



**To enact lines of power:
perceptual dimensions
in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn***
*Encenar as linhas
de força: dimensões
perceptuais em Adeus,
Dragon Inn*



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Abstract: What is the role of categories such as emptiness and slowness in contemporary cinema? In *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, Tsai Ming-Liang radicalizes the experimentation of elements that point to a negative energy of the image. In this essay, I identify a new status of film image: no longer defined as what organizes the visible in the form of a field, but as the *appearance of the visible as a composition of lines of power*. For such, I construct the concepts of *molar* and *molecular percepts*, which dialogue with the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari. I propose to think of acting as a coordination of the forces in emergence in what is visible, therefore debating with contemporary theorists of cinema.

Keywords: contemporary cinema; Tsai Ming-Liang; percepts; *mise en scène*; slow cinema.

Resumo: Qual o papel de categorias como o vazio e a lentidão no cinema contemporâneo? Em *Adeus, Dragon Inn*, Tsai Ming-Liang radicaliza a experimentação de elementos que apontam para uma energia negativa da imagem. Neste artigo, procuro reconhecer um novo estatuto da imagem fílmica: não mais definida como aquilo que organiza o visível sob a forma de campo, mas como o *aparecimento do visível como uma composição de linhas de força*. Para isso, construo os conceitos de *perceptos molares* e *moleculares*, em diálogo com o pensamento de Deleuze e Guattari. Discutindo com teóricos contemporâneos do cinema, proponho pensar a encenação como coordenação das forças em emergência no visível.

Palavras-chave: cinema contemporâneo; Tsai Ming-Liang; percepts; *mise en scène*; slow cinema.

To paint forces, like Tintoretto.

Deleuze and Guattari

In the feature film *Bu san* (*Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, 2003), Malaysian-Taiwanese filmmaker Tsai Ming-Liang synthesizes a construction of image and scene capable of crossing a clandestine passage between excess and minimum, the extreme slowness and a radical affirmation of the movement and speed as vibration and flow, strict silence and a rhythmical proliferation of noise, making cinema a way to activate this unlikely connection between categories, antagonistic at first. Showing the interior of a street movie theater before, during and after the screening of the classic Taiwanese *Long men kezhan* (*Dragon Gate Inn*, 1967, by King Hu), the film radicalizes the exploration of long, fixed and slow planes, narrative rarefaction, spatially distributed soundscape. These aesthetic options, in line with other director's films, point to a cinematographic trend that recent theory has tried to name, using terms such as slow cinema, minimalism, subtractive cinema, or sensory realism.²

Under the tone of farewell to a decadent movie theater, Tsai creates an image whose status is able to unite, not without tension, the extreme reduction of scenic/ audiovisual elements, marked by a subtractive gesture (silence, slowness, immobility, emptiness) and, at the same time, devices in which hyperexcitation arises and proliferates as minimal movements. The image thus becomes the junction between *radical negativity* – suppression of movement and reduction of speed, subtraction of dialogues and sounds with an informative or affective function, narrative rarefaction, disappearance of humanity from the body amid the hardness of walls and corridors – and *minor positivity* – such as the proliferation of micromovement vacuoles in the form of molecular vibrations and agitations, minimal noises distributed in space.

The radicality of the empty and silent planes created by Tsai, instead of pointing to a loss of movement and presence as strong elements of the sensitive experience, creates the visibility of new forms of existence, that of micromovements and micronoise, which *demand an aesthetic gesture subtraction so that they can emerge on the image surface*.

In this essay, I intend to unfold the understanding of this double aesthetic gesture present in Tsai Ming-Liang's inventions and experiments, taking *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003) as an epicenter: the creation of images from negative and subtractive categories, condition from which sensorialities appear linked to minimal

² To quote a paper referring to each of these concepts: slow cinema, refer to Flanagan (2012); minimalism, refer to Biró (2006); subtractive cinema, refer to Fiant (2014); sensory realism, refer to Luca (2014).

and aberrant existences, which demand the first movement of denial in order for them to come to life. For this, the image needs to forge a relation with different scales of perception, establishing different perceptual instances – the *global or molar percepts*, with which we perceive the negative categories (fixed plane as immobility, silence as no sound, emptiness as lack of volume), and the *molecular percepts*, with which we perceive the establishment of positivity as minimal existences (fixed plane as accumulation of vibrations and scintillations, silence as spatialization of microneoise, emptiness as hyper-habitation of densities and discrete masses).

Compensatory imbalance

In an article in which the author recognizes certain trends in a minimalist contemporary cinematography, Yvette Biró notes an aesthetic strategy, dating back to the beginning of modern cinema, in which the frame and the montage operate by an “intensity gained through a deliberate reduction to a very few elements” (BIRÓ, 2006). There, the *intensity* becomes a central operator of the image, so that the look and perception are divested of a function of communicational transit, as when we process information in a narrative film, to become a mode of production of small intensities. It is about building *intensive relationships* between looking and certain pulsations of what is seen, to the point that this pulsar is perceived in its different aspects – narrative, pictorial, noisy, texture, shadow, rhythm, movement.

Through this intensive relationship, minimalism is capable of producing a “change of scale in perception,” as David Lapoujade (2017, p. 110) commented on the visual arts. In the minimalist aesthetic gesture, what primarily moves is the dimensional instance with which perception bends over the world to apprehend what becomes apprehensible matter: from the outlines that involve the globality of the image and its chain organization, perception moves to the micro level, the details, the margins, where the figures, shapes and volumes claim a mode of existence that circulates under the order of the minimum. There is a homologous operation and a common choreography between the aesthetic operation that Lapoujade recognizes in minimalist painting and the movement between subtraction/filling noted by Yvette Biró enhanced in contemporary cinema: to reduce the elements that occupy the molarity of the visible, creating a change in scalar greatness through which perception circulates, in order to force the eyes to see – to produce visibility of – what exists only on a molecular scale.

Recovering Robert Bresson’ writings, Biró (2006) finds, in the appearance of immobility and silence in cinema, the condensation of an accumulated movement,

analogous to what frequently occurs in music, as in Mozart, in which it is necessary to generate an instant of pause when a stirring energy reaches a point of stunning excitement. Through this comparison, the author sees a compensatory but unbalanced relationship within the cinematographic plane, in which something is immobilized to release the kinetic energy that accumulates in another region.

There is a silence that is confronted with the moments of sound agitation, producing a flow of contraction and relaxation. It should be noted, however, that this is a mode of operation of silence and emptiness that is very different from that silence that, in music, appears as pause, the brief negative moment that happens and precedes each musical note, which determines the duration of the intervals between sounds, a condition for rhythm and harmony; in the same way as it is distinct from the silence that surrounds phonemes during speech, giving consistency to the operation of language through orality, in which Le Breton finds a central element to operate as a “modulator of communication” (LE BRETON, 1997, p. 27, our translation).

The negative categories – silence, emptiness, immobility – to which Biró and Bresson are calling attention have another quality: they function as instances of production of something like a *compensatory imbalance*, a conflict between areas of agitation and rest, each one establishing internal rhythms and perceptions, an energetic transit between moments, in which the excess of movement allows accumulating the energy that vibrates over the moments of suspension.

Something of the same order is built in the cinematographic montage. Laura Mulvey (2006) perceives a similar movement in *Tchelovek s kinoapparatom* (*Man with a Movie Camera*, 1929, by Dziga Vertov): when we see a carriage, at high speed, being pulled by two horses, the “energy concentration” of the image is elevated to such an extent – by the speed of the cuts and by the movements within the frame – that the scene culminates in the frozen frame of the two horses that take the screen, as if the frantic rhythm of the first moment was compensated by the stagnation of the movement of the image in the next instant, causing a transformation not only in the rhythm, but in the way we apprehend rhythm and duration. “This accumulation of movement carried forward the movement of the film and of time itself, so when the image froze another temporal dimension suddenly emerged” (MULVEY, 2006, p. 13).

However, these examples taken from Bresson, Biró and Mulvey point to a flow of movement energy that transits between different moments of music or cinematographic montage, assuming, for this very reason, a conception of aesthetic work based on a consistent temporal linearity. As much as Vertov’s film is not guided by the chain of narratively progressive actions, the comment of Laura Mulvey (2006) sheds

the light upon the foundation of the montage on a conception of time as a substitute for moments, in which categories such as succession and anteriority can function as axes of aesthetic creation and the distribution of pictorial and sound agitations.

In Tsai Ming-Liang's cinema,³ we are faced with a loss of the linear flow of time, forcing the transit of kinetic energies to find another axis on which to run; that is, the logic of compensatory imbalance – between acceleration and immobility –, instead of being structured in the chain that is distributed between moments positioned on the timeline, *starts to operate on different scales of perception*. Thus, the movements will appear in their multiple modes, but condensed in the same instant and split between the molarity of the image – its global condition – and the molecularity – its micro-manifestations. In this way, it is in the minimum palpitations of the image that an excess energy of movement appears as an object of our concentrated attention to be compensated by a paralysis of its global movements. Movement and immobility simultaneously inhabit the same image, but occupying different dimensions of perceptual matter: it freezes or empties global movements, transforming them into immobility and neutralization, at the same time that the minimal and pictorial movements vibrate, shifting the look from the macro scale (the events of the plot, the narrative action, the content of the dialogues, the meaning of the gesture, the transit of sensations and identifications) to the micro scale (scintillations, noisy spatialization, production of volumes and textures).

The noise in the movie theater at the *Dragon Inn* session is enhanced by the particularity of this space: a place where, at first, silence should predominate, so that any noise is considered a disturbing effect. The sounds of popcorn, dripping, chewing, snoring, kisses, are transformed into sonorous presences of the order of excess, precisely because they are confronted with a background of silence over which only the sound of the film screened should be audible.

The “scale of perception,” to use the expression of Lapoujade (2017), is altered, shifting the dimension by which attention circulates, making it possible to contemplate the play of variations and repetitions of movements and noises. In molecular instances, therefore, a kinetic energy is accumulated and that, in order

³ In fact, we believe that the aesthetic gesture that we are going to talk about goes far beyond Tsai, being generalizable, with the necessary adjustments, the significant part of “postmodern” cinema, which emerged from the 1980s, displacing the centrality of *the pure image of time* (DELEUZE, 1985) to the creation of images as production of modes of existence – something that we will find in full operation in filmmakers like Abbas Kiarostami, Lisandro Alonso, Pedro Costa, Chantal Akerman, Carlos Reygadas, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Béla Tarr, Albert Serra, Jia Zangke, Sharunas Bartas, Dardenne brothers, but who are not within the scope of this article.

to exist, requires simultaneous reduction of mobility in other scales of perception. It would not be possible to produce an intensive look towards small movements and see the condensation of micro-stimuli in them without the plane orientation tending to immobility. In this way, in the concentration of movement energies in different scales of perception, a clandestine passage is opened between fullness and the emptiness, rarefaction and filling, crossing the duality that would suggest us to take such categories as attributes to be attached to antagonistic objects (BIRÓ, 2006).

Tsa's image, in this way, is capable of precisely displacing the place of dualisms such as movement/immobility, excess/minimum, acceleration/slowness, or artifice/realism, insofar as, although it does not undo these oppositions, plane and cinematographic editing create an area of power lines capable of simultaneously putting such categories into circulation. Therefore, we do not reject the importance of negative notions that assert themselves in contemporary cinema, but we propose that negativity should be thought of not as an attribute that names and confers an opposing predicate to the quality or form of a scene or plane, but rather as an instigator of the lines of power that act in perception of categories such as silence, emptiness, slowness, immobility.

This leads us to suggest a statute for the image that is no longer organized under the order of the field – an order that includes the extra-field established by the frame –, but as an association of lines of power. In this sense, the noises that emerge from the off-screen space in the fixed planes of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003), instead of diverting attention to the extra-field and what it visually hides, conduct the affirmation of a presence that manifests by a rhythmic sound, whose best example is the movie theater projectionist's limping, creating, from her physical disability, an almost musical march, producing a mode of existence whose intensity is linked to the sound that shakes in the composition of the scene. Thus, the off-screen sounds, less than underlining the relevance of what is not visible outside the field, are lines of power with which a body, a character, an object, an action create their particular way of claiming their sensitive existence.

What we have, therefore, are signs propagated in different intensities and ways of manifesting their presence, because of what – and this is the central hypothesis of this essay – *we fail to understand the image as what organizes the visible as a field* to think of it as *the appearance of the visible as a composition of lines of power*.⁴ This

⁴ Close definition of image is well elaborated, in the context of device and virtual theories, by André Parente (2009, p. 21): “the image no longer as an object, but as an event, field of forces or system of relations that bring different enunciative, figurative and perceptive instances of the image into play.”

means that the fixed and elongated plane of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003) is not a way of loading the extra-field or marking neutrality of the filmmaker, but the *work of a displacement in the status of the image, in order to make all presence an apparition that claims a sensitive existence in different ways and by variable intensities.*

Perhaps it is valid to explain here the importance of a certain arsenal of Deleuzian concepts for the elaboration of what we are proposing and to summon the notion of *percept*, developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1992) in *What is philosophy?*, to designate the stimuli that plot the appearances of the visible and the audible in Tsai Ming-Liang’s plane and montage.

The two percepts of the image in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*

By means of the concept of percept, Deleuze and Guattari propose to make perception embodied (not only) in the image thinkable, but not tied to empirical conditions that would require a receiver with a name, flesh and face. In this way, the percepts manifest themselves as forces that open the possible field of perception, circulating through the image, producing the visibility of what in the world *still* vibrates without the opaque form of the visible; they make “the insensitive forces that populate the world sensitive” (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1992, p. 235). It is, therefore, something that pre- and post-exists to the act of perceiving and the subjects involved in it. “Percepts are not perceptions, they are packages of sensations and relationships that survive those who experience them” (DELEUZE, 1992, p. 171).

In this sense, thinking about the image from the perspective of the percept⁵ implies understanding that the visible is instituted more by intensity of forces than by the visible/not visible dyad, or inside/outside the frame. When the projectionist of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003) is in the extra-field and we hear the almost musical cadence of her limping, it’s her gait that becomes visible at a certain intensity, to be changed when the character is framed and again when she climbs a ladder with her back to the camera and is seen only partially in the shot composition. Everything in the image is always visible, whether inside or outside the field, but in different intensities. The priority movement is not that of bringing to the field what was in the extra-field, but of transforming the way in which walking was perceived in the continuous flow between the visible and the audible.

⁵ In addition to percept, Deleuze and Guattari recognize *affect* as the other component of art, but it is not object of interest of this article.

In monochromatic painting, Deleuze and Guattari (1992, p. 234) recognize the ability of the percepts to operate on the threshold of the existent and the non-existent, “as a minimum before the emptiness.” In this way, the matter of perception can be almost imperceptible, bringing the look precisely to a dimension in which attention is not only devoid of center but also finds presences as modifications of the emptiness – such as the noise of popcorn, dripping or of movements and friction of the body in the movie theater where *Dragon Gate Inn* is screened, which sound like small differences in the layer of silence, an emptiness populated by small volumes and micro agitations; “subtle imperceptible variations (however constituting a percept)” (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1992, p. 235).

In this sense, we say that, on the fixed plane, the image globality – both by the static framing and by the economy of internal movements – characterizes a *molar percept* that points to immobility, to the absence of human figures, to narrative rarefaction, to a low density of significant presence, marking the image with forces that operate by subtraction. This first negative instance opens up the possibility for the simultaneous constitution of another perceptual dimension, in which molecular percepts emerge, made up of a minimal sub-matter, always on the threshold of existence, but creating an accumulation of micromovements, an excess of microscopic vibrations.

When it comes to molar and molecular percepts, the distinction is not just about size – large or small – but also, and above all, about systems of relationships that each of these scales weave inside and outside the image. Lights flickering in the corridors of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, as in other Tsai’s films, such as *Ai qing wan sui* (*Long Live Love*, 1994), *Dong* (*The hole*, 1998) and *Tian bian yi duo yun* (*The wayward cloud*, 2005), are not small at all considering the space they occupy on the screen; it is a molecular percept due to the network of sensory relations that their agitation establishes with other sensory elements of the image, such as the nuances of color and shadow, the repetitive rhythm of flickering lights meeting the cadence of the micronoise. With this consideration, we follow Deleuze and Guattari when they remember that “the molar and the molecular are not only distinguished by size, scale or dimension, but by the nature of the reference system considered” (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 2012, p. 104) and “if it is true that the molecular operates in detail and passes through small groups, it does not mean that it is less extensive to the whole social field, as much as the molar organization” (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 2012, p. 102).

Molarity is the instance in which the circulation of narrative and psychological representations takes place, just as molar politics is of the order of

social representations, while molecularity, on the other hand, agitates beliefs and desires (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 2012). This distinction has serious consequences for its elaboration in the field of cinematographic percepts, since the two perceptual scales in cinema discern the field of operation of constructions that occur under the order of representation, that is, the molar percepts – events of the plot, chaining of actions, identification of movements while moving the camera or narratively significant changes within the frame, transmission of sensations between body on screen and spectator body – and the flows that mobilize the look as sensoriality, fractured sensations or frictional desires, in which movement is no more progression, displacements, transformations of the whole, but vibrations and oscillations, that is, molecular percepts.

Negativity that creates

In *Cinéma I: l'image-mouvement*, Deleuze (1983) points out two trends that appear in the cinematographic frame: rarefaction or saturation. The former consists of a restriction of what occupies the frame, which may tend to extreme close-up shots (Hitchcock) or to empty landscapes (Antonioni, Ozu), while the latter is marked by the population of the screen with different visual or sound elements (Altman, Wyller) (DELEUZE, 1983, p. 24). However, in both (saturation and rarefaction) there would be nothing that is missing, says Deleuze (1983), as the look will always find some matter with which to build its relationship with the film, so that even the rarest of the pictures will not fail to offer us the elements we need for visibility and readability. “If we see very few things in an image, it is because we have been able to read it poorly, it is because we have poorly evaluated both rarefaction and saturation” (DELEUZE, 1983, p. 24, our translation).

Thus, Deleuze does not recognize a negative dimension in the image,⁶ since even the empty frame would be a form of affirmation of the visible and legible that ascends through the direct experimentation of time. Saying that Antonioni’s empty landscapes are marked by the negative would imply, under the Deleuzian concept, to suppose a decrease in the strength of the film perceptual and affective matter, a hypothesis that Deleuze needs, therefore, to exclude. However, this is due to the fact that, in this concept, rarefaction and saturation are predicative attributes, therefore, excluding categories, and not forces in intensification or discouragement.

⁶ By the way, as he does in practically all his philosophy. On Deleuze’s confrontation with the forms of the negativity, it is possible to refer to Safatle (2019), “Entre a diferença e a contradição: Deleuze contra a negatividade” [Between difference and contradiction: Deleuze against negativity].

At the root of the self-excluding conception of the categories of rarefaction and saturation addressed by Deleuze (1983) it was the fact that, even in the majority of modern cinema, the image conceives the visible as that which is organized as a field, under this aspect opposite to its extra-field so that the rarefied/saturated polarity can appear as a derivation of the field / extra-field pair from which acting, montage and the modulation of planes – with which the cinema operates a kind of management of the visible – are being thought of. However, it will be necessary for the movements of history and aesthetics to seek a repositioning in the status of the image, so that, being created and experienced as a composition of lines of power instead of the modulation of the visible through the field, it can depolarize the categories with which thought operates to make them inter-productive.

It is not surprising, however, that post-1980 cinema has been recognized for notions that point to an aesthetic gesture of subtraction – of speed in the case of slow cinema, or of the elements of *mise en scène* –, for David Bordwell (2008) and Jacques Aumont (2008, p. 175-180), understanding it as a loss of power that motivated the relationship between the film and the look. When Jacques Aumont (2008) hypostatizes the end of acting, categories such as emptiness, immobility of the body, muteness and, above all, the fixed plane, are invoked as the markers of a decline in playing movement/stop or approach/departure, with which *mise en scène* became the very thickness and density, par excellence, of cinema. If filmmakers such as Otto Preminger and Alfred Hitchcock instituted cinema as a management of the visible – modulating themselves by the presence of the face, by hiding/revealing through which action and space gained texture and power to mobilize the look –, in modern cinema, with exceptions, acting is moved to other keys, reducing this modulating power. In Werner Schroeter and Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, for example, Aumont (2008, p. 113) says that what emerges, instead of the movement played by decoupage, would be a theatricality of the minimum.

But according to Aumont (2008), it is in contemporary cinema – the 2000s – that the *mise en scène* will find a strong constraint.⁷ Bordwell (2008) recognizes the importance of emptiness, slowness, economy of cuts and movements as operators of acting in his analyzes of Hong Sang-soo and Theo Angelopoulos. However, they appear as markers of a stylistic idiosyncrasy, the result of a creative gesture in which the

⁷ The authors' nostalgia is assumed and touching: "It is quite true, as Bordwell nostalgically says, that few filmmakers today are able to organize a plan with the subtlety, complexity and emotional power of the era of Authors (Mizoguchi, Renoir, Ford, Dreyer), and even with science and the knowledge of the great pioneers (Griffith, Feuillade, Bauer). [...] In terms of acting, cinema no longer invents. [...] Currently, it is well known that editing decisively overlapped acting" (AUMONT, 2008, p. 178-180).

filmmaker mobilizes the repertoire of his cinematography to take the lead in a wild struggle for innovation (Angelopoulos) (BORDWELL, 2008, p. 195-197). In Sang-soo, the author recognizes the tendency of the frame towards stasis, made flexible by brief oscillations of a “light” camera, as an active condition for the establishment of a body dynamics that gives texture to the relationships between the characters and development of the already rarefied narrative (BORDWELL, 2008, p. 25-29).

In Bordwell’s analysis, immobility, slowness and emptiness are manipulated in favor of creating differentiations in cinematographic codes, with which directors stamp films with the unmistakable mark of their faces and which operate the transmission of narrative information. When the author indicates in Sang-soo the occurrence of dislocations of attention as jumps in the eye movement (BORDWELL, 2008), this will never allow leaving the molar dimension of perception, because, throughout his study, the perceptive subject is an a priori ready and unchanging category.⁸ His cinematographic look does not reach – nor does it aim to reach – the ways in which the image produces thoughts, modes of existence, and weaves energies that move seamlessly between cinema and the world. In this way, the fixed and elongated plane appears as a recurrence of cinematographic codes that would always jeopardize the power of the *mise en scène* and the supposed human interest in movement and progression, but that great directors, such as Sang-soo and Angelopoulos, would be able to revert in favor of acting.

However, Aumont is more dramatic in identifying, in the tendency to emptiness and immobility, a collapse of the acting potential in managing the visibility of bodies and actions, balancing the approach with the character through the close-up or the subjective camera, controlling the identification flow. The author affirms, not without mentioning some exceptions, that in contemporary cinema “there is no acting in the sense of arranging the plane as a frame” (AUMONT, 2008, p. 179).

On the one hand, as we have seen about immobility and stasis in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003), Aumont’s thesis is accurate in noting the end of the scene based on the manipulation of the frame; on the other hand, it is not a matter of, starting from that, supposing a cinema that, believing being the last, would claim “to have reached the end of history” (AUMONT, 2008, p. 177), as, not without some

⁸ This is made explicit in a histrionic manner when, for example, the author bases his conception of attention and perception on biological and evolutionary characteristics of the human species, when questioning Jonathan Crary’s theses about the historical transformations of attention regimes: “He [Crary] never confronts the obvious objections that changes in attention, as I indicated in the discussion of jumping eye movements in Chapter 1, are of great evolutionary advantage and, in fact, are part of the mammalian heritage” (BORDWELL, 2008, p. 313, note 8).

suspicion, suggests the author. On the contrary, the challenge of cinematographic theory, given the transformations in the criteria with which aesthetics measures its impulses, is to notice how emptiness and stasis of the camera appear as categories, which despite (and because of) their negativity, are endowed with strong power of creation: if the “arrangement of the plane as a frame” is no longer able to differ the modes of construction that inhabit the image, then it is the case of abandoning the centrality of the notion of field – which does not mean ignoring the limits of framing and its role in the composition of the scene – to understand the image as a composition of lines of power, and try to realize the acting that is in the distribution of intensities and rhythms within this magnetic zone.

Contrary to what Bordwell (2008) proposes, the fixed plane here, instead of creating stylistic differentiations in cinematographic codes, operating narrative information transmissions and defining the who-is-who of the character network, is charged with a negative energy with which molar percepts enter into a process of self-annulment, in order to pressure the attention shift towards minimal movements, that is, to establish a new perceptual, microscopic dimension.

It will be interesting to quickly note how the negative categories of the image have been approached by slow cinema theorists, among whom I take Tiago de Luca as an example. In recent articles (LUCA, 2016, 2017), the author recognizes, in the elongated plane, the aesthetic gesture of focusing the viewer’s attention on film time. Along this path, the slowness tendencies in contemporary films are moving towards a reconnection of the look with the screen, in order to favor the collective experience of cinema (the space founded on the “theatrical” structure) to the detriment of new forms of fragmentation and individualization of the look, made frequent by portable devices and installation arts. Nevertheless, the radicalization of the long and slow plane represents a type of experimentation through which cinema expand to other forms of artistic existence, such as images made for exhibitions and museums, which will be practiced not only by Tsai, but by other slow cinema filmmakers, as Abbas Kiarostami and Jia Zhangke.

Thus, as indicated by the approach of Luca (2016, 2017), it is an aesthetic investment towards a double (and paradoxical) relationship: at the same time that it dialogues with the experimental radicality of the videos made for installations, the planes of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003) request a look that points to the finitude of the film material, its own time and the viewer’s (and collective) experiential condition. The premise of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* invites to a farewell to the movie theater to meet it again, as if announcing its death, but with the purpose of making it to revive.

Slow cinema, in this way, would be plotting, by re-founding the experiential (continuous and collective) character of perception, a way of reaffirming the time of the image, so that the look is forced to rediscover its social dimension, in which we encounter a temporality that is not ours, but that of a situation collectively experienced. The notion of the cinematographic field, in this proposal by Luca (2016, 2017), changes its function if compared to its use traditionally recognized by Bordwell (2008) and Aumont (2008), starting to no longer serve the management of the visible from its opposition to the extra-field, but to operate as a space to which attention converges and in a way that allows looking at a consciously social temporal experience. In slow cinema, what occurs is “to facilitate a sustained perceptual engagement with the audiovisual elements on-screen” (LUCA, 2016, p. 26). The slowness and the field gain a political thickness when they stop spread the attention regimes prevailing in contemporary capitalism, marked by the ostensible fragmentation and individualization of the time of the look, in a way that “it is noteworthy that the trend [slow cinema] has emerged at a time when capitalism itself undergoes a radical transfiguration based on nonstop monetary circulation and 24/7 communication models” (LUCA, 2016, p. 30).

This emphasis on the political and cultural context of recent cinematographic trends, incorporated by Luca (2016), supposes cinema politics as a form of resistance – in its almost literal physical sense, that is, a force that presses in opposition to the dominant power – the modes of perception prevalent in advanced capitalism.⁹ In this approach, cinema functions as an “antidote” (LUCA, 2016, p. 41) to the imperative of fragmentary individualization of looking and listening.

The political dimension of the negative categories that we have proposed here is, however, in another key: not as a refusal of a hegemonic regime of perception, but as an internal movement between the scales of perception in favor of the possibility of seeing what has not won the status of an existing thing, but of emerging forces. In the same way, it is a departure from what we understand as negativity: no longer as the refusal per se of the predominant regimes in capitalism (that is, the

⁹ This political-cultural approach will not be exclusive to Luca (2016 and 2017) but shared with other contemporary authors who have put slowness at the center of film analysis, such as Song-Hwee Lim, Ira Jaffe and Lutz Koepnick. It can even be said that the notion of slow cinema – compared to that of flow cinema, which appeared strongly in the critics in the previous decade – gains stature after the thesis of Matthew Flanagan (2012), when the cited authors, although with relevant differences between them, perceive the need to understand such film trends no longer just as changes in the order of cinematographic codes and styles, but as transformations occurred in connection with contemporary cultural issues, so that “slow cinema” emerges as a certain political approach to cinema. However, this topic remains as a suggestion for another work.

negative as resistant), but the insertion of negative forces in the mode of operation of the image, so that, due to them, minority movements can emerge.

Looking at a film like *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003) implies the sensitivity of seeing how the stasis of the frame is an active retreat in the perceptual experience play, whereby the movement can shift from scale to appear as vibration, so that acting takes the form no longer of the revelation/concealment of the action and the characters through the hide-and-seek game in the field/extra-field, but as the *distribution of forces that vibrate*. Nor will the image condense, primarily, an antagonism towards the dominant forms of accelerating perception and fragmentation of attention, but as the establishment of movements on the threshold of existence.

With these hypotheses, we want to explain the limits both of the studies that proclaimed the “end of acting” and of the notion of image as a direct durational experience (Deleuze) and the political-cultural approach of slow cinema, in perceiving what is aesthetically played when cinema places priority emphasis on categories such as emptiness, silence, immobility and slowness, emerging between the modern and the contemporary: the subtraction gesture is, with regard to the confrontation between the look and the perceptual matter, primarily creator, a negativity that launches a circuit of movements in which something takes place – intensities, rhythms, a planned distribution of lines of power to give rise to the visible.

Acting and distribution of power

Erwin Panofsky (1991) recognized two elementary ways in which emptiness can appear in the image, operating the organization of space on screen, in his study of the emergence of perspective in modern Western painting. The first one is related to a pre-perspective representation, in which the shapes and figures appear loose in the two-dimensionality of the screen – whether a painting, a wall, a paper sheet. It corresponds to the pre-Renaissance visual organization mode, so that emptiness is produced by the absence of any physicality from which something like a gravitational force may come, from which the shapes, objects and bodies of characters are distributed with the ground as reference (PANOFSKY, 1991, p. 56-58).

Instructed by the Panofsky conceptual network, we could say that the emptiness that appears in images such as Tsai’s planes would, on the other hand, be in the transition to the institution of a *physicality* – a term dear to the theory of “sensory realism,” elaborated by Tiago de Luca (2014) – in which the movements are, above all, installed by the presence of a gravitational force, founder of all spatiality. The background, outside the abstract neutrality of the pre-perspective representation,

is loaded with a density of possibilities for movements, by creating the world as a physical spatiality that produces scintillations and oscillations. The limping leg of the projectionist of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003) is the sliding coupling between body and space, between the organic-mechanical laws of the limb traction and the gravitational law.

Limping, the movie theater dripping and the popcorn that fly around the room appear as tests on the physicality of the world, as if they were there to testify that the fixed plane has not abandoned the laws of perspective. The dispersion of movements through the image and noise through space, transcending the logic of the frame, finds in the law of gravity a power of spatial organization, which submits them to the floor and to an orientation in the verticality of the field. Emptiness and the fixed plane, in this case, become the conditions for the installation of a field – which is now gravitational – to exert a power that affect all the movements distributed in the image, in the form of vertical and diagonal oscillations, noise, flickering lights. Like a steady stream, gravity does not determine movements; what it can do, at most, is to charge the empty environment of energy and a buoyant force, in relation to which everything else will trace its particular course.

Gravity appears here as the arc in which physicality is instituted, allowing small presences to appear articulated with each other as if bathed in a common plasma. This gravitational physicality is the last of the barriers to the dissolution of field logic, trying desperately to bring all the pictorial agitation to a stabilization zone; but what it really does, with some effectiveness, is to offer an explanatory foundation for the movements – the law that states that “everything falls” is what establishes limping as an attribute of the projectionist’s gait, gives life to the movement of the drip and the popcorn, at the same time that it is challenged by the non-gravitational flickering of light – which are already irreversibly regimented as lines of power so that all the explanatory causality for the movements will appear as a limping causality. Gravity, finally, is annulled as a field to transmute itself into gravitational waves and may appear fractionally or occasionally attenuated to the point of finding the appropriate harmony to produce a musical sound in the noises of the drip and the limping gait.

Instead of decoupling action and space by means of framing, acting here appears in the form of a distribution of the lines of power between sounds and imagery elements, as well as the modulation of their intensities and modes of existence: organizing small movements; mobilizing the macro structures of the image to establish conditions under which the agitations can appear in an articulated manner;

transforming presences along the plane by changing the intensity and manner of manifesting their forces.

While the molar percepts produce a drive of self-dissolution, the perceptual investment can move to a microscopic dimension, in which the movements and noise appear as molecular percepts. We do not need to refuse the negativity involved in molar percepts to recognize their instinctive potential, so that excess and lack, rarefaction and saturation appear not only combined, but in a relationship of mutualism.

Perhaps it was the case of trying to think about the image that appears in contemporary cinema, with *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003) as a prime example, under the homology of the factory or the machine, under the condition, however, of operating a deviation in the understanding of these two notions, so dear to the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari (1972): instead of understanding them as something that operates through *production*, it is about apprehending their potential for *creation*. The difference is huge: while production is focused on the products and syntheses of the production process, creation, in turn, at the same time that it produces, establishes priority *modes of production*, installs systems of conjugation of bodies, spatiality and temporality.

As Jean-Louis Comolli recalled, when commenting on the condition of the documentary, but in a more current and valid formula, in this aspect, equally for the whole cinematographic image: the problem of cinema is “no longer how to make the film, but how to do in order for there being a film” (COMOLLI, 2008, p. 169). The image as a machine that creates and the cinema as an art of creation; we would say, to paraphrase Peter Pál Pelbart (2016, p. 394), that acting, under this statute, is *advocating in favor of the forces to come*.

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Submitted on: June 31, 2020 | approved on: May 16, 2020