

# **CINEMA COMPARATIVE CINEMA**



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Cover photo: *Visita, ou Memórias e Confissões* (Manoel de Oliveira, 1981). Taken by Rita Azevedo Gomes (Cinematheca portuguesa).

# Introduction

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*Cinema Comparat/ive Cinema* is a biannual publication founded in 2012. It is edited by Colectivo de Investigación Estética de los Medios Audiovisuales (CINEMA) at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF), and focuses on comparative cinema and the reception and interpretation of film in different social and political contexts. Each issue investigates the conceptual and formal relationships between films, material processes and production and exhibition practices, the history of ideas and film criticism.

*Cinema Comparat/ive Cinema* addresses an original area of research, developing a series of methodologies for a comparative study of cinema. With this aim, it also explores the relationship between cinema and comparative literature as well as other contemporary arts such as painting, photography, music or dance, and audio-visual media.

*Cinema Comparat/ive Cinema* is published in three languages: Catalan, Spanish and English. The journal is biannual and the numbers are published in summer and winter. At least half of the articles included in the journal are original texts, of which at least 50% are written by authors external to the publishing organisation. The journal is peer-reviewed and uses internal and external evaluation committees.

Finally, each issue of the journal is complemented by documentary materials and texts published online, which facilitate and enrich the topics studied in each volume, thus establishing links between longer research projects and monographic focuses throughout this process.



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# The poetry of the earth.

## Portuguese cinema: Rite of spring

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Gonzalo de Lucas

On the 17th of November of 1973, in the Grande Auditório Gulbenkian of Lisbon, the ‘most memorable cinema session that ever happened in Portugal,’ as João Bénard da Costa used to relate<sup>1</sup>, took place. *Rome, Open City* (*Roma, città aperta*, 1945), forbidden in the country back then, was shown that one time, in a copy without subtitles, with the presence of Roberto Rossellini and Henri Langlois. The public’s enthusiasm was so that it generated the clamor for an open Lisbon and the end of Salazar’s regime. During that popular reaction of the spectators, Langlois foresaw the dawn of the Carnation Revolution, which would take place four months later.

That projection was very important to boost the programming work that João Bénard da Costa would carry out later on at the Cinemateca Portuguesa, turning it into a source of filmmakers, a space in which life and cinema met and aesthetics did not forget their political dimension. Now that the majority of film archives in Europe are going through a time of cutbacks and marginalization, the example of Bénard da Costa is still extraordinary to reclaim the function of a film archive from the experiences it can generate.

The history of the grand Portuguese cinema is visible through the transmission of ways and methodologies of production, but above all through a relationship between cinema and the world in which the sensitivity facing the matter of reality and the effects of time on it is worked by images and sounds that generate openings between both sides. It is a story of filiations and encounters such as the ones that orbit around *Rite of Spring* (*Acto da Primavera*, 1963), Oliveira’s founding work in which filming Paulo Rocha and António Reis participated. In a way, the figures of Oliveira and Rossellini are not only the embryo of the best cinema that will be done from then onwards in Portugal,

but of some of the ideas that will traverse the cinematographic modernity in the 70s and even later.

Of some of these filiations is what this issue is about, originated from the desire of watching and rewatching some of those films, and starting from the formal invention of *Rite of Spring* and its influence. Today Portuguese cinema is usually present in most festivals, but its profound and long history is still unknown. Even grand films such as *Change One’s Life* (*Mudar de Vida*, 1966), *A Ilha dos Amores* (1982) by Paulo Rocha, *Trás-os-Montes* (1976) or *Ana* (1983) by António Reis and Margarida Cordeiro, or *Past and Present* (*O Passado e o Presente*, 1972) or even *Rite of Spring* by Oliveira are exceptionally shown outside of Portugal<sup>2</sup>, not to say other films of less renown filmmakers, from Alberto Seixas Santos to Rita Azevedo Gomes. Nonetheless, every encounter with those films can have something of blooming, germination or blossoming of a cinema that works the “poetry of the earth<sup>3</sup>.”•

1. See for example ‘A superficialidade dos homens’, by João Bénard da Costa, published in the dossier of the Brazilian magazine Foco: <http://focorevistadecinema.com.br/FOCO1/benard-rossellini.htm>

2. It is important to point out that for some years now, the works as editor and programmer of Roberto Turigliatto, of Jaime Pena at the CGAI, the dossiers of the magazine Lumière dedicated to Rocha and Oliveira, or cycles such

as Federico Rossin’s about the Portuguese revolution, to mention a few, are creating spaces for these encounters, their documentation and discussion.

3. To recover the title of a beautiful book dedicated to Reis and Cordeiro: MOUTINHO, Anabela and DA GRAÇA, Lobo (1997). *António Reis e Margarida Cordeiro. A poesia da terra*. Faro: Cineclub Faro.



# The soul cannot think without a picture

João Bénard da Costa and Manoel de Oliveira

**Manoel de Oliveira:** Cinema can sometimes have great movement and others be very fixed, stopped. It's something that contradicts many people who still maintain that obsession of cinema being movement and having to be moving all the time. I don't agree with this idea. I thought of it when I saw Leonardo da Vinci's *Annunciation*, which is a completely fixed painting, in which there is an angel with his knee on the ground and whose wings express movement, the flight. But he doesn't move and the Virgin contemplates him, and they are both immobile. In the background there are some trees, and their leaves don't move, there's no wind, nothing, everything is still, so calm that that stillness simulates eternity. It being stopped means there is no time or space. So that kind of fixedness gives a greater strength than movement. Movement distracts, fixedness concentrates. What do you think?

**João Bénard da Costa:** It's exactly like this. Which brings me back to the issue of the representation of life. Before, you quoted the example of the Lumière brothers' train. Today this type of train has disappeared. Technology has changed. In some way, this small film, beyond the effect it provoked during the time, the fear it provoked in the viewers, also preserves—at least while the film lasts—what a train was like in 1895, the station, the people and how they dressed, that is, a combination of elements that the director didn't consider because he was filming the everydayness, and that still remains today when everything has changed in relation to the arrival of a train at a station.

If we concentrate too much on historical detail, the movement of the representation of life in 1895, 1920 or 1930 can distract us from what is essential, which is the passions, the feelings of the characters. And this hasn't changed so much in the course of history, because basically the same ones remain. Habits change, many things evolve, but one always finds oneself with love, hate, jealousy, the same feelings that dominate man, for good or evil, in any time. How to express that through art, and that immobility or that escape of time?

**MO:** That evocation of another time in the present is really distracting, but the filmmaker's art—and in this case it's not the same as the painter's anymore—consists in achieving that that distraction doesn't surpass the drama it represents. Because, as you point out really well, the clothing and the mentality change, everything changes, but the primary feelings subsist since the beginning of humanity: jealousy, love, vengeance... There's a

French author who says that vengeance is the first and most profound feeling that subsists in man, and the one that one identifies today all around us. Terrorism is a kind of vengeance that is fulfilled. Cinema and painting are passionate about what they show, but the paintings are worth for what they mean, not what they show. From which it may be deduced that that which is shown is in the outside, while the meaning of what is shown is in the inside. Isn't this so?

**JCB:** Completely.

**MO:** One day, a critic, who was really a philosopher, told me he wanted to speak with me, and then the only question he asked me was: 'You have films such as *I'm Going Home* (*Je rentre à la maison*, 2001), which everyone understands, easy to watch, but you have others that are difficult to understand, such as *Anxiety* (*Inquietude*, 1998). What explanation do you give to this?' And I told him: 'That's why it's called *Anxiety*.' What else could I say? How to explain something that for me goes from inside out, to someone that goes from outside in, so he can come in? It's a problem, in the way that people go towards what's easier and more immediate. And, of course, the more richness a film has, the public decreases. It's like that with films, philosophy, schools of thought, paintings, with everything... In truth, I don't think there's people who are more intelligent than others, because intelligence is something difficult to distinguish, because there's people who are intelligent for some things but not for others, and that varies in each person. What I would like is for people to have a cinematographic intelligence, but that can't be done.

**JCB:** Precisely because of that, when you spoke about Leonardo da Vinci's painting, and that immobility that gives strength to the painting—which is well pointed out in relation to that painting—, that presupposes an education of the gaze. You can see all that thanks to cinema and your culture in general, but it is especially cinema that makes you see that that effect is due to the absence of mobility, because there's a fixedness. This education of the gaze, this preparation to seeing, is what allows that type of interpretation or analysis, or to feel something that people don't know how to explain and have the need to. The Greeks already talked about this, this is in Plato: to see is man's most important act. More than anything else: to see. To know how to see. To see someone else, an object, a situation, the gaze that allows you to see. Is this importance of seeing in your work something that has been imposed?

**MO:** Certainly. María Isabel, my wife, really likes small books of thoughts and one day she gave me one, which was in English. I leafed through it, because my English is not that good, so there were things I didn't understand very well, but it had a thought of Aristotle that said: 'The soul cannot think without a picture'. The picture is visual and the thought is also visual. The picture is really immediate, but there isn't an image that doesn't translate a thought. And there won't be a thought or a concept—such as a chair, for example, which is a concept—that won't be seen.

**JCB:** Okay, but let's take something more abstract. Intelligence, for example. Despite everything there is an image, which varies from person to person, but remains as an image.

**MO:** As you well say: but it is always an image. Everything is translated through an image. It's very curious.

**JCB:** With a chair it's evident, everyone has seen one, but still almost everyone sees his or her own.

**MO:** And there's something else, if we take Molière, who goes back to more than three hundred years ago, he said that the word is used for explaining the thought, but the word is the portrait of the things and also the portrait of the thought. Everything brings us to the image: the word is image. When Deleuze wrote his first book about cinema, he said: movement/image. And in his second book: time/image. In time there is movement. There's no time without movement, and in the image there is the word. He doesn't talk about the word, because it's not necessary.

There is, therefore, a duplication of the image, without doing a superposition of the images, since when this occurs it's usually something terrible and confusing. In this way, the word superposes the image over another image, which generates great richness, since they don't disrupt each other, on the contrary, they interact well. The director is the one who has to always take care about what is best in terms of image to express those words. One has to be careful to avoid disturbances and contradictions. The position of the camera, the set, the costumes, the attitudes. And where does all of this come from? From intuition, the instant, the instinct. It's very hard and I feel it when I write, since I write the same description four, five or six times, and it changes continuously and gets richer, but I always end up filming something different. Why? Because I'm at a desk, and I'm locked in there, and when I go film I'm facing the set, the actors, the costumes, the light, and all that suggests new things that I didn't see and couldn't see, so I adapt to those circumstances. When I rewrite the script so many times, I get integrated in a stronger way in the context of the film I want to

make, so the changes don't separate me from the film. And if I see something very beautiful, but out of context, I can't film it. That's a very strong reference point to directing and filming.

**JBC:** For you, what does the length of cinema contribute?

**MO:** I think that time is an important notion when it's translated into movement, like in dance or especially music, and in cinema. A film lasts an hour and a half or two hours; a musical piece, twenty minutes, half an hour or two hours. Time is what's determined. A painting lasts the length of time that it is shown or the time I give it, there's no other time. It's always there, but in another place. It can't remain in front of our eyes, we can't fix it, it would be excessive. To be a prisoner for eternity because of a gaze, like Narcissus. It would be the death of time.

**JBC:** And the death of Narcissus as well, who ends up killing himself.

**MO:** Time gives place to reflection. I did my first experience with prolonged time in *The Artist and the City* (*O Pintor e a Cidade*, 1956), where I dragged the time of the images. It was very criticized and frowned upon, like an insufficiency of the director. Bazin was one of the people who saw it like that, although he thought the film was interesting. When an Italian projectionist saw it he told me: 'You should have told me, I would have helped you.' He couldn't see, because the characteristic of cinema was for it to move much faster. When I showed Bazin *Labor on the Douro River* (*Douro faina fluvial*, 1931), he was surprised because it was exactly the contrary of the other one. He saw that making the shots longer wasn't due to an insufficiency of the director, but to his determination. Something that appears later in some of the films by Dreyer, Visconti or Bresson. One time Bresson presented a film in Cannes that was whistled at. After, in the press conference, when they asked him about it he answered: 'What public?' The important thing is to know by whom. Bresson's films are deep, they contain a philosophical dimension that is not visible, and to which the public in general is not used to. It would be necessary to show people how to see, the same as filmmakers have learned from their great masters to make their films. They learned, their films are not innate. Today there are directors who don't want to know anything about what was made before, have nothing to learn and consider that cinema is only made as it figures in their head. I understand that the true originality of a film comes from personality, but this personality must be inserted in a cinematographic context, and not outside. This is essential because we have instincts, and we mustn't give them excessive freedom, because to live in society man must establish rules and laws, certain ethics, which contradict the instincts.

**JBC:** When I was in Japan, in Kyoto, I went to a temple of the eternal nothingness, I don't know if you've seen it, it's a temple with a very complex story. When I arrived, I was a bit disappointed, I thought it was nice, but not as beautiful as was said. But there were some books for tourists that explained the rocks and the stones, and when you read it you entered a little bit in the interior and started to perceive that every one of those stones was a shape, that everything told a story, like art, even the most abstract art. And I started to understand, and all of that went towards the garden of the eternal nothingness, with two little mounds of sand, an impeccable sand, the nothingness, the waters of infinity... And slowly I understood with great enthusiasm. There was a Buddhist monk who was there looking, and he saw my enthusiasm, and asked me in English if I liked it. 'Yes, at first not so much, but now that I begin to understand I like it a lot.' And he asked me: 'You begin to understand?' 'Yes, I start to perceive it.' And he answered: 'It's curious because I've been coming here for thirty years, and every day I understand less.' I felt humiliated because he was right. It was evident that I didn't understand anything, I was tied to the story of a book, but to comprehend you had to go way beyond.

**MO:** I also went to Kyoto, and they took me to a Zen garden. And they told me: 'There are fifteen stones here, but we can only see fourteen. The fifteenth can only be seen with the heart.' I verified that there were really fifteen stones, but when you changed positions there was always one that remained hidden. We remained still for a while, everything was silent, there were few people with us, and I asked the person who accompanied me: 'And now what do we do?' And she told me: 'Now you think.' And I asked: 'Think about what?' And she said: 'About nothing.' Everything was there. To think about nothing is to think about everything.

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*This conversation was filmed by Rita Azevedo Gomes in her film A 15ª Pedra (2007). We thank the author for her permission to transcribe, edit and translate the dialogue.*

#### **Note from the editors**

In the filmed interview from which this dialogue was transcribed and translated, Manoel de Oliveira, probably because of a mistaken memory, quotes Aristotle's phrase in English using the word 'thought' instead of 'soul'. The former appears in most of the translations.

# A certain tendency in Portuguese cinema

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Alberto Seixas Santos

There is a certain tendency in Portuguese cinema that is characterized, despite the diversity of its ways, by the modernity of its thoughts and proposals. This cinema insists firstly in the performance's criticism, which is due to, on one hand, the exhaustion of the model that served as support and, on another hand, the proliferation and trivialization of the images that television has brought.

In this group of authors' films, the 'naturalist' tendency—marked by mimesis, authenticity and transparency—, that has fueled for many years cinema's figuration, becomes denied, distanced or put in parentheses.

Clarity gives way to a relative opacity that is expressed in a different manner: in the refusal of concluding and ending the film, in the abrupt and violent eclipse that runs through the film, in its incomplete and fragmentary aspect, or in the destruction of its narrative thread.

This attitude brings another one. Cinema, which is based in the action and drama that come from literature and theatre, sees itself confronted with a clear choice of being less dramatic, as if the authors were more interested in that which constitutes its purely formal essence. Reading an adventure is replaced by the adventure of reading. Art separates itself from performance, entertainment. The shadow of modern cinema's father, Roberto Rossellini, floats in the air.

As Adriano Arpà has already said, the hard core of Rossellinian thinking is organized around a series of topics: the rejection of the performance ideology, of the star system, of the novelistic fiction, of the 'theatrical' relationship with the public. And, therefore, the end of the studio praise.

In this sense, and bearing in mind the diversity of ways that this tendency in Portuguese cinema creates, it is not less significant that, for every filmmaker, Rossellini is a cornerstone, an essential reference point. Naturally a filmmaker can resume the theatrical issue and confront it with reality, but this passage through theater is a way of positioning oneself in the distance, an exposure of the narrative system as it is. And this task is eminently modern. It is also a cinema without logic or psychological motivation, which is the reason why characters do not have any kind of depth. They are creatures that remain external to the texts they pronounce, letting the words come out their mouths with the materiality of rocks, searching for a possible music, but crude; or they are beings that are more or less apathetic and are helplessly and without remission exposed to our gaze. In other cases, we assist to the stubborn choice of an infighting with the actor with the hope of snatching a second of authenticity or achieve a controlled improvisation, although productive.

This cinema is not on the spectator's side. It invites him to work more than feel pleasure, or, to be more precise, to the pleasure of working.

This tendency in Portuguese cinema, in which inventors of forms with different concerns coexist, does not do other than inscribe itself in the field of the symbolic revolutions that have marked almost all modern arts. The fact that its legitimation comes more from festivals and critics than from the audience's success—just like modern painting, in its first phase, has obtained its benefits from galleries and museums, and not the market—is the price to pay by those few that adventure in an unknown territory.

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Edited in: TURIGLIATTO, Roberto, FINA, Simona (ed.) (1999). *Amori di perdizione: storie di cinema portoghese: 1970-1999*. Torino. Lindau.

# To Manoel de Oliveira

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Luis Miguel Cintra

Dear Sirs and Madams,

Before addressing directly the guest of honour of this party, whose birthday we celebrate, I would like to salute you all for coming. And I shall explain why.

Since the day I was first filmed by Manoel de Oliveira, surrounded by a lot of people between figurants and crew, and tied to the mast of a monumental vessel constructed in the midst of the Tóbis Studios, swayed by the fake waves that actually were the strength of men arms in a long take of *Le Soulier de Satin* by Claudel, it's been already 25 years. I perceived then by experience what I believed I felt as a spectator in *Acto da primavera*: this is not a private cinema. This cinema is addressed to the world, to all and each man, to whoever desires. I do not know another cinema which thinks further than this one, about whom it is made for, about the spectators to whom it will be or should be shown, and who Manoel de Oliveira would wish to be, as said in the prologue of *Acto da Primavera*, 'any sinner', this means, the whole world, as sinners we will all be and each one as worthy of respect. Manoel de Oliveira's camera was in front of me that day to expose myself, rather than in a stage, to the world. I perceived that his cinema, like no other, made me responsible for my condition of human and actor, and that more than myself, put in that situation, much more courage and greater responsibility was assuming the one that filmed. I started perceiving then, from film to film, each time better, how truth this was. It was later confirmed when in that film, and in many others, Manoel de Oliveira asked me to look into the lens. He said: 'Listen, when you look to the camera think about the theatre where the film will be screened.' The filming machine was not the hidden look of a filmmaker, like in other cases, but rather the instrument he openly used to elaborate an art that only had sense when shown to the whole world.

In the same vein, I have always noticed the importance and the equal respect Manoel has given to all public acts he has been invited to, whether festivals, homages, contact with the mass media, any screening of one of his films; whether the simplest meeting with other people, an interview, a dinner in his house, a stroll, being with other people. I do not believe he does it for more vanity than that required by the self-love every man should have. I rather think that he does it because only as an active member of a human society he will understand his trade

as an artist or his simple condition of being, as well, human. Speaking in a less grave tone, it might be for the same reason he has happily never stopped joking, to relate with others. And because of this, I have already said it, this cinema is eminently political in the noblest sense of the word.

Not always, as we know, the reaction towards his cinema has known to have the same dignity as what it showed. I will never get tired of admiring how his energy kept fighting throughout so many years against the lack of curiosity of so many people that, as unhappily frequently happens, remembered and did not gave themselves the space to respond to the challenge with eyes to see. And he was rejected or simply ignored. But with an immovable will and conviction, he resisted until defeating the indifference, the Portuguese envy Viera talks about and, above all, the prejudices and the models of a forever-normalized taste. Happily, the whole world recognizes the interest in his work today, and even some of us might, as human beings, recognize ourselves in it and in its way of giving sight to live.

Even though I love him personally and have him as one of my fondest friends, it has a special significance to me that this celebration, in good time relied to the more than competent cares of Serralves, is a political ceremony, an official ceremony where his homeland's government acknowledges him for his work and pays tribute to him in his hundred 100th birthday. He has the whole right to it. And this day should make history. The way in which he handles his activity as a creator is exemplary. His work will be as useless as any work of art, but for the same reason, and like all works of art should be, it is the most complete way of being alive. In his case, it became evident in a treasure recognized with importance way beyond national limits. Your presence here means you understand it likewise, and I salute you for that. Thank you.

But if you allow me, this party is a party of friends as well, of a huge friendship. Happily, our king of the party knows well how everything in life merges and nothing alive is organized into sealed compartments. I would like, and if I am able to do so in a less solemn tone, to address you now, Manoel, making myself a representative of all the actors that Manoel called for his films. Congratulations, Manuel, for your 100 years and, of course, for the tremendous love to life they testify, but above all for what has been done, for the way you have known to be, and for what you have made us live.

When I watched *Cristóvão Colombo o enigma*, your last finished feature film, in the première that, as all the premières of your films, was a party, I was impressed by the deep melancholy of the film and I talked about it in an interview. I know you liked the observation. I was not mistaken, then. But I got used to see you more as a joker and more provocative, and if it is true that in the formal bravery of the film, the pleasure of subverting and reinventing the cinema language with which I have always seen you joking remains, I felt novelty in it, as I always do. But the novelty consisted in a new distance and a lot of melancholy that I perceived in that whole search the film shows us: the search for the memory, that usually the world does not have, of the life of one that has given so much. Colon's case is that of someone who gave to the world as much as the discovery of a new continent and nevertheless his life is barely known. It is like if the film questioned which of the things each one lived and gave to the world remain in the memory of others, fearing the memory of the world to be, in fact, little. And the film bravely faces the way in which that what makes us live is ephemeral. His cinema, it is known, makes one think. I found myself in the light of eternity, or of the course of time thinking about small things: in the life of those actors he has chosen to play the parts in the films, Ricardo, Leonor Baldaque and Leonor Silveira, Manoel himself and Mrs. Doña Isabel, so wonderfully showed there just as I know them, and even in myself filmed there by your side, so equal to myself that no one believes I am the director of the museum you decided me to pretend to be.

In those images as finally in all of your films, Manoel, beyond any fiction that as an exercise of fantasy, your spice of life, you always put to play with reality in your very unique way of thinking, we are all filmed in those more or less serious playing moments that you made us live, and in this case, you made for yourself. From such type of moments your cinema is constituted, from the life of your actors. For me what counts the most today and what is inseparable from the joy of having been able to participate in your work in so many occasions is exactly the memory of those moments of joy or tension, in any case of deep exaltation, that each of the films has meant for both the ones being filmed and the one who filmed or helped to do it. And there are so much already, so long ago and so many people whose names you have written in the credits of your films! What I would like to express better today in name of those

people, and above all, of those who call themselves actors, is how much it means to us that you have given us those moments of life and transformed them into communication to the world, is how much we acknowledge the fact of participating in your work because it makes us live more. There is no melancholy that can hide this joy. Your work gives a lot more sense to the live of a lot more people.

I never felt any notion of hierarchy in the shooting of your films. There are actors who are vedettes, there are beginners, some are non-actors, and there are evidently characters, but above all there are people I believe you know are worth for what they are. And that is why nobody ever does wrong, even though one does not know how to interpret. I believe that 'to do well or to do wrong' is not a concept that makes part of your cinema. That is strange, and it is a matter of one who knows the value of being alive. Manoel achieves the moment of filming with him to be an important moment of our life, and I have always felt it as an invitation to show the world who I am and what I am capable of. We have been, indeed, people alive in front of his camera, with all the variety that the human specie implies. Some good, some bad, for sure. And we all, who have been through it, feel now as a huge family of which you are the obvious founder. Because it was Manoel who wanted us to get together around him, who has put us in front of the world and who, with our own selves, has known how to create more life. All to try to understand better, with the help of your art, what finally means to live more. This gives more sense to our lives and even though we have not understood it with the same conscious and that, as it is ought to be, each one has kept a different memory about it, and that each one behaved differently in the responsibility that was given to us by the possibility of assuming it in complete freedom, *his cinema* shook all of our lives. That is priceless.

It is in my name, and I consider that in the name of all of your actors, and because of the plenty of life we have received from you, that, in your 100th birthday, I thank you. And, not even for a moment with the slightest melancholy, rather with the biggest love and the greatest joy of living. Please, continue making films. •

# The direct experience. Between Northern cinema and Japan

Paulo Rocha

## Questionnaire

1. What reason or reasons made you choose cinema as a form of artistic expression and what did you go through before starting to direct films?
2. How was your first film financed and in what conditions was its production carried out?
3. In relation to previous decades, and particularly the 50s, do you consider that there was a significant alteration in Portuguese cinema in the 60s?
4. Thinking about the cinema of the 60s, how do you place your movies from that period?
5. Do you consider that your films (in terms of production and aesthetics) had affiliations or received influences from international movements?
6. Do you establish any parallelisms between the films you make today and the aesthetics and production premises of Portuguese cinema in the 60s?
7. In your opinion, which are the ten best Portuguese films in history?

1. In Oporto, between the ages seven and twelve I wrote fictions, which were influenced by my chaotic juvenile readings. My father, a returned “Brazilian”, and a poet in his free time, guided me to be a writer. I discovered cinema in the Trindade, escaping from the Almeida Garrett school. I remember having seen in those times Kinugasa’s first color film, which had just won the Golden Palm in Cannes. The Japanese temptation was just starting...

I went to study Law in Lisbon, where I became friends with Nuno de Bragança, Pedro Tamen, Bénard da Costa, Alberto Vaz da Silva, people who were very linked to a non-conventional film club, the C.C.C, which took place in the Jardim Cine. Day and night, I started to imagine film plots. Between the ages nineteen and twenty-seven I must have done a hundred. I spent my life walking around, looking at houses and people. It made me sad that those people would die, I wanted to stop the river of time. The remedy was to make films. They were very visual ideas, linked to the houses, and concrete spaces. The characters would appear to me as if they were “lost souls” from those places and I were there acting as a medium. I had a great physical fragility, and everything would make an imprint on me like hot wax. I still carry obsessive scenes and images from that time that are slowly being introduced in the films I make now.

Through the engineer Neves Real I met Manoel de Oliveira in Oporto, in the times of *O Pão* (1959), shooting in which I did an internship. I really liked what Manoel did, although I wouldn’t be able to understand him until later on. I think Oporto is a more cinematographic city than Lisbon: look at António Reis, who is also from there, like me, and it’s not coincidence. Oporto is a “dramatic” city from the north of Europe, where the image is born at the same time as a carnal act and a synthesis of intelligence. Lisboa is already Arab, it doesn’t want drama or theatre, it wants poetry, string music, landscape painting, lyric fusion, refined sensuality. It misses the notion of the dramatic conflict, the body-to-body confrontation, the weight of the skin...

I didn’t manage to finish Law. I went to IDHEC [Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques], in Paris (although the SNI had rejected the compulsory presentation letter). It was the golden age of the new wave, and the Cinemateca was full of new people from all over the world. At IDHEC there was Sadoul, Mitry, Varda, Pierre L’Homme, but the teaching was uninspired. I was in debt with Renoir, watched and rewatched, and started studying Mizoguchi’s films. In those times I met a lot of people of Japanese cinema, who passed by Paris. Actors, technicians, scriptwriters. I slowly became very good friends with the great Kinugasa, and started to read everything about the Far East, and to learn the language. At IDHEC there was Cunha Telles and Costa e Silva. Telles already had a thousand ideas about the future of Portuguese cinema, and we talked about it with Margareta Mangs, a very smart swede who had a great heart and came to Portugal (married to António), where she edited *Os Verdes Anos* (1963) and *Mudar de Vida* (1966). When I finished IDHEC, I did an internship in Vienna, at *The Elusive Corporal* (*Le caporal épinglé*, 1962), of my master Renoir, and I liked the man more than the artist. Right after, I helped out a bit in the making of *A Caça* (Manoel de Oliveira, 1964), and soon I realized that the almost unknown Manoel was as big as the great Renoir. That’s why I wasn’t surprised when, so many years later, the capitals of the world started to discover his genius.

2. *Os Verdes Anos* was the first work of C. Telles productions. António had an impressive persuasiveness, and chose the team members wisely. Without counting the French cameraman (Luc Mirot) and Paulo Renato, it was a technical and artistic team of beginners. The enthusiasm was great, but we didn’t have any experience. The film cost 600 contos (between today’s ten and twelve thousand?). I didn’t get anything, and the salaries were modest. Gasoline was cheap... and the engineer

Gil, from Ulyssea Filme, was fascinated with Telles's dynamism and gave some credit. One of Rui Gomes's cousins came in with 100 and something contos, and Telles mortgaged one of his mother's houses, if I remember correctly. Later on, Vitória Filme gave us 200 contos in advance for future expenses. The film ended up being sold to some foreign televisions, which would almost cover the biggest expenses. Today, the Portuguese market, although with more than a hundred thousand viewers, once the publicity is paid, doesn't leave anything for the producer.

3. In the 50s, the traditional Portuguese films had lost its popular public, and the people from Avenidas Novas (Avenida Roma and Avenida Estados Unidos da América) were expecting something else. The 60s gave a first response: on one hand, the Produções Cunha Telles, very 'New Wave', with unknown actors, light technical teams and natural sets; on another, the prophetic heroic deeds of Manoel de Oliveira, who only filmed in the countryside and who, via *Acto da Primavera* (1963), announced the European avant-garde of the 70s and 80s: predominance of the theatrical scene, rediscovery of the text, new rituals. When the cinema novo decided to support Manoel (a famous lunch at Casa do Alentejo), the dynamic that Portuguese cinema has followed for the last 20 years was created. The only thing missing was the return to the studio, which would be the novelty of the next decade.

4-5. My films from the 60s have more to do with the general environment of the city (the end of Salazarism, the culture of the Avenidas Novas), than with the other cinema that was being done. I admired Fernando Lopes, but my artistic references were others. *Os Verdes Anos* has many subliminal tributes to Japanese cinema, but it has an almost expressionist suicide despair that gives it a weight and a darkness that come from my direct experience with people and places, without external artistic mediation. *Os Verdes Anos* was a kind juvenile Lisbon film only in its appearance. *Mudar de Vida* is my attempt at "Northern" cinema. It's filmed in the Furadouro, land of my mother and my grandparents. The image is heavy and monumental, it goes back to being close to the Japanese and some Russian filmmaker. It's also a matter of direct experience: since my childhood I was enchanted by the strength of those fishermen and those boats. It's the contrary of the plastic and literary culture of Lisbon. But it's close to Júlio Resende's paintings. António Reis's collaboration, in the dialogues, was decisive to achieve that environment of hieratic violence. *A Caça*, which I admire very much, was filmed near there.

6. When I finished *Mudar de Vida*, I discovered the Japanese classical theatre and the avant-garde art at the same time. Invited by the Fundação, all of a sudden I had to film the new Óbidos Museum. Almost without thinking, since there was no time, I advanced on a new path, which led me to *A Pousada das Chagas* (1972). *A Ilha dos Amores* (1982) is daughter of *A Pousada* (and,

unconsciously, of *Acto da Primavera*). *A Ilha* and *A Pousada* are opera-films, neo-Kabuki, in which every element (colors, dreams, shapes, words, bodies) is exacerbated, in an aesthetics of excess that has to do with certain ways of modern art in which the waste of energy tries to re-blend the fragments of a fractured world. *Le Soulier*, *A Ilha* and *A Pousada* are "Modernist plays", so close to Gil Vicente's theatre as Glauber Rocha's works. *O Desejado* (1987) will have to do with the films I didn't make but that I wrote around *Os Verdes Anos*, *River of Gold* (*O Rio de Ouro*, 1998), *A Viagem de Inverno*, etc. The same obsessive images of running water return, and the same type of human relationships. I think that in the future I will alternate between the *Ilha* and the *Verdes Anos* styles, between the monumental fresco and the decomposed urgency of passions.

7. I've lived in Japan for 10 years. I haven't seen many recent films, and I have forgotten a lot of the old ones. *Francisca* (Manoel de Oliveira, 1981); *Amor de Perdição* (Manoel de Oliveira, 1979); *A Caça* (Manoel de Oliveira, 1964); *Ana* (António Reis y Margarida Cordeiro, 1982); *Trás-os-Montes* (António Reis y Margarida Cordeiro, 1976); *Ninguém Duas Vezes* (Jorge Silva Melo, 1984); *A Canção de Lisboa* (José Cottinelli Telmo, 1933); *Vilarinho das Furnas* (António Campos, 1970); *Belarmino* (Fernando Lopes, 1964); *Quem Espera por Sapatos de Defunto* (João César Monteiro, 1970). •

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## Conversation with Pedro Costa. The encounter with António Reis

Anabela Moutinho, Maria da Graça Lobo

Following the interview you granted us for the catalog *Os Bons da Fita*—in which you spoke quite a lot about António Reis’s role in your personal and professional life—we would like you to talk about this topic in more detail, particularly about the fact that you were a student of António Reis.

I started Film School in the year ’79 or ’80 (I don’t really remember, although I’m sure I finished in 1983 as the degree was supposed to be three years long). The School, which was still “hungover” from April 25th, didn’t have an organization chart, programs or a stable faculty; on the contrary, it had a series of employed professors that were normally replaced after a few months, so there were big changes in this sense... In fact, there were even professors that almost never showed up, like António Pedro Vasconcelos—who was supposed to teach Editing—or others who disappeared completely, such as Jorge Alves da Silva, who no one knows who he is nowadays but nevertheless taught Film Analysis. And we had three or four technical subjects—Photography, Sound and aspects related to Acoustics, with Alexandre Gonçalves who is still a teacher today—, that were more or less maintained, perhaps because they were taught by technicians, down-to-earth people, so to speak. And the two or three professors that I liked the most and with whom I learned the most: João Bénard [da Costa], who taught History of Film (obviously) and who wasn’t very regular but at least had us watch films (there was an agreement with what in those times was the IPC that granted the display room to the School for didactic purposes) and discuss them and write papers about them; or João Miguel Fernandes Jorge, who taught a kind of Seminars, long, about something vaguely poetic and applied to cinema (it was, on the other hand, very beautiful, as João Miguel was—and is—an excellent teacher); and António Reis.

António Reis was someone whom I did not know. In fact, I didn’t know anything about Portuguese cinema; and that which I watched—alone, in those local cinemas that existed in those times, like the one in my neighborhood (Arroios)—allowed me to mainly access “old films” of John Ford, Raoul Walsh, etc. Therefore, I arrived to the School without prejudices [in relation to Portuguese cinema] but also arrogant and insolent. For me, Portuguese cinema was those comedies of the 40s (which I personally hate; I don’t see any quality in them and I consider them completely fascist, without any interest) and,

as for the Cinema Novo of Paulo Rocha and Fernando Lopes, I had only a vague idea after watching *Os Verdes Anos* (Paulo Rocha, 1963). I had watched it on television or because of my parents’ influence—especially my father’s—and from the film I obviously remembered Isabel Ruth, who I consider a type of Portuguese Anna Karina, the most beautiful girl in Portuguese cinema. And that was all.

So, I arrived at the School with a childhood friend; we both saw an ad in the paper and decided to quit our degrees (his was History and mine Literature). Our interests were mainly the punk music and philosophy of those times (violence, etc.), and so we soon chose to sit at the end of the classroom, hating everyone, provoking as much as we could and doing everything we could to be loathed. It was very funny, because the environment at the School was very favorable for us to “win.”

### But why?

Because it was absolutely idiotic. That is, we lived the “terror” of structuralism. And although it’s true that there is no better cinema historian than Gilles Deleuze, we lacked simplicity. The student that was considered the best in the School (who pointed at us saying “That one over there is a genius...!”) was a 22-year-old guy, with Bataille under his arm... ‘Be careful! He has done a 40-second short film which is absolutely relevant...!’ For us this was disgusting, and even because shortly after someone wrote on a wall that he was homosexual, or things like that... Things that are still written!

### And now...

For example, there was an Italian producer, about whom I read a lot, which had done peplum films, Cottafavi. I loathed his movies, but I had seen quite a few at the Roma and the Alvalade... Now, the School “was” Straub, Ozu, Godard... So I decided to write, with huge red letters (and it’s still there) “To the best Ozu I oppose the worst Cottafavi.” It was around this time that Reis started “winking” at us... During lessons we were very quiet, we never took part in them... Well, rather in some lessons, because in Reis’s I started being scared...

Of...?

Of not being able to follow him. I saw that he was a “giant.” João Miguel [Fernandes Jorge] was much more approachable, because of his age and his interest for rock music, that brought together people from the 20s and 30s generation, since that music included English and American authors that went over to cinema, art or theatre. We ourselves also played; I did posters, another guy, a graphic artist, he wrote novels, many did paintings... Everything had to do with two or three slogans or words: “violence,” “poetry,” “brutality,” “passion”... Now, while João Miguel was more close to us, António Reis was more distant, first of all because he was a country guy, who had the mark of the land, from how he dressed to the kind of cigarettes he smoked... Without filters, obviously, sometimes “Definitivos”... I remember the change towards the “SG Filter”...

**But why? What was so special about it?**

Nothing really, it's just one of those details that come to mind when people die, and we remember certain gestures or fragments... For example, in the time we are talking about –by then we knew each other very well– he had brought his daughter so that I could portray them. The photo came out badly, it was all black and... he gave me a blow, ‘You have to change profession.’ After that I secretly took another one, which by chance came out well, and that's why I offered it to him, to make peace... But he was like that, a brutal guy. Brutal in the sense of “direct.”

**Frank?**

Direct. He made a direct cinema and he himself was direct as well. I went to two or three lessons, in the beginning, where he “dismissed” three or four students mercilessly, with regard to a paper or a composition about a film. ‘I believe this is not your thing.’ And it was like that. No other teacher would do it that way –they would apply the 3 or the 4, or the 0 [values]. Reis didn't have that “elegance,” he had another one. He was an aristocrat, a farmer, with that elegance that not even João Miguel had. João Miguel is a poet, with that pleasure of finding the rightest and the most secret word; for Reis it was as if there wasn't any secret. He was, again, direct, such as I've never met anyone else. He reached very quickly, with his discourse, the essence of a film, of an image, a sound, a person. I remember he had analyzed the way I was dressed (all in black, of course). He had a lot of affection for that youthful brightness that leads people to dress the way they think they have to, or to say short but powerful things. It's not necessary to write hundreds of pages to say what is truly important. All the books he recommended were minuscule works, like *Pedro Páramo* [by Juan Rulfo] or little texts by Blanchot, by Cioran... What I learned with him was the effort of remaining silent and only saying “yes” or “no,” that is, to be convinced of the things one loves. Anyways, more than João Miguel [Fernandes Jorge] or João

Bénard [da Costa] (who was much more of a professor, in the academic sense of the word, although he was sometimes considered a friend), Reis was truly the giant. “Giant” was the expression he used, when he told us, autodidact as he was, about when he had met two or three people that he referred to in that way: Rivette, whom he considered the best critic and theorist of cinema, or Straub, or Jean Rouch (people he knew well), or Tati, or João dos Santos... According to him, it's necessary to “ride on the shoulders” of giants during a certain period of time. And I had the feeling that I had to make the most of it. Instead of continuing to behave smart-alecky and insolent, of being defensive or attacking, with Reis I had to listen. I think I recognized something in him and I think he must have recognized something in me, creating complicity between both of us. With many others as well, during the years: we were the chosen ones. Indeed (and I think that anyone you speak about the School with will confirm this) there was something of “choice,” of proximity, that translated in crossing some borders, like going to his house. I think I crossed some.

So, I never missed any of his lessons, because he was also a constant professor. He loved the Film School, because he loved to teach and talk to us. But not only about cinema, from one shot he would go to other journeys, cave art, India... He wrote very little, and he did it, I think, in the sense of only having to “write the minimum.”

Perhaps that's why our “encounter” happened, in the sense that I entered the School with very straight and select ideas, according to which cinema has to have limits. For me those were: not use special effects, avoid gay cinema, be interested in very violent things. Without these limits, if I don't think this way, I'm lost. From them, I start to work. And António Reis would agree with me, he would say: “That's the way you have to do it: continue, I'm here to help you.” He opened some doors for me, some of them unconsciously, others that I didn't even know existed because I hadn't found them, at school, in the books I read or in the movies I watched. It was somewhat a vague encounter, but there was, in fact, an encounter of *violences*. Reis had a tender violence and a strong fragility, always balanced between something very strong and something very sweet. I think I myself also had, in some way, this “violence,” since the fact of being against everything, but doing well that which has to be done, ends up in something sincere, genuine.

**What subject did Reis teach?**

This is dramatic... (laughs). I think it was Filmic Space...

**But how was it? Was there a specific program? A series of films to watch? What type of work did you develop?**

Although it was some time ago, I remember a small A4 sheet of paper with four dots that materialized the program, which he organized in an outline, and then we followed it. We wrote papers, as well as a continuous work during lessons which consisted, for example, in watching a movie “in progress” at an editing table and talking about it, not like the classic “oral

tests” but by means of oral participation, informally. Informally because there could be students coming in and out in the middle of the lesson, although without a hustle and bustle. With no other teacher, besides, did we learn self-discipline. In our feelings, in our passions, in our knowledge. On another hand, there was, yes, a series of films. I don’t know if you know, but him and Margarida [Cordeiro] had a list of 10 or 20 essential films, and it was around them that the lessons went.

### Do you remember any of them?

I remember almost all of them! I’m not sure if we watched all of the ones on the list, but I remember two or three by Rossellini –*Journey to Italy* (*Viaggio in Italia*, 1954), *Stromboli* (1950)–, especially the latter because there was a copy at the School. I remember one time I was in charge of putting the reel on the table and I let it fall, like a streamer... And my punishment was to roll it all up again... And there also was *The General Line* (*Staroye i novoye*, 1929) by Eisenstein, which we watched many times because there was a copy at the School. We went to see a few at the IPC, including *Faust* (*Faust: Eine deutsche Volkssage*, 1926) by Murnau, which motivated one of the best “speeches” that I heard by Reis, very inspired that morning. On another hand, my memory of Reis is always set in the morning, although our lessons were in the afternoon. Something of a “beginning”, of freshness, of great lightness like the air.

But coming back to the films, there was *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) by Welles –a film that he really liked–, *Marnie* (1964) by Hitchcock –a director who he also really liked–, *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle*, 1960) by Godard –although he preferred *Pierrot le Fou* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1956) but there wasn’t a copy at the School–. In any case, I remember this one well because, even if I hate writing and even more about films, he liked the paper I wrote. And there was Bresson, of course; Bresson most of all. Whenever they played his films at the Cinemateca he would send us to watch them. Besides the fact that we all had to buy (and since they didn’t have it in Portugal, it was one of our friends with foreign contacts who ordered it for us) the *Notes on the Cinematographer* by that Bresson. A kind of “commandments” –‘Think this way,’ ‘Do it this way,’ ‘Watch that,’ similar, in a way, to the guidance that Reis always gave us from his immense culture–‘You must go see Velázquez in the Prado and only after you must buy the book,’ ‘You must go to the Lascaux Caves,’ ‘If you have money you must go to Persia or Iran to see the rug motifs.’ ‘Save up money to travel, and go alone.’

**But do you think these films that you have spoken about were a list chosen objectively to serve specific didactic purposes or did they obey the subjectivity of being, actually, films of Reis’s life?**

Yes, of course, the second hypothesis.

### And did you speak about their work [Reis’s and Cordeiro’s] although in another context?

Not specifically about the films. I know that my friends and I, right when we met him, realized that we had to quickly watch *Trás-os-Montes* (1976) and after *Ana* (1982). *Jaime* (1974) was more difficult to access. But it was evident that after meeting the man we had to know his work. This is what was important. Because, for me, from the moment I watched *Trás-os-Montes*, it was finally the opportunity of starting to have a past in Portuguese cinema. It was finding the poetic reason that I had been pursuing with punk, something like “there’s nothing before and the future doesn’t exist, therefore, we have to do it now”, and I ended up recognizing it in someone who was saying exactly the same things but in films that already existed and which were magnificent. On one hand it was, thus, comforting; on the other, it was being able to establish, as I said before, a type of past, of family, of identity, that gave me security. Not only with Reis but also with Paulo Rocha, at least with his films that I like the most, *Os Verdes Anos* and *Mudar de Vida* (1966). So, I wasn’t starting from scratch anymore and even more in a horrible decade as the 80s were, in which cinema had been subject to all types of “epitaphs” with Godard or the death of narrative and fiction.

Reis was very comforting, he gave us essential messages: ‘You have to be careful, learn to hear and listen, but don’t be afraid of filming what surrounds you. If it’s cars, it’s cars; if it’s rocks, it’s rocks.’ We discussed politics every day, we rejected the “intellectual muck” of the turn of the century avant-garde such as surrealism, but we never dropped down to what was real, to what has to be seen and heard, to the patience of seeing and hearing. Now, when we watched *Trás-os-Montes* –and we had already sensed it in the lessons–, we perceived its documentary side. It gave me more security, because it provoked –and continues provoking more each time– that, when I start thinking about a film, I start first by thinking about someone, real, a face, a way of walking, a place, more than a story. And this is what he proclaimed: ‘Look at the rock, the story will come later, and if there isn’t a story it’s not important.’

### But would you say that it’s an “attention to reality” or an “obedience to reality”?

“Obedience” is a word that I don’t really like, and Reis didn’t like it either. Self-discipline, as I said before, yes, because it’s something with a vaguely eastern side to it (which was very profound in him), about detail, about the pleasure of obsessive control over the different shades of everything, from the first word to the last second of the film. An extremely rigorous discipline. The word “rigor” comes to mind in this link with reality, a rigor that with Reis was human, contrary to the majority of those which, like zombies with books under their arm –very visible–, walked around the School. Of all of them he

was the only filmmaker who lived and did things. For example, he knew the name of every plant, of every type of rock; he knew what the Príncipe Real neighborhood is made of underneath; he spent hours talking about that cedar [signaling the immense cedar in the garden]; he read a bunch of books about Natural Science or History; but *everything always had an application*.

He was someone who didn't mind teaching his lessons, cooking a family lunch, taking a nap, going for a walk and talking with two or three friends, drinking his "espressos" (all the coffees he always paid for, he must have paid for hundreds of espressos here or in "Júlia", which was a café in front of the School, since he had four or five with each student...).

To summarize, Reis is the person who said in words and in films that which I thought and didn't know how to express. I knew what I liked but didn't know why I liked it. And Reis explained it to me. 'You like this because it was in a painting before, and that painting has to do with a certain social organization of that time, and the things are things because at the same time they are the life of men transformed into art in that same time.' Time, space, the topics of his discipline.

**I would like you to, nonetheless, explain to me in more depth what Reis's analysis was, during lessons, of the films you watched. I've already deduced that he wasn't interested in the story. But how did he analyze the shots? Each one independently? Detecting influences and relations in one shot...?**

Exactly as I said before, the story is in the shot. And after a shot there's another shot, and what happens between these two shots is what's important. Here is where everything is in stake, between these two shots. And it was most of all with Reis that I learned this, although afterwards I have delved into it with books by authors such as [Serge] Daney, [Jean-Louis] Schefer, [Jacques] Rivette, [Jean-Marie] Straub... This is what is useful to me nowadays, that which is *between* shots: that which you say, that which you leave, that which you filmed and that which you didn't film, what is or what isn't between those two shots: the *raccord*. Cinema, for him and Margarida, and for me, is the *raccord*. It's not even the shot. I mean, the shot is the unity, it gives us the story, big or small, it gives us the gaze, your distance on things, what you choose, your field, but, above all this, when we decide that the shot finishes it can be exactly when it starts. This is the difficulty: the decision of extending it or finishing it, that is to say, the cut. The cut between images is what counts. That's where your being is at stake. Reis was very much an *author* (Reis and Margarida, of course; I speak of Reis as a professor, but whenever I speak about him as a filmmaker I am also referring to Margarida), and an author is a strong person; but in spite of everything, he said –or at least he made it understood– that that moment, the *raccord*, is the only moment in which one can be diluted, as a being, with matter.

**"Dilute" in the sense of "merge"?**

Exactly. In the link between shots you can merge with the characters (if there are any) or the things (the objects, the houses, the rocks, the clouds), you can hide, that is, become better integrated. (...) Personally I live the "filming" of a film in the sense that the whole film is *something done* with a minimal intervention from my part. (...) More and more, my films get closer to the almost pure documentary or its absolute contrary, in which I carry out a reorganization of reality that I have come to with a great abstract perspective. I prefer to discover the stories as I film.

**And that is Reis?**

I don't know, because I never went to film with him. I know, though, that they went very prepared, they knew the exact time the sun set in a certain place, the color of the clothes, the word that Mother Ana had to say in that scene... I'd say that they knew the exact time of the shots down to the second. But which was the part of the "unexpected" that they let into the filming I do not know, and I've never known. I know some production stories, about things that weren't able to be done in a certain way and were done in another one which they had found better. But I'm sure that they relied a lot on preparation and study. There was quite some time between his movies, although I know of one or two projects that they would have liked to film quicker, especially one, which we spoke about many times and which we almost started to write together, set in Lisbon, in black and white, about *punks*. His films "worked" very well in Berlin, and he always came back very moved, with tears in his eyes, because, in the punk capital of those times, the theaters would fill up with 15 and 16-year-old kids with green hair—those "green-haired princes with leather jackets that cried when watching *Trás-os-Montes* and afterwards went to play the electric guitar", as he described it. He loved this phenomenon, the mixture between sweetness and violence, because he himself was like this: affection and brutality, without measure. Very affectionately, he would touch people amicably, but without measuring his strength, so certain "smacks" were actually very hard... (laughing).

**Maybe it consisted of an almost instinctive strength, perhaps the same strength that made him sense, in class, who the promising students were?**

In Reis (as in many other people) there was that kind of acknowledgement, or that acknowledgement could be produced, without being in the sentimental field of love. That recognition is very strong, very intense, because there's something of dependency. All those who liked Reis were very dependent of him, and he was, at the same time, very dependent of some of our aspects –our youth, our knowledge of music... For example, the song lyrics like the ones from The Clash had a lot in common with his poetry, that is, the everyday poetry.

It was beautiful. Very dependent people, very strong and very weak, who don't need anyone and need everything, who are always alone. Reis was always alone. Immensely solitary.

**Except with his family, I guess...**

Of course, but I don't think it would surprise Margarida to hear me say this, because Reis had always been alone, just like she had always been alone as well, in the sense that the solitary person has their own world. And he was solitary. Probably that's why he recognized other solitudes in the students he had.

**Would this be one of the reasons why their filmography is so unique, so particular?**

Yes, but I don't want to say it was better or worse, or more singular, than Paulo's [Rocha] or [Manoel de] Oliveira's. What touches me more in theirs is something that I don't know how to explain and I don't have words to define, and that I don't find in other films. For example, the other day I rewatched *Francisca* [by Manoel de Oliveira], which I think is absolutely genius. I had seen it when it was released (1981) and, in addition, by António's recommendation. Let's face it, Manoel de Oliveira wasn't a filmmaker of Reis's choosing, although he respected him, had been his assistant and liked some of his films a great deal –nobody spoke of *Amor de Perdição* (1979) like him–. But it was partly because of Reis that I went to watch it, and perhaps that's why I perceived it in a totally different way than how I did recently. Of course time has passed, the way we access films has to do with each person's history, I've had more experiences... But there's something in Reis that I don't find in Rocha or in Oliveira (and I mention these two because, with him, they are the three best Portuguese filmmakers), that has to do with... a type of photogenic quality. Don't ask me to specify because I can't say more than... there's something in the faces, in the people, not so much in the bodies but in the skins, in the rugosity... a photogenic quality "without" aesthetics, that is captured directly and very well, that is, taken instinctively, as if it were bitten... something very, very sensual. To summarize, in Reis there is an almost animistic sensuality that I don't "have" in Paulo or Manoel; there's a sensuality, not savage (although he spoke a lot about savage beings), but delicate and beyond words that can only really be captured with cinema. Why? Because there's a sensual side to it, of the senses, that can, actually, be animated by cinema, that is, one can film something and then animate it with a different type of life, a life that is not life. This pleasure, this dimension that I don't dare call "sexual", is to me masculine, grave (in the sense of "serious"). There's something seriously masculine, in Reis, that Paulo doesn't have, because he is a very feminine filmmaker, and Manoel either, because he is excessively macho. Reis, on the contrary, is everything...

**In human terms, I had the impression (that this conversation only confirms) that Reis was really someone very honest, right?**

Yes, yes. It's really very implicit in everything he said. I'm not his age yet, but I think I have to start saying that cinema today, in Portugal, is very miserable. And it could have been another way. And the lack of Reis is immense, even because what he said, he said it directly. 'This movie is very bad,' 'This person shouldn't film for now,' 'Don't give money to this person,' 'Give money to first works', statements that no one says nowadays. We live in a paralysis, this type of "everyday pornography", which has started to lack beauty and a sense of dignity. And Reis had a great deal of dignity. He said upfront and quickly what had to be said. Now we do press conferences to announce the films that will be done, and we only think about what will make the most money... People are aging badly, very, very badly. And António Reis was young, he was never old... he was ageless.

That's why he kept his first beliefs, those that are really liked without knowing why. Try speaking, writing or drawing, but what is true is that it's yours; it's your better, a part of you. If you look at something and it looks at you back, it's because there is a part of you there. And this is what Reis told us, that we had to choose early a field of action, of combat, of work. And Reis chose. He chose the field of the humble (don't take it as a pretense, because that's not the attitude), that is, a certain humbleness of the people, of the feelings, of the little stories and the little gestures, that really belong to a singular class. And if you study well and stand by him, that class will give you class; he wouldn't say "style" but "elegance". Reis was very elegant. On a day-to-day basis, he would give you money if you needed it, he would feed you, teach you, ask you, this exchange elegance that turns aristocrat because it doesn't have commerce. That's where the brutality comes from. And the elegance. And the great humbleness.

Reis chose from an early age the autodidact path, a life without pageantry, of small rooms in Oporto, of small jobs, of that "dry" poetry about nighttime or how hard it is to wake up in the wee hours of the morning, that is, a path anchored in a humble life, almost thrifty. This choice of the field of the humble was for me essential, as there is, in the poor, a beauty, a richness, a truth, that is getting lost because it's frowned upon, and can only be obtained when spending a great amount of time with these people. Reis spent his whole life with them. This idea of humbleness, which, I insist, is not pretentious, is a good choice because it draws limits. He and Margarida liked this. And I do, too: there's lines that cannot be crossed, licenses that can't be taken, borders that shouldn't be trespassed, because cinema starts one way and it will end—if it ends—in the same way.

**That is...?**

Like the poor. Cinema started looking at people who did not have an image, it didn't start by making stories: it's History. And that is, for me, what is magnificent. For example, this film that I have just finished –*Ossos* (1997)–, is unique because there has never been anything like it and there will never be anything like it. There's a capture of something, but nothing to invent. I felt this resistance to invention in António and I think he had gotten it from Rossellini. Why invent? Only idiots invent in the basis of a cinema that has already been seen, of what's general, universal, of the majority. Now, good movies don't have to invent anything, they only have to watch and reproduce. But reproduce in a different order. In this sense, all of Reis and Margarida's films are "supernatural", because they are ordered in an order that has never been seen and that isn't the first one. And you, when you go, will also make your own order. •

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# The Theatre in Manoel de Oliveira's Cinema

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Luis Miguel Cintra

## ABSTRACT

Based on his experience as both an actor and spectator in Manoel de Oliveira's films, the author reflects about the relation of the filmmaker with theatre, and his way of working the space, the texts, the actors and time. From *Acto da Primavera*, conceived as a truly poetic art, this essay visits Oliveira's filmography to show the way in which his films are based in documentary to reach the actor, and how artifice and representation is constructed from there as the best way of capturing the truth of a mysterious reality: the human life.

## KEYWORDS

Manoel de Oliveira, theatre, actors, camera, fiction, documentary, distancing effect, space, text, time.

I have been many times confronted with the affirmation that Manoel de Oliveira's films are very theatrical and I have questioned myself about the reason of this undeniable presence of theatre in his films. These are uncomfortable matters to me. I do not want to deny you the right to meddle in my trade, but I, who have lived in theatre for so long, don't recognize theatre in his films. What I see in his films is not theatre, not even what it would be called filmed theatre. I only see cinema.

But there is at least one certain thing. Since 1963 Manoel de Oliveira has used theatrical texts for eight of his films: *Acto da Primavera* (1963), *Past and Present* (*O Passado e o Presente*, 1972), *Benilde or the Virgin Mother* (*Benilde ou a Virgem Mãe*, 1975), *The Satin Slipper* (*Le Soulier de Satin*, 1985), *Mon Cas* (1986), *A Caixa* (1994), *Anxiety* (*Inquietude*, 1998), *The Fifth Empire* (*O Quinto Império, ontem como hoje*, 2004). And he has introduced theatre in many other films: *Francisca* (1981), where characters attend to the theatre, *Lisboa Cultural* (1983), where there is a theatrical representation inside the Hieronymites Monastery, *The Divine Comedy* (*A Divina Comédia*, 1991), where several crazy characters represent scenes, *I'm Going Home* (*Je rentre à la maison*, 2001), where the main character is an actor. And there are some scenes of *Le Roi se Meurt* by Ionesco, and *Porto of My Childhood* (*Porto da Minha Infância*, 2001), where the filmmaker himself plays the actor Estêvão Amarante in a theatrical scene. The theatre is really one of the central topics of his films and a dominant presence in certain phase of his work, the 70's and 80's.

For me, everything begins with *Acto da Primavera*, that film which I consider truly poetic art and which marks his clear entrance to the production of fictions. It was the first of his films I saw, overwhelmed. I still can remember my emotion: I did not want to believe in the miracle. I had not known anyone who had looked into theatre from cinema as well. He made theatre like I understood it: the representation of life. I became then forever faithful to his cinema, and this is the film I have forever considered to be the founding act of his work, even though it arrived already in the sequence of other great works.

*Acto da Primavera* begins with the first words of the Gospel According to St. John in off, spoken by a peasant: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shined in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.' The topic of the film and, finally, of the whole work of the filmmaker emerges from here: life as a mystery, how men do not understand the miracle. And as soon as we hear this, we see images that would be guessed

from a documentary and that by their juxtaposition are a representation of humanity after the sin, after Adam: the peace of original nature in the shepherd with the sheep, the labour in the digger's hoe, war and violence in the bull combat, the game with the sticks, and the strange gathering of the messy multitude and the military helmets (to repress it?); the course of time with the old woman of long white hair who combs at the pace of the young, and evidently, the relationship man/woman in the scene between the young woman that will play the Samaritan and her lover burning in desire. Yes, the woman, her vanity and her lie. And even the wedding: she was not with her husband. And little by little, social life is penetrated: people who meet in the streets of the town, the square where the news are read, the progress (with the news of the arrival of men to the moon), until the announcement of theatre is heard. 'Come and see! Come and see!' The announcement of the play brings the preparation for the performance: the construction of the decors, the distribution of the costumes, the actors going to the place, the arrival of the villagers that will attend, the bourgeois audience like presumptuous and dulled tourists... Until the machine of cinema itself (or its representation) appears on the screen: In front of the actor that will open the show, Manoel de Oliveira himself is operating the camera and giving orders to the sound engineer to record the voices and sounds. Finally, in the top of the pyramid, the screen coincides with what Oliveira's camera is recording: the shot of the actor himself, in a long angle that ennobles him. He addresses the audience aware of the responsibility of the moment, in such a solemn and artificial tone that he almost sings. And the actor begins defending, for ever, almost as a celebrant, the reason of being of this structure of production of sense: 'Contemplate this sinners!'

For me, the whole definition of Oliveira's cinema can be found in this sequence. Passing from documentary to the actor, and with him, to the construction of the artifice as the best way of capturing the truth of a mysterious reality: human life. In the film introduction, with the biblical text overlapped to the most constructed sequence of non-staged images, we find the definition of the cinematic matter: men both as creation of God and sinners. The image of men in society and of his relationship with others is represented progressively as the images start to focus in the life of the village. Art is inserted when that man starts to represent himself as a man linked to the religious vision which gives him sense in front of other men, in front of 'any sinner'. Theatre arrives. And Oliveira places himself, in fact, in front of the theatre, or even better, in front of this idea of theatre, filming it, this means, filming the man representing himself in front of others through the Passion of Christ; others, who instead of being an audience become just people.

It is in the light of this symbolic sequence, of this incredibly beautiful and simple declaration of principles defined for the first time in the opening sequence of this film (and I would not be surprised if Olivier's way of being in the world had led him to expose it, in such a clear way, when he starts to get away from documentary and begin to stage what he films), that I get to see the nature of the presence of 'theatre' in Olivier's films. And I believe henceforth, even when he films novels or history, he will never stop filming life through the construction of an evident and strange 'theatre' which might sometimes use theatre texts properly speaking, the stage and a performance of the actors that could be defined as 'recited', but which is, above all, an evident construction of a 'mask', or of a process of 'denaturalization' of the filmic matter towards a distancing effect with the spectator. This effect, above all, leads the spectator to become responsible. It makes him think, see and hear life differently, transformed or 'represented' by itself. It makes us see beyond what we normally see, and feel the (impossible?) need to give sense to it.

In the opening of *Acto da Primavera*, structured in the relation of cinema with its audience, this is, with the existence of other people, it becomes clear how fundamental this relationship is. For Olivier, to make a film is to present himself to the world, to take part in life, in a certain way to celebrate it like the peasants in Curalha do in the representation. And to do it without traps, with the game rules laid bare. A theatre, like an idea, is the exposition of that same conviction: a stall (people alive) in front of a conventional space for the construction of artifices (the stage or the scenography) where other people alive (the actors) expose themselves with costumes (the parts) to represent the life that does not stop being present in their own bodies and souls. It is comprehensible that Manoel de Oliveira turns to theatre and its attributes as a process of his cinema or his artistic thought. Several times he uses it again as clear as in *Acto*. In the introduction of *The Satin Slipper*, more than ever, with the entrance of the audience to the San Carlos Theatre, Moliere's blows and the screen inside the stage itself; In *Anxiety*, in the transition of the first to the second 'story' with the *mise-en-abyme* of *Os Imortais* through the closing of the curtain over the representation, and the actors who were finally on stage (but who were not in the shooting, in fact, as it becomes evident with the scene of the picnic filmed at open-air) bowing the characters of the next 'story'; In the separating parts of *Mon Cas* with the theatre curtain, the comedy and tragedy masks, and 'claquette'. But what interests him is not theatre. Theatre is a tool for his own way of 'representing' that even as a 'representation', in this case cinema, is always the fixation, in images, of the life he has filmed.

Deep inside, it is an artifice produced by an author-artist which wants to be shown as such, which bravely lets itself be seen in order to stop cinema to become that machine of illusion, of evasion of our intellectual responsibility as spectators, that oblivion of ourselves that so wonderfully cinema can become. It is more of an instrument to work the life that cinema can be, like the light, photography, the camera movements or montage, and that, as deep inside all arts, is simultaneously an instrument for a better understanding on the least evident truth of life.

And what does this artifice fundamentally consist on? Why we recognize in that strangeness of Olivier's cinema something called 'theatre'?

I believe there are three points: the space, the text, the actors and maybe time. We all notice how the position of the camera is felt in this cinema. Almost the whole filmed action is organized according to the camera, without internal alibies of fiction. Just like in the theatre. As if the frame, later the screen, was a proscenium. The epitome of this is the shooting of *Mon cas*, where, on the other hand, the process of *Acto* is repeated: in the final moment of joy, when Job is cured by God from his leprosy and is given great descendants in the ideal city, the situation is inverted and the stall where the camera and the whole crew is, is seen from the stage. The camera looks itself in the mirror and shows the process. The camera seems to want to be noticed. And the space, more than Job's ideal city, is the distance from the camera to the actor. And in the film theatre, the audience will be where we now see the filming machine. I will never forget the day when Oliveira told me for the first time, in my function as his actor, the contrary of what any filmmaker would have said: 'Look at the camera.' And another day (because he never gives closed lessons) he added: 'Remember that when you look at the camera you are looking to the film theatre.' We can say: 'Nothing is more theatrical.' Yes, because there is a direct game with the audience and because no one forgets in stage that the spectators are in front, in the stall, looking at us, and there is no fourth wall in the stall that makes someone forget that the actors are in stage, in a conventional place of 'representation'. But is this how theatre is made? Representing to the front? Very few times. In theatre the artifice is the opposite: we mainly look at each other in order to pretend the public is not there. But the characters are 'put together' in the stage according to the eyes of the spectators as well, like here. The figures are distributed in the space according to what the camera sees, and almost never for internal reasons of the fiction, which besides confuses many actors that learned as a rule that in cinema the camera does not exist: it is the keyhole. It is different in this cinema.

The actor is, as it is obvious and for good, representing in front of the camera, as in theatre in front of the audience. How many times Oliviera fakes the look of actors in a face-to-face situation, with profile shots, according to what the camera sees (in order for the eyes of the actors not to remain white, without pupils) to the point of deframing their natural relation, so the fiction of their dialogue becomes completely artificial? And the theatre-sensation comes from here, from this vision of the camera. Because if usually the sensation of the space is similar to the one created in theatre with the audience, this is not the relation that is reproduced here but rather its reinvention with the filmic media. The distance between the spectator and the actor varies with the size of the shot, the camera moves during each shot or from shot to shot, it enters the space of fiction. The relations stage/stall are endless, there are as many as shots in the film, and that does not happen in theatre. And when, at the end of *Benilde*, the camera reverses to show that Regio's house, where the film originally takes place, was finally a decor inside a studio, we say it is theatre, but there is no stage where those decors could have been constructed nor one where the figures could have been deployed as such.

But the 'theatralisation' of the space is not only perceived in the space of fiction that the camera constructs or deconstructs according to the vision of the spectator. Many times is the nature of the decors themselves what turns it theatrical, false (and again the nature of the film device is exposed). It is obvious that this happens in several decors of *The Satin Slipper*. Curiously, the least theatrical the argument is, the biggest the need of the filmmaker to use this resource: the decors of *Benilde's* do not seem to be fabricated, but those of *Amor de Perdição* (1979) do. *A Caixa* is developed in a real 'decor'. In *Mon cas*, if not for its expositive half oval form, the shooting of Regio's play could almost be a real 'decor', but the last part, 'The Job's Book', is represented in an evidently painted decor, completely anachronistic by the way. Was the scene where Ema Paiva sweeps the entrance of the church in *Abraham's Valley* (*Vale Abraão*, 1993) shot in a true 'decor' or was it a stage? In *A Talking Picture* (*Um Filme Falado*, 2003) the Egyptian Pyramids in front of which I interpret myself with Leonor Silveira, who interprets a fictional character in the most amusing game between reality and fiction he has offered me in his many films, were filmed in the real setting (and thanks to that I have been to Cairo), do they not seem as false as in a travel agency brochure? And, do we not always find, since the first films, an ability and pleasure to 'formalise' the landscapes themselves or to denaturalise the natural decors through the 'frame'? And how many times is colour itself what makes them theatrical? Can Picolli's and Bulle Ogier's dinning room in *Belle Toujours* exist in that colour? One who speaks about the decors could refer to the costumes as well, so many times evidently false as in theatre.

Why, if nobody complains about it in theatre, do the texts of the actors, their dialogues are believed to be artificial? Oliviera does everything, almost always, for the text not to come out 'naturally' from us the actors. Now with another order I have heard from him many times: 'Speak loud!' And this is, again, the opposite of what any filmmaker would do. They usually do whatever is possible to dissimulate that the sentences of the characters are not the actor's or the character's, but rather those of the scriptwriter. Oliviera yearns for seeing an 'artificial' way of representing in the actors because he does not want to make any illusion through cinema, and because the literary words are better, they are a product of the work of other artists. And which theatre does Oliviera incorporates to cinema? What plays does he take to the screen? Texts that are not part of the usual repertory, and are even more 'artificial' than what theatre usually implies. They are all particularly elaborated texts, many times laborious and very far from the spoken language, which is the opposite of what is usually considered suitable for cinema. Plays that even in theatre, where we are used to characters who speak in a literary language, could be easily considered impossible to represent: in Acto, a 16th century text based on the Bible and transformed by the tradition until the 20th century, two plays by Vicente Sanches, three by Régio, two by Prista Monteiro, one monumental play by Paul Claudel (seven-hour-verses). Oliviera constructs a cinema that is exposed as artificial but does not bring theatre to cinema, he rather turns theatre in a pure distancing artifice both through a type of non-natural diction that is usually called 'theatrical' and the theatre texts he choses. He invents a process. *A Caixa* by Prista Monteiro is fully written in a language that Prista declares to be a variation of the popular speech from Lisbon, but which actually is a very artificial dialectical pastiche. In *Os Canibais* (1988) he wanted the artifice to get so far that he filmed an Opera in a natural setting and he made the artists preform in playback. He deprived them from their voice, the worst of the different 'tortures' he had subdued me to probably believing that the greater the artifice in the way of representing, the least artifice I would be able to produce for my presence on screen and therefore would expose myself more truthfully. And behind the image of the leprous Job in *Mon Cas*, created on my skin by the make-up artist to the point only my eyes and mouth remained visible, behind the French diction of the Biblical texts or of Viera's pseudobrazilian, there are, in fact, some of the moments in which I have least defended myself in front of the filming machine. But does this pleasure for making the word artificial in cinema not extent to other processes of working the texts that has nothing to do with theatre, or to for example, novel adaptations? In the sense in which this cinema is accused of theatrical, are Oliviera's dialogues in Non or Agustina's dialogues in *The Uncertainty Principle* (*O Princípio da Incerteza*, 2002), for instance, not as theatrical or even more

theatrical than many dramatic texts? And is it only through theatre that Oliviera achieves that effect in the spectator? Would the narration of *Abraham's Valley* or the letters of *Amor de Perdição*, both effects of the novel itself transported to cinema, not have a distancing effect in the spectator or charm them with processes of more responsibility than the pure effects borrowed from theatre?

When one talks about theatre in Oliviera's cinema, one talks about the actors too. Only when Oliviera started to work with great foreign actors or at least when he started to do it in French, maybe then, the complaints about the bad interpretation of his actors, about them being theatre actors with no cinematographic technique, false, etc., ceased. I don't think there is any problem in the quality of the performances of Oliviera's actors. And it is an absurdity to call 'theatrical' the way in which they perform, even in *The Satin Slipper*. In Oliviera's cinema there is, for good and very much so, the concept of good and evil. But this would never be applicable to the actor's performances. There are no rules for the filmed matter. No actor can 'do wrong' because 'performing' in Oliviera's film is never a technical medium to make fiction arise, this is to say, to make the spectator forget they are looking to actors and believe they are looking to characters. Characters are never seen in his films. They might be created in the spectators' mind, in some cases more than in others, based on the way the actors interpret their gestures and speak their dialogues. But what the camera actually records, are characters in the act of representation, as it is evident, on the other hand, in *Acto*. Who sees in that unforgettable Virgin Mary weeping at Christ's feet or in the sublime Veronica, the virgin or Veronica themselves, more than two peasants of Trás-os-Montes in the act of the most moving faith? Is the subtitle with which the film was announced not 'The village of Curalha in the rite of the Passion?' One would say this always happens in cinema, by definition, even when the representation does not seem theatrical. Yes, but the difference is that, as opposed to a 'normal' or 'normalized' cinema, Oliviera turns that into a means of artistic expression and gives it to the spectator to see. And one would say this happens in theatre as well. No, because in theatre the representation of the actors is itself the artistic language with which the dialogue with the spectator is held, and for that to happen, an acting coherence is indispensable between the actors, in the light of which one can say some are doing good and some others wrong. In Oliviera's cinema, the coherence of the artistic language is the look the filmmaker addresses to the actor. And nobody can do wrong. On the other hand, nobody 'does', they all 'are' just what they are (as much as a human being). And as Oliviera always does, he makes a clear affirmation about this in his cinema: when he makes Teresa Madrugada say in front of the camera who she is (Teresa Madrugada) and which the character she will interpret, Ana

Plácido in *O dia do Desespero* (1992). Some actors might have a more interesting way of performing, that for sure, but watching how each one of them performs and what of their deep truth as human beings sweets from there, is one of the biggest pleasures that this cinema can give us. That is why Oliviera makes it possible to get sublime moments from non-actors who in theatre would find it difficult, and less interesting moments from professional actors when they are helped by normalized or stereotyped technical media to perform. And he makes possible that great professionals, apprentices and amateurs cohabit in equal conditions and in the same film. Who will not find the non-actress Teresa Menezes as sublime as the great actress Manuela Freitas in *Francisca*? No, the 'artificial' way of acting in Oliviera's films has nothing to do with theatre, even when we are talking about theatrical texts. Would someone believe they are seeing theatre if they saw *The Satin Slipper* on a stage represented as in Oliviera's film?

The time of his films, always considered slow, is usually called 'theatrical' as well. Why? Is it because in theatre there is no montage of images and the time of the action is not manipulated by any intermediate between the dramatic action and the spectator? And because cinema can create a dynamic where the dynamics generated between actors, space and time of the action are manipulated by the succession of discontinuous images created by montage? Maybe, but I believe this issue is only raised because the spectator is surprised with a cinema that does not present, as usual, everything ready for passive consumption. This cinema projects itself differently and likewise demands a constant surprise. Oliviera does not have, and I believe he does not desire for, his own manner or a style. It would be rather easier to discover an attitude. But there is, in fact in many of his films, a pleasure for making the shot last the time required by the filmed action and make the filmed action last the time it demands itself, as far as it is technically possible. Because in cinema everything represents without ceasing to be what it is. And this is the opposite of the idea of cinema as a factory of illusions. It even opposes the construction of a 'story' by the rhythm of images, of a narrative sequence. Oliviera will rarely assume the place of the narrator. Maybe because he does not want his function as a filmmaker to be that of a manipulator of reality placed outside it to create a filter between reality and the spectator. He will be, at most, a witness or the inventor of the filmed reality itself. To manipulate the true perception of the real time of the action through illusions constructed by montage might not coincide with what I consider the purpose of his cinema. Oliviera wants to see things as they are, and maybe as they are not usually seen. He has always had, as I have understood, a documentary maker's soul. I do not think he could ever have the gesture of manipulating the gaze of the spectator, whose responsibility he is always calling. His

more recurrent process is the creation, in different paths, of a strangeness effect in the spectator, in order for the reality recorded in the image to be better apprehended or to be able to tell us more about its own reality. But he films them in the time they actually occurred, without constructing a fictional time, and because this is very rare in cinema, the result is a very slow time effect for we to perceive it with no strangeness. Opposite to what usually happens in cinema, one would say that the film is made from an amalgam of internal times of the shots seen as a whole. But is it for this reason that it is transformed into theatre? Is it time in theatre as such? I do not think so. Oliveira's game with real time does not have the rules of theatre, he rather subverts those of cinema.

To create distancing in cinema is not only a characteristic of Oliveira. Many others filmmakers have done it and do so. But I think he believes very strongly in men to prefer the fiction constructed on reality over the human reality itself, as usually happens in cinema. The processes he uses both include theatre as one of the ways in which men represent themselves and resemble many times those of theatre, but rather than turning his cinema into theatre they make it more cinematographic. Not exactly as theatre addresses the audience of each show, but similar to this small universe, this cinema, in fact different,

addresses humanity in the light of history, as one who speaks about the Son of God to all those who God created and with the degree of responsibility which it implies. A sinner's speech to other sinners. 'Contemplate this as any sinner' As if said to the whole world, in the present and the future.

But Oliveira is, in fact, closer than the majority of filmmakers to theatre in one thing. He works his imagination to invent a representation, like a theatre director, inside the image itself and before it becomes an image. His work is done, like that of the theatre actors, while he is alive and within life itself, during the shooting, like the invention of multiple live-games of figuration with the actors, the decors, the place where the lights or the camera is placed, the frame, the camera movements he invents while he is in front or by the side of the human beings he is working with. Alone during the scriptwriting, of course, inventing a project (and even then he rather works in the future than in the past), but above all inside the present while the whole team works simultaneously, in the 'plateau' and very little in montage, especially after discovering (in the *Acto?*) that cinema can represent as much as it gives to the sight, and that is possible to be while one represents, that we never stop being who we are, even when we are representing: on the contrary we live even more. The time of our lives does not stop until

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## LUIS MIGUEL CINTRA

Portuguese actor. In 1973 he founded the Cornucopia Theatre together with Jorge Silva Melo. They have staged over 100 theatre pieces. He has participated in numerous films of Portuguese cinema, especially in those by Manoel de Oliveira: *The Satin*

*Slipper* (1985), *Os Canibais* (1988), *O Dia do Desespero* (1992), *Abraham's Valley* (1993), *A Caixa* (1994), *The Convent* (O Convento, 1995), *Anxiety* (1998) and *Word and Utopia* (*Palavra e Utopia*, 2000).

# An Eternal Modernity

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Alfonso Crespo

## ABSTRACT

The ascendancy of *Acto da Primavera* (1962-63) by Manoel de Oliveira, in different generations of filmmakers, places the film in a privileged place in the history of Portuguese cinema. This influence, which transcends time and individual poetics, is here clarified with the notion of pedagogy –applied by the critic Serge Daney to the cases of Godard and Straub, and theoretically broadened later by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze- that followed the war trauma in the mid-20th century and the consecutive deterioration of the idea of the cinematic classic. Therefore, certain precepts assumed by Oliveira in this film, such as the ethnographic respect and the archaeological will towards a lyrical transcendence through imagination and memory games, can be followed in the work of some of the main modern and contemporary Portuguese filmmakers such as Paulo Rocha, António Reis y Margarida Cordeiro, António Campos, João César Monteiro, Joaquim Pinto, Pedro Costa or Manuela Serra. However, *Acto da Primavera*, whose baseline is the registration of the annual representation of the Passion of Christ according to an auto from the 16th century, staged by the inhabitants of Curalha themselves, also teaches that cinema is rather related to the arts that precede it –a repository of forms, ideas, gestures and affects- than to any attempt of assimilation of a language or grammar. Following, for example, the fertile concept of collage as a work that assembles different elements and overcomes the illusion of originality by highlighting the difference in what seems a repetition, Oliveira's proceeds could be related to that of other filmmakers such as Paulo Rocha (*A Pousada das Chagas*), António Campos (*Gente da Praia de Vieira*) or João César Monteiro (*Veredas*).

## KEYWORDS

Manoel de Oliveira, *Acto da Primavera*, pedagogy, Serge Daney, Gilles Deleuze, Alois Riegl, Paulo Rocha, António Reis, Margarida Cordeiro, António Campos, João César Monteiro, Joaquim Pinto, Pedro Costa, Manuela Serra, collage, archaeology, ethnography, transcendence.

## An Eternal Modernity<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the tail with which one begins unravelling the skin of the best contemporary Portuguese cinema, it seems to lead *Acto da Primavera* (1962-63), 'the film where everything started' in words of João Mário Grilo (GRILLO, 1999: 129), to that place where a filmmaker recovered his dignity and two others, Antonio Reis and Paulo Rocha, received some kind of first communion. But what was started with *Acto da Primavera*? It seems difficult to define. Perhaps Oliveira, one of the filmmakers who cited it the most, would like to hear or read it in Deleuze's concepts. Based on the idea of modern cinema as the fracture of the 'beautiful totality' of the classic – whose *mise en scène* was undertaken by the totalitarian states–, Deleuze once referred (DELEUZE, 1986: 381-389) to the ages of cinema by relating them to Serge Daney and Alois Riegl, the 19th and the 20th century, cinema and painting. This provides a *tabula rasa* that forces to return to the origins. Deleuze said: 'Start by seeing, start by perceiving one image, one sound, by reading them... because it is necessary to recover from a blindness, a deafness, both which hindered to realize that the concentration camps were the secret behind the door. This pedagogy, which was famously applied to the cases of Godard and Straub by the film critic, corresponded in Riegl's periodization of plastic art to the purpose of 'spiritualizing nature', making reference to an eye that assumes the flatness of the image and becomes a psychic eye, a spiritual eye. When Joao Bénard da Costa was asking himself –in *Cinema Português?*, Manuel Mozos, 1997– about that familiar look that makes the best Portuguese cinema some kind of fragile and anonymous uninterrupted film composed by images with no depth, stories without psychology or recurrent thematic motives, he probably had in mind this primitive and modern overture by his friend Oliveira.

Thus, it could be said that *Acto da Primavera* starts above all a pedagogy, a discipline, which marked and still marks Portuguese cinema. Therefore, to begin with, we are here encoding a 'before the style' which translates what the poet Reis found romantic about the film (REIS, 1964): 'its very allegoric, very symbolic, even laic and realistic mystic thematic', 'the colour scheme as symbolic, chaste, 'cut' with no relief or mannerism in relation to the natural colours', 'the monody of the word and its plasticity', 'the appreciation of the archaic, of the anachronism, of a certain medieval alchemy, even of magic', 'the simplicity of the film, [...] its immature state', 'a pictorial atmosphere that substantially returns to a primitive sphere, where there is something angular, somehow barbarian and bittersweet'... We

could complete, together with Deleuze, Daney and Riegl, that what *Acto da Primavera* finally announces is that once cinema loses its capacity to embellish nature, it has to humbly admire again the beauty of things, which mysteriously is placed upon the world, the words and men.

In this process, the cinematic machines reveal themselves, gaining the trust of the inhabitants of Curalha for a project that explicitly transcends the ethnographic component and finds its essence in the penetration of archaeological layers: Christ's life, his representation according to a 16th century *auto sacramental*, the anachronistic backlash that inaugurates the cinematographic medium that contains and merges all. Talking about documentaries and fiction reduce the debate and domesticates a combat. When António Reis accomplishes his project for the *Museu de Imagem e Som*, germ of *Trás-os-Montes*, he will point out the difficulty of prefiguring the results of some cinematic works based on similar collisions (REIS, 1974: 24-25): 'They implied a hand-to-hand combat with ancestral and modern forms, between wolves and a Peugeot 504, between Neolithic ploughs and gas bottles<sup>2</sup>'. Ideologically far from Oliveira, Reis and Cordero will simply go beyond the perforating gesture, which in his own words (REIS, 1977) will stop to see Christians and begin to see druids.

Assuming that this latency, as a form of maieutic exercise, was awakened by *Acto da Primavera*, the team of filmmakers enriched the educational practice, which they concentrated and poetically incarnated, by reinforcing the idea of the reencounter and resurrection of the real before its transfiguration. A look that thinks, again, rather than a style [António Reis was explaining nothing, he was not analysing. He was looking, and it is a look of huge intensity<sup>3</sup>, comments António Bélem Lima (NEVES, coord., 2014: 177)] that Reis and Cordeiro highlighted in their cinema with the movement of children who discover life –the astonishment towards the world– in some ludic and thrilling sequences which lead to the redolent visit-invasion of the Observatorio astronómico da Ajuda in Rosa de Areia (1989). Ana the matriarch, in the homonymous film made in 1982, precisely mentioned the stars that continue to illuminate once extinguished: their light enlightens us without being our destiny. However, this will no longer be Reis' and Cordeiro's night, but that of Pedro Costa, who, with his elders, will find in other latitudes his particular way of being contemporary (AGAMBEN, 2009: 18-29): navigating in the darkness of the present and interpolating other times to his own –pasts which never stop passing– in order to read History against the grain.

1. This text would not have been possible without the generosity of Francisco Algarin Navarro and Lumière's friends.

Save what is condemned to disappear –since cinema allows it- to later highlight that faded and sepulchral copy of the real through montage, which pulls out from the irreversible time a very different one, made out of survivals and anachronisms, so human that it disassembles, lyrical intensifier of the games of imagination and memory. This time recalls the spectator of the initial perplexity of the filmmaker towards the ancestral rite, which has been wounded to death. The description would work for such different movies as *Acto da Primavera* (1962-63), *Mudar de Vida* (1966), *Vilarinho das Furnas* (1970), *Trás-os-Montes* (1976), *Veredas* (1978), *O Movimento das Coisas* (1985)...: for Oliveira, Rocha, Campos, Reis/Cordeiro, Monteiro, Serra... All of them, and some others, are related through certain primary gestures of the camera, the panoramas, which introduce a world rather than a story, the rituals, and the unconscious poetic heritage, which transmits a virginal speech, as if it had been recently segregated from the natural noise. Of such attentive-to-time and against destruction cinema is known to draw physical and metaphysical maps. Its main subjects acted within a strange and recidivist secret society that constantly seemed to send encoded messages to one another through Acácio de Almeida. The existence itself of a film such as *Encontros* (Piere-Marie Goulet, 2006), where all this inaugural grammar is concentrated and windows are slightly opened over a landscape assaulted by the testimonies and the voices of the *passseurs and voyageurs* filmmakers (EISENSCHITZ, 2011: 48-52), explains better than any discourse the alliance between pedagogy and poetics, which characterizes this structural trace of Portuguese Cinema that offered eyes and ears for those who were not seen or heard (even though the relation between the filmmakers and the locals was one of lights and shadows).

We are thus not far from an idea of transmission, mainly of an attitude. Perhaps deep inside of a miracle, which is necessary to see with one's own eyes, as happened to Reis and Rocha in Oliveira's shooting or to Joaquim Pinto in the beaches of Furadouro, and later to Giacometti while facing the images and songs of *Mudar de Vida*. Witnesses, like Monteiro of the seminal teachings of *Jaime* (António Reis, 1974) regarding the way of preserving a singular fate and lead it to the collective history of the forms, and further in his career, of the contagious naturalness of *Uma Pedra no Bolso* (Joaquim Pinto, 1988). Were they chances rather than influences? Probably, but chances, as João Bénard da Costa tells in *O Som da Terra a Tremar* (Rita Azevedo Gomes, 1990), are required to be deserved. Were they fulfilled desires? Certainly as well, like that of Paulo Rocha while shooting the loads dragging the fishing boats as he had seen in his childhood, and that only could be accomplished later, *last minute rescue*, by António Campos in *Gente da Praia de Vieira* (1976). The key could simply lay on the fact that such a will of regeneration of the primary potentials of cinema always

summons the notions of community, considering that the efforts of a single individual can not cover it completely, and of communion, joint pleasure as that enjoyed by an autonomous part of the same body.

Regarding the style, however, we would be missing another fertile consequence of *Acto da Primavera* where Oliviera attempted the restitution to the sacred and the mysterious through the image (the word included, as it is known); An ambiguous supplement of epiphany and ascension, but of seduction and deception as well. We are talking about another edge of the same pedagogy, which notices that cinema existed before its own invention, below other forms, in the experience of one who contemplates and conceives the world in its constants of movement and fixity – matter and memory, this is to say that cinema was preceded by a vast repository of ideas and gestures, which would be later transfigured and praised. To be able to start again, it was therefore necessary to nourish from the legacy of other arts rather than from a decadent concept of cinematographic representation. Thus the fact that all acts and affections had already been fixed on centuries of theatre, literature or painting, was not an obstacle for cinema to blow into them a last breath, as similarly proposed in films such as *O Pintor e a Cidade* (1956) by Oliviera or *O Construtor de Anjos* (1978), by Luís Noronha da Costa.

The deepest movement of cinema only arises between shots, leit motiv of *Acto da Primavera*, which is transmitted by Oliviera while opening the distant proximity between past and present, the ordinary and the fantastic, life and death. In this sense, it is significant that this autocratic and marginal Oliviera is described by Paulo Rocha and António Campos as an artist pursuing for the exact trace. Curiously, they didn't realize that they were simultaneously explaining themselves, facing the future, concurrently describing their own exile and their desire, similar in intensity, of colouring fiction with the real. 'Being simultaneously as concrete as formal<sup>4</sup>', thus Rocha validated the plus he admired in the Oliveira of *O Pão*, *Acto da Primavera* and *A Caça*, by enclosing a place beyond transparency, which indicated that a filmmaker should not be content with being an illusionist, because his destiny was rather related to that of a demiurge, opened to chance and vertigo towards the materials within its reach, 'A bizarre number of possibilities<sup>5</sup>' (ROCHA, 1995: 125-6).

A fertile sense of collage here resounds, when dispossessed of semantic vices and historical restrictions, since the work combines elements of different origins, overcoming the illusion of originality through a work that highlights the difference of what is apparently a repetition. In *Acto da Primavera* is an impurity projected to the future, time of conjugation of its

end, bud of life, Godardian resurrection of the image through the remnants of the intractable archives (a threatened future like that of the new born in *Veredas* or the couple of *Mudar de Vida*). According to this more aesthetic than spiritual creed, one could better conceive the ostensible turn that Rocha begins in *A Pousada das Chagas* (1972) –the ‘modernist auto’ (ROCHA, 1995: 135) that revitalizes *The Museu de Óbidos* through texts, spaces and suffering bodies distilling their humours, desires and energies-, and concludes in *Si fosse ladrão... roubaba* (2013). It is about a free celebration of the virtuality of filmic legacy itself, with its broken sutures and already inserted in the indistinguishable amalgam of work and life from which one continues to learn; also in the reappropriation of the popular culture as resistance in the early Monteiro; or when using him to consider the illuminations of José Manuel Costa who observed that the films by Campos ‘are made of everything,’ ‘a cinema that affirms and denies itself as cinema<sup>6</sup>’ (COSTA, 2000: 67, 48). It was precisely Campos, who in the also pioneer *A Invenção do Amor* (1965) would expose, with a similar critical and modern sense as Oliviera, the rest of machines that accompanied the camera, those sound recorders which the daring lovers were spied with, the resonant sources from which the counterpoints of some of his richer and more fertile films, such as *Gente da Praia de Vieira*, were orchestrated, where cinema appears as the bifrontal Janus that it is: on face fixed to the present, the testimonies, the denunciations, the opinions, the staging; the other, turned towards the past, exhuming the memories of the inhabitants of a zone based on the remontage of the cinema of Campos, almost as lost, distant and fragile as the memories of the earliest pioneers.

What is, then, started with *Acto da Primavera*? Nothing that had not started already. In this film, cinema is publicly celebrated, its discipline, its labour, the generosity of its intimate functioning when it is covered by an overflying morality; its inviting vocation as crucible of the most diverse materials. Hence, it congregates a myriad of inclinations and its spectators feel fortunate, almost destined. •

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## ALFONSO CRESPO

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He writes about cinema, literature and theater in *Diario de Sevilla*, where he worked since 2000 and where he publishes the blog 'News from Home'. He is contributor in several magazines (*Letras de Cine, Cámara Lenta, Lumière, So-Film España*) and specialised books (*Claire Denis. Fusión fría*).

# Scenes From The Class Struggle in Portugal

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Jaime Pena

## ABSTRACT

Between April 1974, when the Carnation Revolution started, and 1982, 116 films were produced in Portugal. The Film Series *Despois de abril. Cine portugués 1974-1982*, gathers together and relate 11 of these films to study those post-revolutionary years of upheaval. The author shows how the series not only enables a panoramic view of the cinema of those years, but projects it on the present, on Portuguese cinema of the following decades and on certain questions of representation of that cinema. One of the purposes of the film series was to show the extreme vitality of Portuguese Cinema of the time, the variety of filmmakers who coming from very different generations (that of the sixties, that of the seventies, besides from Oliveira) converge in a concrete historical moment sharing both interests and concerns around the notion of *mise-en-scène*, and configuring a possible national style. In the same way, the paper observes that the radicalization of these first revolutionary moments will decrease with the years, while the cinematographic radicalization, by contrast, will be accentuated.

## KEYWORDS

Film Curatorship, Portuguese cinema, The Carnation Revolution, Political and Filmic Radicalism, National Style, José Ignacio F. Bourgón, Seixas Santos, Manoel de Oliveira

Even if once in a while, it is strongly recommended to return to the pages of *El otro cine: recuerdo de José Ignacio F. Bourgón* or, even better, to the original articles published between 1981 and 1983 by the Madrilenian critic, designer and programmer Jose Ignacio F. Bourgon (Madrid, 1951-1988) in the homonymous section of the Journal *Casablanca*. The volume published by Filmoteca Española in 1989 constituted a homage to one of his greatest collaborators. It consisted on a collection of articles and a cinema series that included films by, in alphabetical order, João Botelho, John Byrum, Sara Driver, Robert Frank, Amos Gitai, Jim Jarmusch, Johann van der Keuken, Robert Kramer, Manoel de Oliveira, Nicholas Ray, Carlos Rodríguez Sanz and Manuel Coronado, Alberto Seixas Santos, Jorge Silva Melo, Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, Gerhard Theuring and Ingemo Engstrom, Wim Wenders and Ivan Zulueta. The films had been made between 1959 (*Pull My Daisy* by Robert Frank) and 1982, although the majority dated from the late seventies and early eighties and had been addressed by Bourgon in his articles for *Casablanca*.<sup>1</sup>

This collection of texts and films takes us to a singular and very far time in which travelling was necessary in order to watch a determined type of films and to contact their authors. It would not be a bad idea to repeat that same series to contrast the meaning of the notion of 'other cinema' in the eighties and today. A number of those films are now accessible in DVD editions or at least have had certain dissemination, some others, nevertheless, still demand us to move: those films must be searched for, they do not come to us<sup>2</sup>. Among them, several Portuguese films should be referred, particularly those by Seixas Santos and Silva Melo. As the biographical text of *El otro cine* (not signed) explains, Bourgon had lived 'very closely the events of the Portuguese revolution. This fact, together with the friendship with directors such as Robert Kramer and the Straub-Huillet', lead him to a 'radicalization of his political and cinematographic postures'<sup>3</sup> (1989:7). It should be clear that Bourgon does not allude in any case to the revolution of the 25th of April 1974 –The Carnation Revolution–, or to the cinema that could be derived from it. It is rather his political spirit that inspires the radicalization of certain forms of production and representation, forms that Bourgon not only brings to his texts, but also to the selection of the films and authors and to his film

programming at festivals, The Filmoteca Española and The Alphaville Cinema.

To return to the pages of *El otro cine* with certain assiduousness have lead me to mythologise that time and, consequently, to wonder about what happened in those years in Portugal, those between the Revolution of 1974 and 1982. Thus, with this aim one writes and programs many times: simply to find the answers to some intriguing questions. In 2013 I started to prepare a large film series for the Bafici (Buenos Aires): 'After April. Portuguese Cinema 1974-1982'. A series that was to be programmed coinciding with the 40 years of the Revolução dos Cravos in April 2014, and that would include around twenty films produced in this period during the years of post-revolutionary upheaval. Finally, the closure for improvements of the Cinemateca Portuguesa at the Cinemateca Argentina postponed sine die that project that was to be nourished by the copies donated by the Portuguese Cinematheque. I resumed the programming of the series for the CGAI-Filmoteca de Galicia (A Coruña) in a more synthetic version in 2015. Problems with the availability of the prints in April and May, forced us to delay the project until October, date in which, keeping the title of the series, at last the collection of eleven films could be programmed in ten sessions. Regarding the initial Bafici project, some of the titles that could be considered more commercial and conventional or, with the perspective of time, unsuccessful (put inverted commas to all these adjectives, if it is the case), were no longer part of the series: Films by Antonio Pedro Vasconcelos, Lauro Antonio or Luis Filipe Rocha, but also by others who were more or less representative for the time such as Fernando Matos Silva, Solveig Nordlund, Luis Galvão Teles, etc. Reconsidering the extension of the film series was related to the magnitude of the Bafici and the CGAI in Buenos Aires and A Coruña. The film I most regret not having been able to include is *Passagem ou a meio caminho* (Jorge Silva Melo, 1980), which was not available in the archives of Portuguese Cinematheque, and which Bourgon had written on in *Casablanca* and made part of the homage series at The Filmoteca Española. As it can be seen, certain films still conserve that inaccessibility aura.

In *O cais do olhar* (1999) José de Matos-Cruz recorded in the period between 1974 and 1982 a total of 116 feature films, an

1. Only a film by George Kurchar is felt to be lacking.

2. To clarify, the film by Jim Jarmusch that Bourgon commented on an article in 1981 was *Permanent Vacation* (1980), while in several texts of 1982 he would address Oliviera with *Francisca* (1981), the Straub-Huillet with *Trop tôt, trop tard* (1981), Nicholas Ray with *We Can't Go Home Again* (1979) and Wim Wenders with *Reverse Angle: New York City, March 1982* (1982), to mention some of the best known names that we can consider today as the

most 'normalized' (this said with inverted commas and all the caution). The first chapter of "El otro Cine" (October 1981) was focused in *Arrebato* (Iván Zulueta, 1979) and *Inserts* (John Byrum, 1975).

3. In a former paragraph we are told Bourgon personally had contact with the Straub-Huillet in the Figueira de Foz Festival in 1974: the Portuguese connection!

important number for a country with a considerable reduced level of production. Matos-Cruz is generous when he attributes to the category of feature films works of less than a hour, nevertheless, some of the most significant titles of these years are not referred in his book because they are, like in the case of *O constructor de anjos* by Luis Noronha da Costa (1978), short films or medium-length films. The film by Noronha da Costa, converted into a mythical title, is one of the eleven films composing 'After April. Portuguese Cinema 1974-1982'<sup>4</sup>. Even if the other ten feature films represent only the 8.6% of the production of those years, I consider them of an undeniable importance and relevance, above all if as I pretended they not only enable a panoramic view of the cinema of those years, but project it on the present as well, on Portuguese cinema of the following decades and why not, on certain questions of representation that the Portuguese have constantly considered and which, in different degrees, could be extended to filmmakers such as Rita Azevedo Gomes, Pedro Costa, Miguel Gomes or João Pedro Rodrigues, thus shaping some kind of national style, a truly national cinema. Of course, the style itself, highly rooted in the theatre and the novel, or at least formulating a different way to approach the traditional forms of literary representation, could be traced already in the work of Manoel de Oliveira, at least since *The rite of Spring (Acto da Primavera)*, 1962). Simultaneously, I have always wondered about the influence, as in the case of Jose Ignacio F. Bourgon, that this retrospective of Straub-Huillet in Figuera de Foz in 1974 could have exerted in this Portuguese cinema as a whole.

Be that as it may, the film series does not have a historicist will nor its discourse is chronologically organized: its disseminative vocation always prevails. If that discourse was prioritized it would be more suitable to commit to titles such as *Benilde ou a Virgem Mãe* (1973) instead of *Amor de perdição* (1979) as examples of the work of Manoel de Oliveira, or in the case of João César Monteiro to *Que farei eu com esta espada?* (1975) rather than *Silvestre* (1981). Certainly the film series pretends to be some kind of *Greatest Hits*, even if many of the represented filmmakers never had a single one and constitute, in countries like Spain, authentic strangers. Deep inside, one of the purposes of the film series was simply to show the extreme vitality of the Portuguese Cinema of the time, the variety of filmmakers who coming from very different generations (that of the sixties, that of the seventies, besides from Oliviera) converge in a concrete historical moment sharing both interest and concerns around the notion of *mise-en-scène*.

4. Film series programmed in the CGAI-Filmoteca de Galicia (A Coruña) between the 7th and the 23rd of October 2015.

5. *Visita ou Memórias e confissões* would have constituted a good response within the series, that of the bourgeoisie itself, since Oliviera's family lost the

Hence the initial decision to choose only one film per director with the exception of the two films by Alberto Seixas Santos, for reasons I will explain later, or that in the midst of the managing of the series with the death of Manoel de Oliviera, the possibility to conclude the series with his posthumous film *Visita ou Memórias e Confissões* (1982) was considered. This film represents a true turning point in Oliviera's career and I would rather say in Portuguese cinema since it defines the end of an entire era. Unfortunately, the limitation of the existing prints, and the avalanche of requests from all over the world, made its inclusion impossible. But far from being devoted exclusively to rarities, the series aimed for a combination between the most known (Oliviera, Monteiro, maybe João Botelho, *Deus, Pátria, Autoridade* a very popular title among cinema-clubs in Spain during the seventies and the eighties) and the least known or directly unknown, including films that haven been widely heard of and read about such as *Trás-os-Montes* (António Reis and Margarida Martins Cordeiro, 1976), but that still have had a very limited circulation in Spain. As usual, the hope is that the better known titles awake the curiosity towards the least recognizable and that the first, at least, bring the attention of the occasional cinephile.

In general lines, the series starts with two films framed in the exact moment of the Revolution and it is structured in three strands. The first one is the change of the regime itself, Salazar's death announced in *Brandos costumes* (1974), and the revision of the Estado Novo, both in the film by Alberto Seixas Santos (the documentary images of Salazarim, the family history as microcosms of a country), and in *Deus, Pátria, Autoridade* (Rui Simões, 1975), a militant documentary of Marxist vocation that advocates for control of the means of production by the working class<sup>5</sup>. If the political radicalization of these first revolutionary moments will decrease with the years, the cinematographic radicalization, by contrast, will be accentuated. In the second strand of the series, that of documentaries, it can be verified that the anthropological observation end up drifting to a questioning of the representation itself and to metanarratives: *Gente da Praia da Vieira* (António Campos, 1975), that great master piece of the cinema of the seventies that *Trás-os-Montes* is, and *Nós por cá todos bem* (Fernando Lopes, 1978), a film that Miguel Gomes himself recognizes as his main influence for *Aquele querido mês de agosto* (2008).

It results particularly noticeable to confirm the perfect continuity between these 'documentaries' and films with a

control of its factory after its occupation by their workers. Oliviera would never recover economically from this, and the sale of his house, the subject, the reason of being of the film itself, was nothing more than a coincidence of that imperial need to pay off the debts he had incurred in.

strong literary component such as *Conversa acabada* (João Botelho, 1981), *Amor de perdição* (Manoel de Oliveira, 1979), *Silvestre* (João César Monteiro, 1981), and *A Ilha dos Amores* (Paulo Rocha, 1982), which compose the third strand of the series. If *Trás-os-Montes* and *Nós por cá todos bem* can not be understood without the precedent of *The Rite of Spring*, a film like *O construtor de anjos*, with its approximation to the fantastic so deeply rooted in Jean Cocteau, seems to foresee the universe of the much later *Os Canibais* (Manoel de Oliveira, 1988). Finally, as if it was an epilogue, *Gestos e fragmentos – Ensaio sobre os militares e o poder* (1982) is the second and indispensable film by Alberto Seixas Santos in this series: who was to shoot the first revolutionary film, would shoot as well its epitaph, a documentary in which Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho, Eduardo Lourenço and Robert Kramer<sup>6</sup> reflect on the ‘fail’ of the Revolução. Political disappointments do not have to go by hand with those aesthetical. More than forty years after April 1974, we know that the revolution bore fruits and, what is even more important, that those fruits had continuity and still are visible in Portuguese cinema today.

6. Precisely the author of *Scenes from the Class Struggle in Portugal* (1977) and, some years later, of another ‘Portuguese’ film like *Doc’s Kingdom* (1988).

Films included in the series ‘After April. Portuguese Cinema 1974-1982’ (CGAI, 1 September – 22 October 2015).

*Brandos costumes* (Alberto Seixas Santos, 1974)  
*Deus, Pátria, Autoridade* (Rui Simões, 1975)  
*Gente da Praia da Vieira* (António Campos, 1975)  
*Trás-os-Montes* (António Reis y Margarida Martins Cordeiro, 1976)  
*O construtor de anjos* (Luis Noronha de Costa, 1978)  
*Nós por cá todos bem* (Fernando Lopes, 1978)  
*Amor de perdição* (Manoel de Oliveira, 1979)  
*Silvestre* (João César Monteiro, 1981)  
*Conversa acabada* (João Botelho, 1981)  
*Gestos e fragmentos – Ensaio sobre os militares e o poder* (Alberto Seixas Santos, 1982)  
*A Ilha dos Amores* (Paulo Rocha, 1982)

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and *Cine español. Otro trayecto histórico* (2005, together with Jose Luis Castro de Paz); Coordinator, among others of, *Edward Yang* (2008), *Historias extraordinarias. Nuevo cine argentino 1999-2008* (2009) and *Algunos paseos por la ciudad de Sylvia* (2007, together with Carlos Losilla).

# Aesthetic Tendencies in Contemporary Portuguese Cinema

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## ABSTRACT

Contemporary Portuguese cinema has become a privileged meeting point for several aesthetic tendencies inherited from film modernity. Filmmakers such as Pedro Costa, João Canijo, João Pedro Rodrigues, João Rui Guerra da Mata, Miguel Gomes, João Nicolau, Susana de Sousa Dias and Gonçalo Tocha, among others, have developed new forms of storytelling away from mainstream conventions, in which they suggest the possibility of joining national identity and transnational links. This paper, therefore, aims to discuss some of the main aesthetic features shared by these filmmakers, such as the experimentation with genres, the mixture of documentary and fiction, the critical revision of archival footage and the aesthetics of distance. These links have strengthened the position of Portuguese cinema in the interconnected network of reciprocal influences that has recently replaced the old paradigm of national cinemas. Arguably, then, contemporary Portuguese cinema addresses national issues as part of an ongoing dialogue with other film industries.

## KEYWORDS

Portuguese Cinema, Film Genres, Documentary Fiction, Film Essay, Archival Footage, Aesthetics of Distance, National Cinemas, Transnational Film

Portugal is no longer the magnetic pole that attracted foreign filmmakers fascinated by its recent history –such as Robert Kramer and Thomas Harlan– or by its culture –such as Alain Tanner and Wim Wenders. On the contrary, from 2000, contemporary Portuguese cinema has become one of the most important aesthetic focal points in the international film scene, multiplying its maverick filmmakers and thus confirming the situation described by French critic Serge Daney in 1981 (2001). The difference regarding the past is that this new Portuguese cinema has become a privileged meeting point for several aesthetic tendencies of contemporary cinema, establishing overlapping and random relationships with other filmmakers, without stopping looking at the present and past of their country of origin. Its main filmmakers are developing new ways of storytelling away from conventions and commercial dictations, while their images, as Glòria Salvadó Corretger has written, ‘suggest some of the most important issues of modernity’ (2012: 8, our translation). We must not forget, however, that three generations of heterogeneous filmmakers meet in contemporary Portuguese cinema without making up a single school: the first one would be the 1990s generation, formed by Pedro Costa, João Canijo, Teresa Villaverde or Manuel Mozos; the next one would be the 2000s generation, to which João Pedro Rodrigues, João Rui Guerra da Mata, Susana de Sousa Dias, Miguel Gomes or João Nicolau belong; and finally there will be a younger generation that began to film after 2005, in which we can include Gonçalo Tocha, Salomé Lamas or Gabriel Abrantes, among others. In our opinion, if we want to grasp the importance and value of their images, we must move away from History’s synchronic and normalising models, because their relationship with each other and, above all, with the Portuguese film tradition –represented by names such as Manoel de Oliveira, Paulo Rocha, Fernando Lopes, João César Monteiro and specially António Reis– is far from being hierarchical and unambiguous.

### Playing with Genres

Contemporary Portuguese filmmakers show a clear desire to experiment with genres in their films. Their games of cinema and *with* cinema reflect an autonomous and independent conception of this medium. Miguel Gomes and João Nicolau, for example, play with cinema and make cinema while playing, to the point that Nicolau understands these games as a way to open spaces of freedom for his characters. In a paper on the latter, Fran Benavente and Glòria Salvadó Corretger even talk about game-images arising from both the need to break with an unsatisfactory reality and the emergence of unexpected musical sequences that lead the story toward fantasy worlds. In fact, Nicolau uses music in a playful way in his whole work, whether as an element of rupture or as ‘something that can make forward

the film’ (ALGARÍN NAVARRO & CAMACHO, 2012: 39, our translation). Thus, in *Song of Love and Health (Canção de Amor e Saúde)*, João Nicolau, 2009), the Brasília Shopping Centre turns red under Shirley Collins’ music and the characters move like ghosts through its shops and hallways. This scene is quite similar to another hypnotic sequence in *To Die Like a Man (Morrer como um Homem)*, João Pedro Rodrigues, 2009), in which the main characters went out to the forest for a wild-geese chase and become paralysed by the moon’s influence while listening to a song by Baby Dee. Again, the image turns red [Image 2]. In these two examples, music works as a temporal break that links reality with the oneiric and ghostly realms, but the desire to experiment with genres is better expressed in *To Die Like a Man*. The very beginning of this film summarises what will be, in the filmmaker’s own words, ‘a transgender film in several meanings of the word’ (ÁLVAREZ, et al., 2010, our translation). Here, the ‘trans’ aesthetic works in both a diegetic and a formal level, as happens in Pedro Almodóvar’s films, because Rodrigues mixes melodrama, war film and musical film in a work that is about sexual and genre identity. Indeed, the film’s lack of generic definition reflects the leading character’s own lack of definition: s/he is Tonia, a transsexual who does not dare to take the final step to become a woman.

Meanwhile, realism also allows the emergence of the fantastic and the ghostly inside it, inasmuch as this aesthetics suddenly gains an unreal, nocturnal and abstract atmosphere. A clear example would be Pedro Costa’s last feature films, *Colossal Youth (Juventude em Marcha)*, 2006) and *Horse Money (Cavalo Dinheiro)*, 2014), in which Ventura’s figure, as well as some gloomy locations, echo F. W. Murnau’s or Jacques Tourneur’s work. The Zombie is thus a key figure that resonates with a clear political aim in Costa’s entire filmography since *Down to Earth (Casa de Lava)*, 1994). The main characters of his films live in the zombie’s liminal condition: they are like living deads in the hands of the system. We can even find an almost explicit allusion to this figure in the second half of the short film *Tarrafal (Pedro Costa)*, 2007), during a conversation between Ventura and his friend Alfredo. The latter seems to be telling to the former his terrible experience in Tarrafal, a camp for political prisoners in Cape Verde, but Ventura addresses Alfredo as if he were already dead, as happens in many other sequences of *Colossal Youth and Horse Money*. Later on, both characters are sitting on a log outside a shack, contemplating the view of Lisbon’s outskirts. This space, like Fontainhas, is a place disconnected from the city and suspended in time, a place ‘where its inhabitants are in an interlude between life and death’ (SALVADÓ CORRETGER, 2012: 242, our translation). In order to reinforce this idea, Costa himself has pointed out that the actors thought in hell while wandering around this location during the filming. (NEYRAT, 2008: 166). Accordingly, for this filmmaker, both deportees and

political prisoners suffer the same situation, in which the state of exception is the rule. Under these circumstances, the space of the concentration camp, as philosophers Giorgio Agamben and Reyes Mate have pointed out, has become the symbol of modern politics.

In many other works, these experiments with genres allow a dialogue with the memory of cinema and with the Portuguese historical memory. The two films that best represent this tendency are *Tabu* (Miguel Gomes, 2012) and *The Last Time I Saw Macao* (*A Última Vez Que Vi Macau*, João Rui Guerra da Mata & João Pedro Rodrigues, 2012). The former establishes a clear link with silent film and American classical cinema – specifically, with *Tabú: A Story of the South Seas* (F. W. Murnau & Robert J. Flaherty, 1931)– while exploring Portuguese colonial history. Its prologue, narrated by Gomes himself, uses the codes of early and silent film to tell the story of a daring and taciturn explorer, tormented by his late wife, who will end up being devoured by a crocodile that will subsequently undergo his same torture: to become a sad and melancholic being. Following this line, the second part establishes clear links with several American epic films set in Africa, such as *Mogambo* (John Ford, 1953), *Hatari!* (Howard Hawks, 1962) or even *Out of Africa* (Sydney Pollack, 1985). Meanwhile, *The Last Time I Saw Macao* adopts a similar dynamic from its beginning, in which a series of leitmotifs immediately place the audience in the noir field: two feet in shiny black high-heeled shoes walking slow and steady toward the stage, the silhouette of a female figure highlighted in darkness, several tigers moving behind her, and Jane Russell's voice singing the main theme of *Macao* (Joseph Von Sternberg and Nicholas Ray, 1952) [Imagem 3]. From this prologue, *The Last Time I Saw Macao* is full of details related to film iconography, beginning with the lone shoe that already appeared in the opening sequence of *Red Dawn* (*Alvorada Vermelha*, João Rui Guerra da Mata & João Pedro Rodrigues, 2011), which reappears here as a quote to Sternberg's and Ray's film – the characters played by Jane Russell and Robert Mitchum met when she threw a shoe through a window that accidentally hits him.

The two main elements used by Guerra da Mata and Rodrigues to give this noir touch to their film are the labyrinthine, mysterious and strange spaces of Macao and a voiceover that recalls the first-person narratives of detective stories. In fact, the whole narrative of the film relies on these two elements, given that its characters almost never appear on the screen: we can only hear their voices and see the spaces through which they pass. Guerra da Mata assumes the role of detective, and his diction manages to convey the granitic appearance typical of the golden age of film noir, 'in which the characters' monologues are also constructed from the mix of poetic and

ironic notes; and in which the social and political commentary, despite not being absent, was not an end in itself, but part of a more elaborated and complex structure' (ÁLVAREZ, 2012: web, our translation). Moreover, the elliptical presence of one of the filmmakers within the story, as in a self-fiction, places *The Last Time I Saw Macao* within another genre, the essay film, given that 'all first-person narrative tends to be essayistic', according to Philip Lopate, 'because the potential for the essayistic discourse is put into action from the moment when a self begins to define its position and worldview' (2007: 68). Finally, the last section of the film introduces usual elements of sci-fi and disaster movies, thereby multiplying its discursive polysemy.

### Between Documentary and Fiction

Beyond the mix of genres, *The Last Time I Saw Macao* also plays with a superposition of registers, between documentary and fiction, that appears in many other contemporary Portuguese films. *Our Beloved Month of August* (*Aquele Querido Mês de Agosto*, Miguel Gomes, 2008), for example, would be another film that presents this type of hybridisation by combining no less than two registers –documentary and fiction– and three genres –ethnographic documentary, family melodrama and metacinema– to thus invite the audience to mix up story and reality. In this case, the film begins as a documentary about the everyday summer life in Arganil, in Beira Alta, but another reality soon appears within this documentary, another level that tells the story of a filmmaker –Gomes himself– who is compelled to assume the impossibility of making his film. Later on, towards the middle of the film, a third level rises, and then *Our Beloved Month of August* becomes the fiction that sought to be: a romantic melodrama in which two teenage cousins face the girl's father's objection regarding their relationship (CUNHA, 2014: 122).

The documentary register is also mixed with fiction in João Canijo's work: *In Blood of My Blood* (*Sangue do Meu Sangue*, 2011), real locations, non-professional actors and sequence shots reinforce the realism of the story, an inquiry into the socio-economic identity of a working-class family. Canijo benefits from the lightness and low cost of digital technology to strengthen the documentary side of fiction, thereby allowing a new relationship with the time and the space of the filming. The possibility of waiting makes easier the inscription of the real into a fictional universe, as well as the inscription of fiction into the real world. Similarly, in the case of Pedro Costa, Cyril Neyrat has stated that what is most disturbing in *In Vanda's Room* (*No Quarto da Vanda*, 2000) is the fact that such a harsh reality is linked to fiction through issues of diction, mise-en-scène or lighting: 'the words 'fiction' or 'documentary' fall apart

because perhaps we have the strongest of documentaries, but with a construction and a kind of belief that entirely come from fiction, from a fictional tradition' (NEYRAT, 2008: 82, our translation). *Colossal Youth*, however, is located at the fictional side of documentary fiction by assuming a more radicalised style. In this film, the rewriting of the real leads Costa to develop a series of situations in which reality is stylised and becomes an image on the verge of abstraction (QUINTANA, 2011: 159). According to Àngel Quintana, this change is symptomatic in contemporary cinema: 'at a time when everything can become an image, the essential question is to see how these fictional images, which have not lost its original documentary nature, may be considered as the recreation of a world that they render more visible' (ibid.: 161, our translation).

The work of these filmmakers shows that the difference between documentary and fiction does not depend on the fact that the former is on the side of the real and the latter on the side of the imagination. Documentary, as Jacques Rancière points out, no longer addresses the real as an effect to be produced, but as a fact to be understood: 'The real always is a matter of construction, a matter of "fiction"' (2010: 148). Fiction, meanwhile, does not give rise to an imaginary world opposed to the real one, but to 'a way of changing existing modes of sensory presentations and forms of enunciation; of varying frames, scales and rhythms; and of building new relationships between reality and appearance, the individual and the collective' (ibid.: 141). This voluntary lack of definition of the border between documentary and fiction ultimately entails a mutation in the principles of film history that have favoured fiction –and storytelling– as an essential element, thus suggesting a new genealogy for contemporary cinema, whether at a Portuguese or at a global level.

### Reviewing the Archive

Reality not only enters the images through live recording, but also through the process of reviewing different types of archives. *Lusitanian Illusion (Fantasia Lusitana)*, João Canijo, 2010), for instance, re-edits propaganda newsreels made between 1939 and 1945, primarily focusing on those images showing the armed forces and the major events organized by the Estado Novo [Image 4]. These newsreels staged a sweetened representation of the time that is later questioned by Canijo by means of a series of texts written by political refugees in transit through Portugal that expose the delusion of such idyllic image. Susana de Sousa Dias' work is also the outcome of reviewing the Salazarist archive. *Natureza Morta* (2005), her second documentary feature, is composed of images from state newsreels and police archives without any commentary. In this sense, her work is more material than Canijo's, inasmuch as she seeks to create a slight sense of estrangement through formal

procedures. She aims to show the hidden face of dictatorship through its own images, so she reframes, slows down and ultimately plays with this footage. Her next film, *48* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2009), is mostly composed of mug shots, over which she superimposes the prisoners' voices recalling their imprisonment and especially the torture they were subjected to by the PIDE (Policia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado – International Police and State Defence). Thus, Susana de Sousa Dias uses the victims' faces to draw attention to a memory relegated to oblivion (AMBRUÑEIRAS, 2013: 179).

*48* consciously echoes the mug shot aesthetics, in which the face becomes a document for identification, social control and discipline purposes [Image 5]. Iván García Ambrunheiras explains that the filmmaker forces this objective aesthetics through an intensive exploration of the faces: 'every little picture is magnified by the size of the screen and the length of the shot' (ibid.: 178, our translation). On the one hand, slowing down the images allows the audience to peruse these documents; on the other hand, reframing them challenges the positivist institutional frame and the anonymity of faces. According to Georges Didi-Huberman, playing with the frame is the easiest way for the photographic apparatus to trigger the crisis in the institutional apparatus: 'It is enough with a slight movement while zooming in or out –whether voluntary or not– to expose the system's excess or to produce a misframing –in terms of symbolic framing– that leaves room for imagination' (2014: 72, our translation). By slowing down the images to the 1% in the editing room, Susana de Sousa Dias made these movements almost imperceptible. In fact, without this effect, the film should last 7 minutes instead of 93: 'These seven minutes', the filmmaker explains, 'were adapted to the length of the interviews' (DIAS, 2012: web, our translation).

The police status of mug shots is also challenged through the testimonies arising from the encounter between the victims and their old faces: every image entails a series of memories and a personal story that had been repressed by official history. By locating these stories into a chronological macro-structure, the filmmaker would perfectly fit into the profile of what Miguel Á. Hernández-Navarro has named 'the artist as a Benjaminian historian'. For this artists, according to him, history is an act of remembering, 'a way of intervening in the past and taking a stand in the present, but also an act of history, a writing of time, an embodiment of the past in the present' (2012: 42). From this perspective, Susana de Sousa Dias' work with police archives and oral memory reveals that the real face of history has always been the neglect of victims.

Other younger filmmakers, such as Miguel Gomes or Gonçalo Tocha, also work with the archive: Gomes has ironic and redeeming intentions, while Tocha aims to create a film archive of future memories for the Corvo Island. The former resorts to found footage in his short film *Redemption* (Miguel Gomes, 2013), whose commentary consists of four personal letters read by different voices in different languages: Portuguese, Italian, French and German. The Portuguese colonial past reappears in the first letter through a series of images shot in Portugal in the early 1970s, over which a children's voice read a letter addressed to his parents, who are settlers in Africa, telling them how life goes on in the mother country after returning from the colonies. Later on, in the second letter, which is read in Italian, a man recalls an old teenage love; in the third, in French, a father apologises to her daughter for his continued absences; and finally, in the last letter, in German, a woman recalls her wedding day in 1976 and the first time she saw Richard Wagner's opera *Parsifal* (1882). We do not know the identity of the senders until the end of the film, when we are forced to rethink the images and the privacy of the speeches, because they are Pedro Passos Coelho, Nicolas Sarkozy, Silvio Berlusconi and Angela Merkel. The feelings expressed by these four politicians have Gomes' usual playful and ironic touch. The emergence of fiction at the end of the film, as well as the mixture of materials of different origin, destabilises the original content of images, which Gomes uses in a performative way: he creates a new film from previous footage in which the fictional speeches favour a political reading between humour and bitterness (WEINRICHTER, 2009: 105).

Regarding Gonçalo Tocha, his footage filmed for the documentary *It's the Earth Not the Moon* (*É na Terra não é na Lua*, 2011) in the Corvo Island –the smallest and the farthest of Azores archipelago– automatically becomes the only existing archive in the island, because it lacked any other previous audiovisual record, as the filmmaker himself has explained:

This is the reason why I sensed that everything I recorded was special and significant. I always filmed the changes in the buildings or the arrivals and departures of people, because I had the feeling that all that footage would remain for a future memory. And as I have everything classified by dates and events, I came to think that I would not make a film, but a giant archive on Corvo Island. I even had the idea of staying there for ten years to film it (PAZ MORADEIRA, 2014: 194, our translation).

Archives are usually conceived as a means of preserving the past in the present, but they are simultaneously machines that carry the present into the future, as Boris Groys explains (2014: 147). Accordingly, being impossible to preserve Corvo Island's past, Tocha develops a documentary device able to establish a dialogue with the future.

### The Aesthetics of Distance

*It's the Earth Not the Moon* begins with the filmmaker's arrival at the island, which symptomatically appears on the screen for the first time as viewed from the sea [Image 6]. In *Espectres del Cinema Portugués Contemporani*, Glòria Salvadó Corretger states that the presence of the sea has always been a constant in Portuguese cinema: 'a sea that stands as a container of crossed times, of History, of death, linked to a literary substratum and a legendary, mythological imaginary' (2013: 84, our translation). In this sense, the image of the sea, associated with the idea of travelling and the desire for distance, reappears in many recent Portuguese titles: in *Balaou* (Gonçalo Tocha, 2007), the filmmakers embark on a journey from Azores to Lisbon aboard a small sailboat skippered by a couple for whom the maritime drift has become their lifestyle. Tocha had moved to the São Miguel Island in search of his roots after the death of his mother, but his return to the continent, to Lisbon, has no arrival day. According to Beru, the ship's captain, you have to have time on a sailboat, because you can never go faster than the wind. During the ocean crossing, Tocha repeatedly wonders 'why I went to the Azores? why I'm in this boat?', but the answer, his desire for distance, precedes the journey: «I just want to leave», he says after fifteen minutes of film, «go straight and remain trapped at sea». As seen above, Tocha will come back to the Azores in *It's the Earth Not the Moon*, but this is not a sea film, although it does include a return to what the filmmaker calls «an imaginary unknown»: the film, while expressing the need to create a memory and an archive in the Corvo Island, also alludes to the old journeys of imaginary anthropology. The very title echoes the stories of lunar travels as the example par excellence of distance: the moon appears here as a remote, distant, fantastic and mythological place, which may also be familiar (PRETE, 2010: 186).

In João Nicolau's films, the same desire for distance is associated with the desire for adventure and the need to escape from everyday life. As explained by Fran Benavente and Glòria Salvadó Corretger, the journeys of the Portuguese sailors, to whom Manoel de Oliveira dedicated a trilogy a well-known trilogy –*Word and Utopia* (*Palavra e Utopia*, 2000), *The Fifth Empire* (*O Quinto Imperio*, 2004) and *Christopher Columbus, The Enigma* (*Cristóvão Colombo – O Enigma*, 2007)– also echo in *The Sword and the Rose* (*A Espada e a Rosa*, João Nicolau, 2010). Nicolau's films, however, are closer to João César Monteiro's –with whom he worked as assistant– especially regarding the representation of the sea: according to Benavente and Salvadó Corretger, *The Sword and the Rose* might be considered the flip side of *Hovering Over the Water* (*À Flor do Mar*, João César Monteiro, 1986), 'because the film seems to have been constructed to show what constitutes a disturbing and mysterious offscreen in Monteiro's film: life aboard a

ghost ship' (2014: 155, our translation). Manuel, the leading character in *The Sword and the Rose*, embarks on a fifteenth-century caravel in order to escape from a routine, boring and almost hostile present. His dissatisfaction with this kind of life feeds his desire for adventure and his decision to join a pirate community, thereby leaving his job and the memory of a failed relationship behind. In *Balaou*, the drawing of a pirate appeared superimposed in the image while the sailboat captain told the filmmaker that they still exist. In *The Sword and the Rose*, the new pirates travel in a caravel and 'can have all the necessary goods and provisions' thanks to a fanciful substance: Plutex (ALGARÍN NAVARRO y CAMACHO, 2012: 41, our translation). Towards the end of the film, the former pirate Rosa offers them the paradise they were looking for, a place in which they can find 'dream, love, art and science, literature, music, technology, coffee and rum':

The end is almost Edenic. Nothing is missing, they seem to have everything in that wonderful propriety. However, for some reason, that is not enough for Manuel, so he leaves with the map and we assume that he has to look for other things. It is the same that made him leave his former life. Hence, when introducing the film, I speak a little about utopias, but also about perdition (ALGARÍN NAVARRO y CAMACHO, 2012: 41, our translation).

This illusion of change and utopian otherness seems to be exhausted once summer and journey have come to an end, giving rise to a feeling of melancholy that can only be appeased by the idea of returning in a geographical and chronological sense. This is the reason why the journey, in *The Last Time I Saw Macao*, transports the filmmakers not only to the Far East, but especially to their personal past and to the distant days of Portuguese colonialism [Image 9]. João Rui Guerra de Mata actually spent his childhood in Macao, so the camera visits his places of memory while his character is looking for his friend around the city: his old house, his school, the restaurant where he used to eat with his parents... For him, returning to Macao means returning to the happiest period of his life, a way to recover his lost memories. Consequently, his commentary conveys a strong sense of nostalgia in which familiar images are intermingled with the strangeness of visiting a world detached from ours, whose sign system is completely alien to us.

### Conclusion: International Relations

All these aesthetic links and visual resonances between different Portuguese filmmakers have led –along with other links of a professional nature born of necessity, pragmatism and friendship– to an interconnected network that have recently replaced what was previously understood as a national cinema. Thus, despite being deeply rooted in their country of origin,

contemporary Portuguese cinema is constantly establishing links with other national cinemas: for example, Miguel Gomes's and João Nicolau's return to childhood in some of their works, such as *The Face You Deserve* (*A Cara que Mereces*, Miguel Gomes, 2004) or *A Wild Goose Chase* (*Gambozinos*, João Nicolau, 2013), echoes Wes Anderson's universe; the presence of conspiracies and plots in Nicolau's films takes us back to Jacques Rivette's; Gomes' tendency to conceive his works as the sum of several parts places him close to Apichatpong Weerasethakul; his performative use of found footage in *Redemption* bears a clear resemblance with *Human Remains* (Jay Ronsenblatt, 1998); the review process of the film image of dictatorship undertaken by both João Canijo in *Lusitanian Illusion* and Susana de Sousa Dias in her whole work coincides in time with Andrei Ujică's similar work in Romania; the usual (con)fusion between documentary and fiction in Pedro Costa's films is also present in Jia Zhang-ke's, Naomi Kawase's, Sharon Lockhart's or Lisandro Alonso's, among others; and finally, the vanishing places of In *Vanda's Room* locate Costa close to other contemporary filmmakers, such as José Luis Guerín, Wang Bing or Jia Zhang-ke, who have felt the need –or the obligation– to film processes of urban change and for whom ruins have become a metaphor for the spatial violence in late capitalism. These international relations, even if they are not fully aware, locate Portuguese cinema within the transnational framework that characterises the contemporary audiovisual scene. The separate compartments of the past currently become overlapping networks that extend from the local to the global. In this regard, any current research on Portuguese cinema has to go beyond the study of a group of filmmakers only obsessed and absorbed with their own identity to understand their position within those networks. Arguably, therefore, Portuguese cinema brings together some of the key trends in contemporary cinema, such as the aforementioned play with genres, the mixture of documentary and fiction, the critical revision of archival footage and the voluntary escape to fantasy worlds. These tendencies, however, are not exclusive of Portuguese cinema, but shared with other national cinemas that also have a clear transnational orientation. From this example, we can conclude that the future of small national cinemas depends on their greater or lesser degree of connection with large global aesthetic networks: thus, the greater the connection, the greater the distribution of films. This would then be the best way to improve the position of countries and cultures in the current geopolitics of cinema. •

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# Susana de Sousa Dias and the ghosts of the Portuguese dictatorship

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Mariana Souto

## ABSTRACT

This article seeks to investigate Susana de Sousa Dias' work as one of the exponents of the Portuguese cinema made about the Salazar dictatorship. *48* (2009) and *Natureza Morta* (2005) utilize portraits of political prisoners and found footage from the police in order to criticize and reflect upon the regime and its consequences on people's lives. Thus, the director produces a discourse that resists from the inside, turning government material into her own weapons. Describing Sousa Dias' work in editing and sound design (for instance the change of speed of the images, the lighting, the slow fades, the soundtrack composed of dissonant noises), the paper argues that these films set a phantasmagoric atmosphere and seem to be part of what we call "horror documentary".

## KEYWORDS

Documentary, Portuguese cinema, Salazar dictatorship, found footage, photography, 48.

António Salazar dictatorship, which ended more than four decades ago with the Carnation Revolution, still leaves traces today in both Portuguese art and society. Contemporary Portuguese cinema often addresses this historical period from different aesthetic perspectives, fiction films such as *Cavalo Dinheiro* (Pedro Costa, 2014) or *Tabu* (Miguel Gomes, 2012) and documentaries such as *Linha Vermelha* (José Filipe Costa, 2012) approach the issue in a variety of forms, subtle and direct, and regard subjects as diverse as the colonial wars, African immigration, the revolutionary process and the land occupation. Amongst the directors who deal with the 'Estado Novo' nowadays, Susana de Sousa Dias is one of the exponents, the dictatorship is the centerpiece of her movies *48* (2009) and *Natureza Morta* (2005).

The gaze on these films is characterized by a historical distance, radically different from the cinema made shortly after the fall of the regime. *Torre Bela* (Thomas Harlan, 1975), *As armas e o povo* (Union of cinema workers, 1975), *Cenas da luta de classes em Portugal* (Robert Kramer and Philip Spinelli, 1977), and *O bom povo português* (Rui Simões, 1981), for instance, were made at the heat of the moment and are endowed with a sense of excitement and urgency. Demonstrations, public speeches, the crowd movement, celebrating parades on the streets, and interviews with large groups of people are present in most of these films. Some of them use unstable images or found footage from amateur filmmakers. With a powerful sense of spontaneity, they witness a singular and special moment in Portuguese history. Leaving the censorship behind, they try to think about the Estado Novo and rewrite the events of those years.

Susana de Sousa Dias departs from this aesthetic and creates a specific way of reflecting on this same period. Her movies have a certain sobriety, a mourning reflection, even an introversion –which can be related to her belonging to another period in history, years away from the Salazar era and his fall, as well as a social context of individualization and micro-historical perspectives. While the films from the 70's are forged in macro-historical and sociological tendencies, dedicated to the representation of groups (the Portuguese people, the soldiers, the marines) with little individuality, and the interpretation of the revolutionary process as a matter of class struggle (the fascism as an imposition of the dominant class and the revolution as a subversion of the working class), Sousa Dias' focuses, mainly in *48*, on subjectivity through the stories and the memories of individualized former prisoners.

Her first feature-length film, *Natureza Morta*, is made with the use of pictures (from the PIDE-DGS archive –“Policia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado/Direção Geral de Segurança”, the political police of the regime)– and moving images (of Salazar, official ceremonies, popular demonstrations, all from a variety of sources like news reports, propaganda films, television records, etc). She changes the speed of the

images, slowing them down to a point when they seem more like photographs coming to life than slow motion movies. And if we think of them as 'moving photographs', it looks as if they are oddly provided with volume and depth. In addition to that, the director uses very long fades –the cinematography resembles candle lighting, and people merge with the darkness, giving them a similar look to an apparition, or ghost–.

The sound of *Natureza Morta* is also slowed down. The soundtrack is composed of dissonant and unfamiliar noises; some of them resemble the sounds of slamming doors, or old and squeaky hinges and chains. Therefore, the soundtrack is somehow disconnected from the images; working within the imaginary of the haunted house and the horror movies, its goal seems to be setting an atmosphere of danger, torture and fear. Even though the movie is categorized as a documentary, it has a great deal of abstraction and experimentalism as well as elements of the scary movies in the fiction field. Thus, from this perspective, perhaps we could say *Natureza Morta* is a 'horror documentary'. In this sense, it is possible to track an affiliation with *O bom povo português*, which also uses very decelerated images, strange noises and transmits an idea of weirdness and haunting. These effects in Rui Simões' film, made in 1981, also seem to put into perspective the images of the Carnation Revolution, but in his case he tends to the irony. Edited a few years later than the others films previously mentioned and past the moment of euphoria, *O bom povo português* sees the Revolution with a dose of frustration for its deployments. At last, the power did not go to the people, contrary to some socialist expectations.

As Simões, Susana de Sousa Dias, uses material produced by the Estado Novo itself, but subverts its primary intentions. With the manipulation of the images and sounds of the Power, she produces a discourse that reflects upon it and resists from the inside, turning the found footage of the government into her own weapons –with similarities and differences when compared to the gestures of Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica in some of their films with found footage. The idea of working with the portraits of the political prisoners, present in parts of *Natureza Morta*, becomes central in her next movie, *48* (2009). Her third and most well known film had a positive reception in festivals around the world and won the Grand Prix of the Cinéma du Réel in 2010. This documentary is entirely made from identification portraits of the PIDE and the vocal testimonies of these same people, interviewed years later by the filmmaker. While we watch the static, black and white, images of the photographs, we hear their voices from the present. They are survivors of the dictatorship, living in freedom some decades after the Carnation Revolution. The title '48' stands for the duration of the Estado Novo –from 1926 to 1974, the longest dictatorship in Western Europe in the XX century–.

*48* is built around an extremely simple and minimalist dispositive. However, at the same time, it is very rigorous,

since it's confined by its own rules for almost the whole length of the movie, with little variation. Behind the apparent simplicity of the dispositive, there is an exhaustive body of research as well as a meticulous conception of editing and sound design. The editing dedicates a long exposure time for each photograph and also to the silences in between the speech of the characters. These pauses are important and stop the images from being overpowered by the text, so that there isn't a relation of subordination of the images by the sound. Each portrait appears and disappears in a sufficiently slow rhythm, so that the spectators can observe and investigate those faces and expressions with full attention, comparing or making associations with the words they hear. Sometimes the time even lasts long enough for the faces to become abstract forms, or outlines, contrasting points of light and shadow.

After all, time and duration are important to the film –one of the most violent aspects of the Portuguese dictatorship is precisely its duration, 48 long years. Some of the people interviewed by Sousa Dias grew old in prison. In other cases, we can see, among pictures from different times, an untimely and forced aging, due to the adverse conditions of the imprisonment. In other words, the film captures not only the aging that happens naturally in prison, but also the aging that happens because of it. The slow fusion between the pictures of a young face and an old one of the same person shows the endurance of the years in jail. Time deforms people.

Besides the silences already mentioned, the soundtrack of *48* is composed of little noises that come from the interview context at the present (a clock, some car at the distance, a person touching some object, movements of the clothes, etc). The testimonies are not registered in the studio, with a clean audio, but rather in an environment that evokes some closeness, maybe a home. The noises, then, contribute to the construction of a cinematic space –the spectator can sense the situation of co-presence between the interviewer and the interviewee that took place somewhere in the world–.

If, during the regime, the silence was both an imposition and a strategy ('the silence is the cry of the dead and the word par excellence of the political prisoner: condemned to silence, it is also by the silence that he resists to torture'<sup>1</sup>) (LEANDRO, 2012:35), at the present time, the word recovers its strength. The speech is not used for the interrogatory, against the will of the militant, but for the testimony, in his or her favor.

Some of the people interviewed in *48* mention that the possibility of resistance in prison was silence or their own facial expression. 'We cannot escape from taking the picture,

but we can choose the expression we put on,' says one of them. The face is the place of the enigma, screen to the marks of the time, sometimes the place of a contradiction (like the case of a young woman who takes a smiling picture to the police and feels guilty about it). In their essay on *Faciality*, Deleuze and Guattari (1996) say that the head, even the human head, is not necessarily a face. The face is produced by humanity, it happens when there is a social production. We could think Susana de Sousa Dias proceeds to something similar: she conducts an operation which transforms a number of heads into faces, giving them voices, subjectivity, dignity, identity, past, present, and history.

Of course other filmmakers in cinema history have experimented with the power of the faces watched very closely (Dreyer, Cassavetes, Bergman, to name a few), but not so many took this idea to the extent of making the whole film focused on it. As *48*, *Screen tests* (Andy Warhol, 1964-66) and *Shirin* (Abbas Kiarostami, 2008) are examples of films that are exclusively made of human faces in all their duration, although moved by very different purposes.

In Sousa Dias's work, we see faces in pictures –sometimes two or three portraits of the same person in different periods of time. Here and there, the faces stand for an idea of the identity and the theme of the recognition intersects the movie in several points. With the photographs in their presence, the former prisoners are stimulated to talk about this materiality: the way they looked at that time, the visible traces captured by the camera. One of them notices the wrinkles and remembers the greenish color of his skin as the result of the sleep deprivation. Another one talks about his weight gain because he couldn't move in prison. Others about the ugly expression they made to confront the police. A son of a character didn't recognize the parent since they were separated so early in his life and he only had one old picture as a reference. In some cases, the characters don't recognize themselves in the images. Thus, recognition is an important theme to *48*, along with the way the dictatorship acts upon it: modifies, ages, mutilates, and deforms people. The torture, the fear and the long time imprisoned had very concrete and visible effects on these people's faces, bodies and identities.

*48* demonstrates the profound impact the 'Estado Novo' had on families, and not only in individuals. 'I lost the love for my wife, I lost the love for my daughter, I just wanted to die,' says one character. Since the documentary is edited from black and white old photographs of faces, it conforms a certain sense of an album, perhaps a family album. In the structure of the film, there are some characters who return when another one

1. In the original: 'O silêncio é o grito dos mortos e a palavra por excelência do prisioneiro político: condenado ao silêncio, é também pelo silêncio que ele resiste à tortura.'

mentions him/her. So, the spectator puts the pieces together, recognizes links, identifies names and traces some kind of family tree.

Besides the faces, *48* leads us to think about the complex history of the looks that crossed those images (LINS et al., 2011). A variety of looks and temporalities dwell on the pictures: the people in the portraits look us directly in the eyes. First of all, the eyes of the prisoners meet the eyes of the police and then, years later, meet the eyes of the spectator. The look escapes the police device of the past and penetrates the present. They survive to make contact with us more than 30 years later. The recovered footage evokes the moment of its production, the unique instant of shared presence of the bodies and the camera. Some aspects of the relation of the police and the prisoners are impressed on the pictures and become visible to us. As Jean-Louis Comolli says, the cinematographic document is, first of all, the document of its own realization:

‘In order to understand the coordinates of a shot or a photograph, it is important to considerate not only its space-temporal and political-historical conditions, but also what happens between those who film and those who are filmed. I would say that if something is documented, it is that relation’ (COMOLLI, 2010: 339).

The photographs, by the way, are not just placed into the editing, they are not frozen frames, but rather filmed, which

provides them with a breathing, almost imperceptible motion. In other words, they are not static, but cinematographic. As in *Natureza Morta*, they are slowed down, sometimes to 1% of the original speed. In both documentaries, the spectator feels the slowness of the passage of time, which, once again, is connected to the long duration of the Salazar dictatorship. In addition to that, the fusions, fades and voices separated from the images give her films a fearful atmosphere. Although the movie is made with the survivors of the regime, there’s still something phantasmagoric about it. Maybe the detachment of body and mind (the overlap of a mute body in the pictures from one time and the disembodied voice from another period) produces ghosts, splits the souls as isolated beings wandering around with no materiality.

If before the movie the PIDE photos were part of a catalogue, almost a taxonomy, now they can be seen as elements of an audiovisual album, an album filled with affection, but also with horror. In other words, Susana de Sousa Dias’ films work to implement a change in meaning and purpose of these documents: from being instruments of registration, identification and control of the political prisoners, they transform into important pieces in the creation of subjectivity and preservation of memory. The editing of *48* and *Natureza Morta* works against the intentions of those who first produced these archives. And this displacement is probably the biggest political gesture of the film: turning the production of a control apparatus not only into live testimonies of the violence, but also into an aesthetic expression of horror.

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# Martínez Muñoz, Pau. ‘Mateo Santos. Cine y anarquismo. República, guerra y exilio mexicano’

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Alejandro Montiel Mues

Until the publication of this valuable monographic research barely nothing was known about the filmmaker who, very early in July 1936, made the inaugural film of the Spanish cinema during wartime, *Reportaje del movimiento revolucionario en Barcelona*, and the most elaborated and stimulating of the first-hour-documentaries produced by the CNT (National Confederation of Labour) during the civil war, *Barcelona trabaja para el frente*. Likewise, the figure of many of the defeated had remained clogged in the haze as well, as that of the anarchist Mateo Santos who accumulated great prestige during the twenties and thirties as the director of the film journal *Popular Film* and several other literary and journalistic activities.

The author, Pau Martínez Muñoz, had already made significant advances on this research with her PhD dissertation on the biographical vicissitudes of the filmmaker: *La cinematografía anarquista en Barcelona durante la guerra civil (1936-1939)*<sup>1</sup>, tutored by the Professor Xavier Pérez Torio, and awarded with the Laureate distinction in 2008 at Pompeu Fabra University. However, the track on Mateo Santos had been completely lost after his exile in France and later in Mexico, without any certainty on the place or date of his demise until today.

Mateo Santos Cantero was born in 1890 in Villanueva de Infantes (Ciudad Real) and died in Mexico in 1964. He was married to Felicidad Santacana Perelló, from Igualada (Barcelona), in 1918. The couple had two daughters, Amelia (Barcelona, 1920) and Araceli Felicidad (Barcelona, 1929), and one son, David, who prematurely died in 1928. He wrote some novice poems for *El eco artístico* (1909-1923) and was an assiduous collaborator of the Journal *Vida Manchega, revista semanal ilustrada* (1912-1920). He spent some time in Madrid in 1913 and moved to the Condal City the following year, where he stayed until the arrival of the fascist to Barcelona. His political commitment was clearly exposed in the articles he published in *Los miserables* (1913-1915), an anticlerical weekly paper that proclaimed itself to be ‘insurgent and romantic’ where he sharpened up his furious verb.

During the time of the *pistolero* in Barcelona, he was victim of a frenzied repression by the criminal military governor of the city, Severino Martínez Anido –whose figure would be glorified by naming one of the main streets of the Catalan capital, today the Passeig de Picasso, after him until Franco’s death. However, Santos achieved a prominent career in cinematographic journalism, giving as one of the most outstanding results the foundation and coordination of the long-lived journal *Popular Film* (1926-1937).

The book by Martínez Muñoz offers a nourished and tasty anthology of those stirring articles, together with other memorable pages of the Manchegan writer, where, only to show as one of the possible examples, he adopts an attitude regarding the irruption of the talkies:

‘It might jell, and might even be liked by the majority of the moviegoers, the talkie. But that does not mean that it corresponds to a positive and convenient advance for the future of the seventh art. It could certainly mark a relapse indeed, making it similar to the spoken theatre’<sup>2</sup> (SANTOS, 1929).

Mateo Santos’ Cinematographic creation was scarce considering many of his projects, such as the Spanish adaptation of the *Cinema del Peuple* French experience of the workers, were not achieved. This experience had encouraged another Spanish anarchist filmmaker, Armand Guerra, to make an exceptional film entitled *La Commune* (Armand Guerra, 1914), where old characters of this revolutionary remote endeavour were shown. Nevertheless, he did complete one first documentary feature film, *Córdoba* (Mateo Santos, 1934) that was supposed to begin a series of films conceived as ‘Spanish Stamps’, and the two productions that were already mentioned –*Reportaje del movimiento revolucionario en Barcelona* and *Barcelona trabaja para el frente*– were completed before the foundation of SIE films, a production house of the literary Union. *El cine bajo la svástica. La influencia fascista en el cine internacional*, one of

the most outstanding of his essays on cinema of the time was published in Barcelona by Tierra y Libertad in 1937. Muñoz collects this paragraph in her anthology:

'And thus, from Krupp to Goebbels, since the years of the armistice signature German cinematography has progressively cultivated poison and discord in the conscience of German people, thus fostering their historical hate against France, and pouncing them into a new a war that, started in Spain, one can not predict which European scenarios it will need to develop the scope of its tragedy, even if the tragedy it represents to the French Republic, the URSS, and more specifically the proletarians of the whole world is already outlined.'

Again, victim of other repression, that of the brutal *Movement* of his first triumphal year, Mateo Santos moves to France through *Le Perthus* on February 6, 1939 and is imprisoned in the camp of Argelès-sur-Mer. He continues to write during his exile in France (1939-1949). From this period it is worth mentioning a book published by the National Alliance of Democratic forces of Spain in 1947, by Editions de La Calanque, with lithographic illustrations by Badía Vilató.

From his definite exile in Mexico (1949-1964) remain both his allegation against Hollywood's domain and his support for Mexican cinema exposed in his weekly collaboration in *Revista de revistas*, where he was in charge of the cinema section between 1951-1958.

To sum up, the research of Martínez Muñoz and this exacting and laborious book, somehow repairs the unfair oblivion in which the abundant cinematographic literature and the few films made by a prodigy of the anarchist Spanish cinema have been kept. The book concludes (before an anthology of essential texts from 1928-1945) with a moving epilogue by Mateo Santos' grandson, Ángel Morales Santos. •