

Soulful (re)constructions- (re)start

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Abstract

The images of Almada Negreiros served as motto for this article, which presents thoughts resulting from research, focusing in the period of the first Modernist movement, in Portugal, and, in particular, in his inner self and aesthetic, through studies of light, sound and image, unfolding, in its modernity, processes of continuous dialogue between characters, mirrors and shadows.

Key words: Image; Contemporary Art; Almada Negreiros; Futurism

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Introduction

A group of colleagues from the fields of Visual Arts, Literature and Pedagogy revisit Almada, his inner self and aesthetic, through studies of light, sound and image, unfolding, in its modernity, processes of continuous dialogue between characters, mirrors and shadows.

The images of Almada served as motto for this article, which presents thoughts resulting from research, focusing in the period of the First Modernist movement, in Portugal, and, in particular, the literary works of Almada Negreiros.

The exposition was entitled ‘*drawing in motion*’ and what caught our attention was the phrase in the cover of the brochure that was being offered to the attending public: “*The first time I appeared in public was during the reading of a text from a one - act play, named “O Moinho”, dedicated to Eduardo Viana, in 1911. Everyone was saying: Wow, this looks like the cinema... In those days! Do you see the determination of the one that follows things by sight?*” (Interview of Manuel Varela to José de Almada Negreiros, 1968).

The Eclecticism and Modernism in Almada

“And everything else is just need” or this need to (re)view/ reclaim Almada in Porto, in the North, to complete the duo, since Amadeo appeared and was (re)viewed first, in the same space. Amadeo, who Almada Negreiros denominated in the corresponding Manifest – to be Amadeo – “the Greatest Invention of the 20th century in Europe”. Amadeo had the fatality of

prematurely disappearing. However, Almada Negreiros, from the First Modernism group – those from Orpheu – extended himself through time, expanding and leaving marks of his Modernism – “his very own understanding of Being Modern” – with his diversity, variety, eclecticism. Almada found several ways of expression, through painting, drawing, poetry, theatre, cinema, novel, short story, but essentially through Drawing and the Word “ people’s worth can be ascertained by their use of words” (In “*A Invenção do Dia Claro*”, 1942: 149).

However, what has this representation of Almada Negreiros to do with our presentation?

In short, Álvaro de Campos and Almada Negreiros represent the Portuguese Futurism within the group Orpheu. It is the enthusiasm and the “*joie de vivre*” that led Álvaro de Campos to sing, as Walt Whitman did, the fraternity among men. In the “Ultimatum” (In *Portugal Futurista*, 1917), the author suggests to “not rationalize attitudes that are not rational”, corresponding to a tendency towards anti-intellectualism. That is to say that within the group Orpheu, Almada Negreiros represents the extroversion, the welcoming and the desire to learn. Almada Negreiros is a symbol of that statement of Portuguese Modernism (Saldanha, 1998), in which Orpheu is one of the main paradigms. It is the paradigm of a generation in upheaval, in the midst of which Almada, unlike, for example, Sá-Carneiro, would reveal an unwavering faith, a boundless enthusiasm, developing a provocative and scandalous stance regarding the Portuguese society. He who at 22 years old presented himself, on stage, at the Theatre of the Republic, on the 14th April of 1917, with the “*Ultimatum Futurista às Gerações Portuguesas do século XX*”, wearing an acrobat and performance suit, thus adopting the attitude of what for him was that of a true artist. (Fig. 1).



Fig.1 Almada Negreiros, Theatre of the Republic, Lisbon, *Acrobat* © Source: Conferência Futurista -*Ultimatum Futurista às gerações portuguesas do séc. XX – 1917*

In addition, because the aesthetic function with Almada is permanently on stage, that is to say, theatrical. For Almada Negreiros, *“the Portuguese, as all decadents, knows only of the passive feelings: resignation, fatalism, lethargy, the fear of danger, servility, shyness and even inversion.”* It is the fulfilment of a portrait, of a negative nature, were the Portuguese as a decadent race, appears to be destined to assimilate what is foreign and not to believe in the future. The group Orpheu, Europe’s adventure in Portugal, developed several aesthetic literary movements, generally linked to the vanguard movements, including those associated to the fine arts. Hence the predisposition that shall systematically occur, to correspond text with image.

The Interseccionism was one of the first trends to appear. It had the tendency to subvert the sensitive perception, its spatial and temporal paintings, mixing the before with the after, the inside with the outsider, dismantling the laws of perspective, ignoring the opacity of the objects. By mixing all the associated sensory data, according to established “correspondences”, like in Baudelaire, thereby establishing something of a spatial and temporal ubiquity. It was the generalization of synaesthesia.

Variants of the interseccionist aesthetic were present in Almada Negreiros. Our interseccionists, with the exception of Almada, did not quote the cubists and it is to be believed

that they also based their theories on the premises of futurism (the words in freedom, the abolishing of the old syntax, with, no comas nor full stops; the appreciation of fields of perception such as, for example, the sense of smell). As examples of interseccionists, we can name the following: Fernando Pessoa in the *"Chuva Oblíqua"*, Sá-Carneiro in the *"Manucure"*, and Almada Negreiros in the *"A Engomadeira"*, *"Saltimbancos"*, and *"K4, O Quadrado Azul"*. The intention behind the decision of diminishing the part played by Reason was that of highlighting the direct contact with life, with life experience. This is the anti-intellectualism tendency. Nietzsche made of his own personal experiences, updating the life forces and will, the condition for his theories: *"Je veux éveiller contre moi la méfiance la plus vive: je ne parle que de choses vécues et je ne présente pas que des processus cérébraux"* (in Thus Spoke Zarathustra: 385).

Almada Negreiros stated that Bergson's influence was different from that of Nietzsche. However, he admitted being acquainted with the *"Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience"* (1889) and said that it was difficult for him to know to what degree did he let himself be influenced by some of those ideas.

Nietzsche, representative of the second movement, who greatly influenced Almada Negreiros, was the pioneer of irrational philosophy and based his theory in the instinctive will to live.

Nietzsche placed great significance in the world of senses, to impulse, to Will (will to act, to overcome obstacles) and to all manner of strong life-affirming instincts.

Between Nietzsche and Bergson, as the main symbols of philosophy and of the emerging European, we feel that Almada Negreiros will have developed an approach and a production that can be placed closer to the propositions of the first one, since his work constitutes a constant appeal to vitality, to a world of senses, to impulse and will.

Initially, Negreiros becomes known as an agitator and a futurist poet. He attacks the more traditional values of Portuguese society. Negreiros shows the existence in our country of obvious signs of weakness and of decay. In his first texts, he wishes to bring forward the lack of real sense of patriotism, the nostalgic tendency felt in the absence of strong feelings, the ease

with which the Portuguese assimilated all that was foreign, the disarray of the constitution of the Portuguese family and amateurism. All of it would have led to national decay, resulting in the boredom that inevitably damned the Portuguese race.

Several plays representative of cinema by Almada Negreiros arrive to Porto, such as the *“O Naufrágio da Ínsua”*, 1934, and *“La Tragedia de Doña Ajada”*, 1929. The latter was recently (re) discovered and, thus, ignored by the public until not so long ago. This is also the case of other initiatives, as for example, the décor of Cine San Carlos, Madrid, 1930, during his productive five years stay in Spain, which greatly influenced his work.

In Almada Negreiros, the being was always a performative being, a being permanently on stage, so to speak. For him, the theatre is “the display case of all arts”. As such, his contribution shall be one of poetics necessary for the creation of a theatrical expression of “figures in drama”, in one play or “a play of people instead of acts”. According to L. Francisco Rebello, this is how Almada influences theatre. The allure for the theatre was a constant where action is with all senses”, as stated by Almada. Action is the perfect symbol of a complete additional expression (to man) that will justify the idea of *“Direcção Única”* (1932) or the consummation of the diversity of paths in which the work of Almada appears, according to L. Francisco Rebello, “in a profound and intrinsic unity”. In the words of Vítor Pavão dos Santos, regarding Almada Negreiros, we recognize the “unescapable connection” with the theatre, a connection that will remain forever in his life”, although he is best known as a painter, a poet and a novelist.

Almada Negreiros believed that *“Art is to turn what is difficult into something easy; the theatre is the art of putting everyone in touch with the same feelings”*. The theatre is Art complete: “Painting and fine arts can only be seen. Music is something that can only be heard. In the theatre all senses are there”.

Beyond all the -isms, of all the novelties which arrived from abroad, from Europe, throughout all the work of Almada that which is predominant is the effort to learn/learn again about direct vision, about childish and naive of things. This become the unmistakeable writing trademarks of an Almada Negreiros style, if it can be so called.

Project Cinepoetry at ESE-IPVC, North of Portugal

Cinpoetry at ESE performed research on an educational practice, which combined the creation and meaning of visual texts, in the scope of Art Education in courses of the Polytechnic Institute of Higher Education (Professional Higher Education Degree in Art and Technology/Light, Sound and Image and Higher Degree Course in Cultural and Art Management).

Methodology of Analysis

The research based itself in a qualitative approach, giving way to a productive contact with the meanings constructed by the five groups of students of the Higher Technical Professional Course (CTeSP) of Arts and Technology (Light, Sound and Image) and the four groups of students of the Higher Degree Course in Cultural and Art Management (GAC).

Sample

Twenty ($n^{\circ}=20$) students of the CTeSP course, twelve ($n^{\circ}=12$) students of the GAC course, an instructor from the *Ao-Norte* Association and the lecturer in charge of both classes as a non-participant observer.

Key questions of the research

- How can the Anti - Dantas Manifest, by Almada Negreiros, be interpreted through a visual text?
- Which concepts did the students apply in order to “enter” in the written text of the Anti-Dantas Manifest and to develop the visual literacy?

Results

Application of Video Technology

Discussing Almada with two student classes of the Polytechnic Institute of Higher Education was a mere pretext to familiarize the students with image reading. Educators apply numerous models in order to promote visual literacy. The work developed by Ana Mae Barbosa and her Triangular Approach are often referred to in Brazil. It consists on articulating the reading of the work associated to the artistic practice and art history. In Portugal, other models

have been tested. Specifically the Higher School of Education (Moura et al, 2017) has been focusing its attention on the visual culture and the lectures given by a technician of *Ao Norte* are proof of it, raising students' awareness towards cinema by exposing them to audio-visual language.

Cinepoetry made it possible to draw attention to the artistic values that communicate and interact with culture, through the allegorical and symbolic dimensions of the literary and cinematographic languages, allowing students to reflect upon the metaphoric weavings of a literary text, through cinematographic language metaphors and codes of meaning, describing and interpreting static and moving images.

In this project, the students have combined the semiotic analysis of images with a poetic path. The text of Almada was a motivational drive that led to creation/visual narrative/symbolic representation. Cristo (2008:128) calls this process of *transduction*, that is to say "the turning of the sign of a language into a visual product'.

Development of Visual Literacy

Cinepoetry was the project that this year brought together the *AoNorte* – Association for the Production and Audio-visual Animation of Viana do Castelo and the Higher Education School of the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo. Once more, this project had the participation of students from the 1st year of the Professional Higher Education Course in Art and Technologies (Light, Sound and Image) and 3rd year students of the Course in Artistic and Cultural Management.

It was a pedagogical project aimed at raising awareness among the university students towards cinema and audio-visual, connecting image with technology and literature. It dealt with the poetic text, providing a space for audio-visual creation being Almada the pretext. Different techniques and creative procedures were applied leading up to the poetic audio-visual creations of the students. All of this took place between the months of November and December. Both classes discussed the Anti- Dantas Manifest. They expressed their ideas, feelings, imagined the stories and produced their own poetic audio-visual creations,

establishing a dialogue with cinema through theatrics and other language crossings, which carried us into the combination between cinema and drawing also found in the work of Almada. In the leaflet of the exhibition of Almada, in the city of Porto, Mariana Pinto Santos (2017) says: *“For Almada Negreiros the ability of putting a drawing in motion was a great conquest of cinema. He stated that it was through animation that the 7th Art fulfilled its true potential”. However, what kind of different look do we try to create with such approaches? That way of seeing things, that Hernandez (2003:5) calls ‘critical and understanding (...) based on the search of meanings in which we find ourselves when we create or when faced with the work of others’.*

Knowledge has built itself through numerous perspectives, languages, gestures, movements, lights, shadows, mirrors.

Conclusion

Almada is the versatile artist of his time and beyond his time. He is the one who chooses the language through which he desires to communicate: painting, writing, performance. In all of them, his aesthetic and style are unique and come together as an inseparable whole when we try to understand and analyse his work. The work of Almada stands out for its originality, in his paintings as well as in his written works. It is in itself a catalyst and works as such in its period in history (Figs.2 & 3).



Figs. 2 - Panels of the Alcântara Maritime Station
Óbidos Station

(scenes of the working world)

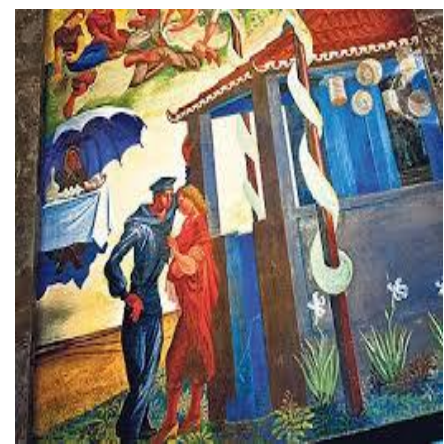


Fig. 3 - Rocha Conde d'

(History of Portugal and day-to-day scenes)

In it are included the social as well philosophic and aesthetic issues. Almada was a member of the movements that innovated and summarized the literary and fine arts language. Let us think of the interseccionist aesthetic (systematized by Fernando Pessoa, in his "*Páginas de Estética*") and the dynamic movement (developed by the Delaunay), among others. It is through the union of colour with dynamic and movement, which Almada includes in his theatricality, that his cinematographic tendency is revealed.

The original Almada goes into his innerness and finds himself with the internal geometry of his work. He renews himself with it to regain the strength of Innocence, which leads him to a constant and eternal Restart (Naiveness, by Almada). It is from these various sources (of which Almada, with his work is an original representative) that the words synthesis of an aesthetic that the performance evidences were made and in which this article was based.



Fig. 4 *Começar* © 1968-69, engraved stone, vestibule entrance, Head Office of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon

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