

● Mirian Tavares  
Faro (Portugal)

Requested: 2009-10-07 / Received: 2010-02-15  
Accepted: 2010-05-28 / Published: 2010-10-01

DOI:10.3916/C35-2010-02-04

# Understanding Cinema: the Avant-gardes and the Construction of Film Discourse

Comprender el cine: las vanguardias y la construcción del texto fílmico

## ABSTRACT

This essay highlights the role of historical avant-gardes in shaping film discourse. This role was vital for the recognition of cinema as an art form, as well as for the constitution of a visual and textual discourse that came to be reflected in the Institutional Mode of Representation – Hollywood film from the 1920<sup>s</sup> to the 1940<sup>s</sup>. To realize the importance of artistic movements in the creation of new paradigms for art at large, it is necessary to understand their principles and the context in which a new way of looking and reflecting on the world came about. The promotion of authentic and efficient film literacy requires focusing on the era in which cinema began. Only by examining the 19<sup>th</sup> century more deeply can we perceive what lies beyond that invention of the Lumière brothers. The essay shows that cinema was not only inscribed in the times from which it emerged but that it also launched a new paradigm that the arts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were yet to discover.

## RESUMEN

A través de este ensayo se pretende resaltar el papel que las vanguardias históricas han desempeñado en la construcción del discurso cinematográfico. Dicho papel es fundamental para el reconocimiento del cine como arte y para la constitución de un discurso visual y textual que se va a reflejar en el cine del denominado «Modo de representación institucional»: el cine hollywoodiense que va de las décadas de los años veinte a los cuarenta. Para comprender el papel de los movimientos artísticos que crearon nuevos paradigmas para el arte en general, es necesario conocer sus principios y el contexto del nacimiento de la nueva forma de ver y de representar/reflejar el mundo. La promoción de una auténtica «alfabetización fílmica» requiere centrarse en el nacimiento del cine y de su entorno, porque sólo a través de una mirada más profunda en el siglo XIX, es posible leer todo que está más allá de la creación de los hermanos Lumière. En suma, en este trabajo se pretende destacar que el cine no sólo se inscribe en su propio tiempo, sino que al mismo tiempo está lanzando un nuevo paradigma, aun por descubrir, para todas las artes en el siglo XX.

## KEYWORDS / PALABRAS CLAVE

Cinema, surrealism, historical avant-gardes, formalism, film literacy, technology, film discourse.  
Cine, surrealismo, vanguardias históricas, formalismo, alfabetización fílmica, tecnología, texto fílmico.

◆ Ph.D. Mirian Estela Nogueira Tavares. Coordinator of CIAC (Center of Arts Research and Communication) and Associate Professor at the Universidade do Algarve (Portugal) (mtavares@ualg.pt).  
Translation: Noel Bye

## 1. Introduction: cinema and the invention of modern life

The promotion of authentic efficient media literacy<sup>1</sup> firstly requires an analysis of the context into which cinema was born. The Arts are perfectly integrated into the enveloping universe that produces, distributes and embraces them. And so it is essential to immerse ourselves in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century to understand the underlying logic from which emerged the Lumière brothers invention of film in 1895 and the path taken up to that year when the history of cinema officially begins.

To inscribe cinema within the context of its origin requires us to know the building blocks of the new century born under the aegis of technology. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Baudelaire<sup>2</sup>, identified the emergence of another object, a man who wanders about flanked by mirrors, surrounded by images: the man in the crowd<sup>3</sup>, anonymous, without purpose or direction; a man who is fearful and trapped inside a space that transforms before his astonished gaze. In short, a new man in need of a new form of expression.

Before cinema, there was a worldwide desire to transform life into a show, entertainment, a sight for the eyes. And all eyes were on Paris, then the centre of the Western world. The *Guía Casell* of 1884 described Paris as a city that always had «something on show». Vanessa R. Shwartz, in an essay on the filmgoer before film existed, says that «real life was experienced like a show whereas the show seemed increasingly like real life» (Charney & Shwartz, 2001). So life as spectacle for the cinema was the perfect response to a hedonist, bourgeois desire that was evident in all the art of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Cinema is the son of bourgeois culture that tends towards Realism and originates as an art that embraces the question of technology, production and mass distribution<sup>4</sup>. It is, therefore, the son of the metropolises that began to expand throughout the Old and New World. The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century finally came with the overthrow of the culture of the Ancien Régime. New answers were needed for the new man that appeared, for the cities that were reconfigured, for a volatile and ephemeral taste that marked the rhythm of mass production, for a new man foreseen by Edgar Allan Poe in his story and faithfully maintained by Baudelaire.

Literature and theatre were predominant at the passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If anybody wanted to express himself in narrative or drama, he would do so through these two discourses. But cinema gradually took over, perhaps because it was more

appropriate for the new reality, the new man, and the new century.

In order to understand the relationship that cinema established with the other arts, it is necessary to examine the century that produced it. There are a number of essays on how Western pre-cinematographic society lived Modernity (in Baudelaire's meaning of the word), an existence that paved the way for the arrival of cinema. These authors show how cinema was an invention that was merely the materialization of an idea already taking shape in the thought and behaviour of the common man of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

## 2. Cinema as a mirror

Early films were essentially documentaries. For the early creators of cinema this was a machine that had no other future than for the scientific use to which it could be put. Watching those films made before the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is to enter a repository of images that reflect the words of Baudelaire and other authors who were able to articulate the times they lived in. As a direct descendant of photography, the new medium of expression effortlessly supports the frame of reality. Besides the possibility of capturing the world as it was, this new medium also gives that world movement. Cinema was photography made in that instant, adding connectivity that up to then had been sought in the world of images but which had never been found. Not even the Renaissance at its peak of representative perfection contributed frames of the world, signs of a reality that stuck as if glued to the lens of the camera.

Reality penetrated the body of artistic creation: photography and cinema, even in their most radical manifestations<sup>5</sup>, provide a frame of captured light and reality. Their ability to capture the world apparently separated both cinema and photography from ART.

Yuri Lotman (1979) stated that the ability of cinema to mimic reality has prevented it becoming an instrument of cognition, and not only as a mirror of the world around it. Meanwhile, the poetry of the new medium was soon apparent, and cinema was freed of technical automatism, which led the avant-garde to acknowledge it as the Seventh Art.

## 3. Cinema and the avant-gardes

The relationship between cinema and the art of the time is best described by the link between film and the so-called Historical Avant-gardes; above all because the avant-gardes enabled cinema to be classified as Art. The role of the avant-gardes in the creation of cinematographic language is essential for understand-

ding the holistic thought that underlay the general ideology of the artists at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Cinema arrives when the avant-gardes, in their iconoclastic desperation, were looking for different media to express the new world that emerged at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The old forms of representation, the old sensibility, were being questioned. The First World War brought in its wake the irrepressible desire to show the horror of an era that had begun so brutally.

More than a contemporary of the avant-gardes of the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, cinema actively participates in the process of creating a form to present the world<sup>6</sup>. This new medium enables the notion of space and time and the man-machine relationship to take on new meanings. Machines fascinated the young artists of the time. If Expressionists saw technology was the evil to be combated, for others, like the Futurists, it expressed the innovative potential of creation that should be incorporated into art. According to Umberto Apollonio, when Marinetti says that «a roaring motor car is more beautiful than the Victoria of Samothrace», he is reflecting on the need for a complete change in the statutes of contemporary art. Art could no longer be confined to museums and academies: «it is widely admitted that schools of all kinds are in need of substantial change, and that art should not be created to sit in museums, in shrine full of dead heroes, but exist for the people» (Apollonio, 1973: 10).

It is important to understand that the avant-gardes' relationship with cinema benefitted both. We need to know what the avant-gardes did for cinema and what cinema gave the avant-gardes in return. Many avant-garde principles are explained through this medium, whose technology succeeded in pushing forward the decomposition and the reconstitution of the look proposed by the Cubists, Dadaists and Futurists<sup>7</sup>. The Manifesto of Futurist Cinema published in 1916 revealed the movement's fascination this new machine. The Futurists was enchanted by cinema, «born only a few years ago (...), lacking a past and free from traditions», as it could become the ideal instrument for new

art, among other things because of its «poly-expressiveness towards which all the most modern artistic researches are moving» (Apollonio, 1973: 207).

The new look that cinema inaugurated also offered the idea of continuity and movement, of time recomposed and montage. The birth of cinema revised the history of art reconstructing it from a new standpoint<sup>8</sup>.

#### 4. From theory to praxis

Sadoul's *Histoire du cinéma mondiale* states that the relationship between cinema and the avant-gardes began when a specific cinema public was constituted. Film clubs were formed, and cinema ceased to be a mere fairground attraction. For Sadoul, 1921 is the

**Cinema is the son of bourgeois culture that tends towards Realism and originates as an art that embraces the question of technology, production and mass distribution<sup>4</sup>. It is, therefore, the son of the metropolises that began to expand throughout the Old and New World. The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century finally came with the overthrow of the culture of the Ancien Régime. New answers were needed for the new man that appeared, for the cities that were reconfigured, for a volatile and ephemeral taste that marked the rhythm of mass production, for a new man foreseen by Edgar Allan Poe in his story and faithfully maintained by Baudelaire.**

beginning of avant-garde involvement in cinema, but he ignored Paul Wegener's first version of *Der Golem* in 1915, considered to be one of the first Expressionist films. Sadoul's omission is probably due to the fact that he believed Wegener's film belonged to the history of conventional rather than experimental cinema as made by the avant-gardes.

Sadoul declared that the Dadaist filmmakers were pioneers. Their films were almost a new form of painting: artist like Viking Eggeling, Hans Richter or Walter Ruttmann pushed back the frontiers of art, using cinema only as a support. For the Dadaist movement, «Le cinéma détient la capacité d'unir en une forme exemplaire et indéfiniment répétable dans la succession temporelle, l'image, la musique et le discours (Sers, 1997: 43). For these artists, cinema was a fascinating

support that was more complete than painting, as it offered the possibility of movement.

In Marcel Duchamp's *Nude descending a staircase*, a work that tries to embody the simultaneity of gestures, we can see where his investigation of plastic arts is leading: to break through the static state of the picture. The expression moving pictures was never so apt: what the Dadaists were looking for, rather than making films, was the physical possibility of applying movement to their pictures using the technique to show its own process, which formed part of the creation.

Despite some points in common, Dadaist films differed substantially from Surrealist cinema. For example, if we take the use of randomness as a motive to help link images together, which is present in both

through Surrealism and Dadaism (and the French avant-garde as a whole at the start of the 20th century): the desire to show the invisible through cinema. Hans Richter comments «J'ai toujours été particulièrement fasciné par les possibilités qu'a le film de rendre l'invisible visible: le fonctionnement du subconscient invisible, qu'aucun autre art ne peut exprimer aussi complètement et aussi efficacement que le film» (Sers, 1997: 7).

### 5. Surrealist poetry

The first Surrealist film was *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, directed by Germaine Dulac and scripted by Antonin Artaud, but the film that best represents the movement is *Un Chien Andalou*, by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí. In 1965, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of

Surrealism (1924-1964) was celebrated with a series of exhibitions and debates, and the *Etudes Cinématographiques* film journal published two volumes on the movement, with specific reference to its relationship with cinema. The aim was not only to clarify the concept of Surrealist cinema but also to what extent this cinema was Surrealist. In general, when we talk of cinema and the avant-gardes, with their theories and manifestos, there is little mention of a Surrealist theory of cinema or even of a specific movement

**Although cinema can reproduce the structure of dreams by means of circularity similar to that in condensations and displacements, Surrealist production in this field is scarce. That is not to say that Surrealist thought and filmmaking have not influenced the history of cinema or certain directors. To distort the world and make it appear strange in order to know it – Surrealism, like the art of its time, proposed a new aesthetic capable of taking the beauty out of the absurd and setting up a diversion in order for reality to emerge.**

that grouped together film-makers and theorists of cinema and Surrealism. But the relationship between them is undeniable, as is how they interpenetrated, albeit in different ways. «S'interroger sur les relations qu'entretinent et qu'entretiennent encore le Cinéma et le Surréalisme, c'est considérer en fait la persistance ou le déclin de cette aventure étonnante que constitue le Surréalisme tout entier»<sup>10</sup>.

movements, we discover that: «La volonté d'éliminer la dépendance causale conduit Dada à la rencontre du hasard, causalité dont on ne peut contrôler les enchaînements» (Sers, 1997: 12). Both movements used randomness, as Sers mentions, but it didn't mean the same for Dadaists and Surrealists. While the former emphasised the exploration of the image for its own sake, discovering the new content that the image revealed, the latter looked for the image but for discursive postulates<sup>9</sup> as well.

According to Sers, the abstract and experimental cinema in Dadaism constitutes the possibility of a discursive language, «d'un ordre de l'image nanti de son autonomie et de sa spécificité dans la marche vers la connaissance» (1997: 6). The Surrealists rejected abstract cinema, perhaps because their own films were based on text and not on image (with the exception of *Man Ray*). For Antonin Artaud, pure cinema was an error. Nevertheless, there was a current running

Philippe Soupault, in a masterly interview with Jean-Marie Mabire in the same issue of *Etudes cinématographiques*, stated: «Le cinéma a été pour nous une immense découverte, au moment où nous élaborions le surréalisme. (...) Nous considérons alors le film comme un merveilleux mode d'expression du rêve» (1965: 29-33). Cinema embodies André Breton's dream: the fragmentation of time thanks to its ability to present the past, present and future at the same time. Time<sup>11</sup> in cinema was perfect for those who wanted to bring the structure of dreams to the surface.

## 6. An original sin

«Les surréalistes s'enthousiasment pour le cinéma qui fait apparaître «les ombres des grandes réalités» (Lièvre-Crosson, 1995: 55). The oneiric nature of film, with the image appearing from, and in, the shadows, opened the way for Surrealist cinema. They tried to recreate poetry on screen with words and objects from the world of painting. However, this begs the question: how was it possible to remain faithful to the movement's principle of automatic creation in a medium like cinema? The best way to resolve this question is to analyze the films of Buñuel. If the Surrealists supported spontaneous creation by means of the movement's various techniques (automatic writing), how can there be Surrealist cinema if this degree of spontaneity is not possible when making a film<sup>12</sup>? If Man Ray, according to M. Beaujour, follows the automatist maxim, then Buñuel is closer to Surrealist painters like Magritte, who «pèche par son abandon théorique de l'automatisme» (1965: 61). Both Buñuel and Magritte rebel against a Surrealist tenet. One could ask if pure automatic writing ever existed in Surrealist art. Even Breton himself acknowledged the difficulty of reaching those higher planes that the Surrealists yearned for. True automatic writing (or art in general terms) was a utopia. With the look of temporal distance, Breton makes some playful reflections that corroborate the impossibility of allowing oneself to be totally dominated by automatism in the act of creation. He also recognizes that even those who use automatic writing in poetry composition later pick out the fragments they consider to be good literature.

In 1924, Max Morise published his chronicle *Les beaux arts, n° 1 de La révolution surréaliste*, in which he stated that «la succession des images, la fuite des idées sont une condition fondamentale de toute manifestation surréaliste». For Morise, Surrealist ideas of plastic art were evident in that movement's literature, painting or photography. However, the possibility offered by cinema of producing a succession of images as well as a simultaneity greater than that provided by other arts like painting and sculpture «ouvre une voie vers la solution de ce problème». Besides, cinema, which is art that occurs in time, is very close to the Surrealist desire to embody an image that starts in an instant and comes and goes tracing a curve comparable «à la courbe de la pensée». Therefore, if for the Surrealists the possibility of recovering the flow of thought, or the current of the unconscious and allowing it to sprout in its own temporal extension is an essential component of their art, cinema appears as the technique to allow this art to be created.

Although cinema can reproduce the structure of dreams by means of circularity similar to that in condensations and displacements, Surrealist production in this field is scarce. That is not to say that Surrealist thought and filmmaking have not influenced the history of cinema or certain directors.

To distort the world and make it appear strange in order to know it – Surrealism, like the art of its time, proposed a new aesthetic capable of taking the beauty out of the absurd and setting up a diversion in order for reality to emerge. Breton opened his first Surrealist Manifesto by stating: «Tant va la croyance à la vie, à ce que la vie a du plus précaire, la vie réelle s'entend, qu'à la fin cette croyance se perd». Perhaps the Surrealist proposal was this: to reaffirm the belief in life, a proposal that was present, directly or indirectly, in the work of various film directors, and which was evident in many of Breton's early texts, even before the movement was officially inaugurated in 1924.

## 7. A Surrealist cinema

It is important to understand that the Surrealist proposal was to deconstruct the narrative logic (on a syntactic and semantic level), which explains their interest in authors like Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Isidore Ducasse. It also explains the attraction of cinema, which breaks the rules of writing and constructs a narrative form built entirely on images through montage and its various technical possibilities. But this rupture did not mean a break with reality, for the Surrealists were seeking the true wonder of life and, according to Robert Bréchon, for the Surrealists this was to be found in a presence that was both desired and foretold, as opposed to the mysterious which was always absent

Bréchon says that Surrealist poetic language has no discursive logic in the linkage of ideas. It appears as «une construction où on n'emploierait ni joints ni ciment» (1971: 176).

The meaning and syntax are often discordant, which causes the discourse to break down, accentuated by the highly particular use of punctuation to the point where some authors simply dispense with it all together. For Bréchon, to do without punctuation, a process he believes was started by Apollinaire and Cendrars and became widespread throughout Surrealism, is a device to «rétablir la continuité de la parole poétique». Surrealist writing is the continuous movement of the word (absence of punctuation) and the discontinuity of images.

Comparing the poetry of Breton and Soupault to the films of Buñuel, for example, we perceive the

intrinsic logic in the construction of Surrealist writing, either through images or text, just as we understand their principle of montage, which differed greatly from that of the Russian Formalists and which also went on to influence the entire history of cinema.

### 8. Montage according to Sergei Eisenstein

After 1917, the avant-gardes placed the new medium at the forefront of their experiments and used it as an instrument of struggle and education of consciences. In general, the films they made were not popular, and were unsatisfactory in the eyes of Communist parties, which wanted something more efficient propaganda-wise. Nevertheless, their films and theories would be fundamental in the history of art and cinema of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

One of the basic principles of the Russian Formalists was «to make the object strange». The idea of strangeness initially proposed by Viktor Sklovskii demanded that the object be taken out of its usual setting to take on a different meaning. Our vision of objects is automatic. It is as if we no longer see them. When we see them outside their everyday context, we see them but we also understand and recognize the world around us.

For Dudley Andrew, rather than being a «philosophy applied to all artistic styles», Formalism showed «a tendency to favour a particular style of art» (1989: 93). However, the importance of Russian Formalism is indisputable, not only as a theory but also in its films, which are frames in the history of cinema. Although they do not constitute a theoretically organic corpus, one principle was always present in Formalist work: to break away from the automatism inherent in the vision of daily life. Formalism produced individuals whose work was internationally recognized, but it was also a true example of an avant-garde working as a group: the FEKS (Factory of the Eccentric Actor). Grouped around Kozintsev and Trauberg, its manifestos of Eccentrism were inspired by Marinetti (some of whose ideas were adopted but later rejected).

Nevertheless, there was one Russian Formalist who stood out: Eisenstein, not only as theorist but also as director of some of the most important works in cinema history. According to Sklovskii, «it is easy to recognize Eisenstein's genius because individual genius is inoffensive (...) but it is difficult to acknowledge the genius of a entire epoch» (1971: 138). Eisenstein belonged to a great period in the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century art and his genius is unquestionable: his conceptions on montage revolutionized cinema.

In 1923, Eisenstein wrote his first essay in which

he explained his ideas on montage, specifically proletarian theatre and the development of the concept of the spectacle. For Eisenstein, the effect of the spectacle must be measured in experimental terms and calculated materially. Evidently, it would be impossible to use the same terminology in Surrealism. His proposal had nothing to do with the Surrealists or Dadaists because his aim was to achieve a specific final thematic effect which, for the Surrealists, was almost always unpredictable<sup>13</sup>.

### 9. Conclusion

«Le plaisir du jeu» is what gives life to avant-garde cinema. The agonizing elements in Buñuel's work, for example, remind us that the fundamental rule of the game of cinema is ambiguity and surrender to the abyss. According to Benjamin Péret, cinema is increasingly removed from what the avant-gardes wanted to see on screen. Of the poetry seen in some films there only remains a shadow of a desire that was never fully fulfilled<sup>14</sup>. The Surrealists' disappointment with cinema was extended to the general frustration of all those who believed film was a medium for revealing the true wonder of life and broadening people's ability to see the world through new eyes.

Perhaps the avant-garde movements themselves were responsible for cinema not fully developing as an art form. In the 1920s, Desnos criticized avant-garde pretension in relation to cinema. He said there was «un mode erroné de penser dû à la persistante influence d'Oscar Wilde et des esthètes de 1890, influence à laquelle nous devons entre autres les manifestations de M. Jean Cocteau, a créé dans le cinéma une néfaste confusion» (1929: 385-7). For Desnos, avant-garde cinema, which arose from a mysticism of the expression, led to film that lacked human emotion and was known for the speed at which its productions became obsolete. As if this weren't enough, all film ran the risk of being influenced by a pernicious aestheticism, which it was necessary to combat.

The artificiality that impregnated a certain French avant-garde was full of formulas that ended up imitating previous works, such as films by Sauvage and Cavalcanti. Few films lived up to what Desnos called «les vrais films révolutionnaires»<sup>15</sup>.

The avant-gardes may have failed in their attempt to transform cinema into an artistic revolutionary form, but their work has not all been in vain. Man Ray (quoted by Buñuel<sup>16</sup>) said: «in all films, good or bad, beyond and in spite of the intentions of the director, cinematographic poetry fights to break through and be seen» (Xavier, 1983: 335). The poetry struggles to rise

up to the surface... what the film director can do is present it. And its revelation will only be complete if the spectator is totally complicit with the film narrative, a complicity that can only occur when the spectator understands the meanderings of the construction of a discourse that is complex and hybrid but not inscrutable.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In «El aprendizaje del cine», Adolfo Bellido López (1998: 13-20) writes about the apparent ease with which we receive film images, as if it were unnecessary to learn how to interpret them better. According to Bellido, if the reflection on the type of image before us is inadequate, it is unlikely that we learn anything from it.

<sup>2</sup> Baudelaire captures and defines the spirit of the age in «El pintor de la vida moderna», in which he discusses the work of the 19th century designer, water colour painter and engraver Constantin Guys, famous for his portrayal of the dandies and courtesans of the time. Defining beauty as «consisting of an eternal, variable element whose quantity is very difficult to determine, and of an element that is relative, circumstantial which, if we so wish, will be in turn the era, the fashion, the morality, the passion or some combination of these». Baudelaire reveals the transitory nature expressed by the sentiment of modernity. The mannerist painter of customs, like modern man, is an observer, a «flâneur» (1996: 10).

<sup>3</sup> In the same article by Baudelaire (originally included in the *L'art romantique* volume, a collection of articles about art criticism published posthumously in 1869), we find references to the tale by Edgar A. Poe: «Do you remember a picture (it really is a picture) described by the most important author of the time called «L'Homme des Foules» (The Man in the Crowd)? From the window of a café, a convalescent avidly observes the passing crowd, mentally immersing himself in all the thoughts that dance around him. Recently recovered from a serious illness, he delights in the little signs and comings and goings of life; just as he had been about to give up everything, he now absorbs and ardently desires to recall everything» (1996: 17). The man ends up merging with the crowd, going in search of an anonymous face that made a striking impression on him, surrendering to fascination for the unknown.

<sup>4</sup> Santos Zunzunegui discusses this question in his article «Acerca del análisis fílmico: el estado de las cosas» (2007: 51-58).

<sup>5</sup> Even in pure cinema experiments, in which Brakhage, Kubelka and others abandoned narrative and representation to work only with cinema materiality, they could not escape the reality of light when making their films.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin, speaking of the spectator's relationship with cinema, describes the nature of a medium which, as opposed to the contemplative arts like painting, does not allow you to stand before it following the free flow of the thoughts because «you simply cannot do this when you watch a film. As soon as your sight registers an image, it has already changed. You cannot detain it». Our perception

is produced by the collision caused by the speed of the images as they pass before our eyes. In a note, Benjamin comments on this statute of the «collision» which, in a way, answers a contemporary need: «Cinema is the art form that matches contemporary life that is more and more dangerous. The need to subject oneself to the effects of the collision is people's adaptation to the dangers that threaten them. Cinema corresponds to the profound changes in the apparatus of perception similar to those faced by any passerby in his private life as he moves through the metropolis, or from a historical perspective, like those experienced by any citizen today» (1992: 107).

<sup>7</sup> «Just as in the case of Dadaism, cinema can help us understand Cubism and Futurism. They both started off as art's inadequate attempt at breaking through to reality by using tools. As opposed to cinema, these two movements' attempt at the artistic representation of reality was a kind of alliance between that representation and tools. This would explain the notable presence in Cubism of the presentiment of the construction of the visual tool that was to be cinema and the premonition of the effects this tool would have,

**Early films were essentially documentaries. For the early creators of cinema this was a machine that had no other future than for the scientific use to which it could be put. Watching those films made before the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is to enter a repository of images that reflect the words of Baudelaire and other authors who were able to articulate the times they lived in. As a direct descendant of photography, the new medium of expression effortlessly supports the frame of reality.**

which cinema was to confirm with the rapid development of filmmaking» (Benjamin, 1992: 108).

<sup>8</sup> «In his essay 'Sobre el punto de vista en las artes' en 'La deshumanización del arte' y otros ensayos de estética, Ortega y Gasset wrote: «History, when it is what it must be, is a production of films. It does not just install itself in each date and view the moral landscape from which it is seen; instead, that series of static images, each one enclosed within itself, is substituted by the image of a movement». He continually criticises the fact that historical events are crystallized, fragmented and deposited in a refrigerator (the museum), finally becoming cadavers. To exhume the dead body «only requires the pictures to be hung in a particular order and for the look to pass over them rapidly, or if not the look, meditation. Then it would be clear that the movement of painting, from Giotto to the present day, is a simple, unique gesture with its own start and end» (1976: 159).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Philippe Sers: «Toutefois, le dadaïsme aura la prudence (étrangère au surréalisme), de ne pas s'engager plus avant dans la formulation ou l'explicitation de cette loi de chance, mais de concentrer sur sa mise en pratique en vue de la découverte des nouveaux contenus. Cela permet de comprendre que l'étude de l'image dadaïste puisse mettre à jour des richesses inattendues dans la voie de l'établissement d'un ordre de l'image exploré en tant que tel, et non en

vertu de postulats discursifs» (1997: 12).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Georges-Albert Astre, in the preface to the first volume of «Études Cinématographiques» dedicated to Surrealism. For Astre, the importance of Surrealism in our times is undeniable because Surrealism «n'a jamais cessé de vivre», its attitude of continually exploring the limits and above all its exploration «de tous émerveillements et tentative pour rendre possible tout le soi-disant impossible». Astre believes that the movement succeeded in bringing us closer to a richer, more complex and fascinating reality. From the start Breton noted «cette magie exceptionnelle des dépaysements filmiques»; the Surrealist act with regard to cinema is more than an act of construction of the film; it is a renewed act of reception. «Inutile de dissimuler: l'intérêt de la relation Cinéma-Surréalisme est ailleurs» (3-5). Like Breton, the end of the first Surrealist Manifesto proclaims: «C'est vivre et cesser de vivre qui sont des solutions imaginaires. L'existence est ailleurs». Therefore, what interests us is what is all around us.

<sup>11</sup> Jean Epstein was absorbed by the question of time in cinema. He believed that the concept of «photogénie», as developed by Loius Delluc, needed to be studied in depth, since «L'aspect photogénique d'un objet est une résultante de ses variations dans l'espace-temps» (Magny, 1982: 5). Epstein examined the processes related to time and its duration: «ralenti, accéléré, inversion de la chronologie, etc. C'est-à-dire à tout ce qui permet d'explorer dans la réalité des aspects invisibles à l'œil nu, et que le cinéma est seul à permettre de découvrir» (Ibidem). In his «El cine y las letras modernas», Epstein writes about the relationship between cinema and modern art from the premise of the time and speed that cinema and modern art use to work the images they create. Time in film was also fundamental for the Surrealists, mainly for the possibility cinema provided for manipulating it.

<sup>12</sup> Michel Beaujour, in his essay «Surréalisme ou cinéma?» (Études Cinématographiques, 38-39) writes: «Le cinéma, par essence, n'est pas un art de spontanéité et d'improvisation (...). L'homme à caméra est condamné à ne pouvoir se passer du monde sensible, médiatisé par une machine et par une organisation sociale assez complexe». What he questions is the extent to which automatism exists in Surrealist painting. Breton recognizes a type of para-Surrealism in the more elaborate works of Miró or Dalí, far removed from the «frottages» of Max Ernst, for their refusal to accept a purely irrational form of creation.

<sup>13</sup> According to Alejandro Montiel, when Eisenstein states that the objective of the montage of spectacles is to reach a specific final thematic effect, he lends his theory a harmonic key, «apparently only similar to the automatic writing of the Surrealists or to the Dadaist claim to the providence of randomness, and other avant-garde movements, because although these aesthetic impacts provoke strangeness (enabling the spectator's critical distance and reflection, which Bertold Brecht was seeking to achieve around that time) and can also be free of narrative linearity (as in the famous scene in «The Strike», in which images of Zarist repression alternate with the butchering of cattle at a slaughterhouse), it must always be subordinate to the tyranny of the subject or, in his own words, must be aimed at «a specific final thematic effect» (1992: 46).

<sup>14</sup> For Dalí, «Contrary to public opinion, cinema is an infinitely poorer and more limited medium of expression for the real functioning of thought than writing, painting, sculpture and architecture» (1978: 21).

<sup>15</sup> Desnos believed that nothing was more revolutionary than sincerity, so, «Et c'est franchise qui nous permet aujourd'hui de placer sur le même plan les vrais films révolutionnaires: 'Le Potemkine', 'La Ruée vers l'or', 'La Symphonie nuptiale' et 'Un Chien andalou', tan-

dis que nous confondons dans les mêmes ténèbres 'La Chute de la maison Usher' où se révéla le manque d'imagination ou plutôt l'imagination paralysée d'Epstein, l'Inhumaine, Panam n'est pas Paris» (1929: 385-7).

<sup>16</sup> These words, apart from their importance for the ideas they contain, are also interesting from another aspect. Buñuel gave a speech at a conference in 1958 that was later published in the journal «Universidad de México», XIII, December 4, 1958, in which he quoted Man Ray, who fits perfectly into Buñuel's argument: the possibility of a poetic cinema and a struggle against the more radical Neo-Realists. In 1965, in the previously mentioned special editions of «Études cinématographiques» dedicated to the Surrealists, we find the same phrase in a testament by Georges Franju, but attributed to Buñuel: «Buñuel a dit un jour: «Dans tous les films, bons ou mauvais, au-delà et malgré les intentions des réalisateurs, la poésie cinématographique lutte pour venir à la surface et se manifester» (1965: 160).

## References

- ANDREW, D. (1989). *As Principais teorias do cinema*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar.
- APOLLONIO, U. (Ed.). (1973). *Futurist manifestos*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- ASTRE, G.A. (1965). Surréalisme et cinéma. *Études Cinématographiques*, 38-39; 3-5.
- AUDOIN, P. (1995). *Les surréalistes*. Paris: Seuil.
- BAUDELAIRE, C. (1996). *Sobre a modernidade*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra.
- BEAUJOUR, M. (1965). Surréalisme ou cinéma? *Études Cinématographiques*, 38-39; 57-63.
- BELLIDO, A. (1998). El aprendizaje del cine. *Comunicar*, 11; 13-20.
- BENJAMIN, W. (1992). *Sobre arte, técnica, linguagem e política*. Lisboa: Relógio D'Água.
- BRECHON, R. (1971). *Le surréalisme*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- BRETON, A. (1972). *Manifestes du surréalisme*. Paris: Gallimard.
- BURCH, N. (1995). *El tragaluz del infinito*. Madrid: Cátedra.
- CHARNEY, L. & SCHWARTZ, V.R. (2001). *O cinema e a invenção da vida moderna*. São Paulo: Cosac & Naify.
- DALÍ, S. (1978). *Babaoou*. Barcelona: Labor.
- DESNOS, R. (1929). *Cinéma d'avant-garde*. Documents, 7; Dezembro; 385-387.
- DESNOS, R. (1925). La mort: la muraille de chêne. *La révolution surréaliste*, 2; 15 de Janeiro; 22.
- EISENSTEIN, S. (1983). Montagem de atrações, in ISMAIL, X. (Org.). *A experiência do cinema*. Rio de Janeiro: Graal; 187-198.
- LANGLOIS, H. (1965). Témoignages. *Études Cinématographiques*, 38-39; 41-43.
- LIÈVRE-CROSSON, E. (1995). *Du Cubisme au Surréalisme*. Toulouse: Éditions Milan.
- LOTMAN, Y.M. (1979). *Estética y semiótica del cine*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili.
- MAGNY, J. (1982). Premiers écrits, avant-garde français et surréalisme. *CinémAction*, 20; 12-20.
- Montiel, A. (1992). *Teorías del cine: un balance histórico*. Barcelona: Montesinos.
- ORTEGA Y GASSET, J. (1976). *La deshumanización del arte y otros ensayos de estética*. Madrid: Ediciones de la Revista de Occidente.
- RONDOLINO, G. (1977). Cinema e surrealismo, in ARGAN, G.C. & alt. (Eds.). *Studi sul surrealismo*. Roma: Officina Edizioni; 375-403.
- SADOUL, G. (1983). *História Mundial do Cinema, II*. Lisboa: Horizonte.
- SERS, P. (1997). *Sur dada – essai sur l'expérience dadaïste de l'i-*



mage. *Entretiens avec Hans Richter*. Nîmes: Jacqueline Chambon.  
SKLOVSKII, V. (1971). *Cine y lenguaje*. Barcelona: Anagrama.  
SOUPAULT, P. (1965). Entretien avec Philippe Soupault, par Jean-Marie Mabire. *Études cinématographiques*, 38-39; 30.

XAVIER, I. (Org.). (1983). *A experiència do cinema*. Rio de Janeiro: Graal.

ZUNZUNEGUI, S. (2007). Acerca del análisis fílmico: el estado de las cosas. *Comunicar*, 29; 51-58.