

Imagination and Potentiality: The Quest for the Real

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Historical Reality and Political Aesthetics after Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler

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Abstract: The article aims at showing how far the technologies of audiovisual registration affect not only the ontology of images but also our sense of realism in politics and history. As argue Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, historical events have become “tele-events” after the birth of these technologies. Our handling with images has changed accordingly. As argues Pietro Montani, we no longer consider them as “copies” of real objects but rather as “occasions” for initiating processes of “validation” of history. Hannah Arendt’s opposition between the ancient concept of history being based on *praxis* and the modern concept of history as “fabrication” (*poiesis*) of the humankind must be therefore reconsidered. History is rather the negotiation between these two attitudes (*praxis* and *poiesis*): cinema might be one of the exemplary sources of this negotiation, as epitomized by the documentary work in the audiovisual archives conducted by Esfir Shub (1927) and Harun Farocki (1992). Representation (Louis Martin) becomes thus a dynamical power of imagination dealing with historical and political reality; consequently, the “ideal spectator”, just as the “ideal reader” for novels (Umberto Eco), is charged with a new task of actualizing the sense of images with regard to their historical and political references.

Keywords: political imagination, history, validation, motion pictures, technologies of registration, montage, aesthetic/political judgment, television, cinema, ontology of images

1 Introduction

The transformation that occurred in the concept of *historical event* during the last 20 years is the object of the present article. This transformation is, of course, influenced by the increasing use of visual media in the global communication networks. As far as the use of visual media implies creating and sharing *images*, it is therefore a matter of *aesthetics* and not only of political theory and philosophy of history. I should speak, therefore, of “political aesthetics” or “aesthetic politics”. And it is a matter of realism, inasmuch as the very concept of event claims for the definition of an *ontology* that makes sense of it. We must keep in mind that, as far as technically registered or reproduced images are at stake, their relevance to politics seems to be an essential part of its aesthetics. This is true at least since the 1930s, when Walter Benjamin wrote the rightly celebrated essay *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischer Reproduzierbarkeit*,¹ in which he acknowledges that propaganda, especially under the totalitarian regimes, is likely to be one of the principal fields of application of both cinema and photography.

¹ Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. The date usually indicated as the year of publication of this essay is 1936. The philological work on its different versions, however, demonstrates that not only each version presents some differences, sometimes significant ones, with regard to the other, but also that each one was written (or rewritten) in a different year than the other ones, all along the 1930s.

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Although the number of scholars and thinkers being committed to the investigation of the alliance between aesthetics and politics has grown endlessly since then, I will consider only a few of them in the present article. The reason for this selection is bound to the choice of the present article's topic: I will consider only the scholars and thinkers who are especially concerned with the status of historical events inside and through visual media.

First, I will focus in particular on the criticism of television developed by Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler in *Echographies of Television*. Derrida and Stiegler are particularly committed to the analysis of why the experience of history passes from a variety of media, especially nonvisual (press, archival documents, academic works), to a visual medium such as television – but, as we shall see, not only television amid visual media appropriates historical events.

The point focused by Derrida and Stiegler's theory concerns the fact that visual media, television in particular, do not just *represent* historical events, that is, events considered for the fact of being historical. These media also *anticipate the condition through which the spectators of an event may turn into actors of the same event or of its consequences*. Otherwise, we could not even speak of any ontology of the event at stake in the visual media, if we except an ontology of simulacra – which is what Derrida and Stiegler are trying to avoid. To explain their position from my point of view, I will analyze Harun Farocki and Andrej Ujčić's movie *Videograms of a Revolution* (1991), with regard, in particular, to the use of videos, especially TV materials.

Second, to avoid some bias in Derrida and Stiegler's theory, I will turn to Hannah Arendt's criticism of the modern concept of history. Amid the variety of critical theories concerning the nature and effects of the modern philosophy of history, Arendt's remarks probably offer the best insight into the commitment of the philosophical conceptions of history to the explanation of the connection between historical events and political actions. I refer in particular to her essay, *The Concept of History*, collected in the volume *Between Past and Future*.

Arendt understands the alliance between aesthetics and politics in her own way: namely, she argues, especially in her latest works, that aesthetic judgments, conceived according to Immanuel Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, supply the most authentic form of political rationality, because their validity is based not on logical and universal principles but on the reference to exemplary cases.² She also makes a step further, stating that, as far as the world is the ultimate and most original “public sphere” human beings belong to, we should therefore consider it not as the abode of being but as a “world of appearances”. In other words, the contingency and variability intimately bound to politics should lead us to reconsider the ontology of the world in-depth – even replacing integrally ontology with phenomenology, literally speaking – as far as the existence of a world is one of the most essential conditions for the appearance of political actions. Arendt's theory of history, however, together with her later philosophy of appearances, has a bias in the fact that she does not consider enough the power of visual media in modifying and eventually transforming the very structure of appearance considered according to her own standards, that is, according to intersubjective, public, and political characters.

Third, I will consider some theories concerning the political and ethical uses of images after 9/11, the terrorist attack against the Twin Towers of New York that happened on September 11, 2001. I will focus, among others, especially on Pietro Montani's understanding of the twin concepts of the intermedial narration of historical experience by images and the validation of images themselves. In that sense, validation is different from authenticity.³ Intermediality and validation capture the “medial-political” situation after 9/11, when the spread of the attack's images on a variety of visual media – not only television, although the attack was meant to be a live event on TV, but also the Internet – designed a totally new configuration of the way political events acquire their historicity through media. In the conclusion, I will formulate, though only roughly, a hypothesis concerning the possible consequences

² See Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*; Id., *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*.

³ Montani, *L'immaginazione intermediale*.

and effects of this very last transformation in the political use of images for aesthetics as well as for our conception of reality.

To conclude, I will formulate some final considerations concerning the destiny of politics through media: to be authentic, that is, oriented to the citizens' engagement and commitment to the "commonwealth", is contemporary politics deemed to give up its media-oriented character? Or is it possible to image politics today, outside the "gamification" of the public sphere (speeches and actions) fostered by many political leaders all over the world, from Donald Trump in the US to Boris Johnson in the UK and Matteo Salvini in Italy? I will only outline a sketch of this problem. However, through such a problem, I will reaffirm the necessity of rethinking the very essence of the event, especially political events, within the mediasphere.

2 Of filmic and televisual events: Derrida and Stiegler on politics through the mediasphere

The content of the present paragraph depends largely on a brief discussion of Derrida's and Stiegler's principal theses on television and the role it plays in politics. The two philosophers develop these remarks in *Echographies of Television*, a book consisting fundamentally of interviews to Derrida himself – one of these interviews was realized by the young Bernard Stiegler, one of the principal students of Derrida and, today, one of the most influential philosophers of technics worldwide. The book ends with an essay written by Stiegler alone and concerning the status of images after the digital revolution.

Though largely focused on television, this book considers images at large: it ranges, in fact, from television to cinema, from photography to its digital evolution. Despite the focus on the new (and newer) media of about 30 years ago, the book still offers a significant analysis of the domain of technical images. First of all, Derrida's way of reconsidering the very paradigm used for understanding those images – namely, the regime of production to which they must be ascribed – is still topical to the turn occurred in the interpretation of images after the age of what Walter Benjamin called the "mechanical reproduction" (*technische Reproduzierbarkeit*). Actually, unlike Benjamin, Derrida would not speak of "reproduction" but rather of *registration*. The German media theorist Friedrich Kittler,⁴ who, by the way, was deeply influenced by Derrida, also speaks of registration, instead of reproduction. Another thinker who also worked on the issue of the new media and is deeply influenced by Derrida is the Italian philosopher Maurizio Ferraris.⁵ It is out of doubt that his concept of "documentality", recently upgraded as "documeriality", shares some significant traits with Derrida's reflection upon the registration of images.

There are at least two good reasons to prefer the paradigm of the registration to the paradigm of the reproduction. The very concept of reproduction implies that an object can be replicated a virtually infinite number of times – some limits to this infinite replication could be ascribed to the materiality of the medium. However, though relevant, this is not a fundamental aspect to the present argument. One aspect, which was revolutionary when Benjamin coined the expression "mechanical reproduction", is that this paradigm allows us to draw a difference between the traditional arts, such as painting and sculpture, to which the distinction between original and copy is relevant, and these new arts, such as cinema and photography, in which this distinction makes no longer sense: the movie viewed, e.g., *Bicycle Thieves* (De Sica and Zavattini 1948), in a theater hall in Rome during the late 1940s or early 1950s is the same movie viewed in Paris or London during the same period – and the same movie viewed today on television, movie clubs, and arenas, despite some changes in the format of the screen⁶ and the relocation of the filmic experience outside its traditional place,⁷ and despite some issues concerning the restoration of the movie

⁴ Kittler, *Grammophone, Film, Typewriter*.

⁵ Ferraris, *Documentality*.

⁶ Carbone, *Philosophy-Screens*.

⁷ Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy*.

and its transfer from film to another medium, e.g., a digital medium. However, this emphasis on reproduction has the effect of overlapping the ontology of the reproduced object with the ontology of the *work of art*. What we watch on the screen – in Rome, London, or Paris, today or 70 years ago – is, in fact, the movie as a whole, not the single photogram. Accordingly, the same considerations I have just made on the ontology of movies could also be made for other forms of art. And they actually have made: let us think of Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* (1964), the perfect replica of the ordinary item available in all supermarkets.⁸

Paradoxically, the paradigm of the reproduction is extremely focused on the moment of *reception*, in which two copies of the same movie appear completely identical one to the other, while it pays little or no attention to the moment of *production*, in which, by virtue of the process of editing, a part of the materials shot will not be used in the final cut of the movie. In other words, reproduction lacks of due consideration for an essential part of a fundamental principle of cinema, taken here as the model for all sorts of media and arts reproducing images: this principle is *montage*.⁹ On the contrary, registration considers montage, not only for its results but also (and above all) for its procedure. Registration refers, in fact, to any inscription derived from every kind of technology, no matter whether visual, audio, or audiovisual. Accordingly, a philosophy of images based on the concept of registration investigates how we pass from such a raw material to “sense units” like movies, videos, etc. If not reduced to the purely operational condition of cut and editing, montage applies to all the process, from shooting to vision, investigating not only the “poetics” at the basis of which, for instance, each director organizes the filmic narration, but also whether camera foreshadows the later narrative montage, or the spectator continues “mounting” the movie in her mind, through imagination.

Consequently, montage as a general principle in the use of registered images (and sounds) can be compared, and even put in analogy, with the *work of imagination* configuring the sense of experience by the production of mental images. This work of imagination synthetizing empirical data into a sensed experience is what Kant, in the first as well as the third Critique, calls “schematism”.¹⁰ Two scholars have especially investigated this analogy between schematism and cinema: they are Pietro Montani¹¹ and the abovementioned Bernard Stiegler.¹² The former theorizes a form of “externalized schematism”, of which cinema is the earliest manifestation. However, it is neither the only nor the last one in the history of images: the Internet, as well as the many interactive technologies more or less embedded in it, provides us with ever new examples of externalized schematism. Stiegler, in turn, while sharing many views with

⁸ Theories concerning the decline of originality were elaborated *after* Andy Warhol's revolution in the contemporary art: Arthur C. Danto, in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, speaks, for instance, of “transfiguration of the commonplace”, but seems not to be interested in the issue of reproduction as such. Jean-François Lyotard, in *Philosophy and Media in the Era of Their Experimentation*, in turn, acknowledges the importance of reproduction to Warhol's work, but only in a political perspective: according to a Marxist framework, the artist would be the accomplishment of the industrial laborer's identification with the commodity.

⁹ I will not discuss the question whether montage is relevant to photography too, or not. In favor of this preference for cinema, I will only say that while all issues concerning photography, e.g., the indexicality of the referent, are relevant to cinema too, the opposite is not true: some features of cinema, e.g., the narrative power of montage, could be relevant only to cinema. And this shows that cinema is probably a more advanced and refined medium of reproduction, than photography. And therefore, a cinema-oriented ontology might be more powerful than a photography-oriented ontology.

¹⁰ I owe this way of reading Kant mainly to the Italian philosopher Emilio Garroni, especially his last book: *Immagine Linguaggio Figura*. To fully appreciate his theory of image, together with its Kantian claims, we have to keep in mind two points: first, Garroni assumes that mental images are not only visual but also auditory and multisensory at large. Generally speaking, these images are the anticipation of every kind of cognition of reality: in that sense, they are not barely sensible. Second, Garroni believes the “free play” of imagination with understanding, which Kant puts as a condition for aesthetic judgment and pleasure, configures a sort of “free schematism” opposed or at least different from the “objective schematism” theorized in the first Critique with regard to knowledge. The free schematism would be a moment of reorganization of the very condition of knowledge on the occasion of an experience which is not immediately directed by the subject to an immediate cognition: see D'Angelo, *Estetica*; Velotti, *La filosofia e le arti*. The expression objective schematism is used by Kant himself in the third Critique, to designate the sort of schematism theorized in the first Critique.

¹¹ Montani, *Tre forme di creatività*.

¹² Stiegler, *La technique et le temps*.

Montani's hypothesis, focuses sometimes, especially in the earliest formulations of the problem, on how the encounter between the schematizing imagination and technology is able to determine the mode (and the mood) of our experience. He writes therefore, for instance, that

There is postproduction when the *dérushage* and montage are realized as differing: this is the phenomenon of dream. There is live direction when consciousness "cuts" as soon as it "captures": this is the state of wakefulness. Cinema is of the order of dream. Wakefulness is a sort of tele-vision. Of course, it is always possible to daydream. We shall speak, then, of telecinema.¹³

As we see, cinema is associated with the experience of dreaming, while television resembles the state of wakefulness, and thus might supply us with a sort of fake reality in the form of "live" events. And this is indeed what Derrida calls the "artificiality" (*artefactualité*) of television, according to which reality (*l'actualité*) and the news (*les actualités*) are both an artificial product of television. The point is not really that news might be either true or fake: it is rather that the very structure and functioning – the "grammar", to use Derrida's words – of television do not allow such a distinction. In this sense, all the historical events of our time belong not to television as a device but to a form of *télé-visée*: our intentionality of these events, in the phenomenological acceptation of the word, is mediated by television. It is of course a wordplay: *visée* ("aim") is the French word describing how intentionality "aims" at an object.

Stiegler's reformulation of Derrida's argument on television is here fundamental. As we saw, if this form of "tele-vision" implies the work of imagination, that is, schematism, it follows that, while imagination configures (i.e. "synthetizes") the sense of an event, some *feeling* is added to this work. We say in fact that an event, e.g., the vision of a movie in the darkness of a theater hall, is "dream-like", while another one looks like reality – for instance, when we watch on TV a group of people living for some time in the same house, being shot by cameras for the purpose of entertaining the public with their lives. But if a viewed event is both envisaged and felt, this implies that it is also *judged*: we say, in fact, "this is like a dream, whilst that is like reality". I mean of course judgment in Kant's sense: subsuming a particular under a universal,¹⁴ i.e., under a rule or standard of every sort (pure concepts of the understanding, empirical concepts, etc.). And as far as having an experience of the abovementioned historical events mediated by media implies not the immediate application of already given concepts, but their experimentation, together with the recognition of the feelings they trigger, and this is a case for the faculty of "reflecting judgment", rather than "determining judgment" depending on the legislation of the understanding. This feeling is related to this enterprise of exploring the very nature of the event: by saying that the movie we have watched, e.g., Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria* (1957), is like a dream, and we are trying to grasp its structure, its "concept". Likewise, to deconstruct what Derrida calls artificiality, we need to consider the mediation operated by media (television and, today, the Internet)¹⁵ as being possibly bound to a judgment. The political import of this operation will be that judgment should be, so to speak, unbound and empowered to consider its former technological boundaries as the very object of reflection and critique.

3 History between *Praxis* and *Poiesis*: Hannah Arendt reconsidered

The thinker who probably investigated mostly in-depth the issue of history, at least from the point of view considered here, is Hannah Arendt. Apart from several remarks, sometimes whole paragraphs, devoted to this issue in many of her most famous books, from *Vita Activa* (1958) to *On Revolution* (1963), to mention

¹³ Stiegler, *La technique et le temps*, 54–5.

¹⁴ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Section IV.

¹⁵ For the concept of mediation, see Grusin, "Radical Mediation".

only two of them, she wrote an entire essay concerning this issue in the early 1950s. This essay was later collected in the volume *Between Past and Future*. Unlike other thinkers and historians of ideas, who sometimes even shared with her the same philosophical background and critical legacy to Heidegger's thought, such as Karl Löwith, Arendt does not take the advent of Christianity as the very birth of the modern concept of history. This birth happened later on in time, and coincides with modernity, that is, as soon as the Christian linear conception of the historical time started being handled in a secular way. In other words, the emergence of the modern concept of history is bound, not to the moment when the Western civilization started believing that Christ's venue on Earth represented the pivot in the history of the human salvation, but when the two abbreviations "BC" and "AD" started being considered as pure conventions, useful to orient the historian's work.

At that time, history started being an object for scientific investigation. But modernity did not deal with history only as an object of human knowledge. History also became an object for philosophical reflection. If compared to modern philosophy, the way ancient political philosophy dealt with history as a temporal category was rather simple. Political regimes succeed each other, but their number is extremely limited. To recover a famous classification, they are monarchy/tyranny, aristocracy/oligarchy, and democracy/ochlocracy, whether each of them is considered on its positive or negative side. Consequently, historical time is *cyclical* and, in that sense, corresponds to cosmological time. On the contrary, the linearity of the historical time which modernity inherits from Christianity, secularizing it, leads to think that each historical age is *peculiar* – and above all, it is an *advancement* with regard to the past ages. History has become the place in which *progress* can be verified. This is the fundamental idea staying behind every *philosophy of history* according to Arendt. No matter whether idealist (Hegel) or materialist (Marx), these philosophies consider "world history" (*Weltgeschichte*) as the "trial of the world" (*Weltgericht*), according to Schiller's famous sentence quoted by Arendt.

However, to fully understand and deconstruct the theoretical foundations of the philosophy of history, we have to go back – before Schiller, Hegel, and Marx – to the earliest modern attempts of giving history an adequate epistemological framework according to the criteria of the scientific revolution and the Cartesian philosophy. According to these two influential movements, nature, rather than history, deserves the primacy, as far as the scientific status of the objects to be known is concerned. Nonetheless, the Italian philosopher and humanist, Giambattista Vico, claimed not only the epistemological adequacy of history to experimental science, but even its superiority with regard to nature: for, argues Vico, the only objects, the knowledge of which is fully and undoubtedly accessible to the human beings' inquiries, are those objects that are produced by the human beings themselves. The work of nature rests partly obscure to us, while the work of our own hands is certainly transparent to us. This is, in a nutshell, Vico's argument in favor of the epistemological superiority of the human studies, including history, with regard to the natural sciences, at least according to Arendt's reconstruction of his thought.

The most interesting conclusion Arendt draws from Vico's thought concerning history is that historical time has become the product of a human *fabrication*. History, the abode of politics, was no longer a matter of *praxis* – as it was evident to the ancients, except the philosophers, and namely Plato, but for other reasons than these ones. It has now become a matter of *poiesis*. History is the fabrication process through which "Man" or the "humankind", depending on the theoretical framework assumed, create themselves. Arendt's reconstruction of the modern concept of history is critical and aims at recovering the ancient concept of history as the narration of great deeds, which keeps the memory of the past and offers examples for new actions in the present. I mainly agree with Arendt, but I believe that the power of *poiesis* in the formation of our very idea of history has come to such an extent that we cannot just ignore its presence. Memory has become a matter of *poiesis* too: this is precisely the case for cinema and all the audiovisual media. By shooting and archiving images of the events, we do not only afford their memory: we reshape the very structure of memory, sometimes expanding sometimes canalizing it, sometimes positively sometimes negatively. As soon as cinema has appeared, historical events have occupied the crossing point between *poiesis* and *praxis*, production of images, and undertaking of actions. Judging these events politically implies, therefore, not the suspension of their "productive" background but the understanding of this connection.

4 Validating images

To explore the last issue formulated above, I will propose to turn to Pietro Montani's concept of "validation" (*autenticazione*).¹⁶ Validation is a process that starts with the artist's or director's intention but is prolonged by the spectator's reception. Neither the artist/director nor the spectator is empowered to accomplish validation without the other's agreement. This agreement is not necessarily factual. On the contrary, it is in principle virtual: each agent imagines and anticipates the other's intentions, feelings, and beliefs. The artist/director renarrates thus an event with her movie, because she aims at making manifest a shared, though not sufficiently evident, sentiment concerning that event. And the spectator receives this narration as if this was exactly meant to address her – not only her feelings, intentions, and beliefs but these as far as they are elements of her life as historical being and potentially a political actor. Given its nonfactual, and I dare to say *transcendental*, nature, the agreement necessary for validation is consistent with Kant's idea of *sensus communis*, or *Gemeinsinn*, which is at the basis of aesthetic judgments.¹⁷

Second, and more importantly, validation requires a twofold work on images. On the artist/director's side, this work results in the research of whether and how actions have left a *track* on images – and if not, why.¹⁸ In other words, the artist/director tries to reconstruct the way *poiesis* supplied *praxis* with a memory. But let us keep in mind that the event exists in between these two instances: nobody would say that the event of 9/11 makes sense outside the impact the terrorist attack had on the global news networks. 9/11 was meant to be such an audiovisual event. On the side of the spectator's event, this work on images results, in turn, in formulating the question whether and how those images are able to empower new actions. In other words, the spectator's task concerns the reconstruction of a *critical* philosophy of history, in which the future is not "foreseen" by past events. The present is no state, but a condition for reconfiguring the sense of both past and future.

History is, therefore, neither the fabrication of *poiesis* nor the pure memory of *praxis*: it is rather the negotiation between the two. Inasmuch as images – the "motion pictures" of cinema – capture life, their commitment to movement implies the reference to action, at least if we refer to the human reality. As far as the sense of history is concerned, the spectator operates a sort of virtual montage of the event viewed with all of its possible antecedents and prosecution: history is a sequence, in the filmic sense of the word. And this negotiation is *per se* a way of configuring the sense of politics today.

To conclude, I would like to offer two examples of this cinematic condition of historical events, in the age of audiovisual media. They are two documentary movies concerning two capital events in the history of the twentieth century: namely, *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927) by Esfir Shub and *Videograms of a Revolution* (1992) by Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică. Both movies shed light on the way motion pictures validate an event as part of history – and of a story. The first movie was realized for celebrating the 10 years since the October Revolution. The idea of the movie is not to celebrate directly the revolution – other movies pursued this aim, in the framework of the celebrations of this anniversary – but to narrate the fall of the dynasty: namely, the event originating all the consequences that led to the Bolsheviks' triumph. Shub uses only archive materials: images of the Romanov court, the imperial government and army, and the Orthodox church. These were the pillars of the unjust rule over peasants and workers under the Czarist regime. The montage of images is not accidental: Shub aims – once again, only by using archive materials – at making an idea be visible. Arguably, this idea is that the old imperial state is like Hobbes' Leviathan: it is a monster whose head is the ruler with his family, court, and government. The monster's two arms (the secular and the spiritual) are the army and the church – let us think of the famous front-page image of *The Leviathan*'s original edition.

¹⁶ This concept is presented in his 2010 book, *L'immaginazione intermediale (Intermedial Imagination)*. According to Montani, images are not expected to present reality as such. In that sense, validation does not correspond to authenticity. Images, when effective, rather make available a process for verifying the rules and standards by which we judge events.

¹⁷ And, therefore, it is consistent with Arendt's reconsideration of the Kantian aesthetic judgment as political judgment: see Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*.

¹⁸ On this point, see Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*; Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

Shub's aim is, therefore, the *representation of power*. And, as argues Louis Marin (2002), the representation of power is not a matter of imitation: it is rather the condition through which the "force" of power, by means of signs and images, becomes visible, and above all concretely existing, to the beholder's eyes. But Shub represents the Czarist power *dynamically*: Russia is only one case for the larger global economic power of capitalism. If we compare, as she does, Czarist Russia to the second-Reich Germany and Austria-Hungary, we discover that all these empires were but variants of the same form of rule. And if we compare these empires to the democracies in Western Europe, France, and Great Britain in particular, we discover that these two poles of Europe were actually the two sides of capitalism, which develops either an economy based on trade, business, market, and finance (France and Great Britain) or an industry based on the rigidly military-like control of labor (the abovementioned Empires). Within the capitalist framework, progress and regression, liberalism and conservatism, free trade and isolationism, democracy and dictatorship: all of these couples of concepts are as much the two "arms" of the worldly Leviathan as the church and army were the arms of the imperial Leviathan represented by the Czarist Russia.

This is the first sense in which the representation of the political Leviathan of power becomes dynamical in Shub's movie: she is able to enlarge our perspectives and show us that every Leviathan is but a part of a greater one. But there is a second sense. The dynamics is not only on the director's side but also in the object itself. Shub argues "iconically", so to speak, that, as soon as the worldly capitalist Leviathan started moving toward First World War, it initiated the process of its own decomposition: it was like a machine destined to be destroyed by its own functioning. Death and famine are the two weapons by which the Leviathan "suicides" as soon as it loses the people's obedience. In a perfect Marxist style, Shub gives power not a static but a dynamical representation, which makes sense of history as the process through which the final revolution of labor has to be accomplished. In other words, through montage, she creates an original and dynamical representation of the historical event.

Let us now come to the second example. In *Videograms of a Revolution*, Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică – a Romanian filmmaker, with whom the German director corealized this movie – describe the fall of another regime in 1989: it is the communist dictatorship then led by Ceausescu in Romania. In a sense, it is the end of the story, the beginning of which was narrated by Shub in 1927. The Bolsheviks, who came to power in Russia in 1917 having the purpose of realizing the rule of laborers and peasants, created a new imperial system based on the faith on socialism. But from an aesthetic point of view, the aim of Farocki and Ujică is completely another one with regard to that of Shub. Both movies are entirely based on archive materials. In the latter case, they are videos, shot by either activists or the Romanian State TV channel, concerning the last hours of the regime when, during Ceausescu's last public speech from the presidential palace, a revolt of people burst out, leading to the arrest of the dictator and of his wife, as well as their immediate trial and execution to death penalty.

But Farocki and Ujică, unlike Shub, do not aim at representing the event. When using a certain video, and thus representing a fragment of the event *from a certain perspective*, the voice-off explains who, how, and why shot each event at that very moment and place and according to a certain standpoint. According to this proceeding of montage, the "what is happening" becomes intelligible, thanks to the filmic tracks the video makers left of their presence.¹⁹ Farocki and Ujică aim, therefore, not at representing the event but at *deconstructing* it, in order to enable the spectators to *reconstruct* it, grasping its sense on their own. In a sense, Farocki and Ujică foreshadow a sort of *ideal spectator*, in analogy with Umberto Eco's notion of the "ideal reader" of the literature:²⁰ this ideal spectator is expected not just to grasp the political meaning of the event shown but also to learn the logic of montage – TV montage, in this case – governing the presentation and the very manifestation of this event. They add thus a *reflective import* to the validation process already at work in Shub's documentary montage.

¹⁹ For an extension of this discussion to cinema, see Cecchi, *Immagini mancanti*. For the analysis of *Videograms of a Revolution*, see also Cecchi, "Cinegrams of Premediation".

²⁰ See Eco, *The Role of the Reader*.

To conclude, I would like to underline that, after the emergence of the technologies of audiovisual registration, the reflective of images assumes at least two different aspects. On the one hand, it hints at the several ways available for making sense of images as tracks: track images can be, in fact, considered either as reproductions of the same pattern of interpretation, as happens in Shub, or as registrations available to the elaboration of an experience, as happens in Farocki and Andrei Ujică. It follows that the deconstruction of images, which is necessary for the operation of montage and assumes an even more general meaning in the later audiovisual media, aims in principal at a process of reconstruction of reality by means of the technological device. This does not mean that historical reality exists only inside the “mediasphere”. It means that media empower us to elaborate the strategies to respond to historical events according to adequate political patterns of interpretation.

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