Sensationalist managements: attractions and YouTube videos[1]

Gestões sensacionalistas: as atrações e o audiovisual no YouTube

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ABSTRACT
This article argues that web-based audiovisual spectatorship and aesthetics entail some level of proximity with the cinema of attractions. We focus on a particular case study, that seems symptomatic, to demonstrate how the common rhetoric found in most YouTube videos makes intense use of performatic image and moving body towards the camera, directly addressing the spectator and the aesthetical excess associated with sensationalism. Such elements convey a participative, erratic and fragmentary spectatorship. It is such characteristics that lead us to perceive such videos as a persistence of the regimen of attractions, as well as understand the implications of a sensationalist management of contemporary political debate.
Keywords: Cinema of attractions, spectacle, YouTube, political demonstrations

RESUMO
Este artigo argumenta por uma aproximação entre a espectatorialidade e estética do audiovisual na web e a experiência do cinema de atrações. A partir da análise de um caso em particular, mas que parece sintomático, pretendemos demonstrar como a retórica encontrada em boa parte dos audiovisuais do YouTube faz uso intenso do endereçamento direto ao espectador, da força performática da imagem e do corpo em movimento para a câmera e da lógica do excesso que marca o sensacionalismo, através de uma espectatorialidade participativa, fragmentária e errante. Essas características revelam permanências do regime de atrações nesses audiovisuais, bem como a força política de uma gestão moral a partir das estratégias sensacionalistas.
Palavras-chave: Cinema de atrações, espetáculo, Youtube, manifestações políticas

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INTRODUCTION

MOVING IMAGES AND SOUNDS have spread in different formats and products for public appeal, representing lucrative forms of entertainment and spectacle that have spanned through people's daily experiences. Throughout the 20th century, at least after its first decade, cinema was the dominant form of entertainment based on moving images and sound – by that we mean the collective and public exhibition of predominantly narrative productions (emphasis on the word predominantly, since, as it is well known, the narrative film was not the only form of cinema). The first decades of the 21st century saw the flourishing of a supposedly new regime of productions and spectatorship with audiovisual products being made and shared on the web for ever more intense, individual and fragmented forms of consumption.

Contrary to the discourse that predicted the death of the film, which seemed to rule during the second decade of the 21st century, Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy (2009) stated that the globalized capitalist world media culture was entering the age of hypercinema, creating what the authors call a "screen culture"; an age where the screen takes over the entire space and everyday life, and where the cinema format multiplies, fragments and remains as the main place where society's desires and dreams are projected: "Video screen, miniature screen, graphic screen, nomad screen, tactile screen: the century that is starting is that of the omnipresent, and multiform, planetary, and multimedia screen" (2007, p. 12).

The main goal of this article is to argue for lines of approach between the spectatorship and aesthetics of web-based audiovisual content and cinema of attractions experience. Our thought is based on the analysis of one particular case that, for us, seems symptomatic of what is predominantly presented as audiovisual products in the context of the web, especially on YouTube. Of course, other productions still circulate on the internet, – here we must highlight the growing production of interactive documentaries and web series – however, it seems to us that the main form of consumption of audiovisual products intended for internet specific spectatorship takes place especially via YouTube.

Despite our belief in the proximity between the regime of attractions and the YouTube videos mode of showing and seeing, it is necessary to point out that the audiovisual production present in the platform is extremely wide and diverse. Classifying different genres, or formats, in the context of the site is an impossible, or even unproductive, task, since, despite the diversity and apparent aesthetic and technical simplicity of most videos posted on the platform, an invitation to the participative dimension addressed to the ordinary person permeates a vast majority of its content. Burgess (2014) considers this subject in her analysis of what she calls the "bedroom music" genre available on YouTube,

which consists of a seemingly amateur aesthetic construction where an individual appears on frame, usually at his/her bedroom or some other room in the house, playing an instrument to the camera. In this sense, listing the various examples at hand might be useful, but only to emphasize the understanding of the ways in which the emergence of new formats on the platform occurs. As examples of different formats, we could mention the various educational videos and tutorials, which favor different teaching methods, often based upon an affinity with pop culture and entertainment in general[2]; channels that mainly produce news and documentary content, limited to shorter videos, more dynamic editing techniques, and motion graphics[3], among others. These formats experience – due to the participative, fragmentary and erratic nature of these audiovisuals contents – an intense hybridization and mixture, exactly because of the sort of circulation and exchange upon which the platform is based.

With more than a decade of existence the platform solidified its place as a domain where individuals can share their own voices – individuals who are always eager to create their own existence through the production of their auto-performances and visibility. The platform also became a privileged domain for political manipulation disguised as individual expression and everyday banalities, and we believe that it is possible to recognize a certain recurring aesthetic mode in their productions that intensifies these political effects through an ample use of sensationalist rhetoric. There are many academic writings about the platform – its trajectory, business strategy, the *youtubers* phenomenon, regular people transformed into celebrities[4] – however, few are the works dedicated to think based on the existing image and spectatorship theoretical framework of analysis, connecting the phenomenon with a long line of popular sensationalist entertainment of which cinema is, in many ways, part of.

The common rhetoric found in most YouTube videos makes an intense use of direct spectatorial address, the performatic strength of the image and moving body to the camera, and the excess logic that marks sensationalism. The dominant spectatorial regimen of the platform privileges this sensationalist rhetoric, for it is, as we well know since the end of the 19th century, quite effective in grabbing its audience and consumers' sensorial and emotive attention[5].

There is a whole debate over the concept of performance that not only runs through the artistic formats known as the performance arts, but also through the understanding, in line with what was put forward by Erving Goffman (1959), that all social relations and subjective interactions are performative acts. We will not extend ourselves too much over these ideas, but we will establish that for this article we approach this term as: 1. A pivot in the art field that highlights and privileges *how* actions and works are made, and the body in action as a

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reinforcement to "that which is being done" (Cohen, 2002, p. 66)[6]; 2. A way to see actions and daily practices as performances – in this sense, according to Diana Taylor (2013), it is a methodological and epistemological lens that allows us to see all actions (dramatic or even the most mundane and supposedly natural) as "reiterated behaviors"[7]; that is to say, rehearsed and understood. Further along, when we start to detail the concept of cinema of attractions, we will resume, more rigorously, a larger debate upon the concept of performance.

Above all else, we are interested in establishing how the addressing of the spectator and the emphasis on a sensationalist and excessive rhetoric that intensifies the discussions between the body in the screen and the spectator's body are central characteristics of audiovisual content posted on YouTube, and how such characteristics embody everyday political aspects under the disguises of banality and the reality effect, which end up motivating simplistic and moral judgement actions. In the last few years, during parliamentary and judiciary coups and an intensification of the political crisis, Brazil saw the emergence on social networks, and especially on YouTube, of a torrent of user-produced videos as counterpoints to the discourse disseminated by mainstream media. To the right or to the left of the political spectrum, these videos try to express the ordinary person's opinion to the population, translating a complex political tension into polarities of intense moral nature and immediate engagement, understanding and identification. We argue that there is a political regulatory dimension that is almost inherent to the sensationalist flow, and that it goes beyond web based audiovisual content.

Audiovisual production is an invaluable tool to keep record of political demonstrations, and it acquires, over the internet and especially on social networks, some characteristics related to its recording technique and form of circulation. We think that such images already represent a code in themselves, where the camera movements (usually cellphone and smartphone cameras) and framings *personify* it as an everyday and individual extension of the person at the heart of such demonstrations, and thus, positioning us, the spectators, as players.

Levy (1999) argues that the technique conditions influence but do not determine the political and social processes. In this sense, it is fundamental to think about audiovisual content as a way of registering political protest on the internet, considering how these images were recorded, given that smartphones and the aesthetics conditioned by these devices are important characteristics of these videos. Audiovisual contents that have political demonstrations as the object of their recordings might differ amongst themselves – be it in a short and episodic format, or in long duration streaming via live transmissions – but

their similarities point to their recording and circulation techniques: the camera as an extension of the body in framings and sound designs that intensify the reality effect and the heat of the moment of recording.

We will focus our analysis on the YouTube channel *Mamaefalei*[8] because this object speaks from a place of explicit political manipulation using many audiovisual contents recorded during political demonstrations. The channel also offers other kinds of videos to its spectators, such as opinion pieces in a *vlog* format, interviews with political or corporate agents, commentaries on contemporary subjects, and commentaries on political rivals' videos and speeches, among others. However, it was through the "heat of the moment" videos of demonstrations that *Mamaefalei* started to build its brand, with more than 880 thousand subscribers nowadays, an average of 400 and 500 thousand views on the videos of the "Demonstration" (Manifestação) series (with some of those reaching 1 million views), each video with somewhere between 70 and 100 thousand "Likes".

The channel has a thematic and ideological unity further to the right and identifies with economic liberalism and social conservatism. All videos are presented by Arthur do Val, the channel's owner and a board member of the Free Brazil Movement (FBM). Do Val frequently appears on videos over at FBM's official channel, figuring as a continuity link between these different products. Most part of *Mamaefalei*'s original content is uploaded to YouTube[9], the platform we chose to focus our analysis. We selected one video, titled "Homeless Workers Movement – Paulista Camp" (2017), to put at the center of our filmic analysis, but also thinking about the content organization of the entire channel, as well as other videos from the "Demonstration" series, which has the channel's largest amount of views.

By establishing an analytical connection between one specific video and all the contents uploaded to the channel we call attention to a central aspect specific to audiovisual content in the so-called new medias: despite their seeming randomness and fragmentation, these products hold a dialogic and dialectic dimension among them. This aspect echoes what Manovich (2002) emphasizes about the tendency of new media, such as the internet, to organize content as a database, where the different parts relate in ways that reveal more meaning of a political nature as a collection than by themselves.

Our argument and objective with this article is to think, through the analysis of the material strategies used in the videos at *Mamaefalei*, about the role of the sensationalist appeals that the camera, as an extension of the body that grabs the spectator's attention, can operate; and reflect upon the importance of a spectatorship that happens when fragments and collections connect.

[8] It seems important for us to declare that, even though we do not agree ideologically and ethically with this channel's content, we believe in the importance of a serious analysis of this object in the political and social context that the country in going through, which is marked by intolerance, fundamentalism and a refusal to dialogue, especially on the part of organized sectors to the right. So, investigating these images that uphold and carry on certain discourses is paramount to understanding them.

[9] *Mamaefalei* also has a Facebook fan page where they repost some of the YouTube channel's videos; however, these are shorter videos, with images from different sources and using descriptive motion graphics that allude to FBM and call attention to the channel itself. In that sense, the fan page privileges news circulation (something that also comes about by sharing links from other specialized press agencies) and the dissemination of third party videos.

REGIME OF ATTRACTIONS, GRABBING THE SPECTATOR AND SENSATIONALISM AS POLITICAL KEY

It seems fundamental to us to elaborate a reasoning that proposes the idea of a regime of attractions that goes beyond a cinema of attractions, since the idea of a regime specifically amplifies the material dimension of the concept and attaches it to a more intricate web that surrounds the audiovisual fabric (its materiality), and spectatorial devices and experiences that engender modes of addressing spectators centered on the sensorial and affective dimensions.

In a 1997 article, Miriam Hansen points to a parallel between early cinema's spectatoriality and that which is experienced in contemporary cinema, arguing, by the end of it, how the fragmentary dimension, a dimension dominated by a logic of performance (of the body and the cinematic apparatus) and of invitation to sensorial and sensational common to both contexts, profoundly impacts the public sphere dimension.

Even though she considers that contemporary experience is marked by a hyper individuation logic and domestic and privatized modes of consumption, Hansen (1997) maintains that: "In more ways than one, contemporary forms of media culture evoke parallels with early cinema" (p. 137)

The cinema of attractions concept was developed in order to think about early cinema (that lasted until 1910, approximately) from an aesthetic point of view, as well as its exhibition circuits and practices. But Tom Gunning (2006) himself indicates that the concept surpasses this chronological/historic landmark and that the cinema of attractions survives in the avant-garde, in genres like the musical and the "special effects cinema".

The impact of the concept proposed by Gunning and Gaudreault is especially felt in the field of historic studies and manages to throw a more complementary glance at the so-called early cinema, putting forward the understanding that that which up until that point historiography saw as a primitive cinema (using somewhat degrading terms to describe it such as filmed theater, and rudimentary narrative) was actually responsible for a complex system rooted in other sensorial and popular forms of entertainment and was built around the *marveling* of these vision machines and its ability to render the spectacle of the moving body visible to an audience that was always eager for sensational entertainments.

Regarding the impact of the formulations surrounding the concept of attractions to cinema's historiographic discourse, Auerbach writes:

> This paradigm is powerful because it promises to account for so much, not simply explaining how this first decade of cinema differed sharply from the classic Hollywood narratives that followed, but also how such "attractions" bear close

affinity to avant-garde and post Hollywood productions, including contemporary new media. (2007, p. 3)

Thomas Elsaesser (2006) reiterates that a attraction "by focusing less on linear narrative progression, manages to draw the spectator's attention to a unique form of display, and thus a special economy of attention and sensory involvement" (Elsaesser, 2006, p. 207).

Cinema of attractions is based more on the ability to **show** than in the narration capacity (the narrative dimension understood as *storytelling*). This showing dimension ends up recognizing and introducing the figure of the spectator, which is something that is established by the cinematic apparatus' explicitly defined behavior – especially the camera's choreography in relation to the body on screen, the highlighting of the *performance* of actions and gestures of such bodies directed to the camera's eye (and, therefore, to our eye).

The expression, inspired by Eisenstein's *montage of attractions,* does not hide the sensationalist ties that the original Russian idea brought to the concept. To Eisenstein, a montage of attractions was the necessary moment to engage with the spectator emotionally – through shocks and sensational corporeal actions – in order to direct him to a certain ideological orientation. The attractions in Eisenstein's system were politically strategic because of the power they had to arouse the spectator's body. The Russian developed a montage (in theater and film) from attractions putting exactly the most popular sensational expressions into use such as the horrific and grotesquely comical excessive and expressive Grand-Guignol theater, the *music hall* spectacles and the circus.

The performance dimension and its ability to excite the spectator is central to the idea of attractions. From an aesthetic point of view, it is possible to think about the regime of attractions as fragmentary, stimulating and exciting, since it intensifies the atavistic relation of the spectacle of the body (both the body in the screen and the spectator's body) as something capable of invoking a certain affective engagement that places itself in the order of the sensorial and sentimental.

Eleonora Fabião (2008 and 2009) indicates that performance as a genre in the art regime implies: bodies with materiality or theme; and intertwining and "de-mechanization" of the frontiers between life and work, as well as of other frontiers such as subject and object, true and false.

Both these aspects end up tensing up the spectator's quality and place – something that is constantly recovered by the performance experiences.

Each performance is a momentary answer to recurring questions: what is the body? (an ontological question); what moves the body? (a kinetic, affective, and

energetic question); what can the body move? (a performative question); which body can move? (a biopoethical and biopolitical question) (Fabião, 2008, p. 238)

In her work on the political dimensions of performance in Latin America, Diana Taylor emphasizes the knowledge building powers from incorporated behaviors, that is, practices and actions that are expressed and processed through the body's materialities. "If the performance did not convey knowledge, only the learned and powerful would be able to claim memory and social identities." (Taylor, 2013, p. 19). It is this central dimension of the body's materiality – its actions, gestures and repetitions – as a way of passing on learning, knowledge and meaning that makes performance the called upon expression in order to understand one of the basic dynamics set by the regime of attractions.

In the logic of attractions, the capture of the spectator also happens through the spectacularization of the very characteristics of the apparatus (the camera's body performance as spectacle and attraction). In this sense, the attractions come into being in the film body – and can be perceived as performance and as intensification of the cinematic spectacle's affective and astonishing effect.

In the most classical examples used by early cinema historians, such as *The Electrocution of an Elephant* or *The Gay Shoe Clerk* (both from 1903, Edison Co., directed by Edwin Porter), there is a spectacular exaltation of the cinematic apparatus itself underlying the theme and dramatic action displayed.

Delving deeper into the relationships between attractions and the musical, Pierre-Emmanuel Jaques (2006), reiterates that the attractions represent eruptions inside a film structured by the regime of narrative integration and that, as such, they present themselves as pure show. According to the author, attractions literally irrupt from the narrative, which ends up establishing a special relation with the spectator that, "far from denying its presence, it seeks confrontation", and thus, "by pointing at us, attraction tries to unsettle, surprise, provoke and even assault us." (Jaques, 2006 p. 282).

The camera's ability to put us in front of those scenes (the elephant falling, the close-up to the lady's bare ankle, recalling some of the examples given above) is exalted in the rhetoric of the scene itself. For us, this same dimension seems to be oftentimes present on YouTube's audiovisual content, when the individual and his/her cameras perform themselves exalting their presences and the heat of the moment; inviting us to be accomplices in this marvelous technology that binds us in images and sounds. Our argument is that the emphasis on the spectacular dimension and on the attractions dimension catalyzes the spectator's passionate and affective engagement and that there is a political regulatory dimension to this engagement.

It is important to emphasize that it is not by chance that the cinema of attractions constituted the hegemonic regime of cinema experience in the first decades of the 20th century, because what defines it more definitely is an intense dialogue with other popular sensationalist entertainments typical of western modernity. Even though they are not simply synonyms, attractions and sensationalism have a lot in common in their spectatorial and rhetorical logic, both based on the centrality of an invitation to sensorial and sensational engagement, a direct approach to the spectator's body, and the constant influx of stimuli being injected in their consumption and fruition experiences.

In early cinema's conventional exhibition system the spectator was put in front of programs defined by a diversity of works, styles, and productions. Generally, in most modern cities between 1900 and 1909, a "cinematographer" screening was made up of newsreels or vistas, shocking scenes (of either pornographic or violent nature), and many films were captured from moving vehicles. Their success with the audiences was supported by a wide intertextuality web, which connected what was shown on the screen with themes and sceneries that the spectators shared, or that appealed to the curiosity over the unknown through a testimonial calling (as if saying, come and see what I can show you). Researchers such as Linda Williams (1999) and Miriam Hansen (1997) call attention to the value of the sensational appeal that these early cinema films directed to the spectators, and, Hansen argues, this sensational appeal connects film to the era's other popular entertainments.

We would like to emphasize that these popular entertainments also measured their commercial success in the combination of fragmented consumption and sensationalist rhetoric, which, at the same time, stimulated the modern individual's senses and organized them in a polarized cognition common to an intrinsically scattered, stimulating, and ambivalent everyday modern and urban life. In that sense, it is essential to remember the serialized romance novels and the melodramatic theater, among others – based on an excessive aesthetic (central to the sensationalist rhetoric) – and how both of these were fundamental in the construction and activation of a pedagogy, extremely involved in modernity, that operates in the organization of everyday life. A modern life pedagogy that implements itself not only the by a discursive influx connected to the institutions and practices that surround rationality, but also through the powerful set of practices associated with sensations.

Along with Anna Enne (2007), we believe that sensationalism is a cultural process that is related to the modes of continuity and mediation of popular culture matrices that have survived and been rearticulated before the modernity project rationalized and domesticated the sensorial and emotional. From a wide analysis of works that dedicated themselves to defining the sensationalist press

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characteristics, Enne synthesized some aspects, which are worth noting here, since we will find some variations of these aspects in the analyzed audiovisual content produced for YouTube.

> a) An emphasis on criminal or extraordinary topics, focusing primarily on the body and its scatological and sexual dimensions; b) the presence of marks of orality in the text's construction, implying a quotidian relation with the reader; c) the perception of a series of sensorial marks spread through the text, such as the use of bodily verbs and expressions ("smoking" gun, "icy" voice, "shiver" with terror, etc.) (...); d) the use of editorial strategies to highlight the sensational appeal: big lettered headlines, many of which were followed by jesting and impactful subheadings (...); e) in the narrative construction, the recurrence of a simplifying and manichean structure. (Enne, 2007, p. 71)

What these aspects have in common with a visually appealing and excessive rhetoric is that they try to grab the reader by echoing clichés, stereotypes, and symbols in the text texture that crystallize in the cultural imagination shared between narrative and audience. This rhetoric, based on the mode of excess, ends up making a passionate and affective call to the reader/spectator/consumer. The excess addresses itself to the audience's sensory and sentimental aspects, creating a type of invitation to an affective engagement and with it to an emotional apprehension of reality. Visual appeal is an essential element to catalyze this invitation, leading to what Peter Brooks (1995) defines as "hyper dramatization" of reality through an astonishment aesthetic. Hyper dramatization and astonishment build a kind of complicity between discourse and spectator.

> We are talking about a moralizing pedagogy essential to the construction of modern consciousness and subjectivities, grounded upon using media culture to "teach" the public a form of perception, organization, and reaction to the world stemming from sensations. Passion, shock, desire, and fear are some of the sensorial and sentimental stimuli that affect the spectator's body and make him engage with the narrative. The effectiveness of the sensations pedagogy happens through the use of certain stylistic elements and cultural codes, which, if repeated to exhaustion, have the power to mobilize a bodily and sentimental pleasure on the spectator that comes exactly from the acknowledgment of these elements themselves. (Baltar & Sarmet, 2016, p. 114)

Authors like Ben Singer (2001) and Vanessa Schwartz (2001) establish direct links between 20th century popular entertainments, sensationalism and cinema's "invention".

For Hansen (1997), the cinema borrowed two fundamental principles from modern sensationalist entertainments: a distinctive form of structuring the program that will be offered to the public (variable and fragmented format) and individual mediation between work and audience operated through various strategies (explainers, explanation cards, musical or sound effects live backup, among others) sustained by the value of interaction and interactivity between audience and work. According to the author these are features of the two aspects that are always present in the contemporary context.

We want to argue that these features are especially important to spectatorship on YouTube. Hansen's text was written before YouTube's creation, however, the text seems visionary as it establishes a connection between spectatorship, the aesthetic of cinema of attractions, and the contemporary context:

> Contemporary film and media culture seem to be reverting to a state in which transitory, ephemeral practices are mushrooming, the institution of cinema is increasingly fragmented and dispersed, and long standing hierarchies of production, distribution, and exhibition have lost their force. (Hansen, 1997, p. 139)

We argue that the YouTube way of seeing images and sounds is built upon an entanglement of *YouTube of attractions* that summons more of the audience's attention through their private and everyday nature. Exactly because these are productions based on their power and appeal inside the dynamics of participative culture – which, as theorized by Jenkins (2006), alter the hierarchy between producers and receivers – and on the ordinary and common person (user), who creates the content, discursive construction of testimony and authenticity. Pierced by this plea (of the user's participative dimension), the direct addressings to the spectators made in the video strengthen is spectacular and sensationalist power.

The images being produced in the heat of the moment – i.e. images of political demonstrations such as the ones that populate YouTube – arouse the spectator in what seems for us like a double place in the sensorial and sensational sphere: the participative summoning of the act of witnessing and the spectacular "value" of images that materially carry the reality effect[10]. The importance of these images' spectacular and passionate summoning in relation to the spectator is the subject of Jane Gaines (1999) thinking. In her analyses of the so called "radical documentary", a genre that seems above all else to try creating mobilization around a certain cause, the author emphasizes:

> the documentary film that uses realism for political ends has a special power over the world of which it is a copy because it *derives its power from that same world.*

[10] We will not detail here the implications of this expression, reality effect, but will refer to the discussion raised from Roland Barthes's concept of reality effect held on Baltar (2014), where the author reflects upon the historical construction of material signs on images, which seem to delineate their status as real. These signs function to the spectator as "indicators", as reality effects.

(The copy derives its power from the original). The radical film derives its power (magically) from the political events that it depicts. (Gaines, 1999, p. 95)

The realist illusion given by moving images is relevant to the construction of narratives that create certainty around a subject in particular, but more than that, they can produce an engagement, which is also of passionate type, with the world of images. Eisenstein's thinking is recalled by Gaines in his conceptualization of Montage of Attractions, as a theatrical and cinematographic procedure, guiding good part of her thoughts.

Putting the sensuous back into the theory of political aesthetics would require significant reconceptualization. In Eisenstein's theory of social change and cinema, the bodily senses lead the spectator, whose involvement is not strictly intellectual – politics is not exclusively a matter of the head but can also be a matter of the heart. (*ibidem*, p. 88)

From this thought, and centering her analyses in political and activist documentaries, Gaines (1999) develops the concept of political mimesis, where the production of affection in the spectators through factual images in scene – images of violence, crowds, political action and conflict, especially through the moving body in the heat of the moment – have in important part in political mobilization. However, Gaines' conclusion is that the power of the affects aroused by these images of political mimesis has to bind itself to a more truly political sphere, something that the author ties directly to the issue of Marxist class consciousness.

In the example we analyze here, this political mimesis translates itself less as an actual production of affection in the spectator and more as a discursive key that is always trying to address this spectator, directly questioning him all the time. To us, the strategies used in *Mamaefalei* demonstration videos try to mobilize the spectator's passions through a sensationalist rhetoric that finds support in the camera's, as extension of its presenter's body, attraction effects in order to build an invitation to political alignment that, however, pretends it does not want guide its audience ideologically.

SENSATIONALIST SPECTACLE AND CAMERA ATTRACTION AS BODY EXTENSIONS

Demonstration videos on the internet seem to have at their core a search for the spectator's amazement, a desire to grab his/her attention, and above

all, an addressing to the curious observer. Social media and specially YouTube have an important characteristic that supports this discursive key connected to the regime of attractions and that is the extrapolation out of the filmic text through interaction and sharing tools present on these platforms. Video commentaries are spaces that can be seen as a type of actualization of the spectator's involvement with what is in the screen.

Even though the various videos posted by *Mamaefalei*[11] are indexed in different categories (demonstrations, opinion, interviews, etc.), they all share a similar format and content. The channel, like many others on YouTube, seems to be very close to the way of organization typical to new media, specially the internet, in a database.

[11] Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkSjy-IOEq-eMtarZl2uH1Q

> From a single image which represented the "cultural unit" of a previous period we move to a database of images. Thus, if the hero of Antonioni's Blow-up (1966) was looking for truth within a single photographic image, the equivalent of this operation in a computer age is to work with a whole database of many images, searching and comparing them with each other. (Manovich, 2002, p. 247)

A holistic view of the channel as a collection of filmic units seems to be the privileged analytical key to understanding the new media context. A lengthier analysis of an example is the approach to solve something that is at the same time in each one of the works and in all of them.

The presence in scene of the channel's presenter and self-proclaimed author, Arthur do Val, is a rule that is only rarely broken. The camera is always, except in rare occasions, pointed to Do Val's face, it is also, in many of the examples, operated by him with the lens turned towards himself. A selfie aesthetic intensifies the summoning effect, and the testimonial/participative dimension that the video presents seems to be trying to arouse in its spectator an effect of "we are here together in the heat of the moment", implying intimacy and informality feelings. These aspects recall the cultural process of sensationalism as identified by Enne (2007) and already mentioned here.

The creator of the videos brings a strong everyday men rhetoric to each work, as a citizen who only wants to talk and understand the other person in her/his protest position. "But I only came here to film" is one of Do Val's frequent lines, who ascertains himself in the position of sobriety of a political actor that only wants to create debate, based on previously studied data and statistics. However, the reason that comes across in each video of the "Demonstration" series actually seems to be that of creating some sort of disruption, especially on the protesting bodies. Questioning the other, and

at the same time questioning the spectator, is the device that instigates the conflicts that often follow.

We argue that the channel usually leans on the presentation of images that seem to us close to early cinema's sensational vistas (with the exception of the videos in vlog format with only the presenter and maybe a guest). Gunning (2006) understood these vistas as a cinematographic creation that

> (...) sees cinema less as a way of telling stories than as a way of presenting a series of views to an audience, fascinating because of their illusory power (whether the realistic illusion of motion offered to the first audiences by Lumière, or the magical illusion concocted by Méliès), and exoticism. (Gunning, 2006, p. 382)

Sensational vistas were constantly produced in the cinema of attractions context, offering the audiences of the era images of a distant world or of events with "heat of the moment" spectacular appeal, just like the factual images of political protest, also presented in sequence in the videos of *Mamaefalei* "Demonstration" series.

In the demonstrations filmed by *Mamaefalei*, be it marching crowds, conflicts arising from the affectation of bodies, or the affectation of the camera through violent actions, there is the search for images supported by an "excess rhetoric" (Brooks, 1995) as a discursive key that consolidates a strong refusal of nuance and the need to align oneself with pure and honest concepts. Do Val's body interventions (camera and voice) offer simplistic explanations and reinforce dichotomies, with direct, short and impactful sentences – once again, a summoning of the sensationalism indicated by Enne (2007).

The images – with their framing that reinforce the effect of the camera as extension of Du Val's body – seem to want to build their strength exactly upon the facts that they register. The effect of witnessing and participating of the events – an effect guaranteed by this "camera and sound as extension of the body" aesthetic – recalls what Gaines (1999) defines as the passionate power of factual images, especially those that use political actions where the bodies in scene are in an energetic state of affectation. The author names this effect "event *pathos*" and recognizes that it is pierced by the aesthetic and cultural dynamics of melodrama.

The video chosen for the analysis, "Homeless Workers Movement – Paulista Camp", shows Arthur do Val walking through a camp built by the Homeless Workers Movement (HWM) at São Paulo's Paulista Avenue. He was searching for "ordinary people" at the camp, asking specific questions about the occupation's guidelines, which, according to the movement, were related to the changes made

to the Third Group of the federal government's social program *My House, My Life*[12]. Conflict ended up arising from the questions and interactions, whether with the interviewees themselves, or with other leaderships that were on the camp and were already familiar with Do Val's work for the channel and for FBM that are open political and ideological rivals of HWM as a movement. After a continuous escalation of the conflicts, the video ends with a channel card with links to *Mamaefalei* other social media accounts and a request for donations to keep the video production going.

The video's basic device is the address of others, in this case of various HWM militants shown in the video, but given the effect of the camera as an extension of the body this address ends up also relating to its spectators. Do Val carries the camera on his hand, turned to himself and to the person he is addressing, always making questions that apparently want to cause confusion in this other person, and that also try to reveal the interviewee's ideological contradictions. Even if we start out from the premise that all documentation and filming is already an intervention in and of itself, and as such is made according to personal ethical and ideological assumptions, in the video in question this intervention is made explicit and lauded as the main aspect of its grammar and is articulated on the speech and construction of meaning level. The stated objective is to disrupt the situation, making the cameraman a political actor of images.

The addressing to the spectator is constant and becomes the video's main theme, the presenter's look turns to the camera all the time, even if it turns toward other scenes in some moments, such as in 2'21". Just like in *The Big Swallow* (James Williamson, 1901), *Electrocution of an Elephant* (1903) and various other examples of the early cinema, Do Val constantly looks directly at the camera as someone who's addressing us and saying: "are you seeing this? You are with me". The audiovisual apparatus (frame and sound) is continuously spectacularly emphasized, as a technique that allows us to face these events along with Do Val. This repetition reinforces the capture of our look.

The presenter's questions confuse the interviewees due to their unexpected nature and, sometimes, also due to their specificity and apparent statistical basis, however, the idea of a confused and contradictory interlocutor is built especially by his choice of interviewees, some sort of casting done by Do Val in other videos to demarcate a clear difference between him and the person being interviewed, a difference that will only be intensified (reiterated and excessively saturated) through the video's various jump cuts, just like at the moment in 6'51". The conversations are presented with a series of small ellipsis at various moments, which hide and highlight pieces of the interviewee's speech, revealing an exchange that invariably shows Do Val as being the most well-informed of

[12] *My House, My Life* is a federal government housing program that has several different lines of operation, from building houses for homeless members of the population until selling houses at lower prices to families in various income brackets. The demonstration in question disagreed with the increase to the income allowed by the program's third group, where the ceiling for familial income allowed to participate went from R$ 6500,00 to R$ 9000,00. (Source:<http://www2.planalto.gov.br/acompanhe-planalto/noticias/2017/02/entenda-as-novas-regras-do-minha-casa-minha-vida> Accessed in 02/05/2018)

the two. The excess of jump cuts creates an upside-down opacity effect, since they reiterate Do Val's construction as the more intelligent and learned social actor in the scene, they end up obliterating the interviewee's deliberate choices, which seem less informed and eloquent.

The video's whole montage works in order to create a big patchwork of events, effectively forming a sequence of attractions based on orality, between interviews with confused people, physical altercations in the crowd, and the camera's affectation. These attractions are not assembled in search of any causal connection and the link between them is Do Val's corporeal presence (his body and his camera) summoning us to share this presence, thus managing to arouse the spectator's sensations.

The appeal to the spectator's sensations is an important dimension of the video, in so far as the images of violence and physical danger (recurring scenes of a supposed risk to Do Val's life) seem to synthesize the rhetorical and ideological conflict that was put into question. The handheld camera – turned toward oneself as a need to register one's very presence in the world of images – and the camera as an extension of Do Val's body, are affected along with his body in the moments when the discussion turns into a physical altercation. Vieira Jr. (2014) reflects upon what would be a "camera-body" in contemporary sensorial cinema, where it would be in a "(...) 'semi intoxicated' state, sensorially learning the intensity of the experience that it is capturing, enabling a pulsating mediation with the contemporary spectator." (Vieira JR., 2014, p. 1223). However, here, we believe that there is another kind of "camera body" at work, in this case, the device as an extension of the very body that is filming, through the link it makes with a sensationalist rhetoric put into effect by Do Val's interventions, they build an almost heroic aura for him, valuing the spectator's empathy-identification game with this individual that, by facing the demonstrators, is now at risk, a game that refers in many ways to melodrama passionate engagement game.

Even if this handling of the camera in order to emphasize the operator's body is not groundbreaking, either in fiction or in documentary, here there seems to exist a certain transformation of this filmic trick, especially with the lenses turned upon oneself as rule. So, there is an appeal to sensations, starting at physical danger and violence, the camera is affected, it trembles and is handled in a way that it seems to be acting against the presenter's will, producing images that are sometimes almost abstract – as in the moments when the camera gets too close to the body of the person who is filming or suddenly falls. The direct sound is also affected, producing extremely specific noises.

These actions, which try to emphasize a supposedly involuntary dimension, have sensational effects and also highlight the filmic apparatus as spectacle and

attraction – arousing in a certain way, a marveling in front of the cinematic effects close to what Gunning identified as touchstones of the cinema of attractions – here employed as catalysts to the politically sensationalist vector of these images. In certain moments, the images generated show various angles, be it of the camera in the presenter's hand, the one which he keeps tied to his body, other cameras that follow him around, or cameras of people who are registering the events taking place on the streets.

The repetition of the same action multiple times serves as a reiteration of the excessive nature of this audiovisual content and also as an extrapolation of the events' corporeal dimension, as, for example, in the moment they try to remove Do Val's camera lenses and push him out of the camp in 7'30".

This event is show1n through three different angles: the handheld camera, the camera he wears and a third camera belonging to someone else farther away from the scene. This sort of repetition, typical of the aesthetic of excess (Baltar, 2012), has a sensationalist and attraction effect, with politically manipulative results, which seem undeniable to us.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the particular object we analyzed here, the "event *pathos*" is oversized, multiplying the strength that the images obtain from the fact in showing it with maximum detail, even using slow motion in order to spectacularize the event much more. There is a certain game with the spectator's skepticism, a game that, as we have analyzed, is intensified by the use of a sensationalist excess rhetoric. The spectator's skepticism is a fundamental matter to Gaines (2002), who says that "Documentary attractions are those attractions that automatically raise the question of 'really'?" (Gaines, 2002, p. 791). In the video by *Mamaefalei* there is a dialogue with the logic of attractions – for example, the repetition that seems to show the same action many times in order to reiterate in the spectator the feeling of how unbelievable what is being shown is – that supports itself in the spectacular power of sensationalism. We argue that this sensationalism (to make see excessively) finds an intense political use in internet audiovisual content, because, by grabbing the spectator, it translates a complexity of political and ideological conflicts into easy morality and immediate judgement keys.

In these videos, and in others of the same series and on the channel, Do Val takes the situation up to its maximum limit, bringing the country's ideological conflicts to a head in the microcosm of an specific demonstration and an audiovisual content. The search for and staging of the conflict also looks for a depiction of excess and of the manipulation of the spectator's corporeal senses,

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acting inside a discursive key based upon sensations, grabbing the look and addressing the spectator. A key that presents the argument as an almost exclusively spectacular dimension, which takes over the argument, transforming it into only a figure of speech that serves the spectacle.

Just as Gaines (1999) sees the presence of the cinema of attractions in the documentary through political mimesis and event *pathos*, we also identified in a determined YouTube audiovisual production traits of this attraction regime in dialogue with sensationalism. Spectatoriality as it pertains to the content we analyzed – participative, erratic, and fragmentary – highlights the spectator's address in a radical format that supports itself, as it appears in *Mamaefalei* videos, in the spectacular strength of the camera as an extension of the body that is filming, intensifying the participation and "in heat of moment" testimony effects.

Social media's own tools privilege an extrapolation of the summoning to the spectator in the comments, likes and shares, building a collection of interactions that intertwine with the filmic text and adjacent spaces in the video sharing platform. These are comments like:

"YUU (sic) AREE (sic) COUP PLOTERRRRRRSSSSSS kakakakkaakkakaka"; "Where is the police they have to arrest all these ignorants"; "The question is: why Doria didn't kick out these bums?" ; "ACWJÇKDIUHNWA BWDHYWICHISDNANNÇU ANCAIJC ME YOU AND THE DEVIL!"; "nice little argument!!!"; "2'24" the man is selfish, and if it were his son/daughter he would say this and if the kid endep up dead 'wat' (sic) he would 'says' (sic) about it, it would be an 'ennocent' (sic) life for their 'selffish' (sic), for defending thieves who steal in 'frot' (sic) of everyone #BrazilOnlygetsworse"; "6'12" 'it's me, and you and the devil', In other words: they even invoke satan so they don't need to wake up early and work"; "1'18" when my mother asks me about the 'shet' (sic) that I did I answer."[13, 14]

Judging by some of the commentaries' content and expressive format – like the ones we quoted above – it is clearly understood that the interactions support the sensationalist dimension, summoned by the excessive rhetoric of the audiovisual, in form and content.

The ideological conflict, latent in the videos in question, comes from a factual premise and data, but in audiovisual material reality, such conflict is deployed as a search, as a last resort, by affecting the bodies (in scene and the spectator's). This affecting reinforces the political effectiveness of sensationalism as a normative social control rhetoric, especially since it operates through an intense and immediate moral judgement call. The thoughts we raised here in this article may be an ideologically complex aspect of the ample forms through which the regime of attractions updates itself; however, even if this dimension

[13] "'VOCEIS'(sic) 'SAO'(sic) GOLPISTAAAAAAAS kakakakkaakkakaka"; "Cadê a polícia tem que prender todos esses analfabetos"; "A pergunta é: Por que esses vagabundos não foram expulsos pelo Dória?"; "ACWJÇKDIUHNWA BWDHYWICHISDNANNÇU ANCAIJC EU VOCÊ E O CAPETA!" "nice argumento!!!"; "2:24 o cara e um egoísta, e se fosse filha(o) dele ele iria fala isso e se a criança chegasse a morre 'uq'(sic) ele ia 'fala'(sic) a respeito, seria uma vida 'enocente'(sic) por 'egoismo'(sic) deles, por defender ladrões que roubam na 'frete' (sic) de todos #BrasilDaquiprapior"; "6:12 "É eu, e você e o capeta". Ou seja: Invocam até o cão pra não ter que levantar cedo e trabalhar."; "1:18 quando minha mãe me pergunta da 'marda' (sic) que eu fiz e respondo."

[14] These commentaries were left by the following users : "Raposa Galatica", "Claudemir vicente silva", "Brad Rolim", "Canal Fracazado", "Ban Brisado", "TheNoGoodAngel", and "Lucas Silva", respectively.

of the manichean control of the political order still weights, it is peculiar and symptomatic that the sensorial, sensational, and affective dimension still seem to be at the center of present-day political understanding.

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