AESTHETICAL DIVIDE: A STUDY ON SUSANA DE SOUSA DIAS' *48*

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ABSTRACT: *48* (2009), directed by Susana de Sousa Dias, is a documentary film that portrays, as still life, anthropometric photos from the PIDE's archive. Divided between what we can see (traces of a living past) and what we can only hear (the present voices), the film displays the incommensurable space between what is the visible and what is the expressible in this specific medium. However, as an archive of the present time, moving images past epochs bring back to life, not only through old pictures (from archives, for example), but a past that is described, narrated, and imagined through verbal expression. This particular film raises some questions concerning memory, the archive, and - temporal and spatial displacement. From an inhuman point of view that does not consider the origin of those photos, *48* remains in the present although its "memories" persist and resist in the same present, voices of an eternal past that can and should be revived. In reviving the dead past we are reinterpreting the present. But, what is the aesthetical value of a film made of pictures from the PIDE's archive? The present analysis of *48* will focus on Gilles Deleuze and Vicente Sánchez-Biosca's ideas on the audiovisual archives to help answer this question.

KEYWORDS: Audiovisual Archives, Deleuze, Susana de Sousa Dias; Sánchez-Biosca.

RESUMO: *48* (2009), filme realizado por Susana de Sousa Dias é um documentário que representa, como matéria-morta, as fotografias antropométricas do arquivo da PIDE. Entre o que podemos ver, traços de um passado, e o que apenas podemos ouvir, as vozes do presente, o filme mostra o espaço incomensurável entre o que é visível e o que é expressável neste meio específico. No entanto, como arquivo do tempo presente, as imagens em movimento dão vida épocas passadas, não apenas através de imagens antigas (de arquivo, por exemplo), mas de um passado que é descrito, narrado e imaginado pela expressão verbal. Este filme em concreto colca algumas questões relativamente à memória, arquivo e deslocamento temporal e espacial. De um ponto de vista inumano, sem considerar a origem de tais fotografias, *48* permanece no presente ao passo que as suas "memórias" persistem e resistem a esse presente, como vozes de um passado eterno que pode, e deve, ser trazido à vida. Ao dar vida ao passado extinto, reinterpretamos o

presente. Qual é o valor estético de um filme feito de fotografias do arquivo da PIDE? A presente análise de *48* centrar-se-á nas ideias de Gilles Deleuze e Vicente Sánchez-Biosca sobre os arquivos audiovisuais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Arquivos Audiovisuais; Deleuze, Susana de Sousa Dias; Sánchez-Biosca.

48 YEARS OF DICTATORSHIP

What can a visual artist do with others' personal memories that are part of the collective memories of a country immersed in forty-eight years of dictatorship? A "photo-roman" (photo-novel) was Susana de Sousa Dias' answer. Each time that real historical images, traces of a living past, coexist with the first person speech in the present, we are offered a unique encounter with history and openness to an act of resistance.

The film *48* (2009), directed by the Portuguese filmmaker Susana de Sousa Dias, brings back an idea already established in her previous film, *Still Life* (*Natureza Morta*, 2005). Indeed, both films are cinematic portraits of the forty-eight years of the Portuguese dictatorship (from 1926-1974). *48* is a film made exclusively of the anthropometric photos from the archive of PIDE – Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado (the International and State Defence Police) - specifically, photos of sixteen political prisoners detained during the dictatorship period. With a voice off, those prisoners report, in the first person, of days and months in prison - days and months that are visible in each individual face. They are sixteen faces equivalent to sixteen stories of torture, brutality, and traumatic memories. The director associates the actual voices of that present time to these photos the; never seeing how they really look today, their faces remain in the past, though their memories persist and resist in the present.

According to Dias, her film is a work of cinematic art *in-between* what a photo can reveal and can hide, in-between actual images and past memories. Which power today can cause this enlivenment of a traumatizing past? As one of the witness says (in Figure 1): "Twenty-four years in prison, are not twenty-four hours".
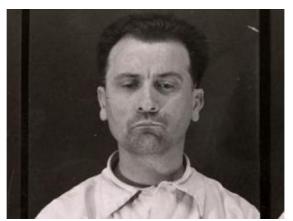
Figure 1 *48* (2009), Susana Sousa Dias

COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Thus, which power can have this archived collective memory of a dictatorship taken from the point of view of a witness-victim? And, how does the Portuguese society deal with it today? According to the Portuguese philosopher José Gil, we do not deal with it at all: those years of dictatorship are not inscribed in our everyday lives. What does Gil mean with the concept of *non-inscription*? In his book *Portugal, Hoje. O Medo de Existir* (*Portugal, Today. The Fear to Exist*), *Gil describes Portugal as a country of non-inscription. A*lthough non-inscription is not an exclusive Portuguese phenomenon, it has a singular connection with our reality: our relationship to Salazar is slightly different from that between the Germans and the III Reich, for example. Despite the Carnation Revolution that took place in 1974, there were no prosecutions of the PIDE's political police officers; the Revolution itself was seen, according to José Gil's interpretation, as a massive act of forgiveness.

The curious aspect in this is that this act of forgiveness was not nonetheless an act of rupture, but a strong legacy from Salazar's years. As Gil states:

> *(…)* Portugal of today extends its ancient regime. This non-inscription is not new, it is an old habit which arises most of all by a refusal of inscription imposed on the individual. Because inscription implies action, affirmation, [and] decision with which the individual conquests autonomy and a sense for its existence. (GIL, 2004, 17)

According to José Gil, one can define it basically as "nothing happens, that is, nothing subscribes: in history or in individual lives, in social life or in the artistic field" (GIL 2004, 15).

THE AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVE

However, and returning to Sousa Dias' film, the raw material of *48* is entirely its archive images, a unique circumstance that makes us question the role that an audiovisual archive can have on the contemporary dramatization of both personal and collective memories.

In order to question the place and function of an archive, I will consider *48* as an example of a photo-roman: each plan corresponding to a single black and white still photographic image. After all, what is an archive for? David Rodowick, for instance, highlights what an archive is to Gilles Deleuze. In *Reading the Figural*, he says:

> By insisting on the incommensurability of the visible and the expressible, Deleuze characterizes the audiovisual archive as inherently disjunctive. Deleuze calls this space ''the audiovisual archive.'' The visible and the expressible thus define two distinct regimes that are irreducible to each other. (RODOWICK, 2001, 67)

Indeed, in electing this concept (of an "audiovisual archive"), Deleuze re-explains Michel Foucault's definition of it. Deleuze does not deduce "l'enoncé" from speech alone; instead, he crosses the incommensurable spaces of the visible and the expressible. Quoting again Rodowick:

> By tracing out the enoncé's strategic coordinations of the visible and the expressible, transformations of what is called ''discourse'' in different epochs, and how the organization of discourse is informed historically by the qualities of knowledge and power, can be more precisely understood. (RODOWICK, 2001, 56-57)

Therefore, Deleuze associates, in Foucault's work, speech to words, and concepts and visibility to institutions and attitudes (DELEUZE, 2004). In this sense, one may say that an archive includes not only a serial cluster of all that can be said, but also, and more important to our analysis, a serial cluster of everything that is visible in one particular historic period. I am considering the audiovisual in this precise sense. Consequently, that is to say that there is a gap between what can be said (speech, as the voice off in the particular case of *48*) and what can be seen (namely, their face's expressions and the emotion's visibility, as the photos from the PIDE's

archive). The *tension* between aesthetics and ethics increases and is intensified by its density. The question to Deleuze, as it was to Foucault, resides in the relationship between the verbal and the spatial effects, which are directly connected to an "archaeology of the gaze", namely, an "attitude towards what is speaking and what is spoken about" (RODOWICK 2001, 44-45). Documental photo archives and its filmic or photographic raw material disturb our soft and indulgent present and awake us to its "dilapidated ghosts" that are watching us from time past (SÁNCHEZ-BIOSCA 2012, 56). How can 48 represent the PIDE's prisoners in an ethical way, and without forgetting the cinematic aesthetics, by using as its main visual source the same images that were produced, at the time, by the enemies of those prisoners?

Figure 2 *48* (2009), Susana Sousa Dias

TOWARDS AN AESTHETIC ACT OF RESISTANCE

How can those archive's images be an act of resistance in this Deleuzian "disjunctive syntheses"? Answering this particular question also demands an answer to a larger question concerning cinema as a problematic object, or as Deleuze remarks as an act of resistance, which brings together a controversial debate gathering different political, cultural, aesthetic, and ethical approaches.

What is an act of resistance? Every work of art (and not only the cinematographic one) is an act of resistance. As André Malraux states, one work of art resists, in the first place, death. As a result, the archives will be the ideal medium for this kind of resistance. It may be a way to deal with an ambiguous period in History – if, on one hand, there is a predictable nature to remember and reveal those

years, bringing into memory something that is collective; on the other hand, there is another natural movement to forget and conceal.

> Art preserves, and it is the only thing in the world that is preserved. Preserves and is preserved in itself (*quid juris?*), although actually it lasts no longer than its support and materials – stone, canvas, chemical colour, and so on - (*quid facti?*). (DELEUZE/ GUATTARI, 1994, 163)

This seems to be true both in José Gil's definition of non-inscription and in Susana de Sousa Dias' film. In the Portuguese case of tortures committed by the PIDE, we may consider the same division with the aggravating circumstances that normally there is no artistic representation, only oblivion; as, for instance, when António de Oliveira Salazar was elected, in 2007, "the Greatest Portuguese ever" in a TV contest sponsored by the public television channel RTP. In the first place, the film *48* deliberately struggles *against* this oblivion in order to be an artistic representation, but in so doing it uses images that were taken by the PIDE's "employees".

BEYOND PHOTO-ROMAN

If we attend to the history of cinema, however, we realise that the idea of a photo-roman is in itself also problematic. A photo-roman is a montage of still photographic images, sometimes comparable to a photomontage, but that can be better understood as "images-in-sequence" (ORLOW 2007, 180); it is in the Deleuzian sense an image *in* movement, that is, a set of images that create the illusion of movement.

Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962) was the first photo-roman in the history of cinema, a classic inhabiting a "somewhat peculiar position both in post-war European cinema as well as in his own oeuvre", to quote Uriel Orlow (2007, 177). *La Jetée* is a 28 minute science-fiction movie made almost exclusively of still photographic images, with the exception – a very important exception – of few seconds of *pure* cinema: the awakening of a woman that opens and blinks her eyes. These brief seconds are a metaphor to cinema itself: cinema as a "time machine" (RODOWICK 1997, 107-108). Nonetheless, in the case of *La Jetée*, the connection concerning the movement-image and the time-image is more complex (DELEUZE 2005). There, one can find still images that create the illusion of movement *and* real movement that creates the illusion of duration.

Still Life and *48* are also photo-roman in this sense: as photomontages. I

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said that we are dealing with still photographic images, but this is not technically entirely correct: first, there is movement, "micro movements with the camera" around these photos and, second, the director used slow motion in the editing room. In the end, the initial seven minutes became a ninety-three minutes long film. *48* and *La Jetée* also share a common interest in the contradiction between rest and movement: we can say that the starting point of *La jetée* is inactivity; not only because of how the world in this post-nuclear period of inertia is represented, but also because the main protagonist is physically immobilized. And, in *48*, one can also find this double sense of inactivity: in the photographic raw material – that is both of physically and mentally prisoners – at that time, prisoners of PIDE, and today, in a more symbolic and general way, prisoners of a non-inscription of that period of time.

To use Vicente Sánchez-Biosca's expression regarding images taken by the Nazi regime, these still photographic images were taken by "employees of violence" (SÁNCHEZ-BIOSCA 1997). Each image taken of each witness-victim has an executioner-torturer on the other side of the camera, the side that we occupy now as spectators. When the photographed individuals look at us directly, it is a *repetition* of the first reversibility that once took place – when they were facing the executioner-torturer. Thus, how can we look at these photos today knowing that they were taken in a biased point of view and with a specific purpose inside the regime's repressive machine?

Figure 3 *48* (2009), Susana Sousa Dias

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CONCLUSION

In this sense, *48* (but also *Still Life*) is a film that reminds us that the complex ontological status of photography is not yet decided. If we can understand it as "transparent pictures", as Kendall Walton defends in its pivotal essay (WALTON 1984), as a convincing proof of a "place and an hour", a there and then, there is a risk of reducing it to a fossil, or a mummy of the past, as André Bazin claimed in another context.

To think the photographic archive in a Bazinian sense means that we are neglecting and misunderstanding the problem's core. The problem with this thesis is that it identifies a photograph as something (or someone) that has been and that is no-more. But it is seen as an eternal past that can, and should, be reanimated. In reanimating the dead past we are reinterpreting the present with aesthetical, political, and historical consequences: in *48*'s case, and because it is not fictional – this is an important element here –, we bring around the past reinterpreting our present – it is a *possible act of inscription*.

Therefore, to go back directly to what my starting point was (the photo-roman as an act of resistance), we may say that *48*, as well as other movies of the same genre, such as *Lusitanian Illusion* (*Fantasia Lusitana*) from 2010 by João Canijo in a more ironic and sarcastic attitude towards the outsider vision of us, are an act of resistance. If a work of art can resist dying, this film can also resist death, to oblivion, to non-inscription. Being a work of art that is specifically a photo-roman, made of archive photos, it is invested by the realistic nature of what is seen and what is said, a representative power that brings back the past as something that can and should be inscribed in our quotidian life. Therefore, Susana de Sousa Dias's film was my case study for re-examining the debate regarding artistic appropriation of raw historical materials as the PIDE's archive found footage and its ethical, political, and cultural unclear boundaries.

NOTES

sobre a metafísica do tempo e a filosofia do cinema em Gilles Deleuze e em Jean-Luc Godard, com James Williams (Universidade de Dundee, Escócia) e João Mário Grilo (Universidade Nova de Lisboa).

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