

Audiovisual e Indústrias Criativas

Presente e Futuro

Volume 1



Coordenador:
José Gomes Pinto



AUDIOVISUAL E INDUSTRIAS CRIATIVAS: PRESENTE E FUTURO

VOLUME 1

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coordenador
Jose Gomes Pinto



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CONTEIJDO

INTRODUCAO

Jose Gomes Pinto	11
CULTURA POPULAR Y REPRESENTACIONES DISTOPICAS DEL FUTURO CERCANO: TECNOCRACIA, BIOPOLITICA Y EMANCIPACION	
Jose Luis Valhondo-Crego	15
LA DISCAPACIDAD EN EL SECTOR AUDIOVISUAL, CONTENIDOS INCLUSIVOS Y EMPLEABILIDAD: EL CASO DE RTVE Y ATRESMEDIA (2019)	
Leticia Rodriguez Fernandez, M6nica Vinaras Abad, Javier Sierra Sanchez	29
LA REPRESENTACION FEMENINA EN EL CINE IRANf. (EL CASO DE LA PELfCULA, LA MITAD OCULTA DE TAHMINEH MILANI, 2001)	
NEGAR SADEGHIAN	45
DISCIPLINE AND RESISTANCE IN THE REPRESENTATION OF MOTHfRHOOD: POSTPARTUM REPAIR DISCUSSION ON CHINESE FEMALE SOCIAL MEDIA RED	
Yixuan LIU	59
ANALISIS PSICOSOCIAL Y DEL CONFINAMIENTO POR COVID-19 EN EL CONSUMO DE CONTENIDOS PORNOGRAFICOS DIGITALES EN LA POBLACION JUVENIL	
Ubaldo Cuesta Cambra, Marion Roberts Martnez, Luz Martnez Martnez, Carolina Bengoechea Gonzalez	79
EL ARQUETIPO HEROICO EN LA NARRATIVA BLACK LIVES MATTER. ANALISIS DE LA MINISERIE <i>WHEN THEY SEE US</i>	
Aixa Jorduera Trascastro, Isabel A. Vazquez Sacristan, Marina Rodriguez Hernandez	95
STREAMING AND OTHER VOD PLATFORMS IN PORTUGAL: NOTES ON THE CHALLENGES THEY FACE, THEIR IMPORTANCE TO AUDIENCES, AND THE OPPORTUNITIES THEY POSE FOR THE PORTUGUESE AUDIO-VISUAL INDUSTRY	
Andre Rui Graa	109
UM ANO DE PANDEMIA NOS JORNALIS ONLINE-A EFEMERIDE NOS CONTEUDOS DIGITAIS	
S6nia Lamy	123

O PODER DO ARGUMENTISTA EM TEMPOS DE PANDEMIA: QUANDO
A TELENOVELA SE TORNA OBRA FECHADA - NARRATIVA,
ESPECTATORIALIDADE, AUTORIA

Rosane Svartman, Pedro Lopes 139

THE STREAMING EFFECT ON THE WRITING AND CONCEPTUALIZATION
OF CONTEMPORARY TV SERIES

Possidonio Cachapa 155

AUDIO-VISUAL METHODOLOGIES FOR THE CO-CREATION OF A WEB
DOCUMENTARY

Ines Santos Moura, Vania Baldi 165

ANALISIS DEL USO QUE LA JUVENTUD VASCA Y NAVARRA HACE
DE INSTAGRAM: MUCHO POSTUREO Y FOMENTO DEL CONSUMO

Maialen Goirizelaia, Blanca Miguelez-Juan, Edorta Arana 181

LOS PROFESORES LLEGAN A YOUTUBE: LA FIGURA DE LOS EDUTUBERS
DE QUANTUM FRACTURE Y UNICOOS

Aurora Forteza-Martinez 199

LA SEMIOLOGÍA SAUSSURIANA COMO SISTEMA EN BABA IS YOU (2019)

Carlos Alvarez Barroso 213

ARTE DE LOS [NUEVOS] NUEVOS MEDIOS: CONSUMO VISUAL
Y ABSOLUTO ESTÉTICO

Marra del Mar García-Jiménez, Ramón Blanco-Barrera 227

INTERCREATIVIDAD EN EL PERIODISMO DIGITAL INDEPENDIENTE:
EL CASO DE CTXT

Israel V. Marquez 241

ANALISIS DE LA COMUNICACION DIGITAL DE LOS ORGANISMOS
DE SALUD SOBRE LA COVID-19 EN MEXICO Y EL MUNDO

Rebeca Illiana Arevalo Martínez, Rogelio del Prado Flores 257

EL VIDEOJUEGO COMO MEDIO DE CONSOLIDACION DE LAS INDUSTRIAS
CREATIVAS: EL EJEMPLO DE FORTNITE

Jenniffer Soto de la Cruz, Sara Cortes Gomez 277

LA GESTION DEL «YO DIGITAL» EN LA ERA DE LAS PLATAFORMAS:
LAS JOVENES TRAPERAS Y SUS STORIES DE INSTAGRAM

Carla Barrio Romera, Angel Gordo Lopez 293

GESTION DE MARCAS Y SECTOR PUBLICITARIO EN ESPAÑA EN 2020:
CONTEXTO DIGITAL Y PANDEMIA POR COVID-19

Santiago Mayorga Escalada 457

A PRODUCAO AUDIOVISUAL INFORMATIVA NA ERA DA CONVERGENCIA DIGITAL:
RTP, SIC E TVI

Carlos Canelas 471

EL CONFLICTO VASCO EN EL CINE DE LA TRANSICIÓN

Manuel Antonio Pacheco Barrio 485

COMPETENCIA TECNOLOGICA EN EL USO DE LAS REDES SOCIALES DURANTE
LA PANDEMIA EN LOS PROCESOS DE ENSEÑANZA DE LOS DOCENTES
DEL GRADO NOVENO JORNADA MANANA DE LA INSTITUCION EDUCATIVA
DEPARTAMENTAL ROQUE DE LOS RIOS VALLE SEDE PRINCIPAL RETEN
MAGDALENA

Matilde Bolaiio García, Keguin Jose Gonzalez Castro 503

O SOM, A VOZ E A IMAGEM: A EXPERIENCIA AU DIVEL

Lufs Claudio Ribeiro 515

ENTRE VENTOINHAS E MAQUINAS DE LAVAR - O RUIDO BRANCO
NA CONFIGURAÇÃO DO ESPAÇO DOMÉSTICO

Joao Francisco Porffrio 531

THE AUDIOVISUAL ONTOLOGY TO THE TEST

Fabio Vittorini 547

AUDIOBRANDING. SONIDOS QUE CONSTRUYEN LA MARCA PERSONAL

Raul Terol-Bolinches 559

A METHOD FOR THE ANALYSIS OF SOUND ART AND AUDIO-VISUAL
PERFORMANCE

Adriana Sa 577

MANUAL AND ALGORITHMIC PROCEDURES IN SOUNDSCAPE
COMPOSITION

Gornalo Gato 595

O FUNDAMENTO SONICO E A INTEGRAÇÃO MIGRATORIA

Jorge Bruno Ventura 613

SONS DA DISTANCIA, SONS DISTANTES?

Fabio Fonseca Ribeiro, Pedro Portela 629

BROADCASTING IN RESISTANCE: WALTER BENJAMIN'S VISIONS
FOR THE FUTURE OF RADIO THROUGH PODCASTING

Fuad Halwani 643

EXPLORACION DE LAS CARACTERfSTICAS NARRATIVAS
DEL SONIDO EN EL AUDIOVISUAL

Juana Rubio 657

PERSPECTIVAS SOCIO-SEMIOTICAS DA MUSICA NA PRODUQAO TELEVISIVA

Hedisson Mota 669

GREY LINE BETWEEN SOUND DESIGN AND COMPOSING IN HBO
MINI-SERIES "CHERNOBYL"

Margaryta Kulichova 685

THE MEANING OF AURAL DYNAMICS IN CINEMA

Tarun Madupu 699

PRESENCE EFFECTS IN THE IMMERSIVE BINAURAL AUDIO EXPERIENCES

Massimo Roberto Beato 715

PODCASTING IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: A NEW MEDIA FORM
IN TRANSITION

James Piecowsky 729

THE USE OF THE "RULE OF THIRDS" IN VISUAL FRAMING AND PERSUASIVE
EFFICACY IN AUDIOVISUAL ADVERTISING

Jaime Lopez, Ana Margarida Barreto 741

THE ROLE OF VOICE IN HEALTH PERSUASION: A CONSTRUAL LEVEL
THEORY PERSPECTIVE

Binbin Ni, Fuzhong Wu 757

COMUNICACION SOBRE VACUNAS COVID-19 Y SU IMPACTO INICIAL
"REPUTACIONAL" EN LA OPINION PUBLICA ESPANOLA

Pablo Martfn Antoranz, Ubaldo Cuesta Cambra, Carolina Bengochea Gonzalez,
Guillermo Mejfas Martfnz 769

LOS HIPERVERfDEOS CON FINES PUBLICITARIOS: REVISION SISTEMATICA
DE LA LITERATURA Y ANALISIS DE SUS CARACTERfSTICAS

Marfa J. Ortiz 783

PREFERENCIAS DEL CONSUMIDOR RESPECTO A LAS COMPRAS
ONLINE EN ESPANA: EVOLUCION DEL INTERES EN EL SECTOR
E-COMMERCE EN TIEMPOS DE LA COVW-19

Natalia Abufn Vences, Daniel Francisco Garcfa Rosales 799

ESTRATEGIAS DIGITALES PARA LA PROMOCION DE CIUDADES

Livier Olivia Escamilla Galindo, Claudia Susana Andal6n Delgadillo 809

O MITO UTILIZADO COMO FERRAMENTA DE INFLUENCIA E PERSUASAO
NAS MIDIAS SOCIAISGabriela Abrao Fasanella, Marina Henrique Viotto,
Eliane Pereira Zamith Brito 823

NO TRILHO DA COMUNICAQAO DO SECULO XXI: TENDENCIAS E DESAFIOS

Cristina Santos 835

INFLUENCIA DE LA REALIDAD VIRTUAL EN EL SECTOR DE LA AUTOMOCION.

ESTUDIO DE CASO DE LA APLICACION INMERSIVA DE AUDI A4
EN ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS

Matras Lopez Iglesias, Alejandro Tapia-Frade 851

EL FUTURO DEL VOICE MARKETING EN ALTAVOCES INTELIGENTES

Ainhoa Hernandez-Momblona, Jose M. Lavfn 867

O IMPACTO DO MARKETING EMOCIONAL NO COMPORTAMENTO
DO CONSUMIDOR: UMA PERSPECTIVA DA COVID-19

Rita Pinto da Luz, Fabio Shimabukuro Sandes 881

THE AUDIOVISUAL ONTOLOGY TO THE TEST

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Abstract

Since the late 1960s the cinematographic language has been marked by the recurrent outpouring of two drives. A drive to disintegrate the narrative structure by replacing chronological time, which is homogeneous, irreversible, quantitative and calculable, with existential time, which is unextended, indivisible, qualitative, heterogeneous, non-measurable and reversible. A drive to dissolve the diegetic and extradiegetic voices by concealing or deleting their sources, by dissociating them from the bodies they belong to and from the individualities they embody, by multiplying their reverberations. These drives push image and sound toward a divorce, toward a sort of «acousmatic» cinema which questions the ontology and innocence of its audio-visual technologies, exposing the ideology and dogmatism that have transformed the union of sound and image into religion.

Keywords

Audiovisual, Voice, Identity, Ontology, Ideology.

In 2008, introducing the 100 greatest singers of all time for *Rolling Stone* magazine, Jonathan Lethem questions the mystery of the voice:

There's something about a voice that's personal, not unlike the particular odor or shape of a given human body. After all, that's pretty much what voice is: Summoned through belly, hammered into form by the throat, given propulsion by bellows of lungs, teased into final form by tongue and lips, a vocal is a kind of audible kiss, a blurred confession, a soul-burp you really can't keep from issuing as you make your way through the material world. (2012: 307)

So the voice, as the body, distinguishes the person. Voice is identity: the «soul» manifesting itself within «material» reality, that is the soul acquiring material consistency through sound waves and their qualities (harmonics, timbre, pitch etc.). As it works for the person, so it works for the persona, for the character, on stage or on screen. The voice, as the face and the whole body, identifies the character, manifesting his or her simulated «soul», that is simulating the existence of a fictitious soul through the «material» grain of a real voice (Chion, 1999). This is one of the golden rules of the classical Hollywood cinema, until a sudden "vocal revolution" happens at the end of the sixties of the twentieth century, when a few young American filmmakers become «temporarily able to free the sound-image relationship from the biases of technological and narrative determinism» (Beck, 2016: 6) established by half a century of sound films. They feel free to experiment with new practices of sound recording and to rethink the audio-visual regime of former cinema, that is the mythopoeia which translates ontologically the technological addition image+sound (on the side of production) and watching+listening (on the side of reception) (Chion, 2019: 3-21). Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), John Boorman's *Point Blank* (1967), Richard Lester's *Petulia* (1968), Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool* (1969), Sydney Pollack's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1969), Monte Hellman's *Two-Lane Blacktop* (1971), Richard C. Sarafian's *Vanishing Point* (1971), Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets* (1973), James William Guercio's *Electra Glide in Blue* (1973), Robert Altman's *Nashville* (1974), Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974), Alan J. Pakula's *The Parallax View* (1974), Steven Spielberg's *The Sugarland Express* (1974), Brian de Palma's *Phantom of the Paradise* (1974), Robert Kramer and John Douglas' *Milestones* (1975) and Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven* (1978), among others, challenge current production standards and explore new possibilities in articulating the lexicon, morphology and syntax of the sound, inspired by radio, television and music industry new technologies and welcoming new contents and forms (Martini, 2014; Bartkowiak, Kiuchi, 2015).

Multitrack mixers, new mixing strategies, sound recording on set (sync sound), stereophony restarted with Dolby system, finally free cinematographic sound from the verbocentrism, or rather from the logopathy of the classical paradigm (Sergi, 2004). Logos as narrative discursiveness, as principle of ordering and rationalizing diegesis (the story as a temporal and causal succession of events), gives way to *Phone as*

instrument to render the inexhaustible physicality and sensoriality of the diegetic world (irreducible to story alone). Through processes of hyper-subjectification (the story is entirely internal to the character's voice and interiority), de-subjectification (the sound, even the voice, is radically detached from the character) or relativization (the character is the point of irradiation of a partial sound field, which can interfere with other sound fields and needs to be identified and reconstructed), the Logos loses its role as the main vector of a centripetal and (teleo)logical narrative signification and acquires the value of instrument of a centrifugal and acous(ma)tic significance, which «recalls the idea of an infinite work (of the signifier on itself)» (Barthes, 2002: 455), institutionalizing space as an autonomous sign, or rather as an autonomous agglomeration of signs.

Sometimes not all sounds are referable to the characters' auditory and cognitive field, leaving large areas of unheard and ununderstood, celebrating the irreducibility of the real to the narrative, of the living to the rational, occasionally even of the existing to the human (see f. e. the natural sounds in *Days of Heaven* or the "social" ones in *Mean Streets*). Some other times all sounds are explicitly filtered by characters, declaring the relativity and incompleteness of the represented reality (think of the 24+1 overlapping voices in *Nashville*¹) and of the narrative which takes care of the representation (think of the scenes of sound capturing and recording in *Medium Cool* and in *The Conversation*). In all cases the sound suggests a supplement of world outside the (diegetic and narrative) acoustic field, which, exactly like what remains outside the visual field, is necessary to define the *ontologial*¹ of the diegesis and narrative.

The acoustic anamorphosis, which removes speech from the center of the story's soundscape (by multiplying or dirtying or eliminating the spoken words), often goes with:

- a visual anamorphosis, which refuses to construct the image as a clear perspective with a single vanishing point opposite to viewer's eye (by deforming or fragmenting or [de)saturating the frames);
- a narrative anamorphosis, which frees the editing from the linearity of a story inexorably falling towards a pre-determined ending.

These three transformations violently shake the possibility or the will or the habit of identifying an (acoustic, visual or narrative) center where the meaning of the entire representation is supposed to lie. As in the transition from Renaissance to Mannerist painting, when classical cinema (studio system's Hollywood) is overcome by modern cinema (New Hollywood), unprecedented forms of mimesis are experimented, in order to renew the adherence to the complexity of reality through decentralization and deviation strategies (Maas0, 2008; Le Fevre-Berthelot, 2013).

1 The +1 is the invisible but omnipresent candidate for president.

Since then, the language of modern (not only American) cinema has been periodically crossed and transformed by disintegrating, unrealizing, self-reflective drives. Movies such as Jacques Rivette's *La Belle Noiseuse* (1991), Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), Werner Herzog's *Lektionen in Finsternis (Lessons of Darkness)*, 1992, Terence Davies' *The Long Day Closes* (1992), Alain Resnais' *Smoking/No Smoking* (1993), Ermanno Olmi's *Il segreto del bosco vecchio* (*The Secret of the Old Woods*, 1993), Derek Jarman's *Glitterbug* (1994), Bela Tarr's *Satantang6* (1994), Wong Kar-wai's *Chungking Express* (1994), Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* (1996), Aleksandr Sokurov's *Mat i syn* (*Mother and Son*, 1997), Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (1998), Todd Haynes' *Velvet Goldmine* (1998), Wes Anderson's *Rushmore* (1998), Spike Jonze's *Being John Malkovich* (1999), Manoel de Oliveira's *Porto da minha infancia* (*Porto of My Childhood*, 2001) and David Cronenberg's *Spider* (1996), on the one hand, variously crumble the narrative structure by replacing the linear, uniform and calculable time of the classical narrative with a jagged, inhomogeneous and often not quantifiable time. On the other hand, they liquefy the narrating/narrated voices through a systematic work of delocalization and disorientation, separating visual discourse from acoustic discourse toward an openly «acousmatic» cinema (Chion, 2019: 71) and consequently responding to a need clearly expressed by Pier Paolo Pasolini in 1966²:

We must ideologize, we must un-ontologize. Audiovisual technologies are now a large part of our world, that is of the world of technological neocapitalism that goes on, whose tendency is to make its technologies unideological and ontological, to make them silent and unrelated, to make them habits, religious forms. 'c [...] must fight to the death to demystify the «innocence of technology». (Pasolini, 2000: 226)

New Hollywood filmmakers begin to question the ontology and innocence of audiovisual technologies which cinema is based on since the beginning of the sound era. This attempt to unmask the ideology and dogmatism that have transformed the union of image and sound into a religious and unrelated form recovers some ideas of the old manifesto *Asynchronism as a Principle of Sound Film* (1928), which advocated a use of the sound in a contrapuntal sense, that is not in sync with the image, but as an antidote to any too easy illusion of reality (Pudovkin, 1960). Disregarding Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Grigori Aleksandrovs requests, the perceptual habits established by classical cinema to familiarize the reality have ended up producing a general algebraization of the reality itself, so that, after half a century, it is perceived and recorded as an unconscious, traditional continuity: its audio-vision remains un(re)viewed/un(re)heard, its perception is anesthetized, the awareness of its inexhaustibility progressively lost (Christie, 2003).

This classical ontologization of technologies flattens the audiovisual «knowledge» of reality into a simple «recognition», so that, «held accountable for nothing, life

2 The same year Roger Corman produces and directs *The Wild Angels*, «dry run» of Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969], which «will make New Hollywood explode» (Martini, 2014: 15).

fades into nothingness». Modern cinema aims at leading us «*to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight [and hearing] instead of recognition. By "estranging" objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and "laborious"*» (Shklovsky, 1990: 4-6) and finally accomplishes the ideologization and un-ontologization of audiovisual technologies (Van den Oever, 2010).

The point of no return of this path of de-automatization of cinematographic language, between the two millennia, is David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001). Initially produced as a pilot for a TV series and then integrated and reassembled into a film, its narration synthesizes and systematizes modern un-ontologizing experiments combining them with the devices of meta-cinema, such as *mise en abyme* (the diegesis is reflected into a meta-diegesis), whose most evident prototypes are Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly's *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960), Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*, 1963), Federico Fellini's *8½* (1963), Pasolini's *La ricotta* (1963), François Truffaut's *La Nuit américaine* (*Day for Night*, 1973), Karel Reisz's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981), De Palma's *Body Double* (1984), Altman's *The Player* (1992) and Abel Ferrara's *Dangerous Game* (1993). Among other things, Lynch's real film tells the making of the fictitious film «*Sylvia North Story*» by Adam Kasher, encapsulating the above-mentioned devices in an explicitly cinephile framework where Victor Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz* (1939: the oneiric tale of an imaginative girl) mingles with Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950: the impossible tale of a dead person in Hollywood).

At the same time Lynch un-ontologizes the audiovisual technologies by working directly on the perceptual body of diegesis, that is on cinema as an aesthetic (sensory) before than aesthetic (narrative) (re)construction of reality. The scene which definitively demystifies the «*innocence of technology*» is the one that closes the first part of the film (2/3 of the story: roughly the TV pilot). Los Angeles, 2 a.m. After having sex, Betty and Rita sleep. While she dreams (first eyes closed, then eyes open), Rita speaks: «*Silencio, silencio, si/encio. Nb hay banda, no hay banda. Nb hay orquesta. Si/encio, silencio, silencio...*» Betty wakes up, Rita asks her to go together to a place. A taxi brings them to the Club Silencio. On the stage of the club a Mephistophelian-looking host shouts: «*No hay banda. There is no band. Il n'y a pas d'orchestra. This is all a tape recording. No hay banda and yet we hear a band*». He mentions some musical instruments, whose sound is immediately heard, then he says: «*It's all recorded. Nb hay banda. It's all a tape. Il n'y a pas d'orchestra. It's an illusion*». With sharp gestures he invokes thunders and lightnings, which make Betty violently tremble, then he disappears in a cloud of smoke. A beam of blue light pervades the club. A man dressed in red introduces «*la llorona de Los Angeles*» Rebekah Del Rio, who enters the scene dressed in red and sings a cappella the song «*Llorando*», cover of Roy Orbison's «*Crying*» (1961). Rita and Betty cry. The singer faints, they take her away, but the song continues. Betty opens her bag and takes out a blue cube. The two lovers return home. Betty disappears, Rita takes out a blue key from her bag and uses it to open the cube. The camera zooms towards

the black interior of the cube. In this very moment, 1 hour and 50 minutes from the beginning, a sensational and disturbing twist carry us to the second part of the film, which lasts barely 30 minutes.

Performing the task given by the voice that sings «Llorando», Betty and Rita cry and go on to crying even when the singer's fainting reveals the artifice of lip-sync. It doesn't matter if the voice is not emitted by the body on stage, because the mere coexistence on stage of the body and (recorded) voice is enough to cause the established emotional effect: the weeping spectators' faces reflect the performer's mask (Del Rio has a tear drawn on her cheek), revealing the imitative/sympathetic character of identification. But the imitation/sympathy that Lynch intends to represent is less the one generated in dramatic communication, where the performer's and the spectator's body are *in praesentia* (both enveloped in the physical syntagm of the theatrical event), than the one produced by filmic communication, where the performer's body is *in absentia* (confined to the technological elsewhere that constitutes the paradigm of the cinematographic event). Once the song has begun, Lynch no longer shows Del Rio from the point of view of Rita and Betty, who are watching her from afar and from the top of the theater's balcony, but with tight framings focusing and circumscribing a close-up vision typical of the cinematographic experience. Their weeping thematizes the irresistible ontological illusion¹ generated by the coexistence of body (image) and voice (sound) which characterizes classical cinema, based on a suspension of disbelief that during half a century has made audiovisual technologies a silent, unrelated and hardly questionable dogma: the spectator may be aware that the voice is not literally emitted by the body on-screen (because it is post-synchronized or dubbed, or simply because image and sound arrive through two different physical channels), but the coexistence of images (body) and sound (voice) in the perceptual space of the movie theater is enough to produce the established effect of reality and emotions (Miklitsch, 2008).

Thus, the questions emerging in an apparently distracted way within the less narrative interstices of *Mulholland Drive* end up being disturbing. Although the scene at Club Silencio adds little on the level of the story (it doesn't help us to progress in unraveling the mystery of Rita's identity, whose name is borrowed from Hayworth female lead of Charles Victor's *Gilda (1946)*), it is essential on the level of the narration precisely for its last seconds in black, which turn out to be a specimen of what Roland Barthes calls «obtuse sense» (1982), that is a signifier whose sense is the arbitrariness of the narrative form itself. The unlocking of the blue cube contains the twist that overturns the ontological perspective of the story: what till then seemed "reality" turns out to have been a Betty's dream, revealed by Rita's dream, which at this point reveals itself *en abyme*. Acquiring both epistemological and aesthetical value, the scene at the Club Silencio unequivocally shows that the illusion of reality of the first part of the film was made possible by the ontologized and un-ideologized union of sound and image, which has prepared the spectator to the suspension of his/her disbelief and to the identification with the represented

world. Lynch un-ontologizes the audiovisual technologies not only by working directly on the perceptual body of the diegesis, that is by implicitly staging cinema as an aesthetics-aesthetic (re)construction of reality, but also by arranging the moment of the ontological crisis within the perimeter of an oneiric or hallucinatory experience, that is by recalling «the complex mixture of affinities and differences» between the «filmic state» and the «oneiric state» (Metz, 1977: 131).

The estrangement used by Lynch to reconvert passive recognition into active audiovisual knowledge, rescuing the object of the film from the automatism of perception and un-automating the audiovisual technologies, mixes serious and ironic elements into a sophisticated pastiche. The scene at Club Silencio on the one hand quotes Godard's *Passion* (1982), which tells the story of the Polish director Jerzy shooting the eponymous film «*Passion*», whose interior scenes are *tableaux vivants* accompanied by sacred music such as in *La ricotta*, while outdoor scenes often have overlapping and incomprehensible dialogues (as in Altman) and asynchronous voices. On the other hand, it recalls Pedro Almodóvar's *Tacones lejanos* (*High Heels*, 1991), which, openly inspired by Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959) and Ingmar Bergman's *Hostsonaten* (*Autumn Sonata*, 1978), tells the complicated relationship of love and competition between a daughter (the TV speaker Rebeca, played by Victoria Abril) and a mother (the singer Becky, played by Marisa Paredes), who reunite after 15 years: the night Becky returns from Mexico, they have dinner in a club where the drag queen Letal performs imitating Becky (diegetic playback: lost drag shows are based on lip-sync); a month later Becky performs in a theater in Madrid (narrative playback: Paredes makes a lip-sync on the voice of Luz Cazfli singing «Piensa en mí», whose text speaks of suffering and tears). From *Passion* Lynch takes the cues of the film-within-the-film and the love affairs between actors and director; from *Tacones lejanos*, except the short circuit of the names (the real Rebekah Del Rio sings a tearful song like the fictional Becky, diminutive of Rebeca, and Letal), he takes the themes of the relationship between women and the uncertain sexual identities; from both he takes the trick of the evident playback and the consequent demystification of the audiovisual technologies.

Lynch inherits, assembles, takes to the extreme consequences a complex meta-narrative and meta-technological tradition (the technology reflecting itself is the foundation of the audio-vision), which he rescues from any direct theoretical temptation. He seems to recall Almodóvar doing and undoing melodramas like Penelope's web in *La ley del deseo* (*Law of Desire*, 1987) and in *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* (*Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, 1988), where the dubbing's playback is staged as:

- an element of the story (in both films we see dubbers in action);
- a tool of the ontological construction of the cinematographic narration (both films show the technique of superimposing the sound on the image);

- a vehicle for irradiation and fulfillment of the desire to watch {the voyeurism staged by Pablo's fictitious film at the beginning of *La fey de/ deseo*) and of desire in general as narcissistic practice (Ivan in Pepa's Fellini-like dream in *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*) and self-deception (Pepa and Ivan dubbing in separate tracks Joan Crawford and Sterling Hayden's dialogue in Nicolas Ray's *Johnny Guitar* [1954]);
- a means of access to the cinematographic message itself (the dubbing in a foreign language allows a film to be enjoyed abroad).

He also recalls: De Palma's *Blow Out* (1981), where sound is used as an essential instrument of suspense and veridicality; Krzysztof Kieslowski's *La double vie de Veronique* (*The Double Life of Veronique*, 1991), where sound is used as an essential component of any erotic charade; Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991), staging the voice as an instrument of persuasion, manipulation and coercion; Wim Wenders' *Lisbon Story* (1995), where the ontological trap of audiovisual technologies is denounced to renew the mimetical and epistemological power of cinematographic language; Resnais' *On connaît la chanson* (*Same Old Song*, 1997), revealing the stereotypy of many audiovisual formulas and of the imaginary that they produce.

The new millennium cinema is full of dissident, unoriginated, proliferating, ...>aradoxical, re-mediated, demystified and demystifying voices. As in *Sunset Bot: i vard*, in Sam Mendes' *American Beauty* (1999) the narrating voice-over belongs to the dead protagonist Lester, who in the epilogue, immediately after being killed, reflects on the magic of vision (on the screen we see the video shot by the young neighbor Ricky showing a bag dragged by the wind), which is first of all the beauty and wonder produced by the cinematographic (audio)vision:

« guess I could be pretty pissed off about what happened to me... but it's hard to stay mad, when there's so much beauty in the world. Sometimes I feel like I'm seeing it all at once, and it's too much, my heart fills up like a balloon that's about to burst. And then I remember to relax, and stop trying to hold on to it, and then it flows through me like rain and I can't feel anything but gratitude for every single moment of my stupid little life... ».

In Sokurov's *Russkij Kovceg* (*Russian Ark*, 2002), structured as one single take in p.o.v. camera angle, a narrating male voice-over (who initially doesn't know where he is, what language he speaks and is invisible to all the other characters except one) guides us across the rooms of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg and through the eras ranging from its foundation to the present (when the palace houses the Hermitage Museum), configuring himself as the ongoing (extra or intradiegetic?) narrator of a story that, as Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), reveals the artifice of time, that is time as artifice, and the voice as the essential medium of this (literary or cinematographic) artifice.

In Kar-wai's *2046* (2004) the narrating voice-over (belonging to the protagonist Chow Mo-wan, writer and journalist) and the narrated voice (belonging to Tak, a character invented by Chow Mo-wan) sometimes blend together, confusing the diegetic universes they create and the corresponding ontological perspectives, whose elusiveness is iconized by the film's title: 2046 is at the same time a place, a time, a book, the number of a hotel room (the same where the protagonists of the previous film *In the Mood for Love* (2000) met to write their serial novel), a television souvenir (in «The Lonely», episode 7 of *The Twilight Zone* series broadcast in 1959 by CBS, the story takes place in 2046). What is questioned by these confused, dispossessed, non-referential voices is the very possibility of narrating, that is the possibility of memory, which irreversibly mixes recall and invention, as the music of the film reminds us: the Shigeru Umebayashi's original score is interspersed with many cinematographic reminiscences, as the ones coming from Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Die dritte Generation* (*The Third Generation*, 1979) and *Querele* (1982), Truffaut's *Vivement Dimanche!* (*Confidentially Yours*, 1983) and Kieslowski's *Dekalog*, *pi* (*Dekalog: Five*, 1988).

Haynes' *I'm Not There* (2007) retraces the life of Bob Dylan, entrusting the interpretation (therefore body and voice) to six different actors, who ~~shape~~ six masks - the Poet (Arthur Rimbaud: Ben Whishaw), the Prophet (Jack Daniels/Father John: Christian Bale), the Outlaw (Billy the Kid: Richard Gere), the Faile (Woody Guthrie: Marcus Carl Franklin), the Martyr of Rock&Roll (Jude Quinn: Cate Blanchett) and the Electric Star (Robbie Clark: Heath Ledger) - reminding us not only the elusiveness of the genius or the star, but also the irreducibility of the person to the character: through their bodies and voices the different characters evoke different places, times and inner states which cannot be combined into a unique and definitive design, in order to stage the different aspects of the person, who during his existence more or less consciously plays different roles.

In Malick's *The Tree of Life* (2011), end point after *The Thin Red Line* and *The New World* (2005) - as for James Joyce *Finnegans Wake* (1939) is an end point after *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914-15) and *Ulysses* (1922) -, the narration is marked by a double irresistible drive. On the one hand there is a drive to disintegrate the narrative structure by radically replacing chronological time, which is homogeneous, irreversible, quantitative and measurable, with existential time, which is heterogeneous, reversible, qualitative and unmeasurable: a time dimension where Einstein's physics meets Bergson's philosophy and Christian creationism. On the other hand there is a drive to dissolve the voices, whether internal or external to the diegesis, through a systematic process of dissociation and un-origination: Malick disconnects the image (traditionally entrusted to transmit the bodies' actions, including the speech) from the sound (privileged medium of the narrators' and characters' interiority), pushing the cinematographic language to be radically acousmatic and indifferent to the diegesis' referentiality traditionally accomplished by means of sync sound. As *Finnegans Wake*, Samuel Beckett's *Molloy* (1951),

William Gaddis' *JR* (1975) and David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996), *The Tree of Life*'s narration is wrapped in a slow and self-reflexive spiral reducing the infinitesimal existence of the individual to a voice floating in the immeasurable space and time of the cosmos. A very rich musical architecture seems to be the only countermeasure Malick takes to oppose the drifting of all human sounds and of the search of meaning they try to express: among others, Gustav Mahler's *Symphony no. 1 Titan* (1889), Bedrich Smetana's symphonic poem *Vltava (The Moldau,* 1875), Hector Berlioz's *Requiem* (1837), *Requiem For My Friend* (1998) composed by Zbigniew Preisner in memory of Kieslowski (to whom Malick pays tribute).

In conclusion, two recent movies using the resources of digital (live-action or animated) cinematography to combine sci-fi and melodrama. Jonze's *Her* (2013), not unlike Michel Houellebecq's *La Possibilité d'une île (The Possibility of an Island,* 2005), stages a not-too-distant future when the synthetic voice of a computer's OS, that is a cutting-edge AI in terms of data elaborations and capacity of emotions, is the only physical feature of a completely virtual love, the reality principle of a world that has renounced once and for all being-as-matter for being-as-information. Charlie Kaufman and Duke Johnson's *Anomalisa* (2015) digs into the audiovisual ontology, declined through puppeteering and stop-motion animation: the protagonist Michael lives in an imaginary world where everyone has the same male face and voice, except Lisa, therefore nicknamed Anomalisa; attracted to each other, the two make love, but the next morning he notices that her voice is becoming the same as the others', so he leaves her. Differently virtualized within the story (*Her*'s os; or the narration (*Anomalisa*'s animation), in both films the voice has definitively lost its traditional value of identity mark and show itself as an empty, depersonalized, inhuman form. Deprived of any connection to an analog physical body or face, the voice is no more able to simulate the existence of a character's «soul» through its «material» grain, becoming one of the most powerful antidotes against any temptation to ontologize the technologies and to conceal the genetic acousmatism of digital cinema and of audiovisual narratives as a whole.

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