

A certain tendency in Portuguese cinema

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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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