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Delays and waiting between speculative scripts: a genealogy of unfilmed scripts

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> "For 'potentialism' (...) time can only be the medium by which what was already a possible case, becomes a real case." (Meliassoux, 2011, p.233).

This goal of this presentation is to propose a conceptual approach we believe to be more conducive to the understanding and adequate to the research of unfilmed scripts. To some extent, we will establish a critical dialogue and a revision of the debates on the ontology of the script and even some consequences about the relevance of archived historical material that calls for a more befitting and appropriate theoretical and methodological approach. This presentation is divided into three sections. On the first one, we will go over the concepts of script formulated by authors such as Steven Price and Ian W. MacDonald. Which are the contributions and the specifications of their concepts for approaching cases of unfilmed archives?

Following that question, we will move on to the second topic, which will look at aspects of the Speculative Turn – or Speculative Realism - as a new philosophical area, in order to approach the historical negativity of unfilmed scripts. Even though it is propositional, our conceptual formulation is still at an early stage of the research; therefore, this is the point where it will offer possible concepts for discussion. Along those lines, we will go over concepts such as Walter Benjamin's *waiting*, Heidegger's *delay* and Quentin Meliassoux's formulations of *potentialities* and *virtuality* in order to envisage how unfilmed scripts present a historical latency that ends up distancing them from the structuralist or post-structuralist tradition.

On the third and last section of this presentation, we will go over some case studies of unfilmed scripts by writers/screenwriters such as Bertolt Brecht, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Peter Handke and Wim Wenders. Our aim is to catch a glimpse of a historical, overarching view of the subject – not restricted to individual analyses of their works. We will ask, upon assessing them, whether it

would be possible to envisage an aesthetic history of cinema – parallel and negative, between literature and cinema – prone to be narrated and to captured exclusively through direct contact with archived, unfilmed scripts. A spectral history that will pull us in through the immediate ramifications of this research.

1. Archives and unfilmed scripts

Upon the development of his intriguing notes about the ontology of the script, Steven Price highlights how the understanding of the phenomenon and the singularity of the script has always emphasized precise metaphors. Metaphors stress the transitional character of the script – a structure than longs to be another structure, as pointed out by Pier Paolo Pasolini, in which it flirts with loss, absence, erasure and death. As if metamorphosis was, in this ontological flirtation, a constituent of the singularity of the script. The entire issue researchers may have with those features of the script would actually be about where to focus this emphasis and singularity, seeing as the script would always remain in a state of ebullience. If it transforms, how would one be able to capture it, apprehend it, describe it and narrate its possible contribution for film studies?

Notably more striking and inescapable, the second metaphor is about the Blueprint model, as if the final treatment of the script (the final draft) was a faithful copy of the movie that would be shot. Let's go back to the central question that permeates this debate: how can Screenwriting Studies researchers escape the Blueprint model? How does one understand and approach a script without regarding it as a shadow of the movie, which, in a sense, became fixed, almost eternal, concrete and visible on screen? Very attentive to the filmed script, Steven Price suggests two instigating directions that yield a safe methodological path for screenwriting researchers. The first cunning path aims at understanding the process of filming a script in itself as an adaptation, a new layer of visual and sensuous meanings that migrates from the paper into the screen. One of the examples highlighted by Price in his argument is precisely the case of the script and filming Alfred

Hitchcock's The Birds, in which there was clear a disagreement regarding interpretation and adaptation between screenwriter and director.

Steven Price ends up suggesting the understanding of a *modular script*, in the scope of this thematic baseline, through which the shift and overlap of layers would reveal new features among script modulations. Pertinent and accurate, Steven Price's bet highlights the script as palimpsest aspect, whereupon each treatment and each filming would yield a new layer of aesthetic, artful and sensorial play.

> "Neither the conventional screenplay of today, then, nor the earliest surviving screenwriting texts, can comfortably be described as blueprints; neither do they show the text in a state of flux. Instead, each is a compilation of pre-existing materials that have been combined in a particular order to achieve particular effects (…): the screenplay is a modular text". (Price, 2013 p.236)

Even agreeing with Price's propositions, we realize, on the other hand, that his ontological concept of the modular script and the script as adaptation would not embrace the phenomenon of the unfilmed scripts. In a way, the unfilmed script suggests a philosophical *becoming* – a forthcoming, possible, latent and prenounced adaptation – an imminent transformation that has yet to take place. It would be a negative vector of the script ontology as formulated by Price, located in a very peculiar interval, when the modulation is prenounced by the reading but has yet to be actually realized.

In his recent book *Screenwriting Poetics and the Screen Idea*, Ian Macdonald analyses the last script written by David Lean and his collaborators, which would have adapted the novel *Nostromo* by Joseph Conrad. Lean, however, died just before the set work. I quote Macdonald's final considerations concerning what he calls the 'object problem' of those unfilmed scripts:

> "Scripts drafts are not incomplete at the time they are written, and may even (on occasion) prove more satisfying expressions of the screen idea than the film itself – one more reason why we should not always accept the film as the final, 'correct' version. The imagination still works here, on the script page, before we are tied down to the concrete and the emulation of the real" (MACDONALD, p. 213).

Macdonald highlights the relationships between film as a work of art, in contrast with the moments of the script as readable instants, and the audience experience, which will – not by chance – regard it as the definitive filmic experience. Additionally, I would suggest transferring the 'object problem' to an 'archive problem', which means finding the dramaturgy of film both in paper-based script and directly on the screen. Film shares a similar gesture with theater, where the inscription of the drama happens between scenes and dramaturgical moments. However, in a different sense, film always has a media apparatus that interacts intrinsically with technological tools. Film, as dramaturgy or experience, is a blend of those two different ontological archives and writing traditions.

Macdonald's proposal – focused on the object problem – is, undoubtedly, an improvement. However, we should ask what it could mean to approach and understand the archive as a script, the script as an archive – or the unfilmed script as a proto-archive of a forthcoming film, forever *becoming*. And more: what would be the temporality inaugurated and suggested by this unfilmed archive? What are the implications of embracing the script as an archive?

For this reason I suggest a more spectral and speculative relationship between script and archive. Spectral in that it suggests images without bodies or defined media that are not anxious to happen or to acquire flesh. Like Derrida says, if every archive were inclined to create a future, the script could be understood as a dramatic-visual configuration intended to create cinematic or media events. Thus, the script would be a proto-archive or an archive that constantly restitutes and updates the events of cinematic archives and can potentially generate infinite filmic events.

2. Toward the speculative: waiting, delays and genealogies

Along with out emphasis on unfilmed scripts, we would like to suggest here a broad and complex temporality of those archives. Beyond a synchronic analysis – based on putting a piece of work on the spotlight to cast light upon a filmic idea – we opted for a diachronic emphasis, where

the unfilmed script unfolds over speculations and paths that are erratic, latent, possible, but also imaginary. It is the genealogy – in Nietzsche's and Foucault's sense – who invites us, as a method, to perceive a probable historical force in unfilmed scripts. We actually share a simple and precise question: if we take a set of unfilmed scripts, would we be able to explore and imagine a spectral history of cinema that failed to migrate to the screen? Would it be possible to establish a genealogy of unfilmed scripts?

More than positive, my emphasis here lies in arguing that this is not only a possible path but it would be a necessary step toward understanding the complex dimension of the ontology of the script, or, in parallel, the temporality or the process of *becoming* of unfilmed scripts. After all, what is a genealogy? How does genealogy get consolidated as a historical method? Since Nietzsche and Foucault, genealogy makes an appearance as a historical path that privileges events that happen in parallel with the main historical events, yet are part of the existing narrative. It is, then, an archaeological experience of investigation of events and archives which were relegated, forgotten and historically disregarded. They are, in short, historical events that did not take place within a historical narrative; events that long for becoming, which can only be effected with the interference and added value of the act of research and historical investigation.

This genealogical trail leads us back to unfilmed scripts, as they are part of those archives parallel to the history of film, which, for several reasons, do not take part in the more 'official' historical narrative of this art form. Unfilmed scripts are possible films, latent works, which pulsate with strength and the will of potential, which long to happen but have yet to happen. If unfilmed scripts are safeguarding an ontology, then this ontology necessarily converses with the genealogical adventure that claims the discovery, the readback and the irruption of other historical events, in a historical speech that simultaneously dismantles old concepts and invents new ones.

Even though it is valid, this realization is still not enough. One should inquire about the temporality of the unfilmed script. What are the temporalities begotten by those screenless scripts? Here, there is a singularity that differentiates it, for instance, from other historical archives as

highlighted by Nietzsche and Foucault, since scripts are dramaturgical, aesthetic pieces that invite the reader into a visual and narrative act of imagination. They are historical archives that invent unarchived stories. It is precisely here where we meet the broad, complex and fascinating historical interval of the artifact of the script – and of all technological media. The inventive and ontological face of the unfilmed script generates becomings in between cobwebs, counterpoints and harmonies of possible, simultaneous, parallel becomings. They are multiplicities among possible infinities. They are overlapping temporalities that converse, for instance, with the broad and seductive field of media archaeology, which takes on the adventure of imagining other technological configurations – other media and narrative artifacts – that have not been implemented by the force of the more powerful historical agents. It is within this extensive debate, of a temporality of the unfilmed script, flirting with media archaeology, that we believe it is important to highlight a difference between the concepts of *waiting*, in the ontology of being, presented in Martin Heidegger's most prominent work, and *delay*, in the historical and messianic perspective of Walter Benjamin. I now share a quote by Brazilian professor Maurício Lissovsky, who summarized part of this interesting distinction in a short paper:

> "To Heidegger, delay is the place where an 'authentic' subject is constituted in the here and now toward which past and future converge. The 'wait', on its turn, is also the place where one can safeguard, in the present thickened by expectation, a certain immunity to the future. On 'delay', what is preserved is the subject's presence-at-hand. As for 'waiting', it is a future preserve within a time that insists on passing by evenly – the time of the given instants, of the equivalent instants. In the ebb of time toward the present, in the imminence of the singular instant, time is given back its power of interruption. That which pertains waiting, in an ethics of the instant, is safeguarding the future, and, inside it, the adventitious temporality of happening and difference". (Maurício Lissovski, 2003, p.23).

In some measure, the distinctions between *delay* and *waiting* lead us back to the debate between ontology, historicity and the force of events and becomings that are intrinsic features of the scripts – more specifically, unfilmed scripts. On one hand, *delay* slips into a concept of idea and of authenticity of the aesthetic act. As if there was another signature curve that propitiated the appearance of properly unique entities and subjects. On the other hand, *waiting* proposes an almost

improbable irruption, an opening to a time and to a forthcoming event which, as we will see, also flirts with speculation. We could simplify the debate and choose or emphasize one of the sides, either wait or delay, to refer back to script ontology. However, we realize that the modular, transitory character, as well as the metamorphoses experienced by the script are themselves an index of this type of variation between *delay* and *waiting*. In a way, *delay* is more linked to the moment a script reaches its final draft, where from then on it will seek to be transfigured into another structure. In parallel, *waiting* is closer to a transformation triggered by the contact with a media apparatus – such as film – and from there, technical writing unravels in order to take place in a different technological conception, another sensory ambience.

Perhaps *delay* is in closer conversation with the instant in which the film, in words, is completed – especially if we align with the concept of metaphor of the blueprint script, where the realized movie tends to cast a shadow and become an event that simultaneously reiterates, modifies and erases the tracks of the script in its final draft. *Waiting*, on its turn, translates the temporality that is more adequate to the unfilmed script, which does not flirt with the stalking of that shadow and therefore opens up passages, pathways and bends; it bends, in fact, to the invitation of creative and visual speculation.

Back to the epigraph in this presentation, which we can summarize thus: [if] *time were the medium of materialization and real events*. What does that suggest? Which are the forces, vectors and consequences of understanding the temporality of the script as a medium for its materialization on film? As we have said before, it refers back to the work of French philosopher Quentin Meliassoux, on his work *Aprés la Finitude*, which suggests a broad opening toward the so-called Speculative Turn. We do not aim here to make a presentation of this vast and eminent discussion topic, but simply point out how both speculation – in the philosophical environment – and media archaeology – offer us an extremely fertile route toward rounding up the temporality, the ontology and a possible methodological field of unfilmed scripts.

In the wake of Meliassoux's reflections, it is worth recovering and developing his distinction between the potentialities, the virtualities and the actualizations, which identifies the core issue with speculation as resting upon the the provisional aspect of scientific laws and philosophy's need to deal with probabilistic aberrations. Through each of those biases – of chance, of potentialities and of virtualities – there is a notable preoccupation with restoring a very specific metaphysics that must refute any totalising, fixed aspect that is blind to inevitable transformation and mutation processes.

> "Potentialities are the non-actualized cases of an indexed set of possibilities under the condition of a given law (whether aleatory or not). Chance is every actualization of a potentiality for which there is no univocal instance of determination on the basis of the initial given conditions. (…). and virtuality the property of every set of cases of emerging within a becoming which is not dominated by any pre-constituted totality of possibles". (Meliassoux: *Potentiality and Virtuality*).

More than claiming for a wait, would unfilmed scripts really befit an undefined and pendular oscillation between potentialities and virtualities? Would the drafted films be, if taken as a whole, possible, virtual and speculative narratives that failed to transform – as of yet – into the most applicable form of archive in the history of cinema? Would those unfilmed films and those screenless scripts be an invitation for imaginations of imagined stories? Multiple stories, which deny the totality of predetermined possibles. In any case, the intervals insufflated by unfilmed scripts are long breathers that invite us into a generic and spectral flirtation, a speculative viewpoint under which the very act of un-archiving and narrating an unfilmed script also constitutes a new layer, a new modulation, a writing gesture on a palimpsest of parallel narratives in and to film. With the Speculative turn, we navigate through a becoming that transcends nothing.

3. The unfilmed scripts of Fitzgerald, Brecht, Wim Wenders and Peter Handke

As I tackled my recently-finished doctoral research, I came across several unfilmed scripts, which led me to some of those more theoretical reflections I have just presented. The framework of my research was the more direct collaboration between screenwriter Peter Handke and filmmaker

Wim Wenders, and, while scrambling through the original texts yielded by that partnership in German archives, I came across the scripts for Slow Homecoming, by Wenders, which was the topic of my presentation at the last SRN in Potsdam, and for Kali, from 1992, by Peter Handke. Both scripts remain unpublished and unfilmed.

The contact with those unfilmed scripts aroused my curiosity, and, in segue with that genealogical verve, I became more aware and started to collect each and every datum and index of writers with scripts that were not funded and did not become movies. My genealogical bias, then, focused on highlighting writers transitioning from literary writing into a properly imagistic writing. Would there be, in that bias, a negative history of film, which did happen yet failed to be consolidated? Wouldn't those incomplete strokes from writers-screenwriters from the 20th Century an invitation for an imaginary history of film that never actually reached the screens?

Publications compiling unfilmed scripts with the aim of suggesting a history of film yet to be made concrete on screens are very rare. During my research, the most interesting and wide-ranging case of that kind of bias was the French publication Anthology of invisible cinema: 100 scripts for 100 years of cinema. Released in 1995, in the context of the 100th anniversary of cinema, the book is the product of an almost archaeological research by Christian Janicot, edited by Jean-Michel Place. The really introduce a hundred projects, ideas and scripts by famous authors, intellectuals and artists such as Georges Battaile, Italo Calvino, William Burroughs, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Viktor Chklovski, Blaise Cendrars, Paul Claudel, Salvador Dali, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Robert Desnos, Max Frisch, Federico García Lorca, André Gide, Allain Ginsberg, Graham Greene, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Artaud, Georges Pérec, Stefan Zweig, Magritte, Sainte-Exupéry, Mayakovski, E.E. Cummings, among dozens of other key figures of the 20th Century.

It is obvious that there is, in that anthology, a very diverse plethora of film projects, of scripts and visual or cinematographic dramaturgies. It is difficult, in that pluralist perspective, to trace the lines of a parallel cinematic-dramaturgical history that is potent but has yet to happen. However, a first, more generic aspect is the fact that this broad material engenders a rich dialogue

between cinema, literature and the arts which avoids the debate about adaptation or the convergent of themes from other artforms that happen onscreen, in the film. Being than possible movies, more than hidden archives, those scripts show us how writers and artists that marked the 20th Century imagined and flirted with film, driven by a creative impulse that brought them closer to their art and their original craft. They found on film a shelter for the reinvention of their aesthetic gestures upon direct interaction with the cinematographic language. They are writers who write texts that will no longer be restricted to books or the stage. They are writings for a forthcoming screen.

Animated by those stirrings, I came across, for instance, the more than thirty scripts penned by Bertolt Brecht, which were never filmed and are actually little known and publicized even among the German audience. The peculiar thing is that Brecht did not obtain success and recognition with the transposition of his plots and aesthetics into the screen. Beyond his valid interpretation in the *Dreigroschenprozeß* (The threepenny opera), Brecht failed to weave a consistent dialogue between design, the *Autorenfilm* aura or the UFA film industries standards. In an industrial scope, he revealed himself to be more of a theater person, and that paradox translates his subjective character, since perhaps Brecht was after all one of those authors anxious to write in a cinematographic way. His dramaturgical work for film and his scripts can be divided into three phases. The first one reflects silent movie scripts which, heavily influenced by Charles Chaplin's narrative simplicity, privilege extremely descriptive images, gestures, movements and dramatic threads as well as ways of narrating with a delicate balance between image and plot. The author of scripts such as *Drei Turm* (The three towers), *Der Brillantenfresser* (The Diamands eater) and *Das Mysterium der Jamaika-Bar* (Misteries in the Jamaika Bar) is contemporary to the Brecht who wrote *Baal* and *In the Jungle of Cities*, where there is anarchic experimentation of an expressionistic verve that sounds as daring as much as puerile.

Larger in quantity, the second batch of Brecht's scripts revolves around the singular experience of the Threepenny Opera and it is very interesting to acknowledge how some themes and reflections of those experiences echo a few years prior as much as on later productions from

around the time the Threepenny Opera was filmed. The marriage and money themes, for instance, cut through scripts such as *Marie kommt*, *Die Mutter aller Seeleute der Welt*, *Geld ist teuer*, o *Die Beule*, which relates to the *Threepenny Opera*, and *Santa Lucia oder der Gelegenheitskauf*, which would be an unfolding of the collective experience of *Kuhle Wampe*, a collective film which Brecht took part. There is, of course, much difference between those scripts and projects, but, in general, it is noticeable how Brecht took great pains to transpose his dramaturgical ideas into cinematographic territories, as if he were unable to reach a comfortable haven in that back-and-forth, but able to catch a glimpse of provisional migrations.

The third ranking lineage for Brecht scripts revolves around his migration to the United States and his participation in Hollywood. That is his experience with exile, his attempt to approach Broadway and Hollywood and even his persecution by McCarthyism and his return to East Germany by the end of the fifties. Some of these scripts were even written directly in English, such as *All our yesterdays*, *The godess of victory* and *Silent Witness*.

Parallel to Brecht's experience, we can add the winding passage of USA writer F. Scott Fitzgerald through Hollywood and his attempt to write a script like Infidelity, which unveils several aesthetic, historical and narrative aspects that, one way or another, did not make it through to the screen. Fitzgerald's trajectory is relatively more familiar and analyzed than Brecht's in the field of Screenwriting Studies. However, I find it remarkable just how both writers, despite their truly different aesthetic styles, shared the same historical moment in Hollywood: the thirties. In his novel The Last Tycoon, Fitzgerald paints a legendary portrait of Irwing Thalberg, incarnated on Monroe's role, who hires writers for his studio in Hollywood but controls them as he sees fit for his business. Between Brecht and Fitzgerald, for instance, and their unfilmed scripts, we may disentangle tense and negative aspects of dialogues not entirely actualized from literature into cinema, by means of the interactions of writers – word buffs – with the studios. On one hand, the failure of the writer who wants to be a screenwriter is noticeable. On the other hand, there is persistence and obstinacy in inaugurating a unique way of writing for the screen.

This panorama of dialogues between film and literature by means of a more direct writing through the script only becomes truly positive, however, starting at the end of the fifties. That is the background, in my research, for the introduction of the "carte blanche" that was given to European writers in post-war times, who ended up easily building those bridges between literature, screenwriting and the direction of their own films. Characters such as Peter Weiss, Samuel Beckett, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Marguerite Duras and Georges Pérec ended up weaving cinematographic works – as screenwriters and directors – as consistent and durable as their literary texts. As if their were and represented the other side of the expression "camera-stylo" which marked the politics-heavy era of French authors and spread out all over the world from there.

Finally, Peter Handke's trajectory shares the symptom of the era. Handke writes his first script at the age of twenty-five, when he was very young, a writer in training, and ends up directing the movie *Chronicke der laufenden Ereignisse* himself. Perhaps he represented golden times in the move from being a European writer in the aftermath of the war and the funding system of European public television networks that made the effecting of this scenario possible. However, from the nineties on, the conversation changes drastically. How can a writer contribute and create as a screenwriter in a context where screenwriting manuals, pitchings and the presence of script doctors end up taking the lead? How is this transit between literature, script and film rearranged? The answer to those questions is truly complex and invites us to delve into other adventures and research.

In this presentation, what we would actually like to stress is that even faced with this always negative, market-oriented approach, writers go on writing scripts, under the shadow of history, at the fringes of funding. Not only because writing is urgent and necessary – and for those who give their all to writing, words end up meaning more than life itself. Not only because this writing opens up imaginary rifts, possible and virtual film stories that are to come, or even that will fail and never come to be. Risk and frustration, as we know, are constant forces and mottos, inherent to any aesthetic adventure. In summary, what those unfilmed scripts present us with are persistent gestures

of resistance before dominant industrial practices and aesthetics. Concentrated in their ironclad lines, there lives the veritable force of an aesthetics of resistance that – among waits, delays, potentialities and virtualities – we still can blaze through with the curious of the researcher and a singular, enthusiastic pleasure.

Thank You!