

Narcissus of all Species

(an after-movie script)

— Max Fernandes

1_ The exhibition space *Sol Pele* is supported and run together with Filipa Araújo. It opened to the public on September 18th, 2015 with the exhibition *Jardim* [Garden] by João Almeida.

In order to produce this text, I'm revisiting the movie *Narciso de todas as espécies* [Narcissus of all species] edited in December 2017. Scripted in 2015, the movie's pedagogical tone intends to unpack the transformations brought by the urban development of the city I inhabit, Guimarães, and consequently, the social and cultural affectation of the places and people that have been part of my life for the past decade.

The end of the film focuses on a particular place and the events, relations and phenomena revolving around it: the factory/art-studio that hosts the exhibition space *O Sol Aceita a Pele Para Ficar*¹ [The Sun Accepts the Skin to Stay], commonly known as *Sol Pele* [Sun Skin].

This text functions not only as an after-movie log, a diary regarding the process of conceptual and relational decisions made while editing the film, but also to meet possibilities of newer relations which acquire autonomy from the produced images. In such a flip, the film becomes a *script* from which this text emerges; it gave me the chance to reflect about the rushed editing process of the images-movement that followed the series of events leading to the eviction and expulsion of *Sol Pele*. This text is an opportunity to reflect about the different levels of occurring in different media and different periods.

The film starts with a prolepsis: the demolition of the building neighbouring the factory/art-studio building.

The period represented in the film *Narciso de todas as espécies* spans from 2008 till the end of 2017, with a particular focus on the last two years. The film is divided into three chapters that I would like to consider as narrative threads rather than genres, those being: music, activism and narcissus of all species. It is this last chapter that gives this film its title.

The first chapter followed intuitively the same logic that sustained how the shared art-studio was lived. It tries to frame the artists sharing the factory with me, the spaces of their doings and creation, and the specific soundscapes of each one of them. This art-studio gave a dimension of a collective feel – truly

a supportive chapter with others. Because music was a frequent presence due to regular rehearsals, this chapter tries to capture that. The second chapter focuses on activism as expression of a collective action seeking to defend distinct causes triggered by the proposals of new urban development. Such activism took the form of organized public assemblies - *Assembleias Populares da Caldeirão* – providing a formal structure to discuss and plan concrete actions. These assemblies did not have a central hierarchy and they were sustained by an assemblage of distinct principles, concerning the ecological, urban-development, archaeology, art, and citizenship. The visual material promoting these assemblies was printed in a small manual letterpress, borrowed from Braga's Regional Chapter of the Communist Portuguese Party, which was used during the period of dictatorship (known by the name) of *Estado Novo*. The use of this portable noiseless device to print the assemblies' leaflets, incorporated in the assemblies a temporal and symbolic connection with the illicit purpose it had previously served, a connection that is also a connection between life and art². This creates a passage to the following chapter that focuses on the relation between images and life. For instance, a long sequential shot of a garden inside the quartier is followed by a shot capturing the conversation with the artist Cristina Regadas in her own studio, introducing the natural dyes extracted from plants used in her paintings. The third chapter, with the name *Narciso de todas as espécies*, opens with Faty (my beloved dog) walking next to a turbid lake. When something grabs her attention all her senses turn to it. This is the most metaphorical part of the film, providing images of the site, of the daily living with animals and plants, that defined so much of the place and what was cherished by those exhibiting at *Sol Pele*.

On October 17th, 2015, João Almeida – author of the verses that gave name to the exhibiting space *Sol Pele*³ – presented his exhibition *Jardim* [Garden] as an installation trying to translate his poetry into spatial terms, and by hosting conversations under a plastic tent.

The footage is symbolically revealing, trying to capture the sense

2_ An iconic etching representing the condition of clandestine printing shops by the sculptor and partisan José Dias Coelho, murdered on December 19th, 1961 by an agent of P.I.D.E. [Policia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado - International and State Defense Police, a security agency that existed during the *Estado Novo* (dictatorial regime) of António de Oliveira Salazar] was found along with the letterpress.

3_ *O Sol Aceita a Pele Para Ficar* - The Sun Accepts the Skin to Stay, is an excerpt from the poem "A7" by João Almeida, found in the book *O Mal dos Postes de Alta Tensão* - [The Ailment of High Tension Towers] (2000), edited by Black Sun, Lisbon.

of first impression provoked by the exhibition space, the fondness the poet developed for the site, and for providing a temporal and situational correspondence with the current condition. Almeida's installation reproduced (through a re-enactment), a vigil that took place years before in the factory where the artist's father had worked.

The film progresses with a sequence of images: a narcissus being drawn with brush and Indian-ink; the last public gathering of Guimarães 2012 – European Capital of Culture work-team *Art and Architecture*; and the entering of municipal police and town hall officers on October 2017 in the premises of the factory in order to complete the eviction of artists and their belongings from the space. This sequence carries on with footage of the transportation of objects and plants, cutting to the overlap of images with a panoramic view of Guimarães' city centre and the act of drawing two narcissi. The sequence ends with a work from the exhibition *Faces da Lua* [Faces of the Moon], by the writer and artist Lauren Moya Ford: a double-sided painting on paper, one side depicting a lunar eclipse and on the other a lively flame.

1.

4_28th, January 2014.

Days before I had rented space inside the factory, I wrote something on my notebook about the significance of film in life: "in physics, everything one sees is constrained by the temporal-spatial process of light reflecting on objects, going through the retina to then be decoded. From a physics perspective, the same phenomenon happens between image-movement and memory."⁴ Supplanting acting as a document *per se*, the film becomes light.

My filming increased in proportion to the growing number of people in the factory. The soundscape became particularly present. The drumming rehearsals of artist and musician Igor Gonçalves and the sewing machines of the artist Paula Freitas travelled through the entire plant. Both activities open up to a potential future. In Igor's case, to concerts, and in Paula's case,

future wearability. Their activities resonate the soundscape of past textile production, almost as if this contemporary production was just as noisy as past production. The most silent and invisible of us was the artist and musician João Silvestre. And that might explain why I only have images of his desk, work material and footage of a live performance. Because it was hard for me to picture them as musicians without connecting them to the factory, I've recorded the concerts of the bands *Toulouse* (which João Silvestre is member) and *Paraguaii* (of which Igor Gonçalves and Rui Souza – another resident artist of Caldeirão - are members), both taking place on December 2015 at a neighbouring former factory converted into a fully-functional art centre⁵. The film summons them! My fascination concerned not only the performing artists, but the very performative action. However, the sequence does not follow the order of events. The first sequence captures João Silvestre in a long shot, closing his hands while keying. The second sequence features Rui, going through a series of cables and devices used in the concert, ending with Igor on the drums - the trigger which used to lure me from the daily environment of the factory to the landscape of the concerts.

The studio is not deprived of reality; it is the place where one gets occupied by *artistic research*. The modus operandi of this studio was open to different contexts of operating. The popular assemblies opened the studio to a clearer actuation in society, or to follow Benjamin⁶, as a collective “apparatus of production”. In this case, the studio is not centred within the individual, but in the space and structure that supports it. The range of social, physical and historical conditions (the history of the building and its context in the city, allowing the meeting with former workers, people's casual encounters, the factory as a site of production and its becoming a studio-workshop, studio-office, studio-exhibition site, and studio-headquarters for the the Popular Assemblies of Caldeirão) amplified the current context of political activism with a sense of social spectacle. A sense of emancipation developed from a contextual poetry. It produced a bubble of protection in the interrelation and

5_ Centro para Assuntos de Arte e Arquitectura (CAAA).

6_ Walter Benjamin (1970) *The Author as Producer*.

interdependence between different activities of production of poetry, thinking, sculpture, activism, video, performance, conversation, event, and others, and the people, other beings and phenomena. This was particularly notorious during the last two years prior to the eviction of the resident artists – the soul of this dream, and how the expropriation and subsequent demolition of the building highlighted the involvement of individuals, rather than its disintegration.

2. The second chapter of the film starts with the artist José Almeida Pereira developing a linoleum plate image to advertise a public assembly in the coming week. He does not master the technique to produce this image and here the process becomes allegorical to the unknown yet necessary to be discovered – acting-living. The preparations for the 5th Popular Assembly of Caldeirôa gathered many participants. The footage of the printing process of the leaflets spread out over the large table – the same one over which fabrics were once laid - forewords footage documenting Paula Freitas’ obsession for old factories. Paula films the pressing visit made by the (former) owner of the factory (before its demolition), “discovering” objects and spaces that she knew soon to be gone. They would only remain recorded as in that moment. There was no other way of preserving what she was seeing.

3. The third chapter opens to interspecies relations, references to the land plot and garden at Caldeirôa, the natural dyes used by Cristina Regadas and the bats that meander the inner quartier by the end of the day, and progresses to the third and final chapter of the film. The subsistence of the art studio offered *contact zones*⁷ between the production (of art), biology and social events giving room to other phenomena.

7_ “Contact zones” is a term defined by Mary Louise Pratt (1991) “Arts of the Contact Zone” to identify how “the space of colonial encounters, where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they

The exhibition *Almoço de Trabalhadores* [Worker’s Lunch] by the artist duo Felícia Teixeira and João Brojo, that took place between May 4th and June 11th, 2016, has a biological relation

with the exhibition *Garden*, by João Almeida.

When Felícia and João visited *Sol Pele*, we had lunch using the ingredients collected from João Almeida's *Garden*. The unexpected dialogue between exhibitions found affinity in shared concerns and this sustaining act.

Water is a key element for the sustenance of plants and trees and essential for the functioning of the studio. From April to October 2017, the factory was supported only by water collected from rain, thanks to effective capturing systems: a single day of rain would fill every water containers. That was essential for the survival of the beings inhabiting the studio, in the same way it was a key-element for organizing, preparing and supporting the poetry-reading event *O que falta é amor* [We are lacking love] by André Alves, in June 2017⁸, which brought more than a hundred people to the studio over a period of five hours.

The movie *Narciso de todas as espécies* juxtaposes different phenomena: antagonistic relations between the demolition of buildings and the feeding of a baby bird nested in the walls of the studio; the ephemeral life (from a human perspective) of narcissi during winter time and megalithic engravings of Britelo (Gerês, Portugal) part of the exhibition *Canto, ilhas e cenas* [Singing, Islands and Scenes] of Margarita del Carmen.

The movie describes the phenomena, and through the sequences, reveals them more deeply, refines them, such as the metaphysical touch felt by Lauren Moya Ford as she organizes her painting exhibition, the sense added by the personal spatial-temporal universes of her work, and the soothing balance of her presence. Or the expansion of the sense of space-time, when the sequence gulps and extends into the images gathered and collected by Cristina Regadas. Or the sequence of *Zé* – the cat – wandering amidst the debris of a ruined house, followed by a glimpse of João Almeida through foliage during the transportation of soil needed for his garden installation at *Sol Pele*. Or the simultaneous development of studio spaces and the exhibition space *Sol Pele*, or in the images of *Sol Pele* in ruins – where André Alves' drawings could still be seen – followed by João Almeida's conversation about poetry and his exhibition *Jardim* [Garden].

7_ are lived out in many parts of the world today." (as quoted by James Clifford in the text *Museus como zonas de contacto* [itálico] in (org.) Green, Renée (2003) "Nagociações na zona de contacto," Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim)

8_ for more information about the project, visit <http://www.theandrealves.com/index.php?/works/o-que-falta-e-amor/>

9_ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1007234025354>

10_ As Helio Oiticica argues in the text "Appearance of the suprasensorial", published in 1967-8. Text consulted in the book "Art in Theory, 1900-2000", organized by Charles Harrison & Paul Wood, 2nd edition, Blackwell Publishing, 2002.

The dialogue between these two, sets the tone and marks the beginning of *Sol Pele*. To quote Philip Larkin on the "obligation" of the poet - "I feel that my prime responsibility is to the experience itself"⁹ – it draws a relation between poetry and artistic studio practice.

The film, and this text, exist for their relational embeddedness with the events. The incorporation of notes and descriptions from the film *Narciso de todas as espécies* transports us to a process of a search involving several approaches to research/production in the mixture of art and life. The memory of the lived experience and the enunciation of unmeasurable phenomena remains, even if the building no longer exists.

I see the intensity of these experiences as "experimental exercises of freedom" *in us* as individuals and not *in the* other as a spectator¹⁰. These experiences of image-thought are present in other two videos, *Gerardo* (2016) and *Faty* (2017), that also reflect the mix of art, life and consciousness.

Gerardo is a friend exiled in his native town. As a child, he suffered an accident from which he lost cognitive control. His memory is set free, between the memories prior to the accident and other exquisite contemporary matters of his interest. His sister provides for his health, nourishment and clothing. Gerardo roams, nocturnal, through the city. On a summer day, I brought him to the studio. Because Gerardo likes records, I played the album *Mar Aberto* [Open Sea] by Lucas/Medeiros. In the meanwhile, we started playing football. I grabbed the camera. The film captures eleven minutes of our game, the ball, the music and the wording, Gerardo's gaze, and my body filmed by him. I cannot explain the joy I felt for being there with him at that moment. The film takes after his name.

Faty documents the interweaving of a human and a dog playing. The film sees into their lived reality. While the game takes place, a hand writes quickly about the lived reality and what surrounds it. This image-thought lists multiple social, ideological, biological, metaphysical and pre-physical

dimensions. The position of the words being written on screen is not defined as in a ruled page, and forms freely as drawing. Each word might be followed by a watery stain or not. The words emerge from a circle in the upper left corner of the screen, as other instruments come in (a set-square, a pen).

Each gesture made, amplifies the word.

A dropper smudges the word "social dimension," offering it liquid mutations throughout the film. The "ideological dimension" is squared. the "meta-physical" or "pre-physical" dimension is harder to relate to subsequent stains, but the writing of words is closer to the circle. The painting act is unpredictable. Although the distinct dimensions had been abstractly sketched in a notebook, the transcription was made straight onto the screen. In this game, what the eyes can't see happens.

Link for the video Narcissus of all species
<http://maxfernandes.net/narciso/narciso.html>

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Max Fernandes

Short Bio

Max Fernandes was born in Guimarães, Portugal in 1979. He has developed an extensive number of exhibitions, screenings and research projects, such as:

Solo exhibitions: *Cão-Rio (saco de arroz cozido no chão)*, Uma Certa Falta de Coerência, Porto, 2016; *Bola de cristal*, Mucho Flow 2015, Centro para Assuntos de Arte e Arquitectura [CAAA], Guimarães; *Trabalho*, Uma Certa Falta de Coerência, Porto, 2013; and *O pássaro voa por onde tem espaço*, Gomes Alves Galery, Guimarães, in 2011.

Group exhibitions: *Território Trabalho – 10 anos Laboratório das Artes*, Centro Cultural Vila Flor [CCVF], Guimarães and *Bienal Maia –Momento I– Viagem ao Princípio do Mundo*, Fórum da Maia, both in 2015.

Screenings: *Ciclo em torno da obra videográfica de Max Fernandes* [video anthology] Gato Vadio and Playlist #9 – café-bookshop Candelabro, both in Porto, 2017.

Founder of the artist-run-spaces: *O Sol Aceita A Pele Para Ficar* [The Sun Accepts the Skin to Stay], [2015 - ...], and *Laboratório das Artes*, [2004 - 2006], both in Guimarães.

Comunity projects: organizer of the Popular Assemblies of Caldeiroa, Guimarães; *Clases en el monte*, at Puebla de Sanabria, Spain; *Rastilho* and *Tecer Outras Coisas*, both in Pevidém, Guimarães;

Education: Masters in Contemporary Artistic Practice by Fine-Arts University of Porto, 2008; Independent Studies Program at Maumaus Visual Arts School [Guimarares, 2012 and Lisbon, 2013].