

Cinema and History: archive documentaries as a site of memory¹

Carolina Amaral de Aguiar*

RESUMO

O artigo analisa a relação entre cinema e história considerando esse suporte como um 'lugar de memória'. Para isso, analisa-se o filme *A Espiral* (1975), dirigido por Chris Marker e Armand Mattelart, um documentário montado com materiais pesquisados em arquivos que se dedica a compreender a Unidade Popular no Chile. Após o golpe de Estado de 1973, seus realizadores pretenderam construir um conhecimento histórico que combatia a visão de que a ditadura 'normalizava' o caos instaurado no país, denunciando que o governo de Salvador Allende havia sido vítima de um grande boicote organizado pela direita. Nesse sentido, a montagem organiza um dossiê com base em 'provas' encontradas em arquivos.

Palavras-chave: Cinema e História; filme de arquivo; Unidade Popular no Chile.

ABSTRACT

This article examines the relationship between cinema and history, considering this support as a 'site of memory.' In the article the film *La Spirale* (1975), directed by Chris Marker and Armand Mattelart, is analyzed. It is a documentary made with materials researched in archives that analyzes the *Unidade Popular* government in Chile. After the 1973 coup its makers wanted to construct historical knowledge which could combat the vision that the dictatorship had 'normalized' the chaos in the country, stating that Salvador Allende's government had been the victim of a great boycott organized by the right. In this sense the production organized a dossier based on 'proofs' found in archives. Keywords: Cinema and History; Archive Film; *Unidade Popular* in Chile.

Among the filmic choices of a documentary – or even of a fictional film – are historiographic events and approaches which intend to remember or forget certain themes of periods. Cinema can thus be seen as one of the 'sites of memory' defined by Pierre Nora. In a film, as in these spaces defined by the French historian, awareness of the rupture with the past is confused with the

* Doctoral Candidate, Program of Social History, Universidade de São Paulo (USP). Departamento de História. Av. Prof. Lineu Prestes, 338 – Cidade Universitária. 05508-000 São Paulo – SP – Brasil. amaral_carol@yahoo.com.br

desire for a valorized memory, as well as for a neglected one. In the case of productions which use archive documents in their editing, the research criteria and the use of sources reinforce even further the connection with historic thought that is related to the interests of certain social groups or subjects in dispute.

This article intends to analyze these and other questions related to the study of the cinema through history, looking at the French documentary *La Spirale* (1975). The idea of making a film about the conflicts during the *Unidad Popular* government in Chile came from a filmmaker who had been concerned with political productions about Latin America since the 1960s. It is therefore useful to briefly look at his trajectory.

Chris Marker started his career in the 1940s, working as a literary essayist, poet and cinema critic in the magazine *Esprit*. He was involved with the organizations *Peuple et Culture* and *Travail et Culture*, aimed at creating a mass movement for popular education. At this time he made contacts with important figures from French cinema, such as the critic André Bazin and the filmmaker Alain Resnais. With the latter he co-directed *Les Statues meurent aussi* (1950-1953). After this he made *Olympia 52* (1952) about the Olympic games in Finland, his first work as a director. His filmography is notably marked by documentaries about various parts of the world, with some exceptions (notably the 1962 fiction film *La Jetée*). In the 1960s and 1970s he developed activist film, working with other leftwing directors in popular cinema projects. At the end of the twentieth century his production prioritized dialogue with new media and technologies.

This brief biography does not, however, show the importance of his filmography, which is still somewhat unknown. In part, the absence of works about his films results from Marker's reclusive character and his reluctance to expose himself. His refusal to let himself be photographed or to be interviewed created a kind of mystique about his image, and he has constantly stopped attempts to institutionalize his name, such as retrospective exhibits and academic works. He is the first to discourage researchers who seek to make affirmations about his work. Nevertheless, his will in recent years has been 'disrespected' and the bibliography about him has grown substantially.

Generally speaking, researchers working with Marker have identified certain themes that were constant in his work, such as reflection on memory, the relationship between past, present and future, and the webs that form the fabric of time and of history. These characteristics imposed a discourse that is

always confronted with its own questioning. The images and the voices present in his film often confront themselves. According to Maria Dora Mourão,

In his work Chris Marker proposes a relationship between looking and memory, which configures the silent discourse that always fluctuates between word and thought. Thought is engendered by our desires and needs, our interests and emotions. The transformation of this silent discourse into a manifest discourse is the challenge of the artist.²

Another mark of Marker's works, present principally in his documentaries, is his activist nature. In relationship to this many of his productions, such as the series *On vous parle*, have a preaching tone, encouraging revolution. Others, though, approach the left with a more self-reflexive perspective, using images – some made by leftwing producers, others not – to rethink the victories and defeats in this political field. This occurs constantly, for example, in the documentary *Le fond de l'air est rouge* (1977), which received the inspiring title in English *A grin without a cat*.

This exercise of thinking and rethinking the strategies of the left was echoed in the movements that emerged in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, principally during the Cuban Revolution (1959) and the victory of Salvador Allende at the ballot box (1970), during which time a significant part of his filmography was dedicated to this continent. In January 1961 he travelled to Cuba where he interviewed Fidel Castro for the film *Cuba si! Banned in France*, as it was considered propaganda for the Revolution, the documentary sought to fight the negative vision of the Cuban leader in the French press, emphasizing the benefits of the national reform program. During this time Marker gave some workshops in the *Instituto Cubano del Arte e Indústria Cinematográficos* (Icaic), establishing ties of collaboration with Cuban filmmakers. At the end of 1969 he returned to the island with the editor Valérie Mayoux (also present in *La Spirale*) to make *The Battle of Ten Million*, with dealt with the government's challenge to increase the sugarcane harvest and to resolve national economic problems. Another two productions resulted from the interviews made during the journey with exiles from the Brazilian military dictatorship released from prison following the kidnapping of the US ambassador in September 1969: *On vous parle de Brésil: torture* (1969) and *On vous parle de Brésil: Carlos Marighela* (1970).

In the 1970s the victory of the *Unidad Popular* (UP) transformed the Chilean process into a new reference point. Another Latin American country

had sworn in a Marxist president, this time on the continent and through the ballot box. The left from various parts of the world began to watch the Chilean government very closely. In 1972 Chris Marker also visited Chile (where he had participated in *A Valparaíso* in 1963) with the idea of making a big film about the UP government and its changes. However, the filmmaker found a large amount of Chilean audiovisual production, of which *El primer año* by Patricio Guzmán stood out. Instead of producing his own documentary, Marker helped to produce and publicize the Chilean work. After the 1973 coup, he continued his collaboration with exiled filmmakers: he edited a version of Miguel Littin's film *Compañero Presidente*, and provided financial and technical assistance for the finalization of the epic *La Batalla de Chile* (1975).

The initiative of making *La Spirale* emerged from Marker reencountering Armand Mattelart in France shortly after General Augusto Pinochet's coup d'état in 1973. The sociologist, who had worked for 11 years in Chile as a professor in the Sociology School of the Catholic University, was concerned with the study of the means of communication and their political use in the country. Based on his observations of this question during the *Unidad Popular* government, he developed a theory of how the fascism which overthrew the Salvador Allende was built, in which he defended the thesis that the Chilean bourgeois had created a "rightwing Leninist mass front" (in other words, a leftwing strategy for popular mobilization to favor the downfall of the government),³ counting on the collaboration of the press and its agents. Marker then proposed to him that he detail his ideals and his activist experience in the Chilean context through a documentary.

His team then began to research audiovisual materials and documents of other types to be used in the production. According to the director, three main types of audiovisual insertions were used: 1) auteur films, especially by activist directors such as Patricio Guzmán, other Chileans and the Cuban Santiago Álvarez; 2) news reports produced by Chile Films; 3) reports from television networks from different parts of the world, especially French, many of which originally had rightwing foci. All of these 'original categories' acquired new meanings in the editing, often opposite to what was intended when they were made during the government of Salvador Allende.

An example of this recurrent practice is the banging of pots by women in December 1971, against supposed economic shortages being experienced in the country. Originally the scenes were recorded by a rightwing US network as 'proof' of the chaos created by the UP government. In the documentary, however, the images appeared interspersed with others in black and white from

the same demonstration, recorded by activists from the collective organized by Patricio Guzmán. Despite the opposing objectives of the filming of the female march present in the *a priori* concepts of the film teams, they could be joined in the same scene not only because they dealt with the same event, but because they showed the same thing: women with a white appearance; 'bourgeois' clothes, accessories and haircuts; aspects which indicated they belonged to the elite. This choice to join images produced with opposite objectives in single thematic sequences is part of the method of work of the filmmakers.

To produce *La Spirale* the team also ran into an even greater difficulty in researching archive material. After the military coup, like their makers, the images of the Chilean activist documentaries and of *Chile Films*, recorded during the *Unidad Popular* government, were exiled. In other words, they left the country clandestinely and in a diffuse manner. Gathering the recordings made both by leftwing filmmakers and rightwing television networks, was also a means of challenging this exile which through prohibition and destruction sought to consign the years of the *Unidad Popular* to 'oblivion.'

Documents of other types, such as newspaper clippings, photographs, publications, etc., were also searched for. Highlights in this category were, for example, the locating of a book financed by the Salvador Allende government, which is not only shown in the documentary, but provides important contributions to the commentary. Published by the *Secretaria General de Gobierno* in 1972, *Documentos Secretos de la ITT* reproduces documentary proof that the telecommunications company had effectively acted in a plan with the knowledge of the CIA which had aimed to prevent the victory and the taking of office by the UP candidate. In this case, to the contrary of what occurred with the audiovisual sequence of the women banging pans, the original meaning of the document, made by the left, was reinforced with a voice-over.

LA SPIRALE, A 'DOSSIER FILM'

The limits between the documentary and the fiction film have been passionately discussed by cinema theorists, as well as having been explored by filmmakers who have often dared to produce on the borders between these two genres. The definition that the documentary film takes the real world as a reference is not sufficient, since this world was often well represented in so-called fictional productions. Among the concepts that are usually risked on this

flexible frontier, the considerations of Roger Odin⁴ help to get an understanding of the field in which *La Spirale* is located. For this researcher what differentiates the documentary is not the concept of analysis of reality, since fiction can play this role well. Rather it creates the concept of a ‘documentarizing reading,’ in other words the existence of an effect – fruit of determined strategies – which leads the spectator to classify a type of cinema as a ‘document.’

In *La Spirale* many strategies were reproduced which caused the feeling of a ‘document,’ present in the television reports and documentaries used in the film. Among these were the use of interviews, newspaper clippings, archive images, video and audio recordings made in a direct manner (in some ‘official’ event for example), amongst others. All of these techniques collaborate to place the viewer in front of the events. Thus, there exists a clear intention to attribute a historical ‘truth’ to the events, especially rightwing sabotage and other actions which led to the military coup in Chile.

The manner in which the film organized the documents found in the archives by the filmmakers corresponds at various moments to what Bill Nichols calls ‘the montage.’ This form of using filmic material opts for the presence of many sequential cuts, seeking to integrate the material in the argument that runs through the production and the logic developed by the director. The voiceover is principally responsible for maintaining a narrative coherence and ensuring the thesis that what occurred was a conspiracy on the part of the Chilean right, with the help of the United States, to overthrow Allende. In this way the sensation that all the excerpts, despite being registered in distinct moments, places and situations, were part of the same process.

Nevertheless, it is not possible to insert the entire documentary into this montage typology as defined by Nichols. Although it corresponds to many moments of the production, a tense approach often interrogates the images, alerting viewers to the fact that which is seen does not always correspond to a closed interpretation of reality. This is related to Chris Marker’s practice in his films that interrupts all the time linearity to insert doubt where in principle there should be certainty. An example of this strategy used in the editing occurs when the interview with Augusto Olivares – shown minutes before – is counterpoised to the following voice-over commentary, which repeats what was shown inserting new information, transforming it into a denunciation of the current situation of the country:

Augusto Olivares died on the day of the coup d’état, along with Salvador Allende. After 11 September 1973 the UP stations and press were destroyed or

closed down. No leftwing daily papers remained, nor any that opposed the military junta. No one from the opposition could express themselves on the radio or television. In December 1974 there were still 40 journalists in concentration camps.

Another strategy using archive images used in *La Spirale* is the placing in sequence of documents related to the period in question, the 1970s, and others referring to previous decades. This form of montage allows, for example, *Unidad Popular* to be related to other moments in history of Chile, such as the 1932 Socialist Republic. In the presentation of the electoral process and the sole leftwing candidate, Salvador Allende, a photograph of his from his youth introduces a series of other photos referring to this first leftwing attempt in Chile, creating an association effect of the leader of UP with a revolutionary tradition in the country.

This montage resource served to reinforce the voice-over discourse that there had been two concomitant practices in play for many years: a historic one of repression by the armed forces and a tradition of resistance on the part of the people. This idea is transmitted by the presence of images of the 1907 massacre of workers at the Santa Maria de Iquique school, in the middle of other scenes which deal with political struggles in the period of the *Unidad Popular* government. The photos from the beginning of the twentieth century are accompanied by an off-screen interview with one of the survivors, who concluded saying: "We lived until the year of Jorge Alessandri under a regime of terror for the working class. Not long ago, a celestial youth with an extraordinary capacity was prejudiced." The following sequence, the burial of a young man killed by the police in the 1970s, at which President Salvador Allende appeared, corroborates the conviction of this new government to change history.

The use of archive material with different natures, organized as 'proof,' is related to the tradition of documentaries seeking strategies that can pass on to viewers a feeling of authenticity. The voice-over is one of the fundamental elements used to direct this look. However, even in scenes with direct sound, its insertion in the argumentative line delimited by the montage reinforces the point of view of the filmmakers. A good example of this can be found in the first part, which inserts a sequence from French television which proves the thesis that the Chilean rightwing propagated a climate of economic chaos. On the border between Chile and Argentina the interviewer questions a man who

is crossing with his family, with the following dialogue being reproduced in *La Spirale*:

French interviewer: *Are you leaving Chile, sir?*

Man in the car: *No, no. It is just a trip.*

French interviewer: *No relationship with the events?*

Man in the car: *No! Just a trip.*

In this case the image proves the opposite of what the interviewee declared: focusing on the vehicle as it moved away the camera revealed baggage which emphasized the information that the bourgeoisie had left the country.

In addition to audiovisual materials, the filmmakers used documents of other types to 'prove' their point of view. This occurred in close-up scene with newspaper covers and posters. In this case rightwing publications were preferred in the montage. However, instead of corroborating the discourse of the 'enemy,' the manner in which they are inserted into the editing and the presence of the voiceover modifies their original meaning, transforming them into spokespersons for the left.

In dealing with the presidential campaign of Jorge Alessandri, from the *Partido Nacional*, just to cite a case where this strategy is used, *La Spirale* uses headlines from the time, such as 'Czechoslovakia, 1968. Chile 1970?', 'A people in fear,' 'Soviet Spy in Chile: or the movements of a communist agent,' 'This is communism,' (in the latter accompanied by a photo of a wall). Although when they were produced these phrases were intended to alert against the 'red terror' in Chile, now they serve as evidence of how a conspiracy was hatched in the country, as the voice-over states.

It is worth highlighting another type of document used, this time of an audio nature, which acquires plays an important narrative function: the music of Nueva Canción Chilena, *El pueblo unido jamás será vencido*, recorded in Quilapayún, for example, is responsible for transmitting the feeling of euphoria that accompanied the victory of *Unidad Popular* at the ballot box. While *A desalambra*, by Victor Jara, introduces a reflection:

*Yo pregunto a los presentes
Si no se han puesto a pensar
Que esta tierra es de nosotros
Y no del que tenga más.
[I ask those present*

If they have been thinking
That this land is ours
And not those who have more]

These verses accompany photos of peasants, interrupted by a panoramic sequence of countryside mansions. It is these that announce, even before the voice-over, that the next theme will be agrarian reform. *Canción de la Propiedad Social y Privada*, from the band Inti-Ilimani, indicates that the subject being dealt with is the nationalization of wealth, and when this is shown with people in dungarees painting the phrase *El cobre es chileno* (the copper is Chilean) on a wall, it emphasizes that this government initiative had popular support.

Furthermore, the music creates an atmosphere of affective approximation with the images and people portrayed. It touches on emotion and attenuates the rational appeal of the narrative. Even before the first block when the documentary presents the forces at play in the electoral campaign, among them the UP, the image of Victor Jara at a 1964 rally draws on emotion by wrapping the following sequences with *El poder popular*. From the scene of the musician and his guitar, and his shocking murder certainly moves the viewers who relived it in 1975, the year of its launch, the song gains the status of voice-over when it appears in scenes of *El tren de la victoria*, by Joris Ivens, who documented the first attempt by Salvador Allende to run for election.

It is important to remember that, written about the social changes which led to the victory of *Unidad Popular*, these ‘new Chilean songs’ are also documents of the epoch, similar to audio-visual tracks, newspaper articles or photographs. In the examples of their use described here there is once again a significant change in the documentary archive support made with the songs, which were originally thought of as forms of encouraging popular ‘engagement’ due to their potential to be comprehended. Here they come to be a soundtrack. They illustrate for viewers of *La Spirale* an intended atmosphere of euphoria and popular participation. Furthermore, they reinforce the voiceover, inserting comments on behalf of the filmmakers on top of the montage images.

Also present are written documents. These show the viewer that it is not a fictional film, they are elements which lead to a ‘documentarizing reading’, in accordance with the term used by Odin. When introduced in *La Spirale*, close-ups emphasize some keywords, a strategy that aims to prove their origin. This occurs in relation to a publication organized by the Salvador Allende government in 1972 to denounce a conspiracy headed by the multinational

ITT against his victory. It becomes proof from the point of view of the filmmakers with keywords scattered through it and focused on by the camera.

In the sequences which use photographs, film has new changes of meaning. In some cases their insertion in the montage makes them become a type of photogram, as is the case of the series from 11 September 1973, which – perhaps due to the lack of records available of the bombardment of La Moneda – are put into an order interspersed with an absence of color and light on the screen, as in a slide show. This strategy also involves a type of gain in relation to audiovisual excerpts: they remain longer in the visor, as well as the pause after being shown, which favors the freezing of the exhibited images. The historical time shown returns ‘frozen’ for some moments, to be revisited and not forgotten. This involves a use of these documents in the montage which valorizes the exercise of memory about the terror experienced on this fateful day.

In the same example as described in the previous paragraph, the camera also explores the photos in order to highlight details not emphasized in the original documents, such as Allende wearing a helmet, the last record of him alive, shown in a close-up. In this way, these archives with a non-filmic nature become inserts in an audiovisual production, gaining new meanings in this support. With the use of the camera zoom the photography, which freezes a scene, gains another reading: the scenario disappears and the president’s expression in his final register can be fixed in the memory of the spectator. His characterization as a soldier of resistance, fighting for his people and for legality until the end, alters the nature of a simple visual record.

Due to the montage process and its form of articulation of the documents found, Serge Toubiana characterizes *La Spirale* as an attempt to form a dossier of accusation⁵ against those responsible for the overthrow of the UP. However, although he positively highlights the wealth of analysis used in the documentary of archive material, he draws attention to an implication of the method chosen by the filmmakers:

We perceived that there was a problem inherent in political documentaries, at least documentaries made with archive images, images that are not produced at the same time as the film. With *La Spirale*, this problem became something else: between the moment when the images were captured and when the film was put together there was the defeat of September 1973, death. *La Spirale* worked with defeated images, bereaved, which had already lost their meaning, dead twice.⁶

The question raised by this critic about the death of the original meaning of the images (in the case of *La Spirale*, a dual death: that of the remounting and that of the context in which the shots were made) leads to considerations that need to be highlighted in the analysis of an archive film. In the examples listed are present sequences which use documents originally registered in other supports, written publications photographs and sound recordings. In the case of the written records, for example, the close-up becomes necessary for viewers to manage in the audiovisual rhythm used in the documentary to retain some keywords which will be connected to the argumentation led by the voice-over and by its insertion in the montage. Instead of an understanding that takes into account the argumentation of the written text, the latter gain the status of images, by being reduced to headlines or words highlighted at the criteria of the filmmakers.

In addition to the concept of the ‘film-dossier,’ another notion which helps define the documentary can be borrowed from the article “O manual de história idealizado” (The manual of idealized history), by Ursula Langmann, about Marker’s film *Le fond de l’air est rouge*.⁷ Similarly to *La Spirale*, this Markerian production is based on other audiovisual documents, with only a few shots being recorded specifically for the film. This makes it, according to the author, a ‘film-montage,’ which often makes statements about the filmmaker’s ‘way of seeing’ difficult. Langmann is referring to the fact that *Le fond de l’air est rouge* uses such a large amount of archive material that it is not possible to verify preferences for angles, camera movements or the treatment of images, amongst other resources available at the moment of recording.

The same methodological problem is present in *La Spirale*. The filmmakers’ point of view is visible from the montage, which acquires an even greater importance than in other genres of films. It is this which alters original meanings and creates others, even permitting materials which served the discourse of the right to now speak for leftwing activists, the filmmakers themselves. Some examples of this change have already been listed, but it is worth noting the abundant presence of the speech of presidents of associations, generals and other conservative sectors of Chilean society, which instead of representing their authors, testify against them and in favor of the thesis that a boycott of the Allende government was established.

Analyzing the documentary *Sociedade Anonyma Fábrica Votorantim*, ordered by Votorantim in São Paulo in 1922, Ismail Xavier focuses on its use in another production: *Os libertários* (1976) by Lauro Escorel. This exercise published in the article “Progresso, disciplina fabril e descontração operária:

retóricas do documentário brasileiro silencioso” (Progress, factory discipline and worker relaxation: rhetoric of a silent Brazilian documentary), leads him to reflect on the change of the documental status in this type of archive film:

Completing this discussion of the status of images, we can go beyond this opposition between spontaneous document and staging, noting that the documentary made at a determined moment, with its particular criteria and objectives, produces images which are recycled in other historic films which can link the visible material stored on the film with other texts of discourses in order to project new meanings and values on them.⁸

Like Toubiana’s warning, this citation highlights the importance of attentively focusing on the ‘new texts or quotes’ which also introduce ‘new meanings and values’ to the documents selected by the filmmakers. However, it should be emphasized that in attributing these new meanings, the documentary proposes to be a means of construction of a new historical knowledge based on the archives researched. A ‘new site of memory,’ according to Pierre Nora’s definition.

MEMORIES OF *UNIDAD POPULAR*

As a current phenomenon, memory is consolidated as a space in dispute, while history is the representation of the past. Nora states that “la mémoire est un absolu et l’histoire ne connaît que le relative.” (“the memory is an absolute and the history do not know more than the relative”)⁹ Thus, sites of memory experience an ambiguous situation between the rapid desacralization and ‘conducted’ sacralization. This paradox is even more latent in a production such as *La Spirale*, made shortly after the coup d’état, and therefore faced with the task of desacralizing a discourse that was intended to be hegemonic (imposed by the state) and leads to a new reflection. It is worth emphasizing the potential of this cinematographic genre as a bearer of a memory, connected to a historic discourse, produced on the basis of ‘documents.’

In the article “De la memoria suelta a la memoria emblemática: hacia el recordar y el olvidar como proceso histórico (Chile, 1973-1998)” (From loose memory to emblematic memory: towards remembering and forgetting as a historic process [Chile, 1973-1998]),¹⁰ Steve J. Stern makes a type of mapping of the predominant memories of this period, characterizing them as a dynamic relationship between the ‘loose memory’ (or spontaneous memory) and

‘emblematic memory’ (which becomes emblematic and/or reaches influential spaces in society).

Stern identifies four principal emblematic memories about the UP years and the military coup:

- 1) ‘Memory as salvation,’ in other words the vision that military intervention brought a period of economic chaos to end, in which the country had been in a catastrophic situation of pre-civil war. This form of thinking can acquire more complex articulations, such as attributing ‘excesses’ to military repression, or also that which considers a ‘social contract’ as being necessary for the establishment of order.
- 2) ‘Memory as a rupture’ in which the military government is seen as responsible for turning the country into a hell, breaking up families through murders and exile; and is considered to be responsible for a profound trauma in the nation.
- 3) ‘Memory as a proof of ethical and democratic conscience,’ which considers that the dictatorship imposed fear on the population and inserted all ‘good citizens’ in a process of struggle and ethical and democratic commitments.
- 4) ‘Memory as forgetting’ or as a ‘closed box,’ which sees remembering as a dangerous activity for personal, family and collective lives in the country.

In relation to these mapped categories, Stern identifies that they were constructed between 1973 and 1983. He highlights the efforts of the hegemonic political field to protect ‘memory as salvation,’ especially in the period between 1973 and 1976, which following the establishment of the military junta in government. This is important for understanding *La Spirale* as one of the cultural products which sought to prevent the crystallization of this memory, presenting itself as a vehicle of contra-information to the official discourse of the Chilean state.

The conflicts between history and memory, the objective or subjective point of view, the ‘neutral’ approach or the political positioning. These universes dialogue and confront each other when we see the film as an ‘object of culture’ which develops an interpretation of the historical world. This characteristics, also present in audiovisual fiction, are even more accentuated in historic documental productions based on archives, as is the case of *La Spirale*. In this way some studies concerned with the relationship between cinema and history increasingly approximate the positions of filmmaker and historian, since both dedicate themselves to the interpretation of societies at determined periods. This is the case, for example, of Robert A. Rosenstone:

History (as we practice it) is an ideological cultural product of the Western world at a specific moment of its development in which the concept of 'scientific' truth, based on replicable experiences, was transplanted to the social sciences, including history (in which no experience of this type is possible). History actually is nothing more than convention to think about the past. These conventions change over time – from the plots of Herodotus to the scientificism of Von Ranke – and obviously will change in the future. The 'truth' of history does not reside in the verifiability of individual data, but in the global narrative of the past. If there exists one thing which Oliver Stone – as well as Theodoros Angelopoulos, the Taviani brothers and many other directors – do in their films it is infiltrate, use, comment and contest the data and discussion about the United States in recent times which we call the discourses of history.¹¹

In relation to this conception which approximate the filmmaker and the historian, it is worth asking the question which contained in the title of Laurent Véray's article, "L'Histoire peut-elle se faire avec des archives filmiques?" (Can history be made with filmic archives?). Citing Chris Marker, amongst other filmmakers, Véray highlights that in his films, made with an abundant use of archive material, his objective consists of reconstructing a 'hypothetical historical truth' which reflects on its deepest meanings. Rather than a staging of the past, he proposes its interrogation:

The reconstruction of the past is not the only motivation, the only interest. More than historians, filmmakers do not seek to reconstruct the past in its raw state. To the contrary they interrogate the deceptive evidence of the images they use, question their intended objectives, and propose other readings.¹²

Another author who refers to the historiographical concept present in the filmography of Marker is François Niney in the article "L'éloignement des voix répare en quelque sorte la trop grande proximité des plans."¹³ For Niney the return of previously seen images – in other words the use of archive material present in other filmic or television productions – is an invitation to recompose history. It stops being a commemoration to become a recovery. The images of the past compose a cartography formed by memories and forgetting. The role of the filmmaker thus becomes that of recomposing the webs through which the fabric of time is woven. Therefore, history can always be reinvented, gaining new meanings.

This process is present in *La Spirale*, in its intention to retell the history of the *Unidad Popular* government, using for this its images and documents

from a still unprecedented point of view. ‘Film-dossier’ or ‘film-accusation,’ the objective of the filmmakers is to remount time, create a new version of the recent past. Thus, similar to historians, going to archives is fundamental for the new argumentation to have a solid and valid base as a possible knowledge to be proved.

NOTES

¹ Financial support for the research was provided by Fapesp.

² MOURÃO, Maria Dora. Apresentação. In: CHRIS MARKER: bricoleur multimedia. Rio de Janeiro, Brasília, São Paulo: CCBB, 2009. p.11.

³ The thesis that the Chilean bourgeoisie acquired a ‘Leninist’ character by adopting a model of forming a ‘line of the masses’ in their favor was developed by Armand Mattelart in the article “Frente culturales y movilizacion de masas.” In this text the sociologist argues that even before the victory of *Unidade Popular* this class demonstrated flexibility in balancing various social sectors, which allowed it preserve its interests within the limits of formal democracy. Following this line of reasoning Mattelart discusses the presence of societies and employer associations since the nineteenth century in Chile. For him the ‘guild’ power present in the country, which grouped individuals by professions or activities and not according whether they were employers or employees, allowed the right to mobilize this support even among workers. These arguments are also present in *La Spirale*.

⁴ ODIN, Roger. Film documentaire, lecture documentarisante. In: ____.; LYANT, J. C. (Ed.). *Cinémas et réalités*. Saint-Etienne: Université de Saint-Etienne, 1984. p.263-277.

⁵ The idea of dossier is interesting to the extent that it is not limited to gathering document for a conclusive process, but rather a set of ‘proofs’ still lacking an established ‘truth’ or ‘judgment.’ The concept thus includes interrogative moments from the narrative which interrupt the ‘montage of evident,’ reinforcing, although there is a directing of the look, the point that *La Spirale* has an open trajectory.

⁶ TOUBIANA, Serge. Savoir posthume (La Spirale). *Cahiers du cinema*, n.265, p.56-60, Mars-Avr. 1976.

⁷ LANGMANN, Ursula. O manual de história idealizado. In: GRÉLIER, Robert et al. *O bestiário de Chris Marker*. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 1986. p.29-61.

⁸ XAVIER, Ismail. Progresso, disciplina fabril e descontração operária: retóricas do documentário brasileiro silencioso. *ArtCultura*, Uberlândia (MG), v.11, n.18, p.9-24, jan.-jun. 2009. p.22.

⁹ NORA, P. Entre mémoire et histoire. In: _____. (Ed.). *Les lieux de mémoire*. 4.ed. v.1, p.25-43. Paris: Gallimard, 1997[1984].

¹⁰ STERN, Steve J. De la memoria suelta a la memoria emblemática: hacia el recordar y el

olvidar como proceso histórico (Chile, 1973-1998). In: GARCÉS, Mario et al. *Memoria para un nuevo siglo*: Chile, miradas a la segunda mitad del siglo XX. Santiago: LOM, 2000.

¹¹ ROSENSTONE, Robert A. *A história nos filmes; os filmes da história*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2010. p.195.

¹² VÉRAY, Laurent. L'Histoire peut-elle se faire avec des archives filmiques? In: _____. 1895. Available at: <http://1895.revues.org/266?lang=fr>. Accessed on 25 March 2011.

¹³ NINEY, François. L'éloignement des voix répare en quelque sorte la trop grande proximité des plans. In: DUBOIS, Philippe. *Théorème 6: Recherches sur Chris Marker*. Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2002.