THE STATUARY CONDITION IN CONTEMPORARY PORTUGUESE CINEMA

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This article presents an analysis of the statue as a metaphor and a significant figure in contemporary Portuguese cinema. By examining the use of the recurring motif of the statue, it is our aim to demonstrate the existence of a statuary condition that extrapolates this motif to a transversally deployed figurative representation that posits the sculptural condition of the actor's body, the shot as a block of time and a record of the memory, and filmmaking as a necessary dialectic articulation between the moving temporal flow and the resistance of certain images. To this end, we will analyse the mechanisms that constitute this figurative representation: the blank stare, frontality, immobility, anti-naturalism, theatrical staging, the power of the word, the visibility of representational devices, interruption, and a particular form of working with the actor's body, as the object of phantasmagoria or the site of the material expression of the gag. Taking the work of Manoel de Oliveira as a starting point, source and key influence,[1] we seek to underscore the importance of this figure, closely linked to the need to evoke a past, a personal and collective memory, in some of the most significant poetics of contemporary Portuguese cinema, such as the films of Pedro Costa, Miguel Gomes or Rita Azevedo.

Our main focus will thus be contemporary Portuguese cinema, from which we will take three images as a starting point to illustrate our idea. All three were made in 2012 in the production hub that is the European cultural capital of Guimarães. Two of them are found in the collective film *Centro histórico* (2012); specifically, in Manoel de Oliveira's *O conquistador conquistado* and Pedro Costa's *Sweet Exorcist*. In spite of the difference in tone (Oliveira's short is burlesque and ironic, while Costa's is gloomy and spectral), both filmmakers take the same approach, locating a statue at the heart of the story.[2]

In *O conquistador conquistado*, Oliveira shows us the statue of King Afonso Henriques, Portugal's first monarch, presiding over one

The monumental statue. Frame from *O conquistador conquistado* de Manoel de Oliveira en *Centro Histórico* (2012)

The persistence of history: eyes that don't see. Frame from *Sweet Exorcist* de Pedro Costa en *Centro Histórico* (2012)

of the most emblematic squares of Guimarães. Oliveira's depiction is critical, reducing the sculpture to a cliché. As the tourist crowds pass by so fleetingly, there is only time to see the sights through their camera's viewfinder. The film evokes the choreographies of Jacques Tati and their ironic reflection on the fast pace of the modern world. The banality of the flow of tourists clashes with the solemn stateliness of the statue. The immobile figure is impervious to these new temporal rhythms. Oliveira's film is almost silent. There is no possibility of articulating a verbal narrative (apart from a few announcements from a megaphone) and, consequently, there is no time for history. There is no chance of exploring the past, or of reviving a memory. The tourist's gaze fixes on an image but sees nothing. In this sense, the film functions as a counter-chronicle to *A Talking Picture* (Um filme falado, Manoel de Oliveira, 2003), a film whose central device rests on the need for the word to give meaning to the ruins and vestiges of the past.[3]

Pedro Costa, on the other hand, turns his camera away from city monuments (mythical history) and towards the inside of an ordinary lift, where we find Ventura, the protagonist from *Colossal Youth* (Juventude em marcha, Pedro Costa, 2006), together with the figure of a spectral solider, a kind of metal statue with eyes closed. They are two sculptural, stone figures, trapped in an interval of stillness that interrupts the flow of time to give the moment its dialectic weight. In *Sweet Exorcist*, the ghosts of the past do return. In a kind of dreamlike delirium, faced with the motionless figure of the soldier, Ventura recalls his experiences in the colonial wars, the April Revolution and his days as a worker in post-revolutionary Lisbon. Different times fuse with one another; different moments are superimposed one on the other. The multiple voices of the forgotten emerge: the memory of the slaves returns. In fact, this short film formed the basis for the development of *Cavalo Dinheiro* (2014), a film not concerned with the epic and monumental history of kings and heroes, but with the history of those left behind, on the border between worlds (the secret, phantasmal history of the spectres, the forgotten).

To these two series of images it is worth adding a third: that of the bodies filmed by João Pedro Rodrigues in *The King's Body* (O corpo de Afonso, 2012), sculptural bodies carved out by the camera, which serve to problematise the contemporary representation of the monumental and sovereign body in the age of the image. The film, provocative and humorous, ponders the question of what the

body of Portugal's first king was really like. It thus returns to one of the central themes in Rodrigues's work: the problematisation of the body and the need to sculpt it. In a casting session for the film itself, Rodrigues interviews various characters whose reflections bring corporeality, the concept of monarchy and the economic crisis into relation with one another. The Apollonian exhibition of figures combines with a reading of the chronicles of King Afonso and with other images related to Portugal's first king, shown against a CG screen. The muscular bodies are flattened, becoming two-dimensional. Embedded in the screen, they

The statuary image. *O corpo de Afonso* (João Pedro Rodrigues, 2012)

become pure components of the image. In this way, the exercise proposed by Rodrigues transcends a reflection on the body and history to consider their visual (digital and cinematic) representation.

We can thus see how these three contemporary films posit three modes of figurative representation articulated around the idea of the centrality of a certain statuary condition of the human figure: first of all, with Oliveira, the idea of the statue as monument; secondly, Pedro Costa's articulation of the idea of the body as a monumental statuary record; and finally, João Pedro Rodrigues's portrayal of the move from statue to body and from body to its conversion in image. Each of these

three films illustrates one of the fundamental categories of the statuary condition that we seek to explore in this article: the monumental statue, the statuary body, and the statuary image. It is our view that each of these devices is significant to an understanding of the prevailing aesthetic regime in contemporary Portuguese art house cinema and the importance in that cinema of the statue as a figure and cinematic metaphor. In the following sections we explore these three models in more detail.

THE MONUMENTAL STATUE

The first category, the monumental statue, appears often in the films of Manoel de Oliveira. In fact, Oliveira serves as the key exponent of this figurative representation in contemporary cinema for the purposes of this study. His influence, acknowledged or indirect, has been decisive for the contemporary context. This director's interest in the monumental statue can be identified as early as his second film, *Estátuas de Lisboa* (1932). In this picture, Oliveira brings a series of tensions into play which determine the film's imaginary and affect its mise en **scène**, and which arise from the clash between the dichotomies of absence/presence, mobile/immobile, present/past, real body/figurative body. On this point, it is worth recalling one of the core elements of the Portuguese imaginary, defined by the philosopher Eduardo Lourenço with reference to Fernando de Pessoa's *O marinhero*[4]: the idea of "pure absence as a form of supreme presence" (Lourenço, 2006: 31) and its relation to *saudade*, a uniquely Portuguese kind of melancholy based on the longing for the return of a glorious past that is yet to come (the central idea of the myth of the Fifth Empire). At this point it is worth placing this definition in relation with the set of dialectics activated by the statue: the statue in the here-and-now (supreme presence) evokes a distant past (absence) by virtue of what it represents. At the same time, it is a

static mass which we look at and which, in turn, returns our gaze. Consequently, as Georges Didi-Huberman (1997: 14) suggests, it facilitates the accumulation of temporal layers. However, for an image to truly *look at us*, for the fleeting glimmer of the past to be activated, it is necessary for that past to be associated with the idea of loss: "[t]hen we begin to understand that everything to be seen, as still as it may be, as neutral as it may appear, becomes irresistible when it sustains a loss — albeit through a simple but compelling association of ideas or a play on words — and, hence, it looks at us, concerns us, troubles us" (Didi-Huberman, 1997: 16). In the context of Portuguese cinema this idea can be considered from the perspective of *saudade*, feeling as invocation, the echo of a loss, the impossibility of returning to a mythologised past. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that statues naturally integrate a certain idea of loss: the absence of a presence invoked by a stone figure. Both impressions of loss combine in a reinvention of time. The monumental statues of Portuguese cinema express a latency.

In this respect, in Oliveira's most recent films the statue appears at the point of origin of a temporal friction. Consider, for example, the beginning *Christopher Columbus, The Enigma* (Cristóvão Colombo - O enigma, Manoel de Oliveira, 2007). The brothers Hermínio and Manuel Luciano Silva contemplate the statue of King João I, in Lisbon's Praça da Figueira, just before leaving for the United States. In that moment the narrative plays with time to produce an impossibility, as a caption on the image indicates that the scene takes place in 1946, long before the creation of this statue by Leopoldo de Almeida (it was erected in 1971). The statue acts as a device that precipitates a temporal clash, which seems to underscore the presence of a mysterious figure, something like Walter Benjamin's angel of history (Benjamin, 2008: 310). This static angel (in a way also a statue) reveals the film's temporal trick, evoking the past in the present through the contemplation of objects that return the observer's gaze.

Another significant film in this respect is *A Talking Picture*, in which the history professor Rosa Maria and her daughter Maria Joana take a cruise on the Mediterranean. Mother and daughter travel back to the historical milestones of Western civilisation, reproducing the route of the first conquerors in search of the father, on a journey that evokes the emergence of memory and the survival of the past. The cruise traces the route of Vasco de Gama's sea voyage all the way to India, superimposing different times and spaces. Oliveira's *mise en scène* turns the statues and ruins of Egypt, Greece and Italy into the device (the vestiges) that facilitate the resurrection of history, the resuscitation of the past; they open a temporal breach and function as a space for the articulation of a verbal narrative that turns the movement and power of evocation into clichéd images. Something similar is true of the statue of Pedro Macao and the ruins of the Gran Hotel in *Voyage to the Beginning of the World* (Voyage au début du monde, Manoel de Oliveira, 1997), Oliveira's ultimate film about memory; or with the tombs of the kings visited by King Sebastião in the opening scenes of *The Fifth Empire* (O Quinto Imperio - Ontem como hoje, Manoel de Oliveira, 2004).

The statuary body. *A Talking Picture (Manoel de Oliveira, 2003)*

In all these cases, the statues activate a memory and are, in turn, the driving force that propels a discourse and a system of representation of bodies. The immobility of the statues pushes the narrative beyond its limits. In *A Talking Picture* Rosa Maria turns into a statue on the deck of the boat, staring out to sea. Manoel also evokes his life in the car ride in *Voyage to the Beginning of the World* that takes him to the places of his childhood. The car drives along the highway while he, immobile, looks out and remembers his past. In *Christopher Columbus* Manuel Luciano da Silva and his wife visit the Castillo de Sagres, a "historic centre" for Portugal's maritime expansion. There, next to a broken head of a sculpture and the endless horizon of the Atlantic Ocean, they recite, inexpressively as a duo, the opening lines of the First Canto of Luis Vaz de Camões's *Los Lusíadas*. History, in the context of the figurative representation of the statue, is depicted as words open to the vertical depths of time.

In these scenes an important shift occurs: the immobility of the statues seems to be transferred to the expressions of the characters. Their appearance is static and frontal; their performance is theatrical and solemn. Their gaze is directed out into the void, to a kind of infinite and unreachable great beyond. In this way, the monumental statues give way to the second mode referred to above: the statuary body.

THE STATUARY BODY

We will continue, for the moment, with Oliveira. The process of transfer of statuary qualities from stone to body is made explicit in a central scene of *The Fifth Empire*; the scene in which the statues of the kings that preceded Don Sebastião turn into living bodies while he sleeps. The change of state occurs in the realm of dream, a territory which, according to Lourenço, facilitates a temporal amalgam and, consequently, the expression of the Portuguese soul (LOURENÇO, 2006: 35). These figures inhabit a kind of limbo, a suspended parenthesis in which the great moments of Portuguese history have already occurred and, at the same time, are yet to come. This link between the motif of the statue and a re-reading of Portuguese destiny in history explains the potency of this figurative representation studied in Portuguese film, in a contemporary example of what Serge Daney described about Portuguese cinema in 1981 (DANEY, 2001).

Bodies of stone become human bodies; the static figure acquires motion. Out of this process emerges the fantastic, the mystery. This idea culminates in *The Strange Case of Angélica* (O estranho caso de Angélica, Manoel de Oliveira, 2010), a story about a body's change of state. The corpse of the female protagonist comes back to life in the pictures taken by the photographer Isaac. Angélica, another kind of statue, recovers movement in a still image. Like the kings in *The Fifth Empire*, she is a figure between life and death, the present and the past, arising out of a dreamlike delirium of the male protagonist. In both cases, Oliveira explores the dialogue between movement and interruption, between photography and cinema, between sculptural body and real body, between theatrical representation and cinematic image. In short, as is made clear in the scene in which Isaac contemplates the line of newly developed photographs hanging up in his dark room, Oliveira examines the question of the statue from the perspective of the dialectic between mobility and immobility, and articulates it as a question of editing. Sculptures/static figures turn into moving images in the flow or continuity of the filmic mode.

Oliveira's style is consolidated on the basis of the idea that film is a medium for capturing theatre (BÉNARD DA COSTA, 2001: 98) through mechanisms of gestural and dynamic minimisation, frontality and inexpressiveness. Anti-naturalism and theatricality underpin the *mise en scène* in *Amor de perdição* (1979), *Francisca* (1981), *Le soulier de*

satin (1985) — with its painted sets — and *Mon cas* (1986), which takes place in a theatre; and also in *Abraham's Valley* (Vale Abraão, 1995), *Party* (1996), *Word and Utopia* (Palavra e utopia, 2000), *A Talking Picture* and *Gébo et l'ombre* (2012), a film that underscores the fabricated nature of cinema and of representation.

The gaze to camera is a central mechanism whose use culminates in *Non, ou a vã gloria da mandar*. The ensign Cabrita, played by Luis Miguel Cintra, travels with his comrades in a military truck in the midst of the colonial war. The vehicle is shown in constant lateral motion. The flow is interrupted every time the lieutenant begins the narration of an episode in Portugal's history, and turns his gaze on the spectator, who has the sensation not of being looked at, but of being plunged into the past. Luis Miguel Cintra's gaze evokes a reverse shot that never appears, pointing out an absence that emerges in the shot itself; its reverse shot is the memory, the past. In this way, Portuguese cinema articulates a gaze without a reverse shot that opens up a gap in time; it is *face-to-face* with history.[5] The result is a false match cut, a discontinuity in the images. Once again, temporal fiction is related to a kind of statuary figurative representation.

Often the only movement in these scenes arises from the word, which takes shape and becomes a physical element that also appears in the scene. Indeed, Oliveira views the word as sovereign, as emotion and movement (JOHNSON: 2003), as a *mise en scène* and image in itself.[6]

Apart from Oliveira, Pedro Costa is the filmmaker who has offered the most radical articulation of the poetics of the statuary body in the contemporary context. Before analysing the statue of the soldier that appears in *Sweet Exorcist* and *Cavalo Dinheiro*, we should consider the other body in the story: Ventura, the true paradigm of the static human figure. Ventura, like Vanda in *No Quarto da Vanda* (2000), is a character in suspension. His zombie, living-dead

Resistance in history: eyes that see. *Juventude em marcha* (Pedro Costa, 2006)

state is founded on a heavy, rigid and lugubrious mobility. His slow and laboured walking, his speaking in murmurs, and his vacant stare arise from the tension contained in the body of the character. The friction between mobility and immobility, which in Oliveira's films gives shape to the relationship between actors and space, is contained in Costa's work in the bodies of his characters. In his body Ventura brings together the tension between movement and interruption, between present and past. On the other hand, in Oliveira's work, as Mathias Lavin points out, this tension is translated into two central movements of the *mise en scène*: the frontal body, immobile, positioned in the middle of the shot, and a body in motion that moves around it while it flows from the word (LAVIN, 2008). Costa's characters exhibit limited mobility. Shut up indoors and in intimate spaces, sculpted between lights and shadows, only the word moves between them or in them. This *mise-en-scène* model culminates in *Sweet Exorcist* (and especially in *Cavalo Dinheiro*) with an extreme dissociation between voice and body. The voice is autonomous from the image. Ventura's and the soldier-statue's thoughts exist outside their bodies. A chasm is opened up between image and sound, producing an overwhelming dissociation

of rhythms. The two characters appear suspended in time, their gestures interrupted, but their voices take up the flow of memory. The spatial-temporal disorder, a hallmark of Costa's work, is exacerbated here as well. While Fontainhas was an isolated, disconnected space, a kind of interregnum, the lift in which Ventura appears in *Sweet Exorcist* is a temporal gap in which the past does not yet exist and is present at the same time. This strategy is taken to its extreme in *Cavalo Dinheiro*, a film that presents a labyrinth of times and spaces traced out in Ventura's sleepwalking mind. His memories and experiences give rise to a surprising journey, a perverse connection of heterogeneous spaces that unexpectedly connect passages, catacombs, hospitals and abandoned factories during Portugal's Carnation Revolution. The present, the colonial wars and the Carnation Revolution all occur simultaneously. We enter into a subjective mental state that recalls Dante's limbo in the *Divine Comedy*, a vast valley surrounded by a hazy darkness in which the only sound heard is the endless sound of lamentation.

The word is essential for the development of the narrative. The scenes take shape out of the characters' monologues: Vanda in his room, in *No quarto da Vanda*, talking about his family or the residents of Fontainhas; Ventura, sitting on a bench recalling his past as a construction worker, while at the same time evoking all the stories of the immigrants who arrived in Portugal in the 1970s, or reciting the letter he never sent to his wife. The characters explain their stories on the basis of their memories, their past. Costa moulds the shape of this verbal narrative, which the characters learn and verbalise somewhat mechanically. The director does not give instructions for the performance (the characters are playing themselves) but concentrates solely on the work with the text. Fiction and documentary are fused. The body language and verbal expression of the characters have points of contact with those of Bresson's models.

This configuration of the *mise en scène* around static figures with a statuary quality also appears in the work of other Portuguese filmmakers. For example, João César Monteiro also works with this type of figure in *Que farei eu com esta espada* (1975), a film whose central image is a young woman (Margarida Gil) dressed as a knight who, in an still pose, holds up a sword while looking out over the Atlantic in a kind of warning to any enemy approaching Lisbon from the sea: American NATO vessels which Monteiro, in a playful use of editing, associates with the ship transporting Nosferatu and all the evils that travel with him. In this case it is a figure faced with the abyss, the void, the immensity of the sea; a pseudo-statue associated with the ideas of rebellion and resistance, the fight against imperialism and oppression. It should not be forgotten that this is one of the films that reflects the climate and the hopes of revolution unleashed after April 1974. Once again, and in another context, the statuary figure facilitates an opening to the past, in which everything happens as a result of a gaze (the young woman's gaze out to sea). The past of imperial conquests is evoked and compared against the present of the people's revolution; different times are superimposed one on another, making a political statement that is ironic, playful and teasing. It is an image taken by the spectres of the past.

It is also interesting to note how Monteiro films his own body or the bodies of his *alter egos*: his filmography begins with an image of Luis Miguel Cintra sitting on a bench in Jardim do Principe Real, in *Quem espera por sapatos de defunto morre descalço* (1970), and ends with an analogous frame, filmed thirty years later, in which he plays João Vuvu in *Vai e vem* (2003). These two frontal bodies, which could be likened to static figures, are incapable of remaining impervious to the movement that surrounds them in the shot. The arc that takes us from one film to the other reveals how Monteiro subverts the statuary figure and turns it into raw material for slapstick humour

or into an image for worship. In this sense, on his body Monteiro re-reads the collective historical avatars of the contemporary figures of the vampire, the undead that comes to life, and of the burlesque comic, with its full weight of machinist automaton. The long still frame, the frontality, the spatio-temporal disconnections; all these elements reappear fixed on the body of the filmmaker in anticipation of the subversive moment that breaks with the ecstasy.

In another sense, the ceremonies of exaltation of female beauty that fill the films of the Portuguese director also construct a kind of statuary image. The code of the ritual related to the female body ranges from temporal sublimation to the sculptural isolation of the body and the separation of the sections of torso, face or hands in space or in time. The gaze of João de Deus, for example, in his rituals and libations with young girls, aims at making the image eternal, capturing the ethereal composition of the statue-image in a sacred space and a duration, beyond time itself.

The devices that we are analysing may often open up a third space, in depth, towards the constructive reverse side of the scene. Besides the purely temporal clash, there are films that highlight the place where the representation is prepared, the space outside the frame, for example when characters address the camera and reveal their dual condition as actors and characters. This is what happens in Rita Azevedo Gomes's *A vingança de uma mulher* (2012), whose story is articulated around three key premises: the coexistence of past and present in a single space, theatrical declamation as a core element of all the scenes, and the inclusion of the creation process itself in the film. The influence of Max Ophüls and of modern theatre can also be seen in the demiurge who marks out the story. In the first scene a character addresses the camera; shortly afterwards we discover that this is that type of demiurge, the film's narrator, who dresses the actors, introduces the scenes, fills in the temporal

gaps and integrates the filmic act itself and the theatrical representation as material for reflection in its narratives. The film is constructed around a resentful, rejected female body who as she narrates her story acquires movement through the word. In this case the *mise en scène* also takes shape through the bodily struggle in an enclosed space between two figures: Roberto (Fernando Rodrigues) and the Duchess (Rita Durão). The Duchess is presented as an effigy in the moments of greatest intensity in the story. Out of her blank stare, her face in close-up, arise the memories of her original trauma in the form of an obvious theatricalisation of the past. We see Rita Durão going over the script, as if she were studying her own character. Is Durão preparing her performance? Is the Duchess contemplating what she wants to explain to Fernando? The visibility of the *mise en scène* and its construction (like the back of the theatre set revealed at the beginning of *Benilde*) is material for the narrative. The fictional apparatus moves into the foreground.

The gazes into space also open up unexpected cracks. The last image of *Quem espera por sapatos de defunto morre descalço* is a long take in which Livio, played by Luis Miguel Cintra, also looks at the camera. Livio is a character in suspension, left by his beloved, incapable of regaining movement, whose gaze has no corresponding reverse shot. The image persists as a question mark, open, awaiting a new space that can bring it to life. This tradition reappears in the films of Miguel Gomes and João Nicolau, filmmakers following in the style of Monteiro. The statuary relationship appears in this case in a more playful manner. The constrained, deactivated character, trapped in a cycle of return of the same old experiences, scrutinises the horizon, the out-of-frame, in search of creative energies that could invent a new world. Hugo's initial yawn in *Canção de amor e saúde* turns into the snout of a lion-statue. They are faces with no reverse shot to give continuity. The absence that seeps through the gaps in the shot is the conspiracy, the incomprehensible,

[The statue through editing. *Gébo et l'ombre* (Manoel de Oliveira, 2012)

the secret, the stranger that intrudes in the present of the characters like an element of rupture or a background noise. The theatrical turns into the musical. Ultimately, everything revolves around an escape, the characters' desire for fiction, perceptible in Ventura's stories in *Tabú* (Miguel Gomes, 2012), in Francisco's confinement in a children's story in *A cara que mereces* (Miguel Gomes, 2004) or in Hugo's seafaring adventure en *A espada e a Rosa* (João Nicolau, 2010). Before his eyes a world of fiction opens up and anything is possible. And it is thanks to the cinema, the theatre, the editing, the performance. This is why Francisco takes part in a school play in Gomes's first film, or why the character of Rosa, in *A espada e Rosa,* is performed by three different actors, while Melo, in the same film, performs a play on the boat in which he plays every role. As Jacques Lemière explains, in Portuguese cinema reality appears filtered through the theatre. Reality is explored from the perspective of fiction, working on the basis of a poetics of distortion.

FROM THE STATUARY BODY TO THE STATUARY IMAGE

Finally, we come to the third category: the statuary image. This category occurs through the interruption of the movement of the image; it is a statuary condition articulated in the editing process. The characteristics we have examined in relation to the other statues are also present here; the shot lingers on a frontally positioned body looking into the camera. Raymond Bellour writes that when the camera stops over an image, it generates a vanishing point that indicates an abstract time; an image that brings together various moments in time (Bellour, 2002).

Once again, Oliveira appears as the leading filmmaker in the formulation of this technique. At the end of *Gebo et l'ombre* (2012), when the character played by Michael Lonsdale decides to take the blame for a crime he didn't commit, he stands up before the authorities and his expression is frozen. The image stops. This ending connects with the final scene in *A Talking Picture*, in which the contorted face of the ship captain stares helplessly at the disaster befalling the ship, and with the ending to *Vai e vem*, where Monteiro's eye appeals to the spectator from a kind of great beyond. Once again, we are confronted with images lacking a contemporaneous reverse shot, invoking death and resonating with echoes of the past. The ethical decision of the protagonist in *Gebo et l'ombre* vibrates with the interruption introduced by the editing. Raul Brandão's play ends inconclusively and Gebo's final act is left unresolved.

Hence the importance of what could be referred to as statuary scenes, where immobility affects all the characters in the shot. This occurs at several moments in Oliveira's *Amor de perdiçao* (1979) and *Francisca* (1981) (in both cases this kind of temporal suspension is related to an exploration of the limits of sound and image), and in the scene, bathed in pink lighting, of the hunt for the mythical *gambusinos* in the moonlight in João Pedro Rodrigues's *To Die Like a Man* (Morrer como um homem, 2009). In this way we might explain the predominance of long sequence shots as single-shot scenes in certain Portuguese films.

We may thus conclude that the statuary condition appears as a transversally deployed

figurative representation in different poetics of contemporary Portuguese cinema which share a particular mode of relating to history, a treatment of the shot as a sculptural block (of time and space) and an acting style in which the body is also a stone block, a material presence and medium for the word that passes through it, with its rhythms and music evoking and invoking past or latent ghosts. In this equation, the theatre, the visible mechanism of representation, is the preferred mode of access to the veiled reality. Fiction reveals that reality and the statue is the image that resists, or, rather, insists.

In this sense, we could map an archaeology of the modern (and genuinely revolutionary) particularity of Portuguese cinema at a key moment in its history. This archaeology reveals an original moment in film which, moving beyond Cinema Novo, opens the history of this film tradition to modernity: *Acto de Primavera* (Manoel de Oliveira, 1963). The weight of reality examined through the exploration of the theatrical act, the ethnographic quality as presence of the body of the people, the clash of temporal layers, the predominance of motionless figures, the recitation and the word already brilliantly combined in this foundational film, which presents a theatrical depiction of the mystery of the Passion in a town in the province of Tras-Os-Montes, and in so doing, identifies cinema as mystery. The anthropological memory explored in this film operates as a return of ancestral expressions and a revival of old words deposited in rough, expressionless faces with fixed gazes and a temporalised presence. In Oliveira's work, the statue is a repository of time, a monumentalised being, a record that the cinema sets in a dialectic with the flow of time, of the film, and the animation of the cinematic image. The degree to which this is linked to a particular way of understanding Portuguese cinema and what it records of Portugal as a theme can be explored through the ethnographic documentaries of Antonio Campos and their reuse as an image

of the past in *Redemption* (Miguel Gomes, 2013), through the anthropological films of Antonio Reis and their urban re-reading in Pedro Costa's work, and finally, through Oliveira himself, whose films are founded (for example, in *The Strange Case of Angélica*), on the need to contrast photographic images and stills of the monumental mythological bodies of the harvesters with the images taken of the motionless body of the dead woman so that in the editing, in the gap, between still bodies and reviving words, we may glimpse the ghost, the cinematic image that transcends death and disappearance.

The specifically cinematic quality of the statue as a potential figure and secret code of a film tradition that explores temporal interruption and the place of suspension is thus revealed as another of the particular recurring mechanisms that determine the shared singularities of contemporary Portuguese cinema. ∎

NOTES

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1 Mathias Lavin views the statues in Manoel de Oliveira's films as a key element in the relationship between body and space; in short, in the conception of the *mise en scène*: "[...] la statuaire ne se justifie pas comme un simple motif mais, de façon plus essentielle, comme un élément stratégique dans une élaboration figurative qui conduit à approfondir l'analyse de la relation entre la figuration du corps et le traitement de l'espace" (Lavin, 2008: 128).

2 "Manoel de Oliveira just reminded me the other day—when he saw this film—about *his* statue in the film, the statue of our first king, and he said 'it's good to have statues in my film and your film because it's the only way to talk properly in film about the human

condition.' Very enigmatic, but I'm just saying what he told me." In: Costa, Pedro. *Q&A. The Tokyo Film Exposition*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvlDvoo4sXw> [02/03/2015]

3   In *A Talking Picture*, history reduced to clichés and frozen in the tourist image could only be redirected by the depth of the memory and the movement of the word. It is in this sense that we may interpret, at the beginning of *O conquistador conquistado*, the interesting friction between the initial lateral tracking shot and the shot of the face of the tourist observing the parade of images, all over the voice of the guide. These are followed by powerful shots of the centre of Guimarães that explore the presence of a past ignored by the tourist's camera, which passes over, stops, and sees nothing. Between the stone and the petrified image one can only shrug one's shoulders. The opening of *A Talking Picture* posits the same horizontal movement of the cruise that leaves Lisbon from the original point of the departure of the Portuguese explorers. The route taken can be read as a reverse shot of the frontal gaze of the historian, Rosa Maria, who articulates a spoken narrative that transforms the clichéd superficiality of the monument (el Padrão dos Descobrimentos) into the depth of the reviving evocation that confuses real, imaginary and mythical history (mist over Belem Tower). This is a clear exercise in counterpoint using similar mechanisms of *mise en scène*.

4   It is worth noting, in this context of statues and the importance of the clash between movement and interruption, that the subtitle of this play is *Drama estático em um quadro*.

5   See the concept of the reverse shot with death ("contraplano con la muerte") in Salvadó, 2012.

6   See: De Baecque & Parsi, 1996: 80.

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THE STATUARY CONDITION IN CONTEMPORARY PORTUGUESE CINEMA

Abstract

This article explores the importance of the statue as a key figure in certain poetics of contemporary Portuguese cinema. The statuesque component is deployed from the way of filming bodies and from the interpretive register. It's studied in different modalities of appearance according to categories that we propose: the monument, human statue and picture-statue. This statuesque phenomenology of Portuguese cinema articulates key concepts in the definition of Portuguese film poetics: the anti-naturalism, theatricality, historical archeology and long takes.

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LA CONDICIÓN ESTATUARIA EN EL CINE PORTUGUÉS CONTEMPORÁNEO

Resumen

El presente artículo explora la importancia de la estatua como figura determinante de ciertas poéticas del cine portugués contemporáneo. El componente estatuario se despliega a partir del modo de filmar los cuerpos y del registro interpretativo, y se estudia en diferentes modalidades de aparición según categorías que proponemos: el monumento, la estatua humana y la imagen-estatua. Esta fenomenología estatuaria del cine portugués se articula a partir de conceptos clave en la definición de la poética fílmica lusa: el antinaturalismo, la teatralidad, la arqueología histórica y el plano durativo.

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