filmic, including the means of production, the film crews, the equipment and the actual act of performance, exploring aesthetic authenticity directly through the abolition of the fourth wall, from the *cinéma-vérité* introduced by Jean Rouch to the hybrid cinema that freely mixes fiction with documentary. An emblematic example of this hybrid approach is the film *Lightning over Water* (1980), by Wim Wenders and Nicholas Ray, a metafilmic experience that follows the final phase of Nicholas Ray's life (who suffered from cancer), where the joint creative process of the two filmmakers is shown through the combination of staged sequences, improvised scenes, backstage shots and archival materials.

A broader manifestation of the metadiscursive register – from the *French New Wave* to the Danish manifesto *Dogma 95* – consists of deconstructing the cinematographic grammar itself with the purpose of unmasking it or making its underlying matrix visible, so that, in this new visibility, the primordial sincerity of the cinematographic act is recovered. The case of Dogma 95 is especially illustrative of the realist effort to return cinema to a purer state. Among the ten rules of its "vow of chastity", there are the following requirements: refusal of scenography and accessories, use of real locations and direct sound, free camera, absence of photographic tricks, filters or special lighting, rejection of historical themes (the film must take place in the present), rejection of genre cinema and refusal of dramatic clichés (for example involving homicides and weapons or heroes and villains).

Artificialness: the literalization of authorial intention

There are many poetic figures that convey the contingency effect. Whether through ambiguation, autonomization or sincerity, the artist will seek to address the real to the detriment of himself, even when his style remains unmistakable or when the thematic center is the autobiography. In this performative arc of return to the real, which is essential to aesthetic authenticity, it is not about betraying performativity and reducing experience to a literal sense. The real is literal insofar as it is not performative. In artistic

expression, on the contrary, the return to the real remains anchored on the level of performativity, from which the twist towards the real remains indirect. Despite the apparent paradox, it is precisely this management of distance, of deferral, of mediation, that bears the aesthetic authenticity, the experience of contingency in the work of art, the poetic feel of the genuine.

Despite its innate realist characteristics, cinema is not interested in the literal sense. On the contrary, its artistic value involves avoiding *literalization*, that is, avoiding the reduction of the work to its literal sense. In direct access to the real – for example in news reports, in empirical recordings, in naive documentarism – the performative dimension is missed and only information remains. This phenomenology is perfectly suited to various spheres of experience, but it does not fit in with aesthetic fruition. When the informative record imposes itself in the scope of art, the artistic act itself ends up being caught in the web of literality, not in the sense of a deeper dive into the real, but in the sense of an unmasking of the author, as in an act of magic which failed because the trick was spotted. This embezzlement of performance corresponds to a literalization of the authorial intention: the author is literalized as the work's strings become visible (against his will). The artist's effort is also part of the real – in the same sense that a photographic image is assumed to be a mechanical extension of the photographed reality – but this link to the real must remain indirect so as not to overlap with the work's performative dimension. When the operation draws too much attention to itself, it becomes an extension of the literality of the real and the work's performative relationship with the spectator is suspended. Contingency then gives way to *artificialness*. This is what we feel when the work seems forced, convenient, far-fetched, operatic, false.

For the work to preserve authenticity, the author must be simultaneously involved (performative condition of the work) and dissimulated (return to the real). How is this dissimulation possible in the context of art? By directing the focus to the effect and not to the execution, that is, by avoiding artificialness. The literalization of the authorial intention consists of that instant (of exaggeration or insufficiency) in which the execution eclipsed the effect. When

one says that a given poetic decision by the artist is forced or "feels fake", one does not mean to attack the artifice itself, since any performative object implies, by definition, an escape from the real. The problem is not in the authorial or performative nature of the work, nor even in the awareness of composition or structure, but in the mismatch between the author's intention and his creation, which also corresponds to a mismatch during fruition. The aesthetic experience requires the spectator to take responsibility, co-authorship[8]; and this involvement consists, first, in engaging with the proposal (performatively) without bumping into the underlying mechanisms of such proposal (informatively).

In the poetic orientation towards the real, *artificialness* – the literalization of the author, the unmasking of his intention – occurs due to insufficiencies and exaggerations, that is, the artist errs by default or by excess. Such fault impressions can coexist in the same object (perhaps this is the recipe for *kitsch*, for example), but, in general, it is possible to distinguish them clearly. In the first case, critics speak of amateurism, simplism, facilitation, predictability, etc. These and other insufficiencies go back to the ancient intuition that Plato already used in his criticism directed at art as *mimesis* (the problem of the insufficiency of the copy in relation to the original, of the mundane in relation to the ideal). In the second case, critics speak of convenience, partiality, pretentiousness, manichaeism, sensationalism, sentimentality, or other visible forms of orchestration of certain effects. Quoting Tarkovsky: "When what you have in sight is just the achievement of an effect or the applause of the audience, it is so easy to film a beautiful scene… However, one step in that direction and we are lost" (Tarkovsky, 1998, p. 93). And he adds: "Although, ultimately, all art is biased, [the] same bias can either be absorbed by the unfathomable layers of artistic images that shape it, or it can be exaggeratedly asserted (…). The trend must be hidden, so that it is not exposed like the springs that jump out of a sofa" (*Ibid.*, p. 56). This is also what happens when the work provides reading instructions, when it imposes an

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[8] See Martins, 2018.

intention, a focus of attention, a forced interpretation. The work reveals its artificialness as soon as the trends and instructions leap into view, in the same way that jokes lose their comic effect when they are explained. It is also for the same reason that art shouldn't show morality. Morality is a form of instruction. Still according to Tarkovsky: "The aesthetic structure does not need statements, and the strength of art does not lie there" (*Ibid.*, p. 57).

The poetic effort counteracts artificialness with its phenomenological opposite: *contingency*. In modern cinema, this movement was signaled, at first, in the renewed desire to rehabilitate and show chance itself. In Burch's description: "We are interested here in the fascination that the 'creator' can feel when contemplating and 'presenting' objects or materials which were not created by him, which seem to him more beautiful because they do not come from him (that is, from Men, from the Artist)" (Burch, 1973, p. 129). But the reconciliation of cinema with chance is not a pure dive into exemption, it is still a full-fledged effort, a *poiesis*, a voice, an aesthetic discourse. It will therefore be necessary to redirect the focus: "What interests us here is above all the satisfaction that one can have (and of which some are ashamed, still feeling it) in reworking such materials, such objects, skillfully combining them with others of his own making, finally in bringing them back to the status of a closed work, pulling them out of the contingency where they germinated... and continuing to preserve the originality of these materials coming from another world" (*Ibid.*).

In these terms, it is not so much about capturing the real, but mainly about the author's effort not to disturb the work with the traces of his own manipulative intervention. *Contingency* is to be understood here as a dissimulation of the authorial intention, against *artificialness*. Of course, *contingency figures* do not offer concrete art recipes, not even specific contents. It is not about proposing an artist's manual. However, the three varieties of figures that the phenomenological analysis allowed us to point out here – *ambiguity*, *autonomy* and *sincerity* – can, nevertheless, help us map the guidelines that feed, in each historical moment, the unceasing search for aesthetic authenticity.

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FILM POETICS OF AUTHENTICITY: BETWEEN FACT AND FICTION, DOCUMENT AND AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

SUSANA NASCIMENTO DUARTE

I.

The adherence of the physical and existential reality in action to the cinematographic image, as what allows it to access its ontology–the mummification of time and the embalmed reality spoken of by André Bazin[1]–paradoxically involves emancipating the cinematographic "representation" from its strictly mimetic charge, i.e., preventing the recording of reality from being taken as a faithful reproduction of the movement of things and of the world as perceived by our natural vision and perception.

On this movement, which copies natural perception[2] (and which is a technologically fabricated illusion), the cinematograph superimposes another, as its own essential element, which is inseparable from the discovery of camera movements and editing and which required learning (in other words, it took some time for viewers to recognize it as such). In fact, this was a new inscription

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[1]   Cf. André Bazin, "The ontology of the photographic image", trans. Hugh Gray, in *What is cinema?*, 9-16 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

[2]   The movement here, in its cinematographic translation and despite the panic provoked by films like *L'arrivée du train à la gare de Ciotat*, was nothing more than the sum of motionless shots/cuts of reality (Deleuze), animated by the mechanical, artificial movement of the projector.

of movement that, rather than imitating the movement of the world, allowed itself to be offered as an image of the movement of thought, a new, automatic image, through the introduction of movement into the image. Hence the initial viewers referred to cinema images as surpassing the very movement and flow of their thoughts.[3] They were progressively captured by it, thus initiating the learning process of a new, non-human automatic perception, through familiarization with a whole new set of visual and sonorous signs, as well as their movements and articulations. If the cinematograph is the inscription of movement, it is because it becomes an integrating mechanism for all kinds of movements, making sensible, above all through different ways of transitioning from one shot A to another shot B–in other words, through montage, "the mobility of the world, all types of mobility, the mobility of fictions (ahead to happier tomorrows and various other dreams), bodily mobility (dance, action), material and mental movements (dialectical and logical games)."[4]

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[3]   As Gilles Deleuze emphasizes, for the pioneers cinema would be a thought without equivalent in other arts; it would also be an art for the masses and by the masses, where they would become the subject of thought; it would be a universal language that would force thought to move from possibility to necessity, given the automatic nature of its image. In other words, with cinema, "it would not be possible not to think," which means that cinema would reach the ideal of thought where we do not think whatever we want but are forced to think from something. This statement is the positive variant of Georges Duhamel's negative statement at the time: "I cannot think what I want in the face of cinema, of moving images, i.e., automatic images replace my own thoughts"–a statement which is based on an image of thought that objects to any possible connection between cinema and thought. Deleuze thus clarifies this relationship between cinema and a new image of thought: "I was not foolish enough to want to create a philosophy of cinema, but an encounter impressed me: I liked authors (in philosophy) who demanded that movement be introduced into thought... How could one not rediscover cinema, which introduced 'true' movement into the image?" This introduction of movement into thought, according to Dork Zabunyan, merges with the contingency of encountering cinema as that which forces us to think. Therefore, cinema would be the materialization of Deleuze's image of thought, the mental and spiritual automaton, or in other words, the idea that "there is only involuntary thought, incited, compelled within thought." Gilles Deleuze, *Deux régimes de fous*, 264, quoted by Dork Zabunyan, *Voir, parler, penser au risque du cinema* (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2008), 18. My translation.

[4]   Serge Daney, "From movies to moving", trans. Brian Holmes, in *Art and the moving image*, ed. by Tanya Leighton (London: Tate, Afterall, 2008), 334.

If the 'language' (or grammar or writing) of film is constituted by everything that filmmakers have advanced as a way of transitioning from one element to another–or, as Serge Daney says, of interdicting this passage, giving rise to various theories and practices of montage– the term is often synonymous with the consolidation of a relatively stable system of relationships among the various components of the cinematographic image, oriented by the economy and significant unity of the Aristotelian narrative matrix, which allowed, especially since the advent of sound, for the production of a new realism, one that was irreducible to everything that came before it. This is a realism that, while remaining photographic, is not to be confused with spontaneous mechanical reproduction of the real and rather results from the effect of naturalizing representation: what we interpret as spontaneous meanings are actually the effect of crystallized conventions and result from reconstructions.[5]

Cinema simultaneously reproduces and withdraws things from their referential contingency. This is why Jacques Rancière can see cinema as the representative par excellence of the aesthetic age, drawing attention to a new identity of the passive and the active. For Rancière, this new identity is not to be found in the specificity of the cinematographic device, identified with its natural aptitude for the neutral recording of anonymous life, returned by the mechanical eye of the camera that sees without belonging to anyone. For him, it is more than a question of apparatus; it is the effect of the predisposition of the sensibility of the time for this type of vision, for the equivalent of indirect discourse, in which the privileged point of view of consciousness no longer matters.

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[5] As Nicole Brenez writes, referring to Eisenstein, the image "must be thought of in terms of its relationship–a relationship of knowledge rather than expression, analogy rather than reduplication, work rather than substitution–that it maintains with the real. In the case of a film, this exercise is difficult because cinema, as the art of reproduction par excellence, favors mimetic reduction, in which we immediately refer the image back to its source–as if phenomena could be equivalent to their recording." My translation. Cf. Nicole Brenez in "Comme vous êtes. Représentation et figuration, inventions de l'image cinématographique" in *Admiranda, 5. Cahiers d'analyse du film et de l'image – Figuration Défiguration* (1990): 14, and in *De la figure en générale et du corps en particulier. L'invention figurative au cinéma* (De Boeck Université, 1998), 11-12.

In other words, what would be attributed to the ontology of the cinema image in defining a new identity of the passive and the active–inseparable from the vocation of the device, which is to record the passivity of things, becoming a mirror and automatic echo of the silent spectacle of the world–is only mistakenly related to this. The active part of creation, which, for the writer, for example, means affecting their style as an active element invested with the creator's will, from the passivity of things, is absorbed by the cinematographic device, which becomes an indiscriminate receptacle of life in its nudity, in the silence of its traces, which were not chosen as such.

Rancière questions the centrality of the technical device in determining the conditions of specificity from which the ontological dimension and artistic value of cinema derive. According to him, what is attributed to the device is actually part of a typical operation of the modern age (present since Gustave Flaubert)–the work of dis-figuration, in which one drama is extracted from another. This is the condition for reintroducing in cinema the active part that belongs to any act of creation. Because the passivity of cinema and its device makes it equally receptive to not only the raw movement of the world but also narrative sequences–which arise from a certain writing or scripting of movement and allow for the rehabilitation of the old narrative art as a reemergence of the active part of creation in cinema–cinema has been marked, from the beginning, by the tension between narrative and figure,[6] history/fiction and the silent

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[6]   The figure is to be understood in Benjamin's sense "as an image of fragmentation, of a displacement of meaning that no longer corresponds to the two dialectical poles of creation, according to the regime of representation–either pure mimesis, in which the form is supposed to immediately and without residue refer to a content, a concept, an external model which it resembles, or a subtracted representation, identified as an element, shot, or sequence, isolated and non-independent, serving the entirety of the film as a whole. The figure would instead focus on what belongs to the introduction of ruptures, sutures within that totality. The figure would depend, therefore, on the interruption of the film's movement, separating itself from the overall image of the film, that is, representation understood here as a system of evidence and meaning." Cf. Nicole Brenez, "Comme vous êtes. Représentation et figuration, inventions de l'image cinématographique," in *Admiranda, 5. Cahiers d'analyse du film et de l'image - Figuration Défiguration* (1990): 9-19. My translation.

presence of things. In this sense, bringing the silent spectacle of things, the physiology of existence–made of variations of light, textures, an attention to the plasticity of things and people[7] – to the forefront involves, from Rancière's perspective, subtracting them from the drama of characters inscribed in cinema images. It is by reference to this active, narrative-representative dimension of cinema that another dimension can emerge, contradicting the first.

At the same time, countering the narrative-representative tendency of cinema in this way is accompanied by a kind of reversal, in which the tension or dialectical relationship between constructed images and recorded images, "the mute impressions that speak for themselves and the montage that calculates their signifying force and truth-value,"[8] between the "objective" principle of describing the material world and the "subjective" process of its "poetic" condensation through the work of intervention and projection onto facts and realities, manifests itself differently and emphasizes the poles of the relationship in various ways. In fact, while cinema has often imitated or illustrated "classical poetics" and, at the same time, countered the *mise en scène* suggested by literature and theater, it has always done so under the inescapable constraint of having to collect fragments of reality in order to produce them anew, i.e., to quote them (whether to link them together or to highlight their fragmented condition). On the other hand, but based on the same power of combination and conflict between the machine's muteness and the intervention on the images, when what is foregrounded is the part of cinema's vocation that consists in the "automatic reproduction" of reality, its technical capacity for indexicality typical of documentaries, it is balanced by the creative part, which consists in accentuating the number of perspectives on these fragments of reality, modifying their light, and freely reassembling them.

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[7]   Cf. Jacques Rancière, "A thwarted fable", in *Film fables*, trans. Emiliano Battista (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2006).

[8]   Jacques Rancière, "Documentary Fiction: Marker and the fiction of memory", *Ibid.*, 161.

II.

This relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, the particular way in which the combination of passive and active elements of creation is constitutive of and inscribed inescapably in the cinematograph from its origin on, interferes with the notion of authenticity in cinema, or with the possibility of defining what makes the images in cinema authentic. The value of the authenticity of the image is measured in terms of the automatic and immediate relationship that the photographic device establishes with reality and life, understood as originals that it not only reproduces but recreates. That is, the authentic image is to be read not only as the visible prolongation in space and time of the referent from which it emanates, but also as a sign of a particular type that reveals something of the world, transfiguring it.

The concept of authenticity is associated with the idea of that which proves itself, that which withdraws authority from itself in a self-sufficient manner; in the case of cinema, the authenticity of the images is the result or effect of the cinematographic device, as a mode or technique of authentication.[9]

The images derive their value as authentic from the specific representational relationship they establish with the referent, a relationship supposedly free from mediation or interference in the production of the image. At the same time, and paradoxically, that image, automatic and untouched by the cinematographic equipment, so to speak, is only possible because it is precisely mediated by the equipment.[10] On the other hand, even if the image producer disappears in it (behind the camera) more easily than the naturalistic or realist writer in their writing, the image remains a sign of itself, that is, an

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[9]   Cf. Susanne Knaller, "The Ambiguousness of the authentic. Authenticity between Reference, Fictionality and Fake in Modern and Contemporary Art", in *Paradoxes of authenticity. Studies on a critical concept*, ed. Julia Straub (Rutgers University, 2012), 51.

[10]   Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version (1936)", in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 35.

image determined not only by a referential moment but also by a reflexive and performative moment.[11]

One might assume that, given the characteristics of the cinematographic device, it would suffice to place and point the camera and record what is there to ensure the authenticity or truth of an image. However, as Rancière tells us, doing this also involves restoring the image of art from a given era. It is less a question of the device and the resulting specificities of the image than of the degree and quality of reconciliation established within it at any given moment between the active and the passive parts of creation. In other words, it is not so much an ontological question as an aesthetic one, depending on an ever-changing agreement between reality, technical automatism(s), conventions of the image, and the poetic and expressive gestures that intersect with it, without the possibility of anticipating the form that reality will take or reveal from this encounter.

The authenticity of the cinematographic image, prolonging what the invention of photography made unavoidable, is thus an artistic or aesthetic category in the sense that it expresses not only the authenticity/truth of the object reproduced by the camera but also the objectivity of the very act of creation. For example, if we consider that the active subject involved in it manifests itself through the gaze made objective by the camera or through the use of certain language and editing procedures, etc.

The transformation of aesthetic experience brought about by the emergence of cinema, which is manifested not so much in the question of the time, "Is cinema an art?", but rather in the question "What does cinema do to art?", is evident in the concerns of Walter Benjamin and Sergei Eisenstein at the time. Both reflect precisely on what will become of art given the advent of photography and cinema as technical means of reproducing reality. For Eisenstein, this is a positive development, as cinema emerges as a kind of synthesis of other arts, while for Benjamin it is a symptom of degradation.[12] Benjamin sees in the early days

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[11] Susanne Knaller, *Ibid.*, 52.

[12] Cf. Brenez, *Ibid.*, 13.

of portrait photography the equivalent of the fleeting moment in which the photographic image allows access to the trace of its authenticity from the real, that is, when the portrayed face presents itself as an image that resists the qualities of representation. The suggestion of a distance, in the here and now, "the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be," "a strange tissue of space and time,"[13]– essentially, the aura that gives cult value to a work of art–has its fugitive photographic equivalent in this capacity of the portrayed person to reflect, in the contingency of their appearance, the material conditions of their here and now. But after this brief moment in the history of photography, authenticity dialectically transforms into its negative counterpart, i.e., into facticity, mere objectivity. We are faced with the famous loss of aura that Benjamin diagnoses in relation to everything that is technically reproduced from the world and reality. Eisenstein, on the other hand, reads cinema as an extension of figurative painting, using it to reinterpret other arts, which he analyzes based on cinematographically founded aesthetic categories, allowing him to recognize in those manifestations the cinema *avant la lettre.* Cinema is thus the culmination and fulfillment of the other arts, which in a way announce it and which it comes to fulfill, realizing the promises they contained. Therefore, for Eisenstein, cinematic realism is not to be confused with the spontaneous mechanical reproduction of reality. In fact, Eisenstein sees in cinema and photographic reproduction "a possibility of liberation for signs," while Benjamin understands it as a moment of reification. For the filmmaker, and for Benjamin, reproduction extracts the thing from its referential context, from the here and now, ultimately from that instant where the exhibition value of its appearance competes with the auratic value of cult artworks. In Eisenstein, however, this is synonymous with a reorientation of things toward "an eidetic dimension that he calls imagicity."[14]

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[13]   Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version (1936)", *Ibid.*, 23.

[14]   Brenez, *Ibid.*, 14.

Benjamin's famous diagnosis of the loss of the aura of things and artworks under the effect of their technical reproducibility falls within the scope of reflection on the disturbance of aesthetic experience and the categories of our perception and apprehension of art forms introduced by photography. If photography, and by extension cinema, transform the general character of art, it is because the nature of reproduction has changed with reproducibility, altering the relationship between the copy and the original: not only does the latter suffer in its uniqueness and integrity, but the entire experience now has its own reproduction as reference and justification. In other words, the real, any act, becomes inconceivable without its being recorded. On the other hand, this idea that there is no real without its trace points to what positively emerges with photography in the context of pictoriality: it allows for the preservation of the mark of what is contingent and even traumatic in the real, which painting, for instance, cannot account for. And here, photography aligns with Benjamin's indexical conception of the image: it is the record of that which, because it has been inscribed, like a burn on the body, cannot be elaborated or erased by its representation:

> In Hill's Newhaven fishwife, her eyes cast down in such indolent, seductive modesty, there remains something that goes beyond testimony to the photographer's art, something that cannot be silenced, that fills you with an unruly desire to know what her name was, the woman who was alive there, who even now is still real and will never consent to be wholly absorbed in "art."[15]

The precision of photography (and by extension cinema), which grants it the possibility of being the record of what in reality does not succumb to representation and thus preserves its trace, its traumatic inscription, not only opens access to a world that was hitherto invisible, imperceptible–an excess of reality that the intelligent machine, i.e., cinema, according to Jean Epstein, registers as the feature of a thought that shows us, reveals to us, what we were unaware of about reality and ourselves–but also proves the existence of a reality independent of representation and perception. Reality

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[15] Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography", *Ibid.*, 276.

is self-presenting to the extent that its image forms and describes itself automatically, supposedly without human intervention or rendering it irrelevant.[16] In a way, the authenticity of photography supersedes the intentionality of the creator, with the image seen as a truthful reflection of reality that is not entirely subject to the will of the photographer/filmmaker.

At the same time, the new era of technical reproducibility inaugurated by photography and cinema, alluded to by Benjamin in his famous text, marks a new aesthetic relationship with images that stems from their new automatic mode of production and manifests itself in a reflexive awareness of the medium and the new mode of non-human perception it introduces, turning the constitution of the image into a process that translates not only the duplication of the world through its mechanical and stenographic recording, the trace of an experience or situation, but also a new objectivity of the image as an image, "the reality of the image as a photographic and cinematographic picture."[17]

While photography and cinema have been discussed since their origins in terms of authenticity and truth in relation to the reality they reproduce, what is ultimately revealed is fundamentally different. The image contradicts appearance, the sense of the image within the scope of mimesis and representation. Whether the image invests its truth in the not yet perceived, the imperceptible, as Epstein believes, allowing it to be revealed in a moment of photogeny (a kind of positive counterpart to Benjamin's aura), or whether it invents reality as it is, extracting it from its context (Bitomsky), in the sense that any image is always fiction and artifice, less determined by representation (of a pro-filmic origin) than determinant in relation to it, setting it in

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[16]   In *The Pencil of Nature*, Henri Talbot expresses "his conviction that in photography, the subject of an image would depict itself and hence guarantee its own truthful representation. The influence of the image's creator, according to Talbot, would cease to be decisive of whether a depiction is faithful to the original or not. Indeed, great fascination was aroused by the fact that the photographer does not even seem to have final and absolute control over the image–rather, the things seem to imprint themselves on the photographs"; Thomas Susanka, *The Rhetorics of authenticity. Photographic Representations of War*, in *Paradoxes of authenticity. Studies on a critical concept*, 95.

[17]   Susanne Knaller, *Ibid.*, 57.

motion and avoiding its tendency to crystallize, to remain in the same place, in a simplistic and schematic way we can say that authenticity is always a construction, a staging, a careful choice of what to show and what to hide. Reality without equipment, appearing as credibly real, is paradoxically only the effect of an extensive artifice, even if it appears more equipment-free than, for example, painting: the shots and scenes are credible based on the angle or frame in which they are shown–from another angle, the image could become unviable. At the same time, the film is composed of fragments, resulting from the fragmentation to which immediate reality is destined in the new technological world (Benjamin).

Thus, the material of the image is also the gaze, the subjectivity, and the perception of creators and viewers, who recompose or resolve the film by proposing where to make the cuts between parts and wholes, by filling in the sutures, and by reading the work in accordance with accidents, highlighting or adding elements, not always in a reasonable manner, projecting their affective, thought, and meaning movements onto the images. Whence the ambivalence of photographic and cinematographic authenticity.

As a consequence, there seem to be essentially two ways of approaching authenticity in cinema. The first is the discourse on the potential of the cinematograph to portray reality authentically, in the sense of being factual and objective. The second concerns how filmmakers and viewers work with authenticity within the fabric of filmic signs, so to speak, in the sense of making what depends on the artifice of cinema manifest.

This complicates ontological conceptions of cinema that are based on the indexical nature of the image–the *ça a été*, the presence of reality, in this case, Bazin's realism and the essence of cinema as the production of an unmanipulated vision of things: cinema as restoring not only the trace of reality but also the act of perception, creation, and thought that determined its image or determined it as an image. What becomes privileged is the indexical dimension of the cinematic image, combined with the idea of an image that sustains itself without needing to derive its meaning from something exterior, of which it is a copy.

III.

In the case of documentary film, which we will address in more detail in this third part of the text, the value of authenticity of the images is inseparable from what is understood at any given moment as the "creative treatment of actuality" if we accept that documentary distinguishes itself from other non-fictional forms of approaching reality by presupposing the reconfiguration of natural material or "fact-images."

Indeed, its identity as a genre is consolidated, initially still in the silent era, based on the Griersonian idea of reorganizing cinematic material, placing it in an explicit discursive context through editing and intertitles, in contrast to the "view," a descriptive mode based on the act of looking and showing. The film's form integrates its images into a larger argument/structure/narrative, using them as evidence to substantiate or intensify a discourse.

However, this active emphasis on form paradoxically aims to neutralize it in order to convey an effect of reality, drawing its strength and effectiveness from the codes and conventions of cinematic language that have since become naturalized and associated with authenticity and self-evident truth. At this time, such codes aimed at a transparent style capable of suggesting the erasure of the distance between referent and representation, bringing to the forefront both the authenticity of the descriptive and realistic likeness/verisimilitude of the historical world and the authenticity of the mobilization and agenciation of reality for a cause.

The truth that tells itself takes on the expository form, but also the poetic and dramatic form, of naturalistic realism that we find in films like *Nanook of the North* (1922) by Flaherty, or the didactic and propagandistic form of realism that we find in films like *Misère or Borinage* (1934) by Joris Ivens and Henri Stork. In the first case, Nanook's story tells itself to the extent that a dramatic structure, based on the vocabulary of continuity editing and the individualization of the Natives as if they were fictional characters, shapes and partly determines it. In the second case, an articulated argument, delivered by an omniscient voiceover, rhetorically structures the alignment of the images and guides their ideologically motivated interpretation.

Although procedures like these have become instrumental to the development of codes for the authorized authenticity of documentaries, and although in their later crystallization into a classic and identifiable form of the genre we can sometimes recognize the detrimental confusion between realism and reality, between authenticity effects and truth, they above all exemplify the fact that documentary authenticity thrives on the tension between the recording of the historical, objective trace of reality and the "subjective" elements of its construction as an image.

From this tension, it is possible to approach each period of documentary filmmaking based on an emphasis of one or the other pole of this dialectical relationship. Thus, taking this framework into account, whereas in the case of Flaherty and Ivens/Stork the directors hide, or do not consider it important to underline, their intervention and the participation of the communities themselves in what we are seeing (*Nanook* and *Misère au Borinage* are films that reenact events, whether it is the way of life of the Inuit people from a "neo-Rousseauian"[18] perspective, giving visibility to the exotic and distant other as an equal, or miners from a transformative and utopian perspective, giving representative visibility to the oppressed), with a later filmmaker like Jean Rouch, for example, in *Chronique d'un été* (1960), co-directed with Edgar Morin, this relationship becomes the very condition of the film's being made.

The intertitles in *Nanook*, for example, tell us that Nanook and his family face hunger if the northern hunter cannot find food, but they do not tell us anything about Flaherty's actual relationship to this and other "facts" reported in the film.

Flaherty's narrative realism and the belief it provokes in the documentary and ethnographic authenticity of the situations presented are based, as mentioned above, on the use of a series of procedures inherent to the mastery of filmmaking that precisely promote the naturalization of that realism, that is, the removal of all signs of construction and staging on which it is based. However, this dimension of reenacting the way of life of the Inuit people, erased as

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[18] John Grierson, "First Principles of documentary", in *The Documentary Film Reader. History, Theory, Criticism*, ed. Jonathan Kahana (Oxford University Press, 2016), 219.

such to produce the same suspension of disbelief experienced by the viewer of a fiction film, when it is acknowledged as the aesthetic driving force of the film, only serves to authenticate the realistic context of the staging. If the denunciation of the staging or the fictional aspects of Nanook's story, which may be problematic from the perspective of strict ethnographic documentation, becomes irrelevant as a critique of the film, it is because it is overshadowed by the force of authenticity derived both from the truth of the performances of the Inuit people, who were invited to portray and stage the drama of their own lives, and from their participation in the construction of the film beyond representation. In fact, Flaherty managed to integrate the collaboration of Nanook and his family into his film by creating a darkroom and a screening room on location, which allowed him to develop and print rushes on location and to screen them with the Inuit, thus including their feedback on the film. He called this technique for including the community portrayed in the film being made a "participating camera," believing in its power to unlock communication and making it indispensable to his on-site filmmaking.

Collaboration has also proven to be a fundamental element of Ivens's filmmaking.[19] It is connected to the demand for raw realism, where the filmmaker's task is not only to capture the spectacle of unguarded life but also to counter the tendency to aestheticize reality. This corresponds to an approach to form that requires a method of creatively treating reality, which involves cleansing the image of any "pleasant photographic effects"[20] that could interfere with

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[19] Cf. Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 149.

[20] "When the clean-cut shadow of the barracks window fell on the dirty rags and dishes of a table the pleasant effect of the shadow actually destroyed the effect of dirtiness we wanted, so we broke the edges of the shadow. Our aim was to prevent agreeable photographic effects distracting the audience from the unpleasant truths we were showing. . . There have also been cases in the history of documentary when photographers became so fascinated by dirt that the result was the dirt looked interesting and strange, not something repellent to the cinema audience. The filmmaker must be indignant and angry about the waste of people before he can find the right camera angle on the dirt and on the truth." Joris Ivens, *The Camera and I* (New York: International Publishers, 1969), 87.

the perception of authenticity in what they show and convey: the harsh and unfair living and working conditions of the miners in the Borinage region of Belgium, which give meaning to the social conflict they embody and the collective mobilization involved in the political struggle for a common cause, not only to demand improvements but also to contribute to the deep transformation and change of society, aligned with communist ideals of building a new community beyond the ideology of equal opportunities for all.

The film takes up this struggle and identifies with it through a participatory mode of filming, where its portrayal of the miners arises from collaboration with them in their activity rather than merely representing them as victims.

What the film wants to document is also what it helps to recreate. Thus, the final scene of the film is a reenactment of a protest march that took place before Ivens and Storck's arrival. As Bill Nichols states, "not only did the workers collaborate by determining the exact nature of the march, they found themselves reexperiencing the sense of community or solidarity they had experienced in the original march! The participatory act of filming helped occasion the very sense of community that Ivens sought to represent."[21] At the same time, "Ivens has no desire to be reflexive and draw attention to the problems of representation. On the contrary, that the workers regained their sense of militant spirit during the reenactment added a level of authenticity to the filming that Ivens fully endorsed. The intensity of emotion during the reenactment itself blurs the distinction between history and recreation, document and representation, in ways that point to the formative power of the documentary filmmaker."[22]

After the period of observational documentary, which criticized these performative practices of rehearsal, staging, and reenactment, they returned with the reflexive and participatory

[21] Bill Nichols, *Ibid.*, 150.

[22] Bill Nichols, *Ibid.*, 151.

cinema of the 1960s. Indeed, the observational mode,[23] associated with a significant technological leap–the emergence of lightweight and portable equipment (16mm cameras and sound recorders with magnetic tape cassettes) that caused an epistemological leap in cinematic forms–greater immersion and extended periods of time in filming locations and with those being filmed, had consequences for the "creative treatment" of reality. The fragmentation of documentary reality by the camera and its reconfiguration through editing, whether for dramatic and poetic purposes or for more expository and didactic purposes, seemed inadequate and abstract when it became possible to film the minute events of everyday experience without intervention, capturing only what unfolded in front of the camera. In a different way, however, observational, direct cinema continues to conceal the filmmaker's actual presence and shaping influence, even if non-intervention now takes center stage, rather than using style and form to create the appearance of non-intervention.

On the other hand, participatory cinema arises from the "filmmakers' need not to disguise their close relationship with their subjects, whether by telling stories or observing events that seem to occur as if they were not there."24 With filmmakers like Jean Rouch, "what happens *because* of the filmmaker's presence and the cinema itself becomes as crucial as anything that happens *despite*

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[23] I am alluding here to the documentary modes identified by Bill Nichols in his *Introduction to Documentary*. These modes are not rigid categories, and in a way each film and each author ends up escaping them because a film that primarily falls under a certain mode may include moments that fit into other moades. For example, an expository documentary may contain observational or participatory and performative parts. The modes provide a perspective on documentary as a genre, seeking the regularities and conventions that cut across films and authors at a given time, capturing what can be seen and said in cinematic terms and also what breaks away from it. Similarly, while each mode of documentary representation arises from a movement of rupture and dissatisfaction with the previous mode, conveying an idea of the history of documentary, the truth is that a more recent film does not necessarily have to adopt a more recent mode as its dominant one.

[24] Nichols, *Ibid*, 100-101.

his presence."25 The referential dimension that comes with direct cinema, resulting from a synchronous recording of sound and image made possible by technical advances in filmmaking equipment, which makes it a privileged tool of ethnographic observation, is combined with the participatory dimension as one that emphasizes authenticity as depending on artifice, on the false as a moment of the true, and not just on the passive recording of the referent–in this case, the camera is consciously seen as a participant in what it films, as a stimulator of the filmed events (the issue is not exactly to evoke staging and reenactment procedures with the aim of providing a documentary representation of reality but to reflexively integrate into the film the provocative dimension of cinema; it is not about recording or staging an event or reality, but rather about creating, in a way *ex nihilo*, from the encounter between the camera and the world, situations that would not occur in the same way or would not occur at all without its presence). *Cinéma vérité* is the name Rouch gives to this combination of elements, founded in the pioneering work of Flaherty and Vertov.

Flaherty is referred to as one of the fathers of *cinema vérité* for his invention of uses and notions such as "participating camera" and in the sense that, as Edgar Morin says, a film like *Nanook*, by revealing the tenacious battle of man against nature–arduous, tragic, but ultimately victorious as the foundation of civilization–emphasizes our affinity with the hardy humanity of the Inuit and lays the groundwork for a new cinema, *cinema vérité*, capable of extending its ethnographic gaze not only to the distant and remote, in search of what is common to the human species, but also to the nearby, the contiguous, which paradoxically sometimes appears more foreign to us than supposedly exotic hunters and peoples from remote tribes and ethnicities: "Can we now hope for equally human films, about workers, the petite bourgeoisie, the petty bureaucrats, about the men and women of our enormous cities? (...) Can't cinema be one of the means of breaking the membrane that isolates each of us from others in the metro, on the street, or on the stairway of the apartment building?

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25   Nichols, *Ibid.*, 101.

The quest for a new *cinéma-vérité* is at the same time a quest for a 'cinema of brotherhood'."[26]

Vertov also occupies this space, not only because he coined the term but because films like *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) anticipate the reflexive procedures that *cinema vérité* made its own–reflecting on the film and cinema, its form, while it is being made. For Vertov, constructing a new communist life involves finding a cinematic form worthy of that life and making it conscious: the cine-eye that shows us things as they have never been seen before, the cine-eye that brings perception to things. It is a defense of a cinema that is closely tied to life (but in the sense of producing that life, not merely reproducing it), distinct from both the conception of mediating the facts of the Actuality films of the time, *Pathé* and the like, and from so-called artistic cinema[27]–in other words, a cinema that serves the political activity of the revolution because cinematic forms will neither merely document the facts that justify it or derive from it nor reenact or fictionalize them. The images themselves are the material that will shape this action.

Chronique d'un été is a film that insists on inscribing its debt to Flaherty and Vertov in its method. A modern update of Vertov's *kino-pravda* materializes in this film, which wants to show, without artifice, real people–it doesn't want to show "actors," as the voiceover in the opening credits declares, "but men and women who have given moments of their existence to a new experience of *cinéma-vérité*." The film aims to bring forth the individual stories that traverse the collective everyday reality in which they evolve and to outline the problem of global life in Paris and contemporary civilization.

What characterizes this new experience of *cinema vérité* is the innovative possibility of combining what had hitherto been separated by the opposition between film genres: on the one hand fiction, associated with the expression of subjective life and existential contents–passions, character problems, and resulting actions–on

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26 Morin, Edgar, "Chronicle of a film (1962)", in *The documentary film reader. History, Theory, Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 463.

27 Daney, "Back to the future", 185-190, in *Le salaire du zappeur* (Paris: POL, 1993), 188.

the other hand documentary, with its didactic inclination and the privilege of exploring topics that are external to individuals–objects, machines, social and political themes, etc.[28]

It involves a rupture in terms of cinema practice, with consequences at the level of film language (the concepts of fiction disrupt the organized technologies of truth associated with documentary and its aesthetics of objectivity), which in turn is inseparable from the aforementioned technological leap (the emergence of lighter cameras and portable sound recorders, allowing for synchronous sound).

What is new in the film, however, is not so much an extension of Vertov's *cinema vérité* in the strict sense of updating his ideas but rather its shift to the realm of words, making it possible to produce, practically for the first time, an "authentic talking cinema": "The words burst forth at the very moment when things are seen–which does not occur with postsynchronization."[29]

As a collective endeavor between the filmmakers and the "characters," based on encounters with the words of others, what this film shows us is how cinema participates in reality and transforms it: what it translates is not a "cinema of truth," revealing a dormant and hidden truth, as Morin expected, but the truth "of" cinema, that is, "truth as a function of the film," as Rouch stated.

It is precisely because cinema, through the presence of its apparatus, provokes reality–not in the sense of inhibiting or disguising it through its intervention but rather in the sense of stimulating it to produce events that would not take place without it, potentially altering both the world and its participants–that not only staging but self-staging becomes an irresistible and inevitable dimension of cinematic performance.

This is why, in this famous shot of Marceline Loridan walking along the empty market of *Les Halles*, completely absorbed in her words and her pain, authenticity can be said to coincide with the extraction of a truth hidden deep beneath appearances aspired to by Morin, with the interruption of the natural order of things cherished by Rouch, with

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[28]   Cf. Edgar Morin, *Ibid.*, 466.

[29]   *Ibidem.*

a moment of falsehood, in the indecisiveness between spontaneous performance and deliberate "theatricality" in Loridan's confrontation with the apparatus. This shows us that reality in cinema is inseparable from the reality of cinema, insofar as it always results from a dispute over the multiple dissenting truths of its images, at the intersection between the filmmaker, the one being filmed, and the viewer of the images.

This combination of the truth of the film and the truth of the social or mythical reality it reproduces was observed, practiced, and theorized by Jean Rouch in the context of his anthropological work. In fact, the filming of possession rituals was a fundamental aspect of Rouch's practice of what he called "shared anthropology":[30] "The possession scene became the catalyst for the development of Rouch's *cinema-vérité*, as it offered a particular pro-filmic support for the development of a new form of realism, a different order of truth."[31]

Possession is a form of exposing subjectivity that is not within the reach of what is visible at the level of realistic documentary representation. It involves a metamorphosis of the self into another, whose manifestation paradoxically passes through the spectacle of trance as evidence or proof of its authenticity and presence.

Cinema aspires to become the form of representation that is triggered by the ritual of possession, to secure the same transformative power. Just as possession rituals transfer individuals from their everyday

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[30] The observing filmmaker, while recording trance and possession phenomena, unconsciously modifies them and is also modified by them. As a consequence, there is a change in the nature of knowledge: the ethnographer/filmmaker is no longer an outsider, waving from a distance to the elders of the village; rather, he "'ethno-looks,' 'ethno-observes,' 'ethno-thinks'," and on the field he is modified, and those he observes are equally modified. By trusting this regular visitor, "they 'ethno-show,' and 'ethno-think'." This is what Rouch calls "ethno-dialogue," where "knowledge is no longer a stolen secret, devoured in Western temples of knowledge; it is the result of an endless quest where ethnographers and those being studied meet on a path which some of us now call 'shared anthropology'." Jean Rouch, "On the vicissitudes of the self: the possessed dancer, the magician, the sorcerer, the filmmaker and the ethnographer", trans. Steve Feld and Sahri Robertson, in *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication 1* (1974), 8.

[31] Catherine Russell, "Ecstatic Ethnography: Maya Deren and the Filming of Possession Rituals", in *Rites of Realism. Essays on Corporeal Cinema*, ed. Ivone Margulies, 270-293 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 274.

reality into the world of doubles, spirits, and gods, becoming others under their control, cine-trance could allow us to access a deeper structure of knowledge and experience of reality and ourselves (making us accede to an experience akin to surrealism).

The idea is that one must go through a moment of artifice in order to reach (similar to what happens in the possession ritual) another truth in cinema. This also implies another ontology of cinema, whereby the camera and the film work disrupt the established divine or natural order and stage something else in its place, in order to reveal an image that shows us a reality that is hidden beneath habit, prejudice, and the social conventions of the moment. The realistic documentary image assumes a contradictory and paradoxical character because its authenticity comes not from visual evidence but from the disturbance inscribed within it by what resists cinematic representation and a certain ideology of visibility.[32] This can only be manifested in a performative, artificial, and staged dimension, similar to the theatricality of possession rituals.

If the filmmaker must reflect the trance in front of the camera and make it a model for their activity, this is to allow the ethnographic subjectivity of those being filmed to manifest precisely through their encounter with the cinematic device. This implies their staging and transformation, as well as that of the filmmaker themselves, all becoming others in a cathartic movement similar to that triggered by possession rituals. Through this deviation, it becomes possible to reveal, show, and expose what resists strict cinematic representation: the subjectivity of the other, their significant content, which is normally beyond the reach of the image as a mere observational record.

On the other hand, this mirroring of trance in front of the camera and the filmmaker's own trance creates a space of communication between subjects and subjectivities that extends to the broader anthropological context of seeking identification between the filmmaker and those being filmed, between the white ethnographer and their black characters: as Jean-Luc Godard observes, "[i]n calling his film *Moi, un noir*, Jean Rouch, who is white just like Rimbaud, like him he is saying *I is another*,

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[32]   Cf. Russell, *Ibid.*

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that is, *me* a black."[33] In turn, Deleuze extends and radicalizes Godard's description by asserting that "the Ego = Ego form of identity (or its degenerate form, they = they) ceases to be valid for the characters and for the filmmaker, in the real as well as in the fiction." The filmmaker and characters become others, together and through each other, forming a community that gradually insinuates itself from one place into another, from person to person. "I am another" is the formation of a history that simulates, the simulation of a history, or a history of simulation that discards the form of true history.[34]

A film like *Les maîtres fous* breaks down the boundary between documentary and fiction in their traditional forms because the staging of the reality of the filmed subjects triggered by the possession ritual, and to which the ritual of cinema contributes, exposes the immediate truth and authenticity of this drama, the underlying collective subjectivity. What the possession ritual liberates as fiction or a simulation of history becomes the truth of history. In this sense, we identify less with the mystical state entered into by the characters/subjects, with their spectacular frothing-at-the-mouth trance, than with the colonial drama that becomes reality through that mystical state, in which the spirits of French officials take possession of the bodies of the Hauka cult members, becoming figures that are both venerated and feared, criticized and attacked. A religion like this, in Jean Rouch's words, is "a kind of *inconscient collectif.* The people can't explain what they're doing; they can only show what they're thinking of, and it means that during these years from the twenties to independence (in Ghana), they were thinking of power–military, administrative, bureaucratic power."[35]

That which resists representation, the spiritual world of doubles/gods that is only seen by the possessed, gains reality through the

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[33] Jean-Luc Godard, *Godard on Godard*, trans. and ed. Tom Milne (New York, London: Da Capo Press, 1972), 129.

[34] Cf. Gilles Deleuze, "The powers of the false", in *Time-Image,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 153.

[35] Jean Rouch, "Les maîtres fous, The Lions Hunters and Jaguar. Jean Rouch with John Marshalla and John W. Adams", in *Jean Rouch. Ciné-ethnography,* trans. and ed. Steve Feld, (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 194.

experience of trance in the ritual, and thanks to the film, this mystical/ecstatic state of becoming another also becomes reality for the viewers:

> For me, as an ethnographer and filmmaker, there is almost no boundary between documentary film and films of fiction. The cinema, the art of the double, is already the transition from the real world to the imaginary world, and ethnography, the science of the thought systems of others, is a permanent crossing point from one conceptual universe to another; acrobatic gymnastics, where losing one's footing is the least of the risks. In filming a ritual (for example, a possession dance among the Songhay, or a Dogon funeral), the filmmaker discovers a complex and spontaneous stage setting whose creator he most often knows nothing about. Is it the priest seated in his armchair, is it the nonchalant musician, is it the first dancer? He doesn't have time to look for this indispensable guide if he wants to record the spectacle that is beginning to unfold and cannot be stopped, as if animated by its own perpetual motion. So, the filmmaker stages this reality like a director, improvising his shots, his movements or his shooting time, a subjective choice whose only key is his personal inspiration. And, no doubt, a masterpiece is achieved when this inspiration of the observer is in unison with the collective inspiration of what he is observing. (...) The only possible way for me to approach fiction is to treat it the way I think I know how to treat reality. My golden rule is "one take," only one angle per shot, and everything filmed in chronological order. Inspiration now changes sides, it is no longer solely up to the filmmaker to improvise his shots and his movements, it is also up to the actors to invent the action that they are as yet unaware of, dialogues that are born of the preceding retort. This means that the atmosphere, the humor, and the caprices of this capricious little devil I call "grace" play an essential role in the reaction and interreaction, which can only be irreversible.[36]

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[36] Rouch, "Ciné-anthropology. Jean Rouch with Enrico Fulchignon", *Ibid.*, 185-187.

We conclude with a contemporary trend in the treatment of the poetics of authenticity, which extends the tradition of participatory and ethnographic cinema initiated by Rouch in his critical reinvention of observational cinema methods. In fact, similar to Rouch, the authentication of the pre-filmic material, which is the foundation of documentary, takes place not only observationally but also experimentally and performatively: what is captured is not only the real but also the event of its perception. This type of cinema is performative in that it challenges the disembodied and "ethnographic" observational gaze as much as it challenges realistic referentiality or, rather, the claims of "how things really are" and "how they really happened," to the point of questioning the very notion of documentary. The event of perception, whether it is the gaze, narration, or any other procedure associated with cinematic reflexivity, serves to contextualize referentiality, to move it away from the strict context of representative realism and into a context of multiple and heterogeneous spatial and temporal arrangements that are always changing. This renders impossible any retreat towards the stability of a unified and homogeneous explanatory or referential ground for both those who film and those who are filmed.[37]

An example of this contemporary reinvention is the sensory and ethnographic cinema of Ben Russell. Russell's films create an improvised, dynamic, and reflexive dance between the filmmaker, the camera, and those involved in the film, similar to Jean Rouch's

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[37] Bill Nichols distinguishes performative documentary from reflexive documentary in the following terms: "Unlike reflexive documentary, performative documentary uses referentiality less as a subject of interrogation than as a component of a message directed elsewhere. Performative work may have a defamiliarizing effect, in the spirit of the Russian formalists' notion of *ostranenie*, or of Brecht's concept of alienation, but less in terms of acknowledging the constructed nature of the referential message and more in prompting us to reconsider the underlying premises of documentary epistemology itself. Performative documentary attempts to reorient us–affectively, subjectively–toward the historical, poetic world it brings into being." *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), 99. In Russell, it is as if the vivid sense of temporal duration and spatial location, of embodied and disembodied experience associated with the performances of his social and ethnographic 'actors,' were made sensible through the reflexive qualities of film; the form of cinema is acknowledged in order to convey an equivalent of that experience taking place in the referential realm. Cf. also Susanne Knaller, Ibid., 58.

cine-trance. However, this cine-trance takes on new meanings as it is less concerned with potential epistemological and hermeneutic contributions that may arise from the use of cinema for the ethnographic knowledge regime and the subsequent explanation of human cultures and rituals. Instead, it emphasizes its relevance for a less rational and more intuitive and emotional understanding of these phenomena: "I can film a ritual in a Saramaccan village and then describe what happened in a way that my experience produces data and knowledge that somebody else can take without having the experience that I had – this isn't what I want."[38] Russell speaks in this regard of practicing psychedelic ethnography as a rigorous method that associates "the visceral subjective charge of psychedelia with ethnography's claims to an objective understanding of the/a self. The result is a dialectic that is both embodied and critical, in which the terrors and pleasures of getting lost are balanced by the necessity of knowing where and who and where and what we are, particularly in relation to those who are not us."[39] The subjective experience of otherness–other cultures, other ways of living, other psychic states– turns into the experience of cinema itself, as Erika Balssom puts it.[40]

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Whereas for Rouch the ambition was to use the technical means of cinema as an anthropologist to create a new articulation between seeing and knowing through filmic forms that reconcile aesthetics and ethnographic knowledge, Ben Russell's perspective translates into a desire to approach ethnographic material as an artist, following the ethnographic turn in art diagnosed by Hal Foster.[41] This emphasizes

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38   Michael Guarneri, "Experiencing the world and (mis)understanding culture", Entretien avec Ben Russell, *Débordements*, 2012.

39   Luciana Dumitru, "RIVER RITES – Interview with BEN RUSSELL", Bucharest International Experimental Film Festival: December 10th-14th, 2014.

40   Erika Balsom, Keimena #27: He Who Eats Children, Atlantis, and TRYPPS #7 (Badlands) by Ben Russell.

41   In dialogue with Walter Benjamin's text "The Artist as Producer," Foster updates the articulation between art and politics proposed by Benjamin at the time, emphasizing the demand for a new kind of practice for the artist that reconciles aesthetic and political thought. He thus acknowledges a new framework of intervention for the contemporary artist in which the proletariat's struggle against capitalism is replaced by the struggles for independence from colonial powers: "It is now in the name of a cultural and/or

the phenomenological experience of the ritual and definitively brings the ecstatic approach to the forefront over the scientific one.

In his use of film for ethnographic knowledge purposes, Rouch combines two approaches or methods in order to simultaneously guard against the trap of reproducing the colonial point of view and falling into a strictly observational perspective, supposedly legitimizing the use of cinema as a scientific tool for authenticating recorded reality. One method translates into a systematic, rationalistic, and denotative approach to reality, aiming to penetrate its underlying logical structures. The other method assimilates it with poetic perception, striving to directly communicate with the reality in front of us.[42] Rouch's cinema manages to find its way between these two misconceptions of unbiased objectivity and erosion of meaning through the development of new forms that challenge the very distinction between documentary and fiction. *Les maîtres fous* clearly expresses both an anthropological view of the ritual as dramaturgy and the notion of an anthropological film as narrative, allowing for the articulation of explanatory purposes with a subjective sense of the film's structure or plot, for example, using editing to refer back to the figurative or symbolized referents in the ritual. *Moi, un noir* employs fictional devices and intertwines imagination and ethnography. For example, the characters are performers in a psychodrama about themselves, and there is a back and forth between the real situations they live in and their fantasies, to which the film gives voice, quite literally, through the subjective, improvised, and off-screen commentary that the main character, Oumarou Gandaque, weaves retrospectively about the film's images, which show him and other Africans in Ivory Coast within the immediate reality they inhabit in the Treichville suburb. This allows the film to be another variant of the shared anthropology experiences carried out by Jean Rouch.

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ethnic Other that the artist often fights." Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer?" in George Marcus and Fred Myers (eds.), *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, 302-308. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995, p. 302.

[42]   Cf. Alice Leroy, "Écologie des formes ritualistes du film ethnographique : Rouch, Deren, Gardner, Russell et le Sensory Ethnography Lab", *CINETRENS 1* (2016). ffhal-01966600f.

Authenticity arises here from the paradox of cinema as a scientific instrument and a poetics of reality, and it appears, in its multifaceted dimension, once again as a combination of representation and performativity, fact and fiction. This paradox is also evident in the thinking of experimental filmmaker Maya Deren, as manifested in her text *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form, and Film* (1964), and materializes in her recordings of Vodou trance, which she sought to penetrate through cinema.

Unlike Rouch, Deren, not being a trained anthropologist, uses cinema to approach ethnographic reality as an artist. While, like Rouch, she tends to film the Vodou rituals she witnessed in Haiti less as objects of study and more for their aesthetic power, she also attributed her difficulty in completing the editing of the images she brought back from her stay in Haiti to her lack of understanding of what she had filmed. Therefore, she suspended the film to embark on a reflexive and ethnographic investigation of the rituals she had filmed, which resulted in her 1953 book, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti.*

Similar to Maya Deren, who, like Rouch, is a reference for his work, Ben Russell contrasts the objectivity of a camera, the "artless" guarantee of ethnographic authenticity in the interpretive regime of observational cinema, with cinema as a "ritualistic" form: neither mediation nor translation of the "other" and their worldview, but experience. Cinema as "art is distinguished by not being, for example, an expression of pain or an impression of pain, but rather a form in itself that creates pain."[43]

> The notion that any sort of representation could err on the side of objectivity has always seemed especially suspect to me. Since a fairly exciting toss-up in the sixties and seventies (involving such characters as Rouch, Asch, and Gardner), ethnography seems to have resolved its problems of representation by declaring its allegiance to science, and not art. This makes for a pretty easy target, and since I'm generally more interested in art than science, I'd rather keep working on finding new ways to deal with understanding and not-understanding the

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[43] Maya Deren, *An anagram of ideas on art form and film* (Yonkers New York: The Alicat Bookshop Press), 1946, 17.

world. Knowledge seems much too contingent on context to hope for much else. [...] Jean Rouch's film was absolutely a critical reference point for *Black and White Trypps Number Three,* and the representation of transcendence in both films is a dialogue I was certainly hoping to arrive at. I arrived at the notion of filming the audience at a Lightning Bolt show in part because I was trying to imagine what a corollary within my own culture could be to the Hauka of *Les Maîtres fous.* I'd been part of that crowd depicted in *Number Three* numerous times, and I didn't feel like it was enough just to make a document of the experience – I wanted to engage in the fact of spectatorship, of cinema, which has its own assumptions and expectations of transcendence. A representation is not the thing it represents, and so I set out to produce something else.[44]

The understanding aimed at by Russell requires a direct experience of or relationship to the event through a kind of empathy with what happens on the screen. The types of rituals presented in films like *Trypps #3, Trypps #6 (Malobi),* and *Let Each One Go Where He May* (2009) serve as vehicles for a trance experience through cinema. However, he is not trying to induce in the viewer the precise trance experienced by the subjects in the films: "In the ritual shown in *Let Each One Go Where He May,* I am not attempting to produce another trance through its manifestation: although trance sometimes occurs within the Adjo death ceremony, for the spectator the Cinema-trance happens by virtue of duration and proximity, from moving with these onscreen bodies for the film's full 135 minutes. I am not saying that trance is always of a temporal kind, but in this case it is not just ceremony or ritual but the fact of movement, of travel, that is meant to shift our cultural and physical selves in relation to other selves."[45]

Jean Rouch spoke of participation in cine-trance, but it was primarily a way to experience the thing itself, in some cases to produce the ritual and then reproduce it for the viewer. For him,

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[44] Ben Russell, *Ardèche Images. Les États généraux du film documentaire, 2012.* "Fragment of a filmmaker's work: Ben Russell and Jean Rouch".

[45] Michael Guarneri, *Ibid.*

the emphasis seems to be on understanding and comprehending the cultural phenomenon of trance, rather than on the role of cinema in producing a trance experience through its own means. Rouch believes that the trance that occurs in the pro-filmic or non-filmic space can be recorded and then recreated, potentially inducing a similar trance in the viewer. He is interested in using cinema to trigger the possession rituals of the ethnic groups with whom he worked and lived and, conversely, in allowing that recording to provoke and transform the act of filmmaking and the experience of the filmmaker himself. Russell, in turn, seeks to record or stage a certain type of experience in order to translate it into a completely different experience.

The relevant authenticity ceases to be that of the experience recorded by the camera and instead becomes the ritualistic experience of cinema itself, beyond any mediation or translation, in an exercise of subjective or reflexive ethnography. It is through the displacement of and from the ethnographic terrain that filmmaker Ben Russell can put into tension the dual ritualistic nature of intercultural trance phenomena, as he brings together the trance of Saramaccan culture and the practices of the American counterculture in which he is immersed, as well as the act of filming.[46]

This is how, structurally, films like *Trypps #3* and *Trypps #6* (Malobi) share, in Russell's own words, not only the trance as a common experience but also music as a catalyst for rituals. One trance is secular, triggered by the music of a Lightning Bolt concert, while the other is triggered by the ritual-funeral ceremony of Adjo. They are similar because they show us that the authenticity of what we see is doubly linked to reality–the people, experiences that shape the film–and to its *mise-en-scène*, made sensitive by the presence of clapperboards, camera movements, and flash frames, which require us to reposition ourselves not only in relation to the world but also to the image or *mise-en-scène* itself.[47]

On the other hand, *Let Each One Go Where He May* more deliberately explores the same paradox: that what is happening in

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[46]   Cf. Alice Leroy, "Écologie des formes ritualistes du film ethnographique : Rouch, Deren, Gardner, Russell et le Sensory Ethnography Lab", *CINETRENS 1* (2016), 10. ffhal-01966600f.

[47]   Michael Guarneri, *Ibid.*

front of the camera is a mixture of facts and *mise-en-scène*. Russell pushes his experimentation on the possibilities of film, as anticipated by Jean Rouch, to a new limit, exploring the subjectivity of another beyond the strict boundary between fact and fiction.

The film has as its central characters two Maroon Saramaccaner brothers, and it follows their journey in the footsteps of their ancestors, who were runaway slaves escaping from their Dutch oppressors 300 years ago. The reenactment of this slavery narrative blurs the line between the filmed journey in present-day Suriname and the journey that occurred in the past. However, nothing in today's silent journey provides explicit indications about their identity or history. It appears to be just their expedition, but this non-fictional or documentary element maintains a structural relationship with a fictional dimension since, paradoxically, this journey was written or staged by them and for them. The brothers are friends of the director, and this mutual friendship plays an integral role in the "speculative treatment of their subjectivity" in the filming: "It is as if they are cast as models of themselves, and their journey is part of a filmic speculation on what they would and could become on film."[48] As Michael Sicinski observes, "Russell's feature expands the specific problems of Maroon self-representation, and their necessary collaboration within it, to encompass concerns exigent to the experiential facts of being a 21st-century body, of movement and adaptability, of self-presentation and dissimulation, of labor and the space that defines it. *Let Each One* is (…) broadly humanist because it achieves the general from inside the specific."[49]

The cinema of Ben Russell is motivated not so much by a desire to encounter the other in the ethnographic sense of producing knowledge about a particular culture (in this case, the Maroons of Suriname in South

48 The phrase "speculative treatment of subjectivity" comes from Dara Waldron, who, to characterize what he calls the new non-fiction cinema, turns in the opposite direction of Grierson's expression "documentary is the creative treatment of actuality," used to designate the specificity of documentary within the realm of non-fiction cinema. The emphasis now shifts to an aesthetics of subjectivity, rather than of objectivity, within the realm of non-fiction cinema. Dara Waldron, *New non-fiction film: Art, Poetics and Documentary Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 19.

49 Michael Sicinski, "The Unbroken Path: Ben Russell's Let Each One Go Where He May", *Cinemascope* (2009): 41.

America) but, as he himself says, by the search "for a universal kind of humanism," one that could also be identified with a post-colonial subjectivity.[50] In this sense, it is not about investigating the defining and differentiating function of cultures from an essentialist point of view, which often translates into power relations inscribed in the very devices of producing that knowledge–ethnographic knowledge as a way to introduce the ascendancy of one culture over another, translated in cinema as a subordination relationship between the viewer and the viewed, perpetuating a false relationship between a dominant and a dominated culture–but about discovering a common and transversal ambition in the way the world is experienced, which is shared by all cultures. This is done by making films with friends who happen to belong to a culture that relates to the world in a different way. Russell shares with Trinh T. Minh-ha the need to formally translate the ethical demand expressed in the voiceover statement in the film *Reassemblage*: "I do not intend to speak about; just speak nearby."

As Russell explains, a documentary is a work of art, a work of construction, and "its clash with the idea of objectivity is one of the hallmarks of cinema": "I don't believe that documentaries exist. To believe in observational documentary means that you really have to believe that you can reproduce the world you are recording through Cinema and I don't believe that. (...) I am not trying to be representative of any particular experience."[51] This is why the notion of "non-fiction cinema" as proposed by Dara Waldron is more appropriate for describing what happens in Russell's films. Non-fiction appears as a term that is not opposed to documentary, as fiction is, but it emphasizes the fact that Russell is not interested in representation. It is not an opposition to fiction, seeking its opposite (as is generally the case with documentary), but a cancellation of fiction, a denial of fiction. However, saying no to fiction is not incompatible with the construction of fictional methodologies for filming real life and thus helping to reach the truth or authenticity of the actual situation, or the understanding of a reality that is always mediated when presented in the form of a film. It is about undertaking

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[50] Michael Guarneri, *Ibid.*

[51] Guarneri, *Ibid.*

"a poetics of the moving image in relation to cinema that engages with real people in real situations."[52] It simultaneously allows the world to shape and affect the film ("'the world' can be the people I am working with, or the space I am working in, or the equipment I am using"[53]) and creates the conditions in which chance and the unexpected can occur while still creating its own reality, a reality in and of itself. The non-actors and situations in the film are both actual and fictional: "It is about mixing actual situations with things one needs in order to make the desired film."[54]

The category of non-fiction allows us to embrace Russell's exploitation of the connections not only between cinema and reality, character and subjectivity, but also between documentary and aesthetic and experimental form.[55] Following in the footsteps of Robert Gardner, Russell aims to break with the discursive and didactic approach of ethnographic film, where the use of in and off commentary plays a decisive role, and draws on the heritage and aesthetics of contemporary experimental film as a way to approach the intensity of the experience of reality that he seeks to translate into a cinematic experience.

The image or form creates the event that receives its factual and aesthetic credibility from the reference to the situation that gave rise to it and from the sensoriality and performativity of its experience as cinema. Authenticity is thus revealed in its poetological possibilities, as cinema simultaneously constitutes the real and situates it in relation to the reality of the image, as a fact in itself, thereby leaving it open to renewed affirmation.

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[52]   Dara Waldron, *New non-fiction film: Art, Poetics and Documentary* Theory (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 8.

[53]   Michael Guarneri, *Ibid.*

[54]   *Ibidem.*

[55]   Dara Waldron, *Ibid.*, 18.

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ALLOCUTION: AN INVERTED WAGER

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1

Even the most studiously factual account of the past survives nothing but the future it could not predict.[1] Were this survival to give the present moment more than a nod of obedient self-justification, it might risk revealing the significance of the loss that inspires every desire to remember. This loss that animates memory and history evokes not merely a by-gone yet mentally retrievable element from the depository of time. It indicates quite on the contrary a structural and therefore causal mechanism of time itself.

Neither memory nor history persists without the images wittingly or unwittingly created to distill the indeterminate vagaries of lived experience. These vagaries however fail to foist on experience a uniform indeterminacy. The image never abides the cultivated

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[1] Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962) offers an eloquent reference point for such anticipatory retroaction. An apparent cross-breed of *La Jetée* and Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-80), David Lamelas' *The Violent Tapes of 1975* (1975) presents an abbreviated photo-roman organized in the future anterior. Its narrative sketches the story of a videotape depicting violence from the year 1975 that has become in a future non-violent society subversive evidence of an entirely foreign reality; the non-violent authorities in pursuit of the two people sheltering the tape, ironically, precipitate acts of violence in their struggle to confiscate this politically dangerous material.

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fantasy of a wild but unified chaos proudly elevated into civil order.[2] Experience registers by image what can enter and pass through the chronicle of a life, whether individual or collective, whether by reverie or documentation, but in the same stroke expels what that chronicle cannot absorb.[3]

The incoherent element in experience however lives not outside, naively independent of the coherent image, but operates at the center of the image's inner logic. In this sense, any image of the past, like any image as such, is already a defense against its own beyond. That is, the image defends against its very condition of possibility. Where life must be subject to experience and to the image, art will be seen here as a special case of both, which turns the directed or volitional aspect of each inside out.

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The image produced in time produces in its wake a hole in the fabric of reality commensurate with what the image seizes on to depict.[4] This hole, which irreconcilably divides the portrait and the

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[2] Constructivist and perceptualist alike share the premise of a uniform *a priori* indeterminacy that is, mythology notwithstanding, retroactively unified as «nature», «noise», «chaos», etc. The image shows its intrinsic overdetermination only as the *a posteriori* effect of any symbolic anchor successfully ascribed to it. The image thereby advances backwards beyond simple percept.

[3] The repressive character of mediation and its concomitant productive function in experience cannot be underestimated. In his «On Some Motifs in Baudelaire», Walter Benjamin noted: «Perhaps the special achievement of shock defense may be seen in its function of assigning to an incident a precise point in time in consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents. This would be a peak achievement of the intellect; it would turn the incident into a moment that has been lived (*Erlebnis*)».

[4] Samuel Beckett's *Film* (1965) pivots on this structuring absence in the relationship between the figures of «Object» and «Eye». Beckett used Bishop Berkeley's dictum *esse est percipi* («to be is to be perceived») as the platform for staging this essential gap. «Object» spends the film's entire duration attempting – by way of an «angle of immunity» – to avoid seeing himself being seen by «Eye» (ostensibly the camera). The film's ending presents the horror of the evasive subject's encounter with the void and impossibility driving this flight. A structural affinity with Kurt Gödel's so-called *incompleteness theorem* in set theory can be felt: Like Beckett's «Eye», the set must remain absent from the membership it organizes internally. To foreclose this hole that

portrayed, opens a vacuum that liberates reality from a self-identical fate and delivers lived experience to the polysemy of the interpretable. That said, however, the liberatory leeway to interpret, despite its declared independence from the tyranny of its object, in the same stroke subjugates the interpreter to a master of another order.

For the meaning attributed to any image derives from the retroactively specifiable array of vantage points refused by the singularity of the image. This differential system into which the interpreter projects the image provides the archive of absent alternatives on which the image comes to depend for its identity. The archive, as system, itself forms an image that gives to an interpreter the *de jure* guarantee of producible meaning. It licenses the interpreter with a right of inspection, a power to select and analyze, and a pleasure to undress a meaning.

This archive whose virtual repertory forms the reputed weight of history or burden of memory – in a word, the *context* – organizes the variable and ongoing production of an active meaning. But while the archive makes interpretation possible as virtual repertory, the archive as such does not activate the time of that interpretation's production.[5]

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establishes the set would trigger an existential crisis. We find an inversely-related euphoric echo in Stéphane Mallarmé's elegant flower: «I say: a flower! And, out of the oblivion into which my voice consigns any real shape, as something other than petals known to man, there rises, harmoniously and gently, the ideal flower itself, the one that is absent from all earthly bouquets». (Mallarmé, 1982, p. 76) These three homologies help point to the profound yet tenuous – sometimes even desperate – poetry between absence and phenomenality. To snap these reflections back more directly in line with our subject at hand, it becomes noteworthy that in his *Logic of Phantasy* seminar, Lacan said of «Russell's paradox»: «...it is not a paradox, it is an image» (Lacan, 1966, p. 12).

[5] A comment about the canonical theoretical reference on the archive is warranted here. The «fever» in Derrida's archive positions the Freudian death drive as the founding force of oblivion against which the archive forms a material memory that incorporates, organizes and excludes. As such, the archive mounts an ongoing «violent» defense sanctioned by a fundamentally arbitrary authority. The reality facing the archival image is not only the *finitude* of life (via death, erasure, exclusion) that arouses the archive's urgent political assembly. It is also the *infinitude* of the death drive (in its compulsion to repeat), which creates a «surplus life». This living surfeit of the death drive, however, propels a relentless movement toward – not to mention a potential enjoyment in – an egress from within the social, symbolic order. The archive's purported violence advances not as a police arrest of an open-ended process of radical incompletion or

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In other words, every image does more than obsequiously bear out the authority of the system that certifies its interpretive license. The dynamism of the image springs from the transferential field of the archive that guarantees *de facto* nothing but a lapse. In its irresistible failure to reclaim the living existence of the past, the image as proxy consecrates its object as absent, as missing, as lost and thereby mobilizes the desire to recover it. This desire unfurls a time punctuated by images that fail and fail again, each of which produces a hole that calls for the production of another image. The past thus lives on in perpetual and productive absentia to the precise extent that the image does not capture it. For the trace of the living persists in the lapse where the image never imagines itself. An image gained is an image lost until the impossible condition that gives birth to it rises to the surface to reveal the obstacle to which its coherence owes an indispensable debt. Each hole ultimately reflects the unpayable debt that presents the only debt worth paying.

Where lived experience depends on the image, if only as an extended daydream, the routine passage of time elides the gap underlying the image that propels lived experience forward. Involuntary memory, by stark contrast, abruptly reopens the elision by intervening in a quotidian moment. Whether it is felt as a joyous or disturbing repetition, the memory interrupts the present moment with the hole that supports its guiding pedestrian image.[6] The trace of a lost

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provisionality – an infinite sliding or deferral of signification. It works by way of the opposite operation: by punctuating and thereby enabling this sliding. The archive is internally structured in the simultaneously limiting and generative manner of an asymptote. It produces an infinite range and transcendental potential for interpretation and nonsense alike through cuts that establish the limit and stumbling block by which its semantic opening and coherence are stipulated. (In several contexts, Joan Copjec has pinpointed the often-neglected diachronic imperative to complete meaning in this semiotic problematic.

[6]   The olfactory and other sensory triggers in the Proustian moment imply that the image cannot be restricted to the visual. By «image» one must think in at least three expanded directions: one, to encompass the imaginary moments in the full sensorium and the aesthetic regime as such (e.g. Ranciere); two, to show the image as the compensatory product and alibi of words, whose categorical abstractness both necessitates

existence that is irretrievably withheld in and by the image comes urgently to the fore in a reverse time lapse.[7] Memory that is otherwise encountered as a willfully retrieved experience gives way to an implosion of time itself.[8] The present moment is cut open by a second image, both familiar and uninterpretable, such that the moment of memory is encountered as the hole of this other image, that is, the image as hole.

If the optogram of a dead hare requires the tender, private explanations of a docent, it is because the image is already *hors champ*, out-of-frame.[9] In the Renaissance triumph of perspective, all lines converge at a vanishing point. But what vanishes is not the element

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the concretizing image and punctuates its unrelenting interpretability; and three, to reveal the concatenation of images wherein each image retroactively renders as lost and as obstacle the one it replaces. It might bear fruit in this context to bring together Roland Barthes' «image-repertoire» (Barthes, 1978, pp. 4-9) and what Jacques-Alain Miller has referred to as the «sovereign image» (Miller, 2018, pp. 39-52). The former comprises the lover's archive of images, wherein one image must remain structurally absent; the latter gives us the missing image as the portal or hole whose emptiness coalesces the repertoire and launches the lover's desire to comb through its images.

[7]   One should invoke Eisenstein's insistence that the reality of montage, not to mention of the «persistence of vision», springs from a *superimposition* of images in contrast to a *juxtaposition* of them. The distinction stresses the incommensurable rather than a simply differential gap as the motor operating the mechanics of montage. In a side note: The past as lost object reminds us that the so-called «withdrawn» or «withheld» character of the object in contemporary philosophy – specifically, speculative realism (OOO) – appears to have no way to account for the dynamism of its beloved remainder.

[8]   Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, which generates true or pure repetition in an expansive, erotic dimension, hinges on the same implosive mechanism as traumatic memory. Here we find the unexpected structural overlap between trauma and desire.

[9]   We assemble at the table here the odd trio of Wilhelm Kühne (for optography's claim that the eye stores a recorded internal image on the retina), Joseph Beuys (for the staged exclusion of the spectators of his «How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare»), and Rabih Mroué (for the political typology of a new genre of moving image in which the videographer in wartime perishes while the recording continues beyond death, «The Pixelated Revolution»). Consider, moreover, Joan Brossa's final public piece, in which the artist performed an act of writing a word on a sheet of paper. On stage, the audience saw a table bearing an inkwell into which Brossa would dip his quill pen before exiting stage right. He returned to repeat the sequence of dipping, departing, and returning for seven minutes. Finally, Brossa appeared from off-stage one last time, carrying an envelope, which he handed to a spectator who after five additional minutes opened it and showed the assembled group the single penned word: «end».

receding at the horizon so much as it is an eye precisely inscribed in the scene as missing. The lines meet in the depth of field but mark the point of a void on the surface in the very opposite direction. The image therefore cannot be a mental tattoo etched in the eye for the edification of the homunculus within us all.[10] The image is primarily not even mental, neither perceptual nor internal, but a projection coming back to the onlooker from the archive's future.

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The domain of the image is a transferential field that draws out time and drives the present to anticipate the future and retroactively form the past.[11] No one measures the value of the past, or the future for that matter, except from the unbudgeable position of the present. Thanks to the image, however, the present is already absent from itself.[12] In order to distinguish the present moment from its fleeting

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[10] The homunculus or little master running the picture show (what psychoanalysis calls the *ego*) produces the image by a non-reciprocal circuit. In Freudo-Lacanese, the circuit projects outward the *ideal-ego* only then to re-introject the *ego-ideal* which necessarily fails to integrate – and in failing thereby repeatedly constitutes – the human subject as distinct from the ego.

[11] Time and desire are inextricably linked in the image. But the critical question then arises: Whose time and whose desire? The Other as archive always produces the instigative gap that launches time and desire in an oscillation between protention and retention that generates the unfolding present. The triangulation at the heart of the image's Rorschach effect should be highlighted. The subject faces the inkblot, the archive, and the solicitous prompter. Here one fondly recalls the fraught emptiness of the present: «The decisive moment of human development is everlasting. That is why the revolutionary movements grounded in intellect, which deem invalid everything that has gone before, are correct, for as yet nothing has happened» (Kafka, 2022, Aphorism 6).

[12] This absence in the unfolding present can be found at work even in the most quotidian of viewing acts. When watching an entire television episode, the viewer can be reduced to a feeling of poignant loss at the sheer conclusion of the sequence. The ending interrupts the experiential flow and elicits a reaction to the segment's temporal structure and not simply to its diegetic resolution. To grasp this void that pervades the viewing act, we need only consult the failed ambition of «killing time». Such a death wish gives but vain hope to the prospect of warding off this absence. The so-called «couch potato», allegedly stabilized before the screen, yields a gap that inspires the consumption of another empty substance: popcorn. By contrast, Richard Serra´s *Boomerang* (1974) brings out the absence within the present moment. In this video piece, Nancy Holt's live

passage and bring into focus the sensuous duration of time that one enjoys and endures as lived experience, the present must be synchronized with itself.[13] The simplest act of figure drawing aligns the time of observation with the time of pictorial production. The «decisive moment» in photography transforms *chronos* (empty time) into *kairos* (the fulfillment of time) by synchronizing the stance of the photographer with an emergent picture hidden within time.[14]

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speech is fed back to her via headphones with a one-second delay. The delay doubles the speech act by introducing into the unfolding present an acoustic image of itself. This doubling that reveals speech as a self-interrupting obstacle lays bare the otherwise obscured distinction within all speech between the subject of the statement and the subject of its enunciation. This split, for example, puts in question the instrumental presumption of speech as a mechanical execution of a conscious intention. (This fracture in the present moment raises the question of *synchronization*, to which we will very shortly return in the main text.) As an aside, beyond the moving image, a number of composers – from Josep Maria Mestres Quadreny to George Maciunas, Toshi Ichiyanagi, and George Yuasa to Marcel Broodthaers and Herbert Brün – intervened in the procedural or instrumental logic driving western classical performance by creating musical scores that function as *images*. These scores are images of a time interval that hover between a prompt for generating sound and a spatial composition for beholding with the eye.

[13]   The Bergsonian *durée* conflates the irreducible with the unmediated. The *durée* requires the mediating production of an *image of time* that can at once transcend and retroactively parse the discrete moments that make up succession. Just as the external course of serially juxtaposed pictures cannot explain the cinematic effect of a motion picture, so too the unfolding of lived experience cannot be reduced to the concatenation of discrete images that traverse time. Nonetheless the intensity of the unwinding present expresses the image *par excellence*. Translated into its spatial or extensive constituents, lived experience synthesizes the sensible image: pictures, words, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and so forth that become invisible, silent, proximate, vibrant and indifferent in the coalescence of the intensive present.

[14]   Further examples abound: The listener snaps her fingers to the pulse of the music, while choreography grafts movement onto the time of music. In the so-called «mirror stage» of psychoanalytic lore, the specular image that launches the human subject synchronizes the mimicry of the reflective doppelgänger and the ongoing drive to overcome its difference. The horological impulse is less chronometric than imagistic: In function, the clock first and foremost presents a motion picture of the diurnal passage. In prosody, rhyme and meter fold back on themselves the linear flow of words in order to synchronize language with itself. In film, especially in found or archival footage film, the question of *filmic dressage* typically arises for the filmmaker: how to bring the variant times and rhythms of disparate materials into temporal alignment and coherence.

When one temporality is made to trace, direct, punctuate, or otherwise complement another, the synchronized ensemble generates the very intervals across which time can develop. From this synchresis, a burgeoning empathy between subject and object can emerge that, at its most vital, yields an irreducible and variable flux of becoming within a heterogeneous time.[15] When we are told it is the secret to happiness, this flow holds out the hope of a chronic pleasure that will unify, stabilize, and domesticate the vagaries, excesses, and internal short-circuits of enjoyment and fix the sensorium in the experiential moment. In psychoanalytic parlance, the name for this regulatory mechanism, or pleasure principle, that keeps one firmly rooted in the reality at hand is the *phantasm* or *fantasy*.[16]

Inside this flow, however, the distinguishable encounter with art magnifies appearance as such and therefore its distance from reality, whether that reality is virtual or actual. The work of art overlaps with the absence in the present but endeavors to stretch open that absence in time. Time-based art poses a special problem for synchronization, if the audience can't clap along. Beyond the time architecture of cinema, one enters an open video art gallery always at the wrong moment. Imagine the transmission of an artwork from Mars to Earth and an eager docent ready on this end to interpret and send back a statement.[17] We know the dilemma whenever the video

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[15]   *Synchresis*, a neologism coined by Michel Chion, merges the ideas of synthesis and synchronism (Chion, 1994, pp. 3-24). The concept refers to the empathy produced by synchronizing moving image and sound. This empathy can produce an unexpected and poignant poetic effect when the formal or material characteristics of sound and picture are matched while the interval between their contents hangs agape. Chion has analyzed an «anempathetic» effect (which he clearly distinguishes from «anti-empathetic») wherein music is excluded from a scene so that diegetic sound can serve an analogous but more enigmatic and subversive effect.

[16]   Fantasy provides the constitutive scene and narrative required for every declarable fact.

[17]   These two scenarios of de-synchronization can respectively distinguish the moving image as mirror and veil from the moving image as hole (or frame). The two former effects anticipate a portrait of reality and a revelatory interpretation respectively. The latter by contrast causes a rupture in the viewing context that corresponds to the viewer's own fundamental lack of synchronization with his or her surroundings. By bracketing the film with start-times and durations, previews and end-credits, and house lights switched off and on, the standard cinema «staging» endeavors to

conference connection breaks. But in the case of art, we are not just waiting here, nor are they, whoever sent the artwork, over there. This hyper-synchronized interval, which asserts interruption as the engine of synchronization, is precisely the moment of art.

5

The first lesson we have to learn from contemporary art is that every image is already appropriated. That is, the image is intrinsically taken out of context. Neither the factual nor the semiotic can ultimately claim eminent domain to restore its inherently lost integrity. Context is nothing more than the name for the structural hole in the image, whose very emptiness contains the living substance of its beholder.

If art is to play any radical role in mobilizing «historical memory» beyond the misleading oxymoron the phrase embodies, it must depart from even the most provocative gesture of recontextualization. For the brilliant prank of *détournement* quickly decays into sales talk. The recontextualization it achieves produces the very *récupération* that the rebel pins on his enemies. The art of appropriation is best precisely where it fails to recontextualize. The past does not need to be reinterpreted. The past needs to be blown open, or revealed as already agape, in order to give the status of reality to the specific indeterminacy and multiplicity underlying the historical and experiential present. If art is capable of resynchronizing the past with itself, it must be in the name of this flow of canceled experience.

One glimpses the breaking point of the present moment not in a summary image that captures the fulfillment of a time or the triumph of a will but when the hole within the present moment suddenly overlaps with the hole in the image of the past. If the imaginative act of the artist is to galvanize the irrevocable imagination to which the image is an unceasing testament, the act must draw out a stake from the densely textured emptiness of the hole and adorn the image that it repeats and thereby inflects with the beauty of this originary feature. The viewer is thus asked to take a walk on the backside of

fantasy.[18] Such a stroll ostensibly shares a basic impulse with realism: to return to the founding void or zero point in experience. If art is to distinguish itself from and within the image, it will do so only by allying its project with the invisible, inaudible, and inarticulate element – in short, the senselessness – that is both the root and product of the image. Art and its reception will from that point pursue the paradoxical imperative of an «involuntary history».

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This imperative unveils the essentially involuntary character of time collapsing in on itself as a retroactively prophetic image.[19]

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[18]   While a distinction between psychoanalytic and artistic practice should be rigorously upheld, a resonance can be found between the two. In describing the «traversal of the fundamental fantasy», which concludes the analytic process in Lacanian practice, Jacques-Alain Miller depicted this event as a walk on the *other side* of the fantasy. With Martin Arnold's film *Deanimated* (2002), the viewer begins to enter the backside of the mise-en-scene. The filmmaker has removed the audiovisual presence of a key character from the 1941 film *Invisible Ghost*, finally leaving only empty spaces and the sound of the interstitial noise of the original film's soundtrack. We find in the «anarchitectural» cuttings of Gordon Matta-Clark a spatial analogue. *Splitting* (1974), *Conical Intersect* (1975) and related works introduce holes and intervals that break open the continuous planes and spaces of a structure to reveal unseen relations between inside and outside, and between the inside and itself. In his *Reality Properties: Fake Estates* (1973-75), Matta-Clark purchased tiny, odd-shaped, and sometimes entirely inaccessible land parcels in New York City. The project maps the otherwise-unnoticed, useless, and unowned gaps on the «other side» of real estate capital. These gaps are both scattered unpredictably throughout and yet hold together the urban landscape. They thereby reveal the apparently self-possessing enclosure of an architectural structure or land parcel as a fantasmatic defense against collective space. Put simply, buildings and plots of land quite obviously constitute private property – commodities – but also property that occupies a structurally contested ground.

[19]   This reference recalls the *now-time («jetztzeit»)* of Walter Benjamin's «messianic time»: a narrow gate through which the messiah might enter to redeem the past, or more specifically, the history of the vanquished. The *now-time* not merely contrasts with a concept of the simple *present*, which belongs to the continuity of «empty, homogeneous time». The former intervenes into the latter as the realization of the latter's radical potentiality. Robert Smithson's *Hotel Palenque* investigates an architecture and space displaced in time, or what he calls a «ruin in reverse». In its current state of desuetude, the ramshackle Mexican edifice stands elegantly suspended in the time of an alternate aesthetic extracted from the chronology of ruination. Rendered in

Such a foundering image would appear to flout realism to the degree that the apparently neutralized style is strapped to a temporal (not to mention spatial) verisimilitude. Realism stakes its claim based on a proximity to reality beyond idealizations, flights of fancy, and artifice. It thereby distinguishes itself with a stamp of the genuine. This mark of authenticity cannot do without the formal naturalism by means of which realism then turns toward unpretentious, marginal subjects and techniques.[20]

Realism of course surpasses a simple chronological unfurling of time. Its sequence can retrieve any instant through temporal pleats: the flashback, the foreshadowing, the deja vu, the auguries of innocence, the multiversal parallel, even the eternal return. Yet this solely progressive, reversible, smooth, striated, foldable, not to mention repeatable picture of its temporality misconstrues realism by omitting a key feature. The lynchpin of realism underscores and by the same stroke negates the conscious experience of a ravelable present. Properly conceived, realism at its core must build upon the potential for the uncanny in time.

The dream, to which film is routinely compared, turns over while maintaining the assumed drift of temporal realism upheld by a continuous experiential flow. But everything familiar has become strange, and things unknown have become strangely familiar. At a more basic level, it is perhaps only a half-truth at best, if we follow received wisdom, that the dream persists in order to keep the slumbering dreamer asleep. What if the dream were after all a defense not against waking but against the unbearable void of pure sleep?

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video and slide-show formats, Smithson's project gives a simultaneously fabulational and meticulously descriptive account accompanied by photo-documentation. The narrator nonchalantly exalts the ingenious and mysterious qualities of this structure. To Smithson, the hotel hangs between the ambivalent transfiguration of its apparent dismantling, its interrupted construction, and its decay glimpsed in a now-time.

[20] One could reasonably claim that cubism or structural film is in its own way driven by realist impulses. However, from Courbet to Bazin, the concept of «realism» builds its authenticity on a foundation of formal naturalism. This foundation of verisimilitude is stabilized by the very point that at the same time contains and risks the collapse of resemblance.

7

If spatial verisimilitude structures a visual scene around a blindspot, that is, around a precisely implicated but undepictable vantage point directly opposite the perspectival vanishing point, then verisimilitude structures time around a hole central to its temporal linearity. It is this hole that makes time always subject to anticipatory and retroactive lapses that introduce equivocation, non sequitur, or outright nonsense into any temporal coherence. Without such holes, realism in fact would be unable to function.

Just as the grammatical predicate answers the gap of anticipation and fixes the vanishing subject retroactively, so too the film-ending caps the anticipatory uncertainty that precedes it. Realism requires and in the same maneuver wards off its pivotal hole by mobilizing it through leaps and bounds to drive forward the momentum of the narrative or exposition.

What is in question is not simply the pure «self-presence» of spatio-temporal experience. Such would ultimately comprise but a reflection on mere mechanics. To say that the text, film or what-have-you is open is indeed to say very little, if anything. What is at stake is the palpable and productive function of realism. The hole both accesses the prospect of a resemblance to reality and reveals the narrative or expository image as a *pretense*. One must here keep in mind that to declare the image a *pretense* should be sharply distinguished from identifying a mere «error» of semiotic arrest.

8

Realism, a highly variable and contested concept, embodies the dual aspects of *make-believe* and *make-do*.[21] The «suspension of disbelief» shows that, in a compromise formation, one takes the image at the same time as a reality and as a substitute for reality. As

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[21] Lacanese refers to this composite as a «semblant». Shifting in the scope of its application over time, the term retains the seductive and deceptive senses of *make-believe* and *make-do*. As Russell Grigg noted in summarizing the concept, the *semblant* «fills the void left by the loss of the primary object» which Lacan ultimately designated with his myth of the irretrievable «lamella».

such, realism seems to *have it both ways*. It thereby compensates for the paradoxical break and forced choice between seeming and being, between mediation and the unmediated, between the subjective and the objective.

Yet realism cannot simply wiggle out of its self-division. In the case of cinema, it presents us with fictional and documentary scenes and simultaneously a projection of recorded light. Realism contains the quake of its immanent split by imitating a double-sided composite, the recto and verso of the self-same medium: diegetic and mechanical time.[22] We obviously know better but, on a good day, we instrumentalize the mechanical and get sucked into the story. In fact, as we will see, the experience of art offers nothing singular without the *sucker*.

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[22]   Owen Land's *Film in Which There Appear Edge Lettering, Sprocket Holes, Dirt Particles, Etc. (*1966) puts on display in singular fashion the synchronization of diegetic and mechanical time that necessarily takes place in cinema. The film arrests the diegetic progression of the moving image such that the viewer confronts the cinematic superim-position of two times: machinic projection and the viewing act. (Somewhere Theodor Adorno claimed that this coincidence presents the *raison d'être* of film sound: namely, to mask the mechanical noise of the projector as the disturbing echo of mechanized life under industrial capitalism. Such a provocative, if over-historicized claim diverts from the structural necessity of synchronization in producing the present moment of lived experience, in or out of the cinema.) Michael Haneke's film *Funny Games* tears open this gap between synchronized times: one of the torturers in the story picks up a remote control to review a video recording of their horrific «game» when, instead of the monitor in the room displaying the game, the scene in Haneke's film itself goes on rewind. In the realm of video art, one might recall David Lamelas´ early works *Situation of Time* and *Screen* (1967) in which the time of visual noise presents the hidden bridge between diegetic and mechanical time, or Lamelas' *Time as Activity* (1969) where the film projector is staged as a «time projector». At another level, one can conjure up Lis Rhodes' classic *Light Music* (1975), in which the time of projected film light and the distinguishable time of the mobile and variable observers intersect or collide. Douglas Gordon's de-synchronizing *24 Hour Psycho* (1993) should also be put somewhere in a list of films that thematize synchronization, not to mention the hypersynchronized 24/7 streaming of Andy Warhol's grave – posthumously titled *Figment* (2013) – which synchronizes video and interminable void. Finally, an ostensible work of performance art, Dan Graham's *Performer / Audience / Mirror* (1975) opens up the synchronization and impossible knot of four temporalities: the time of the body, the time of the description of action, the time of the audience, and the time of video recording.

This submission to the diegetic via the instrumental does not pre-empt but instead hinges on the uncanny element the image carries. As a veil, realism aims to satisfy by means of a fetishistic stand-in which covers over its disconcerting nucleus. What lies behind the veil of such representation is not a positive substantive reality or truth. What lies behind the veil is quite literally *nothing*, an empty screen, an unconscious machinery, a hole for which the image pretends to provide a compensatory proxy.[23] It is in relation to this nothing, which mirrors the pith of our subjectivity, that we are compelled in a normative vein to generate meaning.

9

If the temporal image imitates the binary of a coin, its two faces – the aspects of content and empty instrument – never fully compare to the tossable pocket change. The image comprises a surface whose dual-sided topology twists, folds back on, and rejoins itself. Realism at its conceptual core turns out to be a single continuous *non-orientable* surface. When it unexpectedly flips from veil to void, in an instant of utter contingency, the surface does so without registering any inversion. Unlike the oscillating coin, the flip happens within the persistence of vision itself. One suddenly finds oneself inexplicably on the other side.[24]

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[23]   This conception harkens back to Freud's formulation of fetishism. The fetishist knows very well that his beloved object plays a game of *make-believe* with him. Yet he remains unreservedly satisfied. The only enduring question is how to convince the possessing other – whose submission is requisite – to accept the deal. At the level of the unconscious, the principal function of the fetish object is to derail the traumatic discovery of a fated lack in the original object of desire.

[24]   The «either/or» of the coin, in which a dualism resolves the flip by landing on either one side or the other, is here transformed into an «and/but»: the «nonorientable» surface (e.g. a moebius strip) collapses the dualism into a single surface internally split as both sides simultaneously; in short, a contradiction or dialectic. This flip hints at the conceptual, homophonic shift in Lacan's teaching between «*le nom/non du pere*» (the name/no of the father, which constitutes the subject by entry into the symbolic order) and «*les non-dupes errent*» (the non-duped err or run aground, which indicates the uncertain character of the subject). For our purposes, the non-duped would insist on the

The shock of this illogical flip interjects the moment of the uncanny. Suddenly the place where we had found our home becomes a distant, foreign, desolate or even bizarrely utopic landscape.[25] Realism realizes itself in this confounding instant and can no longer *make-do*

«either/or» that professedly averts the dialectical flip by landing decisively on one side. Yet only the duped can encounter the singular moment of the flip's impossible revelation.

25 This uncanny moment bears an analogy to the Brechtian «alienation effect». One finds this gesture in Brecht's poem, «A Bed for the Night»:

> I hear that in New York
> At the corner of 26th Street and Broadway
> A man stands every evening during the winter months
> And gets beds for the homeless there
> By appealing to passers-by.
>
> It won't change the world
> It won't improve relations among men
> It won't shorten the age of exploitation
> But a few men have a bed for the night
> For a night the wind is kept from them
> The snow meant for them falls on the roadway.
>
> Don't put down the book on reading this, man.
>
> A few people have a bed for the night
> For a night the wind is kept from them
> The snow meant for them falls on the roadway
> But it won't change the world
> It won't improve relations among men
> It won't shorten the age of exploitation.
> (Brecht, 2006, pp. 47-49)

The uncanny moment also parallels Martin Heidegger's distinction between the tool as «ready to hand» (*Zuhandenheit*) – functional and as such taken for granted – and the tool as «present at hand» (*Vorhandenheit*) – an instrument that when broken becomes a strange object to behold in its state of uselessness. (It is hard to miss the serendipitous irony in the Duchampian «ready-made».) One can find this uncanny dimension also in Sol LeWitt's difficulty writing a summary statement on his own work: «The total of all past work exerts its influence on the new work. The new work combines the reality of the old and destroys the idea in which it was conceived. It cannot be understood except in context of the other work, the original idea being lost in a mess of drawings, figurings, and other ideas» (LeWitt, 1995, pp. 71). The past comes *after* the new work, in both senses of the phrase «comes after».

with its ersatz benefit. Yet this estrangement, experienced as a flare-up, endures all along as a structural distance – albeit unconscious – until its sudden revelation. The unconscious registration of this structural distance could be baptized an *aura*.

The word «aura» has famously designated a unique, transcendent and semi-mystical property of an object or subject that produces a reverential distance imbued with authenticity. As such, the term appears a morsel plucked from the jargon of authenticity. In that context, the related concept of the *genuine* has been pilloried for the apparent allegiance it pledges to monadism or *principium individuationis*, the repression of its origins in social relations, and at bottom its implicit and complicit deification of exchange value and property relations.[26] But rather than providing a tool or sign of mystification in a specific historical era, the aura could be conceived precisely as the irreducible, uninterchangeable aspect within – and thereby the ultimate engine of – the social link as it unexpectedly returns on itself. Such a rendition of the auratic would offer not the *ideal* of a special genuineness but the stunning encounter with a special *failure* of that ideal.

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The aura constitutes a distance «full of poetry» that emerges when the object – animate or inanimate – glances back at the subject.[27] In this glance, the lure of the fetish withdraws and exposes the

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[26] Beyond his book-length critique, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, Theodor Adorno penned this compressed indictment in «Gold Assay» (Adorno, 2005, pp. 152-55). Adorno's reference to the Leibnizian monad as a summative concept of contemporary social oppression indirectly comments on Walter Benjamin's use of the term in «Theses on the Philosophy of History» and elsewhere. Benjamin however focuses the term on an arresting constellation that interrupts chronological («empty, homogeneous») time and opens the emancipatory gates of messianic time.

[27] Outside his well-known formulations in «The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction», Benjamin in his archived notes sketched a rarely-cited rumination on the idea of «aura» in the social, non-reciprocal terms of a «glance» (Benjamin, 2015, p. 45). This conception becomes fruitful in order to *mobilize in reverse* Adorno's critique of genuineness (and by extension the aura). The «glance» already answers the shortcomings Adorno ascribed to the more familiar formulation of the aura. Here one finds a parallel with the Lacanian «gaze», which marks the structurally failed mastery

initiating observer as already an object having undergone or undergoing external observation. At this instant, the gap between observer and observed inextricably links the two in the incommensurability of a nonreciprocal exchange. One cannot see the position from which one sees the other; nor can one see from the position the other sees one. By extension, the closer one moves toward the object, the further its glance moves away.[28]

The aura that this ungraspable glance yields transfigures the piquant fetish into reverent disbelief. Via an unforeseeable alleyway, realism is shuttled into a detour that passes unexpectedly through the fetish's indispensable lure into the sublime. Precisely by promising special access to reality, realism is capable of producing a glimpse of the authentic but only, paradoxically, by means of the *failure* of its promise. By this lapsed compact, the lure of realism is able to shift so as to elevate reality's inaccessibility to a structural and poetical feature. In the shift, the need for mediation and the dignity of the sublime overlap. From the subtractive presence of the proxy, an unmediated element emerges with the aura. Care should be taken to distinguish such a concept of the «unmediated» from the *non-mediated* or the *immediate*. For the latter two make a claim to precede or bypass mediation in a state of pure or direct phenomenality. By contrast, the former results *ex post facto* from the confrontation with a bungled or interrupted mediation. The otherwise maligned concept of the aura indeed denotes a «lack of mediation»; that is to say, the lack belonging to mediation as such.[29]

The structural lapse within mediation produces in chronological time a fraught deadlock – an unpayable debt, if you will – to which one must commit oneself by risking a gesture. One may feel it is possible to jump over, fill, or sidestep the hole that opens onto an atemporal maelstrom of anticipation and retroaction. But one cannot go back. The

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of the human subject in the visual field; however, Benjamin's «glance» stresses the primacy of the glance's poetic character.

[28]   Benjamin lifted this articulation directly from Karl Kraus, who described the word as caught in a dialectic of distance and closeness.

[29]   Adorno boiled down his criticism of Benjamin's «Work of Art» essay to a lack of mediation. Here we propose that this pointed criticism's unintended equivocation gives access to a dialectical take on mediation: it is the *lapse* itself that mediates the aura.

instant of authenticity rises up in the midst of this non-relational – or more precisely, *unrelational* – vacuum at the heart of the glance. This chasm in the social, symbolic, spatio-temporal surface compels one to stipulate an act – however modest – of creation. In remembrance, which always presents an encounter with representation as the formative failure in the social link, the *gesture* amounts to a retroactive prophecy toward a past that does not exist yet. In the experience of the image as hole, the gesture might take the form of walking out of the cinema at a precise moment during a screening or showing up well beyond the film's midpoint; sketching a radically different closing or opening scene for the perfectly satisfactory arc of a movie; advancing an improbable misuse of a film in its celluloid, mylar, or digital materiality; fabricating a faulty memory or history of a film; falling asleep during an avant-garde masterpiece....[30] The universality

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[30] Benjamin and Adorno each linked the idea of the *gesture* to some form of *interruption*. In his reflections on the «gestic theatre» of Bertolt Brecht, Benjamin expressed two key observations in this vein: first, that «interruption is one of the fundamental devices of all structuring» and second, that «the more frequently we interrupt someone in the act of acting, the more gestures result» (Benjamin, 2007, p. 151). By extension, it is the *now-time* according to Benjamin's conception of history that, in the manner of a *gesture*, interrupts and reveals within chronological time a potentiality for revolutionary action and for redeeming the history of the oppressed. In his «Notes on Kafka», Adorno wrote that the *gesture* implies a break of continuity that indicates a «trace of experience covered over by signification». A few meandering associations spring to mind. In an interview, Abbas Kiarostami responded to the complaint that his films are boring by saying that he would be happy if his viewers would enjoy a good nap during a screening of his films. Serge Daney famously wrote his harangue «The Tracking Shot of *Kapò*» without having seen most of the film. In a more provocative vein, André Breton and Jacques Vachéw, as recalled in the opening of Victor Burgin's *The Remembered Film*, regularly conducted aleatory cinema dérives in which the two would skip between film extracts by hopping mid-stream from one theater to another. In lieu of preparing the work for screening, Tony Conrad pickled a film and presented it either standing jarred on a table or paraded as a kind of snake or whip. A little-known artist once recalled the inspired opening of a film by Yvonne Rainer; years later he watched the film again only to find the opening of his fond recollection entirely lacking from the film. He then had to make, in his own way, the «missing» segment into a piece himself. The same individual later made a film about an international historical figure in which the acted monologue of the depicted personage consists exclusively of false testimonies published about the figure. Finally, one could imagine making a film as a disappearing act in which «machine learning» would be deployed so as to bury the digital code of one entire film inside the underlying code-bed of another, without leaving the

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of the impasse in the image that launches – yet also opens a hole in – the phantasmagoria by which we live implies a politics yet to be fully articulated. To the extent that it carries the potential to be emancipatory and universalist without being «progressive», this politics will have to heed the allocution that lies permanently caught between our elemental verdict and sentence: Even the most studiously factual account of the past survives nothing but the future it could not predict.

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slightest visual trace of the burial. But beyond these cinematic unorthodoxies, could one fathom a performative significance in an academic text in which the footnotes, which traditionally remain under the boot of the primary text, enlarge to such an extent that these subordinate features begin to interrupt and even overtake the main text in its standard paginal allotment?

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ABC: AESTHETICS→CINEMA: ADORNO/AKERMAN; BAUDELAIRE/BENJAMIN; CINEMA/COOKING

PAULA RABINOWITZ

> *Aesthetics that does not move within the perspective of truth fails its task; usually it is culinary.*
> Theodor W. Adorno[1]

> *To know nothing, to teach nothing, to will nothing, to feel nothing, to sleep and still to sleep, that today is my only wish.*
> Charles Baudelaire[2]

> *When we watched films we managed to live. Films were what we needed to live.*
> Chantal Akerman[3]

Theodor Adorno's posthumously published Aesthetic Theory consists of unfinished thoughts about art's meaning to philosophy and in society. Scattering meditations on art and aesthetics from their earliest manifestations in cave painting to their problematic place in late capitalism and its culture shadowed by WWII and the Shoah within a commodified and administered society, Adorno seeks an aesthetics that might discern an artform able to critique its compromised place in this damaged life (as he subtitled Minima Moralia). He repeatedly differentiates the artwork and its achievements of thought, feeling and critique–its aesthetic–from what he refers to as its "practical appetitive behavior."[4] Adorno zigs and zags his way through this chiasmus trying to discern what makes an artwork work–what makes it art–relying on sensibilities ranging back to Aristotle and through Kant: "Every work of art has its irresoluble contradiction in the 'purposefulness without purpose' by which Kant defined the aesthetic."[5] Because the "artwork is both the result of the process and the process itself

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[1] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 347.

[2] Baudelaire, "Three Drafts of a Preface," *Flowers of Evil*, p. xvi.

[3] Akerman, *My Mother Laughs*, p. 44.

[4]   Adorno, *Aesthetic*, p. 11.

[5] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 226.

at a standstill," it moves in and out of its time and our perceptions.[6] Adorno struggles to find a language to convey this slippery concept of immanence. Among his many metaphors about what art is not is a recurrent distinction between art and food–the "appetitive" becomes literalized as the "culinary," "eating and drinking,"[7] At the same time, he comments favorably that Hegel understood that the "dynamic relation of material and labor as… developed in the dialectic of the master and the slave, is pregnantly reproduced in art."[8]

So which is it? Because the culinary–cooking and eating and drinking–pregnantly reproduces social life. "'Aren't you ever going to eat your soup, you damned bastard of a cloud-monger?'" demands Baudelaire's "dear little mad beloved… [as he] was looking out of the open dining-room window contemplating those moving architectural marvels that God constructs out of mist, edifices of the impalpable", while she served dinner.[9] Through her gesture, the poet understands what's what. Poet and "amateur philosopher,"[10] as he called himself, Charles Simic contended, "The true Muses are cooks."[11] So, what if the culinary is the aesthetic process that best captures not the "spiritual processes," or not just the spiritual processes, but also the dynamic of material and labor delivered daily by mothers, those who have "pregnantly reproduced"?[12]

Aesthetic Theory was still in draft form when Adorno died and it is thus possible that he would have cut the redundant mentions

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[6]   Adorno, *Aesthetic*, p. 179.

[7]   *Ibid.*, p. 344.

[8]   *Ibid.*, p. 345.

[9]   Baudelaire, "The Soup and the Clouds," *Paris Spleen*, p. 91.

[10]   Simic, "Notes on Poetry and Philosophy," in *The Life of Images*, pp. 19-26, p. 20.

[11]   Simic, "Food and Happiness," in *Life*, pp. 35-42, p. 35.

[12]   "One of the most interesting coincidences in the worlds of creative art–the art of the kitchen and the butcher's shop, let's say, and the art of the literary text–is the fact that 'epigram' is the name for a particular part of a lamb that requires special treatment by both the butcher and the cook. I t celebrates that mingling of condensation and particularity that is captured by the literary epigram, a small thing summing up a larger one to come, like an aphorism that says a great deal in small space," explains Caws in her book attesting to the deep connection between cooking and aesthetics, p. 89.

of words associated with food and drink. These terms are meant to convey a lesser form of pleasure than the aesthetic, one based not on the challenges art brings to capitalism from within it but rather centered on the base needs and desires of satisfying mere being. His letter to Walter Benjamin in 1936 about seeing Max Reinhardt's film of A Midsummer Night's Dream, for instance, decries its "sorry story," connecting his critique to Benjamin's "own theory," about the aura as a "highly dialectical confirmation: for the film's ambitions to attain the 'auratic' dimension itself leads inevitably to the destruction of aura. Rather like the cinematographic Manet served up to us in Anna Karenina. One must possess nerves of steel to be able to endure this kind of liquidation."[13] Like Clarence Brown's film of Tolstoy's novel, Reinhardt's version of Shakespeare is a kind of liquidation–like making a soup of last night's leftovers–served up to unwitting viewers who perhaps have a taste for it, but no more. Again, food and its consumption degrade art's powers. Yet, as Simic observes: "Honestly, what would you rather have, the description of a first kiss or stuffed cabbage done to perfection?"[14] Neither, for Adorno. But details of making a meatloaf–one I can attest is perfection–is exactly what Chantal Akerman serves up for us along with soup and potatoes.

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In December 2022, Chantal Akerman's 1975 film, Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles was named the "greatest film of all time."[15] This event was lauded as a "first" because in the seventy years the Sight and Sound rankings had appeared, no woman's film had appeared in the top ten, much less at the very top. The poll, conducted once a decade, requested "1639 participating critics, programmers, curators, archivists and academics" in the film world to list their choices for the ten greatest films; the one mentioned most often among all these lists emerged as number one.[16] Ten years before, Jeanne Dielman ranked thirty-six; this

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[13]   As the editor's notes indicate, "Adorno is referring to the eponymous film of 1935 after the novel by Tolstoy, with Greta Garbo in the title role." Adorno and Benjamin, pp. 137-38.

[14]   Simic, "Food and Happiness," in Life, p. 35.

[15]   Ugwu, "'Jeanne Dielman' Takes No. 1 in Movie Ranking," C3.

[16]   "The Greatest Films of All Time," b f i . o r g . u k (Accessed April 6, 2023).

achievement did not surface from nowhere. It points to the "decades of growing recognition for the director," who "change[d] film history," noted Nicola Mazzanti, then director of the Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique (Cinematek), in 2015.[17] Akerman changed film history by her rigorous attention to what the camera can do–look intently at reality and in so doing resurrect vision as fiction. She described her "own style of documentary as bordering on fiction."[18] Or one might suggest it is also a form of fiction bordering on documentary.

Jeanne Dielman is a film that changed film history by changing film audiences–especially the emerging feminist film scholars eagerly seeking to absorb a new aesthetic within women's films. As Giuliana Bruno asked in her moving eulogy to Chantal Akerman, "What viewer of Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles has not been affected or even changed by the experience of watching this film?"[19] Akerman's marathon visual and auditory paean to the near-silent everyday life of a single mother enshrined boredom as a reigning perceptual mode within narrative cinema. Its style and ambience and affect and effect instantiate Baudelaire's search for entropy, for stillness and annihilation.[20] In her insistent repetition of the entirety of the title, Bruno, like Akerman, stretches time, demanding attention, much "like the howling of the baby" disturbs the sonic ordering of Jeanne's space.[21] No one watching the film's repetitions could be bored for one minute; its tension accumulates through the microscopic attention to compulsive acts and gestures and words. Akerman enters into the space and time of this mother, this nobody. She listens with the same patient impatience as the audience does while her invisible neighbor describes buying two kilos of veal for her family's dinner despite nobody in her family liking

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[17]   Quoted in Ugwu.

[18]   Akerman, "On *D'Est*," p. 17.

[19]   Bruno, p. 7.

[20]   Margulies quotes Rosalind Krauss on *Jeanne Dielman*, noting that Akerman "opts instead [of 'the single example that would imply the whole'] for 'accounts of events composed by a string of almost identical details connected by "and"'", p. 72.

[21]   De Certeau mentions this ascene in *Jeanne Dielman* alongside that of the vice-consul in Marguerite Duras's *India Song*, p. 148.

veal because she is paralyzed on the butcher line and ends up echoing the order made by woman ahead of her.

In much the same way that reading a Marguerite Duras novel disorients narrative and consciousness by simultaneously giving too much and too little detail in effect transforming Duras's readers into accomplices, watching this film alters the sensorium of viewers by enlisting us in the daily routines of housekeeping and its calamitous results.[22] The hint of criminality hangs over Jeanne Dielman long before its disastrous finale. It is there in the cooking and eating. In the methodical shopping and nightly strolls that must follow a certain route out from and back to number 23 (both her apartment and her butcher share this address). As Adorno succinctly put it: "Every work of art is an uncommitted crime."[23] Akerman understood that when Jeanne drops a spoon while drying it, this is actually more unsettling than that she murders her john on Day Three.

Part of the film's aesthetic richness comes from Akerman's astute use of cliché–another aspect of the culinary that appears to contradict art's immanent power–which requires audience members to conspire with the film's painful constriction and subtle jokes, with its extended temporality as it restages melodrama.[24] Tensions within the domestic space, vividly portrayed through Akerman's signature use of hallways and doors as frames, and within the domestic narrative of melodrama, excruciatingly encased in the claustrophobic discomfort between Jeanne and her son Sylvain, elicit a visceral sensation within viewers. It's like watching a pot of potatoes boil; when will it be done?

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I learned how to make meatloaf from watching the film.[25]

Image 1: *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles*, by Chantal Akerman, 1975.

Jeanne Dielman provides a step-by-step introduction into basic bourgeois cooking in postwar Europe; a cuisine still holding remnants of wartime shortages in its overabundant use of potatoes to fill out a sixteen-year-old boy's appetite. Akerman explained her personal interest in traveling to Eastern Europe in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's dissolution to film D'Est, in part, because her parents came from Poland: "For a long time–my whole childhood–I believed that their way of life, the way they ate, talked, and thought, was the way all Belgians lived."[26] It is this way of life that Jeanne Dielman conveys–not represents, because this is fiction bordering on documentary–as we watch the obsessive daily chores she performs.

Much of Jeanne Dielman's life is viewed from the rear or sidelong, the view of a child–"an old child," as Akerman calls herself.[27] We see Jeanne in her almost empty kitchen leaning over the sink to wash last night's dishes; we see her adjust the flame to boil potatoes, having discovered that they cook in precisely the time it takes her to turn a trick; we see her grind coffee and

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[26]   Akerman, "On *D'Est*," p. 21.

[27]   Akerman, *My Mother*, p. 17.

polish her son's shoes. Daily. Every day. Precisely. "It's Wednesday so veal cutlet," she tells her neighbor. She's not a particularly good cook, decide Akerman, Delphine Seyrig and Babette Mangolte. The film's director, star and cinematographer debate how Jeanne will bread her veal cutlets for dinner on Day Two. Flour, egg, bread crumbs–in which order? And who would do this so long before supper, leaving the breading to become a gluey paste on the beautifully pounded meat? She then carefully wraps the cutlets in the used tinfoil saved in her silverware drawer in the kitchen table (much as my grandmother did). Who would wreck that piece of meat? Certainly not someone so "very meticulous," as Seyrig says of Akerman's writing about this scene. "The script is so specific," complains Seyrig. But Akerman knows what she wants–the sense of time. Akerman sits next to the camera with a watch timing it: "I want to show time passing," she says to no one in particular as her crew filmed the filming in the kitchen where all the action, well almost all, takes place.[28] Akerman is 25 years old and knows exactly what she wants, "to bring chaos into order."[29] They all knew they were making history.

History hangs over this tightly choreographed film, its action–or inaction–largely entombed within the walls of a small apartment: its hallway, its kitchen, its dining area, its living room with a foldout couch that doubles as Jeanne Dielman's son's bedroom, her bedroom where she stores his clothes in her wardrobe, the building's narrow entryway, its elevator, her neighborhood where she shops for food, pays bills at the post office and drinks her daily coffee. History–of the war, Belgium's bifurcated identity, motherhood, time itself–hangs in the air. Time in/as history.

Each night after dinner, Jeanne listens as her son recites a Baudelaire poem, "The Enemy," his "r"s no longer quite proper French, but accented like his friend Jan's from years in a Flemish school. Delphine Seyrig is stymied at first by Akerman's attention to every detail and insistence that her vision must prevail. So it is no

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[28]   These scenes and comments occur in *Autour de* Jeanne Dielman (Sami Frey, 1975).

[29]   Adorno, *Minima*, "*In nuce.* – The task of art today is to bring chaos into order", p. 222.

accident, as Marxists used to say, that Baudelaire enters into the dining room each evening. Here dinner is served and eaten solemnly and resolutely, with Jeanne nightly insisting that her son not read at the table; here sits the soup tureen where Jeanne keeps the money she makes from the men who come each afternoon for sex; here she sits and knits while she and her son listen to the radio; here she reads a letter from her sister in Canada; here she dusts her tchotchkes kept in the hutch behind her seat. Baudelaire haunts the dining room with his aesthetics: "poetry is like the arts of painting, cooking, and cosmetics in its ability to express every sensation of sweetness or bitterness, beatitude or horror, by coupling a certain noun with a certain adjective, in analogy or contrast."[30]

Cinema had not yet been invented when Baudelaire wrote Les Fleurs du Mal, but surely he might include it in his list of artforms that conjure conflicting affects through uncanny juxtapositions. And he, unlike Adorno, knows that cooking–like painting or filmmaking–is an expression of aesthetic sensibility. Its many small acts of mincing and tasting add up to a finished dish, transforming materials, sustaining life. Like the edits and rehearsals that Baudelaire says must be kept from view to achieve the spiritual sensation of a completed poem, nothing is left to chance in the final cut: the way Jeanne stands, girlishly crossing one leg before the other as she drinks her morning coffee cupped in one hand; the way she pulls up her teenage son's coat and fixes his scarf before he departs for school; the way she folds his pajamas and then folds up his bed into a couch each day; the place she sits for her coffee at the café; the way she unfolds the sugar cubes from their wrappers; the way she buttons her robe; her endless flicking on and off the lights as she enters and leaves a room, thrifty housewife that she is. And, of course, precisely timing her trick so she does not overcook her potatoes or fail to wash herself and the bathtub, then comb her hair before her son returns from school. These ritualized acts, what Ivone Margulies calls Akerman's "hyperrealist everyday," hint at a form of maternal aesthetics, an

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30   Baudelaire, "Three Drafts," p. xiv.

authenticity staged within the frame. They might be any mother's routine. They could be real.

It turns out, contrary to Adorno's resistance, that one cannot avoid cooking up an aesthetics to account for daily life. It's the reigning metaphor.[31] For Viktor Shklovsky, aesthetic practice is variously explained, on the one hand, through recounting an anecdote from Tolstoy about a butcher sharpening his knife on a cobblestone outside his shop,[32] and, on the other, by dissecting the various ways vegetables can be cooked into soup, then eaten with spoons.[33] Skhlovsky's aphoristic ars poetica, Third Factory, written while he had "a job at the third factory of Goskino,"[34] was composed, in part, to save his neck after he returned to the Soviet Union during the early years of Stalin's rule. In it, he returns frequently to the knife and stone and meat and the vegetables and that soup. Sometimes he and his compatriot writers and artists are one, then the other utensil or product or even process–spoon, knife, stone, sharpening, cooking, eating. He is ambivalent–for good reason. The book concludes with a description of the process of

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[31] Scandura uses Kogawa's novel to delve into modernism's complex relationship to the past–as a literary and culinary practice: "Where there is loss, there is the leftover." p. 556.

[32] "I remember walking down the street once in Moscow and seeing a man step outside ahead of me and peer at the stones in the sidewalk; then he selected one stone, crouched over it and began (or so it seemed to me) to scrape or rub with singular strain and effort. What is he doing to that sidewalk? I thought. When I got right up to him, I saw what this man was doing… he was sharpening his knife on a stone in the sidewalk. He had no thought for the stones at all, though he was scrutinizing them; still less was he thinking about them while performing his task–he was sharpening his knife. He had to sharpen his knife in order to cut meat. I had thought he was doing something to the stones in the sidewalk." Shklovsky, pp. 24-25.

[33] "Vegetables, for example, are sometimes cooked in soup and then discarded.
It is essential, though, to understand what happens in that process. Otherwise, you can get the story wrong and mistake noise for work… On the whole, we probably were vegetables… And I–gazing at the samplers from Turkestan… devouring everything on the table–I was cooked along with the others at the Briks.
On the table were these memorable items: 1) figs, 2) a big hunk of cheese, 3) liver paté." Skhlovsky, p. 38.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

industrialized filmmaking in the USSR and Hollywood: "everything is in pieces… you get not only a film but numerous cuttings." But he dreams another sort of film: "I would like to film life in a different way–to achieve a different rhythm. I love long strips of life. Give the actors a chance to show their stuff. Less tea [drunk by the gallons in the commissary between takes], less cutting."[35] He's dreaming of Jeanne Dielman. Shklovshy's writings were just beginning to appear in English in the 1970s and had a powerful influence on the LANGUAGE poets in San Francisco and New York who were themselves connected to the avant-garde filmmaking scenes, especially structuralist films.[36]

Jeanne traverses a narrow path through Brussels as she does her daily shopping, almost always in search of a way to improve Sylvain's wardrobe–a cobbler to resole his shoes; numerous shops, including a department store further afield, to find a match for a missing button on his jacket. She has set routes, culminating in her coffee–with two cubes of sugar–at her local café, making clear "the intersubjective nature of the body and the city."[37] It's a sort of tunnel vision that condenses what Michel de Certeau calls "the long poem of walking," its simultaneous constriction and expansion of space into terrifying form.[38] When she overcooks her boiled potatoes on Day Two, she lacks the imagination to spontaneously make them into mashed potatoes because that is what accompanies the meatloaf she will prepare the next day; she doesn't even consider frying them into latkes. So she must purchase another sack of potatoes at the small market near her apartment where she obviously knows the owner–herself another woman

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[35]   *Ibid.*, p. 84.

[36]   See Hejinian's Afterword to *Third Factory*, pp. 99-106. In turn, these poets were influencing and influenced by the same structural filmmakers that Akerman had encountered in New York during the 1970s.

[37]   Barker, p. 51.

[38]   "Synecdoche makes more dense: it amplifies the detail and miniaturizes the whole. Asyndeton cuts out: it undoes continuity and undercuts its plausibility. A space treated in this way and shaped by practices is transformed into enlarged singularities and separate islands." De Certeau, p. 101.

sitting silently at a table in the backroom, visible to the camera much as Jeanne is seen framed by walls and doorways–but clearly disdains shopping there for this last minute purchase.

Modern life–supposedly full of serendipity–requires a flexibility that Jeanne Dielman lacks, one she cannot experience: she cannot play with the baby in her care; she refuses to consider replacing the missing button on Sylvain's jacket with one not exactly the same or changing them all as one saleswoman suggests. There's a nervous immobility to her habits seen in her placid restlessness as she takes out her knitting bag and sweater instructions and reading glasses, knits one row and replaces the items, each in its different spot. In the short she made of her mother, Natalia Akerman, Chantal Akerman notes that one effect of her mother's experience of the camps is her insistence on regularity, as if the culmination, as Adorno would have it, of enlightenment modernity–the Nazi camps–where random violence and death prevailed, sent its survivors into a permanent state of enclosure in an attempt to maintain control. In My Mother Laughs, Akerman records her mother's comments about her guilt that she doesn't invite the countless homeless people sleeping on the streets into her large apartment: "But I can't deal with this kind of dirtiness. I experienced it once and since then I haven't wanted to hear about it. And especially don't want to see it; not in my home or anywhere for that matter."[39]

The history told–or not told but implied–in this film is manifold: there is the history of WWII and Belgium's liberation; there is the history of a marriage and motherhood. There is also the history of filmmaking. In 2023, the Museum of the Moving Image in Queens, New York, presented a week-long series of films curated by David Schwartz entitled "Jeanne Dielman and Its Roots" that included films by Michael Snow, Robert Bresson, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Agnes Varda, Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Hullet, Carl Dreyer, Jean-Luc Godard. These films, central to constructing the vision of cinema that forged Akerman's determination to make a new cinematic history, blast open the structure and form of cinema: "The structural films she was experiencing and learning from [during her time in

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[39] Akerman, *My Mother*, p. 22.

New York] were often shot in real time, with minimal setups and long takes, all to elicit a visceral response from viewers."[40] The filmmakers' different styles and subjects brought forth devices through which Akerman could express elements central to her self-identity–woman, Jew, first generation daughter of Holocaust survivors, restless inhabitant of our postwar world.

I would add more layers to the series: Marcel Ophuls' Sorrow and the Pity from 1969 which pried open the sordid history of Vichy and began France's long and still incomplete confrontation with its Nazi collaboration. One scene in the film, where Ophuls finds Marius Klein to inquire about the advertisement he paid for throughout the war declaring that he and his brothers were veterans of the Great War and good Frenchmen not Jews, despite their name, became the genesis for Joseph Losey's 1975 film M. Klein. Bernardo Bertolucci's 1970 The Conformist and Jean-Pierre Melville's 1969 Army of Shadows participate in a historical reckoning with the Second World War; Andrei Tarkovsky's Mirror (1974) connects his mother to poetry and memories of the war; Marguerite Duras's 1975 India Song (with Delphine Seyrig) and Sarah Maldoror's 1972 Sambizanga take on the legacy of colonialism–seen through the lens of women.

There are also other feminist accomplices: Martha Rosler's Semiotics of the Kitchen (1975) and House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home (1967-); Alison Knowles's on-going 1960s performance piece, The Identical Lunch and Laura Mulvey's influential article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), preceded by Susan Sontag's "The Third World of Women," in Partisan Review (1973), with a translation of Anna Akhmatova's poem "In 1940," as well as Barbara Loden's 1970 film Wanda and other Agnes Varda's films, not to mention films by male directors–like the 1974 film by John Cassavetes, A Woman under the Influence, and Jacques Rivette's Celine and Julie Go Boating.[41]

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[40]   Program Notes.

[41]   Babette Mangolte recalls "the heyday of feminist thinking. In the US in 1971 (when she first met Akerman), I was introduced to Kate Millett, who wanted to make a movie. I never became involved. But Susan Sontag was making movies." Bergstrom, p. 47.

This recognition of women's subjectivity, coming in the wake of 1968 and its explosion of politics as usual, included such novels as Gayl Jones's 1975 Corregidora, with its disturbing history of slavery's effects on the bodies and minds of generations of women. Jones, born the year before Akerman, wrote her tour-de-force first novel in the swirl of Black feminist anger at both the Black and Women's Liberation movements. Like Jeanne Dielman, it sees history as a reproductive process repressed through perverse sexuality and its domestication; women's enslavement conflates sexual and labor exploitation and it is the responsibility of daughters to express this subterranean story: "The important thing is making generations. They can burn the papers but they can't burn conscious, Ursa. And that what makes the evidence. And that's what makes the verdict," blues singer Ursa Corregidora's grandmother tells her over and over; the physical presence of a speaking body indicts historical amnesia.[42] It is a new world crime story that toggles between the late 1940s and early 1970s, linking multiple pasts to an unsettled barren present. Unlike Jeanne Dielman, which deflects her backstory of surviving the war, the novel explicitly delves into history's violence. It does so, however, in uncannily similar scenes that are delimited to a few blocks where Ursa sings and lives, sleeping on a fold-out couch and dutifully eating distasteful food. As Adam Roberts notes, "Akerman often spoke of 'holes' and 'silences', alluding on the one hand to the gaps in her mother's narrative of her life in the Nazi death camps, but by extension also to her foregrounding of marginalized and silenced voices, and the invisible labours and performances of women and the overlooked inhabiting unremarkable lives (a Brussels housewife, a Mexican factory worker…).[43] Like Jones's novel, Akerman's film was made in the context of women's liberation and its debates about female sexuality, including sex work, marriage and wages for housework.

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[42]   Jones, p. 22 (emphasis in the original). While the idea of generational trauma of slavery is literalized in Jones's novel, as each successive generation brings forth another daughter of the slaveholder Corregidora, from the gestures in *Jeanne Dielman* on, Akerman's films probe the legacy of being a survivor's child in more or less explicit ways.

[43]   Roberts, p. 130.

These works, all of which bring the war home in varying ways, set the stage for the forms of seeing accompanying the dreadful scenes of eating we must endure with Jeanne and her son, Sylvain.

From her first short film Saute ma ville (Blow up my town) made in 1968 and shot in 35mm entirely in her kitchen through her final digitally shot, No Home Movie (2015), Akerman resurrects and recasts the core of a home. She wrote My Mother Laughs "between meals in a room at the end of the corridor of her mother's apartment."[44] Paradoxically, this retreat into a catatonia induced by domestic space is the sustenance for her art. As she frantically cleans while destroying her kitchen in Saute ma ville, actress Chantal hums some distorted phrases of "a classical tune, performing a series of actions that alternate between clearly focused projects (cleaning, cooking, eating, committing suicide) and excess–an uncontrollable mess. Saute ma ville is Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles run amok."[45]

> As soon as the child got there, as worn down as ever by the adult life they weren't managing to live, they would go to sleep on the sofa for a few hours. Then, when they were a little less exhausted, they'd eat.
> The child is her, it's me. And now I'm old, soon I'll by sixty. Or maybe older. And I'm stuck in this state. I don't have children. An old child doesn't have children. So what attachment will I have to this life after.
> Can I live to sleep wake up eat go to bed. And listen to the radio. I had forgotten that. I often listen to the radio… I'm happy to sleep as soon as the sun goes down.[46]

Sleeping along with Baudelaire: as she tells it in her autofictional account, My Mother Laughs, Akerman eats and sleeps along with her dying mother, bringing stasis into dynamic play through the

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[44]   Shreir, p. 209.

[45]   Margulies, p. 1.

[46]   Akerman, *My Mother*, p. 17.

medium of language and cinema in her mother's apartment, "as long as the kitchen is spotless."[47] When visitors come, Chantal's sister must serve the tea and cake because her mother is still too weak. And if Chantal attempts to help, "it might end in disaster. A real disaster. Like breaking a cup, knocking something over, staining the tablecloth, dropping a tray, or worse."[48] A real disaster in this "spotless, sparkling, clean, immaculate" maternal space that must keep the sensations and memories of the filth and death of Auschwitz at bay.[49] A real disaster–like dropping the brush Jeanne uses to clean her son's shoes, or not rinsing a soap bubble on the dish she washes, or leaving one button undone on her robe. Routine contains chaos.

A cinema that can record the entire act of peeling a potato or making a bed, one that is steeped in the "interpretation of how a gesture is done," as cinematographer Babette Mangolte says of Jeanne Dielman, evidences the psychic damage of history's movement on the human (in this case, female) body. "Out of her face, her dress, and her gestures, out of practically nothing at all, I have made up this woman's story, or rather legend," writes Baudelaire in "Windows."[50] Repetitive acts, simple gestures, define the basis of legend–the literary form of narrating (possible) history–and these acts occur by women inside rooms. Standing near her mother who is seated at her kitchen table, in a documentary for French TV, Natalia Akerman (2007), Chantal asks her mother "What did the 1960s mean for you?" Her mother replies "nothing in particular," but for Chantal "it was liberation, freedom." Then she and her mother discuss Jeanne Dielman's obsessive cleaning and orderliness. Chantal observes that "survivors of war know that change can bring the worst." Stasis and stillness, routinized acts, provide a counterintuitive cinematic solace, a moving image that refuses motion.

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47 *Ibid.*, p. 61

48 *Ibid.*, p. 62

49 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

50 Baudelaire, "Windows" in *Spleen*, p. 77.

Confinement, framed by interior walls and long takes, defines Akerman's aesthetic. It is important that we must see from afar the pregnant woman sitting in her room in *Hotel Monterey* and also watch in medium shot the woman sitting at her table carefully slicing salami in *D'Est*. A cinema of intimacy builds on close observation–and on what is within and what will enter the belly. In Henri Lefebvre's succinct telling, "*women symbolize everyday life in its entirety. They embody its situation, its conflicts and its possibilities. They are its active critique.*"[51]

Marxist aesthetics reemerged after 1968 with its dreams of liberation, sous le pavè la plage, from both late capitalism and stultifying communism–the administered state.[52] In the mid-1970s Herbert Marcuse was claiming the arts as "essential components of revolution."[53] Art, "as both aesthetic form and as technique" overcomes the tension between art and praxis, leading to "emancipation" because art and "its essentially subjective qualities" creates "a productive force qualitatively different from labor."[54] Moreover, he writes, "because it cannot represent this suffering [he cites Auschwitz and My Lai] without subjecting it to aesthetic form, and thereby to the mitigating catharsis, to enjoyment [,] art is inexorably infested with this guilt. Yet this does not release art from the necessity of recalling again and again that which can survive even Auschwitz and perhaps one day make it impossible."[55] An image, a representation, immersed within reified commodity culture is always tainted by it–but it's all there is to work with. Akerman's desire to show the mundane work of women in methodical detail subverts its oppressive repetitiveness; she makes clear that the impossible act of keeping things the same is a form of resistance.

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[51] Lefebvre, p. 517 (emphasis in the original).

[52] For a succinct discussion of how post-1968 politics incorporated aesthetics and criticism, see Robbins.

[53] Marcuse, p. 1.

[54] *Ibid.*, pp. 36-7.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 55.

Audiences sometimes gasp in horror or snicker with nervous laughter when Jeanne first breaks her routine movements into and out of rooms: forgetting the proper order of entry and exit of switching lights on and off; leaving the top off the soup tureen; missing fastening a button. Jeanne Dielman is a woman out of time: her outfit–black A-line skirt, silk blouse, cardigan sweater, black pumps, her bouffant coiffure–are relics of early-1960s fashion. The streets are populated by passersby in mid-1970s outfits and the dates 1974-1975 are prominently on view at the post office; but she, as she says of Europe in general when she sets off to buy a matching button for her son's jacket–a gift from her sister in Canada when she visited years before–is "ten years behind America." Everything about her bearing is out of time; she treats her teenage son, played by an adult actor, as if he were still a six-year-old boy, handing him a stick of chewing gum each night after dinner. She washes her evening dishes in the morning, but not the pots nor the breakfast dishes; she salvages used wrapping paper and tinfoil, keeping them folded in her kitchen table drawer along with the silverware and her account book as if it were still wartime or the Depression.

She is serving time–living out the borrowed time we all possess as humans–a dead woman walking. Her carefully set internal clock (potatoes take exactly as long as sex) fails her on Day Two; her Wednesday john says as he leaves that he will see her Thursday. By Day Three, despite setting her alarm, her timing is off. She arrives at her usual shops when it is still dark. She and Sylvain set out for their nightly stroll too late. Too early, there's too much time to sit and stare. Yet these moments of rest induce anxiety. Too early is too late.

In 1936, Adorno called Benjamin's Arcades project his "ultima philosophia," recognizing in its formal methods of quotation and montage a new way of sketching philosophy as if it were an endless array of minute accretions of observations, a kind of sampling achieved by cutting and pasting, by leafing through a magazine, by taking a walk in the city. Yet he derided Benjamin's "gesture of immediacy... as an essentially somatic gesture," undialectically grounded in the body. He finds in Benjamin's essay, "The Storyteller," an unacceptable "anthropological materialism" in which "the human body represents

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the measure of all concreteness."[56] For Adorno, Benjamin's focus on the gestural "distorts the decisively concrete (that is, precisely the dialectical rather than the archaic image)."[57] In short, Benjamin, both in the storyteller essay and in the one on "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," leaps over "the question of aesthetic autonomy."[58] But this leap has made Benjamin's approach to aesthetics–as embedded in and expressed through the modern body in restless movement across cities harboring violence beneath their pavements–so crucial to understanding Akerman's cinematic ultima philosophia.

On the third day, Jeanne kills her moustached john for seemingly no reason other than possibly experiencing an orgasm (though it might also be disgust, either way, a real disaster–feeling) while he, still in his undershirt, moves slowly on top of her. We see this murder through the bureau mirror Jeanne has used throughout the film to comb her hair; she's always alone in this room where she stores Sylvain's clothes, along with the white towels she spreads over her bedspread each day, in her wardrobe. But now we see her standing and him splayed on the bed behind her. We see her tuck in her blouse, then turn and pick up the scissors she left on the bureau. But why are these scissors on her bureau in the first place? How could they be left there by this woman who methodically uses and replaces every item in the apartment, turns off every light switch each time she leaves a room?

Shades of Hitchcock's 1954 Dial M for Murder, where Grace Kelly kills her would-be hired killer.[59] Kelly has left the scissors from her mending box with which she was clipping newspaper items about her tennis-star husband on her desk where she sleepily answers his telephone call–part of his plot to have her strangled. And before that, shades of Fritz Lang's Woman in the Window (1944) where Edward G. Robinson kills Joan Bennett's lover with the scissors she

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56 Adorno and Benjamin, p. 147.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 146 (emphases in the original).

58 *Ibid.*, p. 147.

59 In the short interview film *Natalia Akerman*, Natalia says that Chantal's films resemble Hitchcock's–but instead of putting himself in as a cameo, Chantal puts her mother in her films.

has fetched to open a champagne bottle. Jeanne Dielman has had to fetch them from her kitchen table drawer to cut the string (which she carefully saves, as she also folds up the brown wrapping paper) tying the package her sister has sent her from Canada–a pink nightgown, hardly her style. Interrupted by the doorbell, because she is out of time by this, the third day–too early for the butcher, too late for her trick–she shoves the box under her bed and leaves the scissors on the dresser. Shades of Chekhov's gun.[60]

But Akerman says that it is important to remember the film does not end here. A full seven minutes pass as we watch her seated in her usual dining room table spot, hands folded next to the tureen where she keeps her cash while the headlights of passing cars outside dapple across her face and the sounds of traffic fill the apartment. There is blood on her hands and white blouse (shades of Hitchcock's Marnie). She waits; we wait. Brussels–the city she walks through daily, like a somnambulist with purpose–enters as a flickering light and ambient sound crosses the frame. "It is the unique provision of Baudelaire's poetry that the image of the woman and the image of death intermingle in a third: that of Paris," writes Walter Benjamin in his 1935 version of "Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century," Benjamin notes, "Decisive for Baudelaire in the 'death-fraught idyll' of the city is, however, a social, a modern substrate… this occurs through the ambiguity peculiar to the social relations and products of this epoch… Ambiguity is the manifest imaging of dialectic, the law of dialects at a standstill… Such an image is the prostitute–seller and sold in one."[61] Jeanne sits still; she sits, still. "Spleen is the feeling that corresponds to catastrophe in permanence," writes Benjamin in one of his cryptic remarks on Baudelaire.[62] The catastrophe of regimentation that has hinted at doom all along fixed in a vacant stare.

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[60] "If in the first act you have hung a pistol on the wall, then in the following one it should be fired. Otherwise don't put it there." This is one of several variations on the advice Anton Chekhov gave to writers, from 1889 on. Quoted in *Gurliand,* p. 521.

[61] Benjamin, "Paris in the Nineteenth Century (1935)," *Arcades*, p. 10.

[62] Benjamin, "Baudelaire," *Arcades*, p. 346.

Again, Chekhov's gun–a lyric poem from Fleurs du Mal in the first act, "The Enemy," must trigger events in the last. "My ruined garden/...Time eats out life and mortifies himself."[63] Death, prostitute, city, woman: dialectics at a standstill. Akerman's astute understanding of how motion pictures are made manifest through stillness–long takes and long shots of empty hallways in her 1972 Hotel Monterey; a woman carefully slicing salami at her kitchen table in D'Est; Delphine Seyrig's eerie composure as she awaits Sylvain's return from school with blood literally on her hands–clarify how cinema is a philosophical system, much as Baudelaire's poems were for Benjamin. Each forges an aesthetics of modernity–and does so sleepwalking through Europe's urban bourgeois neighborhoods–"a storm, tenebrous, savage."[64]

Ivone Margulies calls the second part of Akerman's 1975 *Je Tu Il Elle* "a kind of filmic indigestion" (119) as it follows Julie (played by Chantal) compulsively eating sugar from a paper bag while she frantically writes letters to her absent lover. Jeanne drinks her coffee with two cubes of sugar, ritually placing each next to the other on her table before methodically unwrapping them. And Akerman "can only drink my coffee if I had a sugar cube. I would put a sugar cube between my teeth and then drink the coffee. I think my three aunts must have done the same in their day."[65] She sought "to simplify a reality to such a degree that on seeing Delphine Seyrig making coffee one sees all women making coffee."[66] Hitchcock explained that "All of the action in *Dial M for Murder* takes place in a living room, but that doesn't matter. I could just as well have shot the whole film in a telephone booth... You might say that a film maker can use a telephone booth pretty much in the same way a novelist uses a blank piece of paper."[67] Actually, it's all that matters.

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[63] Baudelaire, "The Enemy," in *Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine*, pp. 18-19.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[65] Akerman, *My Mother*, p. 133.

[66] Akerman quoted in Margulies, p. 143.

[67] Truffaut, p. 159.

Anticipating the final shot of Jeanne Dielman by almost a century, Baudelaire agreed. "There is nothing more profound, more mysterious, more pregnant, more insidious, more dazzling than a window...In that black or luminous square life lives, life dreams, life suffers," he wrote in "Windows," a prose poem in Paris Spleen.[68] Living room, telephone booth, kitchen: that black or luminous square of an apartment window. "Across the ocean of roofs I can see a middle-aged woman, her face already lined, who is forever bending over something," maybe a stove, he goes on.[69] It seems we cannot get away from the culinary, from the particulars of taste, when we enter the spaces of the cinematic sensorium. "Let's write a list. The list is for shopping. Every day there's shopping to be done," Akerman explains in My Mother Laughs.[70] This despite her horror of entering a supermarket to shop.

> Let's make the shopping list.
> I sigh but go and sit opposite her at the kitchen talk. It's always in the kitchen that these things happen.
> A bag of floury potatoes, fromage blanc, butter. And then she's out of ideas.[71]

Eating and sleeping, that's enough: Chantal in bed with her apple as the camera pans around her Spring Street room in New York–yet another city–in her 1972 short, La Chambre.

Confinement, stillness and a wry decadent humor combine to chart how Akerman learned to pace her "shots [which] are exactly as long as I had the feeling of them inside myself."[72] If you tarry in the domestic, you risk the culinary. It is all inside. How does it come out? Who will taste it? "She'll eat herring with onions any day of the week," Chantal says of her mother's lack of appetite.[73]

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[68] Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen,* p . 77.

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 77.

[70] Akerman, *My Mother*, p. 172.

[71] *Ibid.*, p. 54.

[72] Akerman quoted in Program Notes.

[73] Akerman, *My Mother*, p. 23.

I still make that meatloaf; it's an exquisite process that I have honed over the years, bringing my grandmother and my mother and Jeanne–who brings Akerman's mother and aunts–into my kitchen. A performance of cooking.

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The Conformist (d. Bernardo Bertolucci, 1970)

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OS VERDES ANOS: BRIDGING THE VISIBLE AND THE LEGIBLE IN CINEMA

MARIA AUGUSTA BABO

The film *Os Verdes Anos*, released in 1963 and directed by Paulo Rocha, is part of what came to be called the *New Cinema*, inspired by the French movement of *Nouvelle Vague*. However, according to Bénard da Costa, this film generated controversy within the elite circles and, particularly, among critics. Some deemed it "excessively 'formalistic' and poetic" (1996b: 76). Others, like Seixas Santos, associated it with *Belarmino* as an embodiment of a generation that "dared to voice their needs" (*Apud Bénard da Costa, 1996a). When screened outside* Portugal, it was honored with the Best First Work award at the Locarno International Film Festival in 1964.

The plot of the film was inspired by Paulo Rocha's reading of a newspaper article about a crime committed by a shoemaker's apprentice who murdered his girlfriend. The script was written in collaboration with the writer Nuno de Bragança, who contributed to the dialogues. The director's interest in the story went beyond the mere *fait-divers,* encompassing other dimensions he wished to highlight. According to Paulo Rocha, the story intrigued him, but it was also about capturing the "fascination that certain more modern areas of the city exerted on me, living near rural areas in urbanization (…) and the inner need to solve a very popular issue – the passional crime, a daily reality in newspapers." (Bénard da Costa, 1996). Rocha chose a very simple story from everyday life to strip away its melodramatic dimension and even its narrative

closure. In this regard, he remarks, "the same story can be told in two ways, one good and one bad, and yet the story remains the same" (*in*: Bénard da Costa, 1996a). In filmic construction, the plot is devalued in favor of the landscapes because it is the *mise-en-scène*, rather than story, which interests him. This is evident through the prominent use of the quasi-documentary style, showcasing the ever-transforming urban landscape of 1960s Lisbon, as well as the portrayal of movement technology within the very filmmaking process (Deleuze).

Thus, *Os Verdes Anos* can be seen as an anthology film, and I will now attempt to justify this aspect. For an unwary viewer, the film appears to have little to no plot. Prado Coelho, in his negative review of the film, points out the significant contrast between the overall placidity throughout the film and the sudden, violent and excessive gesture in the final scene." (Prado Coelho, 1983: 18). In other words, the plot surprises the viewer towards the end, when nothing is expected, and ends abruptly, leaving the denouement in suspense, as Prado Coelho acknowledges when he confesses that this excess "constitutes one of the most interesting dramatic motifs of the film" (*idem*). That is, expecting from a filmic fiction the same narrative plot that presides over the construction of literary fiction, the disappointment of this sequence of images results from an absence of narrative, or from a temporal sequentiality so weak that the feeling it leaves is that nothing happens there, there is not even the creation of suspense mechanisms that could anticipate any disruptive event to fill the very knot of intrigue. The director, in an interview (*in*: Bénard da Costa, 1996a), refers to *Os Verdes Anos* by saying: "Nothing happens, or only detailed things happen, very discreet things, where you see the evolution of the characters, the reactions of people, etc."

From a narrative standpoint, based on the mentioned case of the day, the plot can be succinctly summarized as: The film revolves around the courtship of two young individuals, leading to a routine of Sunday walks. She is a domestic servant, a "maid of all work" – a term used during that era by the emerging bourgeoisie residing in the new avenues of Lisbon – while he is a rural apprentice shoemaker trying to adapt to the urban environment. However, this routine exposes Julio's struggle and inability to adjust to city life. Through a

series of episodes, Ilda's zest for life increasingly contrasts with Julio's growing rebellion and maladjustment. When Julio proposes marriage as a means to escape his insecurity and discontent, Ilda rejects his proposal. This rejection triggers a crescendo of Ilda's attachment to life, while Julio spirals into a state of "abandonment in a strange and hostile world" (Duarte, 1966: 11). Unexpectedly, at the end of the film, the narrative takes a dramatic turn with the sudden and unforeseen disruptive event–the murder of his ex-girlfriend Ilda–adding a narrative dimension to the previously uneventful temporal sequence. Such an event that thickens the narrative, which transforms the routine of a timeless temporality into a *mise-en-intrigue*, is the crime committed by Júlio and whose victim is Ilda, his ex-girlfriend. The film concludes with a poignant and haunting image of Julio, engulfed by a whirlwind of cars, their headlights fixated on him, rendering him "captured in the crossfire of headlights like a bewildered rabbit" (*idem*).

From the very beginning, there exists a twofold, contrasting, and yet complementary interest: a spatial dimension closely tied to the expansion of Lisbon City, running in parallel with the cinematographic exploration of crimes of passion. In an interview with Jornal de Letras in 1964 (*Apud* Fonseca), Rocha emphasizes that, contrary to the importance that the story gains in the fictional narrative, to him, the primary interest "was the relationship between the décor and the character, the treatment of cinematographic matter". Hence the focus of the camera is the key piece in the entire film sequence, for the work of building the shots.

Leaving this aspect for later treatment, let us focus on the narrative dimension of the film because its narrativity is as if disassembled in its own construction.

Typically, a narrative plot revolves around a disruptive event that, when it erupts, breaks the temporal linearity, but is absorbed by a subsequent phase, that of the denouement. Three key moments draw the canonical structure of the narrative: an initial principle or situation, a transformation, core, or knot of intrigue, and a final situation or denouement (Babo, 2017). What gives consistency to the narrative machine and gives it the capacity to be a producer of meaning is the fact that it is, at the same time, the one that contains

the disruptive event and that brings it to the end, to flatten it in its subsequent resolution. The principle of causality, like its symmetric one, the consequence, removes from the disruptive event, which is the core of the knot of intrigue, its character of pure contingency, in order to, in a certain way, explain it in the articulation of cause and effect.

The canonical narrative functioning, as a semiotic machine for creating meaning about reality, eliminates the temporal and causal suspension of events. By linking the before and after through a logic of causality, the narrative ascribes reasons, consequences, and resolutions to events, thereby removing their pure contingency. The Latin aphoristic formulation *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* – "after this, then because of this" – sums up the narrative closure and its explanatory character. To the chronological chain of events, the narrative confers the key to this succession: causality. Hence the denouement is the key moment of the whole narrative because it closes the circle of causes and effects. While in canonical narratives the timid nature of resolution is always euphoria, dysphoric narratives are already, in the face of traditional tales, products of a modernity that has no *happy end* in the moral of the story: punish the bad, reward the good. The sanctioning act, which in fables is the very *raison d'être* of the narrative plot, is, from the point of view of narrative closure and its exemplary character, the key that closes the canonical plot of the knot-of-intrigue.

Returning to the strict point of view of the story in *Os Verdes Anos*, none of this happens. The narrative plot is blurred throughout the film, so that the viewer can, until towards the end, summarize the story to a sequence of actions where "nothing happens".

Let us now detail this sequentiality and the perspective from which it is viewed.

Interestingly, the story of *Os Verdes Anos* has an explicit narrator, himself a character in the plot: Júlio's uncle. It means that the focus of the camera does not coincide with the place of the narration, at least tacitly. There's a kind of double perspective: that of the homodiegetic narrator – Júlio's uncle as his empirical tutor – and the focusing performed by the camera itself, configuring a perspective of the scenographic sequences. The uncle is the character who welcomes Júlio into his house, who is supposed to wait for him at the station upon

his arrival, who gets him a job as a shoemaker. It's also the uncle who legitimizes Júlio's courtship, inviting Ilda to go with them to the other side of Lisbon to have lunch. It is he who calls Júlio to reason, trying to impose his authority on the night scene, in a brewery he frequents. However, such a character, in his pragmatism, seems to forget his dual internal and external role in the narrative plot, until the moment when he himself, in an outburst, confesses that understanding that fateful afternoon is the key to understanding Júlio's criminal act. The focus of the homodiegetic narrator is partial, it is intersubjective, and it is always incomplete since he is not in full possession of the profile and intentions of the protagonist. This is already a characteristic of modernity and the elaboration carried out on the narrative plot. As the narrator, Afonso, the uncle, does not have access to that afternoon, nor can he explain to the spectator, to whom he supposedly addresses his soliloquy, the reason for such an act. At this very moment, the character combines a triple function: narrator of the story, a character in the narrative, and also the role of the chorus in Greek tragedy, that of announcing and preparing the spectator for the tragic moment. As a circumstantial tutor of Júlio, the uncle fails, from the start, in his trip to the station where the nephew disembarks from the province. Júlio ventures into the labyrinth city he does not know, to which he looks in amazement which almost paralyzes him.

The confrontation with the urban environment is total in the starstruck admiration of the protagonist in front of the shop windows adjacent to the Rossio station, which, from the outset, offer a glimpse of this urban and modernist environment, even in the function of glass as a transparency device, vision conductor, which the film will explore until the end, as will be seen later. The same astonishment, the same disturbance of Júlio is given to us when he arrives at the address of his place of work, after the initiatic metro trip. Entering a modern building behind a sparrow, Júlio is trapped inside the *hall* entrance without knowing how to open the door again to the outside. All this confusion of the villager in the face of modern spaces is revealed to us through the glassy transparency between the inside and the street and that ended up confusing him. Unlike Ilda – herself coming from a rural background but acculturated with the modernity of the urban and

laughing of his ignorant provincialism – Júlio descends to the basement, a place that is destined for him to fulfil his place as a shoemaker's apprentice. This spatial and social situation is highlighted by Fonseca (2020) when he states that Júlio's perspective will always be shallow to the ground, framed by the grid of wickets where the shoemaker's workshop operates; forced to deal only with the shallowest objects: shoes. To this extent, the protagonist also brings his focus to the film, and it can be said that he is also a narrator, in this case autodiegetic, one among a plurality of perspectives that the film provides us.

On the contrary, Ilda, serving a bourgeois family, goes up by elevator to the floor where she works and, at the same time, has pretensions to go up in the social elevator. The scene that characterizes this expectation of social ascent is that of the "passage of models" that Ilda stages, on a Sunday afternoon, for her boyfriend, in the room of the absent boss. Through a subtle *mise-en-abyme*, the camera gives us this social representation, carried out by the protagonist, constituted by fashion and the social habits or customs of female dressing. Ilda represents the social sphere, changing clothes according to the social functions, the hours of the day, and the spaces to be frequented, concluding that it is just like that: a garment for each occasion is the bourgeois code. The detail of displaying the shoe cabinet, which amazes Júlio to the point that he exclaims that it is not a cabinet, but a store, refers us to this function of the shoe in social position, a shoe that Júlio repairs, but whose function it allows access he will never occupy. Ilda's mimicry reveals to the viewer the adaptability that she has acquired, a competence that allows her to climb the social elevator because, from knowing what to wear to knowing how to prepare drinks for occasions or trying out the seat next to the boss in his *sports* car, she drank, by osmosis, the distinctive marks of the bourgeoisie. In this difference between Júlio's position and Ilda's, a difference of perspective is drawn, each one granting the spectator of the film his point of view, the focus on the world and life. The film then unfolds the narrator's place in a multiplicity of conflicting, borderline, contradictory gazes. If the characters lack psychological depth, as was understood by certain critics (Fonseca, 2020), this lack is largely compensated by the diversity of points of view to which each lends its gaze. Also, the uncle, leading

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them, on a Sunday, for a sightseeing tour of Lisbon, concludes, from the top of his vision of things (at the top of the Santa Justa elevator), referring to the explosion of new neighbourhoods with their bourgeois houses, that the rich pay dearly to sleep. And, in a sibilant outcome, he concludes that the higher one rises, the higher one falls, showing, in his own way, the inaccessibility of the lower class to the goods of a modern bourgeoisie (Ferreira, 2014). But Afonso is conformed to the social stratum that characterizes him, continuing to inhabit, on the outskirts of the city, a rural area. It is in this suburb that Julio settles and where he seems to find a nostalgic harmony with his childhood. This is shown by the initial episode in which he transforms, with his penknife, a potato into a doll with straw hair, to the delight of the children who follow him. This contrast between the rural environment of origin and the urban environment of the present is marked by the generality of the comments to the film.

In this narrative's plot, it is important to highlight the filigree of its deconstruction. The dismantling of narrative temporality, still within a narrative sequentiality, is, of course, one of the innovative dimensions of *Os Verdes Anos*. Routine is installed in the characters and in the temporality that is manufactured before the spectator's eyes: routine weeks of work for the young nephew as a shoemaker's apprentice; housework for the young maid. And, at certain intervals, the day off, Sunday. This continuous discontinuity opens two regimes of gaze: the gaze of the inner city, of the neighborhood, and the erratic wandering at Sunday, in an outside, atypical landscape, neither rural nor urban, on the outskirts of Avenidas Novas. The repetition of Sunday scenes takes the viewer to this routine where, apparently, that is, visually, "nothing happens", to the point that it is possible to define the film as one where there is no story: an absence or refusal of the narrative. If anything, there is a hope that hovers, more in Ilda than in Julio, of a future elsewhere, in a mythical outside, whose path may even be emigration. Afonso explains, during the cacilheiro boat crossing to the other margin of Tejo River, that this is not a land where there is a future for young people, the only way out being to emigrate. In his aimless walks, however, there is one that hangs in the air: the project never realized, but always formulated, to go see the planes, given the proximity

that is guessed from the airport by the noise the planes make when passing, due to the possibility of leaving that they give to young people imagination. The no-man's-land is a prison that retains them to this situation of nobodies, without psychological depth, precisely because of their own social and life condition. As has been here emphasized, the camera point of view is the narrative focus that gives the story an overlap, a polyphony, a densification of the characters action, or, we would rather say, of their inaction, as well as the determining role of the very places to which they are confined. Through these characters, the film tells us a story of the places and the price of modernizing the city. The dark side of this daytime view of Lisbon is highlighted by some critics, namely Fonseca (2020), who sees this climate as a tribute to Fritz Lang. This dark side thickens especially in the night episode in a tavern, in which Julio's confrontation with his uncle exposes his fragility and his malaise, his inadaptation to the urbanity of the present. The scene unfolds in an episode, somewhat anachronistic, in which the only conversation where Julio feels understood is, precisely, with an Englishman who, however, does not speak or understand what he tells him because he does not share the same language.

Another episode that displays Júlio's maladaptation is set at a Sunday dance, where young people of his social class go to have fun and dance. Curiously, Julio does not witness the onslaught of a young man snatching Ilda nor the quarrel that ensues. Júlio is distant and oblivious because he had gone looking for medicine to relieve his headaches. So the dance scene reveals and, at the same time, does not reveal the maladjustment of Júlio. He's already put himself aside, sidelined, before he's out of the game. This scene ends with Ilda's meeting with "townspeople," as she puts it. And, excusing herself to Júlio, she leaves him to his fate, going off with her people.

Júlio wanders and daydreams. An erratic character, for whom lifeline lies in marring Ilda. Júlio's outlook on life is grounded, as mentioned above (Fonseca, 2020). It is this lack of ambition that prevents him from confronting the challenges of the future. He needs an adjuvant whose function Julia, by intuition or premonition, refuses. The film is the exhibition of this malaise, this discomfort that makes Julio an angry but powerless character, or angry because powerless.

There is no narrative in this state of mind. Nothing happens in this sequence of loose and inconsequential episodes, in a double sense: because they have no justification and because they do not connect. The disruptive event is pushed towards the end of the film. The great strategy of the film direction is to move the event to the limit of what is possible, to the point of removing the outcome or, at most, condensing it into the very strong final image.

The crime is, without a doubt, the event of the narrative, the probable engine of the newspaper news that attracted the attention of the director Paulo Rocha. But the script, written by him and Nuno de Bragança, moves to the limit the knot of intrigue, to the outskirts of the narrative that is already a *mise-en-abyme* of journalistic storytelling. In doing so, it disrupts the traditional structure of causality that typically shapes a plot. The interpretation presented here aims to demonstrate that the series of preceding episodes leading up to the crime cannot be seen as direct causes, as a murder cannot be simply attributed or even explained by the culprit's malaise or erratic experiences. Júlio swiftly commits the criminal act, an impulse that does not raises any suspicions. He quickly goes up in the elevator and asks his boss, who opens the door for him, to talk to Ilda, ensuring that the conversation will be quick. However, similar to Greek tragedy, the drama is veiled to the viewer, as the camera is on the mistress's side, behind a glass door. The glass allows light to pass through but not clear vision, creating an absolute proximity and an inevitable separation between the viewers and the couple engaged in the crime. This hammered glass lets through the sound of a sigh – the last one – but not the observation of the fatal assault. Dramatic, the event is averted from view. There is no display, on the contrary, there is a modesty that the camera expresses in concealment, as pointed out by A. P. Vasconcelos praising the subtlety of the filmic act: "… applaud that you 'close the door' on the final crime" (*in*: Bénard da Costa, 1996a). The drama is not exposed, it is inferred. Hence Prado Coelho's perspective, when stating that "the ending is of an uncomfortable dramatism" (1983: 18), is not only unjustified but even contradictory to this modesty of realization that leads to not showing the unique act that gives the film narrativity. The film removes the drama of the

newspaper news by the cover-up of the act, by its speediness, by the silence itself. It subverts the case-of-the-day narrative by revealing what is not action and obscuring the only decisive, transgressive act that drives the narrative transformation–the death of the other. It deliberately hides the act itself.

By devoting an analysis to *fait-divers*, Roland Barthes (1966) classifies it as an unclassifiable leftover in journalistic taxonomy. According to him, its main characteristic lies in being closed in on itself, that is, in having a beginning, a middle and an end, not needing the context that explains it. Whether it is an unusual or even explicable fact, the *fait-divers* autonomizes itself by creating a closed world that, if it does not explain itself, at least creates effects on the recipient. The sanction, the last phase of the narrative plot, is the stage of the final evaluation of the action. The punishment of the bad and the reward of the good constitute the axiology that underlies happy endings. And, therefore, it is almost redundant, for canonical narratives, that the endings are happy, since, prevailing the logic of the necessary over the logic of the contingent, all endings are always happy since they restore order over chaos, harmony over incongruity. This dismantling of the *fait-divers*, in *Os Verdes Anos*, involves the prevalence of the contingent over the necessary and, in this movement, the suppression of the sanctioning moment. Reasons are not sought, there is no sanction, and there is no outcome because the end does not coincide with the finality. There is no moral to the story. Manoel de Oliveira, invited to write about his fellow director, stresses exactly what this film is about: Paulo Rocha's demand to only capture the essential, "without effects" (*in*: Turigliatto, 1995: 7).

The final image, which rushes into a regime of acceleration, since Julio runs away and, bewildered, breaks a glass whose transparency opposes what had hidden him when the crime, this powerful and, at the same time, enigmatic final image, gives itself and gives us a nocturnal environment. It is in this dark environment that the character launches himself at a crossroads of streets to which, at the same time, converge automobiles that close him in a siege. The number of headlights that focus on the character mirror the multitude of expectant eyes that, located and wrapped in that same blackness of the movie theater,

observe him, but from the back. Júlio is surrounded by foci of vision. Julio is the object of this collective focus that captures him. Júlio cannot escape. But each viewer, in their own unique perception, will make the judgment about him that best suits their own interpretation of the film. That is, the narrative is suspended in this mass vision, but it does not end, does not resolve, and does not pronounce any verdict. Despite the apparent canonical sequentiality, the narrative plot is challenged and shredded, undone. Unlike the case of the day, no commonplace comes to close the narrative and operate the closure of meaning. The narrative, instead of weaving the plot, leaves loose ends to the care of the viewer. Surrounded, the character invites the viewer to pronounce his own sentence, to close the narrative or, on the contrary, to open it in a suspension of judgment. The last scene of the film is of an unsurpassed cinematographic rigor, as Carolin Overhoff Ferreira says in the text she dedicates to *Verdes Anos*: "Detail shots of the cars, shots filmed from inside them and shots [in] *plongé* that move further and further away are edited at an agitated pace and without respecting the rules of a continuous montage, showing how Julio is fenced by modernity" (2014: 42).

      Contingency thus follows from this criminal act that, however, cannot revert any previous incidents to premeditation. This suspension of narrative closure, this unravelling of the narrative web, like a web of Penelope, can only be truly understood by the function that the regime of description gains in this film. Because there is a game here, a fusion between the narrative and the descriptive, between the dramatic and the documentary, between story – temporality – and exposure – spatiality. The failure of the narrative plot is due to, and through the emergence and prevalence of the spatial over the temporal. Bénard da Costa himself points out this aspect when he says that the film "on the one hand bridges the visual imaginary that cinema almost had ignored and a specific cinematic imaginary. / ... / on the other hand, it provides the keys to the possible 'figures of rhetoric' in the future evolution of this imaginary" ("Cinema Novo Português 1960/1974", *in*: Bénard da Costa, 1996a: 151). Note that the imaginary is always of the order of the *imago*, to which the film, in its rigor, corresponds – Alves Costa even speaks of "honesty" (1964,

in Bénard da Costa, idem). The same is highlighted by Leitão Ramos when asserting that the specificity or change that the film operates is in the "filmic breath, in the attention to the movements of the camera, to the plastic reality of the shots, to the durations" (1989: 398). The truth of this imaginary is therefore inscribed in the authenticity of its images, because, as Alves Costa so well concludes, "the décor is not a background" (*idem*), for the simple reason that there is no décor in the superfluous, ornamental sense that serves as the background to the action. Authenticity is in the frames themselves, in these landscapes whose mark impregnates the characters. Authenticity also comes from the non-fictionality of the story, which stems from a true case: "the authenticity of the fact and the act", as lapidarily summarized by Manoel de Oliveira (Turigliatto, 1995). The film is already the transposition into the imagetic domain of a real contingency that happened in the urban context of the expansion of Lisbon.

Cinema is a mixed media given the intervention of two regimes of meaning production: the narrative as a regime of time and the image as a regime of space. Can cinema be narrative and imagery? Can it be time and space? *Os Verdes Anos* show us that it does. In this regard, Carolin O. Ferreira says: "The affinities with the French *Nouvelle Vague*, in the sense of the importance given to the *mise-en-scène*, are obvious: often the spaces where the characters roam are framed by modern architecture; ..." (2014: 41).

According to M. S. Fonseca (2020), Rocha expresses, with this first film, not only the spirit of the 1960s, but a taste for collages between different genres and materials. The film, therefore, has several layers, texts and intertexts.

It would then be said that, although the narrative plot is still there as a background (it is the plot and not the *décor* which constitutes the filmic backdrop), the cinematographic perspective adopted is descriptive, close to the documentary image – the camera that launches itself in the repeated capture of unconsolidated landscapes, revolved terrains, forming swamps, reliefs and concavities through which a couple of lovers from a rural interior, from a stagnant country, literally described in black and white, walk on boring Sundays. It is a report from the outskirts of Lisbon, with wastelands in transformation,

characterized by an unconsolidated orography of remixed soils, pools of dirty water, and pieces of wood invaded by earthworks. The threshold of the city is this no-man's-land that lends itself to aimless wandering, ruin here, elevation there, mud yonder (the episode of the sweater thrown by Júlio into the middle of the mud is revealing of this). As mentioned in the preamble to *Aesthetic Authenticity in Cinema*, by Filipe Martins, "the realistic character of cinema is a commonplace that is based, from the outset, on the very technical nature of the device". From a strictly formal point of view, the descriptive regime overlaps the narrative regime. Both genres can be attributed to both written and filmic texts. Although the overlap of the description in the image register seems obvious, the director himself notes that, in general, the spectator pays more attention to the narrative plot than to the image. It is this later display mode, this care, this elaboration of images that interests Paulo Rocha, what he calls the *mise-en-scène*. There is a power of the image beyond the story and that becomes the key to reading this film.

     Os Verdes Anos is not so much the story of a case-of-the-day, a dramatic narrative about a murder, but the black and white portrait of a Lisbon of the early 1960s (1963). It captures the city as it undergoes growth and expansion beyond its established boundaries, catering to an emerging bourgeoisie that settles in the renowned Avenidas Novas neighborhood. From the public building of the rectory of the University of Lisbon, with bas-reliefs by Almada Negreiros, to the residential building where Ilda works, and Júlio in the basement, architecture configures a way of being – that of knowledge, in the frieze of wise men with whom the two ignorant young people confront, as the director himself characterizes them; a way of life of the bourgeoisie typified by access to the goods and by the social behavior of facade (*see* the scene in which the boss seduces the woman's cousin, who is intuitively aware of this but takes refuge in bed and the so popular, at the time, *Saridon* to calm the discomfort). The film is undeniably modern. The windows at the entrance, where Júlio finds himself caught in a transparency trap, the elevator, that carries a metaphorical significance throughout the film, the apartment interior, which separates the social areas from the service areas for employees, all

that regulatory architecture that exemplifies and reveals the codes of the bourgeoisie is shown in detail throughout the film. But, far beyond this bourgeois private space, the film provides a panoramic view of modernist Lisbon, ciceroned by Afonso, where the aesthetics of decorative arts, such as the tiles and small pieces, stand out. As the criticism points out, in a generalized way, in these details we recognize the iconic places of modern Lisbon, from the Vavá pastry shop to the buildings of the University of Lisbon.

But this panoramic capture, so transparent towards its referent, cannot deceive us about the double character of the cinematographic device. Deleuze warns us of this intrinsic relationship between the visible and the legible (*idem*). In fact, you must read underneath the images, as Paulo Rocha himself warns: "People have to learn how to read /…/ everything that is in the film, in the image" (Bénard da Costa, 1996a: 59). The regime of the visible is not absolutely transparent since it still refers to the regime of the legible. Now, this trajectory through which the camera leads us constitutes, itself, a break with the typical Lisbon portrayed by the cinema of the 1940s. It is in this dual regime that the images must be read and not only seen. The new vision of the city breaks with the typical neighborhoods of cinematic folklore, from films such as *O Leão da Estrela* or *O Pátio das Cantigas*, to name just two. We leave this closed universe where all neighbors know each other, where conflicts are resolved, where the poor are honored and, above all, happy, from the typical neighborhoods of Lisbon. Therefore, the regime of the visible in *Os Verdes Anos* gains a legibility of rupture in this intertextual backdrop where it is located. When we talk about a turning film, the turning is in the cut with the previous images that constitute the very clichés that fill the eyes of the spectators even before they dwell on the film they are watching.

In this specific case, the challenge posed to us by the film under analysis is to understand how the legible is veiled by the visible and how the legible emerges through the visible.

Modernity is not limited, therefore, to the landscape frames of a city that grows according to contemporary architectural trends. It is also assumed by a very accentuated aspect in the film, but little analyzed by critics: the decline of the means of transport where the machine

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is recurrent, as highlighted by Eduardo Souto de Moura (2013). A cult object of modernism, the machine, due to the importance it gains in the film, can be considered another character. The decline of motion through the machines that cause it goes from the train that enters the Rossio station, in this decisive first shot of the film – which takes us to the imaginary of the train stations, from painting to modern cinema –, to the forementioned *sports car* and other transports, from the newly opened metro to the cacilheiro boat that connects the two margins of the Tejo River, and also to the plane, whose proximity and noise are foreseen. Júlio has a bicycle for his daily commute between the rural area in which he lives with his uncle (and which he never abandons) to the urban space (where he encloses himself in the basement illuminated by a cat flap that determines his framework of things and life). The elevator itself, as a social ascension machine, appears in both versions, private, in the residential building, and public, in the Santa Justa elevator. Nowhere does the camera let us fall into the commonplace. Even when the purpose is to show to the pair of lovers the magnificent view of Lisbon from the other margin, the uncle has a caricature attitude of smartness when pretending to sit in a good restaurant so that they admire the view from the balcony and then goes to a tavern where they will actually eat and where nothing can be seen but the modesty of the place. A Burlesque scene that takes away the opportunity of a panoramic postcard shot.

But all these city panoramas do not exhaust the landscape of *Os Verdes Anos*. They are superimposed on desolate landscapes, unconsolidated areas where the terrains form suburbs on the verge of being urbanized, where even the flora does not appease us, since it is part of this overwhelming provisoriness that the excavators will banish. In these suburbs the courtship of the young couple takes place, populated by dialogues that are, first of all, monologues, as some critics refer to, adding that the density of the characters does not exist. It is precisely this overwhelming dimension of the decaying and transient landscapes that weighs on the characters and gives the film its soulful strength. Each character projecting an imaginary: intrepid, in the case of the young woman; fearful and restless in the case of his partner, wandering aimlessly, without a project, without life prospects. The

marriage proposal that Júlio makes to Ilda is not a life project, but a kind of security that the character needs to acquire to stay alive.

From these uncomfortable and unstable places emanates a timid melancholy, a strangeness, at moments, that makes insecure or even desperate those who do not have the strength to break the *status quo*. Here, too, in the framework of the visible, one can read the entire burden of Italian neorealist cinema, from which is taken this shot [image 1] of *Le Notti di Cabiria*, by Fellini, directed in 1957.

Image 1: *Le Notti di Cabiria*, by Fellini, 1957.

In the famous role of Cabíria, we find Giulietta Masina wandering, lost: the same disorientation, the same helplessness of Júlio. André Bazin wrote that *Le Notti di Cabiria* "finished off" neorealism, "surpassing it in a poetic reorganization of the world" (*in*: Chevrier, 2012). The story of Cabiria, a disgraced prostitute, is seen, in Fellini's work, as the turning point in which the filmmaker begins to get rid of "traditional narrative" and "realism" itself in the strict sense (*idem*). As Deleuze points out, while realism separates the object and gives it autonomy, neorealism, on the contrary, creates a kind of indiscernibility between the real and the imaginary (1989), as happens, in our opinion, in the films compared here.

Image 2: *Os Verdes Anos*, by Paulo Rocha, 1963.

Both shots [Images 1 and 2] are united by the similarity of the places, suburbs of expanding metropolises – Rome and Lisbon –, throwing the characters to an outside that rejects them socially and individually. This regime of the legible allows, from the intertextual association between images so close and so coincident in the perspective they offer, to read, under the documentary realism of the image, the poetics of its relations of meaning. Poetics emerges from the deepest layers of the image, either where it meets other imagetic textualities, or where legibility becomes possible.

In black and white, *Os Verdes Anos* stands as a singular work by the *poietics* that emerges from the raw images, from the fragile characters, perhaps even from their lack of thickness, characters thrown into a chance that, disgracing the one whose future does not reach, comes to disgrace the one who believed, in her imagination, to have a future on the rise. The poetics of the film, it must be stressed finally, is not independent of the melancholic musicality of Carlos Paredes' guitar. This power of Paredes' string music, capable of summoning in the image, "at a time, a screaming, impossible clarity, an external, painful anguish, a nostalgia for peace and enchantment coming from the depths of time, from yesteryear and from here", is highlighted by Leitão Ramos (1989).

The melancholic musicality of this guitar that touches gives the image a third dimension, the volume, that is, the imperceptible atmosphere through which the film passes from perception to affection, to use two concepts of Deleuze, combining them, merging them. In this sadness that permeates the film, the images gradually detach themselves from the captured real into a properly poetic plane, not due to any melodramatic trait, but due to the raw rigor from which the camera does not shy away.

Perhaps Baptista Bastos was right, or half right, in saying that "*Os Verdes Anos* is not a good film, but it's a beautiful film." *in Bénard da Costa, 1996a).*

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GENUINE POETICS: EXPRESSIVE AUTHENTICITY IN FILM

SÉRGIO DIAS BRANCO

This chapter seeks to reflect on the concepts of entertainment, engagement, and poetics applied to cinematic art and it inscribes this set of reflections within the scope of aesthetic authenticity in cinema. The discussion is structured around the question of the autonomy of art, understood as a kind of characterization or requirement, a topic that remains current in the critical debates around cinematographic works, with a focus on the relationship between film aesthetics and authenticity. In delimiting the field of film aesthetics, which he ties to questions of value, Andrew Klevan writes about:

> those occasions where, for example, ideological, contextual or conceptual content, even if it relates to formal or presentational matters, is the primary concern and the basis of the evaluation. Equally, not all values relating to the visual, aural, and sensory, the features ostensibly underpinning aesthetic interest, are automatically of aesthetic value. (2018, p. 20)

Following this line of thought, expressive forms in film are the product of the patterns and relationships between the elements of *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, sound, and editing. Film aesthetics is then akin to film *artisticness*, since it concentrates on the artistic qualities of films, but with a philosophical bent. Hence, "aesthetics" in the concept of film aesthetics convokes approaches and inquiries

that go beyond the consideration of the mere aesthetic qualities of the work by themselves. Indeed, the aesthetic study of film can be conducted in multiple ways and usually transcend immediate aesthetic interests to include the treatment of a subject matter, for example.

Debates about entertainment films and committed or engaged cinema works, even when they are not presented in this way, have this problem as a background. I argue that the concepts of entertainment and commitment deserve a critical examination that articulates them with the notion of poetics, in order to think of cinema as an aesthetic and social phenomenon, with no alibi, with no other place than where it takes place, as Theodor Adorno did in relation to art (1997, pp. 225-261) – to think of cinema, therefore, as having a relative autonomy from other spheres and practices.

I discuss these theoretical questions also by analysing some films to make the discussion more concrete and the arguments more cogent. The films are analysed as works that affirm the aesthetic authenticity of the film practice in different ways. The first fulcrum is the absolute autonomy of art, synthesized in the Latin expression *Ars Gratia Artis* (art for art's sake). In contrast to this initial conception, the remaining sections develop the idea of the relative autonomy of cinema as an art, rooted in a critical investigation of the relationships between entertainment and alienation, engagement and poetics, and production and thought. Talking about *relationships* in these cases is already to critically challenge the understanding that these terms form dichotomies, that is, that they are mutually exclusive or contradictory concepts.

Authenticity is an additional concept that can be helpful in going beyond dichotomic thinking because it can be grasped as a quality with dialectical characteristics. Susanne Knaller contends that authenticity is a category that validates a work of art as art and shapes subject-object dynamics with normative and non-normative aspects (2012, pp. 28-29). She later introduces the gradual forgoing of the normative approach to artistic authenticity. The truth is that this discussion has been mainly developed outside of film studies, but it can easily be imported through the philosophy of film. Regarding a film, we may ask if and how it is authentic. In other words: in relation

to what can we say that a film is authentic? As the itinerary of this chapter will make clear, my proposal is that these questions can only be answered within the practices of film analysis and criticism, without an immutable standard to appeal to. A film would be authentic in relation to its artistic project and the expressive possibilities of film, which are ever-expanding. This is what Denis Dutton calls *expressive authenticity*, which investigates the meanings and identities of films by "marking and tracing relationships and influences" (2005, p. 270). The following sections will explore this kind of authenticity, starting with a broader discussion of the limits of conceptualizing works of art as autotelic, as things that have a purpose in themselves and not apart from themselves.

Ars Gratia Artis

Ars Gratia Artis is a Latin expression associated with a vision of art that asserts its absolute autonomy. Coined by Benjamin Constant in 1804, it was the French Théophile Gautier, a key figure of romanticism, who was committed to the staunch defence of the idea of *art for art's sake*. In addition to studying the philosophical roots of this idea – in particular, in the work of the Germans Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten and Immanuel Kant (Baumgarten 1970 and Kant 2002) – it is important to discuss its persistence and function in capitalist society as circumscribing the field of art to the ludic that is self-sufficient. In the context of cinema, this expression cannot be disconnected from the concept of entertainment – after all, *Ars Gratia Artis* is the official motto of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), the great production company founded in 1924 in the United States, engraved in its famous logo around a roaring lion. Be that as it may, the idea is also recurrent in the thinkers who are the heirs of Kantian aesthetics, who stratify cultural production in order to differentiate a priori what art is, without the necessary critical foundation, and to basically deny its inscription in the social and historical fabric (for an example of this approach, see Stolnitz 1965). The "purposeless" and "outside of oneself" of art thus works as a way of omitting or hiding the determining connections that weave, for example, a

film. This idea brings with it the loss of lucidity regarding the many possibilities and perspectives of cinematographic art in terms of creation and enjoyment and leads us to a broader discussion on the relationship between art and society.

This idea was particularly strong in France and associated with aestheticism, a theoretical approach that understood art as an activity aimed at producing formal perfection, devoid of any purpose, a kind of refined game performed only for itself. This did not aim at the uselessness of art, but its autonomy. In the preface written in 1834 by Gautier for his novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1994, pp. 5-30), the exclusion of art from any external purpose is a weapon used against those who use art as a means of education and edification, but also as proof of the artist's distance from mercantile tendencies, the reducibility of the work of art to the criteria of bourgeois society, for which beauty and usefulness are antithetical. Therefore, we find two meanings for the expression *art for art's sake*: art as an exercise in virtuosity within a self-defined vacuum and the assertion of artistic values as autonomous values.

To say that art is purposeless is not usually to mean that it really has no purpose, but that its *sole purpose* is to be contemplated. It is a heritage from Kant's overarching aesthetics, which defends that contemplating a beautiful landscape, aesthetically perceiving and reflecting on such an object of nature, is a source of a pure and disinterested judgment of taste, and it is no different from contemplating the beauty of a work of art (2002, pp. 87-230). In order for these two aesthetic experiences to be considered essentially similar, the specific poetic work behind human-produced objects such as works of art, which include instances of land art and environmental sculpture, has to be ignored or erased. Yet ignoring or erasing this conceptual and material process of production is an amputation of art as a human activity. Moreover, as Nicholas Wolterstorff claims (2015), art is a social practice whose meanings and values rest on the fact that its works emerge in a larger context of relationships and that people respond to them in an equally complex situation.

The controversy about aestheticism and art for art's sake may seem outdated. More concretely, it may seem like a discussion that

belongs to the 19th century and has lost relevance today. Nevertheless, even if the question comes from a long time ago, it is still alive in contemporary thought on art. The idea of the absence of purpose in art can already be found in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1997), in which purposes for aesthetic-making are not indicated, although differences between poetic genres are established. At the same time, philosophers such as Michalle Gal (2015) have resumed the defence of aestheticism with new concepts such as deep formalism. To reflect on these issues, I chose three films produced in the United States as objects of study: *The Band Wagon* (1953), *Harlan County USA* (1976), and *Valse Triste* (1977). The restriction about the national origin of the works has to do with the fact that this is a country with contributions of great artistic value in popular, documentary, and experimental cinema, which are aesthetically diverse and also allow for comparison. It is also a nation with a history of intense conflicts within its capitalist society.

Entertainment and Estrangement

It is common to think of popular cinema as entertainment (Dyer 2002), but the alternative expression *popular cinema* involves an aesthetic qualification, since it signals the way in which this type of cinematic art is produced to be accessible to a vast audience, without the need for specialized instruction or certain knowledge, unlike avant-garde art (Carroll 1998, pp. 243-244). Now *entertainment* is a word that, instead, refers us to the purposes of the experience of a film. In common and trivialized usage, this word is placed in opposition to art. On the one side is entertainment. On the other side, in stark contrast, is art. Each one seems to have its own field and distinct nature. Thus, entertainment would be just a form of fun and distraction. It is not, however, the distraction that Walter Benjamin was talking about, which is the ability to look in a non-concentrated, dispersed, but attentive manner (1969, pp. 239-240). It is an *estrangement*, an attempt to find refuge from the everyday world or to put it into perspective. In Bertolt Brecht's aesthetic, estrangement is part of a distancing effect (originally, *Verfremdungseffekt* or *V-effekt*). The German playwright used it for the first time in the essay "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting" (Brecht 1964, pp. 91-99), published in 1936, in which he describes the process of hindering the audience's

simple identification with the characters to make spectators conscious of their reactions to the actions on stage. For Karl Marx, estrangement or alienation is associated with labour in a relationship that separates work from the means and products of production (1977, pp. 66-80). Estranged labour is a form of human self-estrangement through which there is an externalization of the worker's activity and output. Brecht's estrangement is a way of making critically strange what has become uncritically familiar and combatting alienated responses in theatre, or any other art for that matter, which is a cultural form of the alienation in capitalist society that Marx scrutinizes. What I mean by estrangement is similar to Brecht's definition because the goal is also to make film viewers more conscious and critical, but it is done by enhancing and perfecting entertainment as such instead of pulling away from it.

Cinema was and is often seen as entertainment – particularly if we unearth its genealogy of playful moving image devices such as the zoetrope. Either that or the cinematic corpus is separated between that which is entertainment and that which is art, therefore, making a distinction that is not descriptive of aesthetic differences, but that is evaluative, given that it equates entertainment with low artistic value and art, *properly speaking*, with high artistic value. This arrangement of categories is quite simplistic and avoids reflection and questioning about the concepts it uses. Accordingly, it is necessary to (re)think the very idea of entertainment, particularly the way in which imagination serves as its engine. *Entertaining* refers to the ability to treat someone in a certain way, to hold her or his attention, to be hospitable, even. More precisely, the notion of entertainment in film can be recovered to describe ways of making cinema that hold the spectator's attention, but that also invite her or him to consider or entertain dreams, feelings, and reasons.

In order to probe this rethinking of entertainment, let us look at a musical number from *The Band Wagon*, directed by Vincente Minnelli and starring Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse, one of the most popular musical films produced by MGM. Based on a 1931 Broadway musical starring Astaire and his sister Adele, the film follows a veteran of musical comedies, Tony Hunter (Astaire), who is concerned that his career in theatre and film may be declining.

He accepts the invitation of two friends, Lester and Lily Marton, to participate in a play written by them. Of course, the stage production faces many problems and obstacles. The film came at a time when racial segregation in the United States continued to generate social and political tensions (Sitkoff 2008). It was not until the year after *The Band Wagon* premiered that racial segregation in schools was considered unconstitutional through a United States Supreme Court decision in the case that opposed Oliver L. Brown to the Topeka Board of Education in 1954 (Patterson 2001). It was not until a decade later, in 1964, that the Civil Rights Act put an end to the various state systems of racial segregation known as the Jim Crow Laws.

In one of the film's most celebrated musical numbers, Astaire searches for an old theatre but finds a games room instead. Feeling low, he sings and dances to a song, "Shine Your Shoes," one of the highlights of *The Band Wagon*. His shoes are polished by a black shoe shiner. Philosopher Stanley Cavell refers to the way in which Astaire assumes the heritage of black culture through his dance movements in the scene, which the shoe shiner actually follows when he moves around him or interacts with him, and asserts the harmony between them (2005, p. 236). In these dance steps, they rehearse and find the equality that was still denied in reality. More than equality, Cavell seems to suggest that this cultural fraternity belongs to a still remote America, yet not fully realized (on this topic, see Cavell 1989). The moment when they lean on their left knees on the ground and shake their right hands is the most eloquent point of brotherhood that this sequence choreographs and enacts (for a reading that critically dialogues with Cavell's, see Gooding–Williams 2006, pp. 43-68).

Engagement and Poetics

We can think of the opposite of entertainment as *engagement*. The escapism of the entertainment is thus counterposed by an engagement that would involve exposing and denouncing situations in which human dignity is called into question and, eventually, a commitment to the political struggle for the resolution or overcoming of these situations. The option for engagement is not, however, sufficient

in itself to give artistic value to a work. As we saw in the previous case from popular cinema, the key is once again in the way the film is worked out and gives form to entertainment or engagement or even to both. The same is to say that what counts is the *poetics*, the artistic work that creates a film (see Bordwell 2008). When criticizing engaged cinema because of the supposed instrumentalization of art, what seems to be rejected outright is the notion of *art as an instrument*, despite the fact that art can also be considered a peculiar type of instrument – for example, at a cognitive level. If cinema as an art is an instrument, it is also a means, not for transmitting according to the communication paradigm, but for expressing – that is, a medium in which communicational effectiveness is replaced by polysemous expressive qualities.

Harlan County USA, directed by Barbara Kopple, allows us to address the issue of engagement by linking it to poetics. The film documents the Brookside Strike, through which 180 coal miners and their wives fought for safer working conditions, fairer working practices, and decent wages starting in June 1972. The mine where they worked, located in Harlan County in southeastern Kentucky, was owned by the Eastover Coal Company, a subsidiary of the Duke Power Company. This large power company enjoyed annual profit increases of 170% in the early 1970s, while the miners' families lived in impoverished conditions, some of them living in dwellings without running water. They had received a 4% increase when the cost of living had increased by 7% (for a more developed and first-hand account of the history and memory of Harlan County, see Portelli 2011). The UMWA - United Mine Workers of America union helped organize the strike. Kopple and her team spent years with the miners' families and recorded the difficulties they lived in, such as the workers' serious lung illnesses, and the situations they had to face, such as the violent attacks during the strike. The film's stance is not neutral and so it is unsurprising that the film crew was the target of some of the same physical assaults (Arthur 2006). The filmmaker and her collaborators also began to realize that their presence acted as a deterrent to violence. The thoughtful documentary *The Making of Harlan County USA* (2006) showed that some of the miners considered years later that

if the team had not been present and had not taken sides in their favour, the strike would not have been successful.

This tension is powerfully inscribed in *Harlan County USA*, in the arduous shooting, in the unpolished and grainy image, and in the moments chosen with precision to integrate the film. Rather than using a storytelling device to explain what is happening, the documentary lets people's actions speak for themselves. The presence of the camera is denounced by the protagonists, namely by the police officers placed at the service of the company and other armed men, who look directly at the lens – as if recognizing that they are being observed and have to weigh their actions. The sound has a different function, densely textured to transcend the visual moments of struggle and to connect them to the cultural and political history of the labour movement. Paul Arthur writes that "[a]mong *Harlan County USA*'s many deviations from vérité dogma is its innovative sound design, featuring the intensive use of working-class musical anthems, which is crucial to the film's emotional impact" (2006).

Production and Thought

The notion of art for art's sake in film persists today in certain ways of theorising and discussing cinematic art. This is particularly noticeable in the field of criticism, in the appreciation of what is understood to be internal or specific to the art of film, without giving due attention to all the elements, references, and connections that make up a film. Cinema is often understood as a ludic construction in the aesthetic domain, with a purely autonomous essence, to which thematic elements of a political, social, or moral nature are added as appendices. Such a view is highly disseminated in newspapers and magazines, and it frequently equates technical achievement with artistic merit. This understanding of art is groundless because it confuses the possible decomposition of elements of a work with the differentiation of value between each one of these components. It fails to consider the function and relationship of each of these elements in the structure of the work as well as to tackle the work as an organic whole. Art is not an activity that exists alongside or above

the social fabric and the historical conjuncture. Artistic works do not exist in a separated and hermetic space, isolated from the forces that determine them and with which they inevitably dialogue, even when this dialogue takes the form of a refusal.

The short film *Valse Triste* by Bruce Conner allows us to fathom this arguably more lucid way of understanding cinematic art. Conner's lyrical cinema is inseparable from an experimental montage work based on archival footage. This laborious activity develops from a playful sense of visual combinations that produce creative associations, sometimes also incorporating a narrative structure. In the artist's filmography, *Valse Triste* follows *Take the 5:10 to Dreamland* (1976), to which it is related. Both films use sepia-toned images and some of the shots of the first work are re-used. The two films open with a shot of a little boy going to sleep, followed by his dream which evokes the filmmaker's past.

Valse Triste is an intimate work that emerges from memories of the author's childhood in Kansas. Conner worked from existing filmed material, what is called *found footage.* He, therefore, builds his vision from the visions of other people. Finding his own memories in the images collected and produced by others may seem like a contradiction, but that is what gives the film its wide and open character. Simultaneously, this work appears wrapped in a dreamlike mantle that the narrative structure underlines when, in the beginning, the little boy lies down to sleep and dream. It is with great frankness and subtlety that Conner evokes his childhood days. Unlike some of his other films, here the criteria for selecting images seems straightforward from the outset (on Conner's first works, see Sitney 2002, 297–300). All the images originate from the 1940s, the period when he was a child, so that, through the reuse of these visual materials, he can parallel his life experiences. The kid who goes to bed appears to dream most of the film and the resulting work is made up of fragments that awaken memories: the steam train, the coal mines, the sky, the sheep, the landscape of ears, among other images. Regarding the music, the composition we hear throughout the film is "Valse triste," op. 44, no. 1, a small orchestral piece written by the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius in the early 20th century. It was originally used in a scene

from Sibelius's brother-in-law Arvid Järnefelt's play *Kuolema* (*Death*) in 1903. The theatrical scene took place at night. A son watches over his sick mother, lying on a bed, and falls asleep from exhaustion. Gradually, a reddish light diffuses through the room (Clive 2019). The reddish in the theatre play gives way to the yellowish in the film. *Valse Triste* combines images, joined together by the narrative of a dream that is a memory and by the warm and melancholic colours. The lugubrious piece of music is another element that underlines the continuity between the images.

Conclusions

In a recent book that discusses aesthetic and artistic autonomy and demonstrates the relevance of this topic in the philosophy of art, Robert Stecker argues that *aesthetic value* is autonomous, that is, that it does not derive from other values, while *artistic value* is not autonomous, but heteronomous (2005, pp. 31-48). Following this author, and others like Noël Carroll (1999, pp. 200-201), we can say that the aesthetic value has to do, not only with our experience of a work of art, but with the way in which that experience involves the appreciation of the formal qualities of a work. Consequently, artistic value includes cognitive, historical, moral, interpretative aspects, among others, which have as much to do with the context in which the work emerges as with its aural, visual, and narrative features. It also has to do with the perspective or gaze that the work constructs. In this sense, what Stecker clearly proposes is that art – cinematic art, for example – is *relatively* autonomous. Complete autonomy would mean that the cinematic sphere would and could exist completely unconnected with other spheres of social life.

In any case, the value attributed to a work of art is always historically situated and often in a double manner: on the one hand, in relation to the historical situation of the interpretation and, on the other hand, in relation to the original historical situation of the production. György Lukács develops the idea that art oscillates between a temporal essence and a timeless value that confront each other in the singularity of the work, inseparable from its unique insertion into the historical-temporal course (1970; for a systematic review of

Lukács' aesthetics and this idea in particular, see Kiralyfalvi 1975, pp. 71-87). This singularity, understood in a Hegelian way, is the knot of the process of becoming in which universality and particularity are moments (Lukács 1970, p. 61). It amounts to challenging the romantic and idealist position that attributes full sovereignty over the production of art to the artist, conceived as a demiurge in an imaginary or remote land – and versions of this belief germinated also in cinema, for instance in extreme variants of authorism.

Furthermore, for Adorno, the historical dimension of works of art demands the acknowledgment that the artist's choices are made in precise circumstances because art is created under determined conditions of material production:

> To this extent, each artwork could be charged with false consciousness and chalked up to ideology. In formal terms, independent of what they say, they are ideology in that a priori they posit something spiritual as being independent from the conditions of its material production and therefore as being intrinsically superior and beyond the primordial guilt of the separation of physical and spiritual labour. (1997, p. 227)

The temporality/timelessness of art is a dichotomy analogous to the autonomy/heteronomy dichotomy of art. In each case, leaning only to one side or only to the other is a reduction of the complexity of the artistic phenomenon. These dichotomies can be contrasted with a dialectical relationship. In concrete terms, art is always situated between the need to isolate itself from other dimensions of reality and the need to fully insert itself into it (Anceschi 1936, pp. 226-229). Art is an aesthetic fact as well as a social fact (Adorno 1997, p. 250). Adorno articulates artistic autonomy and heteronomy as the "double character of art – something that severs itself from empirical reality and thereby from society's functional context and yet is at the same time part of empirical reality and society's functional context" (1997, p. 252). The program of defining the work of art as self-contained and isolated is political at its core and it results in the fetishization of these objects as well as their disconnection from the process of production. According to this view, "artworks, products of social labour that are

subject to or produce their own law of form, seal themselves off from what they themselves are" (Adorno 1997, p. 227).

The analyses developed in the previous sections demonstrate these points and also exemplify the need for Klevan's methodological caution:

> It is important not to fall prey to a popular misconception [...] that aesthetics is equivalent to Formalism: an adherence to form at the expense of content (for example, subject matter). Nor is it equivalent to Aestheticism if this is taken to mean an exaggerated devotion to beautiful forms, once again at the expense of content. Aesthetics does not discount or demean moral, political, emotional, cognitive, or conceptual content. This content is important, and often essential to an aesthetic evaluation, but *the engagement will be with the value of its expression through the form of the work.* (2018, p. 20)

This passage goes beyond concerns about methodologies for the close analysis of films. It calls into question the dichotomy between form and content in film, which disregards the role that each one plays in the *integral whole* that is a cinematic work. The same can be said concerning the dichotomies entertainment/alienation, engagement/poetics, and production/thought. My analysis of the three films sought to overcome these dichotomies very precisely through their expressive authenticity, based on a kind of poetics that genuinely uses, deepens, and expands the potential effects and meanings of cinema. Each of the films is expressively authentic in its own way. *The Band Wagon* is authentic insofar as it employs the artistic possibilities of a popular cinematic genre, the musical, to construct a fantasy that responds to the historical phenomenons of racism and segregation in the United States. *Harlan County USA* is authentic to the extent that it uses the conditions of its small-scale production to unite with the labour movement and give aesthetic form to the precarious life of miners and their families. Finally, *Valse Triste* is authentic inasmuch as it takes advantage of experimental collage of archival images to tap into the links between social history and personal memory, and dream and reality.

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"*PERMAFROST (BARENTSBURG)*", FICTION AS COUNTER-MEMORY

FERNANDO JOSÉ PEREIRA

Foreword

In one of his last books, Hal Foster says that the fictions created by artists are the most visible manifestation of authenticity. In times of "fake news and post-truths," what could be more honest, more authentic, if not the work of the artists (at least some of them) who put everything into it? An aesthetic authenticity, therefore. And yet, I ask myself, what is aesthetic authenticity? We all know that the modernist myths of originality have fallen and have no more place. We also know that artistic practices continue to deal with the world and with reality from their territory. A space where there will be no place for dogmas or imposed truths. Much less the didactic attempt to offer answers.

Thus, perhaps one of the possible hypotheses to talk about aesthetic authenticity is to put our concerns at work, far from agendas or fashions. To speak of what we know and thus build a true space. A space in which there are more doubt than certainties, more experiences than affirmations, more accidents than set objectives, more opacity than media impact. All these characteristics constitute a process of making known. Because it is only based on making known that one can speak of authenticity in this time of algorithmic manipulations in which images no longer belong to the domain of the authentic. Far from the discussion on technological progress, the making of art knowledge constitutes the affirmation of the artist who inhabits a kind of inactuality,

which is external to any progress. Above all, because it is involutive. This form of sensitive knowledge visibly intrudes into another, much more critical discussion. That shows us the artists' way of seeing the world. Of course, we will not be naïve. The question now under discussion is recognized only by that art that takes us to the place of honesty, to a place far from spectacularity, to a place where temporalities are not yet deceiving, to a place where the reality that contextualizes the sensitive thought that constitutes the work is offered as a gift by those who know it. This is, perhaps, the observation of most significant importance: of who knows. This is also, to be based on Agamben's words, the place of resistance (and of authenticity), the one where there is a particular condition of potency, which Agamben calls the potency of not, making it impossible to pass from the idea of potency directly to the act. If that were the case, still according to the Italian author, art would only be the fruit of its execution with direct consequences on its reception. His notion of inopertativity is thus one of the most important facets of a hypothetical idea of authenticity.

Before I go into an example of my own work, I would like to mention a recent piece by British artist and filmmaker Steve McQueen. The result is entitled 'Grenfell' and refers, in the peculiar way that works of art can refer, to the fire that destroyed this social housing tower in London in 2016. The artist filmed the images only six months after the accident, yet he decided to present the film only this year, seven years later. So here we have a kind of statement from the artist. To give time for the event you are referring to has been distanced and can be seen, away from the reactions and discussions that took place right after the fatal accident. This temporal distancing is, in my view, a first degree of aesthetic authenticity on the artist's part. It allows him to escape the ethical binary and to work in an a-moral, authentic way. The work shows us a single sequence shot of 24 minutes, filmed from a helicopter. The first part with the screen completely black and the sounds that we recognize as those of the approach to the city, London. Then the image opens, and silence fills the room for the rest of the time. We see the approach to the large, destroyed block of flats gradually taking over the image. This is followed by several whole turns around the building closer and closer to the burnt structure,

and then the finale with the building taking up almost the entire screen (sort of the ruin of the Kubrikian monolith). No words are spoken, no end credits[1] are shown.

In this context of post-truths and hyper-communication, the author's choice to remain silent leaves the viewer responsible for emancipating himself, as Rancière would say. Having to search for meaning, in an apparent attitude of detachment from sensationalist and spectacular speculation, especially in the face of a fashionable appeal for a certain didacticism, seems of the utmost importance. Aesthetic authenticity may well be this.

1.

I've been exploring the increasing denaturalising of nature with its transformation into cultural places, as it's been happening all over the world during the last years with particular emphasis on mountains and remote places, which have been transformed in vacation sanctuaries by the tourism industries. Unfortunately, Svalbard and Barentsburg are now one of them too.

As an artist, of course, my vision is one of somebody who's very much aware of his own impotence to change anything and especially conscious of the singularity of his own discourse, so when I decide upon making something on this subject (as on others), above all, I am interested in showing people things observed from art's particular manner of observing, which we all know is very different from others. Like in McQueen's work, my own aims too to be outside from the bipolar condition of being moral or immoral, as it intends to be a-moral. And this is a very important condition to

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[1] Curiously, another work by the artist, exactly entitled "end credits" contains elements that seem to me to be necessary for the discussion of this subject. First of all, the question of duration: the work has 19 hours, of which "only" 13 have images and sound. The remaining ones have only sound. Here there is no yielding to tastes normalized by compressed temporalities. There is a need that the author found intrinsic to the work's existence. Beyond the subject of the work, the revelation of the files, until then confidential, of the lawsuit filed by McCarthyism against the black singer-songwriter Paul Roberson, already a courageous act, there is an evident attitude of questioning signification and, above all, aesthetic. Perhaps, authenticity.

continue producing because it allows me to focus on the core of the work produced by artists: images that, at best, may be able to create that strange resonance that we all have experienced upon enjoying a work of art, which remains inside our head for a long time after witnessing it. Resonance is a key notion in my work.

Free from these moral chains, the work can continue to be experienced in different ways within this line of investigation (a word not very common in artistic experiences, but it can be used here) and one of my favourites is through the remote places in the extreme north. Since the 1990s, I've been travelling progressively towards the north, having reached in the last few years one of its last frontiers: the Svalbard archipelago. Above it, only the North Pole Sea ice... at least until now.

Was (unfortunately it isn't anymore) an incredible place in which we can find, on the one hand, a fascination for this utopian and untouched landscape and, on the other hand, the dystopian condition of abandoned places, almost like ghost towns, lost in time although imprisoned in their own economic web which has sustained them until now. Let's explain: these towns are from the Soviet period, and they still try to resist time in their own isolation; one of them was completely abandoned (Pyramiden), the other, Barentsburg, is a coal town. The coal from the arctic is very appreciated by the energy industry and is the cause for both economic progress, and ecological disaster. It's a closed circle: the coal exported by Barentsburg, consumed by Southern European countries, is one of the contributes to the climate change, which is most felt in the polar area.

Image 1: *permafrost (barentsburg)*, by Fernando José Pereira, 2009.

Almost isolated from the world, these forgotten towns have an incredible architecture, and the structure of the urban plan is amazingly designed, a sign of the old, Soviet times, where the architectural context was a consequence, never a cause. Apart from that, the other incredible thing is the marvellous way of building: the ground is totally frozen all year round, a phenomenon known as *permafrost*, so they are not able to construct the foundations, which means all buildings are practically suspended. In these extremely difficult conditions, they have built two towns which seems to have been transported from other latitudes, much friendlier to town contractors...

As anyone can imagine, life is difficult there. The population in 2009 was of about 400 and it has been continuously decreasing. On the contrary, tourists have increased their presence. The conditions at that time seemed particularly difficult, especially in Barentsburg because of a fire which had happened in a coalmine a few years back, resulting in half of the mine shut down.

It was with these conditions in mind that I decided to make the short film. It's a fiction, as it is usual in my work, which is a very important consideration regarding all the works I've made. The Polish filmmaker Krzysztof Kieslowski claimed that not everything can be subjected to description and that is the problem of documentaries. Or, in other words, of the images which operate from the truth of reality and interact with it until a certain point. From such point on, they seem suspended by an obvious incapacity. All that remains then is fiction. A territory which cuts itself off from truth may get closer to truth itself. A spacing which, while penetrating the real, does so without obscene constraints, be it moral or any other. The passion for reality thus contains a subtle nuance which must be emphasised: this is not about fictionalising reality but rather about experiencing reality as a fiction. Naturally, this sets an external view before the imposing codes of communication and an approach (a dangerous one) to what we might call the communicativeness of the incommunicable. Film fictions such as this one present themselves as a privileged field of experience. This is determined by their proximity to the register of the real. However, they also impose an increase in the responsibility to which they're bonded, emerging as attention producing vehicles.

This, as we know, is not easy within the bulimic contemporaneity of image production but, for that very reason, it comes forward as a challenge which is hard to resist. Even if only out of respect for reality, the unique thing that produces the events and the places that touch us and to which, by choice, we try not to answer.

However, as it sometimes occurs, reality is surpassed and transformed. These days, in Barentsburg, things are quite different: the reality of my fiction is now a fiction, a thing from the past. A good narrative for a film fiction. The little tourism industry based on a political past seems to have ended. I don't know exactly what they're thinking of doing there. The images that arise from there are the worst news I could have hoped for: the dismantlement of the utopian architecture and, by an 'aesthetic skin graft', its transformation into a somewhat plastic architecture, very, very contemporary: a shopping centre!

The permafrost condition can continue but, metaphorically speaking, the 'permafrosted' time, which was once there, is now gone. And, of course, we may now ask: *permafrost? barentsburg* instead of the film's title. It is a fact, unfortunately.

For this subject, all this can be as tragic as climate changes... we'll see if this place's uncanny beauty will be transformed into a new non-place, a new gentrified one for the joy of the tourist crowds now visiting Svalbard in huge cruise ships. The authenticity is now only on the images of the film because reality became a scenario.

2.

Fictions are always placed in the past, they belong to narrative's domain. They carry, in this case particularly, the memory of the places and their condition, sometimes decadent. Decadence.

The Arctic of today is a decaying region. An obsolete place, I'd say. Some kind of monument in the sense that these elements were/are built: to remember the past from the present to remember it in the future. The changes being made are of such nature that it's no longer possible to regard the region in any different manner: as a fiction whose narrative only adjusts itself to that invented reality.

Hence the importance of the register of images and the embodiment of them in works such as "permafrost (barentsburg)", that in their way, and far from monumental grandiosity, perhaps even in an opposite position, come through as the final opportunity to revisit a universe which, in the meantime, has been made obsolete. Another dimension of prime importance refers to the idea of memory, which the North American art historian Hal Foster calls "archival impulse", i.e., the interest some artists have in working with history and the past to embody that resource in their works as a constructive possibility.

In this regard, French philosopher Jacques Rancière has also mentioned that "memory thus must build itself against the overabundance of information as well as against its shortage. It must build itself as a liaison between the data, between the testimonies of facts and traces of action, just as the 'arrangement of actions' that Aristotle's Poetics speaks of, which he calls *muthos*: not at all 'mythe', referring to some collective unconscious, but fable or fiction".

3.

The paradigmatic case into which Barentsburg has become, in our days, mirrors what we've been stating. The penetration of global capitalism in the spatial logic of the Soviet urbanism's decadence intends to rapidly transform itself from a conceptual formulation on the double condition of a monument which allows for the possibility of a recent past's memory, into a present which, precisely because of its condition of obsolescence, offers itself as a new economy of profit. It's between these two possibilities that the fiction's embodiment is made possible. By overcoming reality's limiting conditions, fiction enables its own insertion within a universe that today, is pure fiction itself. The film was made in 2009, that is, 14 years ago, and today it is a testimony to the consequences of the presented duality: it has become into somewhat of a "counter-memory monument" to a recent past and, however, it's completely gone, having been replaced by an absolutely dystopic reality of a polished and sanitized appearance, ready to be enjoyed by hordes of tourists in strangely gentrified environments, in complete opposition to the eternal condition of frozen nature and

time depicted in the film's images. The condition of existence of the artwork, of the creative gesture, thus asserts its strength in situations that determine the capability for its own survival: the recording of images becomes, itself, the embodiment of the idea of monument in an intangible form. An anti-monument as a counter-memory, a possible option for the preservation of an idea, meanwhile forgotten. The Arctic and the city of Barentsburg portrayed in the film have been being destroyed indelibly during these last few years that, in the meantime, have passed. The Arctic and Barentsburg aren't even obsolete places anymore. Today, they're just sceneries in continuous agony for being consumed by tourists.

  The works that in their genesis have this politic propensity, as is the case for this film, invoke, always, visions which move away from the officialization of memory. They act according to what Hal Foster defines as counter-memory. A direct relationship with the past and, however, distant from History's generic and globalizing tendency. The search comes always from a character (a person, a place, a landscape), which, in a way, affirms itself in a disruptive manner before the officialization of memory – until recently, Barentsburg fulfilled that role – and, from that premise, a fiction is built, one that sometimes encompasses several media, but has as its determinant element its attachment to counter-memory. The simple, absolutely subjective, choice of a supporting character and the combination of its own world with the memories it may trigger, allow for the construction of the narrative whole which links different times within the same space, at the very least, as in this case, through the view, and the manipulation of that view's reality, with the mechanical introduction of its own de-realized possibility [de-realize, as the antithesis for making something real], now turned into another thing: a distinct view and in black and white. Humans see in color and, because of that, the conceptual choice of black and white in a time when such option arises as a statement, affirms, from a certain perspective, a stimulation of that very miscegenation of different times that fiction embodies. Especially by operating the de-realization of observation and, consequently, by producing a perceptive confusion in the spectator which arises from that choice. A possibility amongst the many others

present today in the technology of recording and producing moving images. Or, navigating inside an apparent oxymoron: de-realized to be more realistic: authenticity is present on the black and white images of the fiction, not on the thousands of true bright color images made by tourists with their smartphones.

4.

The time of our times has been rapidly compressing itself. The machinic instantaneity that is influencing human relations in their quotidian is also producing a significant change in the layers of time itself: the immortalization of instantaneity, apparent paradox, but absolutely contemporary condition with which we debate and to which we want to resist. It's this alteration in the temporal relation we establish with spaces, that is also decisively influencing the new conditions in Barentsburg and in the Arctic. The transition from an absolutely utopic idea of architecture and urbanism to the tourism industry's buzzing pragmatism puts the city's entire spatiality in danger. The frozen posture – thus, I'd say, favoring the contemplative idea – potentiated by the permafrost's temporality, in which the city was immersed and that is reported in the film, is today replaced by an uncharacteristic sum of buildings for the tourist to enjoy. Mass tourism feels good in places it recognizes as its own: non-places. Only in this way can it do what it likes most: make images, not see, of the places it visits. And this is an observation of great importance: the architecture of Barentsburg stopped being a monument to a recent past which we could visit and observe so as to become an architecture that desires to be delighted, i.e., utilized. From the utopia to the utilitarian, a sign of the times. I've been working, ever since the beginning of the 21st Century, about these temporal changes and how they're affecting the artistic work I make, as is the case with "permafrost (barentsburg)". One of the possibilities that I've been developing has to do with the urgency of an effective answer to this state of things. In Portuguese, there is a word to signify stopping, *paragem* [let's consider 'stoppage' so as to approach this word in English], which contains within its core

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a paradoxical condition: two verbs which antagonize each other: *parar* [to stop] and *agir* [to act] – *pára* ['stop', as in the imperative form] and *age* ['act', as in the imperative form]. This linguistic observation has led me to develop a reflection and, in parallel, practical work on this apparent paradox which is that of stopping and acting simultaneously. The changes we've been analysing and that have been inserted in time, aimed at its annihilation, have come to potentiate a new possibility for a way of being that, all throughout modernism, was absolutely criticized and put in the shelf of conservatisms: contemplation.

Now, if in the beginning of the 20th century it made sense for the initial artistic vanguards, in their declared war on every condition of past, to openly fight against the contemplative idea in support of an idea of progress founded on velocity, today, after all illusions and accelerations possible, the relationship between art and velocity is all but peaceful. First, art is made from the reflection that it potentiates in the spectator, a reflection which may only exist if the time required for it also exists. Just as in any other contemporary situation, time also did a 180 degrees spin and we passed from a situation in which time determined the idea of progress, to a new condition where time, permanently outdated, it seems, by global spatiality, is confined to a perpetual present embodied and almost dematerialized within the machinic instantaneity. It's in this adverse context that the contemplative possibility can be important. An active, shall we say, contemplation so as to distance ourselves from its classic congener. A possibility of embodying *paragem*: to be still and at the same time in absolute reflexive activity; acting as an "ignorant schoolmaster", to quote Jacques Rancière. But, in order for that to be possible, before the work itself arrives to the spectator, it has to be built according to these theoretical postulates. The long times I've been experimenting upon the construction of the frames, along with that same spectral presence of time, are decisive elements for a consequent result.

The film "permafrost / (barentsburg)" already contains, in its core, these considerations. In fact, it has been constructed from the spectral idea of a different time, and of a past worthy of being revisited.

5.

Maybe one of the figures that have emerged more visibly in our now under threat global contemporaneity, is that of the traveler. The ease with which we travel is one of the attractions that global totalization offers so as to spatialize itself. And, however, this is a condition which contains within itself – had it not be one of the main figures – many contradictions of our present time. The current tourism industry's dispersion throughout the planet is putting a lot of pressure on the more fragile places: such as the Arctic.

In the Svalbard archipelago, one of terrestrial geography's remote places, the massive presence of tourism, which already reaches there with the now famous and simultaneously sinister luxury liners, is just one of the elements which illustrate to us the ongoing climatic changes which come forward as a vicious circle: more tourism in the Arctic equals more pollution in the ocean, equals an increase in the water's temperature, equals less drifting ice, equals more possibilities for the tourism to penetrate, a circle which already goes beyond the previous vicious circle in which the reality of Barentsburg was enclosed in (the coal circle). Gentrification, which approaches like a venom, has already introduced the first symptoms for the landscape's homogenization. As we know, the gentrified landscape of tourism must have the same un-identity as any other non-place. Currently, that's the biggest threat, which is imminent in Svalbard, particularly in Barentsburg.

That cinema and art may embody a possibility of resistance is a very precious idea, albeit ambitious, that has to be put forward. The fictional logic of a film such as "permafrost (barentsburg)" allows for the facing one of the hardest realities: its transformation into an artificial thing, now in a cryogenic state within a perpetual present which removes it from the temporal reality in which it lived. The decadence of Soviet architecture and urbanism, that so perfectly mirrored the utopic formulation, has disappeared. We're left with its transposition to the narratives of cinema and art, no longer as a utopia of Reason, but a necessary presence of a possible utopia of reasons (just like that, without capital letters) that decisively embodies itself within the artistic object's desiring gesture. And that as well can be called, I would like to think, aesthetic authenticity.

Afterword

As in the case of Steve MacQueen, in "permafrost, (barentsburg)", the temporal distance allows already autonomous readings of the discussions that are intrinsic to it. As we have seen in Svalbard, the changes are immense. The very aesthetic authenticity of the city has been destroyed and transformed into something yet to be defined. Like "Grenfell", in "permafrost, (barentsburg)" authenticity is now consigned to the images that stand there like mnemonic archives. Archives that resist the compression of contemporary temporalities that are interested only in instantaneity and the random condition of more than the false idea of the world conveyed by digital information. Involved, themselves too, in the spirals of the inauthentic in a continuous and paradoxical evolution without parallel towards the perfection of the image itself, aggravated in our days by the difficulties introduced in the meantime by the AI. It is, therefore, as we have already said, a complex paradox which, in this time without time that we are now experiencing, is nonetheless quite transparent: aesthetic authenticity appears as a kind of significant redoubt and resistance, absolutely a minority and yet decisive.

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LYING WITH TRUTH: ANTHROPOLOGICAL QUESTS FOR AUTHENTICITY WHEN MAKING SENSE OF THE OTHER IN FILM

HUMBERTO MARTINS

> *We possess art lest we perish of the truth.*
> Friedrich Nietzsche (1993) [1872]

1. Who lies to whom? Lived Reality and Perceived/Represented Reality

The saying 'you deceive me with the truth', which can very well be reversed into 'with a lie you tell me the truth' helps me to position the argument of this text. I reflect on the role of anthropological film in the (objective) representation of reality. How can it simultaneously serve the purpose of realistic and objective representation of the studied reality (the famous and much questioned indexicality of the technologically registered image), while at the same time recognizing the authorship or creativity of those who produce the images, in the choices of how and what to film, of how and what to edit and of what and how to let it be seen. In fact, a critical question to the whole project of knowing in anthropology. That is, how to (re)conciliate the search for difference and the cultural specificity of societies, groups and individuals with a necessary process of understanding this alterity, which always implies a process of translation or re-presentation of the Other. That is, it always implies authorial strategies (editorial, methodological, theoretical choices) of cognitive appropriation and consequent significant communication of this difference[1] via text,

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[1] Difference or diversity understood here in a very simple anthropological sense - any possibility of being and dwelling in the world as a human.

images or sounds to readers or spectators. And, in fact, the creative processes that suggest inauthenticity because they presume creative appropriations of an observed reality (with or without recourse to audiovisual recording means) have helped in anthropology's purpose to access and produce more reliable (authentic) representations of reality and the Other. In other words, the inauthentic allows forms of knowing the authentic as it hides various inauthenticities.

It seems paradoxical, but perhaps it is not, as I will try to show in this text. For now, I use an example in terms of sound treatment in my own editing and post-production process of the film *Making Time* (2003)[2]. A film that reflects on the passage of time in a rural village in Barroso, Trás-os-Montes, Portugal. In post-production, I cleaned up the recorded sound of the *Casa do Povo* bell in the village of Tourém. In the opening sequence, when we see the cattle moving towards the meadows, I added a cleaner and clearer sound of the bell ringing, which had been recorded at another time. For what and why? To lie? To deceive? No. Indeed, it is a sound that was heard (I think it still is) every hour; a sound that echoed throughout the village. The local time signal. That artificial amplification in relation to that concrete image register was aimed precisely at giving the spectator a more credible access to the soundscape of the village. Something that for technical reasons (it was a film of a single person, which recorded image and sound alone) it was not possible to capture in the original recording of the sequence. My solution, intentional, had this purpose, to technically guarantee audiences a sensorial experience of a reality that I had lived and that would have been absent if only with the inclusion of the synchronous imagery and sound recording. With the lie I showed the truth.

But the opposite is also true. And, somehow, the provocation contained in the title of this text points to that. How many credible representations to certain eyes and gazes (for example, anthropological and western spectators) do not fail to elude reality? That is, telling the truth, we lie about substantive aspects of a certain observed reality,

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2   Presented as part of my PhD thesis in Social Anthropology using Visual Media, at the University of Manchester.

because the selection of what is shown or what is told conditions the reading or integral vision of it, or even about the construction process of observation and collection of data and images[3]. Sometimes, even without a clear and explicit intention on the part of the authors to lie or hide reality[4]. How many films have we seen that, with the pretense of extreme realism, deceive us or do not let us see other parallel or coexisting truths? A film always provides us with a framework, a selection of perspectives on any given reality. It invites us to see it in a certain way (according to an aesthetic, a formal definition of style, a narrative, the exhibition device and context). A view determined not only by the author's more or less assumed options, but also by the scopic regime in which we are inserted, this communicational-cultural ecosystem where we exist as people. In this regard, we cannot neglect, for example, the reflection produced by David MacDougall on transcultural cinema (Cf. For example Cezar, 2007, for a summary reflection by the Australian director on the main issues that mark his visual anthropology); nor the theme of self-representation and visual sovereignty, particularly claimed in recent years by indigenous communities (Cf. For example Gómez, 2022). At stake are productions that, while fulfilling criteria of nominal and expressive authenticity, according to Dutton (2003, in Banks 2012), above all, highlight a criterion of instrumental authenticity (Banks, 2013), allowing me to appropriate this author's proposal to verify that we can show truths by not showing all the truths, or even making these other realities invisible. For this reason, for David MacDougall (Cezar, 2007), the critical significance of a good anthropological film depends on providing several points of view and provoking dialogues. And the question he raises is decisive. Whose story is it? We can add others that are equally critical and help us to deconstruct not only the current

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[3]   In the history of anthropology, it would be enough to recover the classic example of Bronislaw Malinowski. His famous and affirmed method of fieldwork, based on a set of stated assumptions, but effectively not fully complied with, as he would recognize in a posthumously edited book (Malinowski, 1989).

[4]   Below, and for this purpose, I will talk about another important ethnographic film in the history of anthropological cinema. *The Ax Fight* (Timothy Asch and Napoleon Chagnon, 1975).

visual systems, but also regimes of truth. For whom do we make the film for? For whom do we produce the re-presentation of the Other? What do we choose to show (by images or in text)? When Mirzoeff (2006) 'denounces' the hegemony of some scopic regimes, he is not only alerting to the existence of different and competitive alternative visions (as social constructions) but he also invites us to think about the themes of authorship and the choices made by authors. The cut of the eye in Buñuel's magnificent film (*Un Chien Andalou*, 1929) did exist, but it was done on a cow and not on a person. And also, in *Las Hurdes – Tierras Sin Pan* (1933) Buñuel, while summoning an extreme realism to show us the hardships of a poor rural Spain, dying of hunger and malaria, seems to evade, at first sight, an ideologically marked reading (his, at the time, communist position) of a reality that already anticipated the rise to power of Francoism and a critical view of a conservative, retrograde and clerical Spain[5]. A documentary that, initially being realistic, was progressively read for its surrealism and, finally, categorized as a *mockumentary*.

2. Which authenticity? Whose authenticity?

The associated themes of authenticity, realism, verisimilitude, objectivity (within the framework of a more general question on the representation of the Other) are not entirely new in anthropology, nor in the intersection of filmic theory with discussions around the epistemological virtues of images (Cf., for example, Banks, 2012 and 1990 or Zoetll, 2009). This incessant search for the 'true' Self, for the authentic Other (which in the past and within the scope of evolutionary and even more romanticized approaches would represent us in our primordial conditions) continues to feed a certain anthropology.

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[5]   A film that, eventually, would generate immense controversy in Spain. Its exhibition was prohibited during the Franco period and it provoked severe criticism from the relatives of the people shown regarding the exaggeration of the Aragonese director. Reactions that are documented in Ramon Gieling's documentary, *Buñuel's Prisoners* (2002). Since this is not the space to carry out an archeology of Buñuel's process of intentions, nor to assess his legitimacy to declare what he wants about the reality with which he is confronted, I focus precisely on the fact that a filmic realism may hide instrumental inauthenticities.

Not so much today and particularly with the obvious assumption implied in the notion of diversity – we are all original and authentic in everything we are and do, and, ultimately, anyone, anything an anytime is unique[6]. In this sense, it is also important to question what authenticity is and how it can and has been approached in (filmic) anthropology, which immediately poses a basic interrogation – which authenticity are we talking about when we talk about authenticity in anthropological film? And to answer this question we have to consider that, currently within the scope of anthropological theory, authenticity have a multidimensional and plural nature. Yet more radically, authenticity is not an intrinsic characteristic or quality of things (Theodossopoulos, 2013), e.g. of artifacts or visual representations, but it is the result of a construction, a fabrication or, to use a keyword in the field of the visual, a fiction (understood in its original etymological sense, precisely, as an invention or creation and not a falsehood). And therefore, we can perceive and identify different and simultaneous authenticities as well as different and simultaneous layers of authenticity.

And, in fact, when we discuss authenticity in the (anthropological) film, the notion of truth emerges and triggers other debates or structural dichotomies (fallacious because already deconstructed in the field) – science/art; objectivity/subjectivity; reality/simulacrum; documentary/fiction; evidence/interpretation – without which, in the light of what has been written in the meantime (fixing the inaugural period of these debates in the 1890s), we can definitively say that we have reached an indisputable conclusion. The debate continues, the dilemmas continue, and anthropological truth is nothing but a possible (and admissible[7]) approximation to a

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[6] In this regard, not having time to discuss the theme of mechanical reproduction and the possible dangers (exponentiated in the digital age) that the possibilities associated with it pose to the originality and authenticity of art works, I recover only an observation by Latour and Lowe (2011) on the way in which copies can not only be invested with aura (and therefore recognized and authenticated) but also help to recover the originality and authenticity, for example, of paintings. The authors referred, in a particularly challenging article, to examples of copies that recover the originality already lost in paintings (namely in Churches with public access) by successive repaintings over time.

[7] In epistemological terms.

knowable reality. Representations constructed using technologically produced images as their privileged or exclusive medium (in particular the anthropological film, which I discuss in this article) are subject to the same doubts and questions (Cf. Banks, 2012 and 1990 and Zoetll, 2009). Can we know in anthropology? What can we know in anthropology – limits of knowledge? Can we know with film in anthropology? What can we know with film in anthropology? We can know and we can know the Others and we can know using film; but the limit of what we can know and how we can know – approaching the Other – can take many forms and certainly never concluding that any product of knowledge is an absolute and integral copy of reality. We just approach reality.

Furthermore, sociologically speaking, from a symbolic interactionist perspective (Goffman, 1959), every human action, every human being is always a performance. In other words, social life can only be seen as an open and continuous theater where individuals (social actors) play roles on the *frontstage* of social life, making use of masks, according to the situations, contexts and the remaining actors with whom they interact. We live permanently in a game of representations and characters created for us (and sometimes against our own will) and we are never truly authentic (ourselves)[8]. Not necessarily a game of lies, but certainly a game of filters and socially constructed appearances, as if we never had access to someone's *backstage* (authentic self). Where lies the truth? What is authentic? We can question whether we think that authenticity and truth are associated concepts and that subjects can be several personae just as things can be several things – depending on the processes of significant (cognitive) appropriation[9].

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[8]   *The Betrayal of the Self* (*A Traição do Eu*) that leads to *The Insanity of Normality* (*A Loucura da Normalidade*) that Arno Gruen talks about (1995 and 1996). In fact, I often allude to this example in my Sociology lectures. Even in spaces and times of greater intimacy (let one think of a situation in which we look at ourselves in the mirror in our bedroom) there are still many other gazes from those with whom we make ourselves as people throughout our social experience. We are never alone.

[9]   I have no space nor time to develop the subject, but it is clear that the authentication of something corresponds to a convincing process, subject to social standards, which is located above all in the cognitive scope and less in the materiality or immediate

In anthropology, the myth of authenticity associated with this search for an exoticized Other (distant in time and space) and which, as we will see, was object of particular fascination in the early days of the use of the image in anthropology (Cf. Griffiths, 2002) has been abandoned. These were the times of a 'rescue anthropology' fascinated by a romanticized authenticity that associated cultural genuineness with the rural or wild world (with all the negative implications of this categorization, including the violent forms of representation and visual display of the Other)[10]. Therefore, the idea that there are ways of life and human groups, cultures, societies, rituals, festivities, as well as (material) things more authentic is today much contested in anthropology and the object of detailed critical analysis (Theodossopoulos, 2013), even because we are increasingly confronted with what Marcus Banks (2013) calls instrumental authenticity that serve political and social purposes that legitimize certain truths (ways of seeing, re-presenting and appropriating the world and as self-presentation). The paradox of authenticity (clearly identifiable in studies of cultural heritage) resides precisely in the fact that time does not stop and that what one seeks to authenticate as authentic always corresponds to processes that take place over time and that authentication itself is subject to social and historical erosion (constructedness). Within the scope of an anthropology of tourism, for example, or even an anthropology of the European rural world, it is known that the performance of authenticity for tourists (to see and believe) or even for an anthropologist (to see and believe), is part of regular (thus authentic) social life of many human groups[11]. In this

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sensorial evidence (Cf. For example, Theodossopoulos, 2013, in his reference to Roy Ellen's work within a cognitive anthropology).

[10]   See the example of the public display of individuals in exhibitions at Natural History Museums in London, Paris, New York, considered as representative specimens of cultures or stages of civilizational development (Cf. Griffiths, 2002). They spent hours on exhibition standing as if they were statues.

[11]   See, in this regard, the film *Capa de* Índio (2010), a collaborative project by Peter Zoetll and Pataxó people, which clearly shows us how indigenous groups manage their indigeneity in a claimed contemporaneity; that is, an up-to-date and up-to-dating authenticity. Maria Cardeira da Silva (2003), in a careful reading of three documentaries produced in the 1980s and 1990s on cultural cannibalism promoted in the context of

regard, Pais de Brito (1996), revisiting the village of Rio de Onor (Trás-os-Montes, Portugal), exemplified very well how people can and manage to represent the ideas that scholars project for them. Returning to a place studied forty years earlier by Jorge Dias, the author found there a theater of representations of an agro-pastoral communitarianism that had been proposed analytically for those people. If this is what is expected of them then they perform it to satisfy desires for the authentic. Just as rural architecture remains in idealized aesthetics (By whom? For whom?) the simulacrum of authenticity is also instrumentalized or part of that game of social roles, in the *frontstage* or even in the *backstage*, where we manage our social (and individual) lives[12]. I also use here an extraordinary example that I find in the documentary by Ilja Kok and Willem Timmers about the Mursi (*Framing the Other*, 2011). A documentary that shows us the predatory nature of tourist safaris (not only linked to the commodification of material goods) in Africa, particularly in Ethiopia. More than just showing us the passivity of the Mursi, as a collective that only expects tourists to visually 'consume' them (with photographs and videos taken in exchange for meager monetary rewards), the filmmakers give space to the voice of a Mursi woman that allows us to see and understand how she and her village also manage their relationship with tourists, and, finally, how they creatively produce forms of authenticity idealized for European tourists (Martins 2016).

Therefore, film and cinema, as social activities that they are, can (or should) be read from this assumption. What is the real shown? What is the displayed reality? What can we know? What are the limits of truth? Where does fiction end? What is authentic? Or inauthentic? Finally, these and other associated or derived issues have fueled many debates in various disciplinary areas – from the philosophy of science to anthropology, passing through art and even, as we know, more objectivist disciplinary frameworks. Questions that

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cultural encounters facilitated by tourism, also reveals the 'illusion of authenticity'. This search for a supposed authenticity by the tourist is particularly exemplified in Dennis O'Rourke's *Cannibal Tours* (1988).

[12] The *Bourdieusian* habitus is not just a script produced by others (social class) for us. It is also a space of creative freedoms where we can play.

arise simultaneously on an ontological and epistemological level, which interpenetrate each other; that is, that lead us to inquire or speculate about the quality of reality (the possibility of a factual existence of reality) and/or about the quality of knowledge (the possibility of knowing objectively). Particularly in the sciences of the spirit, as Max Weber would call them, the question of objectivity (as a quality of knowledge that guarantees a representation of reality not filtered by the subject of knowledge, that is, independent of the knowing subject) has punctuated long and time-consuming itineraries of thought. The comprehensive solution and, even more so, hermeneutics, placing the subject who knows at the center of the equation of knowledge, cognition and perception and transferring responsibility of the final product of knowledge to himself, introduces a subjective dimension (better to say intersubjective) in the debate, which somehow brings out another solution – the relativist one (cultural, social and individual). What is true or what is authentic is always relative to who knows (and produces knowledge, be it a filmmaker or writer of scientific texts) and who is known (never a passive agent in the knowledge relationship and always interfering in any process of knowledge creation[13]), including in this equation the audiences and spectatorships, also culturally and socially inscribed, i.e., relative.

As I mentioned, the search for (cultural) authenticity was, in a way, a *leitmotif* of this knowledge adventure (which is also ethical and political) that we call anthropology and whose founding moment, as a structured scientific area, we can date back in the second half of the 19th century. It is not the space to retrace the History of Anthropology (cf. Fillitz, and Saris. 2013 for a brief but interesting reflection on the search for authenticity and its critique in anthropology), but if it is true that this purpose inspired the beginnings of this discipline, it is equally true that from very early it was perceived that this would be a difficult or impossible undertaking, especially if thought from a criterion that tried or aimed, in some

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[13]   It is known today and methodologically recognized that in any knowledge relationship between people what happens is a bidirectional process in which observers observe observers observing.

way, at the freezing and fixation of cultural traits or identifying the original moments when things appeared. As today, and quite rightly, it is assumed, there are no societies or cultures frozen in time; all are subject to permanent transformative processes and trying to identify any kind of authenticity, originality will always be a speculative exercise or, in other words, it will always be a creative act that depends on always relative search and inquiry options, always obeying elaborate constructions based on authorial choices.

Really? Or does authenticity consist of a quality sought by others - an idea, a projection or an idealized representation based on expectations generated through different sources of information? In a certain way like the 'imaged and imagined' Others (Griffiths, 2002) sought by *rescue anthropologists* at the end of the 19th century – less interested in understanding human life in motion, in transformation and transience, but much more in freezing to 'archive' archetypal representations of cultures and peoples – see, for example, the classic example of the *Strait Torres Expedition* (1898-1899) led by Alfred Cort Haddon. Regarded as a pioneering work of ethnographic film (first screened publicly in 1899, just four years after the Lumière Brothers' films), they are short recordings of techniques, dances and procedures that the Mer (Murray Island) no longer performed at the time of the recording and screening.

And what about another classic, *Nanook of the North* (1922), years later. Also in this masterful work of documentary cinema, the North American director Robert Flaherty sought more a creative representation (desired and imagined) of an Inuit family in their relation with a 'hostile nature' than exactly the objective record of what had happened while he was there filming. A formula for filming (re-presenting) human groups and, in particular, their relation with the environment, which the director would explore in other films, but particularly in *Moana* (1926) and *Man of Aran* (1934). The film *Nanook of the North* and its impacts on cinema and anthropological film have already been extensively debated (Cf. For example, Rothman, 1997), however and for now it is important to fix this idea – the search for authenticity by filmic anthropology has been (not) paradoxically realized throughout the history of

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ethnographic film by the use of strategies based on the creative treatment of reality (as John Grierson phrased it in the context of the *British documentary film movement* of the 30s and 40s of the 20th century), at the level of the image, of the sound, narrative structure, objects and subjects filmed, as well as the purposes and intentions of realization. In other words, the (supposed) authenticity of what is shown depends on strategies that manipulate in representational terms the way it is shown and how it is accessed. And it is convenient to think about the various definitions of authentic not only as something that is original, true (real), or (temporally) inscribed in a legitimized cultural framework (genuine), but also as an expression of honesty or sincerity[14]. The theme of sincerity is, not surprisingly, much explored by both David MaDougall and Jean Rouch when they talk about their visual anthropologies and their ethnographic films, allowing us to think in terms of experiences, performances, objects, artefacts, with different degrees of elaboration – planning, creation, presentation, but also in the processes, contexts, situations or acts of reception (audit, spectatorship, consumption, experience), which presume a principle of convincing the audience. In particular, the two authors and directors position the criterion of sincerity primarily in the relationship between those who film and those who are filmed and not necessarily in convincing or inviting viewers to watch expressions of authenticity that make sense to them. For Rouch and MacDougall, the visual anthropologist's first (and only) obligation in terms of representing reality is to those he represents/films.

3. Ethnographic Film: Realistic Approach or Creative Treatment of Reality?

At this moment, I would like to address the realism of ethnographic films, without pointing, on the one hand, to a history of the film in anthropology, and without intending to be exhaustive in the proposal. I will do so by analyzing two films that I usually

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[14] In this case, as if contradicting the interactionist-symbolic approach. As an expression of a presentation of an I (self) only dependent on the subject's own will to be what he or she is.

present to my students in university courses in anthropology or visual anthropology. With this limited choice, I will try to explore some of the dimensions reflected in the previous sections and always with the background issue in perspective. Is an ethnographic film inevitably a realistic film?

Every year in my anthropology lectures I propose for viewing and discussion in the classroom the film *Les Maitres Fous* (1955) by director Jean Rouch, a filmic ethnography that shows us a Hauka ritual, in present-day Ghana. The film, considered a masterpiece by the director, awarded at the Venice Film Festival, follows a ritual of possession and trance, within the scope of Jean Rouch's own cine-trance. During the film, we are involved in a process of progressive transformation of men (and a few women) who embody *personae* – the Hauka Gods – in the perspective of being able to cure ailments and psycho-psychiatric illnesses that affect them in their social normality. During the ritual, which is also a performance, with several stages of trance and possession, we see those men's eyes rolling back, foam coming out of their mouths, bodies in uncontrollable tremors, voices transformed, all in a structured game of rules from which whoever enter cannot exit. The ritual, which also mimics material elements and traits of the British colonial hierarchy, ends with the sacrifice of an animal – a dog (a food taboo) that is slaughtered alive and then cooked, but whose blood is drunk by the Hauka. There are twenty intense minutes of cinema that invites us to be inside the event and in relation to which we feel, sometimes we got lost in understanding and nauseated by the sensations experienced – in an almost hypnotizing *hapticism*. The film in its original version is narrated by Jean Rouch himself, who produces meaning – translating – what we are led to synesthetically experience. The film, which begins with the contextualization of the capital Accra, and its social and cultural diversity (after all, it also aims to show an example of religious syncretism), ends with the 'day-after', with which Rouch intends to rescue the 'normality' of those men who the day before seemed to be crazy. *Les Maitres Fous*, finally, are men like us who find in that trance ritual the 'solution to the ills' that affect them;

paraphrasing Rouch himself in his last statement at the end of the film, an incomprehensible solution for medicine and Western cultures.

Afterwards, I discuss the film with the students and the expected questions always appear: "But is that true? Or are they acting for the movie camera? Aren't they pretending? That was arranged. The foam, eyes and shaking, they are pretending and doing it on purpose. Where lies the truth? What is real? What is fiction? How to separate them?[15] The debate is almost always lengthy and rich, wandering my argument between the *Goffmanian* justification (after all, we are all always playing a role that does not let us see the true Self) but also summoning a decisive anthropological argument that points to cultural relativism and to the refusal of radical ethnocentrism, which tends to prevent the possibility of admitting other realities and other things (in the *Durkheimian* sense) that escape my/our immediate understanding. Rouch needed to add a voice-over to make sense of what was happening[16]. And it is also clear that the film does not correspond to a direct recording – pure observational. Sound and image are asynchronous (at that time, synchronous recording was not yet technically possible); the sound we hear was 'added', there is editing, there is an author's explanation – the film, actually, was suggested by the Hauka Priests themselves, according to Rouch – and the temporality shown does not exactly correspond to the temporality of the footage. Therefore, we have a film that obeys a creative process of authors (in the assumed and declared shared anthropology of Rouch, which had sequels in other ethno-fictions in the same African context). It is not a direct, raw record, a camera turned on to show live what is happening (as in *Direct Cinema*). But it is a film that

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15   Interestingly, I feel that as the access to self-representation processes has been democratized using technological image recording devices (for example, with smartphones), the doubt about the truth or authenticity of the representation, of what is shown in that film, has been less raised. Not having space to develop the argument here, I speculate that it is surely related to a greater knowledge about the creative and inventive tools associated with image recording and editing that these devices also allow (Martins 2013).

16   A few years ago, I used to screen the documentary without sound and without subtitles to gauge the reaction of my students - with many more averted glances and much more incredulity and incomprehension.

allows us to access the truth of those men, the way they want to tell it. And here comes Rouch's obsession with sincerity (which we also find in David Macdougall). A sincerity that owes completeness to the director's involvement with the reality he studies, with those he wants to study. A methodological sincerity, if we can consider it that way, which guarantees access to the complexity of human experience, from multiple points of view in the equation of social life. A realism less corresponding to an obvious indexicality transmitted by a camera of a direct cinema (*fly-in-the-wall*) but a realism resulting from a new authenticity, provoked by the presence of a camera that acts as a catalyst for new actions and reactions by those with whom the director/anthropologist interacts. And Jean Rouch (1975) strongly believed in this camera that helps people to reveal more of themselves, into levels that without the camera we would never reach. Therefore, to a real more real, to an ultra-real (not a *Buñuelian* surrealism). People in film become characters, they play roles, they act as in a real theater. For Macdougall (Cf. Cezar 2007) that is where the power of film lies – that of allowing us access to other realities, to other meanings of reality that go beyond a direct observation of reality (MacDougall, 1975). A film that is not a substitute for the text, but allows those who are filmed, those who film and those who see what is filmed with new experiences – and in ethnographic film, experiences that are revealing of the enormous complexity that punctuates human life and the non-convergent subjectivities in dialogue.

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Finally, I would like to highlight *The Ax Fight (*1975), by Timothy Asch and Napoleon Chagnon. Also considered a classic of ethnographic film and often described as visually corresponding to the structural-functionalist trend that dominated anthropology until the late 1960s. Alongside the series of films by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson made in the 1930s in Bali and New Guinea, it is also a film noted for its scientific nature and the deliberately analytical character it assumes[17].

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[17] For a close reading of Bateson and Mead's films, see Henley (2013). Nevertheless, Paul Henley speaks of a "transitional phase in the development of ethnographic filmmaking" (p. 101) to realize that the films of Mead and Bateson would not have the sole purpose of serving as an objective record of reality: "the ciné-camera was conceived of as a scientific instrument supposedly capable of recording objective ethnographic data that

The four-part film records and analyzes a fight that, in the meantime, is triggered between Yanomami family groups. Filmed in the Venezuelan Amazon, the film resorts to editing strategies that clearly aim to ensure an analysis of what, in the meantime, happened 'live' and in a chaotic way (because apparently the raw images are captured without anyone expecting that fight). What follows then is an analytical process, in three parts, of making sense of what happened, and which eventually leads Asch and Chagnon to a final edition, a reduced and clarified version of what happened before. In the second part, the North American anthropologists and directors offer the projected audience (anthropologists), a slow-motion reproduction of the raw images accompanied by their comments that give some sense to what happened. In a third part of the film, they display kinship schemes and diagrams to give some sense of local family alliances and rivalries. They complement this graphic information with a map of South America (shown in the beginning of the film) with the filming location (a recurrent visual solution in many documentaries and ethnographic films made in the 1970s and 1980s that helped to reinforce the conviction that anthropologists and filmmakers had been there). 'Being there' marks, even today, the epistemological validation of anthropological knowledge based on *Malinowskian*-inspired field work and which also served for a long time as a validation of the authenticity of observational records and subsequent writings by anthropologists[18].

I do not want to talk about other very hot and critical issues of the film[19], on methodological, ethical, theoretical and political levels, which define Chagnon's applied Amazonian anthropology. In particular, the film's attempt to 'authenticate' or legitimize a structural violence among the Yanomami that would need to be contained

could then later be used in support of a theoretical argument (...) [but] anticipate the development of the more event-based narratives" (idem, ibidem).

[18]   Without having time or space to discuss the subject, I want to mention that this authenticity justified by being there has also been criticized within anthropology for a long time. See, for example, Gupta and Ferguson (1997).

[19]   Meanwhile, in 1997 a CD-Rom was produced, an interactive sequel that permits the expansion of the viewer's experience and understanding of the famous Yanomami *Ax Fight* (Biella, Chagnon and Seaman, 1997).

and controlled by introducing western medicines and resorting to experimentation within the community[20]. I rather want to highlight the fact, within the scope of the argument that I develop in this text, that as a filmic work of visual anthropology, ethnographic film, visual representation, this is the example of how anthropologists often operated analytically on the reality observed at first hand. The raw material – immediate observation in loco – is subject to filtering processes (translation, analysis, explanation, understanding) by the authors in order to produce meaning for themselves and for the audiences. The proof that anthropological knowledge in text and image results from an edition or construction that obeys the deliberate and creative choices of the authors. This is undoubtedly the aim of much (not all) anthropology done through texts and/or images in search of a (certain and possible) truth or authenticity in the representation of the Other. An Other who cannot fail to be what and who he/she is but who also needs to be understood by those who see or want to know him/her. A game of compromises between an immediately available reality (and we already know that it is not necessarily transparent, nor the registration processes guarantee its transparency and completeness) and the creative (authorial) treatment that the anthropologist makes so that whoever sees (or sees himself) and those who know (or know themselves) can see better and know better. Not necessarily everything, but always with the ethical, political and epistemological aspect of trying to re-present the best way possible. And perhaps here I reckon the *Vertovian* 'mechanical I or Eye'. The camera and other technological instruments for recording image (and sound) as devices that expand the human capacity to see and hear (to experience realities), knowing that as humans we cannot see like that, but something or someone can be seen like that.

4. Concluding: The ethnographicness of visual representations

When discussing the epistemological role of film in anthropology a lot has been said on the capacity of this medium to represent the real

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[20]   For more on this subject, see Tierney (2000).

(Cf. for instance, Banks and Ruby, 2011). The history of anthropology is actually the history of the visual anthropology in the sense that this discipline since the very beginning of its intellectual project of knowing the Other has been concerned with objectivity and images would in a certain and naïve way resolve the problem once they allow the direct recording of reality. Sarah Pink (2011) somehow seems to have solved the issue when she invites us to think in a different way. For the author, the ethnographic nature of things is not an intrinsic characteristic, but results from the uses we give and make of them. It is a built in and sought-after feature. And therefore, fiction films, personal photographs and everything that fits in forms of visual representation in non-realistic formats or aesthetics are interesting to think about reality. For example, to think about photography and film ideological and aesthetical options, current cultural and visual systems. Finally, they are vehicles for understanding human life. If we make *ethnographicness* correspond to authenticity in the sense in which we speak of a verifiable and describable condition of existence (ethnography = writing about culture), then we can rest on the premise that any filmic object is available to this appropriation and can be worked from a 'found' or constructed authenticity. I like to think of it that way. And it would not be necessary to resort to movements in the History of Cinema. From Italian *Neo-Realism* (e.g. Vittorio de Sica) to the more recent *British Social Realism* (Mike Leigh, for instance), passing through the intensely raw recordings of the cinematography of Portuguese director Pedro Costa. They are not proposals that fit, for example, in ethnographic film, but they are always present in lectures and in visual anthropology courses – due to the access they allow us to realities experienced and effectively felt by people. In other words, because of their ethnographic virtues. Of their *ethnographicness.*

I conclude by reaffirming my principle. That is, with a lie I can tell truths and with truths I can tell lies. Robert Drew in his magnificent *Primary* (1960) transports the viewers to that synesthetic experience lived by John F. Kennedy and Hubert H. Humphrey in the Democratic election for the presidency of the USA. It is undeniable that we are live in that *Direct Cinema* and things happen in front of us, but there is also a lot that happens, and that justifies what we are seeing, which

is not shown. As in the *Essay-Cinema* of Agnés Varda or Trinh T. Minh-ha, although their creative and transformative solutions from a formal and narrative point of view may be considered anti-realist (Cf. For example, Rodrigues, 2022), we keep seeing and knowing reality. In this case, forcing spectators, as it is clearly explained in the authors' proposal, to an active and creative spectatorship. More attentive and careful of reality.

Finally, I propose that we fearlessly assume that fiction and documentarism are always present in any filmic process and product, just as it happens in any text. We can never deny authorship. And authorship is always a prejudiced condition in the sense that it implies a certain physical and social place from where the World can be seen. No one is God and, particularly, no matter how much technology there may be (including drones) no one has the capacity and ingenuity of that omniscient and omnipresent eye that sees at 360 degrees.

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VISIBILITY OF GESTURES: FROM FILMIC TO COMPUTATIONAL LOGICS

CHRISTA BLUMLINGER

The so-called "cinematic" is nowadays being reconsidered within an epistemological framework that makes us consider media techniques in a broader context while still thinking about their specificity. As Miriam Hansen has put it, the relation between the cinematic, technology and art as a framework has been crucial since the end of 19th century: commenting on Walter Benjamin, she says that "the fate of the 'beautiful' in modernity was inseparable from the human sensorium under capitalist-industrial conditions."[1] Hansen has extended Benjamin's argument concerning the disappearance of the qualities that belong to the work of art as a unique object in regard to its authenticity (and its "aura"): if the standard of universal reproducibility shatters the cultural tradition that derives its legitimacy from experience,[2] then, in the interruption of the circulation of the historical continuum for the "post-auratic" modern work of art, the possibility of a new legibility opens up. But what about the experience of post-optical, algorithmic images? Working from an

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[1]   Hansen, Miriam, *Cinema and Experience, Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, University of California Press, 2012, p. 162.

[2]   Hansen, Miriam, "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: 'The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology.'" *New German Critique*, no. 40, 1987, pp. 179–224. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/488138. Accessed 14 July 2023.

anthropological perspective, Gilbert Simondon[3] considered that the human sensorium has always been connected to technical extensions that cause its own reorganization, and to a reorganization of its "milieu". Following Hans Belting, we can assume here that our need for the true, authentic image, which we demand especially from "scientific" procedures, is culturally conditioned and is linked to the body, understood as a "living medium".[4]

We might assume that in the so-called second machine age marked by digital change, some of the terms that help to think about the modern relation between body, gesture, authenticity and image are being displaced. More than ever, the visible is to be questioned, to put it with Donna Haraway, as "situated knowledge".[5] As Jonathan Beller has shown, cinema is part of a process of the emergent capitalization of perception[6]. From this point of view, photographic, filmic and computational images can be likewise understood as a politico-economic interface between the body and capitalized social machinery. This article seeks to place documentary strategies within a long tradition of technical images measuring and analyzing people's gestures and movements. It stems from a commentary on a set of contemporary films and installations that investigate and foreground the performative dimensions of both gestures and image production. The works that will be dealt with below explicitly investigate both the "mode of existence" of what Simondon has termed "technical objects" *and* visual objects at the same time.

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[3]   Simondon's philosophical project was to study the relationship humans have to the reality of a technique, in particular from an educational and cultural perspective, given that he felt it was insufficient to use only economic concepts to account for how works may be characterized as alienating. See G. Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* [1958], nouvelle édition, Aubier, 2012.

[4]   See, among others, Belting, Hans, *Das echte Bild: Bildfragen als Glaubens-fragen*, Munich: Beck, 2005.

[5]   Haraway, Donna, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", *Feminist Studies* 14, 3/1988, pp. 575-599.

[6]   Beller, Jonathan, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle*, Dartmouth College Press, 2012

The documentary film from 1927, *Les Halles*, shot by Dziga Vertov's youngest brother Boris Kaufman together with André Galitzine, focus on a famous market in the centre of Paris. Constructivist and profoundly modern perspectives appear in the film: the steel facades are filmed with high contrast photography from a bird's eye view or from low-angle shots. Thanks to the composition of the images and the art of editing, the film develops a specific rhythm, in which the gestures and gazes of humans are the primary measure. The result is an anthropology of daily operations at Les Halles. Towards the end of the film, this construction of space according to the physical occupations of merchants, workers, customers and gleaners alternates with distant views of the city's activities in front of Les Halles, representing, as at the beginning of the film, life in its modern, motorized organization. The streams of day laborers indicate the intensity of the hustle and bustle around the market. We see to what extent the changing perspectives and the scale variations link body and machine, crowd and individual. The animal body is the point of reference for the comparison with the machine.

In 1934, anthropologist Marcel Mauss observed that the body "is man's first and most natural instrument": its techniques are of the "habitus" order, i.e. "the work of collective and individual practical reason, where we usually see only the soul and its faculties of repetition". These "habits" of the body vary, he explains, "with societies, upbringings, conventions and fashions, prestiges",[7] and their transmission, as a technique, can only take place if the act is both effective and traditional.[8] This idea of the social and cultural formation of gestures is confirmed by cinema, an art form that Mauss sees as a powerful means, if not to say a medium, for transmitting specific bodily techniques (the way of walking, for example). Furthermore, Mauss and his disciples did not see otherness through the prism of biological inheritance or unchanging authenticity, but rather in terms of social acting.

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[7]   Mauss, Marcel, "Les techniques du corps" (1936), in *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, précédé d'une *introduction à l'œuvre de Marcel Mauss* par Claude Lévi-Strauss, Paris, PUF, 1966 [1950], 372 and 369 [Engl. Techniques of the body, Economy and Society, 2:1/1973, 70–88, DOI: 10.1080/03085147300000003].

[8]   *Ibid*, p. 371.

At the very moment when Mauss was working on "techniques of the body", cinema sought to demonstrate this same idea more or less explicitly: it presented itself as a repository, or even an ideal inventory, of gestures (of work, for example); and at the same time, it was keen to expose the means that were specific to it, and thus to point out the viewer's aesthetic relationship with the film as an object. This dual ambition allows us to identify in certain films both a documentary dimension and the effects of figuration that produce gestures unique to film: we know that the avant-gardes of the 1920s took great care with composition, rhythm and movement.

Throughout the 20th century, the relationship between body, gesture, machine and image has changed, a fact that the historical avant-gardes were already well aware of. In 1926, Abel Gance wrote about film: "What art could have had a dream more lofty, more poetic and more real? [...] This fixation of human gestures in eternity, extending our existence and all the touching, beautiful, and terrifying confrontations with past and present that it supposes, is a miraculous thing."[9] From this perspective, cinema, like other technical images (photography, video, the computer), is part of *Kulturtechniken* (cultural techniques); it makes visible the practical dimension of gestures, and thus the materials and tools that help, as operative processes, to manage objects and symbols. According to Sybille Krämer and Horst Bredekamp, such cultural techniques can even provide the material and technical basis for new theoretical objects and participate in an "iconology of the present".[10]

Together with Séverin-Mars, Gance had formulated a kind of two-pronged praise of style, linking the memorability of gestures to the aesthetic power of cinema. Nearly a century later, Gance's words take on a new dimension as we have entered into a subsequent technological age of machine vision. In a time of global pandemics and transnational

9   Gance, Abel, "La beauté à travers le cinéma", *Cinémagazine*, n°12, 19 mars 1926.

10   See Bredekamp, Horst, and Sybille Krämer, *Kultur, Technik, Kulturtechnik: Wider die Diskursivierung der Kultur*, in H. Bredekamp, S. Krämer (dir.), *Bild–Schrift–Zahl*, München, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2003, pp. 9–22, here: p. 18. (engl. transl., "Culture, Technology, Cultural Techniques, Moving Beyond Text", in *Theory, Culture & Society* 30(6) 20–29, DOI: 10.1177/0263276413496287)

social movements, surveillance and algorithmic images pertain to both public spaces and the more intimate territories of our lives.

The "disruptive effect" (Bernard Stiegler) of digitalization that destroys "the frameworks of nearly every domain"[11] is due to the convergence of information technologies (computer, audiovisual, telecommunications).[12] This unthinkable degree of the transformation of perception poses a special challenge for today's documentary film. In comparison to the optically influenced and machine-age oriented aesthetic, visible in Kaufman and Galitzine's *Les Halles*, documentary films that today deal directly or indirectly with everyday life determined by computational capital have to proceed differently: we are moving towards the post-optical age.

Image 1: *Manu Luksch, Algo-Rhythm, short film, AT/GB 2019.*

Most recent technological systems, based on algorithms able to record, keep track of and analyze our every move, can be understood in terms of political and cultural techniques and their history. This might be a reason for the archeological approach of artistic research that investigates this field today. Thus, for over 25 years, London-based artist Manu Luksch has questioned the social and political effects of digital technologies and, more specifically, techniques of surveillance in public space. Lately, she has been experimenting with a hybrid

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[11]   Stiegler, Bernard, "The Digital, Education and the Cosmopolotism", in Representations No. 134 (Spring 2016), pp. 157-164, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26420557.

[12]   See Stiegler, Bernard, *La technique et le temps 3. Le temps du cinéma et la question du mal-être*, Galilée, Paris, 2001.

form of generative and volumetric filmmaking that integrates older technologies such as photogrammetry. With the goal of describing human life in automated, data-driven and intelligent environments, the artist looks for poetic means to show what makes us vulnerable to political manipulation. In ALGO-RHYTHM (AT/GB 2019), she explores questions of the political misuse of georeferenced data to evoke, among other things, the algorithmic control of everyday life. She uses volumetric images, which she supplements with documentation of performances by Senegalese rappers, graffiti artists, and writers.[13] In collaboration with sound artists, she draws graphic forms from point clouds and other computational figures into which the documentary footage is fed.

The hybrid form of this short film combines volumetric filmmaking with a documentary depiction of Senegalese rappers and graffiti artists who address the "disruptive effect" of digitization. I would suggest that the choice of the collage form in this video does not owe as much as one might think to its content: the political and social effects of computational capital and algorithmic management of everyday life. The figural tension ALGO-RHTYHM builds up lies in the confrontation between an analogue representation of the political body (of the voting people) and the abstraction that data analytics bring into the public sphere. Here, the virtualization of the real is not exclusively due to the recent phenomenon of introducing animation into documentary films. Rather, Manu Luksch's processual and context-based definition of computational filmmaking is anchored in a tradition of conceptual art and deals with the political potential of cinema in the wake of artists such as John Baldessari.

As a leading visual medium and as art, film has accompanied the transformation of social experience throughout the 20th century. If the films of the 1920s remain exemplary figurations of the worker masses (whether in Soviet cinema or in the work of filmmakers like Fritz Lang or King Vidor), modern cinema (Jean-Luc Godard,

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[13]   The cast includes, amongst others: Gunman Xuman, aka "Mr. X, CEO of Data Analytica", a pioneer of the Senegalese rap scene; and the "Presidential Candidates": Lady Zee & OMG (a young Senegalese rapper named Sérère).

Michelangelo Antonioni) aesthetically anticipates the effects of the societies of control by representing, as Gilles Deleuze has put it, the contemporary flood of information as an achievement of the brain (and no longer of the eye).[14] To put it in Benjaminian terms, we might even say that the post-classical cinema (*Blade Runner*, then *The Matrix*, for instance) has pointed not only far beyond the singular experience of authenticity, but also beyond the experience of the optical unconscious and beyond media specificity.[15] Contemporary media artists (Baldessari, but also Gerhard Richter, Andreas Gursky and others), present the masses today as huge, reproduced serial image assemblages – as digitally manipulated visions of a globalized world order, or as collages of anonymous gatherings of people in which the center is empty and where the event is missing. In his series *Crowds with Shape of Reason Missing (Example 1-6, 2012)*, John Baldessari foregrounds, for instance, the context of the film shoot and the composition of a crowd. Reusing movie stills of Hollywood sets, he erases the central action of the scene and thus emphasizes the changing role of the extra.

Younger media artists such as Clemens von Wedemeyer have also established, in works that place a similar emphasis on the extra, a link between the history of the crowd and that of cinematic figures of the crowd: in *Occupation* (2002), for instance, in which we see "a film crew filming two-hundred extras waiting for their cue while held together for many hours by a rectangle marked on the ground",[16] von Wedemeyer investigates the relationship between crowds and

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14 Deleuze, Gilles, "Post-scriptum sur la société de contrôle", in *Pourparlers*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1990, pp. 240-247 (engl. "Post-script on the Societies of Control", in *October* Vol. 59, Winter, 1992, pp. 3-7).

15 One could say that these films demonstrate, in a way, that it is the digital logic that forms the indexicality of the narrative: as it becomes virtual, the idea of the visual sign is no longer based on a real connection between an object, light and an image. For a comprehensive analysis of this issue, see Mary-Ann Doane, "The Indexical and the Concept of Medium-Specificity", *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 18.1, 2007, pp. 128-152.

16 See "On Cinema as Public Space", Clemens von Wedemeyer in conversation with Manuel Segade, in Kaleidoscope, vol. 2, no. 7, Summer 2010.

power. This investigation is informed by his reading of Elias Canetti,[17] whose ideas he has brought more and more explicitly into his recent work. Canetti, Robert Musil, Sigmund Freud, Heimito von Doderer and Hermann Broch have all turned to the problem of the mass in its heterogeneity and ambiguity. Canetti in particular, in wake of the 1927 Palace of Justice fire in Vienna, became interested in the affect-bound behavior of the individual in the crowd. In this context, my question is about the visual configuration of individual and collective bodies in artists' documentaries that experiment with effects of computation, and about the reason why some of them look back to film history.

In an article in Libération from 1988, the French film critic Serge Daney argued in favor of a new approach to a "demography of film beings" ("Ciné-démographie"). He saw a historical correlation between the popular movie public and the crowds on screen and states the following: "A vanished population does not resurrect itself and [...] the extras of Cecil B. De Mille will not miraculously return. We are in another period, something like a *post-cinema* [...] which is characterized by this unprecedented situation: many people want to watch in a few (large) theaters films in which there are few characters."[18] Serge Daney perhaps already had a vision of what Shane Denson and others would in turn name "post-cinema", twenty or thirty years later, in regard to the perceptual qualities of a computational camera that no longer requires a physical lens: "This does not, of course, mean that the camera has become somehow immaterial, but today the conception of the camera should perhaps be expanded: consider how all processes of digital image rendering [...] are involved in the same on-the-fly molecular processes through which the video camera can be seen to trace the affective synthesis of images from flux". Denson states that "hyperinformatic images" are metabolic "spectacles beyond perspective".[19] He suggests that "discorrelated images" in post-cinema

17   See Canetti, Elias, *Crowds and Power* (1960), New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984.

18   Daney, Serge, "Pour une ciné-démographie" [1988], in *Devant la recrudescencea des vols de sacs à main*, Lyon, Aléas, 1997, pp. 147-149, here: p. 148. (My emphasis).

19   Shane Denson, "Crazy Cameras, Discorrelated Images, and the Post-Perceptual Mediation of Post-Cinematic Affect", in Shane Denson & Julia Leyda (eds.), *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film*, Falmer, Reframe Books, 2016, p. 205 and p. 210.

trigger a post-individual sensibility: they relate to the metabolic processing and mediation of life today.

The limits of digital optimization

Computational, post-cinematographic images (in Shane Denson's sense) provide an interface between the body and capitalized social machinery, such as cinematographic images do, but they do it in a different way. In trying to place documentary strategies within a long tradition of technical images measuring and analyzing people's gestures and movements at various scales, I would like to briefly comment on a video installation that investigates and foregrounds the performative dimensions of both gestures and image production.

In observing the disproportionality between humans and their environment, as Serge Daney did in the 1980s, we may consider the means by which present-day populations stay paradoxically invisible all while being overexposed to machines of vision. Drawing on Jonathan Beller's concept of 'computational capital' (turning qualities into quantities[20]), I will attempt to describe the strategies of a *retournement* of image technologies of political economy.

When contemporary essay films question the biopolitical implications of the recording of gestures and crowd movements, the digital transition is often understood as a challenge. In this sense, Berlin-based artist Clemens von Wedemeyer takes on an aspect of the relationship between the transformations of the economics of cinema and the current machine-driven vision of humans. For von Wedemeyer, questioning techniques of the body offers a perspective which is at once epistemological, political and aesthetic. He conceives of the film-machine as a matrix that brings out certain uses of the moving image as an instrument of psychosocial control of the human body. But at the same time, he integrates filmic and documentary forms into his practice in order to create a specific site for their visual inquiry.

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[20] Beller, Jonathan, *The Message is Murder: Substrates of Computational Capital*, Pluto Press 2018, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1x07z9t

Image 2: *Clemens von Wedemeyer, 70.001 (computer animation, 2019).*

70.001 (2019, computer animation) goes back to the "Monday demonstrations" held in East Germany between 1989 and 1991. These demonstrations were a series of peaceful political protests against the government of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) that took place every Monday evening. Clemens von Wedemeyer's computer animation of the movements of so-called "digital agents" in the city of Leipzig gives an imaginary view of the events of 1989; the video works on the shape of the crowd, a group that tries to visualize itself, but it also shows the possibilities of simulating today's group behaviors when it comes to tracking demonstrations. In a series of installations, the exhibition *Majorities* from 2020 (GFZK[21]), he investigates the phenomenon of the majority in the public sphere, while demonstrating how contemporary video surveillance images are automatically analyzed with digital tools that seek out anomalous behavior. In *70.111*, we see a digital crowd flowing through today's (and not the historical) Leipzig. The animation refers to historical footage of crowds that were broadcast on television on October 9, 1989: at least 70,000 people participated that Monday in the demonstrations

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[21] *Mehrheiten* (*Majorities*) was curated by Anna Jehle and Franciska Zólyom and shown at the GFZK Leipzig. *In Gesellschaft* at the Kunstmuseum Luzern was curated by Fanni Fetzer. There was an online exhibition entitled *The Illusion of a Crowd*, at KOW, from April 7 to May 31, 2020.

that were partly filmed from above and became iconic images of a protest that quickly spread to other GDR cities.

Von Wedemeyer's simulation gives an idea of algorithmic-based movements. In the exhibition space, a sound installation opens with comments on the way that the procession of demonstrators visualizes itself. Listening to the voices, we might find an explanation for the gathering of the crowd, given by a computational social scientist (Dirk Helbing) who comments on ways to imagine the potential of the protesters and the space that can easily become saturated: "[…] even if we optimize, we have to select a target function that is optimized",[22] he says. But we also might try an evolutionary approach, based on learning from one another, and create a more complex situation. The exhibition catalogue gives a detailed description of the visual dynamics of the computer-generated animation that produces mechanical motion and does not translate the affective dimension of the crowd that Canetti was interested in: we might for instance notice that "repeated figures are recognizable [… and] all faces are unaffected". The scale variation goes from high angle and large-scale images to close movements into the crowd, approaching the figures and exhibiting their calculated shape in terms of repetition, suggesting that the group dynamic influences individual behavior.

Von Wedemeyer's animated crowd questions the extent to which collective movements are predictable. The critical dimension of the animation produces a *retournement* of image technologies of political economy; paradoxically, it leads us back from quantities to questions of quality. We might then access the vision of a crowd that – in contrast to the mass – refers to "an accidently or temporarily formed group of people that acts without fusion and hierarchy together and thus follows individual interests" (as von Wedemeyer

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22   Dirk Helbing, quoted in Clemens von Wedemeyer, "Voice recordings" (excerpt), in Clemens von Wedemeyer, *The Illusion of a Crowd,* A visual essay, a glossary and texts by Heike Geißler, Fanni Fetzer, and Franciska Zólyom, edited in collaboration with Till Gathmann, Archive Books, 2019, p. 61.

puts it in the catalogue),[23] a dimension that can be identified by the term "multitude" (Antonio Negri/Michael Haardt, 2004).

This mode of *retournement* of the logics of virtual simulation refers to the invisible by pointing to the limits of digital optimization and calculable data in regard to human relations. The aesthetic means by which *70.001* contributes to an archeology of techniques of visibility leads us to what Roland Barthes has called the "blind field" of the photographic image, which should be understood within a larger history of "technical images" (in the sense of Vilém Flusser).

Von Wedemeyer operates a kind of de-framing of the computational image. When put in relation to interviews (in its installation form), as well as through visible repetition and fluid scale variations that highlight the differences between the animated footage and the historical shots of the October 1989 events, the film "doubles" itself, becoming a metafilm about digital animation of "iconic" documentary images: the animation of a historical event "as it could have taken shape", also relates to what Denson calls the "metabolic processing and mediation of life today".

If von Wedemeyer uses real images in other parts of his video series from 2019, he does so in a post-Brechtian manner: he mixes live-action footage with computational images of crowds (in *Transformation Scenario), he* documents re-enactments in the tradition of panoramas that aim to create a hybrid and immersive experience out of what is meant to be fake (in *Faux Terrain)* and he also stages rehearsals that take on the form of serious games (*Emergency Drill,* 2019). Going back to historical footage such as shots from Woodstock, seen as a real-time event, the artist calls on a more anthropological way of considering gestures and behavior (in *Transformation Scenario, 2019*). This comparative mode of editing corresponds to a Farockian idea of documentary, whose primary function today would be to read our serious games and to make sense out of contemporary discorrelated imagery in order to provide a form of artistic criticism or pedagogy through contextual readings of figures of the nameless.

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23 Clemens von Wedemeyer and Franciska Zolyom, Glossary, "Irrationality", in *The Illusion of a Crowd*, p. 66.

Rhythm and milieu

Some artists are now examining how our societies today pose the question of technicity as a link between machines, media and the body, in an age when the body is increasingly equipped with "intellectual technologies" and has gradually abandoned a relationship to machines that paleontologist André Leroi-Gourhan[24] calls "industrial motricity": this abandonment introduces a change in the human being's milieu, in particular his "rhythmic envelope".[25] Simondon even believes that the sensibility of living beings has always been associated with external techniques or technical elements that cause their own reorganization and that of their technico-symbolic "milieu" as part of a "collective individuation".[26] The work of the artist Julien Prévieux offers both an epistemological and aesthetic perspective on this issue, particularly by considering the milieu of bodily techniques in relation to the emergence of new cultural techniques.

These works, often carried out in dialogue with researchers, focus on the social conditions of human senses. They use techniques for recording and representing human movements and gestures in order to divert them from their economic and political context. The artist's specific use of various documentary modes, as part of a series of performances, installations, sculptures and images, is part of his research on the effectiveness of gestures in contemporary observation procedures. Bodies in motion – framed, edited and (re-)animated – figure here as a *tertium comparationis* between technical object and image.

A brief description of the layout of the exhibition *Des corps schématiques* (2015, Prix Marcel Duchamp, Centre Georges Pompidou) can serve as an example of how and why Prévieux lends both a political and aesthetic dimension to the relationship between gesture, work, technology and cinema. Here, the artist questions the ideological implications of modeling gesture or movement data provided by

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[24] Learoi-Gourhan, André, *Le Geste et la Parole, II. La Mémoire et les rythmes*, Paris, Albin Michael, 1965, p. 59.

[25] *Ibid*., p. 135.

[26] Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation psychique et collective*, Paris, Aubier, 1989-2007.

economic systems within the global milieu that has emerged from the development of technological networks.
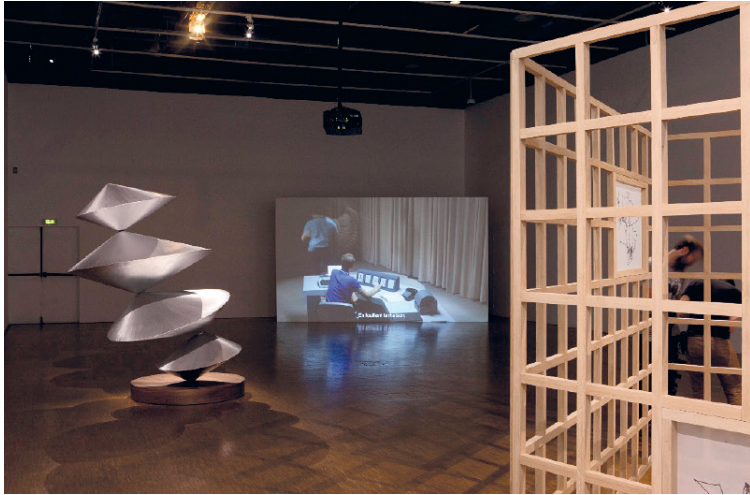

Image 3: *Julien Prévieux, Des corps schématiques* (2015), *installation view, Centre G. Pompidou.*

In this multimedia installation, Julien Prévieux uses a series of drawings, heat maps, sculptures and a film to explore ways of recording, analyzing and modeling human movement. He mischievously appropriates both historical and recent technologies for controlling, targeting and schematizing the human body; he adapts forms of gesture and behavior modeling, or benchmarking procedures, originally used for economic purposes in line with neoliberal society, to reveal their aesthetic potential. This type of artistic hijacking opens up a space for both what Yves Citton calls critical gestuality and for an immersive aesthetic experience: exhibition visitors are plunged into an environment of artistic objects and find themselves in front of a short essay film.

This film, *Patterns of Life*, features six archaeological sites, each representing a different historical stratum of media, which created devices for the visualization, indeed the visibility, of the human body, in the Foucauldian sense of the term: the point here is not so much to show things seen with the eye, but the system of thought

that makes things visible. Additionally, while this film is about the visibility of bodies (and not the body's senses), it is itself an artistic object, just like the sculptures and maps on display. It is therefore also striking for its aesthetic form.

The six sites or scenes lead from Georges Demenÿ's light painting via Frank B. Gilbreth's Motions Studies and their system of modeling to a more recent genealogy of forms of quantification and visualization of movements that have been used in various economic, social or military contexts to control or target human bodies: for example, algorithmically-generated maps used by the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, or by the American and French police, for a process known as crime mapping, an ancient method of police reconnaissance, used to produce plots and diagrams from an individual's activities. This chrono-geographical modeling method had already been commented on in the 1950s by Guy Debord, who saw it as "modern poetry".[27] Today, both the army and the police base part of their intelligence work on what is technically known as "pattern of life analysis", i.e. the study of algorithmic models and the identification of aberrant patterns.

Based on Frank Gilbreth's experiments, the voice-over in Prévieux's essay film *Patterns of Life* dialogues with the work of philosopher Grégoire Chamayou[28], co-author of the screenplay, and explains, in the film's first sequence, the historical process that Gilbreth used, in the wake of Marey, as a mode of visibility: "Once the movement has been studied and corrected, it is important for the worker to learn the exact gestures. A wire reproducing the trajectory of each movement is fixed to the corresponding place on the machine. [...] The movement model makes it possible to visualize the

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[27] Cf. Debord, Guy, "Théorie de la derive", *Les lèvres nues*, nº 9, novembre 1956, dans *Internationale situationniste*, Allia, Paris, 1985, p. 312; quoted in Chamayou, Grégoire, "Avant-propos sur les sociétés de ciblage. Une brève histoire des corps schématiques", *Jef Klak* N°2, "Bout de ficelle", Septembre 2015, p. 1.

[28] The film's title and structure are inspired by the work of Grégoire Chamayou, whose text "Pattern of Life" stems from a discussion with geographer Derek Gregory at the University of California Irvine, in 2014. See Chamayou, Grégoire, "Foreword on targeting societies. A brief history of schematic bodies", art. cit. and from the same, *Théorie du drone. De la fabrique des automates politiques*, Paris, La Fabrique, 2013.

trajectory of a gesture". Prévieux repeats this principle, while at the same time searching for a harmonious form: he films choreographed scenes that he traces by attaching points of light to the bodies of the performers. In the following sequence, he stages a series of movement studies, this time placing the professional dancers in an experimental framework that he borrows from the Taylorist inventor. Drawing on the work of Etienne-Jules Marey, Frank Gilbreth and his wife Lillian created hundreds of films to document, analyze and correct workers' gestures, in search of the "one, best way" to perform any given task.[29] Their *Motion Studies* were created to improve workers' efficiency and productivity. Using the technical gestures of Gilbreth, Marey and contemporary techniques for modeling trajectories, looks and gestures, Prévieux also diagrams the movements of human bodies in a given space and time. Scientific measurements, which are usually used to create data to control the efficiency of military or industrial actions, are used here to create a protocol for dancers.

In another part of the film, we witness the formation of geometric structures, rendered by the performers working with strings. This gesture corresponds to the objects and drawings exhibited in the installation. Prévieux links algorithmic *crime-mapping* procedures to manual drawings of "Voronoi diagrams", which he had drawn up as part of a workshop with Paris police officers.[30] The anachronistic quality that Prévieux seeks to produce here also affects the work in the film: he mobilizes a historical rhetoric of scientific imagery alongside aesthetic values specific to objects that have been considered obsolete since the rise of conceptual art (concerning material, craft or subjectivity). At the same time, his use of historically dated techniques in artwork revolving around manufacturing processes displays his

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[29] On Gilbreth, see Scott Curtis, "Images of Efficiency. The Films of Frank B. Gilbreth", in Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau (eds.), *Films that Work. Industrial Film and the Productivity of the Media*, 2009, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, p. 85.

[30] Prévieux's project is called *Atelier de dessin – BAC du 14ème arrondissement*. In mathematics, Voronoi partitions are "geometric forms subdividing space, composed of polygons defined from a discrete set of points". See Prévieux, Julien, "Esthétique des statistiques. A propos de quelques ateliers artistiques statactivistes", in Bruno, Isabelle, Emmanuel Didier and Julien Prévieux (eds.), *Statactivisme. Comment lutter avec des nombres*, Editions de la Découverte, Paris, 2014, p. 91.

appropriation of contemporary technology, which usually obscures its various phases of diagram construction: hand-drawings to produce cartographic views of data are thus compared to other, more recent processes, disregarding the relationship between the capture of a gesture and its transformation into statistical data. While the sculptures, drawings, performances and films created by the artist present an archaeology of techniques of visibility, they also contribute to refining the relational gestualities of exhibition visitors.

A certain archaeological taste has thus guided the artist's interest in contemporary technologies. In a text written with the philosopher Elie During, Prévieux notes that real futures are futures of the past, or "retrofutures". In so doing, he's not indulging in the kind of "amused" nostalgia or irony often found in contemporary art and cinema (science fiction, for example). On the contrary, he identifies in his artistic research "extensions related to practices of technological reappropriation and hybridization", which he calls *retronics*.[31] According to During and Prévieux, these various artistic projects, undoubtedly conceived in a Foucauldian perspective, propose to "diagrammatize virtual futures – which [...] is much more than a simple 'détournement' of technological functionalities".[32] The artist's taste for obsolete techniques and for an aesthetic of hybridity produces a level of ethical reflection in this work. In this respect, one can connect Prévieux's work with that of Yves Citton, whose anthropological perspective stresses the importance of valuing gestures in the digital age: "We don't have to choose between programmer settings and gestural eventfulness [*événementialité*], but rather measure the relative share of one and the other within our various behaviors. Valuing gestures today expresses resistance to the excessive and suffocating proportions that programming has taken in our present and future forms of life."[33] To bring out gestures, Prévieux created a film that is fully integrated

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[31] Prévieux, Julien and Elie During, "E3: Erreur, éventualité, émergence", note pour un atelier dans le cadre du projet *Technological Uncanny*, Emmanuelle André et Martine Beugnet, eds., Université Paris Diderot, 2016, p. 1.

[32] *Ibid.,* p. 2.

[33] Citton, Yves, *Gestes d'humanités, Anthropologie sauvage de nos expériences esthétiques*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2012, p. 263.

into his installation. What counts in *Patterns of Life* is not so much the documentation of a bodily performance, but rather the relationship of performed gestures to a social and technical milieu, which opens up a dimension that is both epistemological and aesthetic. Here, the documentary essayist makes use of a short format,[34] adapted to the exhibition context, and creates echoes between the various elements of the environment. The film's style quickly makes it clear that the goal is not simply the recording an ephemeral work of art: the precise variation of viewpoints and framing, the determined use of editing to match the rhythm of gestures, the conception of space and sound composition all combine to make the film itself an artistic object. *Patterns of Life*, a film about "forms of life" ("formes de vie"), to use Citton's term, outlines some of the principles of motion capture and shows the complex relationship between performing bodies and a series of technical objects that are capable of recording and analyzing them or of producing a score for future gestures. The film's editing strategies also respond to the juxtaposition of elements within the installation, presenting itself as a temporal and spatial process. It thus affirms the dialogue between performance, art, science and technology.

Prévieux's practice focuses on appropriating existing processes: either he starts from schematic writings of bodily movement (notations, diagrams or other forms of modeling) to then develop gestures on stage; or he starts from a recorded performance (e.g. eye tracking) to create a database to be processed and transformed into artistic forms. The artist thus uses repetition, variation and technical mediation as principles of a processual form of creation: his film exposes the relationship between abstract protocols or scripts and their interpretation by dancers' gestures. This work is to be understood in its unfolding, as a process, both in terms of its production and the aesthetic experience of its viewer-visitor.

In his search for the rules that make human activities visible today, Prévieux's work on gesture evokes a form of resistance. His close collaboration with sociologists, critical statisticians and philosophers is another sign of the political dimension of a practice that the artist,

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[34]   The length of the film is 15 minutes.

hybridizing the words "statistics" and "activism", calls "statactivism". In doing so, Prévieux makes a biopolitical shift: today, control is less and less about the efficient gesture of an individual body, whether linked to a machine or not, than about controlling the behavior of the masses. In the societies of control, according to Gilles Deleuze, "[…] we are no longer faced with the mass-individual couple. Individuals have become 'dividuals', and the masses, samples, data, markets or 'banks'"[35]. In this sense, the question of the scale of application or physical use of a technical object today shifts to the question of how we can live with algorithmic forms of control of bodily movement and of data transmission. Julien Prévieux's objects, films and installations reconfigure with precision this change in the general framework of the treatment of gestures that we might call (following Foucault) *episteme*.

While these works propose an artistic investigation into the transformation of cultural techniques (Kulturtechniken), linked to medial innovations which, according to Horst Bredekamp and Sybille Krämer, "are located in a reciprocity of print and image, sound and number", the question remains open as to the extent to which this type of sensory perception of invisible processes offers "new exploratory spaces for perception, communication, and cognition".[36]

Using digital devices to model the invisible, Julien Prévieux opens up a perspective that is both epistemological and aesthetic. It is no coincidence that his return to historical analysis of bodily techniques leads us to documentary film forms. By filming dancers and animals, the artist insists on something that persists, circulates and returns, what Marielle Macé calls in her praise of documentary, "gestures, regimes of existence and relationships, habits".[37] Visitors of the exhibition *Des Corps schématiques* are quickly led to the screening of *Patterns of Life*: its precise form and striking rhythm ensure that the film enters into a

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[35] Deleuze, Gilles, "Post-scriptum sur la société de contrôle", *art. cit.,* pp. 243-244; engl. "Post-script on the Societies of Control", in *October* Vol. 59, Winter, 1992, pp. 3-7, http://www.jstor.org/stable/778828.

[36] Bredekamp, Horst, Sybille Krämer, "Kultur, Technik, Kulturtechnik: Wider die Diskursivierung der Kultur", in Bredekamp, Horst, Sybille Krämer (eds.), *Bild–Schrift–Zahl*, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-22 (here: p. 18).

[37] Macé, Marielle, *Styles. Critique de nos formes de vie*, Paris, Gallimard, 2016.

harmonious relationship with its spatial environment. But there is more: the film reveals itself as a kind of technique of techniques. It points to an unthought-of part of our relationship to the exhibition of films, which involves forms of ritualized confrontation with images. Capturing our attention as we pass in front of the screen, it seizes us to bring attention to our own gesturality as observers.

When contemporary documentary questions the biopolitical implications of recording gestures and crowd movements, the digital transition is often understood as a challenge. In this sense, artists such as Manu Luksch, Clemens von Wedemeyer and Julien Prévieux take up an aspect of the relationship between transformations in the economy of cinema and machines' current vision of the human. For these artists, the questioning of bodily techniques offers an epistemological, political and aesthetic perspective. All of them conceive of the cinematic machine as a matrix that highlights certain uses of the moving image as an instrument of psychosocial control of the human body and the crowd. They demonstrate the way in which certain digitally shaped forms of life make us act today on "post-individual" and thus on "post-authentic" planes. But at the same time, they integrate cinematic and documentary forms into their practices, in order to create a specific site for their visual investigation. Through aesthetic means, these artists' films contribute to an archaeology of techniques of visibility, de-framing and thus indicating the "blind field" of the image that Roland Barthes has commented upon, an aspect that I suggest we place within a broader history of increasing abstraction bound to what Vilém Flusser[38] has called "technical images".

Thanks to Noah Teichner

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[38] Flusser, Vilém, *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (1989), translated by Nancy Ann Roth, introduction by Mark Poster, Minnesota University Press, 2011.

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Bio-bibliographic Notes

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His filmmaking activity is on a porous border between the visual arts and cinema. His films are therefore shown both in exhibition spaces and at film festivals: "Por i," presentation of the film with the live soundtrack in the Art Directions: sound/vision of the International Film Festival of Rotterdam, 2023. "Novas da Infestação", International Ethnographic Film Festival of Recife, Brazil, 2021. "Now (Post Mortem)", Filmóptico, Art Visual and Film Festival, Barcelona, Catalonia, 2021; Latino and Iberian Film Festival at Yale – LIFFY, USA, 2020. "The Laboratory", Incuna International Film Festival (Jury Mention), Gijón, Spain, 2018; Porto/Post/Doc Festival, Porto, Portugal, 2018. "novas da desolação", The 10th Berlin International Directors Lounge [DLX], Berlin, 2013. Author of a chapter on the book "Arctic Cinemas: Essays on Polar Spaces and the Popular Imagination" Ed. Kylo-Patrick Hart; McFarland & Company, Inc, Publishers, North Carolina, USA.

Filipe Martins is film director, researcher at the Institute of Philosophy of the University of Porto and professor at the University School of Media Arts and Design (ESMAD/IPP), where he directs the MA in Cinema and Photography. His filmography includes works in the fiction and documentary genres, selected and awarded at several international film festivals. Co-director and programmer of the *Family Film Project* – Archive, Memory and Ethnography International Film Festival, which takes place annually in Porto since 2012. PhD in Communication Sciences (UM) and post-doctorate in Philosophy (FLUP). Author and editor of several books on film studies, narrative, and aesthetics.

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Peter Freund is a Barcelona-based artist, writer and curator. He has an international exhibition record of work that often uses appropriation as an instrument to cut conceptual holes in the fabric of historical memory and related enigmas. With a doctoral dissertation based on the impossibility of language, he once started training to become a Lacanian analyst. Stuttering traces of this interrupted endeavor persist in his work. Peter is Professor of Art at Saint Mary's College of California in the San Francisco Bay Area. Currently he is a resident researcher with the *Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art* Study Centre and a visiting artist with the University of Barcelona. As guest curator and editor, he has led projects with the *Barcelona Centre for Contemporary Culture* (CCCB *Xcèntric*), the Barcelona-based art magazine *A*Desk*, and the *Archive, Memory, Ethnography International Film Festival* (Porto). Peter is a founding member of the artist collective, *Adversorecto.*

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Family Film Project

Archive, Memory, Ethnography – International Film Festival

Created in 2012, the *Family Film Project* is an international film festival which takes place annually in Porto, Portugal. Its competitive film sessions are organized according to three areas: *Lives and Places* (with a focus on the aesthetic approach to habitats, biographies and everyday life), *Connections* (focused on interpersonal and

community dynamics) and *Memory and Archive* (dedicated to temporality and the poetic appropriation of testimonies and found footage). With several lines of action, the festival also organizes parallel events at different locations of the city: art exhibitions, concerts, installations, performances, masterclasses, conferences, and book releases, among other activities. The Festival's program traditionally reserves a prominent space for directors, artists and guest researchers of national and international renown, such as Jonas Mekas (2012), Péter Forgács (2013), Alina Marazzi (2015), João Canijo (2016), Regina Guimarães (2017), Bill Nichols (2018), Daniel Blaufuks (2018), Cláudia Varejão (2019), Jaimie Baron (2019), Harun Farocki (2020), Ruben Ostlund (2021), Catarina Alves Costa (2022), Naomi Kawase (2023), among many others.