

The Memory of Horror in the Filmic Body and the Writing of the Event

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Abstract— In this article, we seek to demonstrate how horror movies can be part of writing a political and historical event. Our reflection takes up the question that appears in Barthes in a text called *The Writing of the Event*, which contains an analysis of May 1968 in France. We looked at two horror movies that contain memories of October 2005 and reflected on "who are we and what we do today?". Our goal is to contribute to the diagnosis of the present.

Keywords— memory, body, horror movie; discourse.

I. INTRODUCTION

Michel Foucault's endeavors have changed, by modifying, our relationship with knowledge and truth to the extent that his theoretical-active intervention has introduced a change in power relations and knowledge in contemporary culture, from his Western matrix spread by medicine, by psychiatry, by criminal systems and sexuality. We would say that not only Foucault's work, but also his own unsettling and pyrotechnics (*artificier*) figure of political activist subverted the whole order of modern thinking produced in the West.

The lectures he taught at the renowned *Collège de France* are proof of the pyrotechnic dimensional breadth of his unsettling and subversive work. His obsession with the present led him to deal with the event through his genealogy. For Foucault, "the event - the wound, the victory-defeat, the death It is always an effect, entirely produced by bodies that clash, mingle, or separate; but this effect is never of the order of the bodies [...]" (FOUCAULT, 2000: 246).

We would say that bodies are under the order of the event; they are material effects of the event. In this way, "when they collide, when they mix, when they suffer, they cause on their surface events, which are without density, mixture or passion, which, therefore, cannot be cause anymore [...]" (FOUCAULT, 2000: 246).

However, Foucault was not the only one of his generation to worry about the event. Paul Veyne, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Roland Barthes are some of their contemporaries who have also tried to reflect on the issues related to the event. The writing of Barthes's event, published in 1968, leads us to reflect, "How can an event

be written?" (BARTHES, 1972: 161). We return to this question to analyze two horror films: *Frontière (s)* and *À l'interieur*. The first directed and produced by Xavier Gens and the second by Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury. The reason for this choice is that these two productions, both released in 2007, have the October 2005 event as the background of their plots.

The thesis is that these two productions are part of the Barthesian polygraphic writing of the event whose fuse is the death of 17-year-old teenage girls ZyedBenna and 15-year-old BounaTraoré, who were electrocuted in a station at *Electricité de France* (EDF) when they escaped control of the local police. This fact is linked to the French biopolitics insofar as it enters the entry of illegal foreigners to the country. The demonstrations that began around Paris spread throughout France in a violent but also symbolic manner and, above all, by the speech of the protesters and the authorities, much like the event described and analyzed by Barthes in 1968.

II. THE CRISIS IN THE SENSE OF THE BODIES AND THE BIOPOLITICS

In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, a Lecture he taught at Collège de France from 1978 to 1979, Foucault treated this term / theme as "the way it has sought, since the 18th century, to rationalize the problems posed by governmental practice by the phenomena inherent in a set of living populations: health, hygiene, birth, longevity, race" (FOUCAULT, 2008: 432). One of the questions initially reflected in this course was "how can the 'population' phenomenon, with its effects and its specific problems, be taken into account", in a system concerned

with respect for the subjects of law and freedom of initiative? Of individuals?

For Foucault, liberalism “must be analyzed, then, as the principle and method of rationalization of the exercise of government - rationalization that obeys, and therein its specificity, the internal rule of the maximum economy” (FOUCAULT, 1997: 90). But “of course this is not an ‘interpretation’ of liberalism with exhausting pretensions, but a possible plan of analysis - that of governmental reason” (FOUCAULT, 1997: 94); under which biopolitics is structure to order the bodies, placing them under government and state control in discursive practices and by devices that configure biopolitics, in Foucaultian terms.

The biopolitics of which Foucault speaks is also an event in itself. On the one hand, because it is formed by a set of discursive events; on the other, because, we would say, with Foucault, “it is produced as an effect of and in a material dispersion” (FOUCAULT, 1996: 57-58).

It is within liberalism that we will see the passage from what Foucault called disciplinary societies to the stage of control societies. It is precisely from that point that we can talk about the docilization of bodies and, on the other hand, about the disorder and its crises, especially those of meaning that are in the order of biopolitics. In these terms, “it is known the increasing place these problems have occupied since the nineteenth century, and the political and economic issues they have constituted to this day” (FOUCAULT, 1997: 89). Foucault's first example of the birth of biopolitics is one whose debate “took place in England in the mid-nineteenth century about public health legislation” (FOUCAULT, 1997: 89), but devoted himself to two other contemporary examples: “German liberalism of the years 1948-62 and American liberalism of the Chicago school” (FOUCAULT, 1997: 94-95).

In the German case, “this excess was the war regime, the Nazis, but beyond that, a kind of directed and planned economy, originating from the 1914-18 period and the general mobilization of resources and men; it was also ‘state socialism’ ”(FOUCAULT, 1997: 95). Already in the American, “he also developed in relation to this ‘excess’, which was, according to him, represented, since Simons, by the politics of the New Deal, the planning of war and the great economic and social programs, sustained[...] during the postwar period by the democratic administrations” (FOUCAULT, 1997: 96).

This new phase of liberalism became known as neoliberalism. Foucault noted that the American case differs from the German case because while Germany considered that market price regulation “is in itself so fragile that it must be sustained, organized ‘ordered’ by a

vigilant internal policy of social interventions (implying aid to unemployed, health coverage, a housing policy, etc.)”(FOUCAULT, 1997:96); American neoliberalism sought to extend the rationality of the market, the analysis schemes it proposes, and the decision criteria it suggests to non-exclusively or non-priority economic domains (cf. FOUCAULT, 1997: 96), such as family and birth or delinquency and criminal policy.

The French opted for the German model, “from what we might call a strongly nationalized government, a strong leadership, a strong administrative one, with all the problems it entails” (FOUCAULT, 2008: 266). In this historical context, the strike of the miners broke out in 1963, revealing to the world the inhumane working conditions of the French mines. In 1966 and 1967, they will also be marked with several strikes. The crisis sparked the following year, with the occupation of the University of Nanterre and Sorbonne by students because of the ban on girls sharing girls' housing in Nanterre, so a general strike paralyzed the country for three months with membership of the working class. Some philosophers and historians consider this the greatest popular event in Western Europe since the Paris Commune in 1871.

Entering the order of the May 1968 event, via Barthes, we can observe three levels or ways in which this event was written, “whose polygraphic conjunction may form its historical originality” (BARTHES, 1972: 161). To Barthes, “not only did the crisis have its language, it was also language (somewhat in the sense that André Glucksmann can speak of war): it is speech that has, in any case, plotted history” (BARTHES, 1972: 163).

These three ways are *speech*, *symbol* and *violence*. In Foucaultian terms, these levels or ways would be the ways in which the event took place, that is, its materiality occurred at these levels of material dispersion. The speech of the May 68 event (*la parole*), the first level described by the semiotist, concerns, above all, those emitted by radio channels which, at that time, “within the terms of Western culture, where nothing can be apprehended without sense, radio speech was the event itself ”(BARTHES, 1972: 162). But Barthes also highlighted the talk of power relations between the different groups and parties and the student talk.

Regarding the symbolic level, Barthes noted that they “were produced and consumed with great energy; and above all, surprising fact, they were maintained by a general, participant complacency” (BARTHES, 1972: 165). The symbols of this crisis formed a symbolic field that articulated itself with the same symbolic discourse that “seems to have finally marked members and opponents of the contestation: almost all planned the same symbolic game” (BARTHES, 1972: 166). For the

semiotologist, “a symbolic field is not just a gathering of (or an antagonism) of symbols; it is also formed by a homogeneous rule game” (BARTHES, 1972: 166).

In this description of the May 68 event, Barthes was able to inventory a symbolic field formed by the three-flag paradigm (red / black / tricolor); by the barricade that “allowed to irritate and unmask other symbols; property, for example, with the French from then on, living more in cars than in houses”; and by the “monument (the Bourse, the Odeon), manifestation, dress, occupation, and, of course, language, in its most codified (ie, symbolic, ritual) aspects” (BARTHES, 1972: 165). The Violence, the third level of the writing of this event, symbolized concretely and then verbally 'in the streets', the place of unleashed speech, free contact, anti-institutional, anti-intellectual and anti-intellectual space, immediate opposition to the possible ruses of all the mediations.

Hence, “this writing of violence (eminently collective writing) does not lack even a code; Whatever way one decides to analyze it, tactical or psychoanalytic, violence implies a language of violence ”(BARTHES, 1972, p. 167). In this case, "the presence (or the postulation) of the code does not intellectualize the event (contrary to what anti-intellectualist mythology continually announces): the intelligible is not the intellectual" (BARTHES, 1972: 167).

We note that in Barthes's analytical description the three levels or ways of May 68 worked reciprocally, guided by two postulates of even more controversial scope. The first of these postulates concerns the strict separation of the concepts of speech and writing, “according to Derrida's proposition” (BARTHES, 1972: 167).

Already "the second postulate consists in not having in view the describing scriptural as a" deciphering "" (BARTHES, 1972: 168). This statement made by Barthes has to do with what he stated earlier about the intelligible not being the intellectual, that is, “it is necessary, little by little, to replace the interpretation with a new discourse, which would have as its end not the discovery of a structure unique and 'true', but the foundation of a game of multiple structures: the written establishment itself”(BARTHES, 1972: 168).

Barthes's prediction in *The Writing of the Event* about a new theory that could account for the emergence of his own object of study by investigating the unknown rules of the event finds its place in Foucault's archeogenealogy, this theoretical space in which we dealt with various materialities of which we cite the paintings (*Las Meninas*, *La Musique aux Tuileries*, *Argenteuil*,

L'Exécution de Maximilien etc.), the Panopticon and films such as *Hitler: un film d'Allemagne*.

The statement is one of the tools used by Foucault in his archaeogenealogical endeavors. It has a dimension ranging from micro to macrocosm; that is, the statement has its limits and its independence; “It is rather a function that is exercised vertically in relation to the various units, and which allows us to say, regarding a series of signs, whether they are present or not” (FOUCAULT, 1987: 98). This notion of utterance brings Foucault closer to Barthes. “Indeed, it is curious how Barthes and Foucault will insist more and more on widespread pragmatics” (DELEUZE, 1992: 112). At this point, we believe that Barthes's work can be articulated with Foucault's because of this pragmatics Deleuze speaks of Hence May 68 can be seen as a set of discursive events that constitute his own polyform writing.

III. THE BODY OF HORROR UNDER THE ORDER OF MEMORY

The uniqueness and historical originality of May 68 marked the beginning of a new world order whose slogan is “*Il est interdit d'interdire*” (forbidden to forbid). This event, which began with student protest against conservatism that prevented young people of the opposite sex from staying in the same university housing, eventually became a space of criticism against US liberalism and imperialism, especially with regard to war from Vietnam.

The effects of this crisis are still felt today, as the bodies of now are fragments of this revolution; that is, the bodies of today are effects of the yearnings of the bodies of that historical moment in which May 68 took place. This event in France has subverted the order of world politics as relations between men and women, teacher and students, government and citizens have changed. We would say that the memory of this event, which reorganized the senses of liberal biopolitics in France, regulates them in the now, in the present tense. To demonstrate this, we will use, as an example, the 2005 Suburb Crisis, an event against measures that sought once again to limit the mobility and coexistence of foreigners in the national space, which broke out with the death of the two teenagers mentioned above.

Moirand's (2010) study of the discourse clashes in French newspapers that reported the 2005 Suburbs crisis and the 2006 Universities crisis showed, among other things, how the memory of May 68 was paradoxically evoked by these newspapers, given that it “is part of the collective memory of the French, in the sense given to it by Maurice Halbwachs, memory sociologist” (MOIRAND, 2010: 38). This memory, in a

way, use to guide the construction of the representation of this event, having May 68 as a regulatory paradigm of the senses and effects of bodies.

As with the use of the memory of May 68 by the French newspapers, directors of two French horror film productions have also used this same strategy to translate the fear and horror of the threat of far-right growth in presidential elections in Paris. 2002; ie *Frontière (s)* and *À l'intérieur* are proof that horror films can be part of the writing and memory of the event as they used images of the events linked to the deeds of the attempt to restrict individual rights of citizens. In addition to the images we find in these films, we can see this in the statement made by Xavier Gens.

He says the idea for the movie came in 2002, at the time of the election, when the far right moved to the second round. It was at this moment that he became aware of the extreme gravity of the situation, making him feel a deep fear. Hence, I wanted to try to translate this anxiety through a scenario. Being a big fan of genre movies (like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*), he told himself that the best vehicle for translating this story would be a metaphor for anxiety through the escape of a bunch of young people, all representative of today's youth. Nevertheless, as they try to escape this new policy, they fall into the trap of an even more dubious ideology (GENS, 2007).

So Gens drew on his memory as a viewer of the American film, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, to translate his fear that also affected much of the French and foreigners living in France. He also drew on the 2005 Riot images to express his fear of the arrival of far-right candidates in the 2002 presidential elections. These images and the use of other references form a kind of filmic device that acts as a political apparatus in horror film productions. Thus, the moving images of *Frontière (s)* and *À l'intérieur* to deal with this memory put into play by the film structure, whose bodies are effects of both the filmic event and the event to which it refers.

In a way, the horror film productions that use this device are also forms that rewrite the event, which, for us, is a kind of work that never concludes because it has in its order the commentary, principle responsible for the transmission of multiplicity, of chance, that is, "of what I would risk saying to number, form, circumstance of repetition" (FOUCAULT, 1996: 26). In this case, we would say, with Foucault, that "the new is not in what is said, but in the event of its return" (FOUCAULT, 1996: 26).

In Foucaultian terms, this type of apparatus contributes to the diagnosis of the present, to the extent that it can be used as a type of discourse whose materiality occurs through horror films. In this light, we

can consider films such as *Frontière (s)* and *À l'intérieur* as artifacts that allow us to diagnose our present, always reflecting: who are we today? Why do we need to reflect on the present through such a question? Perhaps this is a way of preventing the diseases of power from taking shape and eventually destroying the humanity within us.

IV. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout this article, we have discussed another form of event writing that we find useful in diagnosing the present. Who would think that horror movies can be used to reflect on "who we are and what we do today?" and how can they be part of writing an event? In our approach, we treat the films *Frontière (s)* and *À l'intérieur* as part of the writing of the Suburban Crisis, as they bring in their filmic structure a critique of the conservative politics adopted at that time and a critique of the growth of the French far right in the political scenario of the country. However, undoubtedly the great contribution of this work was to bring the Foucauldian gestures closer to those developed by Barthes. We return to Barthes's question "How can an event be written?" seeking to update Barthes's discussion in 1968 by including Foucault's Archeogenealogy in our gesture as we reflect on the 2005 Suburb Crisis. The use of images of political events in horror film productions such as *Frontière (s)* and *À l'intérieur* demonstrates, on the one hand, the resumption of a filmic aesthetic of horror committed to the political contestations and social reflections that marked North American productions. Americans in the 1970s; and, on the other, the political engagement that belongs to French filmmakers. In this perspective, these two horror films are part of the writing of the struggle that began in May 1968.

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