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## **Constructed News: Events and Rituals of Political Life**

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# Constructed News: Events and Rituals of Political Life

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## Abstract

This text invites a reflection on early cinema, focusing on the model which gave rise to actuality film, the precursor of newsreels. Actuality film is understood not only as film which tries to document reality but as a model which purports to capture that which was, or would become, an event. The text also addresses the difference between “attraction” and “news”, to conclude that news arises from a series of constructions designed to transform social impact factors, such as those elements which have shaped the chronicling of events or elements of political propaganda in a given event.

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**Keywords:** Early cinema, actuality film, cinema of attractions, documentary, newsreel, film reconstruction.

# Noticias Construidas: Acontecimientos y Rituales de la Vida Política

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## Resumen

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El presente texto plantea una reflexión sobre el cine de los orígenes, fijándose en el modelo que dio lugar al cine de actualidades, el antecedente de los noticiarios. La actualidad entendida no sólo como un cine a la búsqueda de documentar lo real sino como un modelo que pretendía atrapar aquello que era o se convertiría en acontecimiento. El texto también plantea la diferencia entre “atracción” y “actualidad”, para concluir que la actualidad surge de una serie de construcciones encaminadas a transformar factores de impacto social, como los elementos que configuraban la crónica de sucesos, o elementos de propaganda política en un acontecimiento.

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**Palabras clave:** Cine de los orígenes, actualidades cinematográficas, cine de atracciones, documental, noticiario, reconstrucción cinematográfica.

### Documenting reality

When film historians attempt to define a specific date for the official birth of the documentary or its institutionalization, they tend to agree on Robert J. Flaherty's filming of *Nanook of the north* (Les Frères Revillon/Pathé Exchange; US/France, 1922) at the North Pole. The symbolic weight of Flaherty's film in the history of the documentary has been determined by the growing importance awarded over the years to British filmmaker John Grierson's canonical definition, according to which "The documentary is a creative treatment of actuality" (cited by Rotha, 1952, p.70). If we consider the emphasis acquired by the adjective "creative", this definition seems to have condemned all cinema filmed between 1895 and 1921 to oblivion, or at least to the status of simple newsreels of only ephemeral informative value.

Grierson's definition attributed a dual function to the documentary: on the one hand linking it to physical reality, while leaving aside the reproductive value of the medium, and on the other defending it as a creative pursuit that allows for a critical analysis of reality. It is true that all documentaries contain an element of falseness, since, as Stella Bruzzi asserted, no documentary can ever represent the real world. The camera cannot capture life as it is without causing interference because "the documentary always arises out of a process of collision between the camera and the subject" (Bruzzi, 2000, p.7). On the other hand, Grierson's canonical definition is not entirely correct, because many fiction movies also treat reality creatively. If we take as our starting point the discussions that took place in postwar Europe with the development of neorealism, taking in the films of Luchino Visconti and the model established by Roberto Rossellini, we see that the creative capture of reality was jeopardized in their films. Visconti felt that reality was to be constructed by seeking out a certain aesthetic of poverty, while Rossellini trusted the reproductive power of the camera and the way in which elements arising from fiction would conflict with reality, leading to the revelation of a hidden truth. Neither Visconti nor Rossellini made documentaries, but their films proposed a reflection on how cinema might be developed to creatively shape reality.<sup>1</sup>

Although most of the debates that have emerged on the definition of documentary have focused on realistic models and the role of the camera in capturing reality, we consider the newsreel to have played a key role. The newsreel institutionalized a system of capturing and a discourse on reality, turning it into a fundamental element for defining the value of the imprint the documentary left on both early cinema and the history of the informative image prior to the emergence of television news. Its appearance is clearly linked to the evolution of mass society, and specifically one of its manifestations: the illustrated press. This interaction helped to establish a number of information-related issues and problems that television later overcame via the creation of broadcast news. Aside from their value as a precedent for television news programmes, a further interest of newsreels is their means of generating a discourse on the ability of cinema to document the world; to certify, through the weight of photographic recordings, real processes that can be turned into images.

If we consider the origins of newsreels, we see there is a first step that comprised the capturing of real images; this first step is inscribed in the origins of the cinematographer, in the shots filmed by the Lumière camera operators, both in their immediate surroundings and in the remotest parts of the world. The relationship early cinema established with the idea of travel and a fascination with exotic faraway worlds involved searching for images of that which might become newsworthy, based on the canon established by the illustrated press of the time. In a canonical sense, *Le couronnement du Tsar Nicolas II* (Charles Moison, Vue Lumière; France, 1896) was considered to mark the beginning of the phenomenon of the newsreel because the capturing of reality had moved towards the capturing of an event: the ritual of crowning the Tsar. The idea of capturing or reconstructing events from daily life soon expanded. Filmmakers at the Edison factory went from shooting small attractions for the company's Kinetoscopes to capturing or recreating newsworthy events of the age. Films made by a series of filmmakers with links to the Brighton school - James A. Williamson, Alfred Collins, G. Albert Smith - had the clear aim of documenting their environment through the filming of events. Images of local events captured in Blackburn, in the county of Lancashire (United Kingdom) by Sagar Mitchell and James Kenyon, creators of the Mitchell & Kenyon production company in 1897, also had an important bearing. Said

images have today become the largest collection of documentary images to have survived from the early days of cinema (Toulmin et al (ed), 2004). Some of these images are distinctly of news items, such as different sporting images of football games, or a local parade filmed in Bradford celebrating the coronation of King Edward VII - the *Bradford Coronation Procession* (Mitchell & Kenyon; UK, 1902) - which captures members of the different branches of the British Empire: India, Canada, Ireland, England, etc.

From 1908 onwards, the different systems of capturing the news became institutionalized and acquired a markedly informative character. Newsreels ceased to be isolated shots serving to complement programmes on all kinds of attractions in the emerging theatres of the age. Filming by camera operators at the French company Gaumont paved the way for *Actualités Gaumont* which, together with the creation of the *Pathé Journal* in France in 1909 - or its international spin-offs, such as British Pathé - grouped together different informative images and screened them in blocks of news. The *Actualités Gaumont* and the *Pathé Journal*, pioneers in the concept of newsreels, demonstrate that in the early days of cinema there was a clear desire to capture reality and document events taking place around the world, establishing a clear relationship with the world of journalism. Early cinema not only captured distant landscapes and urban shots, but also took an interest in events that were likely to be newsworthy. This desire to document and capture the evolution of events deemed newsworthy expanded in multiple directions during the years between the birth of cinema and the outbreak of the First World War, considered the first war in which the media image began to play a prominent role. The Great War marked a turning point in the evolution of the image because the different filming devices of the era were employed to capture images not only to create newsworthy documents, but to provide images for internal use by armies at war or in the world of medicine.

### **News of events as cinema attractions**

To understand how images capturing reality have evolved, we must take a second to consider the definition of the concept of news. The key element that determines this notion is that the desire of the camera operator to

document the reality appearing before the lens is no longer the only issue, as all reality would seem to be influenced by the notion of event. In the world of the press, anything that happens is seen as an event to be filmed. Early filmmakers captured all accidents and natural catastrophes, like the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. Sometimes they attempted to show certain aspects of black history. An important milestone in the relationship established between newsreels and images of events was the film by Thomas A. Edison Inc. entitled *The Mob outside the Temple of Music at the Pan-American Exposition* in 1901. The cameras were placed in front of the Temple of Music in Buffalo, in the state of New York, to document President William McKinley's visit to the Pan-American Exposition. Although the cameras did not capture the assassination of the president, which took place at close range while he was waving to the crowd gathered there, it did capture the agitated and anxious masses moments after his death. The camera shot, one minute in length, is filmed from distance and shows the heads of the stunned masses, while in the background movements can be detected of the group of citizens who wanted to capture the murderer, the anarchist Leon Czolgosz. Prior to the murder, the Edison Company camera operators filmed the president giving his last speech, before filming the transfer of the president's body from Buffalo to Washington.

A second milestone is that of British Pathé capturing images of the accident which caused the death of suffragette Emily Wilding Davison. The film is entitled *Emily Davison throws herself under the King's Derby Horse* (British Pathé; UK, 1913). Davison, considered a key figure in the struggle for women's right to vote in the UK, threw herself under the horse of King George V at the Epsom Derby on June 4, 1913. Images of the Derby report start by showing the preparations, the jockeys emerging, the spectators attending the race, etc., up until the moment when a camera randomly captures Emily Davison being hit by the monarch's horse, immediately followed by the crowd invading the track. Later, the news which testified to the event included images of the activist's funeral. The tragic death of Emily Wilding Davison turned the filming of what was supposed to be a sporting event into a document more characteristic of a chronicle of events. And finally, another milestone in the history of the genre are the images of the capture and killing of one of the most famous French bandits at the turn

of the last century, Joseph Jules Bonnot, in Choisy-le-Roi, filmed by Pathé Journal camera operators on 28 April, 1912.

Although Filmmakers desire to create events arose out of their contact with the written press, it was also inspired in the notion of attraction formulated by Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault - a key element of early cinema (Gaudreault, 1989). To Gunning, the idea of attraction is characterized by “the existence of an element that appears suddenly, attracts our attention and disappears without developing a narrative line or coherent diegetic universe” (Gunning, 1986, p.65).

When in 1912 Franz Reichelt invited the cameras of the main newsreel companies to gather under the Eiffel Tower to witness how his batwing-inspired costumes would allow him to descend comfortably to earth with no risk, what motivated the companies was attraction. Could the birdman land without killing himself? Would the birdman's leap from high be lethal? The dominant desire was to attract attention; the event was not going to change Parisian life of the age, but it did generate attraction due to the uncertainty inherent in the story of a man who would risk his life to show the effectiveness of his invention. The event ended in tragedy. It was captured by the newsreel operators, who placed their cameras on the first platform and at the foot of the Tower, and thus death in the face of the camera lens, adorned by media spectacle, ended up lending the event a certain poetry.<sup>2</sup> In this case, attraction to the unusual is accommodated as news in the same way as attraction arising by chance was in the case of the death of Emily Davison. All of these examples opened up a path that has remained well-trodden to this day.

The difference between attraction and news resides in the fact that what in attraction is curiosity and sensory impression, in news becomes social relevance or public interest. News did nothing other than move into the territory of images those issues that the photojournalism of the day had institutionalized: official acts, political commemorations, events, wars, etc. In the early days of cinema, the idea of documenting the event to turn it into news did not always involve a certification of truth, because what matters is not the guarantee of reality implicit in the image but rather the way in which the image is able to shape an occurrence that has turned into an event.



Newsreel images were subject to two basic limitations from the very beginning: distance and time. These two constraints meant that when the camera arrived at the event it was either too late or distance impeded capturing images of what was happening. Images of the San Francisco earthquake in 1906 do not show the moment of the tragedy, but rather the destroyed houses, the work of the firefighters and horse-driven ambulances passing by. The cameras captured the effects of the tragedy, but not the earthquake itself. However, together with these images, in 1906 the Biograph Company filmed studio-reconstructed images using miniature models of the crumbling buildings and the fire.<sup>3</sup> Georges Méliès reconstructed *Éruption volcanique à la Martinique* (Star Film; France, 1902) in a studio, attempting to reproduce the tragedy that caused the awakening of a volcano Mont Pelée in the centre of Martinique. The cameras could not be there and it was necessary to recreate, through simulation, a certain reality effect, playing with models, sets and pyrotechnics. Georges Méliès also recreated *L'affaire Dreyfus* (Star Film; France, 1899) at the Robert-Houdin Theatre, in eleven scenic pictures.

Edwin S. Porter shot the execution of the anarchist who assassinated President William McKinley for the Thomas A. Edison Inc. under the title *Execution of Leon Czolgosz with Panorama of Auburn Prison* (Thomas A. Edison Inc.; US, 1901). The film is of interest because it mixes documentary image with reconstructed fiction. In this case, the problem arose because no camera operators were granted permission to attend the execution first hand. We initially see a panoramic shot, followed by a travelling shot from a vehicle in front of the actual walls of Auburn Prison. The two images were captured on October 29, 1901, the same day that the anarchist was to be executed. The shot serves to certify the presence of the cameras, the fact of having been there. Porter gives the images an added realism by showing a train moving outside the prison. A dissolve out moves us from the background to the distant background and allows us to enter the reconstruction of the event using actors in the Edison studio. A group of actors playing prison guards approach Czolgosz' cell and remove the actor who plays him from it. Another dissolve takes us to the electric chair in which he is to be executed. The group of guards moves with the prisoner from the left to right of the frame, establishing a minimal narrative continuity between shots. The image of the prisoner strapped to the electric

chair is a frontal image, which attempts to capture the many details of the situation. According to the Edison catalogue, it is thought that Porter based his reconstruction of the events on the detailed chronicles appearing in the press of the time. The film ends with the seizures of the accused caused by the electric shock, as we see smoke coming out from behind the chair and a doctor certifying his death, emphasizing all of the movements so that the action in the general shot is clear. As Mary Ann Doane suggests with regard to the film, it is interesting to note that the desire to reconstruct the execution in the electric chair was closely related to the role of electricity as a new source of economic power in those years. In line with this, the Pan-American Exposition, where President McKinley died, took place in Buffalo so as to advertise the power of electricity from turbines activated with water from Niagara Falls (Doane, 2002).

In Spain, as demonstrated by Begoña Soto, the film *Asesinato y entierro de Don José Canalejas* (Iberia Cines; Spain, 1912) mixed a reconstruction of the assassination of the Spanish Prime Minister on 12 November, 1912 - based on images reconstructed from the press of the time - with documentary footage of the funeral (Soto Vázquez, 2012). The first part was produced as fiction, centring on the moment when a young anarchist shoots the Prime Minister from behind while he looks into a bookstore window. Professional actors were used in the reconstruction, including Pepe Isbert - later known for his starring roles in such films as *Bienvenido Mr. Marshall* (UNINCI; Spain, 1952) and *El verdugo* (Interlagar Films/Naga Films/Zebra Films; Spain/Italy, 1963), both by Luis Garcia Berlanga - who played the anarchist Manuel Pardiñas, author of the murder.

The mixture of reality and fiction, of document and reconstruction, generated a new order of discourse regarding the concept of truth in the news. The truth, then, was not determined by what happened but by the construction processes carried out in parallel by the press, and by the way it is revealed; or what François Jost has defined as *feintise*. Jost believes that a number of concepts that continue to appear in discourses on both what is real and what is false - lying, the virtual, the truth or misleading appearance - do not conform with what early cinema was attempting to achieve. *La feintise* - or that which is being feigned - is “the element that lends a document a vivid dimension” (Jost, 2001, p.94). Audiovisual feigning is not a deceit, but rather the system of creating a certain degree of trust in

viewers, to the point that they stop worrying about whether what they see is real or simulated. Knowing whether the images of the attack on José Canalejas are true or false is of no importance, because what was important to viewers of the time was the act of perception, allowing them to experience what they saw as if they had been there themselves. To accomplish this effect, what is feigned must fit the codes by means of which the photographic images of an event in the illustrated press were previously created.

It is important to note that cinema emerged at a key moment in the development of the written press and the graphic media and soon also played a key role in creating a certain imaginary in current affairs. Despite the relationship established between cinema and the news, we must consider the early days of cinema as an intermediate space in which there was a legacy from other forms, such as the painting of events, images projected in magic lantern shows, graphic images in the *Mundo Novos*, cartoon strips illustrating events in the press and the legacy of popular shows in which current events often figured, as is the case with wax museums. In this last sphere we must consider, as stated by Vanessa R. Schwartz, that the wax museum reflected reality and helped turn it into a show, especially tragic events, along with *panoramas*, *dioramas* and the morgue (Schwartz, 1998). Among the objectives of the principal wax museums created in the late nineteenth century – the *Musée Grévin* in Paris or *Eden Musée* in New York, for example – was that of creating a space to show visual information regarding events. Some of these museums incorporated as part of their shows magic lantern projections of current affairs, depicting some themes that would later be filmed, such as military parades, royal visits, events and military conflicts.

### **Newsreels and the creation of the image of political power**

The construction of newsreel models was also a key factor in the emergence of new systems of relationship with political power. The ritualization of power on the basis of its ornamental and monumental nature, the royal procession, and the deification of the monarch underwent a radical change with the advent of the camera. The monarch was no longer someone exhibited before a particular community of subjects, but rather someone

who could use the power of the moving image to make their image omnipresent or to publicize their acts as something newsworthy that would be spread easily through the media. However, the relationship between image and power was not an easy one in this regard. Some monarchs were slow to understand the symbolic significance of cameras as key elements in the emergence of a new mass society. Studying the relationship between the camera and power is interesting because it highlights the difference between the old world and the new. While in the old European monarchies the cinematic device was not fully assimilated by the different power systems, in the United States the first president of the cinematographic age, William McKinley, actively used it in his campaigning, relating it to the new image technologies emerging in the late nineteenth century. In an attempt to understand this distinction, we shall focus mainly on a comparison between the way in which the Spanish monarchy was filmed by Segundo de Chomón and the images of McKinley's campaign captured by Edison camera operators. A prominent element of this comparison is the position those in power award the camera to allow more insight into their rituals.

In 1902, Segundo de Chomón and his wife, Julienne Mathieu, opened a workshop in Barcelona to work on the aniline colouring of films the French company Pathé distributed at fairs and variety theatres. Among the documentary films shot by Chomón and still preserved in the archives of the Autonomous Government of Catalonia's Film Libraries, there is an incomplete, enigmatic film entitled *Réception de SM Alphonse XIII à Barcelone* (Pathé Frères; France/Spain, 1904). Despite its eloquent title, the strength of the film does not lie in its value as a historical document, but in how its structure reveals that those in power did not consider newsreels key to projecting their public image. The film, No. 1082 in the Pathé catalogue, depicts a public ceremony of great political significance at the time. It shows a moment from the official visit by the young King of Spain, Alfonso XIII, to Barcelona in April 1904. The monarch, who had just turned eighteen, travelled to Catalonia with his mother, María Cristina. Shooting followed the model instituted by Lumière operators for the images of the coronation of Tsar Nicholas II shot in Moscow. Segundo de Chomón situated the camera in an unfavourable position in the middle of the audience that prevented him from clearly capturing the majesty of the

monarchical ritual. The images he did capture reflect the inability of the camera to establish a minimum control over randomness, and bear witness to the monarchical ritual without any shots of the dignitaries who accompanied the king being recorded by the cinematographer. So what did this documentary really show? Objectively, we can say that the images basically show a crowd of spectators looking for a gap in the crowd so as to observe the monarch up close. The figure of the king is completely eclipsed by the bodies in the audience.

If we analyse the documentary shot from the perspective of the classical model of composition, in which the main figure occupies the centre of the space and the secondary elements acquire a merely decorative function, we can say that in the only filmed images that remain from the reception Barcelona offered Alfonso XIII, the monarch is almost a spectre located in a collateral position relative to the centre of the action: a blurred figure that emerges sporadically from the audience at one end of the frame. The protagonist of the shot is the audience who receive him.

In the foreground of the shot is a group of women taking out their handkerchiefs to greet someone important leading the procession passing before them. After the first line, we find some empty space flanked by a group of spectators, mostly male, who are actively seeking a spot from which to observe royalty in the flesh. The crowd mass to form a human wall that fills the entire visual field. Between the wall of bodies, hats and handkerchiefs, we discern some signs of the presence of the entourage: the top of a canopy of golden columns, indicating that under the ornament moves the blessed figure of the monarch. The feathers of an army dress hat reveal that the royal entourage is quite large and that the ceremony seeks to possess that solemnity characteristic of large-scale monarchical ceremonies inspired in absolutism. Faced with the saturation of its direct field of vision, Chomón's camera is powerless to reflect the solemnity of the event. The camera operator has no special angle from which to view it.

*Réception de sa majesté Alphonse XIII à Barcelone* is a cinematographic news report that represents the attitude held by certain sectors of European political power regarding the presence of cameras intended to record specific events. The presence of the camera as a device is ignored; it can only be situated in the discrete position of the public and the images end up reflecting all the limitations that any individual located in the crowd might

experience. In 1904, when Segundo de Chomón shot these images, there did not exist among most European monarchies an awareness of the political role that cinema would come to assume, nor of the way in which the camera could transform the event into a document for posterity. Nor did they yet envision that the cinematographer would become a key instrument in constructing and disseminating the rituals of political power.

The title of Chomón's film hides, as previously stated, the micro-structure of a story in which there is a protagonist - the king - and an action - the reception. It also establishes an order of discourse that serves to guide the viewer while constructing a particular story. The title brings an order to a chaotic reality that the camera was unable to produce. In his book *Temps et récit*, Paul Ricoeur has shown how temporal integration is the basis of every story. From the moment we use memory to order time which has passed, and we present chronologically the basic actions that took place during this space in time, we are organizing a story. The act of imitating the world is completely determined by the synthesis we establish of the phenomena and actions that take place in this universe (Ricoeur, 1983).

In Segundo de Chomón's cinematographic news report, the point of reference is observed from a single viewpoint, as in the shots filmed by the Lumière brothers, the film being recorded with the intention of building a single shot without the need for editing. Despite this, as André Gaudreault has shown in his analysis of elements that attest to the existence of editing in early cinema, different stops of the camera reveal a primitive form of editing, as they break up the time unit of the shot (Gaudreault, 2000). Nevertheless, in Chomón's film there is a certain uniformity. In the construction of the shot a series of signs betray the camera operator's movements with the camera and demonstrate how during filming he tried, unsuccessfully, to overcome the obstacles that stood between him and the event he wanted to shoot. Therefore, Chomón's film cannot be the objective and mechanical reproduction of an event because it reveals the presence of subjectivity. Newsreels highlight the existence of a subject responsible for this narrative who is struggling to order the world and establish a discourse based on reality.

This conflictive relationship between the old European monarchical power and film is also evident in the process that led to the shooting of the coronation of Edward II of England in London. In this case, the initial

outdoor position of the camera was a privileged one; the problem came with the reconstruction of the ceremony to crown the monarch, which took place at Westminster Abbey. Different companies (Charles Urban Warwick Trading Company, Gaumont, Hepworth and Biograph) requested permission to film in the space between Constitution Hill and Buckingham Palace. However, due to the future monarch suffering from appendicitis, the coronation was postponed from the initial date of June 26, 1902 to August 9 of the same year (Brown and Barry, 1999).

The different companies were given permission to film the procession between Buckingham Palace and Westminster Abbey, passing through The Mall and Parliament Square. The camera operators of the different companies sought to take up the best positions and some, like the Gaumont operators, attempted to devise systems that would allow them to film panoramic shots of the procession. Unlike the Spanish case, the positions of the operators were key and it is estimated that 40 films were made of the procession, in addition to those shot by the film makers Mitchell and Kenyon of side events that took place in some cities in northern England. As revealed by Stephen Bottomore, the problem arose when the Office of Works, responsible for giving permits for the filming of the actual event, decided that no camera operator could be allowed inside Westminster Abbey to film the ceremony (Bottomore, 2012). As a result, entrepreneur Charles Urban commissioned Georges Méliès to rebuild the coronation ceremony using actors. Méliès filmed a few days before the ceremony, drawing on the protocol established by Lord Esher, who was in charge of the ritual.<sup>4</sup> Two different versions were made, one for the British audience and one for international audiences. The reconstructed images were broadcast together with documentary images of the procession.

The images of the coronation of Edward VII and the cinematic report the reception of HRH Alfonso XIII in Barcelona show how the rhetoric of power worked by means of what Louis Marin has identified as the process of ritualizing figures in the royal procession, the symbolic force of whom is achieved by establishing links with the rituals of religious liturgy (Marin, 1991). Thus, for example, the thalamus under which Alfonso XIII sits at the Barcelona reception was an instrument used by the Church to remove the pyx from the tabernacle and parade it through the secular world. As a person blessed with divine power, the king occupied the same position as

the body of Christ. This symbolic weight is also found in Méliès' reconstruction of the coronation ceremony, which left aside fey artifices, typical of the films of his production company, Star Films, to acquire a more "realistic" tone. The viewer of the time fully understood the symbolism, and thus it reinforced worship of the figure of the monarch as a representative of the divine.

In the United States in 1896, as researched by Charles Musser, the cinematographer played a key role in the presidential election campaign (Musser, 2012 and also Auerbach, 1999). Of the images captured by cameras of the American Mutoscope Co., two were key in the election process. The first, entitled *McKinley at home* (American Mutoscope and Biograph Company; US, 1896) was filmed by W.K.L. Dickson, owner of the aforementioned company, at the candidate's summer residence in Canton (Ohio) (Spehr, 2008). The other image shot of President McKinley showed him arriving on the Empire State Express via the New York Central Railroad. These two images were edited alongside images of the actor Joseph Jefferson playing *Rip Van Winkle*, and other images of cadets at West Point and also shots of Niagara Falls. This group of images was used in the election campaign as an indication of the candidate's *Americanness*. McKinley's short term as president - he was murdered, as we have seen, in September 1901 - was marked by the presence of cameras, even in the moment immediately prior to his death.

While on the old continent of Europe the rituals of power followed the symbolic order of ceremonial policy, in the New World the idea was established of relating politics to the new technologies of the age, using film to bring the image of the politician closer to the spectators, creating a new relationship between power and information systems. The act of inviting the American Mutoscope Co. camera operator to film in the garden at the summer residence of the Republican candidate denotes a radical paradigm shift in the way the image of power was constructed. On the one hand, the idea of the cinematographer having an unfavourable position with regard to some systems of power was annulled, and on the other the idea of using the event - the news - to strengthen the public image of the powerful was left behind. The cameras visited the candidate's garden to show his familiarity and generate an electoral propaganda policy that would remain effective for many years to come.



The study of cinema newsreels not only allows us to reflect on what was filmed but also begs the question of what was missing from this type of film. It is clear that we are dealing with a model of the image that is determined by a series of ideological factors - race, power, gender, colonialism, etc. - to reveal systems that end up being institutionalized as news programmes. It is also important to consider not only the mindsets of the era, but also the systems of censorship that limited certain areas of visibility. The passage from isolated newsreels to news programmes - Pathé, Gaumont, Fox, etc. - involves viewing the world as a large news map. In this context, the *news* unit will be conceived by following the guidelines established by the written press, to the point that images will be progressively determined by the textual component, which will be manifested through all kinds of intertitles, generating systems of segmentation but also classifications of news. Moreover, the examples studied certify that actuality does not arise from a desire to create an image of the world, but from a series of constructions designed to transform factors with a visual impact or elements of political propaganda into an event.

To conclude, it would be appropriate to point out that, in the case of newsreels, an interesting phenomenon often takes place that demonstrates both their value as news reports of the age and their reuse in subsequent film edits, which transform and manipulate them, placing them at the service of a certain discourse. Newsreels thus become an important audiovisual archive used as a basis for designing the unconscious imaginary of an era. This phenomenon sees newsreels of the age reused in some canonical examples of compilation films such as *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (Esfir Shub, Sovkino; Soviet Union, 1927) or *Paris 1900* (Nicole Védère, Panthéon Productions; France, 1947), which use images from prior to 1914 as their basis. In many cases, images from the past take on another life, but also another meaning. Their reuse takes place not only in canonical films but in all kinds of historical documentary based on archive footage, which is made to fit the relevant verbal discourse or editing idea. The problem that ultimately arises with the use of images as an archive is seen in the debate between their value as a document of reality or as a document of ways of thinking or institutionalizing what is newsworthy.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Regarding realist construction and debates arising in neorealism, one of the authors of this article has discussed this theme in the following book: Àngel Quintana, *Fábulas de lo visible. El cine como creador de realidades* (Barcelona, Acantilado, 2003). In fact, although the majority of their films were fiction, both Rossellini and Visconti directed a number of documentaries. Rossellini made *India: Matri Bhumi* (1959), and also did some documentary work for television such as *L'India vista da Rossellini* (1959), *Sicilia, idea di un'isola* (1967) or *Intervista a Salvador Allende: La forza e la ragione* (1971). On the other hand, Visconti worked on the collectively made documentary *Giorni di Gloria* (1945), about the Nazi massacre at the Fosse Ardeatine in Rome.

<sup>2</sup> About Franz Reichelt see: Bazin, A. (1998) *Morts tous les après-midi*. In: Bazin, A., *Le cinéma français de la Libération à la Nouvelle Vague*. Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 367-373. And about the film: *Death Jump – Eiffel Tower* (British Pathé; France, 1912)

<sup>3</sup> *San Francisco: Aftermath of Earthquake* (American Mutoscope & Biograph; US, 1906)

<sup>4</sup> *Le sacré d'Edouard VII* (Georges Méliès, Star Film/Warwick Trading Company; France/UK, 1902)

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