

The genealogy of my work

The first component of my working genealogy is cinema particularly that of Godard, Bergman, Antonioni and Pasolini¹. I came to Brasilia with my family in 1962 and from 1965 on my mandatory program was the cine club of Escola Parque, a school on the block where we lived. It was in that cinema that as a teenager I understood the image as a universe of its own and at the same time as something that is built. Each of these directors brought very authoritative components capable of reformulate the cinematographic language. It was a unique experience deeply forming from an aesthetic point of view.

This aesthetic notion that my generation extracted from cinema, especially from European cinema, contaminated us with the quality of the movement but it has had special importance essentially by the easy access to films. From the point of view of fine arts for example we had few opportunities to see contemporary international work in Brazil and the São Paulo Biennial was always an exception. Only the expressions whose medias allowed for a dispersed distribution such as music, cinema and literature, reached the country a little more uniformly. This isolation of the country was real, it even favored the military government's repression project, providing control and usually it came with the seal of censorship. Fortunately there was an answer in popular brazilien music (MPB), in art with the *arte de vanguarda* (avant-garde art) and with the movies of the *cinema novo* (new cinema) movement. There is always a political fact that permeates every moment and contaminates its content of expression.

At home we read a lot motivated by the interest of my mother who always had a book in her hands, by my father who understood that an education was done with encyclopedias, and by my sisters who were studying Literature here at UnB², favoring my access to the campus long before I was a university student and through whom I got to know the Brazilian literature of that time. So this proximity to the books and to the reading as a daily habit is the second significant fact of my education.

I like to read everything but in the sense that I am reporting I want to highlight three authors who due to their narrative skills determined my attachment. The surprise of seeing them taking the liberty of crossing languages in the same work opened an alternative of thought for me. These are fabulous books written eighty, hundred years ago but they are not at the service of the modernist ideal. They are purely authorial works and I venture to say that meanwhile poetry has a clearly modernist constructive project, the modernist literature found its true feature in the 'manifests' while fiction remained really more free in its construction. With Joyce³ (*Ulysses*) I committed the barbarism of attempting a very innocent youth reading, probably only for the value of the confrontation. I recently did my act of contrition and reread it properly. It's amazing. Then there's Falkner⁴ and *The wild palms*. He has been always a

¹ Jean-Luc Godard (1930-), French-Swiss filmmaker. Ernst Ingmar Bergman (1918-2007), Swedish playwright and filmmaker. Michelangelo Antonioni (1912- 2007), Italian filmmaker. Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975), Italian filmmaker, poet and writer.

² Universidade de Brasilia, the federal university of Brasilia, the Brazil's capital city.

³ James Joyce (1882-1941), was an Irish novelist, short story writer and poet.

⁴ William Cuthbert Faulkner (1897-1962), American writer, received the 1949 Nobel Prize for Literature.

terrible ghost, 'the writer' of very important writers, whom pointed out his skill of construction. And he has also worked with the idea of a physical proximity of the pages as a factor of narrative contamination. That's something really formidable for me. And there's the *Livro do Desassossego* (*Book of Disquiet*). It is a book that remained in a state of preparation throughout the life of its author, Fernando Pessoa⁵, or to say better Bernardo Soares, without getting a final structure or form from his hands and that exists today, as a book, thanks to versions organized by different scholars after his death. My attachment to this book is not exactly in its poetic prose style. I have always found myself moved more by the fragmented writing, which allows access to the content freely. Furthermore it is a non-book by a non-author eternally not finished and this condition alone has already a very poetic nature itself. For me this notion of the collection of pieces, which are collected as a continuous task, it is very close to the process of working in art. Nowadays we are dependent on text editor applications and we get used operating commands like control C and control V and all those forms of registration. I believe that's another tool to contaminate thought and forms of production and puts us as artists in the permanent condition of collage authors, puzzle makers and fraction restorers.

So I go back to my genealogy to point out the discovery of Giotto's⁶, a fundamental reference in art history. With him I understood the body of the painting as something that can be teased, demonstrated as a direct relationship between distinguished working areas, populated by the political and relational character of the figures. This was definitive for me although this encounter with his painting was indirect, outsourced by the reproductions of art books, as I would only have the chance to see his work in person much later.

The fifth reference I found is the life example of Hokusai and Matisse⁷, both long-lived artists. In addition to having built their works as an exercise that takes place in the breadth of life, they are examples of permanent dedication, understanding time as a condition, an accumulation factor for finding their own language, something situated beyond each job. I had to learn at young age to organize my time between conventional jobs and the dedication to my work as an artist and so they calmed me down a little.

These references reports to my teenager formation by the time when I realized the choice of life I would make. They are identity meetings seeing my interests in external expressions. This was the case when visiting the IV Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna in DF, presented in 1967 under the still unfinished structure of the National Theater, and where Nelson Lerner's⁸ stuffed pig was exposed. At that time I identified my work interests with the Brazilian incursions in the

⁵ Fernando Antônio Nogueira Pessoa (1888-1935), Portuguese poet and writer. He refers to B.S. as a literary personality, not a heteronym, recognizing the excessive proximity between them. The author presented his plans for the book as having been 'composed by assistant bookkeeper Bernardo Soares in the city of Lisbon / by Fernando Pessoa'. Jacinto do Prado Coelho, 2nd edition, 1997.

⁶ Giotto di Bondone (1266-1337 Italian painter and architect, recognized in art history for improving the representation of perspective in painting, before the Renaissance.

⁷ Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), Japanese artist, engraver of the Ukiyo-e style. Henry Matisse (1869-1954), French artist.

⁸ Nelson Lerner (1932-), artist from São Paulo. *www.nelsonlerner.com.br*. *O Porco*, 1966 (*www.itaucultural.org.br*), stuffed pig in wooden crate, 83 x 159 x 62 cm, Pinacoteca collection of the State of São Paulo.

pop language and had seen the work of Antonio Dias⁹ in Rio. I think I understood the importance of Nelson's political protest at that event but the pig was too much for me. It was too much for everyone, even for the jury that curated the exhibition. But it stayed with me in the understanding of the contradiction between my attachment to the elements of identity opposed to the perspective of a necessary detachment, expressed by a more threatening gesture that I could not reach at that moment.

Much later there was the encounter with the work of Agnes Martin¹⁰, with her paintings and also with her writings reflecting on the nature of the artist's work and the meaning of this dedication. Her ability to build the work with a sharp focus, analyzing the laws imposed on painting and understanding drawing as part of the breadth of painting in favor of an objective project. That was a necessary lesson.

I started working with visual programming at a very young age and my interest in images and graphic references are decisive in my work. These references correspond to the typologies and calligraphies of the printed word; photography for printing in various media; encyclopedias, illustrated books and comic books; and packagings, things that I believe reconstructs the meaning of representation. Just like the covers of books, magazines, records, movie posters and so many products distributed on commercial shelves. I have a huge attraction for the way this universe populates and renames life, stealing authorship from the world and filling us with promises of content. That constitutes a kind of special power.

So I summarize my genealogy like this: the cinema, the readings, the collection of pieces, the body of painting, time as a condition, the pop, the attachment and the detachment, the breadth of painting and the graphic references.

To criticize this genealogy, I want to quote a dialogue between characters in the film *Faust* by Sokurov¹¹. In the middle of the film young Fausto walks in the forest with Mauricius - the Mephistopheles - and asks him for powers. The monstrous creature will not be able to serve him and justifies this impossibility, saying:

- My things don't belong to me. They can be recovered any time.

I believe that this way we can more loosely name what we are made of. Many things are with us as they are part of our life or our work but had been taken by us by a belonging that is reasonable but not concrete. We can always abandon them and they can get emptied themselves, returning to their origins. And that is exactly how the bonds and the value of our choices are reestablished. Although they make sense while they prevail, they make even more sense when we manage to overcome them. RTG 2014

⁹ Antonio Manuel Lima Dias, or Antonio Dias (1944-2018), Brazilian multimedia artist.

¹⁰ Agnes Bernice Martin (1912-2004), Canadian/North American abstract painter and writer.

¹¹ *Faust*, film directed by Alexandr Sokurov (1951-), Russian filmmaker. Free adaptation of the works of Goethe and Thomas Mann, it tells the story of the man who commits his soul in search of knowledge.