

Jaques Aumont. *Materia de imágenes, redux.*

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The Spanish edition of *Materia de Imágenes, redux*, written by Jacques Aumont, has been edited as part of the *Contracampo* collection by the Shangrila textos aparte association in Spain. The book, a revision of his *Matière d'images* (originally published in 2005 by Éditions Images Modernes¹), includes both substantial modifications of the original passages, and six new essays which based on matter, have broadened the scope of the author through the history of the cinematic image. Thus, the author himself declares about a transformed and rekindled edition: 'Now, I can truly call it a book' (AUMONT, 2014: 9).

Aumont defines the cinematic image in three times: the film, the light and the screen. The book goes through these three lines of inquiry to question if the cinematic matter can be found in either one or some of these units, or if it rather shuns them. For doing so, four different groups of texts are gathered together. The first group, comprised under the epigraph 'The Sieged Image', studies the traces in cinematic art, that have generally come from ideas or problems already widely suggested in different painting treatises. Therefore, in this section, matter is understood as the way in which cinema inscribes in the previous forms of history. According to Aumont, matter is not found in how cinema summons or quotes other arts, but in farthest principles that have to do with the migration of images, where the artist is a critic transformer regarding the already

existing works. Aumont favours the question over the assertion: How do these migrations affect –if they do– the canvas and the *mise-en-scène*? Are devices and symbolisms of the cultural history indispensable to understand contemporary cinematographic genre? In which ways do modern gestures –later unrepeatably– break art's itinerary? There is a thrilling idea through this whole first part: the necessity to keep drawing itineraries through these artistic migrations and get them to redo history. Or, in other words, Aumont tries to broaden the perspective and avoids the temptation of reading art history as a history of progress.

This first section studies different artistic devices (Aumont denominates them: vanities, annunciations, speculations and the black colour) that are complemented in the second part, entitled 'The Screen and the Film'. Here, the main dissertation is based on matter (the visible) and the filmic (the sensible). It is less about analysing what is onscreen or in the film, than to observe all the unlimited territories in between, where certain authenticity of the cinematic matter is aroused. Aumont identifies cinema as a scenery for interchanges in intensity comparable to dreams, as a field of separation between two imaginary worlds. This identification is achieved both through the description of a progression where the image has slowly separated itself from its background, and with the inquiry of some other elements such as the colour as matter that

1. AUMONT, Jacques (2009). *Matière d'images, redux*. Éditions de la Différence: Paris.

holds the light and which inscribes cinema to the history of images. The author also dedicates one chapter to shot transitions, specially the crossfade as an essentially and specific cinematic form. For the author, this editing resources work both as a trick to bring matter to first level, and a provocation that points out to the effect of what is thought over what is seen, an idea transversally found over the analysis of the book.

The third part of this *Materia de imágenes, redux* is composed by two brief studies about the forces that Aumont himself recognizes as the fundamental substances of cinema: light and shadow. In 'Ars lucis et umbrae' the author studies light in cinema form the classic standards –as a tool for the *mise-en-scène*– until the point it stops illuminating to become a plastic force itself. Although it is light, rather than shadow what models the image, this third section of the book, focuses as well on the fact that the cinematic spectacle always takes place in the shadow. Despite shadow is not exactly a spectre of the image matter, as Aumont develops in the first section of the book, in cinema, matter is not the shadow: it is rather 'the black'.

The author himself justifies these last groups of texts in the book, more as drafts intended to extend some notes of the first two, than as thorough and independent texts. However, the ideas that are formulated are tremendously suggestive and endow the whole with a completeness that, for the writer of these lines, seems to be essential. Although, this cannot be said about the fourth and last group of the book, constituted by three texts intended by way of 'intermission' or 'interlude'. Yet interesting, extremely didactic and even captivating, this three articles, dedicated to three filmmakers all passionate for painting (Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick and Bruce Conner) and their perspectives on how they asserted image matter through their films, might remain somehow far from the other lines of inquiry.

However *Materia de imágenes, redux* is a revealing book, with an original approach to the

impact and history of images, and although it focuses on cinematic arts, it dissolves the borders between arts and devices tracing an analytic framework both wide and enriching. The author focuses on the 'light and shadow phenomenon, certain sceneries related to the film, its grain or its colour, and as well on the return of certain spectres of the history of images' (AUMONT, 2014: 28). Thus, it never has the intention to reduce film studies to a dissertation exclusively based on the characteristics of its matter; it rather makes a pleasant research trough territories usually unexplored. •

Translated from the Spanish by Carolina Sourdis