

**ATINER's Conference Paper Proceedings Series**

ART2019-0149

Athens, 23 August 2019

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Cinema)**

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Athens, 23 August 2019

ISSN: 2529-167X

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**ABSTRACT**

João César Monteiro was (and is) the most polemical among the Portuguese directors and, despite this, one of the most important and internationally recognized among them, with films like “Silvestre” (1981), “Recollections” of the Yellow House” (1989), “God’s Comedy” (1995), “The Spousals of God” (1999) or “Snow White” (2000). In a text in which the cineaste answers the question 'why do you film?' - entitled “The gentle sobs of the sounds of autumn” - he says that “two [Portuguese contemporary] poets made the most profound and original cinematographic reflection: Carlos de Oliveira and Herberto Helder.” Now, ‘where’ is the cinematographic reflection? Yes, in poetry, says João César Monteiro. It is necessary to look for this ‘cinematographic reflexion’ in the way these two poets work. In their mode of poetic work, in the form of their poetry, the cinematographic reflection indicated by João César Monteiro would be implicit. But from the arrow thrown with his words to the two mentioned poets, what remains is the idea of a powerful attraction between one and another art. Our job is to describe the ways of it, in his oeuvre. What did it do, this attraction, in the cinema of João César Monteiro? Mainly, we want to describe and reflect about the implication of his own body in his oeuvre. And, since “What am I to do with this sword?” [“Que farei eu com esta espada?”, 1975], we can perceive how a film and its fictional figure lives in the cinema of João César Monteiro: it is the film “Nosferatu” (Murnau, 1922), and the figure of the vampire with the same name. “What am I to do with this sword?”, verse of a Fernando Pessoa's poem, is the very question that the director asks to his art - and that the spectator may ask himself, we believe. The sword is, therefore, the cinema.

Keywords: film form, film and the form of poetry, João César Monteiro, Portuguese Cinema, the role of the artist

*Nakedness is the only thing we have in this world*  
 João César Monteiro

In a very beautiful text in which João César Monteiro answers the question *why do you make films?* — ‘The long sobs of Autumn’s sounds...’,<sup>1</sup> as Alberto Vaz da Silva translated the first three lines of Verlaine’s poem ‘*Les sanglots long des violons d’automne...*’ — he starts by saying that he has to paint the ceiling white again (he’s lying down, looks up at the ceiling and then at his right hand, which could be ‘the hand of a musician or thief’)... He stares at his hand repeatedly like a young child does — a hand as a separate instrument, that can be separate, that seems separate — it’s a hand that does and makes things (an artist’s hand, after all) and it is through this that a person is. So, as João César Monteiro wrote, it’s a hand that’s ‘no longer literate’. In other words, that hand doesn’t write poetry, does it? It isn’t expressed through poetry — we must remember that when he wrote this text, it was *nel mezzo del cammin* — sort of halfway through his career, two years after ‘*Recordações da Casa Amarela*’ (‘Recollections of a Yellow House’, 1989). This wasn’t his means of expression; in fact he disliked being told that *he should write because he really had a gift for it*. The hand was going to do or make things differently...

João César Monteiro died shortly after completing ‘*Vai e Vem*’ (‘Come and Go, 2003). He could be said to have died in cinema and in film, and thereby began to live. Born in 1939, he was first a poet but soon wanted to change course and move into cinema. His aim was to make films — this was in the 1960s — and he began as a film critic, perhaps the most brilliant and the most acutely intelligent one in Portugal. So João César Monteiro began his primordial relationship with cinema by writing about it — as did most Nouvelle Vague filmmakers for whom, as Jean-Luc Godard said, film criticism was already in itself a way of making films. (Some of his reviews were brought together in 2005 in the Portuguese Cinematheque’s João César Monteiro Catalogue, which has a copious bibliography; Livraria Letra Livre Lda are publishing all his screenplays and presentations, some for the first time, in ‘*João César Monteiro. Written Work*’. They are of great importance and reveal how painstakingly he prepared his work and his superb style.)

We will start with ‘*Que farei eu com esta espada?*’ (‘What am I to do with this sword?’, 1975). It’s an extraordinary film and one with the fewer mentions in his filmography. It came after his first film, ‘*Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen*’ (1969) — a leading Portuguese contemporary poet — and after another two films that he may not have entirely completed: ‘*Quem espera por sapatos de defunto morre descalço*’ (‘Those who wait for a dead person’s shoes die barefoot’, 1970) and ‘*Fragmentos de um filme-esmola*’ (‘Fragments of a film-handout’, 1972). But in order to begin to understand the manner that a

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<sup>1</sup> João César Monteiro, ‘The long sobs of Autumn’s sounds’, in answer to the question ‘Why do you make films?’ (in 1991): “Os soluços lentos dos sons do outono”, in Nicolau, J. org. (2005). *João César Monteiro, Catálogo*. Lisboa: Cinemateca Portuguesa, pp.20-27. The text was later published in the magazine ‘*Trafic*’ No.54, Summer 2004, Paris.

film and its fictional character inhabit João César Monteiro's cinema — in this case Murnau's 'Nosferatu' (1922) and the vampire of that name, we'll start with '*Que farei eu com esta espada?*' and what he wrote:

João César Monteiro: '... I imagined what might have happened if there had been an invasion. How could we have put up any resistance seeing that we lacked the military means to face an imperialist power? I thought that by showing some of my country's history and culture, I'd have a weapon, the only one with which to fight back. And the film was put together a bit like that. Nosferatu is part of the invading forces: the invader changes into a vampire, the envoy and scourge of imperialism. It was relatively easy for me to play the part of Nosferatu without makeup in '*Recordações da Casa Amarela*' ('Recollections of a Yellow House', 1989) thanks to my looking like him.'<sup>2</sup>

'*Que farei eu com esta espada?*' develops an unexpected dialectic that cannot be broken up in some simplistic scheme of meaning between what it shows of present time (street demonstrations, the city, its people, foreign sailors and the Portuguese people, at work, with their narratives) and what *exists in cinema*; above all, we have the documented presence of a NATO aircraft carrier in the River Tagus in front of Cais das Colunas in Lisbon, and then the images of the arrival of the plague-ridden ship that brings Nosferatu to the city in Murnau's film. We could say that it is with cinema that João César Monteiro directs himself to the world and shows with these images an unusual correspondence between cinema and the world — or at least a possibility of work and thought through this composition. '*Que farei eu com esta espada?*' — 'What am I to do with this sword?' — is a line of a poem in Fernando Pessoa's 'Message' that evokes Count Henrique of Portugal.<sup>3</sup> It reflects the film director's questioning of his art — and the spectators' questioning of themselves. The sword is cinema and here the 'I' is, in the first place, that of the author. But as Rimbaud said: *Je est un autre*; I is not I but another, so the question is also about a space open to all who may also make that question their own.

From the opening shot of '*Que farei eu com esta espada?*', a travelling over a canon towards the warship anchored in the River Tagus, until the last shot in '*Recordações da Casa Amarela*', a rising panoramic shot of a high chimney in the city — from chimney to cannon and from cannon to chimney — we find a way that these two films evoke one another. But it is in João César Monteiro himself (in his personal appearance in any way) — and '*Recordações da Casa Amarela*' demonstrates this extraordinary melding — that he blends into the character of Nosferatu, he becomes Nosferatu, and we think that this surpasses any explicit mimetic process. (Later on, at the end of '*Vai e Vem*'

<sup>2</sup> João César Monteiro, «Um cineasta na cidade» in *João César Monteiro, Catálogo, op. cit.*, p.414 — interview in the magazine *Positif*, No.362, April 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Let's mention here Fausto Cruchinho's text on '*Que farei eu com esta espada?*' in Overhoff Ferreira, C. org. (2014). *O Cinema Português através dos seus filmes*. Lisboa: Edições 70, Lisboa, 2014, pp.141-146, in which the author eventually highlights the connection between the question in the title of the film with Pessoa's poem.

(2003), for instance, this Monteiro-Nosferatu fusion incorporates the material concept of the shot itself with the phantasmagorical images that results from backlit shots that shrivel bodies and transform the characters into Chinese shadows.)

### **Modes of Poetic Invention**

João César Monteiro wrote in his ‘The long sobs of Autumn’s sounds’ text that ‘the most profound and original thinking about cinema had been developed by two poets: Carlos de Oliveira and Herberto Helder.’ It was a pronouncement that sparked consequences, as was only to be expected.

What did he mean? Where, in fact, do these two poets’ thoughts on cinema emerge? For Manuel Gusmão, a poet too, and an essayist about his work, in a perceptive text with methodological reach, they should first be sought in the way these two poets worked — it is in their poetic mode, the style of their poetry, that João César Monteiro’s above-mentioned thinking is implicit.<sup>4</sup>

With the arrow that his words aim at the two poets, what mostly remains is the idea of a powerful attraction between one art and the other — between poetry and cinema. Nobody can now take away that attraction from poetry and cinema (this is the effect certain people’s words have). All we are left with are ways to explain what can be understood by this. In the first place by taking into account the analytical method suggested by Manuel Gusmão himself.

Manuel Gusmão begins by describing images in ‘*O Último Mergulho. Esboço de filme*’ (‘The Last Dive. A film outline’, João César Monteiro, 1992) that appear towards the very end of the film when Esperança writes a letter with her back to a wall covered in coloured tiles. He suggests that when the camera moves away from her, and considering the visual and sound composition, ‘a kind of sovereignty of the text’ is presented. The text continues to be heard after Esperança has ceased writing, and this is what dominates and carries over to all the following shots. However, the camera does what it does at that particular moment because of the text — it is in order to place us within a text, a text that is not contemporary to Esperança (*Hyperion* by Hölderlin), in which her present intentions will fuse. And Manuel Gusmão’s description-introduction ends with: ‘And the viewer may wonder or dream that they wonder (...) or imagine, hallucinated, how that mythic-poetic past is now speaking to them in their own historic present.’ Manuel Gusmão’s words conclude at the start of the second paragraph with the statement that ‘João César Monteiro was a poet for films.’<sup>5</sup> This obviously means that there’s something in César Monteiro’s filmmaking that very directly touches upon another art, that of poetry. It also means that his way of being a poet was to

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<sup>4</sup> Manuel Gusmão, “Algumas prosas par air e vir ao cinema de João César Monteiro (ou de um riso inquieto na noite do último dos românticos)” [‘Prose with which to come and go to João César Monteiro’s cinema (or a certain uneasy laugh in the night of the last romantics)’], in *João César Monteiro, Catálogo, op. cit.*, pp.49-55.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p.50.

make the films he did. The idea here is that poetry does not exist solely in the normal and material circumstances of its verbal existence. This is a first and essential point.

João César Monteiro was not a poet, he was a filmmaker; and if he wrote poetry, when he made films, he made films. What does poetry mean, in what sense is Manuel Gusmão using the term poetry and what lets him do so? For this author, *poiesis* — from whence the word ‘poetry’ is derived — means invention in any art. *Poiesis* is etymologically derived from the Ancient Greek for making, action, creation, production; just as *poietes* — where our word ‘poet’ comes from — means the maker. *Poiesis* went on to mean the art of poetry, poetic skill and by extension all creative doings. (However, perhaps this is not the only reason João César Monteiro is described, or can be correctly described, as a *poet for films*. We must develop this idea.)

Manuel Gusmão went on to specify the modes of poetic invention:

‘...what I want to do when I present João César Monteiro as a poet is not to talk about the known quality of his prose nor crown him with the fatigued laurels of a very ancient and non-identical art, but rather to base myself for a few moment on a tradition that uses the word *poetry* to designate that which is inventive in any art. Invention that is memory and oblivion; discovery of what has been for a long time or is now there; movement of hands looking for a body in the dark, or a throw of the dice to seek the unknown, or something that may happen or someone who might come.’<sup>6</sup>

It is most important to isolate each of these images of poetic invention here (let’s hold onto them for a while):

*memory and oblivion*

*discovery of what has been for a long time or is now there*

*movement of hands looking for a body in the dark*

*a throw of the dice to seek the unknown, or something that may happen or someone who might come*

— *memory and oblivion* is thus the task and need to save and eternalise as well as the erasure or possible transformation into something else — *discovery of what has been for a long time or is now there* is the revelation of a new perception of what already exists, a change in the manner everything, or something in particular, appears — *movement of hands looking for a body in the dark* is the drawing near and separating of the imagined-desired (what we imagine and seek) model, its volume and shape; and also the question ‘where?’ in the midst of darkness; the body in a dark-black place, and in one’s head the question ‘where?’ — *a throw of the dice to seek the unknown, or something*

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p.51.

*that may happen or someone who might come* is the action of throwing, or of throwing oneself outside, which is simultaneously the possibility of attracting.

These are the modes, this is the *poetry* that Manuel Gusmão refers to. Poetry has to involve not only what the work is (how it is created), but also who creates it, the *poet*. The secret resides in this (it is always there), in the relationship between the poet and poetry — and inevitably in João César Monteiro as well; the whole secret is in the relationship between the poet and poetry — a living secret, which nobody will ever be able to tell.

But let us look more closely at this secret (we can't tell it) that Manuel Gusmão is suggesting; firstly, insofar as the modes of poetry used by Herberto Helder and Carlos de Oliveira that are related with the modes of João César Monteiro's cinema — in this case, either montage or shots, length and change of rhythm, or else shifts in style. Manuel Gusmão writes about the two poets and their 'rigorous care in the mode of playing with the boundaries of verse, which is one of the vital questions in order to have verse and mostly when dealing with "free verse"' with 'the change of verse when preparing for *enjambment* (Agamben) and for surprise, or as a decisive form of syntactic and rhythmic modulation of meaning.'<sup>7</sup>

To play with the boundary of verse — for instance, through *enjambment*: the image remains incomplete in the line of verse that moves to the other, the play on an unexpected passage to some *other* thing; a shift in just one step or flash to another step, a dimming or a new tonality — a variation of the same thing, or relation with something else now. With this we might understand the description of the images in '*O Último Mergulho*' with which Manuel Gusmão begins his essay or then read, for example, the poem by Herberto Helder<sup>8</sup> from which Manuel Gusmão extracted the formulas that he develops in his essay.

### **(Ass)signature: Rectifying the Original Randomness**

An understanding of one art, cinema, may come from knowledge of another, poetry, and emerges when the attraction between one art and another is explored. This is what lies behind Manuel Gusmão's use of 'poems, verse and poetic approaches that we may turn to not only to imagine cinema but, above all, to describe, comment on and understand João César Monteiro's films and filmic processes.'

As Manuel Gusmão points out, this it is not about using poetry to explain filmic processes or fill them with meaning. Obviously as in the case of César Monteiro, it doesn't involve applying or adapting poetry, much less enhancing

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p.53. Manuel Gusmão is referring to Agamben's essay 'The End of the Poem' first published in 1996, in *Categorie italiana: Studi di poetica* (Marsilio Editori); available in French online in Belin | publication as 'la fin du poème: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-poesie-2006-3-page-171.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Herberto Helder, "Retratíssimo ou Narração de um Homem Depois de Maio", in *Lugar* (1961-62), Lisboa (or in several publications of collected poetry, eg *Ofício Cantante - Poesia Completa*, Lisboa, Assírio & Alvim, 2009).

or promoting it through aspects of cinema. It's very important to keep in mind that verse and poetic forms are not metaphors for films however interesting they may seem as illustrative insights. So, we are not dealing with a crossword puzzle here, but with an incentive for such a powerful, unexpected cinematographic inventiveness in the images it conjures as the inventiveness of poetry can be and the images it verbalises. And it is to this form of power in poetry that César Monteiro devotes himself.

We should now take a closer look at what Manuel Gusmão wrote:

'If what mattered was to try and show the effects and the consequences of the presence of João César Monteiro (that is to say, the filmed images of his own body) in order to personify the character of João de Deus in 'Trilogy', or then of himself at the end of "*Branca de Neve*" ("Snow White", 2000) or the film at the end, "*Vai e Vem*", I think it might be helpful to look at the final line of the poem "*Vai morrer imensamente (ass)assinado*" (which could be translated as 'He's going to die immensely (ass)+signed or ass+assinated) in Herberto Helder's poem "*Retratíssimo ou narração de um homem depois de Maio*" ("The very portrait or narration of a man after May") in the book "*Lugar*" ("Place") as well as "*Fóssil*" in Carlos de Oliveira's "*Cantata*". It would be completely reductive to use verse as clarification or then poetry to explain or fill these filmic processes with meaning, but I think that the idea of the authorial signature as a fossil inscription in the fabric of fiction could guide us to reach an understanding of how films resist it or not. In its turn, the idea of merging "*assinatura*" (signature) and "*assassinio*" (assassination) of the author, an assassination in which the author is simultaneously both its agent and object, the *subject of* and *subject to*, might not only help us think about the path from *inside* to *outside*, from *before* and *after*, which questions of authorship and signature raise, but also to see in the rough acerbity within the films themselves to what extent, this procedure might not give rise to a frightening (and frightened?) self-irony with a romantic lineage; or to what extent there's a play between a concept of artistic creation and ritual crime. We would have to pass through the signs of an absent though effective presence of the author's body, or his synecdoches and metonyms, ever since his earliest films: his voice presenting the credits in the first, *off-camera* in "*Sapatos*", and the hand that writes in several of his films and would again write in "*Branca de Neve*".'<sup>9</sup>

I believe that what's important in Manuel Gusmão's approach here is the act of referring to the film with an idea obtained from a poetic formula. If the poetic formula could concentrate on the idea of what cinema or some filmic process does, or is, it would help us both to see it better (and see it as it is pure and simply) by freeing it from its muteness and also to give it an intelligibility (dazzling or harsh) that *lights up the night* of that film or filmic process. We can't ask for more — because this is clearly already asking for everything. Needless to say, the likelihood of this thinking and intelligibility of cinema depends above all else on the frequency of poetry — only this, only from here, may science be illuminating and effectual.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p.54.



Manuel Gusmão had previously cited Hegel on ‘imagination’, which was described as a kind of an endless night of images – *night of spirit and night of the world that a man experiences*:

‘The human being is this night, this empty nothing, which contains everything in its simplicity, an unending wealth of multiple images of which none occur to him or which are not present. (...) It is this night that we discover when we look a person in the eye - we look intently into a night that becomes *awful*, it’s the night of the world that now advances to the encounter of us all.’<sup>10</sup>

*The human being* — the human being who, filled with images (with the night), engenders them. Manuel Gusmão uses a particular line in Herberto Helder’s poetry and a particular poem by Carlos de Oliveira *not only to imagine cinema but, above all, to describe, comment on and understand César Monteiro’s cinema* — to delineate, at least here, one of his aspects, that of ‘(ass)assinatura’ [‘(ass)+signature’]. As we saw, this is the line ‘He will die immensely (ass)assinado [‘(ass)+signed (as in signature) or ass+assinated’]’<sup>11</sup> and the poem ‘Fóssil’ (Carlos de Oliveira). What ideas about César Monteiro’s cinema did Manuel Gusmão introduce? They involve *the idea of a fossil inscription* — that is to say, César Monteiro himself, or in any case, the authorial signature as a fossil in his films; and the idea of merging the author’s signature with his assassination — as digression and ultimate consequence of the author as subject and object of the work. The *signature* of João César Monteiro is used in various ways and quite frequently with his writing. (His first film to be screened begins with his voice-off and ends with Sophia’s own writing and signature; and ‘*Fragmentos de um filme-esmola*’ (1972) begins with his own writing; etc.)

The *signature* reveals not only the singularity of an object — a film, in this case —, but the fact that someone we could describe as human undeniably persists within it as the hand of the author, a witness or a medium. The author is not the owner (or a ‘this-is-mine ego’), he or she is ‘someone’. Only this can be the power of the *signature*, and not that of any fleeting advantage fame brings, an advantage that in the end is uncertain and often used to the advantage of powers that the artist himself frequently has to struggle against. A *signature* is a particular way for the object and the witness to be able to resist. Resist as fossil inscription and thus ‘(ass)assinado’ (ass+assinated) — ‘The only thing I insist on... As I usually say, it’s shit but it’s my shit. It leaves my mark. In a film, in the world.’<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Apud, Ibidem*, p.51

<sup>11</sup> See note no.8

<sup>12</sup> João César Monteiro in an interview with Anabela Mota Ribeiro, DNA, Diário de Notícias, 1997.

‘Fossil’<sup>13</sup>

The stone  
opened  
on the dark side  
the tomb  
and sky  
of a starfish  
so as to dream  
the foam  
the wind  
and now remember  
that in the briefest stone  
of the poem  
the star  
is myself

Carlos de Oliveira, “Fóssil” in *Cantata* (1960)

And we can now see how the poetic formulas of Herberto Helder and Carlos de Oliveira resonate in ‘The long sobs of Autumn’s sounds ...’:

‘It’s true that I’ve devoted more time (very much more) preparing my assassination than preparing my films. What’s quite funny is that I continue to believe that my assassination is, for me and thus for cinema, a great deal more important than my films.’<sup>14</sup>

Victor Erice, the Spanish filmmaker, resumed in the following words the film poetics of João César Monteiro and his involvement as an artist: ‘He had to play his life in a throw of the dice that would rectify the original randomness, that of his coming into to the world.’<sup>15</sup>

From one filmmaker to another, one artist to another, Erice recognises what is rooted in João César Monteiro’s cinema. It’s about a life, and its image, especially the reiterated representation of the João de Deus character, who devotes himself whole-heartedly to cinema. This dedication is not about *reflecting the original randomness*, that ceremonial occasion to which we were inevitably extraneous and because of which each one of us is here and are what we are, as Erice’s words would make us understand. For someone who has taken the biggest risks and ‘knew how to say No’ with the greatest audacity, this dedication is, on the contrary, about ‘rectifying’, that is to say, about

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<sup>13</sup> «A pedra / abriu / no flanco sombrio / o túmulo / e o céu / duma estrela do mar / para poder sonhar / a espuma / o vento / e me lembrar agora / que na pedra mais breve / do poema / a estrela / serei eu.»

<sup>14</sup> “Os soluços lentos dos sons do Outono” [‘The long sobs of Autumn’s sounds ...’], in *João César Monteiro, Catálogo, op. cit.*, p.25.

<sup>15</sup> Victor Erice, «Um dado trágico (João César Monteiro)», in *João César Monteiro, Catálogo, op. cit.*, p.555.

making the artist's gesture and determination the equivalent to divine randomness. Consequently, it is about *rejecting* what we involuntarily are — bringing about a possible gesture of liberty, *rectifying* what cannot be rectified with the power of art, without fear of 'assassinating' one's body and soul at the altar of each shot.

What does it mean to *sign* [to put our signature to] what we do? It isn't to introduce a *praxis*, to make use of a technique or some skill that good and proper use has tamed. Rather it's to *exist and live with what we do, create ourselves with what we do* — and likewise, *to die with what we do* — '(ass)assinado' [(ass)signed or ass+assinated]. In 'Vai e Vem', João César Monteiro concentrates his style of filmmaking in a simpler manner. There are long shots that with tremendous power frame in strict symmetry the image of the character he plays at the centre, thereby placing the spectator in the middle of stage-like shots in which a ceremony is taking place with small and demanding actions, and also as listener and link of the flow of words, now corrosive now poignant — the flow of words or the image as it slides away with the sound of words.

### **Offer one's Body: the Filmmaker as the Vehicle of all Things**

In 'Recordações da Casa Amarela', João César Monteiro encounters the João de Deus character. Perhaps the most outstanding and evident marks in this film are those of that layer of soul imprinted on the surface of things, gestures, attitudes and knowledge of what could be called Portuguese culture. They are marks of various kinds, from obdurate Roman Catholicism (especially in the Violet character) to sociable complaining, the moral coercion of small debts and petty blackmailing, violent relationships in the form of contempt for those around you, your neighbours. Once again, the work of João César Monteiro with language is notable — the film is full of formulas that concentrate knowledge of what springs from within Portuguese culture whether it's what people say in their everyday communications or whether it's the *way* they say it, a kind of enraged song that they loudly spit out.

The film also includes the return of this sort of culture of what is considered the heyday of 'Portuguese comedy' in the 1930s and 40s, such as the scene of fights breaking out between neighbours at their windows. In addition, there are general intracinematic marks scattered throughout the film, the most outstanding is the filmmaker himself playing the part of the character Murnau created. This film ends thus: enveloped in smoke, Nosferatu rises from his earth-filled tomb, goes to a town and evaporates as soon as dawn breaks and annihilates the light of night. These final images are linked to the first ones with the River Tagus and Lisbon in the background, while we hear the voice of João de Deus describing a restless night with bedbugs in his rented room — in a shot that ends with the camera shifting to the river water as if about to pierce it. This means that from scene to scene (the scene is sometimes the shot itself),

from situation to situation, the film always leads us to an unexpected time in an intricate network of signs.

However, even with all the signs and also beyond them, beauty is of the greatest importance. Beauty is what is vital — and beauty demands not only a great deal of work but is supposed to demand even sacrifice, a kind of sacrifice that goes beyond the pains of work. That it's necessary *to give one's body* (*'dar o corpo ao manifesto'* or 'sacrifice oneself for something' as the saying goes) is one of João César Monteiro's lessons. If we don't 'expose' ourselves, if we remain at the back as a reserve, if we don't invest in what we film, then we make a beggarly kind of cinema, a cinema that isn't cinema and doesn't brandish a sword.

Returning to *'Recordações da Casa Amarela'*, here is beauty that has been fashioned through the most simple (and not the most easy) of cinematographic compositions. Those are images strongly concentrated in space. We are permanently within interiors, dominated by the lines, light and colours of these interiors, which the camera frames and sometimes draws, and by the relationship between objects, whether it's a chair with a coat and shirt on it in the corner of a room, or else a deodorant stick, a *fétiche*, likewise ready for some immediate satirical visual meaning to be associated with it. These relationships form a striking aspect with which beauty is constructed by the composition of the shot, and thus of the film. And the beauty of the shot is not (and never is) separated from knowledge, it's not illustrative. If one senses that there's beauty, it must be sought and created — this is the filmmaker's task. Here lies the sensation, the best sensation for a spectator, that we never actually get what the images we see and the words we hear are about: they are always bring more than what can be expected. Every shot in *'Recordações da Casa Amarela'* presents contradictory forces that end up imperceptively merging. This is part of the prodigiosity of João César Monteiro's work, his poetics. For instance, we have here the merging of highbrow culture with the mischievously lowbrow: Schubert with Quim Barreiros (a Portuguese pop singer of trashy songs), the beauty of Mozart or a filmic still life, with the obscenity of voyeurism, rape and other images of devastation related to food and sexuality — images that sometimes seem to be having a brief dialogue with Luís Buñuel, especially in this film (the scene in the restaurant with João Bénard da Costa).

However, the most disturbing aspect is the more than simple Chaplinesque presence of João de Deus. João César Monteiro created — or acknowledged — in *'Recordações da Casa Amarela'* — a character for 'all' his films by concentrating 'everything' on himself. (This could perhaps be one of the greatest aspirations of every filmmaker.) Speaking about the character of João de Deus in *'Recordações da Casa Amarela'* (who develops in following three films until *'As Bodas de Deus'* ('God's Wedding', 1999) — and in the next four until the last, *'Vai e Vem'*), João César said:

'It isn't an autobiography according to the exact meaning of the word. I think the character is a kind of double of myself. A somewhat exaggerated double and treated in a hyperbolic manner. (...) What's important for me is to try and find a

kind of warped mirror of myself. A mirror that can reflect back a fresh recognition-cognition of myself. As a film director, I can say that I dispose while the character poses. That's all. (...) It's almost like punishing oneself. We could take away the 'almost'. He's a character who's chosen great austerity, an ascetic life. He's a little out of place in the environment he lives in. In his penury, he tries, as a man, to direct his resistance against poverty and organises himself the best he can. He behaves almost like a prisoner.'<sup>16</sup>

The filmmaker is really in the film, his own body is in it, in all its thinness, mimicry, appealing greatly to cinema's phantoms such as Nosferatu, and it creates an indiscernible oneness in a constant work on being or not being himself. César Monteiro/João de Deus, the same body: the filmmaker is the vehicle of it all, perhaps even of himself. Lusitanian comedy (the subtitle of '*Recordações da Casa Amarela*') exists because it goes through the indiscernibility that is the character/filmmaker. He himself is the comedy.

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<sup>16</sup> 'Um cineasta na cidade', in *ibidem*, p.411.