

# *In Media Res: Tragic Crisis and the Artivism in the New New Social Movements in Portugal*

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## **In media res?**

The new millennium has seen thousands of protesters on the streets. Various social, political and economic crises have affected the global population, with some focused on national issues actually triggering other crises in other places, spreading like wildfire and with systematic global characteristics. This generalized sense of crisis has influenced the collective imagination, bringing up – once again – questions on the relationship between the tragic and Tragedy that should be studied. This paper will, therefore, be discussing how classical Tragedy, whose main role was to represent the tragic experienced in people's lives poetically when dealing with a community in a crisis (due to plague, starvation, wars, droughts and other natural cataclysms), can contribute to the study of contemporary social crises and the reactions, namely the artivism processes, presented in the "new new social movements" (Raison 2009; Gohn 2011; Juris et al 2011)?

In an attempt to provide an answer, this article aims to explore not only some characteristics and notions of Tragedy, but also the concepts of *in media res*, *hubris*, chorus and masks, among others. It will also address its analytical developments, both in terms of greater hybridism between art and the social, as well as a greater mixture of "artistic genres", in Tragedy's proximity to Comedy and Farce.

*A noção in media res ("no meio das coisas") corresponde, na tragédia clássica, a um momento de crise. Um momento que escapa à mera sequencialidade cronológica e onde o presente se "dilata", misturando fragmentos do passado e pronúncios do futuro. Esta noção surge-nos hoje particularmente operativa para reflectirmos a relação entre crise e os processos de artivismo inerentes aos novíssimos movimentos sociais em Portugal, tais como a Geração à Rasca (2011) e Que se lixe a Troika! Queremos as nossas vidas (2012), nomeadamente, para uma problematização sobre que "guiões" de passado, de presente e de futuro são inventariados neste cenário.*

*Palavras chave:* In media Res; Crise Trágica; Artivismo; Performance; Novíssimos Movimentos Sociais.

The notion *in media res* (“in the middle of things”) corresponding, in classical tragedy, to a time of crisis, will be the guideline for this study. *In media res*, it is a moment that escapes the mere chronological sequence and where the present will be “dilated” by mixing fragments of the past and pronouncements of the future. This seems a key notion that is particularly relevant to an analysis of what past, present and future “guidelines” are inventoried in this scenario of crises and their correspondent social movements. Today, in fact, when trying to analyse “the new new social movements”, whose principal precursors in Portugal were *Geração à Rasca* (*The Struggling Generation*) (March 2011) and *Que se lixe a Troika! Queremos as nossas vidas!* (*The Troika can get lost! We want our lives back!*) (June 2012), we are obliged to ask not only where we were in relation to the crisis at the moment it appeared but also where we are in relation to that same crisis today.

Some years before *Geração à Rasca* appeared in Portugal, the crisis had already sown seeds of dissatisfaction in the population regarding the ongoing political and economic scene in Europe and the USA. 2007 saw the stock market crisis, the subprime mortgages, that affected the global market and whose effects are still felt today, as we approach the end of 2017. This led to social protest movements that were mainly partidarial as well as global and with systematic characteristics, as the social networks spread through the Internet broadened public space, and where the performative and activist factor was clearly in evidence: through the profusion of *almost choral* claims, of masks, of caricatures, in addition to the building of political posters and graffiti that filled the streets (Madeira 2007, 2012, 2015a). Portugal ended up having, rather unexpectedly, a role in spreading the wave of protest. Although it was not one of the first countries to suffer from the stock market crisis, it was later intensely affected economically by a set of associated factors that weakened the fragile national economy. The integrating of Eastern European countries in the EU and the expansion of the Chinese economy particularly affected traditional sectors of the economy, especially with regard to Portuguese exports. At the same time as the Portuguese government was unable to come up with policies capable of minimizing these effects, the labour market also failed to absorb young Portuguese graduates, which led to the aggravation of unemployment and precarious employment for many of these young people and their families. *Geração à rasca* was the slogan previously used in the 1990s by student movements demanding education without fees. It reemerged in 2011, bringing thousands of young people together from the most diverse parts of society in a social movement, who held various demonstrations. The claims of this movement were initially focused on a generation of educated young people who had degrees but no access to employment and, therefore, saw a bleak future stretching before them. The movement was not, however, limited to this age group but eventually incorporated all other sections of the population. It included all those who experienced the same problems

of precarious employment or the families of these young people who participated in this collective drama, causing a large group to come under the same banner, including individuals who had never participated in demonstrations.

A year later, in 2012, as a reaction to the subprime crisis that led to the collapse of Portuguese banks and the application of austerity measures by the Troika, the even more all-embracing social movement *Que Se Lixe a Troika! Queremos as nossas vidas!* appeared.

If the concept *in media res* in these movements defines a crisis whose focus is broader than the temporal axis in which they take place; we can also now hypothesize that the intense mass mobilization, which continued in other subsequent transnational movements such as *Indignados (The Indignant)* (October / November 2011) or *Juntos Podemos (Together We Can)* (2012)<sup>1</sup>, who tried to occupy public squares<sup>2</sup> and that, in the last year, have lost much of their energy. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the crisis and the spectres of tragedy do not remain in Portuguese society. What factors can explain the seeming withdrawal these social movements? Alternative forms of empowering demonstrators, including attempts to structure or incorporate political parties? An effective leftist alliance (a coalition government between the Socialist Party / Left Bloc / Communist Party)? A mere change of ideological rhetoric? The emergence of alternative structures of resistance (collective projects and social and artistic centres)? The skilled population emigrating in a wave unprecedented in history and the international context? Reinvestment in the tourism sector? The new world crises, such as that of the refugees that has dominated the global public space? Is there a crisis that gave rise to these movements that ended in Portugal (and in Europe) that has led to a decline in demonstrations? Or, on the contrary, are we still only relating to the crisis *in media res*; that is, exactly in the middle of things?

### **Tragedy and tragic?**

If this study is to develop, it is important to underline that Tragedy's relationship with the tragic is, to some extent, analogous to that which exists between art and life, as Tragedy is a poetic depiction of the tragic. Moreover, if it is true that, in a specific analyse, there is still a debate today between those who advocate the death of Tragedy and those who argue that Tragedy and the tragic have never been so interconnected as they are in our times. We shall see below that, in a more general analysis relating art and the social, various authors have unequivocally stated that there is a correlation between social manifestations - periods of crisis, revolution and anarchy, for example - and a more interventionist kind of art.<sup>3</sup> In *From Art to Politics* (1995), Murray Edelman argues that art provides the environment for reflective thinking about the social, i.e. that art manifests itself like a kind of *cloud of notions* that can function as a model or script that influences social change. For Edelman: "Works of art generate the ideas about leadership, bravery, cowardice, altruism, dangers,

authority, and fantasies about the future that people typically assume to be reflections of their own observations and reasoning” (*ibidem*:3). So, the author concludes that “art supplies the menu of models. From one perspective, that is its essential function” (*ibidem*:8).

Based on this, we can hypothesize that in some artistic initiatives taking a performative stance on the streets in the late 2000s, signs and latencies of the social movements that were to emerge in 2011 had already germinated. These art forms appear to be based on recurring themes in the Portuguese historical imagination, such as the dilution of historical memory (of Dictatorship and Revolution) or the practice of a discrete or semi-clandestine resistance, appearing to be made through a kind of repertoire of social crisis, which was then returning (Madeira 2007, 2012, 2015<sup>a</sup>, 2016 c, d).

One of the concepts that links art and the social to the Greeks of Classical Antiquity is that of *hubris*. This concept is defined in myth as exaggeration and insolence and canonized in Greek tragedy as the *driving force* behind the fall of heroes in the face of the “blind forces” of fate (Ubersfeld, 2010). Since then, the progressive mixture of the genres of tragedy and comedy (or drama and farce), like their relationship with the social tragic and their presence *in everyday life*, has led to various theoretical controversies about the applicability of tragic *hubris* beyond the Greek origins where it was forged.

On the stages of antiquity, this concept functioned as an *example* of what happened to those who exceeded or transgressed the laws of the gods or humans. It may be noted that Athenian society even created a law on *hubris*, stating that “if anyone hybrizei (commit[s] *hubris*) against anyone, either child or woman or man, free or slave, or does anything illegal against any of these, let anyone who wishes, of those Athenians who are entitled, prosecute him” (Fischer 1976:24). On the Athenian stage, the tragic hero thus reflected a remarkable character, usually a real representative, who acted as an intermediary between gods and men and, through his *hubris*, intentionally or not, through ignorance or pure accident, allowed people to see the staging of a difference that endangered the group identity (Meyer 2007:15): therefore he (sometimes she) had to be excluded or sacrificed. Crime, incest, rape, adultery, theft, assault, excesses of all kinds, or merely the fact of being young, healthy, rich or powerful and, therefore, feeling superior and invulnerable to the reverses of fortune, while becoming unable to empathize or feel pity for those who are not, made him a *hubristes*<sup>4</sup>. All these excesses were to be punished so that the group identity and order could be restored. For this reason, there is a terminal and, simultaneously, inaugural role (Nietzsche 2004 [1872]:105) that leads to the crisis and tragic death being transformed into the salvation of the community.

Paradoxically, the canonization of this example in Greek tragedy leads various authors, e.g. Nietzsche, Schopenhauer or Steiner, to advocate the death of tragedy and its impossibility in modern times, thus creating a dichotomy between a “literary and artistic conception” of the tragic and an “anthropological

conception" (Ubersfeld 2010) or "fundamental structure" (Domenach 1967) of the tragic in human existence<sup>5</sup>. It is precisely these factors that have been questioned by authors such as Jean-Marie Domenach in *Return of the Tragic* (1967), Michael Maffesoli in *The Eternal Moment - The Return of the Tragic in Postmodern Societies* (2001) or Raymond Williams in *Modern Tragedy* (2002). According to these authors the tragic has not only not died but presents itself in social life and in art as one of the most striking features of our time, where life is lived under the yoke of a "risk society" (Beck 2000) and constant threat, which has led to the collapse of humanisms<sup>6</sup>. Other authors, however, such as Slavoj Žižek in his book, *From Tragedy to Farce* (2010), pursue the idea of Kierkegaard or Marx, who predicted in their time that we would be on the way to a tragi-comedy or farce. Žižek says that even Marx in his *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* complements Hegel's observation that all great events and personalities in world history happen twice, the first time as a tragedy, the second as a farce, and that, in the introduction to a new edition of the same book in the 1960s, Herbert Marcuse says that sometimes the repetition in the form of a farce can be more terrifying than the original tragedy (2010:10; 14).

As Raymond Williams (2002) says, the argument that there is no tragedy or tragic sense in the everyday life of ordinary mortals, when it is so deeply rooted in our culture, excludes tragic suffering in the common man or woman, an ethical content and a trademark of human action - and, therefore, such an argument can only reflect an analytical flaw or ideological censorship by some academics.

For this reason, the author not only states that our current social tragedies cannot in any way be interpreted in light of the meanings given in Greek tragedy, but also that it is necessary to identify and critically interpret the new relationships in contemporary tragedy<sup>7</sup> (*ibidem*:76). He begins by telling us that "major tragedies, it seems, do not occur in periods of real stability or periods of open and decisive conflict. Their more usual historical scenario is the period preceding the collapse and substantial transformation of an important culture. The condition for them is the real tension between the old and new" (*ibidem*:79). So, this - our - time of social and existential crisis cannot but reflect tragedy and the tragic, and it becomes necessary to identify how they are expressed today. First, the notion of the tragic accident has changed. While this appeared in antiquity as design, fate or providence, connected with metaphysical and social institutions, today this link is being diluted, with the social disorder and crisis being produced in direct relation to the unequal order created within the capitalist system - one that generates inequality, humiliation, unemployment, violence, deprivation, and injustice. This tragic experience, which does not have to finish with the real death of the hero<sup>8</sup>, who, today, can reflect any ordinary person, should rest on clarifying the fact that, in the first and last place, this disorder is a product of the struggle of person against person. According to Raymond Williams, that represents the need for a revolution,

which is included in the struggle or in “man’s search to free himself or deny the tragedy of life” (Domenach 1967), replacing it with an order that ensures the participation of everybody in the construction of a more equal and common destiny. There, he tells us, the only really tragic danger, underlying revolution, “is a disorder that we ourselves continually re-stage” (Williams 2002:111). However, there are few who dare to dream of this revolution, or even “dream dreams of utopian alternatives to capitalism” (Zizek 2010:92). There are more of those who consider that the crisis is not caused by the capitalist system itself but secondary and contingent deviations that delay this revolution (excessively lax legal rules, the corruption of large financial institutions, etc.) (*ibidem*:28).

Maffesoli also notes that this “return to the tragic” reveals itself in a presentist and polychrome time that sees the rise of an ethic of the moment, a culture of pleasure, which produces not only new nomadic and tribal groups but also “new heroes of post-modernity who are capable of risking their lives for a cause that can, simultaneously, be idealistic and perfectly frivolous, taking a risk that can be phantasmal, as a kind of simulation or with real consequences” (2001:26). In a way, this complements Jean-Marie Domenach’s perspective – already presented by Zizek and preceded by Kierkegaard and Marx – that, today, tragedy is manifested through the “absurd, which is sin without God”, produced by men themselves (Domenach 1967: 219).

The capitalist system itself is a kind of replacement of the gods where tragedy included the fall of any noble man, a sort of new “religion of merchandise and the show”, in the sense defined by Débord in *The Society of the Spectacle* (Débord quoted by Jappe: 2008:19). This creates a notion of chaos where, today, any man can fall, indiscriminately, which makes people return to relative passivity in relation to destiny. For this reason, too, according to Domenach, the birth of contemporary tragedy has its origin at the opposite extreme from tragedy itself, i.e. the comic, especially in its least noteworthy forms of farce and parody (Domenach 1967:256).

This mixture of the various facets of the tragic and comic allow more hybridization and unpredictability in the repertoire of life and art, with the repertoire incorporating differences in the characters’ social status (from the dignitary to the common mortal), the type of language (learned, vulgar), the ending (unhappy, happy), the action (the fall, the rise), and the topic (deception/error that is discovered or triumphant). In a farce, the characters, situations, action and speeches are oriented according to the abstract criterion of the “in general” (Kierkegaard, (2009[1848]): 64). Hence, the viewers’ own reactions in a farce, where they must be active entirely as individuals, are also unpredictable. They can be in a sad mood or beside themselves with laughter (*idem*) or, today, more often, indifferent – because, as Meyer told us, “Comedies have long ceased to make us laugh or tragedies to make us cry”. This makes him question whether “men have become insensitive to the suffering of others or to the misfortune of their most naive fellow human beings” (Meyer 2007: 46).

Therefore, I will address some of the features that seem important to contemporary performance in the *new new social movements*, which include these hybrid characteristics between art and the social, as well as the tragic and farce, such as animality, masquerade, chorus and the ghostly.

Animality was, at first, a feature of festive rituals<sup>9</sup>, in legends<sup>10</sup>, and in Greek theatre, which was placed early on under the aegis of Dionysus, the goat-footed satyr god who incites humans<sup>11</sup> to assume their physicality and animal instincts, and leads them to fall into *hubris*<sup>12</sup>. In humans, animals represent ambivalent figures who share common traits with them – an expression of how civilization has failed to tame the animal in us – as well as an alterity. Today, however, this alterity no longer refers to an assumption of the superiority of man over animals<sup>13</sup> or acts as a metaphor of good and evil (Tesnière and Delcourt 2004:23) but, rather, is taken by humans themselves as a representation and critique of the dehumanization of the human (Agamben 2011) or a “positive negation of the human” (Jorn 2012 [1988]) and as a means of questioning social inequalities.

In one of the most important representatives of Greek Cynicism, the 4th century philosopher Diogenes of Sinope, we find a referent for an analysis of the role of animality in contemporary performance in social movements. This philosopher, nicknamed the “Dog” for his decision to divest himself of his possessions and live on the streets in an empty barrel with a cup as his only possession, intentionally began to search for a “return to the animal nature” of humanity (Sloterdijk 2011 [1983]:165). Thus, in public, he exposed his animal nature and corporeality, just as they were, as opposed to his urbanity<sup>14</sup>. This display of his divesting himself of objects and passions was combined with the use of “argumentation” (*ibidem*) or a “rhetoric of confrontation”<sup>15</sup>, a sign of protest against the opulence and corruption of Athenian society. During the day, it is said, he came to the point, in his “cynicism”, of walking the streets with a lantern in his hand, looking for a single reasonable person. In this way, a kind of cynicism was established that can reflect an effective form of resistance against all the powers that be, on the basis of laughter and irony (Sloterdijk 2011[1983]:160, Maffesoli 2001:91). Diogenes thus personifies the political animal that is searching for an honourable place for the animal side (Sloterdijk 2011[1983]:167) of humanity.

This resource of alterity – which, in the Portuguese case, is often identified with an active and performative, almost animal, body occupying the public space and thus demanding a voice – is often accompanied by the mask and masquerade of the participants. This appears as a process of de-identification and de-individualization. The mask can be anyone and everyone, a human and something different from a human, or neither human nor animal. It is precisely this sense that runs through the political protest performances in the *new new social movements* today, e.g. the figure of *Anonymous*, the mimicked film character of *V for Vendetta*, where more mechanical comic features are blended, with interference, as Bergson states (quoted by Meyer 2007). This

“mythology of masks” thus expresses “the set of reflexes” of a discourse that goes beyond the individual who speaks (Pavis 2005: 235).

In the new social movements, the heroes often become a collective or chorus, returning to the primitive form of the chorus in Greek tragedy, which was originally mainly a chorus (Nietzsche 2004 [1872]:71) consisting of a community of citizens or victims. The chorus sings, dances and speaks, and often addresses its declarations to itself, as a participant and spectator at the same time (Ubersfeld 2010:29). These features are often combined, especially in performances of a political nature, with what we may call the ghosts of history that sometimes haunt contemporary manifestations with imaginaries that are decontextualized in relation to today. Examples are the mobilization of the “ghosts of the class struggle” (Zizek 2010:25) and the imaginaries of other revolutionary movements, through the revival of songs, slogans, etc., as well as, according to Maffesoli, “the great ghost of [tragic] universality” (2001:31).

### **Tragic Overcoming?**

All these features have been reworked in the *new new social movements*, but have been done so through diverse forms of activism in an idea of enlarged public space. They have taken place in squares, streets and even social networks on the Internet; and as often in abandoned spaces as in theatres and conventional cultural centres.

In this process, with the crescendo of the social crisis, a new “cycle” began, recycling the “revolutionary script” (Madeira 2007, 2012, 2015a) that had been in force in Portugal during the Portuguese Revolution of 1974 and which manifested itself, in the new millennium particularly, in diverse artistic performative initiatives. In 2008, there was a performance in central Lisbon called “À Procura da Revolução Perdida” (“*In Search of the Lost Revolution*”). On 9<sup>th</sup> July 2008, contrary to what had happened on the morning of 25<sup>th</sup> April 1974 when Portuguese radio stations recommended that they stay at home, the radio station *Antena 2* appealed to the population to come to the streets. They were asked to participate in this event - produced by the radio station and put on by Lignha Theatre - which aimed to gather the collective recollection of what came to be known as the ‘Carnation Revolution’. About 200 people were at the event. Some participants, as can be deduced from the following two statements<sup>16</sup>, stressed the importance of the event in reactivating the memories of the revolution:

*“It should be done every year, precisely on 25<sup>th</sup> April ... an initiative like this, starting at the Carmo barracks and ending here at the Terreiro do Paço.”*

*“Maybe what we need is a revolution! We should have looked for this a long time ago ... not just now, but anyway, we’re still on time!”*



However, its tone was more of nostalgia than genuine belief in the possibility of recovering this world and, until this performance, the moments when there was a questioning approach to the collective memory of the revolution and the Portuguese dictatorship were rare.

One of these rare moments and from which we here can build a connection between Tragic and Tragedy clearly emerged in 1984 in *Elegia para um caixão vazio* (*Elegy for an Empty Coffin*) by the Portuguese writer and journalist, Baptista Bastos. The book presents the funereal image of Portugal as a coffin that had been performed various times during the Portuguese revolutionary process to symbolize death to fascism. It had a resurgence, with a new meaning, in the new millennium during the period of social demonstrations.

The title of the book is justified when someone asks: "Have you noticed that Portugal is shaped like a coffin and an empty coffin?" (59), and later we are told: "empty because of no people; which is worse than containing corpses" (idem), it is is "Calvary" (65). The book deals with the bankruptcy, ten years after, of the revolutionary ideology of the April 1974: "It is the fault of this terrible time. It is the fault of this Revolution that failed" (10). He wonders if the Revolution and the proposed liberty wasn't just a myth: "You spend your time longing for that impossible heroism. They believed too much in liberty as a primordial act (...). Well, it happened on April 25<sup>th</sup>. Are they free? Are we free? We were all freer in the time of fascism. Know why? Because hope was intact, because we fought against every form of individual mutilation. Fascism was there and we fought it as a group. And now?" (58). "April was not a Revolution, but many things changed" (96); "April was not, nor could it have been, the uninterrupted party. And we, of course, cleaned up the remains, the leftovers of a party that was almost a revolution" (97).

The book also desecrates the memories of what life was like in the 60s in Portugal, especially for those who dared to resist; as well as the imaginary future that kept them firm in this resistance, even when they were political prisoners: "You lived in the Future, ignoring the present" (64). "What nourished, stimulated that man and other men and women was an obscure, but inalienable sense of the future" (104). There is also a reference to historical cyclicality: "time is circular, anti-historic, infinitely recoverable: a kind of eternal present whose fearful texture rests on endured humiliations, on pains suffered, on immemorial mourning" (23), and further on, this circularity is justified through the dates of Portugal's emergence as a nation and democracy "1383<sup>17</sup>, 1820<sup>18</sup>, 1910<sup>19</sup>, 1974<sup>20</sup>. Dates suspended, things that were not continued, directions that suddenly stopped, gradually obscured as if there had been absent parties (26) and finally stating that

*"The problem of fascism, today, no longer comes up in Portugal, in Europe. It is a different threat, the danger has another name ... Nonetheless, we should not forget that in a country with millions of inhabitants, PIDE had*

*files on four million people, and some hundreds of thousands of agents, informers, accomplices, sympathisers, collaborators, legionaries. In addition to the Armed Forces, who were no more than the arrogant mimicry of fascism. Portuguese Tragedy is moral. Furthermore, we cannot allow others to say, at some later date: 'Fascism? I don't know what that is!' Bringing the past to light is, sometimes, painful and tricky. In our case, however, it is an urgent pedagogical task" (110).*

Immediately after 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1974, the image of the coffin was exhibited by Clara de Menéres in her work, *Jaz morto e arrefece* (*Lying dead growing cold*): a realistic statue of a dead soldier on top of a coffin, ready for the wake, which expressed the reality of the death of military personnel in the Portuguese Colonial War (Madeira 2016a). However, it generally appeared in a festive context, as a symbol of hope, in the sense of burying a dead fascism, and its institutions, to build a new future. *Festa* (*Party*) is an example of this: an event promoted by the *Galeria de Arte Moderna de Lisboa*, in 1974, including theatre groups, musical ensembles, choirs, poetry recitals and a collective exhibition of 48 paintings (as many years as Portugal had lived under the dictatorship) as a tribute to the Armed Forces Movement and to the Portuguese people. This initiative was followed by a farce-like performance with "characters alluding to certain prominent figures of the previous regime" and where a "Coffin" with a flag bearing an "s" was cast into the river, and which represented fascism. This gesture was emphasized by drumming played in the manner of 18<sup>th</sup> century guillotine executions" (Couceiro 2004, 22). This performance, by the *A Comuna* theatre group, led to the RTP live broadcast being cut and generated the most contradictory reactions from various sectors of society.

In the same year, in Porto, in an initiative set up by *Cooperativa Árvore*, the *Enterro do Museu Soares dos Reis* (the Burial of the Museum Soares dos Reis) was performed, in which a group of artists tried to "denounce the Soares dos Reis Museum as an "inert body", without any pedagogical or didactic action". At the funeral, in front of the museum, the writers Egito Gonçalves and Correia Alves made speeches. An epitaph was placed at the door, which read: Soares dos Reis Museum - b.1926 and died in 1974 - Here lies the former Soares dos Reis Museum, having died of the moth, stuffiness and the yawning mouth of tedium, to the eternal joy of those who will forget it and want a living museum" (Couceiro 2004, 24).

The post-revolutionary period in Portugal was essentially marked by political art in which genuine criticism gradually dissolved into satire and even farce, although occasionally there were moments or artists who, in the line of Baptista Bastos, sought to break out and question this silencing or "non-inscription" (José Gil, 2005) of the memory that had been imposed regarding the Dictatorship / Revolution. One of these moments came up through an act of vandalism by the population of Beja, at a photographic exhibition by Cristina

Mateus, in 1997, which tried to confront the contemporary Alentejo with an Alentejo of the past, which had played an important role in the fight against the dictatorship. The exhibition consisted of a triptych of large black and white screens arranged on the façade of the building housing the exhibition. The two side screens were made up of an identical image of a silo, the only difference being that on the left-hand screen the word "power" could be read over the silo with "ideology" on the right screen. The central screen showed the image of António de Oliveira Salazar - who was the main figure representing power during the 40 years of fascist dictatorship in Portugal.

These screens ended up taking on a performative character due to the reaction they provoked. Even as the exhibition was being set up, the local population began criticising the exhibition of the image of Salazar in a public space. It was considered an insult to the collective memory. On the opening night of the exhibition, someone burned the screen with Salazar's image. The next day, people passing by laughed at the "subversive act" (Cauter 2011) that had destroyed the image of the Dictator. In Catarina Mourão's documentary *Fora de Água* (Out of Water), where one can see part of this process, ends with the phrase "a few days after Salazar's image was burned, there was a demonstration by an extreme left wing party, the UDP<sup>21</sup>, in the same square. In honour of one of the *Estado Novo* victims, protesters placed an image of Catarina Eufémia<sup>22</sup> in the empty space left by the burned image." In this specific example, paradoxically, the artistic work's critical act was reduced to the same extent that the performative reaction to the work was amplified by the population, leading to the act of replacing a negative image of the dictatorship with a positive image of the revolution.

On a par with this initiative, the Portuguese artist who has focused most frequently and to most telling effect on this area from a critical perspective is Paulo Mendes. In particular, through a group of works begun in 1999, in which he has worked on the wiping of memory, of both the revolution; as well as the fascist regime itself, and the figure of its dictator, in a series entitled *S de Saudade* (*L for Longing*). In the former, he has directly called the event into question through the title: *O 25 de Abril existiu? (Did 25th April exist?)*. The latter consisted of distributing a series of stickers, creating images in graffiti, exhibitions and outdoors – some of which were "censored" by the Lisbon City Council, who had invited him to produce some public art. As from 2010, Mendes put together a series of performances in which António de Oliveira Salazar was presented as "Sr. S" (or "Mr. S"). The first of these performances was called *silêncio, ordens, preces, ameaças, elogios, censuras, razões, que querem que eu compreenda do que eles dizem* (*Silence, orders, prayers, threats, praise, censorship, reasons that want me to understand what they say*). In the second, called *se pudessem parar de fazer para não fazerem nada enquanto não param de todo* (If they could stop doing it so they would not do anything while they did not stop at all), the artist used a series of his photographs and depictions of the *Estado Novo* in which the

images were dipped in a tub of white paint and then glued to the wall. In 2011, Mendes put on another performance: the *tortura da memória* (*torture of memory*) at the Porto Military Museum, headquarters of the former fascist police, PIDE, in the city. Here Mendes critically evoked the repressive past and the absence of freedom of expression, associating it with contemporary history and highlighting two facts: the headquarters of PIDE, in Chiado, being turned into a luxurious condominium and the law suit brought by the family of the former director of PIDE, Silva Pais (1905-1981) against the author of the play, *A Filha Rebelde* (*The Rebellious Daughter*) and other members of the D. Maria II National Theatre, accusing them of an “offense to memory”. These performances appeared to be justified by the artist himself as a symbolic act of the historical Portuguese political memory that, in his view, continued to disappear without criticism<sup>23</sup>.

Susana Chiocca, an artist who, in 2011, produced the writing-performance act *à espera que o nevoeiro passe* (*waiting for the fog to pass*) on the walls of the Galeria Boavista, in Porto, alluding to the Portuguese crisis, in 2013, performed in an Amsterdam square and called *Não temos de morrer* (*We don't have to die*), where various small Barcelos cockerels are thrown at a photograph of Ângela Merkel, stuck on the floor, reflecting the political-social tension going on in Europe.

However, one of the novelties in recycling this “revolutionary script” were the settings in which these activist demonstrations happened that, in addition to the streets or unconventional spaces, occupied not only the new social networks on the Internet but also institutional artistic spaces, such as museums, theatres, or even EXPOS (European capital cities of Culture).

In this expanded public space, we can highlight, for example, a collective and symbolic performance by the artist Miguel Januário in which the *enterro de Portugal* or “burial of Portugal” was carried out, through the project ± PORTUGAL 1143-2012 ±, in the very of the “birthplace” of Portugal, as part of EXPO Guimarães 2012. The country's burial “procession”, symbolically represented by a black coffin in the shape of Portugal, was accompanied by mourners lamenting the death of the country. There was also a guard of honour formed by the *Guarda Nacional Republicana* (the Republican National Guard) and the performance finishing (near the wall on which “Portugal was born here” can be read) with the sound of gunshots in keeping with an official event. Future actions, after this death of Portugal, would translate, according to Miguel Januário, as the “resurrection” and “reconquest” of the country, with actions appearing as mottoes for the Portuguese to “Self-Revolutionize” themselves. Paradoxically, this apparently playful participation of the *Guarda Nacional Republicana* led to an official investigation that ended with the exoneration of the territorial commander in charge. Moreover, in the same year, a young university artist, Élsio Manau, came up with a project in the Algarve entitled *Portugal na Forca* (*Portugal on the Gallows*), which consisted of a flag hoisted on a gallows, which led to the artist being tried in court for causing outrage over

his treatment of national symbols. Later however, in 2014, he was acquitted and the work considered purely artistic.

There were new artistic demonstrations against the crisis in 2014, during the commemorations for the 40th anniversary of 25th April: António Barros, an artist who had been part of an experimental poetry group in the 60-70s, posted 40 visual poems – one by one – on his Facebook page in black carnations; and then sent them to the Portuguese parliament, under the title *Lástima* (Pity). Rui Mourão, when opening a vídeo-installation at the Chiado Museum called *Os Nossos sonhos não cabem nas vossas urnas* (Our dreams do not fit in your urns) ended up producing a new activist act by presenting a “manifesto against the current cultural state in Portugal”, with the active participation of some visitors and guests at the inauguration of the exhibition, who “occupied” the museum for a night until the arrival of the police the next day. Vera Mantero presented a conference / performance called *Salário Máximo* (Maximum Salary), in the very space where the Portuguese parliamentary sessions take place. She tried to discuss “the question of the proportion between minimum wage and maximum salary”, with Portugal being one of the most unequal countries in Europe in terms of wages. Joana Craveiro created *Um museu vivo de memórias pequenas e esquecidas* (A living museum of small and forgotten memories) - a play about dictatorship, revolution and the revolutionary process - which explored the Portuguese collective memory. At the end of the show, which was usually around midnight (after five hours only interrupted by a “community dinner”), the director held a debate with the audience who told their own stories and featured subjects such as “persecution, prisons and torture” and “fears”. The “silencing of collective memory” also featured and there was, for example, discussion on “the plaque identifying the former PIDE building in Lisbon, which was removed anonymously several times”.

In 2015, the experimental poet Ernesto de Melo e Castro produced a resignification of a performance by António Aragão, called *Funeração de Aragal*, (Aragal’s Funeration), during the collective event *Concerto e Audição Pictórica* (Concert and Pictorial Hearing), in 1965, characterizing it as “clear symbolism taking into account the dead from the wars in the African colonies” (Melo e Castro 2015; Madeira 2016b).

In a recent interview<sup>24</sup>, and in order to explain this 2015 resignification, Melo e Castro talked precisely of *Concerto e Audição Pictórica* having been contextualized as an event “fully imagined in a completely open way” by Jorge Peixinho, a “deeply politicized man” who wanted to create an event composed of several interventions by the “also politicized” invited participants, with total freedom to do what they wanted in a “context where freedom did not exist.” The colonial war, metaphorically present in António Aragão intervention, was among the other issues relating to impositions on Portuguese society, as one of the dictatorship’s major prohibitions. Melo and Castro describes the performance as follows:

*“Around a table which was brought already set with plates of food, we sat down and started to [simulate] noisy eating, chewing and banging cutlery on plates... a pine coffin where Aragon lay was placed beside the table. Then everyone stood up, one by one, and dumped the leftovers on top of Aragon’s body. Then we lifted the coffin and went out slowly to the chords of the traditional funeral march (2015:132)”.*

Melo e Castro goes on to explain that this performance:

*“1) was a clear allusion to the abundance and / or wasting of food taking place in Portugal while people died; 2) showed that many young Portuguese were being killed in various ways, not only physically but also psychically. Jorge Peixinho himself was admitted to the Military Hospital as a mad man! He simply feigned madness to be excused service! I did not go to war because of my age. If April 25th had not been in 1974, I would have been sent off in the next call-up. I was psychically ready to not go to war, but I had a family. I would have had to go into exile and leave my family behind me, but I would go abroad. But April 25th came and my generation was saved. However, the generation three or four years younger than I was, among them Jorge Peixinho, would all be sent to Guinea. Jorge didn’t go because he was crazy and so was excused military service. But there were some who literally shot themselves in the foot, there were kids who shot themselves not to go to war. I know a critic who mutilated himself. He cut a finger off. It’s not a joke! Others fled and never returned”<sup>25</sup>.*

This continuous “resurrection of memories of the Dictatorship, the Revolution and the Portuguese Colonial War has intensified and expanded in recent years. Nonetheless, it has taken place in a context in which, contrary to what happened in the revolutionary period of 1974, the burial symbol is not necessarily an image of hope for the future, but rather accentuates a bankruptcy of the idea of the future, as Baptista Bastos had predicted in *Elegia para um caixão vazio*.

In fact, the resurrection that Miguel Januário proposed in his performance, *enterro de Portugal* was yet to take place, despite the recent setting up - based on these social and artistic movements and/or the atmosphere they created - diverse projects and collective platforms occupying or re-occupying spaces, and social and artistic causes, generally for a fleeting time, such as *hortas comunitárias* or community gardens, some of which were based on artistic programmes. This was the case with choreographer Vera Mantero’s *mais pra menos que pra mais* (More for less than for more) (2014), which gave origin to the *Horta do Baldio*: still going thanks to the initiative of a group of “guardians” (Madeira 2015b, 2016e). Projects have taken on the line of occupying abandoned spaces, such as the *Ocupação* (Occupation) platform (2015) or

the *Plataforma Trafaria* (Trafaria Platform) (2016), which aim to develop collective artistic projects such as art shows, residences, conversations, communal kitchens or even the creation of radios.

Under these circumstances, the return of this funereal “revolutionary script” (Madeira 2007, 2012, 2015a, 2016a, b, c, d) has a double meaning. On the one hand, it emphasizes the phantom-like character of the revolutions and tragedies of the past, which seems to corroborate the claim with which the sociologist Avery Gordon ends her book, *Ghostly Matters* (2008). Gordon tells us that some people believe “that ghosts do not like new things” (2008: xix) and so, in her opinion, if the injustices were eliminated, we would perhaps cease to be so haunted by the ghosts of the past. In contrast, keeping ourselves *in media res* as regards the crisis, allows us to develop, on a par with the uncertainty of new paradigms for the future, where it is possible to overcome scenarios of disenchantment, precariousness, unpredictability, and disbelief in the value of institutions that affects the belief system and values and creates a tragic imaginary, some alternative strategies, however ephemeral, to rehearse the future, beyond the tragic.

Perhaps this is why this tragic tone has featured on the main stages of Portuguese theatrical performance. One example of this is the piece *Isto é uma Tragédia* (*This is a Tragedy*) from *Cão Solteiro & Vasco Araújo* by Só Solteiro & Vasco Araújo, which premiered recently at the Maria Matos Theatre in Lisbon (November 17<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> 2016). There is no mention of social movements or contemporary protests, nor of historical counter-memories of the Revolution, Dictatorship, Colonial War, etc ... It speaks of everything and nothing, of the banality of everyday life, while background noise makes it difficult for spectators to hear the speeches on stage. The performers carry on talking as if it was nothing, and even when, sometimes, dead geese fall from the sky, or even dead men who disappear down trapdoors, the action continues on stage. Nothing seems to interrupt this tragedy where there are no collective memories, but only a passing life and small individual memories, as one of the characters tells us: “How stupid, the stuff that comes into your head... This nostalgia thing. This thing of memories appearing, as if they came to make sense of the present. But you can’t control anything. They appear, seeming to come out of thin air, and short-circuit the day, don’t they? Then everything seems to have the aura of a psychodrama, it’s horrible”. However, in the Portuguese National Theatres, in Lisbon and in Porto, the Classical Tragedy repertoire has been more intensely re-programmed. Tragedy, in its poetic expression, carries within it the possibility of overcoming the negative by the positive.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Social movements that sprang up in Spain and then spread to Portugal.

<sup>2</sup> In Portugal, a number of popular assemblies appeared based on the *Acampada do Rossio (The Rossio Camp)* (May 2011), which were decentralized to various areas of the city of Lisbon and regions of the country.

<sup>3</sup> Victor Turner and Richard Schechner (1989) speak of a relationship in spiral form between art and the social, where the two worlds are continuously contaminated through non-linear influences. This process, for the authors, “is responsive to inventions and the changes in the mode of production in a given society. Individuals can make an enormous impact on the sensibility and understanding of members of society. Philosophers feed their work into the spiraling process; poets feed poems into it; politicians feed their acts into it; and so on” (idem). Long before, Richard Wagner in *Art and Revolution* (1849) and Anatoly Lunacharsky in *Revolution and Art* (1920) spoke about a zigzag relationship, with the first stating that art influenced the revolution and the second the inverse. Moreover, the controversy between Joseph Proudhon, with his book *Du principe de l'art et de sa destination sociale* (1846), and the journalist and writer Emile Zola regarding the work of the anarchist artist Courbet refers to this intrinsic and conflict-ridden relationship between art and the social (Antliff, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Or, as David Cairns says, “blind over-valuation of oneself caused by the experience or the illusion of excessive prosperity” (Cairns 1996:8).

<sup>5</sup> A conception that has taken root especially since the 19th century, through authors such as Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Scheler, Luckacs, and Unamano (Ubersfeld 2010).

<sup>6</sup> In the current collapse of humanisms and their relationship with a reflection on the tragic, José Pedro Serra (2006) sees the outcome of the extremely close relationship between the metaphysical-

religious crisis, political crisis, the search for human identity, the question of technique, the question of urbanism and the new labyrinthine contours of city life, the new issues of genetic engineering, and ecological issues.

<sup>7</sup> In his own words: “Any attempt to abstract these orders as definitions of tragedy either leads us to the wrong conclusion or condemns us to a merely sterile attitude towards the tragic experience of our own culture” (2002:77).

<sup>8</sup> Though the so-called “Bomb-Menbombers” and “terrorists/martyrs” maintain this “heroic” effect today, even arranging performances and media spectacles before the act. On YouTube, there are many examples of this.

<sup>9</sup> Where according to Bataille it represented an entry point to the sacred. See Bataille quoted by Boric 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Which depict an affinity between humans and animals based on the transmutation of souls. See Grimal 2002:34.

<sup>11</sup> Greek theatre is full of animals (horses, monkeys, bulls, snakes and cocks) that are also defined by hubris - and aggressive and noisy.

<sup>12</sup> *The Bacchae* of Euripides portrays this image.

<sup>13</sup> As happened in the bestiaries of the Middle Ages, which recovered and promoted the bestiary inherited from antiquity.

<sup>14</sup> Therefore not hesitating to urinate or masturbate in public.

<sup>15</sup> In contrast to the rhetoric of Aristotle, which presupposed the assets of order, civility, reason, decorum and civil law (Scoot and Smith quoted by Kennedy:1999).

<sup>16</sup> Report by Paulo M. Guerrinha and Carla Costa for the *Sapo* site. See <http://videos.sapo.pt/dJKjizkw3Ki8ONwZtPiZ>, last accessed 15/11/2016.

<sup>17</sup> Interregnum.



<sup>18</sup> The Liberal Revolution in Porto.

<sup>19</sup> Implantation of the Republic.

<sup>20</sup> 25<sup>th</sup> April Revolution.

<sup>21</sup> *União Democrática Portuguesa*.

<sup>22</sup> A symbol of the rural Alentejo proletariat's resistance to the repression and exploitation of Salazarism, she was killed by the forces of the fascist regime in 1954.

<sup>23</sup> See the artist's page at <http://www.paulomendes.org>, last accessed 15/11/2016.

<sup>24</sup> Interviewed by me on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2016, in Lisbon.

<sup>25</sup> Idem.

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