

Ten contemporary views on Mário Peixoto's *Limite*

Edited by

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*Dedicated to Plínio Sússekkind Rocha;
without him Limite would no longer exist.*

in memoriam Dietrich Scheunemann

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Some times Mário

Walter Salles

I remember the first time I set eyes on Mário, in the little room in which he lived in Angra dos Reis. And I remember well the welcoming smile with which he greeted this newcomer.

I also remember how he would talk for hours on end, although the hours seemed to slip by like minutes. I also realized that I would never again come across a storyteller such as him.

I remember how he would pack up all his medicines in a plastic bag.

I remember the first time he ever mentioned cinema and his admiration for German expressionism and Murnau and Lang, whose films he had seen with two Japanese friends, when they had sneaked out of a boarding-school in England.

I remember that he disliked films the way Humberto Mauro made them, whereas he had nothing but praise for Walter Hugo Khoury's *Noite Vazia* (Empty Night) and David Lean's first films.

I remember that he simply adored chocolate cake and that we devoured an especially delicious one on one of his birthdays.

I remember his red pyjamas, which he wore around the clock, and his response to an inevitable question, "But I have two pairs, so one's always nice and clean!"

I remember the first time he saw *Limite* on video. He was indignant. "*Limite* should be seen on a proper cinema screen. It wasn't made for this, my dear!"

I remember that he absolutely loathed television and that he read and reread Eça de Queiroz's *Os Maias* (The Maias).

I remember the photographs of his father and his mother, who he said had once been a model in Paris.

I remember the first time I saw him ill and how long it started to take him to climb up stairs.

I remember the day on which he had to come to Rio to undergo an operation for cancer and how he literally leapt into the hospital, beaming with angelical clarity.

I remember how terribly he suffered, yet, all the while, making firm friends with the nurses, who would come and visit him, even when off duty.

Introduction

Michael Korfmann

Mário Peixoto's *Limite*, first screened on May 17th, 1931 at the *Cinema Capitólio* in Rio de Janeiro, has reached the age of 75 this year, corresponding approximately to the average human's life expectation. If the movie, voted one of the best Brazilian films of all time, is still quite alive and shows no sign of a forthcoming retirement, and likewise the discussions on its filmic and poetic significance, it is above all due to the following persons: Plínio Sússekind Rocha, who with the help of Saulo Pereira de Mello rescued the film from physically vanishing in the 1960s. Plino unfortunately passed away early, but his work was then continued by Saulo Pereira de Mello who, over the last decades, has been preserving, restoring, editing and publishing the artistic work of Mário Peixoto; and one has to mention director and producer Walter Salles, who in 1996 founded the *Mário Peixoto Archive* located within his production company *videofilmes* in Rio de Janeiro. The *Archive* gave Saulo Pereira de Mello, as its curator, an institutional background for research activities that have led, over the last few years, to a series of very interesting publications on *Limite*, as well as on Peixoto's literary work. To cite some of the key works, one might mention the following titles, all published or edited by Saulo Pereira de Mello: a detailed study on the film *Limite* (Mello 1996); the original scenario (Peixoto 1996); the rare theoretical articles on cinema written by Peixoto himself (Mello 2000); a screenplay written by Mário Peixoto in collaboration with Saulo Pereira de Mello, based vaguely on a story by Brazilian writer Machado de Assis (Peixoto & Mello 2000); a collection of poetry written between 1933 and 1968 (Peixoto 2002); as well as six short stories and two theatrical plays from the early years (Peixoto 2004). In addition, in 2000 the *Universidade Federal Fluminense* published a CD-ROM on *Limite*, with texts in Portuguese, French and English, and in 2001, Sergio Machado, former assistant to Walter Salles, filmed a prize-winning documentary on Peixoto called *At the edge of the earth*, or *Onde a terra acaba* in Portuguese.

But one may also find a *homenage* to Mario Peixoto in a film by Walter Salles, which was released internationally as *Behind the Sun* (2001) but originally entitled *Abril despedaçado*, or *Broken April*, maintaining the title of the novel by Albanian writer Ismail Kadaré that had inspired the movie. With regard to Peixoto's relevance to *Behind the Sun*, not only did Salles choose Breves as the main character's family name – which is part of Peixoto's complete name, Mário Breves Peixoto – but also, the main dialogue between *Behind the Sun* and

Peixoto is related to the question of time and the clockwork as its symbol. Both are central themes in *Limite* as well as in Peixoto's literary work, above all in his six-volume novel *O inútil de cada um* (The futility of every one). The limitations and the feeling of being trapped in time that we experience in *Limite* is also present in Peixoto's novel. In a key scene of the book, the movement of a clock hand is commented as follows: "Every time the clock counts 'one more', it is actually saying 'one less' ", not showing a progression, but rather the vanishing remains of time. The same phrases were also used by Peixoto during a first encounter in 1990 with Salles, who then inserted them into *Behind the Sun*. The idea of an archaic, all-imposing clock moving relentlessly and grinding down all existence is well presented in *Behind the Sun* by the image of the sugar mill with its visual resemblance to a real clockwork mechanism, moved endlessly in circles by the oxen that continue their rounds even after they have been unyoked, and also the motion of a swing that imitates the movements of a clock hand.

Limite is now, once again, being restored and, based on this new version, a DVD should be out soon, replacing the VHS copy available today. Thanks to these developments we will finally have at our disposal quite a breadth of material concerning the film, and therefore the chance to overcome the somewhat polemic reception and discussions initiated by Glauber Rocha in the 1960s. In his efforts to found a tradition of Brazilian film history that would be continued by his *Cinema Novo*, Glauber made an unfortunate distinction between Mário Peixoto and Humberto Mauro, turning Mauro's *Ganga Bruta* (1933) into the overall reference for *Cinema Novo* and rejecting *Limite* as a bourgeois work of cinema, without ever having seen the movie himself, since it was being restored between 1959 and 1972 and unavailable for screening. Even though some Brazilian film critics at times still insist on such a bipolar perspective, it is worth noting that contemporary filmmakers such as Salles consider themselves descendants and emissaries of both tendencies, thereby uniting a recognition of the aesthetic achievements of silent movies such as *Limite* (which does not necessarily mean an attempt to revive or refresh its experimental language) and of the filmic and political implications of *Cinema Novo* as a historical breakthrough for a uniquely Brazilian cinema that has gained recognition worldwide.

Let me summarize the main factual data surrounding the film, which has also been known as the "unknown masterpiece", an expression derived from French film historian Georges Sadoul who, in 1960, had made an unsuccessful trip to Rio de Janeiro just to see the film. Peixoto (1908-1992) gained a profound fascination for movies during his stay in England in 1926/27, where he was able to see many of the contemporary productions by German,

Russian and American directors. In Rio de Janeiro, Peixoto's contacts with the writer and critic Octávio de Farias, cameraman Edgar Brazil and director Adhemar Gonzaga, and also the discussions held in the *Chaplin Club*, a loose circle of friends interested in the aesthetics of silent cinema, laid the groundwork for the idea of making his own movie, in which he would feature as an actor. According to Peixoto, he found his final inspiration for *Limite* in August 1929, on his second trip to Europe, in a photograph by André Kertész showing a woman being embraced by a man in handcuffs. This photograph served as a prototype image that would later appear in the opening and closing sequences of Peixoto's own film, introducing the *leitmotiv* of imprisonment and human limitation. A scenario was written and presented to his director friends Gonzaga and Mauro, but both declined. Peixoto then decided to make the movie himself, hired the experienced cameraman Edgar Brazil and began shooting in mid-1930. As mentioned before, the first screening took place on May 17th, 1931, in the *Cinema Capitólio* in Rio de Janeiro. *Limite* never made it into commercial circuits and, over the years, was screened only sporadically, for instance in 1942, when a special screening was arranged for Orson Welles, who was in South America for the shooting of his unfinished film *It's all true*, and for Maria Falconetti, lead actress of Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928).

By the time *Limite* received its first public screening in 1931, Peixoto had already started work on his second film, *At the edge of the earth*, starring the famous actress Carmen Santos, who had made a brief appearance in *Limite* and who hoped to gain greater artistic recognition under Peixoto's direction. But because of personal quarrels, neither this nor any other efforts to finish a second film succeeded – several serious attempts were made up until the mid-1980s – and *Limite* remained the only film ever completed by Mário Peixoto. In 1959, the nitrate film began to deteriorate; Plínio Sússekind and Saulo Pereira de Mello started a frame-by-frame restoration that would take until 1972, when *Limite* returned to the festival and public screening circuit. Even though nobody could see the movie between 1959 and 1972 – as in the case of Georges Sadoul and his unsuccessful trip to Rio de Janeiro in 1960 – it still served as a reference for controversial discussion, as in the case Glauber Rocha.

With regard to the literary work of Mário Peixoto, his ambitions go as far back as 1930 and include poetry, short stories, theatrical plays and a six-volume novel with strong autobiographical traits called *O inútil de cada um* (The futility of every one). He considered the novel his masterpiece, and worked obsessively on it almost until the end of his life. So far, only the first volume has been published in 1984, while the remaining volumes are being prepared for publication by the *Mário Peixoto Archive*.

With regard to the artistic qualities of *Limite*, the outstanding combination of avant-garde film techniques shaping the movie as a rhythmically structured variation of perspectives and images with an underlying poetic structure and atmosphere should be noted. It is a film that is devised, structured and organised down to its smallest details. The quite unique cinematographic result of visual forms, emerging throughout the movie as altered versions and variations of the opening image, therefore may be best described as a cine-poem of striking intensity, an organic piece of visual art positioned between experimental techniques and an existential reflection on the human condition that resulted from a carefully planned and executed idea, rather than coming from the basic principle of a “chance” outcome, as is found in many avant-garde productions of the 1920s, especially those inspired by surrealism. From a historical perspective, *Limite* can be considered a résumé of the achievements made in film language in the 1910s and 1920s. Looking back, one may therefore see its very rhythm-oriented structure in the context of films like Vertov’s *Man with a movie camera* (1929) or Ruttmann’s *Berlin Symphony* (1927), even though of a different quality and speed. The very sparing use of intertitles we find in Murnau’s *The Last Laugh* (1924) and the boat and shouting scenes in *Limite* might evoke parallels with Murnau’s *Sunrise* (1927), and the moving fields and plants find a counterpart in *Earth* (1930) by Alexander Dovzhenko.

In short, *Limite* can be seen as an effort to explore the visual possibilities, the experimental techniques and the rhythmic variations of the film *medium* in the context of a sometimes melancholic and somewhat aggressive statement about the limitations and futility of human existence. Peixoto therefore accomplished what Germaine Dulac had demanded in 1927: the ‘real’ filmmaker should “divest cinema of all elements not particular to it, to seek its true essence in the consciousness of movement and visual rhythms” (1982: 9). But, on the other hand, *Limite* nevertheless does not abandon the ‘classical’ concept of art as a planned, structured, serious and personal form of expression beyond a mere formalistic exercise. The fascination for *Limite* lies, at least in my opinion, in this unique combination of an extraordinary experimental cinematographic language and a personal, though transcending, quality echoing throughout every sequence of the film.

Peixoto’s own view of his film is quite clearly formulated in an article called *A movie from South America*, which had for a long time been attributed to Sergei Eisenstein, but which was actually written by Peixoto himself and is now being published for the first time in English in this volume. For him, the experience offered by the film cannot be adequately captured by language, but was made to be felt. Therefore, the spectator should subjugate himself to the images, which are the “anguished cords of a synthetic and pure language of cinema”.

According to the director, his film is “as meticulously precise as the invisible wheels of a clock”, in which long shots are surrounded and linked by shorter ones as in a “planetary system”. Peixoto characterizes *Limite* as a “desperate scream” aiming for resonance instead of comprehension. “The movie does not intend to analyze. It shows. It projects itself as a tuning fork, a pitch, a resonance of time itself”, thereby capturing the flow between past and present, object details and contingency, as if it had always “existed in the living and in the inanimate”, or had tacitly detached itself from them. Since *Limite* is more of a state than an analysis, characters and narrative lines emerge, followed by a probing camera exploring angles, details, possibilities of access and fixation, only then to fade out back into the unknown; a visual stream with certain densifications or illustrations within the continuous flow of time. According to Peixoto, all these poetic transpositions find “despair and impossibilities”; a “luminous pain” that unfolds in rhythm and coordinates the “images of rare precision and structure”.

The oscillation between the fluid and the solid, the outstanding and the unidentifiable, the concrete object and the abstraction is a basic principle not only in this film but also in his literary work. From the proto-image based on the photograph he saw in Paris in 1929, the film takes us to a long, almost hypnotic boat scene, which transports us into the continuum of time, a rather fluid, amorphous state in which the camera-brain then moves into the past, tracing out certain memory lines, episodes and associated details, objects, movements and images, and visual flashes of limitation, that reflect themselves in other images and thus escape from a fixed, limited and solid status, thereby capturing the flow between past and present, object details and contingency. The wrecking in the storm then leads us back to the original proto-image, the initial theme, now extended and enriched by the visual and rhythmic variations we experienced.

As to the present publication, the contemporary views brought together in this book analyze diverse aspects of *Limite* and open also thematic links to the literary work by Mário. It starts with the already mentioned article by Peixoto himself on *Limite* followed by the contributions of Walter Salles, Saulo Perreira de Mello and Carlos Augusto Calil. William M. Drew and Alexander Graf look at the historical significance of *Limite* internationally, while Paulo Venâncio Filho considers the actuality of its filmic language. The later articles will then open a broader perspective: Constança Herz shows the influence of the discussions held in the *Chaplin Club* on Peixoto, Aparecida do Carmo Frigeri Berchior confronts *Limite* with Peixoto’s literary masterpiece *O inútil de cada um*, while Marco Luchessi and Marcelo Noah relate *Limite* to the poetic work of Mário.

We all hope you may share some of the fascination and experiences *Limite* has given to us and enjoy the reading. Please feel free to contact the author for further information or inquiries, and thank you for your interest.

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For more details, please consult www.mariopeixoto.com

A film from South America

Mário Peixoto¹

In principle and in some way, this boy grew up with a camera for a brain. What his eyes saw he recorded and the structure of his work is instinctively rhythmical. This is certainly why, and in a number of different circumstances, one comes to the world sometimes as a unique predecessor within his own confines and, at others, as an anonymous component of the inexpressive masses. I call and visualise this emerging as a clear, predominant note that suddenly blasts its way through a symphony as the key motif, which carries one like a wave through one's own innermost world, shaking one to the very core and elevating one to such heights as to be able to survey a whole panorama from on high, unobstructed by environs, yet then hurls one back again, face down into the biting atmosphere through which one has just been hurtled.

I might describe this film by following the three tendencies that slash through it and emanate from its wealth of ingredients (which, at first glance, fires flashes of both musicians and painters, in so far as they are either rhythmic or wholly static):

- 1) Man's solitude and its clamor.
- 2) His constant yearning for evasion, or communion.
- 3) The mimicry of the world of men with its thorns and gnarled trees, or its winds and beaches that beckon with hope, or its flights of adult thought turned into sharp images in a kind of dawn of disorder.

One might add the constant through inconstancy in the little village fountain, which is repeated four or five times as a readjustment and consolidation of the close ups.

This boy (who later I knew to be just sixteen) or this film (of which he is the style, lends or transfers, yet hitherto unimagined, importance to his images: locked doors and windows; windowpanes and decaying walls that make up the composition as a background. The jumble of electric wires is caught in the corner of the image and then, in full view, frames the track of sandy road, stretching as far as the eye can see.

¹ An article on *Limite* supposedly written by Sergei Eisenstein in 1931 and published for the first time in the cinema-column of the Brazilian magazine *Arquitectura*, vol. 38 in 1965. Peixoto himself first said he had translated this text from a French version of the original English article and later on claimed that cameraman Edgar Brazil had translated it from German into Portuguese, but, according to Saulo Pereira de Mello, finally admitted to having written it himself. The article was then republished by Mello (2000) as a text written by Mário Peixoto and is being published for the first time in English in this volume.

Distance seems to double up upon itself so that it becomes impassable and bears down on the heroes as they plod along. Below, on the same road, a woman with bowed head can be made out. The camera encircles her as she stops to wipe her purse with a kerchief and retouch her make-up.

She then resumes her journey, only to swerve to the left, out of sight. The camera does not follow her, but now turns to continue its march alongside the road. Meanwhile, fields for cultivation appear, the trees recently felled, their stumps still erect and charred. All around is hopeless desolation. It is all seen through a tumbledown fence of barbed wire, which lines and divides the fields from the road. Suddenly, the camera stops. It looks back on itself at the same landscape through which it has just passed. It now lunges down at the same stop at which the woman disappeared. It is lowered practically to ground level.

It then rises to show a makeshift gate of three dry tree trunks, which can be removed to allow access to the fields. And there is the woman, seated, worn-out, on one of these tree trunks, her face downcast and one arm outstretched to support her.

This poetic interlude, imposed upon this relentless adaptation to reality, now gives way to details of wheels, in a fusion of images: that of the revolving wheel of sewing machine and the wheel of a locomotive pulling away. I would never venture to describe the whole curvature of the cycle of his work and its display. It would be like attempting to put words, dialectic in fact, to what it does not congenitally possess. It was not born of this, nor does it incorporate it. It was constructed solely to be felt (or discovered) as an aura, with the eyes as a gateway, before being perceived in any more profound fashion. This is an extremely beautiful film, which, from the very outset, should only be subject to the anguish-filled harmony of pure, synthetic cinematographic language. And, it should be said, one of the purest. It is a full-length film, meticulously built around larger scenes, surrounded by smaller ones, like intermediate planetary systems, presented in accordance with time and their relative, intrinsic importance. In order to create the atmosphere desired by the director, the whole is held up by a total freedom of vision and so, all the parts fit together and complement each other as in a chain, with the detailed, clear precision of the finest poetry, or the mechanics of the unfathomable complexity of the cogs and wheels of a master watchmaker, which all turn as one.

The film is one inexorable scream. He dares not (or will not) analyze. It remains as and what it is. It unfolds and discloses, alongside mankind. And in that it also confirms itself. It sets up correlations in space and becomes, at times (which makes it that much harder to grasp for an

unaccustomed audience), very much distanced in time. It unfurls like a diapason, as if it had always existed in beings and objects, or recoils in silence.

It is a state, not an analysis. It is a situation which implies the previous placing of objects, versus the world that we perceive, and not laboratory research. It presents a finality, or solution, if you will, to its castaway heroes in the lifeboat, who appear as if from nowhere and for no apparent reason. They serve only to illustrate the state of affairs, a one-way ticket to no known destination. The impact of the “limits”, once revealed, hovers and unleashes a chain of contacts to the spectator, who grows ever more wide-eyed throughout the full extent of the film, and are soon seen to be eminently possible, at times universal, as was desired, or forced, as if bellowed inordinately into the ear. Like the trees – the human beings (forms and postures in the first case and behavior and static attitudes in the second). Wind through the grass and its effects. The walking of human beings (and their variations). Human hair tossed in the wind and hair plastered down, immune to the effects of the breeze, and so forth.

The detail of an ear, which is seen to be part of a man lost in thought in the lifeboat. The head of a recently caught fish on the beach, lapped by the waves, but which was destined to expire out of its element, etc. etc.

The two blades of a pair of scissors, held aloft for a moment while the woman tests the cut to be made with her hand, running one finger along the blade (her finger glides and plummets off the point). And the juxtaposition of the following scene (lap – dissolve), in which the two open sheets of newspaper are seen as if they too were two open blades capable of the same feats: attracting and then, creating and metamorphosing anything, relegating it to the stagnant stigma of labelled packages according to the general patterns of her heroes. The camera moves in on the back of a page, which, we presume, she has not yet read. A police column announces the escape. It would seem that this news is purposely synthetic and allegorical. She turns over the page and inevitably reads it, etc. etc. The camera is lowered to her legs to show the run in one of her stockings, from top to bottom etc. etc.

All are syntheses, but within cinematographic comparisons. Categorical comparisons, in fact. They are unexpected, in what is, once again, the pure style of “limits”. All is “limits” in its associates, in its congenital images and even its poetic overtones.

Like the gliding wings of birds in flight that must return to land.

Like the sea that breaks in foamy waves, only to abate upon sands that stretch out beneath the baking sun, or grow ashen under a sullen cloudy sky. (Here, I refer to the emanations that radiate from the poetic, not from precise formulae, neither hermetic origins, or those springing virgin from the mind – an inherent state and so forth.)

All three narratives (or three journeys, so to speak) of the standardized human beings in the lost boat, whom we glimpse through the virtuosity of their minds, disclose their inherent adaptability and return to their lifeboat, where they are the inevitable prisoners of destiny for metaphysical motives and through an almost algebraic situation, even while being an integral part of a universe. Any attempt at poetic transposition is doomed to failure, while “limits” comes to unity. Disintegration through death makes no matter, since its barriers are cloaked in unfathomable mystery and its liturgy, passing and questions go unanswered (see the plastic scene of the cemetery: the hand and the flower, the finger and ring, the cigarette and holder).

On the village road, on which the wife of the silent-film pianist believes that she may avoid eviction (or rather, her conditioning to one of the systems, as has been pointed out), is about to meet a child (the young girl, in this case) who is playing with a dog (or, at her tender years, a puppy), near an anonymous, insignificant flower detailed and (then focused by the camera) half suffocated by the suggestive height of a rustic fence, built of gnarled branches, at the foot of which it has fought to carry out its ephemeral cycle. The wilted flower is brushed for a second by the breeze.

As for the man, he is disoriented by his journey and by his appeals, declaimed far and wide. The world, which is external and visual, blurs into unanswering windows (see the traveling beach scene, a panorama seen from the inside out, through these windows, and the subsequent collapse of the man, who appears, as if dead, from non-significance and uselessness). While he lies upon the ground, the camera will link his feet (in a extremely slow vertical panorama, which might contain the whole mystical key to the work) to the curvature of the sky and even to his hand on the other side – one of his hands, which lies there, fingers outstretched, as if mingling with the wet sand, from which, emanates, through damp and coarseness (as textural values) its inexorable meaning.

It is all luminous pain, which unfolds in rhythm, coordinated with images of rare precision and craftsmanship. I saw and weighed it all, I believe, with considerable ease, due to a certain affinity, if I may make so bold, which drew me in as if by the chains of blood and my ancestral roots on the steppes of my country. And that is precisely what is so extraordinary. South America, once an unknown and highly exotic quantity, stretches out to me this night, through the contrition of images and the so disturbing trap of a universal language.

For the artist to have been able to transmit what I have lived through (or, at least, unveil it), it must have taken form from events and put itself outside, like the very spectator himself, with his ambivalence of position, in which he is, at the same time, both actor and director. Such trance-like states are only possible in solitude. There is no one to cooperate. His touch will

penetrate the film and take over, in so far as he is able to overcome it and reach and impregnate this objective.

Thought arises from awareness of one's state. Then, beauty, or strength, is discovered, which does not only exist on a given plane, or rather, the layers of the human being himself. Denominations are always drawn to the need for order in wavering reason. It is in each recognition of the artist that things may attain, or reach, their own reality, or existence, quite beyond thought. In this case, in a picture, enlarged and unexpectedly displayed, there begins the process of this, the most unusual of languages. It will select and take over an angle of the universe and isolate it by the objective and throw into this confined space something of its own. In all eras (yesterday as today), conscious positions engrave the indelible on the rocky massif of the centuries.

Thus, this film makes its mark. I am quite sure that, twenty years hence, it will exude youth, being so full of structural cinema, as it does now, as I have just seen it. It is poetic and bitter at the same time, but now, bereft of its roots and dragged disconsolate into adulthood, as if it had never known its infancy.

Free Eyes in the Country of Repetition

Walter Salles

Sunday, 11 o'clock in the morning.

"If you'd be so kind, bring me my last coffee, son".

The clock now says 11.50 (although when it shows one minute more and then another, what it is really saying is 'one minute less, one minute less').

"Now I think I'll rest a while. If I don't wake up, don't fret".

The clock stops. It is twelve noon. And so expires Mário Peixoto, filmmaker, poet, the author of *Limite*, but not before writing the final scene – interior, day, a final scene that will be added to the innumerable legends, stories and myths that shroud the director of the most important Brazilian film ever made. Such are the legends that hover around Mário Peixoto that the film itself is so often overlooked.

Some say that it was Mário himself who encouraged this. But this opinion is derived from misunderstandings, and pure ignorance, from what has been written about him and his film. A good example of this is an article by a critic in the *Jornal do Brasil* who attributed the film to Humberto Mauro. Another is the journalist from the *Estado de São Paulo* who attributed the photography to musician Brutus Pedreira, when, in fact, *Limite* was shot by Edgar Brazil, the greatest photographer of Brazilian silent movies. *GloboVideo* decided to plaster a photograph all over the home-video which was not even from the film, while there are plenty of photographs available of the filming of *Limite*. As a footnote, the photograph is in fact from *Onde a terra acaba* (At Earth's End), a film of Mário's that was never fully completed. Even the presentation text from England's National Film Theatre, where *Limite* was shown says that the author was influenced by the surrealist films of Buñuel. As it happens, Mário did not care for *Le Chien Andalou*, while he did admire German expressionism and the Soviet films of the 1920s.

Therefore, there are, two distinct ways of looking at Mário Peixoto and his work: one that adds weight to the myth in its various versions, using it as a prop to lament what was never made (yet another cultural figure assassinated in Brazil etc.), or another which attempts to grasp the dimension of his legacy enshrined in this masterful film, *Limite* rescued quite

miraculously from oblivion and disintegration by the generosity of a young physics student. This student, at the age of 17, was amazed at what he saw and promptly proceeded to restore the film with almost religious zeal. His name was Saulo Pereira de Mello.

I personally favour the second path and so I propose that Mário Peixoto was a unique author who composed vast and unique work and, as far as I am concerned, that is enough. As is often the case throughout history, a very few brilliant works by a very few are more relevant than the spewing of innumerable mediocrities by their contemporaries. In keeping with this idea, one cannot overlook Lampedusa, an artist as elegant as Mário, who only produced *Il Gattopardo*, perhaps one of the most beautiful Italian novels of this century, and Laurence Sterne, who also only wrote a single book, *Tristram Shandy*, which led to an entire literature of subjectivity, carrying in its wake Joyce, Svevo, Virginia Woolf and Machado de Assis's *Memórias póstumas de Bras Cubas*. Neither can we overlook Xavier de Maistre and his extraordinary *A Journey around my Bedroom* or, for that matter, the fragments left by philosophers before Socrates, which gave birth to a whole new school of thinkers. Not to mention Walt Whitman, who spent his entire life rewriting the same book, *Leaves of Grass*, which turned out to be several books in one, or *Memórias de um Sargento de Milícias* (Memoirs of a Militia's Sergeant) by Manoel Antonio de Almeida. Even closer to home, Carlos Sussekind wrote but one novel, *Armadilha para Lamartine* (A Trap for Lamartine), and Raduan Nassar with the sparse pages of *Um copo de cólera* (A Glass of Anger) and *Lavoura arcaica* (Ancient Tillage), yet all with such sublime penmanship.

Like Lampedusa, Sterne or Whitman, Mário Peixoto began at the end. He made one god-given, unerring work that was of the essence. He brought the silent movie era to a close, while proposing another; that of films that were essentially poetic, not narrative, but even so, not lacking in meaning. Those who think that *Limite* is a formalistic film should remember that Mário Peixoto had hit upon a universal philosophical question from the very start, that of man, mindful of his finiteness, in conflict with the infinite universe around him. Mário, with amazing maturity for a boy barely beyond puberty, pinpointed one of the central concerns of western culture. As the film's guardian, Saulo Pereira de Mello, pointed out, "It is this cosmic dimension that makes *Limite* so Faustian, in so far as it tries to grasp the infinite, and not merely formalistic". It might be added here that Mário understood like few others the question of beauty, so different from the simple question of good framing, and, as a result, we are faced with the whole dimension of this incomparable work called *Limite*.

In the country of the soap-opera, a single work is not enough. We always yearn for more. We are so addicted to the aesthetics of repetition that we do not realize that this is very often

impossible. As far as Mário is concerned, I would venture to say that he had the good fortune to come across the ideal environment for his first film. It was made among friends, under the influence of the group that had taken him in when he arrived back from England, while still very young. There would have been no *Limite* had it not been for intellectuals like Eugenia and Alvaro Moreyra, in whose house Mário met up with Brutus Pedreira, who composed the music for the film. Raul Schnoor, one of the actors, also happened to be there. There would have been no *Limite* had it not been for the country estate belonging to Vítor Breves, Mário's uncle, the Mayor of Mangaratiba, also owner of the local power station, who supplied lodging, food and electrical energy for the tiny film crew. "It was fabulous... We had such a good time!", Mário used to say. Anyone who has ever been through any kind of a film shoot knows how nigh impossible this is! Mário, a man of art with "free eyes" (to quote Oswaldo de Andrade) was not only a zealous aesthete, but also a man of uncommon integrity and radicalism. He realized that he was unlikely to find the same environment to shoot the beginning of *Onde a terra acaba*. Subjected to the whims of a star-struck Carmem Santos and hamstrung by a more commercially oriented cinema, he preferred to back out in the middle. As Wenders's biography quotes, "Eyes are not for sale". This could not apply more than in Mário Peixoto's case.

The demise of the original collaborators in *Limite* and, most especially that of Edgar Brazil in 1952, sealed the fate of the second film. Those who, throughout the years, tried to help Mário to make *A alma segundo Salustre* (The Soul according to Salustre) know this more than most. They were constantly faced with insurmountable hurdles, not the least being filming Brigitte Bardot in the role of Timbo.

I once again venture to say that, for Mário, the most important thing was *Limite*. I would love to see his masterpiece fully recognized and suspended in time, with no before or after. And so we come to the most important point, which is to understand why *Limite*, the film that heralded modernity in Brazilian films, left no successors – only confessed admirers – unlike the 1922 *Week of Modern Art*, which profoundly modified art, poetry and literature. Both the three days of the *Week of Modern Art* and the first showing of *Limite* were snubbed by critics at the time. Yet the movement led by Mário and Oswaldo de Andrade had such momentum that, after the Week, nothing would ever be the same again. This was not to be the lot of Mário, the solitary creator. When *Limite* was shown, we were revelling in cinematographic parnassianism and have continued to do so for many a long year. Meanwhile, Mário, way beyond his time and alien to the films that have been made and are still being made in Brazil, the true connoisseur *par excellence* of beauty and master of the cinema of poetry and

wholehearted invention, ended up being literally isolated, both artistically and physically, in his refuge in *Ilha Grande*.

Many years have since passed. Quite out of the blue, at the end of the 80s, there was some indication that the essentially non-narrative cinema of poetry invented by Mário was becoming a real possibility. In *Boy Meets Girl*, Leos Carax's first film, a man holds a pair of scissors that becomes a sheet of newspaper, exactly as in *Limite*. Similarly, the film goes through a series of states, rather than a linear narrative. Could this be a *clin d'oeil*, a wink at Mário Peixoto? The two subsequent films by Carax also sought out this poetic quality so akin to Mário, in so far as Carax belongs to a different era in which aesthetic culture predominates over demands for truth or weight of motives.

Likewise, the very theme of *Limite*, the question of the Roman *limes* and the frontiers between men and countries, has become ever more contemporary. Greek filmmaker, Theo Angelopolous, has just made a beautiful film on this very subject, *O passo suspenso da cegonha*, with Marcelo Mastroianni and Jeanne Moreau.

It is most likely that the old master and creator was years ahead of his time. One fact, however, is undeniable. We have no Rembrandts in Brazil. Orson Welles, never managed to make a film here. Many of our best musicians and poets left before their time. Yet we still have *Limite*, the masterpiece, and we had a visionary filmmaker called Mário Peixoto and of that, we should be very and justifiably proud.

Limite

Saulo Pereira de Mello

Merkur.

*Elender! Deinen Göttern das,
Den Unendlichen?*

Prometheus.

*Göttern? Ich bin kein Gott
Und bilde mir so viel ein als einer.
Unendlich? - Allmächtig? -
Was könnt ihr?
Könnt ihr den weiten Raum
Des Himmels und der Erde
Mir ballen in meine Faust?
Vermögt ihr mich zu scheiden
Von mir selbst?
Vermögt ihr mich auszudehnen,
Zu erweitern zu einer Welt?*

Merkur:

Das Schicksal

Mercury:

*Wretch! Is it thus that thou dost treat thy gods?
The eternal ones?*

Prometheus:

*The gods? I am no god.
Yet I believe myself as worthy as any.
Eternal? All-powerful?
What can ye do?
The vast extent
Of the heavens and earth
Confine within my clenched fist?
Do ye have the power to wrench me asunder from
myself?
To make me grow greater
And as vast as the world?*

Mercury:

Fate!

I.

Limite, a Brazilian film by Mário Peixoto, is a surprising and most uncommon film. It is uncommon in the history of silent movies in that, without it, this history would remain - incomplete. It is surprising in that, much to the contrary, as far as the history of Brazilian cinema is concerned, without it, it would be – complete.

Limite is more closely related to world cinema than it is to Brazilian silent movies, although it is a Brazilian film of universal dimensions as regards its images and quite peculiar concreteness, which are wholeheartedly Brazilian, as, indeed, are the faces and clothing, the façades and fences, the skies, the mountains and wetlands, the sea and water craft and the fishermen and their nets and, above all, the light and the dazzling white sky. All this is Brazil but this is not what makes *Limite* a great film: universal in spite of its essentially Brazilian images. On the other hand, its theme is universal in its concreteness. It has no homeland: the essential limitation of the human condition and the fundamental uselessness of human deeds, and what result of those both themes indisguishably interwoven: despair and frustration; defeat and flight - and death, *Limite's* sub-themes unveil, to us, rather than recounting through a storyline, what truly is *Man's Fate*.

The film was made in a country, under circumstances that verged on the barely adequate, where cinema, indigent artistically and expressively, was practically inexistent and that, in itself, makes the feat all the more amazing. *Limite* is a film of rare and meticulous precision, down to the minutest detail. It is of the highest artistic and expressive refinement. It uses the formative means of camera so masterfully and with such self-assurance that it looks, for all the world, like a masterpiece from the end of an era, the swansong of a style, an art that had reached its apogee – a childless film that left no bequest, either in Brazil or elsewhere. It is terminal, the finishing touch, the conclusive. In short, it seems to contain within it all of the great silent films ever made. It also has a strong trace of tragedy, not only because of its theme, but also because of its form, in so far as it is, tragically, the last of its breed.

Limite is a strange and beautiful film, as beautiful as *Earth* and as strange as *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*. And it is as tragic as both. Watching *Limite* in the ritual darkness of a projection room, on the cinema screen (and not on television!), is a unique and

heartrending experience. From the very first scene, we are startled by a certain uneasiness, which grows imperceptibly, until it casts us ashore, stranded, at the tragic and inevitable outcome. *Limite* has one quality that, otherwise, only *City of Lights*, *Man of Aran* and *Mother* possess. Each time we see them, it is as if we were seeing them for the first time. *Limite* has one rare characteristic shared by all true works of art: that of being eternally new, modern and up-to-date.

II.

Limite has a prologue; a key initial sequence; a tragic situation unfolded by this sequence; a theme, which becomes clear in the situation; three “stories” developed from these themes, with rhythmic returns to the situation and a climax, a dénouement and an epilogue.

The prologue is a sequence outside the main body of the film. It is built around the fundamental image of *Limite* in an elementary, proto-image from which all others in the film are born. It is the face of a woman, facing the camera, looking straight into the lens as if into infinite space, beyond the camera and beyond the image. Two male arms embrace her, with handcuffed wrists in the foreground. He who limits is, in turn, limited. The succession of images that makes up *Limite* is a metamorphosis of this proto-image, the *Allegorie* (in the sense of Goethe) of the theme, which will, in the end, metamorphose into *Symbol* (also as in Goethe), really a set of allegories. The theme presented in the prologue by the proto-image is both of the essential human limitation and the uselessness of action. It is a dual theme, like two sides of the same coin. From this theme will flow, in continual metamorphoses, thirst for the infinite and then the ensuing rage against the tragic clash between this thirst and the essential limitation imposed upon the desire for freedom of action and the ineffectiveness of this action. The tragic consequences of this clash are defeat and frustration, despair and flight – and death – the underlying themes of *Limits*.

The initial sequence reveals the situation and the characters: three victims of a shipwreck, two women and one man, adrift in a boat upon the ocean. They each recount their stories. The boat and the castaways are the “reality” of the film. What happens, both to them and around them, happens in “real time”. They, in fact, neither recount nor “narrate” their “stories”. They recall the moments in their lives which drove them to flee – flight expressed by the wheels of a train and endless trudging along endless paths. These “stories”, which are not really stories, constitute the characters’ “pasts” and take

place within them. This sequence is the key to *Limite*. Its basic theme takes form in concrete images of the film reality: the boat – rhythm, cadence, formal and technical style, image conception, direction and "atmosphere", in the sense of the German term *Stimmung*.

In the film's real time, the framing is minimalist and austere graphic. The edges of the boat, the sea and the line of the horizon are almost always visible. The camera mostly pans slowly and simply, but for minimal periods, almost to the point of being redirections. They seem the "landscape of a schizophrenic". The atmosphere already heralds the onslaught of tragedy, emanating from death, in the oncoming, looming storm, sensed by the ominous rocking of the boat and the wind-tossed hair. Hair is soon to become all-significant in the film. Tousled hair reflects the disordered lives of the castaways, barely disguised behind inexpressive, veiled, vanquished and resigned faces. Tragedy reigns in this boat over its threadbare occupants, whom we now see for the first time. The horizon, the rim of the boat, the characters' blank expressions, derived of all hope, bear witness to their tragic and woeful helplessness. Their stony faces, barely seen behind the wisps of hair, belie the peculiar calm that is born of hopelessness and overcast by the realisation of the limits that make all resistance futile. The dual theme, the two-sided theme of *Limite* can thus be seen in the faces of the characters, encased by the boat, as if in a coffin, any gesture of resistance a struggle against the infinite universe, which looms on the line of the horizon and closes in around the gunwales of the boat, afloat on an inert sea under a white and indifferent sky. The characters, whose faces personify the tragic theme of the film, have neither names nor identities. They are as one. They are little more than the determination of human beings hemmed in by the limits of their own finite existences, symbolised by the confines of the boat. And it is there in the boat, that the tragedy of *Limite* unfurls; it is there that remain the tragic present awaiting an even more terrible future; and it is to the boat that the characters, ever in motion, converge. This is the basis upon which the "stories" that they "tell each other" unfold to us the extent of the tragedy of these lives that are the very essence of human existence itself, shown through identity-less, yet quite personal interpretations.

"Stories" is written between inverted commas, because they are not, strictly speaking, stories as such. They are not real, in so far as the only reality in *Limite* is the boat and what takes place in it, which correspond to the *present time* of the film. That present time is feebly structured as narratives and tell what happens in the boat, in the film reality. The "stories", however, are *not* real, but take place within the *minds* of the

castaways. They are not structured as narratives, but are only organised in accordance with the *theme*. They are like memories that seem to follow upon each other in a random fashion and are never recounted by the castaways, but muttered (or whispered), as they turn in upon themselves and away from the others. It is for this very reason that the camera and its angles vary from those showing the boat, although the overall style is maintained throughout and the theme itself is reiterated again and again. The editing of *Limite* is an organic editing of past and present, yet the result, as a whole, is non-narrative. The images and succession of “stories”, all of which are concrete and personalised, act, or interact, collide or are completed by, or with, images and the successive images of the boat, which are, of themselves, concrete and personalised, so that a “third” concrete sense is made to appear, both within and around, which is unique and universal. Eisenstein would approve it. The image and the experience of the two-sided theme is universal and unveils, through the metamorphosis of the images in the film, the *Symbol* (in the sense used by Goethe) of *Limite*, which is a clear exposé of its *Idee*, which we finally glimpse in the *Geistesaugen*, “the eyes of the spirit”, still within the spirit of Goethe and his protean imagery (the woman and the irons), which once again appears when it is an *Allegorie* of themes, and therefore, personalised, and reappears at the end of the film, when it is metamorphosed into *Symbol* – the Universal, the *Idee*, idea, of the theme. We do not only see, but also *live* the theme. It is his *Erlebnis*.

Practically the whole of Mário Peixoto’s creative purpose is revealed to us in the shots of hair, or heads, which reveal the “entrances” and “exits” into and out of the head (and mind) of the character, in other words, the innermost being of the character. The camera comes and goes through the innermost minds of the characters via their hair. It is an image of multiple meanings. Hair blows over their faces, disclosing the castaways’ bewilderment and anguish, while the wind heralds by their images a very real storm, imminent catastrophe and, in the end, death and the annihilation of consciousness. It is not quite death that terrifies them but the annihilation of conscience, the dissolving of the ego. It is not physical or animal death but metaphysical death, the death of the soul that terrifies them. Camera, editing and direction are tightly interwoven as the prime resources of any silent film.

The only character, whose hair remains meticulously in place in spite of the wind, which rumples Raul’s, is the only one whose mind is empty. It is the man from the cemetery, or Mário Peixoto himself, who is found sitting on the grave of the wife of

Man Number 1 – Raul. Here, Mário himself appears as actor and, as far as acting in the film is concerned, he overacts in his ironic smiles and the somewhat affected manner with which he drops the wedding ring into his waistcoat pocket, all of which shows that he will not be in the boat. Even the anger with which he speaks (the only subtitles in the film) is gross, personal and indignant. He will not be in the boat. He cannot sense the ominous wind that tries in vain to ruffle his scrupulously trimmed “hairdo” and he will not be “engulfed” by the sea and the storm and neither will he be annihilated. He is not to die – yet.

The three “stories” are the core of the film. All of them are “stories” of deceit, frustration, defeat and flight, decadence, death and despair, of swimming against the current, struggles against tethers, enclosures and limits imposed upon man’s infinite yearning for freedom. They express, amplify and develop the theme in a technical and formal style that is outlined in the initial sequence. But that is only an outline. Camera style changes. And quite considerably! The image seems on the verge of exploding outside the frame. The camera is now extremely mobile. All the images of these “stories”, all with highly tenuous and fragile narrative threads and framings with totally different variations in take, movement and editing, are still metamorphoses of the images in the prologue. They quite markedly bear multiple meanings and are more concerned with this multiplicity of meanings than with any story line, in the conventional sense of the word, and so, construct a story in a more classical sense. Its significance, its rhythm, the takes, the behaviour of the actors and the angles are far more determined by this intent on multiple meanings than on any interest in the purely narrative. *Limite* does not tell a story, in the conventional sense, or, at least, only to a limited extent. What it actually does is emphasize and re-enforce, affirm and reaffirm and reiterate obsessively the protean images and the bifronted theme. However, it is not mere repetition. It restates, re-stresses and reiterates the allegory of limitation in successive, highly elaborated and metamorphic images. It metamorphoses doors, windows, railings, the horizon, walls, fences, ruins and swamps and, in doing so, alters their meanings. They are no longer mere (closed) doors, (closing) windows, horizon, walls, fences, ruins and swamps, but things that limit, enclose, cloister and hem in. Always there stands an obstacle between the camera and the scene observed, such as the spokes of a cartwheel, trees, the rudder and the propeller. The image is always closed in, whether it is of a human being, or of the pointlessness of any activity. Eating is pointless. Rowing is pointless. The cigarette simply will not light. Raul’s flower is

pointless. Walking is pointless. The cigarette holder is pointless. It does not even have a cigarette in it. And finally, at the end of the film, Taciana's hands beneath her body represent *par excellence* the uselessness of bothering to fight for anything in the boat, because storm and death will come and life will extinguish itself "not with a cry, but with a whimper".

As we have seen, the stories of these memories, organised around the intention of metamorphosis and of the revelation of the *Symbol* of limitation and also of the double-sided theme, distance themselves from the personal and the "real" to beyond the image (particular) towards a non-particular image, which draws itself into itself and tends to be one unique experience – our *Geistesaugen*, or "the eyes of the spirit", which will be prised open by the *Resultat* of this new experience, which is the metamorphosis of them all, which lead back to the *Symbol*, beyond the image – the private, personal images that are nothing more than the *summa* of the singular experiences picked up by the body's eyes, *Augen des Leibes* which organise themselves, each time in a longer form around with ever-greater complexity and concentration. Olga's "story" is simpler, shorter and far less complicated, whereas Raul's is longer and more elaborated. Taciana's story is more elaborated than Olga's, and less than Raul's. There is a *crescendo* in the complexity of the stories. Yet, in them both, we see, with growing complexity, the same reiteration of enclosure, prison, limit and pointlessness, which fires flight and the obsessive walking and all the images in continual metamorphosis, lead to the boat – and to the reality of this cosmic tragedy. The reality of the boat becomes ever more tragic and more ominous with each "story" – in fact, with each series of apparently disconnected memories. The oncoming catastrophe looms larger and larger. Misery bears down as conformity takes over. Everything in the film converges on the boat, where serene resignation is permeated with a feeling of imminent doom. The rhythm, the feeling of hopelessness and the tragic fate of the characters derive from the very limitations of existence. They are overcome by an increasing awareness of their own inutility, boxed in a situation in which any action is pointless, in the tragic confines of the boat, which soon becomes their limited microcosmos, which, with each passing moment, grows more suffocating and filled with despair and the anticipation of imminent death. Now we see that the boat itself has taken on the form of a coffin. At every turn of the boat, everything worsens and heightens despair and tragedy. We sense that the outcome is nigh. And so, the metamorphoses of reality (the boat) and memories (the "stories") fuse into one harmonious whole and become, in the end, a single flow, a

single metamorphosis, which is the film, in which the dynamic accumulation of the double-sided theme – limitation and pointlessness – is unified to create, for us, the *Symbol* of the bifronted theme, which is that of the proto-image, and displays for the “happy eyes” of our bodies and spirits, the *Idee* (still in the Goethian sense) of *Limite*, the film by Mário Peixoto. And in this lies the grandeur of *Limite* as a film and a work of art. It would appear to be little more than a collectanea of obvious and somewhat pretentious signals and symbols, were it not for the way in which they were filmed – direction – and the way in which they are structured – edition. It is a master’s touch that makes *Limite* what it is.

The film reaches its climax almost at the end of Raul’s “story”, which is the longest and most carefully thought-out of all three. The structure of the account of these memories, perhaps more muttered than actually spoken, is the most detailed and the most original. It draws on the whole process which the spectators have undergone in the film. Limitation and enclosure, uselessness and the absence of any meaning to life are already indelibly engraved on our minds – and on the film. Static long shots and short alternate with, darting shots, with a volley of close-ups (17 shots) on Raul’s anguish-stricken face as he utters a cry of desperation after hurling himself forwards. The climax is a long “pan” over the sky, the arch over the world, the extraordinary and circular movement of the camera following the celestial meridian. The camera moves up from Raul’s mud-spattered foot, as he stumbles on in despair, racing from his own cruelly limited destiny, to reveal the desolate landscape and roam over a white sky, so white that it seems like an oppressive, stifling dome, moving in saturated meridian circles until, at last, it moves down once again to the landscape and to Raul’s hand, imbedded like a claw in the sand. This quintessentially dynamic image which only attains full meaning when interwoven in a succession of images, to which it is organically linked, is totally at odds with the spatial and plastic nature of the image from which it is derived and of which it is also the final metamorphosis. It is the final, masterful apex, the summit that caps this allegorical image of the woman’s face and the man’s handcuffed hands. It is the metamorphosis of allegory into symbol, of static image into dynamic image, of the isolated image, complete in itself, into images linked viscerally to all those that have gone by. It is at this point that we are run through by all the profoundest, piercing, emotionally overwhelming significance and pathos of the film. We come face to face with the full understanding of the barest, most intense and bewildering, moving and disturbing emotion and realisation of our own basic and most tragic limitations. We then

become aware that we are prisoners of our own finite and unsatisfactory corporeality. We see with horrific clarity, through the hand clawing the sand, the defeated expression of our yearning for the infinite, a cosmic and universal defeat that fills the universe with its clamour and anguish. The limitless sky is nothing more than an enclosing dome, a limit that the hand of man can never reach – “*Des Himmels und der Erde / Mir ballen in meine Faust?*” The fusion of the hand with the grave, when the dramatic scene between Mário and Raul takes place that provokes his headlong flight, is symbolic. It evokes the presence of death, which the succession of crosses only serves to emphasize. It evokes the funereal destiny of the landscape and of the film, of the universe and the pointlessness of flight. Eventually, we will return to the boat and the heartfelt premonition of desolation and misery, over which hangs imminent disaster.

The dénouement is the storm, which bears down as a result of the ever-increasing sense of imminent disaster that hangs over the boat, which, at every turn, becomes inevitable and fatal. The storm scene which follows, formally and thematically, brings the film to a close; thematically, in so far as it provokes the so long-awaited and, therefore, inevitable outcome and formally, in so far as the rapidly edited volley of shots, which leads to a crescendo, breaks asunder the protracted rhythm and cadence that had only served, until this point, to increase the sense of anxiety.

One of the basic characteristics of *Limite* is its total intermeshing of sense and form. It is through editing that the theme and the whole visual process converge on the storm. After the great meridian panoramic, which is the climax of the film, the situation in the boat becomes unbearable. Everything hangs in mid air. Everything has been lived through and everything has been done. All that remains, now expected almost impatiently, is the dénouement, the only solution to what has no solution, which is death in the storm. This is clearly realised. It has been expected throughout the film as a disaster waiting to happen and is heralded in the wind that incessantly blows throughout all the “stories”. The wind whistles through the grass, it does not allow Raul to light his cigarette, it ruffles hair, billows through clothes, slams doors and now, at the end, it shows itself in all its fury and grandeur. It comes over the line of the horizon, a symbol of limitation and hopelessness, and, through death, brings a solution to the situation, through rhythm and editing.

The epilogue comes with the end of the storm and a return to serenity and calm. Two of the castaways are dead. The third, Olga, the most steadfast, is to die shortly afterwards. The deaths of the first two are real. Raul jumps overboard to rescue the barrel, never to

return. Taciana disappears during the storm as the boat is ripped apart. But Olga dies symbolically, clinging to a piece of driftwood. She disappears in “lap dissolve”. In actual fact, Olga dissolves into a “sea of fire”, as Mário Peixoto described sun gleams on seawater, from the beginning, in the prologue sequence. And the sea goes on and on and on, empty and unruffled. When the protean imagery returns, it is no longer an *Allegorie*, but a *Symbol*. It is particular, yet, in it, is seen the Universal. We do not only understand the image. We “live” it: *Erlebnis*. But this calm is a slow, sad lament on human defeat and pointlessness.

Olga, clutching a piece of driftwood, slowly fades into the glittering sea. The singular return of the protean imagery and the allegory of limitation reflected in these sad, realistic images, which reappear with tragic significance, at last unveil for all to see the true meaning of the film. We now know, we now feel, with the deepest sense of tragedy, far beyond reason, what *Limite* is: *Man’s Fate*.

Mário Peixoto's Revelation

Carlos Augusto Calil

Limite, the extraordinary silent film that Mário Peixoto made in 1930-31, at the age of 22, would come to be transformed into the greatest myth of Brazilian Cinema. The laborious construction of this myth had all the usual ingredients: formal audacity, anachronism, little screening, megalomania and, of course, a capacity to rouse passions. Within this domain, with connivance from its creator that apparently consisted only of indifference, a veritable cult was established around *Limite*, in which the principal high priests were Otávio de Faria and Plínio Sússekkind Rocha. The aura of a mysterious film that could arouse aesthetic pleasure only among initiates was maintained for a long time through the rites of this Masonic brotherhood of intellectuals who were disappointed with the way that cinema was heading, with its vulgarisation through the introduction of sound.

Mário Peixoto had hardly concluded *Limite* when he embarked on another project, “Onde a terra acaba”, while showing a lack of interest in how his first work would fare. Ademar Gonzaga, the ambitious critic who ended up founding the mass-production film studio *Cinédia*, took on the task of distributing *Limite* but ran up against the indifference of the film screeners, who were concerned about sounding out the desires of cinemagoers, who at that time had already been won over by the novelty that had come in from abroad: the talking pictures.

Thus, *Limite* found itself deprived of the prospect of finding its audience, which even though not numerous, would have given the film the historical perspective that it feels the lack of, even today. *Limite* was therefore labelled as an “unusual” and “difficult” film that would “require an education in the domains of both cinema and poetics”. It was a film without “descendants”, with remote kinship with celebrated works of the silent era: *Zemlya*, *Que viva México!*, *The General Line* and *Man of Aran*. *Limite* was not backed by previous theory; “in itself” it formed its own “theory” (Mello 1996: 99). The interpreters of *Limite* – Otávio, Plínio and Saulo Pereira de Mello, the devoted disciple – saw it as an isolated phenomenon within Brazilian culture, which it transcends to become a unique national contribution to a worldwide forum.

The contribution from Saulo Pereira de Mello is irreplaceable. The inheritor of the passion for *Limite*, he has dedicated his intellectual life to it, through time taken out

from the physics and mathematics classes given at the university, the work from which he earned his living. As the person responsible for the restoration of the film, which he concluded in 1977, Saulo had innumerable meetings with Mário Peixoto over a period of more than twenty years, which he kept scrupulous records of, not to mention the correspondence they exchanged. After Mário's death, Saulo inherited his collection of documents. Through his generosity, he created the *Mário Peixoto Archive*, where he gathered together manuscripts, interviews, testimonies, clippings, books and magazines etc: material catalogued by Saulo himself to expand the roll of beneficiaries from this work, which bears the hallmark of an obsession.

Saulo took advantage of an opportunity in 1997 to release, through the publishers *Rocco*, in their *Artemídia* collection, a book of essays about *Limite* that brought together, condensed and completed previous studies. He also released three works by Mário Peixoto through the publishers Sette Letras: the original "scenario" (a word used to describe the screenplay in the silent cinema) for *Limite* and new editions of the book of poetry *Mundéu* and the novel *O inútil de cada um*. The film is from 1930-31; the book of poetry, from 1931; and the novel, from 1935. Over a short period of five years, Mário Peixoto undertook the preparations to be our first multimedia artist. However, when he died in 1992, he was still practically unpublished. Neither the film nor the books had gained any minimally worthwhile distribution. And it was only among the specialists that their author did not go unnoticed.

If *Limite* drew the attention of the members of the Chaplin Club, *Mundéu* drew from Mário de Andrade a vibrant review in which he (a poet doubling as a critic) admired this young author's "startling naturalness". He recognised three poems in the book as "legitimate masterpieces". "These are poems that were born complete, explosions with a unity that sometimes reaches excellence, in which the plastic movement of notions and images is incomparable within our contemporaneous poetry" (Andrade 1931). A judgement like this, which was released without malice, could also be perfectly adapted to *Limite*; Mário de Andrade was unaware of the film's existence. He did not mention it in the letter he sent to Augusto Meyer: "You ask me who this poet Mário Peixoto is. He is an ugly, skinny little fellow from Rio de Janeiro, with a dandified appearance. Manuel Bandeira says that I was presented to him once in Álvaro Moreyra's house [...] I can't remember anything about him at all, but the book is excellent and there are three poems in it that I think are first-rate. I've not seen the book on sale anywhere..." (Cf. Fernandes 1968: 98).

When *Mundéu* is read today by someone who is already familiar with *Limite*, attention is drawn to the persistence of certain themes (fatality and resignation to life) and to certain images that recur in Mário Peixoto's work (eyes that torment), culminating with the insinuation of love that cannot be realised without transgressing the rules internalised by the lyrical ego. But *Mundéu* is also distinguished by the dominance of the rhythm imprinted on the poems – faster or more measured – and especially by the determining presence of nature. Likewise, awareness of rhythm and the acute perception of nature are decisive elements in the higher accomplishment of *Limite*.

In Saulo's study, he properly observes that Mário Peixoto was a poet before being a narrator. *Limite* indeed has the capacity to dislocate images of nature from supposed neutrality to the field of subjectivity. Description of the natural phenomena is thus replaced by their formal construction, in which the autonomy of the lyrical camera predominates, moving with disconcerting freedom because it has already reached the level of a character.

Reading the original “scenario” of *Limite* adds a new element to the question of the narrator's subjectivity. The degree of prior development of this resource and the level of visualisation already present in the idea for *Limite* are unknown. One of the most beautiful and elaborate scenes in this film, in which the camera shows us the second woman's walk as she looks for the road to seek refuge in the solitude of the cliffs, is composed of circular movements, coming close to her and withdrawing, around her body without showing her face. At a certain moment, the camera abandons the character and heads for a wooden fence beside the road. Close to the fence, it reveals to us an extremely delicate flower that is given value through the backlit image. This scene, which seemed to have been conceived by free inspiration during the heat of the filming, is perfectly foreseen in the published “scenario”, in which it bears the number [82] (Peixoto 1996: 136).

In *O inútil de cada um*, Mário Peixoto does away with cinematographic techniques, but the result is inferior. It is a psychological novel about the hypersensitivity of the observer, who moves in an aristocratic environment, and it has an obvious affiliation with Proust, as well as making use of the literary device of disjointed time that was made famous by Sterne. “And from the angle of the cushion that I'm reclining on, I analyse the smallest reactions in it. It's these fractions that yield years, made use of in exact measure”. “I take possession of my gestures with the precision of a meticulous person, and from these I dose my intimate expansions” (Peixoto 1997: 136). This

narrator who meticulously undertakes the dissection of his feelings does not succeed in engaging with reader, either because he is unable to communicate an impression of sincerity (it is a *roman à clef*), without which it is impossible to identify with him, or because he is lost in scenes that unfold successively, thus diluting the search for an emotion that would unite the narrator with his reader. In this novel of sentimental education, the writing is perfected through the descriptions – elaborated in accordance with an efficient cinematographic style – in which the pen-camera puts the reader at rest from the nuances of the psychological being. “Six in the winter, seven thirty in the summer; the time of crowded teahouses, overflowing pavements, tram klaxons and car horns... Tired faces, unconsciously immobilised in an expression of dismay, or faces recently made up, passing by inside long cars, more silent than the shadows... They don’t even look like people!...” (Peixoto 1997: 117).

Saulo saw in *Limite* the human drama, of universal origin, which was developed in a Brazilian environment in which the decadent landscape of a young land enlarges it. “It is not a fictional film; it is a documentary about man!...” (Mello 1996: 48). In this, indifferent nature wins, allied with time, which implacably subjects the paltry human condition to the laws of the cosmos. It is no use reacting...

Mário Peixoto’s complete work, revealed through the dedication of Saulo Pereira de Mello, is almost monothematic: it transmits an abdication from the adult world (from its conventions and repression). In a rite of passage that is not consummated, its young author, gifted with a precocious artistic maturity, decrees the death of desire, the “I wanted to help Cesar, but I could not”, with which he concludes his *O inútil de cada um*. A youthful work that speaks to the heart of young people.

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The counter cinema of Mário Peixoto: *Limite* in the context of world film

William M. Drew

When *Limite* was first shown to the public at the Cinema Capitólio in Rio de Janeiro on May 17, 1931, just six days after the Berlin premiere of Fritz Lang's *M* had given the world a powerful new work in the rapidly evolving medium of sound film, Mário Peixoto's film broke fresh ground in the cinema through the use of images alone, creating a new language filled with poetic and philosophic insights to relate a complex narrative. Part of a wave of silent film production that continued to flourish in the non-Western world in the 1930s counterbalancing the talkies now prevailing in Hollywood and European cinema, *Limite*, in striking contrast to Lang's German classic, failed to receive commercial distribution in its own day. Although it was destined to be the only film completed by Peixoto, *Limite* has been increasingly recognized as a unique masterpiece of world cinema, its artistic triumph revelatory of an aesthetic sensibility of what has been termed counter cinema reshaping filmic language in defiance of the dominant trends in the international film industry.

While clearly the product of Mário Peixoto's individual genius, *Limite* also benefited from several intertwined tendencies that stood in opposition to formulaic approaches to cinematic creation. First of all, in Brazil, as was common throughout Latin America, filmmaking prior to the arrival of sound favoured individual creators employing artisanal methods in contradistinction to the large studio structures that had arisen elsewhere in the world for the production of silent cinema. Secondly, the delay in Brazil of transitioning to the new technology of sound, as with other countries outside the Western industrial orbit, ensured several more years of experimentation with the silent cinema. Third, the international avant-garde movement sweeping the arts in the 1920s inspired Peixoto to adapt some of its concepts countering conventional forms of exposition to his own work. Finally, the director was shaped by the unique aspects of his own national culture, a *zeitgeist* that had led to a fresh wave of creativity in the Brazilian silent cinema.

Although *Limite* brought to a Brazilian context new cinematic techniques that had been developed by European filmmakers, the manner of its creation was characteristic of

silent film production throughout Latin America. A group of friends enthusiastic for the new art would pool their resources and, after obtaining the necessary financing, would boldly plunge ahead to realize their dreams on celluloid. Lacking large studios and big budgets, early Latin American filmmakers concentrated heavily on the use of natural locations while casting was drawn from whatever theatrical and cinematic talent was available and non-professionals including friends, relatives and local residents.

Dispersed across the region with many small companies set up in provincial cities, this seemingly casual yet, in reality, highly dedicated and disciplined method produced a number of quality works, often enlisting as filmmakers men distinguished as intellectuals and masters of the traditional arts. For example, the celebrated Argentine author, journalist, and political figure, Dr. Alcides Greca, directed *El Ultimo Malón*, a dramatic depiction of the conflict between the Mocovi Indians and the whites shot in 1917 in his hometown of San Javier. Equally impressive, the Chilean feature, *El Húsar de la Muerte* (1925), an epic portrayal of the early 19th century revolt of national hero Manuel Rodríguez against Spanish rule, was directed by a talented poet and novelist, Pedro Sienna. In Bolivia, José María Velasco Maidana, later to become a major composer and conductor, directed such silent films as *Wara Wara* (1930), a moving love story set in the final days of the Inca Empire that included among its cast and crew some of the country's leading cultural figures. In keeping with this tradition, Mário Peixoto, when embarking upon *Limite*, which evolved in part from his close association with artists and intellectuals in Rio de Janeiro, took on the burden of financing the film himself and shot on location far from a studio, much of it near his uncle's farm in Mangaratiba (Couselo & Burns 1975: 211-30; Chornik; Vargas).

Early Latin American filmmakers, including Peixoto, were often plagued by the lack of distribution networks capable of presenting the films to a wider market. The few public showings of *Limite* in Rio in 1931 and 1932 were not without precedent in Latin American film history. Not only did most Latin American silents fail to receive international circulation, they rarely made it to screens even in other countries in the region. Velasco Maidana, for example, prepared just two prints of *Wara Wara* which he exhibited in four cities in Bolivia in the early 1930s. Indeed, some films were shown only in the towns where they had been made. Screenings of the 1927 Mexican silent feature, *El Puño de Hierro*, an unusual film about drug addiction with surrealistic elements directed by Gabriel García Moreno, were limited to the city of Orizaba in which it was produced (Drew & Vazquez Bernal 2003: 10-21).

Despite these disadvantages, the existing system provided a fecund environment for individual talents like Peixoto, artists who faced the possibility of no longer being able to freely experiment once talkies dominated, re-establishing Latin American cinema along industrial lines. In the context of the sound film, then being widely acknowledged as the mainstream of contemporary international cinema in the early 1930s, the production of *Limite* can be considered an act of cultural resistance, a very personal reassertion of the power of the moving image over that of the word, both aural and written, and this from a director who had also mastered the art of literature. For during the entire time that Peixoto conceived, filmed, and exhibited *Limite*, from the moment of his inspiration for the projected silent film in the summer of 1929 to the time of its premiere in the spring of 1931, it was apparent to most observers that the new medium of talking pictures was beginning to displace silent films, first in North America, then in Europe, with the rest of the world expected to follow soon afterwards. When Peixoto travelled to Europe in 1929 and saw the latest film productions in London and Paris, while he doubtless paid particular attention to the sophisticated European silent films that would influence his technique, he would also have had the opportunity to see the new sound features pouring in from the Hollywood studios. In comparing the sometimes clumsy and uneven pioneer talkies with the highly advanced silent cinema, a medium by then at its apogee, many cinephiles reacted with dismay at the possibility of a perfected, powerful art form suddenly being uprooted by the addition of synchronized dialogue. British cineaste Paul Rotha expressed this view when he condemned the talkies as “a degenerate and misguided attempt to destroy the real use of the film ... (that) cannot be accepted as coming within the true boundaries of the cinema” (Robinson 1968: 168-69).

Nevertheless, despite the objection of a number of critics, the production of sound moved apace. While Peixoto visited Europe, studios in Britain, France, and Germany were all rapidly being converted to accommodate the installation of the new equipment necessary for filming talking pictures. Back home in Brazil, the first sound film, a musical comedy entitled *Acabaram-se os Otários*, recorded on Vitaphone discs and directed by the prolific Luiz de Barros, was released in September of 1929.

When sound finally did supplant silent films in Brazil and throughout Latin America, it proved a challenge to the filmmakers. The increased costs involved in the transition not only caused innovative companies in such regional centers of Brazilian production as Cataguases and Recife to close down but also halted film production in Cuba,

Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Uruguay, often for a number of years. By 1935, silents had given way completely to talkies resulting in a film industry in Latin America with virtually all production in the region centered in large, well-equipped studios in the three great capitals of Mexico City, Buenos Aires, and Rio de Janeiro. While many outstanding films would issue from the new order, the centralization often worked against the more idiosyncratic artist and perhaps explains why, despite his many projects and scenarios over the years, Peixoto never again had the opportunity to direct a film.

At the dawn of the 1930s, however, his plans for a silent film were still well within the mainstream of Brazilian cinema, aided by the slowness with which the country converted to sound, despite the production of several early Brazilian talkies, all using Vitaphone discs. In common with other nations in Latin America as well as in the Middle East, Asia, and the Soviet Union – all of them either developing countries or latecomers to the pattern of industrialization established in North America and Western Europe – the majority of Brazilian films in the early 1930s were silent. In 1930, Adhemar Gonzaga, whose support for Peixoto's project was crucial to its realization, launched his ambitious new company in Rio, *Cinédia*, with the intent of establishing a major studio to rival those of Hollywood and Europe. But he began the venture with silent films made in the classic artisanal mode which had long been the hallmark of Latin American cinema. *Cinédia's* first release, Humberto Mauro's *Lábios Sem Beijos* (1930), was an exuberant silent romantic comedy in which the director incorporated into his characteristic style advanced concepts of rhythmic editing and unusual camera angles and movement first pioneered in European cinema to express an authentically native Brazilian celebration of the beauties of nature and the joys of love in Rio. Mauro's first experiment with sound, *Ganga Bruta* (1933), was still essentially silent, with short passages of speech appearing only intermittently while the majority of the action unfolded in mime or with written captions conveying the characters' dialogue in the manner of foreign-language subtitles (Gonzaga 1987).

It was only in 1933 that the first Brazilian features employing optical soundtracks were produced. Silent production in the country finally ceased, with the last major Brazilian silent film, Vittorio Capellaro's historical drama, *O Caçador de Diamantes*, being released in February of 1934.² As in other non-Western countries, the longstanding

² The last Soviet silents were released in 1935, while the majority of Chinese and Japanese films were silent until 1936.

preference of many Brazilian filmmakers and cineastes for silents may have reflected not only the technological divide but also a form of cultural autonomy and rebellion at a time when Hollywood and Europe, now wedded to sound, continued to monopolize international distribution. Although by the spring of 1930 when Peixoto had begun production on *Limite*, the possibilities of sound cinema as a dynamic, creative medium had been demonstrated in a number of notable American and European talkies, such as *Hallelujah!*, *Blackmail*, *The Love Parade*, *Sous les Toits de Paris*, *The Blue Angel*, and *All Quiet on the Western Front*, there were still those cineastes who felt there was much more to be gained from continuing the exploration of a purely visual art freed from the tyranny of words. Foremost among these was the film theorist Plinio Sússekind Rocha, a leading force among the Carioca cinematic intellectuals who had formed the *Chaplin Club*. Peixoto, a member of the group, gravitated toward their aesthetics; *Limite*, whose screening was sponsored by the club, would triumphantly vindicate their continued commitment to silent cinema.

Peixoto's response to the new medium of talkies would repudiate its very basis, creating an intricate narrative that was virtually titleless. Unhampered by the constraints and demands posed by the talking film of the West, Peixoto was able to experiment with the art of silent cinema in ever-new ways when he began filming on the Rio coast in May 1930. He conceived of his film as a visual symphony, a consummation of the possibilities to realize a new, powerful language akin to poetry but with images rather than words. The director said his film's "instinctive, rhythmic" structure was as "meticulously precise as invisible wheels of a clock," in which lengthy shots were surrounded and linked to shorter ones as in "a planetary system." He characterized it as a "desperate scream" expressing "luminous pain," projected as "a tuning fork, a pitch, a resonance of time itself, capturing the flow between past and present, object details and contingency" as though it had always "existed in the living and inanimate," or detached itself from them (see his complete article in this volume). Very different from, yet strangely akin to, Japanese master Yasujiro Ozu's contemporary silents with a minimalist style emphasizing contemplative images of "empty rooms, uninhabited landscapes, objects, rain dripping," Peixoto's cinematic elaborations, with their dazzling poetic display of objects and details in a non-linear narrative, were likewise a silent response to the conventions of the new Western sound cinema (Richie 1971: 65).

Peixoto never declared his allegiance to a particular artistic school, yet it has often been argued that his film is part of the avant-garde movement. While he did not necessarily

subscribe to any formal doctrines promulgated by the leaders of the avant-garde in European cinema, having very little affinity with the surrealists, such as Luis Buñuel, for example, he clearly shared the European avant-garde artists' passion for attaining a purity of filmic language. With a narrative whose very premise questions the idea of 20th century progress, Peixoto's vision again parallels avant-garde cinema which was a response to the confusion and atomization of modern life caused by industrialism, the collapse of values, and the mechanized mass slaughter of the First World War. Like many avant-garde filmmakers in the West, Peixoto developed his narrative through a flow of images comparable to music or the kind of allusion one finds in much modern poetry or stream-of-consciousness fiction. It is not known to what extent he may have specifically been inspired by masterpieces like Abel Gance's *La Roue*, F. W. Murnau's *The Last Laugh*, Sergei Eisenstein's *Potemkin*, and Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, films whose radical cinematic techniques had a profound influence on experimental cinema. Nor is it known whether he ever saw a classic example of the pure avant-garde style like Dimitri Kirsanoff's 1926 featurette, *Menilmontant*, which, minus any titles, relates the violent yet tender story of two sisters in a poor section of Paris, using a variety of impressionistic film techniques that breached the traditional methods of screen narrative. But since he spent time in England and France before he made *Limite*, he undoubtedly assimilated techniques he saw in European films of the 1920s.

Peixoto's indebtedness to European cinema has touched off a debate over the extent to which his film was derivative of foreign models rather than a truly native work. In what would become a touchstone in this controversy, Glauber Rocha, a leading director and theorist of *Cinema Novo*, criticized *Limite* as the product of a decadent bourgeoisie more in tune with the European avant-garde than the culture of Brazil. In fact, of all the silent films from beyond the borders of Europe and North America, Peixoto's film shares the honour as the most stylistically radical with only one other work, *A Page of Madness* (*Kurutta Ippeiji*), directed in 1926 by Teinosuke Kinugasa. Like *Limite*, the Japanese film would not be shown outside its country of origin until the 1970s when it won belated international recognition. A comparison between the two films is instructive to demonstrate how in both cases foreign influences were effectively absorbed to achieve works that seem steeped in their own cultures. In incorporating techniques associated with the European avant-garde and applying it to the concerns of very different societies, the two films parallel each other in their ability to transcend the

outside models with which they are linked to become the ultimate examples of counter cinema, countering even the Western avant-garde itself.

Much as the *Chaplin Club* influenced the creation of Peixoto's film, Kinugasa's *A Page of Madness* was born in the theorizing and interchange of ideas of the *Shinkankaku* School, or Neo-Perceptionists (also known as Neo-Sensationalists), a group of experimental writers, including celebrated novelist Yasunari Kawabata. Film historian Vlada Petric wrote that "historically Kinugasa made the first full-length feature film whose plot development is radically subverted, whilst its cinematic structure includes virtually every film device known at the time. These devices, moreover, are used not for their own sake but to convey complex psychological content without the aid of titles" (Petric 1983: 86-87). Based on a story written for the screen by Kawabata, *A Page of Madness* relates the experiences of an aged sailor who takes a job as a janitor in an insane asylum to be near his wife who has been committed to the institution after attempting to kill one of their children. Kinugasa's narrative is punctuated with hallucinatory and nightmarish images, often conveying a surreal quality, of the mental states of both the sane and deranged characters as well as images conveying their visions of restored mental health and happiness. The director uses a variety of impressionistic techniques, including rapid montage, swish pans, and elaborate optical effects (Cohen 1976: 47-51; Sharp).

In terms of style, technique, and thematics, there are some clear parallels between *A Page of Madness* and *Limite*. Both center around the plight of characters caught up in extremely stressful, constrained circumstances from which they are trying to escape and in both films, the attainment of happiness seems ever elusive. Both make elaborate use of symbolism to develop their themes. For example, the bars of the asylum in *A Page of Madness*, beyond representing the artificial barriers separating those deemed insane from the rest of society, can be viewed as the tenuous effort to impose distinctions between reality and fantasy. In *Limite*, the bars signify not only literal confinement but the broader sense of boundaries restricting man's efforts to control his destiny. The design of the bars is an integral part of the composition in many of Peixoto's shots—the prison where the first woman is incarcerated, the window of the factory where she labours at her sewing machine, the outside of the upstairs apartment where the second woman had lived with her now-estranged husband, the gate of the cemetery in which the wife of the man is buried. Both employ a wide range of advanced, cutting-edge cinematic techniques that include filmic devices to convey psychological states of mind.

In *A Page of Madness*, the workings of the human mind are pictured through superimposition and distortion of images. In *Limite*, Peixoto uses the moving camera to express the characters' inner states: as the second woman contemplates suicide, the camera tilts and rotates at extreme angles over the landscape; the man's emotional breakdown is emphasized through rapid moving camera shots of vegetation when, following his meeting with his lover's husband in the cemetery, he rushes frantically after him through the fields. With only three intertitles closely spaced together in the nearly two-hour film, *Limite*, like *A Page of Madness*, is all but title-free, and, also like the Japanese film, rejects traditional narrative formulas for an impressionistic, fragmented account of the protagonists' present existence and past experiences.

Yet the differences between the two films are equally striking. The editing style of *A Page of Madness* is often frenetic, reflective of a film built around the theme of insanity, whereas the arrangement of shots in *Limite* is, in general, more deliberate and slower-paced, building to a crescendo in the final scenes. The world of *A Page of Madness*, largely filmed on a studio set, is constricted and claustrophobic, whilst the world of *Limite*, most of which was shot on location in the open air, often appears far more expansive, although it, too, repeatedly returns to the closed environment of the boat with the characters encountering the fatal limitations indicated in the title, conditions that threaten their fragile existence. The narrative of *A Page of Madness*, continually shifting between life in the asylum and memories and imaginings blending flashbacks of real happenings with dreams and wishful thinking, in effect questions the boundaries between reality and illusion, sanity and derangement. The narrative of *Limite*, intercutting between the present circumstances of the three protagonists adrift in the boat and their recollections of the experiences that led them to their fate, does not question reality but rather suggests metaphysical speculation on the limitations of human existence, the relation between man and society and man and the cosmos.

As works of counter cinema from non-Western perspectives, the two films are linked by an implied criticism of the West's civilizational project, but within the context of two very different cultures. The diverging goals of the characters in the two films exemplify these cultural differences. In his efforts to reunite with his wife, the seaman in *A Page of Madness* seeks to reclaim a lost paradise of domestic tranquillity, emblematic in the flashback in which he recalls those happier times. For a Japanese confronting in his small, crowded nation the disconcerting forces of the modernization and industrialized urbanism associated with the West, there remained at least the memory, the ideal of the

traditional, age-old Asian values of harmony and ancestor veneration. Kinugasa's climactic dream sequence, with the inmates appearing to regain a momentary happiness and serenity by donning the masks of Noh drama, is thus a kind of metaphoric ritual in which the images of Eastern tradition act as a restorative to the madness unleashed by the impact of modern Westernized existence disrupting centuries of Asian civilization. There is no such assurance in Peixoto's film, the creation of a newly-emerging Latin American civilization still seeking to define its relationship to the rest of the planet, somewhat as the characters in *Limite* try, albeit without success, to adapt to a world they cannot comprehend. Unlike the hero of *A Page of Madness*, the protagonists of *Limite* are not trying to recapture or return to anything positive in their past but are rather fleeing their straitened circumstances in a futile effort to find happiness elsewhere. The life of the first woman has been a social nightmare, indicated by her term in prison and her subsequent soul-killing toil as a seamstress in a dress factory. The existence of the second woman is equally blighted by an unhappy marriage to an alcoholic musician; accentuated in the score by the accompaniment of Borodin's tender, romantic *String Quartet no. 2*, the contrast between her lost love and her present state is all the more poignant. Only the man recounts blissful memories of a loving relationship, but this has been overshadowed by his wife's early death and his discovery that his current innamorata is married. For a moment, he appears to be tempted by a chance encounter with a woman, a reaction that quickly turns to revulsion when he realizes she is a prostitute. In the end, the characters' puny efforts to reconstitute their lives in another land are doomed.

As another civilization's critique of the West's claims to reshape the world in the inevitable march to progress, *Limite* is thus unique in that it does not respond with the familiar assurances of conventional piety, Christian or otherwise, radical programs of social reform, or even the bittersweet consolations of nostalgia for a despoiled Eden. Peixoto's perspective is rather shaped by the civilization that evolved from the Europeans' failed attempt to impose their will on masses of conquered Amerindians and enslaved Africans in the New World. Destined to collapse in the face of human reality, the project resulted in a new, not-yet fully defined civilization related to, but distinctly different from, that of the West, blending as it did the older Amerindian, African, and European civilizations. In a nation where the common saying has been, "Brazil is the country of the future and always will be," the heritage of a slave-owning society and the presence of a vast, mysterious wilderness in the interior combined to feed the dreams of

escape to a new environment from the oppressive forces threatening the individual's liberty. However, as Peixoto observes with tragic irony, the very act of fleeing could itself lead to further entrapment.

Glauber Rocha's criticism of *Limite* as a European stylistic imposition in contrast to a film like Mauro's *Ganga Bruta*, which he viewed as a far more native approach, appears to ignore both the historic ties between the two artists, with their parallels to other Brazilian filmmakers of the time, and the intellectual climate of the 1920s in which their films evolved. Far from being antithetical, in Brazil the Modernism of the 1920s and the renewed emphasis on Brazilian native cultural roots were closely intertwined. Perhaps the leading literary figure in this blend of a Modernist style that included the avant-garde and cultural nationalism was the celebrated poet, Mário de Andrade. Andrade, who organized the 1922 *Semana de Arte Moderna*, a São Paulo event that greatly influenced the contemporary arts in Brazil, including the cinema, was a dedicated researcher into Brazilian folk culture. He warmly praised Peixoto's book of poems, *Mundéu*, published the same year that *Limite* was released. Arising from this Brazilian renaissance, Mauro and Peixoto bear a complementary relation to each other with their distinctive artistic personalities expressing analogous themes born of a shared cultural and historic heritage. These themes, including the idea of flight into the wilderness to escape one's past and a mystical reverence for the power and beauty of nature, are rooted in the location of the population itself, bounded on one side by the ocean and on the other by the immense, unexplored reaches of the Amazon, and the legacy of the Afro-Brazilian experience which, however disguised or hidden, has been as crucial to the formation of the Brazilian national identity as the Indian heritage in the creation of modern Mexico.

This identity stemming from centuries of Portuguese and African blending was marked by both oppression and survival. The harsh plantation system resulted in fugitive slaves establishing their own settlements, known as *quilombos*, where they often intermarried with the dispossessed Indians. At the same time, the ability of the African to maintain his cultural and religious identity, despite often savage efforts by the ruling elite to repress it, led to a remarkable syncretism in Brazilian spirituality. Mingled with the dominant Catholic faith and the remnants of the ancient Indian beliefs were native African religions which retained millions of adherents throughout the country. As the 19th century gave way to the 20th, more and more such African religions as *Candomblé* were openly practiced, in time affecting Brazilian thought and culture across the colour

line. These religions, with their worship of the forces of nature, personified as *orishas*, the emissaries of the gods, have so permeated the Brazilian national consciousness that the country is vastly different in its cultural and spiritual outlook from the nations of Western Europe and North America. It would be this essentially Brazilian reverence for nature, shaped by its syncretic religious culture, which coloured the development of Brazilian cinema, including the works of Mauro and Peixoto.³

The extension of this perspective to Brazilian cinema was aided by the legacy of 19th century Romanticism, notably that of the distinguished novelist, Jose de Alencar, whose works such as “O Guarani” and “Iracema,” with their celebration of the Indian and exaltation of nature, have been frequently adapted to the screen since the beginning of national film production in 1908. This literary heritage, within the context of a culture influenced by the vital alternative spirituality found in Afro-Brazilian religion, intensified a native pantheism with deeper roots in Brazil than in many other countries affected by the Romantic movement.

In its poetic evocations of natural landscapes, the early Brazilian cinema would surpass all others in Latin America, rivalling in dramatic and lyric intensity the golden age of Swedish silent cinema of Victor Sjöström and Mauritz Stiller. One of the first extant examples is *Aitaré da Praia* (1926), directed by Gentil Roiz for his Recife-based company. The story of a poor fisherman and his efforts to overcome class prejudice to marry the girl of his dreams, the film includes striking images of the sea and the forest, demonstrating a feeling for nature that would reach its apogee with Mauro and Peixoto. Equally effective in their ability to attain a stark beauty from the drama of man struggling to survive in the wilderness are the silent historical films, Libero Luxardo’s *Alma do Brasil* (1932), depicting a true incident from the devastating Paraguayan War of the 1860s, and Vittorio Capellaro’s *O Caçador de Diamantes* (1934), a recreation of the exploits of the 17th century *bandeiras* exploring the interior in search of diamonds. This Brazilian approach reached its zenith with the work of Humberto Mauro. The sensuous beauty of his images embody a deeper view, almost mystic in its intensity, uniting humanity to the life-sustaining forces of nature with their capacity to transform

³ Also pivotal in the formation of this outlook and its spread to Brazilian cinema was the legacy of 19th century Romanticism, notably that of the great novelist, Jose de Alencar, whose works such as *O Guarani* and *Iracema*, with their celebration of the Indian and exaltation of nature, have been continually adapted to the screen since the beginning of national film production in 1908. This literary heritage, within the context of a culture influenced by the vital alternative spirituality found in Afro-Brazilian religion, intensified a native pantheism with deeper roots in Brazil than in many other countries affected by the Romantic movement.

the individual, concepts in consonance with the unique form of spirituality that had evolved in Brazil through the convergence of the European, the African, and the Amerindian. In his classic films, *Braza Dormida*, *Sangue Mineiro*, *Lábios sem Beijos*, and *Ganga Bruta*, Mauro's characteristic motif of sophisticated, urban individuals finding love amidst the splendors of flowers and trees, reflecting the Brazilian theme of flight and salvation in the wilderness, are expressed through a singularly cinematic method in which characterization and drama are shaped by the natural landscape.

There were considerable ties between Mauro and Peixoto. At one point, Peixoto even asked the filmmaker from Cataguases to direct his scenario. They also worked with some of the same creative figures, including producer Adhemar Gonzaga, actress Carmen Santos, and cameraman Edgar Brasil. The latter, having demonstrated his mastery of cinematography in *Braza Dormida* and *Sangue Mineiro*, brought the same talent for filming locations to *Limite* as Peixoto observed, describing him as "a man of nature, the projectionist who was born for the touching spit sand and natural landscapes." Peixoto further commented: "My subconscious is always Edgar who keeps showing me angles like a movie screen." Indeed, Brasil would become the guardian of the nitrate print of *Limite* from 1942 until his death in 1954 (LIA 2000).

Following *Limite*, Brasil became one of the cinematographers on *Ganga Bruta*. Mauro and Brasil employed some of the same techniques utilized in Peixoto's film, including symbolic shots of objects, an elaborate, mobile camera following the characters' movements, and a narrative based on an unimpeded flow of images. The combination of these silent film techniques with an innovative use of sound in *Ganga Bruta* represented, like *Limite*, a challenge to the talkies from the West, proving to be too much ahead of its time to gain favor with the public and only being fully appreciated for its artistry in a later generation.

Like Mauro's, Peixoto's vision is rooted in the Brazilian land and sea, the basis for the nation's way of life. As Saulo Pereira de Mello writes:

Limite is a film fundamentally Brazilian: these wattle-and-daub wooden fences; these little tree trunks; this windy grass; this beach; these marshes; these twisted trees; these palm trees dishevelled by the wind. Infinitely Brazilian are the windows, the doors, the walls. The moss, the road, the facades, the alley, the faces in the cinema, the beaches' perspectives, the fishermen who mend their nets, the canoes' oscillating prows, the people who pass by. Everything is pure Brazil—Mangaratiba, swamp, mud, beach,

forest. These ruins, this hanging vegetation, these spotted walls, this white sky, this muddy cemetery are Brazil. The characters blend into the landscape and *express* themselves through it (<http://www.contracampo.com.br/27/limitesaulo.htm>).

With its focus on death and despair, Peixoto's film is darker than Mauro's work, depicting nature as essentially indifferent to man, a concept reified by the shot of the man's footprints on the beach being washed away by the sea. While Peixoto may at first glance seem to fall into the category of a modern sceptic, almost nihilistic in his attitude towards human striving and accomplishment, a deeper reading uncovers layers of alternative meanings beneath the surface of his narrative but inscribed in much of his imagery. The director himself rejected any comparison to the avant-garde filmmaker, Luis Buñuel, whose surrealist work, with its continual mocking of the sacred, was altogether alien to Peixoto's taste. Peixoto, by contrast, admired David Lean (with whom he shared a birthday) whose revival of the heroic epic in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* and *Lawrence of Arabia* was apparently far more appealing to the Brazilian filmmaker than Buñuel's cynicism. For all its tragic irony, *Limite* concludes with images of both the heroic and the sacred in keeping with its ties to Brazilian culture.

Although Peixoto was born into Brazil's wealthy ruling elite, with his forebears including a slave dealer, and he seems never to have been attracted to radical reform programs, his sensitivity to his national culture enabled him to create a narrative centered around social outcasts rebelling against their fate. Apparently from the lower middle class, the two women, paralleling the traditional accounts of slaves escaping into the wilderness, are refugees from a male-dominated social order. The man, probably from a higher rank judging from his apparel in the flashback scenes, takes flight following the disturbing encounter with his lover's husband in the cemetery, a confrontation that carries a hint of his threatened social ostracism. Trapped in the lifeboat that has become their prison, the protagonists are forced to take refuge, not in the hallucinatory fantasies of the asylum inmates in *A Page of Madness*, but in their memories of the past, unhappy though they are. The limitations suggested in the film's title are those of the human condition confined on one side by rigid social institutions and on the other by the power of nature, a force impossible for man to conquer. Yet under Peixoto's direction, the camera itself seeks to attain a sense of freedom expressing the human desire for boundless space. To a greater extent than in most films, *Limite* is shaped by a camera that seems to possess a godlike omniscience and freedom of

movement, tilting upward to contemplate the heavens, following the characters in perfect synchronization with their movements, focusing on vast landscapes and huge, detailed close-ups of faces and objects—an effect sometimes achieved in a single shot—peering downward on the protagonists from a lofty perch, or shooting the characters from ground level.

Throughout the film, the director demonstrates a veneration of nature in his depictions of vegetation, wind and water, elements whose action in the narrative also evokes the time cycle.⁴ But it is with the climactic storm at sea that Peixoto's sacralization of the image reaches its greatest intensity. The lengthy sequence consists entirely of the swirling waves, edited to a rapid pace differing from the more measured tone of much of the film's unfolding narrative. Significantly, at no time in this sequence does he intercut the turbulent waters with scenes of the second woman being washed off the boat as it is destroyed or close-ups of the first woman's face as she rides the storm. The strange exaltation that has underscored the film throughout, the sense of wonder and mystery in its view of the world, now comes triumphantly to the fore. With its uplifting musical accompaniment from the Fourth Movement of Prokofiev's *First Symphony*, the sequence of the tumultuous ocean conveys a feeling of joyous abandon as the waves crash and dance across the screen. The constant succession of shots of the surging waters creates a hypnotic effect, a fevered state that is nothing less than the cinematic counterpart of the trances and ceremonies in *Candomblé* and other Afro-Brazilian religions intended to appease the *orishas* embodying the forces of nature. Somewhat like the climactic scene of the donning of the Noh masks in *A Page of Madness*, the storm in *Limite* serves a ritualistic function, enforcing on the spectator a mystical sense of awe at the power and terrifying beauty of the infinite. No less than Mauro's works, *Limite* thus implies the need for man to live in harmony with nature. Puny humanity erects social institutions based on class, gender, and other discriminations, barriers that are ultimately as fragile in the face of nature as the crafts with which mankind attempts to conquer the seas and the structures with which he tries to subdue the land. With its reverential view of nature, *Limite* is in essence a film that could have only been realized in a country like Brazil, situated between the eternal ocean and the equally vast and

⁴ Peixoto had originally planned to present *Limite* with an accompaniment of sounds such as wind and waves, thus giving a "voice" to nature in contrast to his silent protagonists. Partly for technical reasons, this idea was dropped and, under his supervision, Brutus Pedreira, who portrayed the pianist in the film, compiled a dramatic, moving score perfectly matched to the silent images.

mysterious wilderness, a nation whose culture has been moulded by the spiritual heritage of Afro-Brazilian religion based on the worship of natural forces.

The final images of the film following the storm, showing the first woman clinging to the piece of wood left from the boat, are deliberately ambiguous. In her essay on the film, Tania C. Clemente de Souza notes that there is no absolute evidence she will die (LIA 2000). The piece of the board to which she clings is, as de Souza observes, a symbol of salvation, of struggle and resistance, a conclusion that bears an intriguing comparison to the finale of another silent film masterpiece, Erich von Stroheim's *Greed*. In *Greed*, while we do not actually witness the death of the protagonist, McTeague, handcuffed to the body of his nemesis in the desert wasteland, his end is all but certain in the dazed resignation with which he faces his inevitable fate. No passing prospector or cowboy will happen along with the precious water needed to sustain life, no airplane pilot flying overhead will appear to save him.

There is a subtle difference in the concluding images of *Limite*. The first woman is floating on the sea, in part, a symbol of death in the film but also, as in Afro-Brazilian spirituality, the origin of all life; thus, for Peixoto, the sea may be an intertwining of life and death rather than the kind of absolute devastation suggested by a desert whose very name is Death Valley. It is certainly possible she will finally go under with a final, futile gesture of resistance. But one can also speculate she will reach a nearby island or the promontory with the birds seen in the film. Or perhaps a passing ship will come along and rescue her. By opening and closing with her, the director may be suggesting that, more than the two other characters who die in the film, there is something almost timeless and eternal in her personality, that she perhaps is destined, as they are not, to survive. Throughout the film, it has been clear that she is markedly different in spirit from her two companions. Both the man and the second woman are emotionally vulnerable and suffering from a death wish stemming from personal heartbreak while the first woman has no such emotional commitment. Whereas the others are weak, she is strong and self-willed, taking charge of the boat in the resolute manner that has been characteristic of all her moves. It seems that it was Peixoto's conscious aesthetic choice to leave the final dispensation an enigma or mystery, a matter of individual decision for each viewer to complete the script in his or her own mind. But then the belief that there is an absolute, immediate answer to all life's mysteries is itself yet another revelation of the limitations in our constructions. It is perhaps the ultimate paradox of Peixoto's ambiguous narrative that it so effectively combines fatalistic irony with triumphant

celebration. With its variety of possibilities born of a syncretic native heritage, Peixoto's masterpiece of counter cinema reveals the limitations of our mortal lives even as it exalts in the overwhelming power and beauty of the divine and infinite in the universe.

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Space and the Materiality of Death – on Mário Peixoto's *Limite*

Alexander Graf

I. *Limite* in context

Nothing succeeds in terrorising academic circles quite like a unique work of art with no history, no context, an isolated phenomenon, a foundling, created, seemingly, out of the simple yet bold desire of a young, tormented spirit for expression of its innermost thoughts and emotions. Few artists have, in the past, gained recognition and been welcomed out of bohemian obscurity and into the frigidity of the analysed, the processed, the recorded, the catalogued and the constantly shifting, settled-once-and-for-all plateau that is the establishment of art on the basis of a single work. This doubtful privilege has generally been reserved only for 'artists' of the avant-gardes: anti-art artists, that is, who were, and are, frequently on a stated mission to evade precisely such a fate. But for such artists, fate also dictates that, in the absence of any analysable linear progression to their work – career development – they are nevertheless subjugated and absorbed by the insatiable institutions of modern art and accommodated in frequently ad hoc, all-embracing, lineages, crammed into some point and time within a history of art that may, for that single purpose, embrace periods of either two or two-thousand years. That is then its place. And there remains, ne'er again to rejoin with the ethereal spirit that created it, the initial and momentous spark of its unique inception dimmed forever.

A fate similar to this seems to have befallen Mário Peixoto, possibly one of the twentieth century's most successful failed artists. One film, one book of poems and one six-volume novel – the sum total of Peixoto's artistic legacy to the world, and all we have to work with in our academic fervour – do certainly an artist make. But the meagreness of this legacy also forces us to stow away many of our regular analytical tools and instead settle down to a composed and intimate exchange with Peixoto's solitary film work, premiered in 1931 – *Limite*: a work that is, today, at least as visually addictive, as mysterious and as introverted as was its maker.

But, by the same token, to describe Peixoto as a complete hermit, and *Limite* as a wholly uninfluenced work, would also be a mistake. What is known and well-

documented is that Peixoto was born to a wealthy Brazilian family, akin to that country's royalty of colonial days, the landed gentry that controlled and exploited the industrial/agricultural production of coffee and sugar and the slave trade. The wealth of the family enabled Peixoto to attend ten months of schooling in England and, a year later, to return to London and Paris for a shorter period, where, it seems, he was exposed to the artistic experimentation with film that was flourishing at the time. One may speculate that this could have included works by the Soviet directors Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Vertov, the Germans Murnau and Lang, and the Spanish/French Renoir, Man Ray, Picabia and Duchamp.

Naturally, one may be forgiven for seeing the beginnings, or the contours of a "context" in Peixoto's European experiences, within which to place *Limite* in art history, as some commentators certainly have. But Peixoto returned home to Brazil an amateur, both as an artist and as a filmmaker, and this is the context in which one must consider the inception and realisation of *Limite*, as well as the rejection of the film's scenario by industry professionals Peixoto presented it to, with the certainly well-meant advice that he should go away and make his film himself. Terms that recur in analyses of the film by way of seeking to establish a context within which to interpret it include "existentialist", "abstract", "surreal", "impressionist", "expressionist" and "montage-influenced". William M. Drew specifies a series of films he feels influenced collectively the visual and narrative style Peixoto developed in *Limite*:

[Peixoto's] approach is often abstract and surrealistic, evident from the second shot in the film recreating the image on the magazine cover of the staring woman and the man's handcuffed hands. Peixoto's technique was influenced by the legacy of French avant-garde films like *Menilmontant* (1926) by Dimitri Kirsanoff and *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, as well as such classics of French impressionism as Abel Gance's *La Roue* and the works of Germaine Dulac and Marcel l'Herbier. German expressionist films with their strong emphasis on fate, along with the major examples of Soviet montage, were also part of the cultural background that foreshadowed *Limite*. (<http://www.gildasattic.com/peixoto.html>)

Film is nothing if not a gathering point for influences from every artistic medium and every style that preceded its invention. Film is, too, a medium perfectly suited to the adaptation of word, image and time-based media and arts into a language that does all these justice, at the same time as forming entirely new languages out of all of them in

combination and making the end-product easily accessible to the majority of cultures, employing as it does a language composed of image, sound and time: the basic and universal components of narrative, and therefore of human communication through the ages.

Notwithstanding the validity or falsity of every influence deemed to have flown into the composition of *Limite* as identified by Drew above, what is clear from repeated viewings of the film is that Peixoto was a sponge for all of them, and a profoundly romantic thinker, with all the connotations of artishood and self-immersion this implies. All these influences and others are present in the film, yet none of them is allowed to dominate, testifying, perhaps, to its 22 year-old author's amateurism and idealism at the time. This is perhaps one reason why we so readily accept the banality of the crude symbolism Peixoto builds into his visual language – for instance the vultures, the lifeboat, the laddered stocking or the “flashbacks” to scenes from the past in a moment of certain death – which require and depend upon traditional method of reading that fly in the face of all avant-gardistically inspired or inclined hermeneutics. Perhaps this is also a reason why we do not feel the relatively simple narrative causality, on which the three related episodes are built, grates against our expectations of avant-gardistic anti-narrative.

Though the presence of avant-gardist intent is, perhaps, difficult to assert on the basis of the film's mixture of formal features, this should not forbid an analysis of *Limite* from the point of view of its avant-gardistic qualities per se. Such a conclusion should not surprise anyone: formal hybridity and the exploitation of avant-gardist approaches to audio-visual productions in Brazil is also a dominant feature of the two most noteworthy films that precede *Limite*, and that show a similar degree of formal-visual playfulness as does Peixoto's film: Alberto Cavalcanti's *Rien Que Les Heures* (1926) and Rodolfo Lustig and Adalberto Kemeny's *São Paulo – Sinfonia da Metrópole* (1929). Perhaps one can indeed speak of a specifically Brazilian avant-garde, one that borrowed many formal features from the European experimental scene at the time, but that needs not necessarily be measured by the same art-theoretical template. Perhaps these films could also be considered as preparing the way for a truly national Brazilian cinema that was to become known as *Cinema Novo*. But it is also possible, and a highly productive exercise, to examine *Limite* as a completely original work of art that should perhaps be considered in terms of its maker's almost fanatical belief in the power of the cinematic image to illuminate the darkest regions of our subconscious, probing for the

threshold that divides our spiritual selves from our corporeal selves, and thus to consider *Limite* in the context of the future works of art the film may have served as an inspiration for, instead of looking at it as the culmination of an array of divergent influences. By way of suggestion for future investigation, the film works of Maya Deren in the 1940s – coming only ten years later in time, but worlds away from 1930s Brazil both culturally and politically – seem to me to be a fruitful field of analysis from this point of view.

II. Space and materiality

Between terra firma and the ethereal immateriality of the spirit there is *Limite*. These two extremes are represented by physical and symbolic spaces, which exhibit sometimes shared, sometimes completely divergent characteristics. The dividing line – the limit – is not an entirely fixed threshold, but one that undulates and that is marked within narrow bounds that can be mastered and negotiated. The film opens with its title looming large on the screen: already this initial shot, with its gothic, expressionistic undertone generated through the impression of dissolving white lettering against a black background, addresses the theme of solid materiality and ethereal volatility. The credits also recall expressionism through the presentation of the lead characters not by name, but as Woman 1, Woman 2, Man 1 and Man 2. These figures are never further developed with a view to generating identification in the viewer. Indeed, in typical expressionist style, they remain distanced and shall come to represent general human conditions, states of human spirituality, as the film unfolds. The first shot after the credits shows a number of vultures gathered on an incline. This gives way in a slow, almost reluctant cross-fade, to the first exposition of the film's iconic image: the face of Woman 1, staring soberly into the camera, with a man's pudgy, handcuffed hands materializing from the depths of the black background, wrapped around her head, fists clenched, the wrists resting gently on Woman 1's shoulders. The close-up of the handcuffed fists that follows gives way to an extreme close-up of Woman 1's eyes and eyebrows, graphically analogous to the previous image, before fading to a glittering seascape and back to the same close-up of Woman 1's eyes.

This opening sequence functions to establish some parameters of the first space: one side of *Limite*, composed of abstract qualities such as thought, memory, death, aimlessness, fate, beauty and infinity. These are all qualities that can be attributed, either directly, or by inference, to the spiritual dimension of human existence. The head

and eyes, so prominent in three separate shots in this initial sequence, appear repeatedly throughout the film, often clasped by hands, often simply in extreme close-up, especially in moments when the narration suggests emotional turmoil or doubt. (The film does not appear to have a single main protagonist, yet it is Woman 1 whose head is enclosed by the handcuffed hands. Later, it is she who is released from prison. We never discover the reasons for her incarceration, or the motivations for her impromptu release, only that it takes the form of an escape). Whatever the case and the narrative motivation may be for the casting of Woman 1 in the second shot of *Limite*, the opening sequence's symbology of captivity, in association with images of the head – traditional locus of human spirituality – suggest the presence of a neurosis at the heart of human (spiritual) existence. The graphic analogy of shot two with Woman 1's eyes and breasts (heart/sexuality) extends the concept of neurosis to other traditional loci of spiritual identity, while the connotation of a winged death generated through the presence of vultures in the opening shot adds finality and a fatalistic nuance to the shots that follow. Death as a concept, though, never develops negative contours in *Limite*, which is one of the factors that complicate the frequent reading of the film by commentators as an expression of the futility of human toil and existence. Instead, the images of death suggest welcome release into the spiritual dimension, characterized by infinity, and associated by the repeated cross-fade from Woman 1's eyes to the death-bringing sea that eventually engulfs the three characters marooned in a boat. The images of the sea are of an unspeakable and emotive beauty, warmth and poetry, rather than portraying the deaths of the protagonists in the icy claws of a watery grave.

The implied profundity of the sea in *Limite* is different altogether: it forms a further component of the unified space attributed to the spiritual dimension of human existence and, in this sense offers its unbounded depths and expanse as an opposite image to that of Woman 1 and the handcuffed hands in shot 2. Considered in this way it would hardly be misplaced to see Peixoto's objective of delineating *Limite* as further evidence of an interest in expressionism's concern with primitivism, psychoanalysis and ancient cults of death. The opening shot, for instance, recalls the ancient Çatal Hüyük culture's ritual of sky burial, in which deceased humans were honoured by having their remains left for vultures, considered gods, to pick at, and thus to make way for the dead to pass into a spiritual afterlife, a spiritual dimension. Expressionist artists saw death, and regression to a primitive, natural state, as cleansing experiences. I would suggest that the sea – beautiful and gently remorseless as its vast expanses are – could be seen in the same

way in *Limite*, thus uniting the spirit, the sea and the sky – the space negotiated by the vultures, and which also appears as boundless in frequent and extended single- and multi-shot compositions – to complete the contours of the initial space of the spiritual dimension in *Limite*. The features characterising the three components are immateriality, formlessness and fluidity. These are the loci of thought and memory: the boat that holds the three protagonists spins aimlessly on the placid ocean, directionless, spinning like the needle of a compass, or the hands of a clock, telling time – arbitrary measures of physical existence – as each protagonist recounts their respective tale from the past. How they got there is never divulged to us, neither is how the three of them found themselves together in this predicament. It matters as little to the main concern of the film as do the time or direction of their drift. The first key image that introduces a transition between this space and the next – a space of materiality and human toil, characterised by time, direction, opaqueness and solidity – comes approximately 10 minutes and 35 seconds into the film, after a direct cross-fade from a close-up on Woman 1's head. The shot, which introduces a (spiritual) memory of Woman 1's imprisonment and subsequent escape, takes the form of a graphic composition in which the image is horizontally bisected by the solid edge of the boat occupying the lower part of the frame, and the undulating waves of the sea the upper part. This composition is held for 30 seconds, cementing its significance for the form of the film overall, and its essence of transition is repeated in many similar shots that follow. It is also accompanied by the first change in musical theme since the film began.

The three short narratives that are related by the stranded threesome in the boat, and that are presented to use in the form of flashbacks, are tragic to varying degrees. Woman 1 suffers from general ennui, Woman 2 from domestic ennui/romantic turmoil, and Man 1 is evidently embroiled in a triple tragedy: he has lost his wife, whom he perhaps murdered or assisted in suicide; he has started a love affair with a married woman, whose husband now mourns the death of their marriage; and he is informed by the husband of his mistress that she and, by implication perhaps he also, has leprosy.

What are we to make of these three odd and tragic stories? Do they explain possible motives that lie behind the flight of the three characters? Must one even search for logical connections, motivations and implications in the shared predicament of the three in the boat at sea and the stories they tell?

Certain is only that Peixoto portrays the emotional states of the three protagonists, and he uses contexts of materiality to do so. In the first story, physical incarceration is

followed by flight along dust tracks, into the agricultural hinterland and to the domestic activity of sewing, the tools of the trade fetishistically photographed by cinematographer Edgar Brazil in a montage of extreme close-ups. Space, here, alternates between the claustrophobia of gaol and of the place of work, and the implied directional constraints of both road and railway tracks. The close-up of the wheel of a train gives way to an analogous close-up of the sewing machine's spinning flywheel, linking the two in contrasting circular movement (implying stasis) that is transformed, again, into linear movement along predefined routes (the tracks and the hem of the garment the woman is sewing). The suddenly laddered stocking, appearing after Woman 1's second flight, this time from her place of work, suggests that her attempt to reintegrate into the context of social activity via labour, which turned out to be another prison-like incarceration, will be futile. Moreover, the directional movement of this first story – the camera movements are led by the trajectories of roads, telegraph wires and Woman 1's movement along these, at one stage freeing itself of her to continue moving forward independently when she stops to sit on a gate – contrasts starkly with the directionless drifting of the preceding scene on the sea – in which the lines followed by the camera lead nowhere and everywhere simultaneously – making plain the differences in the physical characteristics of this space and the former (spiritual) space.

Woman 2's story similarly exhibits claustrophobic elements, this time associated with a failing domestic life and marriage. Her and her drunken husband's wedding rings are symbols of this claustrophobia, and echo in form the image of the handcuffs at the beginning. Here symbols of bondage, in the final story the three wedding rings create a sensation of conflict, hopelessness and loss.

Woman 2 heads out of town, through a village and observes the sea from a high vantage point, evidently contemplating suicide, before we find her on the rocks lower down the steep incline, almost at the water's edge. Water is a central theme in her story, which begins in direct proximity to the sea in a fishing village. She then walks through the village, past a spring. The nine-fold repetition of the rapid forward tracking shot of the spring, an image of a fish dying on the beach in the sequence's opening shot, and another spring's use for washing laundry cements the association of water in this space as a life-giving, cleansing force. Woman 2's flashback ends again at the waterside with a contemplation of suicide.

Water, here, represents the possibility of rebirth through death and transition into a spiritual dimension. The water's formlessness here is the opposite image to the wedding

rings of the couple, signifying, as they do, wedlock and the resulting tedium and emotional turmoil – further characteristics of the symbolic space of materiality.

The graphic properties of the image here, again, contrast with those of the sequences shot at sea. Where there is a preponderance of straight lines in the story of Woman 1 in the next two stories forms are aggressively jagged, attacking the tranquil sensibilities of vision generated by the calmness of the sea and sky images. This is particularly the case in Man 1's story, beginning again with a tranquil scene of love and togetherness at the edge of the water, as he and his wife walk hand in hand along the beach. Cacti, palms, irregular, dead, wiry trees, reeds, grasses, decaying architecture and telegraph junctions and, not least, the symmetrical jaggedness that combine elements of unity and disunity in the shape of the crucifix upon the tomb of the man's wife, are the dominant and recurring graphic forms on which the camera lingers later on in this last episode. The narrative information, communicated through the film's only intertitles, and conveying text spoken by a figure played by Peixoto, that this man's wife – the woman with whom Man 1 is now having an affair – is leprous initiates Man 1's headlong dash through fields of reeds or sugar cane and into barbed wire fences in pursuit of the Peixoto figure. That this irresolvable conflict should be initiated in a cemetery suggests that burial in this space, on terra firma, does not provide the resolution it promises: the two men are still engaged in a conflict surrounding both the dead woman – mourned by Man 1 – and the live woman – lusted after by Man 1 and mourned by the Peixoto figure. Man 1 ends up where he started, by the sea, unable to reconcile himself with the fate destiny has dished out for him. He collapses on the beach and the camera performs a vertical pan, arcing up from a shot of Man 1's foot into the clouds, in several shots edited together into a single, slow, 90-second sweep, coming to rest once again at the man's hand: a pan that traces the spatial exteriority of the whole of the man's bodily length, and thus emphasises the spiritual dimension – his non-material aspect – as infinitely more extensive and calmer than the psyche trapped within his physical shell, or the container that is marriage and domestic existence.

III. Limite

Limite presents and represents an exploration of the dichotomy between the two spaces I have mapped out above, the physical attributes of which I have sought to illustrate through analogy with spirituality and physical existence, and which form the basis of the narration in the film. The former space, characterised as infinite and therefore as

welcoming of all and any a convoluted soul, includes death in the full immateriality of its finality. This, the film wants to suggest, is the only way death can be reconciled with the desire for life, which is why, in the absence of any religious meaning, the natural element of water is present as a reliable, comforting, simultaneously life-giving and death-bringing force.

Within the bounds of the second space, conversely, death is presented as an irreconcilable part of existence, be it a spiritual or physical form of death. Its finality is denied, as the cemeteries with their crosses, the lifeless trees and decaying ruins testify, and it is this imprisoning aspect of life and death that drives the characters to flee across the threshold separating this sphere from the former. Each of the three figures flees towards the sea, into spirituality, which is where we find them at the start of the film. The three are therefore not shipwrecked, as William M. Drew understandably infers by their presence at sea in a small rowing boat. There is never any mention or suggestion of a ship to which the dinghy may have belonged, and that may have sunk, leading to the predicament we find them in. They are much rather life-wrecked, castaways from the various stories they have left behind them. Before they are swallowed up by the sea, each character is associated somehow with water: Woman 1 lies across the bow of the wooden dinghy, trailing her fingers through the silky waters, wetting her hair with her hands, looking for contact with the body that is soon to consume her; Woman 2's story begins with a close-up of a fish stranded on the beach, still gulping for air; fish is what she brings home to feed her husband, passing by the spring so prominently featured by Peixoto in a montage sequence during the telling of her story; once she has decided to end her life together with her husband, she heads for the sea, contemplating the release and relief it offers; it is the sea, again, that consumes Man 1's wife at the beginning of his story, after he and his wife have skirted along the seaboard hand-in-hand; and it is the sea to which he returns after his odd encounter in the cemetery with the husband of his mistress. It is there, beautiful, undulating and offering eternal rest to the three life-wrecked characters at the beginning of the film. The boat they are in is the last remaining remnant connecting them with their former existences, their former stories, before the ocean finally claims them one by one, absorbing all memory of their stories and casting them into infinity.

Limite is the threshold that divides the two symbolic spaces, the tension between life-experience and life-resolution, and that determines the structure of the film's narrative. It is a testament to the skill above all of cinematographer Edgar Brazil's visual language

that Peixoto manages to express this tension using images to the almost total exclusion of language. He does this by expressing *limite* through the waves that hypnotically caress the seashore, now gently and rhythmically, at other times in a swirling eruption of foam and spray, but always oscillating within the narrow physical boundaries that mark its bond of mutual contradiction with the terrestrial sphere outside. Significantly, it is also the waves that erase the footsteps left in the sand by Man 1 and his wife after she is drowned.

Of all the characters that appear in *Limite* only the fishermen appear able to live comfortably in the vicinity of this threshold. They alone seem able to negotiate its oscillations and the contradictions it represents, harvesting the fruits of the sea while living in utopian peace and tranquillity on land. The tools of their trade are handcrafted boats, baskets, nets and oars. The juxtaposition of these images – shot lovingly in two brief montage compositions – with the images of the channelled water of the spring immediately following them near the beginning of Woman 2's story, reinforce an association of the fishermen with the spiritual dexterity, or purity, that enables them to master the contradictions characterising the two spaces the film is built upon as they carry out their ancient and primitive trade.

That Peixoto was fascinated by, and intended to continue investigating, the region of terrestrial, physical experience at the point where it meets the intangible dimension of spiritual being seems certain from the titles of his two unfinished films: *Onde a Terra Acaba* (At the Edge of the Earth, 1931-) and *Maré Baixa* (Low Tide, 1936-). But, as the only one of these projects to have been completed, and that has therefore passed into Peixoto's legacy, *Limite* also stands as a sole monument to the intimate, skin-to-skin contact between celluloid and the visual world that is unique to film as an art form, and that forms the basis of the poetry of film and its ability, with its shadowy, shimmering image, to access and illuminate the deepest regions of the human soul.

***Limite* today**

Paulo Venâncio Filho

A film that arose from an image, *Limite* does not bring in any element beyond purely visual qualities. It is solely visual and non-literary, going against the pervading style of expression in Brazil, given that at that time literature held an almost hegemonic sway over Brazilian culture. The chained arms of a man going round a woman's neck: this was the photograph by André Kertész for the cover of the magazine *Vue* that Mário Peixoto saw in Paris in 1929. This is how *Limite* emerged, he said. It was visual inspiration at the highest and most up-to-date level, considering that Kertész was one of the greatest modern photographers, which Peixoto expanded and extended. In film and for Brazilian cinema, the protean image of *Limite* has comparable value with the famous scene in Buñuel's *Chien Andalou* (1928), of the razor slicing an eye. It is this visual radicalness that surprises right at the outset, in the inspiration and in the finished work. This is how the film begins. If it is still surprising today, it was even more so in 1931, when with such innumerable difficulties we started to shape a modern visual culture in a country dominated by a literary ethos and by literature. *Limite* came out at the same time, or slightly after, the first modern Brazilian productions, those of the modernism of 1922. And in a certain manner, it goes against these. First of all, the appropriation of modern pictorial languages here in Brazil, cubism in particular, did not take place without indecision and difficulties, which gives rise to interesting questions. What astonishes in the case of *Limite* is its total fluency between language and artistic creation, which is absolute from start to finish and reveals Mário Peixoto's artistic greatness.

This is how Octávio de Faria described *Limite*: "*Limite* is an encounter between three lives within the limit of a boat lost in the ocean. Two women and one man; three destinies that life, after having placed constant limits on their desires and possibilities, finally brings together in the most limited of spaces. Everything is a limit in itself. In the film, at every instant, everything seeks to go beyond the limits. The machine runs away with the characters towards nature, crosses seas and skies, chases clouds, flies with the birds, races with hallucinated men, follows the movement of the boughs of trees that forlornly seem to be calling out, falls with the dispirited bodies, moves forward ten times over gushing springs, flees, runs, loses itself chasing the shadowed horizon –

endless pathways – but when it comes back, it is always the same land that it finds: the ground that is the surface and end of all visions, the fence that delimits the spaces, the limit that binds everything – limits of all types. Even in limitless nature, everything is a limit in itself.” (Mello 1978: 14)

Limite is not a dated film or one from its times: it is up-to-date today. It does not really have a story, nor does it really have a narrative: its narrative is absolutely free, open and fluid. This is also surprising. In the film, the events take place without it being possible to establish a strict connection between them. The motives, the reasons and the causes are veiled, the links disjointed and the sequence is elliptical. It is difficult to establish the start, middle and end. *Limite* appears not to have an end or continuous flow. It is difficult to separate real time from remembered time; distinct temporalities become confounded, for both people and spaces; it is difficult to establish who is narrating or “seeing”. It is also difficult to name the characters or identify them sociologically; their existences are so dense and minimal. It is one of the first Brazilian works grounded in the nameless and on anonymity. Thus, it is an urban artistic creation, in the modern sense of the term. From this stems one of the difficulties in approaching *Limite*: it does not seem possible to get to grips with something that has no name; something that is not even a person. *Limite* thus goes against a typically Brazilian cultural trait: that of closeness, intimateness and personal touch: “The transition from living with the elemental forces of nature to the more regularized and abstract existence of the cities must have stimulated an underlying, insatiable crisis among our men” (Holanda 1963: 131), Sérgio Buarque de Holanda wrote in *Raízes do Brasil*, shortly after *Limite*, in 1936. *Limite* is nothing if not a clear, poetic expression of this crisis.

I reemphasize that the fundamental cornerstone of this artistic creation that is so anomalous in Brazilian cinema and culture is its visual nature. It is a unique work. A work shown just once. A work that was almost lost and which was recovered almost exclusively through the efforts of two individuals: Plínio Sússekind da Rocha and Saulo Pereira de Mello. All this has built up the legend, the fable of *Limite*, which perhaps still stigmatizes the film. *Limite* seems not to have limits. The legend, the fable, seems to have shifted the limit to a singular, unique location, disconnected from everything and with no relationship to the remainder of Brazilian culture.

Limite is, before anything else, Brazilian. It is essentially connected with Brazilian realities. But it is connected to a reality that we do not like to face up to and it translates in a manner that we are not accustomed to seeing. First of all, *Limite* does not portray us

as we are used to seeing ourselves and in a way that we can preponderantly identify ourselves with. *Limite* does not portray us, Brazilians, as happy, expansive, cheerful, sociable, optimistic and numerous other images and ideas. In this sense, *Limite* is an abstract film: the more abstract it is the truer it becomes.

The disjointed nature of Brazil is present the whole time: ruined houses, urban characters in beach villages, electric light posts, absence of cars, fishing, cinema and sewing machine, escape or shipwreck. An afflictive disordering of the environment of life, in which neither things nor people appear to communicate.

Although *Limite* contains dramatic and even tragic elements, it is difficult to identify a genre for the film. It is not a romance, or a tale; nor is it filmed literature. I would venture to say that *Limite* comes close to a genre that, like few others, has helped in comprehending Brazilian realities: an *essay*. *Limite* is, it could be said, an essay type of film. Flexible, free and experimental, *Limite* leads, with novel artistic consequences, to the limit of the erratic, the unfocused and the arrhythmic, without solution. It is an empty invocation but is, however, extremely concentrated as a unitary vision.

And with regard to its vision, *Limite* is on the other side of the hegemonic modernism that is represented by the Week of 1922. *Limite* is close to the engravings by Goeldi, which are also insoluble, empty and erratic. It is also close to the novels of Cornélio Penna, which are set within a timeframe still marked by slavery. It is not a sunny, cannibalistic, tropical Brazil. It is a vision of inability to communicate, despair, anguish, lack of fellowship, a Brazilian solitude: *Limite* speaks of all this in its silence of a film without sound. Unsentimental, *Limite* speaks from another side, from a state of affairs that is the result of violence, injustice and oppression, where sympathy is not granted. *Limite* is one of the higher artistic expressions of one of our basic dysfunctional characteristics: that we can think we are happy in an unjust society.

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A different crossing: cinema and poetry; Mário Peixoto and the Chaplin Club.

Constança Herz

The boundlessness of an uncommon sea invades the screen and indicates a desire for transcendence. The sea's fire seems to go on beyond the screen. Maritime images with fiery highlights, with golden light that we can imagine, in spite of the black-and-white of *Limite*, the movie written and directed by Mário Peixoto.

The reality that this film reflects is always uncertain. There are no straight lines. The camera seeks out the sea's movements and also the trees and stones that appear on the screen. The images of nature tend towards abstraction: maybe because this dissolves the borders that should exist between internal and external realities. There is only anguish: this is the reality that can be known, and internal or external borders would not make any difference, as everything is mixed together in this lyrical horizon that the movie offers.

As a result of the flashback technique, time seems not to be concrete. Past and present go together throughout the movie. We cannot know what is real and unreal, past and present, fantasy and reality, because there will always be the signs and distortions of a vast and restless internal world, as the movie's images reveal, including the ones from the sea, because they seem to be dreamed or imagined, with a horizon that can be reinvented, as a place of multiple projections and not simply a sea of water.

In this world that constitutes Mário Peixoto's works, subjective regard will often be stronger than reality, and will change it. Reality seems to be alive: there is no possibility of being secure. All the works by this rare artist bring touches of a reality that is mixed with dreams and nightmares, full of anguish, and this reveals lyricism and uncertainty. In a short story, Mário Peixoto wrote: "Reality! Now there is something that I still have doubts about!"⁵

Maybe because it is always replete with sensitivity that attributes a kind of torpor to everything, this reality seems to be represented in its disquiet and refusal to be bounded,

⁵ "Bugatti 60 HP" was published for the first time in 1932, in the magazine *Bazar*, in Rio de Janeiro, and was republished in 2004, in a short story anthology organised by Saulo Pereira de Mello: Peixoto, Mário. *Seis contos e duas peças*. Rio de Janeiro: Aeroplano, 2004, p. 53.

through the golden and uncertain sea of *Limite*. These images of the sea define all of Mário Peixoto's works.

In poems, short stories, novels and his only film, we see an artist who seems to be distant from the Brazilian context of the 1920s and 1930s. However, it should be noted that the cinema of German Expressionism was a fundamental reference for Mário Peixoto, as we can see in his movie and literary works, and some rules that belong to Italian Futurism also appear in his works.

From 1928 onwards, Mário Peixoto was able to be close to the extremely sophisticated discussions in Rio about cinematographic language, particularly about the silent movies produced in Europe, the Soviet Union and the United States at that same time (Mello 1997: 58-67). Mário Peixoto was very close to the Chaplin Club, albeit indirectly. This was a group of young intellectuals from Rio who were interested in theoretical questions regarding cinema, which, for this group, was a new possibility for artistic expression at that time. They would discuss issues that they considered important at that moment, the time when talking pictures were emerging, and their debates could be seen in the Chaplin Club's publication, a journal called *O Fan*⁶. The peculiarities of *Limite* cannot be understood without analysing the informal relationship between Mário Peixoto and this group, which displayed an uncommon interest in investigating cinematographic language⁷.

Mário Peixoto was never a member of the Chaplin Club and did not go to its meetings, but he probably read its publications. With Octavio de Faria, one of the most important members of the Chaplin Club members, he had an important dialogue that lasted throughout their lives, as Peixoto always said. He was also close to the inflamed debate between Faria and Plínio Sússekkind Rocha, another important Chaplin Club member (Mello 1997: 59). Octavio de Faria and Plínio Sússekkind Rocha established an elevated discussion about silent pictures, which Faria said should be centred on German Expressionist principles, meaning that the cinematographic images should expose the characters' internal world. Meanwhile, Plínio Sússekkind Rocha would defend the importance of the relationship between the *takes*, and the consequent supremacy of the montage (Mello 1997: 62-64).

Movies were screened at the Chaplin Club, and the last of these occasions was *Limite*'s first showing (Mello 1997: 59). It was evident that the Chaplin Club's members showed

⁶ The Chaplin Club existed from June 1928 until May 1931. Mello 1997: 58.

⁷ All Chaplin Club information was kindly provided by Saulo Pereira de Mello.

a preference for art and European pictures, as they wanted to see cinematographic solutions that differed from the ones they were familiar with from American movies (Mello 1997: 60). More than allowing Mário Peixoto to see movies produced outside of Brazil⁸, the Chaplin Club allowed him to be close to the discussion of complex questions surrounding silent movies.

In Peixoto's verses, in which the images are constructed with "cuts", and with the juxtaposition of images, the principles of montage can be seen⁹. In his poetry works we can identify characteristics that appear in German movies produced in the 1920s and 1930s. The German Expressionist principles are clearly revealed in the effort to show the internal reality of a voice that needs to be exposed and that, moved by enormous anguish, produces phantasms as abysses emerge, in a way that makes this voice impersonal. The universe that comes out from these art works reveals a reality that is as frightening as the German Expressionist one. The Expressionist eye is full of deformations and the reality is uncertain, alive and always creates fear; and Peixoto's reality is always like this. In his works there is anguish and desperation: the characters belong to a ruined world.

And besides the ruins, in Peixoto's works there is the urgency of an unrestrained lyricism, because only dream and poetry can, even without success, try to overcome the fault lines that result from the tragic confrontation between men and reality. Light deforms, but also brings sublime possibilities. Yet we cannot forget that the sublime is impossible, and can only exist in a dreamed world (with words or images). The sublime appears in Peixoto's works, with its tragic possibility of never existing.

With the sublime, "we try to transcend, in feelings and discourse, what is human; and whatever is beyond the human – God or gods, devils or Nature – is material of great divergences" (Weiskel 1994: 17). This comprehension clearly shows the desire in Peixoto's works to go beyond the human being and reality. Nature emerges as an impossible alternative, as a sublimity that cannot be concrete. Like the sun that appears in Peixoto's verses, because it is vital, but cannot be reached, as seen the verse: "for me

⁸ Before producing *Limite*, Mário Peixoto lived in England, where he had come into contact with European movies. He stayed in Europe for some months in 1927, when he was 19 years old. He was able to follow the Chaplin Club's debates from 1928 onwards, and his movie was produced in 1930.

⁹ In Peixoto's written works, it is possible to identify Expressionist characteristics and also montage characteristics. Saulo Pereira de Mello has indicated that Faria and Süsskind Rocha's debate was present in the only movie that Peixoto accomplished, with a German Expressionist side and another side with traits of Griffith's and Soviet cinema. (Mello 1997: 66).

it seemed impossible that the sun could exist” (Peixoto 2002: 44)¹⁰. Peixoto’s sensitiveness is never far from a universe of shadows, where light often seems to be an abstraction, as if it does not belong to reality, but to a lyrical world.

In these picture and written works, the image and the light have huge power, and the word seems to be incapable of containing the complexity of the world to which it is connected. The aesthetic choices of this Brazilian artist are very distant from the choices that were essential for Brazilian Modernism, because the latter, from the end of the 1920s, started to become more and more regionalist. In many respects, Mário Peixoto was closer to the movie directors of German Expressionism, for whom the perfect picture would dispense with words. For the German Expressionist cinema, images should be so eloquent that words would not be necessary, because this group was searching for a cinematographic expression that was absolutely independent from literature.

The Chaplin Club’s concerns were very different from those of the regionalist writers and movie directors that characterised Brazilian Modernism in the 1920s and 1930s. *Limite* was closer to the Chaplin Club, as its publications confirm, than to Brazilian Modernism. This identification between Peixoto and the Chaplin Club may explain why *Limite* seems to be so far from the best-known examples of Brazilian Modernism. This group in Rio, in its discussions on cinematographic aesthetics, established a singular theoretical reflection at that time that was unique in Brazil.

Octavio de Faria took up some positions that we can identify as expressions of an uncommon cultural critic in the 1930’s. This author began one of his articles in this way: “Everybody, in the course of life, wants or has wanted to sue someone or something. The action that I would bring would be against the word. (...). This apotheosis of images that we are watching here, in Brazil (...) is the result of this word’s failure, which seems evident to me. It is the reflex and also the explanation. Because the ascension of the former is the decadence of the latter.”¹¹

Octavio de Faria identified some confrontations between the word and the cinematographic image. He was an enthusiast for the new image technology and its speed. To his eyes, that historical moment was demanding new references for producing

¹⁰ In Portuguese, the verse is “me pareceu impossível existisse o sol” (Peixoto 2002: 44).

¹¹ This is the text in Portuguese: “Todo o mundo tem ou teve durante a sua vida vontade de instaurar um processo contra alguém ou alguma coisa. O processo que eu instauraria seria o da palavra. (...). A apoteose da imagem a que estamos assistindo daqui do Brasil (...) é o resultado dessa falência da palavra que me parece evidente. O seu reflexo e também sua explicação. Pois a curva de ascensão de uma coincide com a de declínio da outra. (Faria 1929a: 1.)

literature, and cinema was extremely important because it was seen as the most appropriate expressive form for translating the conflicts that formed part of that period of time.

Italian Futurism, which is understood by many theorists, like François Albéra, as the first modernist movement (Albéra 2002: 176), published the first manifesto of futurist cinema¹², signed by some Italian artists like Marinetti, Giacomo Balla, Arnaldo Ginna and Bruno Corra. In this manifesto they said that books were “absolutely a means of the past for conserving or communicating thoughts” and that they were “destined to disappear, like the cathedrals, the towers (...) and the museums” (Verdone 1967: 231)¹³. Books have never been surpassed, although it needs to be noted that Faria’s enthusiasm for cinematographic technology belongs to a specific modernist moment when the speed of images in the cinema was seen as presenting very rich aesthetic possibilities. The same manifesto stated that, while futurist artists would be “obligated” to publish books, meanwhile within cinema they would find the possibility for “eminently futurist” art, because cinema was “the best adapted” way to express “the multiple sensitivities of a futurist artist” (Verdone 1967: 231).¹⁴.

For Mário Peixoto, not only words, but also images were shown to be insufficient. It was not possible to trust what was displayed, because organic regard always had faults and deficiencies, as seemed to be shown by the expressionist camera, which distorted reality and revealed new shadows because of the impossibility of living within a safe and objective reality.

Words and images bring movement, and reality only offers frustrations and tragic impossibilities, as revealed in this poem by Peixoto:

¹² The second futurist manifesto, signed by Marinetti and Arnaldo Ginna, in 1938, confirms the affirmations of the first manifesto. (Verdone 1967: 239-241).

¹³ “Il libro, mezzo assolutamente passatista di conservare e comunicare il pensiero, era da molto destinato a scomparire come le cattedrali, le torri (...), i musei (...).” (Verdone 1967: 231).

¹⁴ “Le necessità della propaganda ci costringeranno a pubblicare un libro di tanto in tanto. (...) mentre noi vediamo in esso [il cinematografo] la possibilità di un’arte eminentemente futurista e il mezzo di espressione più adatto alla pluri-sensibilità di un artista futurista” (Verdone 1967: 231).

my mouth will be for smiling
 the impossible
 (...)
 Everything is ready and at its end;
 and with the lights moving away
 from the quay,
 for one who stays,
 for one who extends for another two
 colourless instants,
 it may be – it may be, by God!
 - that something will happen.
 (“The tortuous nook.” In: Peixoto 2002:
 48-49)

A minha boca será para sorrir
 o impossível
 (...)
 tudo está prestes e no fim;
 e com as luzes afastando-se
 do cais,
 para quem fica,
 para quem estira mais dois instantes
 descorados,
 pode ser – pode ser, meu Deus!
 – que algo aconteça.
 (“O recanto tortuoso.” In: Peixoto 2002:
 48-49)

The “impossible” belongs to reality, in Peixoto’s works, and we can read into it that, with the senses and with a smile, there is a desire to experiment with the intangible. There is a bitter tone, even a desperate feeling: “everything is ready and at its end”. There is a waiting in this poem, for something that it is impossible to know about: “It may be – it may be, by God! / that something will happen.” The possible reality seems to be this unstable reality that appears in the poems’ images, in all the images of the sea, with an inexplicable and inevitable shipwreck, as we see in *Limite*’s images. In Peixoto’s works, the anguish takes on tragic tonality.

The ineffable belongs to images and words, in Peixoto’s works. Expressionism and montages are perhaps behind the choice of theme, but this poetic voice remains singular, with a rare originality, and refuses any kind of limit or classification. Expressionism seems to be closer to Peixoto’s works because it brings new forms to an anguished experience of reality.

If we compare this poem’s title, “The tortuous nook”, with other works by Peixoto, including *Limite*, we can perceive that *tortuous* indicates an oblique route, eschewing straight lines. All choices are determined by the senses, and this path cannot be linear, will always surprise and will provide acceptance of the uncertainty of what can be found behind waves, elevations and mountains, because there is never any kind of stability. The sea’s movements cannot be avoided.

As can be seen from Lotte Eisner's book, German Expressionism seems to be much closer to Peixoto's works: "The oblique line has to the spectator an opposite effect of that of the straight line: unexpected curves stimulate psychical reactions completely different of that ones that the harmonious line's disposition provoke" (Eisner 1985: 28). The impact of the oblique line, resulting from its importance to the structure of the artistic work once again reveals that in Peixoto's works it is not possible to sense a secure reality, because such a reality is always untouchable and incomprehensible. In *Mundéu* (first published in 1931 and republished by Saulo Pereira de Mello in 1996), there are poems with titles like: "The great curve", "Cordillera" and "The road that descends":

I compared	comparei
a life	uma vida
as strange as this night	tão estranha como essa noite
this road that descends	esta estrada que desce
these shadows that follow me"	estas sombras que me seguem
("The road that descends." In: Peixoto 1996: 21)	("A Estrada que desce." In: Peixoto 1996: 21)

The oblique line goes together with this "life/as strange as this night". This life is associated with the night, the shadows and this "road that descends". And, like the shadows, a vertiginous sensation seems to be near. The visions and anguish that belong to the German aesthetic movement insistently appear in Peixoto's work: shadows and phantasms also exist in his artistic production.

In Mário Peixoto's works, the unexpected is needed. There is an urgency about taking the oblique line. We could call it an organic line, if we consider that, as there is no harmony in his internal world – that his poetry brings into images – his works must include uncertainty in all its forms and the vertiginous sensation that his imagination experiences. Ernst Bloch (1989: 92-96) states that, during the Gothic period, the organic could find its true and authentic manifestation in the ornamentation. The "organic exuberance" that appears in the ornamentation, in the oblique lines of the Gothic style, reveals the existence of a vertiginous line that tends to the infinity and does not know where it is heading (Bloch 1989: 94).

Sea, curves and mountains, between the light and the shadows, which belong both to *Limite* and to Peixoto's literature, are some of the representations of this rare and unique universe that shows its most famous face in cinema. Nonetheless, we must also consider that this artistic production allows us to identify multiple dialogues that are often indirect: with German Expressionism, Italian Futurism and always close to the original reflections that constituted the Chaplin Club debate in Brazil, between 1928 and 1931.

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Image and movement in Mário Peixoto's creation: an introduction to the dialogue between the cinematographic work *Limite* and the literary work *O Inútil de Cada Um*¹⁵

Aparecida do Carmo Frigeri Berchior

Mário Peixoto's creation is characterised by image generation procedures. These images are processed through circular movements forwards and backwards, retrieving what has gone by in order to move ahead in a new reconstruction from the remaining residues. Such poetics of reconstruction is regulated by a process of opening and closing a poetic circle so that another can be born from the fragments of what has gone by: the closing of one circle is the opening for a new cycle, a new search, and successively like this, with constant uplifting of the poetic image to achieve a primordial state.

Mário Peixoto's cinematographic work *Limite*, a silent movie dating from 1931, and his literary work *O Inútil de Cada Um* (The Uselessness of Everyone), of which the first volume was published in 1984, converge into poetic movements with the aesthetic effect of unfinished work, in the perpetual remaking of each instantaneously captured image, expressed through a structure that is incessantly under reconstruction. These procedures find backing especially in the structuring of the narration and in the composition of characters, in which the resultant poetics makes retrocessive movement until it reaches a primordial image that is present in the constitutive elements of the universe, the generators of the first movements in the world.

The literary work *O Inútil de Cada Um*, with the addition of the subtitle (diary excerpts) *O ruído persegue (romance)*, volume 1 *Itamar* (The noise pursues (novel), volume 1 *Itamar*), is reconstructed from an embryonic novel with the same title *O Inútil de Cada Um*, also by Mário Peixoto and published in 1934/35. In this first work, his second was already heralded metalinguistically as a book whose leading character would be a "weirdly humoured man" (Peixoto 1996: p.83): Orlando, the same character as in the first novel, who lives on Abraham's Island (Angra dos Reis), the setting for Peixoto's

¹⁵ Original Title: IMAGEM E MOVIMENTO NA CRIAÇÃO DE MÁRIO PEIXOTO: uma introdução ao diálogo entre a obra cinematográfica *Limite* e a literária *O Inútil de Cada Um*. Translated by Daniel Fernando Rodrigues.

creation; the location for the second novel. In this second novel, whole sections of the first novel also come back, as well as other fragments that unfold and are remade. Several other characters besides the leading one also come back.

The second novel can be defined as Orlando's Odyssey to try to rediscover time by doing constant exercises with his memory, at different levels of experience. The time records lie within a past that differs from the idealised feeling of missing it, since the memories are fictional material through which the gradual supplanting of time and the gradual predominance of creation are filtered until the procedures for creating a sculpture museum are reached, at which time the literary code, through the power of the poetic image, has a dialogue with the sculpture code.

The procedures adopted for elevating the poetic image in this second novel *O Inútil de Cada Um* are mainly structured through two guiding strands: one that is present in the narration procedures, which is formed by the motif of a diary that is found, thus enabling the use of two narrators speaking in the first person; and a second strand that deals with the relationship between this narration and the character Orlando who gets himself organised psychologically for the crossing, seen through several rites of passage that are found in the motif of searching to rediscover time, from the material gathered in the memory. This process is made effective in the discourse by means of language in constant forward and backward movements that is expressed by long sentences, interspersed with parentheses, in which a reflection leads to another and later returns to the starting point.

In the narration strand, the work takes up the position of a first-person narrator, but with differentiated nuances of focus. The many moments in which this narrator is positioned as if he were a camera deserve to be highlighted: for an included reader, these project the material gathered in the memory, "thirty years later", in a dimension "where the heat, still latent", "makes us rewind the memory spool and projects what has touched us, on the hanging screen of time" (Peixoto 1984: 193).

At other moments, the narrator takes up the position of a "narrator-author", recording his creation as this project is being developed, from the procedures of turning the diary that was found into fiction. In this respect, the work generates a conflict between the "narrator-author" and the narrator-character, and two narrative times result from this process: one relates to the utterance, coming from the character Orlando's memory; the other relates to enunciation, the time of the "narrator-author", outlining the transmutation of the diary into fiction. Thus, there is a relationship between the

construction of the work and the recording of this construction in the ongoing creation, thereby establishing tension between the writing of the work and the writing projected onto it, as it was being done: a “making of” saga; a script of the narrative-writing in progress:

The two narrative times connect at the moment when the narrator-author projects his death into the pre-work, as a way of producing a bigger aesthetic effect:

I’ve decided to kill myself. So I don’t disappoint the reader, I search for my revolver. I take the bullet out of the chamber and look at it. So this is it, etc. I consider (...) the cemetery and grave in which I would like to be buried (...) (My hand will open or drop the pencil; what will happen to it?) (...) sentence from the beginning of the writing pad – to think over whether I fall over the writing pad (this writing pad) on which I’m writing these events that I’m outlining¹⁶.

The preconstructed scene above corresponds, aesthetically, in its development in the ongoing narrative, to the predicted form:

On the bed (..) entwined like in a muslin sudarium, the stretched-out form was recognisable from the yellowed and transparent parchment-like skin (...) One of the mummy’s hands (...) was lost in the folds of the ancient cloth and reappeared further away (...) The other (...) went further still, to the edge of the cot with some fingers detaching, separating ahead of their disconnected phalanx, with which that hand once held (...) a small dark or even, perhaps, black notebook, (...) lightly touched almost by the same bones, with which the hand, in its ultimate effort, had probably attempted to save it. 17

It is interesting to note that, first, there is the utterance recording the scene that is developed and which has already been narrated in chapter 5 (*Hibernação* - Hibernation)

¹⁶ In the original version: Resolvi me matar. Não decepciono o leitor; busco o revólver. Retiro a bala da agulha. Olhá-la. Então era esta, etc., considero. (...) cemitério e túmulo em que queria ser enterrado (...) (Minha mão abrirá ou soltará o lápis; o que será dele?) (...) frase do início do bloco - pensar, isto sim, se caio em cima do bloco (deste bloco) em que escrevo isto que estou traçando (p. 181-182).

¹⁷ In the original version: Sobre a cama (...)– enrodilhada como num sudário de filó, a forma jazia reconhecível através do amarelado e transparente pergaminho da pele (...) Uma das mãos da múmia (...) perdia-se nas voltas do antigo tecido e surgindo adiante (...). A outra (...) avançava ainda na beira do catre uns dedos descolando-se, separando-se adiantado das suas falanges desligadas, junto ao que mantivera, um dia, naquela mão (...): um pequeno caderno escuro ou mesmo negro, talvez; (...) roçado quase pelos mesmos ossos, com que a mão, em derradeiro alento, provavelmente, ainda tentara resguardá-lo (p. 76-77).

and, subsequently, the same scene is unveiled, at the enunciation level, as a preliminary scene in chapter 15 (*Imagens Retardadas I* – Delayed Images I).

In the strand conducted by the character Orlando, the work is structured from the motif for the crossing expressed by rites of passage that would lead to learning through time and creation. First, the crossing is carried out in the movement from the sea to the land, by means of the motif of an allegorical canoe. The sea is the transposition that leads to Abraham's Island, the Promised Land that is also Earth, the constitutive element of the universe in its original state, where the movements of creation occur. The island is the isolation needed for Orlando to accomplish his learning and become able to make the crossing movement back to the beginning, from the land to the sea, within the dimension of time reconciled through creation with a great feat achieved: the sculpture museum, which enables the novel to have an aesthetic of euphoric mood.

Thus, the motif of the passage, which is strongly marked in the novel, also occurs in the cinematographic work *Limite*. Nevertheless, in *Limite*, the motif of the crossing has an aesthetic of tragic expression, composed by dysphoria. This occurs because, in the motif of the crossing, there is no learning: the survivors who have been exhausted by the land and beaten by it seek isolation in the sea, thereby making a movement that is the opposite of what is in the novel. In the cinematographic work, three characters (a man and two women) appear to have been abandoned to the sea, in a drifting boat. Each of them brings an intimate drama from the land. The ocean, in its outward immensity, is a poetic image from within these uprooted characters, in the light of their identities left behind on the land. Thus, these characters have no names; they are indistinct, drifting and made universal in their pain. Learning may only take place by means of returning, since human existence is intrinsically land-based. So the characters in the boat, far from the land, need to return. But such return is possible just through their roots: the history each one carries, thereby generating tension between the need to return and the dramatic experience that their memories retain from that place: the pain of existing, within their limits, which triggered their flight to the sea.

The first images of *Limite* place the viewer in front of the unusual, making him or her feel the strangeness. In the first scene, this viewer comes across a woman in close-up, in the foreground, with her hands cuffed. These hands are masculine and this is superposed on the composition of the female face. This immediately cuts to the next scene: the top of a mountain, elemental Earth, with vultures flying over it. From this initial strange feeling, it is already possible for the viewer to feel the nihilistic indicators that permeate

the work. Following these metaphors, there is a close-up of the eyes of the woman who appears at the beginning. An opening is superimposed on this, which is expanded up to the front of a boat in the sea, where the woman reappears accompanied by a man, in the middle, and by a woman at the other end of the boat. The first images are apparently not decipherable yet. Without any other reference, these three characters show that they accept and have surrendered to their fate: they are no longer rowing and they express an inner fatigue that almost makes their lives come to an end. These worn-out survivors have surrendered to Chaos, at the limit: nothingness. In this state, the processes that lead to their restoration to the land begin. There is no way out, however. They have to return in order to continue learning, which is the maintenance of life, thereby postponing the end; or else they must undertake the definitive crossing towards the end that is foreseen. In *Limite*, the elemental land starts to be recovered, even though the characters are isolated in the sea, through returning to the act of narration, thus going back to the origins of the narrative, shaped by oral traditions from a time when craftsmen and travellers (Benjamin, 1986), because of their experiences brought from far away, had the power to tell stories and therefore contribute towards maintaining the culture of a collective imagination. However, the stories to be told by the characters in this film carry out this process the other way round: the narrators-characters are introduced at a time that is not reconciled, they are destroyed and cut up in *Paradise Lost*. They are not reconciled with time: their stories are rooted in the earth; in the prison of an individual past, i.e. they do not return to the land as narrators of experiences, but to recover a lost identity. They are not like the hero of a literary work that, when leaving in search for the lost paradise, lands in the Promised Land, a place where time is learned about until rediscovered in the created dimension.

The stories in *Limite* are narrated with no speech, since the film is silent. This procedure ends up forming a tool for elevating the poetic image from corporeal expression originating from the tension between the sea, with each character focused on telling his/her story, and the land, the place where each narrated story is rooted. This produces a “psychological shock” on the viewers’ minds (Martin 2003: 93) that is manifested by the effect of these characters’ despair.

In narrating their stories, the characters of *Limite* allow two narrative instances to exist: one presented by the properties of the cinematographic code, in which the meaning of the image is “in accordance with the filmic context created by the editing” (Martin 1990: 28); and the other instance is presented by the interplay between scenes while

maintaining the unit of time and place, which are tied to the characters in the boat, who are therefore in the sea. This unit forms tension with the sequences, which makes it possible to return to another place and another time, fixed within the stories told, while maintaining the unit of action.

In this way, the viewer experiences a montage expressed by three independent stories, constructed through artistic procedures that are indissolubly interlinked through the visual discourse. In the narration of the first woman's story (the same woman as in the opening scene), the narrative plot is set loose. When telling her story, she comes back to the land, since that is where her drama lies: she was a prisoner, but she got out of prison by bribing the warden. She tries to resume her life and her routine, metaphorically expressed by the act of moving a sewing machine, as well as objects semantically linked to circular movements. In her inner self, however, despair takes over and becomes uncontrollable, when she gets to know that her escape is on the pages of a newspaper: she puts herself on a path, a recurring metaphor in the work that is reiterated by roads and alleys, with the aesthetic effect of extending her inner immensity by means of spatial prolongation. On the other hand, the visual discourse in this story is dominated by circular objects that interact with the circularity of the movements of the sewing machine, thereby contributing towards the dramatic effect of the text, as a metaphor for this character's despair. The metaphor of the act of sewing also makes it possible to restore the mythological memory of the Moirai, the three spinning divinities who weave men's destinies from birth to death. Thus, the allegory of the three Moirai expresses the characters' destinies in this conflict between life and death present in the three stories.

Suddenly, in this first woman's narrative, the flow of the story is interrupted, thus causing tension because of the interference of a pair of vertically-positioned scissors in close-up, making imaginary cuts in the visual text. This metaphor marks the interruption of chronological, horizontal, time so that psychological time can definitively slip in. Through this process there is a temporal game that is manifested as one of the procedures unleashing the movement of the work and also a further auxiliary rhythm element provoked by the spatial movement: on the one hand there is the sea, in the present, on which the story takes place within the space of the boat; on the other, there is a past, marked by the space of the land, with the characters' stories. Thus, the present tense marker is the space of the sea, in which the characters express deep feelings of solitude and surrender; the land is the space in which the intimate dramas that generated this present psychological state took place and from which the tragic outcomes on the

land have led to the isolation in the sea. This temporal game intensifies the dramatic effect, in which the action is centred on the story, situated within each character's past, thus making them relive their despair and, at the same time, reinforcing the effect of their solitude.

The psychological effects that come from flashbacks are compared with the ongoing narrative at the present time, narrated in the third person. This narrative forms a camera that becomes a "character in the drama", imposing "its various points of view on the viewer" (Martin 2003: 31). This way, the film starts at the resultant from the drama, "going back to expose the past and then return to the present" (226), and it gives continuity to the narrative in progress. Thus, the work maintains the unity of its strands through the metaphor of the boat, as a unit for both times. The time spent waiting for the crossing is located in this: the boat is the root that maintains the possibility of going back to the land, or else it is the passage towards the end, leading Charon's boat to make the crossing.

Because the work is in black and white, its "colour" is as a function of the intensity of these characters' intimate drama, shown by the contrast between light and dark, and how it is processed as a light effect. This is also corroborated by impressionistic scenery, with tension between the sea and the solitary and practically uninhabited land, with the atmosphere of a beach village. The scenery starts to be a landscape chosen "as the psychologically dominant feature of the action", which "simultaneously determines and reflects the characters' dramas" (Martin 2003: 63), expressed by deep feelings of solitude and surrender.

Another element to be highlighted in the composition of the work is the music. It causes an aesthetic effect on the viewer by reinforcing "the penetration power of the dramatic image" (25). On the other hand, it also softens the tension that comes from the dramas experienced by the characters, and it is also an element that interacts with the rhythm of the film, by interfering in the duration of the plans in order to enhance the slow and fluid rhythm, with waiting time that is more related to what is intended to be suggested psychologically than to what is intended to be shown from within the tragic content.

Where the poetic movement comes into interaction with the constitutive elements of the universe, we first come across the realm of Fire. The characters in *Limite* are dominated by an inner self on fire: the fire burns their innards. It is under the domain of the element Fire, a metaphor for inner expansion, that the message is developed. In this process, the receptor is also captured by this intimate fire and starts to inhabit this realm,

along with each narrator-character. Thus, this intimate fire is experienced until reaching its ancestral home, which lies within the realm of death. When this intimate immensity, this intimate fire, is extinguished, it brings about an image of non-fire, indicating the tragic ending, as can be seen from one scene inside the boat: the male character holds a stick in his hand, which may be the fire that lights life again through the return to the element earth by means of plant life. However, the scene does not develop to this procedure: the stick is thrown away into the salty water, which invades the interior of the boat, thereby creating an image of man surrendering to his own fortune. This process establishes a tension between the two substances crucial for forming the universe: fire and water. The fusion of these two elements fertilises the images, turning the salty water into a blazing, burning water, which turns the sea into a sea of fire. On the other hand, the lasting union of water and fire, as an expression of intimate pain, is also an organism that, in the cosmogonic expression, is constituted as a fundamental principle for other elements to be able to exist in the poetic image.

The domain of the element Water, which is kept in constant opposition to the element Earth, is presented in two ways in *Limite*: first, through the contrast of land versus sea, which is strongly marked in the second woman's story and also in the man's. These two narrator-characters experience an inner conflict that is presented through contrasting metaphors between land, life and sea; the space of salty water; the water of non-life; the surrender in the drifting boat; and the image of dysphoric intimate immensity. One of the poetic images of this intimate dimension takes place most strongly in a scene in the end of the story told by the second woman: she is on land, on the top of a rock beside the sea, in deep despair. At this moment, a poetic game between the story and the discourse is in play: on the one hand, there is the woman's tragic story, with her unsuccessful marriage to a drunk pianist; on the other, the camera invades the story and takes control, thus showing the internal movement of the conflict through quick and circular movements, merging the elements Earth and Water, and giving universal meaning to human emotions.

Water is also presented in the work through its division into salty and fresh water. In the beginning, salty water dominates: the characters are in a boat, isolated on the sea. In this circle, the salty water is an element that catalyses anguish, and the characters expelled from the land are tied to it. The sea, however, does not welcome them, for there is no link with this water of non-life, this inhumane water that does not contain "the first duty of all revered elements, which is to serve men directly" (Bachelard 1998: 158). In

the isolation in the sea, however, it is possible to pick up each story from the land, thus maintaining, through the narration, the links to this element and therefore to life.

To live in a drifting boat on the ocean is like living in Charon's boat, making the crossing to death. However, if death is seen as freedom, through man's need to uproot himself from Earth and live in the immensity of the salty water of the sea, death is also the need to inhabit the source of the memory that sweetens the salt, to enable the crossing back to the Earth. In the recovered land, one of the primordial elements for maintaining life is remembered: fresh water, for "fresh water is the true mythical water" (Bachelard 1998: 158); the holder of conflicting images between life and death. One of the most expressive images of this conflict is presented by the tension between the salty water that surrounds the boat infinitely, penetrating into its interior, and the lack of fresh water in a bowl inside the boat. At this moment, life is threatened, which can be seen from the characters' expressions of despair when faced with the lack of fresh water in the bowl inside the boat, until a barrel that it is suggested is filled with this liquid is seen far away in the sea, thus triggering a conflict between the passage to life versus the passage to death. The man jumps into the infinite sea in search of fresh water, the water of life, and disappears: the salty water, the inhumane water in its infinity wins, and the first crossing of Charon's boat takes place.

The return to the land, from the stories told, maintains the link to life and, therefore, the link to fresh water, which is terrestrial par excellence and has supremacy over salty water. Fresh water is highlighted in three situations on the land: firstly, the viewer is introduced to the water of the river, and attention is drawn in this environment to the presence of two characters: the male narrator-character and his lover, in an idyllic encounter. Secondly, fresh water appears in the second woman's story, with greater poetic tension: water pours out of a spring, which is high up, as if it were an eye of primordial fresh water, thus confirming Gaston Bachelard's thinking, in which "water is the real eye of the earth" (1988: 33). This spring is transmuted into a poetic image of immemorial water, the mother-water of all waters: the mythical water that, in this instance, is also cosmic water. Subsequently, foretelling the tragic destiny that unfolds in the ocean, fresh water comes from the sky: it rains, wetting a cross in the foreground several times, as a metaphor for man surrendering to his fortune, to the cross he must carry. It also foretells of the storms that are heralded.

In this conflict between the elements, the Air is presented by the wind in *Limite*. The image of the element Wind gives movement to the intimate dimension, since, in the

poetic imagination, the wind is capable of being humanised. In the work, it interacts either with the element Earth or with the element Water. In interaction with the Earth, the wind gives material shape to the intimate dimension, from the movement of transformations in nature, bending before its strength. Thus, pastures, sticks and bushes are given poetic dynamism through receiving the wind, thereby being changed into poetic images that shape the narrator-characters' intimate dramas. The strongest expression of this image is found, again, in one of the scenes of the story told by the male narrator-character: widowed, he becomes a married woman's lover until he gets to know from the betrayed husband that she is infected with leprosy. This image is presented as the highest point of his tragic story: he is in the cemetery visiting his dead wife's grave. The betrayed husband leaves home to meet his wife's lover. From a metonymic viewpoint, nervous steps are confused with the wind touching nature. The viewer experiences, in this symbiosis, these men's pain of existing through this poetic image. From the movement of the wind, the conflict between the external movements of spatial content and the internal movements of the human element is also established. In the cemetery, the betrayed husband reveals to his wife's lover that she is infected with leprosy and the story goes on to its end. However, the expected outcome from the love triangle does not occur, for the revenge takes place through the pain that both of them share.

Through the interaction with the element water, the wind that is presented is a furious wind, a salty-water wind, expressed through a storm, thereby leading to the end of the narrative that is developed in the present, in the boat. This salty wind is the expression of non-life, dragging both survivors towards the definitive crossing: a reminiscence of the myth of Charon. In this enraged symbiosis of the water and the wind, the viewer hears the characters' intimate storms, as well as his/her own. "To listen to a tense soul's storm is alternately, or at the same time, to receive Communion, in great fear and wrath, with a raging universe" (Bachelard 1990: 235).

According to Saulo Pereira de Mello, "*Limite* is a cosmic tragedy, a scream of anguish, a throbbing meditation on human limitation, and a painful and cold perception of human defeat" (Mello 2002: 1). This human tragedy is presented, in this storm, through a primordial poetic image that recalls the Urandina. On the other hand, this storm may be seen as a metaphor for creation, because "through wrath, the world is created as a provocation", since it "founds the dynamic being: wrath is the act that starts it" (Bachelard 1990: 233).

In the final scenes of this cosmogonic turbulence, the second woman disappears in the sea. The first woman reappears holding wreckage. From then on, the work starts to come to an end, by recollecting the human circle bound to its own tragedy, in a new dimension. The work returns to its first scene, in which this first woman's face appears in the foreground, with masculine hands cuffed, reaffirming the "universal cosmic tragedy" (Mello 2002: 1).

After this scene, the same opening also follows: the top of a mountain, the Earth with vultures flying over it. Then, the sea surges forward without the woman. This surging sea is a poetic sea: it is a sea of merged contrasting elements: a shimmering calm sea, shaped through creation.

In the literary work *O Inútil de Cada Um*, the constitutive elements of the universe are recovered through the restoration of the element Earth, in the dimension in which learning reaches the sphere of a time reconciled by creation. Unlike what happens in the cinematographic work, in this instance, the Earth has a euphoric poetic movement in which the sign is neither a recollection nor a remembrance of a distant past: the sign is an image and therefore brings with it the merit of the new and the original. Thus, the Earth is recovered in the novel through the dimension of an accomplished work, shaped through creation: the open-air sculpture museum in Abraham's Land. In this creative space, the real sculptures that form the museum are transmuted into fictional objects. These sculptures, as real materials, are handmade references made of white china in a series in the Miragaya factory. Like everything on the island, they were also "planted" there in order to serve as a mould for the creation, and were therefore fictional materials. As images, they are defined by a generating space for highly motivated signs, in a process of returning to a primordial origin, going back up through the mythological universe that is simultaneously inhabited by the poetic message and its reception, since they provide "true awakening of the poetic creation in the reader's soul" (Bachelard 1993: 7). In the poetic space of the museum, there is no previous time that can be returned to, and only the permanent residues remain, for all time.

The structure of the museum presents selective arrangement of the sculptures in the space, organised with the aim of recalling, as symbology, the gods that bring to the surface the image of the meaning of the world, from the interaction between the cosmogonic and the eschatological myths, in which poetic images go up through and give dynamism to the primordial elements Earth, Fire, Water and Air. In this stage, the receptor, through the poetic image, experiences the first movements of the world and

the memory disdains the links to its generating principle: that the past and time exist only in the space of the creation.

In the selection process for the museum, the sculptures prior to the ones of the constitutive elements of the universe, consisting of *Bacchus*, *Diana*, *Autumn*, *Flora*, *Africa*, *Cybele* and *Venus*, still preserve links with the procedures that are connected with experiences through memories, and are thus placed within a process for comprehending the poetic message itself. However, the stages that are interlinked to the elements Fire, Water and Air, expressed through the sculptures *The Fire*, *The Rain*, *The Water*, *The Sun* and *The Wind*, and individualised by the definite article, trigger the experience in the poetic message that occurs at the reception level from different stages of the contemplative act, thereby closing the circle of creation: from the message to its own reception. Within this contemplative sphere, the narrator either places him or herself as a contemplator of his own creation, or as the revealer of the procedures adopted for its creation.

The stages relating to reception that are present in the sculptures *The Rain* and *The Water* come from a contemplator who is still an initiate, undertaking his first traverses to penetrate the creation procedures, and is placed in the admiration dimension, the first entrance to the aesthetic pleasure that would come later. Thus, with regard to *The Rain* “there was recurrent and increasing admiration, increasingly renovated” (Peixoto 1984: 321). On the other hand, for the sculpture *The Water*, “from a single glance” (321), there was the perception:

It was a single compound, in that case, but which made us enjoy that thirst, to feel it, finally changing into that basic and final element: the liquid, the water, as the body of the intention would be.¹⁸

When the sculpture *The Fire* comes to be contemplated, the receptor is placed in his/her second traverse into the poetic message. This stage is marked by the contrast between the white china that shapes the element and the expression of fire as a poetic image, thus leading the contemplator to conjugate the imagined object and the being that does the imagining:

¹⁸ In the original version: Era um único composto, tratando-se ali – mas que nos fazia curtir aquela sede – senti-la – redundando-a finalmente naquele elemento básico e final: o líquido – a água, como seria o corpo da intenção (p.322).

Albeit white china (...), from this figure arose a real sensation of a nearby furnace that had red rays or hidden flames surrounding it, though invisible, but only inducing in the sculpture that powerful irradiation that would suggest and be translated into something that the fire itself with its destructive and burning power obliges anything or anyone in its presence to feel (p. 322).¹⁹

From this traverse onwards, there is a receptor who reflects on the creation procedures: “How could that impression be achieved anyway; how did the artist translate it?”²⁰ (323). With the coming of the sculpture *The Sun* to be contemplated, the element Fire is renewed and humanised, thereby illuminating the Earth as its energy source. In the poetic realm, the myth of Prometheus is reborn through this sculpture, bringing light to humankind and seeking it in the sun chariot: the creation. The sun, the all-seeing eye of the world, gives light to the Earth, making it possible, in this contemplative instant, to recover the human element, with human doings on earth, since the Promethean images contribute towards the renascence of human poetics (Bachelard 1990: 91), which gains power through friction to make fire, to heat and fertilise the earth:

(...) the raised hand covering his eyes, from that direct light that bathed him; a tall basket at his feet from which an array of corncoobs without straw (...) all the luminosity of the star was there, shaped in the figure (...) the thing that was wanted worked. There was the sun.²¹

Prometheus, through the sign of civilisation, is the founder of art. The creator of art is something more than a man: a Prometheus. The man caught by the sunlight, the creation, in the act of contemplation, is also a creator of the poetic image.

From the time of the sculpture *The Sun*, the contemplator is already an initiate and the poetic message presents to the receptor the selection and combination process for each sculpture in the museum, thus unveiling the creation procedures and taking part in its modelling:

¹⁹ In the original version: Se bem que de louça branca (...) subia dessa figura a sensação realmente de uma fornalha por perto, cujos raios vermelhos – ou labaredas ocultas – a estivessem rodeando embora invisíveis: mas apenas induzindo a escultura naquela poderosa irradiação que sugeria – e traduzia-se – no que o próprio fogo com o seu poder destrutivo e abrasante obriga qualquer presença a senti-lo (p.322).

²⁰ In the original version: Como, então, fora conseguida aquela impressão – como a traduzira o artista?

²¹ In the original version: No (...) a mão erguida encobrindo-lhe os olhos, daquela luz direta que o banhava – um alto balaio aos pés – de onde apontava um aglomerado de espigas de milho sem a palha (...) lá estava toda a luminosidade do astro plasmada na figura.(...) a coisa que se quis funcionava. Estava ali o sol (Peixoto 1984: p.324)

It was ordered that the mould be put on the side that I wanted to demonstrate, thereby pointing out its advantages (...) Only a provision model being tried out (...) But from there, looking over the land for the best aesthetics for the set (...) the best effect (...) And it showed itself; it arose (with our stubborn insistence on searching for it... trying to capture, in the appearance of everything, the maximum that the combination of elements could produce for us.²²

Within the sphere of contact with the contemplation of the sculpture *The Wind*, the receptor is capable of participating in the poetic message. In this instance, the narrative procedures, which are connected to the poetic material of time, myth and creation process, are recollected in their primordial origin. Thus, in the light of the reception, the sculpture *The Wind* gives power to the unveiling of the creation, as well as to the relationships that these maintain with the unveiling of the human condition. This sculpture “was much more tragic” than the others and also “was something that could uplift the viewer” (Peixoto 1984: 327), for it was:

Like the wind; like the gales of a typhoon in which the unleashing would be in the minds of those who could face them, but in that extreme force of restricted possibilities, captive to the impetus of creation, to be exhibited motionless! This was achieved by the artist.²³

This sculpture makes the process of humanisation of the work real, in this return of essence, of reconstruction of the procedures from a primordial image. Thus, the primordial Wind, in its mythical origin, goes back up through the movements of the human condition, which starts a process of adherence to the creative procedures. In this poetic dimension, dynamic imagination makes the human element, in a state of poetic movement, be shaped in creation, into the sculpture *Fate*. In this sculpture, “the valence of elapsed time seemed to be static there; almost with no value” (Peixoto 1984: 352), enabling the human condition, with its *Fate*, to be elevated to the status of the fifth

²² In the original version: Ordenava de que o molde fosse levado para o lado que eu queria demonstrar, apontando-lhe suas vantagens. (...) Apenas um provisório sendo ensaiado. (...) Mas dali procurando em terra, a melhor estética do conjunto (...) o melhor efeito (...). E a coisa se mostrava – surgia (com aquela nossa insistência, a procurá-la ... tentando captar no aspecto do todo o máximo que aquela combinação de elementos podia nos produzir) (p. 325-326).

²³ In the original version: Tal como o vento – tal como os vendavais de um tufão onde o desencadeamento ficasse na mente de quem as pudesse encarar – mas naquele extremo poderio de suas possibilidades cerceadas – presas ao golpe da criação para ser *exibida parada!* Isso o artista o conseguira (p.328).

constitutive element of the universe, being shaped into a work of art in the Sculpture Museum, and thus freed from its time chains.

This instance closes the narrative cycle, thereby making it accomplish a movement of return to its origin, the sea, in the same allegorical canoe that, in this poetic dimension, takes Orlando to a new crossing, a new beginning.

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Mário Peixoto and the sea

Marco Lucchessi

Someone that has been captured by *Limite*'s images must necessarily note the powerful images in Mário Peixoto's poetry. *Ut pictura poiesis*: In the same way as the painting; the poetry. This ancient principle seems more and more integrated with the postmodernism that Paul Virilio defined in *The Vision Machine* (1994) as the era of flux and speed. This, to me, is one of the reasons for Mário Peixoto's poetry, because this artist has transformed image into poetics of destiny and abysm, and he has backed memory as an intelligible pathway through the flux.

In fact, memory is the essential conductor within the multifarious and temporal succession of impressions of the *theatre of conscience*. This empirical perspective on the one hand, and its hyperphysics on the other are the forces that provoke the flux and reflux of Peixoto's poetry ("blood" and "healing"), the metempsychosis of remembrances that are reborn and decompose:

Without you, remembrance,
and without the lightning of your commotion,
what would become of the continuous
anonymity
of instants that are reborn and decompose;
of breaths that have already deluded perfect
happiness;
sudden tonalities that were illuminated by the
risked
secret of a smile
and the passages that are still healing in a detail
of the macerated appeal of some bloody stain?
("Sketch written in the margin of a script." In:
Peixoto 2002: 46)

Sem ti, lembrança,
e sem o relâmpago da tua comoção,
o que seria do anonimato contínuo
dos instantes que renascem e se desagregam;
dos bafejos que já ilusionaram a perfeita
felicidade,
súbitas tonalidades que se iluminaram do
segredo
arriscado, de um sorriso,
e as passagens que ainda cicatrizam num detalhe
apelo macerado de alguma nódoa de sangue?!
("Rascunho escrito em margem de um roteiro."
In: Peixoto 2002: 46).

The water's memory is revealed to be deeper and more dangerous than previously thought and this dramatises the ephemeral space in the omnivorous sea of succession. Mário Peixoto pictures a scheme of "traitorous shock", of abyssal scarps, of slime, of rock and shadowy things, that slowly and mysteriously obtain corporeal form, like

Proteus, in the *Odyssey*, and Aphrodite, in the *Theogony*, appearing and disappearing in the plasmatic power of water, like in Breton's *Nadja*:

In the shadows of the gulf
the water's memory anchored
the traitorous shocks
that slimed the scarp's first features,
even before darkening with bitterness,
and when the rock, barer now,
had spontaneously formed
in a decisive corporeal manner...
(“São Martinho.” In: Peixoto 2002:50-54)

A memória da água
fundeou no sombrio do golfo
os embates traiçoeiros
que enlimaram as primeiras feições da escarpa,
antes ainda de enegrecida com a amargura,
e quando a rocha, mais nua,
formara-se, então, espontânea
num decisivo jeito de corpo...
(“São Martinho.” In: Peixoto 2002: 50-54)

And the idea acquires a body, doubtlessly with a presence that is sketched out or perhaps foreseen in a hidden word (the *verbum absconditum*), as a treasure of submersed things such as poems, words or cathedrals, emerging from primitive forms and, at the same time, from the antiquity of submersed and subterranean bodies, of inexhaustible abyssal feelings that are translated as a vertiginous wave:

There is a deaf poem
murmuring at the depths of the roots
that are lodged like octopuses
in the coffins of old bodies
undergoing decomposition,
violated in the secrecy of the soil...
(“Soil in the mouth.” In: Peixoto 2002: 95)

Há um poema surdo
rumorejante das profundas entranhas
das raízes
que se alojaram como polvos
nos ataúdes de velhos corpos
carcomidos,
violados no segredo da terra...
(“Terra na boca.” In: Peixoto 2002: 95)

From these inviolable secrets, from this form that is always unfinished and potentially opened with new words, poems or photograms, emerges his hurt and inhospitable demand for solitude. Few poets have repeated this word so many times (and such renewed ways). Hart Crane used to cultivate solitude. And William Carlos William. And Cioran. But for Mário Peixoto, with his appeals to the abyss, solitude is as assured as nature's powers or as the fractal rules that govern waves' movements:

Alone is the wind,
the inhospitable region, the undulating ground,
and lonely is the flickering shadow
moved forward by your hands,
which also creep across the sandiness of the
floor.

("Already-distant nuances, on this rainy
afternoon." In: Peixoto 2002: 212)

Sozinho é o vento,
a região inóspita, o solo ondulante,
e solitária a sombra cambiando
que as tuas mãos avançam,
rastejante, ela também – pelo arenoso
do chão.

("Nuanças já longínquas, nesta tarde de
chuva." In: Peixoto 2002: 212)

The theme of solitary islands, developed through noumenon or as archipelagos, has a long tradition in Brazilian literature. Jorge de Lima's poetry comes to mind, providing a synthesis of what has taken place since its foundation, at the time of Camões, up to the present day. Mário Peixoto's poetry contains a strangeness comparable to Axel's Castle. It is almost like a Kantian nucleus, with something that is always untouchable, like Bellatrix: a kind of submersed Gothic cathedral that is tropical and metaphysical, and very close to the views expressed in Cornélio Penna's *Fronteira*. The *unbewusste* and *unheimliche* sea seems to express not only the loneliness of Mário Peixoto's untouchable island, but also, and more appropriately, the insular condition of the human being: a kind of inner exile. Perhaps only Plotinus's *Unus* can explain the translucent and murmuring sea, the refusals and circumferences of Peixoto's sea, with assonance and alliteration that bring in a kind of Brazilian symbolism and expressionism, as in Cornélio Penna's drawings, although exhibiting a drastically dichromatic inclination. Mário Peixoto's island has a dark, baroque and tropical intensity, as if it was floating over the waves, like in Manuel Botelho's vision, or absolutely tied, like in Jorge de Lima's:

Alone:

like a forward sentinel buoy,
 a cleaned-up rusty keel,
 from far away
 an echo from the sea,
 still translucent from the copper-toned horizons
 through the salty refraction of many suns,
 the island gasps.

Anchored:

within the roaring tide's compass,
 hurled about, all around, from
 the waves' sweeping cycles,
 rhythmically compressing,
 rushing to meet,
 closing in, convergent, on their
 white horses (...)
 ("The island." In: Peixoto 2002: 258)

Solitária:

como avançada bóia sentinela,
 espanejada quilha ferruginosa,
 de longe
 reboante de mar,
 translúcida, ainda, dos cobreantes horizontes,
 pela salitrada refração dos muitos sóis,
 arqueja a ilha.

Fundeadas

no marulhante compasso da maré,
 arremessada, toda em volta, das
 circulares tarrafiadas das ondas,
 que ritmadas a comprimem
 investindo de encontro,
 fechando-a convergentes nas suas
 brancas cavalgadas (...)
 ("A ilha." In: Peixoto 2002: 258)

The alliteration builds up in a crescendo, to form expressive kinetics, as seen in *Limite*. In this, the narrative follows Heraclitean motion, and each photogram seems to depend on a floating principle that produced it, as if a *dynamis* was one of the main characters, and only the sea, as a means and a destiny, could include it, with an extraordinary and fascinating outcome. And Mário Peixoto makes great use of abysses, vortexes, precipices (words cultivated by Cornélio Penna, Lúcio Cardoso, Octavio de Faria and even Dionélio Machado), subterranean surfaces, concave walls, inevitable limits and borders, labyrinths and sea galleries:

“...The outline of the island with its vegetated promontory; the blocks of rolled stone at the water’s edge, some of them still submersed; others kept at the surface, assailed to some extent by the conveyor belt of tides, piled up in groupings of bizarre positions taken up from times immemorial – everything that was there – mute and at the same time screaming out to form a whole. The work of the little capricious stones: perforated, ruffled, sculpted, tinged with soft colours, sometimes fascinating; the reaction of centuries-old movements of water, rain and wind, loaded with salt and the abrupt freezing of hard winters with brusque temperature changes; the invisible but constant subterranean work of boring tides – corrosive slimes, implacable and constant in their cycles – had brought to the island embroidery of its crumbled blocks, whether sunken or not – very ancient architecture, sometimes exotic – to such spontaneity of the stones that surrounded it.”

(The Island - Part II.” In: Peixoto 2002: 268)

“...O recortado da ilha com o seu promontório de verdura, os blocos de pedra rolados, à beira d’água, submersos ainda, alguns; outros mantidos à superfície, varejados à certa altura pela esteira das marés, encavalados em agrupamentos de bizarras posições acontecidas em épocas imemoráveis – tudo aquilo ali estava – mudo e ao mesmo tempo gritante a formar um todo. O trabalho das pequenas pedras caprichosas, perfuradas, franzidas, esculpidas, tingidas de cores suaves, fascinantes, às vezes, reagidas de seculares movimentos das águas, de chuvas e de ventos, de carregações salitrosas e súbitos congelamentos de invernadas em bruscas mudanças de temperatura; o invisível mas constante trabalho subterrâneo das marés perfurantes – limas corrosivas, implacáveis e constantes nos seus ciclos – trouxera à ilha a bordadura de seus blocos desmoronados, afogados ou não, - arquitetura antiqüíssima: do exótico, às vezes – ao tão espontâneo de suas pedras circundantes”

(“A ilha – parte II.” In: Peixoto 2002: 268)

The absolute chromatism, the salty and subterranean intensity, the work of times immemorial, the implacable tension, the carving out of stone and greenness: all of these allow Mário Peixoto's island to belong to a singular group that forms a certain archipelago within Brazilian-Portuguese poetry.

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The modernist debut of Mário Peixoto

Marcelo Noah

1931 was the year of Mário Peixoto's première and his most innovative artistic contributions. Not only was it the year of his only film, which granted him a mythical status in life, setting him under the spotlight within the history of Brazilian cinema, but also of his most interesting and equally underrated book, *Mundéu*. Their themes differ greatly: the film is surrounded by sea, while the book faces the continent. Perhaps this is exactly Peixoto's most successful moment and greatest artistic cohesion, being able to produce a substantially relevant aesthetic statement, according to the language set by his time and place.

First of all, it is necessary to place film and book into their context: in 1931. *Mundéu* was released six months after the premiere of *Limite*. The limited and beautifully crafted edition of the book, sponsored by the author himself, was addressed to a few prestigious figures in the intellectual circle that Peixoto had been introduced to. Both book and author were instantly celebrated by great household names within modernist literature, such as Manuel Bandeira and Mário de Andrade. The latter, one of the most prominent figures in the Brazilian Modernist movement, wrote in an article published less than a month after the release of the book: "After reading and rereading this *Mundéu*, I am convinced that Mário Peixoto is the best poetry breakthrough we have had this year" (Peixoto 1996: 9). Andrade saluted the technical resources used by Peixoto in his poems, all in perfect synergy with the boldest modernist procedures, which were still quite recent innovations at that point in history. Andrade also pinned down the two main lyrical elements in Peixoto's poetry, namely: "the continent and the mystery". In his following works, Mário would turn away from the continent, diving completely into the mystery that, for him, was inevitably mixed with the sea as an iconic object. His work then began to acquire hues of neoromantic oversubjectivity that were nonetheless already seen here and there, even in his earlier works.

It was not long before he became disillusioned about his first book, later declaring his hate for it and keeping all remaining copies from the public. Peixoto was never the type of person who would make things easier for anyone. He was a very withdrawn person, and whenever someone asked him about some fact of his life and career he was quick to put his imagination to work and build the most intriguing, interesting, enigmatic or convenient version that seemed fitting to the occasion. Therefore, the argument Peixoto used to justify his disgust for *Mundéu*, as reported by Saulo Pereira de Mello, does not seem to be a valid one. Reportedly,

Peixoto considered the book “over-constructed” for his taste, fond as he was of direct manifestations of genius in response to outside stimuli or, more specifically, the anima. Regarding this argument by the author, we must bear in mind that all his following works remained within a tiresome process of writing and rewriting for decades. His second poetry book, *Poemas de permeio com o mar*, was never published by the author during his lifetime. It consists of a collection of writings that cover more than fifty years of activity, counting from the first poem, dated 1933, until the final version of the book, completed by the author in 1987. Likewise, his novel *O inútil de cada um*, which was initially published in a very concise version in 1935, ended up becoming a “work in progress”. The book went through a complete reformulation that consumed 40 years of Peixoto’s life, in the most obsessive “construction and reconstruction” process ever reported for any other Brazilian writer of the twentieth century. The novel, which was no more than 200 pages long in the 1935 edition, reached over 2,000 pages, split into six volumes, at the end of the saga.

Limite went through a process of abandonment by its author that was somewhat similar to what happened with *Mundéu*. It suffices to consider that, after its premiere on May 17, 1931, the movie was only screened again in large public exhibitions in 1978, having endured a long recess of 47 years of almost total marginality, and using a copy that had been restored by a third party, rather than by the maker of the film himself. Therefore, what stands before us is a rare case of immanent absence: this object has continually been at the centre of discussions about cinema in Brazil, even among those to whom the material was unavailable. During the half-century *Limite* spent in obscurity, Peixoto did very little, if anything at all, to have his film exhibited. On July 30, 1942, the newspaper *A Manhã* published a report in which Vinicius de Moraes narrated all the hassle he had had to go through in order to ensure that Orson Welles did not leave the country without attending a screening of the film. Enthusiasts such as Saulo Pereira de Mello were ultimately in charge of keeping the material, which was available only to the mythical director’s exclusive personal circle. It was not only the delightful aesthetic results it accomplished, in relation to the precarious cinematographic production process of that time in Brazil, which would in itself be enough, that made *Limite* notorious. It was also the mythification of the film, promulgated by the legion of admirers that saved it from fungus, while withdrawing it from entire generations of cinephiles and film makers hungry to know what it was all about and perhaps to be able to contend with it.

Faced with this scenario, Glauber Rocha felt obliged not to like what he had not seen. In the early 1960s, Rocha began a rigorous and intrepid journey that aimed to put the national cinema under review. For this, he evaluated and interpreted works, and selected and rejected

the pioneers of the productions that would give birth to the Cinema Novo movement, which is elaborated in his book, *Critical Review of Brazilian Cinema*. After several attempts to watch the film, all frustrated, Glauber Rocha still did not give up, and helplessly dedicated a long chapter of his book to the film. He makes it clear at the start of his text that he had not been able to watch the film, however great his efforts had been. The solution found by Rocha was to extract all the elements necessary for his evaluation from random critiques he collected about the film. He then postulated that *Limite* was supposedly a “product from a decadent bourgeois intellectual branded with good taste”, “inwardly and entirely withdrawn from reality and history” (Rocha 2001: 37). Surprisingly, his account stands as one of the most lucid and revealing reviews ever written about the film. It was not until years later, on the occasion of the film’s second release in 1978, that Rocha raised the topic again, endorsing his earlier impressions and stating that he had then come to understand “the revolutionary dialectics generated by the reactionary system” (29). He also pointed out the film’s formal splendour and linked it to what Faulkner called the “time out of time” (31).

Limite was obviously no use for the Cinema Novo propositions. The latter aimed to achieve inventive cinema in which the language embraced Brazilian social peculiarities and the financial viability of the movie production did not determine the aesthetics to be followed. Glauber Rocha’s proposals stress the importance of the author and reject the dominance of the producer and the industry in the making of a film. Therefore, Rocha determined that the genesis of his movement lay with Humberto Mauro (a filmmaker from Minas Gerais) rather than with Mário Peixoto, who were contemporaries of each other. Peixoto’s film was marked by rigorously hermetic aesthetics, in dialogue with European avant-garde cinema, above all. The enterprise had no financial limits, since his family bankrolled it. Peixoto made his film as a real visionary who has his mind set on transposing the bank of a river, to build a dam designed in dreams. Mauro, on the other hand, let the stream of his homeland’s water guide his camera and it led him further and further towards the centre of the country itself.

It is true that Mário Peixoto not only created, but also made statements and established his own attitude towards art, through his artistic exercise. To anyone who follows his trail, it seems quite plausible that Peixoto was aware that the conditions that would allow his film to be accomplished were never to occur again. Mário Peixoto might have felt he had had enough; he refused to submit to any other structure in which he did not have total autonomy. Octávio de Faria wrote at that time that Mário was an “entrepreneur” rather than a “director”, and that his next films would live up to his merits as a director. They never happened. In the 1960s, Glauber was sorry about the paralysing mythification around the “genius” behind the

masterpiece. On the other hand, *Limite* advocates subjective and introspective poetics, leaving very little else to be said: “when there is nothing else left to say, it is better not to say anything”. Who knows whether he felt he had had enough? Or whether perhaps he feared possible failure through demystification? We will never know.

I am not venturing too far in saying that the critic Otto Maria Carpeaux knew what he was talking about. Carpeaux attended the aforementioned session that Vinicius de Moraes organised for Orson Welles, and left the room saying: “But it is pure poetry...”. True. Mário Peixoto’s cinema is to poetry just as his poetry is to cinema. Throughout the course of his life, Peixoto experimented with different genres and structures. His tone and themes were intensely delimited and his archetypal figures were clearly established. There is one out-of-tune exception, however: *Mundéu*.

Within the Brazilian literary scenery, Mário Peixoto arose in the midst of what historians call the second generation of Brazilian Modernism. This is credited with the construction and consolidation phase following the seismic disturbance caused by a group of artists and writers from the previous decade who adopted an avant-garde attitude of demolition. Peixoto’s premiere took place alongside those of great names, such as Carlos Drummond de Andrade (who published his first poetry book in 1930), Jorge de Lima, Vinicius de Moraes, Murilo Mendes and Raul Bopp, among others. All of these began their works in response to the innovations proposed by the heads of the Brazilian modernist movement, namely, Mário and Oswald de Andrade. *Mundéu*’s author was no different, but his experience was an exception, in relation to the collected hegemony of aesthetics and themes that characterises the whole of his works. Peixoto seems to reject the collective experience of the Modernist syntax, giving way to his own withdrawn and poignant individualism.

Looking at the bigger picture, it is possible to see that the collected material of Peixoto’s subsequent poetry book reacts and rejects the notions that had made Mário de Andrade speak of Peixoto as showing promise for the legacy of modernist ways. However great in poetic quality, *Poemas de permeio com o mar* is bounded by a huge burden of subjectivity, magnetised by the author’s circumspect ethos, in which the refinement of his creation mirrors a concept of art that had been made timeworn by a Eurocentric notion of “good taste”.

Mundéu is different: its poems are connected to the direct observation of prosaic folk elements. It suggests a poet who is still discovering the world and its manifestations around him. The title of the book is a word from the indigenous Indian language Tupi, “*mundé*”, which means “hunting trap” or “trap door”, in the centre of the country’s regional lexicon. This word is found in the only prose text in the book, which functions as an opening for the

poems that follow. In this “chat”, which narrates the slaughter of a pregnant tree sloth, Peixoto indicates the world that will become the book’s theme: the world of dirt and country people in the interior of Brazil. A character points into the woods, “they make *mundéu* in there”.

The whole of the book includes ten poems without metre or punctuation, clearly applying a modernist model. In all the poems, we find dominance of extremely short, intercut verses, which grant a great deal of speed to the text. The main resource is the use of figures of imagery grouped in a collage of clear-cut pictures that find unity in the tempo of the poem. In this book, the maker of *Limite* dances to the music of his time. Peixoto had already strongly delineated his own semantics (the continent and the mystery, “robust in form and matter”, as it was then said). His poetry from that time fits perfectly into the Oswaldian propositions of fusion between archaic and modern, as reported by Fabio Godoh, a poet from Rio Grande do Sul who thoroughly researched this first phase of Mário Peixoto’s work. According to Godoh, such antagonism permeated by the decadent elite’s rural folk themes was sieved through a montage technique Peixoto borrowed from cinematographic language, which accompanied him throughout his life, regardless of the genre he chose. The author notably controlled the poetic art, and was clearly marked by suggested imagery, something that would never leave him, as a reminder that we are looking not only at the poet and novelist, but also, above all, at the filmmaker.

To understand Peixoto’s book better, let us look at some excerpts from a poem that functions as a paradigm for this first period of his career. The whole of the poem, entitled *Jongo* (an African dance forming a circle around a fire, which helps to keep the pace of the drums in *terreiros* language), is formed by a multiplicity of distinct fragments, fused into some sort of heterogeneous assemblage of components. In this poem, images are displayed at great speed through extremely brief descriptive verses. With his eyes turning from the *Casa-Grande* to the floor of the *Senzala*, to recall the seminal study by Gilberto Freyre, a Brazilian anthropologist, in 1933, we find the heedful gaze of an outside observer, describing a popular folk rite in a kaleidoscopic way, in almost the same way a camera would.

da imbaúba furada
do couro de boi
do fogo
e
do sol pra secar
pra temperar
saiu o candongueiro

zunindo na dança

pim bim bim bim bim bim bim

piú

pim bim bim bim bim bim bim

piú

temperador

itacaundi

diu

itacaundi

diu

itacaundi

diu

barril grande

chamador

tum tum tum tum tum buicum

bacum

tum tum tum tum tum buicum

bacum

no terreiro vermelho

incandescente

o suor dos corpos

o frenesi do jongo

o requebro dos quadris

[...]

assa

na brasa

a batata

sobe um cheiro gostoso

do café quentando

com a fumarada parda

morna do calor

do chão

sobe poeira barrenta

que os pés chatos

carcomidos

de sola grossa

de crosta grossa

suspendem na ânsia dos pulsos
dos gritos das umbigadas

[...]

branco quando ta doente
manda chama dotô
nego quando morre
foi cachaça que matô

[...]

e a negrada toda
suada
possessa do jongo
acode

ê ê ê ê ê ê ê ê ê ê
ê ê ê ê ê ê ê ê ê ê

a muié matou marido
com chapa de fogão

ê ê ê ê ê ê ê ê ê ê
ê ê ê ê ê ê ê ê ê ê

itacandi
diu
itacandi
diu

[...]

álcool no terreiro
deu tudo que pôde
fez tudo que pôde
nas horas que avançam
restam os corpos tombados
inertes
e o círculo preto
da fogueira em cinzas

[...]

(Peixoto 1996: 45-52)

These verses do not find an echo in the subsequent works by their author. In these fragments, four-verse poetic folk strophes are inserted alongside onomatopoeia, thereby creating a picture of movement and rhythmic drawing together between the writing and the object that is described. The result from poems such as this anticipates much of the poetic production that would emerge over subsequent decades, albeit through the work of other poets. As an example, we can point to the similarity between *Jongo* and some passages in one of the most important poems in Brazilian literature, *Poema Sujo*, written in the 1970s by Ferreira Gullar, a poet and critic from Maranhão. Mário Peixoto shifted through different genres. He directed a film, wrote a great novel, and simultaneously collected poems, short stories and some essays at his refuge *Sítio do Morcego*. Physically outside the great metropolis, he was the king of a world created by himself, and it sufficed.

Limite is a complete film, hermetic in its vastness of waters and prostration. *Mundéu* is open, incomplete and assertive. That is why Octávio de Faria pointed to the need for Peixoto to shoot a drama, as the natural next step to be taken towards his recognition as a filmmaker, having attained recognition as an entrepreneur with *Limite*. *Mundéu* suggested a promising future that never came, and was lost when the author refused to adopt the language of his contemporaries. Enclosed in his own world, he wrote in order not to die, in a desperate struggle for immanence before the dread of disassembling.

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