

A platform of theoretical connections between artistic practices, processes and curatorial apparatus

Authors:

Alexandra do Carmo (IHA/FCSH-UNL), alexandradocarmo@gmail.com

Daniela Salazar (IHA/ FCSH-UNL), danielavfsalazar@gmail.com

Abstract:

The essay intends to re-evaluate the relations between cinema and the old media of drawing by dismantling the curatorial apparatus within the fabrication of a particular art work and its conceptual organisation; focusing on Alexandra do Carmo's drawing series (projects between 2008 and 2018) — and more specifically *Studio Socialis* 2014. These works enact a transient relationship between the mediums of drawing and video. Firstly we are analysing her work within the world of cinema as *Idea*; we argue that drawing is being used to conceptualise the editing tools of silent film, as if the silence of film without sound, seen through the fictional drawing tools, the pencil as the apparatus, could show us a cinema that lives from its mechanical support yet revealing itself distant from it—as articulated by Pavle Levi (2010) in a dialectical relationship between the concept and the apparatus. Secondly, it proposes a reflection on what is to build temporalities and the performative aspect of the work—of the bodies of the ones looking, as well the memory process of translating one dispositif into another. All in a place of multiple pre given occupying conditions, the art institution.

Key-Words: Apparatus; Performativity; Drawing; Video; Visitor/Spectator;

Paper:

“What matters is that an artifact can be proposed that will ground a dynamic and largely imaginary film-system”

Pavle Levi

“[O]ur culture conceives of each medium or constellation of media as it responds to, redeployes, competes with, and reforms other media”.

Bolter and Grusin

“The spectator behaves as human resonance boxes, surrogates for the voices heard, imaginary sound living in people’s minds, as in silent film.”

Alexandra do Carmo

In 1921/22 László Moholy-Nagy wrote the manifesto *Remarks for those who Refuse to Understand the Film Immediately*. In this manifesto, he specifically describes how film depends on the camera, as its generative absolute power; it is not the narrative, the core of film’s energy, its drive has to do with the mechanical gift of seeing through the camera, the possibility of having alternative perspectives to the naked eye, seeing *the belly of the train for example*, an experience only possible because of the existence of the camera, in this sense deeply related with the mechanical aspect as its source. Although for Moholy-Nagy, a medium’s potential for “de-materialization”, and the state of its technological apparatus, complement each other rather than engaging in mutually exclusive ventures; there isn’t a single commitment to the rule of the apparatus as the main absolute conductor of film. (Levi, 2010, 56) In Raul Hausmann’s long-term investment in the field of optophonetics, the improvement of the apparatus was traveling along with a potential de-materialization of the medium, “understanding perception and thought as machine-like processes, the author of the *Mechanical Head* increasingly posited film—that foremost vision-machine—as the instrument of a generalised “cinematic thought” (Levi, 2010, 57).¹ Haussman’s interdisciplinary constructions reveal its non specificity. (Cornelius Borck, 2005, 10).

¹ Haussman is here recognizing the fact that in the aftermath of its technological realization, mankind’s ancient “dream” of cinema retroactively established itself as an aspect of a larger “reality of total cinema,” of a world-wide network of latent moving images.”

"We then examined how a motion picture is constructed. In order to determine the main strength of the cinematographic effect, we took one strip of film, cut it apart into its separate shots and then discussed where the very "filmness" which is the essence of filmic construction lay."

Kuleshov on Film: Writings of Lev Kuleshov. Berkeley: University

For Andre Bazin, a hypothetical origin of the arts, seen from a psychological point of view, could be related with the Egyptian ritual of life preservation through the artifice of mummification and clay statuary, a veneration of a world that men artificially created through the arts produced, for him, the replica is never a simple observation, it is a construction of an ideal; cinema is not a mere replica nor it should be explained in the context of an art that intends above all to capture reality, rather adds to reality, it is “a thing in nature”, a mold or a masque. (Bazin: 1967, 6)

The idea that cinema could be liberated from the “material” of film, is shared by André Bazin and Sergei Eisenstein and it is articulated in Jonathan Valley’s “The Material of Film and the Idea of Cinema”, although in Pavle Levi’s “Cinema by Other Means”, *montage* is seen through other mediums and articulated through a fundamental dialectical approach (Levi, 2010 53); between an *Idea* of cinema, the conceptualization translated into a “de-materialization” and a construction based on the *apparatus* proper to the medium, “this Idea acquired sufficient conceptual precision—that it gained its own, albeit immaterial, specificity—only after the cinematographic apparatus had already been invented.”(Levi, 2010, 56). Levi articulates the *Idea of cinema* as the concept of the medium which is dialectically conversing with the *cinematographic apparatus* involved — he is referring to the importance of separating these aspects at the light of its historical dimension as a recurring *performative act*, meaning that this separation had to be accessed every time we are in the realm of art/media practice. (Levi, 2010, 56); By observing the unorthodox devotion to medium-specificity “*cinema by other means*” in the art work of the 1920s and ‘30s, he articulates the complexity of the notion of medium, specifically in regards to unraveling cinema within new media apparatuses, invented by the Dadaists, Constructivists, and the Surrealists in this period. Levi is not interested in art made under the influence of cinema, but rather in a “conceptualization of the cinema as itself a type of practice that, since the invention of the film apparatus, has also (simultaneously) had a history of execution through other, often “older,” artistic media.” (Levi, 2010, 53).

For Levi, it is only by “repeatedly evoking, by enacting, the discrepancy between the idea and its technological implementation that the essential qualities and the radical non-instrumentalist creative

potential contained in any medium are maintained". (Levi: 2010, 67). A cinematographic *apparatus* that inspired others in revealing the conceptual within the medium is then showed by other older mediums, non filmic media. His analytical view of Aleksander Vuco and Dusan's *The Frenzied Marble* (1930) (an assemblage made of wood, metal, paper and other material), as a material succession of frames, corresponding to the temporal flow of images in cinema, exemplifies his view.

The cinematic notion of apparatus, that the modernists unified as "the medium or support for film being neither the celluloid strip of the images, nor the camera that filmed them, nor the projector that brings them to life in motion, nor the beam of light that relays them to the screen, nor that screen itself but all of these taken together, including the audience's position caught between the source of the light behind it and the image projected before its eyes." (Krauss, 1999, 25)

In 1999, Rossalind Krauss was engaged in her own voyage, investigating the media's lost of specificity, a differentially specificity, or *medium as such* (Krauss 1999, 32)—in it she rethinks the nature of *medium* versus its *apparatus* (Krauss, 1999, 53)—beyond technicality, "involving the art-historical, ideological, and technological specific of the formal enterprise of art making" (McKee, 2010, 22). Using Marcel Broodthaers as her main example, an investigation into his life project of erasing the idea of individual arts as media specificity. (Krauss, 1999, 12) To find a redemptive usage of the obsolete in Broodthaers, in his embrace of the beginnings of silent film—"Broodthaers honored the differential condition of film: its inextricable relation between simultaneity and sequence, it's layering of sound or text over image". (Krauss, 1999, 45). The artist set himself apart from a structuralist rearticulation of the Hollywoodesque, embracing instead a retrograde position, approaching the silent film condition as self-differing—"If the medium of primitive film resisted structural closure in this sense, it allowed Broodthaers to see what the structuralists did not: that the filmic apparatus presents us with a medium whose specificity is to be found in its condition as self/differing. It is aggregative, a matter of interlocking supports and layered conventions." (Krauss, 1999, 44).

Her thoughts interwove with Walter Benjamin on the potential of obsolescence (Krauss, 99, 41), and reminds us of the extremely resourceful capacity of artists to reinvent the medium, through an outmoded other one, such as the old medium of drawing—interpreted here in this essay through the work of Alexandra do Carmo.

In Yates McKee's essay "Wake, Vestige, Survival: Sustainability and the Politics of the Trace in Allora and Calzadilla's Land Mark" (McKee, 2010, 22), the idea of medium specificity is problematised by considering *the trace* as a medium in this particular contemporary art work, and it is specifically connected with Krauss' proposal where the idea of medium distances itself from materiality as pure physicality.

Resonating with Alexandra do Carmo's proposal, where physical drawing does not act as *the* medium, it is rather the interchangeability between both drawing and cinema (editing as *Idea*) that is acting as such. For the artist is also a way to de-materialise by re-materializing on paper what is for her the idea of film—montage portrayed as drawing as thought. (do Carmo, 2011)

Alexandra do Carmo's *Document* drawing series, enact the conceptualization of the editing principles of silent film through drawing. According to the artist, "the first conceptual rule applied was envisioning a time line as a whole, the figures evolved in their shape as when a director decides which opticals to involve; dissolves, fades, wipes and any other optical effects."²

Reisz and Millar mention the applicability of editing principles involved in silent film today as its dramatic usefulness has remained unaltered, it is very much part of the film-maker's resources. (Reisz & Millar, 1968, 28) The drawings portray the use of cinematic resources, applied through the use of pencil, printed text and paper, a symbiosis of screen and drawing as thought. In these drawings at the bottom part of the sheet of paper, a printed text is added, intended to mimic the content of some of the video sentences heard in the video documents—a sometimes non linear selection of sentences, some seconds or few minutes of the video, strategically positioned as 'video' subtitles.

Bruno Marques writes in *Alexandra do Carmo. Emancipation and Resistance: Suburban Allotments, Spontaneous and "Clandestine"*, that it is not as an anticipated cinema drawing script that the drawings are made, a tool helping to build the cinematic narrative, they rather happen after the video editing process is finished—thus they emerge as a new editing process through drawing—the introduction of a 'pencil on paper timeline' enables the artist to emphasize other aspects of the subject matter in an attempt to produce new meanings—by editing content for the second time through other means. (Marques: 2018, 2).

² Alexandra do Carmo, notebooks on *All was Captured (even the movements of the goat)*, Quadrum Gallery, Lisbon, 2011

Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar refer to the great potential of delivering the content more effectively, literally and figuratively with less aesthetic noise attached: “The picture of the angry father pointing his erring son to the door is made no more significant if we add the words: Get out of here and never darken these doors again.” The silent image, in such a case, may well be more, rather than less, impressive.” (Reisz and Millar, 1968, 26.)

The art historian and curator Catarina Rosendo, in *Representations of a Community of Experience*, refers the specific perceptive codes between the use of the image, the written word and the audio in Alexandra’s work: “Although the series of drawings follows on temporally from the recording, both function in the exhibition space in a circular complementarity and refer to each other in a constant transformation of the illustrated and narrative effects differently explored by the specific codes of perception for the sound, the written word and the drawing, and also by their own forms of interrelationship and more or less innate forms of attention.” (Rosendo: 2011, 3) As the figures in the drawing suggest the camera movement, in fact the whole drawing sequences is an exercise of time in space—the slow work of the pencil, the allusion to the cuts, the continuity of imperfections and of unfinished work. It is not the narrative that is the object of interest, most importantly is the parallel established to the editing temporal movements in film, revealing the Idea of film—which is embedded in the editing process of the eternal fictional element of drawing.

For Carlos Natálio, cinema is a temporal object — “This way, cinema is a temporal object in which the consciousness of the spectator enters during perception, and it is while it’s there that it can be solicited and affected. Or, in other words: “outer cinema” (material mechanism) and “inner cinema” (human mechanism) get each other’s attention. Finally, the phenomenological argument taken from the reworking of Husserl’s retentions, especially the fact that the “tertiary retentions” constituted by technical objects can always affect perception and memory, closes the discussion: cinema is placed within the human and it operationalizes a vital key played outside a rigidified, industrialized vision of the medium of film.” (Natálio: 2015, 111) Being present activates through perception the spectator’s consciousness, which can also be affected in the process, this way material mechanical aspects, which Krauss transformed into *medium as such*, and human aspects, interact. For Alexandra do Carmo, the determination of the project’s concept in interaction with the apparatuses used or represented by, are concretized only in a *mobile spectator*, one moving between rooms, thus there is a permanent dislocation of the spectator’s body, in an attempt to grasp the concept within the whole project.

As part of the logic of seeing drawing as an instrument of thought, and a medium that permanently questions itself and others, the artist superimposes images, fasts forward towards a temporal efficiency, challenging our limits of perception and enhancing the text availability to the spectator. Bellour's film's *unattainable text* is transformed into a slow motion progressive re-evaluation of what the cinematic has to offer. The art work mentioned, portraying *montage* within the apparatus of film, conducts the spectator into discovering what it is to produce, to become an author, as a Brechtian collaborator—thus the author's function becomes active within the viewer's body; their consciousness participating in the experience, transforming itself through a process that involves the perceptual-sensorial human apparatus, only achieved by her presence as in “the movies”. In this essay we aim to reveal the presence of the human sensorial device, that still, as Levi articulates, partially at least, starts the machinery that is making possible to accomplish efficacy through technology: “the medium maintains the non-reified form of an apparatus set in motion by thought-relations.” (Levi, 2010, 67).

Second Part

Besides investigating the dynamic between materialization and de-materialization of its dispositifs and mediums, these artworks constitute a curatorial practice in its presentation component. A fundamental aspect is the place of the visitor, and relative to it we can identify diverse levels of performativity, also in relation to the curatorial apparatus³ as a meeting place of diverse temporal and disruptive dimensions. The viewer's role, frequently mentioned by the artist, is portrayed as someone arriving in order to complete the work through a mental memory reconstruction. And it does so, through a constant dialectical exercise between different temporal and spatial dimensions where each viewer fabricates a distinct work of art. This metaphor turns itself visible by the fact that the artist fills the interior of the eyes of some of the drawing characters with another small drawing, as a reference to a mirror of what the memory could eventually built—the point of view of the ones seeing these drawing characters that are so lightly drawn. This way Alexandra do Carmo presents tools, built through different dispositifs, attending several possibilities of what could eventually constitute each one of these artworks and their memory testimonies. These “other” hypothetically constituted artworks emerge precisely within the curatorial milieu. The works in

³ In this point, it is important to refer the agambenian concept of apparatus, as a constructed object and system, which everything is under control and, in a foucaultian perspective, something which is part of a disciplinary society, in which the bodies are under surveillance. The curatorial apparatus, as all the cultural and artistic institutions are embedded of these mechanisms of selection, organization and control not only of their collections or objects but also of their public and bodies. See it in: Agamben, Giorgio, “What is na Apparatus?” and Other Essays, Stanford University Press, 2009; and in Foucault, Michel, *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la prison*, Paris, Galimard, 1975.

their inherent performativity convoke a particular presentation mode within the creation of a potential undetermined place for a visitor. At the light of the concept of performativity⁴ itself, the nature of the presence of this ‘persona’ as a contemplation act⁵, a brief presence, an affectation or a co-construction of the art work itself, is different in each one of these concepts according to a time of being and a gesture of being in the presence of the work. While the visitor can be described as someone staying in the space with the work, we can distinguish two different performative attitudes within her behaviour—as a visitor-spectator or a visitor-participant. The former can be rather evasive, not letting her being affected by the temporal dynamic of the curatorial apparatus or the work—someone en passage describing a continuous spatial movement, stopping occasionally in order to catch a few captivating details—someone to whom it has been given something to see, and that eventually, explicitly or not will develop thought and build memories around it.

As far as the latter, it is someone assuming co-authorship, knowing that possesses the ability to activate the work, which in some occasions might lead to act or/and even provoke physical change in it. In the curatorial context the concept of spectator can be connected with Tony Bennnett’s “exhibitionary complex”, the place where something has been given to us to see in a selective and organised manner, in order to persuade the visitor to accept what is being shown - “exhibitionary complex – a power made manifest not in its ability to inflict pain but its ability to organize and coordinate an order of things and to produce a place for the people in relation to that order.” (Bennett: 1988, 80). On the other hand Jacques Rancière’s (2008) overarching concept of spectator defends the nonexistence of passivity; the subject is always affected by the image or in this particular case by the work (in a broader way). Thus, the spectator has an active role in the production of meaning, always in a personal and individual manner, which will be retained in the remembering process of the artwork. Although the artist invites the visitor to be a producer of meaning, she does not convoke her/ him to participate in the sense of physically altering what is being presented and that was fabricated by her, rather, she invites the visitor to interpret and giving it a personal/private meaning. This constant performative physical action of the visitor, is also a mental dislocation between the video projection, the drawing presentation and the curatorial discourse. On the other hand, the work itself provokes a dialogue between its “mediums”—video and drawing converge in an imagery montage between what was captured by the camera, what was edited by the computer

⁴ In this context, performativity as an aspect which describes and defines these artworks. They cause a (re)action from the visitor/ spectator not only in gestures but in their thoughts. In this aspect, we shouldn’t forget that exhibition is always a dramaturgical space, an experience place. About this, it would be interesting to see: Smith, Terry, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, New York, Independent Curators International, 2012; or, Dorothea van Hantelmann, *How to do things with art: The Meaning of Art’s Performativity*, Zurich, JRP Ringier, 2010;

⁵ About this point, see Groys, Boris, “Comrades of Time” (2009), in www.e-flux.com/journal/comrades-of-time/

and what is being transferred to the drawing. There is also a sound dislocation happening in place, a sort of sound montage after the fact, between a space where the volume of sound might not allow an immediate awareness of processed thought and a space of silence where the thought of what was previously seen and heard can be calmly and selectively processed. This dialectical transference between video and drawing creates a disruption in the temporal dimension of the video, almost as extending it, a sort of drawing slow motion where you can find possibly lost details within the mind of the one watching the video. Between video and drawing we are constantly challenging the speed and characteristics of time. This fact is *per se* questioning the temporal dimension of the exhibition, in which the now allowed to be named visitor-participant fulfils a time for “seeing the work” through a different “medium.” In this sense, in the performativity of Alexandra do Carmo’s exhibition sites we are constantly on the move, stopping in front of a drawing for a period of time, which might awake some memory, perhaps corresponding to some seconds of a video previously seen and heard. Thus, by juxtaposing the two dispositifs there is a stretching in the time periods of seeing and perceiving within the curatorial milieu. Questions such as these might stay in our thoughts; who stays for the all duration of the video projection? Is there a reasonable video duration in an exhibition context?

The formal decisions of the arrangement of these dispositifs in the space condition the construction of meaning by a visitor-participant. Nevertheless, one shouldn’t forget that the exhibition site is a site of power, of imagery and discourse and also invariably always a constitutive part of what will become the discourse of the work of art itself. Contrary to the notion that there is a linear temporal concept associated with the curatorial apparatus as an absolute element that is occasionally intercepted by the video and the drawing, in the curatorial context this is composed by fragments of speech and by the affect processes of memory emerging in this site. The artist positions herself as a curator intending to work outside the dispositif, keeping a space open for the construction of meaning as a task for the visitor; it wants to make of her a visitor-participant. It is as if the montage exercise that is so characteristic of her work, both in video and drawing translates itself into a composition of these fragments, detailed content and pieces of memory that are at the origin of another work— one emerging from these two “media,” between video and drawing, a space of disruption of the curatorial apparatus. It is through this methodology of fabricating perspectives, or

Didi-Huberman's montage,⁶ used so many times in her work, that a dialectical discourse happens, and the author assumes a whole political discourse through her choices.

Bibliography

- Agamben, Giorgio, "What is na Apparatus?" and Other Essays, Stanford University Press, 2009;
- Bazin, André, *What Is Cinema?*, Volume 1, Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.
- Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT press, 2000.
- Borck, Cornelius, 2005, http://mediacultures.net/jspui/bitstream/10002/292/1/Cornelius_Borck.pdf
- Caws, Mary Ann, *Manifesto a Century of Isms*, Moholy-Nagy, László, *Remarks for those who refuse to understand the film immediately* University of Nebraska press, 2001.
- Didi-Huberman, Georges, *L'Image Survivante: une histoire de l'art et temps des fantomes selon Aby Warburg*. Paris: Ed. Minuit, 2002.
- Foucault, Michel, *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la prison*, Paris, Galimard, 1975.
- Hantelmann, Dorothea van, *How to do things with art: The Meaning of Art's Performativity*, Zurich, JRP Ringier, 2010;
- Krauss, Rosalind, "Reinventing the médium", in *Critical Inquiry*, 25, nº 2, Winter 1999.
- Krauss, Rosalind, *Voyage on the North Sea, Art in the Age of Post/Medium Condition*, Thames & Hudson, 1999.
- Levi,Pavle, "Cinema by Other Means", *October 131*, Cambridge: MIT Press, winter 2010.
- Manovich, Lev, *The Language of New Media (What is cinema?)*, the MIT press, Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England, 2001.
- Marques, Bruno, *Alexandra do Carmo. Emancipation and resistance: suburban allotments, spontaneous and "clandestine"*, Sismógrafo, 2018. At <http://www.sismografo.org/exhibitions/Alexandra-do-carmo-o-atelier-verde-no-ic/>.
- McKee,Yates, Wake, Vestige, "Survival: Sustainability and the Politics of the Trace in Allora and Calzadilla's Land Mark", *October 133*, Cambridge: MIT Press, Summer 2010.
- Moholy-Nagy, László. *Painting, Photography, Film*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969.

⁶ This concept emerges, here, not only as a methodology of the artist but as a condition to the presentation of these works in the curatorial apparatus. There more than one montage process in these works: the artist process and the one that each visitor desire to imagine: an interior and mental montage process in which each one connected áudios, video and drawing. To see more about this concept: Didi-Huberman, Georges, *L'Image Survivante: une histoire de l'art et temps des fantomes selon Aby Warburg*. Paris: Ed. Minuit, 2002.

- Natálio, Carlos, “Cinema, Biopolitics and “cinematic operative model”, *La Deleuziana* – online journal of philosophy – ISSN 2421-3098 N. 1 / 2015 – crisis of the European Biopolitics.
- Rancière, Jacques, *Le Spectateur Émancipé*, Paris, La Fabrique Editions, 2008.
- Reisz and Millar, *Technique of Film Editing*, second edition, New York and London: Hastings House, 1968.
- Rosendo, Catarina, “Representations of a Community of Experience”, C.M.L Quadrum catalogue *Alexandra do Carmo All was captured, even the movements of the goat*, 2011.
- Smith, Terry, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, New York, Independent Curators International, 2012;
- Valley, Jonathan, *The material of film and the Idea of Cinema*” p18 October 103 Cambridge: MIT Press, winter 2003.