

Claudiu TURCUȘ

Deleuze. The Adventure of the Movement-Image

Gilles Deleuze,
Cinema I. The Movement-Image,
translation by Ștefana & Ioan Pop-Curșeu,
afterword by Bogdan Ghiu,
Tact Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2012, 308 p.

The fact that between the 1970s and the 1980s the Romanian culture had substantial translations of literary theory - I am referring to the famous collection of the *Univers* publishing house - can be obviously explained by the literature centered particularity of our public space. Censorship silently approved them, those studies did not seem „dangerous” at all, and that advantage al-

lowed if not for a conceptual synchronization of the Romanian intellectual environment with the Western world, at least for a certain dynamic of debating. Unfortunately, if discussing about the film theory, there is a strong discouraging memory around it. Because, under Communism, the autochthonous thought on cinema was rather discontinuous and the important translations were quite rare. Until 1989, few pieces from André Bazin, Guido Aristarco, Balázs Béla or Serghei Eisenstein have been published in Romanian. Things have not changed significantly even after the 1990s. After more than twenty years, we do not have, for instance, a serious critical film anthology. We have famous film directors, the *New Cinema* has relaunched the creative dimension of the Romanian film, but the reflexive extent has yet to be built.

In this context, the publishing in Romanian of the great 1983 volume of Gilles Deleuze – *Cinema I. L'Image Mouvement* – represents a true cultural event. The book inaugurates a new collection of the Tact publishing house

Claudiu Turcuș

Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca
E-mail: turcus_claudiu@yahoo.com

EKPHRASIS, 2/2012

APOCALYPSE IN CINEMA AND VISUAL ARTS.
NEW IMAGES FOR OLD MYTHS

pp. 207-211

from Cluj-Napoca - intently entitled *Cinema* - demonstrating that a niche but first class editorial project can start a real and quite necessary recovery. Opting for a transitive version of the translation, without losing the substance of the Deleuzian thought and not even his stylistic touch, Ștefana & Ioan Pop Curșeu symbolically „confront” the approach of Bogdan Ghiu - the refined importer of French post-structuralism, devoted not only through his translations, but also in the afterword of this volume, to some autosubminated reflexive framings, true conceptual „deliriums”, both savory and dispersive.

But now speaking to the matter, I would say that Deleuze engages himself to three major things in *Cinema I*. Through the comments on Bergson (centered on *Matter and Memory*) and the numerous references to Peirce, he *claims* an epistemology, while denouncing the dimness of the phenomenology in relation to the cinema; through his considerations on shot, cadre or montage, the French philosopher *describes* the nature of the technical means of managing the image; isolating the avatars of the movement-image - perception, affection, impulse and action - Deleuze *elaborates* an ample semiotic taxonomy.

The great intuition of the end of the 19th century, which Deleuze credits to Bergson, although he does not hesitate to subsequently extend it, is that the „cinema reproduces the image as related to random moments”. Therefore, the breakdown of the idealistic paradigm, according to which images are placed in-

side a consciousness and the movement in space, has allowed for an unconditioned identity between image and movement. „The universe of matter, the immanence - writes Deleuze, adjusting the Bergsonian observation - represents a mechanical merge of the movement-images”. This view of the world as a *meta-cinema* confers the modern science the metaphysics that it conforms with. More than that, Deleuze considers that Bergson makes possible even an unprecedented point of view on cinema, which „is no longer a perfectionated apparatus of the oldest illusion, but on the contrary, a perfectible constituent of the new reality”.

Deleuze’s dialectics implies a studied glide: from the philosophical speculation towards the technical-applicative level and vice versa. Subtle degrees of abstractization traverse the discourse, so if the reason for which the *shot* teaches us that the movement-image is not only visible but implicitly decipherable is relatively easy to assimilate, things get complicated in the framing of the three purely theoretical concepts: the *extra-field*, an absence determined by the shot with which it creates an *ensemble*, and in the end, a *whole* - an „open” that crosses over all ensembles - that is to ensure the communication between them all, preventing their closing. In all this effort of compounding/tearing the movement-image, the only cinematographic consciousness is to pertain to the camera. Its mission is to „extract from different machines the movement, which is their conjoint substance, or to extract mobility from movements,

which is their essence". Photography has been unable to do that, barely recomposing an „immobile mold" of the object, while the cinema has reached the strength to mold to the time of the object, to „evidence its length", as Bazin observes.

Deleuze's praxis only now has the premises to manifest itself. Affirming that there are two types of movement-images release - the *mobility of the camera* and the *montage* - Deleuze focuses on the latter, displaying four fundamental views until the Second World War. On the one hand, there is the dialectical vision of the Russian cinema opposed to the organic, bourgeois and opposite American tendency illustrated by Griffith's montage. The former has been first illustrated by Eisenstein's *pathetic* („the qualitative leap of the organic") and then by Vertov's radicalism („the camera - an eye existent in matter"). On the other hand, the kinetic art of the French School (L'Herbier, Epstein, Renoir, Vigo) aims to the obtaining of an extra movement derived from the inorganic transition „from a mechanic of solids to one of liquids". Instead, as Deleuze considers, the Expressionism, although tenacious against the organic composition, reclaims through its montage a lot more light rather than more movement. The excursus through the films of Wiene, Murnau or Lang notes the fact that Expressionism advises that „there is and there will only be chaos if we do not reach that spiritual universe which it often doubts about itself". The logic of an entire chapter dedicated to the montage derives from such general considerations,

because the montage sets „the cinematographic image in relation to the whole". Its function is not only one of liberating the movement-image, but mostly one of managing a „variable present" related to the time vastness that precedes and follows it.

But what are the avatars of the movement image, its multiple shapes? The first one is the *perception-image*, a kind of inverted human perception. The human being perceives reality subjectively, excluding from the image what is of no interest to them. But the cinema restores, through the mobility/variability of its shots, „ample uncentered and deframed areas", tending towards a complete, objective, but diffuse perception. Being a primary way of distancing from an undetermined center, the perception-image is privileged by Passolini („the reflection in a consciousness of a self-camera"), by the molecular *cinematic-eye* of the French School, by the restoration of the matter intervals about which Vertov has developed an entire theory and by Landow, through the transit from the liquid state of the image to its gaseous form (the finality of the white screen). „The *affection-image* represents the coarse-cadre, and the coarse-cadre is the face" says Deleuze in the beginning of the sixth chapter. Distinguishing itself from the perception-image through its focusing, and from the action-image through the refusal of space, the face eludes itself from its constitutive functions: individualization, socialization and relating. Deleuze insists on the Expressionist face which „concentrates

the intensiveness that grasps its traits and disturbs its shape". From Sternberg who describes not the struggle of darkness with light, but „the adventure of light with the white”, to the nihilism of the Bergmanian face in front of its own nothingness, the affection-image consumes itself between its own vitality (desire, wonder) and its own agonic limit (fear, extinction). A strange intermediate is represented by the *impulse-image*. Neither affection, nor action, this ensemble not only ensures the transition, but it holds its own autonomy, for „the action-image stays incapable in representing it and the affection-image remains unable to make us feel it”. Naturalism represents the great paradigm of the impulse-image: Stroheim, Buñuel, Losey – the inventors of a time whose span does not designate what is done, but what is undone, what degrades itself. And finally, the action-image, the most popular avatar of the movement-image, also represents the ensemble which has generated the crisis of the cinematographic representation during its postbellum beginning. With the uprise and decline of the epic-realistic form SAS' (Situation-Action-New Situation), Deleuze concludes that „what the American cinema and the Soviet one have in common is the faith in a finality of the universal history: here the birth of the American nation and there the victory of the proletariat”. That is why, after Griffith, it seems as if the same movie has been made over and over – *The Birth of a Nation*. If the SAS' schema considers an „integral law”, the ASA' schema (Action-

Situation-Action) claims a „differential law”. It is the first moment when, inside the action-image, the ethic is exchanged with the burlesque, the structural with the occurrence and the spiral with the elipsis. The “small form” - as Deleuze figuratively names it - does not preserve anymore the signs of the American dream. Chaplin's movies, Peckinpah's „westerns” with Chinese and camels, Keaton's aspiration of inserting the burlesque into a „large form” represent an accelerated stage of the decay of the action-image.

The Deleuzian epilogue which both synthesizes the crisis of the classic movie and announces emancipation is worth being entirely mentioned: „The soul of the cinema asks for more and more thinking, even though thinking begins by loosing the system of actions, the one of perceptions and affections, which the cinema has always nurtured from. We no longer believe that a global situation may give birth to an action capable of modifying it. We no longer believe that an action may force a situation to disclose, be it even partially. The «healthiest» illusions can be ruined”. Thus, through the *mental-image camera*, which „takes relations as an object”, involving the viewer in the movie, Hitchcock ensures the premises of the detachment from the movement-image, but he does not generate the shifting. It is only with the search - on the ruins of the cliché images, beyond the movement - of an ensemble which we could name (for now) the *reflection-image*, that the Italian Neorealism will base the modern cinema.

As a conclusion, I would ask two tangent questions: the first one gets an accurate answer from Ioan Pop Curșeu in the foreword of the book, who states that Deleuze is not the slave of his own classifications. I would complete his answer though, saying that Deleuze is the senior of them, as it seems the cinema follows and not anticipates them. Philosophy

does have its benign dosage, sometimes hypocrite and naive, as an artifact. And the second question: could have we spoken of an extra-linguistic history of the cinema starting from *Cinema I*? I have serious doubts on that, because post-logocentric may possibly be the subject that is discussed and by no means the Deleuzian approach.