Politics of perception, politics of aesthetics
Políticas da Percepção, Política da Estética

Catarina Mourão

Aquilo que me interessa em documentário é precisamente a procura de uma forma que se ajuste e que potencie a história que eu quero contar. E aqui reside para mim a dimensão verdadeiramente política do documentário, a questão do ponto de vista traduzida e reinventada na sua forma. De certa forma para mim o conteúdo separadamente da sua forma não existe. A partir do momento que quero contar uma história que tem as suas raízes no "real" o desafio é sempre como é que a vou contar, qual a forma justa para contar essa história, e o pensamento que quero gerar no espectador. Nesse processo de encontrar a forma, a própria história vai-se construindo e reinventando.

Fernão Pessoa Ramos

A política da representação documentária traz essencialmente a dimensão da ação, a dimensão da práxis. Assim, ela pode, ou não, ser carregada no modo estético. Nos grandes modos documentários (Bill Nichols intuiu, de modo pioneiro, estas modalidades) a *mise-en-scène* da ação é aquela do Cinema Verdade (mas não a da 'mosca' retraída na parede do Cinema Direto): é aquela em que o cineasta intervém com sua performance no mundo e, na intersubjetividade pelo sujeito-da-câmera e com o sujeito-em-cena, figura o embate com a realidade social, na tomada. Ela, tomada, aparece então aberta para o indeterminado e para o imponderável, deixando de lado as amarras da decupagem e do roteiro. Para muitos, o documentário deve ser definido neste espaço, o da existência engajada pelo filme na tomada 'direta'. O engajamento é o que justifica a presença na encenação como liberdade da existência, em sua previsão fílmica.

Já a expressão estética audiovisual documentária é perceptiva, se quiserem, mas vai além disto. Como é sensorial, em seu modo pleno, torna-se também háptica, no sentido do encontro do corpo com aquilo que lhe transcende e naquilo que a câmera, como mundo, crê conseguir colar-se – pois sempre reflexo e automatismo. Tocar seria lançar nosso corpo (agora um imenso e quase infinito corpo, sem órgãos, sem imagem) desafiando a medida transcendental dos sentidos. E assim, qual seria a medida do toque que desafia a subjetividade?

Há certamente uma dimensão política no desafio do corpo que afirma a si no 'tocar'. E, mais ainda, quando assim se coloca chocando-se ao biopoder que o restringe, para afirmar-se em potência. Se nos fixarmos a seu sentido mais estreito, aquele do engajamento existencial, política que se faz no campo da práxis, mas nela não é delimitada, pois foge ao campo da ação-reação e da medida pelo esquema sensório motor. Para um novo sujeito pede-se uma nova medida e um corpo liberado: aquele capaz de tocar.

Ilana Feldman

Aí estaria a dimensão política e dissensual da forma-cinema, compreendo o cinema na esteira das contribuições de um autor como Jacques Rancière: não como um conjunto de representações inteligíveis e consensuais da realidade, mas como uma nova partilha e reconfiguração do sensível, pois, se a política opera esteticamente, os afetos gerados pelo cinema operariam politicamente. Sendo assim, o cinema documentário não é simplesmente um conjunto de imagens e sons comprometidos com uma ideia factual de verdade, uma reunião de representações visuais e sonoras da realidade, mas um agente cognitivo e sensível, um operador, potencialmente transformador, da própria realidade. É por isso que, sem dúvida, o documentário, campo de forças plurais e práticas distintas, com toda a sua instabilidade, deslizamento e indeterminação enquanto gênero específico, institui um espaço comum de visibilidade, experiência e de pensamento. Nesse sentido, não apenas existe a possibilidade de uma filosofia através de meios cinematográficos como ela precisa ser reinventada, singularmente, no corpo a corpo entre cada obra e as leituras críticas que dela se podem fazer. Uma filosofia por meio do cinema tem de ser assim não apenas uma filosofia do movimento, mas uma filosofia em movimento.

Mohanad Yaqubi

Any film is a political statement, with or without the filmmaker's intention. The illusion of a de-politicised, objective cinema is simply related to how much the filmmaker is aware of the political and social contexts, and this won't prevent the spectators from looking at the politics. Thinking of the term "the imperfect cinema", is perhaps key to watching/ analysing film. Embedded in the form (and not the content) the filmmaker choses, this conscious approach to the imperfect medium as a metaphor of the deflected reality it represents, allows for a space of dialogue and interpretation with its audience. This is when audience becomes part of the process, and when the filmmaker becomes the spectator.
In a way, representing a community, a cause, a struggle, is an indication of affection, of holding responsibility toward an experience. The line between propaganda and film is really thin, it is a matter of the way how a critic can be presented within an image while being in solidarity, looking for the imperfects as an act of solidarity. Any film is a political statement, with or without the filmmaker's intention. The illusion of a depoliticized, objective cinema is simply related to how much the filmmaker is aware of the political and social contexts, and this won't prevent the spectators from recognizing the political stance. Thinking of the term, "imperfect cinema,"[iv] is perhaps key to watching/analyzing film. Embedded in the form (and not the content) the filmmaker choses, this conscious approach to the imperfect medium as a metaphor of the deflected reality it represents allows for a space of dialogue and interpretation with its audience. This is when audience becomes part of the process, and when the filmmaker becomes the spectator.

[iv] From the text "For an Imperfect Cinema", written by Julio García Espinosa, 1968

Dario Cecchi

If you assume, as I do, that the primary object of aesthetics is not art, but perception, which is aesthesis for the Greeks, then the label 'politics of perception' is identical with 'politics of aesthetics'. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Walter Benjamin argues that the history of art is the history of how perception changes according to social or technological transformations. I believe Rancière would agree with him–although he disagrees with him about other formulations of that essay, such as 'aestheticizazion of politics'. Rancière's concept of 'partage du sensible' is at the same time political and aesthetic. He thinks that the constitution of political power, what he calls 'police', depends on the introduction of an a priori principle that distributes different perceptual modes, and consequently different levels of experience, to groups and individuals. Police thus establishes an order within society.
I believe cinema does not replace this aesthetic-political device: its functioning is overruled, not deactivated. In the *Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, Esfir Shub used only archive materials. These materials were mainly a document of the Czarist propaganda, she reused for instance the footage of the celebration in Moscow for the three hundred years of the dynasty. But she changes the sense of the Czarist propaganda, which aimed to worship the almightiness of the empire. In her documentary, you see instead how an oppressive Leviathan destroys itself when pushed to war by a capitalist economy based on profit and appropriation. The aesthetics behind those images is not eliminated, it is assumed in a dialectical perspective. Shub judges the outburst of the revolution according to the progressive delegitimatizing of the ancient rule. In this way, she unveils the peculiar 'de-figurative' power of documentary, which is the counterpart of the critical stance this kind of cinema claims for the spectator.

David LaRocca

One way of looking at the political and emancipatory potential of film form is to think of a politics of contestation with prevailing cinematic norms. Thus, as alluded to in the prompt, there is no need to have outright "political content" in some traditional sense (e.g., as activist, as proffering scenes of justice delivered or justice denied) in order to see the film as making claims to change what passes for the language of cinema. One instance that remains salient: RaMell Ross' *Hale County This Morning This Evening* (2018), a work that regularly creates an overlap of fiction and nonfiction, of familiar human moments and estranging visuality, of recognizable grammar and an avant-garde interruption to the demotic. Ross' film seems emblematic of the contemporary "political potential of documentary"—where a cameraperson is present with the world she encounters, and the subsequent film (made from those sounds and images) allows cinematic revelations to land upon audiences fully-formed and alive.

Given that popular or mainstream cinema occupies a fairly narrow bandwidth of formal expression, it can seem that any work that broadens and deepens its scope undertakes a political act, whether it is Gene Kelly's adaptation of the experimentalism he saw in the 1940s and 50s for his (and Stanley Donen's) *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) or Derek Cianfrance's contact with the tradition of Stan Brakhage, Phil Solomon, and the legacies of the Binghamton Cinema Department, in his *Blue Valentine* (2010). As Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "only as far as [people] are unsettled is there any hope for them," so we can think of Adorno's form as "sedimented content" as an invitation to become, indeed to continually be, unsettled. Yet why call such unsettling acts "political," why not merely artistic or creative? Because the comforts of familiarity so offer conspire to constrain and defeat just such artistry and creativity. Thus, we could say that in unsettling our inheritances we encounter the political dimensions of form itself (whatever the art).

Mohanad Yaqubi

Looking for metaphors, cinematically speaking, is at the heart of the discussion on form. A political film will not regard the question of copyright for example.
A political filmmaker will use what is available to deliver, be it photographs, newspapers, animation, advertisement, whatever it takes. This intervention is disturbing the norms of film industry and its commercial aspects, and that includes images immigrating from one film to another. The fluidity of images and realities is manifested through the process of editing, and writing. Making films politically is a statement against forms assigned by the markets and film schools; it is to reclaim freedom for the medium. Deciding to reside the cinematic tools for a struggle goes alongside the acceptance to analyze the film and the artist through the same factors that shade people's memory –be it a still image from a film, or a line from an interview, or a smile of a young freedom fighter. It is transferable, it is framed, and it refers to everyone. Maybe this is something overrated and obvious, but we are witnessing the pollution of generations of filmmakers through their education, which is reaching a close end. There is a need to open the film school pedagogies to include more dialectical thinking methodologies not only in filmmaking, but also in developing awareness towards the arts as a reflection of the collective consciousness of its society. This "practice" of thinking does not focus on funding or quality, it works with what is available and harnesses intellectual capacities into a message, with a clear and mature use of the medium and the tools that deliver the messages.
I am returning here a passage from Mustafa Abu Ali's memoir about his time as a film student in London. "It took me ten years to forget what I learned in the film school. There was the need to tell the story of the people by the language of the people, and not by the film education, a medium developed by our colonisers." [v] This awareness of looking for a language that has not been taught, that can be elaborated only after forgetting what has been learned, is what makes the medium accessible. It took me ten years to understand what this means in practice, and having been operating between the practice of filmmaking and film education, I felt an urgency to start forming new and other canons, to lead the filmmakers back to the society, not to the industry.

[v] "Diaries of filming a civil war", by Mustafa abu Ali, *The Palestinian Image*, Issue no.1, 1978

Raed Rafei

When I worked with my sister, Rania Rafei, on writing and directing *74 (The Reconstitution of a Struggle)* (2012), a film that recounts the occupation of the American University of Beirut in 1974 as a crucial era of mass social justice movements in Lebanon, we were not concerned with the "facts" of what exactly happened. History with a capital H is slippery and impossible to discern with all its facets. Particularly in Lebanon, history is a contested territory because it challenges different and clashing imaginaries of the nation state.
In practice, to allow for the magic of the revolutionary years of the 1970s to permeate our film, we had to move away from fixed truths and facts and create an experimental, permeable environment of remembrance. And by that, I mean an environment open to improvisation and chance. Rather than asking questions to former students who took part in the university's occupation to remember what happened as it is done classically in a documentary about a certain incident, we worked with young political activists to re-enact the events of the occupation.
What we were after was an active and embodied engagement with the revolutionary spirit of that era. The film became the product of a collaboration with those activists, each one of them engaging with us and with others in the film by bringing in a mixture of their knowledge about that socially and politically active era of the 70s (from books, archival documents, and conversations with people who had witnessed it) but also their doubts, hesitations, excitement, desires, aspirations, fears etc. The film was precisely troubling because it sought to destabilize notions of linear time and that the past is a sealed moment that admits one truth, or one reading, or one interpretation. We wanted to explore how the past leaks into the present and how the present as a moment always carries residues from both the past and the future. This felt especially true back when we were working on the film in 2011, when the entire Arab region was living an incredible moment of upheavals and hope and change. Suddenly, it felt that the ideals of the 1970s were seeping through the air again! We truly believed that spirits, ideas and affects are not immobilized on a rigid timeline, but actually travel through time and space.
The form of the film was certainly by itself our main political statement. The film was inspired by Peter Watkin's hybrid model of re-enactment that he used in *The Commune* and *Punishment Park*, and other films. Resistance to power structures are recurrent moments in history. Learning about movements of resistance through forms of documentary that are truly participatory is powerful because it allows for ideas and practices of resistance to oppressive institutions to get connected across spaces and times.

Christa Blümlinger

Nous connaissons la critique fondamentale qu'Adorno adressait aux média, dont le cinéma. Mais on peut penser le cinéma avec Adorno, contre Adorno, comme l'a montré Alexander Kluge et par ses propos sur lespace public, son mode de production innovant, imposé à la télévison privée et par ses films mêmes. Ou encore Gertrud Koch, en transférant ses approches musico-philosophiques et esthétiques vers le cinéma. Ceci dit, l'idée du « contenu sédimenté » se réfère chez Adorno aux formes persistantes en musique et à une esthétique négative. On ne peut pas « appliquer » une telle idée à un art figuratif et mimétique, sans considérer d'abord ce que cette transposition implique. Si on veut penser le cinéma avec Adorno, on peut aussi retenir sa fameuse prise en considération de lessai qui doit beaucoup à Max Bense et qui permet de souligner la fonction de la forme dans la pensée.
En ce qui concerne Jacques Rancière et sa définition romantique du régime esthétique de l'art, celle-ci peut se référer au cinéma parmi d'autres arts. Si Rancière a lui-même montré comment on peut par exemple lire les films de Straub-Huillet ou de Costa à partir d'une idée de l'émancipation qui place le *dissensus* au centre, il associe par ailleurs cette idée à la notion de fiction. Nous pouvons de ce point de vue nous rappeler également les concepts des « puissances du faux » ou du « cri » chez Gilles Deleuze, repérés justement à partir d'une classification de formes hybrides, incluant des modes spécifiques de fabulation ou témoignant d'une capacité de résistance. S'il est difficile de définir le documentaire à partir de ces approches et idées, on peut en retenir des lignes esthétiques et des propositions éthiques, concernant par exemple la distribution du temps, du regard et de la pluralité des voix.

Marie Voignier

On dit parfois d'un certain cinéma documentaire qu'il « donne la parole à ». Je ne crois pas qu'un film même militant « donne » la parole à qui que ce soit. La parole est toujours prise en charge et détenue par le ou la cinéaste. Le ou la cinéaste (ou un collectif de cinéastes) peut faire partie d'un groupe discriminé, opprimé, en lutte, et donc sexprimer depuis le cœur de cette lutte. Ou bien : le ou la cinéaste peut faire sienne la parole d'un groupe opprimé / en lutte et en relayer des parties choisies par lui ou elle. Il-elle ne donne pas la parole, mais la prend, la sélectionne. Et cela implique d'immenses précautions et responsabilités. Le ou la cinéaste fabrique dans un film la représentation de son point de vue à partir de la parole ou des images des autres, et cèst en cela qu'il ou elle peut ajouter une participation politique à une lutte, une histoire, un débat.

Susana de Sousa Dias

Considero que o entendimento de Adorno de forma como "conteúdo sedimentado" é extremamente válido no contexto do documentário. Quanto a mim, a dicotomia entre forma e conteúdo é falaciosa. Não só porque tradicionalmente implica uma hierarquização — do conteúdo sobre a forma, da palavra sobre a matéria, dos sistemas verbais sobre os não verbais —, como esconde o papel que a forma tem na criação e sentido do próprio conteúdo e de como ela pode ser um reflexo de concepções hegemónicas do mundo. Em termos políticos, este aspecto é de grande relevância.
Aliás, percebi isto através da minha própria práxis, quando fiz um documentário em 2000, sobre um processo-crime instruído pela PIDE nos anos 50 que levou duas mulheres à prisão. O filme não só secundarizou as imagens de arquivo em relação às palavras, como as subsumiu a uma narrativa teleológica, perpetuando, sem eu ter disso consciência, uma visão da história de matriz positivista, totalmente decifrável e sem lacunas. Foi após esse filme que emprendi uma reflexão profunda sobre documentário, história e arquivo consciencializando algo que se tornou central nos meus filmes: que a forma *forma* o conteúdo. Considero que fazer cinema politicamente implica criar uma "forma que pensa", para utilizar a expressão de Godard, que também diz que no mau cinema é o "pensamento que forma". Por vezes, sucede não acontecer nem uma coisa nem outra. Surpreendo-me sempre que vejo documentários que abordam directamente situações políticas — alguns cujas filmagens, inclusive, implicaram riscos — e que são, paradoxalmente, totalmente despolitizados. Para mim é muito importante encontrar aquilo que designo por *forma justa*, uma forma que deve estar instrinsecamente ligada às matérias sobre as quais se está a trabalhar e ser encontrada a cada novo documentário; uma forma não sujeita a modelos pré-estabelecidos ou já testados, e que, precisamente pela sua singularidade, permite expor algo de novo, residindo ai o seu potencial político.