

Between arrival and departure: recycling of home movies in the essay-film

Entre a chegada e a partida: reciclagens do cinema doméstico no filme-ensaio

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ABSTRACT

The objective is to investigate the consequences of the adoption of an essayistic language in films that revolve around the family background of the directors. Our hypothesis is that the essayistic language assumed by works operates a double transformation in home movies as files, documents: on the one hand, structure them narratively, giving new meaning to them; and secondly, it converts the intimate and private nature of these images in part of a public screening of the film. We intend to analyze *Otto* (2012) and *Elena* (2012), to finally signal that, on one hand, while *Elena* reveals how to resignify life through death, on the other, *Otto* does the reverse movement, resignifying it through birth.

Keywords: Essay-film, home movie, archive, *Otto*, *Elena*

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RESUMO

Objetiva-se investigar os desdobramentos da adoção de uma linguagem ensaística em filmes que giram em torno do contexto familiar dos realizadores. Partimos da hipótese de que a linguagem ensaística assumida pelas obras opera uma dupla transformação nos filmes de família, enquanto arquivos originais: por um lado, estrutura-os narrativamente, ressignificando-os; e, por outro, converte a natureza íntima e privada dessas imagens em parte de um filme de projeção pública. Pretende-se analisar *Otto* (2012) e *Elena* (2012) para, por fim, sinalizar que se por um lado *Elena* nos revela como ressignificar a vida por meio da morte, *Otto* faz o movimento inverso, ressignifica-a por meio do nascimento.

Palavras-chave: Filme-ensaio, filme de família, arquivo, *Otto*, *Elena*

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INTRODUCTION

OUR REFLECTION IS centered on two contemporary Brazilian films, *Otto* (2012) and *Elena* (2012), to seek to understand them from the relations between the family film and the essay-film, investigating the consequences of the adoption of an essayistic language in contemporary films that revolve around the family context of the directors. We are particularly interested in the fact that in both movies we recognize the use of home movies inherited from the family of directors as archival material.

Otto (2012) and *Elena* (2012) were successful in the circuit of Brazilian and international movie festivals. A sign of this was their participation in the 45th Brasília Movie Festival in 2012, when *Otto* (2012) received the awards for best movie, best photography, best soundtrack and best sound; while *Elena* (2012) achieved the best direction, best editing, best art direction and best movie (popular jury). However, despite the importance they seem to have for recent Brazilian cinema, little critical fortune has been received from movie studies, and perhaps none in the focus proposed by this research.

Considering the relational encounter between essay-film and home movies, as well as the approximations coming from it promoted by our *corpus*, the research problem to which we are concerned questions how the adoption of an essayistic language in *Otto* (2012) and *Elena* (2012) relates to the notion of family film, intrinsic to the works, and how such a relationship is unfolded. In addition, we question what kind of transformation these essay-films operate in the household archives inherited from their family.

We work with the hypothesis that the essayistic language assumed by the works operates a double recycling in the home films: on one hand, it narratively structures these archives, giving a new meaning to them; and, on the other, it converts the intimate and private nature of these images into part of a public projection film.

For the analysis of the works, we will make a stylistic-themed study of each film, and then propose a comparative analysis interested in understanding the mechanisms generated by each film when handling these familiar files as fragments to show different forms of relation between the me and the other, the personal and the collective, the private and the political. *Otto* (2012) and *Elena* (2012) are essay-films that approach and distance themselves by the theme and look that surround each one: the arrival of Otto, by his father Cao Guimarães; and the departure of Elena, by her sister Petra Costa. In both cases, the recycling of the home movie footage by the essayistic aesthetic of the cinema contributes, from an autobiographical key, to the reflection on aspects of the human condition. We think that if on one hand *Elena* (2012) tells us how to

resignify life through death, *Otto* (2012) does the opposite movement, it means it through birth.

We intend in a first instance to relate the notion of fragment to the concept of essay-film, and then to reflect on the role of the spectator in this context. With this background in mind, we will start with an understanding of the multiple relationships that our *corpus* establishes with the family film conception. Having done this, we will perform a filmic analysis of the works, centered on the editing procedures used by the films when recycling household files inherited from the directors' family as archival material.

ESSAY-FILM: FOR AN AESTHETIC OF FRAGMENTATION

According to Adorno, "the essay thinks of fragments, since reality itself is fragmented; it finds its unity in seeking it through these fractures, and not in flattening the fractured reality" (2003: 35). Thus, the essayistic form will also show itself in the cinema, starting from a rhizomatic structure, which mixes materials of diverse origins that interconnect in a non-linear, discontinuous and intermittent way as well as the thought itself. In this movement, we will notice that the notion of fragment, rather than seeking a leveling and homogenization of the forms in the essay-film, will be interested in evidencing the texture and the edges present in each image crumb.

Removed from the pretensions of completeness and continuity, the essay romantically conceives the notion of the "fragment as a non-consummate composition" (Ibid.: 34). Which leads us to think that the essay-film will perceive these fragments of images, such as loose image-sound notes of visual and sound music to be arranged. These notes can be orchestrated in multiple ways, depending on the course of the director's thought that is driven by such fragments, but always giving way to silence – an essential place for this song to gain melody, and meaning, in the aware viewer's eyes-ears.

From this perspective, the editing principle will be what is most seen in the final result, by effectively proposing a seam with these images and sounds. We say this because audiovisual essayists will often use displaced images from their original scope – produced by themselves or re-appropriated – with the intention of reaching other senses, by juxtaposing these passages of diverse origins, in the new context. Hence, images show themselves as subjects in which it is possible to model the shape and the contours, materials to be recycled by the editing gesture.

Weinrichter (2007) will point out that this malleability generates a reflexive distance between the filmmaker and the materials he/she handles

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from two techniques: verbal comment and editing. Both techniques are capable of changing the value and potency of these fragments, by allowing us to deal with images as representation, rather than simply encoding what they represent.

If on one hand the mediation of the voice of an enunciating subject is capable of bringing up layers of reading of the image, which would not be easily perceived; on the other, to deal with these fragments in the editing as images literally, and not as the very things of the world they represent, would allow to open interpretive spaces between one shot and another, between one band and another, which are not given in advance.

This composition of the image through diverse archival materials reveals its aesthetic value less by the artist's resourcefulness in reordering the various sources with which they work, than by the traces left by the images themselves as they relate to the new sense created during the editing. *Found footage* is the name of the cinematographic technique that uses the appropriation of other materials. "The use of archival material always has an essayistic drift [...] because it proposes a 'return to see' that starts the image from its original context and meaning, with which it modifies its literal character of representation"¹ (Weinrichter, 2007: 40).

By reserving certain autonomy, the images also act as witnesses, or evidences, that were not produced for that purpose. But they allow themselves to play the role intended by the artist, who moves them from their original place to achieve a meaning that is not given at first sight. Thus, the editing exercise allied to the voice-off of the narrator reveals how much the construction of this reflective audiovisual frame next to these imagery-sonorous extracts is strongly related to the notion of fragment.

"Here, then, is essentially the basic structure of the essay-film: a reflection through images, carried out through a series of rhetorical tools that are constructed at the same time as the process of reflection"², states Català (2005: 133). Therefore, it is the transit between these fragmented images, and the attempt to draw a plan of composition from them, through the rhetorical mechanisms, that forms the thought of the essayist. Moreover, as the author points out, one must be sensitive to the simultaneity of the processes: reflection and audiovisual realization instead of occupying different moments during the production of the work, as usually occurs in conventional audiovisual products, coincide in time. We think that such coincidence may be one of the factors that preserves the fragmented character of the materials used, enabling the viewer to recognize and appreciate the several pieces that make up the audiovisual mosaic that the essay-film becomes.

¹ In the original: "La utilización de material de archivo tiene siempre una deriva ensayística [...] pues propone un 'volver a mirar' que arranca a la imagen de su contexto y sentido originales, con lo cual modifica su carácter literal de representación". This and other excerpts were translated by the author.

² In the original: "He aquí, pues, en esencia, la estructura básica del film-ensayo: una reflexión mediante imágenes, realizada a través de una serie de herramientas retóricas que se construyen al mismo tiempo que el proceso de reflexión".

When talking about rhetorical tools in the essay-film it is salutary to remember that, according to Laura Rascaroli (2009), when it comes to rhetorical strategies, the cinematographic essayist is an extratextual author who creates an enunciating subject: the representative of the director's vision for the movie. The enunciator, in turn, will use one or more narrators to give voice to this enunciating subject. It is usual for the director's own voice to be used to materialize the narrator who represents him. In this sense, the narrator of the essay-film gives voice to personal opinions that may be directly related to the extratextual author (director), but not necessarily his opinions.

In addition to rhetorical strategies, the author defines the essay-film for its textual commitments: "an essay is the expression of a personal, critical reflection on a problem or set of problems. Such reflection is not proposed as anonymous or collective, but as coming from a single authorial voice" (Rascaroli, 2009: 32-33). That is, the reflective process experienced by the director during the process of realization of the work reveals its subjective dimension when reflecting on this problem(s). This aspect is usually evidenced in the essay-films by the marked presence of the directors, either through the recording of their own body (in action in front of the camera); by the voice (commenting on what they see) or both. However, such a dimension does not cease to have a strong social aspect by operating a shift from this personal view to an *out of self* that connects with the world. This transit is sometimes very subtle and variable in the regime of works, but always present.

We think it is in the wake of Rascaroli that Corrigan proposes the formulation of the essay-film as "(1) a test of expressive subjectivity by means of (2) experiential meetings in a public arena, (3) whose product becomes the figuration of thinking or thought as a cinematic discourse and a response from the viewer" (2015: 33). That is, the essayist starts from a personal uneasiness to reflect on an issue that connects him to the social world, taking the film and its discourse as a final result. It is mainly a cinematographic writing made while one is thinking.

Writing which summons the director to cross a path that goes, therefore, from the personal sphere, passing through the social sphere, and culminates in the sphere of abstraction, in which thought takes shape, inhabited by the film. From this path, the compositional materials that essayists articulate to compose their discourse are numerous: by the sum and recycling of these fragments, generally, a pulverized narrative line is constituted by processing the thought until it is condensed in articulate language.

To consider that the essayistic writing is performed while thinking, therefore, could not be perceived as synonymous of lack of care or elaboration. Complex

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thoughts need time to be built around a structured audiovisual language. The somewhat calculated character of the works is the result of a work of thought that reflects on its own form, on the way it makes a certain audible and visible thought: audiovisual.

From such a perspective, the fragmented language of the essay-film summons a specific type of viewer, and not anyone. A viewer who effectively has an interest in a creative dialogue with the work and actively participate in the proposed reflexive process. In this sense, Rascaroli reminds us that in the essay-film “the viewer’s position is not that of a generic audience; it is not in the plural, but in the singular – it is the position of a real viewer, who is directly and personally addressed and summoned” (2009: 34). Therefore, the essay-film will assume as primordial this role of summoning active and critical viewers, interested in converting the work into a dialogical and reflective space.

ON A VIEWER-EDITOR

We start from the conjecture that the essay-film assumes the task of summoning its viewers to the activity, guaranteeing by means of its own writing the lacking of spaces necessary for the narrative to become, therefore, the result of the efforts of the director and the viewer. From this perspective, we think of the viewers of the essay-film as those who collect their own fragmented and indecisive images and approach them to the unfinished discourse they find before them, previously designed by the director, not to take the place of the artist, but to put their own experiences, through the aesthetic way, to the test.

Audiovisual essayists do not pretend to construct a totalizing discourse, which gives the view of a voice of knowledge. Much more interested is to encourage viewers, from the aesthetic experience provided by the work, to relate to the things and ways of life of the world through an intense and profitable dialogue with the film that leads them to the construction of knowledge. The viewers of the essay-film, then, assume to some extent this role of cocreators of the work that they experience.

From this perspective, Bernardet (1999) adds: “the film calls for an active spectator who, in some way, prolongs the editing on himself. We can go further and make the spectator an editor” (Ibid.: 6). According to the author, “an editing activated by the film system, its associations of disparate materials, its circulation by images and meanings [...]” (Ibid.). That is, the essay-film leads us to recognize that looking is also an action, it is giving value to the gesture intrinsic to the power to see. Viewers of the essay-film are summoned

to mediate the fragments of images that their gaze reach by relating them to each other and to a series of other visual and mental images, of now and of other times. Thus, it is possible for the viewers from a distant position to assume the role of active interpreters, and more than that, they allow us to recognize them as viewers-editors.

Considering that “the editing is the principle that governs the organization of visual and sound film elements, or groupings of such elements, juxtaposing them, chaining them and/or organizing their duration” (Aumont, 1995: 62), we think of the viewers-editors as subjects who, during the projection, propose to deal with the materials of composition of the film in an attentive and creative way, exercising their capacity to reorganize them mentally, amplifying the principle of editing proposed by the work.

The viewer-editor, therefore, would be able to unite fragments of sound and image, proposing new relations between them beyond those that the film already proposes; to articulate these images, granting them new possibilities of sequential organization; and to establish the duration, increasing or decreasing the time that your look dedicates to each shot, being able to replace them by others, already seen or only imagined. From this, having incorporated the gesture of the editing into his own gaze, the viewer-editor would become, as Consuelo Lins points out, “a decipherer by excellence, able to use his memory of images to compare what he sees with what he has already seen, and to create his own apprehension of the proposed configurations” (2010: 138). Having said this, it should be emphasized that the constitution of the editing in the essay-film by means of fragments and gaps does not diminish its discursive capacity and solidity. Essay-films are constructed overall from an editing exercise, which protects their biggest potencies. Thus, if the viewer-editor accompanies the imaginary flow, mobilized by his sensitive materiality and the affections of the images, it is less to be freely conducted led than to dialogue deeply with the work.

Thus, our perception of the aesthetics of the fragment impregnated in the essay-film does not fail to be evident. From it we are led to think about the peculiarities generated when these fragments are home movie footages, family films incorporated by the film narrative with the intention of generating a rupture with the private character of these materials.

ON THE RELATIONS WITH THE FAMILY FILM

Otto (2012) is a film that follows the pregnancy process of the wife of Cao Guimarães, Florencia Martinez, and the birth of her first child: Otto. According

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to the synopsis, it is “instinctive and visceral as a gesture. Intimate and confident as a filmed diary. A celebration of life, a movie of love.” Here the filmmaker explores his own affective experience to reflect on the love and constitution of the family from the discovery of his partner’s pregnancy. And in this sense the narrative consists predominantly of fragments of the daily life of the couple that, little by little, reveal the social dimension of this intimate experience that is capable of giving another meaning to life.

Still, we see in *Elena* (2012) the search for Petra by her sister Elena, who had moved to New York twenty years earlier with the dream of becoming a movie star. Between paths and traces, such as letters and home videos, Petra slowly finds her sister not in the streets, but in herself. From then on, Petra recognizes that she has to let her go. We see here an exercise by the director to launch herself into the world to reverse her traumatic experience with her sister’s suicide in a reflection that goes beyond the intimate, reaching the public sphere, and makes us resignify our experience with our own lives.

In this way, both in one work and in the other, we perceive the filmmakers’ gesture, dear to the audiovisual essay, to use the image in *second degree*. That is, to establish mediations with it through techniques that modify the value of the image such as narration and editing (Weinrichter, 2007). From such perspective, we will hear the reflexive voice of Petra Costa and Cao Guimarães, as well as we will be affected by an editing that is not wanted invisible, quite the contrary. The gesture of the editing is evidenced by the juxtaposition of the materials used, which are creating new meanings by sum and contrast.

In this sense, it is perceptible that the filmmakers experience their own subjectivity, by means of clashes with the things of the world, and the reflective process traced during this course is what gives shape to their works. From this perspective, these works have as characteristics: “subjective vision [...], questioning the possibility of representing reality, indecisive declarations, fragmented non-linear narrative and multiple levels of meaning, hybrid style and use of different means and forms etc.”³ (Ibid.: 23). Stylistic traits that predominate in the works that we intend to analyze.

As we could see, both *Otto* (2012) and *Elena* (2012) are generated from the familiar context of the filmmakers. In addition, both use home movie footage as materials for the composition of their works. To do so, in different ways, both will relate to what we call, in the context of our research, home movies or family film. To watch such movies, within the familiar context,

has a little society game, a serious game in which the purpose is to strengthen the family group. It is understood then that the coherence of the film matters little,

³ In the original: “visión subjetiva [...], puesta en cuestión de la posibilidad de representar la realidad, afirmaciones indecisas, narrativa no lineal fragmentada y con niveles de sentido múltiples, estilo híbrido y empleo de diferentes medios y formas, etc.”

because the construction of coherence constitutes the proper purpose of the projection session.⁴ (Odin, 2010: 46)

Thus, the essayistic aesthetic, with its fragmented narrative and full of gaps, when dedicating itself to family narratives incorporates by dialogism this lack of coherence in its own form, converting what was a weakness into power.

Both in *Otto* (2012) and *Elena* (2012) we recognize the use of family films inherited as film footage. This is only a first possible approximation occasioned by our corpus between the essay-film and the home movie. However, we are led to believe that these approaches are broader. When they were made by Cao Guimarães and Petra Costa about, respectively, *Otto* (2012) and *Elena* (2012) – characters connected to the history of their families; no matter how much the two films have assumed pretensions to reach an audience beyond their families, this would not disqualify the character of home movies evident in the works. That is, we assume that in both films the notions of essay-film and family film approach in such a way that one does not overlap the other. We shall reflect on it.

By family film, we understand “a film (or a video) made by a member of a family about characters, events or objects connected in one way or another to the history of that family, and of preferential use by the members of that same family”⁵ (Odin, 2010: 39). We think that the objects of our corpus, considering the aforementioned aspects, dialogue strongly with the concept proposed by Odin. In spite of this, we understand that *Otto* (2012) and *Elena* (2012) go beyond this, for the essayistic language adopted by the works narratively structures the inherited family films, recycling them and assuring them of other meanings, at the same time as converting the intimate and private nature of these images into part of a public projection film.

A film of public projection that does not lose its familiar character. That is, in both works we recognize the use of family films as archives for the construction of a new work, a new family film. At this point a distinction must be made. *Elena* (2012) extensively uses VHS-recorded home material mixed with digitally generated recent images, which reinforces the archival character of the former. In *Otto* (2012), with the exception of the scene shot in 16 mm by Cao Guimarães’ grandfather, the high-definition video records made by the filmmaker himself predominate. However, we cannot say that all the images of the film were made thinking of a film project.

To some extent, we think that at least part of the digital images, in *Otto* (2012), also act as archives. Cao Guimarães says:

⁴ In the original: “tiene un poco de juego de sociedad, un juego serio en el que el objetivo es el reforzamiento del grupo familiar. Se entiende entonces que la incoherencia de la película misma importa poco, porque la construcción de la coherencia constituye la finalidad misma de la sesión de proyección”.

⁵ In the original: “una película (o un vídeo) realizados por un miembro de una familia a propósito de personajes, acontecimientos u objetos ligados de una o otra manera a la historia de esa familia, y de uso preferente por los miembros de esa misma familia”.

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I am a filmmaker and my raw material is what I live, the things that happen to me and the reality that surrounds me. First, I had the passion, of that the pregnancy arose and like all passionate, I began to register. I saw that it had interesting material and I realized that it was a possible film [...]. I put together what I had and turned it into a film because I thought that, besides being a special moment for me, it is a universal subject, something that a human being passes through. (Guimarães, 2012)

Here we see an intention of the director in approaching himself to the material generated by him, to the home movies footage he recorded in digital video, as if they were not his own – which guarantees the necessary reflective distance for the essayistic character sought by the work.

Hence, the essayistic aesthetic, added to the autobiographical character, guarantees a “way of access to the represented world, to the familiar intimacy that reflects the home movies. [...] The filmmaker is going to risk inviting viewers to this projection that was previously reserved for his closest relatives and friends”⁶ (Álvarez, 2010: 139). Therefore, in the context of the present research, we venture from the understanding that *Otto* (2012) and *Elena* (2012) are both essay-films and family films.

⁶ In the original: “modo de acceso al mundo representado, a la intimidad familiar que refleja el cine doméstico. [...] El cineasta se va a arriesgar a invitar a los espectadores a esa proyección que antes se reservaba para los familiares y amigos más cercanos”.

OTTO: ON THE RESIGNIFICATION OF LIFE THROUGH ARRIVAL

At some point in *Otto* (2012), having seen the discovery that Florencia Martinez was expecting a child from the couple, we see in a long shot the sun setting behind the buildings of Belo Horizonte. As the sun goes down, a lady’s voice gradually gains power. With sound and image not synchronized, she seems to present some family members to somebody, saying the names of some aunts, before finishing laughing: “Toothy family, everybody has a tooth out.” In the next shot, we see the face of Cao Guimarães’s mother, Eliana Gontijo, in low angle shot, while she says pointing out of the picture: “This is me, my back.”

In front of her, we recognize in the extra field, a TV that shows old family films and illuminates her face, while smiling she comments on what she sees: “Look at mom, oh! Oh, pretty mother! Look!”. The home movie footages were made in 16mm by Cisalpino Gontijo, father of Eliana, grandfather of Cao. We still do not see these images. We follow only the tender, nostalgic features of her face as she looks at the family films and finishes its construction collectively, these files without beginning and without end, through their comments.

If, according to Odin, the experience of the viewer with the home movie is a “mythical re-creation of the lived past. A family fiction born of the work of the addressees on elements that do not have by themselves this fictional character”⁷ (Odin, 2010: 47), we think that this experience is potentiated here. This is because what remains for the viewers at that moment, who do not belong to this family nucleus and do not see the images themselves, is to propose themselves to pass by it through this recorded domestic session, and especially of Eliane. It is, therefore, to invent, to imagine, to create the images described through their own experiences with the family, the reflections seen in the face of the director’s mother and the narration she has undertaken.

⁷ In the original: “recreación mítica del pasado vivido. Una ficción familiar nacida del trabajo de los destinatarios sobre elementos que no poseen por sí mismos ese carácter ficcional”.

Then we are taken to a close up, with a slight high angle, of Florencia’s face lying on the bed, sleeping, with his hands wrapped under his chin. His breathing is slow and deep and mingles with a song that begins to be played by a mandolin. The soundtrack follows in the next shots, suggesting a connection between the action of the previous shot and the next ones. From the following shot, we have access to the family’s archival footage in 16mm black and white: the blurred face of a baby lying down, looking at who is filming and smiles; the same baby lying down, wiggling his arms and legs; then a baby with a dress who smiles while biting her fingers. Thus, by the gesture undertaken by the editing, no matter how much we recognize the domestic footage of the family of Cao, we cannot simultaneously fail to perceive them as images dreamed by Florencia.

We continue to follow especially images from childhood: now we see children giving somersaults, sometimes learning to walk, sometimes drinking milk. They follow in parallel editing with the scene of Florencia sleeping. Some of these footage images seem to have undergone the director’s interventions, mostly accelerated. In this sense, through the editing we are led to see home movie footages as dream-images. They lose their character only as a document to be accessed by another way: that of the imagination, the unreal, the fictional.

They act for the viewer-editor, therefore, as a trigger that allows the updating of memories related to his own childhood, as a device that promotes the recycling of memories of his own family. Past lived and past imagined intersect and update themselves from the home movie footages seen in the present. In this way, the editing, through parallel narratives and music, is what modifies the value of family films, which resignifies them by opening them to new possibilities of meaning to the point of being reconfigured as a celebration of life that is to arrive, from the life that is being generated and dreamed, from the life that manifests itself among those who are born.

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ELENA: ON THE RESIGNIFICATION OF LIFE THROUGH DEPARTURE

“The first images I think of you are from when you were thirteen and you won that camera,” says Petra. We see Elena recording herself, with a VHS camera, through a mirror and then smiling and making faces at someone who films her. A few moments later, after we had accompanied her father dancing with Petra as a baby, she dances alone. Petra’s voice-over is punctuated by a few moments of silence, and the piano gradually accompanies the subtlety of some slow-moving images of Elena. She turns over and over in a flowing dress, while we hear Petra say in affectionate echoes: “And you begin to dance, to dance, to dance”.

Elena’s act is underlined by a slowing of the image that counteracts the frenetic levels of the piano. Imaging rhythmic attenuation seems to anticipate something to come. Later in the film, aware of Elena’s departure, it is not difficult to relate this change in speed with an indication of the slowing down of the very movement of life experienced by the character, and consequently her family. It was no longer just a home film of a girl dancing in the living room.

Having followed Elena’s winding path to the dream of becoming a film star in New York, with her efforts and crises, to the climax of her departure by suicide; we begin observing the reflections of the life and death of the sister in the growth of Petra. In a certain sequence we see, from a home movie footage, Petra quite upset among other children. This image is confusingly slow. Next, we see a psychiatric report, typed in English on yellow paper. The document is presented to us through a well-defined shot that emphasizes the title *Psychological Report*, accompanied by the word *confidential*. In opening the shot, we have the name of Petra and age, accompanied by a list of examinations administered to her.

The director goes on to read her diagnosis: “Petra is 7 years and 6 months old and was brought to the psychiatric evaluation by her mother. The mother said Petra started talking about wanting to die, and she’s having nightmares.” We no longer access the report for the materiality of the paper, but for more VHS footage of the angry Petra, as a child, at the school door.

There is also evidence of depression, and feelings of guilt. Petra avoided talking about her sister. Petra is using defenses that suggest obsessive compulsive tendencies to deal with difficult situations. It is likely that she will continue to use these defenses for a while, allowing her to deny the reasons for her true depression. (Elena, 2012)

The reading is slow and well-marked. Petra fights with her mother, who stays in the car, and then enters the school. In this context, the home movie

footage seems to be resignified by verbal comment and editing with the intention of broadening its character of document, with the intention of reinforcing the difficulties experienced by little Petra. However, we cannot disregard that these images may have been recorded by Elena herself, and therefore they not a reflection of her death.

In the last scene of the film, very close to the end, the same shot of Elena spinning with her dress and hair fluttering is resumed. We return to this shot with different eyes, as we hear Petra say:

Memories go with time. They fall apart. But some find no comfort, only some relief in the small poetry gaps. You are my inconsolable memory, made of stone and shadow. And it is from it that everything is born. And dances [...]. (Elena, 2012)

The image we already knew is now mixed with Petra's shots, recorded specifically for the film, also dancing and spinning on the street. At different times, they can dance the same music, be packaged at the same pace, be connected by the same measure. The act undertaken by the sisters is able, through the gesture of the editing, to cause one to reflect the image of the other permanently and to prove the eternity of this affective bond. Besides the editing, the narration modifies the value of the same image, sometimes signaling it as a harbinger of departure, now as a source of life and rebirth in the memory of those who remain.

FOR A CONCLUSION: RECYCLING OF THE HOME MOVIES IN THE ESSAY-FILM

From the trajectory traced until here we believe that the essayistic language narratively structures the inherited family films, recycling them and assuring them of other meanings, at the same time as converting the intimate and private nature of these images into part of a film of public projection, which does not lose its domestic character. We also think that, from the analysis of the works, it is clear that through aesthetic features characteristic of the essay-film, there is an invitation to the viewers to enjoy this aesthetic experience as part of this family. Thus, we believe that it is pertinent to consider Petra Costa and Cao Guimarães, in the context of these works, as *home movie filmmakers*, in that they film their relatives and friends not only to see in family, but also to make films that will have a public display; from the sometimes-indiscernible mix of reused family films and recorded material to the new film.

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In this way, we understand that the essayistic aesthetic, added to the character of family film, helps the films to construct a resignification of the concept of life by opposite ways: in *Elena* (2012), such an operation occurs through reflection on the death of a loved one, while in *Otto* (2012) this happens through birth.

On one hand, the creative use of the inherited home movie footage in *Elena* (2012) marks the loss of her sister, while allowing her to reconstruct her trajectory poetically and at the same time Petra Costa recognizes herself in Elena. On the other hand, the use of daily fragments of the pregnancy process of Florencia Martinez shows an absence to be disrupted by childbirth, while allowing the artistic reconnection of the son that is to come with his previous family history and Cao Guimarães projected in him. In both cases, by arrival or departure, the approximation of the home movies to the essay-film and its aesthetics of the fragment allows that the films present histories, be recycled, reconstructed, reconnected; finally, bring life back.

Therefore, the home movie footages, reframed by editing and narration, in *Otto* (2012) and *Elena* (2012) are more objects of a reflective distance between filmmakers and the images that propose to recollect them, order them and recycle them, in order to direct the eye of the viewer-editor; than a translucent and direct connection with the familiar past. As pointed out during the analysis, this distancing occurs mainly from the verbal commentary and from the editing. Considering that the images relate directly to the directors, we might think that there is an oscillation between this distance required by the essay, which predicts the comment and the editing, and an approximation, by the private nature of familiar images. However, we tend to believe that once the director, as an extratextual author, mobilizes an enunciating subject to articulate his discourse, these images will be seen and treated as if they were not his own, but another's.

Thus, the materiality of these images is subordinated to the poetic and creative treatment of the essay-film that gives them new ways of being, updating their meanings beyond the character of memory. In this sense, for the filmmakers, the exercise of looking back at these images is not simply to revisit images of family memory, but to carry out an archaeological work, interested in discovering layers not yet visited and discovered, revealing extracts never seen in to study this family nucleus – its members, facts or pieces connected to its history – from these object-images produced and used in a certain past, even if close. This process of investigation is accompanied by the reflection, materialized through the narration generally, of the explorations accomplished by the directors, with all their questions and doubts. Inquiries

that tend to be interested not in what such images offer as a document only, but especially as a trace, vestige, mark.

Thus, from the fertile encounter between essay-film and family film, the home movie footages, whether inherited or recorded by the directors themselves over time, no longer behave simply as a process of recycling guaranteed by the essayistic aesthetic, to be converted into artistic constructions that depart from a private context to reflect on aspects of the human condition that impact the world. ■

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