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Words, Images, Gestures: A Dialogue Between João Silvério Trevisan's Documentary *Contestação* (1969) and Walter Benjamin's Theses *On the Concept of History*

“Every act of reception of significant form, in language, in art, in music, is comparative.”
(George Steiner).

Abstract: Cinema builds a diversity of important narratives to discuss culture and language. Many of them deal with authoritarian states and their antithesis, rebellion, resistance. This study analyzes the film narrative *Contestação* (1969), by João Silvério Trevisan, an experimental documentary on the protagonism of students against the authoritarianism and violence of dictatorships, from which we will analyze the narrative itself, as well as its composition made from the reuse of media material, film archives and journalism, and music as an element of the filmic montage; it analyzes this intermedia process between word and image. This analysis will be based on Walter Benjamin's Theses on the Concept of History, in order to observe how the film formulates temporalities, the perception of events, and the construction of history. For the analysis of the composition of the film, concepts from theorists such as Eisenstein, Bakhtin, Kristeva, and Intermediality theorists, among others, were used.

Keywords: political cinema; history; authoritarian regimes; Benjaminian theses.

Introduction

Cinema, like literature or in fact all other arts, contributes to the construction of a mode of discussing culture and language. Starting from the context of language studies, the fundamental point of discussion in this study is the analysis of the film

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narrative *Contestação* (1964), by João Silvério Trevisan,¹ which consists of text and images in montage, under the light of Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Concept of History*, which constitutes one of the pillars of Critical Theory. *Contestação* thematizes the protagonism of students' resistance to the civil-military coup in Brazil, against the violence of the dictatorship. It uses word, text, and re-used images and archives for artistic elaboration, which is here interpreted from the perspective of Benjamin's theses. The aim is to scrutinize how temporalities are built, how events are perceived and, at last, how history is constructed.

As readers and spectators, as researchers, we have brought together, because of our interest in aspects and events of our recent history, a series of books, paintings, sculptures, songs and movies that relate to these events. Trevisan's documentary sparks interest not only because of authoritarian and repressive movements but also for the way the narrative is constructed. It is assembled by means of texts, or rather, shards of texts, *imageic* and verbal, put in sequence. The film also reveals a close relationship between art and politics, and the first as framing of time and space. The operation of art is mostly reduced to the artist's engagement per se, but in fact means a certainty (a hope?) that it is necessary to mobilize, or rather to "mobilize mobilization", in the face of the barbarism of totalitarian thoughts. This is based on what the present study considers art to be: a form of intervention that transforms reality and that is, in the case of the film, above all challenging; it challenges through word, image, and the great narrative of history.

Thus the proposal of this study is to turn to the revolutionary actions that were intended to interrupt the continuum of history. This study will approach the ruins that compose the story of *Contestação* and which emphasize the torn present, as Benjamin theorizes. This study will also highlight the power of language, of words as poetic matter in the seams of these ruins, in an intermediate process between the word and the image structured by the filmic montage.

The intention here is to raise what Voloshinov calls the "indicatory, representative power of the word as an ideological phenomenon and the exceptional distinctiveness of its semiotic structure"² for the study of ideologies. Attention is then turned to the actions of youth from student movements around the world in the 1960s, in resistance against authoritarianism, in their desires for freedom, in their contesting actions, recorded in the intermedia art of moving words and images, which the film frames, records, assembles, and makes significant.

¹ João Silvério Trevisan was born in Ribeirão Bonito on June 23, 1944. He is a writer, journalist, playwright, translator and filmmaker, having debuted as an author precisely in cinema with the films *Contestação* (1969) and *Orgia ou o homem que deu cria* (1971). In literature, he has a dozen published books. Openly homosexual, during the harshest phase of the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship Trevisan went into exile in the United States. He returned to Brazil in 1978, and contributed to the founding of a milestone for the Brazilian LGBT movement: the homosexual affirmation group "Somos."

² V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (New York, London: Seminar Press, 1973), 14.

Understandings about *intermedia* relations

“Cutting and pasting are the fundamental experiences of paper, of which reading and writing are only derived forms, transitory and ephemeral.”³

Before understanding the concept of intertextuality, supplemented by Bulgarian theorist Kristeva, it is necessary to go back to the precursor studies of Mikhail Bakhtin on Dostoevsky’s work, in which Bakhtin defines the theses of dialogism and polyphony, precursor concepts of intertextuality. According to him, polyphony manifests itself in the way the voices of the text relate, in a full valid, that is, the fullness and independence of these different voices that traverse the literary text. The concept of intertextuality, outlined by Kristeva⁴ in a resumption of Bakhtinian dialogism, concerns the fact that one text does not dispense with others, that is, the poetic meaning refers to other discursive meanings, in a multiple textual, intertextual, space, so that other speeches can be read. And she concludes: “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.”⁵

Intermedia processes have been a possibility since ancient times, and have been realized in various works of art. However, the realization of this and the theoretical-analytical debate of the arts came from the so-called happenings, a mixture of fine arts, theater and music appearing in the late 1950s.⁶ Walter Moser makes a similar observation in his paper “Intermedia Relations: For an Intermedia Archeology” (our translation). He states that it was not until the 1960s that the term “Intermedia” began to transit the debates about the arts and was then incorporated by comparative studies, more in relation to the *interart* issue than to the transit between media – for Moser, the dialogue between the arts always presupposes the relationship between the media.⁷

In a proposal to build this archeology of the *interart*/intermedia relationship, Moser points out the relationship between word and image, which preceded all others, pointing to the primacy of the relationship between painting and poetry. With the advent of photography, and therefore of cinema, such aesthetic intertwining becomes a more tangible reality. These interactions may be at the level of production, the artifact itself – the work – or the processes of reception and knowledge. At the first level, another intermedia theorist, Claus Clüver (2006), comes up with “mixed art forms” such as opera,

³ Antoine Compagnon, *O trabalho da citação* (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2007), 11 (our translation).

⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Introdução à semanálise* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2005).

⁵ Julia Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue and Novel,” in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 37.

⁶ Dick Higgins, “Intermídia,” in *Intermedialidade e estudos interartes: os desafios da arte contemporânea*, edited by Thaís Flores Diniz and André Soares Vieira (Belo Horizonte: Rona, Fale/UFMG, 2012), 41–50.

⁷ Walter Moser, “As relações entre as artes: por uma arqueologia da intermedialidade,” *Aletria: Revista de Estudos de Literatura* 14 (Jul./Dez. 2006): 42–65.

theater, cinema, videoclips, etc. The configuration of these forms implies an *intersemiotic* transposition, through the transit from one system of signs to another, which commonly happens from one media to another. Clüver, in his reading of Müller, understands this process as “that which mediates for and between humans a (meaningful) sign (or combination of signs) with the aid of suitable transmitters across temporal and/or spatial distances.”⁸ In short, transpositions are translations from one semiotic system to another.

Irina Rajewski also analyses this problem. Her essay investigates the concept and scope of intermediality, raising questions regarding, as an example, the crossing of boundaries between arts and media. It highlights, in this process, media transposition, intermediality by media combination, and media reference. The present study aims at analyzing *Contestação* as a plurimediatric construct, through an analysis, therefore, of the relationship between words and images. According to Voloshinov (1973), the sign, which can fulfill any ideological function, can be understood in its function for the understanding of ideological phenomena; and a text, which is composed of different voices, points to the dialogic quality of language.

Thus, because it contains an intense game of opposites, represented mainly in the images of the confrontations between the forces of repression and the rebels, we consider Trevisan’s documentary a polyphonic text in the Bakhtinian sense, even though it is an audiovisual work.

***Contestação* and Walter Benjamin’s theses**

Trevisan’s film was made at the moment of the intensification of the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship; a moment when other student uprisings were taking place around the world in response to reactionary states. The wave of upheavals outside Brazil reinforced the outcry against the oppression of the national regime, a cry that echoed in several locations in Brazil since the 1964 *coup d’état* and was harshly and violently repressed. Such repression was marked by the Institutional Act No. 5 (AI-5) of December 13, 1968, which suspended all citizens’ rights.

As archives in motion, the representations of rebellion and resistance against authoritarianism as “agents of history” in the sense given by Ferro, *Contestação* presents itself as a narrative that brushes history against the grain, which Benjamin proposes as the historian’s operation. In this light, the film reveals reverberations of Benjamin’s theses that, in general, act to promote another concept of history, rendering the film a libel against the regimes of exception. Another possible approach to Benjamin’s theses is the simultaneity between what happens and its record, as proposed by him, from the perspective that history is “time filled by the presence of the now” (Thesis 14).⁹

According to Benjamin (1994), in order to confront fascism, it must be fundamentally understood that the state of exception is a general rule. For this understanding,

⁸ Müller quoted by Claus Clüver, “Inter textus / Inter artes / Inter media,” *Aletria: Revista de Estudos de Literatura* 14 (Jul./Dez. 2006): 30.

⁹ Walter Benjamin, “Sobre o conceito de História,” in *Obras escolhidas I – magia e técnica, arte e política* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1994), 229–30.

it is necessary to abolish the idea of progress that relies on the image of an inexorable evolution of humans marching within a homogeneous and empty time.¹⁰ This almost natural way of understanding progress, as a norm along linear time, transforms history into a legacy gestated as the result of chained events, rather emptied, immobilized, eternalized by the notion of continuity, bestowed on the present; it invalidates the confrontation of authoritarianism. Benjamin does not see the modification of history as a result of progress; rather, history is modified by suspending the chain of events that guides humanity. This suspension is, according to Benjamin in Theses 12 and 15, the task of the workers, whose orientation is given by observing a past of exploited and enslaved ancestors, and is projected onto the struggles and revolts of the present. Nevertheless, such struggles, carried out in the presence of that context, were harshly repressed; this is seen either from the haunting accounts of those tortured,¹¹ from historiography, however pasteurized, or from artworks in general.

It should be recalled that even today the atrocious achievements of the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship are not sufficiently debated. This is evidenced by the fact that torturers were not properly tried and convicted, and by the superficial way in which the “Great Brazilian History” reports such events, both in school and academia. In his third Thesis, Benjamin discusses how history can only be seen as complete when it includes in its reports all the details, the speech and discourse of the oppressed, constituting a construct that would dispute the widely accepted version validated by the ruling classes. In other words, complete history would challenge the official version that focuses only on the great events, filtered by the convictions of the ruling power classes, would alter the perception of certain historical moments, since the “a chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history” (Thesis 3).¹²

However, a series of episodes concerning the year 1968 have not been sufficiently dealt with in contemporary historiography. This gap has been filled by art with both words and film and, in the case of literature, more specifically restricted to memoirs. *Contestação* discloses a different way of understanding time, history and progress itself because the montage shows another mode of time composition, no longer idealized in its linearity but representing simultaneity through the combination of events, as proposed by Benjamin, happening at the same moment in different places of the world, with images representative of realities that are or have been erased from the great official narrative.

Technically speaking, Trevisan’s film is a short documentary recorded in 16mm film and made from the reuse of media, film and journalistic archives, using music as an element of film editing. It had remained anonymous until 2013 when Cinemateca

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹¹ I would like to recall that ten years ago there was a public hearing of Comissão Nacional da Verdade (National Truth Commission, or CNV) held at the auditorium of the Rectory of UFMG, on October 22, attended by Dean Clélio Campolina, Vice-Dean Rocksane Norton, members of the commission – lawyer José Carlos Dias, psychoanalyst Maria Rita Kehl and lawyer and university professor Rosa Maria Cardoso da Cunha – as well as victims and relatives of victims of the atrocities committed by the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship.

¹² Benjamin, “Sobre o conceito de História,” 223.

Brasileira digitalized the negatives that had been deposited by the author himself. Until that moment, the only existing copy was in a bad state of conservation and belonged, according to Garcia, to the archives of Image, Son, Kinescope and Audiovisuelles (ISKRA), an entity linked to the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Paris and created in 1974 by French filmmaker Chris Marker.

As a work of experimental cinema, the film can be understood as found footage, a film subgenre in which visual collages are made through montage. Trevisan reprocesses images of various acts of violence and repression in direct confrontations between the state and the population, especially of young students and workers – the people – happening at that time in some countries (according to scenes of the film).

The film makes noticeable use of the so-called “intellectual montage”, theorized by Sergei Eisenstein as an interaction between plans referring to a sense (a trace, in the Deridian conception) outside the film, and whose reading requires a movement of reflection in a “conflict-juxtaposition” of associative intellectual sensations.¹³ Such an intellectual montage, which reconfigures existing images most of which are already disseminated in transitory media, creates a construct of clippings of events regularly overlooked by Great History, as Benjamin says. The result of this montage is easily perceived and enhances, through the rhythms of the cuts and soundtrack, a common meaning on all plans: the struggle against oppressive and dictatorial systems, that is, the incessant struggle for freedom.

Stitching the shards: The documentary and its scenes

Before actually starting the analysis of the documentary, it is interesting to note that the main theorist of “montage” in cinema was, as mentioned before, precisely the Russian formalist Sergei Eisenstein. He claims montage is, roughly speaking, present in the artistic creation, taking place through the reunion of “two film pieces of any kind, placed together, inevitably combine into a new concept, a new quality, arising out of that juxtaposition.”¹⁴ Returning to the theoretical filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, we can analyze one of the most easily identifiable combinations in Trevisan's film: the relationship between sound (in the case of this film, mostly noises, and music) and image. Eisenstein believes in the balance of cinematographic elements, such as image, performance, sound, among others, for an effective impact on the viewer. This occurs in *Contestação*, through countless moments in which the sound disturbs the viewer, as well as the image that is seen. The noisy sounds and female voices in tones of despair are intentionally placed in moments where they can dialogue more directly with what is projected.

Another observation regarding non-diegetic sounds (which occur outside of what is shown in the work, that is, is added as a sound layer whose origin is not in the image inside and outside the plane in the film) are the songs with percussion instruments. They are performed together with images moving in the plane, such as

¹³ Eisenstein, *A forma do filme* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2002), 86.

¹⁴ Eisenstein, *The Film Sense* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 4.

tanks advancing on streets and, mainly, people running. This rhythmic interaction between image and music has effects on the viewer, as theorist Michel Chion points out through the concept of musical rhythm as a driving force, in which the sequence of notes and their rhythm add value to information and sensations in a cinematic image.

The film begins with a warning that belongs in the context of its realization; it states that the film's authorship will not be disclosed so as to preserve the author's life. In the first scenes, a US military base appears, specifically the former Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, which launched the satellites that would become the control of information around which revolved the Cold War. It was also the point from where NASA rockets were launched into space, contributing to the propaganda of US superiority. What follows are images of the Moon's trodden soil, the US flag planted on it, and astronaut Buzz Aldrin, the second human to set foot on the natural satellite, waving. The scenes show the placement of objects and events that symbolize progress, the future, as a result of human development, but it is specifically a certain technological evolution that is, moreover, used for oppression.

In the next scene, small cracks in the glass of a window are focused through bullet holes. The camera travels to a half-naked body lying on the ground, then another; soon the first barricades of resistance appear. The reflection prompted by this sequence is the game of tragic irony, in which one question: is the progress of science and technology, in fact, progress of humanity? Benjamin's ninth and twelfth Theses may be useful for the formulation of an answer. Within the notion of progress that Benjamin criticizes, there is a conception of linear time and human transformation; what his formulations propose is the representation of time as a spiral, rather than a line, in cycles of repetition. In this conception, evolution, the idea of progress, would mean questioning the idea of march and its foundation as a historical norm, in search of an ethic for human relations.

Following the plot, the title of the film appears on the sign, surrounded by arrows pointing to it. The term, in the dictionary, means both a proof with the testimony of others and a formulated question, resistance, opposition, and the negation of the accuracy of something. Thus, it is properly related both to the proposal of the film and to our Benjaminian reading of it. Hence, the word "Contestação" that the arrows point is divided into "contesta-ção", that is, in the verb "to contest", the action of contesting,¹⁵ conjugated in the third person (he/she contests), and the suffix "-ção" that forming the noun, specifically, the name to the act of contestation, the rebellion that resists atrocities. A filmic, artistic archive inexorably placed within, and in contrast with, the chain of events called Brazilian history. The first use of the word, that of a testimony, relates to Voloshinov's point that the word, which is the result of socio-historical-verbal-ideological interactions, reflects and refracts, therefore, the socio-discursive conditions proper to discourse. Read this way, as a constitutive action of consciences, ideologies and subject rather than neutral or natural, is a happening event of dialogism, which mediates, therefore, the relationship between the self and the other, what It is

¹⁵ According to Cambridge Dictionary, this word can mean: "to claim that a particular action is not fair or is not legal", or "say formally that it is wrong or unfair and try to have it changed".

precisely the heart of the film's proposal. Moreover, Bakhtin's ideological sign emphasizes that the logical chain of consciousness is tied to the logic of ideological communication, which houses "the image, the word, the meaningful gesture."¹⁶

As mentioned before, scenes are dialogical and, therefore, interact. The immediate dialogue takes place through an interlocutor, who questions the coup, and another one who responds with violence. Hereupon, sequences of speeches given by authorities – Hitler, Lyndon Johnson, Nixon, Pope Paul VI, Queen Elizabeth – are shown as interlocutors, or even the military, troops, diplomats, newspaper clippings. Among such sequences, the insertion of phrases helps compose the idea of shattering as they create meaning for such sequenced scenes, proposing coordination of these dynamic elements. They are oriented, in a progression of terms, towards a message that is completed at the end of the film.

The first phrase is 'We must' (*'É preciso'*). It comes up after a sequence of scenes, the first of which is a Ku Klux Klan demonstration. They carry banners with the words 'segregation forever' and fly the flag of the Confederate States, which represented, in the American Civil War, the union of the southern states that opposed the abolition of slavery. The phrase reappears, followed by scenes of protests in favor of black civil rights, people gathered to listen to Martin Luther King, and at last, a peaceful protest in Asia.

The second text that appears is 'dare' (*'atrever-se'*) and is followed by several protests by the US black movement questioning a massacre. Thus, the two phrases are brought together in another scene, followed by scenes of young people marching peacefully and wearing gags to symbolize censorship. Other protests are shown, with banners reading "go home, Yankees" and "Estudias e lucha"¹⁷. The compound text shrinks back to just "dare", and a sequence of scene follows: a young black man being dragged by the police, and a white young man being escorted by the arms.¹⁸

The next phrase is 'to think' (*'pensar'*) and the following scenes show police actions, arrests, and the resisting youth; then another phrase appears, 'to speak' (*'falar'*) on two occasions. First, young people, already detained, suffer confrontations and aggressions meant to frighten them. Then other youth protests in various locations in Asia, Africa, and the Americas against police violence and aggression are shown.

Next, come the phrases 'to act' (*'agir'*) and 'to be bold' (*'ser temerário'*). The first relates to the masses gathered in protest and the insistence not to back down, even in the face of injustice. The US flag enters the scene, and soon the police are armed and violent repression increases. To the other phrase, which is linked to the belief in modification, the breaking of the chains of domination, follow scenes of student marches against the Vietnam War and, as counter-response, the arrest of protesters in favor of US civil rights. It is interesting to note the conservative US policy outside and inside the country. The former corresponds to the intention of dominating nations, and the latter to the desire to maintain the dominant status quo, which deprives black subjects of citizenship.

Soon after, the phrase 'to be bold' appears and oversteps the screen, indicating

¹⁶ Voloshinov, *Marxism and the philosophy of language*, 13.

¹⁷ Trevisan, *Contestação* (Brasil: Documentário, P&B, 1969), 5:03–5:08.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5:13–5:23.

increased repression that becomes more aggressive in the domestic environment with the use of weapons and war tactics, previously experienced in the horrors of conflicts among nations. The message ‘not being intimidated’ (*‘não intimidar-se’*) appears and is followed by more scenes of persecutions at peaceful protests. This phrase reappears; after this, scenes of the use of military force against young subjects already detained. The last phrases are ‘authority’ (*‘autoridades’*) and ‘great names nor authorities’ (*‘autoridades / grandes nomes’*). They are followed by the aforementioned sequence of scenes showing great personalities, and others featuring soldiers as agents of authoritarian orders. These images seem to unravel the counterpoint between those behind repressive policies and those who piously and effectively carry them out.

Soldiers again attack young people already imprisoned, others appear bleeding; one of them is stuck with a gun, so strongly he faints¹⁹. Images of airplanes, these technologies, and advances that control the desires of the people, a number of bombings, police battalions opening fire; demonstrations of the strength of authoritarian states against unarmed individuals. Vietnamese students crushed by repression and, in contrast, United States supporters of the Vietnam conflict holding a sign that reads “Support our men in Vietnam.”²⁰ After scenes of a US Army soldier, one sees the tail of a plane performing aerial reconnaissance to attack a certain locality; the sign, “Support our men in Vietnam,” reappears. A young country boy is detained; bomb dumps and fires are shown. The military operation ends with the well-known figure of a mushroom cloud. Nixon is shown with a proud smile.

Brazilian newspaper clippings appear, for the last time in the film. The headlines, partially shown, report student occupations and deaths, followed by images of graffiti against communism. It should be recalled that this ideology of the fear of communism prowled the news and penetrated the popular imagination, as if this system posed a threat to the freedom of capitalist systems and should, therefore, be stopped, violently if needed. Such logic still hangs in the popular imagination today and has been defended by conservative politicians, intellectuals, and the media. The final scenes show soldiers accompanying a young man and tying him to a pole, in order to execute him. After the execution, at the sound of gunfire, an entire message is composed of the words of the previous signs: “We must dare to think, to speak, to act, to be bold, not being intimidated by great names nor authority.”²¹

This final message appears translated into English, then into French, German, Italian, Spanish and Russian, to the sound of the song “Cambalache”²² sung by Caetano

¹⁹ Ibid.,10:22.

²⁰ Ibid., 10:36.

²¹ Ibid., 12:49.

²² Composed by Enrique Discépolo in 1934, this Argentine tango appears in the movie *El alma del bandoneón*, directed by Mário Soffici. The song denounces the Infamous Decade, a period of Argentine history that begins with the civil-military coup of 1930. A crisis erupted and the country and many corruption scandals involving the coupists emerged (María Chaia and Victoria Julia Lencina, “Historia del Cine Latinoamericano y Argentino: El alma del bandoneón (Mario Soffici, 1935)” (Bachelor’s Thesis, Universidad de Buenos Aires Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Artes, 2017).

Veloso: “Siglo veinte, cambalache/problemático y febril.”²³ We believe that the choice of these languages has a dual purpose: to remind the viewer that the countries in which they are spoken were directly involved in World War II and that the conflicts shown in *Contestação* derive from it; the other purpose is to make the film’s message understood by a large number of people.

The lyrics deal with human corruption and exploitation. Caetano Veloso re-recorded it, in an attitude of protest against a similar situation experienced in Brazil, with the 1964 civil-military coup, and João Silvério Trevisan uses it in his film with the same purpose of protesting, of showing his non-conformity in face of the authoritarian regimes that dominated the 20th century, making it “cambalache/problemático y febril”. We understand, according to our perspective of analysis of *Contestação*, that the use of tango in the editing of the film points exactly to the permanence of dictatorships, corroborating Benjamin’s statements that authoritarianism in societies is the rule and not the exception.

Among the sentences in different languages are engravings: lithographs of revolutions, then an image of a skull with pierced bones. On top of it, some kind of light field surrounds something indiscernible. An engraving with the American flag appears with an electric chair with a skull; the engraving of the skull reappears, this time disclosing what is above in the image: Our Lady. Noises of screams and sirens begin. The last engravings are a woman in horror and the Paris Commune, for equality and justice, showing the (nonlinear) chain of the resistant and rebellious. In the end, a warning is given: “To those, in my country and around the world, who fight for power to belong equally to all and are therefore persecuted, tortured and murdered. This film was made because of them.” The noises and the screaming finally end, but the dialogue shown in the film goes on; the film places the viewer at one end of that dialogue, having to reflect on the word – which is, by nature, ideological and, in the film, is poetic and political.

As previously mentioned, temporalities and territorialities in the film are worked out quite differently. They are treated from the perspective of the present, within the logic of simultaneity. In general, the protest scenes that make up the film’s assembly took place almost simultaneously in various parts of the world. Although simultaneous, because they occurred in different places and deal with similar issues each image of protest becomes part of another discursive thread that contributes to what Benjamin calls, in Thesis 14,²⁴ the explosion of the continuum of history: that it is no longer possible to think of it as linear, empty and homogeneous, but built by events, images of the past, which recur in a chain of ruins (Thesis 9).²⁵

Such ruins, sequential shards in the case of films, allow another interpretation of the narrative’s time and space, which enter into another logic, Benjamin’s temporality of spiraling time, in order to demonstrate how history repeats itself in a tradition of unequal relations (Theses 8 and 13)²⁶. Shards compose an image of a game of forces; the shattering takes place in the narrative thread, with the intention of highlighting the

²³ Trevisan, *Contestação*, 13:17.

²⁴ Benjamin, “Sobre o conceito de História.” 223–24.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 226.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 223, 229.

thread itself and its spinning, that is, the film and its montage, subjective actions that suggest the subjectivity of the narratives of the official history. Reading Benjamin's ninth Thesis²⁷ enables the reflection upon the composition and montage of the film narrative, by means of these shards that render the writing of history, its official versions, ironic.

Regarding the way documentaries are composed, Bill Nichols classifies them as a "poetic mode";²⁸ in which they deviate from montage conventions, such as continuity, in order to create other temporal paces and space plots. Trevisan's film leads the way and shows us the subjectivity of documents as an authorized version of events. It is no longer the defense of national sovereignty against the communist guerrilla, but the violent actions of repression against peaceful protests by young students.

Final remarks

"Art is not a mirror to reflect the world, but a hammer to forge it."
(Vladimir Mayakóvsky).

We know that freedom as a foundation for interaction is rather a wish that all the progress of humanity is not a march along, as Benjamin puts it, an empty and homogeneous time, but the development of an ethic that underlies peaceful relationships, respecting diversity and enabling common life in the present. Art, as a human activity related to the manifestation of language for the representation of the world, of worlds and human thought, is, this study claims, always political, as it is formalized as a subjective way of framing time and space. In relation to the analyzed film, interpreted here under the light of Benjamin's theses, there is an attempt to interrupt the continuum of history, both through bringing world citizens together in their most peaceful manifestations in resisting authoritarianism, and through showing the intensification of atrocities committed by the state, which should, rather, promote welfare and mediate the dialogue among the different demands of the populations under its jurisdiction. Trevisan's artistic experience demonstrates that the use of real images from archives in motion can serve as what Ferro calls "agents of history", which seek to tell, narrate, the experience of the Other.

Regarding form and content, *Contestação* enhances the discourses and ideas through cinematographic instruments and process balanced by montage: it appropriates supposedly decontextualized images and re-presents them, reconfigured in a new sense that points to questions concerning repression in the name of ideologies and revolutionary actions against it. Far from being complete in itself, because it deals with something dear to human beings – the struggle for freedom against authoritarian, repressive, conservative actions – the film is crossed by a tragic dimension in that it displays various forms of violence, from massacres, executions, torture. There is yet another dimension that can be constructed at the end of the film: the feelings and desires that unite the rebellious during their actions. Finally, besides the film's artistic value which this essay does

²⁷ Ibid., 226–27.

²⁸ Bill Nichols, *Introdução ao documentário* (Campinas: Papyrus, 2005).

not explore much in conservative terms, one notices its tragic-poetic quality as an archive of images of our recent history. In view of Benjamin's theses, it finds that the oppressive state always wins. Therefore, it would be the job of the true materialist historian to write the history of the oppressed, so that the new generations can resume the struggle.

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