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“And I need you now tonight, and I need you more than ever”: Romanticisms of artifice in Brazilian contemporary cinema

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Abstract

In this paper we propose the notion of "romanticism of artifice" to designate fabulation modes which are noticeable in contemporary Brazilian queer films that are marked, in its narrative and aesthetics, by traits such as the use of the cliché, intertextuality, mannerism, visual exaggeration and the appropriation of popular and hegemonic audiovisual repertoires. We work with the short films *Os últimos românticos do mundo* (Henrique Arruda, 2020) and *Looping* (Maick Hannder, 2019), with the aim of situating the romanticism of artifice, partly legible and partly unnamable, as a kind of blur in the consensual order of the ideal of romantic love, producing a hiatus for the political which is built as an action of micro-resistance capable to indicate a space beyond the violence against queer bodies.

Keywords

Aesthetics; Artifice; Brazilian contemporary cinema; Queer cinema

Introduction

What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more. Susan Sontag

Although we mentioned the term “romanticisms of artifice” in a previous article¹ to designate some contemporary Brazilian cinematographic productions, we believe it is reasonable not to make it an aesthetic and political category that already emerges filled with meaning. On the contrary, we will continue to use this term in this article precisely to produce and identify its epistemic practicability as a conceptual opening of what we can understand by political cinema and cinema politics.

In Brazil, as in other Latin American countries, “our understanding of political cinema was reduced, for some time, to the idea of fictional cinema capable of arousing feelings of anger and indignation, or even of non-fiction cinema capable of criticizing pedagogically a number of social injustices” (Marconi, 2020, p. 144). Part of this political tradition is due to the legacy of modern cinema and, more particularly, to the legacy of *Cinema Novo* and its aesthetics of hunger. *Cinema Novo*, as a cinematographic movement, was imbued with “political activism that brought to discussion macropolitical topics such as Brazilian identity, the conflicts of Brazil as a nation, the struggle for grassroots reforms, the consciousness of the oppressed and their forms of resistance and rebellion” (Marconi, 2020, p. 145).

Considering that Brazil is still a country structured by gender, race, and class, contemporary Brazilian cinema, particularly works related to the struggle and survival projects of politically minority groups, still communicates with this legacy of representation and upholds its ties with the social aspect. This is reflected, for instance, in a certain difficulty in distinguishing political cinema from militant cinema (is all political cinema militant? Does political cinema need to be militant?²) and results in issues related to the possibilities of film circulation to aesthetic issues, as pointed out by Amaranta Cesar (2017).

What seems to constitute a (false) issue and, at the same time, a reiterated prescription of what a political film is according to certain Brazilian tradition is that films have value insofar as they are political, but not too militant. If they are too militant, they become devoid of aesthetic value. On the other hand, the very idea of what aesthetic value is also seems to be guided by a commonplace belief, based on certain standards. Let it be political, but not militant. Let it also be provided with aesthetic value, but not in excess, so as not to compromise the possibilities of the film as a tool of engagement. We will address this subject again later.

However, we have also experienced a set of contemporary productions that do not reduce the politics of a film to the politics of representation. Part of this filmography that moves away from the realistic tradition lies in what Denilson Lopes (2012, 2016a and 2016b) refers to as “a return to artifice in contemporary Brazilian cinema”, more particularly in recent queer films. In this case, please note beforehand that we are not dealing with a cinematographic genre. Although its field of presentation may be the romantic narrative, we believe that the romanticism of artifice concerns an aesthetic attitude associated with a wide set of artifice repertoires. One should bear in mind that artifice is a “conceptual, social and historical, aesthetic and articulating category of different cultural products” (Lopes, 2016a, p. 3). In addition, it is a mediator between these different cultural products and material life, and should not be thought of as “simple opposition to reality, but rather as a dissolver of the duality between the real and the unreal” (Lopes, 2016a, p. 3).

¹ Trabalhar imagens, reparar o visível: a política da imagem como prática reparadora (ALMEIDA; MARCONI, 2021).

² Understood herein as “social intervention cinema”, as defined by René Vautier and recalled by Nicole Brenez: “work of performative immediacy, which has as its aim the success of a struggle and the concrete transformation of a situation of declared conflict or structural injustice.” (Brenez, 2017, p. 71)

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The aesthetics of artifice has a vast semantic field, as Lopes (2016a) has already summarized: media simulation, disguises in the performing arts, the challenges of the performativity of the contemporary subject, baroque theatricality, Mannerism, Rococo, Préciosité, Neo-Baroque, decadent aestheticism, *art nouveau*, dandyism, pop musicality, and camp. Accordingly, we aim to identify, in this wide repertoire of artifice aesthetics, a romantic attitude that moves away from the pursuit of the revelation of the real, from the codes of Hollywood naturalist romantic films, or even from the images of the real that prevailed in Brazilian cinema in the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s.

Therefore, this work will seek to investigate an aesthetic choice that insists on *appearing* as artifice, as construction, deceit, frivolous cunning, fabulation³, and inauthentic mannerism. To that end, we will work with the two films that led us to this point: *Os últimos românticos do mundo* (Henrique Arruda, 2020) and *Looping* (Maick Hannder, 2019), particularly because both short films appropriate an extensive set of romantic sensibilities from the audiovisual culture of the 1980s and 1990s, more specifically the iconographic clichés of Hollywood romantic films.

The work with Brazilian films engaged in this aesthetic dialogue with artifice, exaggeration, cliché, and affectation, and also based on procedures of critical and creative appropriation of hegemonic audiovisual repertoires, particularly arising from contexts of symbolic production in the Global North, with the Hollywood cinema, points to the possibility of envisioning the political dimension of these audiovisual aspects insofar as they reveal blurs in the consensual order⁴ of the ideal of romantic love and can be thought of, based on this definition, as an action of micro-resistance capable of indicating a place beyond violence against queer bodies.

Hollywood romantic cinema and pop culture are historically related to globalization and a certain idea of cosmopolitanism; however, the two films covered in this article seem to start from a love for these images to elaborate a critical inflection to themselves, and not to merely refer to them. We believe in the validity of the films as admittedly inauthentic appropriations of a cultural repertoire imported specifically from the United States and critically based on narratives of queer experiences created by young Brazilian gay filmmakers.

"I need to change the world although I prefer this orgasm with you, my love"⁵

For now, we will try to reflect on how artificial romanticism, as an aesthetic attitude produced within individual and collective experiences, can be analyzed given the dimension of some minority experiences, in this case, the experiences of gay men. As we had previously proposed (Almeida, Marconi, 2021), we believe that a cry like "*I fucking got married!*" (said by one of the protagonists of the film *Os últimos românticos do mundo*), in addition to all the other overplayed romantic clichés present in the short film, is not an ode to heterosexual marriage as a social and legal institution that strengthens a model of gendered and sexualized citizenship. We believe in a less conservative and less paranoid response: it is an aesthetic attitude that makes fun of the codes of the romantic ideal and monogamous heterosexual

³ Inspired by Rancière, we work with the idea of fabulation as "non-consensual fictional work", as defined by Ângela Marques (2020): "According to Rancière (2019), the way in which fiction works in the production of figurations, resistances and questions, implies a manner of composing images (intertwined with discourses, texts and words) that disturbs the way in which representations usually tend to present, at the same time, conflicts and their pacified solutions." When we consider fabulation in its relationship with the dissent, we are interested in the possible blurs to be produced, by subjects without a part, in ways of distributing time, space and enunciation regimes seeking to circumscribe them in certain imposed identities.

⁴ According to Jacques Rancière and his formulation on the politics of images (2012).

⁵ Reference to a dialogue from the film *Doce Amianto*, by Guto Parente and Uirá dos Reis (2013), which will be mentioned later in the article.

marriage, at the same time that it is pleased with the possibility that this gesture has of provisionally “de-heterosexualizing” or “de-heteronormativizing” the gendered and sexualized sensitive aspect.

In other words, *Os últimos românticos do mundo* makes a fearless leap towards an aesthetic imagery commonly associated with heteronormativity and the heterosexual romantic ideal. However, this leap has an appropriative nature, as the short film does not only take possession of a set of film-related sensibilities that became fertile in the heart of romantic love idealized and disseminated in Western culture from the 19th century onwards. The short film also appropriates these sensibilities by recognizing that they gradually contributed to the very dissemination of the ideal of romantic love in the second half of the 20th century. However, while romantic films with heterosexual cisgender characters are usually based on realistic aesthetics and believable narrative, as if such devices were a testament to the purity, truth, and naturalness of romantic love, *Os últimos românticos do mundo* appropriates this chimera from an inauthentic gesture: pop, superficial, exaggerated, frivolous, artificial, filled with romantic clichés and old-fashioned gayness.

This romantic artificiality can be found in a wider number of recent Brazilian films. In *Looping* (Maick Hannder, 2019), for instance, the protagonist narrates, in a confessional style, his dates with the boy who made his “heart stop”. The teenage boy says:

I think I’m obsessed. I can’t get him out of my head. The more I try to stop, the more I fall in love [...] I close my eyes and make a wish: I want to do everything with him, I want to travel with him, I want to dance with him, I want to attend every concert and eat all the food in the whole world with him. And I want to have sex with him. A lot. (Looping, 2019)

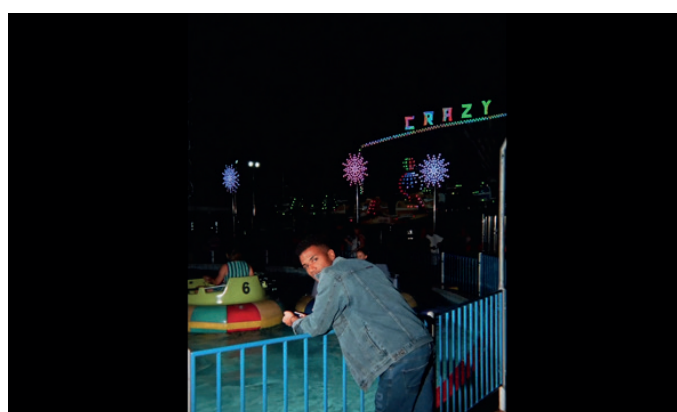
Overwhelmed by his first love, the protagonist – who never shows his face – tells us about his anxieties while he seeks to document their dates in a set of analog photographs. In the words of Vitor Medeiros (2020), *Looping*

Uses a very particular visual device: it is (almost) entirely made up of analog photographs in a vertical window, produced by the stereoscopic system of a Nishika N9000 camera. In the montage, the result is a looping effect that calls back to the title of the film. It is as if each “shot” was composed of four photographs of the same moment which alternate and repeat, appearing and disappearing in the space-time with subtle angular changes, 1-2-3-4-3-2-1-2-3-4-3-2... until a new moment emerges with four additional photos, and so on. In the age of Instagram, this effect refers directly to the boomerang feature, or perhaps to a gif, except that produced with a “real” analog camera, with four lenses and a powerful flash. (Medeiros, 2020)

Like *Os últimos românticos do mundo*, *Looping* also takes advantage of a set of sensibilities from the visual and audiovisual culture of the 1980s and 1990s, as if we were watching a whole universe of iconographic clichés from films about young Americans from that time, as exemplified by the presence of “denim jackets, deserted roads, cheap motels, gas stations, amusement parks, Coca-Cola and cotton candy” (Medeiros, 2020), as shown in figures 1 and 2. Although we never see the protagonist’s face, the short film continues to show us the photos he apparently took of the boy he fell in love with. This boy, the subject of the narrator’s affection, is handsome and charming with his black skin illuminated by the powerful flash of analog photographs. As time goes by, the connection between these analog photographs and the sugar-coated narration will lead our spectatorship towards a gay erotic tale in a motel.

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Screenshots 1 and 2: Looping's core visuals



Source: film screenshots

The film *Inferninho* (2018), directed by Guto Parente and Pedro Diógenes, could also be addressed. In this feature film, Deusimar, a gender-nonconforming character and owner of the *Inferninho* bar (a dream and fantasy camp haven) wants to leave everything behind. Meanwhile, Jarbas, the sailor who has just arrived in town, dreams of settling down and getting serious with Deusimar. In the also fanciful, affected, and melancholy-ridden world of *Doce Amianto* (Guto Parente and Uirá dos Reis, 2013), Amianto has an excessively idealized love relationship along the lines of fairy tales (she even has a fairy godmother named Blanche). The protagonist suffers too much when she is abandoned by her great love, a character that is only referred to as "The Boy". However, despite all the politically engaged demands, Amianto reveals her most frivolous desire during a sexual act: "I need to change the world although I prefer this orgasm with you, my love".

Looping of transgressive romantic clichés

In *O clichê como artifício nas artes e na cultura midiática contemporânea* (2015), Fábio Ramalho does not give in to the discourses of trivialization and loss of power of images in a context of overproduction and overexposure of visual elements. On the contrary, for the author, those images that survive from repetition and surface effects may still engender different modes of intervention in the sensitive and, as a result, shuffle categories in a cliché-image that always reappears in conventional texture,

[...] but crossed by multiple detours; recognizable but distorted; superficially legible, but devoid of any stable meanings. A vague sensation of déjà vu, never fully assimilated, since the very expectation of understanding presupposes the existence of a meaning

that could or could not be captured, but which, in this example, spins around itself and dissolves. (Ramalho, 2015, p. 87)

In this direction, the *cliché* would no longer be a simple trivial image known even before being seen, that is, overplayed with predictability and dullness, but rather a gesture of artifice based “[...] on the mobility between recognition and the frustration of established modes of sensible apprehension and devices of intelligibility.” (Ramalho, 2015, p. 88). In place of certainties about what is already known, “a question of what is illegible in what is seemingly obvious.” (Ramalho, 2015, p. 88). Lastly, and in addition to a fruitful suspicion against the pretensions of aesthetic disruption that are thought to be so important and revolutionary, Ramalho (2015) concludes his theoretical account by arguing that the cliché, as an artificial attitude, allows for a more reasonable critique in which the cliché itself always stems from “hesitant pleasure”.

We believe that it is precisely this hesitant pleasure that can be found in *Looping's* 12-minute projection. When watching the short film, we have the *impression* that we have already watched it countless times, as the almost empty streets, neon signs, and gas stations can remind us of any generic *road movie*. The amusement park, cotton candy, and denim jackets, on the other hand, are also elements in an iconographic universe of romantic films about young Americans from the 1980s. In addition, while the photography emulates an analog or retro texture, the protagonist's naively passionate narration leads us to a set of catchphrases that are commonly used in soap operas and mainstream romantic films. Some of them, like “he looks at me with a smile that makes my heart stop; he's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen”, encapsulates the vague notion that we've already heard these words in different mouths, uttered by an unstable and imprecise number of characters.

However, it would be reckless to argue that this set of visual and sound sensibilities would only lead the viewer to a deadening in the face of the impression of “*déjà-vu*”. There is also the possibility that spectatorship recognizes in this set of *clichés* an appreciation for an artificial romanticism that reveals “inventive appropriations, displacements and reversals of *déjà-vu*” (Ramalho, 2015, p.79). In fact, the short film embraces a trivial iconography of Hollywood romantic films, particularly with regard to the protagonist's narration and the set of photographs that crystallize, in an analog texture, romantic film frames that vaguely populate some collective imaginaries.

Even so, these images only seem to call back to the hegemonic aesthetics and narratives of the cinema romance, after all, in its constant loops, or its coming and going in a vertical shot, the short film moves further and further away from a desire for depth, authenticity or revelation of the real. It's as if the director knows that terms like “depth”, “authenticity”, “realism” and “naturalism” are just another fold of the surface. Based on the foregoing, Hander appropriates an existing cliché-image and takes it to the limit of its exposure. As a result, what we consider to be already known and which, perhaps for this reason, did not call back to any affection, actually comes across as a sweetened hesitation, after all, it's all there: the cliché words, the lasciviously in love protagonist, the iconic force of the romantic movie aesthetics, the anecdotes of first love, the desire to stop time and experience the feeling of love forever.

However, there is still some illegible freshness that does not seem obvious or already known to us. Not only because the film radicalizes cliché-romanticism, but also because it takes this course by featuring characters that are not usually so present in romantic films of a naturalistic style. In this case, if we at least partially agree that cinema, as well as the arts and media in general, is also a device or “genre technology” (Lauretis, 1994), it is necessary to infer without so many misgivings that romantic cinema with verisimilitude is – with a few exceptions – synonymous with the romance between a white heterosexual cisgender couple.

There are still very few cliché romanticisms that give Western audiovisual culture a force or iconic repetition of black homosexual characters as romantic couples. Although it has become notable in Brazil,

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particularly from the second decade of the current century, the coexistence of film works dedicated to reproducing the formula of traditional romantic films only inserting characters of dissident sex/gender, usually concerned with a "positive representation" of these subjects (Marconi, 2020), *Looping* does not pursue this aesthetic device.

Like *Os últimos românticos do mundo*, the short film does not claim a romanticism related to the revelation of the real because it knows that this idealized love does not need a new acknowledgment of its "pure naturalness". Even so, the film also does not rely on engaged critique, as it is not interested in portraying how romantic love was – or still is – a model of relationship that the European and North American middle classes incorporated, from the 20th century onwards to morally distinguish itself from the "promiscuous upper class" and the "salvage lower class" (Katz, 1996). Nor is it interested in relying on a "radical aesthetic" as opposed to exacerbated romanticism to counteract the dissemination of a romantic utopia that not only "prescribed and organized a model of relationship, but also contributed to building the image of homosexuality as deviant and abnormal" (Almeida, Marconi, 2021).

As Vitor Medeiros (2020) also noticed, any sociological criticism in that regard would imply something "dull" that disrupts the "fragile artificial surface" intended by the film. This does not mean that black and gay boys cannot experience the illusion of romantic love in the course of their lives or even oppose it. However, if there is a hesitant pleasure with *Looping's* pastiche, perhaps it is because Hander knows that "romantic love only survives as an aesthetic resource and experience" (Marconi, 2020) and that, for this very reason, the artificialities of the romantic cliché may still be creative and reparative.

In other words, it is possible to understand that these clichés affected by and starring queer subjects, in this case, young black gay men, do not exactly produce a codified and legible expression of authentic romantic images, because when their expressive devices excessively appropriate the iconographic force of romanticism, Hander's film also disrupts the imagery flow of these same iconographies. It calls back, in the terms of Rancière (2012), to the dissent and the disruption of uniform romantic landscapes. At this point, one should bear in mind that politics, for Rancière, is precisely a gesture that introduces an excess of subjects, objects, and enunciations into the overplayed order of *law enforcement* - a regime that assumes the facet of the iconic and uniform order of naturalist romanticisms. *Looping's* literalness and romantic excess exceed, disrupt and overflow the consensus through which the aesthetics of cinematic romanticism was organized, as well as engages the audience in a pleasant and ambivalent manner, stimulating a thoughtfulness that holds within itself the momentary possibility of looking at these sensitive devices in another way.

In this case, it would be too conservative to believe that romanticism of artifice, as a reparative aesthetic attitude, is not tied to "the survival projects" of queer subjects, just as it is neither more nor less deluded and ghostly than a critical and paranoid reinterpretation of the ideal of romantic love. However, its distinction lies in its indeterminacy, which invites the audience to reflect on "the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them". (Sedgwick, 2020, p. 420).

Thus, *Looping* can be positively understood as a creative reaction to the feeling of disorientation of queer subjects not only in the face of a common and fractionated sensitive (Rancière, 2018) – or even gendered, racialized, and sexualized –, but also to the sensitive aspect of the images that for a long time offered unequal representation pillars. In this vein, and just before lasciviously transforming itself into an erotic gay tale, *Looping* is never just a ghostly emulation of what was "already seen" or "already encoded". It is also a queer strength (oblique, hybrid, strange, fabled, and more or less legible) that ontogenically and creatively juxtaposes the movements of cultural history that elaborate coded signs, discourses, images, and affections of romantic love.

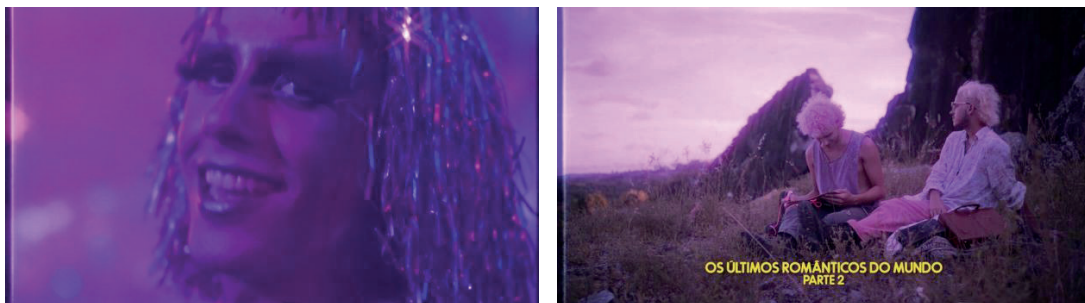
Decorative appearance of an ornate romanticism

Inspired by Susan Sontag's (2020) provocations in *Against Interpretation*, this article proposes a reading that contributes, perhaps, with a "vocabulary – a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, vocabulary – for forms" (Sontag, 2020, p. 27). We approach the author's suggestion to understand what a work of art does, not what it says. In our case, this attempt arises, first of all, from the aesthetic experiences that *Os últimos românticos do mundo* and *Looping* provoked in the audience and from how, based on this affectation, an effort was made to "objectify the feeling", as Sianne Ngai suggests (2011).

In *Os últimos românticos do mundo*, one may note the use of *clichés* and a more open appeal to easily recognizable repertoires - not only in terms of the feeling of familiarity but of explicit intertextuality, as evidenced by mentions of television screening of films divided into blocks identified with the yellow lettering typical of *Sessão da Tarde*, a traditional Brazilian movie session on TV; pop music videos; the use of overtly cheesy songs from the popular northeastern repertoire and even songs considered tacky, such as *Total Eclipse of the Heart*, the '80s hit performed by Bonnie Tyler. The artifice and exaggeration also lie, in this work, beyond the plot, in the film texture itself, and in the materiality of the image and sound, always a few notes above the pitch of what would conventionally be both a romantic or apocalypse film and a realistic film, regardless of its narrative genre, or even a gay film with more evident political ambitions (after all, dressing up as drag queen in front of the mirror, as featured in the short film, is also a *cliché* in itself).

The opening of the short film depicts in succession shots of an old-fashioned boombox, a young man looking to the side and another young man in drag, in a close-up of his face while dancing. All these shots are filled with colors and textures that will be present throughout the film: pink and purple with visual noises that emulate VHS and television (figures 3 and 4).

Screenshots 3 and 4: colors, textures, glow, and television lettering in *Os últimos românticos do mundo*



Source: film screenshots

These early seconds anticipate what we will see throughout the 22 minutes of *Os últimos românticos do mundo*: this brief scene introduces the two protagonists, the initial dramatic situation of the narrative (the impending end of the world), a gay love affair and the suggestion of chronological confusion, going back and forth in time, which is present both in the later appearance of a couple of older gay men who we assume to be the protagonists in the future and in the very fact that the narrative is set in 2050. In those same early seconds, a narration is heard, although the narrator is not identified in-universe. Two different voices alternate saying:

- I'm recording this because it might be the last thing I'm going to say [voice 1]
- In a few hours the world will be entirely destroyed by a pink cloud and tonight I will run away with my love [voice 2]
- The man to whom I dedicate this story [voice 1]
- The boy with pink hair and colorful soul who follows me to the end of the world [voice 2]

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- In the future... I will fondly remember our days together. It's as if we were going to live forever [voice 1]
- It's as if we would never grow old [voice 2]
(Os últimos..., 2020)

We realize later in the film that what we identified in the transcription above as voice 1 is of one of the characters (Miguel) when he was old, and voice 2, is his young self. Subsequently, the film's opening credits roll, followed by a sequence taking place in a nightclub where dissident gender-sexual bodies, both old and young, celebrate the (last) possible party in the face of the imminent end of the world. The atmosphere is that of a low-class nightclub. The second protagonist while young, Pedro, is the star of the night with his performance as the drag queen Magexy. She lip-syncs to the song *Ânsia*, a classic hit of the Pernambuco *brega* made famous by singer Eliza Mell⁶. The structure of this early sequence already evidences the work of fabulation in the film, based on exaggeration, anti-naturalism, and what we defend in this article as romanticism of artifice.

Please note that anti-naturalism does not only concern the short film script and its pink imagery, but also the construction of the *mise-en-scène* and the direction of the cast. From this early scene, one may easily identify the affectation present in their voices, with characters who speak pronouncedly, almost like a caricature. Not by chance, either, the song lip-synced by Magexy in the nightclub denounces a tacky romanticism, with verses like *The man I found made me happy / He opened all the doors of love / He made me feel whole as a woman / And took away all my doubts of love*.

The strongly stylized imagery and the playful appeal which lies in how the *cliché* is placed and on the intertextual appeal are close to what Rosalind Galt conceptualizes as the "pretty": the adornment and the decorative that, in the history of film theories and also from its hegemonic practices, it was considered pejoratively as what makes the image false, "the image as cosmetic, deceptive and feminine" (Galt, 2015, p. 50).

In her work *Pretty: Film Theory, Aesthetics, and the History of the Troublesome Image*, Galt critically recalls a significant part of film theories to illustrate how, over time, a paranoid perspective was constituted around the film image as a phenomenon of a necessarily seductive nature and in relation to which we must be vigilant, so as not to be captured by it. The author summarizes part of this thought that is still quite influential in the context of film studies:

We must be distanced (not seduced) by the image, keeping our distance and distancing ourselves. The image in its imageness is the problem, a seductive surface that cannot be trusted unless it can be made to speak against itself. (Galt, 2015, p. 54)

It so happens that, as Fábio Ramalho argues in his works on the relations between queer spectatorship, repertoires, and affections, from the moment in which the subjectivities of subjects are increasingly built on the mediations of mass media, we are forced to negotiate with repertoires that, for political reasons, we might prefer to refuse or simply ignore.

This is not about, however, a suggestion of peaceful coexistence with audiovisual cultures that over time have reified hierarchies and dehumanizing frameworks of minority groups⁷, but rather the recognition of a certain place that these hegemonic repertoires occupy in our processes of production of subjectivities, of the fact that we need to negotiate with them and the possibility of inventing stories from these repertoires with gestures such as appropriation and mockery, like *Os últimos românticos do mundo* does. It is also a matter of speculating on the possible political meaning of excessively colorful and

⁶ The song was subsequently covered a number of times; the most recent rendition was recorded by Pablo Vittar on their album *Batidão Tropical* (2021).

⁷ According to Ramalho (2020): "Hegemonic cultural devices bring into play the conflicts between the desire to belong and the impossibility of belonging, thus making evident the serious issues of representation faced by these subjects [gay men, in this specific case] in their relationships with the audiovisual universe".

adorned images, since:

In the first, color is made out to be the property of some “foreign” body — usually the feminine, the oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer or the pathological. In the second, color is relegated to the realm of the superficial, the supplementary, the inessential or the cosmetic. In one, color is regarded as alien and therefore dangerous; in the other, it is perceived merely as a secondary quality of experience, and thus unworthy of serious consideration. Color is dangerous or it is trivial, or it is both. (Batchelor apud Galt, 2015, p. 55-56)

From the imminence of catastrophe comes the visual exaggeration of *Os últimos românticos do mundo*. After all, if the world weren't about to end up being hit by a toxic pink cloud, the landscape wouldn't be pink and, therefore, the images wouldn't be either. But the affectation also affects several other elements, including objects such as a sequined unicorn hanging from the rearview mirror of the red convertible car, Pedro's pink hair or the shiny embroidered costumes, as well as the exaggeratedly romantic outbursts, which introduce also an element of utopia: the proposal on the eve of the end of the world is followed by an invitation to set up a new pink civilization on Mars. The radio announcer, who breaks the news about the pink toxic cloud, makes an appeal: “lovers, wherever you are, keep spreading messages of love to the next inhabitants of the planet. Love yourselves!” (*Os últimos...*, 2020).

Who helps us to reflect on artificial romanticism far from a hermeneutic of paranoid suspicion (Sedgwick, 2020) is Rancière (2012), for whom politics stems from a disturbance, confusion, and disorder of the places and names imposed on subjects. In the wake of this proposition, one may infer that romanticism of artifice, partly legible and partly unnamable, constitutes a kind of blue in the consensual order of the ideal of romantic love, producing a hiatus for the political. Why? Because this excessive romanticism on its surface, with its protagonists of rarefied coherence, performs from its own expressive means a recombination of signs that plays with “the ambiguity of similarities and the instability of dissimilarities” (Rancière, 2012, p. 34) of romantic clichés; in this free game, the short film also operates “a local reorganization, a singular rearrangement of circulating images” (Rancière, 2012, p. 34) of common romanticism.

According to Halberstam (2020, p. 25), “being taken seriously means missing out on the chance to be frivolous, promiscuous and irreverent”, and detour is possible from the desire to escape a certain idea of seriousness possible. In the case of *Os últimos românticos do mundo*, romanticism of artifice is the detour that opens up to a glimpse of a future and sets up a utopia, at first contradictory, but later understandable. To accept such a contradiction is to give up, as explained elsewhere (Almeida, Marconi, 2021), a paranoid posture that obstructs the aesthetic experience and its spark of questions-sensations: how to refrain from judging so hastily the images that reach us when it is critical that we are attentive to what makes our embodied lives precarious? How can we allow these images to also be cracks in our own perspective of politics? “Attention, one must have steady eyes; one must be attentive and strong”, sings Gal Costa with an agitated, mellifluous voice. However, how can we, as the audience, or even as activists living in a Brazil that seems hopeless, be sensitive to the political meaning of the clichéd and adorned images of *Looping* and *Os últimos românticos do mundo*?

Answering these questions involves the need to leave in the background, at least temporarily, the exclusive concern of most critics with matters of representation, meaning, and ideology (disquiet par excellence of sociological theories that consider cinema a social and ideological language and praxis). In this vein, answering these questions requires, as proposed by Steven Shaviro (2015), that we foreground affective responses to cinema. Especially, in this case, that we put in the foreground the affective responses of gay and black boys who not only lived with audiovisual devices that, in fact, contributed so that homosexuality and blackness were experienced as cultural traumas, but who also were able to affectively, creatively and ontogenically recreate the aesthetics and narrative of these mainstream devices

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that offered little or no pillar of representation.

As such, the romanticism of artifice identified in *Looping* and *Os últimos românticos do mundo* seeks to restore the materiality of the film work and make it an object instead of a mirror, helping us to understand that 1) art has its own politics, as Jacques Rancière (2012) has already argued; and 2), that the perspective of representation⁸ (that is, the re-presentation, something that is not reality and that returns in the form of an image), when supported by certain militant devices (epistemic horizon that would understand the image as a device of representation of the world and things and which holds it accountable for its effects on lived realities), need to be relativized if we want to understand the political nature of these artificial, clichéd and adorned landscapes.

Final remarks

This article results from an attempt to incorporate, through aesthetics, reparative practices (Sedgwick, 2020) in our theoretical work and in approaching cinema and life itself. That is, envisioning lines of flight guided by an attempt to displace the place of constant surveillance in which we normally place ourselves when we assume the role of "analysts" of products of culture, thus allowing a meeting with the films *Os últimos românticos do mundo* and *Looping* which is of a different nature, which takes into account the aesthetic experience resulting from contact with the short films and which involves some principle of pleasure, or at least a pleasure possible in the midst of the exceptional social and historical moment in which these works approached us because that was the invitation proposed by the films.

From this stance, one may infer a set of situated and provisional characteristics through which we can recognize what romanticisms of artifice are. The term situated is used because such characteristics emerged from the analysis of only two specific films, that is, to the extent that other film subjects are placed in the course of study, other romantic devices of artifice may be addressed; they are also provisional because, depending on the direction these reflections take, other inflection points may contribute to this theoretical and affective onslaught.

Having said that, at present we risk arguing that romanticism of artifice, as an aesthetic and political category, works from the familiarity and intertextuality with traditional romantic images, appropriating the cliché and the decorative as a surface for the fabulation of the already codified, consensual and uniform. By playing with the similarity and dissimilarity, the legible and the illegible of hegemonic romantic narratives, romanticism of artifice need not necessarily be greeted with paranoid reading. It can also be seen as a creative work that privileges a counter-translation. This counter-translation, in the words of Rancière (2010), exceeds the consensual and binary way in which we tend to apprehend these sliding and ambivalent repertoires since the excesses of decorative *clichés* also produce a rearrangement of the pieces, visualities, and appearances that constitute the already given commonplace sensitive.

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⁸ This is a reference to the studies by Francesco Casetti (2005). Particularly when the author discusses three axes in which the debate on representation is placed: the philosophical axis; the militant axis; and the aesthetic axis. In the case of the aesthetic axis, especially when the subject turns to politics, it tends to be left aside by most critics and scholars.

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