Paula Ribeiro Lobo

Between the long duration of New State's images and contemporary artistic questions

The New State (Estado Novo) did not just create images for History; it made History the background of its own image, and with it impregnated how Portugal represented itself in the 20th century. Thus was Portugal linked to a regime that ambitioned to leave its mark beyond its time. Forty-seven years after the end of the dictatorship and of the Portuguese colonial empire, we continue to deal with those images that were thought for the long duration. And perhaps because of that, given its capacity to interpolate different temporalities, contemporary art might eventually prove to be the most effective apparatus to *show* us how certain folds are built between reality and fiction.

In order to better understand the matrix dimension of those images created by the New State, two intertwining factors must be equated. On the one hand is the long duration as an identity value in itself, which helps to explain the relationship that the regime wanted to keep with the History of Portugal. On the other hand is the use of modern propaganda techniques that, borrowing from internationally developed artistic methodologies, were deployed at the service of a nationalist political purpose.

Seeking to keep such factors explicit, this brief reflection will develop in three moments. We will begin by approaching how the dictatorship has always positioned itself in a double condition of rupture and continuity in relation to the Portuguese historical *continuum*. We will then recall the importance of the documentary record in the regime's fabricated propaganda. Finally, we will try to point out how a critical appropriation of those images in contemporary artworks confronts us with the instability of the notion of time itself.

The dictatorship's relationship with history: cuts and continuities

The *Decálogo do Estado Novo* [Decalogue of the New State], published in 1934 by the Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional (SPN, the National Propaganda Office), presented Salazar's dictatorship as a "synthesis of all that is permanent and of all that is new", a regime that placed itself in the "moral, social and political avant-garde" of the fatherland, aiming to "reintegrate Portugal in its historical greatness, in the plenitude of its

universalist civilisation of vast empire", so to restore its status of "one of the greatest spiritual powers of the world."[1] Thusly summarised on posters for better dissemination and assimilation by the masses, the ten principles of this doctrinal charter were not only rooted in the old teleological concept of the proclaimed Christian mission "entrusted" to Portugal, but which also pointed to its future, making the regime a springboard for linking between different times. However, this decalogue took the form of image thanks to red and black contrasts and to current Modernist graphic design. This will allow us, as we shall see later, to go beyond certain narrow concepts that are occasionally linked to certain national logics.

When the *Decálogos*' editions were published,[2] António de Oliveira Salazar (1889-1970) had already consolidated his powers. The turmoil that marked the early years of the dictatorship after the military coup of the 28th May 1926 had been controlled, and with the Finances in a stable condition, the overseas territories ontologically linked to the metropolis by the Colonial Act of 1930 and the new Political Constitution of 1933 promulgated, Salazar was the providential "chief" who presided the government and the destinies of the nation, which in those days projected itself as being one and pluricontinental.

The newspapers and magazines of the time repeatedly informed about the threats to Portuguese sovereignty. Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy claimed for more "vital space"; in India and in Vietnam, uprisings for independence had broken out; and in Africa, movements for independence or autonomy were germinating. Meanwhile, European colonial powers brandished arguments on possession rights or questioned other overseas administrations. The Portuguese press also reported on the violence sweeping through Spain since 1931, focusing particularly on the swerves between the republican governments of Manuel Azaña and Gil Robles, for although ideologically opposed both represented certain Iberianist tendencies.[3] Later, in the context of the Civil War and Franco's rise to power, the Portuguese dictator never forgot that the Spanish *caudillo* graduated with a thesis titled *How to Occupy Portugal in 28 Days*.[4] Although Franco's victory would help to reinforce Salazar's authority, relations between Lisbon and Madrid continued to be ambivalent, as already demonstrated by a study[5] on the complex diplomacy of that period.

The sovereignty of pluricontinental Portugal, extoled and assumed as its historical mission, was at the basis of the narrative construction that drew a straight line between the foundation of nationality itself and the New State. Constitutionally defined as nationalist, anti-democratic, anti-parliamentarian, anti-liberal and corporativist, the dictatorship branded itself as "National Revolution" to break with the recent past, and in particular with the excesses and disorders of the 1st Republic (1910-1926). Nevertheless, among multiple transitions of politicians and of certain policies, there were also transitions of celebratory practices and of national symbols that had been conceived much earlier.

It is through the long duration analysis that the double condition of break and continuity becomes evident. As this is not the place for an in-depth study on this subject,

we shall simply recall how such continuity was symbolically assumed. Although the image of the dictator was exploited for propaganda purposes, contrary to other coeval dictatorships, the New State never created for itself a symbol of the regime. Instead, it sought representation through national symbols. This proved to be a strategy of great strength and reach.

The National Anthem hailing the "heroes of the sea, noble people" was inherited and kept by the dictatorship. Composed in 1890 as a reaction to the British Ultimatum and soon adopted as the march of the 1891 republican revolt, the anthem was banned by the monarchy but an abbreviated version of it was adopted and acclaimed after the establishment of the Republic. Likewise, the dictatorship also kept the National Flag created by the republicans of 1910. This flag legitimised certain causes of rupture dating back to the 19th century by its revolutionary colours green and scarlet and yet also recovered the national coat of arms from monarchic flags, superimposing it over the ancient armillary sphere of King Manuel I. This rhetorical use of the past, as already observed, was based "on the tradition of the myth of the origins of nationality and of the Golden Age of discoveries", thus emphasising "the matrix, not only nationalist but also colonial, of historical republicanism."[6]

For the empire, as it is well known, the young Republic politically justified the participation of Portugal in the Great War of 1914-18. And also for the empire would Salazar's regime reiterate the use of another insignia that had become representative of Portuguese identity centuries earlier: the Order of Christ Cross. Symbol of the religious military order instituted by King Dinis in 1318, it was emblazoned on the sails of Portuguese ships since the beginning of the maritime Expansion. It even became incorporated into African ceremonies in the early 17th century, when the King of Congo began decorating his closest chiefs with the Order of Christ.[7]

Also a part of this identity dimension is the Dia de Camões [Camões Day], whose date 10 June was set in 1880 by the republican commemorations of the third centenary of the death of the poet of *Os Lusíadas* [The Lusiads].[8] The designation of "Festa da Raça" [The Celebration of the Race] appeared in 1924, with the 1st Republic thus sublimating the supposed moral qualities of the Portuguese, in reaction to the categorisations that were marking the rise of racist ideologies and Fascisms.[9] In 1929 the dictatorship declared June 10th as a national holiday, giving it the epithet of "Day of the Race" in 1966, in the midst of the colonial war, lacking any originality (not even in relation to Spain[10]) and at odds with the changing times. This continued until 1977, when the democratic regime began to celebrate the *Day of Camões, Portugal and the Portuguese Communities*, as it is still called.

Salazar wanted to "re-Portugalise" Portugal.[11] And yet, as we shall see next, nationalism and Portuguese colonialism so lauded in the 20th century were based on international models of propaganda, but focused on its own specificities. For example,

although it is true that the effective occupation of overseas territories sped up during the "age of empires",[12] what was highlighted were its antecedents. Besides, as the historian Valentim Alexandre has long been arguing, to place such a shift only in the late 19th century as a reaction to the "Scramble for Africa" by the European powers would be to ignore the overseas "recolonisation" launched by the Portuguese Constitutional Monarchy immediately after Brazil's independence in 1822.[13] The "myth of Eldorado" and the "myth of the sacred legacy", as Alexandre reminds us, not only sustained the colonial project but also played a key role in defining Portugal as an independent nation.[14] The Republic of 1910 endeavoured to demonstrate this. The New State transformed it into "mystique" and doctrine, entrusting its inculcation to the educational system and to propaganda.

The so-called "cultural inheritance" of which Salazar's dictatorship claimed to be the heir led to an instrumental revision of history itself[15] focused on golden moments and national heroes. Contributing to this were important congresses and conferences, such as those held in parallel to the Porto Colonial Exhibition (in 1934), the Historical Exhibition of the Occupation (in 1937), and, of course, the Portuguese World Exhibition, in 1940. On that occasion alone, in sessions held in Lisbon, Porto and Coimbra, some 231 Portuguese and 121 foreign historians participated,[16] with their presentations gathered into 19 volumes of conference proceedings. After the Second World War, with the continuity of the dictatorship and of the dictator, other conferences and meetings reflected the ambitions and policies upheld by the regime, focusing as well on areas such as ethnography or archaeology.[17] Based on numerous sponsored monographs and studies, the official historiography was regularly rendered in schoolbooks.

Propaganda models and uses of the photographic image

The propaganda office had to articulate all the sector-based contributions in order to produce images of the country and of the dictatorship both for foreign and domestic consumption. In 1933, when Salazar created the SPN-Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional (renamed SNI-Secretariado Nacional de Informação in 1944), he did not give it the status of a ministry and always kept it under his political and financial control. "Politically only that which the public *knows*, exists", said the dictator in the opening speech of the SPN, setting the formula to be used: the SPN should "strictly stick to the facts and preferably use images and numbers."[18] António Ferro, the journalist and Modernist writer who had been entrusted to head the new office, was very well aware of the power of images and the context of the arts.[19] To give shape to propaganda through images and numbers, he then relied on statistics, news reports and photography commissions, and he gathered a team of young painters, sculptors and architects

to "factographically"[20] create a modern image of Portugal. But this was an image that was simultaneously idealised and idyllic, one adjusted to the values of the dictatorship and intended to praise it. Ferro, a well-travelled man in tune with the present and with a rare capacity of vision and synthesis, put into practice a "politics of the spirit" that did not please several factions of the regime.

The cultural programme developed and implemented through the SPN-SNI was based on the conjunction of the required dose of nationalism with a Modernist conception of the arts — which soon drew distrust and criticism toward Ferro, as some considered his models too internationalist. As known, persuasion techniques would not be the same after the graphic boldness of Soviet Productivism and the pioneering immersive effect of the exhibitions designed by El Lissitzky between 1928 and 1930. With the press and catalogues showing how to use photomontages and the dynamic conceptions of forms and space to mobilise the masses through exhibition discourse, adaptations were quick to follow. See how Italians in Rome celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Fascist regime whose propaganda Ferro praised so highly. See also how Nazi Germany set up exhibitions adapting these innovative techniques, even turning to Herbert Bayer and architects of the progressive Bauhaus before forcing them into exile.

Regardless of the ideological affinities or differences, there were some in Portugal who were aware of the artistic methodologies and the propaganda models in use abroad, even through study, work or leisure trips. It is worth remembering, for example, that in 1929 the filmmakers Leitão de Barros and António Lopes Ribeiro had gone to Berlin, then the "biggest cinematographic power in Europe."[21] Despite not knowing the language, Lopes Ribeiro continued his trip to Moscow to watch films. Indeed, among the many works he directed for the SPN, he signed the first two full-length propaganda films (*A Revolução de Maio* [The May Revolution], 1937, and *O Feitiço do Império* [The Spell of the Empire], 1940), in both of which he combined fictional narratives and images from documentary films. As for Leitão de Barros, who was also a painter and became one of the closest and most active collaborators of the SPN, he implemented new techniques of graphic printing and with António Ferro created the luxurious propaganda album *Portugal 1934*, a portrait *in the present* of a country engendered through press photos and cinematographic techniques (cuts, superimpositions, variation of shots, brief captions, etc.), now considered one of the best photobooks in the world.[22]

Taking advantage of the value atributed to documentary images, the New State used them widely to fabricate visual discourses that furthered its political goals at each moment and context. Produced and coordinated by the SPN-SNI, but also using collections, resources and, sometimes, under the direction of several different ministries or entities, such images were produced aiming for the long duration. The propaganda machine was not limited to the initiatives of the Secretariado, and Ferro did not always have the leading role or the autonomy of action that is sometimes attributed to him. This was

the case of the Portuguese World Exhibition, part of a vast programme celebrating 800 years of nationhood and 300 years since the restoration of independence after the union of the Iberian crowns between 1580 and 1660. Combining the efforts of a large team of architects, painters, sculptors and historians, the exhibition was held in Lisbon as a "city of history" — although within the context of the Second World War and the exodus then underway it became a city of paradoxical anachronisms shaped with Modernist paints and plasters, made of ephemeral pavilions and surrounded by staged villages, to which the extras were brought in from the North and South of Portugal and from the four corners of the empire to lend an illusion of reality.

The dictatorship's inscription in time and space achieved a longer lasting materialisation through urban planning and architecture, in the then-called metropolis as well in the overseas territories. All those public works, many of which were decorated by painters and sculptors, were showcased in exhibitions, photographs and films, as well as on promotional materials such as posters, postcards or postage stamps. Corporate business also helped spread the imagery produced by the New State by incorporating it into their broadly distributed commercial advertising materials, from coffee packaging to matchboxes.

Photography, cinema and (later on) television crystallized propaganda actions, helping to root them in the country's own history as indexes of self-referentiality. Remember, for instance, the Porto Colonial Exhibition, in 1934, and its augmented map of the empire asserting that "Portugal is not a small country"; the representations at major international exhibitions (Paris 1937, New York 1939, Brussels 1958 or Osaka 1970); balance national exhibitions (such as *14 Years of Politics of the Spirit* or *15 Years of Public Works*, both presented in Lisbon in 1948); the Prince Henry Celebrations of 1960 and the presidential trips to overseas (especially those of 1963, 1964 and 1968, during the colonial war), to mention just a few cases in which the publication of catalogues and albums was aimed at future memory.

Being in charge of Censorship, National Broadcasting and Tourism, the SPN-SNI was responsible for the cultural framework and hypothetical prevention of divergences, in a regime in which repression was exercised by the violence of the political police and prison. However, many people over the decades (especially from 1946 onwards[23]) opposed the dictates of the Secretariado and Salazar, fighting the country's sweetened portraits through multifaceted counter-images. On this front of resistance were the paintings and illustrations of Neo-Realism novels, the pictorial and sculptural proposals of Surrealism, or Abstraction inquiries on the real. Other cases refer to other experimental geographies (such as the remarkable graphic essay Lisboa, *Cidade Triste e Alegre*, from 1959), the aesthetic and thematic updating promoted by Cinema Novo or the artistic denunciations of the evils of colonialism and the ongoing war, presaging the end of the regime and of the empire.

Brief notes on critical reconfigurations and present temporalities

As already argued,[24] after the Revolution of 25 April 1974 the arts continued to *rethink* the country, considering subjects such as the independence of the former colonies and decolonization, Portugal's return to its peninsular borders and its subsequent integration into the European Community. Meanwhile, questions and inquiries abounded regarding the reconfiguration of the national image and imaginary within the context of new artistic experimentalisms, postmodernism or the development of theoretical perspectives that contributed to a broader and deeper problematization of the subject. Moreover, questionings on the dictatorship and the empire have been gaining renewed critical strength since 2000, with an increasing number of artists — some of whom are included in this exhibition presented by MEIAC — actively contributing to a political debate that seems urgent to deepen, and that ties into different articulations.

From the viewpoint of art historiography and the uses given to photographic images, it is important to emphasize two aspects. First, the New State propaganda updates were externally presenting a country in step with the times, which is why modernisms must also be rethought both at internal level and in transnational perspective. The second aspect relates to how the Portuguese dictatorship strived to build memory through the imagery fabricated by propaganda and conveyed through documentary images — among which stand out the ones commisioned to renowned commercial photographers (such as Domingos Alvão or the brothers Mário and Horácio Novais) whose photographs filled exhibition halls and commemorative albums and were circulated among events and printed media, while also featuring in official and private collections that constitute a source for numerous contemporary research of academic or artistic scope.

The "contemporary" is currently a porous, problematic concept, with increasingly expansive meanings — and which can focus, for instance, on the question of the perception of the self in the world or encompass global processes of constant fictionalization.[25] Apropos here, for the subject of long duration, is the definition proposed by Giorgio Agamben: an understanding of the contemporary as an interpolation of temporalities, in a relationship with the past that allows us, archeologically, to access the present in order to articulate it with other times and transform it.[26]

Based on this notion, the reflections suggested by contemporary artworks may still be equated in view of other theoretical references that unfold new readings and meanings. Consider, for example, how the New State's images have been removed from their diachronic linearity and worked within the framework of what Geoffrey Batchen called *post-photography*;[27] and how such images become "the presence of the present" through cuts and montages, superimpositions, displacements, transmutation into less usual supports or sculptural spatializations.

It should also be noted how the relationships between photography and cinema are being explored, making present the "oscillations" and "miscegenations" of the image, to use Philippe Dubois's[28] terminology, and confronting us with discursive ruptures. At the same time, and as seen by Mieke Bal, artistic images gain political power when activated through the sensory relationship with the spectator and "hetero-temporality"[29] strategies, with each spectator having different experiences of time that will inevitably interfere in the encounter with the artwork.

Sliding between individual and collective memories, between official and family archives, photographic or film collections, certain artworks and artists risk the constitution of visual archives that stimulate views of history considered even "absurd", by creating new versions of old images.[30] As Bal noted with regard to well-known Baroque revisitations, "this process is exemplified by an engagement of contemporary culture with the past that has important implications for the ways we conceive of both history and culture in the present."[31]

Without dwelling on issues that have been raised on the historiography of images and visual studies since the 1980s — such as the cut with mimetic referentiality, temporal elasticity or even the validity of categorisations such as "photography" and "cinema"[32] —, from the position of the art history field we realise how certain artworks have been placed at the service of different political causes, precisely through elisions operated between past and present. Keith Moxey emphasised these paradoxes by recalling Germany's relationship throughout the 20th century with Renaissance masterpieces by Grünewald and Dürer.[33] Nowadays, in order to think about images, we use concepts such as anachrony, heterochrony or translation, but there is every reason to believe that significations will become increasingly unstable. As Moxey wrote in his book on the relationship between "visual time" and history:

> The iconic turn reminds us that visual artifacts refuse to be confined by the interpretations placed on them in the present. Objects of visual interest will persist in circulating through history, demanding radically different forms of understanding and engendering compelling new narratives as they wander.[34]

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