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## REALISM AND THE (NEW) REAL IN THE CINEMATOGRAPHIC IMAGE

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## PRESENTATION

Talking about realism in the arts is not an easy task. Paul Wood (1998) says that the very definition of the term “realism” would not be a simple theme, as it suggests an orientation towards reality or a direct connection with reality. This is complicated, since groups with different interests perceive reality in different ways. According to Wood (1998) what would be at stake would be rival definitions of reality. We can think that in a world in which reality is known through singular forms of perception, it is understandable that this theme has often been a point of contention in 20th century art.

Wood (1998) explains that “realism” is not necessarily the same thing as “naturalism” — a term that has been used frequently since the 19th century to designate success in achieving a realistic appearance in art, especially when the subject matter was taken from everyday life. According to him, the representation of ordinary bodies doing ordinary things in everyday life is not what determines “realistic” art. Although realism is not reduced to naturalism, both artistic movements maintain a preoccupation with lived realities in everyday life.

In addition to painting, realism also appears in other forms of art, such as literature, architecture, theater and cinema: in realistic literature its characteristics are opposed to those of romantic literature. The scenarios become urban and the social becomes valued. Elements that were so important for happiness in romanticism – such as marriage and the love of a male hero – are transformed into social practices of appearance, giving way to a daily life that has never been portrayed as being so overwhelming. The milestone of literary realism began, in Europe, with the publication of *Madame Bovary* (1857) by Gustave Flaubert. In architecture, realism appears in order to meet new demands, or rather, new needs of the growing urban life

resulting from industrial transformations in large cities. Cities no longer demand excessive architectural riches such as palaces and temples. Architects and engineers have to build factories, shops, railway stations, schools, hospitals and housing for workers and the ruling class of the time: the new bourgeoisie. Realistic theater also focuses on the everyday problems of ordinary people. Having as precursor the French play: “*A dama das camélias*”, in 1852, by Alexandre Dumas Filho, realism in the theater also presents a concern with the interpretation of its actors, valuing a ‘natural’ style without artificial dramatic events. The naturalness and spontaneity are found in the extratextual elements, such as the play of the scene and the interpretation.

Our objective in this article is to deal with realism in cinema, or rather a new type of aesthetic realism in cinema. To give an account of our proposal, before discussing what is being called new realism, we will understand what realism in the arts means, from its first conception to, from there, we will understand realism in cinema and its different forms. We will delve deeper into realistic cinema and understand André Bazin’s indications about the relationship established between spectator and cinematographic work.

The idea of a new realism will be approached through the ideas of the North American art historian Hal Foster. In his text: *O Retorno do Real* (2014), it starts from a reinterpretation of the visual arts since the 1960s to propose a change in the perspective of realism in the arts. According to Foster, what was previously perceived through the contemplation and experience of a work of art, now becomes a force of irruption on the spectator. It becomes a “traumatic realism”. Realism would no longer be an effect of representation, an attempt to represent a recognizable and believable reality, but an

event of trauma, as an image of violence marked by the limit of what can and cannot be represented. We will develop, in the course of the article, the relationship between film and spectator as a traumatic relationship and think, from the writings of Walter Benjamin, how this relationship affects the construction of our memory and the appropriation of our experience.

## REALISM IN THE ARTS

Realist art emerged in Europe in the last decades of the 19th century and was consolidated between 1850 and 1900. Appearing mainly in the French painting of Gustave Courbet and Honoré Daumier, this new aesthetic trend spread to other continents and developed along with the growth of industrialization. in societies. Realistic art is characterized by “performing a plausible figurative illusion of some people and objects as they appear in the world” (WOOD, 1998, p.254). The scenarios become urban and the social is valued as a theme.

In addition to Paul Wood, other authors will present an even more complex notion of realism. Among them we can highlight the French philosopher Alain Badiou (2004). Badiou states that what characterized the arts, thought and politics of the 20th century was a “passion for the real”, which was a key theme in the debates at the end of the century for the understanding of contemporary Western culture. This passion was expressed not only in the preference for figurative illusion, but, above all, in the criticism of illusions of all kinds. Summarizing Badiou’s argument in this regard, Professor Karl Erik Schollhammer states that the passion for the real would reside, more than in mimesis, “in the criticism against mimetic representation, in the suspicion of the power of resemblance to create false consciousness and therefore in the need to create reflective

distance and estrangement effects in artistic experimentalism, as, for example, in Bertolt Brecht’s theater” (SCHOLLHAMMER, 2013, p.157). We can remember here that Brecht’s theater intended to remove the spectator from a state of alienation, demystifying the theatrical space as a device of illusions. In these terms, the passion for the real would be expressed not only by a desire for mimicry, as in figurative art, but, paradoxically, in a critique of mimicry.

According to Badiou, the real can only be perceived as a result of a counterfactual relationship between reality and representation “that distorts the ties of similarity and can only be recognized indirectly in an act of reflective passion” (SCHOLLHAMMER, 2013, p.157). That is, unlike reality, the real questions the similarity between reality and representation. According to this perspective, both the defenders of realism and its more rigorous critics would be demonstrating the same passion for the real. Whether it be through the affirmation of representative similarity or through its negation.

As we saw earlier, realism appears in various forms of art, such as painting, literature, architecture, theater and cinema. Realism in cinema is the topic that will interest us most. Jacques Aumont, in his book: “*A estética do filme*” (1995) says that in order to address the issue of realism in cinema, it is necessary to distinguish realism from the materials of expression (such as images and sounds) and realism from the subject matter of films:

The “realism” of cinematographic expression materials is nothing more than the result of a huge number of conventions and rules, conventions and rules that vary according to times and cultures. It is necessary to remember that cinema was not always sonorous, it was not always colorful and that, when it conquered sound and colors, its realism changed singularly over the years (...). However, at each stage (mute, black

and white, color), cinema has not ceased to be considered realistic. Realism appears, then, as a gain of reality in relation to a previous state of the mode of representation. This gain, however, is infinitely renewable, as a result of technical innovations, but also because reality itself is never reached. (AUMONT, 1995, p.135)

In Aumont's perspective, cinema never manages to reproduce reality as it is. Even when he aims to reproduce reality, he necessarily uses images and sounds that are the product of rules and conventions that vary greatly in history and in different societies. Technological advances would not be bringing cinema closer to reality, they would just be operating according to a new type of conventions and rules. For example, the insertion of sound in the image, the color image instead of black and white, the 3D image, the introduction of computer graphics in the image, and even the 4D image<sup>1</sup>. At each stage of technological advances, it seems that cinema is closer to reality in relation to its previous stage; however, it is just the production of a new type of "realism", different from the previous ones, which also had this pretension.

The realism of the subject matter of the films is a slightly more complicated matter. This is a somewhat ambiguous idea, because when talking about cinematographic realism, "the themes and their treatment are equally understood, and it was in this respect that a certain French cinema from before the war or neorealism was described as poetic realism. some Italian Liberation films" (AUMONT, 1995, p. 136). Aumont says that neorealism is a great example of the ambiguity of the term realism itself:

Let us note, in passing, that neorealism is, like any denomination of school, a creation of criticism that later erected, in a theoretical model, the convergence of some

films, whose number today appears very limited. Between films like those of Roberto Rossellini (*Roma, cidade aberta*, 1945; *Paisa*, 1946), by Vittorio de Sica (*Vítimas da tormenta*, 1946; *Ladrões de bicicleta*, 1948), by Luchino Visconti (*La terra trema*, 1948; *Belíssima*, 1950), by Federico Fellini (*Os boas-vidas*, 1953; *A trapaça*, 1955) are rather the stylistic differences that are observed today. (AUMONT, 1995, p.136)

There is no unanimity among scholars, or even the directors of the time, when it comes to defining cinematographic neorealism. What can be said is that neorealism was a way of making cinema without great resources, which would have resulted in an escape from the rules of the cinematographic institution, in opposition to the pre-war American or Italian super-productions (AUMONT, 1995).

One of the greatest defenders of cinematographic realism theories was the film critic and theorist André Bazin (1918-1958) and the idea of a new realism in cinema can be understood from his thought and theories, produced in the course of his intellectual work, about this subject.

## ANDRÉ BAZIN'S THOUGHT

Bazin early in his career in 1945 writes: *Ontologia da imagem fotográfica* (1991), text in which he begins his reflections on reality from photography, which will lead him to write about reality in cinema. In this text, he says that with the invention of photography, a new field of imagery opens up, which was not possible from the perspective of pictorial creation. The photographic eye (the lens) replaces the human eye and for the first time nothing is inserted between the initial object and its representation, except another object. "For the first time, an image of the outside world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man, according to a rigorous determinism" (BAZIN, 1991, p.22).

1. As in the inclusion of odors, winds, rains, etc. in movie theaters during the showing of certain films.

According to Bazin, the photographer's personality only comes into play through choice, orientation, and pedagogy of the phenomenon; we can perceive this personality in the finished work, but not as we perceive that of a painter. "All the arts are founded on the presence of man; only in photography do we enjoy his absence" (BAZIN, 1991, p.22). For Bazin, the invention of photography is the most important event in the history of the visual arts, because, finally, the obsession with the real finds its aesthetic autonomy.

But what would this relationship with reality look like in cinema? In this regard, André S. Labarthe (1972) says that Bazin's merit in cinematographic realist theory is that "he was the first to name this awakening of the spectator from his legendary passivity and this new status that thereafter it would be his: the producer of meaning" (LABARTHE, 1972, p.11). According to him, Bazin was perhaps the first critic to perceive a new relationship between film and spectator that emerges with modern cinema. In this new relationship, the spectator must build a meaning for himself through what he sees on the cinematographic screen, he, in some way, participates in the meaning of the film.

Bazin believes that the cinematographic image must maintain the ambiguity of the world, preserving the spectator's interpretive freedom. But the very notion of ambiguity, key in his theory, according to the author Fernão Pessoa Ramos, is not easy to approach:

Reality itself would be ambiguous for Bazin, and it would be up to the moving camera-image (and there would be its quality) to make this ambiguity emerge, founding the spectatorial relationship. The ambiguous mode is the way of being of the world in its indeterminate opening to the subject, constituting itself as such in this relationship. If the image wants to respect the spectator's freedom to exist in the world, it must not shape in advance the way in which it offers itself to the spectator. (RAMOS, 2012, p.26)

Reality is ambiguous because no one perceives the world in the same way, as we have seen before. Every person in the world perceives it differently. The image must respect this ambiguity and let the viewer make their own conclusions about what they are watching, not impose a standard interpretation. And it is from this point of view that Bazin develops his critique of classical montage. In this, there is the impression of continuity and homogeneity through an expressive manipulation of the images by its directors. As a result, the meaning is already constructed for the spectator, not allowing freedom of interpretation to exist.

André Bazin criticizes classical editing, as he believes that a greater approximation to cinematographic realism occurs through the minimization of the role of editing, and cuts, and prioritizing the depth of shots. Ismail Xavier (2008, p. 79) certifies Bazin's criticism when he says that "the meaning instituted by the combination of images is no longer the fundamental nucleus of cinematographic art", what interests both authors is the way of thinking and not the illusion of reality that the moving image evokes. In other words, for the French thinker, what gives real meaning to the film is not the sequence of images combined through montage, but, as has already been said, the freedom that the spectator would have to interpret what he is watching on the cinematographic screen. Still on the realistic model of Bazin, Ismail Xavier says:

Classic decoupage would be an artificial analytical process, decomposing reality into unreal fragments and reconstituting the pieces that assemble an expressive, but abstract, logically consistent whole (like a discourse) but without the weight of reality acquired by the adoption of the sequence shot. In the new cinema, in the true realist cinema, editing continues to exist, but only as a residue: its role is purely negative, of inevitable elimination in a reality that is too abundant. In other words, montage does

not establish any meaning, any essential relationship. The long-shot, the relationships contained simultaneously in the same image, the camera movements and the exploration of a space that opens continuously reveal the essential. (XAVIER, 2008, p. 81)

According to Xavier (2008), Bazin condemns any intervention and excessive manipulation that goes against the integrity of the real represented. Therefore, he was against editing in cases where its use produced a homogeneous meaning, imposed by the arbitrariness of the filmmaker, to the detriment of the ambiguity inseparable from reality. Editing can continue to exist, but without any essential meaning or relationship to the cinematographic image. The film must avoid imposing on the spectator a ready interpretation of what is shown to him, but making him use his experiences to reach his own conclusions and thus perceive the “ontological ambivalence of reality” (BAZIN, 1991, p.69).

Following this line of thought, “the “ontological” characteristic of the Bazinian image, when designating what is inherent to the being-image, constituting itself in the mediation of the camera in the circumstance of taking, adheres, therefore, to the ambiguity by which the world is offered to the subject” (RAMOS, 2012, p.28). Cinema must remove from passivity the spectator who consciously gives it meaning. Bazin claims a neutral character of style, for him it is “by preserving the original feature of the camera-image (the adherence of the being to the world) that style articulates and affirms itself, at the same time that it denies itself as an articulating mediation” (RAMOS, 2012, p.28). The main point is in the way the world is present in the image, without coercing the ontological ambiguity offered to the viewer.

This way, realism in cinema is not committed to reproducing the illusion of reality, or a spectacle that appears real. For, as

we have seen, reality is perceived differently by each of us. And what matters is how we feel about what we are watching, it is the ability of a film to create a sensation of reality in the spectator, with all its “ambiguity” of meanings. In other words, what is real in cinema are the sensations produced, and not the reproduced facts, the most important thing is for the spectator to make use of his freedom and intelligence and thus perceive, as has been said, the ontological ambivalence of reality. The author develops here an idea also present in Walter Benjamin, who would have written that cinema, precisely because of the sensations it is capable of provoking in the spectator, “penetrates deeply into the viscera of reality” (BENJAMIN, [1936]1994, p.187). For him, the real in cinema is the freedom of interpretation and imagination; two people will never be able to watch a movie and have exactly the same feelings and interpretations about what they have just seen, as reality will never be perceived in the same way by everyone.

## THE NEW REAL(ISM)

Hal Foster, in your already quoted text: *O Retorno do Real* (2014), has as its starting point the critique of representation in the arts. He says that realism is no longer an effect of representation, but an event of trauma. We will see, with Foster, that the relationship between spectator and film can be thought of as a traumatic relationship. An idea that Benjamin ([1936]1994) already outlined when describing the cinematographic image as a projectile that produces a shock effect on those who watch it.

In the 19th century, the term trauma came to be used also in a metaphorical sense, corresponding to a wound in the psyche, or, more precisely, a wound in memory. It is this way that the dimension of trauma appears in psychoanalysis. Freud defines trauma as “an

experience which brings to mind, in a short period of time, an increase in stimulus too great to be absorbed” (FREUD, [1917]1976, p. 335). In other words, we suffer trauma when we receive a greater amount of stimuli than our capacity to elaborate, to assimilate them.

Benjamin would have already denounced how much, in modernity, we are collectively exposed to an excess of stimuli. He calls this excess shock, but admits to having extracted the idea from Freudian conceptions of trauma (BENJAMIN, 1989). If we articulate the shock – linked to the context of industrial production, technical development and urbanization – to the psychoanalytic notion of trauma, we can expand the scope of the latter, thinking about trauma on a collective and social level.

Hal Foster, in his text, uses the notion of shock and trauma interchangeably. What happens in traumatic realism, as an artistic trend, is that the experience of trauma would be expressed – even if not represented – through images, as Schollhammer clarifies in a critique of Foster’s text: “Here, realism is no longer the effect of representation, but an event of trauma, an image of social and political violence affectively marked by the limit of what can and cannot be represented” (SCHOLLHAMMER, 2014).

Foster exemplifies traumatic realism with both the work and the speech of Andy Warhol (1928-1987), an American painter and filmmaker and greatest representative of the pop art movement. According to Foster, Warhol states at a certain point in his life: “I want to be a machine” (FOSTER, 1996, p. 165), and Foster understands this statement as that of a subject in shock, who assumes the of what shocks him, “as a mimetic defense against shock” (FOSTER, 1996, p. 165). By placing himself as a machine, functioning as a machine works, Warhol would also be pointing to the compulsion to repeat that the society of production and consumption in series puts

into play. Therefore, two fundamental effects of a traumatic experience are being expressed by Warhol, both in his statements and in his works: “subjectivity in shock and compulsive repetition” (FOSTER, 1996, p. 165). In this case, the repetition compulsion will happen as a compulsive attempt to master the traumatic experience.

Critics of pop art – and of Andy Warhol – see in his works a superficiality without any referential and subjective interiority. Roland Barthes writes, in his text: *That Old Thing, Art* (1989), that the desire of pop art is to strip the object of any symbolism and free the image of any deeper meaning so that it only exists on the surface. In this process, “the pop artist does not stand behind his work [...] and he himself has no depth: he is simply the surface of his paintings, with no meaning, no intention, anywhere” (BARTHES, 1980, pp. 25-26). Andy Warhol himself had a reading of himself in keeping with the criticism. In an interview published on: *Los Angeles Free Press* (1963), Warhol declares:

If you want to know everything about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface: from my paintings, movies and myself, and there I am. There is nothing behind [...]. There was no deep reason to do a show about death, no victims at the time; there was absolutely no reason to do it, only a surface reason. (WARHOL, 1963, p. 3)

Here he is referring to the series of works called *Death in America* (1964), in which he repeatedly reproduces scenes of car crashes, and the famous images of the electric chair. And about his speech, Foster proposes, as an interpretation, a denial of what would actually be a “deep reason”: “this back-and-forth between surface and depth is endless in pop” (FOSTER, 2014, p. 125), which may be characteristic of its traumatic realism.

But if repetition is an effect of shock, it is also a search for defense against it – and this

would be at stake in Warhol's serial canvases, because "when you see a hideous image repeatedly, it doesn't really have an effect" (WARHOL, 1963). At the same time, Warhol states that "the more you look at the exact same thing, the more the meaning disappears and the better and emptier you feel" (WARHOL, 2013, p. 67). This way, the repeated images in his works, on the one hand, function as a defense against trauma; on the other hand, they produce a feeling of emptiness and loss of meaning in the spectator – which is exactly what someone experiences in a traumatic situation. For this reason, Foster says that Warhol's repetitions, like all works that fit the perspective of traumatic realism, are contradictory: they are, at the same time, "a defense against traumatic affects and their production" (FOSTER, 1996), p. 166).

If Foster uses the Freudian notion of trauma, the idea of "return of the real" was taken from another psychoanalyst, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who was concerned with defining the real in terms of trauma. What, for Lacan (1988), configures the traumatic experience is an encounter – always lived as a mismatch – with the real. It is important to note that the real in Lacan is not reality. This could be represented, both through the referent and through the simulacrum. But the Lacanian real cannot be represented. It is characterized precisely by being that which escapes representation, being defined as impossible, unassimilable. The real for Lacan is traumatic.

As the real cannot be represented, it can only be repeated. These repetitions protect from the real, but, at the same time, make the real return. This is what happens in Warhol's series, according to Foster: "the repetition of an image in order to protect against a traumatic real that, despite this, returns, accidentally and/or obliquely, in the screen itself" (FOSTER, 1996, p. 168). The idea of

the image as a screen had been widely used by Lacan to think about the scheme of visibility through the relationship between the image, the observer's gaze and the real. By placing the image as a screen, as Lacan had done, Foster foregrounds the relationship between the observer and the real through the image. This is much more complex than thinking about the image as a representation or not of reality. It is as if there were, in the object, a look capable of violating the subject, a look-of-the-object that invades. This implies the possibility of thinking about the relationship with images – whether plastic or cinematographic – as traumatic relationships: "This change in the conception – from reality as an effect of representation to the real as a thing of trauma – can be definitive in contemporary art, and even more so in contemporary theory, fiction and cinema" (FOSTER, 2014, p. 175).

Thus, what could previously be perceived through a gaze of contemplation is inverted, in this perspective, as a gaze of the object that invades the subject, as a force of irruption on the spectator. It becomes a traumatic realism, which "was characterized through examples of art from the last decades of the 20th century that express the most cruel, violent and abominable elements of reality inevitably linked to radical themes of sex and death" (SCHOLLHAMMER, 2013), p.162-163).

For a better understanding, what is being treated as traumatic realism, by Foster, can be exemplified by a type of cinematographic aesthetic that seeks, through new technologies in image capture and computer graphics, to shockingly show recent films that violate social taboos., triggering fears and desires that threaten normative society and its ideologies. For example: murders displaying sadomasochistic violence, sexual acts considered perverted, incest and miscegenation, the return of the dead and cannibalism (NDALIANIS, 2012).



Foster reinforces the existence, in contemporary aesthetics, of a concern with trauma. There are reasons internal to the arts for this, such as dissatisfaction with the conventional view of reality, but there are also social and cultural reasons: despair in the face of invasive disease, systematic poverty, crime, destruction of social welfare, breach of the social contract., failure of authority figures or solid symbolic references. “Through artistic, theoretical and popular cultures, there is a tendency to redefine experience, individual and historical, in terms of trauma” (FOSTER, 2014, p. 186).

## **EXPERIENCE, MEMORY, CURRENT**

Walter Benjamin, in 1933, had already identified that experience would be on the way to extinction and, with that, the modern human being would be losing the ability to elaborate as true experience (Erfahrung) what he lives. This is because the transformations – technological, ethical, aesthetic, perceptive, etc. – that occurred after Modernity would have caused a profound change in the structure of experience.

He states that, in Modernity, it is the experience of shocks that becomes commonplace:

With the invention of matches in the mid-19th century, a series of innovations came onto the scene that have one aspect in common: they trigger a complex process made up of a series of moments with a single gesture. This evolution takes place in several domains and is evident in the new telephone [...]. Among the countless gestures that served to connect, insert, activate, etc., one of the greatest consequences was the photographer's click. The pressure of a finger was enough to fix an event for an unlimited time. (BENJAMIN, 2015, p. 127-128)

The author calls the experiences described above tactile, and emphasizes that physical

and perceptual shocks startle the inhabitants of the modern urban world at all times. He cites, as an example, the experience of moving through the traffic in big cities, and the experience of observing the ad section inside a newspaper.

From a subjective perspective, Modernity is conceived as a bombardment of stimuli, which our psychic apparatus is often unable to elaborate as an experience. Attempts to appropriate the “true” experience contrast “with an experience that manifests itself in the normalized, denatured life of the civilized masses” (BENJAMIN, 2015, p. 106). Benjamin refers to this new form as experience (Erlebnis).

We can understand the experience as something that happens in Modernity instead of experience. Our perceptual apparatus is hit by excess stimuli, which we cannot elaborate, resulting in trauma. If the stimuli are excessive and we are unable to make sense of or produce a representation of what we are experiencing, we cannot integrate these stimuli into the set of our past experiences.

In the sphere of experience, saturated with shocks and stimuli, we are left with the ability to react to these stimuli, always keeping ourselves at a conscious level in order to protect ourselves. Benjamin here follows Freud, who claims that consciousness does not register memory traces. What happens, according to the Benjaminian interpretation of Freud, is that:

Consciousness and the permanence of traces in memory are irreconcilable in the same system. On the contrary, the residues of memory are often more intense and lasting when the process that left them never reached the conscious level. Translating to Proustian discourse: only what has not been “experienced” expressly and consciously, what has not been an “experience” for the subject, can become an integral part of involuntary memory. Accumulating

lasting traces as the basis of memory in stimulating processes is, according to Freud, reserved for other systems, which will have to be understood as different from the system of consciousness. Still according to Freud, consciousness as such would not register absolutely any trace of memory. (BENJAMIN, 2015, p. 111)

Memory is essential to experience. But, faced with the shocks and excessive stimuli, common in Modernity, the human being is not able to elaborate his experiences as, in a previous period, he would have elaborated his experiences. The experience would take place in systems different from those of involuntary memory, making it impossible to have the resources for the “true” experience. For it only becomes part of involuntary memory – which can be assimilated to unconscious memory – that which could be psychically registered, that which was not just a fleeting experience of consciousness, since it does not register any trace of memory. In this case, consciousness would have another significant function, functioning as a kind of para-excitation, that is, as a protection against excessive stimuli: “the fact that the shock is thus absorbed, trimmed by consciousness, would give the event that provokes it the character of experience in the most authentic sense” (BENJAMIN, 2015, p. 113).

Benjamin says that, in Modernity, suffering a deprivation of experience became normal, insofar as the perceptive apparatus protects itself from the traumatic effect arising from the shock effects to which the modern subject is exposed daily: “the more constant the presence of consciousness in the interest of protection against stimuli [...], the less these impressions will be incorporated into the experience and the more easily they will correspond to the concept of experience” (BENJAMIN, 2015, p. 114).

When approaching cinema, Benjamin will take advantage of his theorization on

subjective transformation in large cities. He will say that cinema also provides the experience of shocks. However, the shock of the cinematographic image need not be identical to the shocks suffered in urban life – as in traffic or factory work. It can wake up, take the spectator out of torpor, awaken the senses that have been put to sleep by excessive stimuli in big cities.

Our perceptive apparatus undergoes transformations and, with the passage of time and the incessant social, aesthetic and technological transformations, the increase in stimuli from audiovisual products - or traumatic realism as an artistic trend as Hal Foster put it - can cause a strangeness in our memory. But these shocks can also create new forms of elaboration, perception and memory.

Cinematographic art embraces, as an art form of its own, the shock effects that characterize Modernity. Unlike traditional works of art, which summon the gaze to a slow contemplation, a cinematographic image does not offer this time or summon this way of perception on the part of the spectator, since it will quickly be replaced by another image. In sudden succession, these changes provoke shocks that affect not only the gaze, but the entire body of the spectator, as if the eyes also became tactile organs (BENJAMIN, [1936]1994). It is this way that, according to the philosopher, cinema has as one of its main functions to awaken the spectator: sudden changes in images work like projectiles that must be intercepted by acute attention. This would be, for Benjamin, the best way to awaken the modern subject distracted by the shocks suffered in the urban environment. He believes in the emancipatory potential of new technologies. According to him, “the film serves to exercise man in the new perceptions and reactions required by a technical apparatus whose role is increasingly growing in his daily life” (BENJAMIN, [1936]1994, p. 174). In

other words, the cinematographic montage summons the spectators to a work of psychic elaboration; despite the shocks it causes us, cinema is also a space for the elaboration of shocks, since it makes us “glimpse the thousand conditionings that determine our existence” (BENJAMIN, [1936]1994, p. 189).

In its various modalities, the realisms discussed here will help us to think about what is at stake in the transformation of sensitivity and memory in our time. It is worth pointing out that watching a “realistic” film is not equivalent to contemplating a work of art (BENJAMIN, [1936]1994). The point is that, when Benjamin thought about cinematographic reception, his writings would be more conducive to the realistic aesthetic form, treated by Bazin, than to the traumatic realism presented by Foster. In any case, we must take into account what Benjamin ([1936]1994) said about the historical character of our sensitivity and perception, and about how much they are capable of undergoing variations at different times. But in this case we can, in relation to contemporaneity, consider that Benjamin is also capable of positivizing the shock: even though the shock has become the norm in large cities, the spectator’s contact with traumatic realism does not produce an impossibility of appropriation, or elaboration. of the experience. We can think of trauma, from its aesthetic modality, as a producer of different forms of awareness and memory typical of contemporaneity.

In an age in which it is the experience of shocks that becomes commonplace, traumatic realism – as put by Hal Foster – for us, would emphasize the productive dimension of shock and the value of trauma in creating a new form of sensitivity and relationship with memory. The idea is not to recover an experience that, in a strong sense, is lost to modernity, but to produce an

experience in which it is possible for man to appropriate it today. (BENJAMIN, 1989).

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