

A journey for the spectator: believe, believe not all, believe again, despite everything

Gustavo Souza

COMOLLI, Jean-Louis (2008). *Ver e poder, a inocência perdida: cinema, televisão, ficção, documentário*.(trad. Augustin de Tugny, Oswaldo Teixeira, Rubens Caixeta). Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2008, 373p.

Resumo.

Fruto do pensamento dos últimos 15 anos do professor, crítico e documentarista Jean-Loius Comolli, a coletânea *Ver e poder* apresenta uma instigante forma de perceber os arranjos que se dão entre diversos materiais audiovisuais – filmes de ficção, documentários, *reality shows*, telejornalismo -, bem como os seus produtores. Ao debater o lugar do espectador e as ações do espetáculo, Comolli convida o leitor a empreender um novo regime de crença, em que é preciso crer, mas sem deixar de duvidar, para a partir daí perceber o cinema como arte política em potencial.

Palavras-chave: documentário, espectador, espetáculo.

Abstract:

Result of the last 15 years thinking of the teacher, critic and documentary filmmaker Jean-Loius Comolli, the collection *Ver e poder* provides a instigating way to understand the arrangements that occur between various audiovisual materials - fiction films, documentaries, reality shows, television journalism -, and their producers. In discussing the place of the spectator and the actions of the spectacle, Comolli invites the reader to undertake a new system of belief, in which we must believe, but while doubt to understand the cinema as an art policy in potential.

Key words: documentary, spectator, spectacle.

The thinking on contemporary french cinema is represented by a constellation of researchers who focus on a countless number of themes and approaches, making a variety of major brands. the various spaces are also where members of the constellation are sheltered. In Paris, there are two centers: the University of Paris 3, with Jacques Aumont, Roger Odin, Michel Marie and Philippe Dubois between their representatives, and the University of Paris 8, with Jacques Rancière and Jean-Loius Comolli like teachers. The first time a considerable number of books and texts is published in Brazil, which makes contact with this production more closely. Already the second, however, is only now beginning to arrive here the first publications. There is several titles of Rancière launched in Brazil, some exhausted, but none about film. Moreover, some of the texts of Comolli only available in the Forumdoc.bh catalogs, copies of which were in hand to hand, almost like a precious. However, the gap begins to be minimized with the publication of *Ver e poder, a inocência perdida: cinema, televisão, ficção, documentário*, Jean-Louis Comolli, launched in December 2008 by UFMG Editor.

It is the latest book by author, critic and documentary filmmaker also published in France in 2004 and bringing together articles, letters and topics for lectures produced in the last 15 years. The book carries a preface by the author specifically for the Brazilian edition, and another text, by César Guimarães and Rubens Caixeta, both professors of UFMG and responsible for selecting and organizing the collection, which discusses limits and boundaries between documentary and fiction. *Ver e poder plants* has two axes: a group discussion around the documentary, the spectacle and the viewer, another brings texts about films and filmmakers. Although this separation, the discussion about the cinema as an art political permeates all the work, which observe the place and importance of the spectator, the effects of the spectacle and the materialization (self)-mise-en-scène. Even to pay special attention to the documentary, Comolli does not lose sight of other audiovisual formats current also establishing a relationship, direct or indirect, with the documentary, such as television, video, the reality show, giving the reader a reflection on the "audiovisual" in its broad sense.

Assuming that the film is above all a meeting between machine and body, several texts of the collection reflect on who will have access to the result of images produced from this meeting: the spectator. For Comolli, the "visual verborragia" with which we must deal daily film makes the spectator, whom the critic calls cinespectator - and that terminology is not random, as we shall see below - to lose the innocence of the face images. He sees them, but they do not believe about them. Now, the images generate doubt, and this doubt is certainly that feeds the process of production and consumption. This movement, in turn, provides a route of-way, creating a sort of "equation" for the spectator: believing, not believing, believing in spite of everything. Comolli believes that, for the cinema spectator, in front of his body and his immobility contain the visual field in the darkened room, must to leave their comfort zone, to enter a place of danger, the visible gives space to invisible from the off-field, on-off games, a "floating consciousness that the eye is fully invested in the film incomplete, not fill, blind and blinding" (p. 142). This leads the viewer to doubt, but aware of the risk. Believe, discrediting. One aspect that draws more attention to this journey the ask for a new in front of the images is that, indirectly or accidentally (?), the author presents one of the instigating spectator theories without clear that this is indeed the central objective.

An important reference work of Jean-Louis Comolli is the concept of the society of spectacle, prepared by Guy Debord. Several of his texts think the production and delivery of images at the time the prevailing life in the spectacle. The reality show, as observed at various times, are indicative of this movement. It is curious that ownership of this concept to the contemporary thinking in a moment the French philosophy has been commissioned to highlight the passage of the society of spectacle (Debord, 1997) for the disciplinary society (Foucault, 2001), and thus to society of control (Deleuze, 1992). However, the ownership concept of Debord's not render the discussion Comolli dated. The use of such reference reinvigorate the debate, which aviod reads somewhat predictable of relationship is established between machines, bodies, spectators and suggests, why not, the existence of various "societies." Apart from cuts in the time and space which award the beginning and end of a society, it is also important to realize that dialogue, sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit, with authors from different theoretical traditions and different historical and analytical perspective like Bazin, Daney, Metz, Foucault, Guattari, Bourdieu, Didi-Huberman e Rancière, only contributes to the discussion. Although this group of references, we can not forget to Claudine de France, which, in his *Film and Anthropology* (1999), establishes the concept of self-mise-en-scène, which is widely used by Comolli. For the author, self-mise-en-scène includes any documentary production. She comes from the time when processes or people come by themselves to the film, revealing a particular way of dealing with the registry, assuming various formats. As for integration in time and space, and above all, the relationship between documentary and one that is shot, self-mise-en-scène is able to cope "with more liveliness and strongly subjective contradictions and collective" (p. 68), setting, therefore, as "social fact" (p.98), because during the execution of a documentary is not only the look of the film that guides the construction of meaning, but the eye crossed the world, people, objects, the viewers.

This breadth of references Comolli not only leads the discussion on the viewer and the documentary, but the films and filmmakers. From Flaherty to Cassavetes, from Vertov to Kiarostami, also passing by Buñuel, Godard and Rouch. the author writes about the assembly, the belief in the images, the *mise-en-scène*. According to Comolli, the secret desire of the viewer – “nothing to see, from both see. See, at last, too, to finally no longer see” (p. 141) - is not something new, and can be perceived in all its potential already in *The man with the camera* (1929), from Dziga Vertov, whom the author dedicates a larger analysis of breath. Considering the Vertov’s film, Comolli addresses important issues (spectator, documentary, show ...), but fail to discuss the specifics that the film shows. Scoring lead all here in a little touring production, and before it is worth emphasizing the vision of the critic on the issue of propaganda, almost inevitable point when discussing the period of soviet cinema. Like his contemporaries Eisenstein and Pudovkin, Vertov also made “cinema for the masses”, but Comolli detects that this goal was ambiguous, because the concern was Vertov reach each individual who composed that body, rejecting the idea of linking from the films with a homogeneous body. A political issue, certainly, but above all a principle of the film, says Comolli. Another point is on the assembly *vertoviana* establishing the union between the human eye and machine eye, inevitably also going by the actions of the *mise-en-scène* – “cut, combined, agencies, prepared” (p. 239) -, and that still does not prevent the clear expression of “real”. The discussion on the assembly and its effects also comments on the score of *Fishermen Aran*, Robert Flaherty, and *Earth without bread*, of Luis Buñuel. One more time, the character opaque Comolli claims that this procedure is capable of providing, either from the *mise-en-scène* of fishermen who play for a camera that fishing is no longer practicing more, or the appearance of people and animals of Las Hurdes that Buñuel put in evidence.

Attentive to the role that images do in the spectacle age, Comolli debate a very controversial issue in studies of the audiovisual sector: the television. He presents his argument so passionate, and this serves both to “praise” for the documentary, and for the negative criticism of television and its products. His point of departure, as it is not surprising, is the french television. And this, by itself, could serve as a plausible explanation to understand its position. However, many of the issues that we highlight him can also be seen in other places where the TV acts. The result of this clash is the most problematic of the arguments of Comolli. Indeed, the impact of their views on the harmful role that television has on the societies can not be disregarded.

And that leads Comolli to separate the spectators from one side the viewer, as a mere consumer of images and stimuli to which television has the task of selling; the other, the *cinespectador*, able to reflect on the world around yourself. But the question in this case is biased and leads to discussion to the reductionisms to see the television from the perspective of an “good” or “bad”, wasting the opportunity to see it in a scenario where justifications dichotomous or loaded prior conceptions of space to give perception of many facets and connections that television is capable of producing (Williams, 2003; Machado, 2005). The argument of Comolli on TV, in some cases even distune of originality and sophistication of its arguments on the documentary or the viewer, for example. His research it produces a persistent point of view, where the cinema is look like art, while the television make palatable products only. But today the opposite direction is possible and exists.

But if the discussion about the TV shows a view inspired in Adorno, the same can not be said about the plural Seara Comolli located where the documentary. Away from the academic rigor of texts that require a certain distance in relation to “objects,” Comolli did not take this recommendation to the streak, so that your writing is, as noted above, a passionate defense for the documentary. Featured is the fact that the author discuss the documentary often scoring differences in relation to fiction, but not to return to the discussions that permeated the’60s and’70s, on rigid demarcations between these two formats, but to prove, passionately, the power the documentary. Comolli says: “the documentary film draws its power from its own difficulties, what, precisely, that the real does not allow you to be happy to forget, that the world’s press, that is to shoot him if that film manufactures” (p. 148). This discussion is latent in *Under the risk of the real*, best known text of Comolli in Brazil, where the clash between documentary and

journalism gives us the opportunity to see the documentary out of the dual systems. For the author, one of the most important vectors for understanding the dynamics of the documentary is the confrontation with the other, with the *mise-en-scène* of the other, because from there is down the crisis of representation, access only, as would Niney (2002, p. 14), the "traces of the real, which are visible, perhaps, the shadow of the show, the eyes cross between spectator, and film characters.

References

- DEBORD, Guy (1997). *A sociedade do espetáculo*. Rio de Janeiro: Contraponto.
- DELEUZE, Gilles (1992). *Conversações, 1972-1990*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora 34.
- FOUCAULT, Michel (2001). *A ordem do discurso*. 7. ed. São Paulo: Loyola.
- FRANCE, Claudine de (1999). *Cinema e antropologia*. Campinas: Editora Unicamp.
- MACHADO, Arlindo (2005). *A televisão levada à sério*. 4. ed. São Paulo: Senac São Paulo.
- NINEY, François (2002). *L'épreuve du réel à l'écran. Essai sur le principe de réalité documentaire*. Bruxelas: De Boeck.
- WILLIAMS, Raymond (2003). *Television*. 3. ed. Londres: Routledge.