



DOSSIER TECHNOLOGICAL & CULTURAL CHANGES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

The ephemeral blink of an eye: material archives, digital files and the framing of memory

El efímero abrir y cerrar de ojos: archivos materiales, digitales y el encuadre de la memoria

O efêmero piscar de olhos: arquivos materiais, digitais e o enquadramento da memória

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Abstract: Jean-Luc Godard's recent films, *Adieu au Langage* (2014) and *Le Livre d'Image* (2018), seem to amplify his already known concern with making cinema from cinematographic matter itself. In cinema, historically, the clash between singularity and standardization of experience has always been present. Today, complex systems of cultural legitimation that permeate the production chain work as filters for what can be seen and preserved as an archive. This work proposes some reflections on the fleetingness of the filmic experience present in the multiple processes of circulation and preservation of archives as a material framing of memory.

Keywords: Archive. Memory. Databases. Technocolonialism. Godard.

Resumen: Las películas recientes de Jean-Luc Godard, *Adieu au Langage* (2014) y *Le Livre d'Image* (2018), parecen amplificar sus ya conocidas inquietudes por hacer cine a partir de la propia materia cinematográfica. En el cine, históricamente, siempre ha estado presente el choque entre la singularidad y la estandarización de la experiencia. Hoy, complejos sistemas de legitimación cultural que permean la cadena productiva funcionan como filtros para lo que se puede ver y conservar como archivo. Este trabajo propone algunas reflexiones sobre la fugacidad de la experiencia filmica presente en los múltiples procesos de circulación y conservación de los archivos como encuadre material de la memoria.

Palabras-clave: Archivo. Memoria. Bases de datos. Tecnocolonialismo. Godard.

Resumo: Os filmes recentes de Jean-Luc Godard, *Adieu au Langage* (2014) e *Le Livre d'Image* (2018), parecem ampliar sua já conhecida preocupação em fazer cinema a partir da própria matéria cinematográfica. No cinema, historicamente, o embate entre singularidade e padronização da experiência sempre esteve presente. Hoje, sistemas complexos de legitimação cultural que permeiam a cadeia produtiva funcionam como filtros para o que pode ser visto e preservado como arquivo. Este trabalho propõe algumas reflexões sobre a fugacidade da experiência filmica presente nos múltiplos processos de circulação e preservação de arquivos como enquadramento material da memória.

Palavras-chave: Arquivo. Memória. Bases de dados. Tecnocoloniasmo. Godard.

Introduction

More than to artistic creation, the rhetoric around art seems to return numerous times to the theme of the perennial condition of the work of art. Although both the uniqueness and the permanence of the artistic object have been constantly questioned – especially by avant-gardes



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from the 20th century onwards – these still seem to be issues that permeate a good part of the world of arts.

The material dimension of the artwork is intrinsically related to its permanence. Efforts to recover famous works such as Da Vinci's *Last Supper* painting or Michelangelo's *David* statue demonstrate the struggle against time and the decay of matter in order to preserve the material support that ends up being taken as the work of art itself. The ruin of ancient objects is highlighted both for its character of inexorable tragedy and for the feeling that something valuable and irreplaceable will be lost. Episodes such as the disastrous restoration of the fresco *Ecce Homo*, by Elías García Martínez, in 2012, still have a tragic-comic aspect of the inglorious fight against the effects of time (SOUSA, 2021).

Benjamin reminds us of the cult character of the works which, enclosed in churches or monasteries, are revealed only on special occasions for the general public. Apart from that, they continue to exist, distant, protected and loaded with symbolism with regard to their existence in time. Still for Benjamin, cinema, in its technical dimension, brings to the work of art not only the possibility of multiple existence – in different places –, but that of an eternal rebirth, the possibility of identical copies, and a renewal of the idea of preservation of the artistic object. Efforts are made not only to control the decay of matter, but also to allow its perfect replication. To a certain extent, the indissoluble link between support and work of art fades, since it is understood that the primary destiny of the former is to become a ruin and be replaced – keeping the artistic properties inherent to the work intact.

Images, therefore, transcend the ruin of matter. In the words of Didi-Huberman, images refuse to disappear. They remain, as ghosts, occupying an in-between space that is not that of preserved and visible matter, nor that of the digital archive, submerged in an ocean of virtual objects.

The images themselves, in this perspective of the return of ghosts, would come to be considered as what survives from an anthropological dynamics and sedimentation made partial,

virtual, for having been, to a large extent, destroyed by time (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2013, p. 35).

The cinematographic matter, dimensioned as an archive, remains, despite the flow of time and the different "deaths" of cinema. Recently, when receiving the FIAF 2019 award, Jean-Luc Godard commented that he regretted the end of a certain way of watching films, specifically related to physical media: "Today, another loss, in my opinion, will be the end of DVDs in a certain way. With the new, what's it called, Netflix and all that. ...People use it to watch one film the way they want, and they don't really go to theaters anymore" (quoted by DRY, 2019). This statement brings, implicitly, the obvious and profound relationship that both cinema and other artistic manifestations – until this very moment – still have with material supports. Besides, it indicates that such supports have the ability to model the fruition of the work of art and the response of different audiences.

Jean-Luc Godard's recent films, *Goodbye do Language (Adieu au Langage, 2014)* and *The Image Book (Le Livre d'Image, 2018)*, seem to amplify his already known concern with making cinema from the cinematographic matter itself. If, on the one hand, the material basis of the archives presents us with the idea of a certain object, under the care of some specialist or interpreter, on the other hand, the databases of streaming platforms work with the notion of excess as their main symbolic capital. In cinema, historically, the clash between singularity and standardization of experience has always been present. Today, complex processes of cultural legitimation that permeate the production chain work as filters not only for what can be seen, but also for what can be preserved as an archive.

Memory can be thought of as a material record of the existence of things: physical archives are an alternative to the erasure – accidental or not – of digital media. Consequently, the cinematographic experience is not only a conditioner of practices and affections, but also a perpetuator of a physical recollection of events.

This article proposes some reflections on the fleetingness of the filmic experience, which

should not be restricted to the temporal lapse of projection, but is also present in the multiple processes of circulation and preservation of archives as a material framing of memory. Based on the analysis of the films mentioned above (and of Godard's relationship with sounds and images in general) we propose some definitions of the different regimes in which we can place images, especially within the current technological context. We pay special attention to its structuring in databases, as digital files, and to the possible consequences of this phenomenon for history and for the preservation of world's memory.

Material issues in Godard's films

"Le cinéma parle de lui-même..."
[The cinema speaks for itself...]
(Jean-Luc Godard)²

Jean-Luc Godard demonstrates, throughout his long career, a special concern in highlighting the cinematographic apparatus. In his 1961 film *A Woman is a Woman* (*Une Femme est une Femme*), Godard is keen to show how mediated the film experience will be. Right after the opening credits, we hear Anna Karina shouting "Lights, camera, action!" with a noticeable saturation in the final part of audio recording. It cuts abruptly to the silence of the film – that is, there is no other sound but the noise of the apparatus – and, as abruptly as the silence, music begins to play. We hear no introduction, no preparatory silence; it starts right in the middle of the recording. It has no fade-in and no exact entry point. It starts unexpectedly, as if someone has randomly placed the needle to spin on a vinyl record. In general, the music in *A Woman is a Woman* does not obey a classical film hierarchy between the various sound elements. It does not hide in the background while the dialogues are being said. It disturbs, disorients. It contains the hisses and clicks of magnetic tapes and vinyl records, revealing that they are just recordings outside the diegesis.

In fact, even when it should function as a die-

getic sound, the result of an action on the scene, Godard makes clear that he was the one responsible for the presence of the sound elements, and not someone else in the film. Angela, Anna Karina's character, inserts a coin into the café's jukebox and it is precisely at that moment that the incidental music stops. A different music begins a few moments later, also with the suppression of its introductory part. The apparent cuts and the lack of concern with "smooth" transitions or with the continuity between sound and image may seem to audience as an "inadequate" use of editing tools. For Godard, however, there is no "adequate" way of assembling sound and image: only filmic conventions that he does not care to obey. His sounds and images deviate from the classic narrative model.

Ambient sounds are excessively loud indoors and virtually disappear in outdoor scenes. In ordinary situations, such as a dialogue in a magazine store, the musical accompaniment is melodramatic, while all other elements of the scene, including the acting, are emptied of this sentimental excess. However, it is not only in editing that Godard makes the technological basis of cinema visible. The use of omnidirectional microphones in some of his films challenges the rigidly protocols of Hollywood films which states that, regardless of point of view, the voice must always maintain its understandability. The manipulation of voice distances and volumes has always fulfilled a need to build a homogeneous base for a heterogeneous structure of images, smoothing cuts or changes in time and space.

By delegating the recording of voices to omnidirectional microphones, Godard favors a sort of machine listening that could be, in a certain sense, exempt. It would not privilege the semantic character of sounds – especially speech – but rather the physical and spatial character of them. In Godard's films, voices come from different places in the room, not just from the central speakers. We are hearing through different ears and are not aware of it. Of course, this aesthetic choice does

² Quoted in DRY, 2019.

not mean saying that microphones have a more precise perception of reality, but admitting the existence of another type of listening to which, by the way, we are all used to since the birth of the art of recording sounds.

The sound organization in different hierarchically arranged tracks is a common procedure in classical cinema. That kind of arbitrary formulation comes to the fore when Angela interprets a musical number accompanied by a recording on magnetic tape. However, instead of the instrumental accompaniment being in the background during the character's singing, what happens is more radical. While the voice is sounding, the audio on the tape is muted and vice versa. Thus, the character can sing delicately without competing with other simultaneous sounds. At the same time, the recording draws attention to itself when it "decides" not to accompany the singer. The sound elements do not mix and, just like the images, are placed on a horizontal axis, with no vertical (or hierarchical) relationship between them. Audio recording reveals its own logic and autonomy.

About the autonomous character of sounds and images, Godard explains that in his films he intends "to tell that history, both in images and in words, for cinema to speak for itself. [His] last film [*The Book of Images*], for example, is made exclusively from films" (quoted in DRY, 2019).

The wild gaze

With language, something's happening. Something awkward about our relation to the world. It acts against pure freedom. I'm speaking... subject. I'm listening... object. [...] We need to get an interpreter. Soon, everyone will need an interpreter. To understand the words that come out of their own mouths.³

Godard's formal concern to reveal the opacity of the apparatus is directly related to his perception that the film is a multiple manifestation, irreducible only to its linguistic dimension. Cinema "speaks" as a "film being", requiring a sensitive

translation so that the spectator can somehow assimilate it. The language shortcut is a facilitator that the director does not necessarily need or want to provide. Despite the insistence on highlighting the role of the material aspects of the film – or precisely because of it – Godard also demonstrates an atypical concern with linguistic and metalinguistic issues in his films. His films are about cinema and how cinema can speak through films. Images, co-opted by language, lose the ability to speak something new in the world: "What they call images are becoming the murder of the present".⁴ The answer to the reduction of the world through language can only be achieved by means of sounds and images as physical elements, assaulting our senses and causing the implosion of the meaning of words. These, as the passage that opens this section explains, need an interpreter.

In *Goodbye to Language*, Godard turns technologies into a conspicuous element of the film, treating them not only as a vehicle for sounds and images, but even questioning their status as accurate models of hearing and seeing. More than that, Godard finds in the technical issues of the cinematographic record a departure from the very notions of fidelity and/or definition – notions that especially guided the technical discourse of the 20th century. Images and sounds in *Goodbye to Language* can be anything but a faithful record of a previous reality. The use of color saturation, different types of images – archival images, cell-phone videos – excessive superimposition of frames, deliberately poor recording quality, distortion, glitch, etc. contest the existence of an ideal model of images and sounds. The film deals with both elements in a tactile and spatial way. The experience takes place in the spectator's body and in the clash between film and perception.

The clearest example of this challenge to the cognitive processes of the audience is his use of stereoscopy. Far from using the effect as it is usually adopted by films of greater commercial appeal, blurring the boundaries between the

³ Excerpt from *Goodbye to Language* (Godard, 2014) transcribed by the author.

⁴ Excerpt from *Goodbye to Language* (Godard, 2014) transcribed by the author.

real and the represented, producing moments of sensorial immersion, Godard causes great discomfort when superimposing two three-dimensional images – one of them with a camera movement. The brain's effort to understand both images, while working to construct spatiality by double reading each stereoscopic image alone, produces a kind of perceptual short-circuit. The discomfort of not being able to fully assimilate such a complex phenomenon hovers in the projection room during the scene. The audience is relieved when the superimposition is over.

That may be the film's most obvious goal: to question any established conception of perceptual processes. In addition to efforts to make the apparatus evident, either through the disclosure of the editing processes or by using different audiovisual raw material, *Goodbye to Language* also calls into question the historically constructed capacities of each of us. Far from naturalizing models of spectatorship, the film proposes a discussion about what would actually be a "natural" way of seeing or hearing. The opposition between nature and technology, from the point of view of cinema, can end up bringing to light the questioning of the former as a more comfortable place for humans. Therefore, it is clear that the concept of record fidelity to which cinema has engaged for decades is not within the scope of primeval nature, but of a late nature that specifically serves man.

In the film, Roxy is a dog who sees and is seen. The images seen by Roxy are noisy, overly colorful and unrealistic. They are, in fact, images processed by technological filters. At the same time, they represent the "natural" view of someone who is not culturally conditioned as we are. The "natural", in this case, is the most "artificial" possible. At the end of the film we hear the sounds of a baby trying to talk and a dog trying to communicate. Language is something learned in both cases, although incomprehensible to us.

Godard seeks not only a vision and hearing "freed" from the weight of language, but a displacement of agency in the production of meaning through sounds and images. As a form of

expression associated with technical mediation, cinema has always been historically divided between the exegesis of theorists from different disciplines of the humanities and a teleological thought with regard to its modes of production. On both sides – linked to the social, cultural and historical domain of society or to the technological environment and its self-centered discourse – cinema has always been defined as the result of human activity. Replicating classical Western philosophical thought, every form of recognition and description of the world implies a relationship between thought and being. Every expressive activity has a central point, which is human consciousness and, consequently, is connected to an idealistic model of (re)construction of the real. The existence of things, however, escapes the control of language or even the phenomenological description of events, since these constitute the perspective of only one participating element (the human).

The concept of correlationism (MEILLASOUX, 2008), that is, the relationship between thought and being as the only thing we have access to, excludes all other beings – biological and non-biological – from the functioning of the world. What *Goodbye to Language* presents us is a sort of vision and hearing of a world that is not only human, but that exists beyond our ability to perceive and interpret. Roxy's "wild gaze" is the certainty that things make sense to someone other than human and that that meaning is partially beyond our reach. The world is unreachable and even our sensitive reading of it is fragile and ephemeral. The only concrete data that remains is physical matter that persists despite us. Perhaps for this reason, we have developed an attachment to the preservation of objects. Although not fully available to our consciousness, they survive our limitations.

Godard provides Roxy with the agency of the worldview. He also submits the description of time and space in his films to the cinematic apparatus. Sounds and images are the result of intentional acts of living beings and objects. In this sense, perception, traditionally attributed to the seer

and listener subject (human agents), undergoes a transformation and becomes an attribute of things in general. The perception of objects by objects accentuates the opacity of the apparatus: that is one of Godard's quests. If the film is the one that can best speak of the film, in order to understand images and sounds it is necessary that we humans become filmlike too. In the digital realm, where objects perceive and act over objects, the relationship between images and archives presents some new elements to be considered: memory is at the heart of the discussion.

Database and memory

In an article published in 2019, journalist Molly Wood interviews Jason Scott, an archivist working with the *Internet Archive*, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving archives of movies, music, concerts and other online data. Founded in 1996, the organization intends to keep these copies for consultation as a way of preserving human knowledge. Scott talks about the case of MySpace, one of the largest collections of personal files of the 2000s, which accidentally deleted approximately 12 years of posts from its users. Many of these files will never be recovered and take with them many years of work, research and memories.

Currently, databases are associated to virtually every human activity. More than storing a large amount of information that we would not be able to deal with without help, databases have the capacity of modifying our routine and relationship with time and space:

When data gathering and processing in the absence of human mediators are accomplished in this way [...], when the bureaucracy of statistics migrates into practices, machines, and devices across the social, the dataset is susceptible to becoming an agency that no longer merely molds citizens but rather spins not their words but their activities continuously by changing the shape of the environment in which they act, innocuously, felicitously, abruptly. Such is the discretion of machines (FULLER; GOFFEY, 2012, p. 95).

Manovich (2013), when stating that software is the engine of contemporary societies, also

identifies in new technologies, including the database, a different temporality. As they work at a paradigmatic level, that is, with the simultaneous coexistence of a large set of information, databases are essential for all forms of new media. The linear organization of data – its syntagmatic dimension – belongs, in his view, to an earlier historical moment: it concerns traditional media. The database-centric model is a feature not only of contemporary forms of expression, but also of our very existence in today's world. Manovich proposes that interpretive models inherited from literature cannot express the audiovisual experience thoroughly. Some of his own works, where sounds and images, previously stored in the form of a database, are randomly organized via software, were initially thought of as installations in art galleries and later adapted to DVD format (MANOVICH; KRATKY, 2005).

Similarly, Katherine Hayles (2012) sees digital tools as responsible for the development of a new cognitive pattern. She adopts the idea of technogenesis, that is, the co-evolution between humans and technical devices that would start from the modification of the environment by new technological structures. Hayles states that our human ability of interpretation, related to the deepening of the content, coexists, today, with a dispersion of focus and with a capacity for rapid grouping of categories of information previously filtered by automatic indexing mechanisms.

Digital tools for storing large amounts of information would favor a non-hierarchical structure instead of linearly organized narratives. The question that arises, however, is whether, in fact, such structures are exempt from a hierarchy or whether this is not surreptitiously present in the programming of routines, algorithms and metadata. Are technical protocols – requirements for adaptation to a global data flow network – not, in themselves, conditions that may accept a certain type of information and discard others? Put another way, as in the MySpace example, to what extent are such routines not subject to the interests (or carelessness) of the corporations that created them?

Information is certainly a valuable asset, but for reasons other than those related to material archives. The value of the digital work (when this is the case) is diluted in a virtually infinite number of copies and, therefore, cannot suffer from the deletion of a single file. However, when we talk about structures as complex as databases, unfathomable for the average user, we must take into account not only the aspects of technological obsolescence, infrastructure maintenance costs and bugs in the system, but also the interests of the administrators of such bases in preserving archives. The digital content is situated in an ambiguous place: it belongs to someone who produced it from their own actions or who paid for it in some way, but also to a complex network, managed and administered by human and non-human elements.

Regarding the security of data stored in large databases, Jason Scott says:

The digital record is very reliable until it isn't. It lets you have enormous amounts of reach, easy copying, easy access, easy sharing. But when things go wrong, they will go wrong utterly. You can recover a burned book. You can't recover a literally dead disk that doesn't work at all without spending an amount of money that nobody would spend. We have the best of times and the worst of times right now. I think that people should be aware that if something matters to them, that in some ways they need to be the caretaker (quoted in WOOD, [2019]).

The Book of Images, as a counterpoint, is built from a set of images that are not organized or managed by some kind of digital memory, but by Godard's. His memory unveiled the excerpts from films, news and other types of images for the creation of his work. The articulations between the different pieces presented are also the result of the possibilities and impossibilities of human memory. As an archon (DERRIDA, 2001) – who preserves and interprets –, Godard provides an opaque mirror of his own remembrances. In this case, the focus of interest is not just the archives that kept and provided the images for the film, but the way in which such objects were preserved in his memory. It is not an impersonal construction

nor does it intend to be. The database is also not exempt from pre-judgments, as we have seen, but it still hides itself under the cloak of impartiality. The archon's memory is by no means neutral and this fact reshapes the facts/images presented.

Archive and history

"Il me faut une journée pour faire l'histoire d'une seconde. Il me faut une année pour faire l'histoire d'une minute.

Il me faut une vie pour faire l'histoire d'une heure. Il me faut une éternité pour faire l'histoire d'un jour. On peut tout faire, excepter l'histoire de ce que l'on fait."

It takes me a day to make the history of a second. It takes me a year to make the history of a minute.

It takes me a life to make the history of an hour.

It takes eternity to make the history of a day.

We can do everything, except the history of what we do.]

(Charles Péguy)⁵

Derrida (2001) reminds us that the archive is in the care of the one who is not only responsible for its conservation, but also for its interpretation. The archon, in these terms, is closer to a particular history of the archives and, therefore, has the possibility of determining what can be seen and what must be preserved. Every interpretation involves decisions of this type and, depending on the amount of material to be worked on, these choices can become impossible ones. We saw from Godard's quotation of Charles Péguy in *The Book of Images* that narratives about things have the capacity to multiply in ever-greater quantities, often inaccessible to our own cognitive capacity. The excess of images thus constitutes a kind of non-linguistic capital, both for its infinity and for its complex nature of production of meanings. However, delegating the interpretation of images (and all other phenomena) to automated mechanisms means granting a language (of a non-human nature) the prerogative to construct narratives.

Standardization is fundamental to the herculean task of organizing an incalculable amount

⁵ Excerpt from *The Book of Images* (Godard, 2018) transcribed by the author.

of information. It is present not only in the forms of extracting, classifying, organizing and visualizing data, but also in the very way in which we use them. The standardization of tools leads to a homogenization of protocols and a blurring of creative processes. In the eagerness for a total preservation of things, we subject ourselves to an emptying of several possible meanings and a flattening of the sensible realm.

The globalized aesthetic erases local knowledge and narratives. Audiovisual technologies are one of the examples of the phenomenon that I have called technocolonialism (CASTANHEIRA, 2021). Late capitalism is structured around a complex and comprehensive chain of production and circulation that requires the development of technical solutions based on standardized technological models, regardless of local characteristics and the more specific needs of the users of these technologies. Thus, contemporary technological discourse works according to a colonialist logic, which is, following Quijano (2005), a continuation of historical colonialism, resulting in the control, modification and erasure of a wide variety of local knowledge. This epistemicide, as defined by Santos (2020), not only makes peripheral countries dependent on knowledge produced outside their borders, but also prevents them from formulating their own productive scenarios or solutions.

While the excess of databases is untranslatable without the mediation of an artificial language, the singularity of the images poses an obstacle to this generalization. It reaffirms the complexity and irreducibility of the world in an overwhelming process of categorization of everything.

Material archives are multiple and non-uniform: they have their vicissitudes. The attachment to matter and the repulsion to decay have always permeated the preservation practices, as we have already seen. Unlike the digital archive, the ruins of analog objects are visible, although not completely understandable. The state of invisibility of the digital has a metaphysical character that expands the idea of transcendence. However, the existence of the digital is more a result of political

and ideological dynamics – which determine its usefulness and its durability – than of its resistance to time. The regime of visibility and invisibility of digital files meets interests at different levels.

Fernanda Bruno (2012) mentions the notion of digital traces as a way of questioning the invisibility of digital files, balancing the character of permanent and ephemeral, of memory and oblivion. Digital traces are produced by any action mediated by digital technologies and are recoverable in case of deletion. That means that there is not, concretely, the total disappearance of digital files: but their suppression is defined by the volatility of the system. We do not decide when and if we will produce digital traces any more than we decide whether to erase them. Automated software actions can make that decision for us, just as they can decide to keep traces on file without our knowledge.

Digital traces are highly valued in practices ranging from digital marketing to control and surveillance mechanisms. The great repository of human actions on the Internet guides corporate actions to offer new products and services and to detect possible suspicious activities.

Structures for controlling human flows in large cities also benefit from digital indelible traces and the possibility of efficiently analyzing them. Facial recognition software and security cameras spread across urban space are used in different countries to identify faces in real time (PASCUAL, 2021). Artificial intelligence and sophisticated hardware are used in the handling of different types of information (CASTANHEIRA, 2020). Images are a significant part of this set of traces and, in the same way as other digital files, benefit from this "distance" reading by the machines.

The classificatory logic of the databases subverts much of the experience accumulated in years of direct work with sounds and images. Similarly to Manovich (2013), when analyzing the functions that different software offers in their menus, Carol Vernallis (2013) identifies a convergence of visual and sound procedures based on new digital editing tools. Computer's timeline became a locus of indeterminacy of me-

dia, presented in the form of colored clips. New relationships between sound and visual objects are built from a new digital praxis. More than ever, cinema is thought of as a standard digital archive.

However, even digital files are linked to material issues. From an archaeological perspective, close to that of some authors of the German media theory, we could say that “there is no software” (KITTLER, 2014). Gabriel Menotti (2019) highlights the performative aspects of the digital archive, which would be nothing more than an abstraction that is only evident in its relationship with other elements of the system:

In its most concrete dimension, there is nothing separating the film from anything else in the machine. The digital file itself is an abstraction created by the operating system as it runs. All the audiovisual information it supposedly contains is an effect of systemic activity. The work needs to be assembled through its real-time interaction with other software abstractions, such as the playback application and audio and video drivers. The file does not “mean” anything without a system capable of decoding it (MENOTTI, [2019]).

In addition to the great ease in terms of creating (and deleting) files, another aspect of digital culture has worried some filmmakers and film theorists, leading them to discuss yet another possible “death” of cinema: the virtualization of spaces.

The different deaths of cinema

“Thirty-five years of silent cinema is gone, no one looks at it anymore. This will happen to the rest of cinema. Cinema is dead.”
(Peter Greenaway)⁶

The movie theater – although Hollywood has invested in other sectors of the audiovisual and entertainment market as a whole – still seems to be the symbolically most important domain for the film. The “film form”, at least in the common sense, is still structurally related to the traditional cinematographic apparatus, even after the numerous changes in the ways of producing films. Perhaps this is why the number of filmmakers

and critics who proclaim the “end of cinema” is growing through the widespread use of digital technologies.

In a book published in 2013, Gaudreault and Marion point to some of these arguments, indicating, among the most pessimistic and the most enthusiastic, a deeper change than the mere replacement of technology. In general, both the concerns of those who understand cinema as an already dead form, like Peter Greenaway, and those who see cinema as part of a renovation process, occupying new spaces, as is the case with Philippe Dubois (2004), deal with the architecture of the exhibition space as the core of the discussion. Greenaway predicts the obsolescence of the classic film format, but at the same time anticipates the emergence of new cinematic experiences from digital devices. Dubois (2004) understands the new audiovisual experiences in museums, galleries, etc. as also cinematographic ones.

The idea of an expanded cinema, following Youngblood's proposal (1970), would be in line with the new relationships between technologies, new spaces and new conditions of spectatorship, proposing new models of seeing and hearing. Those ideas have different effects on theorists and filmmakers. Raymond Bellour (2012) makes clear this association between cinema and certain parameters of the apparatus:

The lived projection of a film in the room in the dark, the prescribed time of a more or less collective session, has become and remains the condition of a unique experience of perception and memory, defining its viewer, and that every other vision situation changes to a greater or lesser extent. And this alone can be called “cinema” (whatever the meaning the word may have elsewhere) (BELLOUR, 2012, p. 14).

Filmmaker David Lynch also shows his discomfort in thinking of movie theaters as spaces in decline:

If you're playing the movie on a telephone, you will never in a trillion years experience the film. You'll think you've experienced it, but you'll be cheated. It's such a sadness that you think

⁶ Quoted by GAUDREULT; MARION, 2013, p. 7.

you've seen a film on your... fucking telephone. Get real (Lynch quoted by GAUDREAU; MARION 2013, p. 36).

The relationship between film and digital devices, however, goes beyond the reconfiguration of the apparatus and the ways of seeing and listening to a film. More than thinking about what Wasson calls a "cinema of suggestions" (WASSON, 2007) – new conditions of spectatorship offered by small screens and small speakers, providing a personal, intimate and low definition vision and listening –, we must think about the increasingly indispensable connection between such devices, constituting a sophisticated technological network.

Physical spaces, such as the movie theater, are places where specific affections are produced. Although the standardization of the cinematographic experience has modified not only the production model, but also the modes of fruition of films, the screening room is one of the last spaces to be definitively transformed (or forgotten). The issue is too complex and involves the interest of traditional exhibitors who see their profits decrease as streaming platforms grow, producing their own new material. A response from the more traditional sectors can be seen in the recent decision by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to once again demand that, in order to be nominated for an Oscar, films must be released and exhibited for at least seven days in movie theaters (OSCAR..., 2022). Films are already screened by digital means in the vast majority of cinemas. Even so, the screening room represents a remnant of a mode of existence not essential to the database model. The digital ethos, proclaiming the virtues of permanence, of infinite and identical copies, of infallibility and uniformity, differs from the stochastic character of the theater room. In this sense, physical matter is the transgressive part of experience, offering and assimilating the flaw, the improbable and the opaque.

Conclusions: the material framing of memory

The control of the dataflow presents, as one of its consequences, the attempt to control history itself. Scientific denialism, the erasure or minimization of human tragedies, the persecution of political enemies and so many conspiracy theories have benefited from the rapid spread of false information through digital media. At the same time, efforts to preserve the physical memory of films and other documents have been spoiled or even attacked as an economically irrelevant activity. The deliberate disregard for the facilities of institutions such as the National Museum, in Rio de Janeiro, or the Brazilian Cinematheque, in São Paulo, resulted in fires in 2018 and 2021, respectively. While copies of films, scripts, old equipment and other documents were burned in the Cinematheque fire, the National Museum's collection was almost completely lost (O QUE..., 2018; INCÊNDIO..., 2021).

While databases are presented as inexhaustible and permanent archives repositories, material memory demands hard work of preservation and research. Digital files can be catalogued, organized and visualized more quickly and efficiently, while their material counterpart needs time and persistence to be investigated. The availability of analog archives faces obvious problems related to the scarcity and limitation of this type of object. They need expert mediation in order to tell us something. Museums, collectors, and public archives function as archons, responsible for guarding (and "interpreting") memory. The decentralized character of digital networks would apparently provide us with a multiplicity of perspectives that physical memory, kept in protected spaces, denies us. However, this is only partially true. In addition to the risk of summary deletion, carried out by errors or incompatibilities of the system or even by political-economic decisions of its administrators, the diversity of voices is also conditioned to external factors. The data most easily accessed are those that preserve and reinforce a series of values (political, cultural, aesthetic, etc.) that are already clearly identifiable

and accepted by most of the population. Even if the circulation of non-hegemonic information is something achievable, it can be easily controlled and banned in a more lasting way. The data available online reinforce the dominant colonialist character in a series of pre-existing social structures. Networks are as democratic as the State or international corporations allow them to be.

For all the effort they require, material ruins impose greater difficulty on their interpretation, but also on their control. They are not erased entirely. Like the remains of the National Museum, they persist, telling us a part of history that continues up to the present time. They tell us about political contexts and interests, they reflect a spirit of time in a hard and unavoidable way. Physical memory is a record of the existence of things made in the bodies of beings: an affectation in which each of the elements keeps a portion of the other for itself. Consequently, matter represents an additional difficulty for the rewriting of history.

Analog "deterioration" can be thought of as an alternative to the standardization of experience, but also as a sign of the permanence of history. At a time when the reconfiguration of memory takes place from the premises of ease of handling and malleability of digital files, we should foresee how much it can lend itself to a political reordering of everyday life. The ubiquity of digital images, in some of its current developments and uses, such as deep fakes or the proliferation of fake news, serves to suppress traces that are not politically, socially or ideologically interesting to dominant groups. The erasure of physical spaces, in addition to promoting the isolation of individuals, favors the customization of facts and the volatilization of narratives. Material ruins, even at a distance, are present and are an alternative to the domestication of memory.

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