The Filmic Image as a Modernist Apparatus. Cinematographic Devices in Historical Narrative*

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Abstract

Calling into question the idea of progress, as it has been done by contemporary approaches in philosophy of history and historical epistemology, entails accepting the impossibility of replacing it by another idea that puts forward a unified sense of history. The decline of metanarratives and of great emancipatory accounts requires a concept of representation that takes into consideration new ways in which human and social temporality appear and a new matrix that links past, present and future. The new notion of representation must also be attentive to new artistic interventions that, either from vanguardist or classic experiences, revisit the pairs "art/history" and "art/politics" by considering the potentialities of art, in general, and films, in particular, to compose narratives that are attuned to an experience of time marked by the crises of representationalism. For this reason, this paper starts by analyzing the crisis of progressive narratives, and its consequences for writing the past, in order to examine both the potentialities of cinematographic images for historical epistemology and the importance of Hayden White's recent work about the ways to conceptualize contemporary historical experience.

Keywords: filmic image - modernist apparatus - cinematographic devices - historical representation

Resumen

Cuestionar radicalmente la idea de progreso, como lo hacen los abordajes contemporáneos sobre filosofía de la historia y la epistemología histórica, implica aceptar la imposibilidad de reemplazarla por otra que arroje un sentido unificado de la historia. La declinación de las metanarrativas y los grandes relatos emancipatorios exige un concepto de representación que se haga cargo de las nuevas formas del aparecer de la temporalidad humana y social y una nueva matriz que ligue pasado, presente y futuro. La nueva noción de representación debe también prestar atención a nuevas intervenciones que, ya sea desde experiencias vanguardistas o clásicas, revisiten los pares "arte/historia" y "arte/política" considerando las potencialidad del arte en general y de la cinematografía en particular, para componer narrativas que estén en armonía con una experiencia del tiempo marcada por la crisis de la representacionalismo. Por esta razón, este artículo comienza por analizar la crisis de las narrativas progresivas y sus consecuencias para escribir el pasado, con el fin de examinar tanto las potencialidades de las imágenes cinematográficas para la epistemología histórica como la importancia del reciente trabajo de Hayden White acerca de las maneras de conceptualizar la experiencia histórica contemporánea.

Palabras clave: imagen fílmica - aparato modernista - artificios cinematográficos - representación histórica.

1. Introduction

> Reporter: Mr. Godard, surely you agree that a story
> must have a beginning, a middle and an end.
> Jean-Luc Godard: Yes, of course. But not necessarily in that order.
>
> (Rosenstone 2007, p. 12)

Calling into question the idea of progress, as it has been done by contemporary approaches in philosophy of history and historical epistemology, entails accepting the impossibility of replacing it by another idea that puts forward a unified sense of history; it also implies that the idea of experience and the way we think about a sense of history as a matrix that links past, present and future, have definitely been transformed. This compels us to enable other kinds of discourses about historical processes that are open to the emergence of alternative articulations. How to weave together past, present and future remains an open problem, but the need for metahistorical categories to support historical narratives is still imperative.

Considering non-homogeneity as something that might enable new senses of history also implies paying attention to rhythms and durations beyond precise chronologies, attentive to social transformations and the length of processes, in order to understand anew notions such as the "subject" and "spatio-temporality". In *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik* (Koselleck 2000), Reinhart Koselleck states that the metaphor of "strata" is useful to think about temporality, because it suggests an idea of formations "that reach different dimensions and depths, and that have been transformed and differentiated at different rates throughout the so-called geological history" (Koselleck 2001, p. 35).[1] The image of overlapping layers is metaphorically akin to a notion of temporality that cannot be reduced to teleology and linearity, and that does not presuppose the unyielding recurrence of repetition; rather, it stresses contingency and the emergence of events.

The decline of metanarratives and of great emancipatory accounts requires a concept of representation that takes into consideration new ways in which human and social temporality appear. This notion of representation must also be attentive to new artistic interventions that, either from vanguardist or classic experiences, revisit the pairs "art/history" and "art/politics" by considering the potentialities of art, in general, and films, in particular, to compose narratives that are attuned to an experience of time marked by the crises of representationalism. To put it differently, it demands a concept of representation that brings to the fore the ways in which art (with its own mechanisms, procedures and devices) manages to disturb historical science. For this reason, this paper starts by analyzing the crisis of progressive narratives, and its consequences for writing the past, in order to examine both the potentialities of cinematographic images for histor-

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[1] T. N. There is no English translation for Koselleck's book. Therefore, the translator has used the publication in Spanish (Koselleck 2001) to translate this quote into English.

ical epistemology and the importance of Hayden White's recent work about the ways to conceptualize contemporary historical experience.

2. The end of great history and modernist devices

In order to locate the context of the fall of metanarratives, one must mention Louis Mink and Robert F. Berkhofer, due to their key contribution to the criticism of conventional conceptions in historical epistemology.

Mink states that classic philosophy of history, "which claimed to disclose the secret of human progress or to discover the overarching meaning of universal history, was consumed in the holocaust of two world wars" (Mink 1966, p. 24), but it has of late arisen from its own ashes in "the guise of the theory of historical knowledge" (Mink 1966, p. 24). To fully understand his position, one must start by analyzing his defense of the autonomy of historical understanding in relation to other ways of apprehending reality, and by reflecting on a notion of "event" that is neither useful nor fruitful outside the historical configuration that it inhabits. According to Verónica Tozzi (Tozzi 2009), we must see Mink as someone committed to "antirealism as the condition of possibility of historiographical practices" (Tozzi 2009, p.70), and note that his theses consider the weakness of the principle of the uniformity of human nature as one of the triggers for the decline of universal history, "favoring the *victory* of cultural pluralism as a constitutive feature of modern common sense" (Tozzi 2009, p. 87). For Mink, historical configuration entails accepting that one inhabits a "historiographically plural" world (Tozzi 2009, p.90), in which each narrative is a new rewriting based, precisely, on the aforementioned antirealism.

In the same vein, in 1995, Berkhofer publishes *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (Berkhofer 1995), where he attempts to convince traditional historians that contemporary reflexivity and the new poetics of textuality are challenges worthy of consideration, if one seeks to improve one's methodologies and contribute to the development of more realist narratives. He assumes that postmodernism is creating new urgencies for historians and, at the beginning of his book, he poses the following questions:

> What is now called the postmodernist challenge to traditional history began as the crisis of representation raised by late modernist and structuralist theorists. To what extent can historians combine the two meanings of history as actual past and modern representation when all we know of language seemingly subverts that very goal? What if a realist theory of the correspondence between history as written and the actual past is abandoned for a constructionist view of history as a form of representation? How can we judge the accuracy of the modern representation of the past against a postulated original when it is, by definition, the past? How can we hope to re-present the past as it was when we must do so through the present-day (re)creations? (Berkhofer 1995, p. 3)

These questions could work as a starting point to think about the crisis of representation in the context of a critique of the homogeneous rationality of his-

tory, in order to enable devices that, as those in films, manage to complicate the representation of the past and disturb the seemingly unity of historical approaches.[2]

The reply to the impossibility of establishing universal criteria of truth is the evident need to admit partial, subjective, contingent truths that make possible "small stories", axiological pluralism and narrative diversity. In the specific case of history, this approach demands attending to the excluded side of hegemonic discourses; because a kind of history that only considers the triumphs of the privileged classes and leaves aside the sacrifices of the oppressed is – as Walter Benjamin claims in *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (Benjamin 1969), written in the 1940s but published *postmortem* – a mutilated, partial and ahistorical story. It also implies new ways of approaching the past and the idea of teleology as something inoperative and empty. This requires not only recognizing disagreement as a characteristic principle but also the necessity of accepting devices that, by exhibiting their own mechanisms, confirm the constructed and artefactual character of historical accounts.

In the light of these considerations, it becomes evident that historical representation has to acknowledge the fundamental rupture that philosophies of history have undergone in the last five decades. As a discipline, it was drastically transformed by the rise of narrativism and its redefinition of historical experience. In fact, New Philosophy of History[3] implied a fundamental change in relation to the representationalist view of the discipline, insofar as it has questioned the fact that historical reconstruction presents the past itself, challenging progressive plots, and because it has posed, once again, the question about the meaning of history. In order to examine the space of the political and the aesthetical, one has to proceed from new bases to think about the relationship between past, present and future. History – as it was conceived – seems to have ceased to be relevant, dissolving communitarian expectations about the future. Nevertheless, by changing the idea of history and acknowledging other forms and supports, spheres such as art become available to come up with alternative strategies to meaningfully articulate-disarticulate the past, putting forth the possibility of a new historical *poiesis*.

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[2] In spite of not being contemporaneous to these analyses about history's non-unity, one cannot help recalling Herbert Butterfield's *The Whig Interpretation of History*, from 1931 (Butterfield 1931). Butterfield argued against the Whig interpretation, that is, the approach that presents the past as an unavoidable progression towards the present "Illustration", ending in liberal forms of modern democracy and constitutional monarchies. Whig historians have even considered the advancement of constitutional government as a form of scientific progress which, as Butterfield noted, was full of contradictions and inconsistencies: "It may happen that the last word of the historian, pondering upon the results of his study, may be some comment on a principle of progress that lies below everything else in the processes of time, or may be some estimate of the contribution which the whig party has made to our development [...]. But this is not by any means to be confused with the whig method of selecting facts and organizing the story upon a principle that begs all questions. And the conclusions will be very different from those which are arrived at when all problems are solved by the whig historian's rule of thumb. The conclusions will be richer by reason of the very distance that has had to be travelled in order to attain them" (Butterfield 1965, pp. 57-58).

[3] The so-called "New Philosophy of History" refers to renewed assumptions brought about by Hayden White and carried on by Frank Ankersmit and Robert Berkhofer, among others (see Tozzi 2009).

Since the 1970s, there has been a strong shift of concerns in philosophy and epistemology of history, marked by what became known as "the linguistic turn", that is, the increasing interest in language and narrative in metahistoriographical approaches. This turn towards texts called into question the historical discipline, which happens to coincide with the end of modernity and the publication of three fundamental books that improved historical epistemology, not only in relation to the paradigmatic or canonical contents of the discipline but also regarding the problems linked to historiographical axiology and the examination of temporality. These books are: *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology* (*Comment on écrit l'histoire. Essai d'epistémologie*) by Paul Veyne, published in 1971 (Veyne 1971); *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, published by Hayden White in 1973 (White 1973); and *The Writing of History* (*L'écriture de l'histoire*), by Michel de Certeau, published in 1975 (Certeau 1975).

These innovations marked the beginning of a program in which history started being approached beyond the notion of representation, and in which representation itself fell under suspicion as a structure of knowledge. This involved historizing practices, troubling the categories that shape history, and questioning the modes of assigning value. Frederic Jameson's call to "*Always historicize!*" – in *The Political Unconscious* (Jameson 1981) – points to this radical historization that must interrupt the sort of historization that the demand to "do history" assumed, that is, "restoring events to their presents, to their living relations with their conditions of possibility" (White 2007, p. 225). It is a call to stop the historiographical machine, to put an end to the representational work of the institution of history, to attend to the political demand of suspending the normalizing effects of historical representation.

These ruptures appear in the context of teletechnological transformations that have changed the ways of affecting and being affected by experience; they have also made necessary new ways of historical production and novel frames of interpretation for dealing with the relationship between facts and reason. The question about the relationship between events and inscription, between historicity and modes of representation, is reopened. At the same time, historiography is warned about the fact that literality is the condition of production of statements not only in the realm of literature but also in the realm of historiography. The practice of history has always been forced to release itself from its literary condition but, as long as it is tied to words and its gadgetry, it is subjected to a regime of truth that imposes a narrative model of representation rooted in the literary realism of the nineteenth century novel, and to strategies that guide actions and affection.

3. Filmic devices for historical narrative

To reclaim the figure of White for this debate means remembering that he characterizes contemporaneity as the "time of manifestos" (White 2007, pp. 220-

221), that is, profuse attempts to "apprehend" the times, verified by the proliferation of philosophies of the event.

In the introduction of *Manifestos for History* (Jenkins, Morgan & Munslow 2007), Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan and Alun Munslow claim that "at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we can assume that history is constituted as a complex series of narratives – representations – of the past, then we have the foundations upon which we can build our visions of its future" (Jenkins, Morgan & Munslow 2007, p. 1) and that is why "all historians have, in effect, a duty of discontent" (Jenkins, Morgan & Munslow 2007, p. 1). This discontent is associated to the problem of the inscription of the event, a notion that, according to White, undergoes a radical transformation as a result of the emergence of kinds of events in the twentieth century non imaginable for historians of previous times (White 1992a, pp. 87-89). He proposes to remark the difference between fact and event, and he places a great importance on the tele-techno-media revolution that entails unimagined changes or fractures in the way we register, figure and understand history.

Thus, a set of discussions about the relationship between art, politics and history and the way to keep thinking about history is started. Robert Rosenstone (2007) ponders about these changes and the potentialities of art, reading White's essay "The Burden of History" (White 1966), written in 1966, as the key "manifesto" of contemporary historiography:

> The world has changed a great deal since the nineteenth century, as we historians above all should know. When we attempt to tell stories about the past or present these days – in words on the page, or in photos, or on the motion picture or television screen, or in a museum display, or on a website – we as a culture are no longer so firmly wedded to the notions of literal reality that pervaded the nineteenth century. The impact of the visual media themselves (if we include among them the internet) are certainly the chief carriers of messages in our twenty-first-century world, and this alone assures a major alteration in our sensibilities, the way we see the past. The continual revolutions in artistic visions over the last century – the movements or tendencies we may label cubism, constructivism, expressionism, surrealism, abstraction, the New Wave, modernism, postmodernism, hip hop – have helped to alter our ways of seeing, telling and understanding our realities (Rosenstone 2007, p. 13).

According to Rosenstone, history must liberate itself from its own tradition and create forms of historical telling for "today and tomorrow", that is, forms of history suited to the sensibility of the times. In effect, he claims that historians need "to experiment with language, image, sound, color and any other elements of presentation that will make the past live and vibrate and terrify us once again" (Rosenstone 2007, pp. 13-14). This consideration highlights the need to create forms of history that are genuinely "concerned" about those subjects and episodes that no one takes into consideration: forms of "history that tries to make us understand not only our own past and ourselves but the past and selves of those others whom we never before knew or wished to know" (Rosenstone 2007,

p. 14). The importance of art in this perspective is explicit. It is not about new ways of erudition – or not entirely – but about more "meaningful" forms of presenting the past that can "create" history but not in the conventional sense. "Perhaps it could be a collage, a comic book, a dance, a rap-song cycle, a series of emails sent to everyone online, or a combination of expressive forms we have not yet seen" (Rosenstone 2007, p. 14).

Likewise, White stresses the ways in which images have the power to act upon history as strategies to gain consciousness – in the same manner as historiographical accounts, but with a particular grammar and syntax. Following these tracks, it is possible to appraise cinematographic operations in order to explore their potentialities. However, it is likely that not all films or all filmmakers can rise to the occasion. In order to come up with new temporalities and new ways of capturing history, it seems inevitable to overcome conventional forms of seeing and telling stories cinematographically. This paper does not intend to explore a particular film or a concrete tendency (Rosenstone, for instance, analyzes these problems in relation to *Maus I* and *Maus II,* in blockbuster films such as *JFK, Gandhi* or *Schindler's list,* and in more artistic movies such as *Frida.*) On the contrary, it seeks to examine the historical potentialities of certain devices. By focusing on the critical turn that has affected the historical discipline and on the ways in which it has modified the basis of the discursive order, it is possible to analyze filmic devices that could provide an answer to White's proposal of the modernist event, a far cry from the mimetic program of historiography.

The notion of "historiophoty" – and the imperative to reflect on media, writing and texts – that White proposes on his article, "Historiography and Historiophoty" (White 1988), allows us to consider the connection that cinematographic production establishes with history, and the way in which it succumbs to certain modernism that links the historical discipline with visual arts, literature, films, the media and media devices. In short, it is a call for an aporetic and transdisciplinar historiographical practice that does not aim at reproducing old ways of writing history in new devices and formats, but to question the politics of disguise that determines the production of historical knowledge.

In "Manifesto Time", White claims that this shift and renewal in history "is not a matter of simply incorporating women, subaltern, primitives, gays, people of color, immigrants and whatever other group now claims a place in 'our' history or rather in our (by which I mean 'Western') accounts of 'history'". Rather, it means "rethinking what is new and 'unheard of' in the present dispensation rather than seeking to accommodate earlier categories of explanation and presentation to what is manifestly new and different in a world seen only 'through Western eyes'" (White 2007, p. 224). He stresses that "history" should not mean just "the past"; rather, it should point to the relationship between "the present", understood as a part of "history", and "the past", which highlights the duty to consider the possibility of the present as history, and of history as a complex, open and ever-contentious fabric. Likewise, he emphasizes the importance of criticism as the premise to write history, considering it as the shift from a his-

torical consciousness to a deep examination of "history's relations with the other disciplines of the human sciences and arts" (White 2007, p. 224), and "the de-transcendentalisation of every regime of truth and knowledge, the denial of universals, substances and essences that are pressed upon us in all times and everywhere, and attention to whatever it is in a thing that makes it a singularity resistant to generalization, abstraction and reification" (White 2007, p. 224).

Once we keep in mind this aspect of White's theory, the discussion about the possibilities of films as a source to study the past gains a new dimension. According to White, historiography, in general, refers to metahistories that justify or imply interpretative strategies to represent the past, and he conceptualizes the notion of historiophoty as the reflection shaped by images and film discourse. This field of historiography employs similar resources as those used by history, and it presupposes the same operations, such as condensation,[4] displacement of agents and processes, selection of information, and articulation of discontinuities as a whole. This evokes the operations that define the editing of filmic images, one of the fundamental tools of cinematographic writing.

White places historiophoty in the context of teletechnological transformations and of "modernist experiences" that dissolve the triad of event, character and plot, and whose implications force us to problematize the relationship between fiction and history, and to call into question both the constitution of the event and the pair fact/fiction. Once we abandon the notion of "fact", central to realism and the mimetic paradigm of historiography, the fictional representation that is captured by literature and films is no longer considered a "falsification" of the event but it becomes the material of "new genres of postmodernist parahistorical representation, in both written and visual form" (White 1999, p. 67). Following White's notion of the modernist narrative as a kind of discourse that brings to the fore the impossibility of distinguishing experience from representation, it is possible to consider that cinematographic devices are able to suitably deal with historical phenomena that are constituted through their appearance in representation, and that are characterized by "fictionalizing", in some degree, events and agents.

4. Problems of realisms

White considers that the twentieth century opened a time of "modernist events" whose characterization includes three features: first, the definition includes wars, genocide, famine or ecological wars whose scale makes them unmanageable via traditional categories of historical representation and explanation; second, they occur almost simultaneously as they are registered due to technological advanc-

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[4] Condensation means "a reduction of the time of the action to the time of the telling and a reduction of all the facts that are known about a given period of history to only those facts that are important" (White 2003, p. 58). It is one of the tools to make historical and literary accounts by "translating" events – that happened in a given time and space – to facts (the written facts) through which one can know anything about those events.

es, digitalization techniques and films; and third, the changes in what used to be considered historical events entail the need to come up with new categories to approach them. To account for this sort of events, he proposes the modernist anti-narrative whose style provides a set of tools to make experience present by diluting the distinction between event and fact, between occurrence and description.

From his reading of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Auerbach 2003) – where the author documents the changes in the dominant ways of mimesis as figuration in Western literary discourse –, White summarizes the characteristic features of modernist style: the disappearance of the writer as a narrator of objective facts; the dissolution of any viewpoint outside the novel; the predominance of a tone of doubt and questioning in the narrator's interpretation of those events seemingly described in an objective manner; the employment of techniques such as "vivid speech", stream of consciousness, internal monologue; the use of new strategies to represent the experience of time and temporality, such as the use of "chance occasion" to release "processes of consciousness".

Furthermore, there is an essential distinction we must remember in order to extrapolate these elements to the realm of cinema: the difference between narration and narrativization. This marks the distinction between providing an account of the past in which the place of the narrator is highlighted, on the one hand, and pretending that the story is "found" in the events or that the events "speak for themselves", on the other. In this second case, the place of the narrator, who appears as a "discoverer", is concealed: a move that can only have political motivations.

It is not hard to imagine the relocation of these notions to the cinematographical sphere, once we consider audio-visual experiences that challenge classic narratives.[5] That is, experiences that use film editing as a device to mark the artificiality of the discursive construction (through overlay, overprint, juxtaposition, construction of meaning derived from duration, speed and rhythm, use of gadgets to construct and deconstruct space and time, among others); that articulate strategies to bring to the fore enunciation (voice-over directed to the audience, use of irony while introducing sings and deictic devices, use of rhetorical figures through the disposition of angles or camera positions, just to mention a few) as a resource not only of self-referentiality but also as a political and aesthetical stance; that blur the difference between fact and fiction, and between showing and constructing the reference, so as to present an "event" that is disseminated through the story and through its multiple signifying surfaces, while at the same time producing an active and engaged kind of spectator. Neverthe-

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[5] "Canonical or classic representations" refer to the kind of representation that ruled the cinema until the mid-50s, approximately. It is characterized by having: psychologically well-defined characters that were clearly identifiable by the audience; a paradigmatic three-act structure; a closed ending; a strong casualty lead by the main character; spatial-temporal relations motivated by realism; an omniscient, highly communicative and mildly self-aware narrator. The cinematographic device, as a whole, is focused on the transmission of information, and it encourages the audience to construct a time and space coherent and consistent with action, in which they can intuitively recognize conventions. For more information on the topic, see Bordwell (1996).

less, this does not mean that the cinema, which enables these operations, is the only mechanism capable of complying with White's "requirements" for modernist writing. Instead, the point is to notice some devices that make possible the equivalence between literary construction of historiographical texts and the configurations of films.

The disappearance of the writer as a narrator of objective facts can be "translated" to the cinematographic image in which the filmmaker disappears as an external and/or objective agent. The tracks of the cinematographic enunciation are revealed, so the motivations (ideological, political, and aesthetical) behind the realization (a complex stage considering the industrial production of the cinema) appear through different marks. The exposure of subjectivity in films prevents all wish to construct a "viewpoint from outside" (White 1992, p. 50)[6] and it favors a doubtful and questioning tone that filmmakers apply to events such as John F. Kennedy's death, the liberation of concentration camps, civil performance in the Spanish Civil War, everyday-life during Latin American dictatorships, etc.

The employment of a specific kind of angle – commonly named "oblique angles" (weird angles, no straight horizon, increasingly deforming framings) – that tries to achieve a feeling of instability, the incorporation of camera movements that show the viewpoint of enunciation, the use of voice-over to ask, judge or give opinions, are some of the ways in which filmic images may challenge canonical senses of history. The temporality that films construct also depends on the ways in which audiovisual elements are organized. Not only is the articulation of what is presented as the character's "past", "present" and "future" produced but so is also a complex interplay of ellipsis, analepsis and prolepsis; this may range from an "out of time" construction of an universal tone, to a problematic introduction of values related to the profilmic context.

Representation is released from objective aspirations, bringing to the fore that reality and truth are not directly attained; it also reveals that the text is a complex fabric and that, as a historical construction, it is a fiction and, as fiction, it is a historiophotic reconstruction. In films – where the basic principle of realism (since the beginning of the cinema until, conventionally, the 1950s) has created the device of the disappearance of the device, turning the camera into an "invisible" eye and the spectator into a *voyeur* – the analysis of procedures reveals not only its proximity to historical narration but also its potentialities to challenge usual approaches in historical epistemology. According to White, the qualitative transformation of the "historical event" allows us to understand the cinematographic image as a new platform of inscription, because it intertwines the epistemic, expressive and political dimensions, creating reading contracts about what is documented, represented and invented.

In "Historiography and Historiophoty" (White 1988), White claims that historical evidence produced by our times is frequently visual as well as oral, and he recalls that communication conventions in human sciences are becoming "pic-

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[6] Auerbach's expression used by White is "viewpoint outside the novel".

torial" as well as verbal, at least regarding prevailing modes of representation. White would agree that analyzing visual images requires its own sort of reading, considerably different from the one employed to study written documents, but this does not mean that it produces a qualitatively inferior historical knowledge just because it is based on the visual dimension. The representation of historical events, agents and processes in visual images, assumes a particular lexical, grammatical and syntactical matrix, different from those employed in other sorts of representations. According to this account, historians are used to treating imagistic evidence as a supplement to verbal evidence, instead of considering that these images entail a different kind of relationship to its references. In fact, White assumes that some information about the past can only derive from visual images that help us, in a specific way, to reconstruct moods and events, sometimes even more than oral testimonies, which means that visual images constitute a proper discourse in their own right. If we accept that all written history is the product of mechanisms of symbolization and that filmic representations build their universe on the basis of devices that echo those procedures, we may claim that what is altered is only the means and not the ways in which the messages are produced. One could also claim that figurative language refers more faithfully to reality due to its potentiality to affect, and that this does not imply leaving aside the story's cognitive status or the responsibility of the bond between the filmmaker, the spectator and the representation.

For White, ontological and epistemological decisions, and their political and ideological implications, release representation of its obsession with objectivity; this is so because reality and truth are not considered something directly achieved and because texts are conceived as the result of complex cultural webs. This account calls into question the separation of historical discourse from other narrative forms, stressing the rhetorical character of all representation. This is why it does not question the possibility of fixing reality or arriving at some sort of certainty about historical events; rather, it points to the fact that historical accounts are networks that articulate a beginning, a middle and an end within a specific framework of interpretation. Thus, it suggests a theory of historical interpretation that is systematized in relation to a redefinition of traditional historical understanding, considering everything that language (any language) imposes upon the historical account (as an artifact). In agreement with this, there is no distinction between conventional historiography and filmic approaches to episodes or periods in history.

5. The eye of history

After this strong defense of narrative discourse for historical construction, the question about the limits of representation – in relation to events such as Nazism and Final Solution – comes up as a corollary of White's approach to history. Traditional historical discourse assumes that there is a crucial difference between an interpretation of facts and an account of them, which would imply

that there is a "real account" (which is different from an imaginary one), and a "true account" (different from a false one). Nevertheless, for White, facts can only impose limits upon the sort of accounts that can be told about them if we believe that events inherently have a certain "plot" and a formal "story". Thus, the question of truthfulness falls under the principles governing "our assessment of the truth of fictions" (White 1992, p. 40), and the difference between opposing narratives are differences between prevailing ways of emplotment. Positions that have a strong stance against stylization of facts, and that feel the need to reject these presentations because they are turning facts into deformations, aesthetizations or sadomasochist fantasies, according to White, keep assuming a backdrop of non-existent objectivity.

Following White, it is possible to believe that anomalies, enigmas and crossroads that are found in discussions about the representation of events such as the Holocaust, are the result of a conception of discourse still reliant on an inadequate realism; in fact, he does not believe that the extermination is "more unrepresentable than any other event in history. [...] [It] requires the kind of style, the modernist style, that was developed in order to represent the kind of experiences which social modernism made possible" (White 1999, p. 42). Indeed, White thinks that the distinction between a historical account and a fictional account does not hold if we take into consideration the fact that they narrate real or imaginary events; this is so because there are a number of poetic mechanisms that determine the production of texts that are the same in one case and the other. What tells historical accounts apart is the particular poetic and constructive act by which the historian configures the historical field. If we think about the historical work in this manner, we can recognize several dimensions that determine the style of the representation: the chronological ordering of events in a sequence, the paradigmatic structuring of the story in three acts, and the explanation by emplotment (romance, tragedy, comedy, satire), among others.

Just to mention a paradigmatic case, the film *Shoah* (1985), by Claude Lanzmann, offers all the elements of a historical account according to these considerations. It puts events into an order (it starts with the testimonies of survivors and it ends with the organization of the resistance), it tells a story that puts forth an interpretation from well-defined axiological schemes (dividing the plot in victims, perpetrators and bystanders), it employs all the power of the cinematographic image to metaphorically construct a criticism of death (we can remember the opening of the film, with Simon Srebnik singing in the canoe, or Abraham Bomba's sequence in the rented hair salon) and, above all, it becomes a historical account not only because it is about a historical event (the camps as *nomos* of extermination) but because it displays a problematization of facts.

A narrative approach, such as White's, rejects both the non-representability of extermination and Lanzmann's zealous defense of the words of the witness and the "non-image" as the only legitimate mechanisms. In *Shoah*, the arguments are not deduced from the correspondence of images to traditional documentary proofs, but from the schemes created by cinematographic tools – film edition,

construction of poetic images – that allow Lanzmann to produce a kind of historical representation. What matters in *Shoah* is the voice of the witnesses; the ordering proposed by Lanzmann and the way he elaborates, as the documentary maker, the spatial-temporal construction and employs the protocols of witness documentary films.

It is a misconception to think that White's theory leads to an overlap of historical narrative (the construction of the past through a story) and historical fiction (the literary account of the past); however, it is also mistaken to assume that there is no possibility for historical fictions to make statements about the past. From these two elements – historical narrative and historical fiction – it is possible to think about the construction of *Shoah* and to place it both in the archive field about extermination and in the field of historical fictions, inasmuch as it guarantees its characters – especially, the victims – the chance to be agents in the story about their past.

In order to approach the relationship between cinema and history, Jacques Aumont's definition can be powerful and functional. In *L'oeil interminable: cinéma et peinture*, he presents the cinema as "a symbolic machine for producing points of views"[7] (Aumont 1997, p. 57). Just like history, the cinema works as an apparatus capable of configuring visions from its inherently technological condition, the iconographic saturation of its devices, the discursive factuality, and the construction of a "transmitter" and the decodification of the "receiver". These concepts, in films, become even more complex, because "every image is polysemous", as Roland Barthes suggests (Barthes 1985, p. 28), and the entity usually named "author" is a conglomerate of creative units that act, collectively, subjected to technological, political and ideological impositions. Furthermore, the reader is not individual but collective, and reception implies processes of perception and identification (connected to contexts of reception and politics of representation), because the channel of transmission needs very specific technical requirements and the codes are not stable enough as in other cultural "organisms". The enunciating subject is revealed in discourse because he is the one who defines himself as an "I" before an instance of "you". This "I", in filmic artifacts, is a collective that is difficult to achieve, and it is shown through an enunciation that makes it visible as an implicit subject, narrator or character. This leads to a complex plot of enunciating subjects and receivers (ideal and real). Unlike classic cinematographic models that follow the logic of the nineteenth century novel or of "modern" historiography, cinematographic modernism attempts to exacerbate the visibility of its conditions of possibility. This is achieved by different means: ruptures in the discursive transparency through camera movement, angles, looking into the camera; statements from the narrator, from the implicit author personified in the diegesis; and elements such as ellipsis and off-camera action.

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[7] T. N. There is no English translation for Aumont's book. Therefore, the translator has used the publication in Spanish (Aumont 1997) to translate this quote into English.

If one accepts that all stories are discourses and that, otherwise, they would be "only chronology, an enunciation of a succession of uncoordinated facts" (Bremond 1980, p. 390), then it is interesting to note the similarities between the written historical account and the filmic historical narrative. The implicit author is always leaving his mark on the cinematographic signifier, which is a function that is performed both on the profilmic material, at the moment of shooting, and on the filmographic material, at the moment of editing the film. The study of enunciation must not focus on the analysis of functions and actions, as when examining a statement, but on the attempt to exhibit the discursive procedures. One cannot know who is the real author or the real reader, because the work does not happen in co-presence, and the real receiver can be anyone at any time and any place. But, somehow, the narrator is no other than the filmmaker, the entity that decides about the structure and continuity of the story, even if the narrative instance is that "abstract place" where those choices are made. Thus, the author is an empirical being that remains outside the filmic artifact while the narrator can come to life through personification. In all cinematographic or historical text, there is an implicit author as the second "I" of the author, who may or may not appear diegetically through a narrator; a narrator who, in turn, may or may not split into multiple "presences".

All of these devices are available for filmmakers who represent both fictions and episodes of history, and they correspond to operations that historians perform through the choices they make. Following Rosenstone's claim that people are "hungry for the past" (Rosenstone 2007, p. 17), it is possible to believe that the time has come for historians to give an answer to these needs, not only by telling stories about the past but also by incorporating "the reasons why the past can talk meaningfully to us today" (Rosenstone 2007, p. 17).

The question is how to assure that the past has "meaning" but not "one meaning". That is why White, at the end of "Manifesto Time" (White 2007), claims that "postmodernist experimentation in the representation of historical reality may very well get us beyond the distinction – always kind of scandalous – between the professional historian, on the one hand, and the amateur, dilettante or 'practical' student of history, on the other" (White 2007, p. 231). In any case, neither the filmmakers not the historians own the past, and they do not have the secret formula to properly grasp it, think it or study it, but what really matters is what sort of responsibility they take *vis-à-vis* their production, how they relate to the past and what they actually manage to achieve with it.

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