

The Documentary Xico Stockinger as Place of Memory

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to discuss the concept of Pierre Nora (1993) about the places of memory, taking as object the documentary Xico Stockinger (2012). The justification presented for the realization of this work is that the discussion of how cinema and audiovisual in general are used as preservatives and diffusers of memory is an issue very relevant to contemporary society. The methodology used was the literature and also the interview with open questions, applied to the film's director. Through the analysis made it possible to conclude that the documentary handled is a place of memory, a fact that serves as an indication that is necessary to give greater attention to the role of the arts and artists in our society.

Key words: memory, cinema, visual arts

1. Introduction

This article aims to discuss the concept of Pierre Nora regarding Places of Memory, using as its object the documentary Xico Stockinger, directed by Frederico Mendina, in 2012, which tells about the life of the Austrian visual artist living in Brazil.

Thus, when analyzing this theme, and taking Xico Stockinger into account, the intension is to point out, what is after all, a Place of Memory and how the documentary in question dialogues with this concept. The justification presented for doing this work is that the discussion about the way cinema and audiovisuals in general are used as preservers and diffusers of memory, this is a very relevant and current issue.

In addition, the fact that the role given to art and the memory of those who are notable for our community is increasingly relegated to small groups who are concerned with ensuring that the traces of what society has produced does not get erased, more than a concern that affects the population as a whole.

In this sense, the reflection on how a documentary film was used by a film director and his team, to record the memory of a contemporary artist in our society, is something that is relevant for the whole community.

The methodology adopted was bibliographic research and an interview with open questions was also used, the interview was done with the director of the documentary, with the subsequent analysis of these questions. Initially, the concept of Place of Memory formulated by Pierre Nora (1993) will be addressed, and then the film Xico Stockinger (2012) and its approximation with this definition will be presented.

2. Development

2.1 Places of Memory

According to Pierre Nora (1993), today we are experiencing an acceleration of history, where there is a fast oscillation of a past that is dead, there is the impression that things are missing, an uprooting along with what remains of tradition.

Thus, attention to places where memory is crystallized has to do with this historical moment, where the break with the past is mixed with the feeling of a shattered memory and the feeling of continuity is relegated to the places. In this context, there would be places of memory, as there are no more means of memory.

This happened with the end of the peasants in the industrial age of the central countries and with the independence of the colonies — which led to the new nations and their groups, which previously had a great deal of memory and little history for historicity.

In this way, the end of the memory societies came to be, which are those that maintained the conservation and transmission of values, as well as, the end of the memory ideologies which were maintained by being regularly passed from the past to the future. But, in addition to this, the printing of history, through the media, replaces memory with actuality.

The author goes on to say that:

“If we inhabited our memory, we would not have the need to dedicate places to it. There would be no places, because there would be no memory carried on by history (...). As long as there is a trail, distance, mediation, we are no longer in true memory, but in history” (Nora, 1993, p. 8).

And for him, the history of national development is a history-memory, the strongest of collective traditions, a great means of memory. And this historiography is a “regulated exercise of memory (...) the reconstruction of a past without a gap and without failure (...). All the major historical changes took place to expand the field of collective memory” (Nora, 1993, p. 10).

Thus, the nation defined the present and justified it by clarifying the past, providing history-memory with continuity. And it was through the nation that the memory remained at the level of being sacred. However, desecration occurs when society emerges in the place and space of the nation, which is now no longer a single body with a collective consciousness.

Then, according to Nora (1993), what was legitimized by the past becomes legitimate for the future, as there is a need to prepare it. And the three terms, once again have autonomy: Nation becomes a given, history a social science, and memory is seen as a private phenomenon.

In this context, the places of memory are between a purely historiographical conception, of history reflecting on itself, and a proper historical idea, bringing a memory tradition to an end. And the author points out that the time of the places is that exact moment, in which the intimacy of a memory disappears, so that only the vision of a reconstructed history exists.

In this way, places of memory are the remains, rituals of a society without rituals, belong to the de-ritualization of a society that is undergoing a transformation and renewal, valuing the future more than the past. They arise from the feeling that there is no more spontaneous memory, that it is necessary to create files, commemorative dates, monuments, associations, etc.

However, besides this, without commemorative zeal, history would erase the places of memory, because if what they defend is not being threatened, there would be no need to build them, if the memories they contain were truly lived, they would be of no use. Thus, they consist of:

“(…) moments in history taken from the course of history, but returned to it. No longer entirely life, nor entirely death, like shells on the beach when the sea withdraws from living memory” (Nora, 1993, p. 13).

For the author, what is seen today as memory is actually already history. Today memory is not true memory, because now it is protected by gesture and habit, by body knowledge and reflex knowledge. And, in this way, it is no longer spontaneous, it is a duty, it is no longer social, collective, globalizing, it is psychological, individual and subjective.

But true memory is different from the current one that is archival, with the need for external support, hence the obsession with the archive, because with the feeling that everything disappears quickly and with the concern to correctly give significance to the present, while dealing with the uncertainty of the future, everything becomes memorable.

So, for Nora (1993), what is currently called memory is actually the material stock of what is already impossible to remember or, going further, the set of what might be necessary to remember.

He argues that with the passage from memory to history, with memory becoming historicized, each group was forced to demarcate its identity by revitalizing its own history.

With this, a duty of memory arose that makes each one the historian of itself and this is a consequence of the end of history memory, something that increased the intensity of private memories claiming their own history. “The less the memory is lived collectively, the more it needs private men who make themselves memory men” (Nora, 1993, p. 18).

Thus, memory today has become, in addition to an archive and a duty, yet another characteristic, in distant memory, this is because the relationship we have with the past is very different from that which is expected of a memory. There is no longer a retrospective continuity, but a discontinuity.

In the history-memory the past was not considered to be truly the past, since an effort made to remember could bring it back and the present was nothing more than a renewed past, updated by this support.

However, the author argues that today, the past is offered as being radically different, it is a world from which one is forever disconnected. And, paradoxically, the reflections, the vestiges of the past have never so desired, but these are an artificial hallucination of the past, only conceivable in discontinuity.

Thus, the relationship with the past is established in a game of the impenetrable and the abolished and, with the loss of a unique explanatory origin, a fragmented universe was generated, at the same time that any and all worthy objects were transformed into a historic mystery.

“We knew, in the past, whose children we were and today we are the children of nobody and everybody. If nobody knows what the past is made of, an uneasy certainty turns everything into a trace, a possible indication, a suspicion of history with which we contaminate the innocence of things. Our perception of the past is the appropriation of what we know no longer belongs to us. It requires precise placement on a lost object” (Nora, 1993, p. 20).

The author concludes this thought by saying that, when historiography enters the epistemological era, the era of identity definitively ends and memory is swallowed up by history, with a memory man no longer existing, but a place of memory.

And in this way, the places of memory belong to two domains: They are a game of memory and history, that is, places of history added to the memory will. In addition, they are places that are present in three ways, which always coexist simultaneously and in different degrees: material, symbolic and functional.

The apparent material place, like a file, is only considered to be a place of memory if it has a symbolic aura. A functional place, like a class manual or an association of former combatants, is only a place of memory if it is the subject of a ritual. And what seems to be of great symbolic significance, such as a minute of silence, is a material piece of a temporal unit, used as a concentrated memory.

But first of all, for Nora (1993), it is necessary to have a desire for memory, if this premise were abandoned, every object worthy of remembering would fall into the category of place of memory. And in the absence of this intention of memory, these places will just be places of history.

The author also postulates that the reason for the places of memory is to stop time, to block forgetfulness, and that the fact that they live in constant metamorphosis, with meanings that continually stand out, and unpredictable ramifications, is what makes them passionate.

In addition, the places of memory leave the collective memory, to enter into the historical memory and, later, into the pedagogical memory. And what makes them great an attraction, with their initial intention of memory or the endless return of the cycles of their memory, is that they are objects of great depth.

But it is necessary to reiterate that to be a place of memory, everything that leads to the appearance of the past in the present, can only be considered as such, if it is invested with the memory will.

On the other hand, the author argues that, unlike history, places of memory have no direct reference to reality, they are their own references, authentic signs. This does not mean that they have no content, that they are not physical or historical, but that what makes them places of memory is where they escape history and symbolize meaning given to context.

Nora (1993), finally says, there is an attachment to these symbols, however, already withered, and that there is a passion that has ended, where we no longer suffer because of suffering, but for reasons of true sadness.

2.2 The Documentary Xico Stockinger as a Place of Memory

The documentary *Xico Stockinger* (2012), directed by Frederico Mendina, is 86 minutes long and tells the story of Stockinger's life, as told by himself, with interventions by the researchers José Francisco Alves and Paulo Herkenhoff, plus animations made from drawings and caricatures drawn by the main character himself.

The film details the life trajectory of the protagonist, since he left Austria at the age of 3, up to living in Brazil, settling in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and later in Porto Alegre, where he lived until he passed away. The film also clarifies how Stockinger, who was an aviator and meteorologist, became a versatile artist with remarkable talent.

Director Frederico Mendina lived with Xico from 2006 until 2009, the year he passed away. Therefore, the recorded images in which the protagonist narrates passages from his own life to Medina's camera have a memorialist tone and are of great value because it is the character himself recalling his story.

The fact that the film uses animations, as tools to illustrate moments lived by Stockinger and is narrated by himself, gives the narrative vitality, while the interventions of critics, such as José Francisco Alves and Paulo Herkenhoff, give credibility and serve to clarify how Xico built his art.

Thus, this documentary film with a biographical character, portrays the human being and the artist Xico Stockinger in a complete way, it puts the viewer in touch with the life and world view of this special character who became a sculptor, having also created cartoons and works in woodcut, in a set of works that highlighted the art

made in the country.

According to director Frederico Mendina, the idea of making the film came to him while talking with friends who are visual artists, he realized the need to contribute, through audiovisual means, to preserve the memory of our society. And he argues that “in other countries there are many films about great artists that enable new generations to have “contact” with the masters. In Brazil, this is still very rare and we have unfortunately already lost some people without having any audiovisual record of them”.

Thus, through this statement by the documentary director Xico Stockinger, it is noticed that there is a clear desire for memory in the making of the film. And Nora (1993, p. 22) tells us about Places of Memory: “Initially, you need to want to have a memory”. As previously discussed in this work, Nora places the intention of memory as a fundamental condition for a given fact/object to be considered a Place of Memory, according to the concept developed by him.

In addition, the author points out that these places exist, since spontaneous memory no longer exists and that if “what they defend is not being threatened, there would be no need to build them” (Nora, 1993, p. 13).

And it is clearly perceived, in the expression of the director of Xico Stockinger, that with the making of the film he aims to preserve the protagonist's memory, as there have already been other cases in which people have been lost, without the proper audiovisual recording being made of them for the future generations.

Continuing his speech, Frederico Mendina states that: “The documentary is a means of preserving memory, just like photos and books. Even though this audiovisual means allows for a greater approximation between the audience and the character portrayed, we still lack the means to allow the general public to have access to the film”.

He also believes that audiovisual is the most complete way to show some fact or character, as it encompasses audio, video, art direction, photography and editing, and this compound provides an unequalled experience to the viewer who has never had access to the content presented.

And at this point, returning Nora's concept of Places of Memory, it appears that this documentary film has, based on the director's own speech, an evidently material sense, since it is a record in the audiovisual format, which materially concentrates the memory of artist Xico Stockinger, through 86 minutes of film.

Frederico Mendina also says that “copies will be sent to the archives of Cinemateca Nacional, the body responsible for maintaining our film history; as well as to the State Film Institute of Rio Grande do Sul-IECINE”. Where it can be clearly seen, that the film is a material record, which must be archived.

In addition, Frederico reports that, after the film fulfills its commercial career, copies will be provided to schools, art institutes and universities, for the documentary to be part of the collection of their video libraries, allowing students access to it.

Thus, this documentary is a Place of Memory, which in addition to the material sense has a functional meaning, since it will serve as a didactic work in schools and universities, making it accessible to students, who will have contact with the life and work of Xico Stockinger during their school education. Without forgetting that when watching it, they will perform a ritual in front of the screen, something that is common to those who watch a film, as Bizello tells us (2010, p. 8):

Even with the technological changes that allowed the film to enter the private sphere, the ritual of going to the cinema, the dark of the room, the image on the big screen, is still somehow reproduced in the home living room in the form of a home theater. The film, in turn, here considered a place of memory, can celebrate and be celebrated in its places of memory.

It is also impossible to deny that the documentary analyzed has the other meaning attributed by Nora (1993) to Places of Memory, the symbolic sense, since the film is representative of the culture of the State of Rio Grande do Sul and Brazil.

This is because, its protagonist is one of the greatest visual artists produced in the country and represents the values, beliefs, and philosophies of the group and the culture to which he belonged, in a given historical period, although this is not known to the general public, but this is something that the documentary aims to remedy.

And this is evident in Frederico Mendina's argument, pointing out that Xico Stockinger is a relevant artist in Rio Grande do Sul, mainly in Porto Alegre, but although there are many of his works in squares and public buildings, the vast majority of the population that frequents these spaces has no idea who created these creations.

In this sense, the director when making the documentary and trying to bring Xico closer to the audience, allowing people to get to know him, through his own words, makes an attempt to preserve the artist's memory, which is also, inevitably, a claim to preserve and disseminate the symbolism of a social group for the wider society.

3. Final Considerations

For all that was covered in this work, it can be concluded that the documentary Xico Stockinger, directed by Frederico Medina, is a Place of Memory, according to the concept created by Pierre Nora.

And as an argument for this statement, it is possible to list the fact that Frederico Mendina, when conceiving the idea of making the documentary, he had a desire for memory, an intention to preserve the artist's memory so that it is not forgotten, a condition postulated by Nora to be a Place of Memory.

In addition, it is possible to observe in the documentary the three simultaneous senses to which the Places of Memory belong: The film has both a material, a functional and a symbolic meaning.

Many more observations could be made when approaching the theme of Places of Memory taking as the object the documentary Xico Stockinger. However, for the purposes of this work we have focused on the most ostentatious characteristics, so that it is clear that the film is a great place of memory and that seeing it as such also makes us reflect on the attention we give to art and memory in our contemporary society.

In this sense, a filmed record that becomes a support for the preservation of the biography of a visual artist, to the point of being considered as a Place of Memory, can demonstrate that our society needs to pay greater attention to the role of the visual arts, so that the memory of our artists can be spread to all social groups in a more spontaneous way.

References

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