

## THE PATINA OF FILM. From time's cinematic reproduction to History's cinematographic representation

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### **ABSTRACT**

An attempt to put into a more systemic perspective all the possible relations between cinema and history. Four levels of historicity are proposed for film studies according to the particular way that each one of them inscribes time into film. The documental aspect inherent to film is discussed in relation to its linguistically codified character, unveiling the tension between its (technical) processes of cinematographical reproduction and its (aesthetical) codes of cinematographical representation, and pointing to the fact that its indicial traces always allow for history, in a self-reflexive discourse, to inscribe itself, either as a document or as a text, unintentionally or not, in film. Finally, three important films in the history of cinema are reinterpreted according to its respective positions regarding the relations between cinema and history.

**KEY WORDS:** History, Cinema, *Mimesis*

Certain trends of research have recently developed in film theory field, especially from the 1990's on, as a reaction to the strong influence exerted by the French post-structuralism in the theory of cinema of the seventies and eighties. Under the cover of an empirical renewal of pragmatic studies of "particular cases", such trends can be best understood as a sometimes open devaluation of the possibility of thinking cinema in its broader articulations with society and History, presenting the film studies' field increasing confinement and specialization as a benefit and a release from the so called "grand theory"<sup>1</sup>. This paper tries to go against this tide.

We'll try to show here, as a matter of fact, that the relationship between cinema and history is one of great importance for both disciplines and that cinema can be studied as a well determined historical *praxis*, that is, as a communications system to be described in all its levels of articulation and mediation with the other spheres of social life. To begin with this task, we'll turn to Marc Ferro's studies on the historicity of the film and its different reading levels, and link them to Martin-Barbero's conceptual matrix of analysis for any given system of communication and to Deleuze's pragmatism and

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<sup>1</sup> See Bordwell, David: "Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory", in Bordwell, David e Carroll, Noël (orgs.): *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1996.

transformational approach of semiotics. We'll argue, then, that this preliminary approach will allow us to elaborate a new paradigm with which we'll be able to demonstrate a constitutive tension, inherent to any kind of film, between its technical processes (the cinematic reproduction of sensorial objects) and its aesthetical codes (the cinematographic representation of cultural signs), and that this tension inscribes itself along the entire history of the cinema as its own characteristic kind of *mimesis*.

## ***Historical experience of the cinema and cinematographic experience of History***

In the middle of the 1970's, when Marc Ferro<sup>2</sup> tried to cope with the complex interrelationships between cinema and history, he began to open a path that was relatively unexplored then by other historians, either specialized in the history of the movies or not. His theoretical articulation of 'cinema's historical experience' with a 'cinematographic experience of History', brought to the film studies' field new possibilities and horizons, as well as to other kinds of historical research. Thinking cinema as a veritable 'agent of History', Ferro inscribed the history of cinema in the broader stream of social history, avoiding its confinement into a mere section of the history of the arts or the communications theory, and allowing for the insertion of the most important problems and phenomena related to the cinematographic *praxis* in the broader sphere of the social, economical and political debates of our time.

Such a move implies, nevertheless, a constant methodological need of double reading the interrelationship between cinema and History, a kind of "zigzag" thought in which both terms must be articulated through the mapping of the multiple links that a film establishes or may happen to establish, unintentionally or not, with its own time as well as with its past and future, that is to say, with time and History. Hence, film analysis must also provide an analysis of the society that produced it. But this is a very delicate and complex task to accomplish, dependent upon an infinite number of mediations, and to which Ferro states only some research coordinates; these are meant to provide the historian not only with the possibility of thinking a film in its historical context (thus understanding the historical experience of cinema in a more traditional approach), but also of studying a given historical time **through** a film, thinking the cinematographic experience of History as an experience that's grounded in the cinematographic *praxis* itself.

It is about this grounding experience that we would like to talk here, since Ferro's work points towards it without plainly elaborating it in a conceptual key. As Eduardo Morettin well observed, Ferro "didn't wrote a more developed work that could plainly demonstrate the accuracy of his analysis"<sup>3</sup>. Although his coordinates are full of distinct research possibilities on the relationship between cinema and

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<sup>2</sup> Ferro, Marc: *Cinema e História*, Ed. Paz e Terra, São Paulo, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Morettin, Eduardo: "O Cinema como fonte histórica na obra de Marc Ferro", in *História e Cinema* (Capelato, Morettin, Napolitano e Saliba, orgs.), Alameda Casa Editorial, São Paulo, 2007, p.46. The translation is mine.

History, and given the fact that these relations are always intertwined irregularly or even in a conflicting way - not only along the history of the cinema but also, many times, inside a single film - such possibilities are never clearly realized, in Ferro's work, from an overall combination of their possible articulations with History. Our main goal here is to think this combination, making explicit the entire array of investigative possibilities opened up by Marc Ferro, as well as the conceptual matrix or core that presides over its many articulations. The seemingly scarce and fragmented character of Ferro's coordinates must be shown, on the contrary, as a coherent and valid method of study for films, as well as other audiovisual forms of media.

In a primary attempt, the problem can be formulated in the following manner: if it's not that difficult to think Ferro's first articulation (the historical experience of cinema) as such, how can we possibly understand, on the other hand, his second articulation (the cinematographic experience of History)? Of what would this experience exactly consist, or, to put it differently, why and in what ways do films relate to History, beyond its evident material function of a possible document?

Thinking film as an historical artifact, Ferro studies the cinematographic experience not only as a new form of art or industry (not even as the modern industrial civilization's "true art"), but as a social specific form of cognitive *praxis* that must be scrutinized by the historian in all its constitutive aspects. This requires a constant "crossfading" between the multiple layers into which the cinematographic experience may unfold when History is comprised as the "general frame" into which the cinematographic experience can take place and cinema is, in the other way round, studied as a specific mode or way to experience History itself.

On one side, the artistic traditional criteria used by critics to study and write about films ('style', 'genre', 'authorship') are clearly insufficient, inasmuch as they generally don't take into account a whole range of external factors that are also conditioning films as texts (that is, as messages whose contents must be culturally decoded) as well as merchandises (that is, "copies" of a socially value-charged product that must be distributed and exhibited). On the other side, "merely" placing a film in its proper historical context and understanding it as a product or a message to be decoded with the help of a specifically localized knowledge of a particular *Stimmung*, belonging to a certain nation or culture, is also unsatisfying due to the international character that cinema ever had, since its beginnings, as an instrument, as well as an effect, of the capitalist world merchandise expansion.

We are not concerned here, therefore, just with finding a way to insert the history of cinema in the wider context of a "General History", but with obtaining an investigative method that may ease the zigzag movement between cinema (understood as the specific object pertaining to an historical discipline called the history of cinema) and History (understood as a possible - and probable - object of an historically determined activity known as cinematography). Shaping such a method, though, depends on determining

in a more precise way the multiple reading possibilities that a film presents regarding its relationship towards History. Ferro's research coordinates are extremely useful in this sense, but purely indicative.

Although Ferro doesn't say it in an explicit manner, we can find at least four distinct film reading levels in his work. This is due to the fact that Ferro works with two simultaneous ruptures, in two distinct fields of analysis: rupture with the dichotomy 'fiction film/documentary film' in the cinema field, rupture with the dichotomy 'true enunciate, therefore historical/false enunciate, therefore fictional' in the History field. In this way, Ferro tries to consider (for a theory of History as well as for a theory of cinema) not only the fictional elements that are inevitably present in the so-called documentary films, but also the documental elements pertaining to any fiction film – allowing us to think, at the same time, in the fictional role that a “true” document can historically assume at a certain moment (for instance, the propagandistic use of the newsreels during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War) as well as in the unavoidable documental character that any historical artifact can acquire for the researcher.

Thus, Ferro thinks cinema's historical status in many different levels that co-exist and co-inhabit any film in different “precipitation” degrees. Ferro thinks a film as a “History charged” object that is time impregnated by multiple duration layers that are intertwined and superposed in a very confusing way sometimes. It is the critic's task, as well as the theoretician and the historian's, to establish a precise method of analysis and “decantation” of these many different cumulative layers of historicity that gradually precipitate themselves over a film.

In a first level of historicity, we speak of the film's insertion in real time as a material document and direct testifying evidence of a singular moment – the one in which filming took place. Here, the relationship that can be traced between film and time is strictly technical, for it is regulated by the temporal gap that separates the frames at a certain speed rate. Time here is just an index for the mechanical reproduction of film as a cinematic print that has the power to embody a given duration.

The second level refers to the many aesthetical ways in which a cinematographic discourse may not only project itself over certain amount of time (its duration), but also establish unlimited time based relationships that may be entirely fictional or imaginary, may be related to a given historical moment or even may relate directly to the ideas of Time and History as such. In this level, films are meant to be studied as texts in the semiotic sense, inasmuch as they manipulate time flows, as symbolic narrative conventions, in order to convey imaginary ways to represent History. This process has reached, in a relatively early stage of cinema's history, the point of developing distinct genres that try to represent specific aspects of History's supposed modes of existence (“period films” for the past, “sci-fi films” for the future, the “based on a true story films” for the present...), thus codifying numberless effects of meaning used to represent time and History in many different ways.

A third level would comprise the relations that a film necessarily has with History beyond its technical and aesthetical aspects: the broader historical context in which it was produced, at first, but also the particulars linked to the possible different ways whether it's going to be well received by its own society or not, as well as by other ones. Duration, here, is the lapse of time spent from the initial film's conception up to its final exhibition – its “ritualistic” process of production, distribution and exhibition, as well as the reactions and consequences aroused by the film along the course of years, both inside and outside the history of cinema. Film here is an object that may be copied several times along its history, to be bought and sold as merchandise.

The fourth and last level is the one that opens up the ‘gates of time’ to film as a palimpsest: every little detail that may escape the film's intentional meaning or discourse (its ‘text’) and, nonetheless, gets printed as a testifying document, an undeniable index of History on film, precisely because it's not there for a purposeful meaning. Such a deepening on the degree of a film's historicity is possible only when a series of institutional mechanisms, like archives and museums, are set up to ensure the keeping, conservation and eventual restoration of its copies along an indefinite duration of time.

A systematic presentation of these four levels of film historicity can be crisscrossed with the main four features of any given communication's media network, as described by Jesus Martin-Barbero, over two distinct axis of analysis – the diachronic (which is oriented by the polarity between Cultural Matrixes and Industrial Formats) and the synchronic (determined by the tension between the many different Logics of Production available and the no less diverse Reception Abilities). According to Martin-Barbero, “relations between Cultural Matrixes and Logics of Production find themselves mediated by different kinds of *Institutionalities*, while relations between Cultural Matrixes and Reception Abilities are mediated by many different ways of *Sociability*. Between the Logics of Production and the Industrial Formats, *Technicalities* do mediate, and between Industrial Formats and Reception Abilities we can find the *Ritualities*<sup>4</sup>”.

If we apply Martin-Barbero's scheme to the four experiencing levels of History on film that we believe to have found in Marc Ferro's work, we'll be able to obtain for films the same layers or *strata* that we can extract from Deleuze's transformational component in his pragmatological approach of semiotics<sup>5</sup>:

A – ANALOGICAL: every film, be it fictional or “documental”, can be considered as an analogical support for the **reproduction** of time through *technical* devices made along the lines of the INDUSTRIAL FORMATS of cinema.

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<sup>4</sup> Ver Martin-Barbero, Jesus: “Anos 1990: Pensar a sociedade desde a comunicação”, in *Ofício do Cartógrafo*, Ed. Loyola, São Paulo, 2004, p.230. Our translation.

<sup>5</sup> Deleuze, Gilles e Guattari, Felix: *Capitalisme et schizofrenie – Mille Plateaux*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1980, p.182.

B – SYMBOLIC: every film, be it fictional or “documental”, can be considered as a symbolical text that **represents** its own historical moment (or any other historical moment, be it real or imaginary) through *social* forms of codifying meaning in articulation with a set of CULTURAL MATRIXES.

C - STRATEGICAL: every film, be it fictional or “documental”, can be considered as a polemical document that **represents** its own historical moment through *ritual* mechanisms that engage the RECEPTION ABILITIES of the film spectator.

D – SELF-REFLEXIVE: every film, be it fictional or “documental”, can be considered as a palimpsest for the mimetical **reproduction** of its own historical LOGICS OF PRODUCTION through *institutional* apparatuses that may select them and preserve them.

The first layer of historicity regards the technical history of the mechanical and electronical devices employed in the reproduction of sounds and images and its many different types of industrial formats. It is not called analogical because it refers only to analogical technologies as opposed to, or different from, the digital ones, but because this layer is mainly related to the physical, material processes of transduction in a **pre-signifying**, indexical level, in which material drives of luminous and sound intensities are registered. This is the cinematic layer of cinema and “film”, here, refers to a physical object.

The second layer is all about the classical problems related to the constitution of one or more cinematographical languages and its aesthetical as well as cultural aspects as reflected in the movies. It is called symbolic in the precise sense that this is the **signifying** level in which an imaginary signifier takes on the cinematic flux and codifies it as a recognizable stream of historical forms. This is cinema’s cinematographical layer, properly speaking and “film”, here, means a mental text.

As for the third layer, it refers to the political as well as social and economical dimensions of cinema as an industry, as well as to the history of its ritualization as a spectacular form of entertainment and its social history as a specific form of *praxis*. It’s called strategical because it’s directly related to the constitutive tension between the two previous layers: in this layer, the cinematographical signifier may establish its hegemony over the entire projection and subjugate the cinematic flux or fail. In this level, signs are thrown into the social battlefield and may be associated with different régimes of enunciation – either controlling their sense, either being caught by their drive to loose intended meaning and acquire new, unimaginable ones. At this level, the cinematographical signifier is constantly threatened by a possible uprising of cinematic simulacra, so we may call it a **counter-signifying** level. As such an issue can only be decided at the spectator’s level, we may say also that this is cinema’s ideological layer and that “film”, here, means a social event.

The fourth layer reveals us History, as well as the history of cinema, in the dim, shady mirror of its own duration, and includes all previous layers, in which the historical experience of cinema happens, to shape a truly cinematographical experience of History. It’s called self-reflexive because this is the level in

which films are aware of their own historicity and become self-conscious enough to play **post-signifying** games with its own history (the history of cinema) as well as with History itself. This is cinema's historical layer, *par excellence*, and "film", here, means a historical document, be it "true" or "false".

Each one of these layers presents, though, its own specifications regarding History, engaging the research on film studies in different aspects of the cinematographical *praxis* and distinct spheres of social mediation.

While the two first levels are short-duration "measures" that shape the very existence of a given film (from "speed rate" recording time to "running" projection time), the last two levels provide the long-duration intervals to which a film can be "exposed" (from a "profit rated" circulation time of film as merchandise to the frozen, captured time of film as a historical document). This is what makes possible to associate these four film layers to Martin-Barbero's generic features of a given system of communication, since the first two levels (A and B) correspond to a properly diachronical axis that describes a flow of historical transformations in the industrial forming technics and in the cultural codified modes of communication, while the other two last levels (C e D) are related to long-term, synchronical features that determine film's logics of production in the economical sphere, and film's reception abilities in the social one.

The entire history of cinema can be inscribed in the diachronical axis by tracing the connexions between the relatively fast changes of its industrial formats and the wide variety of cultural matrixes that are available to cinematographical encoding, thus delineating a generative map of a concrete, given combination of the two. The generative component of cinema is its own specific *praxis* as a multiple generator of languages and codes, genres and styles: it is always a certain regulation of a cinematic segment of time (its "contents") with a cinematographical trace of expression (its "language").

The other axis can not be really considered as synchronical in the structural sense - for it is related to long-term changes in the economical sphere of the logics of production, on one hand, and the social realm of the spectator's reception abilities, on the other. It is not a paradigmatical axis of "eternal" forms that shape the short-term diachronical axis, since this last one is precisely generating its own paradigmatical forms all the time. It's rather the axis that points not to the history of cinema as such, but to the external side of any cinematic generative machine: the no less changeable realm of outside History and its mutably concrete engagements.

According to Gilles Deleuze<sup>6</sup>, the second axis could be called the machinical component of cinema - not to be confounded with its mechanical or technical aspect alone, for the circuit that goes from the cinematic camera to the cinematographical eye is much more wider and has many more features and strata. Mapping these strata would be to delineate the diagrammatical component of cinema as a machine -

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<sup>6</sup> Deleuze, Gilles e Guattari, Felix: *Capitalisme et schizofrenie – Mille Plateaux*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1980, p. 182.

the abstract machine of cinema, that articulates the concrete engagements that combine a whole logics of production (its “contents”) with another whole order of abilities to decode (or not!) a perforated stripe projection as system of signs. The machinical component is what allows cinema to actualize itself again and again as a concrete historical event.

We are rather concerned, in this article, with the transformational components of the machine, that is, the logic with which a given concrete system of cinematographical signs is not only generated but also transformed along the experiencing levels of cinema previously described with the help of Marc Ferro and Martin-Barbero. From this perspective, we can criss-cross the inner levels of the history of cinema (A and B) with the outer levels that relate the cinematographical *praxis* to History (C and D): Industrial Formats and Logics of Production (levels A e D) connect us directly to cinema’s power to convey a **cinematic reproduction of time** according to a quantitative variation, short-termed for the first level and long or even very long-termed for the fourth one. This is the axis where the self-reflexive qualities of a film may be empowered or undermined by its analogical properties, conferring on the cinematographical *mimesis* a specific indexical “flavor”. On the other hand, Cultural Matrixes and Reception Abilities (levels B e C), are always related to the question of a **cinematographical representation of History**, in two distinct qualitative keys, this time, for if the second level answers for the cinema’s symbolic properties to represent imaginary time fluxes - be them historical or not, the third one refers to the strategical factors that may reinforce or undermine the cinematographical discourse in a given historical moment.

We are now in a better position to understand Ferro’s way to analyse a documentary film as “fiction” and vice-versa: as long as any film can be analysed both as a physical document and a cultural text (that is, considering all of the possible transformations that it may happen in the way from its pre-signifying cinematic level to its signifying cinematographical level and then towards counter and post-significances), one must read documentary films through its specific signifying processes of shaping films as texts - on one hand - and analyse fictional films, as any other historical document, through all of its technical and material singularities and specificities that may point, indexically speaking, to a given moment of History (noticing the presence or absence of sound and colours in a movie consists in the most obvious example of this kind of analysis).

“Synchronicity” here stands only for the way that different layers or strata of time – time disjunctions and conjunctions, time’s durations and time’s instants – are combined and articulate themselves in a given historical moment, printing themselves along different lines of exposure for the same film (again, in its double meaning of “copy” or “roll”, on one side, and “art work” or “text”, on the other). Thus, we can map any concretely historical way of cinematographical *praxis* in its own singularity (study of the generative component in the history of cinema) or we can turn ourselves to the concrete historical engagements that make possible any kind of cinema and draw a more abstract (but no less real)

diagram of the general relations between cinema and History (study of the machinical component of the history of cinema as such and of its relations with other historical machines).

The diachronical vector provides us with a transformational model that is able to articulate, inside the history of cinema and the analysis of films, an unavoidable dialectics that evolves, in any kind of movie, between the cinematic plan of real reproduction of a given segment of time and the cinematographical level of imaginary expression of a supposed reality. As long as the techno-institutional features that create and format cinema as a spectacular entertainment are necessarily mediated by socio-ritual instances that codify and decodify films as texts, the cinematographical representation will tend to erase, in a short-term level, any index whatsoever of the very same cinematic reproduction time processes that make it possible. Such processes, invisible in a short -time to the “layman's eye”, become physically apparent on a film with the passing of time, in a cumulative effect that looks like the patina that sometimes covers an ancient painting and gradually overcomes its signifiers to acquire an ever increasing visibility (also “audibility”, in the case of sound films), that is as clear as the constant change in the industrial film formats reveals to the spectator, in the long-time run, the artificial and “defective” character of the former film copies that were put into circulation.

In this way, we can advance far beyond the simple truism that states that any film reflects, unintentionally or not, its own historical moment, since the fundamental question is to think (as Ferro tried to do) a cinematographical experience of History that must be grounded in the historical experience of cinema precisely not to be confounded with it - in order to demonstrate how the cinematographical *praxis* itself consists in a distinct, particular way of experiencing History that steams directly from the dialectics, already mentioned above, and inherent to any kind of film, between the ideal “immediacy” of the techno-cinematical processes that are able to register a segment of time and the unavoidable cultural and social mediations that the many different ways of cinematographical representation of History impose upon the reading of a given film.

### ***From cinematic time reproduction...***

The trouble with the cinematographical reconstruction of the historical past, therefore, ceases to be a problem related only to the so-called *Period Films*, to reveal itself as probably the central question of the entire cinematographical *praxis*. There's a kind of subliminal “philosophy of history” in any form of movie, but such “philosophy” doesn't present itself always in the same way along the history of cinema, nor does it confound itself with the presence or absence – inside the filmic text – of any specific form of time or History representation: it's rather a filmic experience of History than a way of thinking or representing it, and it must be unveiled through a disclosure of the intricate relationship that different

series of films can keep between themselves all over the history of cinema, as well in the cinematic level of technical reproduction as in the esthetical level of cinematographical representation.

This means that cinema reflects History the more intensely the more it reflects about itself, that is, the more it is keen on its own contradictions as a communicational *praxis* that is based in an inherent disjunction between the (documental) reproduction and the (textual) representation of its own historical time. Self-reflexivity in the cinema, therefore, is not only a sophisticated language effect related to experimental or modernist cinema, but a key factor in the analysis of the (historical) relationships between cinema and History, as well the many forms that the cinematographical “thought” has shaped in the attempt of expressing these relations.

The question of self-reflexivity in cinema - too wide to be completely explored in the limits of this article - and of major importance for a proper historical understanding of the cinematographical *praxis*, can only be dealt with when this *praxis* is studied through the questions historically raised by itself.

In an attempt to think which were the main questions that cinema raised along its history, we'll point now to three significant moments of this history, not only regarding the aesthetical development of cinema as an art form, but also in the precise sense we're discussing here, that is, the relationship that cinema can entertain, self-reflexively, not only with its own history but also with History in the broadest sense.

The first of these moments is the end of the twenties and the beginning of the thirties, a key moment for the cinematic level of development of reproduction movie techniques that's marked by the arrival of sound as an undeniable element of the cinematographical art - and by an ever increasing consciousness, in the cinematographical level of aesthetical discussion, of cinema's artistic autonomy regarding other social forms of expression. This new consciousness acquires its ultimate self-reflexive expression in Dziga Vertov's work, especially on his last silent movie, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), a veritable treaty on the self-reflexiveness of the (by then relatively new) possibilities of cinematographical sense construction through an exclusive use of the inner cinematic qualities that are specific to the camera as a technical device to register sounds and images. It's a moment of euphoria regarding the possibility of an immediate reproduction of social reality through cinema, and of an intense aesthetical debate among critics, movie makers and theoreticians over the role that other codes, inherited by the cinema from other artistic forms of expression like theater and literature, music and painting, would have in the movies, or not<sup>7</sup>. Vertov tried to embrace, with his work, precisely the first possibility, hence his enthusiastical reception of sound in the movies (against almost everyone at the time) inclusive - and especially - when it was synchronised with the image.

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<sup>7</sup> See on this debate the excellent book by Albera, François: *Eisenstein e o construtivismo russo*, Ed. Cosac&Naify, São Paulo, 2002.

To Dziga Vertov, cinema should strive to convey an immediate reproduction of its time through the spelling of a **cine(gra)matics** totally deduced from the inner properties of the filming device, and thus questioning the “ilusionistic” realism proper to the traditional methods of pictorial, literary or theatrical representation that were, up to then, invoked by critics and movie makers as well as a way to legitimate cinema as an art form. In this regard, Vertov is, probably, the first movie maker that thought the cinematographical *praxis* as a *mimesis*, that is, as a “showing up” or direct presentation of the social reality that, at the apex of its technical and institutional development would replace or even turn into obsolescence the traditionally established social forms and conventions for representing reality<sup>8</sup>.

This hope or belief in the ability that cinema supposedly have to immediately reproduce its own social reality would vanish very fast, along the thirties and forties, with the spreading of an eminently propagandistical use of film and its documental texture. The vertovian “Project” of reducing cinematographical representation to its intrinsically cinematic properties has revealed itself as utopic (in the best of options) or hypocrite (in the worst scenario) - since the cinematographical *mimesis*, even under its classical documentary form, had never identified itself completely with the real of cinematic reproduction, rather counter-balancing itself over the thin changing line that separates precariously (and film to film) what belongs to the documental realm from what is conceived and perceived as fictionally intended, and developing itself precisely over this inherent tension that splits the cinematographical *praxis* from the inside out.

The second key moment in a self-reflexive history of cinema is, thus, the moment in which a still naive belief in the realistic “powers” of the cinematic reproduction gives place to properly modernist awareness that the cinematographical *mimesis* can not pretend to simply exclude codified representation without running the risk of watching its triumphant return.

### ***...to the cinematographical representation of History***

It was the italian neo-realism, and especially the work of Rossellini, that had the merit of formulating this question explicitly through films, looking for that minimal point (or “zero”) between cinematic reproduction and cinematographical representation that would allow this last one to boost its inner cinematic level instead of taming or hiding it. Although this was also the aim of certain “naturalistic” tendencies of the documentary film at the time – like the american *direct cinema* and the french *cinéma-vérité* movement – the most interesting films of the modernist period were fictional or hybrid productions related to the wave of “new cinemas” that raised, from the nineteen fifties on, with the italian post-war cinema as a possible industrial modelo or a source of aesthetical inspiration.

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<sup>8</sup> For a good discussion on the idea *mimesis* as *Darstellung* (presentation or “show up”) as opposed to the current idea of *mimesis* as *Vorstellung* (representation), see Costa Lima, Luiz: *Mimesis: desafio ao pensamento*, Ed. Civilização Brasileira, Rio de Janeiro, 2000.

An important step on this process is the film *Salvatore Giuliano* (1961), by Francesco Rosi. It's a fictional reconstruction of a political murder that was still "alive" in people's memories at that time; Rosi's film literally "makes history" when it dares to tell – through a new form of cinematographical representation – a totally different (and opposed) version for facts that had happened ten years before, frontally contradicting the official version that was put then into circulation by the "weekly news" that were produced in a "documentary style". *Salvatore Giuliano*, a "fiction film", demonstrates the undeniable fictional nature of the documental images that were shown up right after a murder that was "sponsored" by the forces of "Law and order" – the murder of Salvatore Giuliano, the outlaw – rescuing thus the possibility of an aesthetical articulation of a filming method that may potentially enhance the cinematographical mimetic properties of film in order to establish an historical truth.

Extremely revealing, in this sense, is the cut-up method of editing that Rosi employed: instead of following the chronological order of the facts to provide a clearer (although delusive) narrative, Rosi tangles up the chronology of facts in a constant "zigzag" between a narrated past and the narrative present of the film. With this, he avoids putting the spectator in front of a consumated representation of the narrated facts (a very common problem of ideology that happens in most films that are *based on a true story...*) to represent, instead, the endless and uncertain search for the historical truth. To Rosi, this kind of research can not ignore the traditional instruments of cinematographical representation, but must rather try to soften its ideological effects - through the use of unprofessional actors, for instance, or with a *mis-en-scène* that undervalues the camera point of view as a trustable eyewitness of the facts, instead of enhancing it.

Cinematographical representation here is not "abolished" or "questioned" in the name of pure cinematic reproduction, as it happens in the work of Dziga Vertov, but must be reduced to its ground zero and be acquainted in its inevitability in order to better reveal possible truth effects that generally lay hidden in the cinematic reproduction level as such.

This moment in the history of cinematic self-reflexivity had generated a series of important aesthetical developments throughout the sixties and seventies, shaking the up-to-then unquestionable "status" (at least, to the general public's perception) of documentary cinema as a mode of filming exempt from any kind of representational procedure, and promoting a mix-up of genres that survived the more radical tide of *avant-garde* experimentalism, and has consolidated itself as one of the more important trends of the third historical moment that concerns us here, from the end of the nineteen seventies to the eighties on.

This new moment is contemporary to a certain aesthetical weakening of the many different forms of cinematographical modernism, and displays a great indifference and scepticism towards the possibility of presenting, through a movie, any given historical truth. It is also contemporary to Marc Ferro's own

work and is, therefore, symptomatic of a last “turn of the screw” for the cinematographical self-reflexivity – conscious nowadays not only of its own discursive and significant level, but also of its own history as history of the cinema.

The unquestionable mark for this third moment is Andrzej Wajda’s film *Man of Marble* (1977), in which all the levels or layers that deploy a certain experience of History in cinema are shown up for the first time in a clear, self-conscious cinematographical discourse. Being a fictional film that largely uses authentic documental images from the 1950’s Poland country, as well as another series of fake documental images that are supposedly referent to the same historical epoch, Wajda’s film is built around three distinct temporal layers, organized by the editing in a complex form: first, we have the narrative “present tense” of the film, shot in 1970’s Poland and evidenced by a high contrast, bright colored photography; a second layer represents the film character’s memories of a supposed number of facts that would have happened in the 1950s, and which the film’s protagonist tries to research: this second layer is evidenced by a low-contrast, paled-colored pastel tones photography to symbolize the weakening subjective memory of the many different characters that successively recall past events. A third and last layer consists of black and white documental footage pertaining to the same epoch to which the film refers to: these images, nevertheless, aren’t always authentic, for they are very well mingled with another, fourth series of B&A images (supposedly true but, in fact, entirely fictional), that allow Wajda to insert his fictitious characters in Poland’s post-2nd World War history.

Although the film apparently corroborates, in the cinematographic representational level, the idea that a documental image provides an automatic access to real historical truth – since the film’s protagonist is a TV film maker that unravels an obscure political episode depicting the fall of a (fictitious) party leader from the 50s through a difficult research of documentary film archives – its final effect is exactly the opposite because these archival images eventually reveal themselves - in the literal, diegetical narrative level of the film - to be forgeries intended to hide the real historical truth. But it is also at the subterranean cinematic reproduction level that *Man of Marble* announces our contemporary cinema’s self-reflexivity, since its basic procedure is to make supposed “period” pictures that are entirely false and help to cement the representation’s imaginary effect. But the more attentive spectator can easily perceive texture differences between the authentic documental images (truly indexicalised by the material deterioration due to the passing of time) and the fake ones.

*Man of Marble* introduces, therefore, a language effect that would become very common in the 1980/90s cinema (from *Zelig* to *Blair Witch Project*): the fake documentary, in which the cinematographical representation mimetizes the supposedly immediate features of cinematic reproduction in order to legitimate itself not only as authentic historical document, but precisely as a fictional text.

We arrive here at an opposite stance towards modernist cinema times. It's not about reducing cinematographical representation to its cinematic ground in the sake of historical truth any more, but quite the contrary: such reduction is simulated as a final lure of the cinematographical representation, making it closer to the "documental" texture that any film, while still in its rushes or as unedited material, always presents. Thus, the new possibilities that digital technology offers in terms of an ever more realistic (or even hyper-realistic) simulation of any kind of visual or sound texture don't appear in this precise historical moment by chance. Nowadays, movies can simulate not only any given period of History but its own history as well as its own different styles and forms of aesthetics - as films like Robert Rodriguez's *Planet Terror* (2007) plainly demonstrate.

Nonetheless, film's self-reflexivity must not be understood only as a cinematographical "figure of speech", as said above - to be connected to one or more aesthetical modes or styles of representation - but as a symptom of the constitutive relations that the cinematographical *mimesis* entertains with its own *práxis*, anthetically divided between its documental level of cinematic reproduction and its textual level of cinematographical representation.

We may now provide a transformational diagram for the cinematographical *mimesis* that relates the two first levels of film historicity, its analogic and symbolic layers or aspects, with its two main functions or features, the textual and the documental:

<i>Mimesis</i> and cinema	FILM AS DOCUMENT	FILM AS TEXT
CINEMATIC REPRODUCTION	RUSHES	DOCUMENTAL FILM
CINEMATOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION	FAKE DOCUMENTARY	FICTIONAL FILM

We don't take into account here the other two outer levels of film historicity - the strategic and the self-reflexive - because they are entirely conditioned by the empirical generative maps that each concrete series of historical films may provide. In the diagrammatical and transformational level in which this article has placed its search, the cinematographical *mimesis* can not present itself under another type of disguise.

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