

Teresa LIMA

The Amazed Spectator: An Essay Film Focused on the Viewers

Abstract: This article intends to identify characteristic traits of the essay film in *The Amazed Spectator / O Espectador Espantado* (2016), by the Portuguese filmmaker Edgar Pêra. Throughout the analysis, I reflect on how the use of different types of resources—technical (3D), compositional (color and space) and social (the communities involved)—combine to create a sensory object, one which not only aims to question the relationship between the viewers and the films but is also helpful in understanding the director's *praxis*. More than providing answers, *The Amazed Spectator* poses questions, prompting a constant dialogue, be it between the film's interviewees, be it among the actors who represent the different kinds of film audiences or the viewers, who watch Pêra's film. Positioning myself as a viewer of the said film, I try to reproduce sensations, add further layers of doubt to the questions posed and erect a new discourse on the *The Amazed Spectator*. Amongst enigmas and contradictions, one can state that *The Amazed Spectator* is an essay film about cinema (more specifically about the opposition between window cinema and screen cinema) but might also be about life. That is to say, the way that the viewers—amongst the fear and the awe—go about assuming either a more passive or a more interventional stance towards the world.

Keywords: *The Amazed Spectator*, essay film, spectatorship, Edgar Pêra, 3D.

Introduction

The aim of this article is to add a new frame of interpretation to *The Amazed Spectator / O Espectador Espantado* (2016), by Portuguese filmmaker Edgar Pêra, by positioning it within the backdrop of essay film studies. I will try to identify in this film attributes of the essay genre and the reasons why they are important to define and understand the art of Pêra.

Teresa LIMA

Universidade do Minho, Portugal
lima.teresa0@gmail.com

EKPHRISIS, 2/2021

THE ESSAY FILM
AS SELF-REPRESENTATIONAL MODE
pp. 128–141

DOI: 10.24193/ekphrasis.26.9
Published First Online: December 15, 2021

My point of view is inspired on the aesthetical philosophy of John Dewey, regarding the dialogue that links a film director to the several types of viewers, both parties communicating through the artistic object. I will also assume here the position of another viewer interacting with the object at hand. Upon starting this analysis, I want to clarify my position as researcher-viewer in order to defend a relational insight. This means that, as a researcher, I am not positioned at a “safe” distance from the work but immersed in it, in a dialogical perspective. In other words, like Bakhtin (quoted by Bandlamudi) I will follow an interactional (non-mechanical and non-formalist) perspective.

This article is also a construction of a new discourse, based on the aesthetic feelings elicited by the film upon me (“I” viewer), and, at the same time, the analysis of the meanings suggested by Pêra himself. As quoted by Kress and Leeuwen:

[...] there is a kind of symmetry between the way the image-producer relates to represented participants, and the way the viewer must, willy-nilly, also relate to them. The point of view is imposed not only on the represented participants, but also on the viewer, and the viewers ‘subjectivity’ is therefore subjective in the original sense of the word, the sense of ‘being subjected to something or someone (131).

On their struggle to act through the environment, a conversation is promoted, and a new symbolic order is revealed. Quoting Dewey: “[...] the means of expression are not subjective nor objective, but an experience that integrates both sides of a new object” (324, my translation). I would like to claim a final word about my approach to the film, using compositional interpretation (Rose) as a methodological tool. Although I do not dispute (on the contrary, I reinforce) the auteur theory, I have started to watch *The Amazed Spectator* by looking at what the image presents, ignoring all references and context, exercising the “good eye” mentioned by Rose (51). This form of analysis focuses more on what the image is, rather than on what it represents or what it does. Although this is a perspective that eschews contexts and is directed more towards the experience of visualization (which necessarily generates limitations to the analysis), I consider it a good starting point for the filmic analysis, at least as a first approach to the work. With this exercise completed, I have moved on to another level of comprehension, searching for the context, as well as the technical and semiotic aspects taken together.

The Amazed Spectator is a film that reflects on the relationship between amazement and cinema by focusing on film viewers. The film is, no doubt, a technical, theoretical, and compositional foray into what cinema is, since one can identify the modalities of the visual image (Rose). Following the methodology advanced by Pêra, I point out, in *The Amazed Spectator*, the technological mode (how the images are produced and exhibited, in this case, using 3D), the compositional mode (the use of imagistic formal strategies, such spatial organization or the use of color, considering that this is a film shot in a film theater, mostly in

black and white) and the social mode (the social, familial, academic, artistic or group relations that are present in the film). It seems as if, most of all, these elements were gathered to produce an artistic sensorial object which poses aesthetical and philosophical questions. For example, the academic Eduardo Lourenço says that in *The Amazed Spectator* there are questions to which no answer exists, a fact that does not deter us from seeking them incessantly. Thus, the essay film (and this one in particular) does not have to provide a definite answer to a doubt that assails us. At a certain point the choir of actors states: “It’s more like a path” (00:31:27). “That’s a very good description,” asserts Laura Rascaroli (1:31). On this journey through *The Amazed Spectator* one may feel that he or she is witnessing a surreal chain of disconnected images in randomly repeated fragments, diving into a metaphysical reflection and its enigmas, or is simply taking part in a debate on cinema and its essence.

The film begins by exploring the concept of “amazement” as a starting point to a more extended reflection, through two sets of materials: the speech of the interviewees, and what is conveyed through images. The primary form of amazement—the irrational fear of the unknown, which opens the film—is a protective instinct that enables human beings to survive. While it manifests on the body, it is spurred at the most visceral level, as described by António Damásio: “That which comes to be represented as an image is not purely neural nor purely corporeal” (Damásio *Sentir & Saber* 112, my translation). And he goes on: “And, to further complicate things, at any given time an additional emotional reaction, such as fear or joy, can impose new alterations in certain viscera—the central bodily actors of the emotional process—therefore creating a new set of visceral states and a new set of brain-body associations” (Damásio *Sentir & Saber* 113, my translation).



Figure 1. Fear of the unknown
The Amazed Spectator, Edgar Pêra, Bando à Parte, 2016 (00:22:51)

Although it can be perceived as a film in its own right, *The Amazed Spectator* is part of a larger project by Edgar Pêra which focuses on the understanding of cinema, authorship, and the relationship with the viewers. Among others, the filmmaker had previously directed *CineSapiens* (2013), *Lisbon Revisited* (2014), *The Cavern / A Caverna* (2015), and *Delirium in Las Vedras / Delírio em Las Vedras* (2016). Pêra also lectured at conferences and engaged in film-concerts. Thus, *The Amazed Spectator* emerges as a synthesis of the queries or experiments carried out in previous films, even though Edgar Pêra does not regard it as a thesis-film—that is, one which holds the answers to the posed questions. In this film, the director intentionally incites triggers and paradoxes, leaving the enigmas to be solved by the viewers. As he explains: “It’s a film that points to many paths, it disperses towards the outside” (Pêra “Interview with Teresa Lima,” my translation).

Window Cinema or Screen Cinema?

The Amazed Spectator is a conscious essay film made to create a visual and sonic experience, mirroring the kaleidoscopic exuberance of brain activity at the unconscious and oneiric levels. The whole film is set in a film theater, with the actors in the role of intradiegetic viewers. The scenes intersect and juxtapose with interviews conducted with academics (e.g., Eduardo Lourenço, Laura Rascaroli, Laura Mulvey, among others) and film critics (such as Olaf Möller, Augusto M. Seabra). There is an ongoing dialogue between what is stated by these people and the images and sounds that are usually projected on a screen placed behind them. For instance, Augusto M. Seabra’s preference while watching a film is to never know what the next shot will be—and immediately after this statement, we see an actor in the bathroom, sharing the space with a peeing dog. Concurrently there are apparent anachronisms, like the shot in which a smartphone projecting *The Amazed Spectator* is placed on a nativity scene, between the Holy Family, the cow, and the donkey. Beyond the disruption caused by these fragments, in her book *How the Essay Film Thinks*, Laura Rascaroli emphasizes the need of paying attention to the gaps between shots as a revealing feature. From this exposition, one could conclude that “by juxtaposing the logic of the visual and the verbal in this way, the essay film starts functioning as a proper tool of thinking, of grasping and insight, of generating new knowledge and understanding” as pointed out by Julia Vassilieva and Deane Williams (17).

The imitation of cerebral activity in a film allows us to adhere to several of the film’s techniques—such as quick edited scenes. Pêra reflects on Walter Murch’s blink theory (2021) as a technical resource that is useful to align the movement of film frames with the level of attention of the viewers. In this context, the duration of a sequence will have to be simultaneous to blinking, increasing the audience’s ability to stay attentive and absorbed by what is projected. Pêra clarifies this relation between the natural disruption undertaken by the

mind and the editing of his films, arguing that “often my ideal of a film would be one which would not take up the whole of my time but would allow me to go to other places and then come back, sometimes to think about tax forms” (Pêra “Conversa O Espectador Espantado,” my translation). Not only does the editing recreate that intent, but the profusion of images (by means of superposition) helps to trigger that mental activity as well. In one instance of the film, an interviewee appears to be on a secondary level, as a mere background voice, because the viewers’ attention is fixed on the moving hands holding a smartphone, from which the interviewee is speaking. We could link these strategic techniques to Surrealism, Dadaism, or the vanguards from the beginning of the 20th century, from whose screen Sergei Eisenstein’s theory of montage stands out. Pêra does not disavow any influences, but he aims to distance himself from them: “I often say that I trust my intuition more than my intelligence. I always seek to pick up, not revere ideas or influences” (Pêra “Interview with Teresa Lima,” my translation).

Pêra’s films seem to pursue an immersion that works in the opposite sense of what is customary: it is not the viewers that [emotionally] enter the screen, but rather the screen that [sensorially] throws itself upon the viewers. For instance, in one scene, armed clowns physically jump from the screen towards the viewers. The voyeurism of the viewers is substituted by the camera facing the spectators head-on. This distinction between the one who sees (as a voyeur) and the one who is seen is helpful to understand the difference between a window cinema (in which we dive into an illusion of reality) and a screen cinema (in which the image projects us and provokes us) (Pêra, “O Espectador Espantado”).

In the film *The Amazed Spectator* an actor asks Laura Rascaroli: “Is the essay film a kind of manifesto against voyeurism?” (00:28:53). She answers: “Definitely a different type of amazement, closer to an intellectual pleasure, I would say, curiosity about the ability of feeling” (00:29:19). In other words, by pointing the camera at the viewers Pêra breaks the voyeuristic profile of the film viewers. That is to say: the viewers stop looking through the window to a reality from which he or she is absent and becomes exposed to the gaze of others. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen, the direct look demands a certain degree of interaction with the viewer(s) in the sense that it fabricates an emotional relationship. The authors argue that “the difference between the oblique and frontal angle is the difference between detachment and involvement” (136).

As mentioned by Luís Rocha Antunes: “This layout of a multisensory film experience contradicts the idea of a voyeur spectator who leans back comfortably and visually watches and enjoys in a detached way and in control of his private audiovisual cinematic experience” (Antunes 4). As a result, Pêra reflects: “It seems that I elicit visceral emotions and I’m always amazed that people feel roused, because I’m permanently searching for harmony, with contrasts, of course” (Pêra “Interview with Teresa Lima,” my translation). In Dewey’s opinion, “there is no expression without excitement, without disturbance.” (71,



Figure 2. Wonderment

The Amazed Spectator, Edgar Pêra, Bando à Parte, 2016 (00:01:48)

my translation). Furthermore, when what is at stake is a tension between the imagination and an object, “it’s not only the excitement of what is expressed, but the excitement over something.” (76, my translation). That something can be, in this case, the viewers, who are asked to leave their passive position to take part in the construction of the work. In *The Amazed Spectator* this is accomplished through a film that is explicitly non-narrative and orchestrated to supply enigmas.

The initial amazement is followed by wonderment, which corresponds to the moment where one jumps from the happenstance obscurity of the cave to the full embracement of the shadows. In the film, there is an analogy between wonderment and philosophy, to refer to the way one is guided in our understanding of the world. That is not the same as asserting that cinema opens a window to reality. It is “a new landscape of the possible,” it is said, in intertitles superimposed over an image, in the film. (00:56:34). “There are two ways of appraising films: either as stories around the campfire, or as shamanism,” observes the filmmaker (Pêra “Interview with Teresa Lima”, my translation), who clearly takes the second path. Contradictory as it may sound, siding with shamanism does not entail blind faith, but rather consciousness and revelation. “They are films in which the viewer is conscious about himself—that, paradoxically, is more real” (Pêra “Interview with Teresa Lima”, my translation).

Approaching cinema as a window to the world (which is a realist perspective), suggests that the screen provides us with an image of what we believe to be real, to a point where we enmesh our lives with what goes on beyond the screen. Pêra, though, prefers artifice to realism. In films made for the viewers, the screen works as a mirror of the audience’s feelings. In *CineSapiens*, for instance, the audience literally mirrors the screen, a situation idealized

by Pêra all along. “For a long time, I had the utopia of making films in which people saw themselves” (Pêra “Conversa O Espectador Espantado”). The fact of seeing oneself radically breaks the comfort of watching without being perceived and undermines the viewers’ position and role, since they are no longer mere observers, but are reflected by the object itself. In Edgar Pêra’s opinion, the difference between a window or a screen can be found in the very origins of cinema, in the contrast between the Lumière Brothers and Georges Méliès. “On the one hand, you have real (or profilmic), with its unchanged content; on the other hand, there is the creation of new realities” (Pêra “O Espectador Espantado” 114, my translation). “We should not, therefore, misread this connection between cinema and life as reality. As Olaf Moller states in the film: “You can’t fuck a film.” The opposite, however, is true: “But cinema can fuck you!”, as Pêra replies to Moller. “Yes, especially yours,” Moller retorts. (00:54:38). Pêra clearly positions himself on Méliès’s side: “The fact that I’m not able to be a realist has to do with the idea that cinema holds such power that I have the possibility of creating a universe in which problems are solved” (Pêra “Interview with Teresa Lima”).

Belief is another concept proposed by *The Amazed Spectator*. It is belief, in fact, that which allows for the main distinction between window cinema (which entails one passive viewers) and screen cinema. We can find in both types a hypnotic seduction, but the former relies on the belief that what is seen is reality itself, while the latter assumes the existence of a pact between the viewers and the director by which the viewers agree to embark in an artifice that may change their state of consciousness about the world and about themselves. They are aware that there is a universe being conceived, and they accept to take part in its assembly. This process will turn us into a community of more conscious and active viewers.

Mongrel Cinema

If a film is really about the meaning of life—we can perceive it to be so, amongst the pleasures and displeasures of the audience, who either screams in terror or is fascinated by flying medusas—how does this involve the cinematic technique? Furthermore, does it make sense to attribute existential issues to ephemeral sensations roused by a film? I purposefully leave these questions hovering around as beacons, while I move towards a necessary categorization. What other features of the essay film can be, additionally, perceived in *The Amazed Spectator*? The film contains self-reflective and biographical elements, even though they are only implicit. It is a film made by an *auteur* and his inquiries, so from that viewpoint it fits well within the essay film genre, as described by Phillip Lopate:

That’s not to say it is always first-person or autobiographical, but it tracks a person’s thoughts as he or she tries to work out some mental knot, however various its strands. An essay is a search to find out what one thinks about something. (110).

Yet, I think it cannot be considered exhibitionist or narcissistic, but more of a group effort. No actor stands out to the detriment of others, nor do the characters embody any sort of creative introspection on the part of the director. All the elements, from the musical soundtrack (composed by Artur Cyanetto, Edgar Pêra's alter ego) to the way the actors move and immerse themselves in this aesthetics, as well as the way the interviewees give in to the process, remind one of a kind of osmosis. The fragmentation is intentional, becoming the central issue of the film and being responsible for its balance and consistency. Therefore, one can talk of films made by "we filmmakers for we spectators," (00:29:41) as Pêra does in *The Amazed Spectator*. Laura Rascaroli concurs: "Films are never, in any case, a singular discourse." (30:01). This evidence does not contest the importance of the director as the primary author of the artwork; he remains responsible for the mixing and reworking of the input that he receives from the different elements of the crew, in a performative act that is fully his own. Peter Wollen's author's theory is helpful here:

The director does not subordinate himself to another author; his source is only a pretext, which provides catalysts, scenes which fuse with his own preoccupations to produce a radically new work. Thus the manifest process of performance, the treatment of a subject, conceals the latent production of a quite new text, the production of director as an auteur (213).

It is true that the questions are never asked in the first person (the author speaks through the voices of others) and as already mentioned, there is not one single ending or a clear path. This strategy is confirmed by Rafael Almeida, who states: "The enunciator, in turn, will use one or more narrators to give voice to this enunciating subject. It is usual for the director's own voice to be used to materialize the narrator who represents him." (275). Voices float on the screen of *The Amazed Spectator*, resonating through space or reverberating in the next shot, through a technical manipulation in which sound and voice are independent features, each concentrated on its own language, but nevertheless trying to invade the other's discourse. As pointed by Paul Arthur: "[...] their segmental and sound-image relationships tend to entail collision or dialectical critique" (164), another aspect of the essay film.

In this case, instead of producing an entirely subjective or introspective object Pêra transfers to the viewers his own cinematic perspective, in a reflexive game, or, according to Dewey [...], "the work of art is completed only when it goes through the others experience." (119, my translation). Along the same line, Rascaroli sees the enunciation of the authorial voice as a structural feature of essay film, concluding that "the 'I' of the essay film always clearly and strongly implicates a 'you'" (Rascaroli "The Essay Film" 185). Stanley Cavell also mentions the authorial point of view and the eventual exposure of his or her self: "Instead of

laughing at himself with a well-deserved appreciation of self, an author (of a work of art) may wish to steal our laughter in order to cover his embarrassment” (124).

In the film this “other” that is sought after is an imaginary audience (a type of viewer that is longed for) and a specialized group of intellectuals who habitually think about cinema. The questions asked range from the apparent platitude (“What was the first movie you saw?”) to the trap (“Would you rather see *Citizen Kane* on a mobile phone or a football game in a film theater?”). “It’s cinema, cinema, cinema,” recalls Pêra’s son at a given point in the film (00:53:10). What cinema? “A mongrel cinema, with no pedigree” advances the filmmaker (Pêra “Interview with Teresa Lima,” my translation). Corrigan, inversely, thinks that the essay film “has a long historical and theoretical pedigree” (7). By not positioning himself within the scope of mainstream cinema, nor in the tradition of the arthouse, what is Edgar Pêra left with? In “cosmopolitanism, which is a step forward towards a solution, grounded on the duality of identity and freedom, based on the idea that I have my identity, but I must have the freedom to create different things” (Pêra “Interview with Teresa Lima,” my translation). Something akin to “the blurring of the boundary” quoted in *CineSapiens*, as a necessary condition for emancipation, which can be interpreted in a double sense: emancipation of the viewers (in the film) and of the filmmaker, in his aesthetic posture and in the way he makes films (Pêra *CineSapiens* 00:10:01). One is tempted to establish a connection between the biographical aspects and the essay film to conceive of the director’s work as the authorial writing reflecting his life (therefore, life writing). Still, there are no openly biographical revelations. It is all about cinema. It is Pêra’s father, for instance, who introduces the anecdote of the chicken in the movie, recalling the uproar of the film theaters of his youth, where even a chicken’s neck was once thrown over the audience.

One can perceive throughout the film that everything in *The Amazed Spectator* is aimed at the *other* for whom films are made. The reference to previous films has the specific aim of exploring an aesthetics which serves as an experiment towards a philosophical meditation about the perception of the world through a certain kind of cinema. Pêra’s uniqueness rests in his assumption that the interest of making art is the dialogue established with the viewers. This dialogical aspect (which is different from a dialectic) is emphasized by Laura Rascaroli as being crucial in the characterization of an essay film (*How the Essay Film Thinks*). *The Amazed Spectator* is an interesting experimental (better said, experiential) film because it does not deviate its focus from the audience, but without any commercial intent. Instead, Pêra reflects upon the role of the viewers and produces an essayistic film based on this point of view.

The Actor-viewer Participating in the Film

The film makes a clear distinction between the believer-viewers (who are passive) and the emancipated viewers (who is a participant). This is symbolically conveyed through the spectacular entrance of the actor Nuno Melo on a motorbike, impersonating the “actor-viewer.” Tellingly, the segment is in color.



Figure 3. The emancipated viewer

The Amazed Spectator, Edgar Pêra, Bando à Parte, 2016 (00:22:27)

In all likelihood, this dialogical impulse is what will more surely define *The Amazed Spectator* as an essay film. As argued by Corrigan, “essays describe and provoke an activity of public thought, and the public nature of that subjective experience highlights and even exaggerates the participations of their audience, readers and viewers in a dialogue of ideas” (55). Beyond the defense of a certain aesthetic or a specific influence, what guides Pêra is the permanent exchange between the work that he produces and the viewers, in a search that is, albeit indirectly, self-referential.

Indeed, the role of the viewers in this type of film was explored in previous works by Pêra, introduced as pieces in the puzzle that is *The Amazed Spectator*. Each of these films have served a specific purpose that migrates to *The Amazed Spectator*. For example, in *Lisbon Revisited*, a film without a single human presence, there is an exploration of Lisbon’s flora serenaded by the poetry of Fernando Pessoa. “I think it is crucial to watch *Lisbon Revisited* before *The Amazed Spectator*, because the focus is not on the viewers, but on the wonderment that an image can cause on the viewers” (Pêra “The Amazed Spectator” 184). In *The Cavern*, contrary to *Lisbon Revisited*, there are no words. The search is for “the sensation without the boredom of communication” (“O Espectador Espantado” 250, my translation). It is a film

without words, also shot in a theater (i.e., Teatro Trindade, in Oporto), where we can see a community of viewers, associating the caver, as was Plato's intention, to a world of fears and shadows, but contrary to Plato's concept, enjoying themselves immensely. *CineSapiens* (shot in Teatro Jordão, in Guimarães) is a delirious satire, containing a fervorous defense of the cinesapiens (the prototype for the amazed spectator) as well as slogans chanted against the "legion of cinedecency" (00:11:28). Finally, *Delirium in Las Vedras*, is a mockumentary about the carnival festivities of Torres Vedras, where the playful, artificial, and the grotesque and bizarre are pushed to extremes. In all of them we find elements that are transposed to *The Amazed Spectator*, some image-cannibalizing occurring from the previous films to the latest one. As Pêra puts it: "[...] resuming a narrative kino-mythology from *CineSapiens*, *The Amazed Spectator* is a Krypto-celluloid film, but instead of sucking up reality to expel it in the shape of a movie, it vampirizes cine-reality (the previous films I directed) to also expel it in the shape of a movie. Therefore, *The Cavern* and *CineSapiens* are step-movies that *The Amazed Spectator* climbed and descended" (Pêra "O Espectador Espantado" 264, my translation).



Figure 4. Viewers' communities

The Amazed Spectator, Edgar Pêra, Bando à Parte, 2016 (00:22:51)

Among the almost obsessional elements in Pêra's *praxis* one finds the expedient of 3D, a technique that was used in all the above-mentioned films. According to Julia Vassilieva and Deane Williams, the use of technology (or new techniques) is a component of the essay film. Pêra tries to amplify the imagination, aiming to bring back the early years of filmmaking and the illusion upon which they rested (Pêra, "O Espectador Espantado"). It is also a way to pursue novelty as an attempt to reach the viewers and attract an audience, accomplishing a renewal of awe. It reinforces the meta-discourse that prevails throughout the film, extending to the actors-viewers—who are instructed to put on or remove their 3D glasses. There is an

instrumental and symbolic concept here: what we see in 3D is different, new and exciting. Pêra asks: “Will the cine-sapiens-sapiens (in other words a 3D meta-viewer) triumph over the cinesapiens (the 2D viewers)? As soon as cinema becomes holographic, any film (be it 2D or 3D) will be considered as non-realistic” (Pêra “O Espectador Espantado” 9, my translation). For the sake of their clarity, let us take the words of Alter and Corrigan, when they state that “the essay film, in its attempt to make the invisible world of imagination, thoughts, and ideas visible, can draw from an incomparably larger reservoir of expressive means than can the pure documentary film” (quoted by Rascaroli “The Essay Film” 91). Thus, it may be ill-judged, in this context, to consider the use of 3D as a mere technical whimsy.

In Pêra’s films, the soundtracks are another awe-inducing element because they are presented as being independent from the image (with its own meaning). Pêra mentions the example of *The Cavern* to explain the extent to which the music in the film can be used to awake sensations in the viewers: “Sleepwalking and hypnotic musical performances, with a suspended rhythm, wander through the film, and other chords, closer to horror movies, with aggressive sonic disruptions, travel through the speakers, affecting the viewers’ audio perception, and create a discomfort zone (“O Espectador Espantado” 205).

Conclusion

My analysis of *The Amazed Spectator* had the explicit purpose of avoiding the functionalist perspective of the semiological tradition, improving, at the same time, a dialogical line, based on aesthetic experience. To that aim, I have focused on identifying characteristics of the essay film in this particular work, hoping to help disseminate Pêra’s philosophy on a wider scale.

Watching *The Amazed Spectator* is like taking part in a game whose rules one can hardly guess, or like riding in a rollercoaster. In order to accept taking part in the fun, one should be aware of what lies ahead: the fear of falling off, hysteria or, inversely, the fascination of the ride. For those who are aware of the inherent falsity of our biggest fears—after all the likelihood of falling off the fairground attraction is ridiculously low—the option is to take part in the gimmick. What Pêra offers is a cinema based on sensations, their relationship between body and mind, leading us into a conscious hypnosis (the contradiction is intentional). The full realization of what *The Amazed Spectator* can be is not immediately attained. Upon the first contact with the film, the strangeness triggered by the succession of images somehow evokes the feel of a roundabout in which one does not fully realize what is going on. By pointing the camera at the viewers and inciting senses of awe or wonderment, Pêra contributes to a greater spectatorial involvement, on one hand, while also subverting cinema’s classical boundaries. Without providing obvious answers to the questions he asks, Pêra creates an essay-like object that escapes passivity and offers hints for the comprehension of its own aesthetics.

Works Cited

- Almeida, Rafael de. "Between Arrival and Departure: Recycling of Home Movies in the Essay-Film." *MATRIZES*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2017, pp. 271–86, doi:10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v11i2p271-286.
- Antunes, Luís Rocha. *The Multisensory Film Experience: A Cognitive Model of Experiential Film Aesthetics*. Intellect Books, 2016.
- Arthur, Paul. "Essay Questions." *Essays on the Essay Film*, edited by Nora M. Alter and Timothy Corrigan, Columbia University Press, 2017, pp. 161–71.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Translated by Caryl Emerson, University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Bandlamudi, Lakshmi. "Creative Living and Aesthetic Vision: Cultivating Finer Sensibilities." *Proceedings from the Second International Interdisciplinary Conference on Perspectives and Limits of Dialogism in Mikhail Bakhtin, 3–5 June, 2009*, edited by Karin Junefelt and Pia Nordin, Department of Scandinavian Languages, 2010, <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A352131&dsid=5463>. Accessed 6 Oct. 2021.
- Cavell, Stanley. *The World Viewed: Reflexions on the Ontology of Film*. Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Corrigan, Timothy. *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, after Marker*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Damásio, António. *Sentir & Saber: A Caminho Da Consciência [Feeling & Knowing - Making Minds Conscious]*. Translated by Luís Oliveira Santos and João Quina, Edições Temas e Debates, 2020.
- Dewey, John. *El Arte Como Experiencia*. Translated by Jordi Claramonte, Paidós 2008.
- Kress, Gunther and Theo van Leeuwen. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. Routledge, 2006.
- Lopate, Phillip. "In Search of the Centaur: The Essay-Film." *Essays on the Essay Film*, edited by Nora M. Alter and Timothy Corrigan, Columbia University Press, 2017, pp. 109–33.
- Murch, Walter. *The Blink of an Eye*. Silman-James Press, 2021.
- Pêra, Edgar. "O Espectador Espantado." PhD. Thesis, Universidade do Algarve, 2017, <http://hdl.handle.net/10400.1/10821>. Accessed 6 Oct. 2021.
- . "Conversa O Espectador Espantado." *Youtube*, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-Ufg5ZHk0c&ct=2012s>. Accessed 20 June 2021
- . "Interview with the Edgar Pêra," conducted by Teresa Lima, 2021.
- Rascaroli, Laura. "The Essay Film: Problems, Definitions, Textual Commitments." *Essays on the Essay Film*, edited by Nora M. Alter and Timothy Corrigan, Columbia University Press, 2017.
- . *How the Essay Film Thinks*. Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Rose, Gillian. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*. 3rd ed. SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011.
- Vassilieva, Julia and Dean Williams, editors. *Beyond the Essay Film: Subjectivity, Textuality and Technology*. Amsterdam University Press, 2020.
- Wollen, Peter. *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*. BFI, 2013.

Edgar Pêra's Film Cited

CineSapiens. Directed by Edgar Pêra. Bando à Parte, 2013.

Lisbon Revisited. Directed by Edgar Pêra, Bando à Parte, 2014.

The Amazed Spectator / O Espectador Espantado. Directed by Edgar Pêra. Bando à Parte, 2016.

The Cavern / A Caverna. Directed by Edgar Pêra. Bando à Parte, 2015.